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Threats that Silence:

Trends in the Safety of Journalists

Insights discussion paper

WORLD TRENDS IN
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
AND MEDIA DEVELOPMENT:
GLOBAL REPORT 2021/2022



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Short summary

The past five years show that the perpetrators continue to get away with murder in nine of every 10 killings of journalists, and that other threats continue to mount against news reporters.



**In the past five years,
UNESCO recorded**

**400
killings of
journalists**

For the period 2016–2020, UNESCO recorded 400 killings of journalists. This figure is a nearly 20 percent decrease from the previous five-year period. Yet, unabated levels of impunity for these cases correlate with increases in imprisonment and other attacks. The daunting combination, including online violence, spurs self-censorship. This *Insights* discussion paper records these trends, alongside new analysis that elucidates what is unique about violence against journalists. Also recorded are recent international and national level efforts to protect journalists and their vital work.

The research presented here also constitutes a chapter on trends in the safety of journalists of the forthcoming full edition of UNESCO's *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022*. The full World Trends Report responds to a key task agreed at UNESCO's 36th General Conference in 2011, for the Organization to monitor and report on contemporary developments in press freedom and the safety of journalists. For UNESCO, a free and safe media environment, along with an end to impunity for crimes against journalists, is essential if societies are to receive reliable information as produced by media workers who can do their jobs without fear.



**“Since wars begin in the minds of men and women
it is in the minds of men and women that the
defences of peace must be constructed.”**



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1 Overview

Despite growing global efforts, journalism remains a dangerous profession. Recent years have highlighted both the vital role that journalists occupy in maintaining the flow of information and the great risks (old and new) associated with this task. Hostile actors threaten journalists with harassment, imprisonment, violence, or death—simply for doing their jobs.

Killings of journalists remained a serious issue in the five-year period ending in 2020.¹ Although numbers have decreased in comparison with the previous five-year period, the risk of violence, and even murder, remains a persistent threat. In some regions, the decrease in journalist killings is partially attributable to fewer killings in countries experiencing armed conflict. However, the ratio of journalists killed in those countries compared to countries not experiencing armed conflict has also declined: a larger percentage of journalist killings in the past five years has occurred in countries not considered to be actively experiencing armed conflict.² While this shifting trend is partially due to the decrease in killings in areas of conflict, simultaneously, some countries not experiencing armed conflict have reported higher numbers of journalist killings in the past five years.

Compounding these fatal attacks is impunity for crimes against journalists, and this Report shows no significant improvement: nearly nine in ten cases of killings remain unresolved.³ Research for this Report further shows that this impunity rate is not correlated with general levels of criminal impunity amongst the affected states. This research also confirms that where the number of journalist killings is high, so too is impunity for these killings, threatening a continued cycle of violence as lethal crimes against journalists often go unpunished. Meanwhile, the number of countries which responded to requests by UNESCO for information on judicial follow-up fell compared to the previous year, and the number of unresolved cases continues to accumulate. In recognition of this persistent challenge, UNESCO leads the commemoration of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on 2 November of every year.

The past five years also show the importance of considering other rising levels of threat against the safety of journalists, threats which not only violate press freedom and the right to free expression, but can also harm and intimidate journalists in ways that impact negatively on their ability to keep the public informed.

Among these threats is imprisonment. New UNESCO analysis, using data on journalist imprisonment gathered by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), shows that globally, journalist imprisonment is inversely related to journalist killings: even as journalist killings decline, imprisonments are on the rise (see Box 1). Countries with the highest numbers of killings tend to have relatively few imprisonments, while countries with many imprisoned journalists do not register similarly high levels of killings. Throughout, it is important to recognize that while these trends are considered globally, many countries continue to exhibit neither journalist killings nor imprisonment.⁴

¹ This *Insights* discussion paper forms a chapter of the forthcoming *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022*. The *World Trends Report* addresses a key task put forth by UNESCO's 36th General Conference in 2011, for the Organization to monitor and report on contemporary developments in press freedom and the safety of journalists. The paper focuses on the period 2016-2020.

² Killings were considered to have occurred in a country experiencing armed conflict if the country was included in the annual report of the UN Secretary-General on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, in the year in which the killing took place. Countries included in the Secretary-General's report vary from year to year.

³ Throughout this Report, impunity is measured cumulatively, assessing the resolution or lack thereof of all cases since UNESCO began systematically monitoring journalist killings and impunity in 2006. Analysing impunity cumulatively, rather than by number of cases and resolutions in an individual year, allows for the time required in resolving some cases and takes into account the accumulation of unresolved cases.

⁴ As in previous *World Trends Reports*, UNESCO does not examine the question of which of these imprisonments could be assessed as arbitrary, but rather looks at the trends over the years.

International organizations, civil society, and researchers have also given greater attention in recent years to threats, including various forms of online violence, that inordinately affect women journalists and those who represent minority groups in the profession. According to UNESCO research, seven out of ten women journalists who participated in a global survey reported experiencing online violence during their work, in some cases spurring self-censorship.⁵

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these and other ongoing challenges to journalist safety. While the financial impact of the pandemic has threatened many media workers with salary cuts or job loss, even those who have been able to continue work face the risk of exposure to the virus and psychological trauma in covering the unprecedented health crisis. The pandemic has further spurred freedom of expression-restricting legislation and policies, which addressed the spreading of “rumours” and disinformation around the pandemic but were often broad enough to be used to detain journalists for their coverage of the crisis and of government responses.

At the same time, mobilization efforts have rallied to protect and promote the safety of journalists and freedom of expression worldwide. These efforts were made all the more relevant as the world recognized the fundamental role of a free, pluralistic, and independent press in combatting the global health crisis.

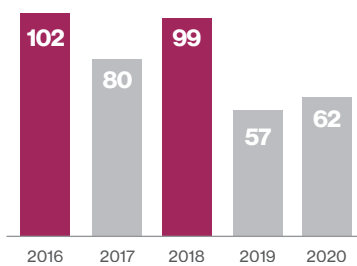
⁵ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>

2 Global and regional trends in killings of journalists, 2016–2020

Between the start of 2016 and the end of 2020, 400 journalists across the world were killed for doing their jobs. Still, this is nearly a 20 percent decrease from the previous five-year period, 2011–2015, in which UNESCO registered 491 killings. The downward trend, however, remains a stuttering one, as numbers continue to rise and fall from year to year (Figure 1). Over the past five years, 2016 was the deadliest year for journalists, as 102 were killed while on the job or targeted for their work. Another peak was registered in 2018 but was immediately followed in 2019 by the lowest number of killed journalists in a decade (57). A slight rise was registered again in 2020, when 62 journalists were killed for their work.

FIGURE 1:
The number of journalists has varied from year to year, with peaks in 2016 and 2018

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists

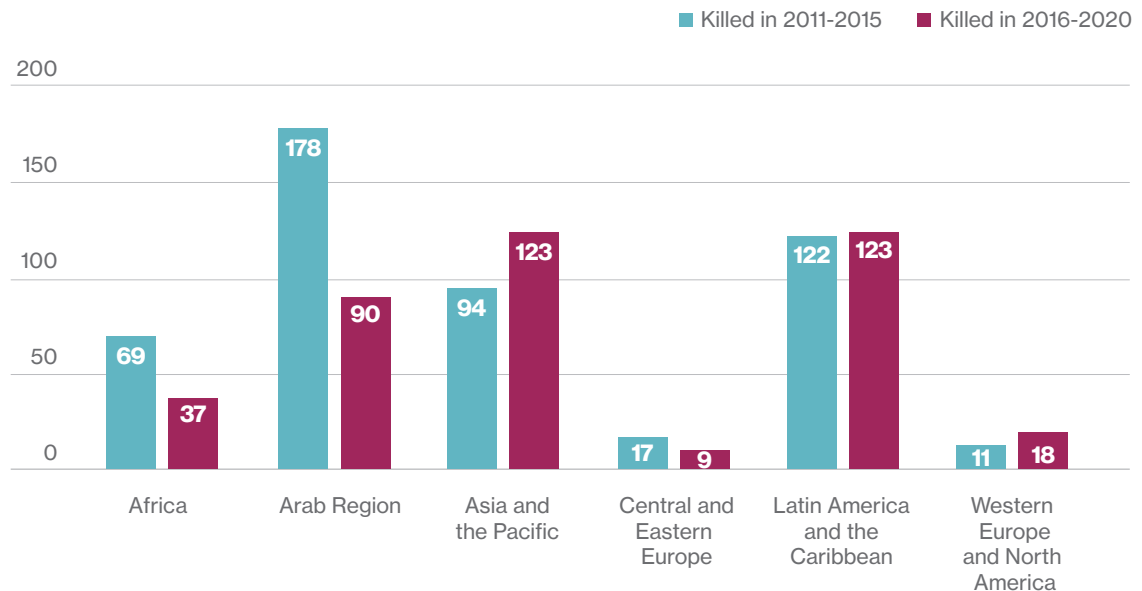


Life-threatening risks exist for journalists everywhere. However, the number of killings varies strongly between regions.⁶ The Asia and the Pacific region, as well as the Latin America and the Caribbean region, show the highest numbers of killings of journalists over the past five years (123 journalists killed in each region), followed by the Arab region (90 journalists killed), while less than a quarter of the total number of killings took place in Africa, Western Europe and North America, and Central and Eastern Europe combined. Though Western Europe and North America reported just 5 percent of all killings from 2016 to 2020, the past five years registered a marked

increase for the region with 18 journalists killed, compared to 11 killings between 2011 and 2015 and three killings between 2006 and 2010. The rise in killings in the region was largely attributable to a single mass shooting event in 2018.

FIGURE 2:
Journalist killings have nearly halved in some regions, but increased in others

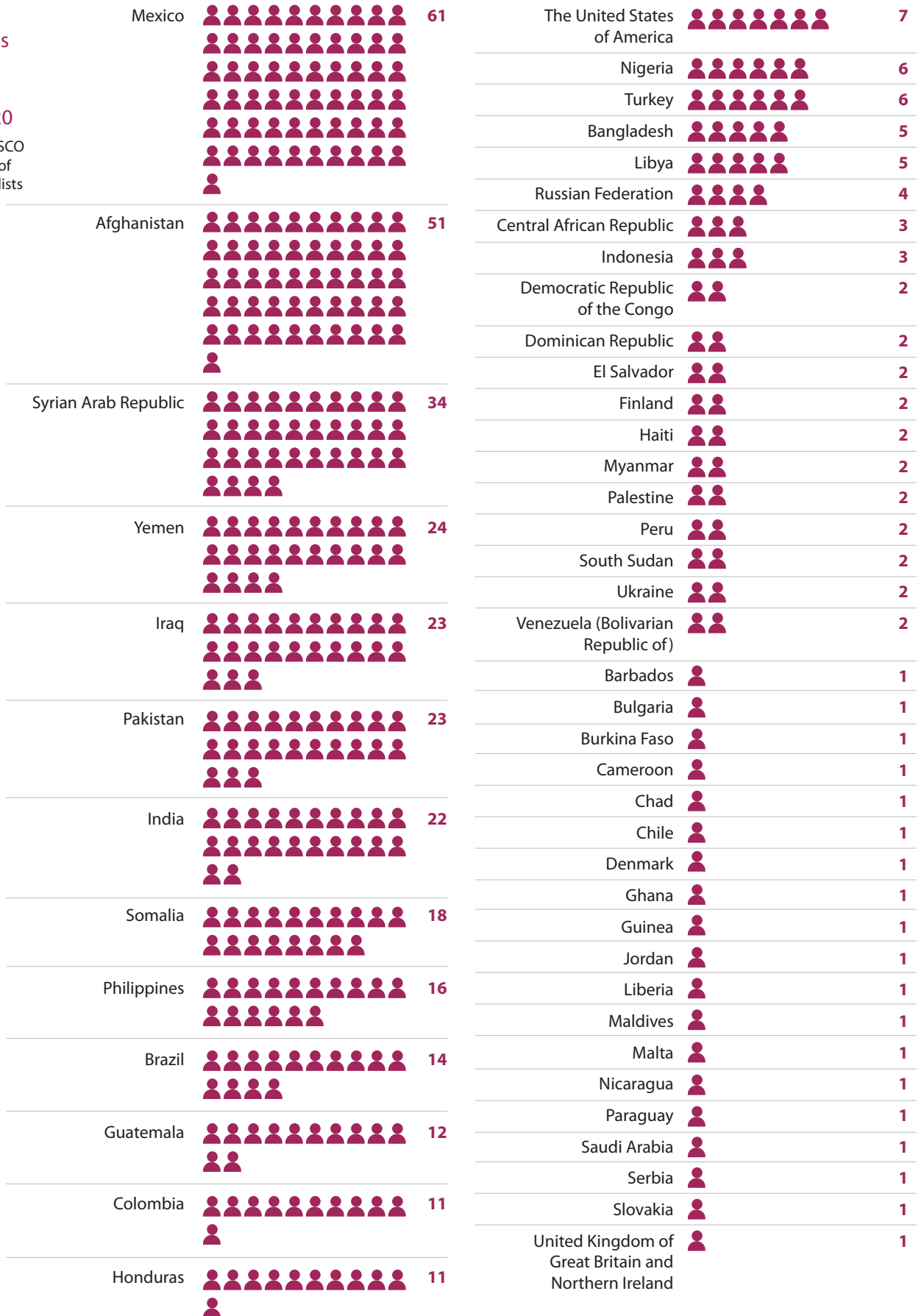
Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists



⁶ This analysis was conducted according to six regional groups as defined by UNESCO (see Annex I).

FIGURE 3:
Journalists
killed by
country,
2016–2020

Source: UNESCO
Observatory of
Killed Journalists



In some regions, substantial shifts in journalist safety have occurred over the past five years. Most significantly, in the Arab region, Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe, the numbers of killed journalists nearly halved compared to the previous five-year period. In the Arab region, this decrease is largely attributable to the previously high levels of killings in countries experiencing armed conflict. While journalists' killings in the region remain high, numbers have decreased after peaking before 2016. Similarly, conflicts in some countries caused higher numbers of killings in Africa from 2011 to 2015, while armed conflict beginning in 2014 resulted in higher numbers in Central and Eastern Europe.

The only region in which numbers of killings of journalists were considerably higher from 2016 to 2020 as compared to the previous five-year period is Asia and the Pacific, which registered an increase of 31 percent. In the past five years, Mexico, followed by Afghanistan and the Syrian Arab Republic, recorded the highest number of journalist killings (Figure 3).

FIGURE 4:
The proportion of journalists killed outside of countries experiencing conflict increased significantly over the past five years

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists

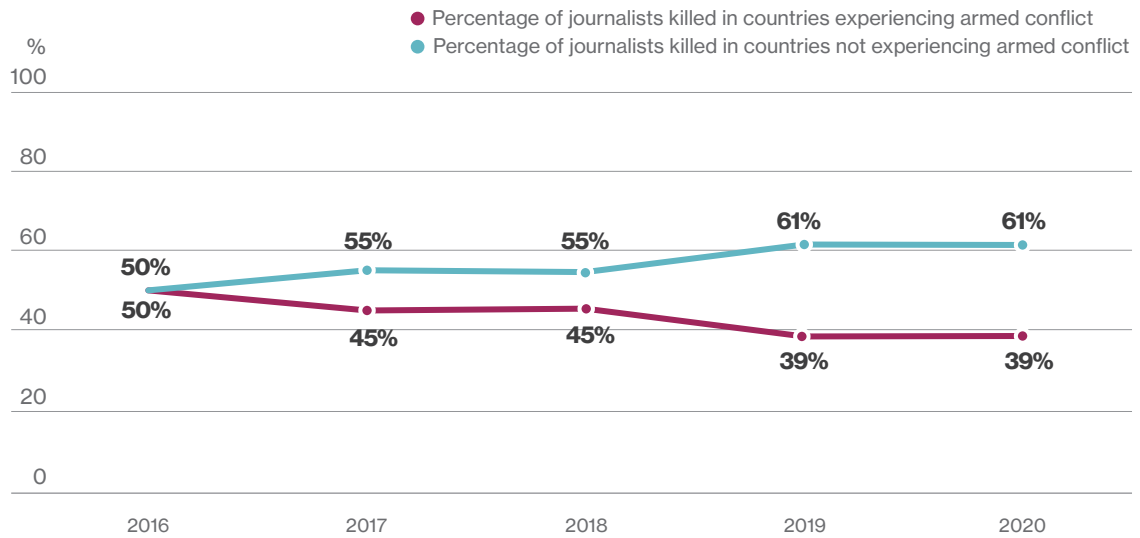
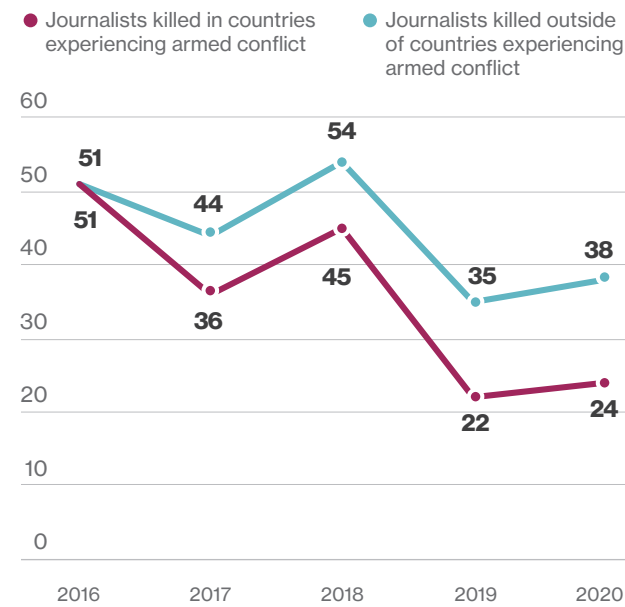


FIGURE 5:
While journalist killings have declined globally, the trend is most evident in countries experiencing armed conflict

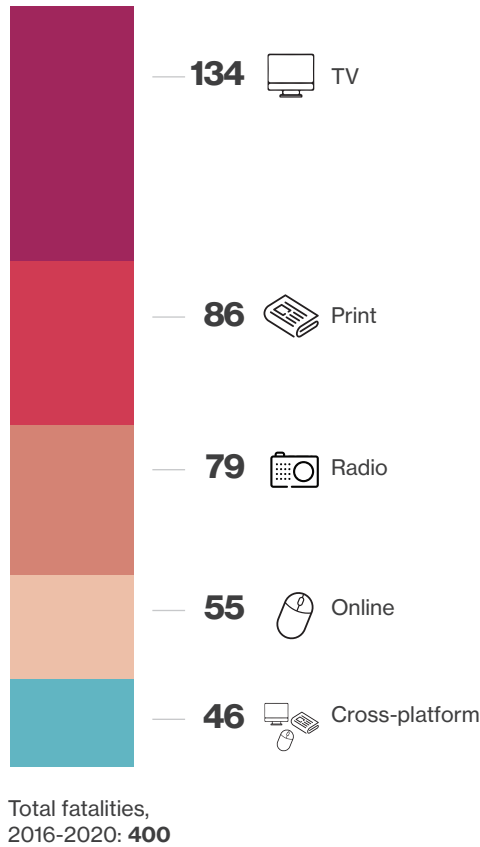
Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists



This shift in deadliest regions reflects a notable trend: over the past five years, out of all killings of journalists, the proportion that occurred outside of countries experiencing conflict has been steadily rising, from 50 percent in 2016 to 61 percent in 2020 (Figure 4). Overall, journalist killings have decreased worldwide, but in the past five years, the number of journalists killed in countries experiencing armed conflict has declined more significantly (Figure 5).

FIGURE 6:
TV journalists, followed by print journalists, remain most vulnerable

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists



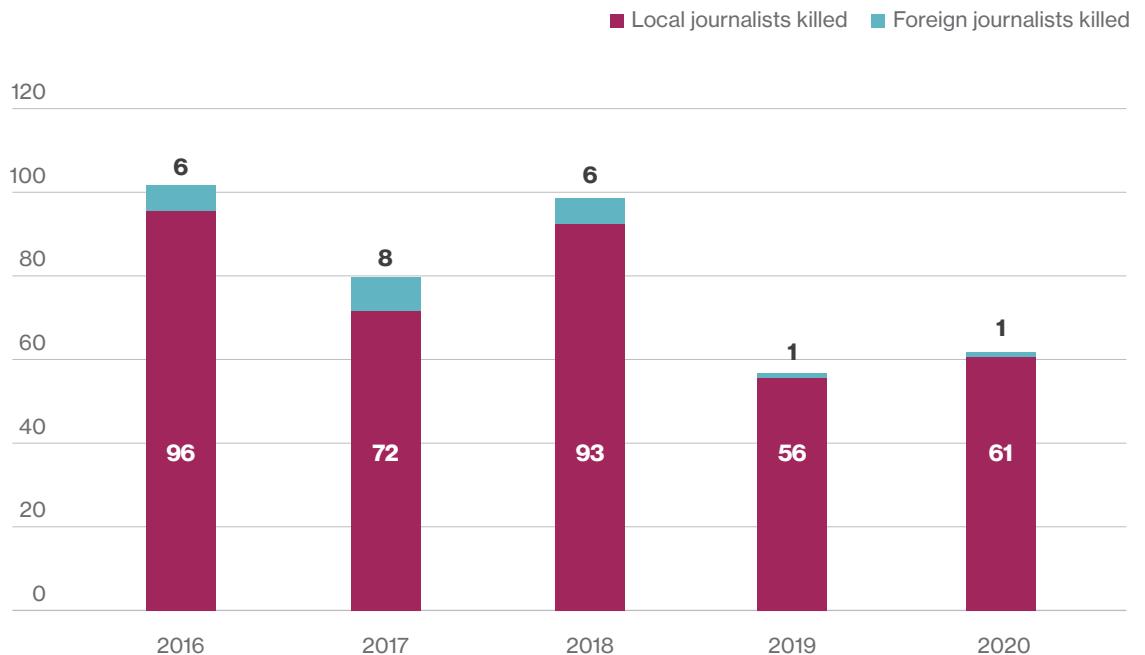
Television journalists are by far the most attacked group among journalists, accounting for 134 journalist fatalities, or 34 percent, in the past five years (Figure 6). Those covering conflict are especially vulnerable and at high risk of being either killed in crossfire or directly targeted. Since 2016, print journalists account for the second most vulnerable group (22 percent), followed by radio journalists (20 percent).

In the previous five-year period, from 2011 to 2015, television and print journalists were represented at almost equally high levels among victims of fatal violence (148 print journalists and 147 television journalists). Though print journalists therefore now seem less vulnerable, this perceived shift may be due to the increase of journalists now working across platforms, not solely in print.

Among the 400 journalists killed from 2016 through 2020, 22 were foreigners; the vast majority of killed journalists were killed in their country of nationality. In fact, in the past two years, only one journalist each year was killed while working abroad. As highlighted in a recent UNESCO issue brief, published under the umbrella of the World Trends Report series, the low number of foreign journalists among fatal victims may be connected to increasing reliance on local journalists to report for international news outlets.⁷

FIGURE 7:
In the last five years, killings of foreign correspondents decreased

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists



⁷ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378300>

3 Global and regional trends in levels of impunity for crimes against journalists

Impunity for the killing of journalists remains a persistent concern worldwide, as both an obstacle to ensuring journalist safety and a chilling contributor to self-censorship. While the killings of journalists have decreased, the global impunity rate has remained very high, and nearly nine out of ten cases (87 percent) of journalist killings remain unresolved.

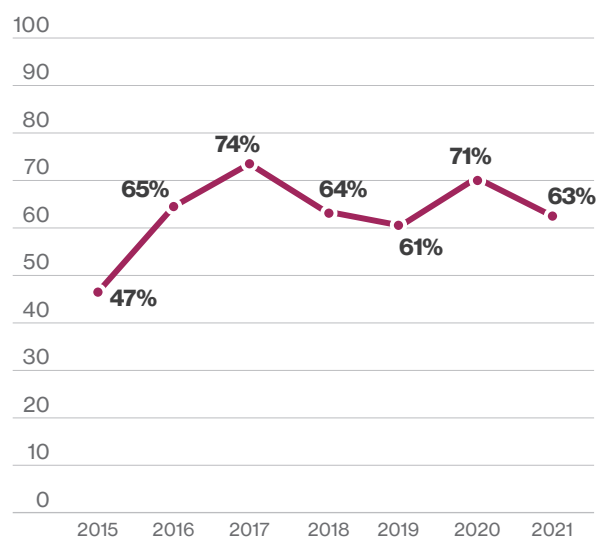
Original research commissioned by UNESCO in 2021 confirms what many have long suspected: at the country level, journalist killings and impunity rates are typically proportional, and high rates of fatalities are associated with high rates of impunity. As journalist homicides go unresolved and unpunished, there is little to deter the continued threat of violence.

Furthermore, the analysis finds that there is no clear correlation between impunity of journalist killings and impunity for other crimes in the country. Similarly, though some may assume that journalist killings are correlated with overall homicide levels in any given country, UNESCO analysis for this Report finds that that is often not the case. Rather, the killing of journalists—and impunity for that crime—is a unique issue across the globe, reinforcing the clear intentionality in targeting media professionals.

Pursuant to UNESCO Executive Board Decision 196 EX/31, and in line with the mandate of the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), UNESCO collects data each year to monitor impunity for crimes against journalists. Accordingly, every year, States are requested to report on the status of ongoing investigations into cases of killed journalists. Their responses are recorded as “resolved”, “ongoing/unresolved”, or “no information received”.

FIGURE 8:
State responses to UNESCO's request for information on the status of judicial inquiry remain inconsistent, in spite of previous positive trends

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists



In 2021, UNESCO sent requests for information on unresolved cases to 64 States⁸ and received some form of response from 40 of them (63 percent), a decrease from 71 percent in 2020 (45 States out of 63). Since 2016, the response rate has fluctuated but remained over 60 percent each year, with peaks in 2017 and 2020 (Figure 8). Additionally, in 2021, 30 States (47 percent) provided specific information on the status of judicial investigations of killed journalists. The remaining 10 States that provided a response acknowledged the request but did not provide concrete information on the status or advancement of cases (Figure 11).

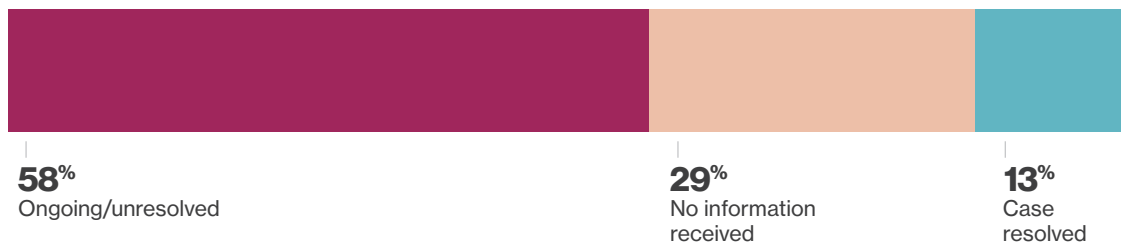
⁸ Though not a UNESCO Member State since 1 January 2019, the United States of America has continued to respond to UNESCO's request for information on the status of judicial investigations regarding cases of killed journalists that occurred within its borders.

Global level of impunity remains high

As of 31 December 2020, a total of 1,229 journalists had been killed since UNESCO began systematically monitoring journalist killings and impunity in 2006. Of those, 163 cases (13 percent) are now considered fully resolved, the same resolution rate as that recorded the previous year. Of the remaining cases, 706 are considered ongoing or unresolved, and UNESCO has not received any information on the status of 360 cases (Figure 9).

The Arab region registers the highest level of impunity, as in previous years, with 98 percent of cases considered unresolved. However, a number of states in the Arab region have never submitted information on individual cases to UNESCO, and a large portion of the “unresolved” cases are those that have not been reported on.

FIGURE 9:
In the past 15 years, 87 percent of cases of killed journalists remain unresolved or unreported



Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists

The Arab region is followed by Asia and the Pacific (89 percent of cases unresolved) and Africa (87 percent) as the regions with the highest levels of impunity for journalist killings. Latin America and the Caribbean (67 percent), Western Europe and North America (53 percent), and Central and Eastern Europe (52 percent) register lower impunity levels (Figure 10). Still, even excluding cases for which no information has been received, more than half of all cases registered by UNESCO are considered ongoing or unresolved.

The two regions with the lowest levels of impunity are also the only two regions in which Member States have provided information to UNESCO about all cases recorded by the Organization.

FIGURE 10:
Status of judicial investigations by region, as of 2021

REGION	TOTAL CASES 2006-2020	CASES RESOLVED	ONGOING/ UNRESOLVED	NO INFORMATION RECEIVED	% UNRESOLVED OR UNREPORTED
Africa	142	18	72	52	87%
Arab Region	379	6	170	203	98%
Asia and the Pacific	332	37	204	91	89%
Central and Eastern Europe	46	22	24	0	52%
Latin America and the Caribbean	298	65	219	14	78%
Western Europe and North America	32	15	17	0	53%
TOTAL	1,229	163	706	360	87%

Source: UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists

As part of the annual request, States are also asked to submit information on “actions taken to promote the safety of journalists and to combat impunity, including action taken to monitor and tackle gender-specific risks, as a way to share good practices”. In 2021, 28 States reported on measures taken to bolster the safety of journalists and 11 reported specific measures to address the safety of women journalists (see Section 8). Eighteen out of the 40 States that responded to the Director-General’s request in 2021 also gave permission to publish official documents online on the UNESCO Observatory of Killed Journalists.

FIGURE 11:
Responses received by States to the 2021 request by UNESCO’s Director-General for information on the status of judicial investigations

- ✓ Information provided on judicial case
- Acknowledgement

COUNTRY	RESPONSE BY COUNTRY ON STATUS OF JUDICIAL INVESTIGATIONS	COUNTRY	RESPONSE BY COUNTRY ON STATUS OF JUDICIAL INVESTIGATIONS
Afghanistan	✓	Mali	
Angola	●	Malta	✓
Bahrain		Mexico	✓
Bangladesh	✓	Mozambique	●
Barbados		Myanmar	✓
Brazil	✓	Nepal	✓
Burkina Faso		Nicaragua	✓
Burundi		Nigeria	✓
Cambodia	✓	Pakistan	●
Cameroon		Palestine	✓
Central Africa Republic		Paraguay	✓
Chad		Peru	✓
Colombia	✓	The Philippines	✓
Congo		Russian Federation	✓
Democratic Republic of the Congo	●	Saudi Arabia	
Dominican Republic	✓	Slovakia	✓
Ecuador	✓	Somalia	
Egypt		South Sudan	
El Salvador	✓	Sri Lanka	
Eritrea		Syrian Arab Republic	
Ghana		Thailand	●
Greece	●	Turkey	✓
Guatemala	✓	Uganda	
Guinea		Ukraine	●
Guyana, Republic of		United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	✓
Haiti	✓	United Republic of Tanzania	
Honduras	●	United States of America	✓
India		Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	✓
Indonesia	✓	Yemen	●
Iraq	✓		
Kenya	✓		
Kyrgyzstan	✓		
Liberia			
Libya	●		
Maldives			

Total countries: 64
Responses: 40 reactions (63%), among which 30 responses providing concrete information on judicial cases (47%) and 10 acknowledgements (16%)

4 Other attacks on and threats against journalists

Journalists continue to be victims of a range of repression tactics: non-lethal physical attacks, kidnapping, arbitrary detention, threats, harassment off-line and online, and retaliation against family members. All of these attacks pose a considerable threat to journalists' ability to perform their critical work and help serve people's right to information.

Against this background, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Indicator 16.10.1 encompasses cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists, and human rights advocates. The metadata for the indicators includes a reference to also measuring "other harmful acts" against these persons. Recent statements at the international level have called for strengthened monitoring mechanisms of non-fatal attacks against journalists.

- The IPDC Council in 2018 invited the UNESCO Director-General to enhance "current monitoring in collaboration with UNESCO's Institute of Statistics (UIS) as appropriate, in order to align and reinforce synergies with the methodology of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and the overall reporting on SDG 16.10.1."⁹
- The IPDC Council in 2020 encouraged Member States to appoint a focal point on the issue of safety of journalists and impunity.¹⁰
- The Human Rights Council, in its 45th session in 2020, expressed deep concern and condemned unequivocally "all attacks, reprisals, and violence against journalists and media workers", including non-fatal attacks.¹¹
- The Windhoek+30 Declaration, adopted at the 2021 World Press Freedom Day global conference, expressed alarm over "enduring and new threats to the safety of journalists and the free exercise of journalism, including killings, harassment of women, off-line and online attacks, intimidation and the promotion of fear, and arbitrary detentions."¹²

Adding to an unsafe environment over the past five years, journalists have been increasingly stigmatized and denigrated in public speech, sometimes by political figures. As noted by the UN Human Rights Council, this "increases the risk of threats and violence against journalists and undermines public trust in the credibility of journalism".¹³

Journalists silenced by enforced disappearance, kidnapping, and arbitrary detention

While killings remain the ultimate threat against journalist safety, enforced disappearances, journalists reported as "missing" and arbitrary detentions are urgent concerns in protecting the safety of journalists and their ability to carry out their jobs. According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), ten journalists were reported missing during the period between 2016 and the end of 2020.¹⁴ Journalists also continue to be held hostage by non-state actors: RSF reported 54 journalists held as hostages in 2020, compared to 57 in 2019, 60 in 2018, and 54 in 2017. All incidents occurred in countries experiencing armed conflict, with the vast majority taking place in the Arab region. Globally, journalists forced into exile also remains an issue of concern.

⁹ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000266235/PDF/266235eng.pdf.multi>

¹⁰ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374994/PDF/374994eng.pdf.multi>

¹¹ <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/45/L.42/Rev.1>

¹² https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/windhoek30declaration_wbfd_2021.pdf

¹³ https://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_e.aspx?si=A/HRC/RES/39/6

¹⁴ Data extracted from RSF annual round-up reports. https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/rsfs_2020_round-up_0.pdf

Arbitrary detention is a continuing threat for journalists around the world. As defined in SDG Indicator 16.10.1 metadata, detention is considered arbitrary when it does not conform to existing national laws, or when it is deemed unjust or unnecessary.¹⁵ National authorities predominantly justify the arrest and detention of journalists by pressing anti-state charges, including charges of terrorism, espionage, and conspiracy. Disproportionate libel and defamation laws, as well as the proliferation of cyber-laws and anti-“fake news” legislation, have also served to imprison members of the media.

“We are not intimidated. No amount of legal cases, black propaganda, and lies can silence Filipino journalists who continue to hold the line...”

MARIA RESSA

Co-founder and CEO, Rappler, and Laureate of the 2021 UNESCO/Guillermo Cano Prize and the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize¹⁶

In 2020, CPJ registered at least 274 cases of imprisoned journalists, the highest number recorded since 1992.¹⁷ Of these, 184 journalists (67 percent) were detained on “anti-state” charges and 34 journalists (12 percent) had been imprisoned on “fake news” charges.¹⁸ RSF, which also includes media support staff in its reporting, recorded 389 cases of imprisoned journalists and media workers in 2019 and 387 in 2020, similarly noting historically high levels. It also reported that more than half of the world’s imprisoned journalists (61 percent) as of December 2020 are being held in just five countries in Asia and the Pacific and in the Arab region.¹⁹ The conditions in which journalists are detained have led both CPJ and RSF to report instances of mistreatment, negligence, and sometimes torture. In recent years, a number of journalists have died while imprisoned, sparking calls for further investigations from UNESCO and other international bodies and free speech advocates.

BOX 1:
Global trends in journalist imprisonment

Though killings of journalists have decreased over time, as discussed above, CPJ reports that imprisonment of journalists around the world has simultaneously increased. Original UNESCO analysis further confirms that those countries that register higher numbers of journalist killings typically report low numbers of imprisonment, and vice versa. In considering this relationship, however, it is important to recall that killings are often—though not always—carried out by non-state actors or occur in countries experiencing armed conflict.

The variation in case numbers from one year to the next frequently reflects changes in just a few countries, as was evident in the impact of fewer journalist killings in the Arab region. For both killings and imprisonment, the majority of cases occur in fewer than two dozen countries; while these trends are considered globally, many countries continue to exhibit neither journalist killings nor imprisonment. Still, the rise and stagnation of imprisonment numbers signals that there could be increasing repression of press freedom in several regions, even as the decline in killings sparks hope for progress in journalist safety.

¹⁵ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-16-10-01.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.rappler.com/about/rappler-statement-maria-ressa-arrest-cyber-libel-february-2019>

¹⁷ These numbers refer to overall numbers of imprisoned journalists, not only arbitrary detentions. As in previous years, UNESCO does not enter into assessment of which detentions are arbitrary, but rather examines the overall trends in numbers imprisoned.

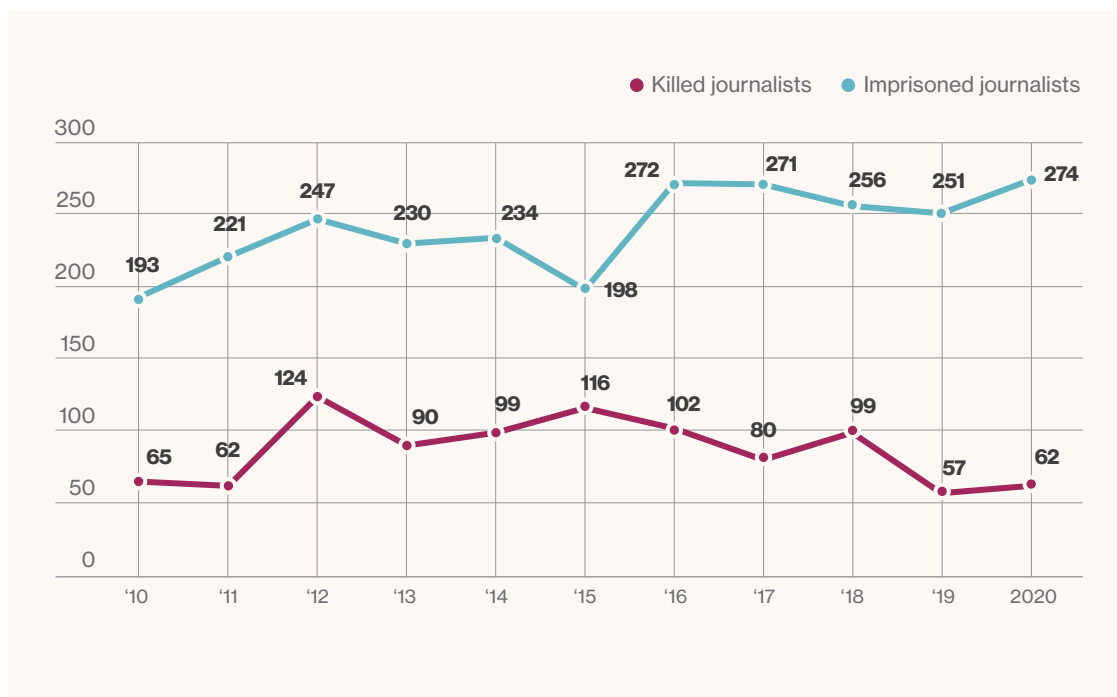
¹⁸ <https://cpj.org/reports/2020/12/record-number-journalists-jailed-imprisoned/>

¹⁹ https://cpj.org/data/imprisoned/2020/?status=Imprisoned&start_year=2020&end_year=2020&group_by=location

¹⁹ https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/rsfs_2020_round-up_0.pdf

FIGURE B1-1:
Trends in
journalist
killings and
imprisonment,
2010–2021

Sources:
Committee to
Protect Journalists
(CPJ)
UNESCO Observatory
of Killed Journalists



Spotlight on threats against journalists

Aside from the types of violence explicitly mentioned in SDG Indicator 16.10.1, journalists face other menacing issues with effects on their physical and psychological safety, including threats of violence offline and online. A recent study by RSF showed that, of the 139 journalists killed from 2011 to the end of 2020 in four countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, 41 percent had received threats prior to their assassination.²⁰

The UN has recognized the need to address threats against journalists with the full force of the law, and in March 2021, the 14th United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice adopted its final Declaration, calling for Member States to “investigate, prosecute and punish threats and acts of violence, falling within their jurisdiction, committed against journalists and media workers, (...) with a view to ending impunity for crimes committed against them.”²¹ In its 66 years of existence, this was the first time that the UN Crime Congress had recognized the specific threats faced by journalists, also in conjunction with journalists’ role in uncovering crime and corruption.

This need was likewise emphasized by previous resolutions adopted by various UN bodies, including the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly, and the Security Council (see Annex II). For instance, Resolution A/HRC/RES/33/2,²² adopted by the Human Rights Council in 2016, called on Member States to “develop and implement strategies for combating impunity for attacks and violence against journalists” through measures such as the creation of special investigative units, the appointment of specialized prosecutors, the establishment of monitoring and rapid response mechanisms, and the training of members of the judiciary on the safety of journalists.

²⁰ <https://rsf.org/en/reports/2011-2020-study-journalist-murders-latin-america-confirms-importance-strengthening-protection>

²¹ https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CCPCJ/CCPCJ_Sessions/CCPCJ_30/Kyoto_Declaration_V2102815.pdf

²² <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/33/2>

In the 2019 Report to the Human Rights Council on investigating the killing of Jamal Khashoggi,²³ the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions recommended establishing “a standing Instrument for the investigations of violent crimes against journalists, human rights defenders and other activists and dissidents targeted for the peaceful expression of their opinions”, and stated that this instrument should “investigate such violations, in accordance with criminal law standards; identify possible avenues for the administration of justice at national, regional and international levels; prepare files to facilitate and expedite fair and independent criminal proceedings (...); [and] identify other mechanisms for delivery of justice and ending impunity, including at political and diplomatic levels”.

Safety of journalists covering protests

UNESCO has observed a problematic trend of heightened attacks against journalists covering protests, emanating from multiple sources, including both security forces and protest participants. From January to August 2021, UNESCO registered attacks against journalists in connection with the coverage of protests, demonstrations, and riots in at least 60 countries worldwide.²⁴ In some cases, the attack was directed against one journalist; in other instances, multiple journalists were targeted. Since 2015, at least 13 journalists have been killed while covering protests.²⁵

A large majority of these cases were perpetrated by security forces and included attacks such as beatings, the use of tear gas, and arbitrary arrests. At the same time, a significant number of attacks against journalists were perpetrated by citizens participating in the protests, including both physical and verbal attacks. Journalists have also been threatened with raids of media offices and the physical destruction of journalistic material in retaliation for coverage of protests.

No global monitoring mechanisms of attacks against journalists covering civil unrest exist to date. In countries where national monitoring mechanisms exist, a high level of attacks has been recorded, suggesting the potential of large underreporting elsewhere.

²³ https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session41/Documents/A_HRC_41_CRP1.docx

²⁴ Recorded by UNESCO, drawing on credible documentation by national and international partners.

²⁵ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374206>;
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377346>

5 Trends in digital safety

Global awareness of the digital threats that journalists face has increased in recent years. Online harassment, mass and targeted surveillance, data storage vulnerabilities, and digital attacks (including hacking) are among the many ways that digital tools have been used to jeopardize the safety and integrity of journalists as well as their sources. Both state and non-state actors use these tactics to gain access to confidential information and intimidate journalists. There is evidence to suggest that digital threats faced by journalists are growing: in its 2021 report on the first 10,000 cases of its Digital Security Helpline, Access Now recorded an increase in requests for urgent support from journalists and activists working in conflict settings and in countries experiencing shrinking civic space overall.²⁶

Alongside a rise in digital attacks, threats to the safety of journalists have been compounded by the passage of legislation that grants security forces greater powers of surveillance, often under the justification of national security or public health. Surveillance and hacking compromise the protection of journalists' sources,²⁷ as recently illustrated by the "Pegasus Project" revelations, following which UN human rights experts called for all States to impose a global moratorium on the sale and transfer of surveillance technology, until regulations that ensure that such technology complies with international human rights standards are put in place.

Protecting against digital threats has become even more important during the COVID-19 pandemic, with more journalists working remotely and relying on personal devices. In a global survey on journalism during the pandemic, conducted by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University, a significant portion of the 1,406 respondents reported blatant threats of government surveillance (7 percent); targeted digital security attacks, including phishing, distributed denial of service (DDoS), or malware (4 percent); or forced data handover (3 percent).²⁸ Digital tools also served as a vector for psychological attacks: 20 percent of respondents reported that their experience of online abuse, harassment, threats, or attacks was "much worse than usual" during the pandemic.

While spyware, surveillance, and other digital attacks are increasingly recognized as serious threats to journalism, many journalists do not have adequate access to or knowledge of (digital) tools that can help protect them. Often, the onus is put on the individual to ensure their own digital safety, as other actors, including internet companies and media organizations, very often do not offer adequate support.²⁹

End-to-end encryption has been increasingly recognized as one important tool for protecting the safety of journalists and their sources, therefore strengthening the right to privacy and to freedom of expression.³⁰ In 2020, the UN Human Rights Council called on Member States to "refrain from interference with the use of technologies such as encryption and anonymity tools".³¹

²⁶ <https://www.accessnow.org/cms/assets/uploads/2021/06/Helpline-10000-cases-report.pdf>

²⁷ UNESCO (2015) CONNECTing the Dots: Options for Future Action Outcome Document. Available at: https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/connecting_dots_outcome_document.pdf; Posetti, Julie (2017) Protecting journalism sources in the digital age. UNESCO. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248054>

²⁸ <https://www.icfj.org/our-work/journalism-and-pandemic-survey>

²⁹ Høiby, M. and Mariateresa, G.V. (2020) Reconsidering journalist safety training. *Media and Communication*, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 68–77.

³⁰ <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v8i1.2525>

³¹ https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246527_eng; <https://www.accessnow.org/why-encryption-is-important/>

³¹ <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/45/18>;

6 Violence against women journalists

“We knock on many doors, thousands of doors, for only one to open, and to be believed. And the most difficult thing, I think, is when it involves a crime of sexual violence. Because you have to fight every day for people to believe you were raped.”

JINETH BEDOYA LIMA

Colombian journalist and UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize laureate

In recent years, civil society, researchers, and international bodies have increasingly recognized the extent and impact of violence against women journalists—off-line and online, verbal, visual and physical. Many women journalists report suffering physical and online violence perpetrated by colleagues, sources, public figures, anonymous perpetrators, and strangers. That violence, in its many forms, poses a threat to diversity in the media, as well as equal participation in democratic deliberation and the public’s right to access information.

From 2016 through 2020, 37 women journalists were killed, accounting for roughly 9 percent of the total 400 killings recorded in those five years. This proportion is consistent with previous years. Research on the global level as to why women journalists are underrepresented among fatal victims is still lacking. In some cases, women journalists may be less involved in traditionally dangerous beats: according to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), women reporters were least likely to cover issues of “Crime and Violence” (33 percent women) and “Politics and Government” (35 percent women).³²

Further, in many countries, women are excluded from top editor and manager positions.³³ This means that issues that affect women journalists, such as misogynistic online violence, may also be less likely to be prioritized at a decision-making level, including the fact that women journalists face specific challenges related to gender-based violence that may go beyond longstanding understandings of journalist safety.

Mapping the scale of online abuse and hostility

Women in the public sphere, off-line or online, risk being targeted for gendered harassment, abuse, and violence that seeks to make their participation in public space difficult or impossible. The more public visibility a woman has, the more she is exposed to these risks. Recent research has shown that gender is only one of many factors that impact the likelihood that a person will be targeted by abuse, harassment, and violence in the public sphere. Mounting calls for integrating an intersectional perspective on gendered harassment of journalists have highlighted how individuals are targeted by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. This dynamic was clearly illustrated in a 2016 study of abuse in comments on the *Guardian* news site, which found that violence against women journalists was compounded by stereotypes and prejudice related to ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation/gender identity.³⁴

³² https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/GMMP-2020.Highlights_FINAL.pdf

³³ <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/women-and-leadership-news-media-2020-evidence-ten-markets>

³⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments>

In 2021, the findings were released of a two-year global research project led by UNESCO in cooperation with the ICFJ on online violence faced by women journalists. The study included a large-scale global survey of 901 journalists from 125 countries, as well as long-form interviews with 173 journalists and experts and two case studies analysing over 2.5 million social media posts directed at prominent journalists Maria Ressa (The Philippines) and Carole Cadwalladr (United Kingdom). The survey found that 73 percent of women journalist respondents said they had experienced some form of online violence.³⁵ Twenty percent had also been attacked or abused off-line in connection with the online violence they had experienced.³⁶ The survey further showed that harassment was compounded with multiple stereotypes and prejudice related to ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation/gender identity, as respondents identifying with these categories experienced both the highest rates and most severe impacts of online violence. The study additionally established that attacks against women journalists are also often closely related to coordinated disinformation campaigns.

BOX 2:

Online violence and harassment of women journalists remains a serious threat

Out of the **714 respondents** to the UNESCO-ICFJ survey who identified as women...



One in four of respondents who said they had experienced online violence said this had included **threats of physical violence**, including sexual violence, and more than one in ten had also received threats against those close to them.



Four in ten reported being targeted in online attacks that appeared to be linked to **orchestrated disinformation campaigns**.



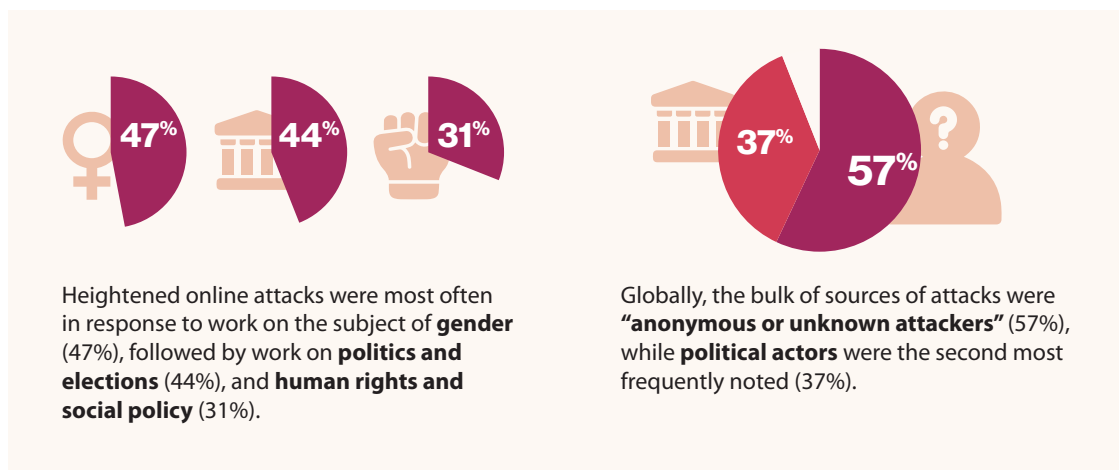
A quarter of respondents reported experiencing **mental health impacts** as a result of online violence, and more than one in ten having sought medical and/or psychological help.



Only one in ten (11%) of the women journalists surveyed had **reported instances of online violence to the police** and only 8% had taken legal action.

³⁵ Expressed as a percentage of the 625 women journalists who responded to the question.

³⁶ Expressed as a percentage of the 596 women journalists who responded to the question.



The study also found that online attacks on the women journalists surveyed had increased in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the pandemic-induced reliance on online spaces for communication, a rise in online abuse against women has become one of many “shadow pandemics”, similar to the “disinfodemic”. In the case of women journalists, this mirrors how media workers have become even more reliant on online tools to perform their work, but also how online abuse has worsened for members of marginalized groups. In December 2020, a UNESCO-supported study by African Women in Media (AWiM) found that 69 of the 108 women journalists surveyed had experienced increased online harassment during the pandemic.³⁷

A growing coalition to fight gender-based violence targeting journalists

Launched in 2020, the Coalition Against Online Violence spearheaded by the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) brings together over 30 civil society organizations to advocate for change and offer journalists collective support. A variety of other civil society organizations have also begun new initiatives to support to journalists targeted by online harassment. Trollbusters, OnlineSOS, Vita Activa, and the Coalition Against Online Violence typically serve individual women journalists and provide capacity-building for newsrooms.

International organizations have also emphasized the issue of gendered online violence in their own campaigns. These include the Safety of Female Journalists (#SOFJO) initiative of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which also published a resource guide on this issue,³⁸ and UNESCO’s #JournalistsToo campaign. In line with the UNESCO General Conference 39C/Resolution 39, which invited the UNESCO Director-General to “reinforce activities (...) aimed at addressing the specific threats to the safety of women journalists, both online and offline”,³⁹ UNESCO has prioritized the gender dimension of journalist safety through research, outreach, and training initiatives.

Increased recognition of the problem at international level has also helped produce a series of resolutions and decisions within the framework of international human rights law. Two recent examples include the UN Human Rights Council Resolutions 39/6 (2018)⁴⁰ and 45/42 (2020)⁴¹ which recognize the specific risks faced by women journalists in relation to their work and underline the importance of taking a gender-responsive approach when considering measures to address the safety of journalists.

³⁷ <https://africanwomeninmedia.com/impact-covid19-east-african-women-journalists/>

³⁸ <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/468861>

³⁹ UNESCO General Conference 39 C/Resolution 39.

⁴⁰ UN Human Rights Council. The safety of journalists. A/HRC/RES/39/6 (September 2018)

⁴¹ UN Human Rights Council. The safety of journalists. A/HRC/RES/45/42 (October 2020)

7 Safety of journalists during COVID-19

“Journalists are on the frontline and put their safety in peril every day to bring citizens reliable and verified information on the pandemic. Their contribution has been invaluable for us all. But many lack protective equipment and access to healthcare, and some have been made to pay the ultimate price for their coverage of the health crisis.

I stand in solidarity with media workers and their families during this demanding and perilous time.”

AUDREY AZOULAY

Director-General of UNESCO, 9 June 2020⁴²

The COVID-19 health crisis has created new challenges for the safety of journalists and considerably exacerbated existing ones. When covering the pandemic and its repercussions in the field, journalists have inevitably risked exposure to the virus, and many (especially freelancers) lack protective equipment, sanitary safety training, and/or access to healthcare. The non-governmental organization Press Emblem Campaign recorded at least 1,788 deaths of journalists having contracted COVID-19 between 1 March 2020 and 3 September 2021.⁴³

Many media workers covering the pandemic have experienced psychological stress and trauma, both from the nature of the assignment and from job insecurity caused by the rising financial instability of many media outlets. Loss of revenue has put many journalists' jobs in jeopardy and constitutes a severe threat to the very existence of many independent media outlets.

In addition, media workers around the world have been subject to harassment, persecution, and detention as a result of their work to inform citizens about the crisis. Some have been the subject of accusations of spreading disinformation when reporting on the pandemic and on governments' responses to the crisis. In some of the worst cases, journalists have been physically assaulted by anti-vaccination protestors, as well as by government officials and security forces, or imprisoned for their coverage of state contracts issued under the pandemic. Many of these charges or arrests have been grounded in existing laws. Additionally, in some countries, governments have introduced new legal measures which are often so broadly worded as to criminalise legitimate journalism. As a result, there is a risk that the COVID-19 pandemic could also

lead to a rise in arbitrary detentions of journalists. While exhaustive monitoring and analysis of reprisals in connection with COVID-19 reporting does not exist, one report recorded that, between January 2020 and June 2021, at least 76 journalists suffered retaliation after reporting on or criticizing the COVID-19 response.⁴⁴ These reprisals included criminal charges, physical abuse and torture, threats, and harassment. In its 2020 report, RSF reported that as of 1 December 2020, 14 journalists were still being held in connection with their coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The UN Secretary-General further expressed concern for detained journalists, specifically with COVID-19 spreading in prisons, and called for the immediate release of “journalists who have been detained for practicing their profession”.⁴⁵

⁴² <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-deplores-fatalities-among-journalists-covering-covid-19-pandemic>

⁴³ This number includes all journalists and media workers that contracted COVID-19, including when the contraction of the virus cannot be clearly linked to the execution of the profession. <https://www.presseemblem.ch/-1.shtml>

⁴⁴ https://rightsinddevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Unhealthy-silence_full-report.pdf

⁴⁵ <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/note-correspondents/2020-09-17/note-correspondents---response-questions-recent-letter-the-committee-protect-journalists>

8 Good practices and positive measures recently reported by Member States

Under the umbrella of the 2021 Director-General's request for information on judicial follow-up to cases of killings of journalists, 28 countries (44 percent) have reported to UNESCO positive steps that they have taken in establishing and implementing stronger protection, prosecution, prevention, and reporting measures to enhance the safety of journalists.⁴⁶ These encompass the examples below.

Monitoring and research initiatives

Several States have reported implementing national and subnational monitoring mechanisms for the safety of journalists. In Latin America, for instance, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Paraguay have established monitoring protection measures and incidents of threats and violence, typically within the framework of a national policy programme for supporting journalists and human rights defenders. Monitoring mechanisms within national protection units or task forces were similarly reported by Kenya, Palestine, and the Philippines. In many Member States, civil society also plays a vital role in monitoring violence against journalists.

Several Member States have also recognised the importance of research initiatives in order to better understand the challenges that journalists in a particular context may face. Brazil, Kenya, Nepal, and Thailand, for example, recently reported having undertaken or commissioned studies on key issues (such as SLAPP actions or review of media sector policies) related to safety of journalists in their countries.⁴⁷

Action plans, legislation, and reforms in law enforcement procedures

Improving reporting mechanisms, sensitizing and building the capacity of the law enforcement system, and creating extensive policy frameworks at the national level are all important steps for promoting the safety of journalists. Ecuador, Malta, Slovakia, and the Philippines reported having proposed or implemented new legislation towards this aim. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland also reported introducing a National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists. In Yemen, a National Committee on human rights violations investigates crimes against journalists.

Inter-institutional cooperation was emphasized in the reports of many Member States. For example, Ecuador highlighted that its Inter-institutional Committee for the Protection of Journalists and Communication Workers at the National Level and the Coordination of Actions on an International Scale has met regularly in recent years to implement a range of reforms. These include strengthening the capacity of the police to undertake individual risk assessments, considering intimidation of journalists as a crime under Ecuador's criminal code, and including threatened journalists in victim and witness protection mechanisms. This kind of cooperation was also presented by Venezuela, which reported that the Public Prosecutor's Office collaborates with various investigative divisions.

⁴⁶ These countries are: Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Malta, Mexico, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Palestine, Paraguay, Peru, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Slovakia, Thailand, Ukraine, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America, Venezuela, and Yemen.

⁴⁷ SLAPP actions, short for Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation, are a form of legal harassment used to intimidate and restrict critical voices and free expression through expensive and time-consuming legal proceedings.

Mexico has introduced a special department within the office of the Attorney General to investigate crimes against freedom of expression, which is also present at the subnational level in certain states. Similarly, Guatemala reported the creation of a Division on Crimes Against Journalists within the Public Prosecutor's Office, and Iraq reported the establishment of a special investigative unit on crimes against journalists within the Ministry of Interior. Indonesia has introduced a special prosecutor for crimes against journalists. Like the Philippines, it has also established a special task force for the safety of journalists.

In Peru, journalists facing threats or harassment can report to the Ombudsman's Office. In addition, the government has prepared guidelines for the Ombudsman's office on how to react to safety threats and infringements of freedom of expression reported by journalists.

The introduction of special reporting mechanisms for journalists, such as hotlines, was also highlighted by Colombia, Haiti, Iraq, and the Philippines.

Trainings and capacity-building

Many Member States reported having focused on trainings and capacity-building measures with a variety of actors. Bangladesh, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico, Myanmar, Nigeria, the Russian Federation, and Ukraine all reported having conducted multistakeholder training programmes targeting the media sector, law enforcement, civil society, and other actors. Common focus areas included improving communication between law enforcement and the media, gender-based violence, and safety protocols in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Advocacy and awareness-raising

The United States of America reported diplomatic efforts in promoting freedom of expression and of the media, through initiatives such as advocacy for the release of imprisoned journalists and supporting multilateral commitments on media freedom.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ As noted above, though not a UNESCO Member State since 1 January 2019, the United States of America has continued to respond to UNESCO's request for information on the status of judicial investigations regarding cases of killed journalists that occurred within its borders.

9 UNESCO activities to advance the safety of journalists

BOX 3:

Implementation of the UN Plan of Action of the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity

UNESCO, as the UN agency with a specific mandate to defend freedom of expression and press freedom, is spearheading the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. This systematic UN-wide plan was adopted in 2012 with the aim of working towards a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers, and with a view to strengthen peace, democracy, and development. Within this framework, UNESCO's work to advance the safety of journalists is structured around six axes:

1. STANDARD-SETTING AND POLICY-MAKING

28 resolutions and decisions on journalists' safety have been adopted between 2016 and 2021 by the UN General Assembly, the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO bodies, and regional organizations.

An indicator on the safety of journalists (SDG Indicator 16.10.1) has been established to measure achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly of Target 16.10 on public access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms. UNESCO contributes data to the UN Secretary-General's annual monitoring report.

UNESCO also accompanies Member States seeking to reform their legal and institutional frameworks related to freedom of expression and media freedom through policy advice and technical support.

2. AWARENESS-RAISING

Over 150 events marking the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI) have been held around the world since its first commemoration in 2014. In recent years, UNESCO led several global communications campaigns around IDEI to raise awareness of the dangers faced by journalists around the world. In 2018, the #TruthNeverDies campaign was covered by 900 news articles. The 2019 #KeepTruthAlive campaign was covered by 300 news articles, received over 1 million impressions on Twitter, and was displayed on billboards in 60,000 locations in France, Belgium, and Mexico. In 2020, the "Protect Journalists. Protect the Truth" campaign highlighted findings from the Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity. It was the most viewed video ever on UNESCO's Twitter channel, and its content directly reached 3 million people on social media.

Annual commemorations led by UNESCO have produced important commitments to the safety of journalists. These include, for instance, the 2019 announcement by the Mexican Presidency that the government would take into account recommendations by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to strengthen national protections mechanism for human right defenders and journalists. Additionally, in 2020, during joint commemorations of World Press Freedom Day (WPF) and IDEI of the “Forum of Legal Actors”, a network of legal operators was launched to support and defend the right to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists.

3. MONITORING AND REPORTING

UNESCO’s Director-General has condemned every killing of a journalist or media worker since 1997.

Since 2008, following a decision by the Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC, the Director-General has compiled a biannual analytical [Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity](#), which contains updated information on killings of journalists and the status of judicial enquiries into each of them, based on information provided by the country in which the killing took place.

This information is also made publicly available through [UNESCO’s Observatory of Killed Journalists](#), an online database which was launched in 2018.

4. CAPACITY-BUILDING

UNESCO conducts capacity-building for journalists on physical safety in the field, digital safety and psychosocial safety in various countries around the world, and particularly in countries experiencing conflict.

UNESCO has also strengthened the capacities of over 23,000 judicial actors and 8,500 members of security forces around the world on freedom of expression of the safety of journalists, aided by UNESCO resources such as:

- [Freedom of expression and public order: fostering the relationship between security forces and journalists](#) (2018)
- [Legal standards on freedom of expression: toolkit for the judiciary in Africa](#) (2018)
- [Guidelines for prosecutors on cases of crimes against journalists](#) (2020)
- [COVID-19: the role of judicial operators in the protection and promotion of the right to freedom of expression: guidelines](#) (2020)
- [Global toolkit for judicial actors: international legal standards on freedom of expression, access to information and safety of journalists](#) (2021)
- [UNESCO guide for amicus curiae interventions in freedom of expression cases](#) (2021)

Other resources include UNESCO and RSF's "[Safety guide for journalists: a handbook for reporters in high-risk environments](#)", which was updated in 2017 to include increased focus on the safety of women journalists; and UNESCO and the International Federation of Journalists' "[Model course on safety of journalists: a guide for journalism teachers in the Arab States](#)" (2017), which was integrated into the curricula of various journalism schools across the Arab region.

5. ACADEMIC RESEARCH

In 2016, UNESCO held its first academic conference on the safety of journalists as part of the global conference celebrating WPF. On this occasion, the Journalism Safety Research Network (JSRN) was launched, with the aim of strengthening research and contributing to safer environments for journalists.

Since then, academic conferences on the safety of journalists have been organized yearly as part of WPF celebrations, bringing together universities from around the world, the JSRN, as well as the UNESCO Chair on Media Freedom, Journalism Safety and the Issue of Impunity at Sheffield University, which was created in 2018.

Assessments based on UNESCO's Journalists' Safety Indicators have been conducted in ten countries, with further assessments currently underway.

Together with ICFJ, in 2019 UNESCO launched a comprehensive study on online violence against women journalists and on best practices to counter it. [Its findings were published in 2021](#), some of which are discussed above in Section 6.

6. COALITION-BUILDING

Informal "Groups of Friends" of Member States that support the safety of journalists have been set up at UNESCO and at the UN in New York and Geneva. Similar groups exist at the OSCE and at the Council of Europe. UNESCO, together with its Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists, organized conferences on online harassment of women journalists (2019) and on the role of the judiciary and international cooperation in fostering the safety of journalists (2021).

Concrete, action-oriented proposals for strengthening the implementation of the UN Plan of Action were produced through a four-month multistakeholder consultation, including a major conference in Geneva in 2017.

Together with OHCHR, UNESCO has coordinated the UN Focal Points Network on Safety of Journalists, which spans 14 UN agencies and entities. Since 2018, this Network has carried out concerted preventative actions across the UN system regarding the safety of journalists, including in specific cases of attacks against journalists, as well as activities to sensitize UN staff in Headquarters, regional hubs, and in the field.

Spotlight on funding modalities and the safety of journalists

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION (IPDC)

Since 2009, UNESCO's IPDC has supported 149 projects that promote the safety of journalists in more than 45 countries. In the first half of 2021, 21 IPDC projects dealing with safety were approved. These grassroots projects, together with a wide range of other activities and initiatives supported by the Programme's different funding modalities, have supported national monitoring and reporting mechanisms on the safety of journalists; capacity building, including of judicial operators; awareness-raising; development of safety guidelines; and country assessments using UNESCO's Journalists' Safety Indicators (JSI). The JSI is a research framework of the IPDC, which provides a mapping of the key features that indicate the extent to which journalists are or are not able to carry out their work under safe conditions. UNESCO has published JSI assessments on Afghanistan, Guatemala, Honduras, Iraq, Kenya, Nepal, and Pakistan, and further assessments are currently ongoing.

GLOBAL MEDIA DEFENCE FUND (GMDF)

The Global Media Defence Fund, established in 2020 with significant support from the Governments of Canada and the United Kingdom, finances local, regional, and international projects seeking to strengthen the legal protection of journalists and/or enhance media freedom through investigative journalism or strategic litigation. The Fund has since also received generous voluntary contributions from Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, France, Germany, Japan, Latvia, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Serbia, and Slovakia.

The first Call for Partnerships of the Fund in 2020 received 110 partnership proposals from not-for-profit organizations, representing all regions of the world and targeting over 50 countries. UNESCO is currently supporting the implementation of 41 projects selected out of the 2020 Call, a majority from the Global South, and 17 of which are being implemented in Africa. The second Call for Partnerships of the Fund was launched in April 2021 and received over 140 proposals from candidates from around the world.

UNESCO'S MULTI-DONOR PROGRAMME ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS (MDP)

The MDP serves to further strengthen UNESCO's work on freedom of expression at global, regional, and national levels by channeling funds towards emerging priorities and the most pressing needs. Since its inception in 2017, the MDP has supported the creation and reinforcement of monitoring, reporting, protection, and prevention mechanisms, as well as of networks of safety focal points. It has also strengthened the capacities of thousands of judicial actors on freedom of expression and the safety of journalists.

10 Mainstreaming freedom of expression and safety of journalists in the Universal Periodic Review

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a process involving the review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States by the UN Human Rights Council. This peer-to-peer review provides an opportunity to assess whether legal domestic frameworks sufficiently guarantee freedom of expression and access to information, and whether laws are being effectively implemented by Member States. According to a 2021 research project undertaken by Sciences Po under the supervision of UNESCO,⁴⁹ 79,387 recommendations were made over the three UPR cycles covered in this report.⁵⁰ Of these recommendations, 3,205 related to freedom of expression in general. Out of these, 17 percent enjoyed support by States under review, meaning that they agreed to work towards their achievement.



Recommendations on safety of journalists constituted 23% of all recommendations related to freedom of expression

This highlights the importance of the issue on the international human rights agenda and the international political will to protect journalists.

Recommendations have included calls to “adopt effective measures to prevent any harassment or intimidation” of journalists, to “end intimidation, threats, and physical attacks” against them, and to “adopt a national policy on the protection of journalists and human rights defenders”. UNESCO contributes to the UPR, advocating for the alignment of domestic laws with internationally recognized standards in the field of freedom of expression, a gender sensitive approach to protection, and the adoption of specialized normative frameworks for journalists.

While the commitments made by Member States during the UPR are important steps forwards, proper follow-up must be undertaken at the domestic level to ensure compliance. In 2021, UNESCO released guidelines for UN Country Teams on how to effectively engage with the UPR to foster freedom of expression, access to information and safety of journalists.⁵¹ These guidelines will be complemented by resources addressed to other stakeholder groups.

⁴⁹ Note that this report was performed for UNESCO's internal use and analysis.

⁵⁰ At the time of this research, Cycle 3 was still ongoing, with 126 out of 193 reviewed by the Human Rights Council.

⁵¹ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377808>

11 Conclusion

While several important steps have been taken towards achieving a safer environment for journalists in the past five years, the challenges have both remained significant and become more diversified.

Though killings of journalists have decreased by nearly 20 percent in the past five years compared to the previous quinquennium, other types of attacks against journalists are numerous. Additionally, while killings have decreased everywhere, the proportion of targeted killings outside of countries experiencing armed conflict has steadily increased over the past five years. This trend may suggest that even as fewer journalists have suffered fatal attacks while covering armed conflict, they risk their lives when reporting on topics such as corruption, crime, and politics.

Impunity for crimes against journalists remains high and just 13 percent of cases documented by UNESCO are currently considered resolved. In the remaining 87 percent of cases—nearly nine out of ten—UNESCO considers the case as ongoing, unresolved, or has not received information on the judicial procedure from the concerned Member State.

In 2022, the framework under which much of the international cooperation to ensure a safer environment for journalists turns a decade old. The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity has been an effective tool for multistakeholder cooperation, together with an unprecedented number of coalitions and national, regional, and international initiatives to monitor, prevent, protect, and prosecute, a recent selection of which were detailed in Section 8. Additionally, international awareness on issues such as intersectional types of violence against journalists, the impact of threats, digital safety, and other issues has grown.

In the past five years, UNESCO has issued a series of recommendations and suggested actions, outlined in the documents and reports cited above and in Box 3. These recommendations were formed in dialogue with the analysis and trends summarized above and are important elements towards improving the national, regional, and global policies to protect journalists and prevent and prosecute crimes against them and the vital service they provide.

ANNEX I:

UNESCO MEMBER STATES BY REGIONAL GROUPING

Group I: Western Europe and North America (27)

Andorra	Iceland	Spain
Austria	Ireland	Sweden
Belgium	Italy	Switzerland
Canada	Luxembourg	Turkey
Cyprus	Malta	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Denmark	Monaco	
Finland	Netherlands	
France	Norway	
Germany	Portugal	
Greece	San Marino	

Group II: Central and Eastern Europe (25)

Albania	Georgia	Russian Federation
Armenia	Hungary	Serbia
Azerbaijan	Latvia	Slovakia
Belarus	Lithuania	Slovenia
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Montenegro	Tajikistan
Bulgaria	North Macedonia	Ukraine
Croatia	Poland	Uzbekistan
Czechia	Republic of Moldova	
Estonia	Romania	

Group III: Latin America and the Caribbean (33)

Antigua and Barbuda
Argentina
Bahamas
Barbados
Belize
Bolivia (Plurinational
State of)
Brazil
Chile
Colombia
Costa Rica
Cuba

Dominican Republic
Ecuador
El Salvador
Grenada
Guatemala
Guyana
Haiti
Honduras
Jamaica
Mexico
Nicaragua
Panama

Paraguay
Peru
Saint Kitts and Nevis
Saint Lucia
Saint Vincent and the
Grenadines
Suriname
Trinidad and Tobago
Uruguay
Venezuela (Bolivarian
Republic of)

Group IV: Asia and the Pacific (44)

Afghanistan
Australia
Bangladesh
Bhutan
Brunei Darussalam
Cambodia
China
Cook Islands
Democratic People's
Republic of Korea
Fiji
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Japan
Kazakhstan
Kiribati

Kyrgyzstan
Lao People's Democratic
Republic
Niue
Pakistan
Palau
Papua
New Guinea
Philippines
Republic of Korea
Samoa
Singapore
Solomon Islands
Sri Lanka
Thailand
Timor-Leste
Malaysia

Maldives
Marshall Islands
Micronesia (Federated
States of)
Mongolia
Myanmar
Nauru
Nepal
New Zealand
Tonga
Turkmenistan
Tuvalu
Vanuatu
Viet Nam

Group V: Africa (47)

Angola
Benin
Botswana
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cameroon
Cape Verde
Central African Republic
Chad
Comoros
Congo
Côte d'Ivoire
Democratic Republic of
the Congo
Djibouti
Equatorial Guinea
Eritrea

Ethiopia
Gabon
Gambia
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Kenya
Lesotho
Liberia
Madagascar
Malawi
Mali
Mauritius
Mozambique
Namibia
Niger
Nigeria

Rwanda
Sao Tome and Principe
Senegal
Seychelles
Sierra Leone
Somalia
South Africa
South Sudan
Swaziland
Togo
Uganda
United Republic of
Tanzania
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Group VI: Arab Region (19)

Algeria
Bahrain
Egypt
Iraq
Jordan
Kuwait
Lebanon
Libya
Mauritania
Morocco
Oman

Palestine
Qatar
Saudi Arabia
Sudan
Syrian
Arab Republic
Tunisia
United Arab Emirates
Yemen

ANNEX II:

Timeline of Key Resolutions and Decisions regarding Safety of Journalists since 2016

2016

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 33/2 on the Safety of Journalists (A/HRC/RES/33/2)

This Resolution calls upon States to ensure that measures to combat terrorism and preserve national security or public order do not arbitrarily or unduly hinder the work and safety of journalists. It also calls upon States to protect in law and in practice the confidentiality of journalists' sources. The Resolution emphasizes that in the digital age, encryption and anonymity tools have become vital for many journalists to exercise freely their work and calls upon States not to interfere with the use of such technologies.

UNESCO Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC Decision on the Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity (CI-16/COUNCIL-30/4)

In this Decision, the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's IPDC underlines the increase of acts of violence against media workers and urges Member States to actively provide information to UNESCO's monitoring mechanism on judicial-follow up to killings of journalists as well as to increase their efforts in mobilizing funds to support UNESCO's work in the area of safety of journalists and the issue of impunity.

2017

UNESCO Executive Board Decision on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (201 EX/Decision 5.I.I)

In this Decision, UNESCO's Executive Board expresses its commitment to the safety of journalists and media workers. It acknowledges the specific risks faced by women journalists and encourages Member States to develop national prevention, protection, and prosecution initiatives. It strongly urges Member States to continue to provide voluntary responses concerning the judicial investigations of the killing of journalists and to develop effective monitoring mechanisms for this purpose.

UN General Assembly Resolution 72/175 on the Safety of journalists and the Issue of Impunity (A/RES/72/175)

This Resolution condemns unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists and media workers. It also condemns specific attacks on women journalists in the exercise of their work, including sexual and gender-based discrimination and violence, intimidation, and harassment, online and offline. The Resolution calls upon States to implement more effectively the applicable legal framework for the protection of journalists and media workers in order to combat impunity. It also recognizes the decision of the Secretary-General to mobilize a network of focal points throughout the United Nations system to intensify efforts to enhance the safety of journalists and media workers.

UNESCO Executive Board Decision on the progress report on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (202 EX/Decision 5.I.K)

Through this Decision, UNESCO's Executive Board took note with interest of a progress report by UNESCO's Secretariat on work on safety of journalists and the issue of impunity and the Multistakeholder Consultation on Strengthening the Implementation of the UN Plan of Action. It requests the Director-General to continue work towards the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 16.10 and monitoring of indicators 16.10.1 and 16.10.2. The Decision encourages Member States to reinforce their efforts in ensuring the voluntary implementation of the UN Plan of Action at national level and strongly urges Member States to provide information on judicial investigations into the killings of journalists. It also calls on Director-General to reinforce activities addressing the specific threats to the safety of women journalists.

UNESCO General Conference Resolution on strengthening UNESCO's leadership in the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (39 C/Resolution 39)

This Resolution welcomes UNESCO's efforts towards the formalisation of a system of focal points for the safety of journalists within the relevant United Nations entities. It also encourages Member States to strengthen the voluntary implementation of the UN Plan of Action at country level and invites the UNESCO Director-General to reinforce actions addressing threats to the safety of women journalists online and offline.

Organization of American States (OAS) General Assembly Resolution on the promotion and protection of human rights (AG/RES. 2908 (XLVII-O/17))

This Resolution emphasizes the contribution of investigative journalists who report on human rights violations, organized crime, corruption and other wrongdoings, and resolves to condemn murders, acts of aggression and other violence against journalists and media workers, underlining that these constitute an assault of the right of everyone to receive information of public interest. It reaffirms the duty of Member States to implement comprehensive measures for prevention, protection, investigation, and punishment of those responsible, as well as to implement strategies to end impunity and share good practices, such as the creation of independent prosecution units, the adoption of specific investigation and prosecution protocols, and the provision of continuous capacity-building for judicial actors.

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1/17 on Human Rights and the Fight against Impunity and Corruption

In this Resolution, the IACHR stresses the important citizen oversight role played by journalists and the media in investigating and reporting on corruption. It calls on Member States to fulfil their obligations to protect human right defenders, including journalists and media outlets, who are particularly at risk due to their investigations and dissemination of information on corruption.

UNESCO Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC Decision on the Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity (CI/2018/COUNCIL.31/H/1)

This Decision encourages Member States to provide information to UNESCO on judicial investigations of killings of journalists and to appoint a focal point on the issue of safety of journalists to coordinate monitoring on the safety of journalists. Additionally, it invites the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC to continue supporting projects that further the objectives of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 39/6 on the safety of journalists (A/HRC/RES/39/6)

This Resolution urges States to do their utmost to prevent violence, intimidation, threats and attacks against journalists and media workers, including by creating a safe environment for journalists to perform their work; raising public awareness; publicly condemning violence against journalists and media workers; establishing mechanisms, to permit the collecting, analysis and reporting of concrete disaggregated data on violence against journalists; establishing an early warning and rapid response mechanism; supporting capacity building; putting in place safe gender-sensitive preventive measures and investigative procedures, ratifying human rights instruments and implementing applicable legal framework.

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 38/7 on the Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet (A/HRC/RES/38/7)

This Resolution condemns unequivocally all human rights violations and abuses committed against persons for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms on the Internet, and calls upon all States to ensure accountability in this regard. It also condemns unequivocally online attacks against women, in particular where women journalist are targeted for their expression. It calls upon States to create and maintain, in law and in practice, a safe and enabling online environment for the enjoyment of human rights so that journalists may perform their work independently and without undue or unlawful interference.

2018

Council of the European Union Conclusions on the Strengthening of European Content in the Digital Economy (2018/C 457/02)

In these Conclusions, the Council of the European Union encourages Member States of the European Union and the European Commission to ensure the effective protection of journalists and other media actors, such as their sources. It also invites the European Commission to support projects which provide legal and practical help to journalists and media workers under threat.

European Parliament Resolution on Media Pluralism and Media Freedom in the European Union (P8_TA(2018)0204)

In this Resolution, the Parliament of the European Union urges the Member States of the European Union to prevent violence against journalists and media workers, to ensure accountability, avoid impunity, and guarantee that victims and their families have access to the appropriate legal remedies. It also calls on Member States to set up independent and impartial regulatory bodies in cooperation with journalists' organizations for monitoring and reporting on violence and threats against journalists.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Decision on the Safety of Journalists (MC.DEC/3/18)

This Decision by the Ministerial Council of the OSCE condemns all attacks and violence against journalists such as killings, torture, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and detention, arbitrary expulsions, intimidation, harassment, and threats of all forms, such as physical, legal, political, technological, or economic. It also condemns attacks on women journalists, such as sexual harassment, abuse, intimidation, threats, and violence, including online. It further urges participating States to take effective measures to end impunity for crimes against journalists, and calls on political leaders to refrain from intimidating, threatening or condoning violence against journalists.

UN General Assembly Resolution 74/157 on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (A/RES/74/157)

This Resolution condemns the prevailing impunity for attacks and violence against journalists as well as the specific attacks on women journalists and media workers in relation to their work. It urges Member States to do their utmost to prevent violence and ensure accountability. It further urges political leaders, public officials and/or authorities to refrain from denigrating, intimidating or threatening the media, including individual journalists and media workers, specifically women. Finally, it calls upon States to put in place safe gender-sensitive preventive measures and investigative procedures, in order to encourage women journalists to and provide adequate support, including psychosocial support, to victims and survivors.

UNESCO Executive Board Decision on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (206 EX/Decision 5.I.B)

This Decision encourages Member States to continue to ensure the voluntary implementation of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and invites the Director-General to continue strengthening the implementation of the Plan. It also invites the Director-General to prioritize activities addressing the specific threats to the safety of women journalists, both online and offline, as well as new and emerging threats to the safety of journalists.

Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Resolution 1/18 on Corruption and Human Rights

This Resolution builds on IACHR Resolution 1/17 on Human Rights and the Fight Against Impunity and Corruption and reiterates that the safety of journalists is essential for ensuring the eradication of corruption. It recommends to States to foster a climate of guarantees for the freedom to report acts of corruption, which includes guaranteeing the safety of journalists and other human right defenders, as well as ensuring the confidentiality of journalistic sources.

2019

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 45/18 on the Safety of Journalists (A/HRC/RES/45/18)

This Resolution calls upon States to take action on a number of barriers to ensuring a safe and enabling environment for journalists and media workers. These include developing strategies to combat impunity; ensuring accountability through the conduct of impartial, prompt, and effective investigations; establishing prevention mechanisms; ensuring that defamation and libel laws are not misused, in particular to illegitimately censor journalists; refraining from interference with the use of technologies such as encryption and anonymity tools; and to address sexual and gender-based violence. It also calls upon States to cooperate the media and civil society organizations to assess the damage that the COVID-19 pandemic is inflicting on the provision of vital information to the public and the sustainability of media environments.

UN General Assembly Resolution 75/101-A on Information in the service of humanity (A/RES/75/101 A)

This Resolution urges all countries, organizations of the United Nations system as a whole and all others concerned to ensure for journalists the free and effective performance of their professional tasks and condemn resolutely all attacks against them.

UNESCO Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC Decision (CI-20/Council.32/9) on the Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity (CI-20/Council.32/9)

This Decision encourages Member States to enhance the capacities of national judicial training institutes, prosecution services and law enforcement agencies to make use of UNESCO resources in addressing impunity and the safety of journalists, and to appoint a focal point on the issue of safety of journalists and impunity to coordinate monitoring on these issues.

African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Resolution 449 on Human and Peoples' Rights as Central Pillar of Successful Response to COVID-19 and Recovery from its Socio-Political Impacts (ACHRPR/Res. 449 (LXVI))

This Resolution underlines incidents of violations of human rights (such as disproportionate use of force, extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, and physical assaults) resulting from measures adopted by States to counter the COVID-19 pandemic, which have disproportionately affected journalists and human rights activists, among other groups. It calls on States to release from detention those imprisoned for their work or political views such as human right defenders and journalists, and urges States to guarantee the unrestricted operations of journalists and media.

Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 2317 on Threats to Media Freedom and Journalists' Security in Europe

This Resolution calls on Member States to the Council of Europe to carry out effective, independent, and prompt investigations into any crimes committed against journalists, including murders, attacks and ill-treatment, and to bring authors, instigators, perpetrators and accomplices to the crime to justice. It also calls on Member States to set up national mechanisms consistent with the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, to fight online harassment of journalists and particularly of women journalists, as well as to establish rapid-response mechanisms like hotlines or emergency contact points to ensure immediate access to protection.

African Commission on Human and People's Rights Resolution 468 on the Safety of Journalists and Media Practitioners in Africa (ACHPR/Res.468 (LXVII))

In this Resolution, the ACHPR expresses its deep concern regarding the deteriorating situation facing media workers in Africa, and in particular physical attacks and violations of the right to life, kidnappings, death threats and intimidation, arbitrary arrests and prolonged pre-trial detention, along with attacks on media houses resulting in the loss of equipment. The African Commission then calls on States Parties to ensure the safety of journalists and take specific measures for the safety of women media workers. It stresses the risks faced by journalists covering protests and mass rallies and underlines that security officials should receive training to avoid abuses in such contexts. It also prompts States to investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of attacks against journalists and media practitioners, and to make certain victims have access to appropriate remedies.

European Parliament Resolution on Strengthening Media Freedom: The Protection of Journalists in Europe, Hate Speech, Disinformation and the Role of Platforms (P9_TA(2020)0320)

In this Resolution, the European Parliament underlines the role played by journalists reporting on protests, and prompts Member States and the European Commission to ensure the effective protection of journalists and media workers as well as of their sources in law and practice, including in a cross-border context. It further asks Member States to provide specific training programmes for law enforcement authorities responsible for the protection of journalists, and urges the European Commission to set up an EU-wide rapid response mechanism for journalists requesting protection in the form of a hotline.

Organization of American States (OAS) Resolution on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (AG/RES. 2961 (L-O/20))

This Resolution urges Member States to develop and implement comprehensive policies and measures on protection and prevention of violence against human right defenders, including journalists. These measures should incorporate a gender perspective and be consistent with the new reality brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

European Commission Recommendation on Ensuring the Protection, Safety and Empowerment of Journalists and other Media Professionals in the European Union (C (2021) 6650)

In this Recommendation, the Commission of the European Union calls on Member States to investigate and prosecute all crimes against journalists, including crimes committed online, in a timely, effective, and impartial way. It further urges Member States to set up coordination centers and protocols of cooperation between security forces, the judiciary, local public authorities, and media bodies. The Recommendation also encourages Member States to provide rapid and effective personal protection to journalists under threat as well as to establish rapid response mechanism to support them. In addition, specific recommendations are formulated regarding the safety of journalists during protests.

UN Human Rights Council Resolution 47/16 on the Promotion, Protection and Enjoyment of Human Rights on the Internet (A/HRC/47/L.22)

This Resolution condemns unequivocally all human rights violations and abuses committed against persons for exercising their human rights and fundamental freedoms on the Internet, and calls upon all States to ensure accountability and effective remedies in this regard. It also condemns measures in violation of international human rights law that prevent or disrupt an individual's ability to seek, receive or impart information online, including Internet shutdowns and online censorship, calls upon all States to refrain from and to cease such measures. Furthermore, it requests the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to study the trend in Internet shutdowns, analysing their causes, their legal implications, and their impact on a range of human rights.

2021

UNESCO Executive Board Decision on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (211 EX/5.I.G)

Through this Decision, the Executive Board of UNESCO strongly urges Member States to provide, or continue to provide, on a voluntary basis, information on judicial investigations into the killings of journalists, to develop effective safety mechanisms, and to share good practices of measures taken to strengthen the safety of journalists and monitor and tackle gender-specific risks, including online. It invites the Director-General to continue prioritizing activities addressing the specific threats to the safety of women journalists and to reinforce activities aimed at tackling emerging threats to the safety of journalists, in particular the digital threats to which journalists can be exposed, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ANNEX III:

Declarations and Commitments

2016

Finlandia Declaration “Access to Information and Fundamental Freedoms – This is your Right!”

Adopted on the occasion of the global World Press Freedom Day celebration in Helsinki, Finland, the Finlandia Declaration reaffirms the essential role of access to information and calls on concerned stakeholders to promote this right as well as to create a conducive environment for people to receive public information.

2017

Jakarta Declaration “Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media’s role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies”

Participants of the main conference celebrating World Press Freedom Day in Indonesia, Jakarta, stress through this declaration the importance of free, independent investigative journalism for democratic civil and political life. It further calls for free media to be recognized as a public good and for the reinforcement of safety mechanisms.

Nairobi Declaration on National Mechanisms for Safety of Journalists

Participants of the Eastern African conference commemorating the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists adopted this Declaration, which contains an agreement for the establishment of national safety mechanisms in East African countries and defines roles for national and regional cooperation.

2018

Accra Declaration “Keeping Power in Check: Media, Justice and the Rule of Law”

This Declaration, adopted during World Press Freedom Day celebrations, expresses concern at the proliferation of restrictions to the free exercise of journalism, and urges States to enhance judicial independence and the capacities of judicial actors to respect freedom of expression and prosecute attacks against journalists.

2019

Addis Ababa Declaration for the Recognition of Cartooning as a Fundamental Human Right

Although not directly linked to UNESCO, this Declaration by Cartooning for Peace was adopted at the margins of World Press Freedom Day celebrations. It recalls the role played by cartoonists in providing political commentary and scrutinizing public affairs, while also underlining that cartooning is especially threatened. It recalls that the freedom to draw is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights along with the intangible right to the physical integrity of cartoonists, and calls on States to discuss and reflect on “the right to satire and irreverence”.

Addis Ababa Declaration “Journalism and Elections in Times of Disinformation”

Adopted during the main event celebrating World Press Freedom Day, this Declaration underlines the rise of disinformation and hate speech and how these can undermine electoral processes. It notably calls on States to encourage the development of electoral assistance strategies that build trust between all electoral stakeholders, including the media, and to discourage over-regulation of digital electoral communications that can limit freedom of expression and privacy.

Arusha Declaration on Strengthening National Mechanisms for the Safety of Journalists and Media Workers in Eastern Africa

In line with the 2017 Nairobi Declaration, participants from Eastern Africa to commemorations of the International Day to End Impunity held in Arusha, Tanzania, agree through this Declaration to strengthen national mechanisms across the sub-region, create monitoring and reporting systems, and pursue judicial accountability for crimes against journalists.

2020

The Hague Commitment to increase the Safety of Journalists

At the initiative of the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Conference (a hybrid joint commemoration of WPDF and IDEI) in 2020, government representatives of 53 countries gathered to address the importance of safety of journalists and of fighting impunity for crimes committed against them. This commitment has since been endorsed by almost 60 countries. It pledges to investigate and prosecute all forms of online and offline attacks on journalists and other media personnel, both in their own country and internationally. It also pledges immediate action when female journalists are exposed to specific risks and threats.

2021

The Windhoek+30 Declaration “Information as a Public Good”

This Declaration marks the 30th anniversary of the 1991 Windhoek Declaration for the Development of a Free, Independent and Pluralistic Press. It takes forward the spirit of the original Declaration, while taking into account new developments within the media and digital ecosystem over the past three decades. It stresses new challenges such as the disruption of traditional business models, the proliferation of disinformation and hate speech, and the severe economic crisis faced by the media. It includes recommendations on supporting media viability, mainstreaming media and information literacy, and ensuring the transparency of technology companies.

Threats that Silence:

Trends in the Safety of Journalists

Insights discussion paper

WORLD TRENDS IN
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION
AND MEDIA DEVELOPMENT:
GLOBAL REPORT 2021/2022



The past five years show that the perpetrators continue to get away with murder in nine of every 10 killings of journalists, and that other threats continue to mount against news reporters.

For the period 2016–2020, UNESCO recorded 400 killings of journalists. This figure is a nearly 20 percent decrease from the previous five-year period. Yet, unabated levels of impunity for these cases correlate with increases in imprisonment and other attacks. The daunting combination, including online violence, spurs self-censorship. This *Insights* discussion paper records these trends, alongside new analysis that elucidates what is unique about violence against journalists. Also recorded are recent international and national level efforts to protect journalists and their vital work.

The research presented here also constitutes a chapter on trends in the safety of journalists of the forthcoming full edition of UNESCO's *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: Global Report 2021/2022*. The full World Trends Report responds to a key task agreed at UNESCO's 36th General Conference in 2011, for the Organization to monitor and report on contemporary developments in press freedom and the safety of journalists. For UNESCO, a free and safe media environment, along with an end to impunity for crimes against journalists, is essential if societies are to receive reliable information as produced by media workers who can do their jobs without fear.

