



**MEDIA FREEDOM  
RAPID RESPONSE**

*MONITORING REPORT*

# **MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM**



January – June 2022

## Content

Introduction.....	4
Overview .....	6
Thematic Analysis .....	10
Ukraine .....	10
Guest Post.....	12
One year on from the EC Recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists .....	14
Spyware and surveillance of journalists .....	18
Analysis of selected countries .....	20
Turkey .....	20
Germany .....	21
France.....	22
Serbia.....	23
Greece .....	23
Poland.....	25
Spain.....	26
Malta.....	27
Belgium.....	28
Netherlands.....	29
Conclusion.....	30
Disclaimer.....	31



The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) tracks, monitors and reacts to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. This project provides legal and practical support, public advocacy and information to protect journalists and media workers. The MFRR is organised by an alliance led by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) including ARTICLE 19 Europe, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), International Press Institute (IPI) and CCI/Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBC Transeuropa). The project commenced in 2020 and is funded by the European Commission. [www.mfrr.eu](http://www.mfrr.eu)

## Introduction

The first six months of 2022 have been shaped by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which started on 24 February. While in 2021 most media freedom violations in Europe were linked to COVID-19 – such as journalists being attacked while covering protests – the war in Ukraine has become the source of the most severe attacks against media freedom in the continent. The conflict has deeply affected journalists and media workers. Several have lost their lives or have been injured while reporting, while others have had to flee the country and now work in exile.

While events in Ukraine have cast a dark shadow over media freedom on the continent and underscored the serious threats posed to journalists reporting from war zones, media freedom violations have continued to take place all over Europe, ranging from physical attacks against reporters to lawsuits against media outlets. Due to the continued deterioration of the situation in many countries, one year ago the European Commission presented a recommendation aimed at ensuring the protection and safety of journalists and media workers.

The current monitoring report for the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) has focused on summarising media freedom violations across EU Member States and Candidate Countries from January until June 2022. It must be pointed out that Ukraine and Moldova became candidate countries on 23 June, and therefore alerts from these

states are not included in the 6-month analysis. However, Ukraine was monitored from the beginning of the invasion in February and it is explained in a dedicated chapter of the report, which also includes a guest article by Maria Grynevych, Editor-in-Chief of the Ukrainian news agency Socportal and current journalist-in-residence at the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF).

In the first 6 months of 2022, MFRR documented 311 media freedom violations involving 552 individuals or media entities in 29 countries. Verbal attacks, including harassment and threats were the most common types of violations (39.2%), followed by legal incidents (30.9%). Physical attacks accounted for 19.3% of cases, although these were often the most serious, including the murder of Güngör Arslan, Managing Editor of the Turkish newspaper *Ses Kocaeli*. Attacks to property made up 14.2% of alerts, and 12.9% of alerts were linked to censorship, such as blocked access to information, a topic which is further explained in the thematic section of the report.

As for perpetrators, private individuals remained the main source of attacks to journalists and media workers (36.3%), followed by police and state security (17.7%) and government and public officials (11.6%). Online and digital attacks increased significantly and became the most frequent context (22.8%) where media freedom viola-

tions took place, closely followed by attacks during protests (22.2%).

The report is divided as follows: an overview with quantitative information and graphics, a first thematic section focused on the war in Ukraine, a second one to analyse compliance with some of the topics raised by the EC Recommendation on the safety of journalists, an analysis of recent cases of surveillance involving media workers, and country reports summarising the state of media freedom in Turkey, Greece, Spain, Poland, Malta, France, Germany, Serbia, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

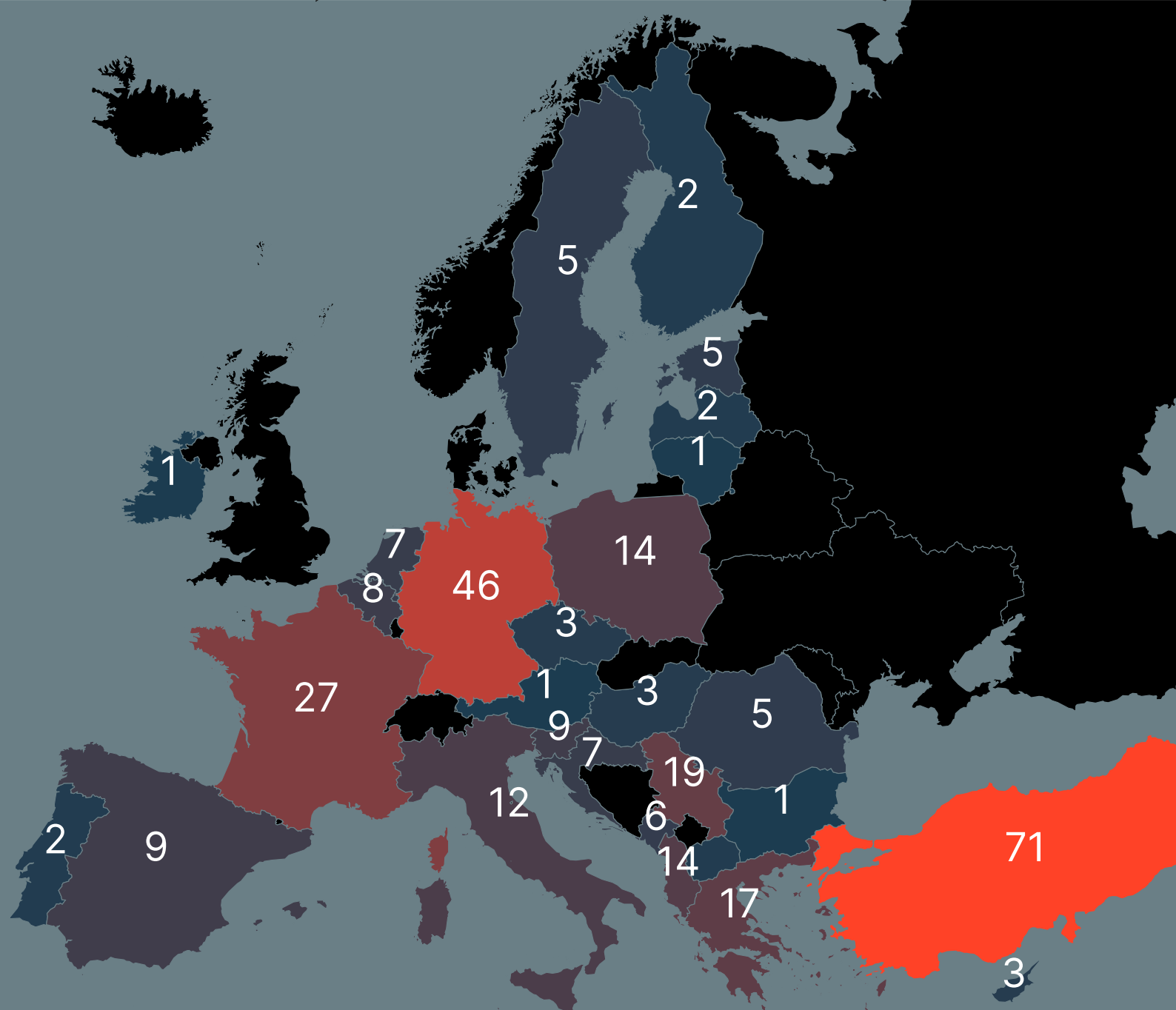
The report has been compiled by the International Press Institute (IPI), the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), and the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), in the context of the joint Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) project which monitors and supports journalists, media workers,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

311

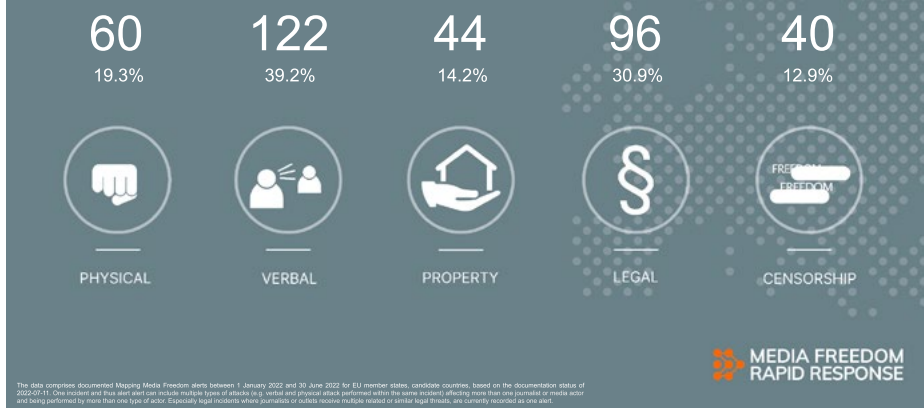
MAPPING MEDIA  
FREEDOM  
ALERTS

Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the different issues faced by journalists and media actors in the first 6 months of 2022. MFRR documented 311 media freedom violations involving 552 individuals or media entities in 29 countries. Each alert documented on Mapping Media Freedom is classified based on a detailed category system, including the type of attack, type of aggressor (source), and the place (context) in which the attack happened. Through the analysis of these aspects, more information about the characteristics of the attacks can be revealed, which provides deeper insights into the situation of press and media freedom and its trends.



## MAIN TYPES OF ATTACKS



Journalists and media actors face several different types of attacks. Sometimes they even face several types of attacks at the same time, such as a verbal and a physical attack performed within the same incident by the same aggressor. In this section we show how many alerts involved a certain type of attack. The types of attacks are grouped into 5 main categories with detailed information provided below.

**Physical:** In nearly 1 out of 5 incidents (19.3%, 60 alerts) media actors were physically attacked. In 17 incidents (5.5%) media actors were injured. One journalist was killed: [Güngör Arslan](#), owner and managing editor of the local Ses Kocaeli newspaper in Turkey, who was attacked and shot in front of his office.

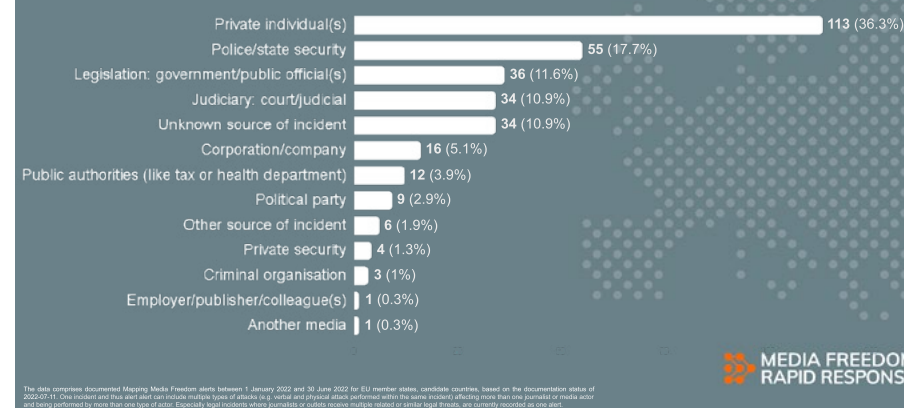
**Verbal:** In nearly 4 out of 10 incidents (39.2%, 122 alerts), media actors were verbally abused. This includes intimidation/threats (29.3%, 91 alerts), insult/abuse (21 alerts), discrediting (13), harassment (6),

sexual verbal harassment (4), and bullying/trolling (2) targeting media actors.

**Property:** In more than 1 out of 7 incidents (14.2%, 44 alerts), property was attacked. This includes equipment (25 alerts), attacks to general property like cars or houses (11), hacking/DDoS attacks (9), or personal belongings (1).

**Legal:** In nearly 1 out of 3 incidents (30.9%, 96 alerts), media actors faced legal consequences. This includes arrest/detention/imprisonment (29), criminal charges (22), civil lawsuits (19 alerts), legal measures like laws restricting press and media freedom (12), conviction (8), surveillance and interception of journalistic data (5), loss of employment (2), violation of anonymity (2), closure of media outlets (2), interrogation (1), and expansion of state outlets (1),

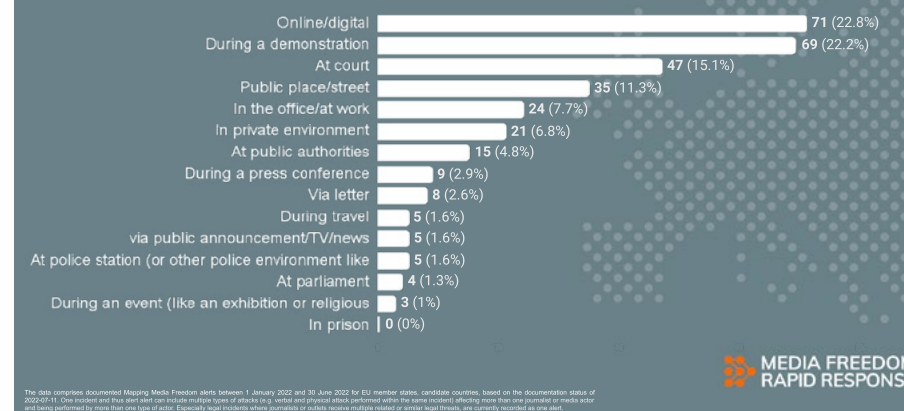
## SOURCES OF ATTACKS



**Censorship:** In more than 1 out of 8 incidents (12.9%, 40 alerts), media actors faced censorship. This includes blocked access to information (e.g. blocked websites or no answers to enquiries) (20 alerts), arbitrary denial of accreditation or registration (incl.

blocked access to events or press conferences) (15 alerts), commercial interference (2 alerts), journalistic work not being published (2), and disinformation (1)

## CONTEXTS OF ATTACKS



# Thematic Analysis

## Ukraine

Media freedom in Europe in the first half of 2022 has been overshadowed by Russia's devastating war of aggression in Ukraine. The conflict has taken a deadly toll on journalists, led to multiple human rights abuses against those reporting on the front lines, and posed existential challenges for the survival of independent media in Ukraine. In addition to a global outpouring of support and solidarity with Ukraine's journalistic community, Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 has also brought into focus the need to safeguard press freedom and democratic values within the European Union. As the war drags on and with no end to hostilities in sight, Ukrainian media continue to adapt to a challenging new economic reality while also navigating the multiple challenges posed by information warfare. MFRR began monitoring Ukraine when the invasion began in February 2022. During the reporting period Ukraine became a candidate country in June 2022. During the first six months of 2022, the platform documented [94 attacks and violations of media freedom](#) involving 142 targets.

The war on European soil has already taken a deadly toll. Eight journalists and media workers, both Ukrainian reporters and international correspondents, were killed in the line of duty or because of their journalistic profession during the monitoring period, according to MFRR monitoring partners. They are: [Yevheniy Sakun](#), [Brent Renaud](#), [Pierre](#)

[Zakrzewski](#), [Oleksandra Kuvshynova](#), [Oksana Baulina](#), [Maks Levin](#), [Mantas Kvedaravičius](#) and [Frédéric Leclerc-Imhoff](#). Five were killed by gunfire, while the other three were killed by shelling. There is evidence at least five more Ukrainian media workers and civilian journalists may have been killed or executed by Russian troops in occupied territory in apparent connection to their profession, though these have not yet been verified and the motive remains unclear. Such a loss of journalistic life within Europe has been unknown for decades and created a dark cloud over the wider landscape for media freedom.

In the first few months of the war, fast-changing frontlines and indiscriminate shelling exposed journalists to serious physical harm. Since 24 February, the MFRR documented 15 cases of domestic and foreign journalists in Ukraine [suffering serious injuries](#) as a result of shelling, airstrikes, or gunfire from military forces. An additional [19 cases](#) were documented in which reporting crews or individual journalists were caught in artillery fire or were shot at but escaped unharmed. At least [eight journalists were kidnapped or abducted](#), with some undergoing torture and other human rights abuses at the hands of Russian soldiers before being released or transferred to detention centres. Reports that Russian forces had lists of Ukrainians, including media figures, to be killed or transferred to camps follow-

ing occupation underscored fears about retaliation against the press.

In some documented cases, there is evidence that Russian soldiers fired deliberately on journalistic crews and cars bearing PRESS insignia. In many others, MFRR partners were unable to independently identify the source of the fire. Four confirmed strikes on TV towers and other broadcast infrastructure in Ukraine by Russian forces appeared to have been targeted. In 59.6% of all incidents attacks occurred within active warzones, while a further 11.7% occurred while journalists were travelling between locations or on their way to or from the front lines. In 74.5% of the incidents, individual journalists were attacked, with media outlets making up the bulk of the additional targets.

Beside physical attacks targeting journalists and media-related property, MFRR documented 21 cases of [intimidation and threatening](#). As existing information warfare between the two countries intensified after the invasion, many Ukrainian media outlets also became the target of intimidation from Russian sources. Individual journalists reporting on the conflict faced threats from unidentified users online who warned they or their family would face prison or violence in the event of military occupation. These psychological attacks aimed at pressuring journalists into silence were sometimes followed up by cyber-attacks, including distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, often attributed to Russian hackers. The MFRR has documented at least [nine serious cyber-attacks](#), with many more likely going

unreported. In territory occupied by Russian forces, dozens of regional media outlets were forced to shut due to threats and the seizure of newsrooms, many of which were then taken over and used to disseminate Kremlin propaganda.

Outside the theatre of war, Ukrainian media have also faced unprecedented challenges for their survival. With the advertising market wiped out at the start of the invasion, the financial foundation of many of the country's largest news outlets was shattered. Although foreign funding has poured into the media market, the uncertain military situation and a lack of ability to make long term plans means Ukrainian media face major uncertainty about their long-term sustainability or survival. For many, the economic situation remains dire. At the same time, staff shortages and the psychological pressure of war reporting have also taken a damaging toll on the journalistic community. Widespread misinformation and disinformation spread on social media also posed serious pressures on accurate and ethical reporting. In practical terms, both national and foreign journalists have also faced challenges posed by curfews, checkpoints, and military restrictions. Overall, Ukrainian authorities continue to allow journalists freedom of movement within the country and access to military units and humanitarian relief efforts on the front lines. However, Ukrainian government authorities have implemented wartime restrictions on the press, including the [merging of all nationwide TV channels](#) into a single government-run service. The shutting down of pro-kremlin Russian propaganda



media also raised questions about the limits of state censorship during periods of war.

Despite the immense pressures, independent media in Ukraine remain vibrant and journalists continue to report courageously from the front lines, providing remarkable stories of resilience and adaptation. Inter-

national solidarity and financial support will continue to be vital in the coming months. However, with no end to hostilities in sight, it remains too early to tell what the future holds for the media in Ukraine or what scars the war will leave on the country's democratic fabric.

## Guest Post

**"You can't write anything without considering the war, because the war changed everything"**

Guest post by Maria Grynevych. Ukrainian journalist and Editor-in-Chief of the news agency Socportal. She has been displaced since the start of the war in Ukraine and is currently participating in ECPMF's Journalist-in-Residence programme in Leipzig. Adapted from interview, full text available [here](#).

When your country goes to war, all other news fades into irrelevance. It blurs into the periphery while the conflict dominates the daily cycle. As a journalist, your primary editorial focus loses importance – the war supersedes everything. Within three months of Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, our entire editorial board had fled the country. One of a journalists' key roles is to reflect on-the-ground realities as accurately as possible. At the be-

ginning of the war, we were totally focused on covering everything that was happening. We worked 24/7 just writing about the war on any possible channels: on our website, Instagram, Telegram, Tik Tok, YouTube, and other social media.

Now our work is a little bit calmer. We still write a lot about the war because it is still our focus. But we try to focus on our main issues. We founded Socportal to cover social issues – support systems for people with disabilities, the allocation of pensions, health care – issues that mattered to the people. Everything changed when the war started. The hook of the story no longer mattered – one way or another it would always come back to

the war. Our coverage of support for people with disabilities became stories about the displacement of those same people by the war. Narratives on healthcare shifted to stories of emergency first aid and citizen medical training. The war affected everything, and our writing reflected that.

For most, switching to a focus on the war wasn't a choice. Smaller outlets with more niche focuses closed in droves. If they couldn't change their perspective quick enough, they were finished. For those who could switch, they found themselves moving from one crisis to another. Surviving an editorial shift was step one; step two was an existential battle for financial sustainability. Outlets were forced to cut salaries as advertising revenue dried up. Journalists were put on leave or fired. Those in the occupied territories were forced to shut to protect the safety of their workers. They hide their identity because otherwise they will be taken and prosecuted. Even at a more granular practical level, outlets failed. Those who relied on print circulation faced collapse when they could no longer produce physical copies of their papers. This is always in the back of my mind. I need to remember that – regardless of how hard it is – if I quit, my life's work would come to

an end. My colleagues would lose their jobs.

It is easy for people to look at this industry-wide collapse and wonder how it differs from any other sector struggling in the face of social and economic disaster or why it matters at all. The answer lies in the second frontline of Russia's invasion – the informational war. Coordinated Russian disinformation campaigns have the potential to skew the narrative, to damage Ukraine's reputation, and to hamper pleas for international support. On the ground, independent media is needed to accurately portray the severity of the situation and to counteract misrepresentation through disinformation. This is why outlets like Socportal scrambled to shift their editorial focus at the beginning of the war, it's why support is needed to prevent the financial collapse of other organisations, and it's why journalists – including those in exile – are doing all that they can to keep the light on in Ukraine.

## One year on from the EC Recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists

September 2022 marks the first anniversary of the [Recommendation “on ensuring the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals in the European Union”](#) presented by the European Commission. Although non-binding, the Recommendation is meant to be “a strong call” to the Member States, in the words of Vice-President Věra Jourová, to push them to put forward measures to improve the safety of journalists and media workers in the European Union. The text was written on the basis of International standards on freedom of expression highlighting the obligation of Member States to provide for an enabling environment for the media and journalists through legal, administrative, and practical measures. While the EU is still considered one of the safest places for journalists, the number and severity of threats and attacks documented within the [MFRR](#) project since March 2020 is of increasing concern. Whereas in the past European journalists felt little need to take special safety measures when reporting in their own country in contrast to war reporters, they are now confronted with situations that put their physical and mental integrity at risk. Demonstrations and the online space are two contexts in which journalists face violence and intimidation – and the COVID-19 pandemic has only made the situation worse. In this respect, Member States are not only failing in their obligations, but are sometimes actively playing a role in the deterioration of media freedom.

Primarily addressed to EU Member States, the Recommendation is also meant to inspire candidate countries and potential candidates in the EU accession process who are encouraged to follow the guidelines. The text covers a wide range of issues such as actions to reduce impunity for criminal acts against media workers, to better cooperate with law enforcement authorities, or to foster equality and inclusion in newsrooms. This report focuses on three of the main topics addressed in the Recommendation which were widely documented on Mapping Media Freedom from January to June 2022: access to venues and sources of information, online safety, and safety during protests.

### [Access to venues and sources of information](#)

Journalists should be able to access public interest information to effectively play their watchdog role. However, throughout Europe, they face a number of challenges in accessing information from private entities or public bodies as well as accessing venues. A total of 35 alerts involving 84 attacked persons or entities related to media were submitted to the monitoring platform in relation to access to venues and sources of information in 12 EU countries and three candidate countries, including Turkey (11 alerts), Germany (4), Poland (4), France (3), Greece (2), and Malta (2). They can be divided into two categories: alerts documenting [blocked access to information](#)<sup>1</sup> (20 alerts)

and [blocked access to venues](#) (15 alerts). In most cases (25 alerts), the perpetrators were state related, including public authorities, police and state security, judiciary, as well as legislation and public officials.

The Recommendation says that Member States should “ensure that journalists can attend and ask questions at press conferences and events”. The MFRR has documented several restrictions that go against this principle from the highest level of power. In Malta, ahead of the 2022 election, on multiple occasions during press conferences, the country’s Prime Minister Robert Abela [refused to answer questions by reporters](#) from various media outlets over his alleged links to a property deal and on the financing of the party’s electoral campaign. In France, [three media outlets were denied access](#) to Emmanuel Macron’s only political rally during the electoral campaign. In Turkey, the police in Ankara [denied entry of journalists](#) to the commemoration of Ethem Sarisülük, who was killed by a police bullet during the 2013 Gezi protests in Güvenpark.

Unjustified denial of accreditation is also a relatively frequent problem, although Member States should “make good use of accreditation procedures” and should ensure that journalists are not excluded “merely on the basis of their professional affiliation”. This year two more alerts documented cases in Germany where journalists were denied accreditation in retaliation for previous unfavourable media coverage. The [Tesla company refused accreditation for a TV crew](#) of the German public broadcaster ZDF for the opening of Elon Musk’s new Te-

sla plant. Tesla’s press office said journalists would not receive accreditation because of previous reports that broke “the company’s trust”. ARD [reporters were also excluded from a collective interview](#) with an Olympic athlete due to previous media coverage over the disputed doping ban imposed on the athlete a decade ago.

Issues with press cards are sometimes reported, although journalists are not obliged to have one in order to work in most places (with a few exceptions). According to the Recommendation, Member States should therefore “not impose strict formal conditions” to check the professional status of journalists. One issue was reported in France, where three journalists were subjected to an accreditation check and were [unable to continue their work despite having a press card](#) and the fact that the interview was taking place in a public space.

The Recommendation further states that requests for access to information should be processed “without unnecessary delay” and that decisions to decline access to documents or information should be “duly justified”. Serious issues with Freedom of Information requests (Fol) have been reported in Malta and Poland where two media outlets, [The Shift](#) and [Gazeta Wyborcza](#), have had their requests denied on several occasions. In the case of The Shift, the government not only rejected the requests, but also coordinated appeals from 30 different ministries and public authorities, going against the Data Protection Commissioner’s decision to grant information on public expenditures. These vexatious appeal lawsuits, officially

<sup>1</sup> [Five alerts](#) document the ban of Russian and Belarusian TV channels in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in response to the war in Ukraine.



motivated by the fact that the FoI requests place an excessive burden on the administration, pose a serious threat to the country's already worrying freedom of information.

### Online safety

Ensuring digital and online safety of journalists is a major challenge. With 71 alerts, the number of attacks taking place online has increased from 14.7% in 2021 to 22.8% in 2022, becoming the most frequent place where journalists get attacked – closely followed by protests. Within these 71 incidents, a total of 126 persons or media related entities have been targeted. Attacks can take various forms including intimidation and threats in most cases (40 alerts), discrediting and smear campaigns (10), insults (10), hacking (8), or surveillance (4). Recognising the scale and seriousness of the above-mentioned digital-related issues, the Recommendation specifically calls on Member States to take action without delay.

While all journalists are likely to face such attacks, the Recommendation highlights the specific situation of women journalists and reporters from minority groups, as well as those covering equality issues. In fact, based on MFRR's monitoring data, women journalists are more likely to be attacked online than men journalists. While online attacks account for 18.1% of all attacks against men journalists, this is significantly higher for women journalists as more than 1 out of 4 incidents (26.1%) are online attacks. The MFRR documented 24 online attacks against women journalists, some of them with unprecedented verbal abuse, using

[sexist](#) and racist rhetoric. They have carried out professional and quality journalistic productions related to polarising topics, such as [migration](#), [religion](#), and [politics](#).

In terms of perpetrators of online attacks, [private individuals](#) rank highest with 36.6%, followed by [unknown perpetrators](#) (33.8%), meaning that it could not be finally identified if a private individual or an organisation was behind the attack. It is particularly concerning that attacks performed by [government and public officials](#) rank third with 14.1%. Social media platforms were frequently used to spread abuse. The Recommendation encourages Member States to cooperate with online platforms to foster a digital environment that prevents the use of online services to attack journalists and to force online service providers to increase transparency.

The last section of the Recommendation refers to the confidentiality of communications, illegal online tracking, and surveillance of journalists (see thematic report on surveillance). Member States have a responsibility to ensure that the cybersecurity of journalists' communications is guaranteed by disseminating cyber hygiene guidelines for journalists and assisting those seeking to determine whether their devices or accounts have been compromised.

### Protests

The safety of journalists and media workers covering demonstrations remains an issue of concern in Europe. Specifically recognised in the Recommendation as a growing problem, there have been 69 incidents involving attacks and harassment of journal-

ists during protests in the first six months of the year – which account for 22.2% of all registered incidents during the period – involving 138 attacked persons or entities related to media. Almost half (47.8%) of these incidents took place during protests against [COVID-19](#) measures.

As stated in the Recommendation, Member States should recognise the public interest role of journalists and media workers at public gatherings and demonstrations, and therefore provide the appropriate working environment for them to operate safely and without restrictions. Yet the reality on the ground shows a very different situation where journalists take significant risks to their safety to report from demonstrations. Based on the figures of attacks during protests compiled in the first 6 months, in 42 cases (60.9%) journalists faced [physical attacks](#), with 11 cases resulting in [injuries](#). [Harassment and psychological abuse](#) was involved in 22 cases (31.9%). Furthermore, journalists faced attacks on [property](#), all of them against equipment (16 cases), 12 cases involved [legal consequences](#), with most in the form of arrests, detention, and imprisonment, and [censorship](#) in the form of denied access to venues (5 cases). Most attacks during protests were performed by protesters (60.9%), followed by police and state security (36.2%). Member States are therefore encouraged to improve law enforcement agencies' "capacity to guarantee public security while at the same time protecting journalists and not inhibiting their ability to report". This twofold mission is far from being effective in many European countries.

On the one hand, the police are not always able to intervene when citizens attack media professionals who face hostility and disrespect from protesters in the first place (42 alerts). The example of two German freelance journalists [Antonio Müller](#) and [Noah Berendt](#) underlines the difficulty for the police in maintaining order with sometimes reduced staff. The reporters sought to stay close to the few police officers present to secure the Querdenker demonstration as the situation was getting very tense. However, when the police were out of sight, a number of demonstrators started to threaten and hit them in the legs.

In other situations, the police were found to be behind the beatings or obstruction of work. In total, the MFRR documented 25 attacks from [police](#) during protests, notably in [Turkey](#) and [Albania](#) where police brutality led to serious injuries on journalists. In addition, legal incidents performed by police during protests, such as [arrests, detentions, or imprisonment](#) account for 11 cases. While most of them were released within a few hours, the MFRR deplores the chilling effect on media professionals and the violation of the public's right to information. To prevent new incidents, the European Commission recommends that Member States put in place trainings, effective communication between journalists and law enforcement authorities, as well as transparent reporting. However, few significant measures have been taken by the Member States since September 2021 to improve the safety of journalists and media workers at the national level.

## Spyware and surveillance of journalists

Threats posed to journalists by spyware and other surveillance weapons remained a major area of concern for press freedom during the first half of 2022. In addition to the latest exposes about the targeting of journalists in Catalonia using Pegasus spyware, there were major revelations in Greece about the use of a similar malware tool called Predator to hack into the phone of a financial journalist. The same journalist was also revealed to have been wiretapped by a state intelligence agency, illustrating the ongoing threats posed by more traditional monitoring tools. These disclosures, and the emergence of new cybersurveillance weapons, have added a new dimension to ongoing EU investigations and galvanised efforts to better regulate the mercenary surveillance tools across the bloc. Although [greater light](#) is being shed on the spyware-for-hire industry, experts believe figures for the number of journalists within the EU who have been targeted with such tools could still be the tip of the iceberg.

Concern over the use of advanced surveillance technology against journalists in the European Union was ignited in 2021 after the publication of an investigation by the Pegasus project, which revealed the abuse of the spyware by governments around the world, including in [Hungary](#). Pegasus is developed by Israeli cyber-security firm NSO Group and is sold only to state intelligence and law enforcement agencies. It can infect Android and iOS operating systems and turn a smartphone into a surveillance device, giving access to passwords, encrypted chats, contacts, location data, and even

turning on the recorder and camera. Unlike malware products which require the target to click on an infected link, Pegasus can infect a phone with “zero-clicks”. The technology poses serious threats to journalistic safety and source confidentiality. According to recent reports, NSO is believed to have contracts with 22 security agencies in 12 EU countries.

In 2022, fresh revelations surfaced about the scale of the use of Pegasus by Spanish authorities. In April it was revealed that at least four Catalan journalists were amongst those to have their smartphones [targeted or infected](#) with the spyware between 2017 and 2020, after Catalonia’s failed independence bid. [According to Citizen Lab](#), the journalists targeted included Meritxell Bonet, the spouse of an activist who chaired the Catalan NGO Òmnium. Also targeted were journalist and historian Marcel Mauri, who later became vice-president of Òmnium, as well as journalist and former Catalonia MP Albano Dante Fachin, and journalist Marcela Topor, wife of former president of Catalonia Carles Puigdemont. All those targeted had links to the Catalanian independence movement or figures within it. Separately, Spanish journalist [Ignacio Cembrero](#), a correspondent specialising in coverage of the Maghreb, has been identified as a potential target for surveillance using Pegasus and has alleged Moroccan authorities were responsible.

While Pegasus remains the most well-known spyware tool, a burgeoning commercial market for similar surveillance tools exists within the European Union, and beyond.

These hacking systems, which work by exploiting software vulnerabilities, are developed by private companies and secretly acquired by state agencies. Information about the relationships between EU governments and these mercenary companies remains secret or highly opaque, as does the level of operational safeguards in place. While such tools are used primarily by EU intelligence agencies to tackle threats to national security, abuses of such tools against journalists, civil society, and opposition figures are being increasingly identified.

In a major case in Greece, in April 2022 it was revealed that financial and banking journalist Thanasis Koukakis, who works for CNN Greece and other international media, was [surveilled](#) for at least ten weeks in summer 2021 using a [spyware tool called Predator](#). It was the first reported case of a journalist having their phone hacked using the technology. Researchers were not able to identify who the source was. The Greek government denied involvement. The tool was initially developed by North Macedonian firm Cytrox, which was acquired by Intellexa, a company which sells digital surveillance products in Greece, and which has an office in Athens. According to investigative reports, Grigoris Dimitriadis, the former general secretary and nephew of the Prime Minister, had dealings with Intellexa. After the revelations surfaced, a government spokesperson said an “individual” was responsible for targeting Koukakis. However, a licence for the malware reportedly costs €14 million and such sophisticated tools are normally only sold to state agencies. The Greek government has repeatedly said it has no busi-

ness relationship with Intellexa and does not use its products.

These denials have been complicated by the fact that in April 2022 it was revealed that Koukakis had, before the Predator attack, been put under [wiretapping surveillance](#) by the Greek National Intelligence Service (EYP) in May 2020. The agency had been placed under the direct supervision of the office of the Prime Minister in 2019. When Koukakis first suspected he was being surveilled, he requested that the Authority for Communication Security and Privacy (ADAE) confirm this. Shortly after, the government changed the law blocking the ADAE to retroactively inform citizens if they had been monitored. When initially [questioned](#) about the wiretapping, the government denied involvement. As evidence mounted, the EYP’s spy chief, who later resigned, admitted during a closed parliamentary session that the agency had bugged Koukakis’s phone under “national security” grounds. No explanation was provided about why a reporter investigating financial corruption at the time posed a threat to national security. There is evidence that another investigative reporter, [Stavros Malichudis](#), was wiretapped by the EYP in connection with his reporting on refugees and migration. These cases have illustrated the different types of surveillance available to those wishing to target journalists and have led to [additional concerns](#) about [deteriorating press freedom in Greece](#).

As the EU Parliament’s Committee of Inquiry continues its investigation into the use of the Pegasus and equivalent surveillance spyware

across the EU, it is clear that greater transparency and safeguards are needed to prevent abuses of the technology against jour-

nalists and others and to regulate the use of advanced cybersurveillance tools across the bloc.

## Analysis of selected countries

This chapter provides deeper insights into the press freedom situation in selected countries. Monitoring is performed systematically and relies on diverse sources, including established networks across countries, individuals reporting directly through [ReportIt](#), and through the use of an innovative tool based on Artificial Intelligence detecting reported press freedom violations in news articles and Tweets. To interpret the

media freedom situation of a country it is important to take into account that reporting of alerts might vary slightly between states due to different conceptions of what constitutes a severe media freedom violation. The goal of MFRR is to identify violations and trends in all countries, and therefore it is important to analyse topics and countries quantitatively but also qualitatively.

### Turkey

Turkey's full scale attack on press freedom continued as systemic repression of independent media and escalated in the first six months of 2022. Turkey continues to be one of the biggest jailers of journalists in the world. MapMF recorded 71 press freedom violations in Turkey between January and June 2022, involving 171 attacked persons or media entities. At the time of publishing, 45 journalists were [imprisoned](#). Increasing criminal charges and arbitrary arrests make it difficult to report critically on the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), while physical assaults on journalists by police and private individuals created a hostile and dangerous work environment.

In February, Güngör Arslan, the owner and managing editor of the local Ses Kocaeli newspaper, was [shot and killed](#) in front of his office in the northwestern province of Kocaeli. He wrote articles against the former Grey Wolves Kocaeli Provincial President and lawyer, Ersin Kurt, and according to the prosecutor's claim, Kurt ordered Arslan's murder to silence him.

The most pervasive threat to journalism continued to be legal persecution, which was related to over half (59.2%) of the cases recorded on MapMF. Arbitrary detentions and police raids on news outlet offices and journalists' homes made up nearly one third

(31.0%) of the cases. Several journalists and photojournalists were detained while covering protests such as the [Istanbul Pride](#) and the [mass demonstration](#) arranged in commemoration of the Gezi Park protests. In early June, in one of the largest single-day crackdowns on Turkey's independent media, at least [23 journalists of pro-Kurdish media were detained](#) and [16 of them are still imprisoned for allegedly "spreading terrorist propaganda"](#).

The most common types of criminal charges were linked to alleged dissemination of terrorist propaganda or membership of a terrorist organisation, which was the case for photojournalist Abdurrahman Gök, who was found guilty on a [terrorism charge for recording the police killing of a Kurdish man](#) in 2017. Freelance journalist Nazan Sala was sentenced to one year and three months imprisonment in January on [terrorism charges for reporting on the alleged torture of two citizens by Turkish soldiers](#). In June, the

### Germany

MFRR documented 46 alerts in Germany involving 82 attacked persons or entities related to media. Most attacks on journalists occurred during demonstrations (36 alerts), the majority of these during protests against the COVID-19 measures (24 alerts).

More than half of the alerts for Germany involved physical attacks (54.3%) with 3 incidents resulting in (minor) injuries. Nearly one out of three incidents (32.6%) involved harassment and psychological abuse, 13

Turkish government [demanded that Sweden extradite two dissident journalists](#) amid Sweden and Finland's NATO membership negotiations.

Journalists in Turkey were subjected to physical violence by police, especially while covering protests. One in three cases (33.8%) recorded on MapMF stated police or state security as the source of the press freedom violation. In April, at least twelve journalists were [physically assaulted](#) or faced police aggression while covering a press statement commemorating the 1977 1 May Massacre.

Journalists also received [threats of physical violence](#) and [death threats](#) online, as well as [sexist harassment](#). Turkey's government-controlled media regulator, the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), continued [sanctioning media outlets](#) and [blocking access to their websites](#) in a discriminatory manner.

alerts (28.3%) involved attacks against property, mainly equipment. Furthermore, 4 alerts involved censorship in the form of denied access to reporting venues, and 3 alerts involved legal actions.

While the vast majority of all incidents in Germany were perpetrated by private individuals (69.6%), in some cases (5), the police were responsible for the attack. In two of them, the police either [broke](#) or [confiscated](#) journalists' equipment. Journalist

[Danni Pilger](#), who experienced such a situation, was also detained by the police on the sidelines of a climate demonstration. In the same context, [Jannis Große](#), a photojournalist specialising in covering climate activism, had his details recorded by the police after showing his press card. Finally, a journalist [was pushed and insulted by a police officer](#) while covering an Alternative für Deutschland event. In a few cases, it appeared that [the police had not been reactive enough](#) in protecting journalists at demonstrations, even though attacks were taking place in front of them.

## France

The first half of 2022 was marked by two major political events in France: the adoption of the vaccine pass in January and the presidential and legislative elections that followed a tense election campaign. MapMF recorded 27 cases involving 41 attacked persons or media entities.

When the National Assembly voted to adopt the vaccine pass – which obliged the population to be vaccinated in order to access leisure and cultural venues, restaurants, etc- the French took to the street to protest against what they saw as an attack on individual freedom. Several demonstrations took place between 1 January and 15 February throughout France, during which six journalists and media workers were [insulted](#), [intimidated](#), and [physically attacked](#). It was in this context of mistrust of the government and of the rising of far-right politicians that the electoral campaign for the presidential and legislative

Journalists in Germany also face the threats of neo-Nazi supporters. Between 8 January and 13 February, [five attacks](#) were recorded during events where neo-Nazis had targeted 11 journalists and media workers. They include verbal threats, physical attacks, and intimidation. Despite the presence of their bodyguards, [two journalists from Vue Critique were kicked, punched, and hit](#) with various objects by neo-Nazis during a Querdenker demonstration against the COVID-19 measures.

elections took place over the months of April, May, and June 2022. On several occasions, journalists and media outlets were prevented from carrying out their watchdog role: the political party of presidential candidate Macron, La République en Marche, [refused access to one of its meetings to three media outlets](#), [a journalist was arrested by the police](#) while following the election night with activists, and [a voter physically assaulted a journalist](#) while she was following the results of the presidential elections alongside voters of the far-right party, Rassemblement National.

Finally, the continuity of the number of alerts concerning the police remains worrying. The police are the second biggest threat to media freedom after private individuals. Some alerts concern the fact that the police deliberately do not recognise journalists' press cards and prevent them from accessing political events or [demonstrations](#).

## Serbia

MFRR recorded 19 alerts for Serbia involving 33 attacked persons or entities related to media. The majority of these alerts concern cases of harassment and psychological violence, with two trends standing out: online harassment (6) and harassment in the workplace (4). Most of the online threats were made via social media, including four via Facebook. Two of these alerts followed articles in which the journalists wrote about religion.. The most serious one followed a front-page story by the news portal Danas, which triggered a [wave of insults and threats](#) sent to the newsroom's email, messaging apps, and social media pages, after an appeal was made for citizens to send messages to the editorial staff. As far as workplace threats are concerned, this period has seen [two bomb threats](#) to the offic-

## Greece

Press freedom in Greece continued its marked deterioration between January and June 2022. MapMF recorded 17 violations in total involving 19 attacked persons or entities related to the media. A major scandal involving the wiretapping and bugging of a financial journalist with a spyware tool called Predator raised fresh concerns about surveillance, while a major arson attack carried out by an anarchist group underscored concerns about the physical safety of journalists. Abusive SLAPPs and legal threats against the media remained a serious issue.

es of Adria Media Group in 10 days, where almost ten media outlets are located. They were false alarms but the buildings had to be evacuated. Attacks on media premises did not stop at mere threats, with [RTS having a window broken](#) by a brick for the second time in two years. [OK Radio's premises were "walled up" for a weekend](#) and [an individual sprayed white paint on a café](#) that the radio also uses as its premises. Veran Matić, one of Serbia's best-known journalists and media managers, chairman of the Commission for the Investigation of Murders of Journalists and member of the Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists, who went to support the radio station, had [his portrait plastered all over the city](#) with threatening phrases written on the posters.

One of the most disturbing patterns of press freedom violations in the country were makeshift bombs detonated in front of the homes of journalists, who had received threats due to their reporting. In January, the home of SKAI journalist and presenter Dimitris Kampourakis was targeted with an [explosive gas canister](#). In June, a [make-shift explosive device exploded](#) outside the home of Skai TV journalist and commentator Aris Portosalte in Athens, causing a fire and significant damage to the building. These arson attacks underscored the serious and ongoing threats facing the safety of jour-

nalists in Greece since the 2021 murder of crime reporter Giogros Karaivaz.

In April, a surveillance scandal broke out when Greek media outlet Inside Story revealed that the mobile phone of finance and banking journalist Thanasis Koukakis, who reports for CNN and other international media outlets, was [surveilled for at least ten weeks](#) in 2021 using a little-known spyware tool called Predator by an unknown source. It was also revealed he was wiretapped separately by the Greek intelligence agency under obscure “national security” grounds. For more information on this case, see the thematic chapter on surveillance of journalists.

Over half (58.8%) of the cases during the first six months of 2022 were legal cases. In a case which sparked major concerns about press freedom, in January, two journalists and two publishers whose media had reported extensively on the so-called Novartis scandal, were summoned to testify to the Special High Court multiple criminal charges of conspiracy to abuse power, defamation and unlawful extortion of money. The charges against [Kostas Vaxevanis](#), [Gianna Papadakou](#), and Alexandros Tarkas, were

criticised for being politically motivated. In June 2022, the Judicial Council of the Supreme Court [ruled](#) that all allegations made against the journalists and publishers were baseless and declined to send them to full trial at the Special Court. Meanwhile, Strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) remained a threat to investigative journalism. Hefty financial demands ranging from [€8000](#) to [€200,000](#) were filed by private individuals and [politicians](#).

Threats and physical violence towards journalists by police continued, and made up nearly a quarter (23.5%) of the cases recorded on MapMF. In January, journalist Chris Avramidis was [kicked and insulted](#) by police officers when covering a protest in the city of Thessaloniki. In May, freelance photojournalist Iason Raissis took a controversial photograph of a police officer at a high-profile trial which led to him being [pressured and threatened](#) by the police. Arbitrary arrests were also among the monitored cases, such as the detention of Norwegian photographer Knut Bry, who was [held for six days](#) by Greek authorities on charges of espionage after he took pictures of a military vessel off the island of Lesbos.

## [Poland](#)

MapMF recorded a total of 14 violations in Poland during the first six months of 2022 involving 22 attacked persons or entities related to media. Half of the cases (42.9%) were related to harassment or psychological abuse while (42.9%) were linked to different forms of censorship. Legal challenges remained a serious concern as well.

In a major case in February, Spanish freelance journalist Pablo González [was arrested](#) by the Polish Security Services in a Polish border city with Ukraine, where he was reporting on the refugee crisis generated by Russia’s invasion. He was accused of conducting illegal espionage on behalf of the Russian state. González’s detention was twice extended by a Polish court. Press freedom organisations have criticised the lack of evidence for the serious charges presented by prosecutors.

The migration crisis on the borders between Poland and Belarus and Ukraine continued to pose issues for press freedom. While major restrictions on journalists’ freedom of movement were deemed unconstitutional and reversed, in January an article from Onet was [reported to the police](#) by a pro-government

institute for picturing children at a border facility near the Belarusian border.

TVN24, a television station critical of the government which last year saw an attempt by the ruling Law and Justice party to pass a damaging media ownership law, was under pressure again in February after politicians from the United Right coalition allegedly [interfered in the editorial policy](#) of the broadcaster.

Between March and June 2022, the Polish government [implemented a new technological standard](#) for digital terrestrial television broadcasting, which caused a financial blow to independent television stations and left nearly two million Polish households without access to any media other than public TV news broadcasting. Press freedom groups raised concerns that these changes could leave many Polish citizens with no access to independent television news in the wake of the elections.

Polish journalists have also [struggled with FOI requests](#) and faced threats of [defamation lawsuits](#). Access to information remained a [challenge](#) for journalists from independent media.



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## Spain

Fresh spyware revelations, abusive lawsuits and discriminatory fines under the controversial “gag-law” undermined press freedom in Spain. Between January and June 2022, MapMF recorded a total of 9 press freedom violations involving 13 attacked persons or entities related to media.

The first surveillance revelation emerged in April when Citizen Lab revealed that at least four Catalan journalists were among those to have had their [mobile phones targeted or infected](#) with Pegasus spyware. Although Citizen Lab did not conclusively attribute the source of the surveillance, the report indicated that circumstantial evidence pointed to the Spanish government, which is confirmed to have acquired the hacking technology. Another surveillance case came to light in May after it was reported that Spanish journalist Ignacio Cembrero was a [target for potential surveillance](#) using Pegasus.

Legal persecution and arbitrary arrests were linked to most of the recorded violations on MapMF. In February, energy company Iber-

drola [filed a SLAPP](#) against Titania, the publisher of the newspaper El Confidencial, for the investigations into the alleged relations between the company and a convicted former police agent. In total, Iberdrola filed a claim of €17.6 million for alleged reputational damage.

The Law on the Protection of Public Safety, also known as the “gag law”, continues to have a chilling effect on press freedom in Spain. The widely criticised law allows authorities to fine journalists and media outlets for distributing unauthorised images of police, impose financial penalties on those who are not able to identify themselves, and sets strict limits on when and where protests can be held. In January, photojournalist Mireia Comas [was given a €601 fine](#) for refusing to remove a photo of a police checkpoint. In June, photojournalist Javier Bauluz [received a fine of €960](#) for “disrespecting an agent” and “refusing to identify himself” relating to an incident in November 2020, when Bauluz had been documenting the arrival of a rescue boat at the port in Arguineguín in Gran Canaria.

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## Malta

For Malta, MFRR documented 9 alerts involving 9 attacked persons or entities related to media. Especially worrying were attempts to block journalists’ access to information, and developments in the case of murdered journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia.

In February, the man indicted on charges of masterminding and financing Caruana Galizia’s assassination in 2017 [requested a copy of data related to Caruana Galizia’s mobile phone from the criminal court](#). Although the accused is entitled by law to access all the evidence presented at court, there is a high risk of exposure of sources if the accused gains access to the data retrieved from the phone.

Legal cases made up over half of the cases documented on MapMF. Media freedom in Malta took a sharp turn for the worse in January, when 30 [different government ministries and entities appealed](#) against a decision by the Information and Data Protection Commissioner which ordered the disclosure of information on the use of public money requested through Freedom of Information (FOI) by The Shift News. However, those requests were denied by multiple entities, and after the newspaper appealed, the Data Commissioner ordered the disclosure

of the documents. One by one, all the different ministries and public authorities filed identical appeals, arguing the requests put an undue burden on state departments. The appeals will result in a time-consuming and costly legal process for the newspaper, which has to fight each case individually.

In addition, lawyer Joe Gerada [filed a request](#) to Malta’s Information and Data Protection Appeals Tribunal asking it to block The Shift News from accessing publicly available information about him via a FOI request. [Another legal threat](#) towards The Shift came from lawyers of the London-based businessman Ram Tumuluri. The Times of Malta faced issues with FOI requests and [legal threats](#) as well.

The government’s lack of transparency was eminent ahead of the elections in March 2022, as the country’s prime minister Robert Abela [refused on multiple occasions](#) to answer questions by reporters from independent media about his alleged links to suspicious deals involving alleged criminals and on how his party’s electoral campaign promises would be financed. Reporters from various media outlets were also excluded on different occasions from electoral and campaign events.



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## Belgium

MFRR recorded 8 alerts for Belgium involving 12 attacked persons or entities related to the media. Like in France and Germany, journalists and media workers in Belgium were the target of physical attacks during protests against government measures to combat the spread of the COVID-19. On 23 January 2022, at least five journalists were targeted including a [press photographer for De Standaard](#), who was repeatedly beaten, and [two journalists from BX1 and two journalists from the Associated Press](#), who were pushed and insulted by a group of people.

Cases of online harassment against three women journalists were also documented. Journalist [Samira Atillah](#) from the newspaper De Morgen faced new death threats of racist and misogynistic nature following

articles she wrote on justice, migration, and racism. She said anonymous calls, photos with sexual content, and messages have had a “heavy effect” on her life, while several complaints were filed to the police. Journalist Safia Kessas, responsible for diversity and equality at the Belgian public broadcaster RTBF, has [been the subject of an online harassment campaign](#) on social media by black and queer activists who contested the choice of a “non-black” journalist to host a debate with the American feminist writer Angela Davis in April. Due to the seriousness of the threats, Kessas was placed under police protection for the duration of the conference. Last June, another RTBF journalist, [Johanne Montay](#), filed a complaint against unknown Twitter users for online harassment.

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## Netherlands

In the Netherlands, 7 attacks against journalists and media workers were recorded involving 8 attacked persons or entities related to media. Citizen violence against journalists remains high. In all but [one case](#), individuals were the source of the violation for incidents that took place online and in the public space. A TV crew for the regional channel RTV was the target of a robbery with violence in the Kanaleneiland area of Utrecht. One of the journalists was [punched in the face by two persons](#), who also [stole the camera and tripod](#). Intimidation examples also include cyberbullying such as doxing i.e. the sharing of personal information. NRC journalist [Tara Lewis](#) and columnist [Marcel Van Roosmalen](#) were harassed and threatened with death after their home addresses were published on social media. As a result, Roosmalen had a Nazi flag sent to his house, while Lewis had to change location overnight as the threat to her safety

was serious. Journalist [Özcan Akyol](#) also reported serious death threats against him, his family, and colleagues. Last May, he had to temporarily stop broadcasting his show for NPO Radio 1 from his home to move to a studio in Hilversum.

Following the murder of Peter R. de Vries last year in July 2021, the situation for crime reporters remains a priority for the authorities. The case of [John van den Heuve](#), a well-known journalist with De Telegraaf who has been threatened for years and lives under police protection day and night, was quickly taken up when the journalist’s security guards suspected a chase on the A2 motorway. Due to the seriousness of the threat, the police closed part of the road for about an hour and arrested a man. The charges against the main suspect were dropped three weeks later as the suspicious situation appeared to be a coincidence.

## Conclusion

The current report has focused on analysing media freedom violations in the European Union and Candidate Countries during the first 6 months of 2022. This time period has been marked by the war in Ukraine, to which the report has dedicated its first thematic section. The MFRR consortium has recorded 94 media freedom violations in Ukraine, and it is expected that the number will grow in the coming months while the conflict is ongoing.

The report has also focused on the compliance of states with the European Commission Recommendation on ensuring the protection, safety, and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals. On its first anniversary, MFRR has found that journalists and media workers still face problems that hinder their ability to work, such as by being denied access to press

conferences or being attacked while covering protests.

Surveillance has also affected journalists from several countries such as Spain and Hungary, an issue which is now under investigation by the European Parliament. While attacks linked to COVID-19 have remained high in the first half of 2022, they have followed a downward trend coupled with loosening of restrictions in most European countries.

It is to be expected that the continuation of the war in Ukraine and its consequences—such as rising inflation will also affect the state of media freedom in the continent in the second half of the year. The following MFRR Monitoring report, which will be published in early 2023, will analyse these and other issues affecting journalists and media workers throughout 2022.

## Disclaimer

The respective alerts for this Monitoring Report can be viewed directly in the Alert Explorer [here](#).

This report includes all incidents from 1 January until 30 June 2022, published before 11 July 2022. If cases are reported and published after this date, they will still appear in the data available under the link of the Alert Explorer above as well as under the individual links provided within the report to give an up-to-date view at any time.

One incident and thus alert alert can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) affecting more than one journalist or media actor and performed by more than one type of actor. In particular, legal incidents where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert. This means, when showing e.g. how many alerts included a certain type of attack, the sum of all shown numbers can be more than the total number of alerts and thus more than 100%.



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