

MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM

# MONITORING REPORT 2025



By ECPMF - EFJ - IPI



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**MEDIA FREEDOM  
RAPID RESPONSE**



**MAPPING  
MEDIA FREEDOM**  
by European Centre for Press and Media Freedom

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)

*Cover photo: A journalist covers a protest by residents in Novi Sad, Serbia, on November 17, 2025.  
picture alliance / NurPhoto | Maxim Konanov*

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The MFRR thanks its monitoring partners: SafeJournalists Network (SJN) and French Observatory on Violations of Press Freedom (OFALP).

## ABBREVIATIONS

- BiH - Bosnia and Herzegovina
- EU - European Union
- GD - Georgian Dream (party)
- MapMF - Mapping Media Freedom
- MFRR - Media Freedom Rapid Response
- NGO - Non-governmental organisation
- SLAPP - Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation
- USAID - US Agency for International Development

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- For the year 2025, the Mapping Media Freedom (MapMF) database documented a total of [1481 press freedom violations](#) affecting 2377 media-related persons or entities.
- EU Member States accounted for [740 recorded attacks](#) on press freedom against 1143 media-related persons or entities – almost exactly 50% of all recorded violations. This report offers insights into the situation in Belgium, France, Italy, Hungary, and Spain.
- EU candidate countries accounted for [741 recorded attacks](#) on press freedom against 1234 media-related persons or entities. This report offers insights into the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro, Türkiye, Serbia, and Ukraine.
- The killings of [four journalists and media workers](#) – Aliona Hramova, Yevhen Karmazin, Oleksandr Kolychev and Hakan Tosun – marked another deadly year for journalism in Europe.
- [Verbal attacks](#) (40%) remained the most common type of attack, including [88 death threats](#). Further violations involved [interference](#) with journalistic work (24.3%), [legal attacks](#) (23.2%), [physical assaults](#) (14.7%), and [attacks to property](#) (13.9%).
- [Private individuals](#) were the main perpetrators (24%) of attacks against journalists. [Government and public officials](#) also took a worrying share of 18%, a number that has constantly increased over the past years.
- [Serbia](#) was the country with the highest number of recorded violations in 2025 – with 208 media freedom cases affecting 358 media-related persons or entities – making it a media freedom crisis point in the region.
- [Foreign agent laws and narratives](#) about foreign funding continue to threaten independent media across Europe. Most worryingly, [12 legal initiatives](#) were recorded in Georgia, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czechia and Slovakia, indicating a continued spread of such legislation.
- While Europe overall remains a relative safe haven for press freedom globally, with many countries among the healthiest climates in the world for independent journalism, the region is also marked by multiple ongoing media freedom crises which require urgent international attention.

# INTRODUCTION

In 2025, the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) (MFRR) documented a total of 1481 press freedom violations across 35 European countries on the [Mapping Media Freedom](#) database. In total, 2377 media-related persons or entities<sup>1</sup> saw an infringement of their democratic right to report freely on public interest matters.

This annual MFRR monitoring report takes a closer look at this data and offers an analysis of overarching trends and national developments that have shaped the press freedom landscape in Europe this past year.

The report is divided into four sections:

1. A general overview of media freedom issues and trends based on all 1481 press freedom violations recorded in 2025.
2. Thematic chapters on impunity of crimes against journalists, foreign agent laws and narratives, and Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs).
3. Analysis of national developments in select EU Member States: Belgium, France, Italy, Hungary, and Spain.
4. Analysis of national developments in select EU candidate countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine.
5. This past year, journalists, media outlets and other actors in the field were targeted by a large variety of attacks, including serious physical attacks, verbal assault, legal pressure, or interference and obstruction of their work.

Four journalists risked and lost their lives for their reporting in 2025. Aliona Hramova, Yevhen Karmazin, Oleksandr Kolychev and Hakan Tosun are honoured in a thematic chapter on impunity. Impunity continues to be a defining feature in crimes against journalists across Europe, particularly in the context of Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine.

Verbal attacks (40%) were again the most common type of attack, ranging from insults and threats to smear campaigns. For 2025, the MapMF recorded 88 death threats made against journalists, either in person or online. In a total of 218 incidents, journalists were physically attacked, leading to injuries in 86 cases. Legal incidents also represented a significant challenge to press freedom as highlighted in the thematic chapters on foreign agent laws and SLAPPs.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'media-related persons or entities' refers to diverse actors in the media field, including journalists, media workers, family members of media actors, journalists' sources, security personnel and so forth.

While private individuals were the most frequent perpetrators, governments and public authorities increasingly used their platforms and influence to target journalists and media. Police and state security were identified as being responsible for a total of 190 attacks, including arrests and physical attacks at protests.

Online attacks continued the upward trend from previous years and accounted for one-fourth of all attacks in 2025. Journalists were also frequently attacked when reporting on protests and demonstrations.

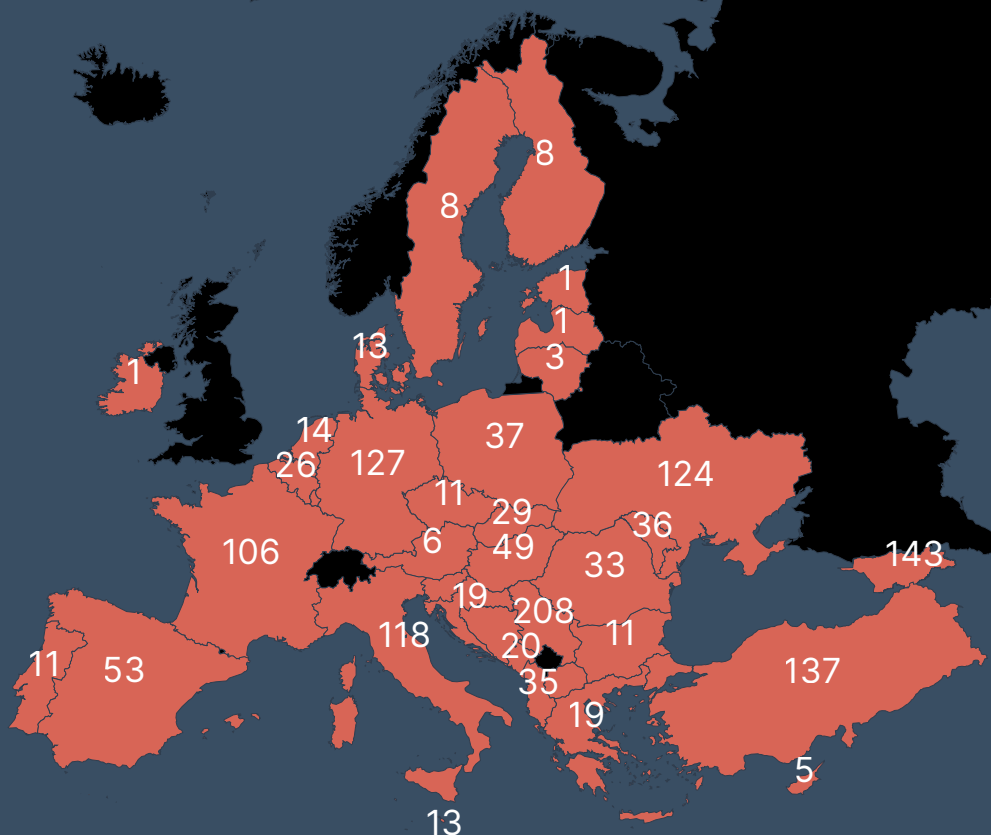
Across all EU Member States, MapMF documented a total of 740 attacks on press freedom affecting 1143 journalists or media actors. Challenges to press freedom are unique depending on the national and political context of each country. This report highlights a continued government crackdown on independent media in Hungary, legal pressures and a spyware scandal in Italy, physical attacks and verbal threats aimed at silencing reporting in Belgium and France, and editorial independence of public broadcasters at risk in Spain.

In EU candidate countries, a total of 741 attacks on press freedom were documented that threatened 1234 journalists and media actors. Serbia stood out with 208 documented cases, reflecting the ongoing media freedom crisis in the country amidst the government's heavy handed response to nationwide protests. In Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro verbal attacks were a significant source of pressure. In Türkiye and Georgia, legal attacks have left a lasting dent within national press freedom landscapes, threatening journalists and media with laws, fines, and arbitrary arrests. As the full-scale invasion of Ukraine approaches its fifth year, Russian forces continue to target journalists, inflicting death, injury and sustained damage to media infrastructure.

# MEDIA FREEDOM ISSUES AND TRENDS

Journalists, media workers and media outlets across Europe were subjected to various attacks and press freedom violations in 2025. This chapter provides quantitative insights on MapMF to identify existing and emerging media freedom issues, based on hundreds of documented cases.

In 2025, MapMF documented [1481 press freedom violations](#) targeting 2377 media-related persons or entities. Half of these cases – or 740 violations – were recorded in [EU Member States](#) targeting 1143 media-related persons or entities. In [EU candidate countries](#), 741 press freedom violations were documented with 1234 targeted media-related persons or entities.



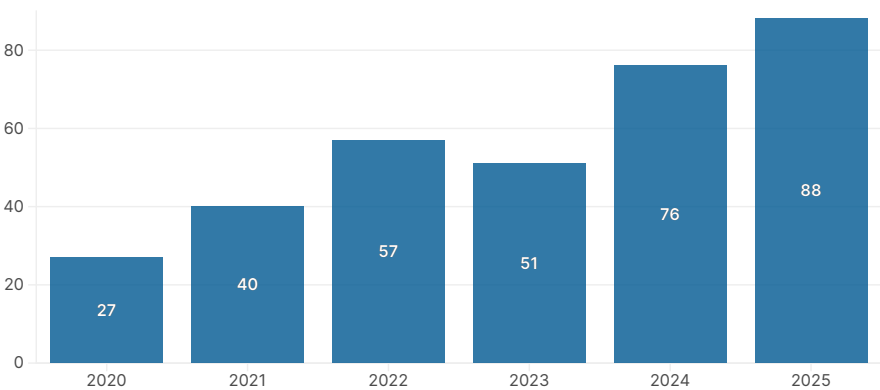


# Types of attacks: killed, injured, arrested, and threatened with death

The number of violations and the [diverse nature of these attacks](#) reflect the ongoing hostile environment for journalists and media operating in many parts of Europe. Media workers faced verbal attacks, physical assaults, attacks against property, interference, and legal incidents.

**Physical attacks:** During 2025, 14.7% of the documented press freedom violations involved [physical attacks](#) equating to 218 incidents. In 86 cases the attacks resulted in [injuries](#). Physical attacks were mainly perpetrated by private individuals and police and mostly happened during protests, on public places and streets, or during events. [Four journalists and media workers were killed](#): Aliona Hramova, Yevhen Karmazin and Oleksandr Kolychev in Ukraine, as well as Hakan Tosun in Türkiye.

**Verbal assaults:** In 40% of all recorded incidents, media workers faced [verbal assaults](#), equating to 592 attacks and nearly 1000 affected media-related persons or entities. In 21.5% of all recorded incidents media workers were [intimidated and threatened](#). Especially alarming were the [88 recorded death threats](#). The number of death threats has constantly increased over the past years, with more than double the number recorded in 2025 compared to five years ago (40 incidents). Between 2020 and 2025, the database recorded 339 cases of death threats against 588 media-related persons or entities.



Number of death threats recorded per year between 2020 to 2025.  
Source: [mappingmediafreedom.org](#)

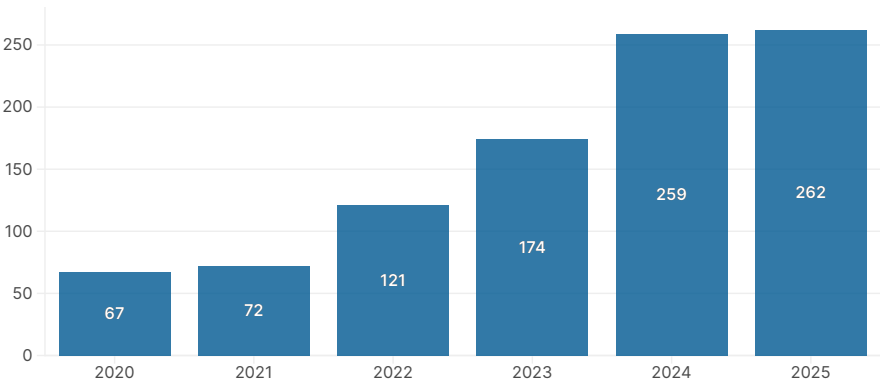
**Property:** More than [200 attacks on property](#) were recorded in 2025, covering 13.9% of all incidents. This included attacks against general property like cars, private homes, editorial buildings, or reporting equipment, but also cases of [hacking and DDoS attacks](#) on media websites and [surveillance](#) such as [spyware](#) on journalist’s mobile devices.

**Legal incidents:** In 344 cases (23.2%), media outlets and individual journalists faced [legal incidents](#). This involved 33 [legislative initiatives](#), including restrictive laws or draft proposals threatening press freedom. These 33 cases span 16 countries, with half of them in EU Member States. Legal incidents also covered 112 cases of [arrest, detention, or imprisonment](#) (affecting 184 media workers), as well civil lawsuits like SLAPPs and criminal charges.

**Interference:** In 360 incidents journalists faced [interference](#) into their work. This involved [blocked journalistic activity](#) (241 incidents) or [interference with journalistic content](#) (56), including [editorial interference](#). Notably, MapMF recorded an increased number of cases within [administrative and financial interference](#) compared to the previous years, especially in relation to [loss of employment](#) and [withdrawal of financial support](#). [Spoofing and identity disguise](#) remained a trending type of violation, often in the form of fake websites, fake articles, or as deep fake videos abusing [Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#).

## Perpetrators: government and public officials as a major concern

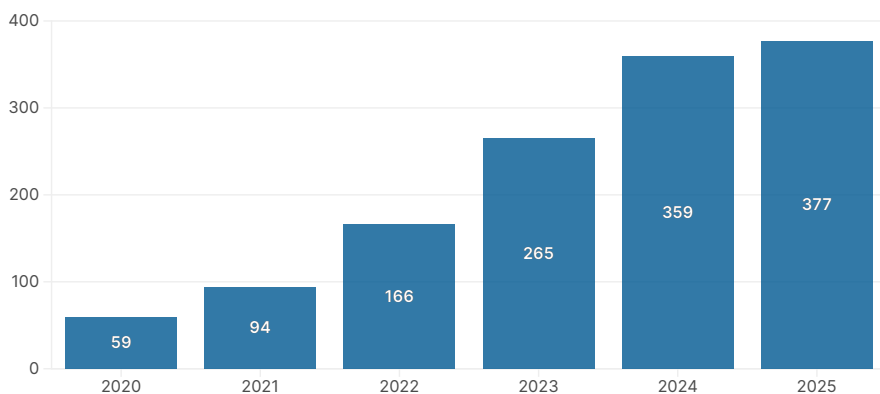
[Private individuals](#) remained the most common perpetrators, being responsible for a quarter of incidents (23.6%). [Government and public officials](#) were the second most frequent type of perpetrator. Over the past years these numbers have increased drastically. While in 2021 government and public officials were responsible for 10.9% of all incidents, this number reached 17.7% (263 incidents) in 2025. Recorded attacks were notably high in EU Member States where government and public officials were responsible for 20.9% (155 incidents) of all recorded attacks. Violations perpetrated by [police and state security](#) (190 incidents) or by the [judiciary](#) (124 incidents) also remained alarmingly high.



Number of attacks by government and public officials recorded per year between 2020 to 2025.  
Source: mappingmediafreedom.org

## Contexts of incidents: from online abuse to real-world threats

[Online and digital attacks](#) further increased, continuing the trend of the past years. In 2025, more than every fourth incident (25.5%) happened online or digitally with 377 violations recorded. As a consequence, this was the most frequent environment where media freedom violations took place. Online attacks mainly involved online harassment, but also included cases of hacking, spoofing or surveillance. Media workers were also attacked during protests (202 incidents), followed by incidents at court (167), in public places (147), during reporting from events (105), and at the office (100). It is especially concerning when attacks infiltrate journalists' private homes and lives. MapMF recorded 37 incidents that happened in the [private environment](#) of journalists, media workers, or their families. This involves cases where media workers suffered raids and arrests in their private home, as well as threats through phone calls, letters, graffiti, banners, a severed goat head, car bombs, or physical assault.



Number of online attacks recorded per year between 2020 to 2025.  
Source: [mappingmediafreedom.org](https://mappingmediafreedom.org)

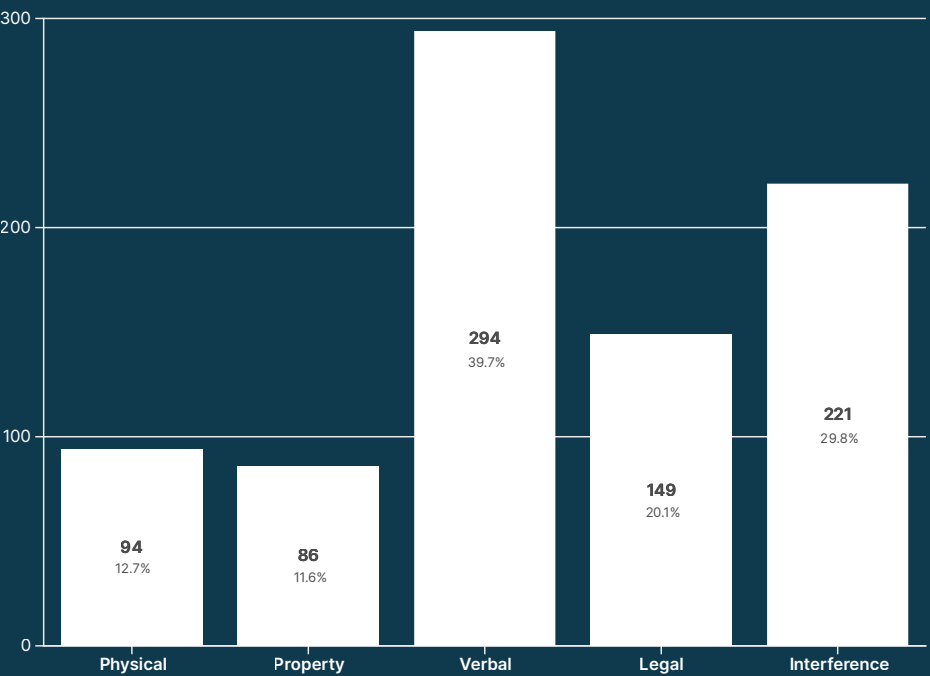
## Attacked media related persons and entities: not only journalists

The bulk of media freedom violations affected [journalists, reporters and other individual media workers](#) (1021 incidents). [Media outlets](#) were also the target in 447 documented incidents. In addition, MapMF recorded 29 incidents targeting the [family members of media actors](#), a number which has more than doubled compared to 2024 (13). This was followed by associations such as trade unions or NGOs fighting for press freedom (20), journalists' sources (3), and media security personnel (1). Furthermore, MapMF recorded 104 cases which involved incidents not directed against individual media-related persons or entities, but against media freedom and independent journalism in general, such as laws restricting press freedom, media blocked from reporting locations, or smear campaigns targeting 'the media' as a whole.

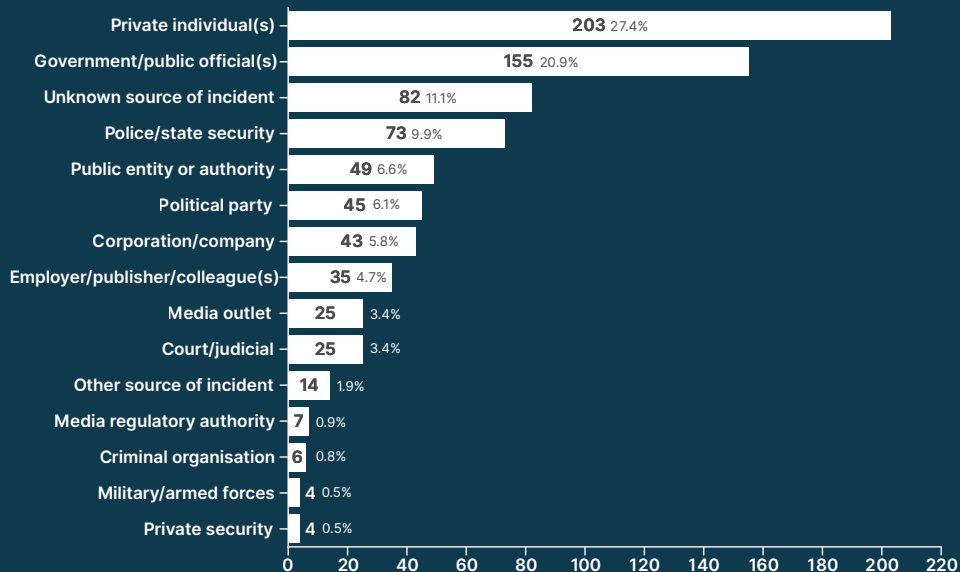
# SPOTLIGHT ON THE EUROPEAN UNION

While EU Member States and candidate countries share certain media freedom issues, there are also differences between the two groups. The following chapters shine two separate spotlights on EU Member States and EU candidate countries. Nevertheless, it should be noted that also within these groups some issues might be more prevalent in certain countries than others and should be assessed on a case by case basis. The individual situation for some selected countries is additionally analysed in the country chapters below. Furthermore, statistics and additional insights on overall issues or certain countries can be retrieved through the [MapMF Alert Explorer](#).

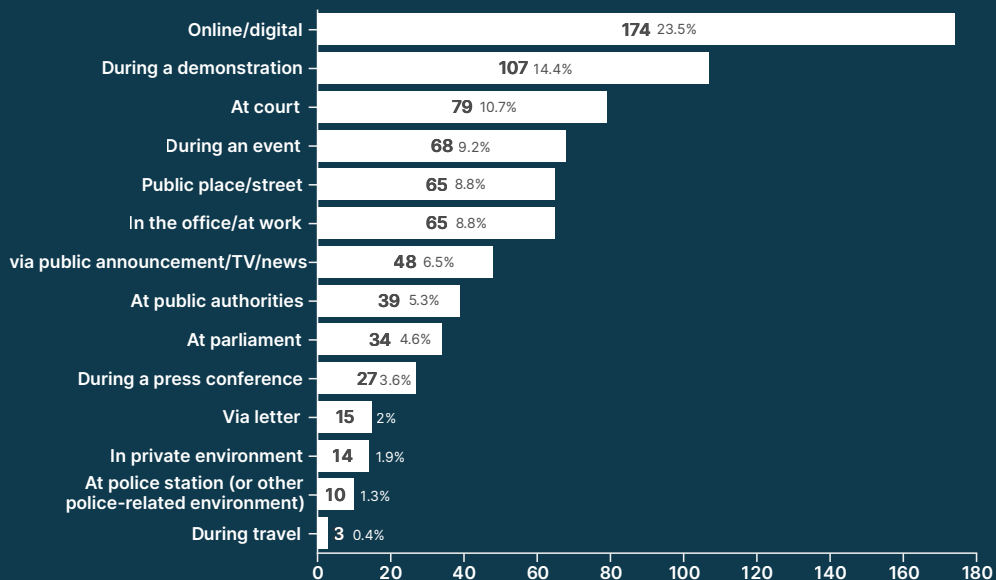
Main types of attacks in EU Member States



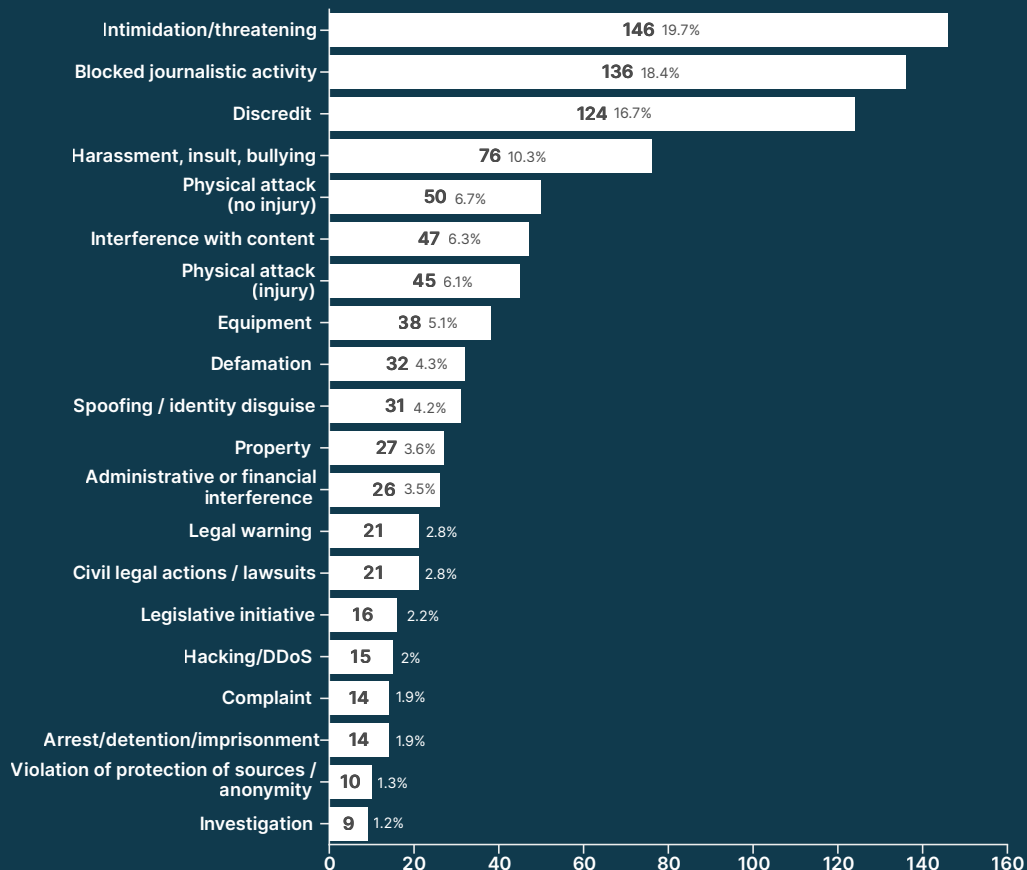
## Sources of attacks in EU Member States



## Contexts of attacks in EU Member States



## Top 20 detailed types of attacks in EU Member States



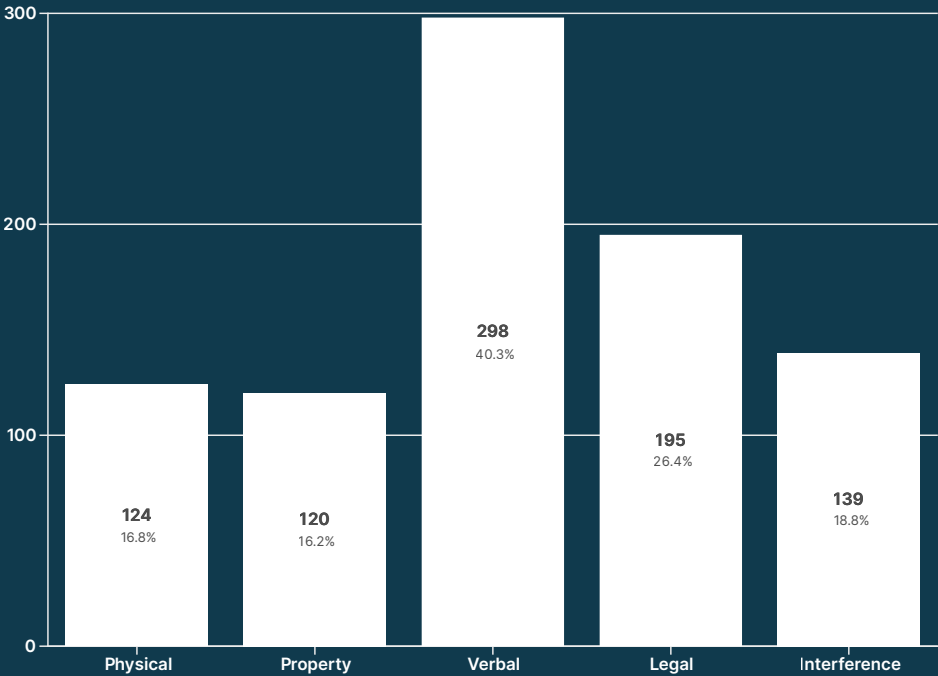
Source: [mappingmediafreedom.org](https://mappingmediafreedom.org)

The data comprises documented Mapping Media Freedom alerts between 01/01/2025 and 31/12/2025 for European Union Member States, based on the documentation status of 31/01/2026. One incident, and thus alert, can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) affecting more than one journalist or media actor and being performed by more than one type of actor. Especially legal incidents, where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert.

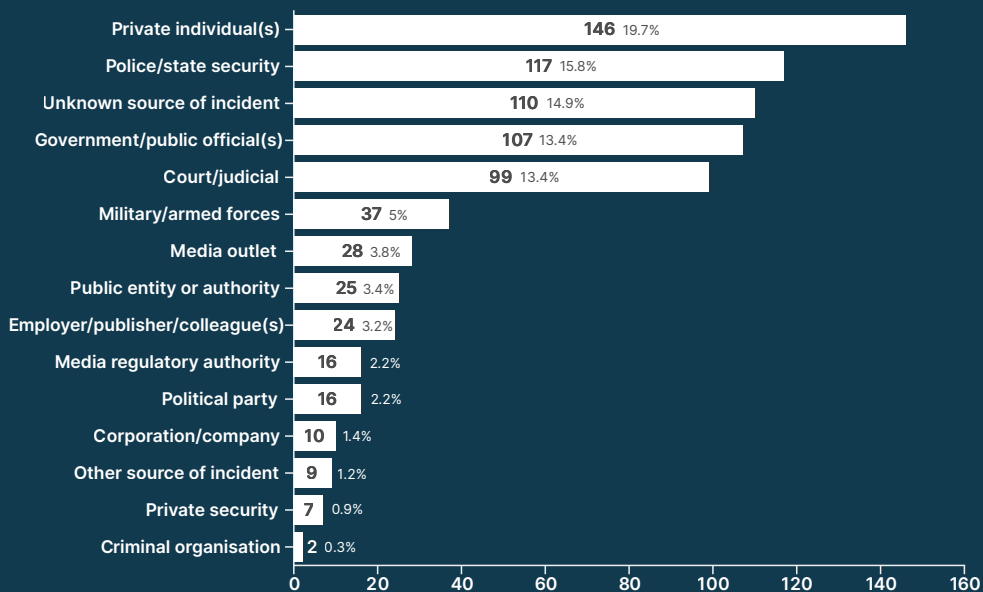
# SPOTLIGHT ON CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

The following chapter provides a statistical overview of the main types of attacks, perpetrators, and contexts of press freedom violations documented in EU candidate countries. As with the statistical overview of data recorded in EU Member States, the situation varies significantly between candidate countries, depending on their respective national and political contexts. The country chapters highlight select case studies from the candidate bloc.

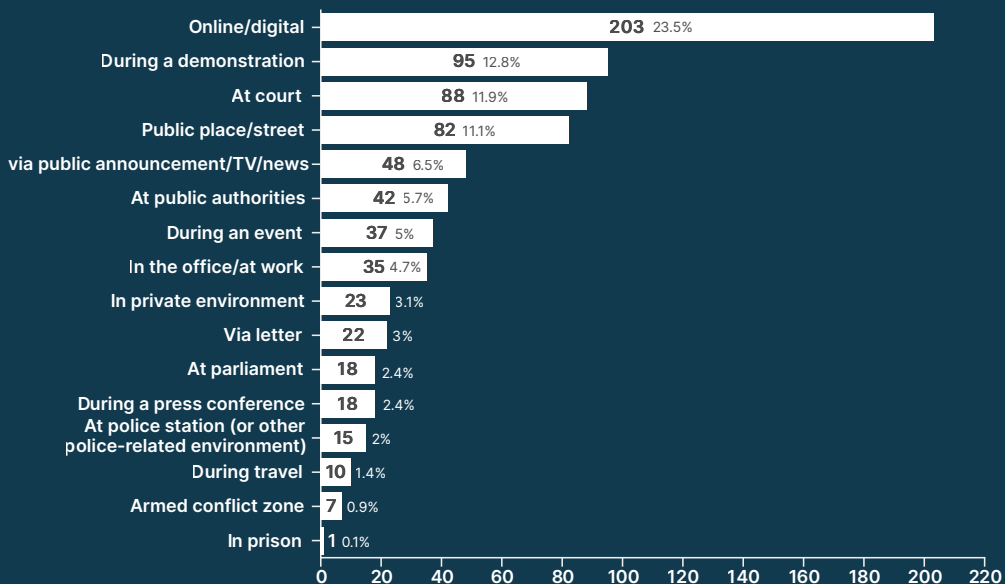
Main types of attacks in candidate countries



## Sources of attacks in candidate countries

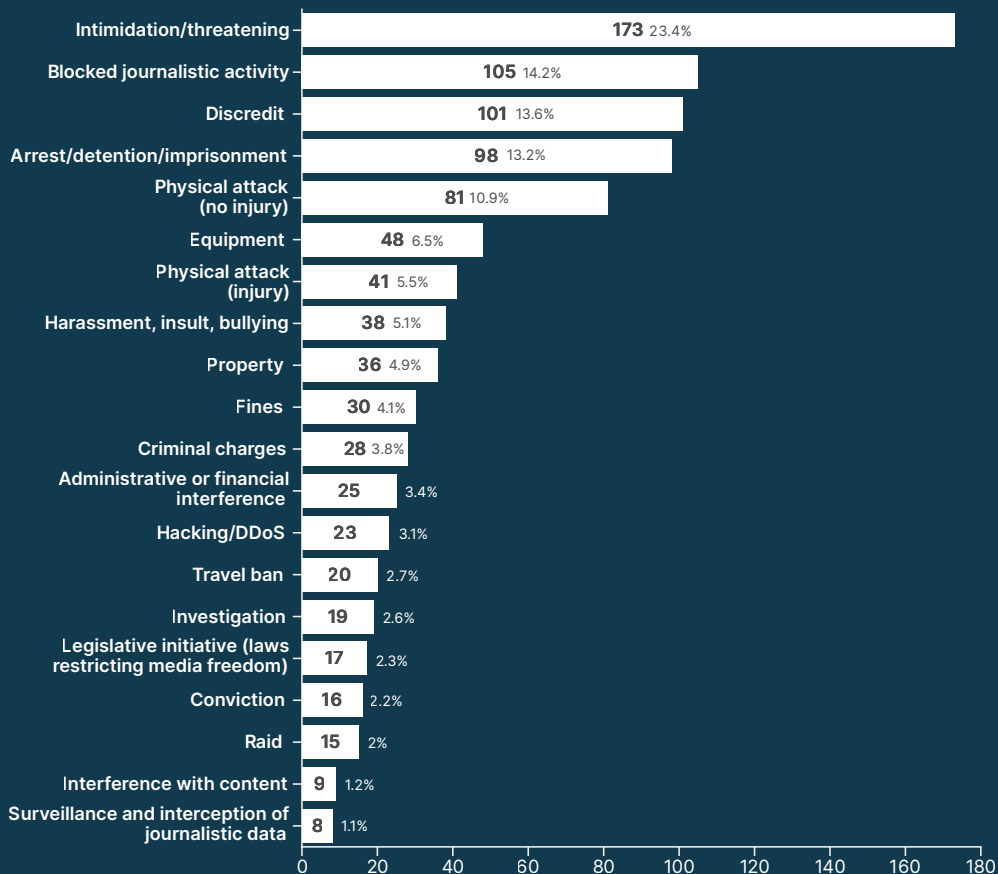


## Contexts of attacks in candidate countries





## Top 20 detailed types of attacks in candidate countries



Source: [mappingmediafreedom.org](https://mappingmediafreedom.org)

The data comprises documented Mapping Media Freedom alerts between 01/01/2025 and 31/12/2025 for European Union candidate countries, based on the documentation status of 31/01/2026. One incident, and thus alert, can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) affecting more than one journalist or media actor and being performed by more than one type of actor. Especially legal incidents, where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert

## THEMATIC ANALYSIS



Mourners gather at the funeral of photojournalist Hakan Tosun in Istanbul on 16 October 2025, days after a fatal assault. picture alliance / ZUMAPRESS.com | Abdullah Tepeli

## FOUR JOURNALISTS KILLED IN 2025: IMPUNITY PERSISTS AS A MAJOR PRESS FREEDOM THREAT

Journalist killings represent one of the gravest attacks on press freedom, democracy and the public's right to information. During 2025, Europe saw a disturbing pattern of violence and inaction, with [four killings of journalists](#) in October alone: three in Ukraine and one in Türkiye. This is an alarming increase from 2024, when MapMF documented [one killed media professional](#) by Russian forces in Ukraine, Reuters security adviser Ryan Evans.

Ukrainian war correspondent Aliona Hramova and Ukrainian camera operator Yevhen Karmazin were both [killed in a Russian drone attack](#) in Donetsk region on 23 October, when a Lancet-type drone struck a service station where their vehicle was parked. The two journalists had been reporting on the aftermath of a prior Russian attack before they were targeted. The strike, which occurred in the city of Kramatorsk, also injured another crew member, correspondent Oleksandr Kolychev, who sustained shrapnel wounds and a broken leg.

French photojournalist Antoni Lallican was [killed by a Russian drone](#) in eastern Ukraine on 3 October. Reporting confirmed that Lallican was killed with the use of an FPV (first-person view) drone, which allows operators to visually identify the target with a camera at the moment of the strike. The photojournalist was wearing visible PRESS markings at the time of his death.

The ongoing and apparently deliberate targeting of journalists by Russian forces in Ukraine, and the absence of any effective investigations or measures to reduce risks to media workers,

underscores the acute dangers faced by journalists in conflict settings, the urgent need for their protection, and the persistent lack of accountability.

These risks extend to those investigating Russian war crimes, as illustrated by the death of [Victoria Roshchyna](#), a Ukrainian journalist detained and held in custody for over a year at an undefined location by Russian authorities. At the time of her death, which was confirmed in October 2024, Roshchyna reportedly [weighed only 30 kilograms](#). Her body showed numerous signs of torture that she suffered while in Russian captivity.

[Hakan Tosun](#), a Turkish journalist and activist known for his reporting on ecological destruction and local corruption, was brutally beaten in Istanbul and died from his injuries on 13 October. A preliminary autopsy report confirmed in January 2026 that he died as a result of the attack. According to the report, Tosun sustained severe head injuries, multiple fractures and widespread haematomas. No traces of drugs were found in his system, contradicting claims made by two suspects in police custody, who had alleged that Tosun was under the influence of drugs and behaving inappropriately at the time of the attack. The Büyükçekmece Chief Public Prosecutor's Office is reportedly investigating the case. With two arrests made, authorities must now swiftly clarify whether his journalistic work was a motive for the attack.

Impunity continues to be a defining feature in many cases of killed journalists across Europe. [At least 16 journalists have been killed in Ukraine](#) in relation to their work since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion on 24 February 2022. To date, none of those responsible have been held accountable for any of these killings.

Meanwhile, in Serbia, four former state security officers who had already been convicted twice of the murder of journalist [Slavko Ćuruvija](#) were acquitted by the Belgrade Court of Appeals in February 2024. The prominent editor and publisher, known for his criticism of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic, was fatally shot in front of his home in 1999.

Within the EU, seven years after the assassination of investigative journalist [Ján Kuciak](#) and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová in Slovakia, the alleged mastermind has been acquitted multiple times. The well-known Aktuality.sk reporter uncovered alleged corruption and tax fraud schemes involving businessman Marián Kočner and prominent figures with suspected ties to the ruling Smer-SSD party and organised crime groups. Despite the hitmen and intermediaries receiving lengthy prison sentences, Kočner, who was originally accused of allegedly masterminding the crime, has been acquitted twice due to lack of conclusive evidence. Following Kočner's [second acquittal](#) in May 2023, a new retrial began in January 2026.

In Malta, while two men were recently sentenced for their roles in the car bombing that killed [Daphne Caruana Galizia](#) in 2017, the alleged mastermind Yorgen Fenech has yet to face justice, with a trial expected to start in 2026. Fenech, a powerful Maltese businessperson, [was released on bail](#) in February 2025 and successfully obtained a court order restricting media reporting on his proceedings.

In Greece, the murder of crime reporter [Giorgos Karaivaz](#) in April 2021 remains unsolved, with two suspects acquitted due to insufficient evidence. Karaivaz's family [appealed this decision](#), arguing that evidence and testimonies were not properly assessed. However, these appeals to the Supreme Court were rejected. In December 2024, a ruling by the Mixed Jury Court of Athens recognised that the killing was linked to his work, though this did nothing to further the case. No further progress has been made in identifying those responsible.

These tragedies are not isolated incidents but part of a European crisis of impunity in crimes against journalists, illustrating a persistent pattern of violence and an ongoing failure by authorities to ensure justice for killed journalists and their loved ones. The combination of targeted attacks, stalled investigations, and repeated acquittals contributes to an environment in which those responsible for violence against journalists rarely face consequences.



Protest on Elizabeth Bridge in Budapest during a demonstration against the public transparency bill, May 2025.  
picture alliance / ASSOCIATED PRESS | Szilard Koszticsak

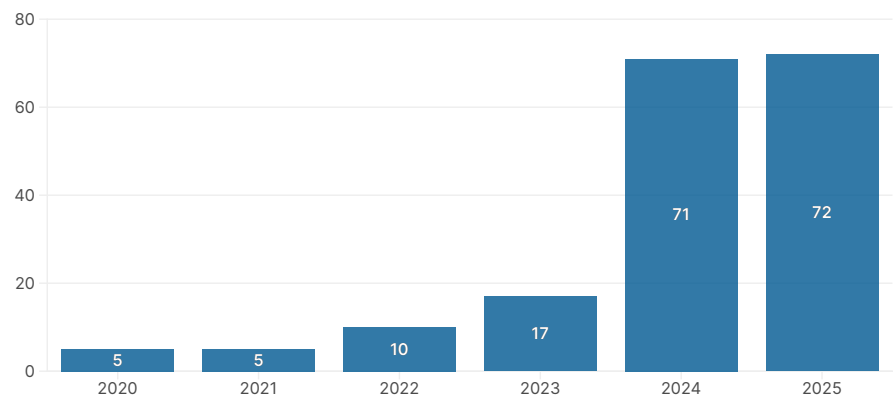
## THE TOXIC IMPACT OF FOREIGN AGENT LAWS AND NARRATIVES ON MEDIA FREEDOM

Over recent years, a growing number of EU Member States and candidate countries have introduced legislation seemingly framed around combating hostile foreign influence. In reality, such laws pose risks to press freedom and independent journalism. In addition to so-called foreign agent laws, political actors across the bloc have increasingly weaponised narratives of foreign funding or interference to stigmatise critical media, portraying outlets that receive international grants as “foreign agents”. While such narratives are often justified in terms of transparency or national security, their real purpose is often to restrict access to funding, and weaken the public’s access to independent information.

Labelling journalists or media as serving foreign interests is aimed at deliberately eroding trust among readers. In Europe, a dominant trope [describes independent outlets as “Soros media”](#). These accusations are particularly acute in countries with captured media ecosystems and low levels of media pluralism. In these countries, independent media have frequently been cut off from state advertising and other domestic funding sources, making international funding and grants essential for their survival.

In 2025, MapMF [recorded 72 press freedom violations](#) linked to foreign agent laws or accusations of foreign funding or influence, affecting 142 media-related individuals or entities. Of these cases, 34 occurred in [EU Member States](#) and 38 in [candidate countries](#). [Hungary accounted for the highest number](#) (18) of incidents within the EU, while [Georgia recorded the most cases](#) (18) among candidate countries.

[Verbal attacks](#), including discrediting statements and smear campaigns, constituted nearly two-thirds (61.1%) of the violations, while [legal actions](#) accounted for one-third (33.3%). [Government and public officials](#) were responsible for more than half (52.8%) of the recorded incidents. The bulk of violations were documented in countries in Central and Eastern Europe, where foreign funding of media via grants is traditionally higher due to a lack of domestic funding sources for public interest media. As the domino effect of foreign agent laws and narratives has spread in recent years, the MFRR has documented increasing numbers of press freedom violations on the topic.



Number of attacks related to foreign agent laws and narratives documented per year between 2020 to 2025.  
Source: mappingmediafreedom.org

In early 2025, the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump began dismantling the US Agency for International Development (USAID), a major donor to media organisations globally. This shift increased financial pressure on many outlets and was quickly exploited by governments and political actors.

During the monitoring period, MapMF documented [19 violations directly linked to USAID funding](#), often framed as evidence of foreign influence. The topic was especially heated in Moldova, where accusations of foreign influence related to USAID funding [led to a physical assault](#) on media workers. In November 2025, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Hungarian-language service, Szabad Európa, closed following a decision by the Trump administration to [terminate its funding](#) on the grounds that it produced content that "undermined President Trump's foreign policy by opposing the duly elected Prime Minister of Hungary", further weakening media pluralism in the country.

Most alarmingly, across Europe this increasingly common political rhetoric was accompanied by foreign funding or influence initiatives which targeted civil society and media organisations. In 2025, MapMF recorded [12 incidents related to proposed or adopted legislation](#) connected



to the topic of foreign influence or funding. These included initiatives in [Georgia](#), [Hungary](#), [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Czechia](#) and [Slovakia](#).

Georgia represented the most far-reaching example during the monitoring period, with [repeated verbal attacks](#) against independent media by pro-government outlets and public officials. Building on the adoption of the [“Law on Transparency of Foreign Influence”](#) in 2024, the ruling Georgian Dream party escalated its efforts in early 2025 by [introducing a law](#) modelled closely on the US Foreign Agents Registration Act, alongside [amendments to broadcasting](#) and [grants legislation](#). These measures significantly expanded state oversight of media funding, imposed intrusive reporting obligations, and allowed authorities to block foreign grants.

Hungary remained a central example of the use of foreign influence narratives against the media in the EU. Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and members of his Fidesz party [repeatedly accused](#) independent outlets of serving foreign interests. The controversial Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO) [launched or participated in several discrediting campaigns](#) against independent media and journalists. These attacks culminated in the proposal of the [“On the Transparency of Public Life” bill](#) in May 2025, which would grant the SPO extensive powers to blacklist any foreign-funded entity deemed a threat to national sovereignty. Following domestic protests and international criticism, the bill was shelved.

In February, the parliament of Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina [passed a “Foreign Agent Law”](#) requiring NGOs engaged in vaguely defined “political activities” and receiving foreign funding to register on a special list and submit to enhanced reporting obligations. Given that many non-profit media outlets in Republika Srpska have historically been registered as NGOs, press freedom organisations warned that the law could be used to target independent journalism and critical reporting. Since then, the law has been cited as adding major administrative pressure to investigative media.

In Slovakia, parliament [approved a fast-tracked transparency law](#) in April imposing new disclosure requirements on NGOs, including the publication of donors contributing more than €5,000 and detailed financial reporting obligations. Although the government removed explicitly stigmatising terms such as “foreign agent” following public criticism, observers warned that the law’s broad definitions and expanded powers for registry authorities resembled similar legislation adopted in Hungary and Russia. As far fewer media are registered as NGOs in Slovakia, the impact on the media sector was less than in other countries.

When the programme of the incoming Czech government was announced in late October 2025, it included a [proposal for a new law](#) that would force “politically active” NGOs receiving foreign funding to disclose it publicly. Incoming Prime Minister Andrej Babiš singled out Pavla Holcova, editor-in-chief of Investigace.cz, and accused her of running such a “political” NGO.

In Bulgaria, opposition parties [intensified attacks on independent NGOs and media outlets](#), calling for parliamentary commissions to investigate organisations linked to foreign donors. Parliament [approved the creation of the commission in November](#).

Beyond legislative and verbal attacks, MapMF also documented a range of additional violations linked to false or toxic narratives around foreign agents and foreign funding. In Georgia, media outlets were targeted with [legal warnings and investigations](#), the Charter of Journalistic Ethics and news outlet Tabula [lost their funding](#), and a British journalist was [denied entry](#) into the country after he was smeared as a “Soros agent” by state-aligned media and government officials. In Ukraine, a Russian-installed court in occupied Crimea [fined a journalist](#) for “foreign agent” activities. In October, a cross-border investigation revealed how politicians in Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia [were using paid social media advertising](#) on Meta’s platforms to target media critical of them, accusing journalists of treason and acting as foreign agents.

These cases demonstrate how foreign agent narratives and related legal frameworks are increasingly used across Europe to stigmatise independent media, further restrict access to media funding, and justify state pressure on critical press. Under the guise of transparency and sovereignty, these measures are already eroding press freedom and narrowing the space for independent journalism inside and outside the EU.





Vecteezy / Praewpailyn Srijaeren

## SLAPPS AND LEGAL ATTACKS AS POWERFUL TOOLS TO SILENCE PUBLIC INTEREST JOURNALISM

Legal threats, including Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), remain a serious obstacle for journalists, media professionals, and journalism. As a way of hindering media freedom, politicians, business people, and authorities use legal warnings, including pre-publication and post-publication warnings, criminal complaints, investigations, lawsuits, fines, arrests, and other legal means to obstruct journalists from collecting and disseminating public interest information.

In 2025, MapMF recorded [344 legal incidents](#). One of the most prominent pre-publication legal threats registered was in Denmark. Danwatch, a Danish investigative online media outlet [received more than four strongly worded legal letters](#) from the Moscow-based law firm ELWI sent on behalf of their client Ingosstrakh, a major Russian insurance company that has been sanctioned by the United States and the United Kingdom. The letters followed a joint investigation by Danwatch and the Financial Times into how the Russian insurer Ingosstrakh, which covers oil vessels, was suspected of being used by Russia to circumvent Western sanctions. The law firm sought, on behalf of Ingosstrakh, clarification, which Danwatch provided; however, it refused to provide the documents requested by the company.

Follow the Money, an investigative media outlet based in the Netherlands was also targeted by a pre-publication warning. The outlet [received a letter threatening legal action](#) should it publish an investigation into the 'unconventional' investments of German entrepreneur Christian Angermayer, ranging from cryptocurrency to psychedelics. The article, entitled

"Charity closure casts spotlight on biotech billionaire behind the 'Steroid Olympics'", was published on 13 June 2025.

In terms of SLAPPs, MFRR documents [six defamation lawsuits filed against media outlet N1](#) in Slovenia by the University Psychiatric Clinic of Ljubljana. The SLAPPs were filed following a series of investigative reports alleging the use of violence within the clinic's facilities between April and July 2024. They were made public in February 2025, when the defendants were officially served and asked to respond. The clinic was seeking €70,000 in compensation in the first lawsuit, followed by €25,000 in each of the five subsequent lawsuits against N1's articles, amounting to a total of €195,000. Following [calls by civil society and press freedom defenders to withdraw the lawsuits](#), it was reported that N1 and University Psychiatric Clinic reached an agreement and the lawsuits were withdrawn.

Another example of SLAPP is the case of the Romanian anti-trafficking NGO leader Benjamin Lup, who filed lawsuits against multiple media outlets reporting on the suspicious deaths of his wives. On 24 March 2025, it was reported that Benjamin Lup, head of the WorldTeach Association and the Butterfly Center in Zolt, [filed multiple lawsuits](#) in November 2024 against Romanian media outlets and journalists, including PRESShub, Ziarul de Iași, Libertatea, Click, and Sursa de Vest through their publishers, as well as against one of the witnesses cited in their reporting.

In 2024, the Council of Europe and the European Union started to develop legislative solutions on SLAPPs. There is now an [EU Directive](#), an [European Commission Recommendation](#), and a [Council of Europe Recommendation on SLAPPs](#). EU Member States must now ensure that these European rules are implemented nationally, not as a box-ticking exercise to meet obligations towards the EU or the Council of Europe, but in a way that truly supports journalists and other public watchdogs.

As the deadline for the transposition of the EU Directive approaches in May 2026, the year 2025 has already been marked by a wave of initiatives across Europe, with Member States taking steps to introduce legislation implementing both the EU Directive and the Council of Europe Recommendation on SLAPPs. According to the [European Anti-SLAPP Monitor](#), an online tool that tracks the implementation of anti-SLAPP standards, at least 17 Member States have initiated implementation processes. These efforts include the establishment of ministerial working groups and, in some cases, the proposal of concrete legislative measures.

For the implementation to be successful, it is important that Member States transpose both the EU Directive and the Council of Europe Recommendation simultaneously. It is also important that Member States consider these instruments as minimum standards and aim to go further. For example, early dismissal should be available both upon request and ex officio by the court; security for procedural costs and damages should be ensured; cost-capping measures should be introduced; and dissuasive measures, including penalties for claimants abusing the courts, should be included.

# COUNTRY REPORTS

## EU Member States

### Belgium

In Belgium, [26 incidents were documented](#), impacting the work of 40 media workers or related entities. The most frequent violations were verbal attacks (34.6%), followed by interference (26.9%), physical assaults (19.2%), legal threats (19.2%), and attacks to property (3.8%).

Intimidation attempts by high-ranking officials remained a major concern in Belgium. Since January, several cases have been attributed to elected officials from the Reformist Movement (MR) party, notably its leader Georges-Louis Bouchez. Public broadcaster RTBF was a main target: Bouchez qualified its reporting as [“fake news”](#) and [threatened a journalist with physical violence](#) following coverage of Le Vif’s investigation into the alleged misuse of a PRM card in a vehicle he used regularly. Bouchez also pressured blogger Yurbise for sharing the same investigation on his social media with a [formal notice](#) letter. The MR party also faced criticism after three of its representatives [demanded the dismissal](#) of the local channel TéléSambre’s editor-in-chief.

One serious case of threats implying physical violence was recorded. Congolese journalist Baelenge Irengé received [repeated threats over the phone](#) from an unknown individual who claimed to know where the journalist lives. The [threats explicitly referenced a recent knife attack](#) on another Belgium-based Congolese journalist, Claude Pero Luwara, outside his home.

In 2025, a total of [five physical assaults were documented](#), mostly perpetrated by private individuals. Journalists attacked during reporting were an [Het Nieuwsblad photojournalist](#) in Gent, two [BX1 journalists](#), and a [camera operator](#) for the broadcasting and media production company ‘Gravity Media’. MapMF also recorded one case of police violence against freelance journalist Erika Di Benedetto, who was [injured](#) while covering a pro-Palestinian protest in Brussels. She filed a complaint with the Standing Police Monitoring Committee.

Spoofing remained a concern, particularly for public broadcasters VRT and RTBF whose journalists were [impersonated](#) as part of different scams.

One instance of property attacks was recorded against the premises of La Meuse and RTL Info in Liège during a protest in November. The building’s [facade was covered in paint](#) and litter, including eggs, fruits, and a beer bottle. Eight individuals were arrested in connection with the incident.

[Five legal incidents were documented](#), including the [arbitrary arrest](#) of a freelance journalist in Brussels, who spent the night in a cell (in administrative detention) with five activists after

covering a disobedience action. [Legal threats](#) were also issued against the investigative outlet Apache and the journalist Frank Olbrechts following their reporting on a eugenics-linked ideology at Ghent University. Belgian investigative outlet Médor also [denounced a 'gagging procedure'](#) after a six-year legal battle ended when the defamation lawsuit, filed by the company Socfin in a Luxembourg court, was dismissed due to the statute of limitations.

On positive developments, the year saw favorable judicial outcomes in long-running cases, such as a [ruling benefiting Dirk Selis](#), who had been sentenced in 2024 for having unlawfully processed personal data of former mayor Veerle Heeren. October also saw the conviction of a man who [cyber-harassed](#) journalist Florence Hainaut and RTBF for years. The court stated that a “denigration strategy was developed collectively, executed systematically” and “with the aim of harming Hainaut”, and that multiple anonymous accounts had been created for this purpose.

Finally, the French-speaking media landscape is on the verge of an unprecedented concentration. A [merger agreement](#) was signed in December between the two main French-language press groups, IPM and Rossel. The Belgian Competition Authority is currently examining the case: its decision will condition the effective entry of IPM under Rossel.

## France

In 2025, MapMF [documented 106 attacks](#) affecting 163 media professionals or related entities. This figure is comparable to the 108 incidents recorded in the 2024 election year, suggesting a continued deterioration. A total of 33 violations were [verified](#) in collaboration with the [French Observatory on Violations of Press Freedom](#) (OFALP). Verbal attacks (40.6%) were the most frequent type of attack, followed by interference (26%), legal threats (19%), physical attacks (18%) and attacks to property (12%).

In 2025, MapMF documented [43 verbal assaults](#) targeting 59 journalists or media outlets. This involved 24 cases of [intimidation and threatening](#). At least seven cases of [death threats](#) were recorded: they were directed at investigative journalist Thomas Dietrich and his family, Martin Saussard, Guillaume Krempf (Rue89Strasbourg), as well as reporters for investigative programme Cash Investigation. Marie Turcan (Mediapart) also faced [death threats](#) coupled with homophobic abuse. Other cases of intimidation included an [explosive package](#) addressed to the host of a talk show Estelle Denis, which was intercepted by the gendarmerie before delivery. In another case, a French businessman renamed his holding company 'Thomas Lemahieu', [appropriating the name of a journalist](#) against whom he had previously issued legal threats.

Media companies were also the target of serious [intimidation](#), including a “Charlie Hebdo”-style threat against a local radio station and threats of bomb attacks that forced RMC BFM and France Télévisions to evacuate their premises.

[Media and officials associated with the far-right](#) were the source of at least 10 attacks on journalists and their representatives through smear campaigns, online harassment and public discrediting attempts. Examples include far-right media *Frontières*, which subjectively [labelled several journalists in an “interactive map”](#) purportedly detailing the French far-left movement. Some officials and public figures [amplified](#) disparaging efforts on social media and on air, while the [public broadcaster faced mounting pressure](#) amid a National Assembly inquiry into public service neutrality.

Journalists were [restricted in their reporting in 21 cases](#), ranging from [denied access to events](#) (12), including [refusal of accreditation](#), [blocked distribution of journalistic content](#) (4), [no answers to enquiries](#) (3), to [forced deletion of footage](#) (2). In one instance, obstruction escalated into a [physical attack](#) by state security during a council meeting. The [withholding of information](#) further hindered reporting, prompting complaints from the local investigative outlet *Mediacités*, including against a Regional Council which was ultimately [ordered](#) to disclose elected officials' expenses.

Alarming, of the 19 documented [physical attacks](#) against journalists, 12 were committed by [law enforcement authorities](#), and five by [private individuals](#). Despite clearly identifying themselves as members of the press, ten journalists were [injured](#), mainly while covering protests against racism, International Women's Day, and May Day.

In the context of demonstrations, MapMF documented 15 cases of [police hindering journalistic work](#), including three [arbitrary arrests](#). Photojournalists were [detained](#) during September protests in Bagnolet and Rennes, while Andrei Manivit (*Le Média*) and freelance reporter Enzo Rabouy were arrested for covering a militant action at the Paris Air Show. Plainclothes police [handcuffed](#) Rabouy upon arrival in Paris. He was also [arrested](#) and [summoned](#) for “incitement to hatred” over separate reporting.

The number of lawsuits against media outlets and individual journalists is particularly concerning. At least nine [defamation cases](#) were filed during the reporting period, an increase compared to the previous years. Two of them were identified as [SLAPPs](#) by the MFRR legal team. [Local investigative media outlets](#) were particularly targeted by legal proceedings, which placed an enormous burden on them. Some of these were eventually dismissed by the courts, such as the case filed by the head of the Brittany pork firm *Evel'Up* against *Splann!*. *Marsactu* and *Mediapart* reported being [sued under defamation](#) by orthopaedic surgeon Michel Assor, although the lawsuit was dismissed in the first instance and an appeal was filed.

The judicial harassment against *Disclose* and its investigative journalist Ariane Lavrilleux persisted. Although the Paris court [dismissed the criminal charges](#) against her for “appropriation and disclosure of a national defence secret” related to her investigation into France's complicity in state crimes in Egypt, the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Paris Court of Appeal appealed the decision in October. In addition, *Disclose* is also the target of a [criminal defamation lawsuit](#) by *Thales*, the French multinational company specialising in armaments.

Media were also sued in some instances under commercial law on the pretext of unfair commercial practices. This was the case of the online outlet Warning Trading, recently convicted by the Commercial Court of Aix-en-Provence for “commercial denigration”. This was followed by a [complaint](#) submitted by the Paris law firm Ziegler & Associés, whose practices were reported by journalist Philippe Miller the previous year. At that time, Miller was arrested and authorities seized his equipment, which has still not been returned at the time of writing (February 2026).

[Spoofing attacks](#) (5) continued to interfere with journalists’ work. Two [fake websites misused identities](#) of several French journalists to circulate fabricated narratives, including pro-Russian propaganda [targeting](#) Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and financial scams [impersonating](#) journalists.

## Italy

In 2025, the amount of press freedom violations in Italy remained high, underscoring the persistent challenges facing journalists and media. MapMF documented [118 incidents](#) targeting 200 media-related persons and entities. Italy also saw the EU’s most serious spyware attacks on journalists in 2025, and the attempted assassination of one of its most famous journalists.

While [private individuals](#) were the most frequent perpetrators (39.0%), [government and public officials](#) were responsible for nearly a quarter of the violations (22.9%), highlighting the continued vulnerability of journalists to both societal and institutional pressure.

[Verbal attacks](#), including insults, harassment and discrediting comments, accounted for half of the cases (50%). MapMF recorded 15 cases of [physical attacks](#) against journalists and media workers, six of which [resulted in injuries](#). These incidents occurred while reporters were on assignment or otherwise in [public spaces](#), and while [covering demonstrations](#). In October, four journalists [were injured](#) by police and protesters during a pro-Palestine protest in Bologna. Such cases reflected the risks faced by journalists during public demonstrations and the challenges in ensuring their safety.

Concern for the safety of journalists was exemplified by the attempted assassination of one of Italy’s most famous journalists, Sigfrido Ranucci, when a bomb containing approximately one kilogram of explosive [detonated near his car](#). The explosion happened shortly after his daughter had parked the vehicle. Although no one was injured, two cars and a nearby house were damaged, underlining the severity of the threat. Ranucci, in addition to at least nine other journalists, [was placed under police protection](#) during the year due to severe threats.

[Intimidation and threats](#) made up 25.4% of all recorded violations, including six cases involving explicit [death threats](#). A newsroom at Il Tempo [received a letter](#) containing death threats against several newspapers, while journalist Andrea D’Aurelio [was threatened](#) inside





*Sigfrido Ranucci attends a demonstration in support of press freedom in Rome on 21 October 2025, after his car was detonated.  
picture alliance / abaca | LaPresse/ABACA*

a courthouse by relatives of a defendant during a trial. Federico De Ros also [received death threats](#) on social media following his reporting on criminal violence in Pordenone.

Several incidents were [linked to organised crime](#) and the mafia. Fanpage.it journalist Giorgia Venturini, known for her investigations into organised crime, [found a severed goat's head](#) and skin in a black bag outside her home in Milan, a widely recognised intimidation tactic. In November, an armed group [attacked a delivery van](#) transporting newspapers including Roma, Metropolis and Sannio Quotidiano, disrupting their distribution.

In January, a major spyware scandal further raised concerns about surveillance of journalists. Fanpage editor-in-chief Francesco Cancellato was among around 90 WhatsApp users [targeted with Paragon spyware](#), and in April Fanpage journalist Ciro Pellegrino's phone [was targeted](#) with the same spyware, also known as Graphite. The Italian government confirmed that law enforcement agencies use spyware but denied involvement in this case and has not acknowledged any formal contract with Paragon. Media reports indicated that Paragon terminated its contracts with Italian intelligence services shortly after the scandal became public. Investigations and parliamentary scrutiny followed, but the authority responsible for deploying the spyware has not been identified, with several indicators pointing to at least one state agency.

[Legal pressure](#) also remained a significant issue, covering 22% of all documented cases. [Government and public officials](#) were the most frequent sources of legal incidents (34.6%), with [defamation lawsuits](#) repeatedly used by high-profile politicians to silence critical reporting. [Legal warnings](#), [civil lawsuits](#), [criminal complaints](#) and [defamation lawsuits](#) were used by companies, magistrates, public authorities and politicians, often targeting journalists reporting on sensitive topics. In particular, Rai's investigative programme 'Report', which Ranucci hosts, was the target of [constant legal threats](#). In January, partially state-owned oil company ENI [issued legal threats](#) against Report to prevent the broadcast of an episode examining its operations in Congo.

[Editorial interference](#) was another major concern with 28 recorded incidents (23.7%), especially at public broadcaster Rai, where [multiple cases](#) highlighted problems with editorial independence. In December, the [planned sale](#) of the Gedi media group to Greek company Antenna, affecting newspapers such as La Repubblica and La Stampa, raised additional concerns about media pluralism and editorial independence.

Journalists in Italy continued to face a wide range of pressures, from physical attacks and intimidation to legal harassment, surveillance and editorial interference. Threats linked to organised crime and political figures remain persistent, while unresolved spyware allegations and concerns over media ownership further weaken the environment for independent reporting. Together, these developments point to ongoing structural challenges for press freedom, safety and editorial independence in Italy.



## Hungary

Press freedom in Hungary continued to deteriorate in 2025, as government officials, public authorities and pro-government media increasingly weaponised foreign agent narratives against independent media in a pre-election year. MapMF documented [49 press freedom violations](#) against 74 media-related persons and entities during the year. The most common types of violations were [interference](#) (38.8%) and [verbal attacks](#) (36.7%), with [government and public officials](#) responsible for nearly half (49.0%) of all recorded incidents. This was a stark increase from 2024, when 23.5% of all violations were by government and public officials.

Smear campaigns and hostile rhetoric remained a central feature of the media environment. All recorded verbal attacks were carried out by political actors, public authorities or pro-government media outlets. The most alarming case took place in March, when Prime Minister Viktor Orbán used a major rally to attack groups critical of his government, including independent media, as [‘bugs’ who should be eradicated](#). Such rhetoric contributes to the stigmatisation of independent journalism and reinforces narratives portraying critical reporting as a threat to national interests.

Independent outlets were repeatedly [denied entry](#) to government press conferences and speeches of Prime Minister Orbán. Journalists also faced constant restrictions on [access to information](#), including four cases linked to [Freedom of Information \(FOI\) requests](#).

Foreign agent narratives were increasingly weaponised against independent media. MapMF recorded 18 violations linked to [foreign agent laws and accusations of foreign influence or funding](#), reflecting the Fidesz government's continued efforts to portray critical outlets receiving any form of foreign grant or funding as serving external interests. In May, [draft legislation on foreign funding was introduced](#) to parliament that would have granted the controversial Sovereignty Protection Office (SPO) expanded powers to blacklist and potentially close organisations receiving foreign support. The proposal drew widespread domestic and international criticism, prompting the government to shelve the bill. If it had passed, the law would have dealt a severe blow to media freedom in Hungary.

During the year, the SPO [intensified its activities](#) against independent media under the controversial Sovereignty Protection Act. From May 2025 onwards, it launched coordinated smear campaigns targeting journalists and NGOs. Investigations also revealed that SPO and Fidesz-affiliated actors systematically [used paid political advertisements](#) on Meta platforms to label journalists, civil society organisations and human rights defenders as “foreign agents” or part of the “Soros network”. These campaigns illustrated how state-linked institutions were used to discredit critical voices. The European Commission has [launched infringement proceedings](#) against Hungary over the Sovereignty Protection Act and the establishment of the SPO, citing violations of EU law.

Legal pressure on independent media and media owners continued. The Supreme Court ruled in favour of Prime Minister Orbán in defamation cases against [Klubrádió](#) and [Hírklubb](#), ordering both outlets to publish corrections and pay legal costs for reporting on statements by Spar Austria CEO Hans Reisch. The Court ruled that the media could only report Reisch's claims if they could prove their truth in Hungarian courts.

Meanwhile, the Budapest Chief Prosecutor's Office sought a two-and-a-half-year [prison sentence](#) and professional bans for Zoltán Varga, owner of the Central Media Group, alleging financial misconduct in a 2015 real estate deal. Varga's lawyers described the case as politically motivated. His company operates 24.hu, one of Hungary's few remaining major independent news portals.

Concerns over media pluralism also intensified. Media outlet G7 reported that companies linked to businessman Lőrinc Mészáros, a close ally of Prime Minister Orbán, [transferred nearly HUF 28.5 billion](#) into a trust controlling commercial broadcaster TV2. In late 2025, pro-government media group Indamedia [acquired Hungary's largest tabloid Blikk](#), while state-owned Pro-M Zrt. [took full control](#) of the country's terrestrial broadcasting infrastructure. These developments reinforced patterns of politically-aligned media consolidation.

Taken together, these trends point to a continued erosion of media freedom in Hungary. The combination of political pressure, smear campaigns, legal actions, restricted access to information and increasing concentration of media ownership has further weakened pluralism and the operating space for independent journalism ahead of the 2026 elections.

## Spain

In 2025, press freedom in Spain was marked by persistent challenges linked to political interference, physical attacks, legal pressure and online harassment. MapMF documented [53 press freedom violations](#) affecting 89 media-related persons or entities. [Interference](#) (41.5%) and [verbal attacks](#) (35.8%) represented the most common forms of pressure, but the data also included a considerable amount of physical attacks (18.9%).

[Employers were the perpetrators](#) in almost a quarter (24.5%) of the documented cases. They were responsible for nearly all cases of [editorial interference](#). [Interference with content](#) was the most frequent type of incident recorded in Spain, particularly within regional public broadcasters. The situation prompted staff of several regional broadcasters to protest [in July](#) and [November](#), calling for editorial independence free from political influence.

The situation [was especially concerning](#) at the Valencian public broadcaster À Punt following the [adoption of a controversial public broadcasting law](#) in 2024. Journalists repeatedly denounced political interference by the regional government led by the People's Party (PP), supported by Vox. Staff representatives said recent reforms [had reduced the broadcaster's autonomy](#), suspended the Editorial Board, and removed newsroom representatives' decision-

making powers. Concerns were also raised about a new editorial style guide that altered standards on gender-based violence, language use and programme content. In response, two journalists resigned in [September](#) and [October](#), invoking the “conscience clause” due to what they described as a substantial change in the broadcaster’s editorial line.

Physical safety also remained a key concern. At least 17 journalists and camera operators [were physically assaulted](#), most often while [covering demonstrations](#) or [working in public spaces](#). Seven of the ten documented cases of physical attacks resulted in injuries. While most perpetrators [were private individuals](#), three cases [involved police violence](#). In October, photojournalist Joan Gálvez [was injured](#) by a foam projectile fired by a Mossos d’Esquadra officer while covering a pro-Palestine protest.

Journalists and media outlets also [faced different forms of legal pressure](#). In March, four journalists [were charged with disclosure of secrets](#) for publishing parts of a Civil Guard report linked to a Supreme Court case involving the State Attorney General. The ultraconservative group Hazte Oír [threatened legal action](#) against comedians Lalachus and David Broncano, as well as RTVE president José Pablo López, over alleged offences against religious sentiments, citing Article 525 of the Penal Code. The Catholic association Christian Lawyers [sued satirical magazine](#) El Jueves over a cartoon it claimed violated the right to honour. Investigative outlet La Marea faced a [€60,000 defamation lawsuit](#) from Invest Medical LLC, the company behind the surrogacy agency Gestlife, over reporting on the international surrogacy business.

Journalists [reporting on environmental issues](#) faced repeated pressure. In Cártama, a Canal Sur journalist and camera operator [were physically attacked](#) while reporting on heavy rains and flooding. A journalist was [summoned to court](#) over coverage of a 2023 climate protest at Madrid-Barajas Airport. In December, journalists attempting to report on African swine fever affecting wild boars in Barcelona’s Collserola Natural Park [were restricted](#) in their access. Journalists at Catalan broadcaster TV3 [denounced editorial interference](#) over the postponement of a documentary featuring whistleblower allegations about unsafe construction practices in flood-prone areas.

Far-right actors played a prominent role in several incidents. MapMF recorded seven cases of verbal attacks by [far-right party Vox and its politicians](#), as well as nine cases linked to [far-right activists and protesters](#). Journalist Román Cuesta of Diario Red was [assaulted and injured](#) by four suspected far-right individuals outside his home. Political analyst Laura Arroyo, a contributor to Canal Red, [was targeted by an online harassment campaign](#) after comments she made on public television. The abuse, which focused partly on her identity as a migrant woman from Peru, intensified when Vox amplified hostile messages through its official X account, adding a statement widely interpreted as calling for the deportation of those who “propagate hatred and violence”.

In September, [Vox launched a coordinated online harassment campaign](#) against journalist and author Cristina Fallarás, urging supporters to report her to the authorities. The party

promoted a pre-written complaint across its website and social media platforms, featuring Fallarás by name and image. The campaign triggered a wave of online harassment and threats against her.

Based on the 2025 MapMF data, journalists in Spain continued to face a variety of violations, including political interference, physical attacks, legal threats and coordinated online harassment. Editorial independence at public broadcasters, particularly at regional level, remained a central concern, while far-right actors played a major role in targeting individual journalists. Together, these trends highlight ongoing challenges to press freedom and safety of journalists in Spain.

## Candidate Countries

### *Bosnia and Herzegovina*

In 2025, the MapMF database documented [25 press freedom violations](#) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), affecting 45 media-related persons or entities, an increase compared to the 17 cases [recorded](#) in 2024. Verbal attacks (18 cases) remained the most common type of violation, followed by interference (5), legal incidents (4), physical attacks (4), and attacks to property (2).

Of the 18 cases of verbal abuse, seven were [perpetrated by public officials](#), mainly through discrediting and humiliating statements. During press conferences and public events, the then Republika Srpska President Milorad Dodik [labelled](#) independent media as 'criminals' and those receiving USAID foreign-funded as "politically biased". Public officials also strategically used their widely followed social media accounts to disseminate discrediting posts. Serious cases included Minister of Foreign Affairs Elmedin Konaković [publicly discrediting media outlets](#) such as Avaz, Istraga, and Hayat. Mostar's mayor [accused](#) the co-owner of Hercegovina. info of fostering a "lynch mob atmosphere". The [adoption](#) of the so-called 'foreign agent law' might be used to further intimidate and pressure government critics, raising further concerns for press freedom in the country.

Verbal attacks by private individuals involved [intimidation and violent threats](#), with two cases [escalating into physical attacks](#). The editor of Defter hefte was [threatened with physical violence](#) alongside his son. Stav magazine's Rabija Arifović and Secretary General of the local journalists' association BH Journalists, Borka Rudić, were also targeted with [hateful and misogynistic threats](#) by the same perpetrator, who was later detained. Four [death threats](#) were also recorded, including those against Dino Durmić, Evelin Trako (Dnevni avaz), and Nataša Miljanović Zubac. Zubac has been subjected to constant threats ever since her [car was set on fire](#) in 2022.

While fearing for her life, Miljanović Zubac was involved in [several legal cases](#) following her investigation into alleged criminal activities within the police. They [included](#) an arrest order by the Prosecutor's Office of BiH, a search of her home, and the illegal use of her phone while it was confiscated during her custody; in a clear violation of the protection of journalistic sources. Another legal case involved [a criminal defamation complaint](#) filed by the Head of the Municipal Police Department in Zvornik against Drina Media news portal.

A total of five cases involving [interference with journalistic work](#) affected 11 media workers or related entities. Of the five incidents, three were perpetrated by private individuals and two by public officials. In February, Branislav Okuka, an advisor to the then President Dodik, [forcibly obstructed](#) journalists from BNTV, RTL, and Al Jazeera Balkans at the Republika Srpska National Assembly. In March, Dodik, dissatisfied with critical questions, instructed a security guard to [prohibit](#) an Oslobođenje journalist from entering the Republika Srpska Palace and

[publicly humiliated](#) an RTV correspondent at a conference. Public officials also used opaque and last-minute changes to accreditation measures, [excluding](#) journalists from a Doboj City assembly meeting. Other obstructions were perpetrated by private individuals, including an [ethnically motivated attack](#) on a crew working for the Croatian-language RTVHB media. A particularly severe assault involved journalists from the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIN) in Brcko, who were [injured](#) by a group of individuals, and their equipment damaged.

The number of affected media-related persons or entities more than doubled in 2025, sending an alarming signal of increased pressure against critical reporting, also echoing legislative efforts to criminalise critical voices. A further weakening of media pluralism was indicated by the [sudden closure of Sarajevo-based Al Jazeera Balkans](#) in July for economic reasons, after 14 years of broadcasting.

## Montenegro

In 2025, MapMF documented [20 press freedom violations](#) impacting 32 media workers or entities related to media in Montenegro. This figure marks a notable increase in attacks compared to six cases [monitored](#) throughout 2024. The most frequent press freedom violations were verbal attacks (17) followed by interference (3) and legal incidents (1). In 2025, one [physical assault](#) and one [property attack](#) were recorded.

Half (10) of all recorded cases in Montenegro consisted of intimidation and threatening, including five alarming cases of [death threats](#), which were sent mainly online by private individuals. Televizija E journalist Itana Kaluđerović was warned to [“watch out for a bullet”](#) in a Facebook comment, while M portal editor Danica Nikolić received a [sniper threat](#). Several Vijesti journalists were also targeted. Investigative reporter Jelena Jovanović faced [renewed death threats](#) linked to her work on corruption and crime, including one referencing [decapitation](#). TV Vijesti journalist Alisa Hajdarpašić also received [death threats](#) on Facebook. In August, Vijesti photojournalist Borsi Pejovic was [threatened with death](#) by a dozen individuals during the live reporting on the illegal removal of a monument attributed to a war criminal. Pejović was reporting in Berane with another journalist, Stevo Vasiljević, who was physically [assaulted](#) and his equipment damaged.

Five cases of [discredit](#) were recorded against three individual journalists and two media outlets. One notable case involved journalist Dragana Šćepanović of Vijesti, who was subjected to [years of defamatory attacks](#) by the 'Aktuelno' portal, owned by a businessman who also controls a ski resort, and has been the subject of Šćepanović's investigative reporting. In March, the journalist won her case in the first instance. The court found that Aktuelno, through many articles, had discredited Dragana Šćepanović as a person and as a journalist, and had called into question her personal and professional credibility.

State officials were also involved in [verbal attacks](#) recorded in three incidents. Members of the Democratic Montenegro party, [Boris Bogdanović](#) and [Momcilo Leković](#), publicly accused

several media outlets, including Television E, M Portal, and Analitika of being corrupted “servants and protectors of the mafia”.

Additionally, concerns were raised in September over the Ministry of Defence's alleged discriminatory treatment of the press. This followed the case of Antena M journalist Bojana Dabović, who had her [accreditation denied for a press conference](#) alongside several other media outlets.

The one legal incident recorded concerned a [violation of journalistic sources](#) after the editors of the M and ETV portals received a letter allegedly sent by the Assistant Director of the Police Directorate, requesting explanations about an article published on alleged political pressure exerted on a Disciplinary Prosecutor.

The environment for Montenegrin media professionals reporting on sensitive issues has become increasingly hostile. This is indicated by the fact that the number of recorded press freedom violations has more than doubled within the past year.

## Türkiye

Press freedom deteriorated further in an increasingly restrictive political climate in Türkiye in 2025. During the monitoring period, MapMF documented [137 press freedom violations](#) affecting 259 journalists and media organisations in the country. These incidents reveal a systematic pattern in which critical journalism was increasingly reframed as a criminal or security concern.

Journalists were targeted amid major political developments, most notably the [mass protests following the imprisonment](#) of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu. The protests that ensued were met with a government crackdown including [detention of journalists](#), [restrictions on press coverage](#), and [police violence](#).

[Legal incidents](#) remained the most pervasive instrument of repression, accounting for 70.8% of all recorded violations, with a total of 97 cases affecting 200 journalists, media outlets and other media-related entities. Authorities continued to rely on broadly framed legal provisions, including the so-called [disinformation law](#), [terrorism-related legislation](#), and charges [related to insult](#), specifically those concerning “[insulting the president](#)”, and [national security](#). [Arrests, detentions and imprisonment](#) constituted the most frequent type of violation (49.6%), with 68 documented cases involving 131 journalists.

Routine journalistic activities such as reporting on corruption, court proceedings, protests, elections, and public institutions were repeatedly criminalised, reinforcing a climate in which professional reporting was treated as a threat. At least 22 journalists [were convicted](#) on the basis of their reporting, while practices such as [dawn raids](#) on journalists' homes and [prolonged pretrial detention](#) were routinely employed as tools of intimidation.

In addition to local investigative journalists, high-profile journalists such as [Timur Soykan](#), [Barış Pehlivan](#), [Nevşin Mengü](#), [İsmail Saymaz](#), [Fatih Altaylı](#), and [Enver Aysever](#) were detained, arrested, or prosecuted for commentary or political analysis. In addition to custodial measures, [judicial control mechanisms](#) such as travel bans, signature obligations, and house arrest were also widely imposed, functioning as ongoing constraints on journalistic activity.

Repression extended beyond individual journalists to target the institutional viability of critical media organisations. One of the most striking examples was the espionage investigation against [TELE1 editor-in-chief Merdan Yanardağ](#), which culminated in his arrest and appointment of a state trustee to assume control of the broadcaster. Similarly, Leman magazine [faced an extensive crackdown](#) following the publication of a satirical cartoon, including [arrests of staff members](#), [confiscation of the issue](#), [financial investigations](#), and [violent protests](#) directed at the magazine outside its headquarters that were [encouraged by political rhetoric](#).

[Verbal](#) assaults and [physical violence](#) against journalists remained at alarming levels during the year. Journalists investigating organised crime, corruption, or sensitive political issues were subjected to death threats, intimidation campaigns, doxxing, and harassment, often extending to their families.

In October 2025, journalist and environmental activist [Hakan Tosun](#) died after being violently assaulted in Istanbul. Although the investigation is ongoing, many questions about his murder remain unanswered. Similarly, the [armed attack on Evrensel newspaper's bureau](#) and a shooting targeting journalist [Mehmet Nafiz Koca](#) illustrate the lethal risks faced by members of the press.

Investigative journalists such as [İsmail Arı](#), [Alican Uludağ](#), [Murat Ağirel](#), [Şule Aydın](#), and [Rabia Öner](#) reported explicit death threats linked directly to their reporting, often accompanied by the exposure of personal information, threats against family members, or warnings referencing organised criminal networks. Persistent impunity, as effective investigations into attacks and threats against journalists remained rare, reinforced the perception that perpetrators faced little risk of accountability.

[Regulatory pressure](#) intensified markedly in 2025, accounting for 10.2% of recorded violations, a sharp increase from 2.2% in 2024. Overwhelmingly targeting a small group of critical broadcasters, the Radio and Television Supreme Council justified its decisions using broadly defined rationale. Türkiye's broadcast regulator [functioned as a central instrument of political discipline](#), issuing a [wave of fines](#) and [programme suspensions](#). In several instances, sanctions escalated into temporary broadcast bans, notably against [SZC TV](#) and [TELE1](#). RTÜK [threatened](#) that further violations could result in license revocation, effectively placing critical broadcasters under constant threat of closure.

Digital repression was also a central concern in 2025. Authorities imposed widespread [access bans and account blocks](#), including court-ordered restrictions targeting the websites and social media accounts of organisations such as [Kaos GL](#). During periods of protest and



political crisis, authorities implemented [extensive bandwidth throttling](#) that disrupted access to platforms including X, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal, severely restricting the public's ability to access news and information.

The violations recorded throughout 2025 demonstrate that press freedom in Türkiye is constrained by a calibrated system of repression, in which legal mechanisms, regulatory interventions, physical violence and digital controls operate in tandem. Taken together, these developments point to a further contraction of freedom of press, deepening erosion of democratic safeguards.

## Georgia

In 2025, the ruling Georgian Dream (GD) party continued its severe crackdown on independent media. MapMF recorded [143 media freedom violations](#), targeting 263 media-related persons and entities. A drastic increase in legal attacks was particularly alarming, with 60 documented cases (42%) compared to 33 incidents recorded in the previous year. Out of all recorded incidents, most were perpetrated by [police and state security forces](#) (28.0%), followed by [government and public officials](#) (25.2%) and the [judiciary](#) (18.9%).

In the beginning of August, following more than 200 days in unjust pretrial detention and a highly politicised trial, Mzia Amaglobeli, the founder and director of two of Georgia's most prominent independent media outlets, Batumelebi and Netgazeti, [was sentenced](#) to two years in prison. Since her arrest, Amaglobeli and her media organisations have faced [smear campaigns](#), [degrading treatment](#), and [economic retaliation](#). Amid rising authoritarianism and crackdown on media freedom, she has [become](#) a symbol of resilience.

Arbitrary arrests remained a significant issue. MapMF documented [18 cases](#) of journalists being arrested, jailed or detained at the border. One of the arrested journalists was Guram Murvanidze, Amaglobeli's colleague and camera operator for the media outlet Batumelebi, who [was arrested](#) on administrative charges a few days after Amaglobeli's detention while he was covering protests and social unrest. Authorities charged him under 'petty hooliganism' and 'disobeying a lawful police order'. In autumn, [Ninia Kakabadze](#), journalist for Mediachecker and [Mamuka Mgaloblishvili](#) of Publika were detained on alleged administrative charges for 'blocking the road'.

Georgia continued to [deny entry](#) to a number of foreign journalists, including freelance British journalist [Will Neal](#), freelance French photojournalist [Jérôme Chobeaux](#) and journalist [Clément Girardot](#), Italian journalist [Giacomo Ferrara](#) and Swiss photojournalist [Gregor Sommer](#).

During 2025, GD adopted several repressive pieces of legislation despite national and international outcry. Georgia experienced a sharp rise in legal incidents, which [accounted](#) for 42% of all recorded cases. With [60 legal incidents](#) documented in 2025, the number nearly doubled compared to [33 incidents](#) in 2024.

In April the GD-led Parliament passed a [new version of the Foreign Agent Law](#), entitled the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which will impose obligations carrying fines up to GEL 25,000 (€8,250) and up to five years in prison. In June, the Parliament [adopted amendments](#) to the Law on Grants that require foreign donors to obtain prior approval from the executive branch before disbursing grants.

The amendments to the Law of Broadcasting, which [went into force in early June](#), expanded the powers of the Communications Commission (GNCC), to regulate factual accuracy, fairness, and privacy – previously overseen through self-regulation. The amendments enabled the GNCC, a captured media regulatory body, to issue penalties of up to 3% of a broadcaster's annual revenue or revoke its license for breaching the new rules.

Additionally, the Parliament [adopted amendments](#) to Georgia's Law on Freedom of Speech and Expression that narrowed existing protections and increased liability for defamation and insult. In the same month, the Parliament [advanced amendments](#) to the Organic Law on Common Courts that significantly restricted journalists' ability to report from courts.

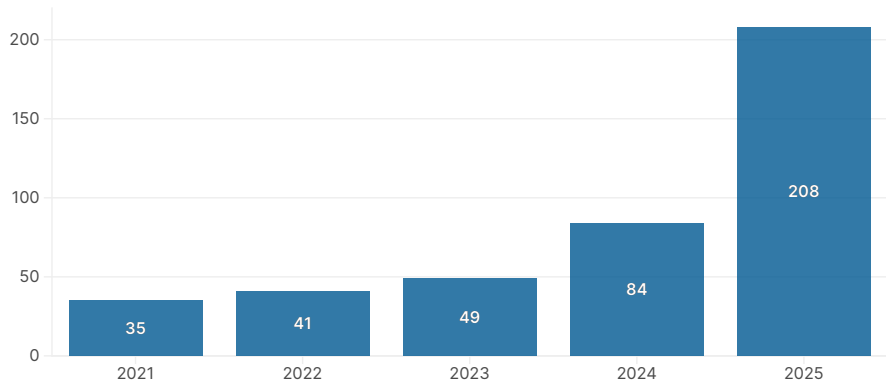
Based on these laws, independent media organisations were [actively targeted](#), including online media Project 64, the organisation running Mtis Ambebi (Mountain Stories), and the Organised Crime Research Media Centre, which runs investigative news outlet iFact. The Anti-Corruption Bureau launched inquiries into independent media outlets based on the new restrictive Law on Grants demanding from them to disclose donor and grant data under the new legislation. Furthermore, GNCC [issued written warnings](#) to TV Formula and Formula Multimedia, as well as to the radio broadcasters Journalists' Union – Voice of the People (Radio Marneuli), Radio-TV Nori, and Systema Gamma (Radio Positive), for violating the Law on Broadcasting.

Impunity for crimes against journalists [remained widespread](#), with investigations often insufficient and perpetrators not held accountable. According to MapMF data, 33 journalists and media workers were [physically attacked](#), the majority of them (21) by police and security forces. Most of the attacks [occurred](#) during demonstrations, targeting 25 journalists. Additionally, 36 journalists [faced arbitrary fines](#), whereof 25 were also targeted in the context of demonstrations. The journalists reported that they were fined for [allegedly 'blocking roads'](#) while they were actually covering demonstrations and were easily identifiable as journalists.

The Georgian Public Broadcaster (GPB), [a captured public service media](#) which has long been serving the interests of the ruling party, intensified censorship and pressure on those employees who expressed criticism about the channel's editorial policy. The GPB management [dismissed prominent journalists](#) Vasil Ivanov-Chikovani and Nino Zautashvili after they publicly raised concerns about political interference at the broadcaster, and [subsequently cancelled](#) Zautashvili's talk show. MapMF documented five incidents concerning [loss of employment](#) resulting from GPB management decisions, affecting 21 journalists and media workers.

# Serbia

The media freedom situation in Serbia further deteriorated, marked by a sharp rise in reported cases. Throughout the year, [208 violations of press freedom](#) were documented — more than double the number of cases (84) [recorded](#) in 2024 — affecting a total of 358 media workers or entities. Throughout this year, verbal attacks constituted a major concern (62%), followed by attacks on property (23.1%), physical violence (21.2%), interference (19.2%), and legal threats (5.8%). Most cases were verified in collaboration with the [SafeJournalists Network](#) (SJN).



Number of total press freedom violations documented in Serbia per year between 2021 to 2025.  
Source: [mappingmediafreedom.org](#)

The media environment remained particularly dangerous for journalists covering anti-corruption protests in the aftermath of the deadly collapse of the Novi Sad railway canopy on 1 November 2024. The ever-increasing pressure, marked by state repression, prompted the MFRR consortium to undertake a [solidarity mission](#) to Belgrade and Novi Sad in April 2025. The mission revealed a “situation of emergency” in which censorship, political pressure, media capture, smear campaigns and threats to the lives of journalists are commonplace and often go unpunished.

In 2025, physical attacks increased alarmingly, with 44 instances [recorded](#), compared to 14 for 2024. Violence was normalised, especially as law enforcement officers have shifted from inaction to excessive use of force against journalists covering protests. Of the 16 assaults [attributed](#) to police, over 90% were recorded at protests and five [resulted in injuries](#). More than half of the physical attacks were committed by private individuals. At least five media workers were violently [attacked](#) during the first anniversary protests of the Novi Sad canopy collapse by masked individuals. Among them, one journalist was forced to delete footage under [threats of broken bones](#).

In an attempt to increase pressure amid a tense political climate, high-ranking officials, including President Aleksandar Vučić, continued to [discredit](#) some journalists with statements

falsely labeling them as "enemies" of the state. This rhetoric, amplified by pro-government media such as [Informer TV](#), fuels online and offline threats with near-total impunity. Discrediting tactics by public officials are also increasingly [replicated](#) at the local level against journalists reporting on regional communities and issues.

The independent broadcaster N1 is one of [the most targeted](#) media outlets with at least 52 attacks, ranging from repeated threats of bomb attacks, [numerous death threats](#), to physical intimidation and harassment of its journalists. N1 journalists are particularly targeted by President Vučić and public officials, who regularly single them out in public statements. The President accused N1 and Nova TV of "[pure terrorism](#)", a charge that was quickly followed by numerous [death threats](#) and a [letter referencing a "Charlie Hebdo"-style attack](#). In December 2025, President Vučić publicly [discredited and humiliated](#) N1 journalist Mladen Savatović during a press conference. He then received [multiple threats](#) of sexual violence.

Similar harassment was faced by other independent media outlets, including [Nova](#), [Danas](#), [Radar](#), and [Radar cartoonist](#) Dušan Petričić. Podcasts hosts [Nenad Kulačin and Marko Vidojković](#), as well as journalist [Dinko Gruhonjić](#) were also persistently threatened, likely following smear campaigns in pro-government tabloids. [Anonymous leaflets](#) targeting them and other journalists were distributed in public and private mailboxes, further raising concerns for their safety and that of their family members. In Serbia in particular, the targeting of journalists' relatives is unprecedented and deeply concerning with 11 documented cases of serious [threats against journalists' parents and children](#).

In this context, organisations defending journalists were also targeted by the newly formed pro-government Association of Journalists of Serbia (ANS), which repeatedly [smeared](#) the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS) over its tireless efforts to support journalists. These fabricated smears, which falsely accused NUNS of orchestrating the anti-corruption protests, were publicly [supported and amplified](#) by President Vučić after NUNS provided safety equipment to journalists at-risk.

Another concern for journalists' safety and their sources is the ongoing illegal use of advanced spyware tools and targeted hacking attacks. Amnesty International revealed that two BIRN journalists had their devices [infected](#) with the [Pegasus](#) spyware. In addition, two local media, as well as Beta news agency and the Youtube channel of a podcast, were [hacked](#), disrupting access to information for a period of time.

MapMF also documented [12 legal incidents](#) during the reporting period, including the [arbitrary arrests](#) of 11 journalists. A new [defamation lawsuit](#) was filed against KRIK, a media outlet investigating crime and corruption, by former Agriculture Minister Jelena Tanasković. A disturbing case involved the [arrest](#) of KTV's Aleksandar Dikić and a search of his apartment following the publication of an edited video [falsely promoting](#) violence.

Amidst hostility towards critical voices, [further irregularities](#) in the appointment process for the Council of the Regulatory Authority of Electronic Media, Serbia's most important media regulator, were exposed and criticised for lacking transparency and independence, despite EU-required reform.

Uncertainty is mounting over the future of N1 and Nova, two of Serbia's remaining independent TV broadcasters, owned by United Media. This follows recent leadership changes within the parent organisation United Group, one of the largest independent media conglomerates in southeastern Europe. Rumours of a potential sale intensified after [both channels were removed](#) from the EON SAT (Total TV) service, now owned by state-linked Telekom Srbija. In addition, a [leaked audio recording](#) suggested political pressure from President Aleksandar Vučić to [weaken N1's editorial independence](#).

Cases of [political interference](#) were also documented at public broadcaster RTS, which had failed to report on the protests for months. They include alleged politically-motivated dismissals and direct editorial interference. Additional examples were documented at [Euronews Serbia](#), ELLE Serbia, Večernje Novosti, and Politika, where several journalists who stood up for ethical journalism against censorship were either forced to resign or [dismissed](#).

In 2025, Serbia's media environment continued to deteriorate at an alarming speed. Moving forward, concrete actions are needed to ensure citizens' right to free and independent information and to reverse the trend of backsliding media freedom.

## Ukraine

In 2025, MapMF recorded [124 press freedom violations](#) affecting 154 media-related persons and entities in Ukraine, as opposed to [141 cases in 2024](#). While the overall number of violations was slightly lower, the incidents recorded were especially serious, mirroring the increasingly dangerous situation on Ukraine's front lines as the full-scale Russian invasion approaches its fifth year.

Over the past year, three journalists were killed while carrying out their professional duties: on 3 October, French photojournalist [Antoni Lallican](#) was assassinated by a Russian FPV (first-person view) drone. Later that month, on 23 October, Ukrainian journalists [Yevhen Karmazin and Aliona Hramova](#) were killed by another Russian unmanned aircraft.

Both incidents took place in Ukraine's Donetsk region, where Russia's renewed offensives have put reporting trips – and the lives of the civilians that journalists report on – under increased danger. Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, [16 journalists have been killed](#): October 2025 stood out as the month with the second most deaths, only exceeded by March 2022, when [five journalists lost their lives](#) while carrying out their work. Recent technological developments in the sphere of FPV drones help the Russian army to target journalists more easily. The deaths of Antoni Lallican, Aliona Hramova and Yevhen Karmazin have shown that PRESS markings,





A press vest lies at the Kramatorsk strike site where journalist Aliona Gubanova and cameraman Yevhen Karmazin were killed while reporting on the war, 23 October 2025.  
picture alliance / Anadolu | Jose Colon

instead of protecting journalists in combat zones, are increasingly used by Russians as a way to identify and carry out strikes on journalists reporting on the full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Over the past year, MapMF also recorded six cases in which [twelve journalists were injured](#) due to Russian military activity while carrying out their reporting work. At least 18 more came under Russian fire, but [were not injured](#). This was broadly similar to the situation in 2024, when [16 journalists were injured](#) in Russian attacks, while seven more [came under Russian fire](#), but were not injured.

While no new arrests of journalists in Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine were documented, nearly all of those that Russia had earlier detained for politically motivated reasons continue to be held behind bars. In 2025, only three Ukrainian journalists were released from prison in Russia: [Dmytro Khyliuk](#), [Vladyslav Yesypenko](#) and [Mark Kaliush](#). The MFRF consortium partners estimate that no fewer than [26 Ukrainian journalists are still held in prison](#) by Russian authorities.

MapMF additionally recorded 17 incidents in which Russian forces [damaged or destroyed media infrastructure](#) in Ukraine. As in the previous year, several major Ukrainian media offices were destroyed in Russian attacks: in 2025, the [bombing and destruction](#) of the regional hub of public broadcaster Suspilne in Dnipro stood out in particular by the extent of the damage inflicted.

Overall, out of the 124 press freedom violations recorded in 2025, 33 (26.6%) were [attacks on property](#) – approximately half of these were Russian strikes on Ukrainian media infrastructure – 24 (19.4%) were [physical attacks](#) on journalists, 15 (12.1%) were considered as [interference with journalistic work](#), while 14 (11.3%) were [legal incidents](#).

The most common perpetrators of violations [were military forces](#), who were responsible for 37 (29.8%) cases. In 36 out of these, Russian armed forces were identified as the perpetrator. In 32 (25.8%) of all documented cases, determining the source of the violations [was impossible](#) – half of these [were cyber attacks](#) against media or journalists. The sources of these cyber attacks are not confirmed, despite suspicion of Russian involvement in some cases.

Overall, MapMF monitoring in Ukraine in 2025 revealed trends similar to those observed in previous years: while domestic actors were responsible for a number of press freedom violations in Ukraine – such as physical attacks, online harassment or legal interference in reporting – Russian forces remained responsible for the most serious incidents, namely killings and serious injuries of journalists carrying out reporting work, as well as large-scale destruction of media offices and infrastructure.

# CONCLUSION

In 2025, the MFRR documented continued pressures on journalists and independent media across Europe. A total of [1481 documented press freedom violations](#) reflect the wide variety of attacks that threatened watchdog reporting and the public's right to information.

The four killings of journalists recorded in 2025 emphasised the highest possible cost for reporting in Europe, particularly in the context of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Attacks by state authorities remained a central concern. Laws and other legislative initiatives – like foreign agent laws – risk criminalising or severely restricting the work of watchdog and independent media. SLAPPs directed at individual journalists and small investigative media outlets can put an entire livelihood at risk and have a chilling effect on journalism at large.

Verbal attacks were again particularly prevalent. Public attempts to discredit journalists or intimidate them can discourage crucial investigative work. Death threats – one of the most severe forms of verbal attack – have continued to increase in recent years, reaching a new peak in 2025. Journalists are particularly vulnerable to such attacks online, prompting calls for national governments to improve safeguards against digital harassment and other online threats, such as hacking, DDoS attacks and spyware.

While still a relative safe haven for media freedom, the report again demonstrates that the climate for free and independent journalism inside the European Union remains marked by numerous threats and challenges. Systemic challenges in Member States such as Hungary and Slovakia require urgent EU attention to safeguard democratic values. Outside the EU bloc meanwhile, the report demonstrates how Serbia, Georgia and Türkiye in particular continue to experience a dramatic media freedom crisis and continued deterioration. These flashpoints require urgent attention from the international community and the EU to safeguard what remains of independent media.

In the year that [European Media Freedom Act](#) (EMFA) came into full force, the MapMF data presented again underscored the need for strong implementation of the regulation in the coming year to address systemic threats to media freedom and pluralism. As the EU Commission continues work on the [European Democracy Shield](#) in 2026, the data also illustrates the need for coordinated action to harmonise EU instruments for protecting media and journalists from digital threats such as spyware and legal threats such as SLAPPs.

The MFRR remains committed to documenting and analysing these violations through the Mapping Media Freedom database. The project will continue to monitor developments, produce reports, and provide insights into the state of press and media freedom in the coming year.



## DISCLAIMER

The respective media freedom violations for this monitoring report can be viewed directly in the Alert Explorer [here](#). This report includes all incidents from 1 January until 31 December 2025. If cases are reported and published after the publication of this report, they will still appear in the data available under the link of the Alert Explorer above, as well as under the individual links provided within the report to give an up-to-date view at any time. One incident – and thus alert – can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) affecting more than one journalist or media actor and performed by more than one type of actor. In particular, legal incidents where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert. This means, when showing e.g. how many alerts included a certain type of attack, the sum of all shown numbers can be more than the total number of alerts and thus more than 100%.



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