

The OSCE Representative
on Freedom of the Media

Safety of Journalists: An imperative for free media

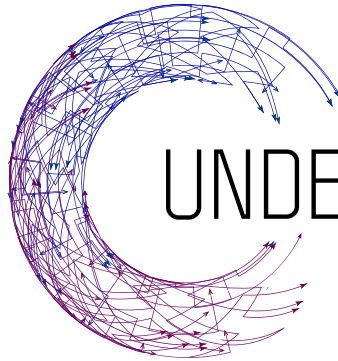


Violence against journalists

Journalists' safety has been deteriorating worldwide and in the OSCE region in recent years. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has intervened in about 200 cases dealing with journalists' safety annually, as well as on cases of legal safety such as criminal investigations launched against journalists.

Harassment and intimidation have reached unprecedented heights with acts of violence against journalists taking place throughout the OSCE region and beyond.

These acts are attempts to silence journalists and other media actors and are blatant violations of OSCE commitments on media freedom.



JOURNALISTS
UNDER ATTACK
a threat to media freedom

Information from the conference in April 2019 can be found at osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/415115. Photo: OSCE.

Violence against journalists takes many forms, including:

- Murder and physical assault;
- Threats to their lives and those of their families;
- Online harassment and threats of violence, including sexual violence, especially against female journalists and media actors;
- Destruction of private and professional property, including vandalism and arson.

Attacks on the legal safety of journalists include:

- Unlawful detention;
- Arrests on unfounded or baseless charges;
- Excessive fines;
- Arbitrary raids on editorial offices and journalists' homes and seizure of property;
- Breaches of the confidentiality of sources.

Impunity from prosecution



The vast majority of attacks on journalists worldwide result in impunity, with no conviction made. Photo: OSCE.

In addition to violence, intimidation and harassment of journalists there is a staggering lack of prosecution of the perpetrators of these crimes.

On average, in the past 25 years in the OSCE region, only one in 10 investigations into murders of journalists has resulted in prosecution. Statistics like this prove that journalists' safety must become a higher priority for governments that claim to support the work of the media and uphold OSCE commitments.

Governments have a key role to play in bringing about much-needed change. Political commitments to protect media freedom are important. But without effective and timely prosecution and punishment of all those responsible for crimes against journalists, nothing will change.

In short, politicians and authorities must support OSCE commitments with political will and action.

This means:

- Government authorities and law enforcement must send out a clear message that attacks against journalists will not be tolerated;
- Swift and efficient investigations must be conducted every time a journalist is the victim of an attack;
- Evidence must be taken in a professional manner with the goal of prosecuting all responsible parties;
- Prosecutors need to be trained to understand the nature of media work and how this work renders members of the media vulnerable to harm, intimidation and harassment;
- Judges must apply criminal sanctions and sentences for these crimes in full accordance with the law and proportionate to the offenses committed.

International commitments on safety of journalists

OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on Safety of Journalists

—7 December 2018, Milan

In this landmark Decision, the participating States acknowledge that safety also entails physical, legal, economic, psychological and digital aspects and commit themselves to comprehensive measures to ensure the safety of journalists, such as, inter alia, to condemn all attacks and violence against journalists and to take effective measure to end impunity for such crimes. The Decision also urges the release of arbitrarily detained journalists and recognizes the importance of investigative journalism.

Budapest Document: Towards a Genuine Partnership in a New Era (Summit of Heads of State or Government)

—5-6 December 1994,
Budapest

The participating States reaffirm that “pluralistic media are essential to a free and

open society and accountable systems of government”. They commit themselves to safeguard freedom of expression, and to “condemn all attacks on and harassment of journalists” and to “hold those directly responsible for such attacks and harassment accountable”.

Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE

—3 October 1991, Moscow

“The participating States will adopt, where appropriate, all feasible measures to protect journalists engaged in dangerous professional missions...and will co-operate to that effect.”

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/163 on safety of journalists and the issue of impunity

—18 December 2013,
New York

This resolution “condemns unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists

and media workers, such as torture, extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and arbitrary detention, as well as intimidation and harassment in both conflict and non-conflict situations”.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 2222 on the protection of journalists

—27 May 2015, New York

The resolution, adopted unanimously, condemns all violations and abuses committed against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in conflict areas and “recognizes the importance of...protecting them”. It strongly “condemns the prevailing impunity for violations and abuses” committed against them in situations of armed conflict, which in turn may “contribute to the recurrence of these acts”.

Vulnerability of female journalists



Female journalists are increasingly being targeted and attacked online. Photo: iStockphoto.

Violence against journalists has, in recent years, taken a dangerous gender-specific turn.

Female journalists and media actors are increasingly subjected to threats of sexual violence.

The gendered nature of this harassment goes beyond traditional vitriol, using threats of rape and graphic violence to silence women. The phenomenon has a devastating impact on media plurality and freedom as a whole as female journalists and media

actors are more likely to engage in self-censorship.

In December 2018, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, together with the International Press Institute, launched the documentary 'A Dark Place', to highlight the experiences of female journalists who have been subjected to online harassment, in a bid to raise awareness and inspire change.

Any effort to silence female journalists must be regarded as a direct attack on freedom of the media and must be

addressed as a top priority by the global community.

In the Ministerial Council Decision on Safety of Journalists which was adopted in December 2018, OSCE participating States expressed their concern by

“...the specific risks faced by women journalists, in relation to their work, and underlining in this context the importance of considering the gender dimension of measures to address their safety. ”

The fight must continue



“ Countries committed to democratic principles must protect the freedoms of speech and expression as cornerstones of society. ”
Harlem Désir

Facts and figures

400
total
deaths

Around 400 journalists have been killed in the OSCE region in the past 25 years.

85%
impunity for
murders of
journalists

Impunity prevails, less than 15% of murders of journalists are solved.

Follow the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media



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