

## **Effective prevention and protection of journalists in Montenegro**

### **Tasks and obligations to prevent offline and online harassment for editors and journalists**

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# A HANDBOOK FOR JOURNALISTS AND EDITORS

Many journalists regularly experience harassment in their daily work. Audiences in Europe have become increasingly aggressive in their communication due to the spread of anti-media sentiments and populist attitudes. This is further facilitated by technological changes, rendering interaction with journalists simple and intrusive. So far, research has found that journalists reporting on specific topics and with particular social profiles regarding gender, race, sexuality, and religion are predominately and systematically harassed.

It is essential to be able to define harassment, as opposed to the right of the public to freedom of expression. Not all forms of online harassment, for example, violate the law and what is considered “harassment” may be protected by freedom of expression and be legal, which may be challenging when mitigating online harassment.

This short handbook provides essential information and practical advice to journalists in their work, but any guideline and handbook can only be efficient with the necessary training and policy in newsrooms. A culture of newsroom safety against harassment among journalists and media managers is a prerequisite for journalists’ safety.

## WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT ?

SEE ALSO “BACKGROUND 1”

### Harassment offline

- Insults: in a repetitive manner, either made by or a few individuals, of orchestrated by a group
- Following victims and waiting outside work premises or home address, etc.
- Making unsolicited telephone calls, sending letters and parcels
- Stalking: someone who does something that is calculated to annoy or cause discomfort to another, or to threaten another with violence

### Specific online harassment

- Sending repetitive emails
- Online impersonation: using the identity of a journalist for malicious purposes
- Smear messages: messages representing the target and the target’s work as unpatriotic, biased or beholden to a particular interest
- Verbal abuse: messages containing insults, which might differ depending on the context or the culture
- Trolling: sending insulting messages (often in a repetitive way) on the internet in order to annoy someone
- Doxing: when a journalist’s private or personally identifiable information is made public online, to provoke personal or financial harm

### Legal harassment

Journalists can be subject to repetitive, numerous and abuse lawsuits. This can be due to alleged “threats to national security” against public authorities. It can only be due to the will of powerful individuals or companies to muzzle journalists. This specific type of harassment is known as “strategic lawsuits against public participation” (SLAPP).

*This type of harassment is not covered by the present document.*

## How to prevent online harassment

- Limit personal information in your work: be cautious about sharing personal details on public platforms, including social media. Use privacy settings to control who sees your information. Review photos of you online and assess whether any of them can be used to discredit you.
- Secure the digital presence: use strong, unique passwords and enable two-factor authentication on social media and email accounts.
- Use pseudonyms or aliases: when covering sensitive topics, consider using a pseudonym online to protect your identity.
- Be mindful of social media: although journalists are often obliged to use and to be active on social media, be strategic about your online presence. Avoid sharing real-time locations and sensitive information that could be used to track you.
- Review your social media sites regularly for comments that could indicate the beginning of a trolling situation. Be especially vigilant just after a story has been published, especially if it is a topic that attracts the interest of trolls or doxers.

## What employers should do: create a culture of safety

- Internal memorandum: send an email to all staff members making clear that the media organization takes online attacks seriously. This is important to build confidence in the newsroom. It sends two important messages: First, it helps to avoid the feeling among journalists that being targeted with “abuse on social media is the new normal”; and second, it gives journalists a sense of security that the media organization will support them.
- Regularly speak about online abuse in editorial meetings: one way for editors to raise the issue is simply to informally ask whether any journalists have recently been targeted as well as raise awareness about the risk of attacks when assigning stories that are likely to attract abuse. During a political crisis or civil unrest or ahead of elections, these discussions should be more frequent.
- Distribute an anonymous survey within the newsroom to take stock of the impact of online harassment and the efficacy of measures in place to combat it.
- Establish regular meetings between social media teams and journalists to carry out a “health check”<sup>1</sup> related to journalists’ work on social media or engagement on online comment sections.

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<sup>1</sup> See also: <https://newsrooms-ontheline.ipi.media/measures/online-harassment-health-check/>

## WHAT IS THE “ONLINE HARASSMENT HEALTHCHECK”?

Regular meetings between social media departments and journalists should take place to carry out a “health check” related to journalist’s work on social media or engagement on online comment sections. Social media editors can help journalists understand patterns behind online attacks and who might be behind them. Among other things, this type of knowledge can:

- Help journalists identify online violence if they or a colleague is targeted
- Help journalists maintain distance from attacks by understanding that these are responses to specific interests or topics and not directed at them personally.

Social media and audience editors should consider covering the following items in such meetings:

- Inform journalists of the latest trends on social media and the media outlet’s own forums and comment sections: hashtags aiming to discredit the news outlet, specific campaigns by the state or political parties, the common types of attacks on social media, etc
- Bring up issues that journalists face in their everyday work: E.g., have any of them been targeted? How have they dealt with the attacks and what sort of help do they need from the social media/audience departments?
- Communicate the support mechanisms that exist and how to access These “health checks” should be carried out every three months or more often in case of a political crisis or civil unrest or ahead of elections.

## How to respond to harassment

- Assess the physical danger : speak with the journalist about the threats that are being received and try to establish whether the journalist is in immediate physical danger. The risk is greater if the attacker or attackers are local or are able to travel to be physically close to the journalist. If the newsroom has a security team, speak with them to determine best practices for protecting the physical security of the journalist.
- Document everything: keep thorough records of harassment incidents. This documentation can be useful for legal action if necessary. Create a spreadsheet to capture information, such as the date of the attack, the handle of the harasser, a URL link, the platform it happened on, and whether the journalist under attack reported it to the tech company. Take screenshots, in case the reported content is removed, by platforms or harassers themselves. It will also help to identify patterns in the harassment and possibly identify who is behind the attacks.
- Secure online data and accounts: online harassers often continue to search for further personal details even after the journalist has been doxxed, including hacking of accounts. Journalists need to secure and remove personal online data. It can take time for data to be removed from the internet and once a journalist has been doxxed that data will continue to exist on the internet in different online spaces, such as message boards and other people’s personal accounts.
- Step back and monitor the accounts: do NOT engage with the trolls and harassers, as this makes the situation worse. The targeted journalist may step away from all accounts until the attack calms down or stops. In order not to miss further threats, a colleague or other member of staff should monitor the journalist’s accounts. If the journalist does not feel able to give access to a newsroom colleague to review the journalist’s social media or email, a family member or close friend may do it instead.

- Report incidents and know your rights: know your organization's policies for reporting harassment. Don't hesitate to report it to authorities or platforms where the harassment occurs, particularly if it escalates. Familiarize yourself with relevant laws regarding harassment and freedom of the press.

#### **WHAT IS THE "PEER TO PEER SUPPORT"?**

*Harassment can be an isolating experience. It is important for media workers to have a community in the newsroom that they can contact. This means:*

- *Having trained members of staff to offer support and mentorship*
- *Creating a group chat on a messaging app where journalists can talk about abuse, share tips and resources, and let others know when they need support.*
- *Reaching out to younger journalists who may not feel comfortable approaching more senior members of staff about abuse.*

Understand what protections exist for journalists in your country.

- Engage with support mechanisms: build a support network of colleagues, **peers**, and professionals who understand the challenges. Seeking advice and sharing experiences can be comforting.
- Seek institutional training: advocate for training within your organization on harassment reporting and response protocols.

#### **TIPS IN CASE OF ONLINE THREATS AND FEAR FOR THE PHYSICAL SAFETY:**

If you fear for your physical safety because of an incident of doxing or an online threat, the following steps may be helpful to consider:

- Contact your newsroom and let your editor or manager know that you are concerned about an online threat and inquire about any possible support they could offer.
- Review the threat to see if you can obtain more information on the attacker. Assess the possibility that the person threatening you is local or nearby. Ask a friend or colleague for help with this if you feel unable to do so.
- If you fear for your physical safety in your home, arrange alternative accommodation. This could be a hotel or a family or friend's home. If possible, speak with your newsroom to see how they can support you.
- In case of doxing: let your bank, utility companies and mobile phone companies know that you have been doxed to prevent fraudulent use of these services.
- You should leave the area for 24 hours and then reassess the situation. If the threat continues and feels credible then, in some cases, a permanent relocation should be considered. If this is the case, speak with your newsroom to see what support they can offer.
- If you no longer feel you are at risk, you may wish to return to your home. You should inform your manager, a colleague or family and friends that you are back so they know where to locate you in case of an incident. You may wish to install alarms and cameras at your home as an extra security measure.
- You may wish to report the threat to law enforcement. If you do, and if it is possible, ask to speak with an officer who has experience with online crime. If you work for a media outlet, you should speak with your editor or manager to see what support they can offer when reporting the incident to the police.

## After the harassment: seek help and beware of post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) and do not underestimate the psychological impact of harassment

- Monitor your colleagues for signs that they have been affected by a traumatic event. Also talk to others involved or other colleagues.
- Practice self-care: engage in activities that promote your mental well-being. Regular breaks, exercise, and hobbies can help mitigate stress.
- Journalists should talk to their manager at the earliest opportunity if they are experiencing problems after a traumatic event or have concerns
- Seek counselling: experiencing an attack can have psychological effects. Professional support, including therapy, can help process these experiences
- Consider peer support groups: connect with other journalists who have faced similar situations for emotional support and shared coping strategies.

## Resilience-building among journalists against harassment

- Focus on your community: engage with professional organizations or unions for journalists. They can provide resources, training, and a sense of solidarity.
- Share experiences: consider writing, speaking or reporting publicly about your experiences with harassment. Raising awareness can contribute to systemic change and encourage others to speak out.
- Advocate for change: support initiatives or movements that aim to combat harassment against journalists. Participation strengthens community efforts and policymaking.

By adopting these strategies, journalists can not only enhance their personal safety but also contribute to the broader effort against harassment in the industry. Staying informed and prepared helps create a more inclusive and secure environment for everyone in the field.



## Recommendations

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### Governments and public authorities: “what is illegal offline is also illegal online”

- Ratify international agreements and implement European standards: Commit to and implement instruments that protect journalists.
- Enforce laws against harassment: Create and enforce robust legal protections for journalists, including stringent penalties for those who attack them.
- Investigate attacks: Promptly, thoroughly, and impartially investigate any attacks against journalists and hold perpetrators accountable
- Holding online platforms and digital service providers accountable in case of harassment and threats against journalists
- Organise and provide training: Offer training for law enforcement and security forces on the importance of press freedom and how to protect journalists against harassment.
- Educate journalists on electronic safety issues – e.g. academic level at universities / journalism schools
- Create or support independent “focal points” for reporting security harassment and incidents for journalists, in collaboration between journalists’ organisations, employers and public authorities;
- Require state entities, such as police officers to be adequately trained and supported when dealing with threats against journalists, including online harassment and abuse, to ensure they are equipped to deal with a wide range of threats. This should be offered on an evolving basis to reflect the changing media environment and emergent threats and risks

### Media outlets (employers): “it’s not their fault, but it’s their problem”

- Commit to harassment issues. Editors and editors-in-chief should be the gate keepers to ensure the safety of journalists and should put in place a risk-assessment process considering the following elements:
  - Does the journalist already have a history of being attacked online? If so, this likely means that he or she will be attacked again.
  - Does the story involve contacting people who are known to harass others online, for example members of online communities or certain political groups and their supporters?
  - Is the subject of the story likely to cause the journalist to be attacked online? Be aware that certain groups are more active online than others.
  - Is your journalist aware of the risks of online abuse related to the story they are covering?
- Consider the following points about online harassment:
  - Does the newsroom have a protocol for dealing with online abuse, including steps for reporting online harassment?
  - Has the newsroom planned for a situation of harassment?
  - What tech support will you be able to offer a journalist should their online accounts be hacked?
  - Does that support extend to a journalist’s personal online accounts?
- Support community managers to moderate comments and to engage with users to educate on “best commenting” practices. Although it can be difficult and can consume a large number of resources, adopting “think-twice policies”, where readers are reminded of the

rules of commenting before posting, and reducing the number of articles on which users can post a comment, might be effective strategies.

- Establish contact points: Editors, editors-in-chief or a dedicated person should be the gate keepers to ensure the safety of journalists against harassment
- Mental health support: Ensure access to mental health resources for journalists who experience threats or violence.
- Facilitate communication: Foster an environment where journalists can report threats or violence without fear of retribution.
- Advocate for press freedom: Actively engage in advocacy efforts to promote the safety of journalists and press freedom.

#### Civil Society, NGOs and academics: “monitor, analyse, support and advocate”

- Monitor and report: Keep track of instances of harassment of journalists and publish reports to raise awareness.
- Create awareness campaigns: Launch initiatives to educate the public on the importance of press freedom and the challenges journalists face.
- Support a scientific approach to the study of online harassment, based on a systematic collection of data to measure its impact and explore the causes behind the phenomenon.
- Provide resources: Offer shelter, legal assistance, and psychological support for journalists harassed or under threat.

## Background 1. Identification of the risks and consequences of harassment

*Harassment* is the most common term used to describe the hostile behaviour of audiences toward journalists<sup>2</sup>. It is unwanted, abusive behaviours, going from “mild” to extreme verbal or physical abuse, including with a sexual or sexist dimension. This means that harassment can be both *intended and unintended*: the most important aspect is not how a person intended harassment, but how it is perceived by the receiver/victim.

Currently, harassment must be considered under two angles:

- **Political:** the spread and the success of populism lead to a polarization of opinions going hand in hand with the spread of disinformation and conspiracy “theories”. Democratic institutions -to which the media are assimilated-, are challenged by anti-democratic and anti-media movements. Harassment is rooted in discourse made by right-wing and populist politicians and their partisan media, which “denounce” other media outlets and often harass journalists.
- **Technological:** in addition to the “traditional” relationship between the audience and their journalistic media or journalists, the algorithms of platforms and the sharing habits of users reach other groups and individuals through “incidental” news exposure when content is circulating and being discussed on social media. Harassment has become frequent, if not the “norm”, on digital platforms. In the past, interactions between journalists and their audience took place in dedicated and “protected” sections of media, such as comment sections, even on news websites. However, with the increased visibility of journalists through their presence and their reporting on social media platforms, they are brought to the centre of audiences’ attention. From professionals, many journalists became “public people”, and they are harassed in this capacity.

Harassment, especially online, takes a variety of forms. It can be carried out either by one or a few individuals, or orchestrated by groups following a political or an ideological agenda. It can remain purely online, or verbal, or lead to further attacks. The most worrying development in the past years is doxing, when a journalist’s private or personally identifiable information is circulated online. But it is difficult for journalists to protect themselves from harassment, precisely because the use of online resources and exposure on social networks are often essential to their work.

Three separate elements can be identified when defining **online harassment**:

- Perpetrators: online harassment targeting journalists may originate from an individual with no particular agenda, or from groups of individuals or coordinated accounts.
- Patterns: online abuse made by individuals who express anger tend to be erratic. Orchestrated attacks on journalists follow a specific logic and frequently involve huge numbers of (apparently unrelated) message that threaten the target. In a second stage, messages are picked up by hundreds of thousands of followers on social media, creating an impression of a “mass attack”. In a third stage, propaganda sites, often linked to the originators of the attack, cover the trend, “validating” the attacks. Finally, the attack is employed against the journalist, creating a long-term stigmatization in the public eye.

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<sup>2</sup> See: [Different Media, Different Audiences, Different Harassment? How the Journalist-Audience Relationship Shapes Experiences of Harassment](#)

- Methods: online harassment and abuse can take place in different forms such as insults, doxing, trolling, etc.

The effects of harassment go beyond the individual journalist and have consequences on an institutional level. Journalists with specific “social identities”, such as women and people of colour, are more affected by harassment. Harassment can lead to a “structural chilling effect” because whole newsrooms strategically avoid certain topics or platforms to prevent harassment of their staff. Studies in the US found that 25% of the media avoided certain topics, 15% changed the angle of a story, 13% stopped reporting a story, and 23% of the journalists considered quitting because of harassment<sup>3</sup>.

Harassment seriously threatens the integrity of journalism as a public good and a vital democratic institution.

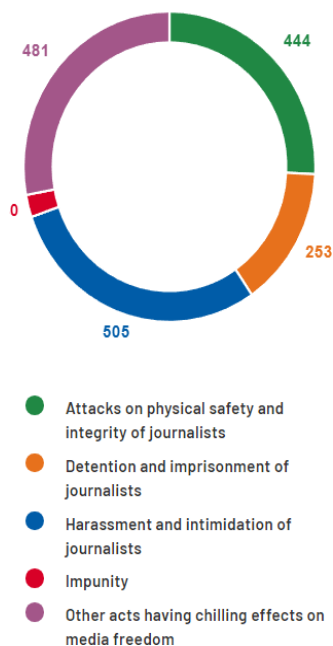
## In Germany

In an “explorative interview study” with 32 German journalists published in May 2024<sup>4</sup>, researchers analyzed how experiences of harassment affected them. Journalists reported anxiety, fear, and stress due to an increased demand of “emotional labour” in their everyday work. *“As a result of the mental and physical toll on journalists’ well-being, harassment can cause reduced productivity and sometimes even leads to leaving the profession”.*

## Elsewhere in Europe

When looking at a broader picture at European level, according to the annual report on “*Press Freedom in Europe: Time to Turn the Tide*”<sup>5</sup> issued on 5 March 2024 by the Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists of the Council of Europe (the Platform), the major threats to media are:

### Alerts by category i



- Attacks, harassment and intimidation of journalists, including online
- Impunity
- Detentions, arrests and criminal prosecutions
- Restrictive legislation, SLAPPs and other lawsuits
- Media capture and attacks on public service media
- Surveillance and spywares

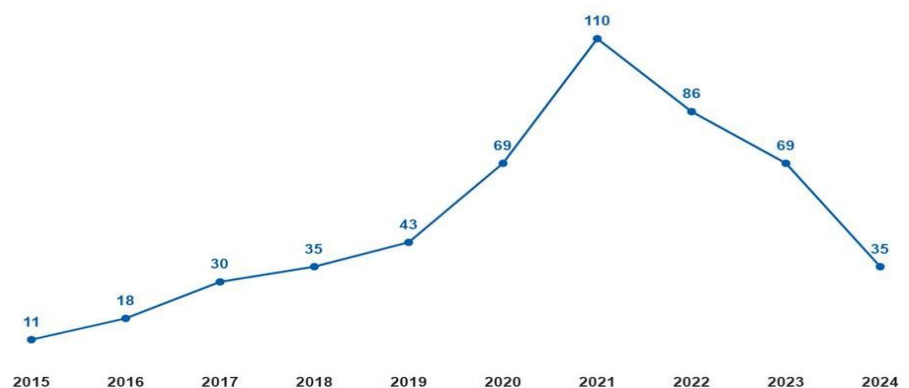


Figure left: Categories of alerts in 2023. Figure right: Evolution harassment and intimidation of journalists in Europe. Source: Platform of the Council of Europe.

<sup>3</sup> See: [Harassment’s Toll on Democracy: The Effects of Harassment Towards US Journalists](#)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> [Press Freedom in Europe: Time to Turn the Tide \(Council of Europe\)](#)

The data from the Platform show that **harassment and intimidation of journalists (including online) represented more than one-quarter of the general safety issues for journalist** on a cumulative basis between 2015 and 2024. In terms of annual evolution, harassment and intimidations reached a peak in 2021 and are still significantly higher than before 2020.

## Background 2. Obligations of various stakeholders

General regulations/obligations (Council of Europe and EU standards, Germany and other selected countries)

Safety of journalists is considered by international, European and national standards as being part of the obligation to respect and enforce press freedom. In addition to the general principle of media freedom, the following standards and obligations can be identified for the safety of journalists:

### International standards

- **United nations (UN)** : In 2012, the UN developed its [Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists](#), which addresses prevention, protection, and prosecution. The Plan is coordinated by UNESCO, as the UN specialized agency in the field of the promotion of free flow of information. It includes six areas: raising awareness; standard setting and policy making; monitoring and reporting; capacity-building and research. It also set up the [Observatory of Killed Journalists](#) and it developed UN-based Journalists Safety Indicators (JSIs), which include the following elements: number and types of threats against the lives of journalists, number and types of other threats to journalists, number and types of non-fatal actual attacks on journalists, number and types of killings of journalists, number and types of threats against media institutions, number and type of attacks on media institutions.
- **International Labour Organization (ILO)**: On 10 June 2022, the ILO adopted “a safe and healthy work environment” as one of its five fundamental principles and rights at work for all<sup>6</sup> (freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; the effective abolition of child labour; the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation). ILO Member States, regardless of their level of economic development, commit to respect and promote these principles and rights, whether or not they have ratified the relevant Conventions. This represents an important leverage for trade unions calling their government and employers’ organisations for action on health and safety matters, including harassment and its consequences.

### European standards

- **Council of Europe (CoE)**: To complement the general principles of Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights<sup>7</sup>, a key text of the Council of Europe is

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<sup>6</sup> [ILO Conference adds safety and health to Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work](#)

<sup>7</sup> *Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.*  
*The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.*

[Recommendation CM/Rec\(2016\)4\[1\] of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors](#), stating also that “*positive obligations include, among others: to create a favourable environment for participation in public debate for everyone and to enable the expression of ideas and opinions without fear; to put in place an effective system of protection for authors and journalists; to afford protection against physical violence and intimidation; to protect life; to investigate fatalities; and the duty to prevent torture and ill-treatment*” (paragraph 12) and that “*states are under a positive obligation to protect journalists and other media actors against intimidation, threats and violence irrespective of their source, whether governmental, judicial, religious, economic or criminal*” (paragraph 28). In October 2023, the Council of Europe launched its campaign for the safety of journalists entitled “Journalists Matter”<sup>8</sup>. Each member state designated a National Focal Point to act as the interface between the domestic stakeholders and the Council of Europe Secretariat of the campaign.

## German law

**The Constitution (*Grundgesetz*)** provides the main general protection for freedom of expression and freedom of the press<sup>9</sup>. Threat (Section 241 of the Criminal Code) constitutes a criminal offence which are investigated and prosecuted upon the victim’s request or if the prosecution authorities find a particular public interest warranting prosecution.

According to the distribution of powers in the Constitution, measures for the specific protection of media workers are fundamentally the responsibility of the states. Accordingly, the federal government cannot provide any compulsory policy or guidelines that the states may have for the protection of media workers.

### GOOD PRACTICE : UNITED KINGDOM

The United Kingdom recently passed the “Online Safety Act 2023” which defines abusive content, requires new oversight of online service providers and provides new oversight authority to government agencies.

Therefore, special criminal offenses to protect journalists against harassment are not foreseen by the German legislation. It does not include mechanisms to ensure specific investigation and prosecution of attacks against journalists and other media actors.

## Specific media requirements/obligations, including company-based or industry-based

### Employers and Unions in Germany

Almost all journalists are members of on the two professional unions, the German Federation of Journalists (*Deutscher Journalisten-Verband, DJV*) and the German Journalists' Union (*Deutsche Journalistinnen- und Journalisten-Union, dju in ver.di*). They provide support, legal

<sup>8</sup> [Journalists Matter : Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Die Grundrechte, Artikel 5](#): “*Everyone has the right to freely express and disseminate their opinions in speech, writing and images and to obtain information, without hindrance, from generally accessible sources. Freedom of the press and freedom of reporting by means of broadcasts and films shall be guaranteed. There shall be no censorship.*”

assistance, advocacy and training<sup>10</sup> for journalists facing threats or attacks and are powerful instruments of protection of journalists, including for freelancers. A survey issued by the EFJ in 2022<sup>11</sup> showed that following an incident of any type (threats, harassment and attacks, journalists report to their professional organisation in the first place (see also figure 5, below).

### A new “Protection codex” since 2022

With the “[Protection codex](#)” (Schutzkodex), a network of media organizations<sup>12</sup> developed a framework for effective measures and standards for media houses to support journalists. The code includes a dozen practical measures such as fixed contact persons at employers and psychological and legal support, including in case of harassment. Major media outlets such as the press agency DPA, newspapers TAZ, die Zeit/Zeit online, Spiegel and Frankfurter Rundschau had already joined the protection code at the start, in 2022. The Süddeutsche Zeitung had joined later. However, more media employers should still commit to this codex.

The following services should be offered to affected media professionals if there is a threatened or harassed by hate messages in connection with a journalistic contribution for the media house:

- external psychological support
- legal support and representation
- assumption of personal protection costs
- help and assumption of costs for any change of residence as a result of the publication of the private address;
- assumption of costs if affected media professionals have to temporarily take a taxi to work for their own protection;
- legal and psychological support also for the families of those affected. Quick blocking of hater profiles and users on social media
- “Social media watch” before sensitive/potentially endangered events, security/entrance controls if necessary
- In addition, regular training courses and workshops on dealing with hate messages and threats should be offered to all colleagues.

The Codex foresees for also the **appointment of a contact person for threats, attacks and harassment in the media company**, to whom both freelancers and permanent employees can turn if they have become the target of right-wing, racist, anti-Semitic, misogynistic or otherwise politically motivated threats, doxing campaigns and acts of violence due to their reporting. The contact person informs the affected colleagues about all in-house and external legal, psychological and psychosocial as well as financial support options. The establishment of a central in-house contact person to whom freelancers and permanent employees can send the hate mail they receive (anti-toxic mail address). The hate mail received there is regularly checked by the in-house legal department for its criminal relevance and, if necessary, reported to the law enforcement authorities. The in-house IT department takes care of archiving and, if necessary, creates statistical overviews of senders, etc. This aims to relieve the burden on those harassed in two ways: they do not have to save the threats on their personal accounts or read them to the end, and they are accompanied by the legal review of the in-house legal department for criminally relevant threats in all procedural steps.

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<sup>10</sup> [Dju in ver.di - Sicherheitstraining für Journalist\\*innen \(2024\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Safety4Journalists \(2022\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> The initiative for the protection code includes the German Journalists' Union in ver.di, the German Journalists' Association (DJV), the New German Media Makers eV, Reporters Without Borders eV and the Association of Counseling Centers for Victims of Right-Wing, Racist and anti-Semitic Violence eV (VBRG e.V.).



## Other examples of initiatives in Germany

"Tracking instead of just deleting" ("*Verfolgen statt nur Löschen*")<sup>13</sup> is an initiative launched in 2021 by several German media. It takes stock for the criminal prosecution of hate speech on the Internet, with reinforced cooperation with the Federal Criminal Police Office. Media regulators, law enforcement authorities and media houses are working together in a coordinated manner. With almost 900 reports and over 550 investigations initiated in recent years, it is clear that hate messages continue to pose a serious problem for editorial offices and that criminal intervention is urgently needed. Thirteen further media houses are part of the initiative. They benefit from the efficient procedures and direct contacts in media supervision and law enforcement and are committed to ensuring that criminally relevant hate speech is not simply deleted but prosecuted. At the same time, the high number of investigations in relation to the number of reports received shows that a thorough legal review is taking place.

## Background 3. Good practices and examples

### The Netherlands: cooperation between police, journalists and prosecutors

Persveilig is the initiative of the Steering Group on Aggression and Violence against Journalists, consisting of the police, the Public Prosecution Service, the Society of Editor-in-Chief and the Dutch Association of Journalists (NVJ). Since 2019, the various parties aim to reduce threat, harassment, violence and aggression against journalists and people in the media. The parties involved all signed a Press Safety Protocol for the purpose of this goal. The media has drawn up a collective norm. This means that journalists always file a complaint by the police when something happens within the norm. In addition to acting as a liaison point between journalists, the media sector, the police, and the Public Prosecutor, PersVeilig's everyday work consists of four key strands:



- research and monitoring;
- safety training;
- support for journalists following violence and abuse; and
- enhancing journalists' safety online

For example, PersVeilig delivers free training sessions for journalists across the Netherlands on a regular basis. To date, nearly 750 journalists and 1,500 journalism students have attended these sessions. PersVeilig also trains media outlets and editors on how to establish a safety protocol in the newsroom and other methods of creating a culture of safety, and provides training to freelance journalists. PersVeilig provides direct support to journalists in the aftermath of violence and abuse, including supplying freelance journalists with a wide range of tools to enhance their digital and physical safety (e.g. safety buttons and surveillance systems).

However, the changing nature of threats against journalists in the Netherlands requires constant adaptation, such as polarisation, online harassment and a decline in trust in journalists among some demographics – including politicians.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.medienanstalt-nrw.de/presse/pressemitteilungen-2021/2021/februar/verfolgen-statt-nur-loeschen-zieht-zwischenbilanz.html?newsletter=true> . The partners of the "Track instead of just delete" initiative are: the Contact Point for Cybercrime North Rhine-Westphalia (ZAC NRW), the State Criminal Police Office of North Rhine-Westphalia, the media houses Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland, Rheinische Post and Westdeutscher Rundfunk and the State Media Authority of North Rhine-Westphalia. The Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, the Express, Deutsche Welle and eco - Association of the Internet Industry eV, Deutschlandradio, Aschendorff Medien (Westfälische Nachrichten) , Der Patriot , Die Glocke , Emsdettener Volkszeitung , Hellweger Anzeiger , General-Anzeiger Bonn , Medienhaus Aachen , Münsterländische Volkszeitung , Recklinghäuser Zeitung , Remscheider General-Anzeiger , Solinger Tageblatt , Siegener Zeitung and Westdeutsche Zeitung



### **Belgium: a reporting point set up by the journalists' union**

The Flemish Association of Journalists (VVJ) has developed a similar approach to the Netherlands, limited for the moment to a “Reporting point” and various information to promote the safety of journalists: <https://www.persveilig.be/>

### **Sweden: a national action plan to defend free speech**

Sweden adopted a [national action plan Defending Free Speech](#) in 2018 to “safeguard active democratic debate” through measures to protect journalists, elected representatives and artists from threats and hatred. Linnaeus University was commissioned to assist newsrooms and news media organisations to counter threats to journalists’ safety by strengthening their own capacities, backed by a dedicated database and a telephone helpline. The police were also mandated to open a dialogue to improve channels of communication with journalists’ groups and develop new means of ensuring their safety.

### **United Kingdom : a national action plan and a specific online training tool**

A [National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists](#) was agreed in 2021 between the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Home Affairs. The objectives are to increase the understanding of the problem; enhance the criminal justice system response in tackling crimes against journalists; support journalists and their employers to build the resources they need to protect personal safety; help online platforms to tackle the wider issue of abuse online and improve public recognition of the value of journalists.

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) created “[Story Smart](#)”, a specific online training course on safety of journalists, with interactive modules taking into account all aspects of safety, including psychological trauma. This comes in addition to the “[Safety toolkit](#)”, also available online and as an app for journalists who need it in the field.

### **International: a journalists' coalition investigates massive harassment of a woman journalist**

[Maria Ressa: Combating a Surge of Online Violence](#). In 2021, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) analysed more than 400,000 tweets and 57,000 public Facebook posts and comments published over a five-year period as part of a trolling campaign against Rappler CEO Maria Ressa, a journalist who won the 2021 Nobel Peace Prize. Using data collection and visualization tools, the authors of this investigation were able to understand the modus operandi of these attacks and identify those responsible. In this case, the key factor is the behaviour that is uncovered. Once attributed, the level of violence describes the people behind the attacks.