MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE

MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM

MONITORING BRIEFING

JANUARY - JUNE 2026

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

Journalists gather in Istanbul on 29 March 2026 to protest increasing pressure on the press in Turkey and call for the release of detained and imprisoned journalists, including İsmail Arı, Alican Uludağ and Merdan Yanardağ.
picture alliance / ZUMAPRESS.com | Abdullah Tepeli

736 PRESS FREEDOM VIOLATIONS MONITORED JANUARY TO JUNE 2026

This briefing analyses violations of press and media freedom documented in the Mapping Media Freedom (MapMF) database between 1 January and 30 June 2026 in all 27 EU member states and candidate countries. The first six months of 2026 saw a wide variety of attacks on journalists, media outlets and associated individuals across Europe.[1] This briefing summarises the main findings regarding the types of attacks faced by journalists and related actors, as well as the perpetrators and contexts.

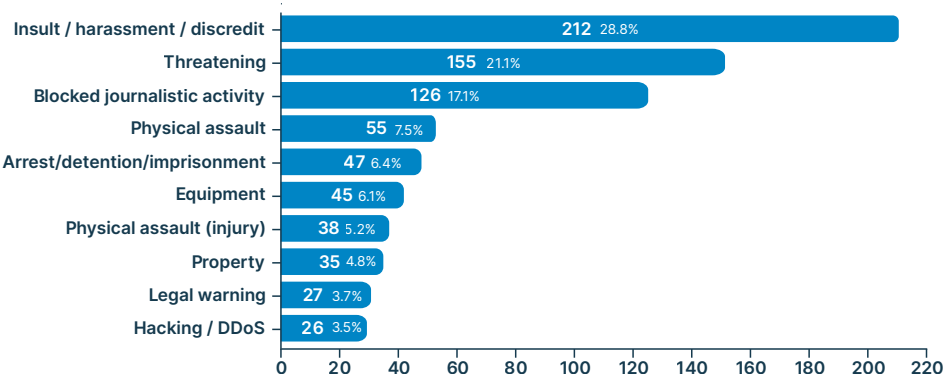
KEY ISSUES AND TRENDS 736 1174

Mapping Media Freedom documented a total of 736 attacks on 1174 journalists and other media professionals.

Types of attacks

Media workers were subjected to verbal abuse, including death threats, as well as physical assaults, attacks on their property, attacks on the integrity of journalistic data, interference with their work, and legal incidents. A closer analysis reveals the diverse nature of attacks faced by media workers across Europe.

Chart: 10 most common types of attacks against media workers



1 Mapping Media Freedom monitors attacks against a wide range of media actors and related entities, including journalists, media outlets, editors, photographers, citizen journalists, family members and other actors. For a more detailed overview, please refer to the MapMF methodology page.

363 ATTACKS IN EU MEMBER STATES

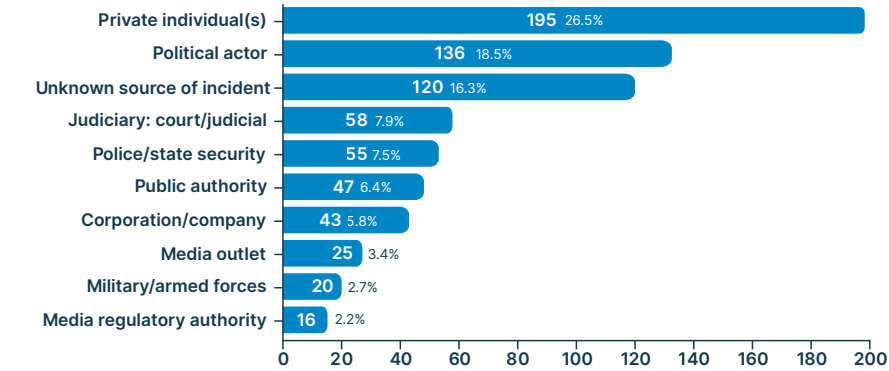
373 ATTACKS IN EU CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

Journalists gather around riot police during an opposition protest in Tirana, Albania, on 22 March 2026.
picture alliance / NurPhoto | Vlasov Sulaj

Perpetrators

Media workers were attacked by a broad range of actors, including private individuals, political actors, unknown sources, the judiciary, or the police. Attacks by political actors were especially concerning, accounting for 19% across Europe, and even 25% within EU Member States. Most frequently, political actors threatened, insulted, or discredited journalists, but recorded cases also included physical attacks, legal incidents, and interference with reporting work.

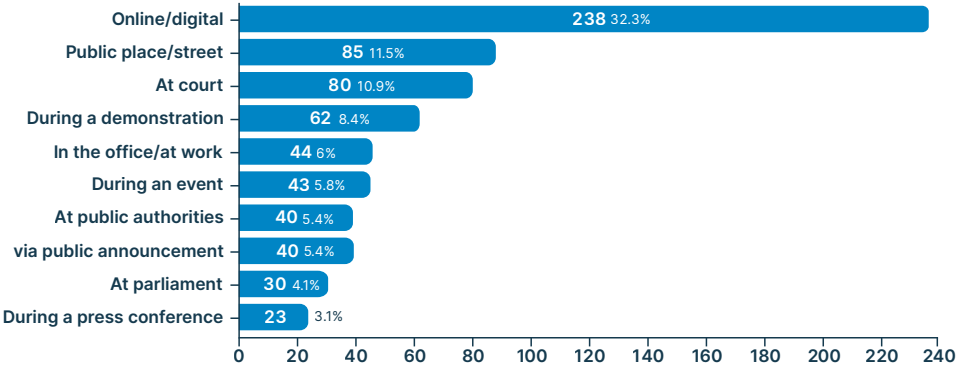
Chart: 10 most common sources of attacks



Contexts

Media workers were most frequently attacked online, in public places, at court, reporting on demonstrations, or at the office. Online and digital attacks stand out as the most frequent environments where journalists face attacks – this number has increased significantly over the past years. The majority cover cases of online harassment in the form of verbal assaults like insults and attempts to discredit journalists, but also threats, including death threats. Furthermore, attacks targeting journalistic data often occur online or through digital means, like hacking, spoofing, doxing, or surveillance. Perpetrators of online and digital attacks often remain unknown, making the prosecution of such attacks especially difficult.

Chart: 10 most common contexts where media workers face attacks



MFRR fact-finding missions

From January to June 2026, the partners of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) conducted fact-finding and advocacy missions in Italy, Serbia and France in response to press freedom challenges and violations documented on Mapping Media Freedom. These missions involved on-site assessments through a series of meetings with journalists, government officials, legal experts, and civil society representatives. The findings were summarised in mission reports, which included tailored recommendations for national and international stakeholders.

Italy

During the mission (9-10 March), the MFRR delegation observed an overall downward trajectory in media freedom compared to its previous visit in 2024. One major issue remained the persistent political interference in Italy's public broadcaster Radiotelevisione Italiana (Rai), with its governance and funding models failing to comply with the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA). See the full MFRR report here.

Serbia

The mission (25–27 March) was organised in collaboration with the Council of Europe's Safety of Journalists Platform. It found a continued spiral of violence against media professionals that was fuelled by state officials, pro-government media outlets and law enforcement officers, in a culture of impunity. See the full MFRR report here.

France

The mission (9-11 June) was jointly conducted with Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the support of local partners SNJ, SNJ-CGT, and CFDT-Journaliste and MFRR partner L'Observatoire français des atteintes à la liberté de la presse. Preliminary findings indicate a critical juncture for media freedom ahead of the French presidential elections. Primary challenges included rising media concentration, attacks on public media service, abusive lawsuits and safety concerns for journalists during protests as well as a weak legal protection of their sources. See the preliminary MFRR report here.

THEMATIC SPOTLIGHTS

Journalists, media workers and outlets have faced a multitude of challenges and restrictions in their reporting work. The following spotlights shine a light on areas of particular concern: the arrests and imprisonment of journalists over their critical reporting; laws and legislative initiatives targeting press freedom; the strategic bombing of critical media infrastructure in Ukraine; and attacks on journalistic data.

Arrest and imprisonment of journalists

47 61

Between January and June 2026, MapMF monitored 47 cases involving the detention, arrest, or imprisonment of 61 journalists across Europe. Of these, five took place in Georgia, Serbia, and Spain, whereas Türkiye accounted for the remaining 42 (89%). Compared to the previous year (January to June 2025), fewer European countries recorded cases of arrest, detention, and imprisonment. However, Türkiye continued to record high numbers, a persistently concerning trend.

In Türkiye, 30 cases involved detention or arrests, and were connected to protest coverage or social media postings, with disinformation allegations recurring. A further 12 cases resulted in prison sentences for 15 journalists, totaling at least 32 years, most often under terrorism and disinformation laws.

In Georgia, exiled journalist Afgan Sadygov was deported to Azerbaijan hours after his arrest despite measures by the European Court of Human Rights barring his extradition, while German-Ukrainian journalist Marina Klimchuk was denied entry at Tbilisi airport and held nearly 24 hours despite her pregnancy. In Serbia, photojournalist Gavrilo Andrić was first detained while covering a farmer-activist's arrival at a court hearing, and then, along with photojournalists Nađa Gavrilović and Marija Stojnić, while reporting on an anti-government banner. In Spain, Salvadoran photojournalist Diego Andrés Rosa Rosales was arrested while seeking political asylum.

Laws and legislative initiatives targeting media freedom

11

For the first half of 2026, MapMF documented 11 legislative developments raising concerns for press freedom, including restrictions on foreign funding, public service media independence, access to information, and surveillance.

The most far-reaching measures were adopted in Georgia, where new legislation significantly restricted foreign-linked funding for media and civil society, requiring government approval for journalism grants, training and other forms of support, with violations punishable by up to six years in prison. Foreign-funding initiatives also emerged elsewhere: Czech MPs prepared a

broad “foreign influence” registration law, which was later shelved, while the Romanian Senate approved a bill requiring NGOs, including non-profit media, to disclose donors or face closure.

Other initiatives concerned the institutional and financial conditions for independent journalism. In Slovakia, proposed reforms would concentrate the powers of the media regulator in a single chairperson appointed and removable by parliament. In Czechia, the government approved plans to replace public broadcasting licence fees with lower direct state-budget funding, prompting concerns about both financial sustainability and political influence.

In Germany, proposed amendments to Berlin’s Freedom of Information Act were postponed following criticism that they would pose serious threats to public interest reporting and the public's right to know, while the regional authorities in the state of Saarland adopted amendments removing specific safeguards against the technical surveillance of journalists.[2]

Shelling and bombing of critical media infrastructure in Ukraine

9 14

During the first half of 2026, nine cases of bombing, shelling or arson targeting media actors and infrastructure were recorded in Ukraine. This represented nearly all such incidents across Europe during this time period.

In the first half of 2026, offices of small, local media in Eastern Ukraine were especially affected, while major media hubs in regional capitals and Kyiv were also damaged by Russian forces, as was the case throughout 2025. In May 2026, a large-scale Russian attack on Kyiv damaged the offices of several Ukrainian and international media.

The repeated destruction of media infrastructure demonstrates the broader and systemic impact of Russia’s full-scale invasion on journalists’ ability to continue reporting, particularly in frontline and heavily targeted regions, such as Kyiv and a number of regional capitals across the country.

Journalistic data surveilled, retrieved, and destroyed

69 92

Protecting journalistic data from unauthorised access, surveillance, or destruction is crucial for defending press freedom. Over the past few years, MapMF has documented a growing number of such attacks on data and has introduced a new main category ‘Data attacks’, as an umbrella term to reflect these developments.

Hacking and DDoS attacks temporarily or fully shut down the websites and social media accounts of media outlets and journalists across Europe. In 81% of cases, perpetrators

2 In July 2026, a proposal by the German government for a broader reform package threatened to significantly undermine the federal Freedom of Information Act and incorporated many of the points that had already been criticised in connection with the proposed amendments to the Berlin FOI Act. See the MapMF alert here.

remained anonymous, increasing the risk of impunity. A total of 17 attempts to **seize, access, or destroy data** were documented that included six cases where journalists were pressed or forced to **reveal** their confidential sources.

Perpetrators **spoofed or took on the identities** of journalists on- and offline – sometimes by copying visual identities with the help of AI – spreading false information and narratives. Perpetrators also **doxxed** personal information of journalists, including names, home addresses, photographs and phone numbers.

CONCLUSION

During the first half of 2026, journalists, media workers and media organisations were subjected to a wide range of attacks and pressures. These included verbal attacks — such as threats and harassment, both online and offline — as well as physical assaults, deliberate obstruction of journalistic work, and legal actions all of which challenged or restricted independent reporting.

Of particular concern were legislative initiatives in several European countries that threatened to further restrict press freedom. Journalistic data, including information on anonymous sources, is also becoming increasingly vulnerable, particularly online. Meanwhile, Russia's continued war against Ukraine has intensified the targeted destruction of critical media infrastructure, putting independent reporting at further risk.

The MFRR will continue to monitor violations of press and media freedom, as well as relevant developments, across EU Member States and candidate countries throughout 2026.

MORE INFORMATION

The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) is a Europe-wide mechanism which tracks, monitors and responds to violations of press and media freedom in EU member states and candidate countries. It is co-funded by the European Commission.

The MFRR consortium is led by an alliance coordinated 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 Mapping Media Freedom (MapMF) database is part of the MFRR, documenting press and media violations across Europe. To learn more about the methodology guiding the MapMF project, please visit the Methodology page. For more information about the project, and guidance on how to read the MapMF data, please visit the About page. Previous reports or fact sheets can be found here.

DISCLAIMER

The numbers in this 2026 MFRR Interim Monitoring Update cover all press freedom violations documented between 01 January 2026 and 30 June 2026 in EU Member States and candidate countries (Status: August 2026). If cases are reported and published after the publication of this paper, they will appear in the data available under the links to the MapMF database, but they might not be reflected in the numbers.

One incident/alert can include multiple types of attacks, perpetrators, and affect several journalists at once. For example, a journalist is insulted and pushed at the same time, amounting to both a verbal and a physical attack. Because a single alert can contain multiple attack types, an alert may be counted more than once. As a result, the sum of the displayed counts can be higher than the total number of alerts, and the percentages may add up to more than 100%.

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