

# **Improving monitoring for crimes against journalists**

**Report on monitoring workshop**

**Free Press Unlimited**

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## 1. Introduction

This report is part of a UNESCO-financed project entitled “Improving monitoring for crimes against journalists”, which fits into the framework of the wider SDG 2030 Agenda. This project consists of three main components.

The first pillar of this project is a **survey and in-depth interviews**. Between 10 August and 31 August 2022 a survey was administered using SurveyMonkey. The goal was to get a good insight into the problems that civil society organisations (CSOs) face in regard to monitoring violations against journalists and the impact this has on the protection of journalists. A selection of six respondents from different regions were consequently asked to participate in an in-depth interview. The report dated 16 September provides an analysis of the survey results and the follow-up interviews.

The second pillar of this project is the two-day **monitoring workshop** that took place on 19 and 20 September in The Hague. Representatives of eight monitoring organisations, Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the International Press Institute (IPI), and the Centre for Freedom of the Media (CFOM) of the University of Sheffield attended this workshop. The aim of the workshop was to unpack the findings of the survey and the in-depth interviews in this ‘community of practice’, and to facilitate an exchange on approaches, best practices, issues and needs with regard to monitoring violations against journalists.

Finally, drawing from the monitoring workshop, this **report** forms the third pillar of the project. This report will, after sketching the context of the project, explore the main findings of the monitoring workshop and provide recommendations, best practices and suggestions, feeding into a pre-conference session on 3 November in Vienna on the topic of “monitoring of attacks”. This session will be led by IPI, and serves to develop concrete recommendations for improving the implementation of the UN Plan of Action. This two-day conference (3-4 November) serves to commemorate the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists and the 10-year Anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

## 2. Context

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 16.10, public access to information, is an essential requirement towards achieving “effective, accountable and inclusive public institutions” (SDG 16). However, the safe practice of journalism is a prerequisite for the provision of reliable information to the public: if journalists are not able to carry out their work without risking harm, they will be unable to function as watchdogs. This is recognised in SDG indicator 16.10.1<sup>1</sup>, as the first step towards safer working conditions requires a full picture of the violations against journalists happening around the world.

However, in practice, many states are reluctant to report on the safety of journalists and SDG indicator 16.10.1. Out of the 44 countries asked to provide a Voluntary National Review (VNR) report in 2021, only 4 referenced data on the safety of journalists. This shows that few governments acknowledge the urgency of this issue. In this context, a range of civil society shadow monitoring initiatives are ongoing so as to provide complementary or alternative data to that officially provided (or not provided) by countries within the VNR process. These shadow monitoring initiatives are crucial as accountability mechanisms and as a means by which civil society can highlight their perspective on the progress of SDG implementation, especially when there is a lack of political will by states to provide relevant data on the indicator. To support the efforts of CSOs in drafting shadow reports, FPU developed a Shadow Reporting on SDG 16.10 Toolkit with the support of UNESCO.<sup>2</sup>

However, research from CFOM<sup>3</sup> shows that existing shadow monitoring under SDG indicator 16.10.1 is patchy. Many CSOs lack the means and capacity for systematic data collection, enabling comparisons. Furthermore, shadow reports from civil society and their inputs are often not taken seriously or even ignored by state authorities.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, many CSOs do not record data beyond the heavily reported category of killing. Improved data quality and accuracy, however, can support a more sophisticated and structured data analysis, for example in the form of systematically monitoring signs of violence escalation as the basis for early warning and early action.

Additionally, better monitoring leads to better data and thus better insight into the problems that are at play. It can also increase the chances of being taken seriously by and gaining more traction with the government. In other words: consistent monitoring over time leads to credibility, legitimacy and the possibility to exert influence on governments. An example is that of IJAS - an organisation which has been involved in monitoring violations against journalists since 2008 and the data of which is currently even being used by the Council of Europe, to compare it with data provided by the state institutions.

1 SDG indicator 16.10.1 seeks to measure the number of verified cases of killing, enforced disappearance, torture, arbitrary detention, kidnapping and other harmful acts committed against journalists, trade unionists and human rights defenders on an annual basis.

2 See: <https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/themes/enabling-environment/advocacy-resources/shadow-reporting-on-sdg-16-10/>.

3 See: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research/features/creating-safer-global-environment-journalists>.

4 See: <https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/2021/07/civil-society-data-on-safety-of-journalists-neglected-by-un-member-states/>.

In the long-run, efforts of CSOs to engage on this topic enable a dialogue with state actors responsible for the shortfall in accountability. This is why supporting CSOs in the systematic improvement of their data gathering and presentation in credible reports helps to improve the efforts to address the safety of journalists and the national and multilateral level.

## 3. Monitoring workshop

### 3.1 Background

The monitoring workshop took place on 19-20 September at the Humanity Hub in The Hague. FPU had initially invited two to three participants per region, but unfortunately due to illness (COVID-19) and not being granted a visa in time, not all invitees were able to participate in the workshop. Therefore, representatives from only eight local monitoring organisations were able to participate. The participant list was as follows:

1. Renjani Puspo Sari - Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), Indonesia
2. Raissa Carrillo - Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP), Colombia
3. Yelanetzi Godoybaca - Fundación Libertad de Expresión Democracia (FLED), Costa Rica
4. Mohamed Ibrahim - Somali Journalists Syndicate (SJS), Somalia
5. Jaber Bakr - SKeyes Center for Media and Cultural Freedom, Lebanon
6. Habiba Al Hinai - Omani Centre for Human Rights (OC4HR), Oman
7. Snezhana Trpevska - Research Institute on Social Development (RESIS), North Macedonia
8. Rade Djuric - Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (IJAS), Serbia
9. Jacqueline Harrison - Centre for Freedom of the Media (CFOM), University of Sheffield
10. Diana Maynard - Centre for Freedom of the Media (CFOM), University of Sheffield
11. Sara Torsner - Centre for Freedom of the Media (CFOM), University of Sheffield
12. Amy Brouillette - International Press Institute (IPI)
13. Leon Willems - Free Press Unlimited (FPU)
14. Nada Josimovic - Free Press Unlimited (FPU)
15. Manizja Aziz - Free Press Unlimited (FPU)
16. Jantine van Herwijnen - Free Press Unlimited (FPU)
17. Tomás Chang Pico - Free Press Unlimited (FPU)

### 3.2 Findings

#### Monitoring efforts

As had also become apparent from the survey in which 27 local monitoring organisations partook, monitoring violations is very context- and resource-dependent. That means that organisations based in different countries may operate in similar contexts; face similar issues when it comes to the safety of journalists and monitoring violations against them; and use similar methods, tailored to their context and capacities. For example, both SJS and AJI gather data from their members - or "press freedom monitors" as SJS calls them - which are located across the country. However, the most common method of gathering data is by tracking news reports and social media posts.

The type of violations are ever-changing, which asks for constant adaptability of the monitoring organisations. As noted by the representative of FLED: "In Nicaragua new and diverse violations take place every day, such as passport suspensions and other impediments to either leave or re-enter the country." Another, more novel way of silencing journalists, is imposing Internet shutdowns.

### *Regional networks and platforms*

Both FLIP and FLED are part of the Voces del Sur Network. This is a collective, consisting of 16 peer organisations, monitoring violations of freedom of expression and freedom of the press based on SDG indicator 16.10.1. The Network agreed on a regional methodology of 12 indicators designed collaboratively to register alerts on violations against fundamental rights.<sup>5</sup> Both FLED and FLIP use these categories, but FLIP is putting more emphasis on certain subcategories which are more relevant in the Colombian national context.

In the Western Balkans, both IJAS and RESIS are part of the Safejournalists.net Platform. This cooperatively created platform is home to annual reports, press releases, educational articles and numerous alerts on the pressures and attacks on journalists in the Western Balkans. The platform has also developed the Western Balkans' Journalists' Safety-Index (WB-JSI), a research-based tool designed to measure and monitor both the environment for journalists' safety and actual safety of journalists in the Western Balkan's countries.<sup>6</sup> Next to this platform, there are also several other regional initiatives in Europe which endeavour to map violations against journalists, such as the Safety of Journalists Platform of the Council of Europe<sup>7</sup> and the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFFR) mechanism.<sup>8</sup>

In Sub-Saharan Africa IPI is launching a new project that will systematically collect information on press freedom violations. This information will be used for advocacy to strengthen policies protecting media freedom and journalist safety and hold states in Africa accountable for failures to protect journalists and prevent impunity for crimes against them. IPI will be working closely together with a network of local and regional CSOs across Africa and collaborating with existing monitoring and advocacy initiatives, in particular the new Digital Platform for Safety of Journalists in Africa.<sup>9</sup>

In MENA and Asia such regional monitoring platforms are currently lacking. However, AJI is leading a collaborative action in six countries in Southeast Asia, with the aim of developing an alert and monitoring platform that is tailored to the Southeast Asian context.

### **Monitoring violations against journalists: issues and needs**

#### *Shrinking civic space*

Independent media face serious challenges as a result of democratic backsliding and the accompanying trend of shrinking civic space. Illiberal political actors seek to delegitimise their work and limit their ability to uncover information, reach an audience, and hold powerholders to account. Similarly, in some countries monitoring organisations which try to map these threats to journalists and press freedom are met with resistance and threats. One example is the OC4HR, which is working from exile due to laws preventing the establishment of

<sup>5</sup> See <https://vocesdelsurunidas.org/>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://safejournalists.net/>.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte>.

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.mfrr.eu/>.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://fom.coe.int/en/alerte>.

independent NGOs in Oman. Another example is that of Fundación Violeta B. de Chamorro (the work of which FLED builds onto), a Nicaraguan CSO which had to close its operations in February 2021 due to the entry into force of the Foreign Agents Law.

Therefore, the work of monitoring violations needs to be seen against the backdrop of sometimes hostile environments hindering them in mapping violations against journalists and bringing these to light. Even when violations are brought to light, whenever they are carried out by state officials (such as police officers), this sometimes brings about little consequences for them, such as in the case of Somalia. Furthermore, in some countries it is much harder to monitor violations in areas that are more conflict-ridden, as for example the Papua region of Indonesia.

#### *Lack of resources*

A lack of resources is a problem prevalent across all monitoring organisations that partook in the workshop. This lack of resources may translate into various ways. First, monitoring and analysing violations against journalists is time-consuming and requires a specific set of skills. Nevertheless, most organisations do not have the funds to hire a staff member tasked specifically with monitoring - most organisations even rely on volunteers assisting in monitoring rather than paid staff. It is also financially challenging to free up an existing staff member to whom monitoring can be designated, or to offer training to staff members. Training is especially valuable, however, when it comes to the stage after data collection, in which data is extracted, linked, compared and visualised. Most organisations currently use Excel or Google Sheets which works well for collecting and storing data, but may fall short when it comes to analysing the data.

#### *Lack of reliable data*

A prevalent issue is that of the lack of reliable and methodologically consistent data, either from government/statistical agencies, online sources or civil society sources. Some organisations are the only ones in their country monitoring violations against journalists, which means there is no data from other civil society actors - and often not from the government either - that they can rely upon.

Most harm committed against journalists is not reported by traditional media, but by users of social media. This shows the importance of methods such as NLP (natural language processing), which enables organisations to generate, systematise and analyse data from qualitative text sources, such as social media posts. However, once again, using NLP requires specific software and a set of skills that organisations may not have in-house.

#### *Violations against women journalists*

As aforementioned, one of the key issues is the lack of reliable data. Especially in the context of violations against women journalists, the little data that is available does not reflect the actual situation regarding attacks against women journalists, particularly in the cases of sexual

harassment or assault. As the representative of IPI mentioned: “We assume that the cases involving women are heavily underrepresented.” In some countries, such as Somalia, sexual violence is a taboo topic. As a result, women journalists who have become the victim of sexual violence rarely report on this, and if they do, they are not keen on the publication and dissemination of this information. A possible way to mitigate this, is by publishing data on violations against women journalists anonymously. However, this can lead to governments disputing the credibility of the data on grounds that it is anonymous, a point raised by the OC4HR. However, in some other cases publishing information is also undesirable or dangerous; the representative of SKeyes noted kidnappings of journalists by ISIS as an example.

### *Responsibility of newsrooms*

During the workshop the conclusion was reached that the safety of journalists is not solely a state responsibility, but also a corporate responsibility, namely that of the newsrooms. However, on behalf of newsrooms there is often a lot of negligence, which can, for example, take the form of sending young, inexperienced journalists on missions to report demonstrations without any sort of briefing or training beforehand. Monitoring violations can also help in raising awareness of newsrooms and urging them to take certain precautions to limit the risks that their employees may face. However, not providing safety training is not always a matter of unwill, but is often tied to a lack of funds.

Some violations take place in the newsroom, perpetrated by managers. One example is that of sexual harassment in the workplace. Especially when monitoring organisations rely on information from media outlets, it might be very difficult for them to gather information on violations within the newsroom. Again, there is a corporate responsibility for newsrooms to make sure that such violations do not go unpunished.

### **Shadow monitoring of violations against journalists**

CFOM has carried out research with the aim of strengthening systematic SDG indicator 16.10.1 monitoring, based on the premise that the role of CSOs is crucial as an accountability mechanism in providing data alternative or complementary to official statistics (or the lack thereof), in the light of many governments’ lack of will and efforts to report on the safety of journalists. Among other things, their research identified the need to align existing monitoring with SDG indicator 16.10.1 violation category definitions. Aligning the data that is already being collected by local monitoring organisations with SDG indicator 16.10.1 categories and human rights definitions, allows for cross-comparisons across organisations and countries.

Existing monitoring predominantly records instances of violations against journalists by counting the number of times a violation has occurred, but this way of monitoring does not systematically capture additional key information, for example on relationships between events, victims and perpetrators. In order to gather this supplementary information, CFOM proposes an events-based approach and relational data model, which would entail a move



from monitoring violations as outcomes or “end result”, towards monitoring the chain of events prior to, connected with, and following a violation. As the representative from IJAS mentioned, journalists may not only face primary victimisation (such as an attack or a verbal threat), but also secondary victimisation, which is pressure faced at a later stage, for example obstruction while facing a police report. This shows the relevance of mapping the chain of events.

### **Creating a community of practice and steps forward**

The workshop proved to be a good stepping stone towards the creation of a community of practice. The participating organisations stressed their commitment to be transparent about their own procedures, by sharing, among other things, their definitions of working categories, monitoring methodologies and template spreadsheets. FPU will facilitate this exchange of information by linking the monitoring organisations to each other so they can continue to learn from each other. Furthermore, there is an intention to invite the participants to the “Safety of Journalists: Protecting media to protect democracy” conference on 3-4 November in Vienna. In preparation for this pre-conference, a number of recommendations have been drafted for improving the implementation of the UN Plan of Action.

### **3.3 Recommendations for the UN Plan of Action**

The participants at the workshop, covering all regions of the world, specified their needs that would strengthen the ability to improve the systematic monitoring and reporting on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. They can be summarised in the following four points:

- Create a **community of practice** of CSO monitoring organisations and academia to facilitate learning, exchange and discussions on methodologies and best practices related to monitoring. State and corporate actors are requested to generously fund this effort;
- Organise **technological assistance** to assist with the gathering, analysis and reporting of data relevant to all categories of violations;
- Ensure **dialogue with state actors** on the issue of journalist safety and identify focal points for dialogue, especially statistical agencies, judicial actors and policy institutions;
- Urge relevant **multilateral agencies to support** the community of practice for the monitoring of the safety of journalists and facilitate evidence-based dialogue with state actors.

#### **We call upon state actors to:**

- Instruct statistical agencies, judiciary actors and executive branches of government to enter into dialogue with civil society and address their alerts and reports on the safety of journalists;
- Ensure statistical agencies and government representatives report on violations taking place in their country to the relevant international mechanisms;
- Strengthen or establish national mechanisms for redress for journalists who have faced violations and include civil society in those discussions.

**We call upon UNESCO and OHCHR to:**

- Increase support for independent civil society monitoring work that takes place domestically and in exile;
- Make shadow reporting mechanisms for SDG 16.10.1 accessible for local CSOs by tackling technical challenges to submit data and by providing simple guidelines for what input is needed and when;
- Support research and collaboration between academia and CSOs to address the need for more reliable, quality data on the full range of human rights violations against journalists as a means to more effectively counter attacks;
- Make UN procedures in general more accessible and easier to comprehend – for example in terms of wording (less technical and legal phrases) – by developing toolkits;
- Create regional mechanisms (such as courts and platforms) where journalists can file complaints against the violation of their rights, in regions where such mechanisms are currently lacking, such as Asia and MENA;
- Focus on the development of early warning mechanisms and on monitoring of specific issues, such as arbitrary detention, violations affecting women journalists, corruption and hybrid threats, to better understand patterns of escalation in attacks on journalists and to establish a data evidence base that can support the prediction and prevention of such attacks;
- Introduce enforcement and sanction mechanisms, that journalists can resort to if their rights are violated, that will increase pressure on national authorities to be answerable.

**We call upon media houses to:**

- Take the corporate responsibility for the safety of their employees or the freelancers that they are momentarily employing, by having in place preparedness plans, insurance and protective gear as well as safety procedures;
- Task newsrooms with sharing information and news about threats to journalists with relevant monitoring organisations for further process.

**We call upon social media corporations to:**

- Assist with the technological challenges that exist in the monitoring domain by providing expertise, software and technological support to monitoring CSOs;
- Take their responsibility for violations against journalists which take place in their sphere of influence seriously, for example by sharing and providing access to data on safety threats and work on joint research to find solutions for this;
- Work with CSOs to develop a universal approach to complaints and defamation as well as take-down of genuine content - with a clear chain of reactions between violation and response.