



# FACT SHEET

## MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM

### European Union Member States

### Year 2021

February 2022

This fact sheet is a selection of statistics and analysis from [Mapping Media Freedom](#) (MapF), submitted by the partner organisations in the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) (MFRR). This data covers the period **from 1 January until 31 December 2021** in the 27 current EU Member States (i.e., it does not include the United Kingdom).

It provides an overview of the different issues faced by journalists and media actors in 2021 in European Union Member States. Each alert documented on Mapping Media Freedom is classified based on a detailed category system, including the type of attack, type of aggressor (source), and the place (context) in which the attack happened. Through analysis of these aspects, more information about the characteristics of the attacks can be revealed, which provides deeper insights into the situation of press and media freedom and its trends.

The respective alerts of this fact sheet can be viewed directly in the Alert Explorer [here](#)<sup>1</sup>. This fact sheet includes the analysis of all incidents of the year 2021 published until 15 January 2022. If cases are reported and published after this date, they will still appear in the data linked in the Alert Explorer above to give an up-to-date view at any time.

Beside the overview, this document also provides more detailed information on the following selected topics: **COVID-19, protests, online and digital attacks, physical attacks, and attacks against women journalists.**

---

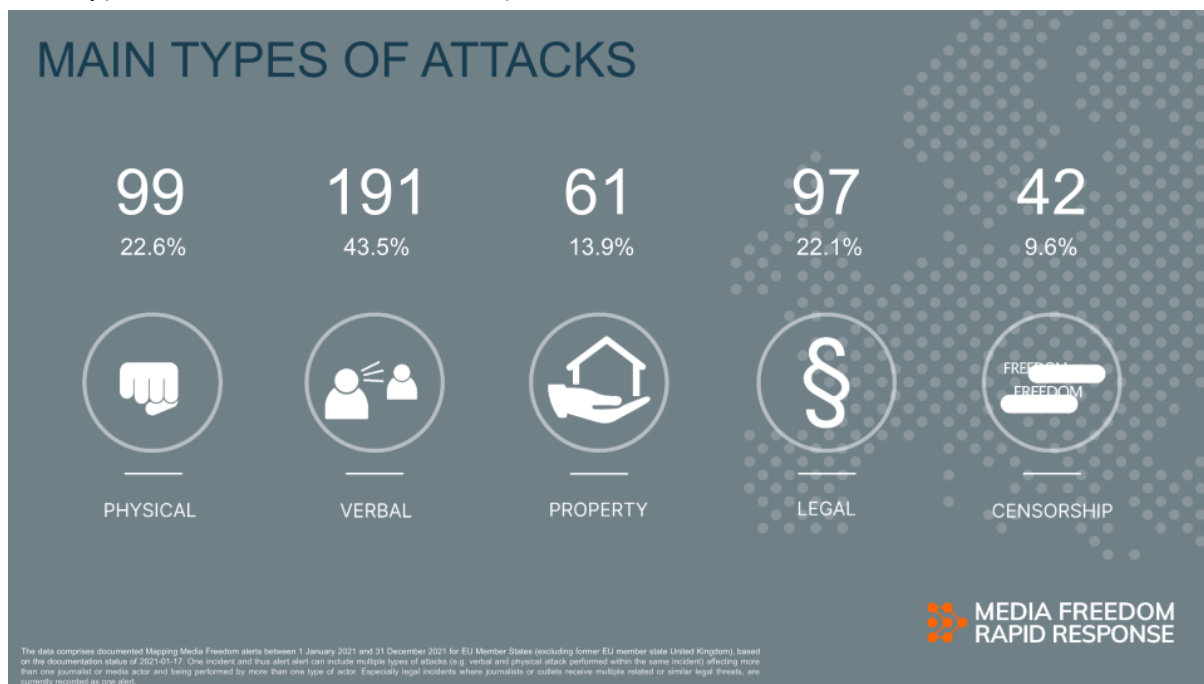
<sup>1</sup> or by visiting [mapmf.org/explorer](https://mapmf.org/explorer) and filtering for Year of incident = 2021 and EU Membership Status = European Union member states

# Overview

**439 alerts (with 778 persons or entities related to media being attacked) in 24 EU Member States in 12 months**

## Types of attacks

Journalists and media actors face several different types of attacks. Sometimes they even face several types of attacks at the same time, such as a verbal and a physical attack performed within the same incident by the same aggressor. This section shows how many alerts involved a certain type of attack. The types of attacks are grouped into 5 main types with detailed information provided below.



**Physical:** In more than 1 out of 5 incidents (22.6% – 99 alerts) media actors were physically attacked. In 34 incidents (7.7% of all incidents) media actors were injured. Two journalists were killed: the investigative journalist [Peter R. de Vries](#) in the Netherlands and the television reporter and veteran crime reporter [Giorgos Karaivaz](#) in Greece.

**Verbal:** In more than 4 out of 10 incidents (43.5% – 191 alerts) media actors were verbally abused. This includes intimidation/threatening (109 alerts – 24.8%), insult/abuse (59 alerts), discrediting (26), harassment (20), as well as bullying/trolling (6) behaviour targeting media actors.

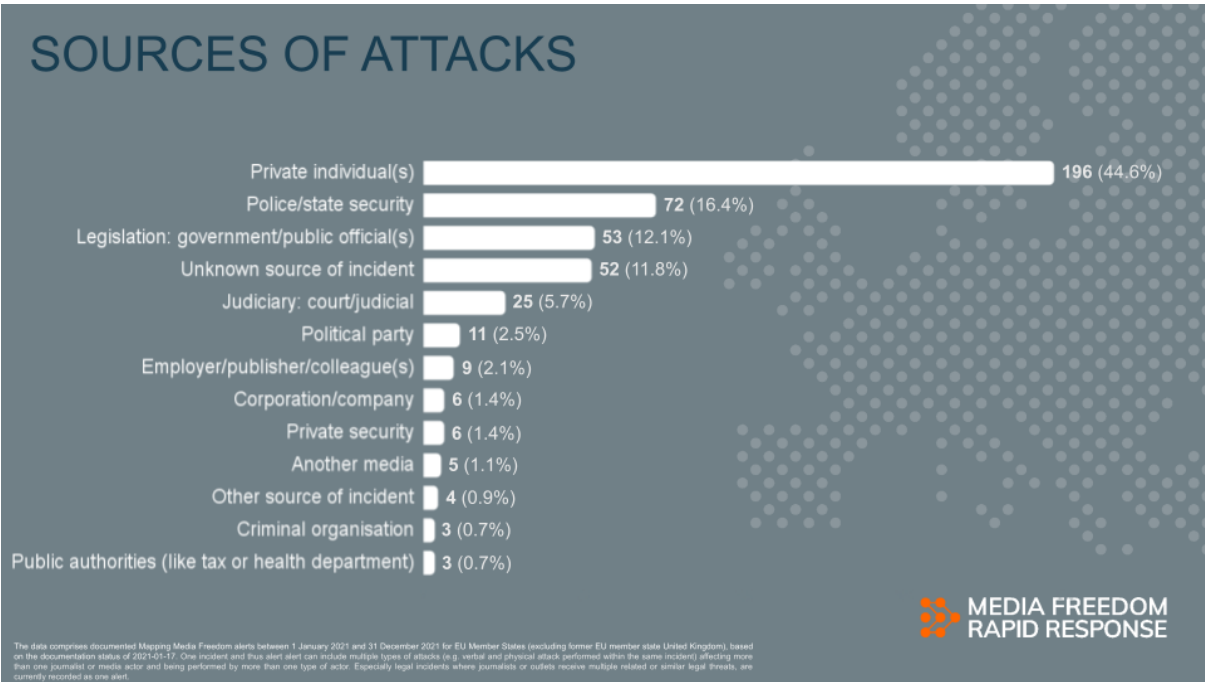
**Property:** In nearly 1 out of 7 incidents (13.9% – 61 alerts), property was attacked. This includes equipment (34), personal belongings (3), but also attacks to other property such as cars or houses (20), as well as hacking/DDos attacks (6).

**Legal:** In more than 1 out of 5 incidents (22.1% – 97 alerts), media actors faced legal consequences. This includes civil lawsuits (19), arrest/detention/imprisonment (17), legal measures like laws restricting press and media freedom (13), surveillance and interception of journalistic data (13), criminal charges (12), interrogation (10), loss of employment (6), defamation (4), conviction (4), and violation of anonymity (3).

**Censorship:** In nearly 1 out of 10 incidents (9.6% – 42 alerts), media actors faced censorship. This includes arbitrary denial of accreditation or registration (incl. blocked access to events or press conferences) (22 alerts), blocked access to information (e.g. blocked websites or no answers to enquiries) (11), commercial interference (8), disinformation (3), and censorship of an article not being published (1).

### Sources

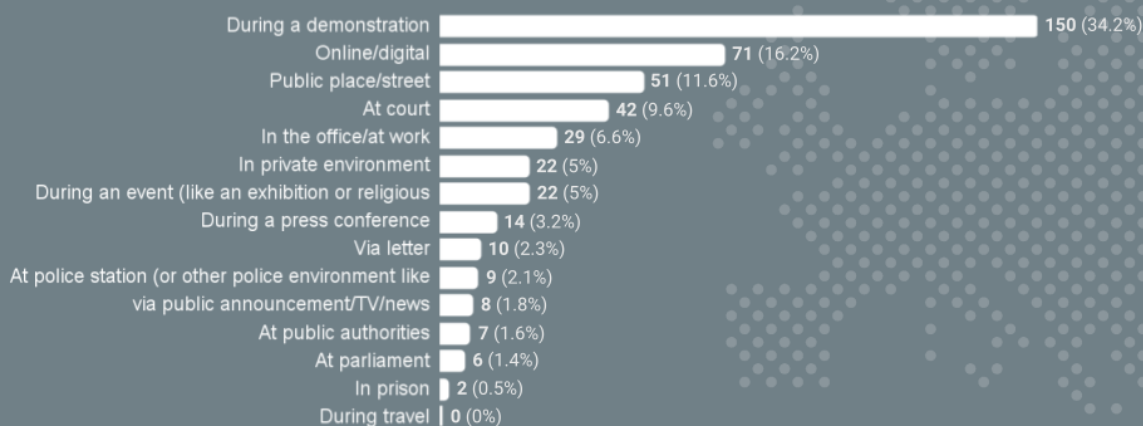
With 44.7% (196 alerts), most of the attacks were perpetrated by private individuals, followed by 1 out of 6 incidents performed by police and state security (16.4%), and nearly 1 out of 8 incidents by legislation (12.1%). In 11.8%, the source was unknown, meaning it could not be clearly identified if there was a private individual or any group or organisation behind the attack. MFRR has documented violations performed by a wide range of sources which can be seen in the graphic below.



### Contexts

The context describes the environment in which the attack took place. More than 1 in 3 incidents (34.2% – 150 alerts) happened during protests. Protests were the most frequent context where media actors were attacked or prevented from carrying out their work. Nearly 1 out of 6 incidents was performed online or digitally (16.2% – 71 alerts). Further contexts can be seen in the graphic below.

## CONTEXTS OF ATTACKS



The data comprises documented Mapping Media Freedom alerts between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2021 for EU Member States (excluding former EU member state United Kingdom), based on the documentation status of 2021-01-17. 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.

**MEDIA FREEDOM  
RAPID RESPONSE**

## COVID-19

MapMF recorded 153 incidents related to COVID-19. This means more than 1 in 3 incidents (34.9%) were related to COVID-19. For more details see the chapter dedicated to COVID-19 related attacks below.

## COVID-19

153  
34.9%



related to the Coronavirus /  
COVID-19

COVID - 19

The data comprises documented Mapping Media Freedom alerts between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2021 for EU Member States (excluding former EU member state United Kingdom), based on the documentation status of 2021-01-17. 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.

**MEDIA FREEDOM  
RAPID RESPONSE**

## Who was attacked?

Not only were attacks on media actors such as journalists, media workers, and media companies recorded, but also 4 incidents for associations like trade unions or NGOs

fighting for press freedom, 3 incidents for family members of media actors, and 3 incidents for journalists' sources because of their cooperation with media actors.

## Selected Topics

### COVID-19

Mapping Media Freedom documented **153 alerts** (with 238 attacked persons or entities related to media) in 15 countries related to COVID-19. This means more than **one 1 out of 3 incidents** (34.9%) of all attacks that occurred in EU Member States in 2021 was related to the COVID-19 pandemic, either directly, in response to government responses to the pandemic, or connected to public opposition to the situation. The respective MapMF alerts of the attacks related to COVID-19 in 2021 in EU Member States can be found [here](#)<sup>2</sup>.

**Types:** More than 1 out of every 3 COVID-19 related incidents (34.6 % – 53 alerts) included **physical assaults**. In 1 out of every 10 incidents (10.5% – 16 alerts) journalists or media actors were **injured**. More than half of the incidents related to COVID-19 (54.9% – 84 alerts) included **verbal attacks**. In 19.0% (29 alerts) **property** was attacked, 3.9% (6 alerts) involved **legal** action against media actors, and 6.5% (10 alerts) included a form of **censorship**.

**Sources:** In more than 3 out of 4 incidents related to COVID-19 (77.8% – 119 alerts), journalists and media workers were attacked or impeded from carrying out their work by **private individuals**, followed by **unknown** sources (10 alerts), **legislation** (9 alerts), and **police** or representatives of state security (7 alerts). The MFRR also documented four violations committed by the judiciary, two by other sources, and one alert each for political parties and another media.

**Contexts:** More than 2 in 3 incidents related to COVID-19 happened **during protests** (68.0% – 104 alerts), where media workers were attacked or prevented from doing their work. However, incidents related to COVID-19 are not confined to protests alone. Other common contexts included attacks performed online or digitally (9.2% – 14 alerts), public places/streets (7.8% – 12 alerts), or in the office/at work (4.6% – 7 alerts).

### Protests

Mapping Media Freedom documented **150 alerts** (with 237 persons or entities related to media) in 14 countries that happened during protests. This means more than **1 out of 3 incidents** (34.2%) of all attacks that occurred in EU Member States in 2021 happened during protests, making protests the most frequent place where journalists were attacked. **More than two thirds** of the attacks that happened during protests **were related to COVID-19** (69.3% – 104 alerts). The respective MapMF alerts of the attacks during protest in 2021 in EU Member States can be found [here](#)<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> or by visiting [mapmf.org/explorer](https://mapmf.org/explorer) and filtering for Specific Topic = "Coronavirus/COVID-19" beside Year of incident = 2021 and EU Membership Status = European Union member state

<sup>3</sup> or by visiting [mapmf.org/explorer](https://mapmf.org/explorer) and filtering for Context = "During demonstrations" beside Year of incident = 2021 and EU Membership Status = European Union member states

**Types:** More than 4 out of 10 incidents at protests (41.3% – 62 alerts) included **physical assaults**. In more than 1 out of 8 incidents during protests (12.7% – 19 alerts) journalists or media actors were **injured**. Nearly half of the incidents at protests (46.7% – 70 alerts) included **verbal attacks**. In 19.3% (29 alerts) **property** was attacked, 6.7% (10 alerts) involved **legal** action against media actors, and 4.7% (7 alerts) included a form of **censorship**.

**Sources:** In more than 2 out of 3 incidents at protests (70.7% – 106 alerts), journalists and media workers were attacked or impeded from carrying out their work by **private individuals**, followed by **police** or representatives of state security (26.7% – 40 alerts), a small number were performed by unknown sources (2 alerts), and 1 alert for each for private security and corporations/companies.

## Online and digital attacks

Mapping Media Freedom documented **71 alerts** (with 114 persons or entities related to media) in 18 countries that happened online or digitally. This means nearly **1 out of 6 incidents** (16.2%) that occurred in EU Member States in 2021 were performed online or digitally. Nearly 1 out of 5 incidents performed online or digitally were **related to COVID-19** (19.7% – 14 alerts). The respective MapMF alerts of the online and digital attacks in 2021 in EU Member States can be found [here](#)<sup>4</sup>.

**Types:** In 84.5% (60 alerts) attacks performed online and digitally included **verbal attacks**. In 5 alerts (7.0%) **property** was attacked in the form of hacking or DDoS attacks, 8 alerts (11.3%) involved **legal** action against media actors, all of them being [surveillance and interception of journalistic data](#)<sup>5</sup> performed online or digitally, and 4 alerts for **censorship** with 3 of them addressing [disinformation and spoofing attacks in Malta](#) and 1 regarding blocked access to information.

**Sources:** In more than 1 out of 3 incidents (38.0% – 27 alerts), journalists and media workers were attacked by **private individuals**, followed by **unknown** sources (28.2% – 20 alerts), **legislation** (14 alerts), police (4), political parties (3), another media (3), and 1 alert each for judiciary, corporations/companies, and other sources of incidents.

## Physical attacks

Mapping Media Freedom documented **99 alerts** (with 154 attacked persons or entities related to media) in 13 countries involving physical attacks. This means **more than 1 out of 5 incidents** (22.6%) of all attacks that occurred in EU Member States in 2021 involved physical attacks. The respective MapMF alerts of the attacks related to physical attacks in 2021 in EU Member States can be found [here](#)<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> or by visiting [mapmf.org/explorer](https://mapmf.org/explorer) and filtering for Context = "during demonstrations" beside Year of incident = 2021 and EU Membership Status = European Union member states

<sup>5</sup> The Pegasus Spyware had a major impact here However, not all cases addressing surveillance and interception of journalistic data happened online or digital, but also offline, such as in private environments in the form of house searches or in a public place, or at court. All respective alerts can be seen [here](#) (or by selecting Type of incident = "Surveillance and interception of journalistic data" beside 2021 and EU Member States)

<sup>6</sup> or by visiting [mapmf.org/explorer](https://mapmf.org/explorer) and filtering for Type of incident = "Physical assault" beside Year of incident = 2021 and EU Membership Status = European Union member states



**Types:** In 34 alerts (34.3%) physical attacks resulted in **injuries**. Two journalists were killed: the investigative journalist [Peter R. de Vries](#) in the Netherlands and the television reporter and veteran crime reporter [Giorgos Karaivaz](#) in Greece. In 12 alerts (12.1%) physical attacks were **accompanied by verbal abuse**, 14 alerts (14.1%) included attacks to **property**, and 1 alert with legal consequences in the form of arrest/detention/imprisonment.

**Sources:** In more than 3 out of 4 incidents involving physical attacks (69.7% – 69 alerts), journalists and media workers were attacked by **private individuals**, followed by **police** as the perpetrator of more than 1 out of 5 physical attacks (21.2% – 21 alerts), unknown sources (7 alerts), private security (3), and legislation (1 alert).

**Contexts:** Nearly 2 in 3 physical attacks happened **during protests** (62.6% – 62 alerts), followed by public places and streets (29 alerts), during an event (4), in a private environment (2), at court (1), and in the office/at work (1).

## Attacks against women journalists

Mapping Media Freedom documented **91 alerts** regarding attacks against women journalists (with 151 attacked persons or entities related to media) in 18 countries. The respective MapMF alerts of the attacks against women journalists in 2021 in EU Member States can be found [here](#)<sup>7</sup>.

In summary, the most outstanding differences for women journalists included a higher proportion of online attacks in the form of online harassment, but also in general, women journalists faced proportional more verbal abuse, including harassment, insult/abuse, discrediting, or intimidation and threats. In regard to perpetrators, it is noticeable that the proportion of unknown sources is considerably higher, meaning that it could not be clearly identified if there was a private individual or group or organisation behind the attack, which is often the case for online or digital attacks through social media or emails. On the contrary, women journalists faced a lower proportion of physical attacks and injuries, attacks performed by private individuals or by police, and attacks performed during protests. It needs to be noted that, though these attacks occurred in lower proportions than for men journalists, they still made up a considerable amount of attacks against women and thus also represent the main issues women journalists face.

The 91 alerts considered in the analysis for women journalists include 63 alerts that targeted women only, and 28 attacks involving women and men being attacked within the same incident in parallel. In total, MapMF recorded more attacks against men than against women. Attacks against men journalists cover 233 alerts, involving 204 alerts only targeting men journalists and 28 alerts involving women journalists in parallel. Furthermore, MapMF recorded 143 alerts (32.6%) where neither male or female was selected for the recorded aspect of gender. This was because it was either not applicable (e.g. for attacks targeting media companies or general attacks to websites or laws restricting press and media freedom), or for cases where the gender of the attacked persons was unknown. However, by looking at the distribution of recorded attacks against women journalists, including the comparison to attacks against men journalists, several characteristics can be identified.

---

<sup>7</sup> or by visiting [mapmf.org/explorer](https://mapmf.org/explorer) and filtering for Gender = "Female" beside Year of incident = 2021 and EU Membership Status = European Union member state

**Types:** Nearly 1 out of 5 attacks against women involved **physical assaults** (19.8% – 18 alerts). In 5 incidents (5.5%) women journalists were injured. Though attacks against men journalists involve a much higher proportion of physical attacks (31.3%) and also more injuries (11.2%), physical attacks are still an issue when it comes to attacks against women. Women journalists faced very high rates of **verbal abuse** (57% – 52 alerts), which is a considerably higher proportion (factor 1.4) than for men journalists (41.2%). These verbal attacks involve harassment, intimidation/threatening, discrediting, or bullying/trolling behaviour. In 1 out of 10 incidents (9.9% – 9 alerts) targeting women, **property** was attacked. This is lower than for men (14.6%). In 23.1% (21 alerts) women journalists faced **legal** consequences, which is comparable to men journalists (22.3%). **Censorship** made up 3.3% (3 alerts) of the attacks against women.

**Sources:** The main source of attacks against women journalists was **private individuals** (39.6% – 36 alerts), though at a lesser proportion than for men (49.8%). This is followed by attacks from **unknown** sources (17.6% – 16 alerts) and **police** (15.4%). For men journalists, this ranking is reversed, with 22.8% for police and 11.2% for unknown. Considering the proportion, women were 1.6 times more likely to be attacked by unknown perpetrators. Furthermore, 8 attacks against women were perpetrated by legislation, 6 alerts from judiciary, 5 alerts by employers/publishers, 4 alerts by political parties, 3 alerts for other media, 2 alerts for private security, and 1 alert for criminal organisations.

**Contexts:** In one quarter of the incidents (24.2% – 22 alerts), women journalists were attacked **online and digitally**, directly followed by attacks during **protests** (23.1% – 21 alerts). This distribution is significantly different to attacks against men journalists where 43.4% happened during protests and only 16.3% online or digitally. Women journalists face proportionally more (by a factor of 1.5) online attacks than men journalists. The vast majority of online attacks recorded against women are in the form of online harassment. 20 of the 22 attacks performed online or digitally against women journalists included verbal abuse such as harassment, intimidation and threats, insults, or abuse. On the other hand, MapMF recorded a significantly lower proportion for attacks against women journalists during protests than for men journalists (factor of 0.5). Further contexts, in which women journalists were attacked were public places or streets (11 alerts), in the office or at work (9 alerts – with a proportion of 9.9%, also much higher than for men journalists at 2.2%), at court (7 alerts), in a private environment (6), during an event (5), at police stations or a police environment (4), at public authorities (2), during a press conference (2), commissioned in prison (1), and through a letter (1).

## What is Mapping Media Freedom and MFRR

[Mapping Media Freedom](#) (MapMF) is a platform which documents press and media freedom violations across Europe and beyond. The new [Alert Explorer](#) shows the incidents on a map, as a list, or as a detailed alert report. It allows sophisticated filtering and helps to gain insights into the state of press and media freedom. MapMF is a crowdsourced platform that enables anyone to report attacks and threats against journalists and media workers across Europe via the user-friendly [ReportIt](#) form. Every alert is verified by the monitoring partners before publication. The network is made up of the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), and the International Press Institute (IPI), as well as an international network of local partners. Alerts recorded on the platform guide the work of the Media



Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) to directly engage with and help at-risk journalists and media workers.

The [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) (MFRR) tracks, monitors, and reacts to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States, candidate countries and the United Kingdom. The programme can support lawyer's fees, living costs, medical assistance, psychological support, and family support for journalists in need as well as preventive support in cases of emergency. The MFRR is organised by an alliance led by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) including ARTICLE 19, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), the Institute for Applied Informatics at the University of Leipzig (InfAI), International Press Institute (IPI), and CCI/Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT). The project started in 2020 and is funded by the European Commission

## Disclaimer

This fact sheet was compiled by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom as part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) and based on the monitoring recorded on Mapping Media Freedom performed by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and the International Press Institute (IPI). The respective alerts for this fact sheet can be viewed directly in the Alert Explorer [here](#) (including updates on alerts).

One incident and thus alert 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. 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 more than 100 %.

