

“Together for Reliable Information”

Civil Society efforts to monitor SDG target 16.10
Synthesis report of three VNR shadow reports

25 May 2021

Free Press Unlimited with Africa Freedom of Information Centre
Uganda (AFIC), Association of Journalists Indonesia (AJI),
Fundacion para la Libertad de Prensa Colombia (FLIP), International
Press Institute Austria (IPI) and Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF)

In cooperation with UNESCO

**FREE
PRESS
UNLIMITED**

People deserve to know

Content

Acknowledgements	3
Reporting on Journalist safety in the context of the SDG agenda	4
Global trends on safety of journalists during the Covid-19 pandemic	5
National trends on safety of journalists based on VNR shadow reports	9
Recommendations to Governments and stakeholders involved in the VNR process	10
Summary findings on the safety of journalists in Colombia in 2020	11
Summary findings on the safety of journalists in Indonesia in 2020	14
Summary findings on the safety of journalists in Pakistan in 2020	16
The State of Press Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Africa	18
The State of Press Freedom and Safety of Journalists in South Asia	20
<hr/>	
Annex 1 VNR Shadow report Colombia	
Annex 2 VNR shadow report Indonesia	
Annex 3 VNR Shadow report Pakistan	
Annex 4 Access to information in 4 African countries	
Annex 5 Safety of Journalists in South Asia	

Acknowledgements

This study was commissioned by UNESCO to Free Press Unlimited. The work on the shadow reports from Colombia, Indonesia, and Pakistan were carried out by Fundacion para la Libertad de Prensa Colombia (FLIP), Association of Journalists Indonesia (AJI) and Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) in cooperation with the Policy & Advocacy department of Free Press Unlimited in the Netherlands.

In addition, Free Press Unlimited co-funded a monitoring report on journalist safety carried out by International Press Institute Austria (IPI) focused on safety of journalists throughout South Asia.

With regards to trends and issues related to press freedom and access to information in Africa, the Africa Freedom of Information Centre in Uganda, carried out a comparative analysis of access to information legislation and the implementation thereof in Africa. For additional information we have used sources from our respected colleagues at RSF and Article 19.

Free Press Unlimited would like to thank the following persons for their invaluable contributions and efforts for this report, Eva Danayanti from AJI, Gilbert Sendungwa and from AFIC, Raissa Carrillo and Jonathan Bock from FLIP, Owais Ali from PPF, Ravi Prasad from IPI and my colleagues Amy Vis, Annelies Langelaar, Mira Chowdhury, Guusje Somer and Evelien Wijkstra at Free Press Unlimited.

We thank the European Commission, especially Laura Bretea at DG INTPA for the unwavering support for the post covid recovery project for Sub Sahara Africa that funded the research carried out by AFIC into access to information in 4 African countries.

Finally we would like to express our thanks to the Communication and Information department at UNESCO head Quarters in Paris for their support and encouragement, especially Theresa Chorbacher and Guilherme Canela from UNESCO.

Leon Willems, Amsterdam 9 July 2021



This report was produced with the support of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication.

Reporting on Journalist safety in the context of the SDG agenda

The 2021 High Level Political Forum will be focused on “sustainable and resilient recovery from the Covid 19 pandemic” and will review Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16. This conversation cannot take place without looking at the importance of SDG target 16.10 in a year that saw the space for civil society, media and journalists shrink further. In a year where most of the worlds’ attention was focused on the Covid-19 pandemic, the mind of the world has not been as vigilant as needed towards safety of journalists.

Even before the pandemic, many governments struggled to protect journalists and guarantee public access to information for a variety of reasons. Ranging from a lack of political will, scarce resources or insufficient public demand caused by a lack of awareness. This undermines the concept of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions as enshrined in Goal 16 of the development agenda.

People need public access to information to be well-informed, critical, and resilient. It is crucial to empower citizens to shape their own development. Attracting attention to good practices to encourage UN Member States to fulfil their responsibility to deliver on target 16.10, is a much-needed initiative at this time. Transparency and proactive sharing of public information creates trust between citizens and their government.

Openness and transparency of government systems are, however, globally under pressure. On top of existing challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has in many instances led to the introduction of further legal restrictions to the safety of journalists and public access to information. Ensuring the safety of journalists is a crucial requirement in enabling an environment where people have access to information. Journalists should be safe to perform their societal function to inform people.

Rationale for taking stock of reporting on journalist safety

- This year, at the fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, a ground breaking paragraph was added to the declaration¹ calling on states to investigate, prosecute and punish threats and acts of violence, falling within their jurisdiction, committed against journalists and media workers, with a view to ending impunity for crimes committed against them, in accordance with national legislation and applicable international law;
- In addition, next year is the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the issue of Impunity². In 2022 it will be crucial to provide an update and take stock of the development thus far on the experiences and results as well as include recommendations towards the further action related to concrete action to ensure the effect of the UN Plan to further guarantees for Journalist Safety.

People deserve to know

Free Press Unlimited, works with local partner organizations in over 40 countries with challenging developmental contexts for the safety of journalists. To give an evidence-based reflection of the situation per country we have built our submission on the input from our partners. The majority of the independent media outlets and journalists that we work with operate under stress since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, even in countries where democratic guarantees and legal institutional frameworks for the safety of journalists exist.

That is why we strongly emphasize the crucial importance of the UN development agenda and the enabling quality and relevance of access to information for citizens and civil society across the globe. Finally, we have highlighted several good practices and recommendations for UN Bodies to take into consideration. We call on all governments and UN agencies to do more on monitoring, reporting, and addressing the trends and issues that we have found in this report.

Global Trends on safety of journalists during the Covid-19 pandemic

The safety of journalists has rapidly declined since Covid-19 spread. We have seen a strong increase in journalists requesting urgent help through our Rapid Response fund, largely caused by Covid-19 and the government measures that have inhibited the ability of journalists to report freely. Requests of women journalists rose even 170% compared to 2019.

Governments and state actors around the globe have enacted additional and repressive legislation, though the trends and levels strongly differ per region. Below, we have listed the measures taken, the impact on the safety and work of journalists, and focusing specifically on the situation of women journalists.

Legal measures

During the pandemic we have seen many countries all over the world curbing press freedom. Many introduced legislation that criminalize the spread of information about the pandemic, or the impact such information may have, albeit in different forms. Others legally prohibited the freedom of movement, or access to specific sites and events for journalists. The passing of such restrictive legislation was facilitated by the emergency legislation that 107 countries have adopted considering the pandemic.³ Such legislation enables governments to adopt restrictive measures by decree. But the consequential laws and measures limit the ability of journalists to do their jobs freely.

First, 18 countries, including Bosnia Herzegovina, Vietnam, Cambodia, Azerbaijan, Thailand and Russia, adopted fake news regulations.⁴ These are laws that criminalize the spread of disinformation about the pandemic. In some cases, like Hungary, the publication of factual news is also punishable if it “hinders the fight against the epidemic”. Other countries have adopted similar legislation using different terminologies, such as the criminalization of “scaremongering” or “spreading chaos”. In practice, these laws - intentionally or unintentionally - lead to censorship of information and seem to be an ideal tool for silencing critical voices, many of which are journalists. Authorities took the fight against “fake news” into their own hands, empowering themselves to block sites deemed

guilty of spreading it, often with little oversight or accountability mechanisms in place.

Thorough consultation with our local partners, together with a sharp increase in applications for Free Press Unlimited’s emergency funds, underlines this trend. In 2020, almost 90% of the support was for journalists affected by and under threat due to the virus. In the past year, journalists and independent media have increasingly faced arbitrary arrests, detentions, and charges for publishing information about Covid-19 that does not conform with the government narrative. This often results in lengthy legal processes, which lead to high costs which many journalists and media cannot afford. Currently, more than 204 journalists have already been arrested, detained, or otherwise engaged in legal proceedings during the pandemic.⁵ The first journalist to be arrested for spreading ‘panic’ by publishing information was in Serbia.⁶ In Venezuela, journalists have been arbitrarily prosecuted for publishing information related to the COVID-19 pandemic. In August 2020 the Russian independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta was fined for supposed “fake news stories” about coronavirus outbreaks in Chechnya and inside the Russian Army. The human rights group Agora recorded more than 200 cases of persecution of citizens and organizations for disseminating information that differs from official press releases in three “epidemic” months.⁷

Another example of repressive legal measures, often passed by decree, are restrictions to the freedom of movement. Aruba and Venezuela adopted laws to limit the movement of citizens, without categorical exceptions for journalists. This hinders or even makes it impossible to continue their work. In Aruba, for example, an independent journalist was arrested and interrogated when she was doing her work during the curfew. An employee of our partner in Venezuela was also arrested for collecting protective equipment packages distributed by Free Press Unlimited.

At the same time, in some countries journalists were denied access to specific sites and events. In Hungary and Venezuela, the access to information is deliberately restricted by impediments for journalists who are not

allowed, or at least obstructed to enter hospitals. In Venezuela, the traffic control points are used to restrict the movement of journalists passing to other entities to cover social events, despite their press cards. In Serbia, Macedonia, the Philippines, and Florida journalists were physically banned from press conferences regarding Covid-19. In other instances, such as Nigeria and North Macedonia, press conferences about Covid-19 were held online. Here, only the media known to be pro-government were allowed to attend or ask questions. In Hungary, there is no option for journalists to ask questions directly at press conferences - they can only ask their questions by email. These often remain unanswered.

Finally, in several European countries, such as Poland and Hungary, the deadlines for responding to information requests from journalists and the public were suspended or extended. In Hungary and Russia, health personnel are not allowed to speak to the press. Such government measures limit the right to access to information in a time where public information about the Covid-19 policy is in fact more important than ever. Journalists and other watchdogs need such information to analyze and scrutinize government policies and decisions taken under huge time pressure.

Physical threats

In too many instances, government forces took measures that directly impacted the physical safety of journalists, which has deteriorated rapidly since 2020. First of all, security forces seem to have stepped up their violent acts against the press during the pandemic. Many journalists were physically threatened and even attacked by police and security forces, often but not solely during protests against Covid-19-related government measures. This happened in Uganda, Kenya and India. In Serbia, in July 2020 during Covid-related protests, media workers and journalists were attacked brutally by police forces. In the Democratic Republic Congo, authorities have cracked down on peaceful critics, journalists, and political party members, while using state of emergency measures imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁸ But increasingly, also protestors and civilians used violence against journalists and media workers. In Venezuela, journalists have become victims of groups sympathetic to Maduro who wrote threatening messages on the walls of their homes. In the Netherlands, the public broadcaster NOS removed its logos from their broadcasting vans after experiencing too many threats and violent acts from protestors and citizens.⁹

Other aspects of this worrying trend of declining physical safety are not directly linked to government measures. Yet, it cannot be overlooked that the continuation of journalistic work, which is vital especially during crises, brings along serious risks of exposure to the virus. Between the outbreak of the pandemic and mid-April 2021, 1,060 journalists had died from Covid-19, according to the Press Emblem Campaign (PEC).¹⁰ In other words, each day more than 2 journalists die from Covid-19. One of our partners in Bangladesh reported that in August 2020 only, already 697 journalists in the country had been infected. Also, journalists in Latin America suffer a lot: more than half of the fatal cases are reported in Latin America.

Many journalists don't have protective equipment, and in most countries there is no national mechanism in place to protect journalists. An online survey conducted by SACMID (Bangladesh) showed that 32% media professionals are doing their job with no personal protective equipment and 76% journalists have no health insurance or risk allowance from their respective houses. Hence, from the very start of the pandemic, to fill these protection gaps, Free Press Unlimited has collaborated with local partners. Around 4,200 press workers received personal protective equipment such as antibacterial gel, gloves, and disposable face masks.

A lack of reliable information

The listed government measures all together have limited the ability of journalists to provide reliable information in a safe and constructive manner. This directly impacts the information that citizens receive. Never was disinformation so widespread as during the pandemic. The rise of disinformation is caused by multiple reasons. Generally, it must be stated that people will search for explanations, especially during insecure crisis times. If people don't have enough reliable information, rumors and guesses will be used to find answers. By obstructing journalists to provide reliable information through various measures, governments pave the way for disinformation to thrive.

To make things worse, in many instances governments and political leaders actively spread disinformation, including via social media. For instance, former President Donald Trump of the United States personally promoted the use of hydro chloroquine as a Covid-medicine, against all scientific advice, while President Bolsonaro of Brazil still publicly denies the impact of the virus. Such unclarity about information leads to mistrust among citizens and justifies the constant

questioning of reliable information and facts distributed by independent media. Journalistic critical news reporting is increasingly portrayed as unreliable. This is further exacerbated by political leaders who have publicly accused independent journalists of spreading disinformation about Covid-19.

From another point of view, in some cases access to information was limited not due to particular restrictive legislation, but rather due to the absence of a law prescribing this right. In Somalia, there is no law barring journalists from seeking and receiving information, but the policy of the government has been that all media have to gather information regarding the pandemic from the Ministry of Health solely. Hence, due to absence of a variety of journalistic sources and a lack of governmental actions to promote access to information, journalists do not have access to accurate information about the pandemic.

Consequently, many populations across the globe have little to no factual information about the virus, the following health crisis, and measures that their governments take in this context. But access to reliable information is crucial in times of crisis and can literally save lives. If journalists in Wuhan would have been able to report freely, chances are that the global pandemic could have been managed better. Reliable information is vital to critically scrutinize governments' policies and spending of taxpayer's money. And while people lack factual information, disinformation is on the rise. These conditions cannot be viewed as separate from the declining safety and work conditions of journalists. Distrust towards independent media and journalists can lead to aggression as we witnessed during the insurrection at Capitol Hill where journalists were attacked, and their equipment was destroyed.

Women journalists

The Covid-19-crisis has exacerbated the hardship that women journalists face. For the first time since the set-up of the Legal Defense Fund and Reporters Respond fund, Free Press Unlimited saw a significant increase of requests from predominantly women journalists. In 2020 alone, the number of applications from women journalists rose with 170% compared to 2019. However, consultation of our partners did not reveal government measures to combat Covid-19 that specifically target women journalists. Only from Somalia we heard that women journalists are kept in solitary confinement and this may subject them to abuses.

Yet, pre-existing gender inequalities in the safety of journalists while reporting the news have become sharper due to the pandemic. Firstly, many of our women partners informally self-reported that the lockdown measures forced them to work from home, and they felt the double-burden of having to deliver professionally and being expected to take informal care and household duties "as normal". Secondly, the shifting of interactions towards the online sphere brings along serious threats to women journalists. Even before the pandemic started, women journalists faced more online harassment, threats and intimidation than their male colleagues. Threats are often of sexual and racist nature, targeted at the person instead of the content, thus making the workplace an unsafe environment for women.¹¹ According to research done by ICFJ, in 2020 73% of the over 700 women respondents had suffered from (some form of) online violence. ICFJ sees an exponential growth of such incidents, although many women journalists are expected not to report online violence. Such online violence can lead to mental problems, fear and self-censorship, women journalists quitting their job, and in the worst cases even lead to offline violence.

Economic hardship and mental health problems

Finally, two other pandemic-related trends that impact the work and safety of journalists deserve attention. Media outlets are struggling financially due to a fall in their revenues. The media business is in dire straits and faces a near-extinction crisis. According to a survey that FPU conducted among our partners in June 2020, an estimated 40 to 60 % of the media houses had already ceased their activities or were on the verge of collapsing due to economic hardship. A similar percentage of the journalists had already been fired or agreed to a salary cut. As a result, we see a massive layoff of journalists and the disappearance of independent media houses that simply cannot sustain their operations any longer. These economic difficulties pose a new threat to journalism: that of losing their political neutrality and independence. In countries like Bangladesh and the Czech Republic, the extinction crisis was politicized: government organizations unequally disperse their commercial budget, according to the political affiliation of a media organization. Some of these independent media outlets are taken over by commercial companies or political actors and lose their function as watchdog.

Secondly, attention must be paid to the risks to mental health that the pandemic brings along for journalists globally. A consultation by SACMID in Bangladesh revealed that 82.2% of the total respondent journalists suffer from high perceived stress while 99.5% are severely hopeless about their life. On average, 42.9% of the Bangladeshi journalists suffer from depression. Among the depressed, women journalists are overrepresented at 48.48% compared to 41.77% of their male colleagues.

The abovementioned trends demonstrate a very precarious situation for independent journalism, and the safety of journalists and media workers worldwide. One cannot but conclude that the pandemic has fueled repressive legislation against free media, instigated physical violence against journalists, triggered even more online violence against women journalists, and deprived lots of people from access to reliable information.

Good practices

However, our partners have also highlighted several good practices that have partly alleviated the complications of their work. In Zimbabwe and Romania, after successful lobby efforts by the local civil society, the profession of journalism was acknowledged as a vital profession. Consequently, journalists were prioritized in the national vaccination strategy.

Moreover, in several countries such as the Netherlands and Bangladesh, state authorities have taken measures to financially support independent media houses and journalists. In Bangladesh, the Ministry of Information announced a “Journalists Welfare Trust” for vulnerable (unemployed and unpaid) journalists. If they register, they can receive up to taka 10,000 (around 100 euros). As a critical side note, it must be added that according to our partner, many journalists don’t want to apply for this trust, as they fear increasing media control by the government as a result.

Although income streams have declined for almost all independent media houses, some have seen their audience increase. For instance, Al Menasa, an independent media outlet in Iraq, experienced a 25% growth in audience, and Daraj, a pan-Arab digital platform providing in-depth reporting and analysis, experienced a 50% increase in audience.¹² Another positive development is the innovation that some media outlets have managed to introduce, to adapt

to the new situation and to be able to reduce costs. Some newspapers were already in the process of the digital transformation, but due to the lockdowns they had to accelerate this transition. Eastern European media partners integrated more interactive formats in their work, like live music concerts on Facebook (Euronews in Belarus and Hromadske TV in Ukraine) or an Instagram interview with an epidemiologist (Novaya Gazeta in Russia).

Recommendations for UN bodies

First of all, UN bodies, including OHCHR must ensure that national governments uphold the right to freedom of expression and access to information, as prescribed by Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the ICCPR. More specifically, OHCHR must insist that emergency measures are retracted once the pandemic allows it and must publicly condemn those authorities that abuse the pandemic to introduce legislation that restricts freedom of expression and the freedom of the media.

Furthermore, several local partners have highlighted the need for more cooperation between the Special Rapporteurs for Freedom of Opinion and Expression of the UN, Organization of American States (OAS) and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR). For example, by joint advocacy for continued attention to the challenging circumstances journalists and independent media find themselves in as a result of the pandemic and the consequences thereof for the access to information of citizens around the globe. More specifically, they could promote the creation of protection programs and foster donations of supplies and vaccinations to journalists and press workers. Other partners indicated a more prominent role for UNESCO in providing recommendations to national governments promoting respect for journalistic freedoms.

Finally, more advocacy efforts are needed at national level to prevent the marginalization of (independent) press and to defend media pluralism. UNESCO, OHCHR and other relevant UN bodies, could contribute to people’s access to information during and beyond this pandemic by emphasizing the economic status of media in international political fora. Only by combining these strategies, the spread of fake news around the pandemic can be addressed and media can hold governments accountable for implementing justified and proportionate measures to protect citizens.

National trends on safety of journalists based on VNR shadow reports

2020 did not provide an upward trend for journalist safety in the three countries researched in which VNR shadow reports were produced, Colombia, Indonesia and Pakistan. While the local context varies very much, the trends in this year remain very similar.

An increase is noted in physical attacks against journalists across the three countries. For example, in Colombia a 10% increase is noted, in spite of the fact that a peace agreement was signed that provided hopes for an end to impunity.

Digital attacks are on the increase even more rapidly and the moment of violence moving from the online domain towards the real world is near according to some of the incidents reported in Indonesia where digital smear resulted in street attack against journalists reporting.

Legal attack against journalists, mostly originating from content regulation, criminalizing speech by state authorities are a third trend. In Pakistan this phenomenon has accelerated over the course of 2020, resulting in more self-censorship by media and journalists.

All three countries noted increased violence on-line and offline towards women journalists. In Colombia FLIP indicate a problem with machismo in the culture in this regard. In Pakistan and Indonesia, most gendered violence takes place online, but threats and sexual intimidation to women reporters also exists while covering street protest or on the work floor of media houses.

Police and Judicial authorities fall short of investigating and prosecuting acts of violence against journalists. State protection mechanisms fail to produce adequate protection in Colombia for example, a safety bill for protection of journalists is stalling in the legislative process for too long in Pakistan and Freedom of Expression has not been a priority issue for the administration in Indonesia.

Additional challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic

Covid-19 has exacerbated the already challenging situation, by adding economic constraints to the profession of journalism, increasing dependencies on state advertising for example in Pakistan, or resulting in lay-offs and salary cuts in Indonesia.

In none of the countries adequate protection measures for journalists were readily available for those reporting on the pandemic causing unnecessary exposure to the virus and resulting in the death of journalists in for example Pakistan.

Issues pertaining to the Voluntary National Reporting efforts on SDG 16.10.1

In all three countries, the submission of data provided by the civil society actors have not resulted in adequate reporting by the government toward the UN on SDG 16.10.1

Colombia and Pakistan lack an inclusive and integrated approach to data collection from Civil Society. Participation in the VNR process is hampered by the lack of clear consultation mechanisms. In Indonesia the mechanism exists but data related to SDG 16.10.1 were omitted from the government VNR submission in 2019. AJI hopes for better this year.

FLIP in Colombia also indicates lack of official data and a unified database on the safety of journalists. Also, in all three countries, methodologic differences, also among practices in civil organizations for the correct measurement of the indicator, places the urgent necessity of harmonization for cleanness of data, in order to have results that allow a precise reading about the regional situation to create effective public policies.

Recommendations to Governments and stakeholders involved in the VNR process

On Safety

National protection mechanisms for the safety of journalists in accordance with the UN plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists are in high demand and need more urgency.

Governments should start implementing recommendations of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and produce annual progress reports to UNESCO.

Additional action is needed to ensure judicial actors and security services act in conformity with international standards of freedom of expression and the safety of journalists especially with regards to the need to prosecute crimes against journalists in relation to their profession.

On social media regulation

Government must provide more clarity on legislation regarding social media. Social media rules developed have repeatedly been criticized by civil society and to ensure that if there is legislation regarding this platform, stakeholders are actively involved in the process.

More attention is needed to address the increase of digital threats against women journalists online and offline.

On Covid-19

Considering COVID-19, the government should assist media houses and ensure that media workers who are often on the frontline are provided with the safety measures such as vaccinations and protective equipment as well as the cost of treatment for those infected.

Governments should reconsider legal inhibitions on freedom of expression regarding fake news related to Covid-19 and start Civil Society consultation on how to withdraw such regulation.

On VNR process

More resources are needed for integrated unified data collection and the integration and participation of Civil Society in the process of Voluntary National reporting on SDG 16.10.1.

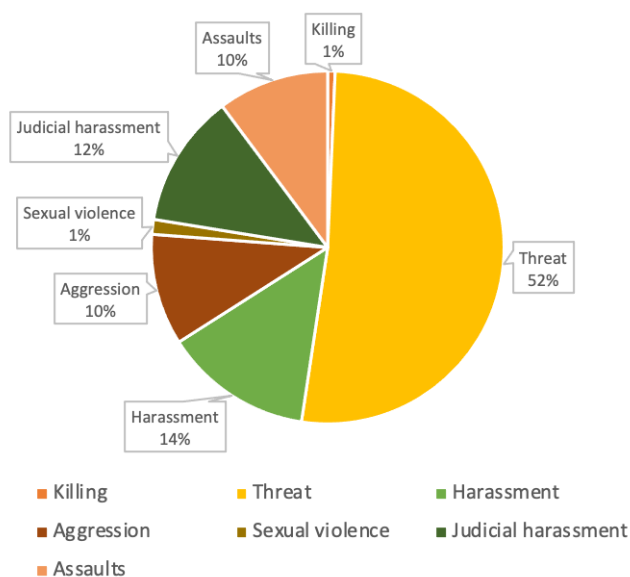
The governments should be more inclusive in consultations with main civil society organisations working on different aspects of SDG 16.10.1 such as those working on press freedom, internet freedom, digital rights, and cyber security.

Summary findings on the safety of journalists in Colombia in 2020

Despite the signing of the Peace Agreement, the numbers of violent aggressions against journalists continue to be alarming, they have increased in the last four years and a worrying context of violence against journalists perseveres in Colombia¹³.

In 2020, 449 aggressions were registered against 632 journalists. FLIP recorded a 10% increase in threats and 40% increase in digital threats compared to 2019. Two journalists were assassinated (Abelardo Liz and Felipe Guevara) in the first case responsibility from the public force is questioned. Both the pressure and hostile environment have escalated to the point of causing 8 displacements and 4 exiles¹⁴; This indicates that the climate for practicing the journalistic profession is far from providing the minimum guarantees for safety and protection, so unfortunately self-censorship can continue to be perceived as a self-protection strategy.

Colombia: Attacks on Press Freedom in 2020



Trends in 2020

- Gender based violence** At least 8 of the aggressions reported by FLIP were related to gender issues coverage, originated in discrimination based on the journalist's gender. Flip reports 4 cases of sexual violence against women journalists. Women journalists suffer differentiated violence even in their workplace, which reflect serious problems of machismo in society: 98% of the journalists surveyed agree that women and LGTBQ + people are the object of specific violence in social media due to their gender identity, 2 out of 10 women stated that they had been victims of sexual violence, 6 out of 10 said they had been victims of gender discrimination in work related environments.¹⁵
- Peaceful protest and surveillance** One of the most affected scenarios is social protests. There, we registered 41 aggressions and 58 victims, out of which 75% of the aggressions are attributable to police abuse. It is of special concern that officials from different State entities are dedicated to intelligence tasks by illegally monitoring activities of journalists. The illegal surveillance activity described would have been targeted at journalists, especially those who investigate possible irregularities or human rights violations from the State security forces. The risk level for journalists in Colombia is so high that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights granted precautionary measures to the journalist who revealed these systematic interceptions.¹⁶
- Access to information during Covid-19** In 2020, 56 aggressions are related to coverage of the pandemic. The foregoing occurred while the press coped with the pandemic, which added a direct biohazard and a risk of indirect censorship. Reporter Sans Frontieres concluded in its annual report, "the pandemic has fueled censorship in Latin America and reporters have had great trouble finding out how governments in the region have handled the public health crisis."

- Responsibility to protect Despite the fact that thousands of millions of pesos are invested in a protection mechanism, it is ineffective and increasingly loses legitimacy, still waiting for the promised reengineering plan. Added to the budget crisis is the crisis in decision-making, hardship in assessing risk levels and streamlining procedures, unjustified delays in the implementation and delivery of protection schemes.
- Impunity on crimes against the press is not overcome, there are structural factors that make this critical situation persist fostering self-censorship, such as the lack of investigation about the line of connection of crimes with the occupation, the lack of diligent investigation and in accordance with inter-American standards for the investigation of crimes against the press.
- Covid – 19 specific issues added to this, the access to official information about the aggressions against the press has been hampered by the actions taken within the framework of the pandemic, therefore the response times on requests for information were doubled, hampering the verification of data versus government data.
- The usability data for SDG 16.10. 1. Methodologic differences, among practices in civil organizations and requirements for the correct measurement of the indicator, it's placed as a precedent the urgent necessity of its harmonization for cleanness of data and adoption of new practices, in order to have results that allow to provide a precise reading about the regional situation to create effective public policies.

Constraints in the process of gathering data for SDG 16.10.1 and the VNR process

- Lack of public and official data Colombia was the first country to include the ODS as the general frame in the formulation of the National Development Plan 2014-2018. The 16th goal appears as a transversal element¹⁷, but it doesn't identify a measure or specific policy in the face of violence against the press as a freedom guarantee. The Attorney's General's Office, the National Police Department and the Protection Unit don't have a unified data base about the aggressions even though that the violence pattern against the press in the context of the armed conflict in Colombia, just as the high rates of impunity, has been recognized at the Inter-American Court of Human Rights OAS.¹⁸
- Lack of channels for participation for civil society in the VNR process While the government included the ODS to the National Development Plan, the Voluntary National Report based principally in official measurement and had no feedback and effective participation from the civil society. The National Administrative Department of Statistics requested information from the FLIP in order to consolidate the measurement of OSD. However, the cooperation expected is limited to the information delivery and this results into a symbolic participation from the civil organizations.

Priority recommendations for improvement of the safety of journalists for Colombia

- To reform the Protection Program (Programa de Protección) and to establish mechanisms and measures that promote protection from a preventive perspective and invest in the creation of an early warning system on risk and violence against the press.
- To train the Attorneys General Office (Fiscalía General) staff and the judges of the Republic so that they know the inter-American and universal standards on the investigation and prosecution of crimes against the press. Ensure the implementation of the judicial orders of regional and national sentences regarding the protection of journalists, as well as widely disseminate the standards of.
- To establish an indicator on access to information by the Attorney General that fulfills the obligation to deliver information by national authorities and publishes information on existing disciplinary processes by the breach of this obligation by public officials.
- To create an intersectoral table in Colombia, with the participation of control bodies, entities in charge of protecting journalists, academia, the media union, journalists, and civil society to analyze sources of risk for journalistic work and establish an action plan.

Priority recommendations for improvement of the VNR process

- To stimulate a broader sense of public ownership of the final objectives and goals, provide the space for dialogue for civil society participation in the RNV.
- To reaffirm commitment to human rights, justice, accountability and transparency, ensuring access to official information to properly monitor the objectives of Goal 16.
- To specifically include journalist safety in the National Development Plan as part of the 2030 Development Agenda and the need for measures to guarantee an environment conducive to freedom of the press and the right to information.
- To produce public statistics from the State - in particular from the Generals Attorneys of the Nation (Fiscalía General de la Nación), the Protection Unit (Unidad de Protección), the Office of the Ombudsman, the Generals Procuracy Office of the Nation and the National Police - so that it produces figures segregated by the office of victims - of journalists - and according to the type of effects on freedom of the press, which are included in the indicator 16.10.1 SDG.
- To train civil organizations on technical aspects of monitoring the SDG by DANE, so as to promote the use of adequate documentation methods so that their information can be used for the monitoring and evaluation of the indicated, according to the methodology of The United Nations.¹⁹

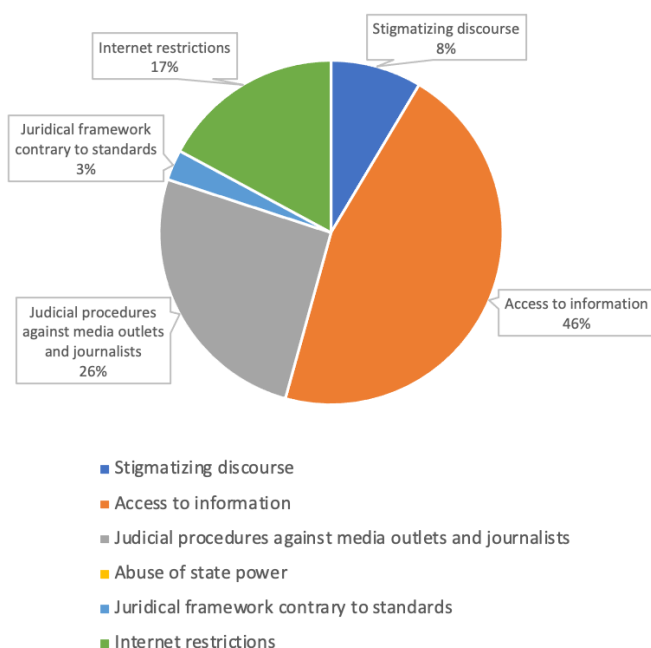
Summary findings on the safety of journalists in Indonesia 2020

The year 2020 marks a new chapter in cases of violence against journalists. The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI) and Legal Press Aid (LBH Pers) recorded 104 cases in 2020. Not only higher than 2019's recorded cases of 53, but this is also the highest number since AJI has monitored cases of violence against journalists more than ten years ago.

The government shows more defense towards criticism, violence against human rights activists increases, transparency deteriorates, and limited public participation goes down. Some observers call this phenomenon "a democratic backsliding"²⁰ which marks the emergence of authoritarianism.²¹ This too has hampered efforts to achieve target 16.10.1 of the SDGs.

The year 2020 will be remembered as a particular year in the history of Indonesia, including by the press. The Covid-19 pandemic, has caused significant impacts on journalists, marked by the closure of the media, layoffs, salary-delays and cuts in wages.

Indonesia: Attacks on Press Freedom in 2020



Trends

- Physical attacks against journalists were the most violent cases in 2020. The incident that contributed the most to cases of violence were the demonstrations against the ratification of the Job Creation Law. Law enforcers acted aggressively toward the demonstrators, arresting and beating them. Also cases of arbitrary detention and restrictions to access the location were recorded while covering these demonstrations.
- Apart from the physical violence, another type of violence against journalists is death threats. Journalists critical of government handling of the Covid-19 crisis or public accountability to the public were threatened on social media and in one case forced to withdraw an article under threat of a revolver.
- Another form of violence that journalists experience is digital attack. According to AJI's data, the digital attacks were carried out in various ways, including exposing the identity of the journalist and spreading it (doxing), because of the news they wrote. Two leading online media, namely Tempo.co and Tirto.id were targeted by attacks on their websites causing temporary shutdown and deletion of critical articles.
- AJI and LBH Pers also recorded at least five cases of violence against women journalists. The perpetrator of violence in three cases was the police. The other two cases were intimidation by a governor and a digital attack on a journalist by a doctor.
- Legal attack against journalists has accelerated using the Criminal Code (KUHP) and Law Number 11 of 2008 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE), that have been used to criminalize journalists, for allegations of defamation, insulting the president, to religious blasphemy.
- Supreme Court Regulation Number 5 of 2020 concerning Trial Protocols and Security in the Court Environment was issued. The Journalist Safety

Committee, a coalition of journalists and civil society organizations, assesses this is an effort to inhibit journalists from carrying out journalistic activities in courtrooms.

- The year 2020 will be remembered as a particular year in the history of Indonesia. The Covid-19 pandemic, has caused significant impacts on journalists, marked by the closure of the media, layoffs, salary-delays and cuts in wages.
- Omission of data in the Government VNR report Since 2018, AJI has submitted the data and recommendations to the Indonesian Government SDG VNR report, particularly to contribute to component 16.10.01. Unfortunately, the Government did not relate the Civil Society data submissions in the final version of the report presented at earlier UN HPFL meetings.

The trends reported have adversely affected the way journalists and the media carry out their function to provide the public with information and hold the government to account. The high number of cases of violence against journalists is not a stand-alone issue. Issues pertaining to eradication of corruption, law enforcement, democracy or press freedom were not mentioned by President Jokowi during his inaugural speech in 2019.²²

Recommendations on the VNR process

- Currently, most of the violence against journalists' cases in Indonesia remain unresolved. Some have been legally reported, but it would often stop at the police—no follow-up after. For cases of violence

against journalists involving police officers, it is still far from enforcing the Law. And, when the case involves TNI officers, the legal process continues until military courts sentence the perpetrators of violence. The challenge here is how the spirit of one corps does not prevent the police from enforcing the Law, how the Indonesian Government puts equal treatment related to any violent perpetrator.

- Thus, we recommended the Indonesian Government to be more concerned with the settlement of cases on violence against the journalist. The fulfillment will strengthen the safety protection to the journalist, for working without being interfered, frightened and making the journalist be a journalist.
- AJI also suggested the Indonesian Government include journalists and media violence in the SDG VNR of Indonesia. This year, AJI has submitted the data and recommendation to the VNR report through The Ministry of National Planning and Development and provided a Civil Society shadow report for this year's HLPE. In previous years the data on journalist safety were not included in the government submission to the UN High Level Political Forum.
- It will support the Indonesian Government to fulfill the achievement of the SDG indicator, particularly component 16.10. It will raise public awareness and understanding of the act that violated and harmed social justice in Indonesia. The implementation of SDG 16.10.1 starts with an acknowledgement of the data and statistics and trends and the government focus on addressing shortcomings.

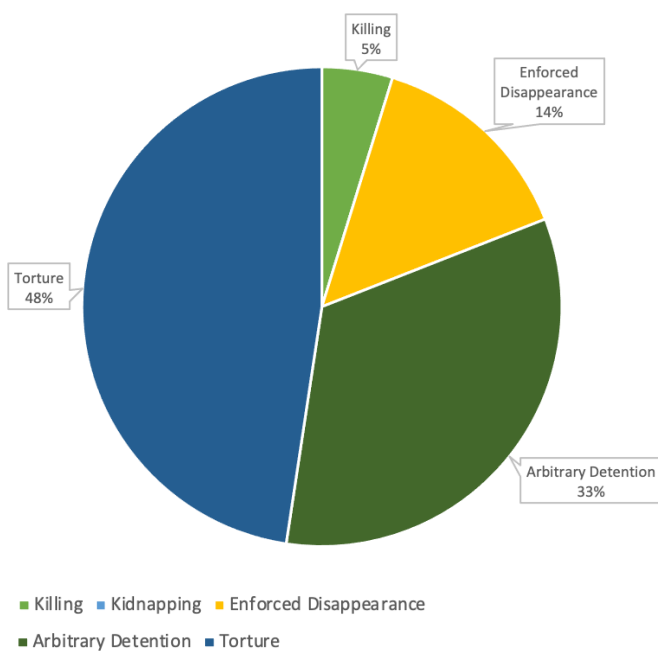
Summary findings on the safety of journalists in Pakistan in 2020

In 2020, Pakistan Press Foundation recorded one murder of a journalist, three enforced disappearances, seven incidents of arbitrary detention, ten incidents of torture, eighteen government directives regarding content issued including bans, four instances of legal action against media, four incidents of internet restrictions and four incidents of legislative action.

In 2020, attempts to limit free speech online particularly on social media platforms picked up intensity, changes of rules as well as other legal barriers to free expression being enacted particularly when it came to freedom of expression online.

COVID-19 developed into a serious threat to the media in Pakistan — from the basic safety and well-being of journalists to financial constraints and challenges to the explicit attempts to control the nature of content and attacks on those covering the pandemic.

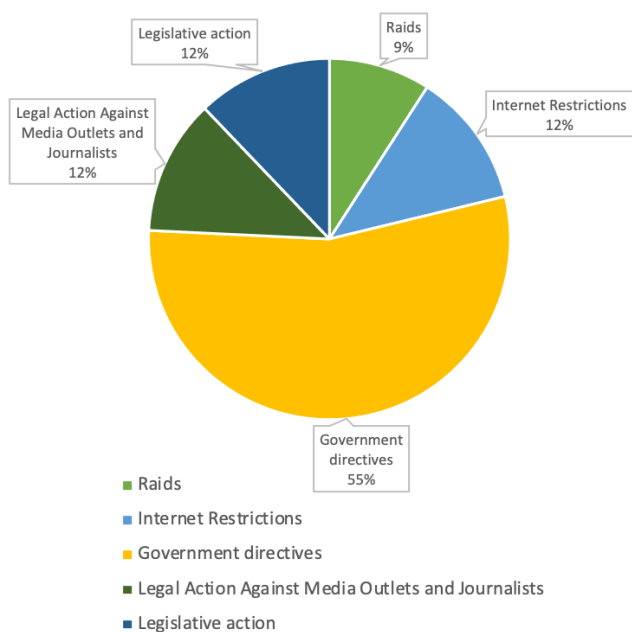
Pakistan: Attacks on Press Freedom in 2020



Trends

- As physical attacks against the media continued to threaten the lives and safety of journalists, 2020 also witnessed more coercive techniques including extra-legal abductions and the registration of criminal cases against media workers resulting in widespread practice self-censorship in Pakistani media.
- In the online sphere, attacks on free expression also took on a gendered angle with women journalists being the specific targets of smear campaigns, trolling and abuse online. This was escalated in light of COVID-19, as the world increasingly went online to gather and disseminate information in a time of lockdowns and restrictions to physical movement.
- A more troubling development during the year were at least three instances of enforced disappearance of media workers. Enforced disappearances are particularly terrifying because of the lack of accountability for those who perpetrated these attacks as well as the chilling effect on the media fraternity as a whole.
- The spread of COVID-19 created a new challenge for journalists in Pakistan. In 2020, Pakistan Press Foundation recorded at least eight deaths of media workers in Pakistan due to the coronavirus and many others tested positive. Many reporters lacked protective gear while continuing to cover the news for their audiences.

Pakistan: Other Harmful Acts in 2020



- The impact was also felt in terms of restrictions and attacks on free expression that the pandemic gave birth to. In at least two instances, journalists were arrested for their coverage of the pandemic were reported in 2020. While the media must follow the appropriate ethics, this results in a sanitized, limited and more government narrative-driven rhetoric and is likely to be missing important developments.
- At a broader media level, the coronavirus also created a financial struggle for the media in Pakistan. As advertising revenues of media houses fell due to the economic impact of COVID-19, they became more dependent on government advertising.
- In spite of the constitutional guarantees for press freedom judicial authorities have failed to prosecute and follow up on all cases of threats made against journalists, adding to the prevalence of impunity for violence against journalists.

Regarding the VNR process in Pakistan

- Acts of intimidation are able to succeed in their objective of silencing critical voices thus completely undermining the Target 16.10 of the SDG that calls for the public's access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms.

- It should be noted that no official or unofficial inclusion of Civil Society Organizations and/or citizen participation was organized by the Government of Pakistan in order to prepare for the VNR process, thus limiting the effect and impact of the UN agenda to achieve its goals.

Recommendations by PPF on the safety of journalists:

- Effective national and provincial legislations for protection of journalists and media practitioners must be enacted without any delay. While it is positive that the provincial assembly of Sindh has passed the *Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Bill 2021*, the federal *Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Bill 2021* contains a number of weak and negative clauses that need to be amended or removed.
- There should be prompt and effective consultations with media stakeholders so that the federal *Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Bill 2021* is improved and then be approved at the earliest by the National Assembly. There is also need for Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, as well as Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir, would follow suit and enact similar laws similar to Sindh's Protection of Journalists and Other Media Practitioners Bill 2021 without any delay.
- Federal and provincial governments in Pakistan should start implementing recommendations of UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and produce annual progress reports. Each attack on a journalist should be investigated and prosecuted by the authorities in order to reduce impunity in crimes against journalists.
- Regarding Covid-19, the onus lies on media outlets and government bodies in ensuring that media workers are provided with the necessary personal protective equipment, provided routine testing, and assisted in creating the safest possible way to work under such circumstances.

Recommendations on the VNR process

- In order to involve civil society in the voluntary national review process, the government should work with the main civil society organizations in different aspects of SDG 16.10.1 such as those working on press freedom, internet freedom, digital rights, and cyber security.

The State of Press Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Africa

“PUBLIC TRUST AND LEGAL MEASURES AGAINST JOURNALISTS THREATEN LIVELIHOODS OF JOURNALISTS IN AFRICA AS RESULT OF COVID-19”

Free press is critical for an effective response to health and other crises like the Covid-19 pandemic. Media is critical in helping people access lifesaving information important to help them prevent infections or safely give care to their loved ones who have been infected by the deadly virus. Free press is also important in shining the light on resources appropriated to fight the pandemic with a view of ensuring accountable use. It should be recalled that in several countries, resources allocated to fight the Covid-19 pandemic have been misappropriated. Even commitments for transparency under IMF and World Bank covid-19 response support haven't been implemented²³.

Important as this may be, during the covid-19 pandemic in Africa, we have seen rising cases of attacks and restrictions on media freedom, affecting peoples' access to accurate and important information. These have taken various forms:

Legal measures

One of the immediate impacts of the covid-19 pandemic on the safety of journalists is the criminalization of speech by several African governments. Governments introduced measures and legislation that criminalize the spread of information about the pandemic. One of the most notorious measures which cut across the globe was the restriction on freedom of movement which limited the ability of journalists to play their watch-dog role and facilitate the dissemination of information.

In Nigeria for example, Lagos State passed the Infectious Diseases (Emergency Prevention) Regulations 2020 which in Section 2.8 provides that, *“Any person who fails to comply with a restriction or prohibition order, or who provides false or misleading information intentionally or recklessly, or obstructs the carrying out of duties under the Regulation, or does anything contrary to the Regulations, shall be liable to fine or imprisonment or to both...”*²⁴

Other states in Nigeria such as the Ebonyi State also adopted and enforce similar legislations²⁵.

In Ethiopia, the government passed the Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation no 118/2020, which took effect on March 23 2020²⁶. The law contains an overbroad definition of disinformation that provides authorities with excessive discretion to declare unpopular or controversial opinions “false.” The law also arbitrarily imposes harsher penalties for social media users who have more than 5,000 followers.

In Egypt, apart from being the world's biggest jailers of journalists, the country has experienced a sweeping crackdown on the media.

Egypt, reporting on the Coronavirus continues to be increasingly difficult, as the country has criminalized spreading “false news” about the pandemic. Accusations of “fake news” are used as grounds for blocking access to websites and webpages and for withdrawing accreditation. Crack down on journalists at a time when reporting on COVID-19 is crucial for maintaining public health greatly escalated.

Restriction of movement

Restriction of movement was one other mechanism that endangered the freedom and safety of journalists during the pandemic. For example, Uganda adopted measures to restrict movement of persons including journalists. In the first lockdown that took effect between March 18 to June 5, 2020, people were not allowed to move. Journalists were not considered essential workers and as such they were not given movement permits, affecting their ability to work and denying people of access to information from independent sources²⁷.

During the first phase of the pandemic, Rwanda implemented drastic measures against the media too. For example, on March 21, 2020, Rwanda implemented COVID-19 response measures that included banning all “unnecessary movement,” with the exception of essential services which unfortunately did not include journalists²⁸. In Nigeria, the president's office drastically reduced the number of journalists accredited to cover press conferences.

By restricting the free movement and operation of journalists, some governments are withholding up to date, relevant, and independent information on COVID-19 from the public. Other countries suffer from poor information infrastructures where, despite good intentions, news from independent media, or even information from the government, does not reach high risk groups. This is true for Sudan, Ethiopia and Burkina Faso, where remote areas and conflict zones are deprived of information on prevention and of advice on health.

Economic impacts

One of the adverse effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the safety of journalists took an economic dimension; at the time their work is more important than ever. Due to low business, media houses were forced to downsize on their employees by terminating their contracts or sending them on forced leave. In normal times, reporters at the Nigerian Independent radio network earned the equivalent of around \$100 a month. Their pay was however slashed and the media house asked a third of its staff to stay at home. In Kenya, majority of mainstream media houses, announced pay cuts of between 5% to 30%, citing economic challenges brought about by the global pandemic. In Uganda, and Kenya, one of the largest media outlet, the Daily Nation downsized staff significantly. The state-owned media outlet, the New Vision in Uganda followed suit. In Uganda, there were allegations that journalists who were perceived to be independent were targeted for termination.

Physical threats

Since the emergence of COVID-19, the safety of journalists has been under threat, especially their physical wellbeing. Many have been, assaulted, unlawfully detained and in worst case scenarios tortured to death for doing their work. Independent investigative journalists and those critical of government measures in containing the spread of the virus have been the victims. In Uganda for example, Rumanzi, a reporter and operations manager at Freedom Radio was in April 2020 slapped in the face by the Resident District Commissioner without explanation and was forced into a waiting vehicle where he was taken to an unknown destination outside Kabale town²⁹. He was further beaten for what they called negative coverage of the government. He was also accused of giving voice to the opposition politician Kizza Besigye who appeared on his show. Arinaitwe Emmanuel Kajungu of Radio Ankole was hospitalized following an assault by security personnel on his way from work.³⁰

Best practices

Despite these challenges, we have seen some good practices aimed at promoting the safety of journalists. In Zimbabwe and Romania, after successful lobby efforts by the local civil society, the profession of journalism was acknowledged as a vital profession. Consequently, journalists were prioritized in the national vaccination strategy.

1. Although income streams have declined for almost all independent media houses, some have seen their audience increase. For instance in Uganda NBS Uganda and NTV experienced growth in their viewership online as people sought for accurate reporting on the pandemic.
2. Many governments adopted the use of media to disseminate information on prevention measures on COVID-19.

Recommendations

- Safety and security of journalists during health crises is critical for public access to information is critical for effective response yet curfew and other control measures have exposed them to risk. Journalists should be considered essential workers during pandemic and curfews.
- Independent journalists have been targeted for retrenchment during the pandemic, fueling censorship and economic insecurity. Governments should recognize independent media as important partners in the fight against Covid-19 pandemic. Rather than target them for victimization and economic sabotage, governments should include them in various welfare programmes to assist people affected by the pandemic.
- UNESCO and other stakeholders should strengthen monitoring and reporting on the safety and security of journalists during the covid-19 pandemic.

Free, independent and pluralistic media play an indispensable role in informing the public during the ongoing crisis. Everyone has the right to comprehensible, accessible, timely and reliable information concerning the nature and level of the threat COVID-19 poses to their health, allowing them to follow evidence-based guidance on how to stay safe. Access to information is the difference between life and death.

The State of Press Freedom and Safety of Journalists in South Asia

The South Asia region is witnessing an unprecedented onslaught on media freedom. Journalists and media organizations are faced with a multitude of challenges. A climate of hatred towards journalists and media outlets is being fostered by political parties in power in the region. Objective and critical journalism is frowned upon by those in power, who use social media, cutting edge information technology and financial constraints to undermine press freedom.

Media pluralism has witnessed a marked decline amidst increasing arrests, online attacks, smear campaigns and legal actions against independent media organizations and individual journalists, who criticize political leaders and governments. Equally alarming is the fact that these democratically elected governments are not only failing to uphold press freedom and to protect journalists but have also enacted legislation or resorted to other means of coercion to stifle independent media and critical journalists³¹. Media organizations that do not toe the official line are being starved of government advertising revenue and the private sector is under pressure to withhold advertisements to these outlets³².

Over the years, several journalists have been killed in the region with complete impunity³³. Attacks on journalists are a daily occurrence. The situation is so grave that journalists and editors have resorted to self-censorship in these countries.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the assault on press freedom globally and the South Asia region is no exception. According to the IPI COVID-19 Press Freedom Tracker³⁴, nearly 200 violations linked to the pandemic have been reported from the Asia-Pacific region, of which 107 are from four South Asian countries: Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan³⁵. As many as 71 journalists have faced arrests and charges related to their coverage of the pandemic and its consequences, while 32 cases of physical attacks and verbal threats have been reported from these countries.

Since the beginning of 2021, three journalists have been killed, 14 arrested and 32 targeted in attacks across the region. Another 28 journalists have had criminal cases filed against them, with possible threat

of arrest and prosecution under criminal laws the provide for stringent punishment, as governments try to clamp down on critical reporting and social media posts by journalists³⁶.

The actions by governments in these countries constitute a major obstruction to the free flow of independent news, which is all the more important during an unprecedented health crisis. Informing the public about vital measures to contain the virus, as well as maintaining an open dialogue and debate on the adequacy of those measures, are essential for winning public confidence to deal effectively with the pandemic.

Governments in South Asia are extremely sensitive and averse to international pressure on issues of human rights and press freedom, and in fact, view such interventions as interference in their domestic affairs.

All South Asian countries are States parties to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)³⁷ and have ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)³⁸, and therefore duty bound to uphold and protect freedom of expression and media freedom. However, actions by governments undermine these international norms and severely infringe upon freedom of expression and press freedom.

Furthermore, all these countries have adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and are obliged to take relevant steps to attain these goals, including SDG 16 target 10, which requires Member States to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms in accordance with national legislation and international agreements³⁹. According to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, journalists and human rights defenders have become targets of violent attacks and that there has been a marked rise in widespread hostile rhetoric directed at the media and journalists⁴⁰.

The crackdown on the freedom of expression in South Asia poses a major challenge to attaining the SDGs and needs to be addressed urgently through coordinated action by the international community.

State of press freedom and attacks on journalists in South Asia

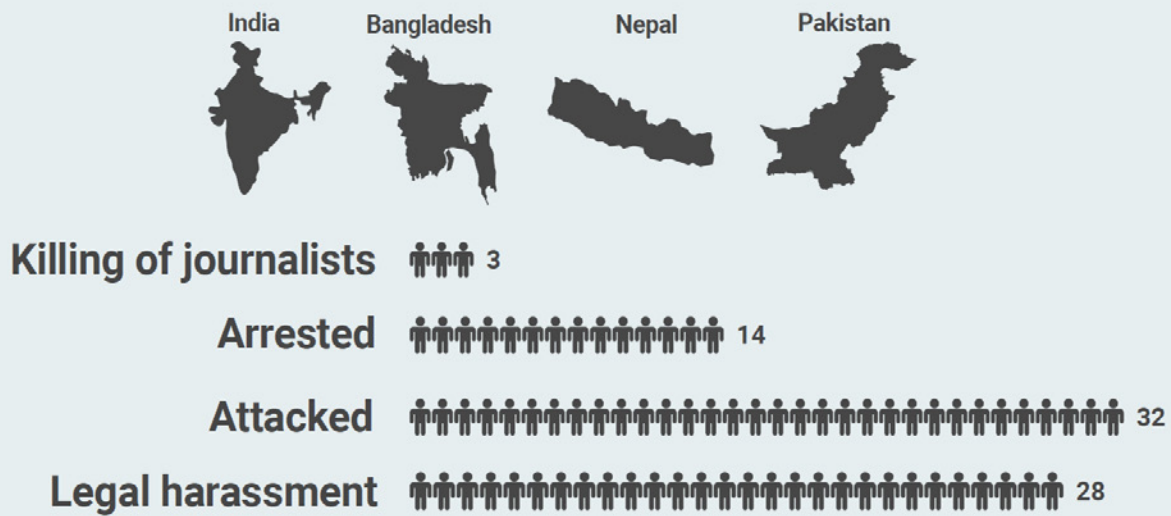


Figure: Data on press freedom violations and attacks on journalists in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan between January and June 15, 2021

Recommendations to UN bodies and Governments involved in South Asia

On safety of journalists

- Governments in South Asia should end the arrest, intimidation, and legal and financial harassment of journalists and independent media organizations. Independent media organizations should not be denied advertisement revenue by governments.
- Enable implementation of the national legislations and mechanisms for press freedom and safety of journalists. The UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists urges Member States to develop legislation and mechanisms guaranteeing freedom of expression and information.
- Governments in South Asia should do more to speedily investigate and prosecute crimes against journalists. Most murders of journalists in the region have remained unsolved.

On access to information

- Repeal laws that suppress press freedom and the ability of journalists to report independently. The Digital Security Act in Bangladesh, the sedition laws and the new Information Technology rules in India, Pakistan’s proposed ordinance to create a new media regulatory body, the new laws proposed in Nepal and the application of anti-terrorism laws in Sri Lanka have a chilling effect on media freedom.

On the VNR process

- Take serious note of the stifling press freedom environment and attacks on journalists in South Asian countries. The increasing threat to the safety of journalists is a major impediment to attaining not just SDG 16 but all 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Without the informed participation of citizens, countries cannot fulfil their commitment to achieving SDGs. A lively public debate and the empowerment of citizens through access to information are essential to achieving the SDGs. Most governments are not reporting on SDG 16.10 and a call to action to member states to do more is urgent.

A call on member states engaged in the SDG agenda and the Group of Friends of Safety

- Engage with governments in South Asia through diplomatic channels to ensure the safety of journalists and press freedom. South Asian countries are sensitive to criticism by the international community, member states should use diplomatic channels to convey their concerns over curbs on press freedom and threats to journalists.
- Support journalists' bodies, press freedom groups and civil society organizations to promote media freedom and the safety of journalists. They are key stakeholders in these countries.
- The states involved in the group of safety of journalists should support development and implementation of national mechanisms for the safety of journalists through diplomatic and capacity building measures, in collaboration with UNESCO and civil society organizations.

Notes

1. <https://undocs.org/A/CONF.234/L.6>
2. https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/un-plan-on-safety-journalists_en.pdf
3. <https://www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/?issue=5>
4. <https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>
5. IPI Covid-19 Tracker, consulted as March 29th 2021 <https://ipi.media/covid19-media-freedom-monitoring/>
6. MFRR report
7. <https://agora.legal/articles/Doklad-Mezhdunarodnoi-Agory-%C2%ABEpidemiya-feikov-borba-s-koronavirusom-kak/30>
8. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/22/dr-congo-authorities-founding-rights>
9. <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2020/10/16/the-netherlands-public-broadcaster-nos-removes-logo-from-vehicles-following-increased-attacks-against-journalists/>
10. <https://pressemblem.ch/pec-news.shtml>
11. Beijing +25 –The 5th Review of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the EU Member States’, European Institute for Gender Equality, 22 November 2019, page 111.
12. <https://www.mediasupport.org/covid19/>
13. See FLIP VNR report on the detail and analysis of the documentation of attacks against the press in 2020.
14. FLIPs record for the period between January 1 and December 31, 2020. Under-registration is expected since it is known that journalists do not always report attacks. In some regions there are no attacks since journalists avoid covering certain topics.
15. For gender specific data see FLIP. Pages (2020).Pag. 56-57.
16. http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2021/res_6-2021_mc-207-20_co.pdf
17. Artículos 1 y 2 de la Ley 1955 de 2019. También ver: <https://colaboracion.dnp.gov.co/CDT/Prensa/Resumen-PND2018-2022-final.pdf>
18. I / A Court HR. Case of Carvajal Carvajal et al. V. Colombia. Judgment of March 13, 2018. merits, reparations and costs. URL: https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/canes/articulos/seriec_352_esp.pdf
19. Actualmente la Procuraduría General de la Nación cuenta con el Índice de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información - ITA, que mide exclusivamente el grado de cumplimiento de las obligaciones de publicar o ‘Transparentar’ su información derivadas de la Ley 1712 de 2014, Ley de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información Pública. cfr. <https://www.procuraduria.gov.co/portal/ITA.page>
20. Beritasatu.com, Indonesia is considered to be experiencing democratic backsliding, 16 August 2020.
21. Kompas.com, LP3ES: Democratic Backsliding, Government Moves towards Authoritarianism, 17 November 2020.
22. BBC Indonesia, President Jokowi’s Inauguration Address: ‘Three important things that were not raised’, 21 October 2019.
23. Implementation of IMF commitments <https://www.open-contracting.org/resources/integrity-in-imf-covid-19-financing/> July 5, 2021
24. Infectious Diseases (Emergency Prevention) Regulations 2020 <https://covidlawlab.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Infectious-Diseases-Regulations-2020.pdf> accessed on July 5, 2021
25. Ebonyi State COVID-19, Other Infectious Diseases Emergency Prevention <https://guardian.ng/news/umahi-signs-covid-19-other-infectious-diseases-emergency-prevention-bill-into-law/>
26. Ethiopia Hate Speech and Disinformation Prevention and Suppression Proclamation <https://chilot.me/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/HATE-SPEECH-AND-DISINFORMATION-PREVENTION-AND-SUPPRESSION-PROCLAMATION.pdf> accessed on July 5, 2021
27. Uganda Covid-19 lockdown <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/328101/uganda-authorities-announce-14-day-nationwide-lockdown-april-1-update-3> accessed on July 5, 2021
28. Rwanda Covid-19 enhanced measures <https://www.africanews.com/2020/03/22/rwanda-update-on-covid-19-coronavirus-22-march-2020/> accessed on July 5, 2021
29. Journalist beaten https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?id=887517484648891&story_fbid=280648852751765 accessed on July 5, 2021
30. Radio Ankole Journalist beaten and hospitalised <https://www.watchdoguganda.com/news/20210625/116277/ntungamo-journalist-beaten-to-pulp-by-security-operatives-during-curfew-hospitalized.html> accessed on July 6, 2021
31. Global press freedom crackdown widened in 2019. Available at <https://ipi.media/global-press-freedom-crackdown-widened-in-2019/>
32. Modi government freezes ads placed in three Indian newspaper groups. Available at <https://in.reuters.com/article/india-media/modi-government-freezes-ads-placed-in-three-indian-newspaper-groups-idINKCN1TT1R6>
33. IPI Death Watch data. For more, see <https://ipi.media/programmes/death-watch/>
34. IPI has been tracking press freedom violations since the onset of the pandemic. For more see <https://ipi.media/covid19/>
35. COVID-19 pandemic severely undermined press freedom in South Asia. For more see <https://ipi.media/covid-19-pandemic-severely-undermined-press-freedom-in-south-asia/>
36. SOUTH ASIA MEDIA FREEDOM: CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION – FACTSHEETS. For more see <https://ipi.media/covering-and-investigating-attacks-against-journalists-in-south-asia-a-cross-border-cooperation/data-analysis-state-of-press-freedom-and-attacks-on-journalists-in-south-asia/>
37. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For more see <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
38. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. For more see <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
39. Sustainable Development Goal 16. For more see <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>
40. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020. For more see <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/goal-16/>