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SERBIA

Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety Index 2025

Authors
Marija Babić and Rade Đurić



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About the Project

BACKGROUND OF THE INDICATORS

Journalists' associations from the Western Balkan countries have established the [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net) platform, with the support of the European Commission,¹ in order to jointly monitor media legislation and practice in their countries and to engage in improving the legal and institutional environment in which journalists and other media professionals work. Each year, based on a carefully designed methodology,² partners from [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net) conduct advocacy research that provides journalists' associations with reliable, relevant, and fact-based data on the main problems and obstacles in the implementation of EU standards in the field of media and journalists' freedoms and safety in the Western Balkans. The results of this advocacy research shape the partner studies, providing them with new evidence and examples, and strengthening their advocacy position.

The first qualitative research tool – *Indicators on the level of media freedom and journalists' safety*, was first developed in 2016 and gradually fine-tuned over the years. It is composed of three groups of indicators: (A) Legal protection, (B) Journalists' position in the newsroom, and (C) Journalists' safety. Based on this monitoring tool, a total of seven assessments were published, the last one is from 2024.

The quantitative research tool – *Journalists' Safety Index*, was developed in 2020 and tested in 2021. It is designed to "measure"

1 In December 2022, the European Commission approved a new three-year cycle of the platform [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net), which is a continuation of the previous two phases: the project Western Balkan's Regional Platform for advocating media freedom and journalists' safety (January 2016 – December 2018) and [Safejournalist.net](https://safejournalist.net) (February 2020 – March 2023). The main objective of the project is to empower and strengthen the role of the national journalists' associations, members of the Platform [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net), to become effective and accountable independent actors in advocating and creating relevant media policies in their countries: Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (IJAS), Association of BH Journalists (BHJ), Croatian Journalists Association (CJA), Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK), Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) and the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro (TUMM). The project is funded under the EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023 (IPA III).

2 The advocacy research is designed and coordinated by Snežana Trpevska and Igor Micevski, research fellows of the Research Institute on Social Development RESIS, from North Macedonia (www.resis.mk).

the changes in the environment that have direct or indirect impact on how safe journalists and other media actors feel when practicing their profession. It is composed of four groups of indicators: (1) Legal and Organisational Environment, (2) Due Prevention, (3) Due Process, and (4) Actual Safety. Based on this tool, a total of three research cycles were implemented: 2020 (pilot project), 2021 and 2022.

Since 2023, Safejournalists.net platform combines the two (qualitative and quantitative) research methodologies i.e. tools into one single advocacy research project – Indicators on the level of media freedom and Journalists' Safety Index. The platform monitors the situation in seven countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo³ and Serbia.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The entire research process is divided into two phases: in the *first phase*, data are collected for all qualitative indicators – both for media freedoms and for the safety of journalists, while in the *second phase*, the qualitative indicators for the safety of journalists are converted into quantitative ones and the procedure of scoring and calculation of the Journalists' Safety Index is carried out.

A range of various research methods were applied to collect and analyse data related to each specific qualitative indicator:

- review of studies, analyses, research reports, policy papers, strategies and other documents;
- qualitative analysis of legal documents;
- retrieval and analysis of information published on the websites of public institutions and other organisations and bodies;
- retrieval and analysis of press releases, announcements and other information produced by professional organisations;
- secondary data collected by journalists' associations;
- in-depth-interviews with experts, journalists, policy makers etc.;
- focus groups with journalists, and;
- surveys with journalists (in some of the countries).

At the national level, advocacy research is conducted by national researchers who collect data and write narrative reports, which are then reviewed by local media and legal experts and the lead researcher. In Serbia, the Independent Journalists'

3 This name is without prejudice to the status and in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and the opinion of the Tribunal on the Declaration and Independence of Kosovo.

Association of Serbia appointed Marija Babić and Rade Djurić as national researchers, and Prof. Jelena Kleut as media expert and public prosecutor Lidija Komlen Nikolić as legal expert.

QUALITATIVE INDICATORS ON THE LEVEL OF MEDIA FREEDOM AND JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

The following table presents all qualitative indicators for the level of media freedom and safety of journalists, divided into three areas. These qualitative indicators are presented in descriptive or narrative form. The indicators used in the conceptual framework for the Journalists' Safety Index are shaded in red in the table.

Overview of all qualitative indicators (Indicators on the level of media freedom and journalists' safety)

A. Legal safeguards and their implementation	B. Journalists' position in the newsrooms	C. Journalists' safety
A.1 Basic guarantees for media and journalists' freedom and their application in practice	B.1 The job positions of journalists are stable and protected at the workplace	C.1 Journalists and media actors have access to immediate and effective protective measures
A.2 Independence and efficiency of the regulatory authority	B.2 Editorial independence in the private media	C.2 Journalists and other media actors have access to special protection or safety mechanisms
A.3 Independence and autonomy of the public service media	B.3 Editorial independence in the public service broadcasters	C.3 Female journalists have access to legal measures and support mechanisms when faced with gender-based threats, harassment or violence
A.4 Financial support to quality journalism and media content of public interest	B.4 Editorial independence in the not-for-profit media sector	C.4 Practice of regular public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media has been established
A.5 State advertising in the private media sector	B.5 Freedom of journalists in the news production process	C.5 Police authorities are sensitive to journalists' protection issue
A.6 Legal provisions related to defamation and their application do not create a chilling effect on journalists and the media	B.6 Working position of women journalists	C.6 Specialised units/officers are equipped with expertise for investigating attacks and violence against journalists
A.7 Other laws are enforced objectively and allow journalists and other media actors to work freely and safely		C.7 Investigations of serious physical attacks on journalists and other media actors are carried out efficiently (independently, thoroughly and promptly)
A.8 Confidentiality of journalists' sources is guaranteed in the legislation and respected by the authorities		C.8 Journalists and other media actors are efficiently protected from various forms of online harassment
A.9 Journalists are free to pursuit their profession and to establish, join and participate in their associations		C.9 Investigations of all types of attacks and violence against journalists and other media actors are carried out transparently
A.10 Right to access official documents and information		C.10 Quality statistics collection systems established by state authorities to stem impunity
		C.11 Non-physical threats and harassments
		C.12 Threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists
		C.13 Actual attacks
		C.14 Threats and attacks on media outlets and journalists' associations

JOURNALISTS' SAFETY INDEX

Taking into consideration the standards and recommendations established by the Council of Europe and other international organisations, the concept of "journalists' safety"⁴ was operationally defined by considering the following four dimensions:

- I. **Legal and Organisational Environment** – the existence and implementation of legal safeguards relevant for the safety of journalists.
- II. **Due Prevention** – the existence and implementation of a range of preventative measures that have direct effects on journalists' protection and safety
- III. **Due Process** – the behaviour of state institutions and public officials towards journalists and the efficiency of the criminal and civil justice system concerning the investigations of threats and acts of violence against journalists.
- IV. **Actual Safety** – incidents and instances of various forms of threats and acts of violence against journalists and media.

The table below presents the four dimensions and indicators that make up the theoretical model of "journalists' safety" concept. Data for all these indicators were collected in the first phase of the research, and in the second phase, based on the collected research evidence, nine members of the Advisory Panel from each of the countries⁵ assessed the situation and assigned scores for each of the 19 indicators:

Overview of indicators related to the Journalists' Safety Index

I. Legal and Organisational Environment	II. Due Prevention	III. Due Process	IV. Actual Safety
1.1 Legal provisions related to defamation and their application do not create a chilling effect on journalists and the media	2.1 Journalists and media actors have access to immediate and effective protective measures	3.1 Specialised units/officers are equipped with expertise for investigating attacks and violence against journalists	4.1 Non-physical threats and harassments
1.2 Confidentiality of journalists' sources is guaranteed in the legislation and respected by the authorities	2.2 Journalists and other media actors have access to special protection or safety mechanisms	3.2 Investigations of serious physical attacks on journalists and other media actors are carried out efficiently	4.2 c
1.3 Other laws are enforced objectively and allow journalists and other media actors to work freely and safely	2.3 Female journalists have access to legal measures and support mechanisms	3.3 Journalists and other media actors are efficiently protected from various forms of online harassment	4.3 Actual attacks
1.4 Journalists are free to pursue their profession and to establish, join and participate in their associations	2.4 Practice of regular public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media	3.4 Investigations of all types of attacks and violence against journalists and other media actors are carried out transparently	4.4 Threats and attacks on media outlets and journalists' associations

4 Researchers from the RESIS Institute (www.resis.mk), Snežana Trpevska, Igor Micevski and Ljubinka Popovska Toševa developed the conceptual and methodological framework for the Index and the model for its aggregation, weighting and calculation.

5 Members of the Advisory panel in Serbia were: Sanja Petrov, Isidora Kovačević, Bojana Jovanović, Ljiljana Stojanović, Kristina Todorović, Nina Nicović, Mladen Savatović, Marko Miletić and Predrag Simonović.

I. Legal and Organisational Environment	II. Due Prevention	III. Due Process	IV. Actual Safety
1.5 The job positions of journalists are stable and protected at the workplace	2.5 Police authorities are sensitive to journalists' protection issue	3.5 Quality statistics collection systems established by state authorities to stem impunity	

Note for Serbian language version: Wherever gender-specific terms are used in this report, they refer to both genders, unless explicitly stated otherwise. This is done to ensure readability and is by no means intended to cause offense or promote sexism.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

LPIM – Law on Public Information and Media

LEM – Law on Electronic Media

REM – Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media

LIA – Law on Internal Affairs

LA – Law on Advertising

PMS – Public Media Service

RTS – Radio Television of Serbia

RTV – Radio Television of Vojvodina

Mol – Ministry of the Interior

BIA – Security Information Agency

LFAl – Law on Free Access to Information

RSF – Reporters Without Borders

AVMS Directive – Audiovisual Media Services Directive

SPPO – Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office

PPO – Public Prosecutor's Offices

CC – Criminal Code

CPC – Criminal Procedure Code

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

EU – European Union

SLAPP – Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation

Introduction

Serbia in 2025 can be viewed as a society at a “turning point”, marked by intense social instability, strong civic resistance, and the erosion of civil rights. The dominance of a single political option, the collapse of institutions, and the immense distrust of citizens in them have led to the complete breakdown of a system that has been showing weaknesses for years. The achieved level of rights and freedoms is being undermined, and in some cases, collapsed and restricted through legislative amendments and the introduction of inadequate solutions. The year was marked by the total collapse of the principle of separation of powers, the violation of legal and constitutional authorities by the highest state officials, and the interference of, primarily, the President of the Republic in the work of the executive and judicial branches of government. In this manner, institutions are weakened and lose their role, which is particularly visible in the judiciary. In 2025, the actions of certain institutions, which ought to be independent, were particularly visible in serving the interests of the ruling regime and the executive power.

The use and abuse of legal mechanisms through the prosecution of various criminal offences against the constitutional order against citizens and students who expressed their dissatisfaction at protests raises the question of their potential abuse through prolonged detention, slow court proceedings, and frequent postponements of hearings. Particularly concerning is the conduct of the police, very often exceeding their authority, and in some cases, involving highly brutal attacks on journalists, students, and demonstrators. Inadequate and unlawful police conduct was also demonstrated toward journalists, where in a large number of cases they failed to react to attacks on them despite being present, but also through direct attacks on journalists while reporting from events of public interest.

The human rights situation over the past year has been utterly deplorable. The state did nothing to protect human rights, and individual institutions directly participated in their erosion. The year was marked,

among other things, by repression, excessive force by the police, an absence of accountability, the dominance of the executive branch and its influence on the judiciary, as well as the restriction of freedom of assembly and the inability to protect participants of public gatherings. A trend of weakening the rule of law is observed, along with the violation of media freedoms, the limited scope of the fight against corruption, and the lack of effective mechanisms for controlling the executive power.⁶

Despite constitutional and legal guarantees of freedom of expression and media freedom, the situation in 2025 drastically worsened. Deterioration was recorded in all areas, primarily regarding the safety of journalists, various forms of media pressure, the inadequate distribution of state funds, the absence of an independent regulator and unlawful procedures for electing members of the REM Council, the complete collapse of professional standards by pro-government media, and the impact of disinformation and propaganda. These are just some of the problems encountered over the past year. The collapse of media freedoms has been highlighted in various reports by international institutions and organisations.

The European Commission report, although stating that Serbia has achieved some level of preparation in the area of freedom of expression, nevertheless points out that there has been backsliding because the environment for journalists, media professionals, and outlets seriously worsened. The key recommendations that have been highlighted as priorities for years are: the adequate implementation of media laws, the independence of the regulatory body, strengthening the protection and safety of journalists, the transparent and fair co-financing of media content in the public interest, as well as full transparency of media ownership and advertising. Furthermore, political and economic influences on the media and editorial policy, as well as SLAPP lawsuits, are highlighted. Negative statements by public officials regarding the work of journalists and the negative effect of such actions on freedom of expression are particularly emphasised.⁷

The Freedom House report⁸ recorded a decline, and Serbia still falls into the category of partly free states. It is pointed out that the ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) has gradually eroded political rights and civil liberties, exerting pressure on independent media, the political opposition, and civil society organisations. The media environment in Serbia is characterised by systemic political and economic pressures, including threats from government representatives, influence on editorial policy through funding and advertising, as well as regulatory weaknesses that call into question media independence and pluralism. Additionally, journalists and independent media are exposed to intimidation, spyware, smear campaigns, and various forms of institutional pressure.

6 Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, [Human Rights in Serbia – Protests 2025](#), 2026.

7 European Commission, [Serbia 2025 Report](#), November 2025, pp. 7–8.

8 Freedom House [Freedom in the World 2025: Serbia Country Report](#).

The Reporters Without Borders report⁹ emphasises that journalists are exposed to political pressure, and crimes committed against them remain unpunished. Journalists work in a difficult environment where they do not feel safe, frequently targeted by attacks from members of the ruling elite, which are accompanied by campaigns through national TV stations. It is particularly emphasised that female journalists remain the targets of attacks, both due to their work and their gender. The unfavourable economic context in which the media operate is pointed out, while advertising and state subsidies are non-transparent and largely controlled by the ruling elites.

Particularly concerning is the report on civil liberties by CIVICUS Monitor,¹⁰ according to which Serbia recorded a rating downgrade from "obstructed" to "repressed." The report emphasises that fundamental freedoms are in crisis and that the authorities sought to suppress protests with increasingly harsh measures. Demonstrators and their supporters face violence from the police and groups linked to the ruling party, alongside mass detentions, intimidation, and surveillance, while the police used excessive force against journalists who reported on the protests.

Freedom of expression and media freedom in Serbia have been under a serious test since November 2024, following the tragic collapse of the canopy in Novi Sad, in which 16 people lost their lives. Large civic protests, inadequate reactions from institutions, total distrust, as well as the control of the media space by the authorities, have led to these freedoms being seriously eroded, along with the systematic violation of regulations and the narrowing of space for critical and independent reporting.

9 Reporters Without Borders (RSF), [2025 World Press Freedom Index: Serbia](#), December 2025.

10 CIVICUS Monitor, [People Power Under Attack 2025](#), December 2025.



Media freedom and journalists' safety in Serbia – Indicators

A. LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

— A.1 BASIC GUARANTEES FOR MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS' FREEDOM AND THEIR APPLICATION IN PRACTICE

Freedom of expression and media freedom are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and a set of media laws. The provisions that apply generally to freedom of expression also apply to internet access, which is widely available to all citizens, including journalists. However, the overall situation in society and general problems in law enforcement also have consequences for the application of laws in the online sphere.

Over the past few years, there have been several legislative amendments; these processes have been marked by a series of problems, introducing new provisions contrary to the Media Strategy, which diminish the level of achieved rights. In addition to already observed key problems, such as the state returning to media ownership, contrary to the goals defined by the Media Strategy, the year 2025 was also marked by attempts to narrow the rights of journalists regarding the presumption of innocence and the publication of information from criminal proceedings, as well as the inadequate introduction of the public procurement mechanism into the Law on Public Information and Media (LPIM) – all under the pretext of alignment with the comments of the European Commission. The proposed changes regarding the presumption of innocence allowed for an overly broad interpretation and potential abuses, which do not benefit journalists or strengthen their rights, but rather restrict them. Due to a strong reaction from journalists' associations, those provisions were not adopted in the manner proposed by the Ministry. Other amendments relating to public procurement were introduced into the law at a declarative level, without precise regulation of the specific media services that may be subject to them, despite concrete requests from the European Commission. Positive provisions and

guarantees are also introduced in relation to media outlets that are indirectly or directly state-owned, such as an internal code of ethics, the exclusion of politicians and public officials from governing bodies, and the obligation to publish reports, but without established independent oversight of their implementation and without clear sanctions in case of their violation¹¹. Amendments to the Law on Electronic Media (LEM) tighten the responsibility of the media for harmful content, accompanied by high fines, but continue to ignore key problems related to the electoral process, such as covert political advertising and official campaigns, which domestic and international organisations have been pointing out for years.

Certain provisions in previous amendments to the law have somewhat improved legislative solutions; however, the past year has demonstrated that the improvement of such solutions did not contribute to an improvement of the situation and that one of the key problems remains the enforcement of these laws. This problem is also highlighted by the European Commission in its report, stating that media laws are inconsistently implemented, that the latest amendments lacked transparent and inclusive consultations, and that the legal obligation to hold a public consultation was not respected, except in the case of the Law on Public Service Broadcasters.¹²

Despite multiple legislative amendments that did not contribute to the improvement of the actual situation, and warnings from relevant journalists' and media associations and experts that current social circumstances are not favourable for amending the laws, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications at the end of 2025 once again invited associations to participate in new processes of amending the laws and drafting a new Media Strategy. First, alongside two relevant associations, IJAS and JAS, the Ministry invited a newly formed association, the Association of Journalists of Serbia (AJS), to the working group, whose leadership positions are held by journalists and editors of media outlets that daily and systematically violate the journalistic code of ethics and belong to the so-called pro-government media. After IJAS refused to enter the working groups, the process continued in early 2026, when the Ministry invited other associations, some of them relevant, but also many GONGO organisations. Despite the fact that the vast majority of relevant associations refused to participate in the working groups, the Ministry proceeded and formed two working groups. One is for amending the Law on Public Information and Media and the Law on Electronic Media, and the other is for drafting the new Media Strategy. A Standing Working Group for the Improvement and Coordination of Media and Digital Literacy was also formed.

Alignment with the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) is cited as one of the arguments for new amendments, but analyses have shown that it is not the right time to align with this act because the key prerequisites for it do not yet exist in Serbia. There are no functional and independent

11 Z. B., [What Do the Amendments to Media Laws, Imposed Outside of the Public Consultation, Bring?](#), Danas, 20 May 2025.

12 The European Commission's Serbia 2025 Report, November 2025, pp. 45 and 46.

institutions, and the problem is not a lack of laws, but rather their selective enforcement, particularly in the absence of a genuinely independent regulator. Additionally, the EMFA itself is not yet fully operational even at the EU level, meaning that hasty legislative changes in Serbia would be merely formal and without any real effect.¹³

Given the growing influence of major platforms and the impact that social media have in the media sphere, as well as the fact that over the past year and a half, social media have taken over the role of traditional media and become a new method of content distribution, it is highly important to align legislation with the European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA). This act has a specific impact on the media sphere regarding content moderation, while on the other hand, it introduces greater transparency into how platforms manage risks to the public. Aligning our legislation with this act carries certain risks, such as alignment without a previously built infrastructure for implementation and oversight, an insufficient degree of institutional stability, independence, and capacity of the competent bodies (especially the regulator), as well as weak applicability, effective communication, and enforcement regarding major platforms. Furthermore, the risk of abuse within the domestic political and social context is highlighted, along with the fact of Serbia's status as a candidate country and its inability to rely on European Union mechanisms.¹⁴

In the past year, no filtering or restriction of internet content by state authorities was recorded in Serbia. However, a decline has been recorded regarding internet freedom, and journalists have also been targeted. In 2025, attempts to deploy spyware continued, and investigations into previous cases have not advanced past the very beginning. According to the Freedom House *Freedom on the Net* report, Serbia is ranked among the partly free countries, with a decline recorded in the previous period. The authorities detained social media users for posts related to the protests, while online journalists reporting on those events faced increased pressure, including violence and harassment, both online and in the field.¹⁵ The decline in internet freedom is also indicated by the increasingly frequent abuse of surveillance technologies, political pressures, cyber-attacks, and various forms of digital manipulation, particularly in the context of protests and the work of journalists, activists, and students.¹⁶

Furthermore, the end of 2025 and the beginning of 2026 were marked by hacker attacks on media websites, as well as mass bot attacks on the Instagram profiles of independent media and media workers, even leading in some cases to the suspension of certain accounts that had been highly active in reporting on social events over the past year and a half. Although the accounts were restored within a short period of time, this method of pressuring journalists and

13 Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, [Implementation of the EMFA Through Amendments to Media Laws](#), Miloš Stojković, February 2026.

14 OSCE, [Alignment with the DSA in Serbia and the Protection of Media Freedoms](#), Milica Tošić, February 2026.

15 Freedom House, [Freedom on the Net Report for Serbia](#), November 2025.

16 SHARE Foundation, [Digital Rights Monitoring in 2025: Voices of Resistance to Digital Violence](#), December 2025.

media outlets represents a major threat to both media freedoms and freedom of reporting in general.¹⁷

In 2025, there were no attempts by the state to introduce licensing or stricter conditions for establishing print or online media. Certain negative initiatives exist, such as granting journalists the status of public officials, but also the draft law on foreign agents that appeared at the end of 2024, which would introduce a potential indirect threat to journalists as well. However, that law has still not been adopted.

— A.2 INDEPENDENCE AND EFFICIENCY OF THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY

The selection procedures for the members of the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media (REM) were not conducted in a democratic and transparent manner. Since the previous council composition ceased its work in November 2024, two procedures for the election of members have been initiated, both accompanied by a series of irregularities and violations of the law, and both ended with the withdrawal of independent candidates.

At the end of 2024, after the mandate of the previous Council had already expired, the Committee on Culture and Information initiated the first selection procedure for new members, thereby already violating the provisions of the LEM and formally causing a standstill in the work of this body. The entire process took place with a series of irregularities, primarily procedural problems, as well as issues regarding the fulfilment of eligibility criteria by both candidates and nominators. A large number of authorised nominators and candidates did not meet the legal criteria, which affected the credibility of the procedure, while systemic irregularities in most groups of nominators indicate a lack of political will to elect an independent REM Council.¹⁸ Recorded pressures, manipulations, and deviations from democratic standards seriously affected transparency and fairness, which ultimately led to the complete collapse of the process.¹⁹ Due to all the aforementioned irregularities, the process ended with seven independent candidates withdrawing from the procedure.

Following this, student protesters blockaded RTS, dissatisfied with its coverage of the social situation and the protests. The condition to end the blockade was for a new selection procedure for the REM Council to be initiated and conducted in accordance with the law. In May 2025, a new process was launched. However, it was plagued by the same problems as the previous one, ranging from illegitimate nominators and disputed candidates to procedural irregularities and abuses. In June, the Committee once again acted contrary to the law, accepting illegitimate nominators and candidates, while completely failing to consider around 30

17 IJAS, [IJAS Sent an Open Letter to Meta and Instagram: Suspensions and Shutdowns of Independent Media Accounts Threaten Freedom of Expression](#), 20 January 2026.

18 Civic Initiatives, [Analysis of the Selection Process for the Council of the Regulatory Authority for Electronic Media](#), April 2025.

19 IJAS, [Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and the Journalists' Safety Index 2024 – Serbia](#), April 2025, p. 14.

submitted objections. Subsequently, due to the failure to consider objections and the disregard of warnings about violations of the law, as well as misinterpretations of basic legal norms, a total of 78 authorised nominators and 16 male and female candidates withdrew from the selection procedure, whereby both nominators and candidates pulled out in as many as seven out of nine categories.

After international organisations became involved in the entire process, some progress was achieved; a portion of the illegitimate nominators and candidates was not accepted in the further proceedings, but there were still candidates in certain groups of nominators who did not meet the requirements. Despite this, the process continued. In the candidate harmonisation procedure within the category of national minority councils, alongside the representatives of three councils who were legal participants in the process, a group of nine representatives from the “coordination of national minority councils” was brought in, who voted on pre-prepared ballots for the candidate of the National Council of the Hungarian National Minority, whom the authorities had favoured from the very beginning.²⁰

The independent candidates who were elected on that occasion announced they would withdraw if the voting was not conducted lawfully. Following public reaction, this led to a repeat of the procedure and the nomination of two candidates by the minority councils, who were the authorised nominators. However, immediately before the final parliamentary vote, Vice-President of the Assembly, Elvira Kovács, publicly called on the ruling coalition not to support either candidate from this category, throwing the entire process into question. In the end, the Assembly elected eight members, while the member from the group of nominators of national councils of national minorities was not elected. Following this, the parliamentary Committee decided to initiate a new nomination process for that specific seat, resulting in a shortlist of two new candidates; however, neither candidate was elected in the new procedure either. In protest of these irregularities, four independent members of the REM Council first announced and then formally submitted their resignations. They stepped down after the Assembly failed to meet their demands to repeat the vote and choose between the two legally established minority council candidates, stating that the state’s actions proved it did not want an independent REM.²¹ By the end of December, the Committee initiated yet another procedure to elect four new Council members; however, the process was suspended as there were no applications.

In November 2024, the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation, IJAS, NDNV, and CRTA filed a criminal complaint with the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office for Organised Crime against Nevena Djurić, the Chairperson of the Committee on Culture and Information, for obstructing the implementation of the amended Law on Electronic Media and failing to publish a

20 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Rodoljub Šabić, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.

21 N1, [Four Elected Members of the REM Council Submit Resignations](#), 19 December 2025.

public call for the election of new members of the REM Council within the legally prescribed deadline. The following year, the same organisations filed a supplement to the criminal complaint against the secretary of the committee, Dana Gak, due to reasonable suspicion that she had abused her official position to influence the outcome of the selection procedure for new members of the REM Council.²²

The work of the regulator has been subject to serious criticism for many years. This body does not function independently or impartially, but is instead susceptible to the influence of major broadcasters and ruling structures. For years, it has been pointed out that REM does not impose enough of the measures available to it, so even in 2024, it imposed only 5 measures. This problem, as well as the lack of independence, is also highlighted in the European Commission report.

Throughout 2025, the regulator operated without its main body, the Council, which completely rendered the entire work of the regulator meaningless. REM cannot function effectively, as the essential conditions for its operation are simply not in place. Although the professional services can collect and analyse data, without the REM Council, which makes the key decisions, such activities cannot yield results. Even though the new Law on Electronic Media has been in force for almost two and a half years, including the amendments from 2025, it has not improved the work of REM. Following the continuation of the bad practice of the old Council, the Regulator has been functioning without a Council for a long time and practically exists only formally, without any real effect.²³

In the previous year, there were no allocations of new licences, bearing in mind the fact that the Council did not exist. The fifth licence for national coverage has still not been awarded, even though the call was launched back in 2022. At the end of the mandate of the previous council composition, some controversial decisions were made. One of them is the allocation of a regional licence for Belgrade to *Informer Television*, whose editor-in-chief is the same as the editor of the pro-government tabloid *Informer*, which systematically violates professional standards.²⁴ Three days before its mandate expired, the REM Council awarded the licence in a procedure that was not transparent. In the period from 21 November 2024 to 28 January 2025, this television station violated the law daily in its news programmes, including the ban on hate speech, the protection of dignity and privacy, the obligation of content pluralism, and respect for the impartiality of courts, and CRTA filed 15 complaints to REM regarding this.²⁵ In April 2025, *TV Informer* returned the licence and since then has continued broadcasting via cable operators, and it is available with all providers. REM awarded a licence to *RT (Russia Today)* television, enabling it to launch a programme

22 IJAS, Supplement to the criminal complaint due to irregularities in the selection of REM Council members, October 2025.

23 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Rodoljub Šabić, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.

24 Press Council, [Results of the Monitoring of Adherence to the Code of Journalists of Serbia in Daily Newspapers for the Period from 1 July to 31 December 2025](#), January 2026.

25 Istinomer, [The Case of TV Informer: A Regional Frequency for Mass Violations of the Law](#), 1 April 2025.

in the Serbian language via the cable operator Telekom. IJAS requested access to information regarding the licence for RT, but REM did not act upon the request, under the explanation that it cannot respond without an elected Council.²⁶

— A.3 INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTERS

The autonomy and independence of public media services in Serbia are guaranteed by laws, as well as through their statutes. The law clearly prescribes autonomy and editorial independence, as well as the basic principles upon which the work of public media services is founded. However, autonomy and independence are not sufficiently protected in practice. This is primarily a consequence of non-compliance with the law, but also the readiness of the management and editorial staff to permanently express loyalty to the authorities. The threat to independence should also be addressed by REM, which is not functioning, as well as the competent ministry, which currently represents the interests of the authorities.²⁷

The amendments to the Law on Public Service Broadcasters completed in 2025 brought some good solutions; however, an opportunity was missed to improve their position and independence in the manner envisioned by the Media Strategy. The amendments to this law were not without obstructions by the Government and the competent ministry either. A fundamental omission is the fact that the method of funding was not regulated in the manner proposed by the Strategy, which is crucial for the independence of public media services. At the same time, the method of electing governing bodies did not fully secure autonomy.²⁸ Following the adoption of the law, the public services had deadlines to align their internal acts with the legislative amendments. The legal deadlines for adopting these acts and electing programme councils have expired, there are no new councils, and due to their competence, the election of commissioners has not been carried out either. Public media services did not align their internal acts on time, nor did REM adopt a new rulebook on the election of management board members.²⁹ The existing laws provide a sufficient basis to adequately fulfil the role of the PMS; however, the problem lies in the enforcement of these laws, pressures from the authorities, and also individuals within the public services who are not ready to advocate for them to truly be in the service of citizens.

"If the management and the editorial team do not want to ensure pluralism, equality, freedom of expression, and respect for the communication needs of all social groups and all individuals, even though this is an obligation arising from all media laws, then they are responsible, and not the law."³⁰

26 N1, [REM Rejects IJAS Request to Act Upon Access to Information of Public Importance](#), FoNet, 12 December 2025.
27 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Rade Veljanovski, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.
28 IJAS, Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and the Journalists' Safety Index 2024 – Serbia, April 2025.
29 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Rade Veljanovski, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.
30 Quote by Rade Veljanovski.

The method of funding public media services still does not ensure their independence and stability. The combined funding model remains legally present, and the amendments failed to align this area with the Media Strategy and ensure greater independence. As in the previous year, RTS managed to secure independent funding in 2025, which was not the case with RTV. In 2025, funds were allocated from the budget for public services, of which the entire amount of RSD 900 million was directed to RTV.³¹

Although the subscription fee, as the primary method of funding public services, was more precisely regulated by the legislative amendments and linked to the minimum wage at the level of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications rejected the proposal of the RTS and RTV management boards to adjust the amount for inflation. The proposal referred to an increase to RSD 387.32. As the reason, the Ministry stated that adjusting the fee amount is provided by law as a possibility and that at this moment they consider it unnecessary to adjust the fee amount to the inflation growth rate. This is yet another indicator of financial instability and a potential threat to independence. Such a decision can have serious consequences for the functioning of public services, particularly RTV, as well as on the material position of the employees.³²

The Programme Council should represent society and ensure that programming functions are performed according to the highest standards of providing media services for the broadest audience, encompassing all social groups and all individuals, with diverse, balanced, and non-discriminatory content.³³ However, this has not been the case so far, primarily bearing in mind that this body was elected by the Management Board. The legislative amendments introduced a change, meaning that the members of this body will be elected outside of the public services. The members of the RTS Programme Council are elected by the National Assembly committee competent for the field of public information, while the members of RTV are elected by the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina committee competent for the field of public information.³⁴ A Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of Listeners, Viewers, and Readers has been introduced, who should protect the interests of the public, as well as the rights and interests of citizens regarding the fulfilment of the programming role, professional and ethical standards, and the legal obligations of the PMS, while also taking care of the improvement of programming standards.³⁵ Until now, we have not had this mechanism, and one of the key things should be the adequate implementation of the law regarding the election, its competences, and responsibility. If the right person with extensive experience and the intention to improve communication

31 N1, [Committee on Culture and Information Adopts Proposal to Extend Temporary Funding of RTV](#), Beta, 25 November 2025.

32 IJAS, [Public Service Fees Remain 349 Dinars: Ministry Does Not Accept Inflation Adjustment](#), I. K., 23 January 2025.

33 Law on Public Service Broadcasters, Article 28.

34 Ibid. Article 29.

35 Ibid. Article 32a.

with the audience and help citizens realize their rights were appointed to that position, it could be a major contribution to strengthening the functions of the public service.³⁶ However, a problem is posed by the failure to align internal acts with the new legislative amendments and the election of the new Council, and consequently, the Commissioner.

By law, the Programme Council has an obligation to organise a public consultation at least once a year on programming content, and it submits a report on the public consultation being held, along with recommendations for its improvement expressed during the process, to the General Director, the editors-in-chief, and the Management Board, while informing the public about it. However, in practice, their effect is completely unknown to the public, and the very manner of organisation renders the entire idea and essence meaningless. There is no publicly available information that any public consultations were organised in 2025 at all.

A new Director General of RTS, Manja Grčić, was elected, and this selection did not pass without criticism from the professional public either, which highlighted a conflict of interest³⁷ and the failure to meet basic criteria as the main problems.³⁸

All of this indicates that there has been no improvement in the work of the public services, neither in terms of legal obligations nor in fulfilling their role as a public service. News programmes are often superficial and one-sided, with insufficient representation of social processes, limited pluralism, and poor space for public debate and the expression of different viewpoints.³⁹ Dissatisfied with RTS's reporting on social events and protests, student protesters and citizens blockaded RTS for two weeks, demanding objective, truthful, and timely reporting in accordance with the law.⁴⁰ Such demands were also made by an informal group of RTS employees, "Naš pRoTeSt" (Our Protest), who pointed out the inadequate reporting of this public service and the failure to comply with the law.⁴¹

— A.4 FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO QUALITY JOURNALISM AND MEDIA CONTENT OF PUBLIC INTEREST

There are no official subsidy mechanisms solely for print media; however, they are included through regular procedures of project co-financing of media content in the public interest. State funds are distributed to the media in various ways, starting from project co-financing, through direct funding, public procurement, and advertising. However, it has been shown that the distribution of state funds is one of the most effective tools of "soft censorship" and illicit pressure on the media.⁴²

36 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Rade Veljanovski, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.

37 IJAS, [IJAS: February – Physical Attacks, Death Threats and Pressure: 34 Incidents Against Male and Female Journalists](#), Marija Babić and Rade Djurić, 10 March 2026.

38 JAS, [Certificate of Passed Examinations Shows That the Diploma of the New RTS Director Manja Grčić Lacks the Required 240 ECTS Credits](#), K. Kovač Nastasić, 17 April 2026.

39 OSCE, [Public Media Service in Serbia: Genesis, Current State and Further Development](#), Prof. Dr Rade Veljanovski, February 2026, p. 11.

40 Danas, [RTS Blockade Ends After 14 Days: Student Protesters Announce Their Demand Has Been Met](#), FoNet, 28 April 2026.

41 N1, [Group of RTS Employees: Our Protest Is Not Against Colleagues, But Against the Servile Editorial Course](#), Beta, 28 March 2025.

42 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Tanja Maksić, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.

Project co-financing of media content in the public interest was conceived as a model for distributing funds for quality content that covers topics of public interest. However, this process has turned into the exact opposite: funds are distributed in violation of legal regulations and awarded to media outlets that systematically violate the journalistic code of ethics. Instead, the process serves to reward compliant media close to the authorities, rendering it entirely meaningless. The provisions of the Law on Public Information and Media relating to project co-financing, although aimed at improving the process through the 2023 amendments, did not lead to the expected results. On the contrary, legal provisions were bypassed once again, resulting in an inadequate distribution of funds contrary to the law, which represents one of the most serious deviations since the introduction of this model.

The biggest problem is that the majority of budgetary funds are allocated to pro-government media, while critical and professional outlets are deprived or receive minimal funding. In 2025, the same individuals frequently sat on the evaluation committees, local media faced discrimination, and certain outlets secured funding for similar projects across multiple calls for proposals. Furthermore, an adequate and transparent evaluation of projects is not being implemented.⁴³ A particular deterioration was recorded at the local level, where the majority of media outlets that reported on student and civic protests did not receive support, even though some of them had received smaller funds in previous years.⁴⁴ Project co-financing has a certain level of transparency (available decisions on the allocation of funds, public calls, etc.), but this did not prevent bad practices. The redirection of funds to public procurement, which is significantly less transparent, is particularly concerning.⁴⁵

The distribution of funds to the media is also achieved through public procurement, direct contracts, and agreements on business and technical cooperation, which, in the absence of clear criteria, opens up space for the non-transparent distribution of funds and a potential influence on editorial policy. Public procurement of media services remains non-transparent and without real competition, amid suspicions that the conditions and criteria are tailored to pre-determined media outlets. Although the data are formally available,⁴⁶ their presentation is neither sufficiently clear nor transparent.⁴⁷ Public procurement for media services functions as a mechanism to funnel public funds toward preferred media outlets, thereby establishing a form of indirect control and influence over the media market. It is particularly concerning that a significant portion of funds goes to media outlets that systematically violate ethical standards,⁴⁸ while fair

43 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Bojan Cvejić, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.

44 ANEM, [Indicators of the State of Local Media in Serbia for 2025](#), Bojan Cvejić, January 2026.

45 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Tanja Maksić, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.

46 Amendments to the Law on Public Procurement introduced the requirement that procurements with a value below one million dinars must also be shown on the public procurement portal.

47 OSCE, [Public Advertising and Public Procurement in the Media Sphere](#), Nemanja Nenadić, February 2026, p. 32.

48 BIRN research: RTS spent over 133.5 million dinars on advertising in print and online media, billboards and outdoors, including over 55 million dinars spent on tabloid media.

competition and the independence of editorial policy are further undermined through non-transparent criteria.⁴⁹

In 2025, more than one million euros was paid from state and local budgets to the publishers of six daily newspapers close to the authorities, through public procurement and project co-financing of the media.⁵⁰ The majority of these media outlets violated the journalistic code of ethics to a large extent,⁵¹ and during the same year, they published more than 1,800 manipulative news pieces.⁵²

Under the pretext of alignment with the requirements of the European Commission, a provision on public procurement was inserted into the Law on Public Information and Media in a general manner, without any specification of what media services encompass – it does not prescribe the conditions under which they can be procured, nor does it establish a control mechanism, which leaves room for abuse and the favouring of certain media. In this way, the opportunity to adequately regulate this area was missed.

There are no clearly defined mechanisms for financing media in national minority languages, which makes it difficult to ensure media pluralism in those languages. Although the LPIM stipulates that a portion of budgetary funds is provided through co-financing and other forms of support, these mechanisms are not sufficiently developed in practice. A particular problem is posed by media outlets established by national councils of national minorities, which are susceptible to various influences, while other minority media face the problem of financial instability due to the inadequate distribution of budgetary funds and unequal conditions.

— A.5 STATE ADVERTISING IN THE PRIVATE MEDIA SECTOR

State advertising in the media is a problem that has been highlighted for many years as a method of pressuring and controlling the media, which was also pointed out by the latest Media Strategy. In the latest amendments to the Law on Advertising from 2025, an opportunity to adequately regulate this area was missed. The key problem is that state advertising, particularly the advertising of public authorities and enterprises, is not regulated in a sufficiently clear and comprehensive manner, thereby leaving room for the non-transparent channelling of public funds and indirect influence on the media.⁵³ There are opinions that the Law on Public Procurement and the Law on Advertising, which are primary for this area, are generally solid and aligned with European standards, but that they could be improved with clearer criteria (content quality and adherence to the Code, rather

49 BIRN, [Transparency Under Scrutiny: Public Procurement for Media Services](#), Tanja Maksić, 19 November 2024.

50 Raskrikavanje, [More Than One Million Euros for Pro-regime Media in 2025](#), Milica Ljubičić, Stefan Kosanović and Milica Blagojević, 8 June 2026.

51 Press Council, [Results of the Monitoring of Respect for the Code of Journalists of Serbia in Daily Newspapers for the Period From 1 July to 31 December 2025](#), January 2026.

52 Raskrikavanje, [A Record Year of Lies: Pro-regime Newspapers Published More Than 1,800 Manipulative News Pieces in 2025](#), Milica Ljubičić, Stefan Kosanović, Milica Blagojević and Vesna Radojević, 8 June 2026.

53 OSCE, [Public Advertising and Public Procurement in the Media Sphere](#), Nemanja Nenadić, February 2026.

than just the price), as well as by introducing a transparent evaluation of results, which is currently entirely within the discretionary competence of the contracting authorities.⁵⁴

Although these laws contain provisions stating that advertising must be fair, equitable, and transparent, practice falls short. Media advertising largely serves to sustain clientelist relations between political actors and the media, while exerting influence over editorial policies. Due to vague criteria and the absence of information quality standards, the largest share of advertising funds goes to tabloid media that frequently violate ethical codes.⁵⁵

The publication of data regarding the funds allocated for advertising across different media is not sufficiently transparent. Namely, only a portion of the data is visible on the Public Procurement Portal (the public call and supporting documentation, as well as the concluded contract). What is missing is the entire process following the contract, which falls entirely within the discretionary competence of the institutions.⁵⁶ Furthermore, the Law on Public Information and Media contains provisions that ought to lead to greater transparency. It prescribes the obligation to enter advertising data into the Media Register within the Serbian Business Registers Agency, but these data are not being entered there.

— A.6 LEGAL PROVISIONS RELATED TO DEFAMATION AND THEIR APPLICATION DO NOT CREATE A CHILLING EFFECT ON JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

In Serbia, the criminal offence of defamation has been decriminalized. On the other hand, there is a possibility to exercise rights through civil lawsuits for the compensation of non-material damage for injury to reputation and honour. The legal regulations do not recognize different provisions for journalists and state officials. However, these lawsuits are used disproportionately to pressure journalists and exhaust editorial teams. In practice, courts generally do not award high amounts for the compensation of non-material damage; however, a greater problem here is represented by the high amounts of the claims filed by the plaintiffs, which carry high court fees that further burden journalists and the media.

In light of the social circumstances over the past year and a half, a serious weakening of the institutional and social mechanisms ensuring the protection of fundamental rights is evident. Simultaneously, there has been a further deterioration of the media scene, accompanied by a pronounced rise in tabloid reporting and numerous violations of ethical standards and legal norms. Citizens, as well as certain journalists, affected by almost daily targeting by tabloids, have begun to take certain steps to protect their rights by filing lawsuits in court. In 2025, a drastic jump in lawsuits filed with the Higher Court in Belgrade against

54 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Tanja Maksić, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.

55 BIRN, [Money Flows, Lack of Criteria and \(Non\)respect for Ethical Norms](#), Tanja Maksić and Bojan Cvejić, January 2026, p.24

56 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Tanja Maksić, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.

journalists and the media for damages was recorded. During 2025, 1,935 lawsuits for damages were filed with this court, 965 cases were resolved in the same period (645 became legally binding), while as of 23 February 2026, 2,780 cases remained pending.⁵⁷ There is no precise record of how many lawsuits against journalists have been initiated by state officials and politicians. A large number of these lawsuits are directed towards tabloid media that heavily violate the ethical code. Although attempts are made to present this as a new practice of pressuring these media outlets, data from business registers and financial statements show that this has been an integral part of their business model for many years, as are the large amounts of funds that these media allocate for court costs.⁵⁸

In 2025, a total of nine cases against journalists and the media were recorded that carry the characteristics of SLAPP lawsuits. Although the year 2025 is characterized by other types of lawsuits against the media and journalists, there are still recorded cases carrying the characteristics of SLAPPs that concern the compensation of non-material damage. Jelena Tanasković, a former minister and one of the accused in the case of the canopy collapse in Novi Sad, filed two lawsuits against the investigative portal *KRIK*. In the first lawsuit, Tanasković is claiming one million dinars, stating that *KRIK* violated her honour and reputation and breached the presumption of innocence. The lawsuit was filed because of an article in which *KRIK* published information that a criminal complaint for financial malpractice had existed against her, which was later dismissed following a police report.⁵⁹ She filed the second lawsuit for injury to reputation and honour because of a news piece in which *KRIK* published the information that she had filed the first lawsuit against their editorial team. She sued *KRIK*, claiming that they presented her as a “murderer” because they wrote in the news piece that the canopy killed 15 people, whereas at no point in the text was it stated that she was accused or suspected of murder, but rather that she was one of the suspects in the case of the canopy collapse in Novi Sad.⁶⁰

Regarding the seven lawsuits filed against *IN Medija* and editor-in-chief Verica Marinčić, four judgments have been handed down so far, ordering them to pay a certain amount of damages. The lawsuits were filed due to the publication of a photograph of minors, taken from the municipal website, within a text about packages that had been presented to them at a reception hosted by the President of the Municipality of Indjija, which contained jars of honey that is also advertised as an aphrodisiac. The costs of these proceedings exceed the amounts of the damages. For a local media outlet that is in a difficult financial situation, this is a severe blow and could lead to its shutdown.⁶¹

57 Data obtained from the Higher Court in Belgrade in the response to the request for access to information of public importance dated 24 February 2026.

58 Raskrikavanje, [More Lawsuits Than Before, But Not a New Practice: Tabloids Have Been Paying Millions Due to Lawsuits for Years](#), Stefan Kosanović, 12 December 2025.

59 *KRIK*, [Tanasković Sued KRIK, Demands One Million Dinars](#), Bojana Jovanović, 17 January 2025.

60 *KRIK*, [Tanasković Sued KRIK Again – Because We Published That She Had Sued Us](#), Sofija Parojčić, 6 February 2025.

61 *IN Medija*, [Court “Congratulated” IN Medija on Its Birthday with a New SLAPP Judgment of 314,850 Dinars](#), 9 April 2026.

Although proceedings concerning defamation, as well as other proceedings characterized as SLAPPs, represent highly serious pressure on journalists and the media and have a severe impact on the work of journalists through financial exhaustion, as well as psychological and emotional pressure, certain journalists are not discouraged from continuing to deal with sensitive topics. However, when it comes to young journalists who encounter such lawsuits at the beginning of their careers, they consider whether to continue pursuing journalism, as it affects not only them but also their families.⁶² The aspect of psychological impact on journalists is particularly problematic, especially regarding preparation for trials, lack of sleep, stress, and a feeling of fear.⁶³ Sometimes a certain defiance emerges, particularly when a journalist has the support of the editorial team.⁶⁴ However, when it comes to smaller local media outlets that are already exposed to various pressures and are in a financially difficult situation, lawsuits can lead to self-censorship and a reconsideration of the decision to report on certain topics in the future. The proceedings last for a very long time, a lot of time is invested in preparing for trials, and due to judicial practice, the outcomes are uncertain, which affects their journalistic work.

— A.7 OTHER LAWS ARE ENFORCED OBJECTIVELY AND ALLOW JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS TO WORK FREELY AND SAFELY

Serbia has yet to tackle the issue of SLAPP lawsuits, and there is no initiative whatsoever to introduce anti-SLAPP regulations. While lawyers argue in their defence pleadings that certain cases bear the hallmarks of SLAPP lawsuits, judges have yet to recognize this or address the issue in their rulings. There have been attempts in these cases to invoke the mechanism of abuse of rights in civil proceedings, which is grounded in the Law on Contracts and Torts and the Law on Civil Procedure. However, it is rarely used, and even when judges invoke it, it remains unrecognised by higher instances. In the current socio-political situation, the prevailing opinion is that the initiation of amendments and the introduction of new regulations should not be pursued, but rather that the focus should be placed on the enforcement of the law, the recognition of such lawsuits, and a more decisive reaction from the judges themselves.

In 2025, cases involving the use of other proceedings against journalists were recorded, such as criminal proceedings, through which, in addition to fines, prison sentences are sought for journalists, as well as bans on practicing journalism. The position of defendants in criminal proceedings is further aggravated because they are required to attend every hearing, thereby placing them in the position of persons violating the law, even though they acted within the scope of their professional work. It is particularly concerning that public officials are among the plaintiffs filing SLAPP lawsuits.

62 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.

Namely, after filing two lawsuits⁶⁵, one criminal and one civil, during 2025, Dušanka Djordjević, a judge of the Court of Appeal in Belgrade, filed yet another private criminal complaint against *KRIK* journalists. Through this criminal complaint, she demands a 10-month prison sentence and a two-year ban on practicing journalism for *KRIK* editor Bojana Jovanović and Jelena Radivojević due to an alleged violation of the right to privacy. The lawsuit was filed because of the “Prosudi ko sudi” (‘Judge Who Judges’) database, in which *KRIK* investigated the work of the judiciary, and the published data originates from publicly available sources.⁶⁶

In the context of the ban on practicing journalism, a judgment by the First Basic Court in Belgrade following a private criminal lawsuit for insult, filed against the editor of *Večernje novosti*, caused debate and a certain degree of concern. Namely, by this judgment, the court found the editor guilty of the criminal offence of insult and imposed a fine within the statutory range. Additionally, acting on a motion by the private prosecutor, the court issued a security measure banning her from working as an editor for a period of one year. Although violations of ethical and legal norms are unacceptable and the judgment falls within legal boundaries, a ban on practicing journalism can establish a dangerous precedent with serious consequences for freedom of expression and the media.⁶⁷ In a broader societal context, particularly in systems with weak institutions and pronounced political pressures, there is a serious risk that such a practice might not remain an exception, but could instead be abused to intimidate and silence journalists.

Another private criminal complaint against *KRIK* journalist Sofija Bogosavljev was filed by the company “Starting”, which is one of the subcontractors for the works on the Novi Sad Railway Station building, from which the canopy collapsed. The lawsuit states that the journalist presented untruthful information regarding the company’s business operations, thereby intentionally damaging the company’s reputation in public, and demands a fine of 300,000 dinars. The lawsuit was filed over an investigative story in which *KRIK* revealed that misdemeanour proceedings had previously been brought against the company regarding worker injuries at unsecured construction sites, most of which became time-barred due to court delays.⁶⁸ The company withdrew the lawsuit at the end of the year.

In the previous period, cases were recorded involving the filing of criminal complaints and private criminal lawsuits by state-owned and private enterprises, in connection with articles dealing with topics of public importance. Particularly concerning is the filing of a criminal complaint against *Radar* director Mihailo Jovićević and editor Vesna Mališić by Elektromreža Srbije for causing panic and disorder. The author of the article is journalist Vuk Cvijić; it speaks about

65 IJAS, [Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and the Journalists’ Safety Index 2024](#), Rade Djurić, April 2025, pp. 23 and 24.

66 KRIK, [Judge Djordjević Filed a Third Lawsuit Against KRIK, Demanding Jail for Two More Female Journalists](#), Isidora Martać, 13 October 2025.

67 IJAS, [IJAS: Ban on Practising Journalism for the “Novosti” Editor Is a Dangerous Practice – Urgent Reaction Needed to Threats Facing the “Kurir” Editorial Team](#), 4 December 2025.

68 KRIK, [Details of the Lawsuit Filed by the Company Starting Against a KRIK Journalist](#), Isidora Martać, 16 July 2025.

the “collapse of the electrical power system of Serbia”, and it is based on facts presented by a competent interlocutor and expert. There was no reaction whatsoever to the article itself; instead, this enterprise merely filed the criminal complaint. The fact that this offence, if committed through the media, carries a prison sentence of 6 months to 5 years represents not only pressure on journalists but is also a threat to media freedom. Another company, Millennium Team, filed a private criminal complaint against *Nova* editor Ranko Pivljanin and a journalist for damaging its reputation, an offence for which a prison sentence of up to one year is prescribed.⁶⁹

Broadly speaking, SLAPP proceedings do not entail only classic lawsuits; rather, they refer to the use of other proceedings, namely their abuse. We can also see this through different methods of pressuring journalists via apprehensions and detentions. On those occasions, the phones of some were confiscated and they themselves were detained overnight,⁷⁰ while others were released on the same day.⁷¹ All apprehensions are related to their journalistic work while reporting from events of public interest. In some cases, highly aggressive conduct by police officers occurred, and cases of apprehension due to an expressed opinion were also recorded.⁷²

Practice has shown us that there are individuals, but also companies, that file multiple lawsuits against the same media outlets and their journalists, or a large number of lawsuits against different media outlets due to reporting on a single event of public interest. The *KRIK* editorial team has been exposed to such a practice on multiple occasions. First of all, we have three lawsuits by judge Djordjević within a few months, but also cases of lawsuits by the *Kurir* publisher, which filed lawsuits with the Commercial Court for three consecutive years due to unfair competition and demanded damages. It filed the lawsuits because of articles which published how many manipulative and fake news pieces *Kurir* had on its front pages annually. In all three cases, the judges delivered judgments dismissing the lawsuits; however, the proceedings lasted for several years.⁷³ Verica Marinčić and *IN Medija* received seven lawsuits due to the publication of a photograph of minors taken from the municipality’s website, while BIRN was also targeted by the Mayor of Belgrade, Aleksandar Šapić, twice for two articles – one concerning a villa in Trieste and the other regarding the legalisation of a property in Bežanijska Kosa, demanding a total of 12 million dinars for mental distress.⁷⁴

69 N1, [Criminal Complaints Against Nova and Radar: A New Method of Intimidating the Editorial Teams of Free Media](#), nova.rs, 26 September 2025.

70 Zoomer, [STATEMENT: The Arrest of Our Journalist Is a Precedent Creating a “New Normality” in Which Journalists Can Be Arrested for Reporting in the Public Interest](#), 6 June 2025.

71 SafeJournalists Network, [SafeJournalists Network Condemns the Detention of Photojournalist Gavrilo Andrić in Serbia](#), 10 March 2026.

72 N1, [Peščanik Columnist Dejan Ilić Summoned for a Police Interview Over His Guest Appearance on N1](#), 10 April 2025.

73 KRIK, [KRIK Wins Third Court Case Against Kurir](#), 16 April 2026.

74 BIRN, [Aleksandar Šapić Files Two Lawsuits Against BIRN, Demands 12 Million Dinars](#), 29 March 2023.

— A.8 CONFIDENTIALITY OF JOURNALISTS' SOURCES IS GUARANTEED IN THE LEGISLATION AND RESPECTED BY THE AUTHORITIES

Freedom of public information and the flow of information are guaranteed and must not be endangered by pressure, threats, or blackmail directed at editors, journalists, or sources of information. A journalist is not obliged to reveal a source, except in the case of data relating to a criminal offence, or the perpetrator of a criminal offence, for which a prison sentence of at least five years is prescribed by law, provided that the data for that criminal offence cannot be obtained in any other way.⁷⁵ The Criminal Code provides guarantees for the protection of sources and stipulates that journalists will not be considered perpetrators of an offence if they do not reveal the identity of a source, except in the cases of the aforementioned criminal offences or when it is necessary for their prevention.⁷⁶ Until now, these provisions have protected journalists and their sources, and despite attempts to obtain this information, journalists have not revealed them, nor have they suffered consequences. From a professional standpoint, the journalistic code of ethics obliges journalists to protect a source's request for anonymity, which provides additional protection for sources.⁷⁷

In addition to traditional methods of demanding the disclosure of sources, over the past two years, sources have also been endangered in different ways. In Serbia, this issue has become highly prominent ever since the discovery of illegal surveillance, specifically, the use of, or attempts to infect certain journalists' phones with spyware. Even prior to this, journalists and their sources had been cautious regarding surveillance; however, the use of these technologies, supported by concrete evidence of their existence in specific cases, has fostered additional fear and compromised sources.

In 2024 and 2025, a large number of attempts to monitor the devices of journalists, activists, and students were recorded, involving the use of tools such as Cellebrite and Pegasus and the installation of spyware. Civil society organisations collected data and initiated proceedings before the competent institutions. In 2024, the two most drastic cases of infecting phones with a previously unknown spyware, NoviSpy, were documented. Specifically, this software was installed on the phone of journalist Slaviša Milanov while he was giving a statement at a police station in Pirot.⁷⁸ This was confirmed by an Amnesty International report, which revealed that the Serbian police and the Security Information Agency (BIA) utilised this bespoke Android spyware system to covertly infect devices.⁷⁹ The second case involved journalist Ljubomir Stefanović, on whose phone NoviSpy was also discovered.⁸⁰

75 Law on Public Information and Media, Articles 4 and 58.

76 Criminal Code, Article 41.

77 Code of Journalists of Serbia, chapter VIII.

78 Raskrikavanje, [State Surveillance: Spyware Secretly Installed on Journalist's Phone During Questioning at a Police Station](#), 16 December 2024.

79 Amnesty International Report, [Serbia: Authorities Use Spyware and Cellebrite Forensic Tools to Hack Journalists and Activists](#), 16 December 2024.

80 Danas, [Spyware Also Deployed into the Phone of Slavija Info Channel Editor Ljubomir Stefanović](#), Uglješa Bokić, 18 December 2024.

In 2025, two attempts to target the devices of female *BIRN* journalists with Pegasus spyware were recorded, which were also confirmed by Amnesty International. The journalists received messages via Viber from a number registered with Telekom Srbija; written in Serbian, the messages contained an infection link.⁸¹

Other methods of attempting to uncover sources have also been recorded. The Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade submitted a request demanding from the *KRIK* editorial team the audio recording of a conversation between Sten Miller, CEO of United Group, and Vladimir Lučić, Director of Telekom Srbija. In the recording, Lučić can be heard stating that President Aleksandar Vučić demanded the dismissal of the director of United Media, a company managing several media outlets. The request was submitted to verify the allegations in a criminal complaint filed by United Group. However, the journalists of this editorial team believe that the prosecutor's office intended to identify the journalistic source who provided the recording.⁸² Another attempt to uncover a source occurred in December, when *Danas* journalist, Uglješa Bokić, received a summons for questioning at the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in Novi Sad. This concerned the publication of parts of an official police note regarding the arrest of Novi Sad lawyer Nemanja Aleksić. The summons followed a criminal complaint filed by the lawyer against an unidentified person for the criminal offence of Breach of Confidentiality of Proceedings. The editorial team of *Danas* learned that the police were ordered to question the journalist on who delivered the note to him, when it was delivered, and whether he still possesses it, with an instruction to hand it over if it remains in his possession.⁸³

Cases of attempts to uncover sources in court proceedings through SLAPP lawsuits and by questioning journalists about their sources have been known from before, and these do not aim to exercise rights but to find out journalistic sources.⁸⁴

All the events over the past two years, especially the use of spyware by state institutions, have hindered communication between journalists and sources. Journalists do not feel safe communicating with sources and must constantly find new methods and channels for that communication. This directly affects and significantly complicates the work of not only individual journalists but also the entire media outlet. They must find new tools and organise new training sessions to further secure themselves and their sources, while trust in the institutions that should provide them with that security is almost non-existent, which further aggravates the situation. Journalists often have a feeling of constant surveillance, either digital or physical, directed both at themselves and at the persons they are in contact with.⁸⁵

81 BIRN, [Two Female BIRN Journalists Targeted by Pegasus Spyware](#), Aleksa Tešić, 27 March 2025.

82 KRIK, [Higher Prosecutor's Office in Belgrade Demands Recording of Miller and Lučić Conversation from KRIK](#), Isidora Martać, 15 October 2025.

83 *Danas*, [Danas Journalist Summoned for Questioning by Police to Reveal His Source](#), 22 December 2025.

84 Raskrikavanje, [Belgrade Mayor Aleksandar Šapić Attempted to Uncover Source During BIRN Trial](#), Vesna Radojević, 23 September 2024.

85 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Tanja Maksić, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.

— A.9 JOURNALISTS ARE FREE TO PURSUIT THEIR PROFESSION AND TO ESTABLISH, JOIN AND PARTICIPATE IN THEIR ASSOCIATIONS

Journalists in Serbia do not require licences to practise journalism, nor were there any attempts by the state to introduce such a requirement in 2025. The question regarding the definition of a journalist is still occasionally raised; however, there have been no formal proposals. Certain organisations publicly advocate for journalists to receive the status of public officials, which causes concern and could have serious consequences for their work.⁸⁶ Institutions and the media community accept a broader understanding of the journalistic profession, and no cases of negative interpretations have been recorded.

Discrimination against the media is prohibited by law, but in practice, especially at the local level, it still occurs frequently. One of the greatest problems local media have been facing is not being invited to events of public importance and a generally poor communication with local institutions. In 2025, IJAS recorded 17 cases where journalists were denied access to and reporting from certain events, cases of not being invited to press conferences or events of public interest, as well as failures to respond to journalists' questions. The majority of the recorded cases relate to multiple media outlets, consequently the number of media outlets whose work was obstructed by this practice is much higher. Furthermore, certain local institutions persistently ignore critically oriented media outlets, and despite numerous interventions regarding discrimination, they have failed to alter their practices. The municipalities of Novi Bečej and Lazarevac have on multiple occasions withheld invitations from certain local media outlets for events of public interest. The total disregard shown towards journalistic and media associations that point out such practices, as well as the complete lack of responses to their letters, is particularly concerning. Journalists from *TV N1* and *Nova S* were not permitted to report from events organised by ministries as well as local self-governments. It frequently occurs that when a national-level institution organises an event locally, only specific media outlets receive an invitation.⁸⁷

There were cases where police officers demanded credentials from journalists reporting from protests; however, situations where journalists were attacked, even by the police, despite having visibly displayed credentials and other insignia, were more common.

No direct cases of bans on joining relevant associations have been recorded. On the other hand, pressures on certain associations and their representatives have been documented, including, in some cases, severe targeting and threats to their safety.⁸⁸

86 Danas, [SINOS Demands That Journalists Be Legally Awarded the Status of Public Officials](#), 30 March 2026.

87 JAS, [JAS: The Government of Serbia Must Treat Media Equally](#), 3 January 2025.

88 The case of targeting IJAS and the case of targeting Veran Matić, President of the Board of Directors of ANEM.

Furthermore, a significant number of GONGO associations are present, which are activated whenever necessary. These organisations considerably hinder the efforts of relevant journalistic and media associations in their struggle to improve media freedom, achieve a better professional standing for journalists, and establish a more favourable environment for journalistic work. Particular legitimacy is granted to them by state institutions, such as the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, which constantly invites them to join working groups for legal amendments and the development of the Media Strategy. Their negative impact is especially evident in project co-financing and the activities of expert commissions for the distribution of funds. This is notably prevalent at the local level, where commission members frequently originate from such organisations. Consequently, significant funds are allocated to pro-government media outlets that systematically violate professional standards.⁸⁹

In 2025, a new journalistic association was established, the Association of Journalists of Serbia (AJS). A large number of journalists in leadership positions and among its membership hail precisely from those media outlets that are close to the authorities and that violate professional standards. In certain media outlets where their members hold editorial positions, professional journalists and media are targeted almost daily, while relevant media and journalistic associations are also subjected to such targeting.⁹⁰ Legitimacy is granted to this association by the competent ministry, which included it in meetings immediately after its establishment and later into working groups for amendments to laws and the Media Strategy. The practice of creating and institutionally supporting such parallel associations, which can further undermine the representativeness and integrity of the media community, is concerning.

— A.10 RIGHT TO ACCESS OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION

Journalists in Serbia, particularly those engaged in investigative journalism, frequently utilise requests for access to information of public importance. The responsiveness of public authorities depends on multiple factors, primarily the sensitivity of the requested information. Exercising the right to access information has been hindered, and the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection highlights the impeded realization of the right to access information for journalists, as well as abuses of this right, as a fundamental obstacle. In 2025, the Commissioner received 8,802 new complaints in 2025, in addition to 12,302 unresolved complaints carried over from the previous period. Journalists were among those who frequently exercised this right. In 2025, 43.37% of the total number of journalistic complaints were filed due to the “silence” of

89 IJAS, [Journalistic and Media Associations and Trade Unions Demand the Urgent Suspension of the Process of Amending Media Laws](#), 28 November 2025.

90 Danas, [What Does the Journalistic Association AJS Represent – A Facade for Professionalism or a New Platform for Targeting Independent Media?](#), Nadja Vukajlović, 24 June 2025.

public authorities (failing to respond to inquiries). The trend persists that a higher percentage of the Commissioner's final and binding decisions on complaints filed by journalists and media representatives remained unenforced, 22.22%, compared to a general non-enforcement rate of 20.2%. It is particularly concerning that journalists were denied information of public interest, such as: environmental data, information on capital projects, the disposal of public money and public funds, the co-financing of media projects, the legalisation of illegally constructed objects, and the like.⁹¹ A specific problem arises from the fact that institutions very frequently direct journalists to submit formal requests for access to information instead of answering standard journalistic questions.⁹²

The executive branch in Serbia is not sufficiently transparent and does not maintain fair and open relations with the media. As in previous years, there is no systemic solution; instead, openness itself depends from ministry to ministry. The level of openness of the executive branch in Serbia remains low and shows no tendency towards improvement, while its non-transparency continues to be the rule rather than the exception. Institutions mostly make only basic information available, thereby maintaining the illusion of transparency. The majority of ministries do not publish documents such as work plans, reports, or financial documents, while administrative bodies display the lowest degree of openness.⁹³ In 2025, the local self-government transparency index was at a relatively low level.⁹⁴ In their communication with the media, ministries are not open and very frequently fail to respond to requests and questions, while certain ministries are particularly problematic, such as the ministries of health and the interior.⁹⁵

When it comes to the courts, transparency is better than within the executive branch; however, it is still not at a satisfactory level. The issue has not been systemically resolved, and openness varies from court to court, depending on who the spokesperson is and how the internal distribution of tasks is organised.⁹⁶ Media access to trials is enabled; most courts have a specific regulation on access and available information, while decisions depend on individual permission from judges and the technical capacities of the courtrooms. On the other hand, special rules apply to the filming of trials, requiring the approval of the judge and the consent of all participants in the proceedings.

In Serbia, public access to parliamentary sessions is generally enabled. Sessions are broadcast via the media, while journalists can have access subject to prior accreditation. In practice, journalists encounter situations where access is denied, primarily when it comes to sessions of local parliaments. Regarding the National Assembly, the main hall

91 Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection, [Report on the Work of the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection for the Year 2025](#), March 2026, pp. 27, 28 and 30.

92 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

93 Partners Serbia, [Openness of the Executive Branch in Serbia and the Region](#), Kristina Obrenović, September 2025, pp. 32 and 33.

94 Transparency Serbia, [Average LTI 2025 at the Same Level - 52, Novi Pazar at the Top Again](#), September 2025.

95 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

96 Ibid.

and the press room in the main building are accessible to journalists, while entry into the plenary hall and the gallery is prohibited, and cameramen are allowed only a few minutes of filming before the start of plenary sessions. In 2025, a case was recorded in Valjevo where the secretary of the local assembly issued a notification listing the specific media outlets permitted to broadcast the assembly sessions, without any justification whatsoever.⁹⁷ The openness index of the legislative branch, although recording a slight increase compared to 2023, remains below the required level, and the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia records a higher degree of openness compared to the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.⁹⁸

97 JAS, [JAS: The City of Valjevo Must Not Discriminate Against Journalists and Obstruct Their Work](#), 6 March 2025.

98 Partners Serbia, [Openness of the Legislative Branch in Serbia and the Region](#), Dragana Lukač Zečević, Marijana Jancheska-Ugarkovikj and Milena Gvozdenović, September 2025, p. 25.

B. JOURNALISTS' POSITION IN THE NEWSROOMS

— B.1 JOB POSITIONS OF JOURNALISTS ARE STABLE AND PROTECTED AT THE WORKPLACE

In the preceding period, no progress was made regarding the labour law status of journalists; conditions have become even harder, jobs more insecure, and their rights more endangered than before. A large number of journalists and media workers continue to be engaged under non-standard employment contracts, thereby depriving them of fundamental rights arising from an employment relationship. Abuses regarding employment models have been recorded. The most frequent forms of abuse involve the conclusion of, primarily, temporary and occasional service contracts, followed by service contracts but also fixed-term employment contracts even when the conditions for their conclusion are not met; nevertheless, employers conclude them for the performance of tasks that fall under their core business activity. The conclusion of temporary and occasional service contracts is particularly problematic and represents the most common form of abuse, especially within public service broadcasters. This type of contract is problematic because the employer can very easily terminate it for any reason and at any moment.⁹⁹ Undeclared work remains more prevalent in the journalism profession than in other industries.¹⁰⁰ In the preceding period, several cases of dismissal were recorded, alongside the non-renewal of contracts for freelance contributors who had worked in that status for years, even in positions for which a great need exists, as well as the issuance of warnings of dismissal. Journalists suffered consequences due to the views they expressed, including on their private accounts on social media, or because they advocated for professional reporting in the public interest within their own media outlets. Formally, these were not stated as the reasons for dismissal; instead, in the majority of cases, the dismissals were justified as operational redundancies, following previously implemented controversial evaluation processes and amendments to the systematisation of job positions.

Journalists in Serbia work under very difficult conditions, and their social and economic position is unfavourable. The most common problems they faced in the previous year are precisely related to insecure forms of employment, as well as constant pressure and the fear of suffering certain consequences for what they say. Furthermore, media freedom carries other rights with it, including labour rights. When that freedom exists, and when journalists know they can report freely in accordance with the law, they can also fight for their labour rights. However, when that freedom is absent, the exercise of basic labour rights is also endangered, leading to a lack of employment contracts, as well as the denial of rights to paid overtime work, trade union organising, and other rights.¹⁰¹

99 OSCE, [Economic and Social Rights of Journalists and Media Workers](#), Dr Jovana Misailović, Dr Mario Reljanović, February 2026, pp. 5–9.

100 Ibid., p. 31.

101 Interviews conducted as part of the research, implemented by Marija Babić.

In addition, the difficult financial situation and the survival of media outlets directly affect the position of journalists, especially those in smaller local communities whose basic rights are endangered. Often, these are very small editorial teams, sometimes with just two employees handling all operations, where even basic labour rights are virtually non-existent. However, journalists themselves frequently consent to this out of a desire to remain in the profession and ensure the survival of their media outlet, consequently being forced to take on additional jobs to secure a basic livelihood.

Some of the rights most frequently violated include: the right to limited working hours and a predictable working schedule, the right to disconnect, the performance of tasks not included in the job description, inappropriate editorial influences and external influences on reporting, discrimination and harassment at work, the absence of health and safety measures at work, as well as the right to a fair salary and other earnings and compensations.¹⁰² The main problems are the level of salaries and irregular payments.

Journalists consider their greatest problems to be financial, including low salaries and economic uncertainty regarding the survival of media outlets, especially smaller local ones. However, last year, larger media outlets also encountered similar problems, such as changes in ownership structures that left journalists wondering whether they will be able to report freely, or if they will have a job at all. As a result, journalists often consent to lower salaries and harsher conditions to preserve their professional freedom.¹⁰³

Journalists' salaries are low, especially when compared to the national average. A trend of deterioration in the material position of journalists is also being recorded.¹⁰⁴ Research shows that a total of 60.9% of surveyed journalists receive amounts in the three highest categories (81,000 to 90,000, then 91,000 to 100,000, and more than 100,000 dinars),¹⁰⁵ while 5.1% had no income in the past three months or receive less than 50,000 dinars.¹⁰⁶ The situation is particularly poor in smaller local media, where journalists work for incomes that are lower not only than the average salary but also than the minimum wage. Another analysis dealing with the state of local media shows that a fifth of the surveyed journalists earn less than 50,000 dinars per month, and an equal proportion earn less than 65,000 dinars, which shows that almost half of local journalists live with monthly incomes below the national average, and even below the minimum wage.¹⁰⁷

The average basic net salary of journalists employed at Radio Television of Serbia (RTS) amounts to 95,619 dinars, while the

102 Ibid., pp. 11–15.

103 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

104 Coalition for Media Freedom, [Analysis of the Results of the Research on Labour Rights, Socio-Economic Position and Professional Status of Media Workers in the Republic of Serbia in 2025](#), Dr Smiljana Milinkov, March 2026. The research showed that 45.9% of the surveyed male and female journalists recorded a deterioration, as opposed to only 13.9% who recorded an improvement in their material position.

105 The research encompasses 8 income categories: no income, less than 50,000 dinars, 51,000 – 60,000 dinars, 61,000 – 70,000 dinars, 71,000 – 80,000 dinars, 81,000 – 90,000 dinars, 91,000 – 100,000 dinars and more than 100,000 dinars.

106 Ibid.

107 ANEM, [Indicators of the State of Local Media in Serbia for 2025](#), Bojan Cvejić, January 2026, p. 2.

average basic salary of employees is 96,066 dinars.¹⁰⁸ Within this public service broadcaster, large differences are noticeable between journalists and managerial positions. As of 31 January 2026, the average net salaries of directors amounted to 199,196.16 dinars, executive directors 159,491.52 dinars, and editors-in-chief 179,231.68 dinars.¹⁰⁹ There was significant public discussion regarding the rewarding of RTS journalists and the high amounts allocated annually for performance bonuses, which are not awarded transparently and fairly, as also pointed out by the President of the RTS Management Board, while RTS itself denied this. The highest individual bonus paid in the period from 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025 amounted to 274,000 dinars gross, while the lowest individual bonus paid was 4,000 dinars gross.¹¹⁰ At Radio Television of Vojvodina (RTV), the situation is worse. The average net salary of journalists employed at RTV amounts to 73,327.56 dinars, while for employees in general, it amounts to 67,510.83 dinars.¹¹¹

Trade unions exist in private media, but not to a sufficient extent, and the general trust of journalists in trade unions has recorded no progress. The percentage of trade union establishment within the editorial teams themselves remains very low, and although there were attempts to establish them, they remained unsuccessful. However, it has been shown that at times when journalists' labour rights are endangered, they join trade unions and turn to them.¹¹² At the local level, journalists engage less in trade union organising. The fact that journalists consider trade unions not to be useful enough remains a concern, and there is a deeply divided perception regarding the value of trade union action.¹¹³ Media owners generally do not allow the establishment of trade unions, and the idea of establishing one creates a poor relationship with the owner.¹¹⁴ Collective agreements have been signed in a total of four media outlets, of which two are public service broadcasters, *Magyar Szó*, and Radio Television Kragujevac. They have proven to be a relatively good tool for improving the position of journalists.¹¹⁵ However, private media outlets do not have collective agreements, nor has a branch collective agreement been signed that would secure better conditions for journalists. There is an awareness among journalists regarding the importance of a branch collective agreement, but although there were attempts to initiate negotiations, there is no progress, nor is there support from state institutions, and the branch collective agreement itself remains unattainable.¹¹⁶ Serbia is far from a branch collective agreement, primarily due to employers who refuse to negotiate, and the basic conditions for this do not exist. Trade unions are not strong enough, they cannot reach an agreement among themselves,

108 Data obtained from RTS upon a request for access to information of public importance dated 25 February 2026.

109 [Information Booklet](#) of the Public Media Institution "Radio Television of Serbia", March 2026.

110 IJAS, [What Is Hidden Behind the Performance Bonuses at RTS – A Reward System or a Conformity System?](#), Ivana Kragulj, 2 April 2026.

111 Data obtained from RTV upon a request for access to information of public importance dated 13 March 2026.

112 OSCE, [Economic and Social Rights of Journalists and Media Workers](#), Dr Jovana Misailović, Dr Mario Reljanović, February 2026, pp. 16 and 17.

113 Coalition for Media Freedom, Analysis of the Results of the Research on Labour Rights, Socio-Economic Position and Professional Status of Media Workers in the Republic of Serbia in 2025, Dr Smiljana Milinkov, March 2026, pp. 35 and 19.

114 SINOS, [How to Achieve Decent Work for Journalists and Media Workers in Serbia](#), 24 December 2024.

115 OSCE, [Economic and Social Rights of Journalists and Media Workers](#), Dr Jovana Misailović, Dr Mario Reljanović, February 2026, p. 12.

116 Ibid., p. 31.

and it is also necessary to determine representativeness, which has not been established for many years.¹¹⁷

— B.2 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE PRIVATE MEDIA

Only a small number of media outlets have specific internal acts that ensure editorial independence and separate the editorial team from the media owner. This number has increased due to alignment with the law, which introduced a new obligation for the media. However, we do not have data on the exact number of media outlets.

The Law on Public Information and Media prescribes additional guarantees for the protection of media editorial policy and freedom of public information, and stipulates that the publisher is obliged to draft and publish a document providing for measures and procedures to protect that policy.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, for media outlets whose founder is indirectly or directly the state, the principles upon which the work of public media services is based apply; it is then prescribed that the editorial policy of such media is independent of the founder and publisher, and that the fulfilment of professional and ethical standards in operation is secured through the adoption of an internal ethical code approved by the media's editorial team.¹¹⁹

The obligation to submit a document providing for measures and procedures for the protection of editorial policy to the Media Register began to apply on 1 January 2025. The Coalition for Media Freedom drafted models for a set of internal acts that would make it easier for the media to implement the entire process. These acts are in accordance with domestic laws, the ethical code, and also international standards relating to public information, providing greater guarantees of protection. Media outlets may adopt them, but there is no prescribed sanction if they fail to do so.

Furthermore, the Code of Journalists of Serbia stipulates that the economic and political interests of the publisher must not influence editorial policy in a way that results in inaccurate, unobjective, incomplete, and untimely informing of the public, which additionally guarantees editorial independence.

However, despite all guarantees, the illicit influence of media owners on the editorial team and editorial independence is precisely the problem. Editorial independence is seriously undermined, and the mechanisms of protection against influence are ineffective or are not respected. This is primarily a consequence of clientelist relations and political control over the media, as well as the funding from public sources used to exert influence on private media.¹²⁰

117 Interviews conducted as part of the research – Jovana Misailović, implemented by Marija Babić and Rade Djurić.

118 Law on Public Information and Media, Article 39.

119 Ibid., Article 39a.

120 CMPF, [Monitoring Media Pluralism in Serbia for 2025](#), Irena Milutinović.

Media outlets still mostly do not have their own internal ethical codes, but certain media adhere to the ethical standards prescribed in the Code of Journalists of Serbia, which was amended and whose provisions began to apply in 2025.¹²¹ For online media, there are Guidelines for the Application of the Code of Journalists of Serbia in the Online Environment,¹²² as well as the Code of the Online Media Association,¹²³ both of which rely on the Code of Journalists of Serbia. Over the past few years, certain private media outlets, in cooperation with the Press Council, have introduced internal codes: the *Beta* agency, *Lozničke novosti*, *Sremske novine*, the portals *Magločistač*, *Storyteller*, the *Media i reform centar Niš*, as well as *TV Info Puls Vranje*.

In addition to the external pressures that journalists of private media suffer, which affect their daily work but also their safety, journalists encounter internal pressures from owners and media management. In 2025, the most common form of internal pressure in private media was the dismissal of journalists, both men and women. The most common formal reasons stated were contract terminations due to operational redundancy. However, the journalists who were dismissed were those who had publicly expressed certain views or stood up in protection of professional rights and opposed the reporting methods of their media outlets.

Despite all the stated legal guarantees, the most drastic case was recorded at *Euronews TV*, which is owned by Telekom Srbija, a company under majority state ownership. Journalist Marija Šehić had her employment contract terminated on the grounds of careless or negligent performance of her work duties and violating work discipline. One of the reasons cited was that she incorrectly stated the functions of two guests during a broadcast, even though she corrected that mistake during the same programme.¹²⁴ Following this, at least 12 journalists were dismissed due to alleged redundancies, with justifications citing organisational changes and the cessation of the need for their job positions, alongside controversial evaluation processes and changes in the systematisation of job positions. The dismissals followed changes in the leadership of this media outlet and after a shift in its editorial policy. Prior to that, the journalists had been exposed to various forms of pressure for months, which became visible after a large number of journalists from this editorial team drafted a statement expressing disagreement with the media outlet's official press release regarding the blockade of RTS, pointing out the deviation from professional standards. Although cost reduction was cited as the reason for the dismissals in internal communication, following the change in leadership, investments were made in new projects, additional costs were incurred, and a larger number of people were hired.¹²⁵

121 IJAS, [Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and the Journalists' Safety Index 2024](#), Rade Djurić, April 2025, p. 32

122 [Guidelines for the Application of the Code of Journalists of Serbia in the Online Environment](#).

123 [Code of the Online Media Association](#).

124 Coalition for Media Freedom, [The Dismissal of Marija Šehić from TV Euronews Serbia Is an Example of the Persecution of a Journalist Who Opposed Professional Dishonour](#), 12 June 2025.

125 IJAS, EFJ, JAS, IJAS and Nezavisnost Trade Union: [Euronews Serbia Dismissed Journalists, Cameramen and Media Workers Who Defended the Profession](#), 28 June 2025.

Cases of dismissals were also recorded where “operational redundancy” was cited as the formal reason, while the journalists themselves pointed out that the actual reasons were connected to expressing opinions, publishing pictures from protests, and public support for student protests on their private profiles. Examples of such situations include the dismissals of the editor of the weekend edition of *Politika*, Sandra Gucijan and the chronicle editor, Dorotea Čarnić, followed by *Večernje novosti* journalist Vojislava Crnjanski Spasojević,¹²⁶ the editor of the *ELLE* magazine website Tara Djukić,¹²⁷ as well as Milica Blažević, a final-year journalism student employed at *Tanjug* television.¹²⁸

Pressures continue in 2026, and one of the crucial points involves changes within the Adria News Network, under which *N1*, *Nova*, *Danas*, *Radar*, nova.rs, and other regional media operate. The concern began with the dismissal of the director of *N1* television, Igor Božić, which was seen by the public as an attack on the editorial independence of this television station and pressure on other media within this group, as well as an unacceptable interference by the owner in the editorial policy of this outlet, which could have consequences not only for these media but also generally for media freedom in Serbia.¹²⁹ This apprehension deepened following confirmation that an agreement was reached on the sale of the company Adria News S.à r.l. to the international investment group Alpac Capital. Although the sale itself does not necessarily mean an automatic threat to editorial independence, the socio-political situation, the current state of the media sector, and the pressures faced by the media indicate the severity of this situation and point to much broader pressures on media freedom in Serbia.¹³⁰

Local media suffer the consequences of operating in smaller communities where most people know each other, meaning that journalists’ decisions to publish specific content are called into question almost daily, often accompanied by suggestions regarding who the news relates to, and even receiving “friendly” phone calls.¹³¹

— B.3 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTERS

The editorial independence of public media services is prescribed by the Law on Public Service Broadcasters. As with the ban on censorship and illicit influence on the editorial team and journalists, it is also guaranteed by the statutes of Radio Television of Serbia and Radio Television of Vojvodina. RTS has adopted a Code of Ethics which does not contain provisions on editorial independence, but prescribes certain standards of conduct and behaviour for journalists.¹³²

126 Danas, “[Stop the Persecution of Journalists” Gathering: Female Journalists Testify About Dismissals Due to Professional Coverage and Personal Posts](#), FoNet, 20 June 2025.

127 N1, [Editor Dismissed from ELLE: Publisher Denies That the Reason Is Support for Students](#), 15 January 2025.

128 Vreme, [Tanjug Journalist Dismissed Due to Support for Students?](#), 2 September 2025.

129 IJAS, [NCEU: The Dismissal of the N1 Director and Pressures on Editorial Policy Move Serbia Away from European Standards](#), 9 April 2026.

130 IJAS, [EFJ and Regional EFJ Members Express Concern Over the Sale of Adria News Network to Alpac Capital](#), 29 May 2026.

131 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

132 IJAS, [Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and the Journalists’ Safety Index 2023](#), Rade Djurić and Marija Babić, April 2024, p. 25.

There are no special internal organisational rules to ensure that editorial teams are independent from the management and governing bodies of public media. The RTS Code of Ethics does not contain such rules, while the RTV collective agreement provides for some additional guarantees for journalists, specifically for authors.

However, pressures on public service broadcasters continued into 2025, affecting their editorial policy as well. Cases of pressure from public officials have been recorded. Particularly concerning is the conduct within RTS itself regarding employees who publicly expressed their opinions and demanded that the broadcaster report professionally, in a timely manner, and objectively in accordance with the law.

The authorities continued to exert pressure on public service broadcasters in the preceding year as well, primarily on RTS. Dissatisfied with the method of reporting, the President of the Republic called an RTS correspondent from Niš an imbecile, and in the apology, he issued afterwards, he uttered new insults.¹³³ Furthermore, the President of the Republic stated that RTS was part of a coloured revolution, while also targeting individual journalists. RTS was also targeted by the Serbian Progressive Party, whose members stated that journalists were siding with politicians who wanted to overthrow the constitutional order of Serbia.¹³⁴

On the other hand, dissatisfied with the reporting on protests and social events, student protesters and citizens blockaded RTS and demanded that the public service broadcaster report in accordance with the law. At that time, certain employees were targeted when personal data were publicly shared on social media and posters with the names and photographs of editors were put up, resembling wanted posters in their appearance.

RTS employees suffered immense pressure within the editorial team itself during 2025. In the course of the protests, a section of the employees formed an informal group, "Naš pRoTeSt" (Our Protest), which demanded professional reporting by RTS in accordance with the law and the code of ethics. Employees from this group suffered a series of pressures, and some of them were summoned for an informative talk by the BIA. Namely, following a meeting of RTS employees held on 16 April in the parking lot of this media house's building, which was attended by more than 50 colleagues, both men and women, five of them received a summons from the BIA, and some of them were also members of this informal organisation.¹³⁵

Pressures within the media house itself ensued due to professional viewpoints, the expression of opinions, or the signing of an open letter to the RTS management. A large number of freelance contributors had their contracts not renewed, even though they had held those positions for a very

133 Vreme, [Vučić Apologised, But Called Out Journalists and RTS: They Are Not Journalists, But Political Activists](#), 3 March 2025.

134 Danas, [Vučić Is Obsessed with RTS: The President at War with the State Television, Wants to Turn It into Informer and Pink](#), Nadja Vukajlović, 7 October 2025.

135 IJAS, [We Are Concerned Over the Summoning of RTS Employees for Informative Talks](#), 14 April 2025.

long time, and even in positions that are facing a shortage within RTS. Furthermore, three permanently employed staff members from Radio Belgrade received warning notices for an alleged breach of work duties and non-compliance with work discipline, with a warning of dismissal if the same breach is repeated within the next six months. This all followed after they signed an open letter in which they publicly opposed the RTS coverage method and demanded that this public service broadcaster report objectively, truthfully, and in a timely manner, in accordance with laws and ethical standards, and most of them were part of the informal workers' association of RTS, "Naš pRoTeSt".¹³⁶ In 2025, the "empty desk mobbing" practice continued. Namely, the editor of the RTS news programme, Tamara Tankosić, was ignored last year as well, received no work assignments, and her reports very rarely appeared in news broadcasts. Furthermore, after sending an open letter to the editor of the RTS news programme, journalist Milan Srdić from the RTS correspondent office in Novi Sad no longer receives work assignments.¹³⁷

Journalists who wished to report freely and cover student and civic protests suffered a great deal of pressure in 2025 and faced consequences because of it. Pressures occur during attempts to invite certain guests to broadcasts and cover specific topics, but they are also exerted through changes to programming schedules.¹³⁸

— B.4 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT MEDIA SECTOR

Civil sector media are public information outlets that provide their services in the public interest, in order to satisfy the specific interests of certain social groups and citizens' organisations, and the publisher cannot be a legal entity established for profit.¹³⁹ Civil sector media services are provided for the specific interests of certain social groups rather than for profit, and the media service provider can be an association, an endowment, a foundation, a higher education institution, a church, or a religious community.¹⁴⁰ The greatest number of non-profit media outlets are online media. Mostly, these are media outlets engaged in investigative journalism, but also local media that employ a smaller number of journalists and are established by civil society organisations. The significance of non-profit media is major, particularly because the focus is placed on certain specific interests and topics. However, the contribution of non-profit media has also been evident over the past year and a half in field reporting and daily social events. They reported on topics of public interest and were recognised for it.¹⁴¹

Certain media outlets have adopted internal acts and codes, and where they exist, they are applied in practice.

136 IJAS, [We Demand an Immediate End to the Retaliation Against RTS Employees for Defending Objective Reporting](#), 25 July 2025.

137 OSCE, [Economic and Social Rights of Journalists and Media Workers](#), Dr Jovana Misailović, Dr Mario Reljanović, February 2026, pp. 20, 26 and 27.

138 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

139 Law on Public Information and Media, Article 36.

140 Law on Electronic Media, Article 84.

141 H-ALTER, [Non-profit Media in the Era of Rebellion](#), Alen Mikec, 23 November 2025.

Still, a larger number of media outlets do not have their own internal acts. Media outlets engaged in investigative journalism have their own internal acts, including the Centre for Investigative Journalism of Serbia (*CINS*), *Insajder*, the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (*BIRN*), and the Crime and Corruption Reporting Network (*KRIK*). *BIRN* also has its own code of ethics. In addition to these, certain local media outlets, such as the portals *Storyteller* and *Magločistač*, also have internal acts, which contain provisions concerning the relationship between management and the editorial team.

Non-profit media and journalists from their editorial teams were exposed to various pressures. Investigative media were exposed to SLAPP lawsuits, and this trend continued in 2025. *KRIK* was the target of serious SLAPP lawsuits, not only for injury to reputation and honour but also criminal lawsuits through which even prison sentences and a ban on practising journalism were demanded. Furthermore, these media outlets were the target of daily pressure and targeting by public officials, both at the national and local levels.¹⁴²

— B.5 FREEDOM OF JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWS PRODUCTION PROCESS

Journalistic freedom in the process of news production and topic selection depends primarily on the type of media outlet in which journalists work, their editorial independence, and professionalism. This difference became even clearer in the preceding year, which demonstrated that media outlets with greater editorial independence also enjoy more freedom. Media outlets engaged in investigative journalism still enjoy the most freedom, while the situation is different within pro-government media.

Over the past year, journalists were exposed to various influences and fell under external as well as internal pressure. Journalists across different media outlets have been under various types of external pressure for many years. Those who perform their job professionally find themselves under constant pressure from those on whom they report critically. However, in 2025, pressures from management were also recorded. Journalists of *Euronews* Serbia were exposed to pressure from management but also from the editors, which included censorship, unprofessional demands, bans on asking questions to certain government representatives, as well as sanctions for refusing to comply with such orders. The situation deteriorated from the moment journalists and other media workers opposed and publicly expressed disagreement with the management. Following this, even greater pressures ensued, along with constant threats of dismissal, and changes to the work schedule that were exhausting and unsustainable for the employees.¹⁴³ All of this influenced their professional standards and the performance of journalistic work.

142 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

143 IJAS, [EFJ and IJAS: Concerning Pressures and the Collapse of Professional Standards at Euronews Serbia Must Stop](#), 16 May 2025.

In 2025, censorship and self-censorship were more pronounced than in previous years, both in private media and within public service broadcasters. One of the key factors in the violation of their rights was the inappropriate influence of editors, as well as external influence on reporting. This is particularly concerning for journalists who hold non-standard employment contracts and who have almost no protection.¹⁴⁴ However, examples from the preceding year have shown us that even employment contracts offer little guarantee.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, self-censorship was exceptionally present in the previous year, and a series of examples indicates that employers and management, through their conduct, intended to influence journalists not to cover certain topics and to restrict objective reporting. On the other hand, self-censorship is highly present within media close to the authorities, and is directly linked to their livelihood, meaning, complying with such rules for the sake of survival.¹⁴⁶ Within public service broadcasters, self-censorship is very pronounced because people have grown accustomed to it and have been operating that way for years.¹⁴⁷

— B.6 WORKING POSITION OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS

The general deterioration of working conditions has particularly affected female journalists. They work under very difficult conditions, and their status and working conditions themselves are often worse compared to their male colleagues. This situation is mostly compounded by specific ways in which female journalists are targeted, including sexism, misogyny, and discrimination. Female journalists are frequently overworked and engage in non-standard employment, which also leads to health problems.¹⁴⁸ The position of female journalists in smaller local areas is harder because these are small communities where everyone knows one another, and the level of responsibility is greater.¹⁴⁹

The economic position of female journalists is more unfavourable than that of their male colleagues. Although the crisis affects both sexes, research shows that female journalists are more affected when exiting the profession, while this is particularly visible during re-entry into the labour market. Namely, in the event of job loss, women are in a more disadvantageous position as 25.2% of them stand no realistic chance of finding a new job. Salary discrepancies exist, especially in the lower pay grades; men are more heavily represented in the highest income categories, while women are in the lower pay grades.¹⁵⁰

Although female journalists predominate in this profession and are present in editorial positions, men still outnumber

144 OSCE, [Economic and Social Rights of Journalists and Media Workers](#), Dr Jovana Misailović, Dr Mario Reljanović, February 2026.

145 A large number of employment contract terminations for employees at Euronews Serbia due to operational redundancy.

146 Coalition for Media Freedom, [Analysis of the Results of the Research on Labour Rights, Socio-Economic Position and Professional Status of Media Workers in the Republic of Serbia in 2025](#), Dr Smiljana Milinkov, March 2026, p. 39.

147 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

148 Coalition for Media Freedom, [Analysis of the Results of the Research on Labour Rights, Socio-Economic Position and Professional Status of Media Workers in the Republic of Serbia in 2025](#), Dr Smiljana Milinkov, March 2026.

149 Prijepolje Women Forum, [Amela Bajrović: It Is Harder to Be a Female Journalist in a Smaller Town](#), 25 March 2026.

150 Coalition for Media Freedom, [Analysis of the Results of the Research on Labour Rights, Socio-Economic Position and Professional Status of Media Workers in the Republic of Serbia in 2025](#), Dr Smiljana Milinkov, March 2026, pp. 17 and 18.

them in managerial roles. The dominance of men and inequality in certain areas are still present in the media, such as the gender imbalance in breaking news.¹⁵¹

Women are exposed to specific gender-based pressures. In the preceding period, although attacks were directed at both female and male journalists, they nevertheless differed, as attacks and threats against female journalists were often accompanied by highly brutal misogynistic and sexist threats and insults. In addition to such attacks, female journalists were also exposed to cases of internal harassment.¹⁵² The research data indicating that nearly 80% of female journalists have experienced some form of gender-based violence are particularly concerning.¹⁵³

Furthermore, female journalists and media workers in Serbia are exposed to various forms of discrimination. Research shows that 84% of surveyed media workers have experienced gender-based discrimination, and the fact that only 5 per cent of them reported the case to the labour inspectorate is particularly concerning.¹⁵⁴ Comments regarding appearance are frequently directed at female journalists, and they are also exposed to discrimination concerning national affiliation, as well as due to the way they speak the Serbian language.¹⁵⁵

Female journalists encounter problems in their daily work, pressures from interlocutors, inappropriate comments and offers, up to situations where interlocutors address their male colleagues during a conversation instead of them.¹⁵⁶

Female journalists do not feel safe, and the deficiencies in internal acts within newsrooms further deepen their insecurity. The lack of will within the editorial teams themselves to deal with this issue more seriously, alongside the inadequate response of the competent institutions, indicates an insufficiently developed mechanism for their protection. This is also highlighted by specific cases where the editorial management decides to send female journalists to report from certain higher-risk locations and events because it is expected that there will be a lower chance of a woman being attacked than a man, which is frequently not the case.¹⁵⁷

151 GMMP, [WHO MAKES THE NEWS, Women and Men in the News in Serbia](#), Snježana Milivojević and Danka Ninković-Slavnić, December 2025, p. 36.

152 Coalition for Media Freedom, [Analysis of the Results of the Research on Labour Rights, Socio-Economic Position and Professional Status of Media Workers in the Republic of Serbia in 2025](#), Dr Smiljana Milinkov, March 2026.

153 Nezavisnost, [Conference on Violence Against Women in the Media: 'We Will Not Consent to Silence'](#), 21 April 2026.

154 Nezavisnost, [Mass Discrimination of Female Media Workers in Serbia!](#), 19 December 2025.

155 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

156 Ibid.

157 Ibid.

C. JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

— C.1 JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ACTORS HAVE ACCESS TO IMMEDIATE AND EFFECTIVE PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Journalists and media actors in Serbia, when attacked or threatened, have limited access to immediate and effective protective measures.

As early as 2016, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of the Interior (Moi), with the support and at the initiative of journalistic associations, established a mechanism for reporting serious threats, allowing journalists relatively easy access to the system. The functional mechanism encompasses a system of reporting and notification through instructions that bind prosecutors and the police to urgent action within short deadlines, as well as contact points for the rapid reporting and verification of cases. These instructions imperatively bind prosecutors and the police to urgent action within short deadlines, rapid reporting, and the verification of cases.¹⁵⁸

Journalists exposed to threats and attacks can also turn to the Standing Working Group for Safety, which coordinates and monitors the work of contact points, meeting on a regular or extraordinary basis depending on current threats of attacks against journalists.

The system is partially functional and, in reality, facilitates reporting; however, application in practice demonstrates that its effectiveness varies. During the year, 140 cases were formed within public prosecutors' offices based on reports.¹⁵⁹ The conduct and attitude, particularly of police officers, are frequently selective and contrary to the regulations governing their conduct. Public prosecutors also acted selectively, but unlike police officers, they demonstrated a higher degree of accountability.

In 2025, a drastic shift occurred in the conduct and attitude of police officers, especially following the emergence of student protests and blockades alongside citizens. From March 2025 until the end of December of the same year, more than 75 different forms of attacks and threats by police officers and other special units of the MOI against journalists were recorded, as well as various forms of non-action or refusal to act when journalists were attacked or threatened.¹⁶⁰ This sudden change in the behaviour of police representatives is linked to socio-political changes and the dissatisfaction of students and citizens in Serbia with the actions and attitude of government officials regarding accountability for tragedies and corruption in the country.

158 Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, [Journalist Safety page](#), December 2025.

159 Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, [Statistical Data on the Conduct of Public Prosecutors' Offices](#), May 2026.

160 IJAS, [August Records a High Number of Attacks on Male and Female Journalists](#): 46 Incidents in One Month, 14 Attacks by the Police.

Although the basic level of communication and requests towards the police within the contact point system was maintained, representatives of four out of five associations within the framework of the Standing Working Group froze relations with police representatives and continued to utilise only the official contact point system.¹⁶¹ This process represents a reaction and dissatisfaction with the work of executive government authorities on behalf of the largest number of active and credible associations and organisations at all levels. The police are particularly singled out, as they are considered to be under the immense influence of the executive branch.¹⁶²

— **C.2 JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS HAVE ACCESS TO SPECIAL PROTECTION OR SAFETY MECHANISMS (WHOSE LIVES OR PHYSICAL INTEGRITY ARE AT REAL AND IMMEDIATE RISK) HAVE ACCESS TO SPECIAL PROTECTION OR SAFETY MECHANISMS**

In Serbia, several mechanisms exist for the protection of journalists facing threats or who are in danger, particularly those investigating corruption and organised crime. These mechanisms primarily focus on legal protection and the rapid reaction of institutions, while capacities for providing direct physical protection to individuals and certain other more specific measures remain limited.

The police, in cooperation with the BIA, can provide individual and special protection in cases where they assess that a need for it exists. This assessment is carried out upon the personal request of the individual concerned, or based on an official police assessment that it is necessary. Direct physical protection, such as the assignment of personal security, is provided rarely and usually in exceptional situations when it is assessed that the risk to the life or physical integrity of the journalist is high. Such measures require an individual assessment by the competent authorities, lack systemic regulation, and are not among the mechanisms supported by journalists, primarily due to the high level of distrust towards the police and the security structures represented by the BIA. In practice, a safety assessment can be conducted individually by the competent authorities, as the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) has done in certain cases during earlier periods when journalists reported threats or attacks. In July 2025, journalist Veran Matić requested a safety assessment from the police after the President of Serbia, Aleksandar Vučić, stated that “those who were convicted because of Veran Matić should have their sentences erased from the records”. Today in Serbia, only one journalist has police protection, namely Vladimir Mitrić from Loznica, who has had a permanent police escort for 19 years.¹⁶³

Although no standardised procedure for systematic risk assessment exists at the national level, the competent

161 Beta, [ANEM and IJAS Freeze Membership in the Standing Working Group for Journalist Safety](#), January 2026.

162 Insajder TV, [Petrović \(BCBP\): Proceedings Against Police Officers in Novi Sad Even Though They Acted in Accordance with the Law Fits the Authorities' Pattern of Behaviour](#), April 2026.

163 Nova.rs, [The Case of Journalist Vladimir Mitrić Enters Its 21st Year Without Full Justice](#), 29 April 2026.

authorities can conduct individual safety assessments in specific cases of reported threats or attacks against journalists.¹⁶⁴ Practice has demonstrated that such assessments are possible without the request of the persons concerned, but rather through an *ex officio* decision and the police's own assessment, with the assistance of the BIA. Numerous journalists and media workers refuse to have a special safety assessment conducted, and the reason for this is serious distrust towards the competent authorities, the police, and the Security Information Agency.¹⁶⁵

Helplines and telephone numbers for journalist assistance provide free legal aid to journalists exposed to threats, attacks, or pressure, covering the costs of lawyers representing the attacked journalists. Assistance is also provided by human rights organisations, such as Yucom, Civic Initiatives, and the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (BCHR).

Although psychological support is recognised as important for journalists facing stress and trauma, such services are limited.¹⁶⁶ Journalists frequently lack access to adequate psychological help, which points to the need for developing specialised support programmes in this area. Despite the existence of these services, challenges remain regarding their availability, coordination, and sustainability. Many organisations depend on project funding, which can affect the continuity of assistance provision.

In 2025, organised support for journalists was part of the pro bono and volunteer assistance of organisations and journalistic associations through cooperation with lawyers and their firms.¹⁶⁷ This particularly applies to lawyers who provided free services and support to journalists reporting during the protests when they were attacked or detained by the police or the BIA. Free legal aid also extended to other cases of targeting journalists, such as the confiscation of mobile phones and other personal devices and the installation of software to monitor journalists' communication.

Although the focus of the Standing Working Group for Journalist Safety is on legal protection and the efficient prosecution of cases involving threats to journalist safety, there is no clear data on the existence of a formalised procedure for systematic risk assessment that would identify the specific protection needs of journalists or other citizens who are victims.

— C.3 FEMALE JOURNALISTS HAVE ACCESS TO LEGAL MEASURES AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS WHEN FACED WITH GENDER-BASED THREATS, HARASSMENT OR VIOLENCE

In 2013, the Republic of Serbia ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating

164 MOI, [Strategic Assessment of Public Safety of the MOI for 2026-2029 on Trends and Directions of Protection](#), December 2025.

165 [Analysis of Journalists' Mental Health](#), ANEM, March 2026.

166 [IJAS Psychological Support](#), ANEM Psychological Support.

167 [The "Štit" \(Shield\) Protection Mechanism](#), Civic Initiatives, December 2024.

violence against women and domestic violence, known as the Istanbul Convention, thereby committing itself to harmonising its legislation with the standards of the convention, which resulted in the adoption and amendment of several laws and strategic documents aimed at the prevention and suppression of gender-based violence.

The systemic framework consists of the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Law on Gender Equality. The first introduces urgent protection measures, the mandatory risk assessment of repeated violence, as well as the coordinated action of competent institutions for a more efficient response. The second law is aimed at suppressing all forms of gender-based violence, while simultaneously promoting equal rights and opportunities for women and men, and obliges public authorities, employers, and other actors to integrate a gender perspective into their operations. The strategic framework is defined by the National Strategy for the Prevention and Combating of Gender-Based Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence for the Period 2021–2025, which establishes objectives and measures for improving the institutional response: from prevention and the protection of victims to the prosecution of perpetrators.

The framework also provides for a series of preventive activities, such as education and awareness-raising through educational programmes and public campaigns, as well as the continuous professional development of employees in education, healthcare, the police, and the judiciary, so that they can recognise and adequately react to cases of gender-based violence in a timely manner. Nevertheless, in practice, these activities rely heavily on the work of non-governmental organisations.

Regulations mandate cooperation between the police, the prosecutor's office, centres for social work, and other relevant institutions. The possibility of imposing urgent protection measures, such as removing the abuser from the home or issuing a restraining order, is also provided for to ensure the immediate protection of the victim.

Despite such a normative framework, female journalists continue to face daily threats, sexist insults, physical attacks, as well as long-term targeting campaigns. Specific regulations protecting women are of no assistance to female journalists. A significant number of these cases remain without an adequate institutional response or judicial epilogue. In the SafeJournalists database, at least 73 attacks and threats directed at female journalists were recorded.¹⁶⁸ In 30 cases, these involved physical attacks, and in 20 cases, involved death threats and endangerment of safety. In at least 50 other cases that do not relate directly to women, the threats and attacks can be linked to female journalists. Out of 103 individual persons who were the targets of attacks

168 [SafeJournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net) database, data search on female journalists, December 2025.

reported to public prosecutors' offices in Serbia, female journalists were the injured party in 48 cases (46.6%).

Female journalists face almost daily threats and sexist insults, physical attacks, and long-term targeting campaigns. The majority of cases remain unpunished or without an effective reaction from institutions.¹⁶⁹

— C.4 PRACTICE OF REGULAR PUBLIC CONDEMNATION OF THREATS AND ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

In Serbia, a consistent practice of public condemnation of threats and attacks against journalists has not been established. The absence of clear and timely reactions is frequently accompanied by a negative narrative from government representatives, which additionally contributes to creating an environment in which such attacks are more frequent and perpetrators are encouraged to act.

The reactions of state institutions and political actors are distinctly selective. Public condemnations are most frequently voiced in politically sensitive or strategically important cases, primarily when the targets of attacks are journalists close to the authorities or pro-government media. Conversely, threats and violence directed at independent and critically oriented journalists often remain without an adequate reaction, especially when they do not attract wider international attention. In certain cases, including incidents involving police officers, even minimal institutional condemnation is absent, and repression and the use of force are justified.

Practical examples confirm such a pattern. While in certain cases of attacks on journalists from pro-government media a rapid reaction and prosecution occur, incidents affecting independent journalists frequently remain without an epilogue. In the case of journalist Vuk Cvijić, no significant progress has been recorded in the investigation, which further highlights the problem of selective conduct.¹⁷⁰

In 2025, a pronounced tendency of public officials to quickly and without reservation stand in protection of pro-government media was observed, often without prior verification of facts. Simultaneously, in cases of attacks on independent journalists, reactions are absent or delayed, and mostly only in situations involving more severe physical incidents. The role of public statements by political leaders in forming a hostile environment is particularly concerning. Negative descriptions of journalists frequently originate precisely from public officials, after which such a narrative spreads through pro-government media and social media. Such coordinated smear campaigns aim to intimidate and delegitimise critical journalism. In attacks on journalists and the media, five dominant narratives have been observed, which interweave and complement each other:

169 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

170 [Attacks on Radar journalist Vuk Cvijić](#), September 2025.

professional discreditation, dehumanisation and demonisation, labelling journalists as traitors and mercenaries, criminalisation, as well as accusations of fascism and Nazism.¹⁷¹ In this context, the example of continuous attacks on the *KRIK* editorial team illustrates the way a long-term pressure campaign is created through the synergy of political statements and the media narrative. Similar patterns are recorded in other cases, where political and media actors use almost identical vocabulary in the targeting of independent journalists.

Despite the formal existence of a legal framework, in practice, there is no consistent, unequivocal, and systemic support for the protection of journalists. On the contrary, selective reactions, the absence of condemnations, and the active creation of a negative narrative contribute to an atmosphere in which journalists, especially those who report critically, are exposed to an increased risk. For the last five months of 2025, the Slavko Ćuruvija Foundation recorded a total of 673 verbal attacks on journalists and the media.¹⁷²

— C.5 POLICE AUTHORITIES ARE SENSITIVE TO JOURNALISTS' PROTECTION ISSUE

Police officers in Serbia continue to display an insufficient level of training for the protection of fundamental human rights and a lack of understanding regarding the role of journalists in a democratic society.

The conduct and attitude of police officers towards journalists on the ground point to a serious gap between formal training and actual practice, whereby the police frequently fail to act in accordance with international standards and their own obligations concerning the protection of journalists.

During 2025, a large number of incidents were recorded in which police officers directly endangered the safety of journalists. In at least 77 cases, journalists were exposed to physical violence, threats, unfounded deprivation of liberty, as well as the confiscation of equipment or obstruction of their work. Cases of reporting from protests and public gatherings are particularly problematic, where journalists, despite clearly displayed credentials, were treated as participants rather than observers acting in the public interest.¹⁷³

The police failed to demonstrate appropriate attention towards journalists regarding their safety. The attitude of the police towards journalists in 2025 was characterised by violence, intimidation, institutional inefficiency, and a lack of accountability, which stands in contrast to domestic regulations and international standards for the protection of freedom of expression.¹⁷⁴

171 SCF, [Constructing an Enemy: How Tabloids Deal with Professional Journalists](#), June 2025.

172 SCF, [Targeted by the Powerful, Six-Month Report](#), February 2026.

173 IJAS, [IJAS: MOI to Initiate Proceedings Against Officers Who Physically Attacked Journalists Last Night](#), November 2025.

174 IJAS, [Safety of Female Journalists in Serbia Drastically Deteriorated: Threats, Physical Attacks and Impunity Characterised 2025](#), March 2026.

Journalists were detained without a clear legal basis, identification checks were conducted in a selective manner, and journalists were exposed to intimidation by police officers during field reporting. In certain situations, the police confiscated mobile phones, cameras, laptops, and recorded material, thereby directly endangering freedom of information and the protection of sources. Cases of verbal threats and attempts to remove journalists from the scene without a legal basis were also recorded, especially during politically sensitive gatherings.

Such conduct has led to a serious erosion of trust between journalists and the Ministry of the Interior (MOI), as well as to the suspension of regular communication with certain editorial teams and journalistic associations.

The MOI applies the Instruction on Urgent Action in Cases of Threats and Attacks Against Journalists, which was adopted as early as 2016. The Instruction is part of the implementation of the Law on Police and has not been updated since. The MOI is also supposed to apply an internal act that ensures assistance to victims during the commission of criminal offences, and it has been emphasised on multiple occasions that this act also applies to journalists and media workers.

Although the police formally conduct training in the field of human rights, often with the support of international organisations such as the OSCE, the practical attitude of the police towards journalists shows that these training sessions do not have the corresponding effect.¹⁷⁵

Organisations and research emphasise several key conclusions regarding the conduct of the police towards journalists:

- The police increasingly use excessive force or powers to restrict reporting from protests;
- Unfounded detentions and the confiscation of equipment are becoming standard patterns of pressure;
- The lack of effective investigations and sanctions for police officers contributes to impunity;
- The problem of targeting journalists who report on politically sensitive topics is pronounced;
- Formal mechanisms for the protection of journalists exist, but their implementation remains weak and inconsistent.

An additional problem is represented by the non-transparency in the work of the police and hindered communication with journalists. Media inquiries frequently remain unanswered or the responses are incomplete and untimely, while communication is reduced to formal procedures that do not allow for the efficient exchange of information.¹⁷⁶

175 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.
176 Ibid.

— C.6 SPECIALISED UNITS/OFFICERS ARE EQUIPPED WITH EXPERTISE FOR INVESTIGATING ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Despite the existence of formal mechanisms of cooperation between the police and public prosecutors' offices, including the contact point system established as early as 2018, practice in 2025 demonstrates serious deficiencies in the protection of journalists and efficient response to attacks.

The contact points, although conceived as a crucial instrument for coordination and rapid reaction, frequently function without continuity, accompanied by frequent personnel changes, insufficient training, and the limited transparency of their work. The commitment of public prosecutors and police officers depends on the attitude of the specific section of the institution and the individual approach towards the issue of attacks on journalists. In the preceding year, the impression was that this attitude was better on behalf of part of the public prosecutor's office, whereas the attitude of police officers became highly poor and concerning.

Today, public prosecutors' offices and the police possess sufficient knowledge to protect journalists. In operational terms, the police dispose of significant technical capacities for gathering evidence, while prosecutors' offices hold a key role in prosecution. However, the lack of coordination, varying levels of commitment, and the absence of sensitivity towards the position of journalists result in inconsistent conduct. In practice, journalists' reports are frequently processed slowly or selectively, and individual cases are dismissed due to a formal interpretation that direct threats do not exist, thereby disregarding the broader context of intimidation and the severity of the consequences for journalists.¹⁷⁷

Cooperation between the institutions has deteriorated, most frequently due to slow action or non-action by the police in cases where orders to act have been issued. This seriously hinders investigations, but it does not absolve public prosecutors, who continue to easily dismiss journalists' reports in a large number of cases and do not resort to a more serious consideration of the existence of other criminal offences or misdemeanours.

During 2025, a series of specific incidents was recorded that point to problematic conduct by the police towards journalists. On multiple occasions, journalists were detained without grounds while reporting from public gatherings and protests, without a clear legal basis, frequently accompanied by custody that was disproportionate to the situation. Cases were also recorded in which police officers confiscated mobile phones and equipment, thereby directly preventing the documentation of events and potential abuses.¹⁷⁸ Cases involving the use of surveillance measures and digital

177 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.
178 Attila Mong, [Serbian Police Target Journalists as Anti-Government Protests Escalate](#), CPJ, 25 September 2025.

tracking are particularly concerning. In 2025, at least 15 cases were documented in which journalists were the targets of sophisticated surveillance tools, including software such as Pegasus spyware, Predator spyware, and forensic tools such as Cellebrite, as well as the Serbian software NoviSpy. In at least five cases, the compromise of communications was confirmed, pointing to serious risks concerning the protection of sources and the privacy of journalists.¹⁷⁹

In addition to this, cases of physical and verbal violence by police officers were also recorded, particularly during the security management of public gatherings. In certain situations, journalists were removed from the scene even though they were clearly identified, while the police failed to react to attacks by third parties or reacted with a significant delay. Such conduct additionally contributed to a feeling of insecurity and distrust among media workers.¹⁸⁰

— C.7 INVESTIGATIONS OF SERIOUS PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE CARRIED OUT EFFICIENTLY (INDEPENDENTLY, THOROUGHLY AND PROMPTLY)

Investigations in Serbia are formally conducted as independent; however, in cases of special political significance, the boundary between the executive branch and the actions of prosecutors' offices is frequently blurred. In such cases, direct or indirect influence by political actors occurs, which calls into question the impartiality and comprehensiveness of the proceedings.¹⁸¹

In 2025, according to the European Commission's Rule of Law Report, serious concern remains regarding the independence of investigations conducted by the prosecutor's office and the police, particularly when it comes to attacks on journalists. These findings were confirmed in other reports indicating that investigations are frequently not comprehensive, that political motives behind attacks are disregarded, and that the potential accountability of public officials is rarely examined. It was specifically emphasised that government representatives compromise investigations through their public appearances: by disclosing information or the legal qualification of cases in advance, they influence the course of proceedings and render the collection of evidence meaningless. This further hinders the work of prosecutors' offices and the police, and in certain cases, *de facto* prevents the execution of an effective investigation.¹⁸²

Investigations are not conducted in a manner that prioritises attacks and threats above all else and ensures the gathering of appropriate evidence. Problems within investigations also become visible through specific cases. Attacks on journalists and the manner in which proceedings were conducted during

179 Amnesty International, [Serbia: Female BIRN Journalists Targeted by Pegasus Spyware](#), 25 October 2025.

180 Nevena Bogdanović and Jovana Krstić, [Record Number of Attacks on Journalists in Serbia: Media Report, Authorities Remain Silent, Radio Free Europe](#), 15 October 2025.

181 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

182 European Commission, Serbia Progress Report, November 2025.

2025 demonstrate a typical pattern: a selective approach in individual cases, prolonged evidence collection, a lack of transparency, and ultimately the dismissal of criminal complaints with unclear justifications. While simpler cases (with known perpetrators and direct threats) are resolved relatively quickly, more complex cases, especially those involving potential political motives or organised attacks, remain unresolved or drag on for years. This practice has been recognised as one of the key systemic problems in Serbia.¹⁸³

A similar pattern has been observed in other cases, initial decisions by prosecutors' offices to dismiss complaints are frequently reversed only after the intervention of higher instances. Instead of the legally prescribed rulings on dismissal, a large number of cases are concluded with official notes, to which the injured journalists have no right to file an objection. Clear criteria do not exist for deciding when a prosecutor's office will issue a formal decision and when it will issue an official note, even within the same prosecutor's office. Simultaneously, noticeable discrepancies exist in the quality of justifications: ranging from detailed to completely sparse, without stating specific actions and reasons. In individual cases, official notes are not in compliance with regulations because they lack fundamental elements, such as a description of the actions undertaken, the factual situation, and the legal assessment. Additionally, it occurs that prosecutors' offices undertake a larger number of evidentiary actions, which points to the need for a deeper investigation, yet the cases nonetheless conclude with an official note instead of a formal decision.

From a procedural aspect, significant problems still exist regarding compliance with deadlines. Although it is envisaged that the first actions are to be undertaken within 48 hours, practice demonstrates that deadlines are frequently breached, and actual investigations are delayed without clear justification. This state of affairs affects the ultimate outcomes of the proceedings and results in a reluctance to submit new reports.

Delays, a lack of information, and limited access to evidence for journalists in their own cases continue to be pointed out. Victims frequently lack effective access to justice or adequate information regarding the course of the investigation, and several key problems are highlighted: insufficient independence of investigations and the presence of political influence, selective conduct and a focus on less complex cases, frequent delays and breaches of legal deadlines, a lack of transparency and limited access to information for the injured parties, the absence of a comprehensive approach that would include an analysis of the motives and the broader context of the attack, and failures in the reactions of internal control or appellate public prosecutors' offices.¹⁸⁴

183 IJAS analysis, [Official Notes Instead of Legal Protection – A System That Leaves Journalists Unprotected](#), IJAS, November 2025.

184 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

— C.8 JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE EFFICIENTLY PROTECTED FROM VARIOUS FORMS OF ONLINE HARASSMENT

The Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia recognises several criminal offences relating to threats and attacks committed via the Internet and social media.¹⁸⁵ Particularly significant for journalists is the criminal offence of Endangering Safety under Article 138, which in paragraph 3 specifically encompasses attacks on persons performing work of public importance in the field of information. In addition to this, the criminal offence of Stalking under Article 138a is also highly relevant in practice, as it frequently manifests precisely within the digital space.

Other criminal offences are also significant for the online environment, such as Computer Sabotage (Article 299), Unauthorised Access to Protected Computers, Computer Networks, and Electronic Data Processing (Article 302), Unauthorised Collection of Personal Data, as well as Racial and Other Discrimination (Article 387). These offences can be of particular importance in cases of online harassment of journalists, which is a frequent occurrence in practice.

Representatives of the journalistic community point out that certain criminal offences continue to be insufficiently prosecuted, although they could be crucial in combating organised online campaigns, including so-called “bot” attacks. Such campaigns often involve serious threats and incitement to commit criminal offences, which is regulated by Article 34 of the Criminal Code. Despite this, practice shows that such cases are rarely adequately investigated, which further contributes to a sense of impunity.

Journalists reported a wide spectrum of online harassment, ranging from death threats and physical violence, through insults, defamation, and trolling, to cyber-violence, impersonation, and sexual harassment. Attempts to take over accounts, as well as attacks on media websites, were also recorded. These incidents are frequently part of coordinated campaigns, pointing to a distinctly hostile digital environment and the need for stronger protection of media freedom. A particularly serious example is represented by the attempt to install communication tracking software on the devices of female BIRN journalists via digital channels. Within the Special Prosecution Office for Cybercrime of the Higher Public Prosecution Office in Belgrade, 71 cases were formed in connection with threats or online attacks, representing 50.71% of the total number of cases.¹⁸⁶

The reaction of the competent institutions to these phenomena remains limited. Activities are primarily focused on providing support to injured parties and gathering evidence, while systemic preventative and protective

185 Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia, Articles 138 paragraph 3, 138a, 299, 302, and 387.

186 Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, [Statistical Data on the Conduct of Public Prosecutors' Offices](#) from 2016 to 2026, April 2026.

measures are not sufficiently developed. A large number of cases remain in the category of unknown perpetrators.

The application of existing legal solutions in practice does not yield encouraging results, which is why additional approaches are increasingly being considered, particularly for so-called “borderline” cases. The professional public and journalistic associations do not hold a unified stance: while some advocate for amendments to the law, others believe that the key lies in changing practice and ensuring a more consistent application of existing norms.

During field activities, the Standing Working Group for Journalist Safety continued its dialogue with media workers across Serbia, while journalistic associations organised training sessions on digital safety, evidence gathering, and the recognition of criminal offences, with a specific focus on complex and borderline situations.¹⁸⁷

The proposed amendments to the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code do not, for the time being, contain specific mechanisms for the protection of journalists. Although certain general measures may have an indirect effect, the vague formulations of new criminal offences cause concern due to their potential negative impact on freedom of expression.

— C.9 INVESTIGATIONS OF ALL TYPES OF ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE CARRIED OUT TRANSPARENTLY

Investigations into attacks on journalists are not conducted in a fully open and public manner, failing to disclose data relevant to the public and the injured journalists.

The injured parties did not have fully effective access to the investigative proceedings. In a large number of cases, female and male journalists did not receive adequate information regarding the investigation, had limited access to case files, and faced numerous problems and challenges in gathering and presenting evidence.¹⁸⁸

Access to case information and the evidence presented is guaranteed by the Criminal Procedure Code and the prosecutorial investigation. Public prosecutors’ offices insist on access through official channels, such as the inspection of the case files by the injured parties; however, information in a less detailed form and notifications regarding proceedings can also be accessed via the contact points within journalistic associations.

Press offices of courts and prosecutors’ offices in Serbia failed to provide regular or fully truthful information on the status of proceedings in 2025, particularly regarding information on cases of more serious crimes, corruption, and attacks on

187 ANEM, [Meeting of Journalists and Prosecutors: Journalists in Serbia Increasingly Unprotected and Becoming Easy Targets](#), April 2025.

188 Highlighted by male and female journalists within the focus groups that were realised for the purposes of the research in February 2026.

journalists. The transparency of the process was limited due to delays, a lack of public data, and institutional weaknesses.

Data for the previous year show that, alongside 3 cases resulting in convictions, 30 of them were closed either by dismissing the criminal complaint or via an official note stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings. There are 101 cases still pending, where the perpetrators have not yet been identified in 13, while in more than half of the active cases (58 cases), the required notifications from the police are awaited.

A specific problem in cases of attacks and threats against journalists involves the treatment of submitted reports and dismissals via official notes, to which the injured journalists have no right to file an objection as a legal remedy. Journalists lacked knowledge regarding the manner in which the proceedings were conducted and the evidence presented.

Evidence points to the presence of political and other pressures on the courts and prosecutors' offices, including comments by officials and the relocation of prosecutors for political reasons.

— C.10 QUALITY STATISTICS COLLECTION SYSTEMS ESTABLISHED BY STATE AUTHORITIES TO STEM IMPUNITY

The Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office (SPPO) and the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) have been keeping records since 2016, though both the scope and quality of the information they collect and share differ. Since December 2023, the monthly updated records kept by the SPPO have been delivered to the representatives of the Standing Working Group for Journalist Safety.

During 2025, a total of 140 cases were formed in public prosecutors' offices on the basis of submitted criminal complaints/reports, concerning events to the detriment of 145 injured persons, namely 103 individuals performing work of public importance in the field of information, of whom¹⁸⁹ 55 injured persons were male (53.4%) and 48 were female (46.6%). Out of the total number of cases, 71 cases were formed within the Special Prosecution Office for Cybercrime of the Higher Public Prosecution Office in Belgrade, representing 50.71% of the total number of cases. These cases were formed in connection with events to the detriment of 67 injured persons, namely 46 individuals, of whom 20 were male (43.48%) and 26 were female (56.52%).

In the cases formed during 2025, the following actions were undertaken:

- in 3 cases, a conviction was delivered;

189 Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, [Statistical Data on the Conduct of Public Prosecutors' Offices](#) from 2016 to 2026, April 2026.

- in 5 cases, proceedings before the court are ongoing based on the indictment of the public prosecutor;
- in 16 cases, a decision on the dismissal of the criminal complaint was issued;
- in 21 cases, an official note was issued stating that there are no grounds for initiating criminal proceedings;
- in 14 cases, the execution of evidentiary actions is ongoing;
- in 1 case, the application of the mechanism of deferred criminal prosecution is ongoing;
- in 1 case, proceedings for international legal assistance in criminal matters are ongoing;
- in 56 cases, a request for gathering the necessary notifications has been submitted;
- in 6 cases, the allegations of the criminal complaint or report on information gathered during the pre-investigative proceedings are being considered in order to reach a decision;
- in 17 cases, even after undertaking measures in the pre-investigative proceedings, the potential perpetrator has not been identified.

A first-instance or final decision was delivered in 40 cases, representing 28.57% of the total number of cases.

Due to certain standards and rules applied by public prosecutors' offices that are frequently unclear, it happens that specific cases are removed from databases. The reasons for this vary (concluded cases, offences not initially linked to attacks on journalists, a lack of evidence indicating that it involves an attack or threat against journalists because of the work they perform, etc.).

The Ministry of the Interior also keeps a certain database on incident events and reports submitted when the injured party is a journalist.

The data maintained and submitted by the SPPO are the most comprehensive, categorized by the type of criminal offense, basic details of the injured party, and the procedural stages. Public prosecutors' offices only record cases that are formally formed regarding offenses against journalists, rather than all received reports. In practice, this means that nearly 20% of submitted reports and notifications remain unrecorded. IJAS has identified at least 20 cases that were reported, or about which the police and prosecution were notified, but were missing from the SPPO database.

Furthermore, cases are not initiated on the basis of *ex officio* knowledge, but solely upon receiving a report. The database captures personal data, the location of the attack, the filing date,

gender, and the current stage of the proceedings, providing a basic description of the actions taken by the public prosecutor and the police. However, this description does not necessarily reflect the actual situation. Aside from gender, registered cases are not classified by ethnicity or other socio-demographic criteria. Although the data are not broken down by other indicators, certain personal data are accessible to members of the Standing Working Group for Journalist Safety, enabling the analysis of other characteristics within the notifications.

— C.11 NON-PHYSICAL THREATS AND HARASSMENTS

In 2025, 40 cases of non-physical threats and harassment were registered.

The situation deteriorated further compared to the previous year, with the number of such threats constantly increasing. A particular concern is the absence of mechanisms and legal remedies capable of prosecuting these threats and creating a deterrent effect. The majority of these incidents lack further prosecution or epilogue through action by public prosecutors' offices or the police, leaving them as a severe and ongoing threat to both male and female journalists. This is primarily due to the lack of deterrent effect resulting from deficient mechanisms and inadequate opportunities for efficient prosecution. It is especially dangerous that some cases concern incidents that occurred on the streets of Serbian cities during public gatherings, where police officers failed to protect journalists. In some instances, indirect threats were even made by police officers themselves.

The most prominent cases involve specific forms of threats on social media and incidents involving various forms of harassment without physical contact. Prior to the major student and citizen protest on 15 March 2025, media crews from *RTL*, *Cropix*, *POP*, *Slobodna Dalmacija*, and *Pixsell* were stopped at the border with Croatia upon entering Serbia; they were banned from entering the country by the Serbian Ministry of the Interior (MOI) without any justification, solely based on a safety assessment.

In this category, the portal *KRIK* was sued multiple times through SLAPP proceedings for writing about corruption concerning the renovation and reconstruction of the Novi Sad Railway Station in connection with the canopy collapse on 1 November 2024. Journalist Sofija Bogosavljev, as well as *KRIK* editors, were also sued. *KRIK* was severely targeted several times by government representatives and officials of the SNS, particularly by Darko Glišić, who was the most brutal in these attacks. Local journalists and media outlets were also endangered in such cases, facing hate speech and being targeted as traitors to the Serbian people and Serbia. Female journalists Kristina Demeter Filipčev, Tatjana Lazarević, and Vladimira Dorčova Valtnerova, who report from small local communities where freedom of expression and freedom of speech are most under attack were also verbally attacked.

— C.12 THREATS AGAINST THE LIVES AND PHYSICAL SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

In this year, as many as 124 serious and actual threats against female and male journalists and media workers were recorded. These involve highly serious threats which, in the majority of cases, represent directly voiced threats on social media and in person, which are dangerous to the life and limb of female and male journalists and their family members. Unfortunately, the majority of these cases remain unresolved. A culture of violence and a violent narrative are being encouraged, causing the number of threats to increase from month after month.

Threats of murder, physical assault, rape, and violence were directed not only at journalists, but also at their children and family members. Entire editorial teams faced threats of bomb attacks, mass murders, hangings, expulsion from the country, imprisonment in camps, and other forms of violence. Through comments and direct messages on social media, journalists were told to watch out and be careful about what they write, alongside explicit messages threatening attacks and murder. All of these incidents followed journalistic reporting on criminal connections and the activities of politicians, serving as a form of retaliation and a warning to them and other journalists about what could happen if they continue reporting in this manner.

The highest number of these cases was recorded on social media and in the comment sections of the portals of the media outlets for which these journalists work. The editorial staff and journalists of *TV N1* received the most threats of this kind (at least 20), Mladen Savatović received 12 separate threats in person and online, while Nenad Kulačin and Marko Vidojković received 9 in the past year. All of these threats were sent over social media or in comments on published articles or video content. Prior to the publication of a new issue of *Radar*, Vuk Cvijić received a threatening phone call from abroad aimed at intimidation. Dušan Petričić received 3 serious threats due to his caricatures.

Mladen Savatović was threatened in person, as were journalists reporting from protests and gatherings related to the upcoming local elections in Sečanj, Vrbas, Mionica, and Kosjerić. Once again, Dinko Gruhonjić and Ana Lalić were targeted by individuals who issued severe threats in various ways. At the beginning of the year, as a consequence of a brutal tabloid media campaign, the two of them received a massive volume of threats.

The situation is the most difficult since attacks on journalists began being recorded in Serbia. Given the general atmosphere of unaccountability and impunity for the perpetrators, there are no mechanisms or means to reduce the number of threats. Those responsible feel no accountability and are aware that they will most likely never be held responsible for their words. On the other hand, the authorities fail to condemn these attacks and, through their statements, encourage them to continue. A significant portion of these

individuals is directly linked to the activities of government representatives or operate as activists for the ruling party.

— C.13 ACTUAL ATTACKS

The year was marked by as many as 113 actual attacks, which represents an absolute record when it comes to the safety of journalists in Serbia.

The key locations where the attacks occurred were protests (anti-corruption, political rallies), elections, and political events, as well as local communities, such as various construction sites or conflicts instigated by local political activists and government representatives. The largest number of incidents is linked to the harsh reactions of the police and violent individuals during protest gatherings of students and citizens.

It is particularly concerning that the number of attacks and physical incidents committed by police officers has increased. Over 30 physical incidents by police officers against female and male journalists were recorded.

Journalist Vuk Cvijić was harshly attacked by members of the Gendarmery at a protest in front of the Faculty of Law in Belgrade. Journalist Darko Gligorijević was held in custody after giving a statement regarding his filming an incident in Studentski Grad in New Belgrade. Student photojournalist Luka Pešić was detained by the police near the Youth Centre (*Dom omladine*) in Belgrade. Pešić was chased by several individuals without insignia, only to be stopped after about a hundred metres by police officers and detained on charges of fleeing from the police. Pešić's camera was taken, his footage was deleted, and he was held for several hours without the presence of a lawyer. During the protests, the cameras of *Blokada Info* journalists were struck several times by members of the Gendarmery. Photojournalist Aleksa Stanković was dragged into a police van, struck several times, and mistreated by masked police officers as a form of retaliation because he had filmed police officers catcalling female passers-by during a protest a few days earlier.

The most dangerous incidents occurred during and after civic and student protests, but also during gatherings of Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) activists, when female and male journalists were physically attacked by SNS activists and individuals staying in an improvised camp in Pionirski Park in Belgrade. These individuals emerged from the camp itself, physically attacked and struck journalists, snatched their mobile phones, smashed cameras, and obstructed their work, such as in the case when the *TV N1* crew consisting of Maja Nikolić and Ivan Pavlović was attacked. They were attacked by an individual who destroyed their camera and issued threats, before fleeing in an unknown direction. Police officers failed to react or refused to provide assistance to the attacked journalists, directing them every time to report the cases at police stations. Journalists were also physically attacked during events linked to election campaigns in local cities and municipalities. In November 2025, six different physical attacks were recorded in Negotin, and journalist Gavriilo Andrić had his phone snatched by SNS

activists riding motorcycles. The police once again refused to react on the spot. In the same town, a *Blokada Info* cameraman and a female journalist for *Mašina* were physically attacked, as were local female journalists Suzana Mihajlović and Milena Ilić.

— C.14 THREATS AND ATTACKS ON MEDIA OUTLETS AND JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATIONS

A total of 40 cases of threats and attacks against media outlets and journalistic associations were recorded.

The situation has deteriorated compared to previous periods. Independent, investigative, and critically oriented media outlets that question the actions of the authorities particularly receive threats, face attacks while on work assignments, in public, or via social media, and have their equipment and devices damaged.

Most frequently, these involve direct threats directed at media editorial teams, warning of bombs, physical attacks, rape, expulsion, and other forms of hate speech, while individual journalists are sometimes mentioned in the context of these threats against editorial teams. The physical attacks were mostly outbursts of rage and violence, as well as intentional attempts or completed attacks aimed at damaging cameras, microphones, tripods, equipment used by journalists, cars, other vehicles, and their personal devices.

What is visible is systematic pressure on independent media (*N1*, *Nova*, *Radar*, *Danas*, their portals, and the *Nova* newspaper), where a total of over 50 attacks or threats were recorded in a single year against the media outlets themselves or their journalists.

The highest number of threats was directed at the editorial team of *TV N1* and its portal. The weekly *Radar* was threatened at least six times, and none of these threats have been resolved. The largest number of proceedings remains in the category of unknown perpetrators. The editorial team of *Danas* was threatened with anti-tank rocket launcher (Serbian "zolja"), while *Autonoma* was threatened with "9.2-millimetre rewards" for their publications.

Media outlets in local communities also suffered damage. The portal *Epicentar* was targeted several times by hacker attacks, while the entrances to the premises of *Ozon Press* and *Čačanske* were vandalised. Furthermore, the news agency *Beta* experienced a cyberattack.

Unidentified individuals broke into the premises of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV) inside the SPENS centre in Novi Sad during the night, thereby intimidating journalists and representatives of the association.

To date, almost no case has been resolved, which speaks to the continuous and deliberate targeting of the media and individual journalists, as well as the complete inefficiency of institutions.



Conclusions and Recommendations

CONCLUSIONS

LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

Although legal guarantees for freedom of the media and expression exist, Serbia constantly records a decline, as pointed out by relevant reports from international institutions and organisations. There is room to improve the laws, but the greatest problem is their implementation in practice. Freedom on the internet is guaranteed; however, a decline is recorded in this area as well, and journalists have also been the targets of attacks. Despite the insistence of the non-governmental sector that, under such socio-political circumstances, new processes of amending laws should not be pursued, bearing in mind previous experiences, poor legal solutions contrary to the Media Strategy, and the fact that the greatest problem lies in the enforcement of the law, the Ministry initiated new processes. Under the pretext of alignment with the EMFA, two working groups were formed for legal amendments and a new strategy, which also included GONGO associations. Invoking acts such as the EMFA or DSA is particularly concerning, keeping in mind that even the basic conditions for their implementation, namely independent and functional institutions, are not met in Serbia.

Even after a year and a half since the expiry of the mandate of the REM Council, Serbia does not have a new Council. Attempts were made to conduct two processes, accompanied by a series of irregularities, violations of the law, and various pressures, both of which led to the withdrawal of independent candidates. The result is an absolutely chaotic and unregulated media scene, without any accountability on behalf of broadcasters. The REM is a body that has been criticised for years due to a lack of independence and the insufficient imposition of measures on broadcasters, while towards the end of the mandate of the last council, this body delivered controversial decisions regarding the allocation of broadcasting licences.

The autonomy and independence of public media services are legally guaranteed, but their implementation in practice represents the problem. The law provides them with adequate protection and the opportunity to fulfil their role; however, the non-enforcement of the law, along with pressures from the authorities and the insufficient will of people within public service broadcasters to resist this, leads to public services that are not independent and do not fulfil their primary role and obligation towards citizens. The opportunity to establish greater financial independence through legal amendments was missed. The Programme Council does not reflect society as a whole. With the amendments to the law, certain solutions were introduced that could contribute to a better role for the Programme Council, but the implementation of these laws and the will to enforce them in the spirit in which they were adopted, namely a public service at the service of the public, will be crucial.

One of the greatest problems and methods of pressuring the media is through various forms of distributing state funds to the media. Despite legal improvements to the entire process, project co-financing experienced a complete collapse in the preceding year. The diversion of funds to public procurement, direct contracts, and agreements on business-technical cooperation is particularly concerning, as these are even less transparent, lack clear criteria, and open up space for potential influence on editorial policy. Funds are allocated to media outlets close to the authorities that systematically violate professional standards. For years, state advertising has served as a means of media control; funds are distributed in the same manner, without clear criteria, and the distribution is not fair, just and transparent.

In Serbia, nine cases bearing the characteristics of SLAPP lawsuits were recorded. In addition to standard lawsuits for injury to reputation and honour, journalists and the media were also the targets of other concerning proceedings in which their position is even harder. These involve criminal proceedings for damaging business reputation, violations of the right to privacy, but also the spreading of panic, where in addition to fines and prison sentences, a ban on practising journalism was demanded. It is particularly concerning that the claimants are public officials, but also large and powerful companies. Despite good examples and decisions by judges, we also have those that are concerning and could have consequences not only for specific journalists but can also affect media freedom. The number of lawsuits for injury to reputation and honour recorded an unprecedented surge: in 2025, 1,935 lawsuits were filed against journalists and the media, which is a consequence of the deterioration of the media scene, the tabloidisation of the media, and the overall social situation.

The protection of journalistic sources is guaranteed by law; however, despite certain attempts to uncover sources, journalists did not suffer consequences for non-disclosure. In 2025, two cases of attempts to uncover sources in criminal proceedings were recorded, when journalists were summoned to deliver audio recordings and give statements

before the competent institutions. Over the past two years, sources have been endangered in other ways, due to illegal surveillance and the deployment of spyware into journalists' phones. Despite the complete absence of accountability in earlier proceedings before the authorities and any progress in investigations, two new attempts to deploy spyware into the devices of women journalists at BIRN were recorded in 2025.

Discrimination against the media, although prohibited by law, occurs very frequently in practice. In 2025, IJAS recorded 17 cases where journalists were denied access to and reporting from certain events, cases of not being invited to press conferences or events of public interest, as well as failures to respond to journalists' questions. It is concerning that the majority of cases relate to multiple media outlets, meaning that the number of media outlets discriminated against is much higher. A large number of cases were recorded in smaller local areas where the media encounter a series of problems, which further aggravates their situation. No direct cases of bans on joining relevant associations have been recorded; however, new cases of establishing GONGO associations have been documented, made up of journalists who are champions in violating the ethical code and who work in media outlets close to the authorities, to whom legitimacy is granted precisely by those authorities, namely the competent ministry, through invitations to meetings and working groups.

Journalists utilise requests for access to information of public importance in their work, which is also confirmed by the Commissioner's report. However, exercising this right was hindered in 2025, and the main problem was the silence, meaning the lack of response, from institutions. The executive branch and the courts in Serbia are not sufficiently open, and it is emphasised that this issue has not been systemically resolved, but rather varies from institution to institution. Public access to parliamentary sessions is generally enabled, they are broadcast via the media, while journalists can have access subject to prior accreditation. However, in practice, journalists encounter problems and restrictions, primarily when it comes to sessions of local parliaments.

JOURNALISTS' POSITION IN THE NEWSROOMS

In 2025, journalists worked under difficult conditions, jobs were more insecure, and their rights were more endangered than before. Their labour law status did not improve; they continue to work to a large extent under non-standard employment contracts, and accordingly, they are deprived of the most fundamental rights arising from an employment relationship. A significant number of dismissals were recorded, alongside the non-renewal of contracts for freelance contributors who had worked in that status for years, as well as the issuance of warnings of dismissal. Journalists suffered consequences due to the views they expressed, including those on private accounts on social media, or because they advocated for professional reporting in the public interest within their own media outlets, while operational redundancy was cited as the formal reason, following

previously implemented controversial evaluation processes and amendments to the systematisation of job positions.

Journalists highlighted problems of a financial nature, low salaries, but also financial uncertainty and the survival of the media as the greatest challenges, particularly when it comes to smaller local media. A trend of deterioration in the material condition of journalists is also being recorded. Journalists still lack trust in trade unions; nevertheless, when problems arise within the media, an increase in the number of enrolled journalists is recorded. A small number of private media outlets have trade unions, whereas the situation is better within public service broadcasters. Serbia is far from a branch collective agreement, primarily due to employers who do not wish to negotiate.

The number of media outlets that have internal acts ensuring editorial independence and separating the editorial team from the media owner is higher, given that the obligation for the media to draft and publish a document providing for measures and procedures to protect that policy began last year; however, we do not have the exact number of media outlets that acted in accordance with the law. Furthermore, even greater guarantees are provided by law for media outlets whose founder is indirectly or directly the state; nevertheless, it was precisely within those media outlets that pressures from management were recorded in 2025. At *Euronews* Serbia, journalist Marija Šehić had her employment contract terminated with the justification that she performed her work duties carelessly or negligently and violated work discipline, while another 12 journalists were dismissed due to alleged operational redundancy, with justifications citing organisational changes and the cessation of the need for their job positions, alongside controversial evaluation processes and changes in the systematisation of job positions. The dismissals followed changes in the leadership of this media outlet and a shift in its editorial policy. Cases of dismissals due to operational redundancy were also recorded in other media outlets.

The editorial independence of public media services is guaranteed by law; however, pressures that affect precisely their editorial policy continued. Cases of pressure from public officials and holders of the highest state functions have been recorded. In addition to external pressures, journalists were under pressure within RTS itself because they performed their job professionally, publicly expressed their opinion, and demanded that RTS report professionally, in a timely manner, and objectively in accordance with the law. The contracts of many freelance contributors were not renewed, and some journalists received warnings of dismissal. Certain RTS journalists were summoned for informative talks by the BIA.

The significance of non-profit media, as well as the work of investigative ones, is major, particularly when reporting on specific topics. Over the past year and a half, the contribution of non-profit media in reporting on daily social events has been significant. A smaller number, particularly of investigative media outlets, have their own codes of ethics which they respect. In 2025, pressures on these media outlets continued, primarily

through court proceedings and SLAPP lawsuits, but also via targeting by public officials at both the national and local levels.

The freedom of journalists in selecting the news they will report on depends primarily on the media outlets in which they work. If they work in media outlets that perform their job professionally, that freedom is greater, whereas such freedom does not exist in media outlets close to the authorities. In 2025, the media were the target of various types of pressure, both externally and internally. Censorship and self-censorship were particularly pronounced, both in private media and within public service broadcasters.

The deterioration of working conditions also affected female journalists, who often work under harder conditions than their male colleagues. The economic position of female journalists is more unfavourable; salary discrepancies are visible, especially in the lower pay grades, and female journalists are particularly affected if they find themselves back on the labour market, where the chances of finding new jobs are slim. Although they are more present in editorial positions, there is still a higher number of men in managerial roles. Female journalists are exposed to specific pressures and gender-based violence, and attacks and threats are frequently accompanied by highly brutal misogynistic and sexist insults. They are exposed to various forms of discrimination, and the very low percentage of reports filed in such cases is concerning. Comments regarding appearance are directed at them, and they are also exposed to discrimination concerning national affiliation. In their daily work, they are exposed to inappropriate comments and offers by interlocutors.

SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

The safety of journalists is at its most endangered since threats and attacks against them have been monitored and recorded. Public prosecutors' offices and the police fail to protect journalists, and the number of attacks grew from month after month.

The general state of unaccountability and impunity has extended to those who attack journalists, including both organised violent groups and violent police officers. The police have completely altered their attitude and conduct towards journalists and, instead of securing their protection, attacked them, detained them, threatened them, refused to act when they were attacked, and tracked them using surveillance software.

Through their violent narrative and culture of violence towards journalists, government representatives have encouraged, made desirable, and initiated a large number of threats and attacks.

Intimidation, detentions, the confiscation of mobile phones, the tracking of journalists' communications, stop-and-search procedures, identification checks, and refusals to provide them with assistance have become a daily reality in Serbia.

A particularly high level of violence and intimidation against journalists is recorded during protests on the streets and public gatherings, when both violent individuals and the police were distinctly aggressive towards a specific group of critically oriented and independent newsrooms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DIMENSION A: LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

Given the socio-political situation in Serbia, as well as the facts that the previous amendments to media laws were carried out in a non-transparent and accelerated manner, and without the real participation of the expert public, amendments to the laws should not be pursued, nor should the Media Strategy. Despite the fact that there is room for the improvement of the legal framework, the existing regulation provides a sufficient basis for providing protection and achieving media freedom.

State institutions at all levels need to start enforcing the laws. The essence lies not only in the amendment of legal regulations, but in their adequate application in practice, which is currently one of the greatest problems.

The harmonisation of legal provisions with European acts (EMFA, DSA, DMA, AI Act, and the European Commission's Anti-SLAPP directives) should be postponed until the necessary socio-political conditions are created.

The work of working groups for drafting the Media Strategy and harmonising the laws with the EMFA should be suspended until the conditions for it are met. Analyses have demonstrated that the legislation is, in part, already harmonised with the EMFA. The fact that the EMFA is not fully operational at the European level also supports the postponement of harmonisation.

When the conditions for legal amendments are met, the drafting of a new Media Strategy should begin, accompanied by harmonisation with the new EU media legislative framework, as well as the emergence and impact of artificial intelligence (AI). This should also include the process of amendments in accordance with the legislative framework of the European Union: EMFA, DSA, DMA, AI Act, and the European Commission's Anti-SLAPP directives.

When the conditions are met, the processes of legal amendments themselves must be transparent and inclusive. Working groups must include all relevant actors and organisations that can contribute to the professional dialogue, while allowing sufficient time for public consultations rather than the legal minimum. Consultations should encompass public debates with experts, rather than merely sending comments via email.

The comments and suggestions of the European Commission must be accessible to all members of the working groups, and the state must report clearly and transparently to all parties in the proceeding.

The conduct of institutions implementing media laws must be in accordance with the prescribed procedures. They must ensure the protection of the project co-financing provided for by law, as well as accountability for breaches of procedures and the misuse of funds.

It is necessary to conduct appropriate controls over all procedures by which funds are allocated to the media and production companies, especially regarding irresponsible public and other procurement practices through which funds intended for topics that can only be realised via project co-financing are improperly redirected.

It is necessary to fully implement the procedure for the selection of members of the REM Council in accordance with the law.

Accountability must be established for the failures committed in initiating and implementing the previous procedure, as well as the accountability of the Chairperson of the Committee on Culture and Information for the failure to elect members of the Council of the Regulatory Body in accordance with the legal deadline.

The competent committee of the National Assembly must act in accordance with its granted powers, which also relate to determining irregularities regarding the proposers and the received candidacies.

The work of the REM must be improved in practice through the execution of greater control and by raising the level of accountability of decision-makers. All activities from the sessions of the REM Council that include proposals and recommendations from the professional service must be regularly published on the Regulator's website.

Media monitoring during election campaigns must be precise and clearly regulated methodologically, accompanied by objective assessments and reports.

The statutes and internal acts of public media services should be aligned with the latest amendments to the law, and the Commissioner for the Protection of the Rights of Listeners, Viewers, and Readers, as well as the missing members of the governing bodies, should be elected in accordance with the law.

It is necessary for institutions to respect the laws and enable greater openness towards the media and journalists in order to facilitate the work of journalists and adequately report to the public.

Local self-governments should act in accordance with the law, cease discrimination against the media, and enable unobstructed reporting for all media outlets.

DIMENSION B: JOURNALISTS' POSITION IN NEWSROOMS

It is necessary to establish greater financial and editorial independence for public service broadcasters

through amendments to legal regulations once the socio-political conditions are met.

Strategic planning and work must be undertaken to develop specific anti-SLAPP regulations to protect journalists and the media from malicious lawsuits, and to establish the accountability of, particularly, government representatives who abuse these lawsuits.

Understanding among judicial officials regarding SLAPP lawsuits and their impact on journalists and human rights defenders should be enhanced through training sessions and other forms of exchange of views.

Following the achievement of the necessary socio-political conditions, all legal mechanisms currently existing within our legislation should be examined in order to align them with the directive and recommendations of the Council of Europe concerning SLAPP lawsuits.

Judicial practice in proceedings against journalists for damages in connection with the publication of information must be harmonised with the practice of the European Court of Human Rights.

A better labour law status for journalists and other media professionals must be ensured by creating conditions and strengthening employers' associations, followed by the signing of a branch collective agreement aimed at securing better working conditions, supporting trade union organisation, and ensuring more efficient inspections to reduce undeclared work.

It is necessary to establish measures and procedures to improve the position of female journalists and editors, and women employed in the media, and to create better conditions for their greater representation in managerial roles.

It is necessary to establish mechanisms for recognizing and preventing all forms of discrimination, alongside the development of comprehensive support policies, including psychological, social, and other types of assistance.

Greater independence of journalists and the editorial team in relation to media owners and management must be ensured through the signing of specific acts that would enable this independence, or by providing for the signing of an annex to the employment contract that defines the professional rights and obligations of journalists and editors.

DIMENSION C: SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Government representatives must behave responsibly, cease violent narratives, and do everything necessary to lower tensions, as well as urgently condemn all events that endanger the safety of students, journalists, and citizens who dare to think and speak critically.

The competent authorities must conduct investigations into all campaigns of hate speech and incitement to violence in society by government representatives and powerful individuals; it is particularly important that they proactively initiate and participate in all proceedings for the protection of female and male journalists from violence, especially those that journalists find difficult to recognize as they unfold.

It is necessary to conduct urgent investigations and resolve all cases of threats and attacks against journalists, students, and activists, especially those initiated by government representatives and police officers at protests.

It is necessary to conduct urgent investigations and resolve all cases of the confiscation of phones and other devices, as well as the use of tracking tools against journalists, students, and activists by members of the police and the BIA.

Clear, unequivocal, and non-selective condemnations of all violence against journalists, students, and activists committed by high-ranking public officials must be ensured in order to convey a message of unacceptable behaviour.

The police must prosecute and resolve all cases of attacks by their officers against journalists.

The Ministry of the Interior (MOI) must condemn all cases of attacks and incidents against journalists and the media committed by their officers.

Police officers acting in cases of attacks on journalists must act conscientiously and responsibly, and must urgently, without delay, act upon the orders to act of public prosecutors regarding the collection of notifications and information in cases where journalists are the injured party.

It is necessary to continue the work and training of police officers and public prosecutors, particularly on the topics of freedom of expression and media freedom, with a focus on sensitivity and the secondary victimisation of the injured parties.

Police officers must undergo mandatory training to understand the position of victims of criminal offences, as the highest number of withdrawals from reporting is linked to negative treatment by the police and public prosecutors' offices.

The capacities of public prosecutors' offices and the police must be strengthened, rather than undermined by transferring trained personnel and contact points to other departments. Certain departments of public prosecutors' offices are being seriously compromised by constant changes to the annual schedule of public prosecutors, meaning that cases of threats and attacks against journalists are handled by public prosecutors who lack the acquired knowledge and experience.

It is necessary to continue working on changing the practice of understanding criminal offences for a better comprehension of the manner in which threats are voiced

or written in connection with specific criminal offences that protect journalists, particularly when it comes to the issue of endangering safety in the online space.

It is necessary to raise the level of sensitivity among judges and public prosecutors regarding journalistic work and awareness of the consequences of threats and attacks. Judges should be actively involved in finding solutions that will help change the practice in understanding criminal offences, especially the endangering of safety, as well as improve it to the benefit of the injured journalists.

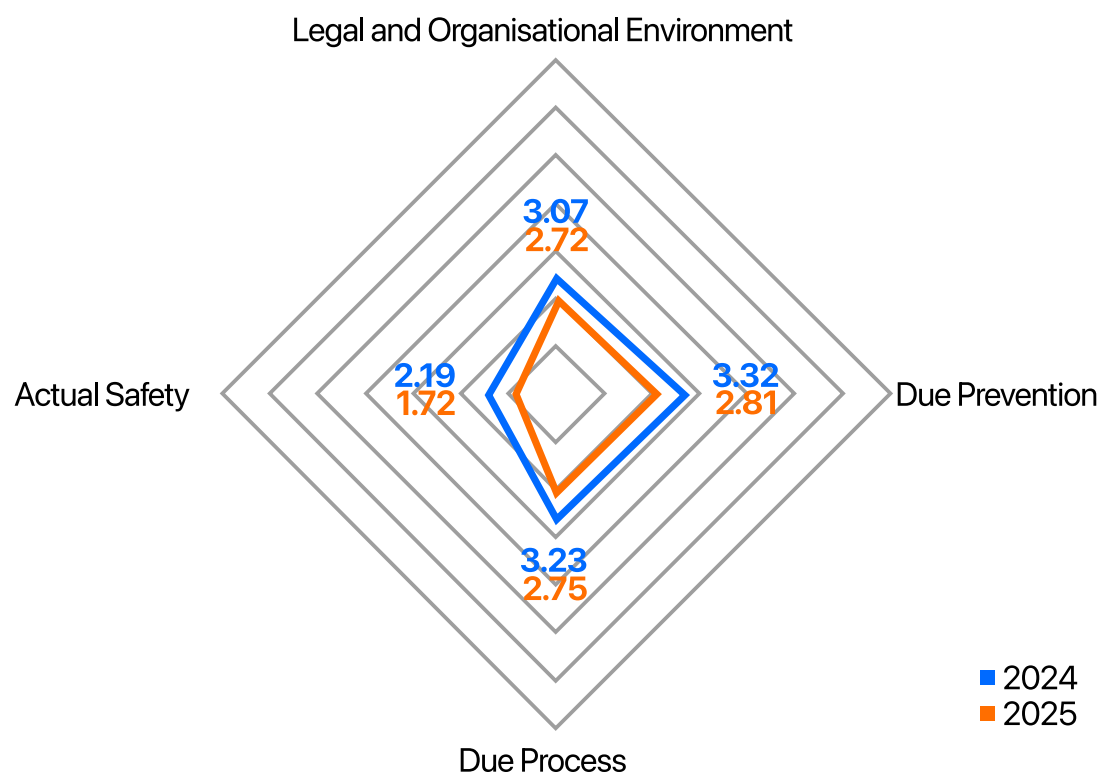
IV

Journalist Safety Index in Serbia – 2025

In this section of the report, the Journalists' Safety Index for 2025 is graphically presented in comparison to the previous year, 2024. For each of the four dimensions and all 19 indicators, a brief explanation is provided regarding the key changes that occurred in 2025.

A broader explanation of the data and the changes that took place for each individual indicator of the Index can be read in the narrative section of the report:

Indicators of Journalists Safety Index	Narrative report
I Legal and Organisational Environment	
Legal provisions related to defamation and their application do not create a chilling effect on journalists and the media	A.6
Confidentiality of journalists' sources is guaranteed in the legislation and respected by the authorities	A.8
Other laws are enforced objectively and allow journalists and other media actors to work freely and safely	A.7
Journalists are free to pursue their profession and to establish, join and participate in their associations	A.9
Job positions of journalists are stable and protected at the workplace	B.1
II Due Prevention	
Journalists and media actors have access to immediate and effective protective measures	C.1
Journalists and other media actors (whose lives or physical integrity are at real and immediate risk) have access to special protection or safety mechanisms	C.2
Female journalists have access to legal measures and support mechanisms when faced with gender-based threats, harassment or violence	C.3
Practice of regular public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media has been established	C.4
Police authorities are sensitive to journalists' protection issue	C.5
III Due Process	
Specialised units/officers are equipped with expertise for investigating attacks and violence against journalists	C.6
Investigations of serious physical attacks on journalists and other media actors are carried out efficiently (independently, thoroughly and promptly)	C.7
Journalists and other media actors are efficiently protected from various forms of online harassment	C.8
Investigations of all types of attacks and violence against journalists and other media actors are carried out transparently	C.9
Quality statistics collection systems established by state authorities to stem impunity	C.10
IV. Actual Safety	
Non-physical threats and harassments	C.11
Threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists	C.12
Actual attacks	C.13
Threats and attacks on media outlets and journalists' associations	C.14



	2024	2025		Main new developments in each dimension
Legal and Organisational Environment	3.07	2.72	↓	Although the laws do not differentiate between journalists and public officials, lawsuits are utilised as a means of pressure, accompanied by high claim amounts that burden the media. Although there are no formal demands to disclose sources, the safety of journalists is seriously endangered through surveillance and tracking via spyware technologies. In practice, other proceedings, including criminal ones, are used against journalists, carrying demands for severe sentences. Journalists work under difficult conditions, characterised by insecure engagements, low incomes, and frequent violations of labour rights. They face serious pressure during reporting, including identification checks without grounds, and even attacks, while reactions from institutions are often absent. The situation is also poor in local areas, where small media teams attempt to survive by taking on additional jobs, which negatively affects mental health and also leads to leaving the profession.
Due Prevention	3.32	2.81	↓	Journalists do not always have access to timely and effective protective measures when threatened, and the relationship has further deteriorated due to police attacks and refusals to act. The rules applied in special protective measures are unclear and allow for abuses, and journalists mostly refuse them due to misapplication. The police rarely act even when enhanced protection is requested in simple situations, such as reporting during elections. Female journalists lack access to specific measures of protection and support. Government representatives and politicians have not only failed to establish a practice of condemnation, but have increased their violent narrative and established a culture of violence towards journalists as a desirable form of behaviour and a mechanism of intimidation. In a large number of cases, the police attacked and threatened journalists, and turned a blind eye when journalists were being attacked or threatened.
Due Process	3.23	2.75	↓	Contact points for the protection of journalists function without continuity, accompanied by personnel changes, insufficient training on human rights, the position and rights of journalists, and the limited transparency of their work. In politically sensitive cases, the boundary between the executive branch and the acting institutions, especially the police, is frequently blurred, which calls into question impartiality and indicates political interference in the proceedings. Journalists are not adequately protected from online attacks and intimidation, and certain criminal offences continue to be insufficiently prosecuted, despite their significance for suppressing organised "bot" campaigns and threats. Investigations into attacks on journalists are not conducted with sufficient transparency, nor is information of significance to the public and the injured parties themselves disclosed to a sufficient degree.

	2024	2025	Main new developments in each dimension
Actual Safety	2.19	1.72	↓ An enormous increase has been recorded in every category of threats and attacks against journalists and the media. Journalists are primarily threatened via social media and in direct communication, endangering their safety and that of their families. The largest number of attacks occurred during protests, political events, and in local communities, where journalists were frequently exposed to violence, obstruction of their work, and the absence of adequate protection. The newsrooms and crews of independent and investigative media outlets are particularly under attack, facing threats on the streets, attacks during their work, the destruction of their equipment, and attacks on their accounts through social media and internet hacker attacks. Threats to newsrooms frequently included violence, bombs, and hate speech, while physical attacks were directed at both journalists and their equipment. The majority of these cases have remained unresolved, while the number of threats continuously increases. The growth in the number of incidents is linked to the lack of efficient prosecution, the long duration of proceedings, and a general sense of impunity, due to which perpetrators feel encouraged.
Journalists' Safety Index	2.70	2.24	↓



Legal and Organisational Environment



INDICATOR 1.1

— LEGAL PROVISIONS RELATED TO DEFAMATION AND THEIR APPLICATION DO NOT CREATE A CHILLING EFFECT ON JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

Score for 2024: 3.06 / Score for 2025: 2.72

The situation has slightly deteriorated. Defamation is not a criminal offence in Serbia, but protection is achieved through civil proceedings for damages. Although the laws do not differentiate between journalists and public officials, in practice, lawsuits are frequently utilised as a means of pressure, accompanied by high claim amounts and court costs that burden the media. A sudden surge in the number of lawsuits for damages has been recorded, pointing to a further deterioration of the media environment and the intensification of pressures on journalists. Simultaneously, several cases bearing the characteristics of SLAPP lawsuits have also been registered, particularly criminal lawsuits demanding prison sentences and a ban on journalistic work, which additionally contribute to the intimidation and financial exhaustion of the media.

INDICATOR 1.2

— CONFIDENTIALITY OF JOURNALISTS' SOURCES IS GUARANTEED IN THE LEGISLATION AND RESPECTED BY THE AUTHORITIES

Score for 2024: 3.43 / Score for 2025: 3.00

The situation has deteriorated. Although freedom of information and the protection of sources are legally guaranteed, and journalists are not obliged to disclose the identity of sources except in exceptional cases and without formal requests for disclosure of sources, the safety of journalists is seriously endangered through surveillance and the use of spyware technologies. Numerous attempts to track and compromise journalists' devices have been recorded, including cases of using software such as Cellebrite, Pegasus, and other tools, which has further undermined trust and made communication with sources more difficult. All this leads to a sense of constant surveillance, reduced trust, and the need for journalists to apply additional protection measures, which significantly complicates their work.

INDICATOR 1.3

— OTHER LAWS ARE ENFORCED OBJECTIVELY AND ALLOW JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS TO WORK FREELY AND SAFELY

Score for 2024: 2.97 / Score for 2025: 2.59

The situation has deteriorated. Serbia lacks a developed practice for identifying SLAPP lawsuits, nor are there initiatives to introduce specific regulation. Although legal defences occasionally point to their elements or the abuse of rights, the courts rarely accept this, and higher instances almost never uphold such an approach. The prevailing view is that a more consistent application of existing regulations and a more

active role for judges are more important than the adoption of new laws. In practice, other proceedings are also used against journalists, including administrative, misdemeanour, and criminal actions, carrying demands for severe penalties and work restrictions. It is further cause for concern that such lawsuits are frequently initiated by public officials or that bodies such as the police are abused, alongside a broader pattern of pressure and the misuse of institutions, which contributes to intimidation and aggravates the position of journalists.

INDICATOR 1.4

— JOURNALISTS ARE FREE TO PURSUIT THEIR PROFESSION AND TO ESTABLISH, JOIN AND PARTICIPATE IN THEIR ASSOCIATIONS

Score for 2024: 3.00 / Score for 2025: 2.73

The situation has slightly deteriorated. In Serbia, journalists are not required to hold work licences, nor have there been attempts to introduce such a requirement; however, the issue of their status is occasionally raised. Although discrimination against the media is prohibited, it is frequent in practice, especially at the local level through the ignoring and non-invitation of critical media to events of public importance. Journalists also face pressure during reporting, including identification checks without grounds, and even attacks, while reactions from institutions are often absent. Simultaneously, the influence of pro-government and so-called GONGO associations is strengthening; with the support of the Ministry of Information and Telecommunications, they influence decision-making processes and the distribution of funds. The establishment of the Association of Journalists of Serbia (AJS) further indicates a trend of creating parallel structures, which may undermine the independence and integrity of the media community.

INDICATOR 1.5

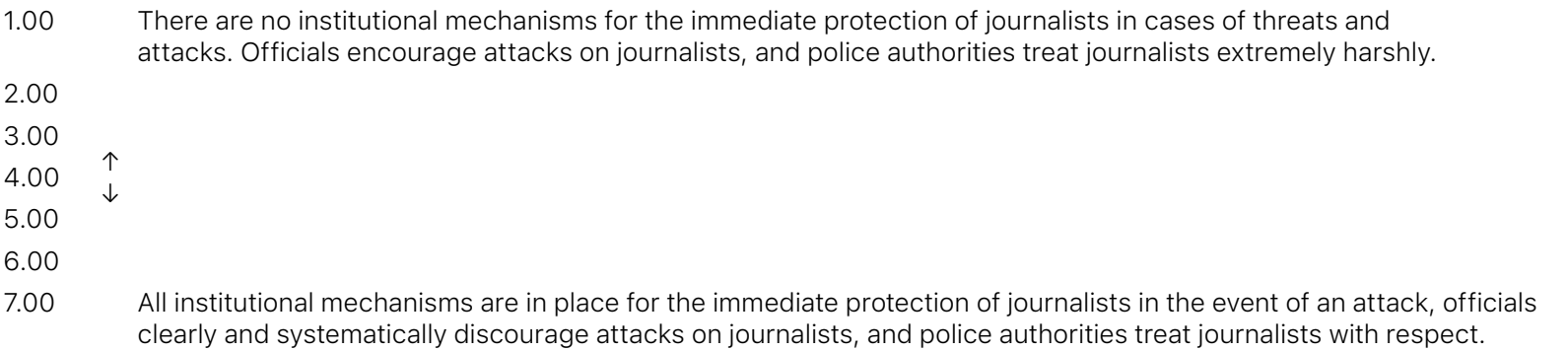
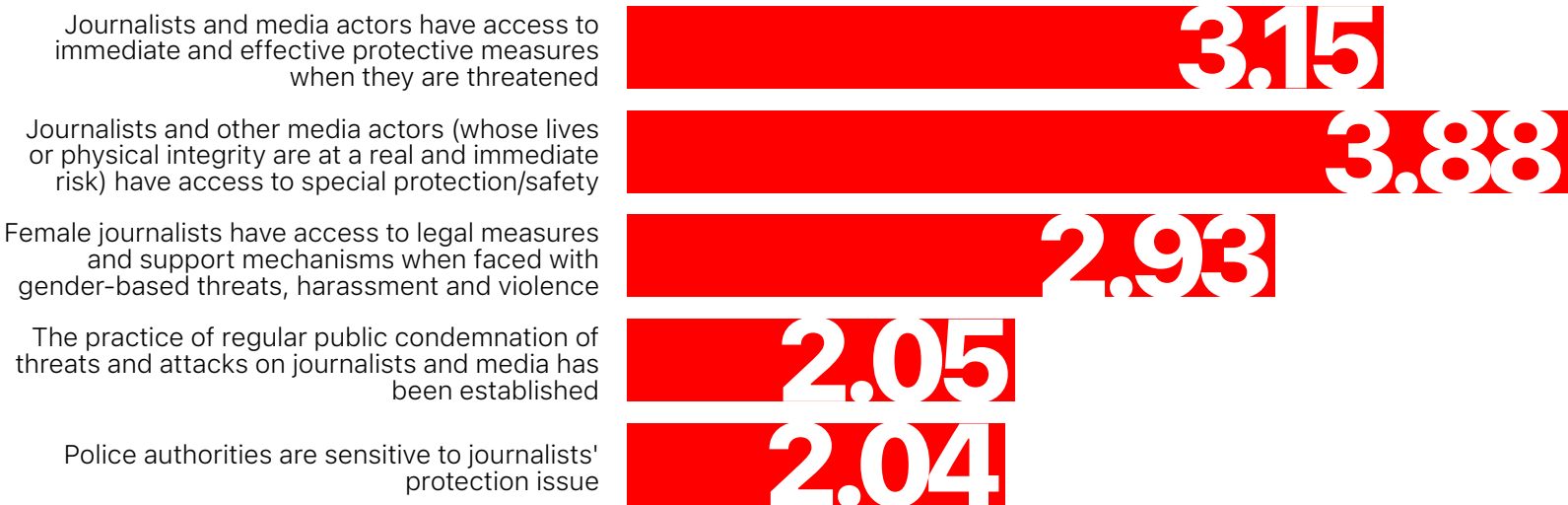
— JOB POSITIONS OF JOURNALISTS ARE STABLE AND PROTECTED AT THE WORKPLACE

Score for 2024: 2.89 / Score for 2025: 2.57

The situation has deteriorated. Journalists in Serbia work under difficult conditions, characterised by insecure engagements, low incomes, and frequent violations of labour rights. The situation is particularly poor in local areas, where small media teams attempt to survive by taking on additional jobs, which negatively affects mental health and leads to leaving the profession. During 2025, pressures were further intensified through dismissals, the non-renewal of contracts, and sanctioning due to professional viewpoints, often masked by formal reasons such as "operational redundancy". All of this points to an exceptionally unfavourable and insecure position for journalists, which directly affects the quality and freedom of information.



Due Prevention



INDICATOR 2.1

— JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ACTORS HAVE ACCESS TO IMMEDIATE AND EFFECTIVE PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Score for 2024: 3.86 / Score for 2025: 3.15

The situation has deteriorated. Journalists do not always have access to timely and effective protective measures when threatened. The relationship and access to these measures have deteriorated, particularly during open protests and events where journalists were reporting, when police officers on the ground refused to receive reports of attacks and threats or provide assistance to journalists. Police officers frequently ignored reports on the spot, even when they were present during attacks; they failed to provide protection to journalists and disregarded their own accountability when their own officers attacked or issued threats. Police officers often lack awareness that they themselves are contact points, nor do they understand their role in protecting journalists and the media and the special status journalists hold when under attack.

INDICATOR 2.2

— JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS (WHOSE LIVES OR PHYSICAL INTEGRITY ARE AT REAL AND IMMEDIATE RISK) HAVE ACCESS TO SPECIAL PROTECTION OR SAFETY MECHANISMS

Score for 2024: 4.30 / Score for 2025: 3.88

The situation has deteriorated. Journalists generally lack special access to protective measures and safety assessments when their lives are threatened. The institutional approach is the same as that for other citizens, while the applied rules are unclear and prone to abuse. The police rarely act even when enhanced protection is requested for simple situations, such as reporting during election days; if protection is provided, it often occurs without the knowledge of the media outlet that requested it. Journalists' safety is very rarely assessed *ex officio*. Due to the frequently negative and hostile attitude of the police and members of the BIA, and their abuses against them, journalists very rarely request safety assessments and generally avoid such situations.

INDICATOR 2.3

— FEMALE JOURNALISTS HAVE ACCESS TO LEGAL MEASURES AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS WHEN FACED WITH GENDER-BASED THREATS, HARASSMENT OR VIOLENCE

Score for 2024: 3.27 / Score for 2025: 2.93

The situation has deteriorated. Female journalists lack access to specific protection measures and support when faced with gender-based threats and attacks. The institutional attitude is the same as that towards male journalists, despite the existence of internal acts regarding the status of victims of criminal offences and specific criminal offences that are verified when female journalists are the injured party. Independent and

professional institutions hardly recognise them as a special category during protection. Police officers are not sufficiently trained and do not recognise a woman journalist as a victim who requires more help and support while navigating the reporting and evidence-gathering system. The progress made in previous periods regarding systemic recognition and better support from the police and public prosecutors has fallen through following the increase in violence against journalists during the protests.

INDICATOR 2.4

— PRACTICE OF REGULAR PUBLIC CONDEMNATION OF THREATS AND ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

Score for 2024: 2.38 / Score for 2025: 2.05

The situation has deteriorated. The practice of publicly condemning threats and attacks against journalists has not been established. Representatives of the authorities and individuals within institutions have not only failed to establish this practice but have intensified the violent narrative, introducing a culture of violence towards journalists as a desirable model of behaviour and a mechanism of intimidation. Through their attitude, insults, threats, and targeting, and especially by exerting pressure on the public prosecutors' offices and the police themselves, they have directly influenced the increase in threats and attacks on the media and journalists. Due to the inaction of competent institutions and a practical state of institutional capture, they remain outside any system of responsibility and punishability.

INDICATOR 2.5

— POLICE AUTHORITIES ARE SENSITIVE TO JOURNALISTS' PROTECTION ISSUE

Score for 2024: 2.79 / Score for 2025: 2.04

The situation has deteriorated. Police representatives are generally not sensitive to protection and react selectively and only in certain cases when journalists are attacked. In a large number of cases, the police failed to react, turned a blind eye, and looked away while journalists were being attacked and threatened. The police themselves, in at least 75 cases, attacked, threatened, or failed to react in incidents against journalists. Trust has been completely eroded, and this has been further compounded by the detentions of journalists and the confiscation of their equipment and phones, on which communication tracking software was installed.



Due Process

Specialised investigation units and/or officers are equipped with relevant expertise for investigating attacks and violence against journalists



Investigations of serious physical attacks on journalists and other media actors are carried out efficiently (independently, thoroughly and promptly)



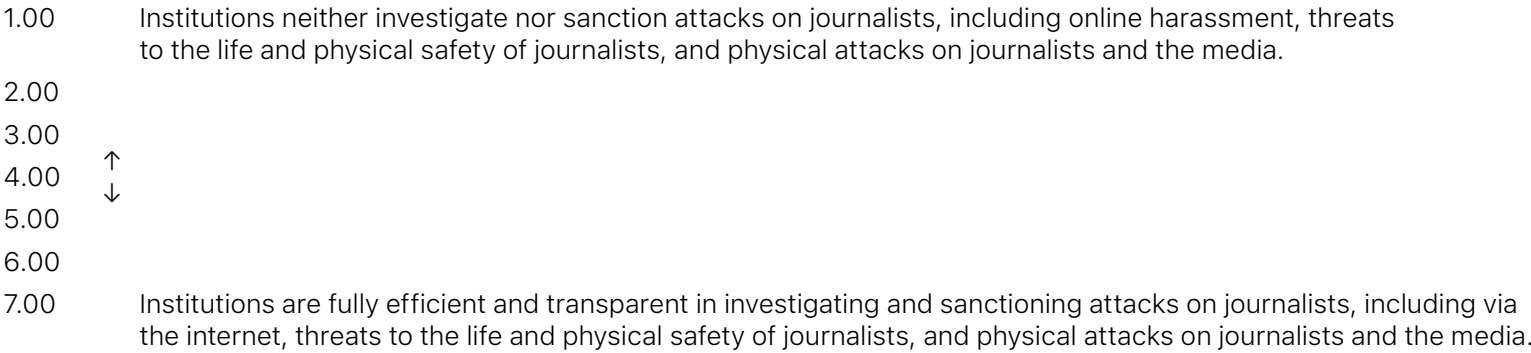
Journalists and other media actors are efficiently protected from various forms of online harassment



Investigations of all types of attacks and violence against journalists and other media actors are carried out transparently



Quality statistics collection systems established by state authorities to stem impunity



INDICATOR 3.1

— SPECIALISED UNITS/OFFICERS ARE EQUIPPED WITH EXPERTISE FOR INVESTIGATING ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Score for 2024: 4.44 / Score for 2025: 3.53

The situation has deteriorated. Special police units and public prosecutors are equipped with the knowledge and technology to conduct investigations into attacks and violence against journalists. However, contact points frequently function without continuity, accompanied by personnel changes, insufficient training on human rights and the status and rights of journalists, and the limited transparency of their work. Commitment and action have depended on individual attitudes towards the position of journalists. This approach has been significantly better on the part of part of the public prosecution, while the attitude of police officers is often negative and concerning.

— INDICATOR 3.2

— INVESTIGATIONS OF SERIOUS PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE CARRIED OUT EFFICIENTLY (INDEPENDENTLY, THOROUGHLY AND PROMPTLY)

Score for 2024: 2.80 / Score for 2025: 2.31

The situation has deteriorated. Investigations in Serbia are formally conducted as independent; however, in politically sensitive cases, the boundary between the executive branch and the acting institutions, particularly the police, is frequently blurred, calling into question impartiality and indicating political interference in the conduct of proceedings. Information points to serious doubts regarding the independence of investigations, especially concerning attacks on journalists. Proceedings are often not comprehensive; political motives, public targeting, and the conditions leading to attacks are disregarded, and the accountability of public officials is rarely examined. Meanwhile, public appearances by government representatives further influence the course of investigations and render the collection of evidence pointless.

INDICATOR 3.3

— JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE EFFICIENTLY PROTECTED FROM VARIOUS FORMS OF ONLINE HARASSMENT

Score for 2024: 2.93 / Score for 2025: 2.58

The situation has deteriorated. Journalists are not adequately protected from online attacks and intimidation, and certain criminal offences continue to be insufficiently prosecuted despite their significance for suppressing organised “bot” campaigns and threats. Such cases are rarely thoroughly investigated, which fosters a sense of impunity. Online harassment encompasses threats, insults, cyber-violence,

and attacks on accounts and media platforms, often as part of coordinated campaigns. Although a significant number of proceedings have been recorded, the institutional reaction remains limited, focusing on individual incidents rather than systemic prevention, while a large number of attacks remain without identified perpetrators.

INDICATOR 3.4

— INVESTIGATIONS OF ALL TYPES OF ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE CARRIED OUT TRANSPARENTLY

Score for 2024: 2.55 / Score for 2025: 2.22

The situation has deteriorated. Investigations into attacks on journalists are not conducted with sufficient transparency, nor is information of significance to the public and the injured parties themselves disclosed to a sufficient degree. The injured parties were not provided with fully effective access to the investigative proceedings. In many cases, female and male journalists did not receive timely and adequate information on the progress of the investigation; access to the case files was limited, and they faced numerous difficulties in gathering and presenting evidence.

INDICATOR 3.5

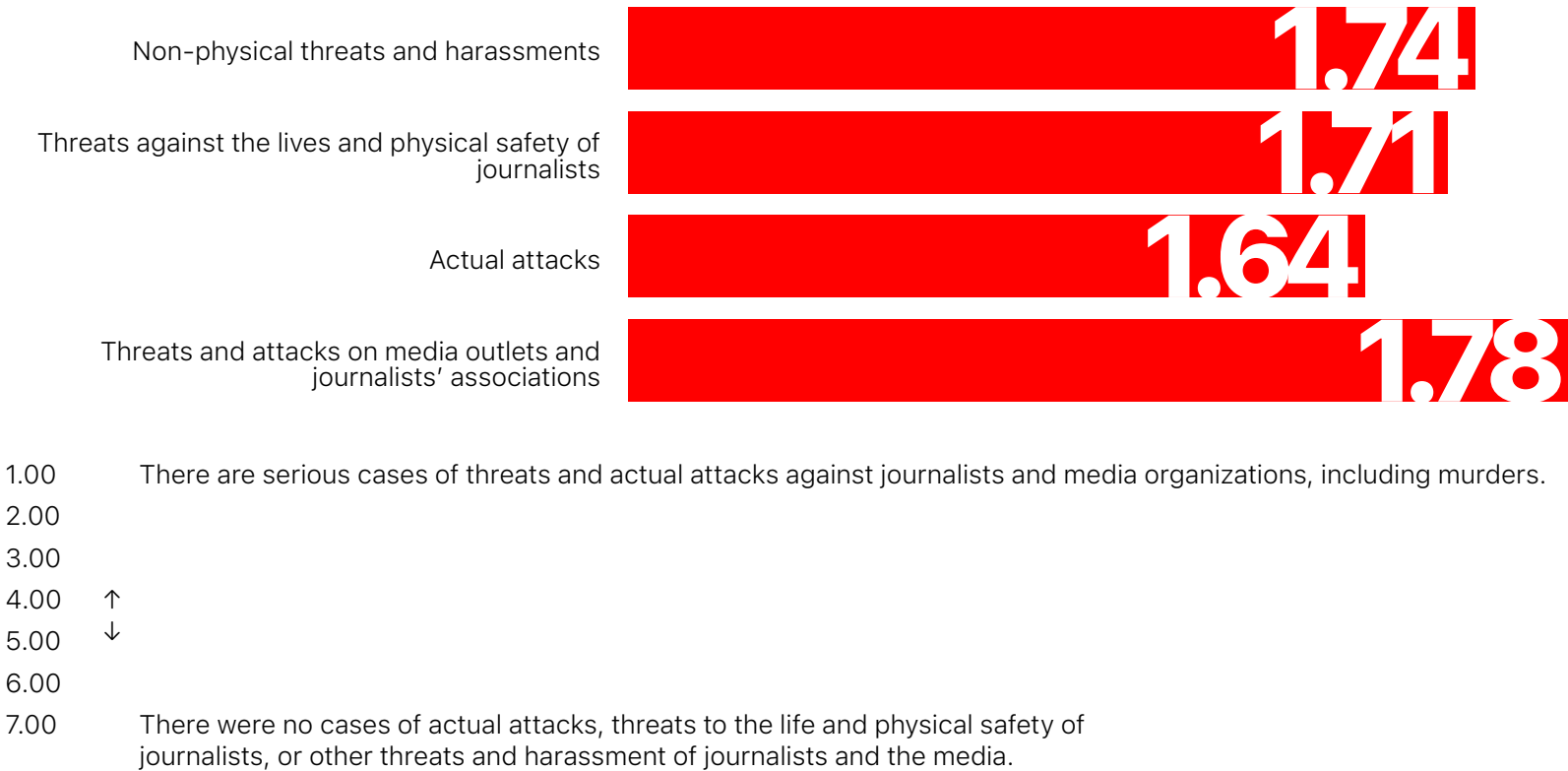
— QUALITY STATISTICS COLLECTION SYSTEMS ESTABLISHED BY STATE AUTHORITIES TO STEM IMPUNITY

Score for 2024: 3.42 / Score for 2025: 3.13

The situation has slightly deteriorated. Relatively high-quality databases on journalist safety exist, but they primarily cover only reported cases, while *ex officio* action is rarely represented. Public prosecutors' data are the most detailed but only include formally established cases, leaving a portion of reports outside the records. Additionally, certain cases are subsequently removed from databases due to differing criteria, further affecting the completeness of the data. The records contain basic information about cases but do not provide a full picture, proceedings are not initiated *ex officio*, and the data are not systematically classified by broader socio-demographic criteria.

IV

Actual Safety



INDICATOR 4.1

— NON-PHYSICAL THREATS AND HARASSMENTS

This may include surveillance or monitoring; harassment by telephone; arbitrary judicial or administrative harassment; aggressive statements by public officials; other types of pressure that endanger the safety of journalists while they perform their work. These types of threats do not include bullying and harassment in the workplace.

Score for 2024: 2.07 / Score for 2025: 1.74

The situation has deteriorated. In 2025, 40 cases of non-physical threats and harassment were recorded, with an increasing trend compared to the previous year. It is particularly concerning that most of these incidents do not have a judicial epilogue due to insufficiently effective processing mechanisms, which diminishes the deterrent effect and leaves journalists exposed to risk. The most common and pronounced forms of threats occur on social media. An additional problem is represented by threats during public gatherings, including police failures to provide protection, and even incidents involving their own officers.

INDICATOR 4.2

— THREATS AGAINST THE LIVES AND PHYSICAL SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

This may include calls for the killing of journalists, their friends, family, or sources; and calls for physical attacks on journalists, their friends, family, or sources. Threats can be direct or conveyed through third parties; sent electronically or in direct communication; and they can be implicit as well as explicit.

Score for 2024: 2.16 / Score for 2025: 1.71

The situation has deteriorated. In this year, 124 serious cases of threats against journalists and media workers were recorded, mostly via social media and in direct communication, often endangering their lives and safety and those of their families. Most of these cases have remained unresolved, while the number of threats is continuously growing. Threats include violence, murder, threats of sexual violence, as well as attacks on newsrooms and the families of journalists, often as a reaction to reporting on crime and political topics. The lack of accountability and the weak reaction of institutions to the threats, along with the absence of clear condemnation by the authorities, have further encouraged impunity and emboldened perpetrators.

INDICATOR 4.3

— ACTUAL ATTACKS

This may include actual physical or mental injury, kidnapping, intrusion into the home/office, seizure of equipment, arbitrary detention, failed murder attempts, etc.

Score for 2024: 2.36 / Score for 2025: 1.64

The situation has deteriorated. The year was marked by a record 113 physical attacks on journalists, which indicates a serious deterioration of the security situation. The growth in the number of incidents is linked to the lack of efficient processing, the long duration of proceedings, and a general sense of unaccountability and impunity, which makes attackers feel emboldened. The largest number of attacks occurred during protests, political events, and in local communities, where journalists were often exposed to violence, obstruction of work, and the absence of adequate protection. A particular problem is represented by cases in which the police do not react or do not provide protection to attacked journalists. Further concerning is the increase in incidents involving police officers, with more than 30 recorded physical attacks, which further undermines trust in the institutions and the protection system.

INDICATOR 4.4

— THREATS AND ATTACKS ON MEDIA OUTLETS AND JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATIONS

Threats may include harassing telephone calls, arbitrary judicial or administrative harassment, aggressive statements by public officials, and other forms of pressure (graffiti, threatening posts, etc.). Actual attacks include intrusion into offices, the seizure of equipment, damage to equipment, vehicles, etc.

Score for 2024: 2.19 / Score for 2025: 1.78

The situation has deteriorated. A total of 40 cases of threats and attacks against the media and journalists' associations were recorded, representing a decline compared to the previous period. Independent and investigative media outlets are particularly targeted, facing threats, attacks while on assignment, and damage to equipment, both in the field and via social media and cyberattacks. Threats directed at newsrooms often involve violence, bomb threats, and hate speech, while physical attacks are targeted at both journalists and their equipment. Continuous pressure and the targeting of specific media outlets are evident, characterised by a high number of incidents and a near-total absence of legal epilogues, which points to institutional inefficiency and systematic targeting..

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Author
Marija Babić
Rade Đurić

Reviewers
Jelena Kleut
Lidija Komlen Nikolić

Serbian Language Editing
Nataša Polić

Translation
Anica Milenković

Cover photo
Andrija Vukelić

Design
comma.rs



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