



JOURNALISTS MATTER

Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists

Minutes of the Meeting

***Journalists Matter* annual thematic Conference: “Building the paradigm against impunity for crimes against journalists”**

29 April 2025, Luxembourg

Organised within the framework of the [Council of Europe’s Campaign for the Safety of Journalists – Journalists Matter](#), the [conference “Building the Paradigm Against Impunity of Crimes Against Journalists”](#) was held on 29 April 2025, in Luxembourg. The event was co-organised by the Luxembourg Ministry of Justice and the Minister Delegate to the Prime Minister for Media and Connectivity, under the Luxembourg Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

This year’s conference of the *Journalists Matter* Campaign, focusing on the Prosecution pillar of [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2016\)4 on the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists and other media actors](#). The event gathered judges, prosecutors, national focal points to the Campaign, representatives of media, civil society, governments, international organisations, and Council of Europe representatives to address the enduring issue of impunity for crimes against journalists.

The event was opened by the Luxembourg Minister of Justice, who underlined the country’s commitment to defending press freedom and ensuring accountability for crimes against journalists. In her address, the Minister announced the official launch of [Luxembourg’s National Action Plan for the safety of journalists](#).

***Journalists Matter* Campaign – Progress update**

An update on the campaign’s progress was presented, showing significant steps taken since the launch:

- 41 of 46 member States have appointed National Focal Points.
- 27 national committees or dialogue platforms are in place, most of them newly created under the Campaign.
- 11 countries have adopted National Action Plans (NAPs) for the safety of journalists, with several others currently in development.
- 2025’s focus on Prosecution builds on 2024’s work on Protection. A specialised seminar with prosecutors is planned for autumn 2025.
- The 2026 conference, focusing on the Prevention pillar, is tentatively scheduled for Moldova in spring, under the country’s presidency to the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers.

Challenges and issues raised

Participants discussed the systemic obstacles to prosecuting crimes against journalists, emphasising that such attacks are not isolated events, but rather part of broader efforts to undermine democratic institutions. Key concerns included:

- Increased violence in conflict zones and under authoritarian-leaning regimes.
- Gender-based violence, especially the online targeting of female journalists.
- A persistently high global impunity rate of 85%.
- Cross-border impunity including cases where perpetrators are outside the jurisdiction of Council of Europe member States.



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- The fact that threats and intimidation against journalists also occur in well-established democracies.
- European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) [jurisprudence](#) on freedom of expression is not consistently applied across all member States.
- Online safety and the cooperation with technology companies in this sense remain an issue

Applicable standards and legal frameworks

The conference reinforced that the long-standing message that member States must comply, including when it comes to the protection of journalists and their safety, with their obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights, also when it comes to positive obligations. The ECtHR recognises journalists as public watchdogs, and its case-law places specific responsibilities on states to protect journalists—particularly, although not only, when they are reporting on public interest matters. Participants were reminded, in this context, of the [Reykjavik Declaration](#) (2024), which reaffirmed member states' commitment to freedom of expression and media freedom.

Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 outlines the core requirements for effective investigations: adequacy, thoroughness, impartiality, independence, promptness, and public scrutiny. The Council of Europe's [Pocket Guide: Key actions for improved safety of journalists](#), developed under the Campaign, was highlighted as a practical tool for prosecutors, judges, and other stakeholders.

Cooperation with International Partners

The conference also recognised the value of complementary international efforts:

- UNESCO has issued [prosecutorial guidelines](#) and facilitated extensive training aimed at strengthening judicial responses to crimes against journalists.
- The European Commission has introduced several legislative and policy tools:
 - The anti-SLAPPS package : [Directive](#) (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on protecting persons who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded claims or abusive court proceedings ('Strategic lawsuits against public participation'- SLAPPS) and [Recommendation](#) (EU) 2022/758 of 27 April 2022 on protecting journalists and human rights defenders who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings;
 - The [European Media Freedom Act](#), built on ECtHR and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) standards;
 - The [Digital Services Act](#), which imposes duties on platforms to manage online threats

National practices and support mechanisms

Discussions also addressed domestic prosecution practices, existing legal remedies and support systems for journalists. Key reflections included:

- SLAPP lawsuits pose a serious threat, especially where media actors face unequal legal or financial resources. Journalists need access to specialised legal aid and authorities who understand the risks associated with such tactics.



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- The potential benefit of specialised/experienced prosecutors or judges for journalist-related cases was noted, with examples of positive outcomes in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- The Montenegrin Commission for monitoring investigations of attacks on journalists is fostering cooperation between journalists, prosecutors, and police. While lacking enforcement powers, it has helped reopen cases, build trust, and serve as a pressure valve for accountability. Its inclusive, multi-stakeholder structure offers a source of inspiration for other countries facing similar challenges.
- Civil society organisations play a crucial role in monitoring, supporting, and following up on investigations and prosecutions of crimes against journalists. Their contributions include documenting violations, advocating for accountability, and providing legal, psychological, and financial assistance to victims and their families. As an example, the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine has established Journalists' Solidarity Centers that offer emergency assistance, safe workspaces, and protective equipment to media workers during wartime.
- Nevertheless, states must ensure that these efforts are complemented by official remedies, including transparent investigations, public reporting, and avenues for victims to claim reparations. States should institutionalise such cooperation and reinforce national frameworks to ensure victims do not depend solely on NGOs for justice and protection. Ukraine is implementing a National Action Plan to protect the safety of journalists, which includes initiatives such as continuous monitoring of violations, documenting crimes against journalists, and providing financial aid to families of detained journalists.
- There is growing concern around online harassment and the lack of adequate frameworks for digital accountability. Participants discussed the need for shared responsibility, including clear obligations for tech companies.
- ECtHR case-law highlights the need for judicial systems to ensure effective investigations and accountability. Judges must be equipped to apply Convention standards, including positive obligations under Article 10, and to impose sanctions where state failures or impunity persist.

Conclusion

The conference concluded with a strong call for coordinated and systemic responses to end impunity for crimes against journalists. Participants underscored that prosecution mechanisms must be strengthened through comprehensive, state-led frameworks that ensure accountability and justice. National Action Plans for journalists' safety (NAPs) should have a strong component regarding prosecution of crimes against journalists and combating impunity. This should be anchored in Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 and translated into concrete institutional action.

As a result of the conference discussions, a set of guiding components was proposed for inclusion in NAPs under the *Prosecution* pillar:

- **Prompt, thorough, and impartial investigations** and prosecutions of crimes against journalists;
- **Specialised training** for prosecutors and judges on freedom of expression standards and journalist safety;



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- **Designation of focal points or specialised units** within prosecution services to handle journalist-related cases;
- **Mechanisms for coordination** between law enforcement, prosecutors, and media stakeholders (e.g., national commissions like that of Montenegro);
- **Public accountability tools**, such as regular reporting on the status of investigations and prosecutions, number of cases processed and indications on the sanctions applied on the authors of crimes against journalists
- **Protection measures for victims and witnesses**, including psychological, legal, and physical safety support;
- **Gender-sensitive approaches** to address gender-based threats and violence;
- **Cooperation frameworks** with civil society to monitor cases and support victims;
- **Data collection and case tracking systems** to identify patterns and evaluate performance;
- **Transparent complaint, redress mechanisms and support** for victims and their families.

The Council of Europe and its Journalists Matter Campaign will continue to support member States in integrating these components into their national frameworks. The success of such efforts, however, will depend on sustained political will, inter-institutional cooperation, and meaningful engagement with civil society. Ending impunity of perpetrators of crimes against journalists is not only a imperative in protecting journalists and journalism—it is essential to safeguarding democracy itself.