



# MEDIA FREEDOM

*The right to freedom of expression and freedom of the media as protected by Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights are pillars of democratic security in Europe. The Council of Europe promotes an enabling environment for freedom of expression, underpinned by legal guarantees for independence and diversity of media and safety of journalists and other media actors.*

Brief overview of the latest  
Council of Europe guidelines and  
activities to promote the freedom  
of expression in media

Thematic  
Focus

Information  
Society

[www.coe.int/freedomofexpression](http://www.coe.int/freedomofexpression)

### Assessing challenges

In his annual reports “State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law”, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe assesses the **freedom of expression in member states** in respect of legal guarantees, protection of journalists and other media actors, media independence, plurality and diversity, and freedom of expression on the internet. These reports regularly identify trends and provide specific recommendations.

Since April 2015 the **Platform for the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists** collects and disseminates information and alerts from civil society on the most serious concerns about media freedom and safety of journalists in Council of Europe member states in collaboration with a number of partner organisations.

### Identifying risks

A number of studies and reports have been commissioned by the Council of Europe on particular aspects related to media freedom.

Published in 2015, the “**Journalism at Risk**” study emphasises the rising death toll among journalists, physical attacks, acts of intimidation, judicial harassment, imprisonment, muzzling legislation, smear campaigns and abuse of financial levers.

The “**Freedom of Expression and Defamation**” review, published in September 2016, examines the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. It explains how defamation laws that are overly protective of reputational interests and that provide for far-reaching remedies or sanctions can have a chilling effect on freedom of expression and public debate.

Issued in April 2017, the study “**Journalists under pressure**”, conducted among 940 journalists and other news providers in the 47 Council of Europe member states and Belarus assesses the prevalence and impact of unwarranted interference on journalists.

Particular aspects of media freedom are examined in the reports on “Challenges and opportunities for news media and journalism in an increasingly digital, mobile and social media environment” (2016) and on “Media coverage of the refugee crisis from a cross-European perspective” (2017).

### Enhancing standards

The Council of Europe has developed a consistent body of standards supporting media freedom, including topics such as hate speech, culture of tolerance, gender equality, public service media governance, safety of journalists etc.

For example, the **Recommendation on gender equality and media** (2013) calls to combat sexist stereotypes and gender-based violence in media, and advocates gender equality in decision making and equal access and representation.

The **Recommendation on protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors** (2016) provides specific guidelines to member states to act in the areas of prevention, protection, prosecution, promotion of information, education and awareness rising.

### Building capacity in member states

During this decade, the Council of Europe **Information Society Programme** has implemented over 20 projects in member states and partner countries promoting media freedom. The aim is to foster an enabling environment for freedom of expression taking into account the challenges of a changing media environment. The projects provide human rights expertise and assistance to media and new-media actors, as well as guidance to governments and regulatory authorities in target countries.

Since 2016 a special dialogue was established with **national human rights mechanisms to better protect journalists**. This dialogue with ombudsman institutions, press commissioners and non-governmental organisations focuses on exchanging good practices and strengthening national capacities to promote the safety of journalists.

### Fostering partnerships

Co-organised by the Council of Europe, the European Broadcasting Association and the Czech Parliament in November 2016 in Prague, the conference “**Public Service Media and Democracy**” discussed the role of parliaments in protecting the media, as well as the present and future of the public-service media in the region.

In March 2017 a conference focussed on “**Promoting dialogue between the ECtHR and the media freedom community**” was organised in Strasbourg in partnership with the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom.

### Developing new policies

Further policy reflections are geared towards ensuring a pluralist media landscape, transparency of media ownership, diversity of media content, inclusiveness in public service media and gender equality in media coverage of election campaigns.

Opaque media ownership and financing, media concentration and convergence pose a challenge to the plurality of ideas and the right of individuals to access and impart information. Therefore, the Council of Europe is preparing a new policy instrument on **media pluralism and transparency of media ownership**, based on best practices in member-states and relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.

Unbalanced and unfair media coverage of gender during elections can impact the public’s understanding of electoral stakes and influence gender balance in the result of electoral competitions. Thus the work has been initiated towards developing new standards concerning **gender equality dimensions of media coverage of elections**.