



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

Assessing challenges

In his annual report “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. This report regularly identifies trends and provides 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.

The publications “**Journalism at Risk**” (2015) and “**Journalists under pressure**” (2017) emphasise the rising pressure and threats to journalists including 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.

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).

The report “**Information Disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making**” addresses today’s challenge of information pollution. It examines the implications of disinformation campaigns designed to sow mistrust and confusion, and identifies steps to reduce the global pollution.

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 raising.

The **Recommendation on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership** (2018) tackles the issues of media pluralism and diversity in the new multimedia environment where actors other than legacy media have come to the fore. Moreover, 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.

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.

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 promoting the essential role of quality journalism for providing timely, accurate and relevant information, as well as solutions for its sustainability.

Furthermore, media coverage of elections has an important impact on the public’s understanding of electoral stakes and influences the result of electoral competitions. However, as an important part of political campaigning is moving online, electoral spending and questionable advertising techniques based on micro-targeting of voters cause a number of concerns for the fairness and legitimacy of elections. Likewise, unbalanced and unfair media coverage of gender during elections requires a detailed analysis and policy solutions.