



WORKSHOP on the existing initiatives on the safety of journalists

1-2 June 2023, Agora, Room G01

Meeting Report

Introductory part

Mr Patrick PENNINCKX, Head of Information Society Department, Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law, opened the workshop by welcoming the participants. In his introductory remarks he recalled the outcome of the [Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe](#) and the Principles in the [Reykjavík Declaration - United around our values](#). He acknowledged that this is critical moment for Europe and for journalists, in particular women journalists, who continue to be the targets of violence, harassment and discrimination. He also stressed the necessity to take effective measures, considering positive examples taken at a national level, aimed at countering pressure on journalists.

Mr Matjaz GRUDEN, Director, Directorate of Democratic Participation, provided information about the [Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists](#) and confirmed the motivation of the Platform's partners to provide support to the upcoming [Campaign for the Safety of Journalists](#) in identifying practical ways to counter challenges related to the protection of journalists. He also introduced outstanding data from the 2023 Annual Report "[War in Europe and the Fight for the Right to Report](#)" and informed that the Platform will start publishing alerts on structural issues having a systemic impact.

The workshop was conceived as a "preload" of the imminent Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists, enabling national authorities and other key stakeholders to present, exchange, learn and find inspiration from existing promising experience, and the Campaign secretariat to finalize the preparations of the Campaign in the light of existing work, in Council of Europe member states, on concerns of relevance for the safety of journalists.

The workshop was structured around the following two main thematic areas, namely:

- i) National Action Plans and other cooperation tools;
- ii) ii) mechanisms and tools for ensuring the safety of journalists. The discussion was articulated in 5 Panels:

1. National Action Plans for the safety of journalists

Mr Peter Ter Velde, Project manager, presented “PersVeilig”, a mechanism created in the Netherlands in 2019, an initiative composed by the Society of chief editors, the Journalists’ union, the prosecutor’s office and the police. In his rich presentation, Mr Ter Velde informed about the priority given to journalists when presenting a claim; clarified safeguards dedicated to freelancers; and explained how priority is given to journalists’ cases. He provided information regarding available journalists’ safety policies, access to online information and organisation of safety trainings.

Examples of National Action Plans were briefly presented, such as that adopted by Switzerland, inspired by the Council of Europe CM/Rec(2016)4, or by Norway in 2017, as well as mechanisms otherwise defined although similar in scope.

The question of States’ funding, challenges raised by the spreading of disinformation, and the deterioration of the situation of journalism in general were also addressed. Participants further exchanged on the impact of recent legislative amendments in the field, in particular defamation laws. It was also noted that journalists face increasing threats in the digital space and that the pandemic has exacerbated the phenomenon.

2. Legal guarantees and specific cooperation mechanisms

Ms Anastasia Tetarenko-Supe, from the Latvian Association of Journalists, presented the Memorandum of cooperation developed for a better cooperation between the police and the associations of journalists and more effective action for the safety of journalists. She referred to verbal and physical attacks against journalists taking place both on- and off-line and stressed the importance for incidents to be taken seriously by law enforcement authorities, whose reaction should be timely. Finally, she addressed the aftermath of the presence of Russian media exiled in Latvia.

Participants further presented media strategies in place or under preparation for upcoming adoption; they illustrated efforts against impunity for crimes against journalists and highlighted the importance of political will. Positive examples were also provided regarding the setting up of platforms to monitor attacks on journalists and hotlines providing 24/7 support.

3. Trainings for journalists and security best practices

Ms Eva Stabell, International adviser at the Norwegian Union of journalists presented the Norwegian Union of journalists’ initiatives dealing with cases of harassment, threats, and violence. She indicated training programs for journalists, including digital trainings, and provided information about fundings and government’s support. Providing statistics on reporting procedures, she noted that few journalists notify their employers when targeted. She expressed appreciation for the “MeToo” campaign, which resulted in a substantial improvement with respect to the protection of women journalists.

Participants agreed about the necessity to provide security trainings and a more protective framework for women journalists. The importance of tailoring trainings was highlighted, for

instance for journalists working in crowds or dealing with aggressions, or trainings for social media editors or moderators. Participants also emphasised the necessity of providing psychological support, as appropriate; preparing students around the risks of the profession; making the trainings accessible at a large scale.

4. Promoting the safety of journalists and role of civil society organisations

Ms Roberta Taveri, Media Freedom Senior Program Officer at Article 19, opened the discussion. In her address, she focused on monitoring data documentation; positive initiatives; advocacy work and established cooperation mechanisms; and the importance of bridging the current gap on implementation at national level. She encouraged collaborations with media associations for the implementation of States' obligations and noted that relevant initiatives may include research, legal analysis and missions.

Participants drew attention to the lack of monitoring mechanisms in some countries, situation which does not allow for a clear picture of the concerned States. Information was provided regarding the functioning, data and purpose of the Council of Europe Platform for the Protection of Journalists and the Promotion of Journalism.

5. Safety of women journalists.

In her presentation, Ms Maria ORDZHONIKIDZE, Director of Justice for Journalists Foundation, firstly noticed that the lack of reliable or comprehensive statistics poses several challenges in effectively addressing harassment and violence against women journalists. She highlighted, as one of the main issues contributing to this complex situation, the lack of trust, which concerns both women journalists, not reporting about incidents, and the public, distrusting or diminishing the work they carry out. She reported that even AI and Pegasus spyware are widely used to intimidate women journalists. She further noted that additional challenges occur when online or offline physical attacks are not established as crimes by law. Practices followed in Italy and in the United Kingdom were provided as good examples as to management of cases and enactment of witness protection programs, methods which indeed provide support to women journalists, but still do not enable them to continue carrying out their work.

Participants noted that, in the case of online attacks, some challenges arise from the short timeframe during which IP addresses can be kept for storage, often not sufficient for the investigation. The necessity to exercise more pressure on social media platforms was also addressed. It was proposed for the future Council of Europe campaign to distinguish attacks against journalists when based on gender.

Conclusions

Participants praised the initiative of organising a workshop enabling the information sharing on good practices and existing initiatives in the field of journalists' safety. They noted that direct communication between key stakeholders is key and encouraged the Secretariat to facilitate the exchanges amongst participants as a follow-up to the workshop, including by sharing documents and information regarding current and future activities.

Amongst the main takeaways, participants suggested that the Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists should focus on the setting up, or revision, and implementation of dedicated national action plans or strategies. Indeed, it was observed that special legislative provisions for the protection of journalists can significantly contribute to enhancing journalists' safety. Moreover, it was reiterated that it is important to ensure the involvement of a wide range of national stakeholders, including state authorities, the police, prosecutors' offices, media associations and civil society organisations.

Participants further stressed that awareness-raising and education programmes, including addressed to the general public and targeting young generations, should play a key role in this framework. It was further observed that local realities merit careful consideration. Attention should be devoted to the specifics of the local context, with a view to acknowledge and address the nuances of the local situation.