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# CROATIA Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety 2022





**CROATIA**  
**Indicators on**  
**the Level of**  
**Media Freedom**  
**and Journalists'**  
**Safety 2022**

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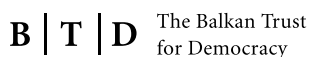
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A PROJECT OF THE GERMAN MARSHALL FUND

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# Project Overview and Scope

The journalists' associations from the Western Balkan countries, with the support of the European Commission<sup>1</sup>, have set up a joint platform [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net) to monitor changes in their countries' legislation and practice and to engage in various advocacy activities aimed at advancing political, legislative, and institutional environment in which the journalists and media work. Starting in 2020, the members of the platform monitor the situation in seven countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo<sup>2</sup> and Serbia). Every year, the assessment of the situation is conducted on the basis of standardized methods for data collection and analysis<sup>3</sup>, while the focus of the advocacy research is on the changes in both the traditional and online media environment in the Western Balkans.

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- 1 In December 2019, the European Commission approved the three-year project [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net), aimed at empowering national journalists' associations in the Western Balkan's countries to become effective and accountable independent actors in advocating applications of EU standards in the field of media freedoms, with a long-term goal of advancing citizens' right to informed choice. This Action represents an up-scaling of the previous project (Western Balkan's Regional Platform for Advocating Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety), based on the knowledge and experience built in the period 2016-2018. The project is funded, under the Civil Society Facility and Media Programme 2020-2022, Support to regional thematic networks of Civil Society Organizations.*
  - 2 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.*
  - 3 The first edition of the research methodology for this advocacy research project was developed in 2016 and fine-tuned over the years to reflect the situation in the Western Balkan countries. 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](http://www.resis.mk)).*

# A Note on Methodology

The research methodology is composed of three groups of indicators developed based on a systematic analysis of various guidelines produced by relevant international organizations. In the course of the previous years the originally developed qualitative indicators have been refined to address the distinctive socio-political context in the Western Balkans region and to reflect the specific needs and interests of the journalists in the seven countries.

A range of various research methods were applied to collect and analyze data in order to answer the indicative questions related to each specific 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 web sites of public institutions and other organizations 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 national level, the advocacy research is conducted by national researchers who carry out the data collection and draft the narrative reports, which were then reviewed by local media experts and by lead researcher. In Croatia the Croatian Journalists' Association nominated Monika Kutri as national researchers and Đurđica Klancir as media expert to review the report.

*Table 1: Indicators on levels of media freedom and journalists' safety*

A. Legal protection	B. Journalists' position in newsrooms	C. Journalists' safety
A1 Legal guarantees for media and journalistic freedom and their application in practice	B1 Economic restrictions of journalistic freedoms	C1 Statistics of attacks on journalists and impunity
A2 The impact of defamation laws on journalists	B2 Editorial independence in private media	C2 Conduct of state institutions and political actors in relation to the protection of journalists
A3 Legal protection of political pluralism in the media	B3 Editorial independence in public media services	C3 Conduct of criminal and civil justice in relation to threats and violence against journalists
A4 Freedom of work and journalistic associations	B4 Editorial independence in non-profit media	
A5 Legal protection of a journalistic source	B5 Journalists' freedom in the process of news production	
A6 Protection of rights to access information	B6 The economic position of women in journalism	





Croatia is a unique and indivisible democratic and social state where power originates from the people and belongs to the people as a community of free and equal citizens<sup>4</sup>. It is organized as a sovereign parliamentary democracy based on the division of powers into legislative, executive, and judicial branches. According to the Constitution, Croatia is the national state of the Croatian people and national minorities. According to the 2021 population census<sup>5</sup>, national minorities make up 6.2% of Croatia's population, with the largest groups being Serbs, Bosniaks, Roma, Italians, and Albanians<sup>6</sup>. According to the Freedom House report for 2022<sup>7</sup>, Croatia is a semi-consolidated democracy and has held that status for several years.

In Croatia, as of 2022, the end of the coronavirus epidemic has not yet been declared, so there are still certain restrictions, although much less compared to 2021 and 2020. In November 2022, an inflation rate of 13.5% was recorded<sup>8</sup>, and the annual inflation for 2022 was 13.1%<sup>9</sup>, the highest value since the State Bureau of Statistics started record-

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4 Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. *Narodne novine (Official Gazette)* 56/90, 135/97, 08/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01, 76/10, 85/10, 05/14.

5 The population in Croatia has significantly decreased compared to 2011. According to the 2021 census, Croatia had a population of 3,871,833, which is 413,056 people or 9.64% less than the previous census. The share of national minorities in the 2011 census was 7.62%; <https://dzs.gov.hr/vijesti/objavljeni-konacni-rezultati-popisa-2021/1270>, accessed: 01.01.2023.

6 National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia. Government of the Republic of Croatia, Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities; <https://pravomanjina.gov.hr/nacionalne-manjine/nacionalne-manjine-u-republici-hrvatskoj/352>, accessed: 01.01.2023.

7 Freedom House, „Nations in Transit – Croatia”, 2022; <https://freedomhouse.org/country/croatia/freedom-world/2022>, accessed: 11.2023.

8 Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Inflation; <https://podaci.dzs.hr/>, accessed: 07.01.2023.

9 Croatian Bureau of Statistics, Inflation calculator; <https://web.dzs.hr/calculfl.htm>, accessed: 07.01.2023.

ing these data. The economy is still in crisis, and there are concerns about the continuation of the crisis in the following year due to the introduction of the euro as the official currency instead of the current Croatian kuna.

The atmosphere in which journalists are working in Croatia is not good. They are still being blamed as “culprits”, and high-ranking state officials accuse and criticize them in their public appearances. The media sector, especially nonprofit media, has not yet recovered from 2016 when the then Minister of Culture, Zlatko Hasanbegović, abolished the program of funding for nonprofit media. This decision left a large number of journalists unemployed, nonprofit media were pushed to the brink of existence, and the consequences are still felt today. Minister of Culture and Media Nina Obuljen Koržinek, who succeeded Hasanbegović, announced a media strategy and a new Media Act, but these strategically important documents for the media scene have not been adopted yet. The preparation of the National Plan for the Development of Culture and Media for the period from 2023 to 2027<sup>10</sup> is currently underway.

There is a large number of registered media outlets in Croatia. The Council for Electronic Media at the Electronic Media Agency maintains the Register of Media Service Providers, Electronic Publications, and Nonprofit Producers of Audiovisual and Radio Programs, while print media is registered with the Croatian Chamber of Economy (HGK). As of December 31, 2022, there were 31 active media services of television, 156 media services of radio, 500 media services of electronic publications, 203 media services via satellite and the internet, 21 on-demand media services, and 79 nonprofit program producers<sup>11</sup>. Croatia has two public media services: the Croatian Radiotelevision (HRT) and the Croatian News Agency (HINA). There are no official data on the total number of journalists in Croatia, but data on the number of employed journalists in individual media outlets<sup>12</sup> are kept by the Croatian Chamber of Economy. The largest organizations representing journalists and advocating for their rights and ethical principles are the Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) and the Trade Union of Croatian Journalists (SNH). The Society for Protection of Journalistic Copyrights (DZNAP) deals with journalists' copyright issues in Croatia.

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10 Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia, Development of the National Plan for Culture and Media for the Period 2023-2027; <https://min-kulture.gov.hr/o-ministarstvu-15/kulturne-politike-52/stratesko-planiranje/izrada-nacionalnog-plana-razvoja-kulture-i-medija-za-razdoblje-od-2022-do-2027-qodine/22285>, accessed: 04.03.2023.

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11 For the purpose of this report, the information was obtained from the Agency for Electronic Media.

12 The table provided by the Croatian Chamber of Economy (HGK) to the Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) contains data on the number of permanently employed journalists in electronic media, as well as the total number of journalists in electronic media. The accuracy of the included data is questionable as, in some cases, the number of permanently employed journalists exceeds the total number of employed journalists.

### **A1 Legal guarantees for media and journalists' freedom and their application in practice**

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Is the right to freedom of expression and information guaranteed? Does it include internet access? Are legal guarantees implemented in practice?

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The right to freedom of expression and information is guaranteed by the Constitution and laws. Article 38 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia guarantees freedom of thought and expression, the right to correction, the right to access information, and prohibits censorship. It explicitly states that “freedom of expression of thought particularly includes freedom of the press and other means of communication, freedom of speech and public appearance, and freedom of establishment of all public communication institutions.”<sup>13</sup> The laws that regulate the rights of journalists and other participants in the public sphere, as well as the prerequisites for the principle of media freedom, include the Media Act<sup>14</sup>, the Electronic Media Act<sup>15</sup>, the Croatian Radiotelevision Act<sup>16</sup>, the Croatian News Agency Act<sup>17</sup> and partially the Copyright and Related Rights

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<sup>13</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. Narodne novine 56/90, 135/97, 08/98, 113/00, 124/00, 28/01, 41/01, 55/01, 76/10, 85/10, 05/14.

<sup>14</sup> Media Act. Narodne novine 59/04, 84/11, 81/13.

<sup>15</sup> Electronic Media Act. Narodne novine 111/21.

<sup>16</sup> Croatian Radiotelevision Act. Narodne novine 137/10, 76/12, 78/16, 46/17, 73/17, 94/18.

<sup>17</sup> Croatian News Agency Act. Narodne novine 96/01.

Act<sup>18</sup>. The Right to Access Information Act<sup>19</sup> and the Media Act<sup>20</sup> guarantee journalists the right to access information held by public authorities. However, the implementation of these guarantees in practice is not always most effective, as it is not always easy to obtain information<sup>21</sup>. Journalists are often forced to use the mechanism of appeal or the Information Commissioner to obtain information that public administration bodies and institutions refuse to provide, but which is of public interest. Civil lawsuits can be lengthy, and legal remedies against violations of the law are not always effective.<sup>22</sup>

### Is the media legislation developed through a transparent and inclusive process in consultation with relevant professional associations?

The media legislation is generally developed through a transparent and inclusive process, but at times it gives the impression of being carried out *pro forma*, with the final decisions on regulatory solutions being made by the ruling structures<sup>23</sup>. In 2021, new laws were enacted, such as the Electronic Media Act (ZEM) and the Copyright and Related Rights Act. The Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) withdrew from the Working Group for the preparation of the ZEM<sup>24</sup> because the Ministry of Culture did not consider any of HND's suggestions in the Draft Proposal of that law<sup>25</sup>. The new ZEM introduced the following changes: a revised calculation method for the program basis; authors of comments posted below media publications on portals will be held responsible for

those comments; the number of users of the Fund for the Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity of Electronic Media was expanded, but the finances for that fund were not increased; incitement to hatred and violence is prohibited (based on political or other opinions, membership in national minorities, property, birth, disability, age, sexual orientation, or citizenship, and content that incites terrorism)<sup>26</sup>. The current Media Act from 2004 has become outdated, and many well-established provisions of that law are not effectively implemented in practice due to the fact that the legislator did not provide for sanctions. At the end of 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Media established a Working Group for the amendment of the Media Act, with the inclusion of one member each from the Croatian Journalists' Association and the Trade Union of Croatian Journalists. Despite concrete proposals from these associations, the Working Group did not hold further meetings after the initial meeting in 2022. One of the fundamental issues repeatedly emphasized by journalists' associations is the lack of a Media Strategy and Media Policy in Croatia. The furthest progress in creating such a policy was made in 2015 when a Draft Proposal for a media policy<sup>27</sup> was created, but it was never adopted. In 2022, as part of the preparation of the National Plan for the Development of Culture and Media for the period from 2022 to 2027, the Ministry of Culture and Media conducted an analysis of the media sector in the Republic of Croatia.<sup>28</sup>

### Have there been attempts by state authorities to impose licensing or other stringent requirements for the establishment of print and online media? Do these requirements go beyond mere company registration and taxation?

During 2022, there were no attempts to impose licensing for print and online media. The registration of these media outlets is merely an administrative requirement, with electronic media being registered with the Agency for Electronic Media (AEM), and print media being registered with the Croatian Chamber of Economy (HGK). The HGK's registry includes 845 publications<sup>29</sup>, while the AEM has registered 31 television media services,

18 Copyright and Related Rights Act. *Narodne novine* 111/21.

19 Right to Access Information Act. *Narodne novine* 25/13, 85/15.

20 Media Act, Article 6. *Narodne novine* 59/04, 84/11, 81/13.

21 The current Media Act dates back to 2004, and there is no independent body overseeing its implementation. For this reason, when journalists seek information, they do not refer to the Media Act but rather to Right to Access Information Act, which has an implementing body – Office of the Information Commissioner.

22 Regarding the decisions in which the Commissioner approves journalists' appeals, public authorities can further appeal to the High Administrative Court, so it often takes years to obtain the requested information.

23 Helena Popović, a media expert, emphasizes that "this means that different partakers are called upon and involved to legitimize the decisions of the majority, which is formed in a way that includes those who support the decisions of the authorities. In other words, the decisions are made within the ruling structures, and afterwards, a democratic procedure is simulated with a very predictable outcome." Interview conducted by Monika Kutri in January 2021.

24 Croatian Journalists' Association, HND: "We have withdrawn from the working group for the development of the Electronic Media Act (ZEM) because the Ministry of Culture did not consider any of our proposals." Zagreb, January 19, 2020; <https://www.hnd.hr/hnd-istupili-smo-iz-radne-skupine-za-izradu-zem-a-jer-ministarstvo-kulture-nije-uvazilo-nijedan-nas-prijedlog/>, accessed: 02.01.2023.

25 Croatian Journalists' Association, HND: "Comments on specific articles of the proposed Electronic Media Act.," <https://hnd.hr/hnd-komentari-na-pojedine-clanke-prijedloga-zakona-o-elektronickim-medijima>, accessed: 02.01.2023.

26 Electronic Media Act. *Narodne novine* 111/21.

27 Ministry of Culture and The Media, Draft Proposal of Media Policy, Zagreb, September 30, 2015; <https://min-kulture.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/Uprava%20za%20medije/Nacr%20prijedloga%20medijske%20politike%20Republike%20Hrvatske.pdf>, accessed: 02.01.2023.

28 Ministry of Culture and The Media, Analysis of the Media Sector in the Republic of Croatia, Zagreb, October 6, 2022; <https://min-kulture.gov.hr/vijesti-8/analiza-medijskog-sektora-u-republici-hrvatskoj/22898>, accessed 13.01.2023.

29 Data from the table provided by the Croatian Chamber of Economy (HGK) to the Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) for the purposes of this research, received on January 11, 2023.

156 radio media services, 500 electronic publication media services, 203 media services via satellite and the internet, 21 on-demand media services, and 79 nonprofit program producers<sup>30</sup>.

### Have state authorities attempted to restrict the right to access the internet or to block or filter online content?

There is no known information that state authorities attempted to restrict the right to access the internet, block, or filter online content during 2022. The Digital Monitoring database<sup>31</sup> does not record any such restrictions on rights in Croatia, and Freedom of the Net does not have data for Croatia<sup>32</sup>.

During 2022, a situation occurred where some media outlets published a report from HINA (Croatian News Agency) on their portals about a debate in the Parliament where politicians referred to journalistic articles that addressed the connection between a high-ranking official of the Security and Intelligence Agency (SOA) and a group of influential businesspeople. However, certain media outlets promptly deleted that report<sup>33</sup>. The editorial boards of the media outlets that deleted the articles justified their actions in various ways, but there are serious indications that these deletions were a result of behind-the-scenes pressures.

### Is the regulatory body exercising its powers in an independent and non-discriminatory manner? Are the regulations for broadcasting licenses applied fairly and neutrally?

The Council for Electronic Media (VEM)<sup>34</sup> is the only independent regulatory body<sup>35</sup> in Croatia. VEM oversees the Agency for Electronic Media (AEM) and enforces the

Electronic Media Act (ZEM)<sup>36</sup>. Concessions are awarded through public tenders<sup>37</sup>, and this process is regulated by the Ordinance on the Content and Procedure of Notice on the Intention to Grant Concessions for the Provision of Television and Radio Media Services<sup>38</sup>. VEM monitors the work of publishers or concessionaires and is responsible for imposing sanctions in case of violations of the ZEM. The new ZEM introduces new requirements regarding the professional qualifications of Council members, but the procedure for their appointment remains the same. The Council consists of seven members appointed and dismissed by the Croatian Parliament (by a simple majority vote, for a five-year term) based on the proposal of the Government, and Council members can be reelected without limitations on the number of terms. The Council operates mostly transparently, but the fact that its appointment is under the control of the parliamentary majority can significantly impact its political independence as a regulatory body<sup>39</sup>. *Media Daily* conducted a survey in which 60 publishers participated, and 63.4% of respondents believe that VEM is not independent in its work.<sup>40</sup> It is important to note that print media does not fall under the regulation of VEM, so such media outlets do not have a regulatory body. The Croatian Journalists' Association's Press Council grants admonishments or opinions based on violations of the Code of Honor of Croatian Journalists or Universal Ethical Principles of the Journalism Profession.

**A1.1** *In the first quarter of 2022, the Council for Electronic Media (VEM) unanimously registered a media outlet whose main mission is to advertise and promote the businesses of municipalities and cities<sup>41</sup>. Registering a media outlet that is not editorially designed, is not in line with the Electronic Media Act*

30 For the purpose of this report, data obtained from the Agency for Electronic Media.

31 Share Monitoring, *Monitoring Digital Rights Violations in South and Eastern Europe*; <https://hrbird.tools/>, accessed: 02.01.2023.

32 Freedom House, *Internet Freedom Status*; <https://freedomhouse.org/explore-the-map?type=fain&year=2022>, accessed: 06.01.2023.

33 H. Šimičević i G. Borković, *Where Do Articles on SOA and partners of PPD CEO disappear*, *Novosti*, July 1, 2022; <https://www.portalnovosti.com/gdje-nestaju-tekstovi-o-soa-i-partnerima-sefa-ppd-a>, accessed: 06.01.2023.

34 *The powers of the Council for Electronic Media do not extend beyond the field of electronic media, so the Council is not competent for an article published in the print edition of a newspaper, while it is responsible for the same article published on the website of that newspaper.*

35 *Certain regulatory authorities in the field of media include the Croatian Competition Agency, the Croatian Chamber of Economy, the Agency for Network Activities, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Finance, but none of these institutions exclusively deal with the media.*

36 Agency for Electronic Media, Council; <https://www.aem.hr/vijeci/>, accessed: 25.02.2022.

37 Agency for Electronic Media, concessions; <https://www.aem.hr/kategorija/koncesije/>, accessed: 25.02.2022.

38 Council for Electronic Media, *Regulation on the Content and Procedure of Notice of Intention to Grant Concessions for the Provision of Television and Radio Media Services*, *Narodne novine* 131/13.

39 European Commission, *Rule of Law Report 2022: Chapter on Croatia*, Luxembourg, July 13, 2022, page 18; [https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2022-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2022-rule-law-report-communication-and-country-chapters_en), accessed: 12.01.2023.

40 *Media Daily Research Team, Survey! The majority of respondents believe that the Council for Electronic Media (VEM) does not make independent and autonomous decisions regarding the allocation of radio and TV concessions!* March 29, 2022; <https://mediadaily.biz/2022/03/29/anketa-vecina-ispitanika-smatra-da-vem-ne-odlucuje-samostalno-i-neovisno-o-dodjeli-radijskih-tv-koncesija/>, accessed: 30.03.2022.

41 **Zoran Kovačić, VEM registers a web portal whose main mission is to serve cities and municipalities for the purpose of advertising and promoting their business?** *Media Daily*, April 12, 2022; <https://mediadaily.biz/2022/04/12/vem-upisao-u-registar-web-portal-cija-je-glavna-misija-sluziti-gradovima-i-opcinama-u-svrhu-reklamiranja-i-promoviranja-njihova-poslovanja/>, accessed: 03.01.2023.

(ZEM), and the mission of publishing uncritical propaganda articles is also contrary to the Code of Honor of Croatian Journalists. During 2022, VEM removed six publishers from its register of media service providers, but the portals [sloboda.hr](http://sloboda.hr), [maxportal](http://maxportal.hr), and [zadardanas](http://zadardanas.hr) continue to publish content on a daily basis.<sup>42</sup>

Are legal provisions on advertising of state institutions in the media used for political influence on their editorial policy? Is the distribution of public funds transparent, fair and non-discriminatory? Do state institutions regularly publish data on the funds allocated to the media?

Advertising in Croatia is regulated by laws, but clear and fair criteria for the distribution of state advertisements to the media are still lacking. State institutions are generally transparent and disclose information about funds allocated to the media. However, this represents only a portion of the money flowing from the state treasury to the media. Public companies and state-sponsored entities also allocate funds, but these data are not transparent<sup>43</sup>, and are treated as “business secrets” hidden from the public. Significant funds from the state budget also flow into the media through marketing agencies that do not disclose this information. The “monitoring of local self-government” is recorded as commercial advertising revenue rather than public support, making it difficult to determine the extent of such practices<sup>44</sup>. In some cases, local media are supported “in kind”, such as covering their electricity bills or providing free use of space in local cultural centers<sup>45</sup>. According to a pilot study conducted by Gong in 2021<sup>46</sup>, it appears that certain media outlets receive significantly more favoritism in terms of state advertising compared to others. In 2022 it is again observed that the government and some ministries are unwilling to disclose to the public the amounts allocated to specific media outlets through advertisements. Such non-transparent state advertising “dangerously under-

mines the autonomy of editorial policies in many media.”<sup>47</sup>

Are there any types of media subsidies or funds for the production of media content of public interest and how are they implemented in practice?

The Fund for Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity of Electronic Media, managed by the Electronic Media Agency, is one of the sources of funding. The Croatian Radiotelevision Act ensures the financial resources of this Fund, and every year three percent of the revenue from the radio and television fee is allocated to it. Funds are allocated through an annual public tender, which some publishers believe is not completely regular and fair<sup>48</sup>. Print media that have a media statute and are published daily benefit from reduced VAT to the sum of only five percent.<sup>49</sup> Despite the fact that the Media Act stipulates that the State will call for public tenders for subsidies to the media every year, the State does not respect this obligation. Also, according to ZEM, public authorities are obliged to spend 15% of their marketing budget in local media every year<sup>50</sup>. Data on this are published in VEM’s annual reports, but are incomplete because most public bodies do not submit data.

**A1.2** During 2022, in collaboration with SNH (Trade Union of Croatian Journalists), HND (Croatian Journalists’ Association) conducted a research on the funding of local media with public money<sup>51</sup>. Based on this analysis, *Models for Financing Local Media*<sup>52</sup> were developed, along with recommendations<sup>53</sup> for Local

42 Hina, VEM deleted six publishers, three portals are still active, September 19, 2022; <https://www.hina.hr/vijesti/11101665>, accessed: 04.01.2023.

43 GONG, State advertising – millions from the budget and state companies are poured into selected media, December 29, 2021; <https://gong.hr/2021/12/29/drzavno-oglasavanje-milijuni-iz-proracuna-i-drzavnih-tvrtki-slijevaju-se-u-birane-medije/>, accessed: 04.01.2023.

44 Saša Paparella, (Non)transparent financing and (non) independent journalism, HND, January 4, 2017, <https://www.hnd.hr/ne-transparentno-finciranje-i-ne-ovisno-novinarstvo>, accessed: 01.01.2023.

45 Ibid.

46 GONG, State advertising – millions from the budget and state companies are poured into selected media, December 29, 2021; <https://gong.hr/2021/12/29/drzavno-oglasavanje-milijuni-iz-proracuna-i-drzavnih-tvrtki-slijevaju-se-u-birane-medije/>, accessed: 04.01.2023.

47 Saša Paparella, Oriana Ivković Novokmet i Melisa Skender, State funding with no clear criteria – Censorship tool for the media? GONG, 2022, Page 5, <https://gong.hr/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Drzavno-financiranje-bez-jasnih-kriterija-Alat-za-cenzuriranje-medija.pdf>, accessed: 04.01.2023.

48 In a survey conducted by Media Daily, in which 60 publishers participated, when asked whether VEM (Council for Electronic Media) evaluates applications to this Fund correctly and fairly, 36.7% of respondents believe it does not, while 16.7% believe that VEM sometimes unfairly assesses them; <https://mediadaily.biz/2022/03/29/anketa-vecina-ispitanika-smatra-da-vem-ne-odlucuje-samostalno-i-neovisno-o-dodjeli-radijskih-i-tv-koncesija/>, accessed: 01.01.2023.

49 Zoran Kovačić, The Media and the State (I) Influence of money on media reporting, Media Daily, April 27, 2020; <https://mediadaily.biz/2020/04/27/mediji-drzava-utjecaj-novca-izvjestavanje-medijae-izvjestavanje-medija/>, accessed: 07.01.2023.

50 Electronic Media Act, Narodne novine 111/21, Article 38.

51 Melisa Skender, Analysis of financing of local media with public money, HND and SNH, August 31, 2022; <https://www.hnd.hr/uploads/files/0Analiza%20financiranja%20lokalnih%20medija%20javnim%20novcem.pdf>, accessed: 05.01.2023.

52 Helena Popović, Andrea Milat and Iva Borković, Models of financing local media, HND and SNH, August 31, 2022; <https://www.hnd.hr/uploads/files/Modeli%20financiranja%20lokalnih%20medija.pdf>, accessed: 07.01.2023.

53 Andrea Milat and Iva Borković, Recommendations, HND and SNH, August 31, 2022; <https://www.hnd.hr/uploads/files/Preporuke.pdf>, accessed: 07.01.2023.

*Government Units. The conducted research revealed that the criteria for co-financing media from local and regional budgets are not clear, and that media outlets generally receive funding based on the “discretionary decision of local leaders”<sup>54</sup>.*

#### What are the mechanisms for financing media in the languages of national minorities?

The funding mechanisms for media in languages of national minorities are generally carried out through the tenders organized by the Council for National Minorities. National minority councils, associations, as well as members of national minorities themselves, can engage in public communication activities<sup>55</sup> in accordance with the law<sup>56</sup> to exercise their right to information in their mother tongue. State, regional, and local budgets allocate funds for co-financing radio and television programs owned by national minorities. The Council for National Minorities financed 67 information programs in 2021 through the Decision on the distribution of funds provided in the state budget of the Republic of Croatia for the needs of national minorities.<sup>57</sup> The Agency for Electronic Media, through the Fund for Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity of Electronic Media, annually allocates funds to media service providers in the category of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia through a public tender. Article 18 of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities (Agreement between Croatian Radiotelevision and the Government of the Republic of Croatia for the period from January 1, 2018, to December 31, 2022) guarantees the representation of national minorities in the program of Croatian Radiotelevision.

Is the autonomy and independence of the public radio and television service guaranteed and effectively protected? Does the funding framework ensure its independence and stability? Is its supervisory body a representative of society as a whole?

The Croatian Radiotelevision Act formally guarantees the independence of Croatian Radiotelevision (HRT)<sup>58</sup>, but it appears that this independence is not protected in practice. The HRT management is appointed by the ruling majority in the Croatian Parliament, which has been a practice of political appointments and attempts to influence the public service’s programming.<sup>59</sup> HRT is funded through a broadcasting fee paid by all citizens, which amounts to approximately 1.2 billion kuna annually<sup>60</sup>. It could be said that the funding source enables financial independence and stability of the public media service. HRT has two supervisory bodies: the Supervisory Board and the Program Council of HRT. The Supervisory Board consists of five members, four of whom are appointed by the Croatian Parliament, while one representative is from HRT’s employees, and this body oversees the operations of HRT and compliance with the Croatian Radiotelevision Act<sup>61</sup>. The Program Council of HRT “represents and protects the public interest by monitoring programs and improving radio and audiovisual programs, as well as other audio and audiovisual and multimedia services.”<sup>62</sup> This body consists of 11 members, nine of whom are appointed by the Parliament based on a public call, while two are elected by HRT employees. At the beginning of 2022, the new Director General of HRT, Robert Šveb, dismissed some of the directors of HRT’s business units, such as the Director of HRT Program, Director of Production, Director of Technology, and Director of Business (Renato Kunić, Damir Novinić, Zvonimir Jukić and Mislav Stipičić). Interestingly, Bruno Kovačević, the Chief Editor of all HRT programs and the international television program channel, Katarina Periša Čakarun, the Editor of the Information Media Service, and Ana Milić, the Editor of the Mosaic Program, were not dismissed, despite the ongoing criticism from the profession and the public regarding these two pro-

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Publish newspapers, produce and broadcast radio and television programs and perform the activities of news agencies.

<sup>56</sup> Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Government of the Republic of Croatia, Access to means of public communication for members of national minorities and the right to perform public communication activities (receiving and disseminating information) in the language and writing they use; <https://ljudskoprava.gov.hr/pristup-pripadnicima-nacionalnih-manjina-sredstvima-javnog-priopcanja-i-pravo-obavljanja-djelatnosti-javnog-priopcanja-primanje-i-sirenje-informacija-na-jeziku-i-pismu-kojime-sluzi/626>, accessed: 07.01.2023.

<sup>57</sup> Council for National Minorities, Decision on the distribution of funds to be provided in the State Budget of the Republic of Croatia for the needs of national minorities in 2022, *Narodne novine* 48/2022.

<sup>58</sup> Croatian Radiotelevision Act. *Narodne novine* 137/10, 76/12, 78/16, 46/17, 73/17, 94/18.

<sup>59</sup> Reporters Without Borders wrote again in their 2022 report that “State interference in the management of HTV still exists.”; <https://rsf.org/en/croatia>, accessed 06.01.2023.

<sup>60</sup> Iko Ćimić, *The arrests confirmed: First they racketeers us, then they use same funds to pay for HDZ’s crime*, *Index.hr*, May 29, 2020; <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/uhicenja-potvrdila-prvo-nam-otmu-novac-pa-ni-me-financiraju-hdzov-kriminal/2186544.aspx>, accessed: 06.01.2023.

<sup>61</sup> Croatian Radiotelevision Act. *Narodne novine* 137/10, 76/12, 78/16, 46/17, 73/17, 94/18.

<sup>62</sup> Program Council of HRT; <https://o-nama.hrt.hr/organizacija/programsko-vijece-hrt-a-4333>, accessed 06.01.2023.

grams<sup>63</sup>. Although the exact reason for the dismissal of the management staff is not explicitly stated, Šveb mentioned in an interview that “HRT has been managed in a completely wrong way for many years, even decades.”<sup>64</sup>

## A2 The Impact of Defamation Act on Journalists

### Are the provisions on defamation strict and do they protect public officials? What are the main shortcomings of these laws?

The criminal offense of severe defamation was decriminalized in 2020, but provisions on defamation and insult remained part of the Act. The Croatian Journalists’ Association (HND) has been appealing for years to remove defamation from the Criminal Code. The provisions on defamation and insult are very strict, and public officials often use them, sometimes as a form of retaliation against journalistic reporting<sup>65</sup>. A conviction based on defamation or insult “allows the prosecutor to directly seek monetary compensation from the journalist after the completion of the criminal proceedings.”<sup>66</sup> Legal experts believe that the decriminalization of severe defamation is a good start, but the other two provisions should also be decriminalized. Defamation is generally difficult to prove, but there are numerous lawsuits related to insult. Additionally, politically exposed and legal persons often use the provision on the violation of reputation and honor from the Criminal Code to silence critical media, regardless of the accuracy and verification of the published information in the public interest.

### A.2.2 How many lawsuits against journalists have been initiated by state officials and politicians in the past year?

According to the survey<sup>67</sup> conducted by the Croatian Journalists’ Association (HND) in the first quarter of 2022, there were at least 951 lawsuits against media

outlets and journalists active in Croatia at that time, with plaintiffs seeking almost 10.3 million euros in damages. Out of the total number of 951 lawsuits, 928 were civil proceedings for compensation due to defamation and damage to reputation filed against publishers, editors, and journalists for published articles and reports. On the other hand, there are currently 23 ongoing criminal proceedings. The plaintiffs, apart from individuals unknown to the general public, are predominantly individuals from public and political life, including politicians in power, as well as legal entities and even judges. In the active court cases, the amount of the claims ranges from a few thousand kunas to over a million kunas, while the longest court case has been ongoing for 32 years. According to the data from the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration<sup>68</sup>, in 2022, 245 new civil lawsuits for damages were filed against journalists, 395 were resolved, and 710 lawsuits remained unresolved as of December 31, 2022. The number of active criminal cases where journalists were defendants in all courts in Croatia at the end of 2022 was 101. In only seven cases, a guilty verdict was reached against journalists, indicating that a very small number of journalists were convicted for the offenses they were charged with.

### To what extent are court decisions against certain journalists politically motivated? What penalties have been imposed?

It could be said that some lawsuits against journalists are politically motivated<sup>69</sup>. The large number of lawsuits against journalists and media is not new in Croatia, and over time, plaintiffs have realized that this is an “elegant” way to attack journalists in order to discredit, demotivate, intimidate, and financially exhaust them. Judicial practice is not consistent, and this presents a significant problem. In court proceedings against journalists and media, judges who file lawsuits generally fare the best<sup>70</sup>.

63 Zrinka Vrabec Mojzeš, Robert Šveb: “HRT was managed in a completely wrong way for a number of years”, *Nacional*, March 6, 2022: <https://www.nacional.hr/robert-sveb-hrt-om-se-niz-godina-upravljalo-na-potpuno-pogresan-nacin/>, accessed: 20.01.2023.

64 *Ibid.*

65 Mašenjka Bačić, *Crime media*, *Novosti*, March 18, 2019; <https://www.portalnovosti.com/krimi-medija>, accessed: 06.01.2023.

66 *Ibid.*

67 Monika Kutri, *HND research: the number of lawsuits against journalists and the media is increasing, at least 951 of them are active*, *HND*, March 30, 2022; <https://www.hnd.hr/istrazivanje-hnd-a-broj-tuzbi-protiv-novinara-i-medija-u-porastu-aktivno-njih-najmanje-951>, accessed 06.01.2023.

68 Data obtained by HND from the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration for the purposes of research on lawsuits against journalists and the media.

69 In the ad hoc study “SLAPP in the context of the European Union”, it is stated that the large number of lawsuits initiated by HRT against journalists raises the suspicion that the public service has been captured by a political interest group; [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/ad-hoc-literature-review-analysis-key-elements-slapp\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/ad-hoc-literature-review-analysis-key-elements-slapp_en.pdf), accessed: 06.01.2023.

70 Igor Lasić, *The Media in Croatia: When Judges become plaintiffs and decision makers*, *DW*, December 12, 2022; <https://www.dw.com/hr/mediji-u-hrvatskoj-kad-kadija-tu%C5%BE-i-sudi/a-64061516>, accessed: 01.03.2023.



**Do the courts recognize the established self-regulatory mechanism (if it exists)? Do they accept the validity of published responses, corrections, or apologies?**

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Some courts recognize the work of the Croatian Journalists' Association's Council of Honor as a self-regulatory body. Although they are not obligated to consider the Council of Honor's decisions during the process, in practice, this does happen, although the judicial practice in Croatia is not consistent, so this claim cannot be made for the entire judiciary. Lawyers often submit the decisions of the Council of Honor as evidence of compliance with or disregard for the Code of Ethics for Croatian Journalists. Published responses, corrections, or apologies are often taken into account in court. However, it is becoming increasingly common for disguised denials to be attempted in the media, where the content of such unpublished correspondence, presented as "corrections," does not actually contradict the statements in the original article but rather seeks to defame the journalist. The courts are not willing to consider the content of such unpublished letters presented as "corrections."

**What do journalists think about the defamation provisions in the law? Do these provisions have a discouraging effect on their investigative work and critical writing?**

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Journalists have divided opinions on this matter. Some journalists, in interviews and focus groups conducted for the purpose of this research<sup>71</sup>, have stated that defamation provisions do not have a intimidating or discouraging effect on them. However, another group has mentioned that these provisions systematically act as self-censorship on journalists. Some journalists have pointed out the lack of knowledge within the judiciary as a major problem in this issue, as well as the expertise of judges regarding media law and the journalism profession. The issue is that in defamation lawsuits, it must be proven that the journalist intentionally spread falsehoods to defame someone, while in cases of injury to reputation and honor, regardless of the accuracy and verification of published information, a journalist can be accused of jeopardizing someone's reputation.

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<sup>71</sup> For research purposes, three focus groups were conducted in January 2023, one with 10 journalists engaged in investigative journalism, the second with 7 journalists from non-profit media and the third with 4 female journalists. The focus groups were conducted by Monika Kutri.

### **A3 Legal Protection of Political Pluralism in the Media**

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**Is political pluralism in the media regulated by media legislation outside of electoral processes? What are the obligations of public service media and commercial electronic media regarding political pluralism outside of electoral processes?**

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Political pluralism in the media outside of electoral processes is not explicitly regulated in general media legislation. According to the Croatian Radiotelevision Act (HRT), the public service media is obliged to promote the plurality of political ideas, enable the public to be informed about those ideas, and impartially cover political issues<sup>72</sup>. Commercial media are not explicitly obligated by the law to promote political pluralism.

**Is the regulatory body responsible for monitoring and protecting political pluralism outside of electoral processes?**

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The regulatory body, the Electronic Media Council, is responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Electronic Media Act. Political pluralism in the media outside of electoral processes is not explicitly regulated in general media legislation.

**Do political parties and candidates have fair and equal access to the media outside of electoral processes?**

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Non-parliamentary parties have little presence in major media outside of the election campaign, while parliamentary parties generally have access to major media outlets proportional to their size and influence.

**What are the legal obligations of the media during election campaigns? Which body oversees electronic and print media?**

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During election campaigns, publishers must provide all political parties with equal promotional opportunities in accordance with election regulations and instructions from the competent election authority<sup>73</sup>. The rules for electronic media with national concession in Croatia during election campaigns<sup>74</sup> stipulate that publishers

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<sup>72</sup> Croatian Radiotelevision Act. Narodne novine 137/10, 76/12, 78/16, 46/17, 73/17, 94/18., članci 7. i 9.

<sup>73</sup> Electronic Media Act. Narodne novine 111/21.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

of electronic media must provide appropriate space for the presentation of political programs of election participants, while the Croatian Radiotelevision is obliged to provide at least five minutes for the presentation of political programs for all participants in the elections. The Program Council of the Croatian Radiotelevision oversees the content of the public service media, in line with the legal obligations of the Croatian Radiotelevision, but it only has an advisory role. The Electronic Media Council regulates and monitors the implementation of legal provisions relating to electronic media, while the Croatian Journalists' Association's Council of Honor is the body that issues warnings and opinions <sup>75</sup> in cases of violations of the Code of Ethics of Croatian Journalists.

#### **Do political parties and candidates have fair and equal access to the media during election campaigns?**

Political parties and candidates have access to the media during election campaigns, which is guaranteed to them by law<sup>76</sup>. However, politicians who hold high-ranking or local positions are more present in media programs due to their status, and many take advantage of this opportunity for self-promotion, which also brings political gains. Since there were no elections at the national level in 2022, a more recent conclusion cannot be drawn.

### **A4 Freedom of journalists' work and association**

#### **Do journalists need a state license to work? Have there been any attempts by the government in the past year to introduce journalist licensing?**

Journalists in Croatia do not require licenses to work, and there have been no recent attempts to introduce such licenses.

#### **Are journalists denied the right to report on certain events due to a lack of accreditation?**

Reporting from the Government, Parliament<sup>77</sup>, and some other public institutions is conditioned by accreditation or applications that journalists must request in advance from the institution or apply to cover specific sessions. According to a survey conducted by the Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) among its members<sup>78</sup>, 52.5% of journalists stated that they have sometimes been denied the right to report on certain events. Some participants in focus groups mentioned instances where they or someone they know have been denied the right to report. There is no publicly available data for 2022 on whether any journalists have been denied the right to report, and the HND does not have such information either.

#### **Are journalists organized in professional associations, and if so, how? Are there pressures on their organization or individual members?**

Journalists are free to associate in professional organizations and unions. The Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) is the largest professional association of journalists. It was established in 1910 and has around 2,000 members. In 2015, the Croatian Journalists and Publicists Association was also founded, but the number of its members has not been publicly disclosed. The HND, as well as its members, are often targets of attacks and pressures. Additionally, the Society for the Protection of Journalistic Copyrights operates in Croatia, along with several other smaller branch-specific journalist associations.

#### **Are journalists organized in unions, and if so, how? Are there pressures on union leaders and other members? Can journalists become union members?**

In Croatia, journalists are organized in the Trade Union of Croatian Journalists, which has around 2,200 members and has existed since 1990. Although association in unions is guaranteed by law and the Constitution, some media owners do not view it favorably, as it is

<sup>75</sup> Depending on whether the journalist or the editor is or is not a member of HND.

<sup>76</sup> OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Republic of Croatia: Parliamentary elections on July 5, 2020; UDHR Election Assessment Mission: Final Report; <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/4/471453.pdf>, accessed: 01.03.2023.

<sup>77</sup> Parliament of the Republic of Croatia, accreditations. <https://www.sabor.hr/hr/press/akreditacije>, accessed: 10.01.2023.

<sup>78</sup> The survey was conducted in January 2023 among HND membership and was answered by 41 female and male journalists.

seen as rebellion or protest. Journalists often face problems because they are union members<sup>79</sup>.

### **Is there a media council, and how is it organized? Are there pressures on council representatives?**

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The Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) and publishers of all major Croatian media outlets established the Croatian Media Council (HVM) in 2011. It was intended to be a self-regulatory body responsible for monitoring and sanctioning violations of professional journalistic ethics. However, due to organizational and financial issues, the Council's work never fully materialized, and it was completely dissolved after several years of existence. There is the Council for Electronic Media, but its work does not cover the regulation of print media.

## **A5 Legal protection of journalists' sources**

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### **How is the confidentiality of journalistic sources guaranteed by law? Under what circumstances can the right to source protection be limited?**

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According to the law<sup>80</sup>, journalists are not obliged to disclose information about their sources. The State Attorney's Office has the right to request information about the source if it is necessary for national security, territorial integrity, and protection of health. In such cases, a court may require the journalist to reveal information about the source if the public interest in disclosing the source outweighs the protection of the source<sup>81</sup>. When it comes to whistleblowers<sup>82</sup>, one of the channels for their disclosures involves public exposure, i.e., exposing irregularities and/or unlawful activities through the media. Whistleblowers are rare<sup>83</sup> in society, which is not surprising given the history of lack of their pro-

tection in Croatia, even when they revealed matters of great public interest<sup>84</sup>. In April 2022, a new Act on the Protection of Whistleblowers<sup>85</sup> came into force, which should provide better protection for whistleblowers than the previous legal provisions.

### **Do the authorities respect the confidentiality of journalistic sources? Have there been instances where journalists were asked to reveal their sources, and was it justified in the interest of the public?**

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Authorities generally respect the confidentiality of journalistic sources. Some participating journalists in focus groups mentioned being questioned about their sources in court, but they invoked their right not to disclose that information, and that was the end of it.

### **Have there been sanctions against journalists who refused to disclose the identity of their sources?**

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There have been no sanctions against journalists who refused to disclose the identity of their sources in the past year.

### **Do journalists feel free to seek access to and maintain contact with their sources of information?**

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Interviewed journalists, as well as participants in focus groups, generally feel safe to communicate with their sources. They are not afraid to meet with sources or communicate with them, although when it comes to sensitive topics, they prefer to meet in person. They prefer to use secure applications for communication.

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79 Interview with Maja Sever, president of SNH and European Federation of Journalists, conducted by Monika Kutri in January 2023.

80 Media Act, Narodne novine 59/04, 84/11, 81/13, Article 30.

81 In that case, the court is obliged to ensure that the confidentiality of the information about the source remains in the courtroom among the necessary number of people for that trial.

82 A whistleblower is a person who exposes illegal activities or information within an organization, i.e. "warns of abuse of power, violation of the law, and corruption among superiors or powerful individuals"; <https://transparencij.hr/hr/antikorupcija-detali/ko-su-zvzdaci-416>, accessed: 08.01.2023.

83 Interview with a whistleblower conducted by Monika Kutri, in January 2023.

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84 Višnja Gotal, Thirteen most famous Croatian whistleblowers: All of them were punished, declared losers – for being honest, Jutarnji list, January 19, 2022; <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/13-najpoznatiji-hrvatskih-zvzdaca-zvzdacica-svi-su-kaznjeni-proglaseni-gubitnicima-zbog-postenja-15147381>, accessed: 10.01.2023.

85 Protection of Whistleblowers Act, Narodne novine 46/22.

## **A6 Protection of the Right to Access Information**

### **What are the legal rules regarding access to official documents and information that are relevant to journalists?**

Journalists are provided with access to documents and information relevant to their work based on the Act on the Right to Access Information. The preferential access of journalists to information is somewhat defined by the Media Act, but in Croatia, there is no regulatory body (commissioner) that would immediately respond in case of a violation of this legal provision.

### **Do journalists make use of these rules? Do authorities comply with the rules without exception?**

Journalists in focus groups have said that they often follow all the rules, but despite that, authorities frequently make it difficult to access information. Journalists state that authorities mostly violate the law by not providing information on time. Even those who respond to journalists' inquiries more promptly will try to stall once they realize the seriousness of the matter. According to the experiences of focus group participants, the government and institutional representatives are more responsive to television than print media. It is still quite arbitrary, depending on the individual, as there is no system, no criteria, and everything comes down to improvisation, based on the contacts someone has, how well they know the person they are interviewing or seeking information from, and which media outlet they represent. Participants agreed with the observation that if four of them send an inquiry, there is no guarantee that all four will receive a response. Some government officials became angry because they did not receive editorial coverage or did not get asked to authorize a photograph.

One participant in the focus group mentioned that in their media outlet, they had waited for a document from a ministry for as long as 107 days. Delayed information sometimes becomes unusable or is no longer relevant to the journalist's story. Occasionally, due to the strength of the media outlet they work for, certain journalists have easier access to information. Journalists find various ways to navigate this situation, citing the Law<sup>86</sup>, sending emails with deadlines for response, and so on. Focus group participants emphasize that some institutions respect the rules and deadlines and provide the necessary information on time. However, when the information journalists seek is more sensitive, it becomes harder to obtain<sup>87</sup>.

### **Are government authorities generally transparent? Do they have open, non-discriminatory, and fair relationships with the media, or do they tend to operate in secrecy? Do state institutions prefer media outlets that are politically aligned with them?**

In theory, the government is generally open to the media: some institutions require accreditation, while others only require prior announcement from the journalist team. In practice, the situation is somewhat different: journalists in focus groups have said that government authorities are generally not transparent. One journalist added that it often happens to her that when she quickly receives a response from institutions, that response is just a question turned into a declarative statement. When asked whether state institutions prefer media outlets that are politically aligned with them, all participants unequivocally answered yes. Some added that they prefer journalists and media outlets that are politically aligned with them<sup>88</sup>. The government of the Republic of Croatia does not have a habit of convening regular press conferences where they would be open to questions.

<sup>86</sup> The Act on the Right to Access Information because it allows for appeals and sanctions if information is not provided, which the Media Act does not allow.

<sup>87</sup> For research purposes, three focus groups were conducted in January 2023, one with 10 journalists engaged in investigative journalism, the second with 7 journalists from non-profit media and the third with 4 female journalists. The focus groups were conducted by Monika Kutri.

<sup>88</sup> Focus group with 10 journalists engaged in investigative journalism, conducted by Monika Kutri in January 2023.

**Are the courts transparent? Is media access to legal proceedings provided on a non-discriminatory basis and without unnecessary restrictions?**

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In principle, the courts are open, but their transparency is not equal at all levels of the judicial system or across the entire country. Participants in focus groups have stated that documents that should be publicly available are not publicly disclosed, and only 6% of verdicts are published for the public eye. Some courts do not have their working hours published on their websites, and some don't even provide contact information. One participant in the focus groups mentioned that for civil cases, the court requests the case number to provide information, but the case number is not available because it is not published. Journalists generally only receive permission for audio and video recordings in high-profile cases, which raises questions among some participants in the focus groups about the duration of SLAPP lawsuits, if such hearings were allowed to be recorded. One participant in the focus group mentioned that courts sometimes limit public access by selecting small courtrooms for important trials, where only a limited number of people can attend.

**Is public access granted to parliamentary sessions? Are there any restrictions for journalists in monitoring the work of the Croatian Parliament?**

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The Parliament is open to the public, but journalists who want to report from it need to be accredited. Parliament sessions are broadcast live on the Parliamentary Television, the 4th program of Croatian Television, parliamentary websites, and the parliamentary YouTube channel.

**How open are the Government and ministries to the public?**

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In general, the Government and ministries are open to the public, but there are situations where the Government shows preferences towards certain media outlets. This kind of preference can undermine the right to report on politics. Additionally, some ministries use PR agencies to negotiate specific communication models with selected media outlets<sup>89</sup>. The problem also lies in the inconsistent standards for organizing press conferences, where representatives of the Government and ministries are equally accessible to all media outlets. Regular and organized press conferences after Government sessions are still not held, and the dominant practice is “catching” politicians on the street, upon arrival or departure from sessions or events, with a lot of improvisation. This undoubtedly does not contribute to consistent and quality information and communication.

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<sup>89</sup> Đurđica Klancir, *Here is how much all ministries in Plenković's government spend on external PR services: one agency is in high demand*, [Net.hr](https://net.hr/danas/koliko-ministarstva-u-plenkovicevoj-vladi-trose-na-vanjske-pr-usluge-jedna-agencija-je-jako-trazena-1eac3d78-35ce-11ed-87d7-12e0ae5762ec), September 20, 2022; <https://net.hr/danas/koliko-ministarstva-u-plenkovicevoj-vladi-trose-na-vanjske-pr-usluge-jedna-agencija-je-jako-trazena-1eac3d78-35ce-11ed-87d7-12e0ae5762ec>, accessed: 01.03.2022.

# B

## Position of journalists in newsrooms

### **B1 Economic restrictions on journalists' freedom**

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How many journalists have signed employment contracts?  
Do they have adequate social security? What are the  
salaries of journalists? Are they paid regularly?

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The economic situation of journalists has remained unfavorable and has not significantly changed compared to previous two studies. Journalists and journalism have not fully recovered from the 2008 crisis<sup>90</sup>, and in 2020, they were hit by a new crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, as well as the earthquake that affected Zagreb, but also Petrinja and the Sisak-Moslavina County. A large number of journalists have still not recovered the engagements that were canceled at the beginning of the 2020 crisis. According to the data available to the Trade Union of Croatian Journalists, out of their 2,200 members, around 1,000 members have permanent employment contracts, while the remaining members are individuals, freelancers, or occasional collaborators, and a smaller number are retirees<sup>91</sup>. There are collective agreements in three media outlets in Croatia, and in the past 20 years, there have been attempts to negotiate a national collective agreement (NKU), but they were interrupted because employers did not

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Maja Sever, President of the Trade Union of Croatian Journalists (SNH) and the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), conducted by Monika Kutri in January 2023.

<sup>91</sup> There is no exact data on the types of contracts they have, nor how many of those other members are employed on a temporary basis.

want to accept the following proposals from the Union: a 40-hour workweek, career advancement based on years of professional experience, basic salary, elements included in journalists' working hours, collective agreements at the level of media companies (so that in financially successful media outlets, higher rights than the minimums from the NKU could be achieved after signing the NKU), and basic protection for occasional collaborators.

Journalists who have signed employment contracts have better social security guaranteed by the laws<sup>92</sup> compared to those working as freelancers. Journalists' salaries are considered confidential information and vary based on numerous factors. The Trade Union of Croatian Journalists has calculated approximate salary averages for journalists in three categories based on statements from journalists:

	Journalists	Editors
Large electronic systems (national televisions)	900,00 – 1.000,00	1.500,00 – 2.000,00
Printed media (national printed media)	750,00 – 1.000,00	1.000,00 – 1.600,00
Local media	500,00 – 700,00	700,00 – 900,00

Tablica 1: Range of average net wages expressed in euros<sup>93</sup>

*Media daily* published an article in November 2022 based on data from the company *Dun&Breadstreet*, which analyzed 25 media outlets<sup>94</sup> and their average net salaries. At that time, the average salary in Croatia was 950 euros, and all 25 media outlets listed in *Media daily's* article had an average net salary higher than the national average<sup>95</sup>. The highest average salary in Croatian media in 2021 was earned by *Hrvatski tjednik*, amounting to 3238 euros<sup>96</sup>. Interestingly, *Hrvatski tjednik* has received multiple warnings from the Croatian Journalists' Ethics Council in recent years due to unprofessional reporting and non-compliance with the Code of Ethics for Croatian journalists. Other media outlets at the top, in terms of average net salaries, include the Walt Disney subsidiary with an average net salary of 1958 eu-

ros, Nova TV with 1582 euros, and RTL Hrvatska with 1360 euros<sup>97</sup>.

### What are the working conditions of journalists? What are the biggest problems they face in the workplace?

Journalists who participated in focus groups identified numerous problems they encounter in the workplace and described their working conditions. Those working for online portals highlighted the lack of time as the biggest issue because everything needs to be published quickly, and sometimes it becomes a problem when one editorial team determines what is worth publishing. Additionally, understaffing and time constraints pose significant challenges. Poor editors, inadequate staffing decisions, the absence of HR departments, and lack of adherence to editorial codes of conduct and collegiality often lead to frustrations. Editors prefer journalists to be present in the newsroom, which can be detrimental to the nature of journalistic work since stories happen outside the newsroom. Some journalists noted that this limitation hinders their ability to fully engage with sources, as they are rushed to return to the newsroom. When asked about the reasons behind this, the answer likely lies in poor organization, which ultimately results in journalists being burdened with numerous tasks unrelated to their primary role. It is challenging to conduct investigative reporting when journalists do not have the luxury to focus solely on it, as they are required to produce new content for online portals every day, leading to a decline in the quality of investigative work. Lack of mentors or mentorship support was mentioned as a problem, as journalists often feel pressured to churn out news without the opportunity to specialize in a particular area. One journalist added, "You become a machine, meeting quotas without even knowing what you're doing. Journalism is dying this way."<sup>98</sup>

Regarding technical and spatial issues, some journalists in large media organizations who frequently work outside the newsroom do not have official laptops and mobile phones, which hampers their work. Open office spaces enhance productivity for some but hinder others, who complain about the lack of quiet areas for conducting interviews or making phone calls. In some newsrooms, chairs are decades old, monitors are outdated and too small, and parking facilities for employees are rarely provided.

92 *The Primary Health Insurance Act, the Pension Insurance Act, and the Act on Mediation in Employment and Rights during Unemployment.*

93 *The data was obtained from the Trade Union of Croatian Journalists for the purpose of last year's research, but the Union confirmed that the amounts have not significantly changed for this research as well. The Union collected the data through discussions with colleagues; there is no official statistics on journalists' salary levels in Croatia.*

94 *Zoran Kovačić, The highest salary in the media is paid by Hrvatski tjednik. Find out how much., Media Daily, November 7, 2022; <https://mediadaily.biz/2022/11/07/najvecu-placu-u-medijima-isplocuje-hrvatski-tjednik-doznajte-koliko/>, accessed: 10.01.2023.*

95 *Ibid.*

96 *Ibid.*

97 *Ibid.*

98 *Participant in the 10-members-focus-group of journalists engaged in investigative journalism, conducted by Monika Kutri in January 2023.*

## B2 Editorial independence in the private media

Have private media organizations implemented documents that separate editorial structures from the management and marketing structures of media publishers?

The relationships between publishers, editors-in-chief, and journalists, as well as their respective rights and obligations, are determined by the media's statutes<sup>99</sup>. Media statutes are a legal requirement for all media outlets and are also a condition for those media outlets that wish to receive various forms of state or public support, such as financing from the Fund for the Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity in Electronic Media<sup>100</sup>. All electronic media listed in the Registry of Electronic Media maintained by the Electronic Media Agency should have statutes, and printed media outlets seeking a reduced value-added tax (VAT) rate for print media should also have their own editorial statutes. However, there are no sanctions for non-compliance with the provisions of the statutes, leaving room for the violation of many rules.

Do private media organizations adopt other rules that protect editorial independence from the owner and management bodies of media publishers? Are these rules respected?

Private media outlets, apart from their editorial statutes, do not have other rules that protect editorial independence from the owner and management bodies of the media. Influence on editorial decisions and journalistic work in private media exists and represents a significant problem<sup>101</sup>.

### B2.3 Do private media outlets have internal ethical codes or do they adhere to a general code of ethics?

In Croatia, media outlets do not have specific internal ethical codes, and according to a 2019 study,<sup>102</sup> only the Croatian Radiotelevision<sup>103</sup> (HRT) and *Večernji list*<sup>104</sup> have publicly available internal ethical codes on their websites. In Croatia, there is the Code of Honor of Croatian Journalists, established by the Croatian Journalists' Association<sup>105</sup> (HND). The Croatian Journalists' Association has had the Journalistic Council of Honor as the only self-regulatory body in the Croatian media space since its establishment in 1910, responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Code of Honor<sup>106</sup>. The Journalistic Council of Honor handles complaints filed by anyone who observes a violation of the Code. Although the decisions of the Council of Honor do not carry the weight of a court verdict, courts often consider the decisions relevant as a source of information.

What are the most common forms of pressure from media owners and managers on newsrooms or individual journalists?

The editor-in-chief serves as the main link between journalists and media owners, as well as advertisers, who represent a source of finances that can turn into forms of pressure. When journalists are asked about pressure from owners or managers, those who believe they have good editors say that they are usually shielded from any potential threats because the editor does not burden them with it and resolves the issue in their own way. On the other hand, some journalists mention that editors indirectly draw attention to topics that are not suitable for coverage. One participant in a focus group mentioned sending an inquiry to a source for a story, after which the source called the media owner, and the journalist was informed in their newsroom to hold off on that top-

99 Media Act. *Narodne novine* 59/04, 84/11, 81/13.

100 Agency for Electronic Media, Ordinance on the Fund for Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity of Electronic Media, Article 7; [https://www.aem.hr/repository\\_files/file/1306/](https://www.aem.hr/repository_files/file/1306/), accessed 07.01.2023.

101 Đurđica Klancir, Who puts pressure on journalists: from politicians to advertisers, GONG, December 15, 2021; <https://gong.hr/2021/12/15/tko-sve-pritisce-novinare-i-novinarke-od-politicara-do-oglasivaca/>, accessed: 07.01.2023.

102 Tina Đaković and Ivan Novasel, The importance of portrayal – how suspects and accused persons are portrayed in the media and the public, House of Human Rights, June 2019; [https://www.kucajudskihprava.hr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Izvjesje-CC%8Ctaj\\_POI\\_mediji\\_hr.pdf](https://www.kucajudskihprava.hr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Izvjesje-CC%8Ctaj_POI_mediji_hr.pdf), accessed: 03.02.2023.

103 Croatian Radiotelevision currently does not have this document published on its website. Inspection carried out on February 3, 2023.

104 Code of Ethics of *Večernji list*; [http://media.vecernji-list.hr/pdf/Eticki\\_kodeks\\_Vecernjeg\\_lista.pdf](http://media.vecernji-list.hr/pdf/Eticki_kodeks_Vecernjeg_lista.pdf), accessed: 17.02.2022.

105 At the 66th regular Assembly of the HND, a decision was made to establish a commission to amend the Code of Honor of Croatian journalists in order to modernize the document; <https://www.hnd.hr/zakljucni-66-godisnje-skupstine-hrvatsko-novinarsko-drustvo>, accessed: 7.1.2023.

106 Journalists' Council of Honor of the Croatian Journalists' Association; <https://www.hnd.hr/novinarsko-vijece-casti/>, accessed: 07.01.2023.



ic, and the story was never published<sup>107</sup>. Previous research conducted by GONG on pressures on journalists and media has documented various forms of pressure from media owners and managers on newsrooms and journalists: management selling ads in the media company putting pressure on the newsroom, believing that covering certain topics will result in the loss of advertisers; “changing headlines to soften the damage to the Prime Minister and ministers, removing articles from the portal that were unfavorable to an HDZ county prefect”; “increasingly demanding that journalists write articles based on the editor’s orders and predetermined theses, often inaccurate”; prohibiting the inclusion of certain guests in television shows.<sup>108</sup> These are just some examples of pressures exerted by superiors within media organizations. When asked, “Have you been prohibited from covering a specific topic in the past two years? Has your superior, either personally or within the broader editorial circle, asked you not to or told you that you don’t need to address a certain topic at all or within a certain time frame?” in the context of GONG’s research, 10 journalists answered affirmatively, while 11 answered negatively.<sup>109</sup> Focus group participants state that the worst pressure comes from advertisers, but the issue lies in the fact that journalists never understand sales, and sales people never understand journalists. Sometimes there is self-censorship among lower-level editors because they are uncertain about the reaction of higher-level editors. Advertisers fail to understand that by purchasing an advertisement, they are not buying influence in the media but rather ad space in a highly read outlet, which in turn increases the visibility of the advertisement.<sup>110</sup>

### B3 Editorial independence in the Public Service Broadcaster

Does public radio and television have an adopted code of conduct for journalists and editorial independence? Do journalists adhere to this code?

The public service broadcaster has adopted the Code of Ethics for Journalists and Creative Staff of the

<sup>107</sup> Focus group with 10 investigative journalists, conducted by Monika Kutri, in January 2023.

<sup>108</sup> Đurđica Klancić, *Who puts pressure on journalists: from politicians to advertisers*, GONG, December 15, 2021; <https://gong.hr/2021/12/15/tko-sve-pritisce-novinare-i-novinarke-od-politicara-do-oglasivaca/>, accessed: 07.01.2023.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> Focus group with 10 investigative journalists, conducted by Monika Kutri, in January 2023.

Croatian Radiotelevision<sup>111</sup> (HRT). HRT also has an Ethics Commission, which can provide opinions on violations of the Code of Ethics.

**Do bodies of the public broadcaster have internal organizational rules to ensure the independence of the editorial offices from the management bodies of the public broadcaster? Are these rules being respected?**

HRT has an internal Regulation on Internal Organization, but it does not clearly indicate the level of responsibility of certain office holders. The position of the editor is most influenced by the Director-General of HRT. Although the statute could and should allow journalists to influence the selection of editors, the statute of the public service broadcaster does not obligate journalists to vote on the selection of editors.

**What are the most common forms of pressure exerted by the government on editorial offices or individual journalists at the public broadcaster?**

“Government interference in the management of HRT still exists.”<sup>112</sup> The fact that there is influence on the selection of HRT’s Director-General suggests that compatible, rather than necessarily competent, individuals are chosen for that position. “The large number of lawsuits initiated by HRT against its employed journalists raises suspicions that the public broadcaster has been captured by a political interest group.”<sup>113</sup> In 2022, HRT finally withdrew its lawsuits against journalists<sup>114</sup>, and Hrvoje Zovko also won the last lawsuit against HRT<sup>115</sup>.

**What is the most illustrative example of government pressure on the work of entire editorial offices or individual journalists in the past year?**

Prime Minister Andrej Plenković, in several of his public appearances during 2022, belittled the work of journal-

<sup>111</sup> Croatian Radiotelevision currently does not have this document published on its website. Inspection carried out on February 3, 2023.

<sup>112</sup> Reporters Without Borders, Croatia; <https://rsforga/en/croatia>, accessed: 6.1.2023.

<sup>113</sup> Ad-Hoc Request – SLAPP in the EU context; [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/ad-hoc-literature-review-analysis-key-elements-slapp\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/ad-hoc-literature-review-analysis-key-elements-slapp_en.pdf), accessed: 06.01.2023.

<sup>114</sup> Hina, Šveb: *There is no censorship on HRT, we are withdrawing lawsuits against journalists*, N1, April 7, 2022; <https://n1info.hr/vijesti/sveb-na-hrt-u-nema-cenzure-povlacimo-tuzbe-protiv-novinara/>, accessed: 6.1.2023.

<sup>115</sup> Tamara Opačić, *Zovko – HRT 7.0, Portal Novosti*, September 12, 2022; <https://www.hnd.hr/zovko-hrt-7-0-predsjednik-hnd-a-osloboden-optuzbe-da-je-oklevetao-hrt>, accessed: 06.01.2023.

ists, insinuated that he knows which journalists “belong to which spectrum,” and accused them of intentionally diverting attention from topics he wanted to present to the public when they asked him questions about the involvement of his closest associates in scandals. In this way, he undoubtedly attempted to classify the media and impose positive coverage of the Government<sup>116</sup> as the journalistic ideal. However, the most significant and still present form of pressure is the arrangement of conferences and advertising agreements with certain publishers, which is used to influence the content.

#### **B4 Editorial independence in the non-profit sector**

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**Have nonprofit media adopted a code of conduct for journalists and editorial independence? Do journalists adhere to that code?**

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Nonprofit media in Croatia often have very small editorial teams where “everyone does everything.” Serious nonprofit media have their own editorial statutes but do not have their own ethical codes, so they are governed only by the Code of Honor of Croatian Journalists.

**What are the most common forms of pressure on nonprofit media? B4.3**  
**What is the most illustrative example of pressure on nonprofit media?**

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The most common form of pressure on nonprofit media is still the denial of their funding<sup>117</sup>. In Croatia, there is no culture of citizen donations to support media work, so nonprofit media rely on project-based funding and funds allocated by local and regional self-government units, as well as the state. Although such funding exists in Croatia, journalists have to dedicate more time to project management than journalism itself in order to access these funds, which certainly raises questions about

the functioning of such media<sup>118</sup>. The new Electronic Media Act has expanded the number of beneficiaries of the Fund for Promotion of Pluralism and Diversity of Electronic Media, but the finances allocated to the Fund have not increased, which will likely further negatively impact the funding of nonprofit media. Another common form of pressure on such media is SLAPP lawsuits<sup>119</sup>, which are still prevalent in Croatia and push nonprofit media to the brink of existence because they lack the financial resources to hire lawyers.

#### **B5 Freedom of journalists in the news production process**

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**How much freedom do journalists have in choosing the news they work on and in deciding which aspects of a story to emphasize?**

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In a survey conducted by the Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) among its members<sup>120</sup>, 70.7% of respondents stated that they have mostly or complete freedom in choosing the topics they work on. When it comes to deciding which aspect of a story to emphasize, 73.2% of those surveyed said they have mostly or complete freedom in that regard.

**How often do journalists participate in editorial or newsroom coordination (attend editorial meetings)?**

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52.5% of the respondents said that they rarely or almost never participate in editorial meetings. Several participants in the focus group also emphasized that they do not have such meetings and they have the impression that their superiors are reluctant to communicate with journalists<sup>121</sup>.

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116 Index news, VIDEO Plenković attacks the journalists: You are deliberately diverting attention from the hospital I am inaugurating, Index, October 28, 2022; <https://www.index.hr/vijesti/clanak/video-plenkovic-napao-novinare-namjerno-skrecete-poznju-s-bolnice-koju-otvaram/2407241.aspx>, accessed 01.03.2023.

117 Focus group with 7 journalists working in non-profit media, conducted by Monika Kutri in January 2023.

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118 Although project funds can contribute to the development of journalists and the media, often these funds are not intended for the daily financing of journalistic work. This makes the work of nonprofit media much more difficult, because instead of producing content and investigative stories, they have to allocate a part of their already small editorial offices to projects that involve project management.

119 Strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP) – lawsuits aimed at censoring, intimidating and silencing critics by burdening them with legal proceedings; <https://anti-slapp.org/what-is-a-slapp>, accessed: 06.01.2023.

120 41 journalists participated in the survey. The survey was conducted in January 2023 by Monika Kutri.

121 Focus group with 10 journalists engaged in investigative journalism, conducted by Monika Kutri in January 2023.

## What are journalists' attitudes towards respecting journalistic ethics?

In the survey, 75.6% of the respondents emphasized that they fully agree that journalists should always adhere to a professional code of ethics, regardless of the situation and context. In its last term, the Croatian Journalists' Association's Council of Honor, a self-regulatory body that decides on complaints regarding violations of the Code of Honor of Croatian Journalists, held 30 sessions and discussed 287 complaints, issuing an equal number of decisions. Non-members of the Croatian Journalists' Association received 134 opinions, while members received 29 reprimands, 7 severe reprimands, and 1 expulsion from the association. Journalists and editors generally respond to inquiries regarding complaints.<sup>122</sup>

## What is the personal perception of journalists regarding the extent to which they have been influenced by various risks they are exposed to and influential individuals/pressure sources?

The analysis of responses in focus groups and the results of the survey indicate that journalists are mostly influenced by their personal beliefs and journalistic ethics.

## How many journalists report editorial censorship? How many journalists witness self-censorship due to fear of job loss or other risks?

Journalists rarely report censorship: some don't even know how to report it, and they don't feel like going through all the procedures<sup>123</sup>. Participants in the focus group stated that censorship is present, everything is strictly controlled, and sometimes journalists are forbidden by their editorial boards from asking questions at press conferences. The results of the research conducted by GONG indicate that censorship is present in the Croatian media environment and that "mechanisms within editorial censorship" are becoming increasingly prevalent.<sup>124</sup>

122 Report on the work of the Journalist Council of Honor 2019-2023.

123 In January 2023, three focus groups were conducted, one with 10 journalists engaged in investigative journalism, the second with 7 journalists from non-profit media and the third with 4 female journalists. The focus groups were conducted by Monika Kutri.

124 <https://gong.hr/2021/12/15/ko-sve-pritisce-novinare-i-novinarke-od-politicara-do-oglasivaca/>, accessed 25. 02. 2022.

## B6 Economic position of women journalists

### Do women journalists work in worse working conditions compared to their male colleagues? Are they employed through employment contracts as often as men?

Female journalists generally work under the same conditions as male journalists, and employment through employment contracts is not usually gender-conditioned<sup>125</sup>. However, there is a significant number of atypical<sup>126</sup> workers in the Croatian media, such as freelancers, who do not have employment contracts and, as a result, do not have the labor rights guaranteed by the Labor Law. For example, women working as freelance journalists in the media do not have the right to maternity leave. Additionally, there are indications that older female journalists have a harder time finding employment in television, and appearance and age of female journalists are sometimes considered significant factors in hiring. The Ombudswoman for Gender Equality has also responded to such discriminatory treatment of female journalists at HRT.<sup>127</sup>

### Do women occupy leading editorial positions in newsrooms as often as men? How are their salaries compared to their male colleagues?

The Labor Law guarantees equal pay for equal work between women and men. Salaries in the media often depend on the position that the journalist holds in the media. There is no recent research on salary differences between female and male journalists, but there is still a gender pay gap in Croatia, where women, on average, earn less money for the same job compared to men. Women are increasingly more present in the media, particularly due to a negative trend that where lower salaries are common, there is a higher representation of women in that branch<sup>128</sup>.

### Are they subjected to specific gender-related pressures?

There is still a trend where public figures insult female journalists for years, and politicians are often among the

125 Focus group female journalists.

126 <http://www.snh.hr/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Medjiski-freelanceri.pdf>, accessed: 25.02.2023.

127 Ombudswoman for gender equality, Public announcement due to gender and age discrimination on HRT, September 23, 2020; <https://www.prs.hr/cms/post/150>, accessed: 25.02.2023.

128 Interview with Maja Sever, president of SNH and EFJ, conducted by Monika Kutri in January 2023.

most prominent perpetrators. The sole reason for attacking or insulting female journalists is often their gender. According to research on experiences of sexual abuse and harassment in the media<sup>129</sup>, the majority of participants in the study were victims of some form of sexual harassment, primarily by colleagues in the newsroom or in the field. The victims are usually in a lower position of power and younger in age. The consequences of harassment for female journalists are often self-censorship or mental health issues. Incidents of harassment are often unreported or underreported due to lack of trust. As a result, 44.9% of respondents stated that they try to ignore or overlook the harassment.

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<sup>129</sup> *Experiences with sexual abuse and harassment in the media, Research conducted by Dina Vozab (Center for Media and Communication Research, FPZG). The research was conducted for the purposes of the Together Against Hate project conducted by the Trade Union of Croatian Journalists, based on a survey done in April 2022. The research was conducted on a sample of 89 women. The results of the research were delivered via email for the purposes of this report.*



## C1 Safety and Impunity Statistics

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"In 2022, the [safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net) database<sup>130</sup> recorded 14 attacks and threats against journalists in Croatia. Although there were 34 attacks on journalists reported last year, conversations with journalists, interviews, and focus groups give the impression that the situation has not significantly improved, and journalists continue to refrain from reporting attacks and threats. Reporters Without Borders highlight that "working as a journalist in Croatia can be dangerous."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Database on attacks on journalists in Croatia; <https://safejournalists.net/napadi-na-novinare/?lang=hr>, accessed: 31.12.2022.

<sup>131</sup> "Journalists investigating corruption, organized crime, and war crimes, especially at the local level, are often targeted by harassment campaigns; physical attacks, threats, and cyber violence pose a significant problem. The authorities remain silent." Reporters Without Borders, Croatia; <https://rsf.org/en/croatia>, accessed: 06.01.2023.

Table: Number of Registered Attacks on Journalists in 2022

Categories	Nr.	Description
<p><b>Non-physical threats and harassments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– surveillance or trailing;</li> <li>– harassing phone calls;</li> <li>– arbitrary judicial or administrative harassment;</li> <li>– aggressive declarations by public officials;</li> <li>– other forms of pressure that can jeopardise the safety of journalists in pursuing their work.</li> </ul> <p>These types of threats do not include mobbing and bullying in the working environment.</p>	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 22.11.2022. – In the folders of the tablet seized by the police from Dražen Koštan, who was indicted on November 21, 2022, for preparing terrorism, documents were found indicating that Koštan was monitoring around sixty individuals or institutions, including Faktograf editor Petar Vidov, columnists Tomislav Klauški and Ante Tomić, as well as N1 television.</li> <li>– 15.10.2022. – Former Member of Parliament and member of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Stevo Culej, current president of the Association of Special Police from the Homeland War, told journalist Gordana Duhaček that he would wish the journalist to be raped.</li> <li>– 11.10.2022. – Hrvoje Zovko received a letter addressed to the Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) in which, among other things, it states: "And you, Chetnik from Imotski, don't think that we don't follow your actions and your leading role in that Chetnik den – everything is seen and known. The hand of justice will reach you, be sure of that." The letter is signed by "VOLUNTEERS OF THE HOMELAND WAR, READY FOR THE HOMELAND." (a pro-nazi salute from era of WWII)</li> <li>– 1.8.2022. – Maja Sever was filming the usurpation of the coast and the devastation of maritime property on the island of Tijat, near Šibenik. A man, who was identified as the owner of a restaurant, approached her, shouting and insulting her. He demanded that she delete the footage from her mobile phone and then took her phone.</li> <li>– 4.4.2022. – In early April, journalist Hassan Haidar Diab from Večernji list received threats after writing an article about the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadirov. Now, in the same arrogant tone, Matvej Sidorov, former media advisor to the Russian ambassador in Croatia, has addressed him. Sidorov reacted to the publication of threats to Haidar Diab through the Telegram application and wrote, among other things: "Hey, greetings Hassan, another great article! But it's not really up to date. Why didn't you publish it while we were in Zagreb?"</li> <li>– 7.3.2022. – The editorial board of the portal <a href="http://Direktno.hr">Direktno.hr</a> received a message on their editorial email in which it said, "Message to the owners of <a href="http://Direktno.hr">Direktno.hr</a> portal: We are monitoring your pro-Russian activities. Consequences will follow."</li> <li>– 6.2.2022. – Split's Deputy Mayor Bojan Ivošević, after a published article that he did not like, contacted Nikolina Lulić, editor and journalist of the City section of Slobodna Dalmacija, by phone and verbally attacked her in a rough manner. As reported by the daily newspaper, Ivošević told her, among other things, "I will drink your blood."</li> </ul>
<p><b>Threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists, which may include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– references to killing journalists, journalists' friends, family or sources;</li> <li>– references to making physical harm against journalists, journalists' friends, family or sources;</li> </ul> <p>These threats may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– made directly or via third-parties;</li> <li>– conveyed via electronic or face-to-face communications;</li> <li>– may be implicit as well as explicit</li> </ul>	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– 15.11.2022. – Hrvoje Zovko received a letter addressed to the Croatian Journalists' Association in which someone refers to him as "CHETNIK HRVOJE." Among other things, the letter states, "TO ALL OF YOU AND ESPECIALLY DEŽULOVIC, I WISH FOR CROATIA TO KILL YOU WITH PREMEDITATION OR NEGLIGENCE, WHICHEVER." The sender signed off as "HOS member" and added "FOR THE HOMELAND READY." (a pro-nazi salute from era of WWII)</li> <li>– 26.10.2022. – The trial for the criminal offense of fraud began in Dubrovnik for Zoran Čegar, a police officer from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Journalists from the Center for Investigative Journalism (CIN) in Sarajevo approached Čegar outside the courthouse, where he started insulting them. After a CIN journalist requested a comment from Čegar, he reacted aggressively and threatened: "I'll rip out your throat!"</li> <li>– 8.9.2022. – Marcello Rosanda, a journalist from Glas Istre, received insults and death threats due to an article published in the newspaper, on the website, and the Facebook page of Glas Istre, titled "Pula Restaurateur Develops a Business with All the Elements of Quackery. Providing Advice to Seriously Ill Patients."</li> <li>– 9.8.2022. – Journalist Toni Perinić from Zadarski list received threats after publishing an investigation into a case of tourist fraud, for which the Tourist Board received at least 30 complaints.</li> <li>– 22.6.2022. – Journalist Mateo Pejaković wrote several critically-toned articles about the head of the Administrative Department for Municipal Services and Management of the City of Požega on his portal. After the articles were published, Pejaković encountered Mandel at a local establishment in Požega, and they spoke for a few minutes. Following their conversation, Mandel's husband, Ivan, appeared and verbally clashed with Pejaković. Allegedly, he attempted to grab Pejaković by the throat while his wife tried to prevent it. According to sources, Ivan Mandel reportedly pointed his finger at the journalist and told him, "You're dead."</li> </ul>

<sup>132</sup> Attacks are described with more detail on the platform [safejournalists.net](http://safejournalists.net)

Categories	Nr.	Description
<b>Actual attacks on journalists</b> Types of actual attacks may include actual physical or mental harm, kidnapping, invasion of home/office, seized equipment, arbitrary detention, failed assassination attempts, etc.	1	– 10.9.2022. – At the protest of the “Freedom Together” initiative in Zagreb, one of the protestors rudely pushed away the hand in which Bojana Guberac, journalist of TV channel Vida, was holding the microphone, along with savage insults.
<b>Killings of journalists (in the past 15-20 years)</b> Types of killings may include being killed in cross-fire, assassinated, killed in a bomb explosion, beaten to death, etc.	1	– Ivo Pukanić was killed in a bomb explosion on October 23, 2008. Six people were legally convicted of the murder, while the perpetrators have not yet been found.
<b>Threats and attacks on media institutions, organisations, media and journalists’ associations</b> Actual attacks on property of media outlets and organizations, their personnel, seized equipment, aggressive declarations by public officials etc. Description of threats and attacks might include some of the categories listed above.	1	– 22.3.2022. – A hacker attack was carried out on the Slobodna Dalmacija portal. Several older articles in the columns of Slobodna Dalmacija have been replaced by articles promoting Russian propaganda in the war with Ukraine.

### Non-physical threats and harassment in 2022

Non-physical threats were the most common form of attacks against journalists in 2022. Throughout the year, there were 7 such attacks. The latest case in 2022 involved the discovery of documents in the folders of a Samsung tablet confiscated by the police from Dražen Koštan (53) from Šibenik, who was indicted on November 21, 2022, for terrorism preparation. These documents indicated that Koštan had been monitoring around sixty individuals or institutions, including the editor of *Faktograf*, Petar Vidov, columnists Tomislav Klauški and Ante Tomić, as well as N1 television. Interestingly, the relevant institutions did not inform any of the journalists about whom Koštan had gathered information, even though he was arrested in March 2022, initially on suspicion of robbery, with elements of a more serious criminal offense emerging later in the investigation.

### Death threats and physical security of journalists in 2022

Death threats and threats to the physical security of journalists were the second most common type of attack against journalists in 2022. Such threats can involve

references to killing or causing bodily harm to journalists, their friends, their families, or their sources. In 2022, there were 5 such threats, two of which were in person, one through a letter, and two through electronic communication, such as social media, emails, or comments under media articles. The in-person threats included phrases like “You’re dead” and “I’ll rip your throat out,” highlighting how perpetrators casually employ this rhetoric even outside the internet.

### Actual physical attacks on journalists in 2022

There was one physical assault recorded in 2022, and like the previous year, it occurred during a protest. The initiative “Freedom Together” held a protest on September 10, 2022, at the Square of Victims of Fascism in Zagreb under the slogan “We’re firing you.” The protest was directed against the government of Andrej Plenković and the HDZ party, and the protesters demanded the government’s resignation, the holding of early elections within 90 days, and the organization of all referendums that had not been called yet. During the protest, one of the protestors aggressively pushed journalist Bojana Guberac, who worked for the TV channel Vida, while hurling insults.

## Killings of journalists in the past 15-20 years

Since 2008, there have been no recorded murders of journalists in Croatia. Ivo Pukanić was fatally killed in a bomb explosion on October 23, 2008. Six individuals were convicted for the committed murder, but the masterminds behind the crime have not yet been found. In 2020, new evidence emerged linking certain individuals to this murder<sup>133</sup>, but since then, no significant developments have occurred regarding the investigation.

## Threats and attacks on media institutions, organizations, media, and journalist associations

In 2022, there was one hacking attack on the editorial office of *Slobodna Dalmacija*. However, media outlets regularly face various insults that border on threats, which they regularly receive via email and on social media.

## **C2 Behavior of state institutions and political actors regarding the protection of journalists**

Are there specific provisions in laws or other mechanisms aimed at supporting the safety of journalists, both offline and online? Have state institutions adopted documents (protocols, guidelines, etc.) that provide additional guidance to the military and police on how to deal with journalists?

Croatian laws do not have articles explicitly protecting journalists, but Article 315b of the Criminal Code applies, among other things, to coercion against a person performing tasks of public interest, which includes journalists. The police and the military do not have publicly disclosed documents regarding their treatment of journalists in case of their endangerment. However, the police

have a document called “Guidelines in Relations with the Media.”<sup>134</sup>

Are there mechanisms for monitoring and reporting threats, harassment, and violence against journalists? Do state institutions publish data on attacks against journalists and impunity?

The Ministry of Justice and Administration keeps records of criminal cases in which journalists are defendants, as well as civil proceedings for damages<sup>135</sup>. The State Attorney’s Office of the Republic of Croatia maintains a record of offenses committed against journalists for which prosecution is undertaken *ex officio*. The Ministry of the Interior keeps records of events related to persons engaged in journalistic activities. None of these records are publicly available.

Have state institutions recognized attacks on the safety of journalists as violations of freedom of expression and the Criminal Code? Do government officials provide clear statements condemning attacks on journalists?

The highest state officials still do not recognize the importance of regularly publicly condemning every attack on journalists, and they themselves are often the ones who attack and insult them. For example, the President of the Republic often generalizes when speaking about journalists and journalism, and he derogatorily refers to newsrooms. In April 2022, stating that he does not follow the media, the President described them as follows: “They follow me, they follow me like an itch, like a skin infection. Some things I simply cannot ignore. It’s terribly bad. The educational criterion has plummeted immensely. It’s a completely neglected profession.”<sup>136</sup> Such insults and similar ones coming from people in positions of power are extremely dangerous as they encourage and promote violence against journalists in Croatia. The Government itself often poses a threat to press freedom.<sup>137</sup>

133 Berislav Jelinić, *Exclusive: twelve years after the death of Ivo Pukanić, an audio recording from prison suddenly appeared and points to the perpetrators of the assassination*, Nacional, October 30, 2020; <https://www.nacional.hr/ekskluzivno-dvanaest-godina-nakon-pogibije-ive-pukanica-iznenada-se-pojavila-audiosnimka-iz-zatvora-koja-ukazuje-na-narucitelje-atentata/>, accessed: 10.01.2023.

134 Ministry of the Interior, *Guidelines In Relations to the Media*, Zagreb, November 2018; <https://mup.gov.hr/UserDocsImages/dokumenti/SMJERNICE%20MINISTARSTVA%20UNUTARNJIH%20POSLOVA%20U%20ODNOSIMA%20S%20MEDIJIMA%202018.pdf>, accessed: 22. 01. 2023.

135 These data are not publicly available, but the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration provides them to HND every year upon request.

136 HND, *HND calls on President Milanović to stop insulting the journalistic profession*, April 30, 2022; <https://hnd.hr/hnd-poziva-predsjednika-milanovica-da-prestane-vrijedati-novinarsku-profesiju>, accessed: 10.01.2023.

137 Reporters Without Borders, *Croatia*; <https://rsf.org/en/croatia>, accessed: 06.01.2023.



**Do state institutions collaborate with journalists' organizations on matters of journalists' safety?**

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When it comes to the safety of journalists, state institutions collaborate with the Croatian Journalists' Association (HND) and the Trade Union of Croatian Journalists (SNH) in case of attacks on journalists. The HND has most frequently and effectively cooperated with the police, who have responded to every attack on journalists. In 2021, the HND and SNH initiated negotiations with representatives of the Ministry of the Interior (MUP) to define a joint working model based on the European Commission's Recommendations of September 16, 2021, on ensuring protection, safety, and strengthening the position of journalists. The document on joint action should enhance and formalize cooperation by defining communication channels and processes that would result in better protection of journalists and prevention of attacks. The negotiations reached their final stage at the end of 2022, and it is expected that the document on cooperation will be finalized and signed by both parties during 2023.

**Do state institutions respect freedom of expression and privacy in cases of electronic surveillance? What is the latest case of electronic surveillance of journalists?**

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In 2022, there were no recorded cases of electronic surveillance of journalists.

**C3 Behavior of the Judiciary Regarding Threats and Violence Against Journalists**

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**Are there specialized departments within judicial institutions dedicated to investigating and prosecuting threats and violence against journalists?**

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Within the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration (MPU), the Ministry of the Interior (MUP), and the State Attorney's Office of the Republic of Croatia (DORH), there are no specific units solely dedicated to the investigation and prosecution of threats and acts of violence against journalists.

**Do the State Attorney's Office and the Ministry of the Interior provide adequate resources to cover investigations into threats and acts of violence against journalists? Are investigations into crimes against journalists, including intimidation and threats, conducted quickly, impartially, and effectively?**

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Institutions handle investigations into threats and violence against journalists in line with their priorities. MUP states that "criminal investigations are conducted based on the principles of operational urgency, impartiality, and legality."<sup>138</sup> DORH handles "criminal cases formed on the basis of a reasonable suspicion of committing criminal offenses against journalists in an urgent, efficient, and impartial manner."<sup>139</sup> Last year, MUP recorded "10 incidents involving persons engaged in journalistic activities. In all ten cases, journalists reported threats received via letters, phone calls, or social media. In one case, no elements of the criminal offense of 'Threat' as described in Article 139, Paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code were established (...). Furthermore, in one case, police officers filed a criminal complaint against the specific perpetrator with the competent state prosecutor's office, while in the remaining eight cases, criminal investigations or decisions by the state prosecutor's office are still ongoing."<sup>140</sup>

**Are there protective measures for journalists when their physical safety is threatened?**

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Whenever the police assess that a journalist's safety is at risk, they can provide police protection, which has been done several times in the past.<sup>141</sup> MUP states that by signing one of the protocols between the HND and MUP, the procedures regarding the apprehension of a criminal offense committed against journalists and other media workers will be defined.<sup>142</sup> The police emphasize that as an emergency response service, they are available 24/7 by calling the emergency number 192 or 112.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> The answer of MUP to questions related to research, received on 25. 01. 2023.

<sup>139</sup> DORH's answer to questions related to research, received on 23. 01. 2023.

<sup>140</sup> The answer of MUP to questions related to research, received on 25.01.2023.

<sup>141</sup> Dušan Miljuš, Gordana Malić and Domagoj Margetić are just some of the journalists who have had police protection in the last 15 years.

<sup>142</sup> The answer of MUP to questions related to research, received on 25.01.2023.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

In cases of final verdicts, are sanctions imposed on the perpetrators of the attacks only or also on instigators/masterminds?

In cases monitored by the HND since 2014, final judgments have been issued only against the perpetrators.

Do institutions organize appropriate training for the police, prosecutors, lawyers, and judges on the protection of journalists and freedom of expression? Are these trainings organized in collaboration with journalists' associations?

In 2021, the Ministry of Culture and Media established an Expert Working Group to shape the policy for combating SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation), which included representatives of journalists and publishers, professional journalists' associations, the Judicial Academy, the Croatian Bar Association, the academic community, as well as the Ministry of Culture and Media and the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration.<sup>144</sup> The idea is to exchange experiences and knowledge through dialogue and to educate representatives of these organizations and institutions, which should result in an effective way to prevent SLAPP and protect journalists' freedom of expression.

The Judicial Academy has organized training sessions on media relations, freedom of speech, and hate speech in recent years, with the participation of judicial officials, representatives of electronic and print media, lawyers, and judges. State prosecutors have also participated in training on freedom of speech.<sup>145</sup> Police officer training is conducted annually<sup>146</sup>, and a part of it covers Article 315.b of the Criminal Code, which refers to coercion against persons performing tasks of public interest. The training provided by the Judicial Academy and the police is not yet conducted in collaboration with the Croatian Journalists' Association.

When it comes to lawsuits in which the injured parties are journalists, the proceedings take a very long time. The attack on Živana Šušak Živković, which took place in April 2020, received its judicial epilogue only in November 2022, which is more than 2.5 years after the incident. The journalist repeated several times "this is a reminder of the trauma, if only it would end quickly."<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ministry of Culture and Media, Expert Working Group on Designing a Policy to Suppress SLAPP Lawsuits; <https://min-kulture.gov.hr/naslovnica-blokovi/izdvojeno/izdvojena-ljevo/mediji-16434/strucna-radna-skupina-za-oblikovanje-politike-suzbijanja-slapp-tuzbi/22216>, accessed: 22. 01. 2022.

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<sup>145</sup> The Ministry of Justice and Public Administration responded to HND's inquiry to the Ministry with a letter and provided information.

<sup>146</sup> When asked by the Ministry of the Interior about whether training is organized for the police in relation with the protection of freedom of expression and the protection of journalists, MUP replied: "We inform you that the training of police officers on the topic of criminal offenses against life and safety from Chapter ten of the Criminal Code, criminal offenses against personal freedom from Chapter thirteen of the Criminal Code and criminal offenses against public order from Chapter thirty of the Criminal Code, is conducted every year."

<sup>147</sup> Gabrijela Radanović, Journalist Šušak Živković at the hearing where the people who attacked her in front of the church were to be tried: "This is a reminder of the trauma, if only it would end quickly..." The head of HND also commented on the case. Slobodna Dalmacija, January 24, 2022; <https://slobodnadalmacija.hr/Split/splitska-novinarka-zivana-susak-zivkovic-napadnuta-je-na-ulazu-u-crkvu-na-sirobuji-dok-je-izvijestavala-o-misi-koja-nije-ni-smjela-biti-odrzana-danas-se-sudi-njezinim-napadacima-1161862>, accessed: 10.01.2023.

Table: Chronicle of trials where the injured parties are journalists

Case	Year	2018.	2019.	2020.	2021.	2022.
1. Physical assault on journalist Živana Šušak Živković (12. 4. 2020.)				1. 6. 2020.–The Municipal State Attorney's Office in Split has filed an indictment.	During 2021. – the first hearing was scheduled for January 24, 2022.	24.1.2022. – the first hearing was postponed because one defendant did not appear before the court. 28.03.2022. – first hearing was held. 7.11.2022. - father and son, Tonči and Antonio Čukušić were convicted at the Municipal Court in Split for a criminal offense against public order – coercion against a person who performs tasks of public interest or in public service, and the son was also convicted for a criminal offense against property – damage to someone else's property.
2. Attack on journalist of Slobodna Dalmacija Andrea Topić (23. 1. 2020.)				22. 7. 2020. – The Municipal State Attorney's Office in Split has filed an indictment against four men.		

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## Conclusions

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The right to freedom of expression and information is guaranteed by the Constitution and laws, but the implementation of these guarantees is not most effective. Although media legislation is developed through a transparent and inclusive process, it seems that decisions on final regulatory solutions are still made by the ruling structure, and the feedback from professional associations is not incorporated into the Law. There are no clear criteria for the distribution of state advertising to the media, nor clear criteria for co-financing media from local and regional budgets. Despite announcements, Croatia still lacks a Media Policy or media strategy. Print media lacks a regulator. The practical independence of the Croatian Radiotelevision is not adequately protected, primarily because the management is appointed by the ruling majority. Defamation and insults are not decriminalized, and the number of lawsuits against journalists and media does not decrease from year to year. SLAPP lawsuits continue to be a significant problem faced by journalists and media in Croatia. Political pluralism in the media is not effectively regulated in general media legislation, and political parties are represented in the media outside the electoral process based on their size and activities. Journalists are granted access to documents and information relevant to their work based on the Right of Access to Information Act, but in practice, they struggle to obtain this information, often receiving it with significant delays or not receiving it at all. The government and institutions are partially transparent and often favor specific media and journalists who are politically aligned with them.

The economic and working conditions of journalists depend on the position and media they work for, as well as whether they are freelance contributors or permanently employed by a media outlet. Some of the major problems journalists face are lack of time, staffing, poor work organization, poor communication, and outdated office equipment. Serious media outlets generally have media statutes, although there are no sanctions for non-compliance with the provisions of the statutes, leaving room for the violation of many rules. Pressures on journalists and editorial staff most often come from media owners, advertisers, and the lack of sufficient finances (small and non-profit media). Freelance journalists are in a disadvantaged position as they lack labor rights, and female journalists are particularly vulnerable and experience various forms of gender-based pressures.

The number of attacks on journalists has decreased compared to 2021, but journalists still do not report the attacks, so the actual number of attacks is certainly higher than the one recorded in the [safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net) database. During 2022, there were 14 attacks and threats, including 7 non-physical threats and harassment, 5 death threats and physical endangerment, 1 physical attack, and 1 cyber attack on a media outlet. In addition to these attacks, there is a significant number of insults directed at journalists, as well as SLAPP lawsuits that are used as an “elegant” way to silence, intimidate, and psychologically and financially exhaust journalists. The government and institutions must protect journalism as an important factor in any democracy. This includes better communication with journalists, dispelling the notion that journalists are enemies of the government and institutions, investing in journalism, and developing protection mechanisms that would sanction, reduce, and prevent attacks and threats. The weak socioeconomic position of journalists, especially in small and non-profit media outlets, poor working conditions, and a shortage of staff can impact the content and quantity of material journalists produce, as well as the overall quality of journalism. In Croatia, there is still no culture of reporting threats, which ultimately creates an unrealistic picture of the state of attacks and threats, which are much more prevalent. Journalists have come to accept that threats are “part of their job” and mostly endure or ignore them. The Croatian Journalists’ Association must continue to publicly address the problems in journalism and exert pressure on institutions and the Government in order to ultimately defend journalism.

## Recommendations

- Establish a unified media registry.
- Expedite the adoption of a new Media Act and strengthen the enforcement of regulations related to journalism.
- Transform the Council for Electronic Media into a Council for Media, an independent regulator for print and electronic media, to provide regulatory oversight for print media as well.
- Establish clear and fair criteria for the distribution of government advertisements to media outlets.
- Clarify the criteria for co-financing media from local and regional budgets.
- Amend the Act on Croatian Radiotelevision (HRT) to change the method of appointing the Management Board and reduce political influence.
- Decriminalize defamation and the violation of honor and reputation.
- Establish a mechanism to systematically monitor SLAPP lawsuits and find ways to combat them.
- Promote political pluralism in the media.
- Encourage media outlets to adopt internal ethical codes in accordance with the Code of Ethics of Croatian Journalists.
- Encourage media outlets to respect editorial statutes.
- Establish a mechanism to monitor the total number of journalists in Croatia and the total number of employed journalists.
- Ensure better labor and legal status for freelance journalists.
- Encourage journalists to strengthen their professional position by joining the Croatian Journalists’ Association and the Trade Union of Croatian Journalists.
- Precisely define the term and profession of “journalist” to align with contemporary forms of journalism and methods of performing journalistic work.
- Establish improved mechanisms to protect journalists.
- Encourage officials and institutional leaders to openly, clearly, and non-discriminatorily condemn every attack on journalists, demonstrating that attacks are not tolerated in Croatia; encourage them to refrain from statements that may endanger journalists’ safety.
- Encourage institutions to develop internal guidelines for interacting with journalists.
- Encourage institutions, the State Attorney’s Office, and the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration to expedite the processing of cases related to attacks on journalists.
- Encourage journalists to report threats and attacks.





