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Western Balkans Journalists' Safety Index

Narrative Report Albania 2022

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Introduction

The Western Balkans Journalists' Safety Index (Index) is a research-based tool designed to measure and monitor changes in the Western Balkan countries' respective social and political environments that have a direct or indirect impact on the safety of journalists and media professionals in the course of practicing their profession. The index relies on the research data collected and analyzed by the partners of the [Safejournalists.net](https://www.safejournalists.net) based on a rigorous research procedure. The collected data on different dimensions of the complex concept of "journalists' safety" are quantified and aggregated into a composite indicator – Journalists' Safety Index – to measure the changes across the seven Western Balkans countries over time. Based on the research data, nine members of the Advisory Panel in each country¹ assessed the situation and assigned scores for each of the 19 indicators within the following dimensions:

- (1) **Legal and organisational environment** – the existence and implementation of legal safeguards relevant to the safety of journalists;
- (2) **Due Prevention** – existence and implementation of a range of preventive measures that have direct effects on journalists' protection and safety;
- (3) **Due Process** – the behaviour of state institutions and public officials towards journalists and the efficiency of the criminal and civil justice system concerning the investigations of threats and acts of violence against journalists;
- (4) **Actual Safety** – incidents and instances of various forms of threats and acts of violence against journalists and media.

The index was jointly developed by the researchers of the Skopje-based RESIS Institute² and the partners of the Safejournalists.net platform: the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia, the BH Journalists Association, the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro, the Association

¹ The advisory panel in Albania consists of Dorentina Hysa, Eda Noçka, Elira Çanga, Elvin Luku, Erjon Curraj, Gjergj Erebara, Ilda Londo, Lutfi Dervishi, and Orkidea Xhaferaj.

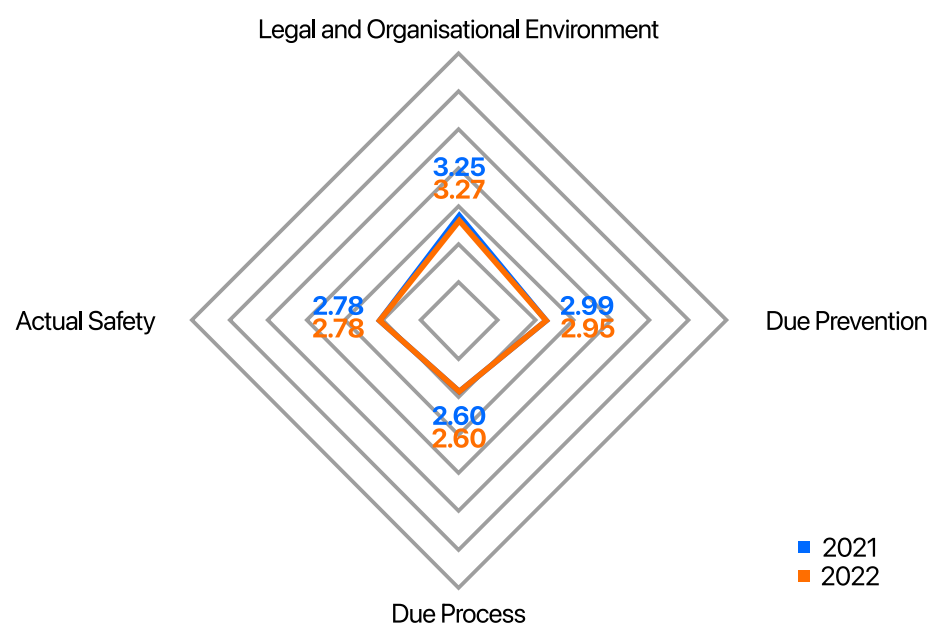
² The researchers of the RESIS Institute (www.resis.mk), Snezana Trpevska, Igor Micevski and Ljubinka Popovska Tosheva - have developed the conceptual framework for the Index and the model of its evaluation, weighing, and calculation.

of Journalists of Macedonia, the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, the Croatian Journalists' Association and an independent researcher from Albania³. Hence, the index is the result of the joint effort of the Safejournalists.net Platform and covers all the specific issues that the local partners have deemed relevant to their country's context.

The year 2020 was the first (pilot) year for developing the conceptual framework and the methodology for the assessment, collection, and calculation of the index. This report refers to the situation in Albania in 2022 and presents the improvement or deterioration of the situation for each of the four dimensions, taking into account the assessment for 2021 as a reference year. More details about the theoretical framework and the procedure for developing and calculating the Index and all the reports for the Western Balkans countries can be found at (<https://safejournalists.net/safety-index/>).

³ Blerjana Bino is the independent researcher for the Safejournalists.net platform in Albania.

JOURNALIST SAFETY INDEX



	2021	2022		Main new developments in each dimension
I. Legal and Organisational Environment	3.25	3.27	↑	In 2022, the Government of Albania withdrew a controversial anti-defamation package. Laws protecting journalistic source confidentiality were upheld, with no recorded instances of source disclosure. However, legal challenges related to defamation, libel, hate speech, copyright, personal privacy, and data protection laws persisted. There were no significant changes regarding journalists' formal status or licensing.
II. Due Prevention	2.99	2.95	↓	In 2022, Albania made little progress in improving reporting mechanisms for threats against journalists, and legal aid was inconsistently provided. While police responses were satisfactory in registration, follow-ups were slow and ineffective. Public condemnations of threats to journalists were sporadic, and, despite some police training, issues like unwarranted detentions continued.
III. Due Process	2.60	2.60	–	In 2022, ongoing issues with slow, often dismissed investigations of physical attacks against journalists raised concerns about law enforcement effectiveness. Albania lacked a unified system for collecting and analyzing data on threats and attacks against journalists.
IV. Actual Safety	2.78	2.78	–	In 2022, life-threatening cases against journalists were not systemic. There were nine reported cases of actual attacks on journalists. Structural issues like political and business ties to media, lack of funding transparency, media blackmail, conflict of interests, limited media plurality and access to information, increased disinformation, and poor working conditions continued to threaten the environment for quality, independent journalism.
Journalist Safety Index	2.85	2.84	↓	

— SUMMARY

I. LEGAL AND ORGANISATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

- In 2022, the Government of Albanian refrained from introducing new legal changes, including the complete withdrawal of an anti-defamation package. As such, the defamation legal slightly improved compared to 2021, considering the withdrawal from Parliament of the anti-defamation package. Under the Albanian Criminal Code, any citizen, including public officials, can bring criminal charges against journalists for defamation, insult, or privacy infringement. The Civil Code also supports claims for non-pecuniary damages. Upon a final court ruling, the plaintiff can seek financial compensation towards journalists or other persons for committing deliberate defamation or

insult. Predominantly, politicians, business people, and public institution representatives initiate these lawsuits before the court. An evaluation of past court judgments indicates that high fines, coupled with substantial financial burdens for journalists, deferred proceedings, and potential criminal records, may induce self-censorship. This situation poses a significant threat to the freedom of expression, especially for investigative and critical journalists.

- The country's legal framework, specifically Article 159 of the Criminal Procedures Code, supports in principle the right to maintain source confidentiality, recognizing it as a cornerstone of media freedom and freedom of expression. This protection takes the form of a professional secret, thus exempting journalists from being compelled to disclose their information sources. Regardless, such legislation provides exceptions, allowing the court to order such disclosure under specific circumstances. Such cases were not recorded in 2022. The year also saw no alterations to the legal provisions safeguarding journalists' sources and no instances of state authorities compelling journalists to hand over electronic devices that could potentially compromise source identities. This is a marked improvement from 2021 when a high-profile case saw the seizure of electronic media devices from a media outlet. However, journalists, particularly those in investigative roles, still faced challenges in establishing and nurturing relationships with their sources in 2022. Broader safety concerns and unstable working conditions continued to complicate these efforts, posing potential risks to their freedom and capacity to maintain critical contacts.
- In Albania, implementing other laws relevant to journalists and media actors has posed challenges to their freedom and safety. Laws related to defamation, libel, hate speech, copyright, personal privacy, and data protection have been applied selectively, potentially deterring journalistic activities. In 2022, there were instances where legal provisions were wrongly invoked to limit the dissemination of leaked information following a cyberattack. Additionally, public officials' practices of providing pre-prepared content rather than engaging with journalists directly have raised concerns about media freedom, access to information, and transparency. While there were no reported cases of multiple lawsuits to prevent investigations into corruption and illegal practices in 2022, journalists still face intimidation and challenging working conditions. Furthermore, journalists covering protests have experienced wrong short deprivation of liberty by police, violence, and harassment, compromising their ability to work freely and safely.
- In 2022, journalists in Albania did not require a license to work, and there were no significant developments regarding the establishment of a formal status for

journalists. Concerns arose regarding media accreditation from one new institution of the judiciary, and consultations did not bring substantial changes to its chilling regulation. Freelance journalists and independent reporters face challenges in recognition, as current practices often focus on traditional media affiliations. Journalists in Albania are free to organize and join professional associations without reported obstacles in 2022. However, the consolidation of these associations is still an ongoing process in the country. There were no instances of parallel or fake media organizations aimed at undermining genuine journalistic associations.

- In 2022, journalists in Albania faced persistent challenges in their labor rights and working conditions. While most of them have formal employment contracts, there was a noticeable deterioration in working conditions, particularly regarding delayed payments and unlawful dismissals. Journalists, particularly those working in online media, experienced these issues more acutely. Fear of reprisals and the solidarity of media owners hindered journalists from addressing these problems publicly or through institutional channels. Digital security threats, such as hacking and surveillance, further endangered journalists, emphasizing the need for improved cybersecurity measures. Gender-based discrimination and challenges, particularly affecting women journalists, were significant concerns.

II. DUE PREVENTION

- In 2022, there was no significant change in terms of relevant state institutions in Albania establishing effective and dedicated mechanisms for individuals, including journalists, to report hate speech and serious life threats. There is a toll-free emergency number (112). Journalists and media employees are not eligible for free legal aid or exemption from judicial taxes under existing legislation. NGOs provide legal assistance independently, but the scheme does not offer sustainable support for journalists who need free legal aid. The response of the Police to reported threats has generally been satisfactory regarding registration, but follow-up is slow and ineffective, particularly in online attacks and hate speech cases. Cases passed on to the Prosecution often are either dismissed without investigation or are delayed. Underreporting of cases by journalists is a concern. Concrete actions to address attacks on journalists have been limited, and accountability and data collection mechanisms are inadequate. Unlawful detention and obstruction of work involving police officers also occur, highlighting further challenges journalists face.
- Albania's applicable legislation lacks specific guarantees and dedicated protection mechanisms for the safety of journalists and other media actors who may face risks.

Existing mechanisms, such as the victim protection mechanism, are not designed to address journalists' specific needs and challenges. The data collected for this report indicates no registered cases in 2022 of journalists benefiting from the victim protection mechanism. However, alternative forms of support are available to journalists, such as pro-bono or legal aid, provided by local and international civil society organizations and media freedom advocates. These avenues offer assistance and protection to journalists in navigating legal challenges and ensuring their safety. Nevertheless, there remains a need for sustainable, comprehensive, and tailored safety mechanisms that specifically address the unique risks faced by journalists and media actors in Albania.

- While Albania has ratified the Istanbul Convention and provides regular reports to the Council of Europe, the effective implementation of the convention is still a work in progress. However, the lack of segregated data - specifically for cases involving female journalists who are victims of violence, threats, or sexual harassment - creates a situation where responsible authorities may underestimate the magnitude of the issue. The existing support mechanisms primarily focus on assisting victims of gender-based domestic violence, but they are fragmented, inadequately equipped, and not tailored to address the unique challenges faced by female journalists or the threats they encounter in their work. Of particular concern is sexual harassment, as female journalists often hesitate to report such cases, and institutions lack the necessary capacities to address them effectively.
- The practice of regular public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media in Albania has not been fully established. While there have been instances where public authorities have condemned such threats and attacks as a violation of freedom of expression, the frequency and consistency of these condemnations remain limited. There is a need for a more systemic and regular approach to denounce such acts publicly, emphasizing their significance and the importance of protecting journalists and media workers.
- In 2022, efforts were made to enhance training and awareness among police officers regarding their interaction with journalists and adherence to international human rights standards. However, the adoption of official protocols in a systematic manner remains limited. While there has been a general trend of condemning attacks on journalists' safety by state officials and improved responsiveness from the police, limitations in conducting administrative and criminal investigations into incidents persist. A slight deterioration is noted in the number of incidents reported in 2022 of illegal accompanying of journalists

or unwarranted detention, equipment confiscation, and mistreatment during protests and other events.

III. DUE PROCESS

- Irrespective of general awareness of the importance of protecting journalists, law enforcement agencies in Albania still face challenges regarding their knowledge, capacity, and resources to effectively investigate attacks and violence targeting journalists. The current Criminal Code does not provide clear provisions that would secure special protection for journalists in cases where they are subjected to violence or attacks because of their professional duties. Additionally, the absence of specific protocols for investigating such incidents hinders the efficient detection and prosecution of those responsible for aggression and violence against journalists.
- Physical attacks against journalists in recent years have remained unresolved, with investigations often being slow, inefficient, or ultimately dismissed. The lack of progress in these investigations raises concerns about the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts in addressing attacks on journalists. Additionally, the lack of regular communication institutional practices for such cases and the principle of investigation secrecy that is decentralized depending on individual approaches of prosecutors charged with investigation further contributes to limited transparency, as these processes are often lengthy and provide limited public information.
- Albania's legislation lacks a comprehensive definition of harassment, including online harassment, as it currently only protects against sexual harassment. State authorities have limited knowledge, resources, competencies, and established procedures to effectively address and protect journalists, especially female journalists, from online harassment. This gap in protection against online harassment, accompanied by the culture of non-reaction or non-reporting of these cases, poses significant concerns for the well-being and safety of journalists in Albania.
- There is generally limited transparency and information available to the public and the victims or their legal representatives regarding the progress of cases and the evidence collected during investigations. This is primarily due to the overapplication of rules on the secrecy of investigations by the Prosecution Office without clear and well-defined criteria. As a result, there is minimal indication that investigations are conducted in cases of attacks against journalists, as many of these cases remain unresolved or suffer from prolonged investigations, significantly diminishing their effectiveness.

- A reliable and unified system for collecting and analyzing statistics and data on threats and attacks against journalists is lacking in Albania. None of the relevant state and judicial authorities have established a comprehensive and standardized data collection system that is disaggregated based on various criteria. This means there is no reliable and consistent information regarding these incidents. Additionally, state institutions face limitations regarding resources and capacities, which further hinders their ability to collect and publish such data. As a result, there is a significant gap in understanding the extent and nature of threats and attacks against journalists in the country.

IV. ACTUAL SAFETY

- In comparison to 2021, there was a slight increase in the number of significant cases of non-physical threats and harassment reported in 2022. While in 2021, only two major cases were reported, in 2022, the Safe Journalists Network recorded a total of 6 incidents.
- Threats against journalists' lives and physical safety exist both implicitly and explicitly. Only one case was recorded in 2022 compared to a few cases in 2021 by the Safe Journalists Network and other international platforms for media freedom. However, such cases are not systemic.
- Actual attacks in Albania against journalists have been recorded in 2022 (9 reported cases) and in 2021 (9 reported cases). However, most cases in 2022 were related to ungrounded detention by Police and other obstructions of journalists and media workers while reporting on live protests. Whereas in 2021, the actual attacks are related more to private individuals.
- Due to ongoing challenges, the environment for good quality, independent, watchdog journalism in the public interest remains significantly threatened in Albania. These challenges stem from a range of structural issues, including symbiotic relationships among politics, business, and media, ownership concentration, lack of transparency in funding sources, media being used for blackmail, conflict of interests, limited media plurality, limited access to information, decreased quality of media content, an increase in information disorders, and poor working conditions and labor rights.

Legal and Organisational Environment

3.27

Legal provisions related to defamation and their implementation do not produce chilling effects on journalists and media

3.08

Confidentiality of journalists' sources is guaranteed in the legislation and respected by the authorities

4.14

Other laws are implemented objectively and allow the journalists and other media actors to work freely and safely

3.11

Journalists are free to pursue their profession and to establish, join and participate in their associations

3.73

Journalists' job position is stable and protected at the workplace

2.27

1.00
2.00
3.00
4.00
5.00
6.00
7.00



By Law and in practice, there is absolutely no protection of journalists' working position, their sources and their organizations, thereby producing an extreme chilling effect.

By Law and in practice, there is a highest degree of protection of journalists' working position, their sources, and their organizations.

10

Legal provisions related to defamation and their implementation do not produce chilling effects on journalists and media

Score for 2021: 2.91 / Score for 2022: 3.08

The Albanian Government in 2022 refrained from introducing new legal changes, including the complete withdrawal of an anti-defamation package. As such, the defamation legal slightly improved compared to 2021 considering the withdrawal from Parliament of the anti-defamation package. Under the Albanian Criminal Code, any citizen, including public officials, can bring criminal charges against journalists for defamation, insult, or privacy infringement. The Civil Code also supports claims for non-pecuniary damages. Upon a final court ruling, the plaintiff can seek financial compensation towards journalists or other persons for committing deliberate defamation or insult. Predominantly, politicians, business people, and public institution representatives initiate these lawsuits before the court. An evaluation of past court judgments indicates that high fines, coupled with substantial financial burdens for journalists, deferred proceedings, and potential criminal records, may induce self-censorship. This situation poses a significant threat to the freedom of expression, especially for investigative and critical journalists.

In Albania, the legal system holds journalists accountable for instances of defamation, an act still recognized as a criminal misdemeanor, contradicting globally recognized standards and repeated recommendations by the European Commission and European Parliament. The Criminal Code's Section VIII, entitled "Criminal Offences Against Morality and Dignity," elucidates defamation as the "Deliberate propagation of statements or any other type of information, with the understanding that they are unfounded, adversely impacting an individual's honor and dignity" (Article 120). Monetary penalties for defamation range from 400 euros to 12,000 euros but can escalate based on the case's unique circumstances, as described in paragraph 2 of this article. This section further elaborates, "A similar act, if performed publicly, repeatedly, or detrimental to multiple individuals, constitutes

— INDICATOR 1.1

a criminal misdemeanor and warrants a financial penalty ranging from around 450 Euro to 25,500 Euro, depending on the specifics of the case." Since 2012, the penal measure of up to two years imprisonment for defamation has been abolished. The notion of Insult is also incorporated within the Criminal Code under Article 119, which states: "A willful insult to a person amounts to a criminal misdemeanor and incurs a fine ranging from 450 Euro to 8,500 Euro." Furthermore, if such an act is performed publicly, repeatedly, or is harmful to several individuals, it is deemed a criminal misdemeanor and penalized with a fine that varies from 450 euros to 25,500 euros. Again, since 2012, the punitive measure of imprisonment of up to two years for defamation has been omitted.

Criminal Code's Article 121 in Albania outlines an additional criminal misdemeanor that could lead to legal repercussions for journalists and media professionals, known as "Violation of one's privacy." This rule indicates that unauthorized use of eavesdropping or recording devices and capturing, recording, broadcasting, storing for publication, or publishing details that reveal personal aspects of an individual's private life are considered criminal misdemeanors. These activities are subject to either monetary penalties or imprisonment for up to two years. This provision explicitly impacts investigative journalism, especially when it discloses aspects of someone's private life without consent in reporting matters of public interest.

Article 119 of the Criminal Code further outlines that an "Intentional insult to an individual is recognized as a criminal misdemeanor, subject to a fine ranging between 450 and 8,500 euros. If committed publicly, repeatedly, or to the detriment of multiple people, the same act is deemed a criminal misdemeanor and could result in a fine ranging from 450 to 25,500 Euros."

Additionally, the Civil Code of the Republic of Albania includes articles related to defamation: Article 617 on Deceptive or false publications; Article 625 on Liability for non-material damage; and Article 647/a, which defines the methods and criteria for determining civil liability and the extent of non-property damage.

The Criminal Code of Albania does not specifically impose more stringent penalties on journalists compared to state officials. Consequences for defamation, intentional insult, or deceptive or inaccurate publications relating to non-material damages are determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the specifics and context of each incident brought before the competent court.

Considering the nature of journalistic work, the conditions under which journalists operate, unfavourable level of salaries for most of them and sometimes even informal working environment, as well as constraints on journalistic freedom when an editor or media proprietor directs a news piece,

— INDICATOR 1.1

criminal penalties can be seen as excessively severe. Civil liability legislation stipulates that compensation for non-material damage related to the violation of one's honor, personal dignity, or reputation aims to restore the infringed right in proportion to the damage caused, with considerations made based on the specifics of each case. This leaves room for judicial discretion in determining sanctions or reparations.

For example, the Civil Code stipulates that when determining civil liability and the extent of non-pecuniary damage, the court should take into account various factors. These include the manner, form, and timing of the act, the defendant's adherence to professional ethics, issues relating to private life and public interest, whether the purveyor of false statements benefited from their circulation, and whether the compensation would significantly strain the defendant's financial situation, among others (Article 647/a).

The Consolidated Decision No. 10, dated September 14, 2007, by the Joint Chambers of the Supreme Court of Albania, asserted that "The quantification of compensation for emotional distress, owing to its inherently subjective and intrinsic nature, cannot be predetermined through the use of tables or preset calculation schemes. Consequently, the court makes its decision rooted in the principle of justice, guided by its internal assurance formed through the comprehensive examination of all circumstances surrounding the case. This process takes into consideration any relevant normative criteria pertaining to the violated law's nature or, if absent, criteria and assessment elements established by judicial precedents in similar cases or related non-judicial experiences. The court must also acknowledge the country's current economic and social progression, inclusive of the value of money within the national economy."

In 2022, Albania witnessed a total of 30 court cases involving either Article 119 (Insult) or Article 120 (Defamation) of the Criminal Code filed against journalists or media personnel. Of these, 11 cases were carried from previous years, leaving 19 as new cases. Additionally, 12 civil cases were lodged in the same year; out of them, 11 related to Article 617 of the Civil Code that foresees fraudulent or misleading publications and one related to Article 625 of the Civil Code that foresees non-material damage liability. The A.L.T.R.I Centre's 2022 report on criminal and civil court cases against journalists and media representatives in Albania indicates that fines ranged from around 450 euros to 30,000 euro. In addition to the obligation to retract statements, disavow defamatory assertions, or remove news articles concerning the plaintiff, these fines can be considered excessive, especially when factoring in the average salary of Albanian journalists.

The available data do not clearly indicate whether any of the court rulings against journalists in Albania during 2022 were politically motivated. However, the highly polarized political

— INDICATOR 1.1

climate in Albania and the fact that the judicial system continues to be in a reforming transition phase, which, regardless of progress, has also encountered challenges, does not exclude the possibility of unverified political influence in the judiciary.

There have been instances of case processing delays and transparency issues in the verdicts, which may raise doubts about potential political influence.

There is no definitive evidence to suggest that judges, prosecutors or other relevant state officials have misused their duties during court proceedings against journalists. However, several confirmed instances of journalist intimidation during proceedings have led to retractions and self-censorship.

The long trial duration, often two to three years, and the resulting increase in costs for journalists have indirectly contributed to a culture of self-censorship within the journalism community. This is also spurred by instances of intimidation faced by journalists during proceedings. Although state officials may not directly misuse their procedural rights, the ensuing atmosphere can often suppress journalistic freedom and foster self-censorship.

The drawn-out nature of legal proceedings, the related financial burden, and the potential for criminal sentencing have stifled journalistic freedom, steering many journalists towards self-censorship. Especially amongst independent and investigative journalists, who often engage in critical reporting, there's a pervasive sentiment that the application of defamation law negatively influences the pursuit of high-quality, impartial journalism in Albania. This trend is further exacerbated by the fact that journalists often face these trials without substantial institutional support from their media organizations or employers. This lack of backing creates a chilling effect, wherein journalists are dissuaded from investigative and critical reporting due to fear of legal and financial repercussions.

The repercussions of past verdicts continue to exert a negative influence on journalists. The previously levied fines, ranging from approximately 450 euro to 30,000 euro, are particularly burdensome, considering the average income of journalists in Albania. Recently, another concerning trend has emerged: an increase in defamation lawsuits filed by journalists against their colleagues, further compounding the challenges faced by this profession.

Confidentiality of journalists' sources is guaranteed in the legislation and respected by the authorities

Score for 2021: 3.86 / Score for 2022: 4.14

The country's legal framework, specifically Article 159 of the Criminal Procedures Code, supports in principle the right to maintain source confidentiality, recognizing it as a cornerstone of media freedom and freedom of expression. This protection takes the form of a professional secret, thus exempting journalists from being compelled to disclose their information sources. Despite it, such legislation provides exceptions by allowing the court to order such disclosure in specific circumstances. Such cases were not recorded in 2022. The year also saw no alterations to the legal provisions safeguarding journalists' sources and no instances of state authorities compelling journalists to hand over electronic devices that could potentially compromise source identities. This is a marked improvement from 2021, when a high-profile case saw the seizure of electronic media from a media outlet. However, journalists, particularly those in investigative roles, still faced challenges in establishing and nurturing relationships with their sources in 2022. Broader safety concerns and unstable working conditions continued to complicate these efforts, posing potential risks to their freedom and capacity to maintain critical contacts.

The Albanian legal framework affirms the right to protect confidential journalistic sources, recognizing it as a foundational aspect of media freedom and freedom of expression. As stated in Article 159 of the Criminal Procedures Code, journalists are exempt from the obligation to reveal their information sources by acknowledging it as a professional secret. Nevertheless, the court may order journalists to disclose their source during criminal proceedings, should it be deemed critical to proving a criminal offense. Ethical standards also bind journalists to uphold their sources' confidentiality. Although the law safeguards this principle, its practice could be potentially compromised by the court's criminal rulings requiring disclosure. Despite such scenarios, journalists are ethically bound to protect their sources, barring explicit consent from the concerned individual for disclosure.

— INDICATOR 1.2

There were no recorded instances in 2022 through which journalists in Albania were required to reveal their sources, neither for public interest reasons nor for the resolution of any specific criminal cases. Throughout 2022, there were no alterations to the legal provisions safeguarding the confidentiality of journalists' sources in Albania. Additionally, there were no recorded instances in the same year where journalists were penalized for refusing to disclose their sources. However, Aleksandra Bogdani, an investigative journalist for the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) Albania, was summoned to give evidence before the Parliamentary Committee investigating the controversial incinerator cases in Albania. Her testimony about journalistic reporting on these cases was obligatory under the commission's rules. During these proceedings, Members of Parliament (MPs) may potentially query her sources for the sake of their inquiry. Ms. Bogdani was not directly pressured to reveal her sources.

In 2022, no such incidents were reported in Albania, where state authorities ordered journalists to hand over their electronic devices, potentially risking the exposure of their sources. This was a contrast to the previous year, 2021, when a sensitive case had transpired involving special prosecutors against corruption and organized crime, demanding the confiscation of computers, servers, phones, and USB drives from an online media portal. This case stirred significant reactions, including the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). Such pushbacks led Albania's Special Anti-Corruption Structure (SPAK) to reconsider and reverse its directive.

In 2022, journalists in Albania, particularly those engaged in investigative reporting on organized crime and corruption, continued to confront hurdles in securing access to, and nurturing relationships with, information sources. This was consistent with the difficulties experienced during the prior reporting period. These challenges are further amplified by broader safety concerns and precarious working conditions that such journalists often face, potentially impacting their freedom and confidence to establish and maintain vital contacts.

Other laws are implemented objectively and allow the journalists and other media actors to work freely and safely

Score for 2021: 3.22 / Score for 2022: 3.11

In Albania, implementing other laws relevant to journalists and media actors has posed challenges to their freedom and safety. Laws related to defamation, libel, hate speech, copyright, personal privacy, and data protection have been selectively applied, potentially restricting journalistic activities. In 2022, there were instances where legal provisions were wrongly invoked to limit the dissemination of leaked information following a cyberattack. Additionally, public officials' practices of providing pre-prepared content rather than engaging with journalists directly have raised concerns about media freedom, access to information, and transparency. While there were no reported cases of multiple lawsuits aimed at preventing investigations into corruption and illegal practices in 2022, journalists still face intimidation and challenging working conditions. Furthermore, journalists covering protests have experienced wrong short deprivation of liberty by police, violence, and harassment, compromising their ability to work freely and safely..

In Albania, the potential for the arbitrary application of laws exists and may infringe upon journalists' freedom of expression. Laws addressing issues like defamation, libel, hate speech, copyright, personal privacy, and data protection have sometimes been invoked as grounds for restraining journalistic activities.

In 2020, certain instances arose where the content was restricted, or journalists were charged due to supposed incitement of panic and fear during events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and earthquake. The trend persisted into 2021, where journalists occasionally found access denied for reporting, often justified by anti-COVID-19 measures. In 2022, after a significant cyberattack on Albania's e-governance system, authorities prevented media outlets from publishing leaked information, citing a risk of public panic.

Despite initiating weekly press statements in September 2021, Albania's Prime Minister and ministers held limited press conferences that allowed for substantive journalist engagement. Most of these sessions morphed into press

— INDICATOR 1.3

statements in 2022, largely excluding journalists. Moreover, there were two instances in 2022 where Prime Minister Edi Rama admonished journalists for their critical questions, sending them for “re-education.” These developments underscore a pressing need for increased transparency, accountability, and respect for media freedom in Albania.

Worrisome trends emerged from the wrong and harmful practices of public officials in Albania, such as providing the media with pre-prepared content. The Mayor of Tirana and other high-ranking officials continued to bypass press conferences, restricting journalists' access to public events, and instead offered pre-packaged materials. This method severely inhibits critical questioning and comprehensive reporting, raising concerns about media freedom, access to information, and transparency.

In 2022, there were attempts to limit journalists in Albania based on legal provisions related to the dissemination of misinformation or causing panic. A significant instance occurred on September 19, 2022, when the Tirana Prosecutor's Office prohibited media outlets and the general public from publishing any data or information obtained from the cyberattacks on Albanian state servers that began in July 2022. Microsoft later attributed these cyberattacks to Iranian hacking groups, resulting in severe damage to government databases and public institutions' computer systems. A group called 'Homeland Justice,' allegedly connected to the Iranian hackers, released files containing classified police data and sensitive correspondence involving Albanian politicians, authorities, institutions, and foreign diplomats.

In response to the leaks, the Albanian government accused Iran of orchestrating the attacks, leading to the cessation of diplomatic relations between the two nations. Albanian media outlets subsequently published articles regarding the leaked content, focusing on alleged assassination plots and issues related to the State Police.

The ban by the Tirana Prosecutor's Office was justified on the grounds of national security and privacy. The statement warned that anyone found publishing the data could be subject to criminal charges under Article 293/b "Interference in Computer Data" and Article 192/b "Unauthorized Computer Entry" of the Criminal Code. It is worth noting that none of the provisions of the Criminal Code mentioned in the ban of the prosecution bring criminal liability to journalists if they publish data or information obtained from the cyberattacks on Albanian state servers that began in July 2022. The criminal liability is the sole responsibility of those who enter computer systems, deform or distort the information, etc. Furthermore, it stated that any website caught hosting the data would be blocked. The Prosecutor's Office tasked a State Police cybercrime investigation unit to monitor for violations and solicited information from the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) and

the Electronic and Postal Communications Authority (AKEP). On September 20, the AMA underscored the sensitive nature of the hacked files and called on editorial offices to demonstrate caution and professional responsibility in their data handling.

Albania's existing legislative framework does not, unfortunately, provide explicit protection or safeguards for journalists who may become targets of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPP). The state-guaranteed Legal Aid under Law No. 111/2017 offers the only recourse for waiving judicial taxes and receiving free legal aid. However, this law's beneficiaries do not include journalists and are confined to specific categories, such as people with disabilities and victims of sexual abuse or trafficking. So, if journalists are sued due to a SLAPP lawsuit, they should hire a lawyer to defend themselves professionally.

One notable instance involved Isa Myzyraj from Ora News, who experienced intimidation linked to his reporting on the vetting process of Elizabeta Imeraj, former Head of the Tirana Prosecution Office. Imeraj filed a defamation lawsuit against Myzyraj, embroiling him in a protracted legal struggle. Other cases involve the defamation lawsuit against two other journalists in Albania by companies related to the controversial case of incinerators.

SLAPP lawsuits threaten freedom of expression and media freedom in Albania, hampering the ability to report on issues of public interest, notably large-scale corruption and organized crime, such as the three cases reported in 2020 involving BIRN journalists and other independent investigative reporters. Nevertheless, as a positive development, in 2021 and 2022, there were no reported cases of multiple lawsuits initiated by powerful individuals or groups against journalists for alleged defamation with the intent to stifle investigations and reporting on corrupt or illegal practices.

However, it is important to note that journalists and media experts have confirmed that investigative and critical journalists face intimidation and challenging working conditions, which inevitably impact their independent reporting. The high number of cases dropped also suggests that civil and criminal lawsuits against journalists often lack substantial basis or legitimate purpose.

The rights and safety of journalists in Albania have occasionally been at risk, especially during the coverage of citizens' protests. Historically, such incidents have led to unlawful accompanying or detention (short deprivation of liberty) of reporters or attempts to confiscate their equipment by police officers. This situation was particularly pronounced in 2020, during the protests that followed the demolition of the National Theatre and a controversial police incident.

— INDICATOR 1.3

In 2021, while there was a decrease in such incidents, there were still sporadic instances of journalists' safety being compromised while reporting live from events, including attacks by private individuals.

Unfortunately, these incidents continued into 2022, with journalists facing varying degrees of violence and harassment. There were instances of police officers attempting to restrict media coverage during protests and direct physical assaults on journalists. Such actions hamper journalists' ability to report freely and safely on events, particularly those involving citizen protests against issues such as rising costs of food, fuel, and energy or urban redevelopment projects.

Journalists are free to pursue their profession and to establish, join, and participate in their associations

Score for 2021: 3.76 / Score for 2022: 3.73

In 2022, journalists in Albania did not require a license to work, and there were no significant developments regarding the establishment of a formal status for journalists. Concerns arose regarding media accreditation from one new institution of the judiciary, and consultations did not bring substantial changes to its chilling regulation. Freelance journalists and independent reporters face challenges in recognition, as current practices often focus on traditional media affiliations. Journalists in Albania are free to organize and join professional associations without reported obstacles in 2022. However, the consolidation of these associations is still an ongoing process in the country. There were no instances of parallel or fake media organizations aimed at undermining genuine journalistic associations.

At present, Albania's journalists do not require a state or other license to work in journalism. However, in 2021, a group of journalists formed the Movement of Journalists, advocating for establishing a formal status for journalists. While some media experts expressed concerns that this could potentially lead to licensing requirements, there have been no significant developments in this regard in 2022. Therefore, as of 2022, journalists in Albania remain free to pursue their profession without needing a state-issued license. It is important to note that the absence of licensing requirements allows for greater freedom and accessibility in journalism, enabling journalists to freely exercise their right to freedom of expression and participate in their professional associations.

In 2022, concerns arose regarding media accreditation and its impact on media freedom in Albania. The introduction of a new media relations regulation by the High Prosecution Council (HPC) raised questions about transparency, access to information, and media freedom. Article 8 (paragraph 3) of the regulation states that the Coordinator for the Right to Information, with the approval of the respective member of the Council, has the right to request from the relevant head of the media accredited replacement of a journalist

— INDICATOR 1.4

if there are clear distinguished violations of objectivity and professionalism, Constitution, the law, and the principles of this regulation. According to paragraph 4 of the same article, when the violation is public, serious, or flagrant, the respective member of the Council decides to remove the accreditation of the journalist who committed the offense. However, the criteria and process for evaluating journalists' professionalism and reporting transparency remained unclear. The roles of the Coordinator for the Right of Access to Information at the HPC and the respective Council member in charge of media were also not well-defined. Initially, the regulation was announced without consulting relevant stakeholders, but after facing public criticism, the HPC consulted with journalists. Nonetheless, the regulation was not revised, but HPC does not actively implement it. These developments highlight the need for clear and transparent accreditation processes that protect media freedom and ensure the free flow of information.

In Albania, there are generally procedures in place for the accreditation of journalists by various institutions, and some new justice system institutions are in the process of developing their own accreditation policies. It is common practice for public authorities to require journalists to wear easily identifiable badges while carrying out their work. However, a challenge persists in recognizing the status of freelance journalists, bloggers, and independent journalists who may not be affiliated with traditional media organizations or entities.

This issue raises concerns about the equal treatment and recognition of all journalists, regardless of their employment status or affiliation. It is essential for the authorities to ensure that accreditation processes and policies accommodate the diverse landscape of journalism, including independent journalists and those working in non-traditional formats. Recognizing and respecting all journalists' professional rights and privileges, regardless of their working arrangements, is crucial for upholding media freedom and ensuring that journalists can effectively carry out their important role in society.

In Albania, journalists are generally free to organize themselves into professional associations and have the right to join existing associations. This principle allows journalists to come together, share common interests, and advocate for their professional rights and interests collectively.

As of 2022, there have been no reported cases of journalists facing obstacles or restrictions when it comes to joining associations. This indicates that journalists in Albania are able to exercise their right to freely associate and participate in professional organizations without undue interference or limitations.

The ability for journalists to join associations is crucial as it fosters solidarity, supports professional development, and

— INDICATOR 1.4

strengthens the collective voice of journalists in advocating for press freedom, media ethics, and the protection of journalists' rights. By being part of associations, journalists can access resources, training opportunities, legal support, and networking platforms that contribute to their professional growth and well-being. Furthermore, associations play a vital role in promoting professional standards, and ethical conduct, and ensuring the independence and integrity of journalism. However, these structures still need to be consolidated in Albania.

As of 2022, there have been no reported instances of parallel or fake media organizations in Albania whose purpose is to undermine the critical position of genuine journalistic associations supported by the government or powerful political organizations. While it is important to remain vigilant and monitor the media landscape for any such developments, there is no specific information or evidence suggesting the existence of such entities in Albania.

However, it is worth noting that media ownership concentration and political influence have been topics of concern in the country's media landscape. Media outlets with affiliations to political parties or powerful individuals may potentially shape the information landscape and influence public discourse. This situation highlights the importance of promoting media pluralism, transparency in media ownership, and ensuring an environment where journalists and media organizations can operate independently without undue interference.

Efforts to strengthen the media sector, support independent journalism, and promote ethical standards are crucial to maintaining a diverse and vibrant media landscape that upholds the principles of freedom of expression and media freedom. It is essential to foster an environment where genuine journalistic associations can thrive, uphold professional standards, and serve as a strong voice for the journalistic community.

Journalists' job position is stable and protected at the workplace

Score for 2021: 2.51 / Score for 2022: 2.27

In 2022, journalists in Albania faced persistent challenges in their labor rights and working conditions. Despite most of them having formal employment contracts, there was a noticeable deterioration in working conditions, particularly regarding delayed payments and unlawful dismissals. Journalists, particularly those working in online media, experienced these issues more acutely. Fear of reprisals and the solidarity of media owners hindered journalists from addressing these problems publicly or through institutional channels. Digital security threats such as hacking and surveillance further endangered journalists, emphasizing the need for improved cybersecurity measures. Gender-based discrimination and challenges, particularly affecting women journalists, were significant concerns.

In Albania, journalists in most cases work under formal employment contracts. However, the labor rights of journalists still face challenges in implementation. These challenges include delayed and informal payments, inadequate social security benefits, long working hours, limited holidays, and the issue of unlawful dismissal. Some journalists (such as district correspondents or portal journalists) are contracted with consulting or service contracts, which do not fall under the regulation of the Labor Code, but are operated for external experts. Such a situation makes the legal protection guaranteed to this category minimal, creating an unfavourable environment for working conditions. A 2022 report highlights that young women journalists working in online media are particularly vulnerable to the lack of employment contracts, while payment frequency concerns newspapers, online media, and local outlets. This suggests that formal contracts alone are not enough to fully implement labor rights. Reforms are necessary to strengthen labor protections and enhance compliance with existing regulations, thereby improving the working conditions of journalists in Albania.

Furthermore, disparities in journalists' salaries have been exposed, revealing a significant gap in pay among media workers. While some individuals, such as presenters, producers, and certain journalists, receive high monthly salaries of up to 20,000 euros, others are paid considerably

— INDICATOR 1.5

less. The leaked data highlights the presence of informal practices in the media industry. On average, journalists earn around 500 euros per month, which is twice the minimum wage. This salary discrepancy not only perpetuates income inequality but also poses risks to the independence and integrity of journalism, as financial pressures and informal practices may influence news reporting. Ensuring transparency and fairness in salary practices is crucial for fostering a more equitable and professional journalism sector in Albania.

In 2022, the Safe Journalists Network documented numerous cases of journalists' rights violated in Albania. One notable incident involved reports from RTSH reporters and media workers who claimed they were dismissed as part of a restructuring following the appointment of a new Director General. While the Director General has the authority to appoint and dismiss head directors/sectors as per the law, these actions must be carried out transparently and in compliance with journalists' labor rights. The Safe Journalists Network requested information on the number of affected journalists and media staff. Still, RTSH responded by stating that all procedures were followed according to the Labor Code and that no journalists were laid off. Despite multiple reports, no media staff or journalists have come forward publicly to address these issues, likely due to fears of reprisals and the challenging media environment where media owners may stand in solidarity against journalists' grievances.

In the latter part of 2022, the Safe Journalists Network also received reports from media staff at Euronews Albania indicating the alleged dismissal of approximately 30 employees due to changes in senior management. Most affected individuals were coerced into resigning, while a few were dismissed outright. Jetmira Kaçi, a former executive producer with a permanent employment contract, publicly denounced her dismissal as unjustified and initiated legal proceedings. She is one of the few media workers who have publicly come forward, as the potential existence of informal pressures and fears of professional retribution seem to discourage others from disclosing similar cases of unlawful dismissals or forced resignations. It is important to note that the Labour Inspectorate reported no violation of the Labour Code at Euronews Albania, adding complexity to the situation due to contradictory accounts from journalists and information from public authorities.

Moreover, FaxNews, Oranews, and RTV Ora, among other media organizations, faced significant challenges during the year. FaxNews experienced substantial delays in salary payments to journalists and media staff, which were attributed to the owner's passing and severe financial constraints faced by the outlet. Similarly, Oranews and RTV Ora encountered payment delays for their personnel, with RTV Ora even being seized by the state under the implementation of the Anti-Mafia Law against its owner.

— INDICATOR 1.5

In addition to these challenges, journalists in Albania face increasing digital security threats, including hacking, phishing, and surveillance. Journalists working for online media outlets are particularly vulnerable due to the prevalence of informal employment practices. The lack of formal contracts can pose difficulties in safeguarding their intellectual property rights and establishing their professional profiles. Furthermore, major personal data leaks in 2021 and a massive cyberattack in 2022 resulted in the disclosure of additional personal data, including bank accounts, raising concerns about the safety and privacy of journalists and their sources. It is crucial for journalists to prioritize digital security, and media organizations need to implement robust cybersecurity measures to protect their employees and sensitive data.

Women journalists in Albania face significant challenges and gender-based discrimination in the workplace. In 2022, issues of sexual harassment, online violence, and gender-based disinformation came to the forefront. However, there is limited reporting of such cases, as women journalists fear retaliation. Greater support and protection are needed, including improved reporting mechanisms and measures to address discrimination and harassment. Women are underrepresented in editorial and decision-making roles, and the lack of gender-disaggregated data hinders progress monitoring. Women journalists also face a gender pay gap, impacting their economic empowerment and leadership opportunities. Sexual harassment, online violence, and smear campaigns are common forms of pressure faced by women journalists, often going unreported. Concerns about gender disinformation and online harassment further hinder their career growth and participation.

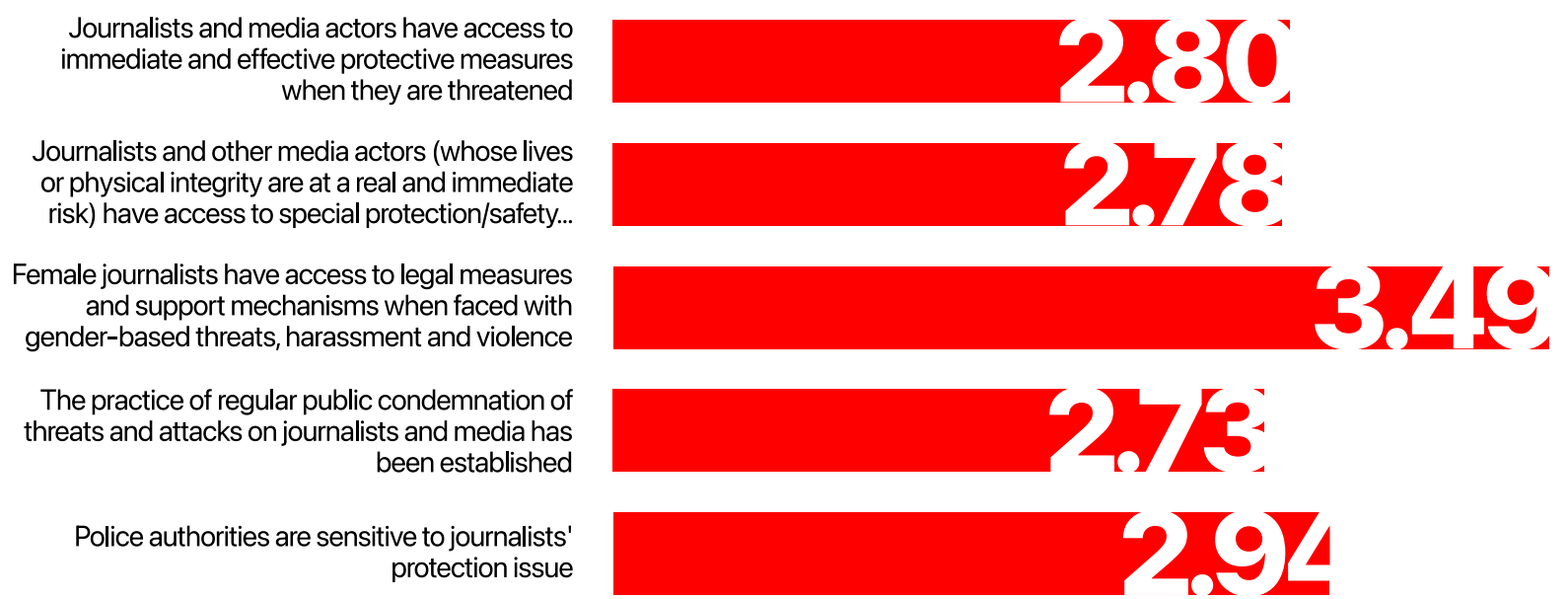
Freelance journalists in Albania face precarious working conditions characterized by challenges in accessing institutions and gaining recognition as journalists. They often struggle with securing payments and lack social insurance coverage, further exacerbating their vulnerability.

Despite the Labor Code provision allowing a group of at least 20 employees to form a trade union to protect their rights and interests, journalists and media employees in Albania are not organized in trade unions. Generally, journalists themselves attribute this lack of unionization to their fear of retaliation from media owners. Additionally, there is no provision for free legal aid for journalists provided by their media outlets, and no collective agreements are in place to safeguard journalists' labor rights in private media. This absence of trade unions and collective agreements leaves journalists without adequate protection and support in their workplace.



Due Prevention

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Institutional mechanisms for immediate protection of journalists in cases of threats and attacks do not exist, officials encourage attacks on journalists and police officers treat journalists extremely harshly.

All institutional mechanisms are established for the immediate protection of journalists in the event of attacks, officials clearly and systematically discourage attacks on journalists and police authorities treat journalists with respect.

Journalists and media actors have access to immediate and effective protective measures when they are threatened

Score for 2021: 2.85 / Score for 2022: 2.80

In 2022, there was no significant change in terms of relevant state institutions in Albania establishing effective and dedicated mechanisms for individuals, including journalists, to report hate speech and serious life threats. There is a toll-free emergency number (112). Journalists and media employees are not eligible for free legal aid or exemption from judicial taxes under existing legislation. NGOs provide legal assistance independently, but the scheme does not provide sustainable support for journalists who need free legal aid. The response of the Police to reported threats has generally been satisfactory regarding registration, but follow-up is slow and ineffective, particularly in online attacks and hate speech cases. Cases passed on to the Prosecution often are dismissed without investigation or delayed. Underreporting of cases by journalists is a concern. Concrete actions to address attacks on journalists have been limited, and accountability and data collection mechanisms are inadequate. Unlawful detention and obstruction of work involving police officers also occur, highlighting further challenges faced by journalists.

There is no change in 2022 regarding the mechanisms for reporting hate speech and serious life threats. Relevant state institutions in Albania have not established effective and dedicated mechanisms for individuals, including journalists and media actors, to easily and immediately report hate speech and serious life threats. While there is a toll-free emergency number (112) established by the Ministry of Interior that connects citizens to the State Police in cases of emergencies, it is not specifically designed for reporting hate speech or serious life threats. This hotline is meant to serve the entire population in urgent situations or when threatened by a crime, which may not effectively address the specific needs of journalists. Additionally, there is no dedicated hotline established by the Ministry of Interior to report hate speech. However, the State Police has engaged in

— INDICATOR 2.1

capacity building and awareness-raising activities regarding hate speech through donor-funded projects in 2021.

Regarding legal aid, the existing legislation (Law No. 111/2017) does not include journalists or media employees as particular beneficiaries eligible for free legal aid or exemption from judicial taxes. As a result, no specialized legal service is available to journalists within the state-run services. However, several non-governmental organizations operate independently in this area on a donor-driven basis by providing legal assistance to journalists and media employees. Such a scheme is not sustainable.

Regarding hate speech, the Media Pluralism Report 2022 indicates that Albanian citizens have three main avenues for lodging complaints related to media content: The Council of Complaints of the Audiovisual Media Authority addresses issues related to hate speech in audiovisual media. The Commissioner Against Discrimination is viewed as the most user-friendly and efficient mechanism, despite its focus being limited to specific protected categories under anti-discrimination law. The Alliance for Ethical Media's board, a self-regulating body of around 30 online Albanian media outlets committed to the Journalists' Code of Ethics, has a limited reach due to the few media outlets it encompasses, and its rulings often go unheeded. In 2020, Albania established the "No-hate Speech Alliance", comprising the People's Advocate, the Commissioner Against Discrimination, the Audiovisual Media Authority, and the NGO the Albanian Media Council. Despite its establishment to combat hate speech and discrimination, its success in raising awareness and increasing complaint numbers has been limited.

Although specific statistical data on the number of journalists who have utilized the established reporting mechanisms are unavailable, the Safe Journalists Network has documented several cases of threats and attacks. In 2022, there were nine reported instances of actual attacks and one threat against the life of a filming crew from the investigative show Fisk Fare. Three of these incidents were reported by journalists through the toll-free emergency line. The State Police responded promptly to these cases by dispatching officers to the scene. Additionally, journalists have the option (same for the other citizens) to visit police stations to report issues or threats they encounter. It is important to note that while the existing mechanisms do offer avenues for reporting, there is a need for more comprehensive and dedicated channels specifically tailored to the unique needs of journalists and media actors in addressing hate speech and serious life threats. It is crucial to notice that the other actual attacks against journalists in 2022 involved unlawful detention or obstruction of work by police officers.

The response of the Police to reported cases of threats against journalists has generally been satisfactory in terms of registering the complaints. However, thorough investigations

— INDICATOR 2.1

have significant shortcomings, especially in online attacks and hate speech cases. Multiple reports and interviews indicate that the follow-up measures, such as investigations that the prosecution should conduct and hold perpetrators accountable, are slow and ineffective. Although state institutions acknowledge and process journalists' reports on rights violations, their limited resources and capacities often result in a lack of responsiveness and effectiveness, particularly in addressing threats, online harassment, hate speech, and gender-based discrimination targeting journalists. Many cases are either closed or delayed due to a lack of evidence, revealing a weak institutional link and undermining the effectiveness of comprehensive investigations.

Another concerning issue is the underreporting of cases by journalists to state authorities. The lack of updated information or statistics on the current status of investigations into attacks on journalists over the past few years further complicates the situation. Information related to ongoing investigations is often considered confidential or wrongly protected under investigative secrecy, making it difficult to assess progress.

In 2022, while public authorities did condemn attacks on journalists as a violation of freedom of expression, concrete actions to address these issues have been limited. Although the Police have shown a relatively swift response to public attacks, the scope of follow-up investigations remains limited. The persistent lack of accountability and impunity for those responsible for violence against journalists is a grave concern. Furthermore, the absence of systematic and institutionalized data collection on attacks against journalists hampers effective monitoring and the development of targeted strategies to combat these issues.

It is crucial to highlight that in addition to the reported cases of threats, there were also incidents of unlawful accompanying or detention of media workers and obstruction of their work involving police officers. These instances further underscore the challenges faced by journalists in Albania and raise concerns about the relationship between journalists and law enforcement authorities.

Journalists and other media actors (whose lives or physical integrity are at a real and immediate risk) have access to special protection/safety mechanisms

Score for 2021: 2.78 / Score for 2022: 2.78

The current Albanian legislation lacks specific guarantees and dedicated protection mechanisms for the safety of journalists and other media actors who may face risks. Existing mechanisms, such as the victim protection mechanism, are not designed to address the specific needs and challenges faced by journalists. The data collected for this report indicates that there were no registered cases in 2022 of journalists benefiting from the victim protection mechanism. However, alternative forms of support are available to journalists, such as pro-bono or legal aid, provided by local and international civil society organizations and media freedom advocates. These avenues offer assistance and protection to journalists in navigating legal challenges and ensuring their safety. Nevertheless, there remains a need for sustainable, comprehensive, and tailored safety mechanisms that specifically address the unique risks faced by journalists and media actors in Albania.

There are no changes in 2022 regarding this indicator. At the national level in Albania, there is a lack of specific safety mechanisms to provide physical protection for journalists, particularly those reporting on corruption or organized crime. While there are provisions for legal support and protection for whistleblowers in cases of corruption reporting, these provisions are limited to individuals with an actual or former employment relationship with the subject of the suspected corrupt practices. Once whistleblowing is made public, the protection provided under the law no longer applies, which is not in line with the EU Directive and Committee of Ministers' Recommendation that advocates for protection regardless of public reporting.

— INDICATOR 2.2

Furthermore, the victim protection program for citizens, including women experiencing domestic violence, does not specifically target journalists or media workers. Obtaining a protection order for victims of threats or violence can be challenging due to bottlenecks in the process. Additionally, the Law on the Protection of Witnesses and Collaborators of Justice, implemented in 2009, does not extend to journalists reporting on corruption or organized crime unless they fall within the narrow categories of witnesses or collaborators of justice.

These limitations highlight the need for specialized safety mechanisms tailored to the unique risks faced by journalists reporting on corruption or organized crime. The existing legal framework falls short of providing comprehensive protection for journalists in these circumstances, and there is a lack of specific programs or initiatives to address their safety concerns effectively.

Based on the findings of this report, it is evident that state authorities in Albania have not established systematic and well-integrated procedures for the risk assessment of journalists and media workers. The absence of such procedures indicates a lack of comprehensive measures to evaluate and address the safety concerns faced by individuals in the media industry. This gap in the working practices and culture of state authorities highlights the need to develop and implement specific protocols that prioritize the risk assessment of journalists and media workers.

The existing victim protection and safety mechanisms outlined in the law are not specifically tailored to address the needs of journalists, potentially resulting in inadequate protection and limited options for internal relocation. Efforts have been made to enhance journalists' safety through various civil society initiatives.

Female journalists have access to legal measures and support mechanisms when faced with gender-based threats, harassment and violence

Score for 2021: 3.49 / Score for 2022: 3.49

While Albania has ratified the Istanbul Convention and provides regular reports to the Council of Europe, the effective implementation of the convention is still a work in progress. However, the lack of segregated data specifically for cases involving female journalists who are victims of violence, threats, or sexual harassment creates a situation where responsible authorities may underestimate the magnitude of the issue. The existing support mechanisms primarily focus on assisting victims of gender-based domestic violence, but they are fragmented, inadequately equipped, and not tailored to address the unique challenges faced by female journalists or the threats they encounter in their work. Of particular concern is sexual harassment, as female journalists often hesitate to report such cases, and institutions lack the necessary capacities to address them effectively.

The Istanbul Convention, which was incorporated into Albanian national legislation in 2014, provides a legal framework for addressing gender-based violence and harassment. However, there is a need to align the legislation and policies with the specific provisions of the Convention and ensure effective implementation. Recommendations from the GREVIO assessment report of 2017 highlight areas for improvement, such as expanding the definition of domestic violence, enhancing data collection on violence against women, including violence against women in crime statistics, and addressing barriers that prevent victims from accessing civil remedies.

Despite some progress, gender equality is not fully mainstreamed, and the language used in the legal framework is not gender-sensitive. Available data from 2022 reveals numerous cases of alleged sexual harassment and high levels of domestic violence against women. However, there is no systematic collection of segregated data focusing on women journalists as victims of violence. In terms

of workplace harassment, the Law on Gender Equality in Society recognizes gender-related harassment.

Efforts have been made to address violence against women beyond domestic violence, with protective measures introduced for forced marriage, sexual harassment, and sexual violence. However, there is a need for more comprehensive data collection and analysis to better understand the specific challenges faced by women journalists and to develop targeted support mechanisms.

The effectiveness of the existing protection measures outlined in Albanian legislation has been called into question, as evidenced by the number of women killed by their partners in 2022. While policies recognize the gendered nature of violence against women, ongoing efforts are needed to enhance the protection and support available to women journalists who face gender-based threats, harassment, and violence.

State institutions in Albania offer free legal aid to victims of domestic violence and victims of sexual harassment and human trafficking involved in criminal proceedings. This provision is outlined in Article 11, letters "a" and "b" of Law No. 111/2017, "On Legal Aid Guaranteed by the State." The law's interpretation indicates that beneficiaries of state legal aid encompass individuals with limited income, other vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, juveniles, individuals under social protection schemes, and those who have experienced discrimination as determined by competent authorities.

The Ministry of Justice has established the Directorate of Free Legal Aid to ensure equal access to justice. This entity is responsible for facilitating the provision of state-guaranteed legal aid to all individuals. Additionally, an online manual has been published in Albanian to guide individuals on how to access free legal aid services. Numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also offer free legal aid to needy citizens.

It is important to note that while free legal aid is available for various categories of victims, including those subjected to domestic violence, sexual harassment, or human trafficking, the specific focus on women journalists as beneficiaries of these services is not explicitly mentioned in the information provided. Further efforts may be required to ensure that women journalists have access to the necessary and sufficient legal aid and protection mechanisms tailored to their unique challenges and experiences.

Albania lacks a consolidated system or support service that provides comprehensive information on security measures, legal advice, and other relevant information for victims of gender-based violence. Support services in this area are fragmented, requiring victims to interact with different institutions to access the necessary support, which can potentially lead to re-victimization. For instance, while the

— INDICATOR 2.3

Criminal Procedures Code grants victims the right to request information on the progress of their cases, during the investigation phase by the prosecution, access to information is restricted under the justification of investigative secrecy.

In collaboration with NGOs, local social services offer some support for security measures to victims of gender-based and domestic violence. Local referral mechanisms operate at the municipal level, aiming to provide a unified response to domestic violence. However, these mechanisms primarily focus on supporting victims of domestic violence and may not be fully equipped to address the specific challenges faced by female journalists. Frontline social service staff and local staff may not receive adequate training to provide professional support and advice to female journalists.

The Police implemented an automated application issuance process within their case management system in 2021, allowing for the rapid issuance of protective orders and recording them according to the Human Rights Index. The Ministry of Health and Social Protection also approved a protocol for operating shelters for victims of domestic violence and trafficking during the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2021.

Another mechanism available in Albania is the Commissioner for the Protection against Discrimination, an independent institution mandated by the Parliament. The Commissioner's mission is to provide effective protection against discrimination and address any behavior promoting discrimination. This includes handling complaints, imposing administrative sanctions, filing lawsuits in court to protect victims of discrimination, and administratively investigating ex officio cases of discrimination issues based on public indications. While the Commissioner's responsibilities encompass all citizens in Albania, including female journalists who may face gender-based discrimination, the specific support available to female journalists within this framework is not explicitly mentioned.

It is important to note that despite the existence of these mechanisms, there is a need for further consolidation and improvement to ensure effective and comprehensive support for victims of gender-based violence, including female journalists.

While the legislation in Albania prohibits sexual harassment, there is a lack of effective enforcement by law enforcement agencies. Female journalists, in particular, are often hesitant to approach institutions regarding harassment or threats, especially when it involves sexual harassment in the workplace. Because of their profession, recognizing the weaknesses of the institutional system in the prevention, referral, and treatment of gender-based violence brings a discouraging effect in approaching these institutions when they themselves are victims of this violence. Criticism towards state institutions in general due to the profession makes these

— INDICATOR 2.3

women feel vulnerable in relation to them when they need such services due to the fear of potential re-victimization.

Although female journalists in Albania can seek help from state institutions such as the Commissioner for the Protection against Discrimination and report cases to the police regarding gender-based discrimination and harassment, the likelihood of them doing so is minimal. Recent studies have revealed that women journalists felt pressured by their male superiors, and some of them were aware of a lack of institutional responsiveness in cases where their colleagues had experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. However, female journalists generally do not come forward or show support for their peers in cases of sexual harassment or when incidents are reported.

The practice of regular public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media has been established

Score for 2021: 2.73 / Score for 2022: 2.73

The practice of regular public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media in Albania has not been fully established. While there have been instances where public authorities have condemned such threats and attacks as a violation of freedom of expression, the frequency and consistency of these condemnations remain limited. There is a need for a more systematic and regular approach to denounce such acts publicly, emphasizing their significance and the importance of protecting journalists and media workers.

The practice of public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media actors in Albania is inconsistent and often driven by political considerations or interests. While some public authorities have condemned such attacks as a violation of freedom of expression, the response lacks concrete action to address the underlying issues. Although the police have shown a relatively swift response to public attacks, follow-up investigations are limited, non-comprehensive, and mostly delayed. There is a prevailing lack of accountability and impunity for those responsible for violence against journalists. The absence of systematic data collection on attacks further hampers efforts to monitor and effectively address these issues. Establishing a more consistent and institutionalized practice of public condemnation, coupled with robust investigative procedures and measures to hold perpetrators accountable, is essential to safeguarding press freedom and ensuring the safety of journalists in Albania.

The public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists in Albania is influenced by political dynamics, with different reactions from influential politicians and political parties. The Democratic Party, as the main opposition party, tends to be more vocal in condemning such incidents and holds the government and the ruling Socialist Party responsible for the decline in media freedom. In contrast, high-level politicians affiliated with the Socialist Party and public officials linked to the party often downplay the severity of these cases. This

— INDICATOR 2.4

partisan approach to public condemnation highlights the politicization of media freedom and the challenges in achieving a unified and consistent stance on protecting journalists. It is crucial for political leaders across the spectrum to prioritize the safety and well-being of journalists, independent of political affiliation, and to condemn threats and attacks without reservation in order to foster a climate of press freedom and ensure the protection of journalists' rights.

The challenges faced by journalists in Albania go beyond direct pressure from government and public officials. They also stem from the intricate and interconnected relationships between media owners, politicians, and powerful interest groups. Indirect pressure on journalists is exerted through strategies that aim to undermine the credibility and relevance of professional journalism, such as smear campaigns and anti-media discourse. The government's actions contribute to this environment by devaluing the role of the media. Furthermore, journalists face additional threats in the form of defamation lawsuits and legal threats, particularly when engaging in investigative reporting. Digital safety is another concern, as journalists are vulnerable to data breaches and other cybersecurity risks. These multifaceted challenges demonstrate the need for comprehensive measures to protect journalists' independence, safety, and the integrity of their work. Efforts should focus on fostering a climate that values and upholds the crucial role of journalism in a democratic society.

Police authorities are sensitive to journalists' protection issue

Score for 2021: 3.10 / Score for 2022: 2.94

In 2022, efforts were made to enhance training and awareness among police officers regarding their interaction with journalists and adherence to international human rights standards. However, the adoption of official protocols in a systematic manner remains limited. While there has been a general trend of condemning attacks on journalists' safety by state officials and improved responsiveness from the police, limitations in conducting administrative and criminal investigations into incidents persist. A slight deterioration is noted in the number of incidents reported in 2022 of illegal accompanying of journalists or unwarranted detention, equipment confiscation, and mistreatment during protests and other events.

In 2022, there were some efforts made to enhance the training and awareness of police officers on how to interact with journalists and media professionals, as well as on international human rights standards and the crucial role of journalists in a democratic society. However, the adoption of official protocols in a systematic and institutionalized manner remains limited. Trainings supported by international donors were conducted for police officers and judges, covering various topics including the safety of journalists, online safety, hate speech, and harassment. While these trainings were beneficial, there is still a need for further capacity building and awareness-raising initiatives to strengthen the understanding and implementation of best practices in dealing with journalists. Continuing to invest in such training programs and fostering a culture of respect for media freedom aims to create an environment where journalists can operate freely and safely.

In 2022, there has been a general trend of condemning attacks on the safety of journalists by state officials, recognizing them as a violation of freedom of expression. The police have shown improved responsiveness in addressing these incidents publicly. However, there remains a limitation in terms of conducting administrative investigations by the Service of Internal Affairs and Complaints and criminal investigations by the Prosecutor's Office. Independent institutions, including

— INDICATOR 2.5

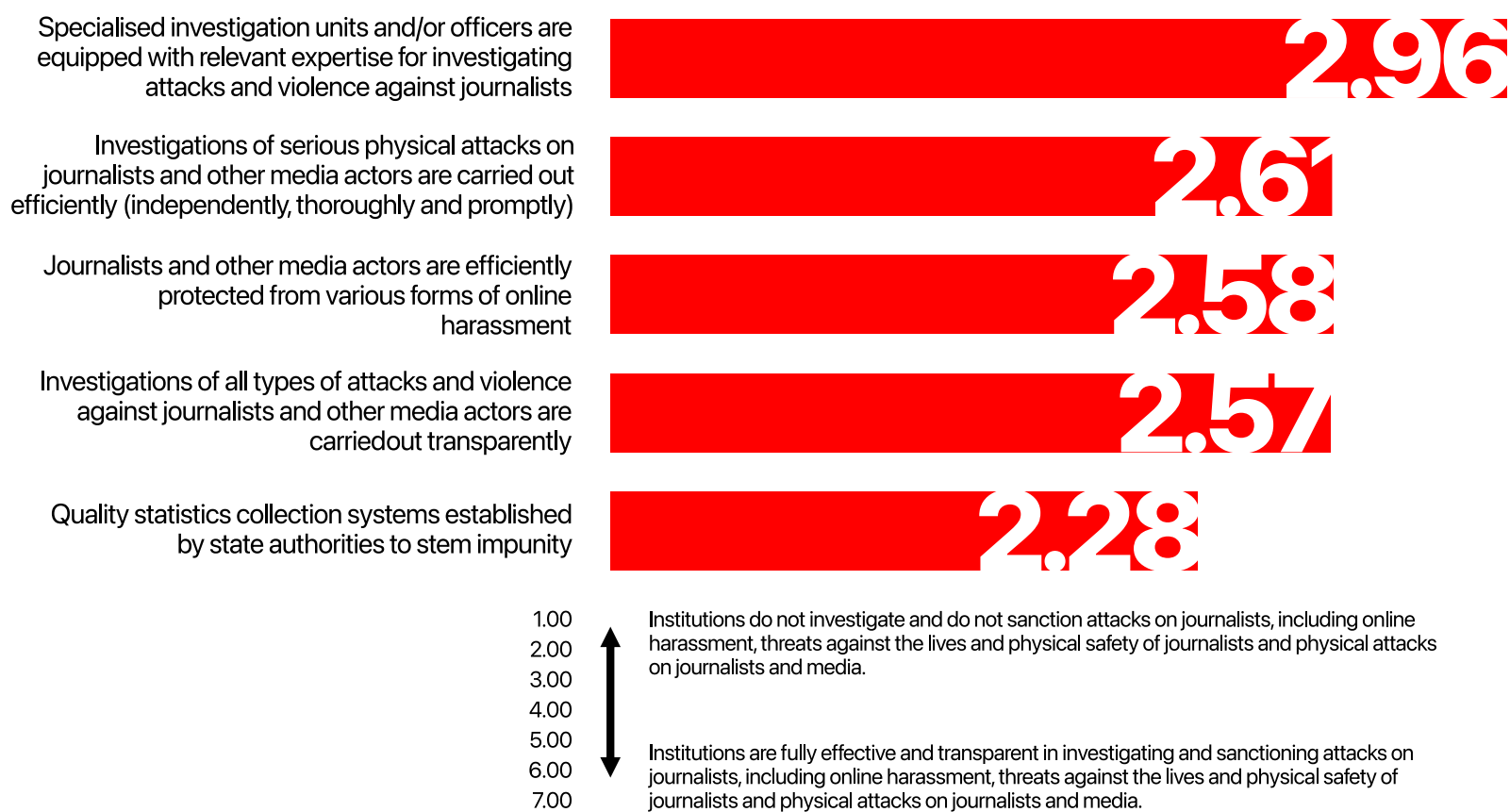
the Ombudsman, the Commissioner for the Protection against Discrimination, and the Information and Data Protection Commissioner, have collaborated with journalists' organizations to address journalists' safety concerns. Notably, the General Prosecution and Police have also engaged in cooperation with journalists' organizations on issues related to journalists' safety.

Based on the data collected by the Safe Journalists Network, there were incidents in 2022 that raised concerns about the attention given to journalists' safety by some police officers in Albania. For instance, journalist Sami Curri was escorted to the Bulqiza Police Station after covering a protest against rising oil and food prices. Photographer Gent Shkullaku had his camera confiscated during clashes between police and football fans. Journalists covering protests against cost increases in multiple cities faced targeting by police, with at least two journalists physically assaulted in Tirana and Durrës. Additionally, journalist Ledio Guni was forcibly removed by police while documenting the demolition of citizens' houses in Tirana's "5 Maji" Neighborhood. Sonila Musai was also subjected to violence as she was dragged by the police while reporting live on residents' resistance against the demolition of their apartments. These incidents indicate cases of unwarranted detention and mistreatment of journalists by the police. It is important to further investigate and address such incidents to ensure the protection and safety of journalists in Albania.



Due Process

2.60



Specialised investigation units and/or officers are equipped with relevant expertise for investigating attacks and violence against journalists

Score for 2021: 2.96 / Score for 2022: 2.96

Despite a general awareness of the importance of protecting journalists, law enforcement agencies in Albania still face challenges regarding their knowledge, capacity, and resources to effectively investigate attacks and violence targeting journalists. The current Criminal Code does not provide clear provisions that offer special protection to journalists in cases where they are subjected to violence or attacks due to their professional duties. Additionally, the absence of specific protocols for investigating such incidents hinders the efficient detection and prosecution of those responsible for aggression and violence against journalists.

There is a lack of specialized units within the justice system that are dedicated to investigating and prosecuting threats and acts of violence against journalists. While there have been training initiatives to improve knowledge and awareness among law enforcement agencies, they still lack the necessary resources to effectively investigate attacks and violence targeting journalists. Although some state institutions have received training on dealing with journalists and media professionals, the adoption of official protocols remains limited. While police and prosecutors have a basic understanding of the criminal offenses related to violence and attacks against journalists, there is a need for further development and implementation of comprehensive protocols to address these issues effectively. Enhancing the resources and capabilities of law enforcement agencies in investigating and prosecuting such cases and establishing positive case law in terms of an effective, objective and comprehensive investigation is crucial to ensure the safety and protection of journalists in Albania.

— INDICATOR 3.1

Police and prosecutors in Albania possess a general understanding of the criminal offenses applicable to violence and attacks against journalists, as these offenses are the same as those for any other citizens. However, unlike the provisions in our Criminal Code that offer special protection to certain officials and workers engaged in public services, there is no judicial practice clarifying whether journalists are considered part of this category. Consequently, despite being a crucial profession in the private sphere, journalists do not benefit in practice from explicit provisions or specific criminal offenses related to attacks against them based on their professional duty. Furthermore, there is a lack of established and institutionalized guidelines to ensure the efficient detection and prosecution of aggression and violence specifically targeting journalists. These cases are typically investigated using the usual standard investigation practices, and unfortunately, no significant cases of actual attacks on journalists have been successfully resolved in the past three years. It is essential to address these gaps in legal protection and establish effective measures to ensure the safety and security of journalists in Albania.

While there is a degree of cooperation between relevant institutions in Albania regarding investigations, there is a notable absence of a specific protocol dedicated to journalists. This means there are no established guidelines or standardized procedures specifically tailored to address the unique challenges and risks journalists face during their work. As a result, investigations and responses to threats and attacks against journalists may lack a systematic and coordinated approach.

Investigations of serious physical attacks on journalists and other media actors are carried out efficiently (independently, thoroughly, and promptly)

Score for 2021: 2.61 / Score for 2022: 2.61

Physical attacks against journalists in recent years have remained unresolved, with investigations often being slow, inefficient, or completely dismissed. The lack of progress in these investigations raises concerns about the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts in addressing attacks on journalists. Additionally, the lack of regular communication institutional practices for such cases and the principle of investigation secrecy that is decentralized depending on individual approaches of prosecutors charged with investigation further contributes to limited transparency, as these processes are often lengthy and provide limited public information.

As in previous years, the report highlights a concerning trend of unresolved cases involving actual attacks on journalists within the past three years, indicating a lack of proper investigation into physical attacks against journalists. It is important to note that obtaining information related to ongoing investigations can be challenging due to the principle of secrecy guiding these proceedings, limiting access to the investigation file to prosecutors and police. The lack of regular communication with the public from the police and prosecution regarding the progress and completion of these investigations limits the information that has particular interest for the public regarding the work of these institutions in clarifying the motives of the event and identifying those responsible. Consequently, this closed approach minimizes institutional accountability and the importance that journalists' physical and moral integrity should have for them when such events threaten it. Furthermore, the Criminal Code lacks clear provisions that would ensure special protection for journalists when they are subjected to violence or attacks while performing their professional

— INDICATOR 3.2

duties. This absence of specific legal provisions has resulted in a lack of emphasis on investigating the motive behind crimes committed against journalists and establishing a clear link between these crimes and the journalists' professional responsibilities. Addressing these issues is crucial to strengthening the investigation of attacks on journalists and providing them with the necessary protection they deserve.

The report highlights the inadequate and delayed investigation of prominent cases of physical attacks against journalists over the past five years. The absence of specific provisions in the Criminal Code to protect journalists from violence or attacks linked to their professional duties has resulted in a lack of prioritization by prosecutors. The failure to thoroughly investigate the motives behind these crimes perpetuates institutional silence, denying the truth to the public and preventing to put before the criminal charge or full punishment of the perpetrators.

Furthermore, the principle of investigation secrecy poses challenges in accessing information on ongoing investigations. According to the Code of Criminal Procedure, information related to the criminal case can only be obtained from the prosecutor of the case, and such decentralization of information creates different approaches to getting official information from the prosecution as an institution for these cases. The data collected for this report reveals that investigations into attacks on journalists are often not given the highest priority, leading to delays in procedural deadlines. Limited police resources and capacities further contribute to the hindered progress in investigating these cases. As a result, addressing attacks on journalists is not consistently prioritized, potentially compromising the pursuit of justice and accountability.

Multiple reports indicate that the investigation of attacks on journalists is hindered by stalled procedural deadlines from prosecution and a lack of resources and capacities within the police and prosecution as well. This situation raises concerns about the prioritization of these cases, as the limited resources allocated to the investigation of attacks on journalists suggest that it is not always seen as a high priority. The resulting delays and resource constraints undermine the effectiveness of investigations and hinder the pursuit of justice for the victims of these attacks.

Journalists and other media actors are efficiently protected from various forms of online harassment

Score for 2021: 2.58 / Score for 2022: 2.58

Albania's legislation lacks a comprehensive definition of harassment, including online harassment, as it currently only provides protection against sexual harassment. State authorities have limited knowledge, resources, competencies, and established procedures to effectively address and protect journalists, especially female journalists, from online harassment. This gap in protection against online harassment, accompanied by the culture of non-reaction or non-reporting of these cases, poses significant concerns for the well-being and safety of journalists in Albania.

The legal framework in Albania addresses protection from harassment through various laws, each with its own specific definition. Article 108/a of the Criminal Code focuses on sexual harassment, encompassing any behavior that violates a person's dignity and creates a threatening or offensive environment. This provision also includes online sexual harassment. Additionally, Article 32/a of the Labor Code provides a comprehensive definition of harassment in the context of employment, emphasizing the employer's responsibility to prevent sexual and moral harassment and maintain favorable working conditions. Furthermore, the Law on Protection against Discrimination, under Article 3, point 5, safeguards individuals from harassment based on discriminatory grounds, aiming to protect their dignity and ensure a respectful environment. These laws collectively address different aspects of harassment, emphasizing the need for employers, individuals, and society as a whole to take proactive measures to prevent and address such behaviors.

The report highlights that relevant institutions have taken no specific measures to address and protect journalists from online harassment. In 2022, women journalists expressed concerns about instances of sexual harassment, online violence, and the spread of gender-based disinformation. However, there is a lack of reporting of these cases to authorities, and women journalists tend to be hesitant to come forward and seek support. Re-victimization from institutions and lack of trust are among the factors that feed the culture

— INDICATOR 3.3

of hesitation. Similar to previous reporting periods, women journalists continue to face gender-based pressures, including sexual harassment, online violence, and smear campaigns. These issues emphasize the need for effective mechanisms and support systems to address and combat these forms of harassment and violence against women journalists.

Investigations of all types of attacks and violence against journalists and other media actors are carried out transparently

Score for 2021: 2.57 / Score for 2022: 2.57

There is generally limited transparency and information available to the public and the victims or their legal representatives regarding the progress of cases and the evidence collected during investigations. This is primarily due to the overapplication of rules on the secrecy of investigations by the Prosecution Office, without clear and well-defined criteria. As a result, there is minimal indication that investigations are conducted in cases of attacks against journalists, as many of these cases remain unresolved or suffer from prolonged investigations, significantly diminishing their effectiveness.

According to Article 58 of the Criminal Procedure Code, victims, including journalists, have the right to request information about the stage of the proceedings and to be familiar with the acts and evidence while respecting the principle of investigation secrecy. However, in practice, journalists are often deprived of their right to access acts and evidence during the investigation, as they are considered investigation secrets. This lack of transparency not only limits their ability to contribute to the investigation but also hinders their access to crucial information that could support the prosecution. Limited information is available regarding investigations into attacks against journalists, and authorities have provided no updates on significant cases of physical attacks. While justice institutions should have rules on public relations and communication, these are not consistently in place. The High Judicial Council, the body responsible for establishing the standards of the court's relations with the public and the media, only in June 2023, submitted for consultation the draft guideline that sets these standards. Meanwhile, the High Council of Prosecution does not appear to have approved such standards for the communication of the prosecution with the public and the media. Nevertheless, in 2019, the General Prosecutor's Office issued an Instruction on Public Relations

— INDICATOR 3.4

in Prosecutor Offices, which addresses the role of the judicial police in sharing or refusing to disclose information acquired during an investigation. The overall relationship between justice institutions and the media is regulated by general provisions within the specific laws of each justice institution.

The press sections of courts and prosecution offices do not provide frequent and truthful information on the status of the proceedings due to the lack of guidelines and other internal shortcomings (such as the backlog of cases, the fact that the system is under the vetting that created a lot of vacancies and bottlenecks, etc). As mentioned earlier, victims have the right to access information pertaining to their case as long as it does not compromise the secrecy of the investigation. In addition, the General Prosecutor issued General Instruction No. 05 on 26th October 2018, which focuses on assisting victims and witnesses of criminal offenses. This instruction provides guidelines on how prosecutors and judicial police should treat victims and outlines their rights, including the provision of physical protection when necessary. The Istanbul Convention is referenced as one of the legal foundations for issuing this decision. However, the extent to which this instruction is effectively implemented is not readily ascertainable.

Quality statistics collection systems established by state authorities to stem impunity

Score for 2021: 2.28 / Score for 2022: 2.28

A reliable and unified system for collecting and analyzing statistics and data on threats and attacks against journalists is lacking in Albania. None of the relevant state and judicial authorities have established a comprehensive and standardized data collection system that is disaggregated based on various criteria. This means there is a lack of reliable and consistent information regarding these incidents. Additionally, state institutions face limitations in terms of resources and capacities, which further hinders their ability to collect and publish such data. As a result, there is a significant gap in understanding the extent and nature of threats and attacks against journalists in the country.

In Albania, there is a lack of official recording, disaggregation and publication of data specifically related to attacks on journalists and impunity. State institutions generally lack the necessary resources and capacities to collect and publish such data. The annual report of the General Prosecutor on the state of criminality in the country indicates a deficiency in segregated data and an inadequate statistical mechanism for collecting and analyzing data on criminal offenses involving journalists and media workers as victims. Monitoring and reporting on threats are primarily carried out by the Council of Europe, Rapid Media Freedom Response, and the Safe Journalists Network. State authorities do respond to alerts from the Council of Europe. The absence of a unified case management system, including for criminal cases, makes it challenging to track their progress, particularly when they reach the court stage. This lack of unified data accessibility hinders public access to comprehensive information on the entire prosecution and trial process, including the status and phase of a case, until its final court ruling.

IV

Actual Safety

2.78



1.00
2.00
3.00
4.00
5.00
6.00
7.00



There are severe cases of threats and actual attacks against journalists and media organisations, including killings.

There have been no cases of actual attacks, no threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists, nor there have been non-physical threats and harassment against the journalists and media.

Non-physical threats and harassments

Score for 2021: 3.60 / Score for 2022: 3.37

Compared to 2021, there was a slight increase in the number of significant cases of non-physical threats and harassment reported in 2022. While in 2021, only two major cases were reported, in 2022, the Safe Journalists Network recorded a total of 6 incidents.

In 2022, the Safe Journalists Network recorded six incidents of non-physical threats and harassment against journalists in Albania. These incidents included a police officer, Ms. Kostani, publicly insulting journalists on social media, resulting in her suspension and an investigation by the Albanian Police Head, Mr. Gledis Nano. Prime Minister Edi Rama banned journalist Klevin Muka from attending future press conferences for three months and ordered him to be "re-educated" after asking a conflict-of-interest question to Minister Olta Xhaçka during a press conference. Journalist Isa Myzyraj faced pressure and intimidation for his reporting on the vetting process of Tirana Prosecution Office's Head, Elizabeta Imeraj.

In another incident, a public notary generated a family certificate and payment receipt on the e-Albania portal for journalist Edmond Hoxhaj and his wife without their knowledge or consent. During the "File 184" court hearing, a judge acted as editor-in-chief and censored a BIRN reporter, influencing how the case should be reported. Furthermore, during an impromptu press conference, Prime Minister Edi Rama told journalist Ambrozia Meta of Syri.net TV that she needed "re-education" and refused to take any questions from her for 60 days, citing what he considered to be "unprofessional behavior."

Threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists

Score for 2021: 4.26 / Score for 2022: 4.30

Threats against journalists' lives and physical safety exist both implicitly and explicitly. Only one case was recorded in 2022 compared to a few cases in 2021 by the Safe Journalists Network and other international platforms for media freedom. However, such cases are not systemic.

While reporting outside the perimeter of the Ovital Company in the village of Sukth, Durres, where the chickens were disposed of near inhabited areas, individuals claiming to be representatives of the company broke the camera of the cameraman and threatened the life of Fix Fare investigative show journalist.

Actual attacks

Score for 2021: 3.43 / Score for 2022: 3.37

Actual attacks against journalists in Albania were recorded in 2022 (9 cases) and 2021 (9 cases). However, most cases in 2022 were related to ungrounded detention by Police and other obstructions of journalists and media workers while reporting on live protests. Whereas in 2021, the actual attacks are related more to private individuals..

- In 2022, journalists in Albania faced various forms of violence and harassment, including physical attacks and interference with their work. These incidents highlight the challenges and risks journalists encounter while performing their duties. Some notable cases include Simon Shkreli, a TV Rozafa and ABC News journalist, being told to stop filming by police officers while with his children in Shkodra. During a protest outside the Democratic Party headquarters in Tirana, journalists and media teams were targeted by a police water van and sprayed with tear gas. Journalist Sami Curri was escorted to the Bulqiza Police Station following a protest against increasing oil and food prices. Unidentified individuals in Tirana physically assaulted Adriatik Doçi and a 62-year-old man was arrested for physically attacking a journalist in Korça. In clashes between police and football fans, photographer Gent Shkullaku had his camera confiscated. Journalists covering protests against rising costs in Albanian cities also faced targeting and physical assault by police officers. Additionally, journalist Ledio Guni was forcibly removed by police while documenting the demolition of citizens' houses in the "5 Maji" neighborhood, and Sonila Musai was violently dragged by the police while reporting on residents' resistance against the demolition of their apartments in Tirana. These incidents emphasize the need for enhanced protection and safety measures for journalists in Albania.

Threats and attacks on media outlets and journalists' associations

Score for 2021: 3.84 / Score for 2022: 3.84

Due to ongoing challenges, the environment for good quality, independent, watchdog journalism in the public interest remains significantly threatened in Albania. These challenges stem from a range of structural issues, including symbiotic relationships among politics, business, and media, ownership concentration, lack of transparency in funding sources, media being used for blackmail, conflict of interests, limited media plurality, limited access to information, decreased quality of media content, an increase in information disorders, and poor working conditions and labor rights.

In January 2022, several Albanian online media outlets, including dosja.al, syri.net, faktor.al, SportExpress, Lapsi.al, among others, have reported cyberattacks allegedly ordered by Mayor Erion Veliaj after publishing an audio recording of Veliaj using threats and foul language to get his man elected head of the country's football governing body, claiming these cyberattacks are related to their ongoing criticism of the government and Mayor Veliaj, who has accepted that the audio recording is authentic but made no declaration regarding the cyberattacks, while Safe Journalists Networked has called for an investigation.

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