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Albania – Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety Index 2023

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About the Project

BACKGROUND OF INDICATORS

Supported by the European Commission¹, journalists' associations from the Western Balkan countries have established the Safejournalists.net platform to jointly monitor media legislation and practice in their countries and engage in advancing the legal and institutional environment in which journalists and other media professionals work. Based on a carefully designed methodology², Safejournalists.net partners conduct annual advocacy research, which has provided journalists' associations with evidence-based, reliable, and relevant data on the main problems and obstacles encountered in the implementation of the EU standards in the field of media and journalists' freedom and safety in the Western Balkans. The findings from the advocacy research enhance partners' activities by providing them with fresh evidence and examples that refine and strengthen their advocacy positions.

The first qualitative research tool – *Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety* – was first developed in 2016 and was gradually fine-tuned over the years. It is composed of three groups of indicators: (A) Legal Protection, (B) Journalists' Position in the Newsroom, and (C) Journalists' Safety. Based on this monitoring tool, a total of seven assessments were published, the last one in 2022.

Another quantitative research tool – *Journalists' Safety Index* – was developed in 2020 and tested in 2021. It is designed to 'measure' the changes in the environment that have direct or indirect impact

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- 1 In December 2022, the European Commission approved a new three-year cycle of the Safejournalists.net Project, which is a continuation of the previous two phases: the project Western Balkan's Regional Platform for Advocating Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety (01.2016 – 12.2018) and Safejournalist.net (02.2020–03.2023). The main goal of the project is to empower and strengthen the role of the national journalists' associations, members of the Safejournalists.net Platform, to become effective and accountable independent actors in advocating and creating relevant media policies in their countries: Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (IJAS), Association of BH Journalists (BHJ), Croatian Journalists' Association (CJA), Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK), Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) and the Trade Union of Media of Montenegro (TUMM). The project is funded under the EU Civil Society Facility and Media Programme in favour of the Western Balkans and Turkey for 2021-2023 (IPA III).
 - 2 The advocacy research is designed and coordinated by Snezana Trpevska and Igor Micevski, research fellows of the Research Institute on Social Development RESIS, from North Macedonia (www.resis.mk).

on how safe journalists and other media actors feel when practicing their profession. It is composed of four groups of indicators: (1) Legal and Organisational Environment, (2) Due Prevention, (3) Due Process, and (4) Actual Safety. Based on this tool, a total of three research cycles were implemented: 2020 (pilot year), 2021 and 2022.

Starting from 2023, the [Safejournalists.net](https://www.safejournalists.net) will combine the two (qualitative and quantitative) research tools into one single advocacy research project – *Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety Index*. The platform monitors the situation in seven countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo,³ and Serbia.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

The entire research process is divided into two phases: in the *first phase*, data is collected for all qualitative indicators – for both media freedoms and journalists' safety. In the *second phase*, the qualitative indicators for the safety of journalists are converted into quantitative, followed by the scoring process and calculation of Journalists' Safety Index.

A range of various research methods were applied to collect and analyze the data related to each specific qualitative indicator. These research methods included:

- Review of studies, analyses, research reports, policy papers, strategies and other documents;
- Qualitative analysis of legal documents;
- Retrieval and analysis of information published on the websites of public institutions and other organizations and bodies;
- Retrieval and analysis of press releases, announcements and other information produced by professional organisations;
- Secondary data collected by journalists' associations;
- In-depth interviews with experts, journalists, policy makers, etc.;
- Focus groups with journalists; and,
- Surveys with journalists (in some of the countries).

At country level, the advocacy research is conducted by national researchers who collect the data and draft the narrative reports, which are then reviewed by local media and legal experts and by lead researcher. In Albania, Blerjana Bino is

³ This name is without prejudice to the status and in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and the opinion of the Tribunal on the Declaration and Independence of Kosovo.

the national researcher and Kristina Voko serves as media expert and Erida Skëndaj as legal expert to review the report.

QUALITATIVE INDICATORS ON THE LEVEL OF MEDIA FREEDOM AND JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

The following table lists all qualitative indicators for the level of media freedom and safety of journalists, divided in three areas. These indicators are presented in a descriptive or narrative form. Indicators used in the conceptual framework for the Journalist Safety Index are marked in grey in this table.

Table 1. An overview of all qualitative indicators (Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety)

A. Legal Safeguards and Their Implementation	B. Journalists' Position in the Newsrooms	C. Journalists' Safety
A.1 Basic guarantees for media and journalists' freedom and their application in practice	B.1 The job positions of journalists are stable and protected at the workplace	C.1 Journalists and media actors have access to immediate and effective protective measures
A.2 Independence and efficiency of the regulatory authority	B.2 Editorial independence in the private media	C.2 Journalists and other media actors have access to special protection or safety mechanisms
A.3 Independence and autonomy of the public service media	B.3 Editorial independence in the public service media	C.3 Female journalists have access to legal measures and support mechanisms
A.4 Financial support to quality journalism and media content of public interest	B.4 Editorial independence in the not-for-profit media sector	C.4 The practice of regular public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media
A.5 State advertising in the private media sector	B.5 Freedom of journalists in the news production process	C.5 Police authorities are sensitive to journalists' protection issue
A.6 Legal provisions related to defamation and their application do not create a chilling effect on journalists and the media	B.6 Economic position of women journalists	C.6 Specialised units/officers are equipped with expertise for investigating attacks and violence against journalists
A.7 Other laws are enforced objectively and allow journalists and other media actors to work freely and safely		C.7 Investigations of serious physical attacks on journalists and other media actors are carried out efficiently
A.8 The confidentiality of journalists' sources is guaranteed in the legislation and respected by the authorities		C.8 Journalists and other media actors are efficiently protected from various forms of online harassment
A.9 Journalists are free to pursuit their profession and to establish, join and participate in their associations		C.9 Investigations of all types of attacks and violence against journalists and other media actors are carried out transparently
A.10 Right to access official documents and information		C.10 Quality statistics collection systems established by state authorities to stem impunity
		C.11 Non-physical threats and harassments
		C.12 Threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists
		C.13 Actual attacks
		C.14 Threats and attacks on media outlets and journalists' associations

JOURNALISTS' SAFETY INDEX

Taking into consideration the standards and recommendations established by the Council of Europe and other international

organisations, the concept of “journalists’ safety”⁴ is operationalized by considering the following four dimensions:

- I. **Legal and Organisational Environment** – the existence and implementation of legal safeguards relevant for the safety of journalists.
- II. **Due Prevention** – the existence and implementation of a set of preventative measures that have direct effects on journalists’ protection and safety.
- III. **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.
- IV. **Actual Safety** – incidents and instances of various forms of threats and acts of violence against journalists and media.

The table below outlines the four dimensions and indicators that form the theoretical model of the “journalists’ safety” concept. During the first phase of the research, data for all these indicators were gathered. In the second phase, based on this collected evidence, nine Advisory Panel members from each country evaluated the situation and assigned scores for each of the 19 indicators.

Table 2. An overview of indicators related to the Journalists’ Safety Index

I. Legal and Organisational Environment	II. Due Prevention	III. Due Process	IV. Actual Safety
1.1 Legal provisions related to defamation and their application do not create a chilling effect on journalists and the media	2.1 Journalists and media actors have access to immediate and effective protective measures	3.1 Specialised units/officers are equipped with expertise for investigating attacks and violence against journalists	4.1 Non-physical threats and harassments
1.2 The confidentiality of journalists’ sources is guaranteed in the legislation and respected by the authorities	2.2 Journalists and other media actors have access to special protection or safety mechanisms	3.2 Investigations of serious physical attacks on journalists and other media actors are carried out efficiently	4.2 Threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists
1.3 Other laws are enforced objectively and allow journalists and other media actors to work freely and safely	2.3 Female journalists have access to legal measures and support mechanisms	3.3 Journalists and other media actors are efficiently protected from various forms of online harassment	4.3 Actual attacks
1.4 Journalists are free to pursue their profession and to establish, join and participate in their associations	2.4 The practice of regular public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media	3.4 Investigations of all types of attacks and violence against journalists and other media actors are carried out transparently	4.4 Threats and attacks on media outlets and journalists’ associations
1.5 The job positions of journalists are stable and protected at the workplace	2.5 Police authorities are sensitive to journalists’ protection issue	3.5 Quality statistics collection systems established by state authorities to stem impunity	

Note: When the male form is used in this report, it always refers simultaneously to female, male and diverse individuals. Multiple designations are omitted for the sake of better readability.

⁴ Researchers from the RESIS Institute (www.resis.mk), Snežana Trpevska, Igor Micevski and Ljubinka Popovska Toševa developed the [conceptual and methodological framework](#) for the Index and the model for its aggregation, weighting and calculation.

— LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- ALL – Albanian Lek
- AMA – Audiovisual Media Authority
- AKEP – Electronic and Postal Communications Authority
- ATSH – Albanian Telegraphic Agency
- BIRN – The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
- CEC – Central Election Commission
- DDoS – Distributed Denial of Service
- EC – European Commission
- ECHR – European Court of Human Rights
- EU – European Union
- FOI – Freedom of Information
- GoA – Government of Albania
- IGC – Intergovernmental Conference EU-Albania
- IPTV – Internet Protocol Television
- HJC – High Judicial Council
- HPC – High Prosecutorial Council
- MIA – Media and Information Agency
- MPRO – Media and Public Relations Officers
- ODIHR – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
- OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
- PSB – Public Service Broadcaster
- RTSH – Albanian Radio Television
- SCiDEV – Science & Innovation for Development
- SPAK – Special Prosecution Against Organized Crime and Corruption
- WB – Western Balkans

Introduction

Albania is a parliamentary republic with a unicameral assembly and a constitutional framework designed to uphold democratic governance. However, it continues to face substantial challenges in fulfilling these principles. The country operates under a proportional electoral system and holds generally competitive elections, though these are often marred by electoral violations, such as vote-buying and manipulation. Albania's population is diverse, including recognized national minorities like Greeks, Macedonians, Vlachs/Aromanians, Roma, Egyptians, Montenegrins, Bulgarians, Bosnians, and Serbians.⁵ The political culture in Albania is characterized by deep polarization, the prevalence of clientelism, widespread corruption, and the influence of powerful political figures, which often undermine democratic processes. Albania is classified as a transitional or hybrid regime⁶ and is considered Partly Free⁷ in terms of political rights and civil liberties.

In 2023, Albania's political scene was marked by significant polarization, particularly within the opposition Democratic Party, which struggled with internal fragmentation, weakening its ability to hold the government accountable. This instability contributed to dysfunction in parliament, allowing the ruling Socialist Party, led by Prime Minister Edi Rama, to solidify his dominance through a decisive victory in the local elections of May 2023.⁸ These elections were marred by allegations of electoral misconduct, including vote-buying and misuse of public resources,⁹ which raised concerns about democratic integrity. The political environment also saw a deterioration in civil society space¹⁰ and media freedom, with journalists facing increased pressure and intimidation. The EU progress report for 2023 acknowledged Albania's

5 Law No. 96/2017 on the [Protection of National Minorities in the Republic of Albania](#), accessed on May 10, 2024.

6 Freedom House. "[Albania: Nations in Transit 2024](#)," accessed on June 5, 2024.

7 Freedom House. "[Albania: Freedom in the World 2024](#)," accessed on June 5, 2024.

8 Central Election Commission of Albania. "[2023 Election Results](#)," accessed on June 5, 2024.

9 OSCE/ODIHR. "[Republic of Albania Local Elections, 14 May 2023: Final Report](#)," accessed May 12, 2024.

10 More about the shrinking of civic space at the [commemoration of 33 years of democratic journey](#) and [second national conference on civil space](#).

advancements in aligning with EU standards, particularly in the rule of law and public administration, but emphasized the need for further efforts to combat organized crime and corruption.¹¹ The European Council recognized Albania's reform progress, anticipating the opening of negotiations on fundamentals,¹² yet the challenging political climate continues to impact journalistic freedom and independence, as media outlets often align with political interests to avoid repercussions.

In 2023, Albania's economy grew by 3.3%, driven by increased private consumption, exports, and investment, despite challenges including rising energy and food prices.¹³ The country focused on structural reforms to enhance its productivity and competitiveness, with particular emphasis on tourism, agriculture, and digitization. However, these economic developments have not translated into improved conditions for journalists. The media landscape remains dominated by a few family-owned conglomerates with significant political and economic influence, which stifles media pluralism and independence.¹⁴ Coupled with economic pressures, this high concentration of media ownership forces many journalists into precarious working conditions, where they face intimidation and are often compelled to align with the interests of the media owners and political elites.¹⁵ As a result, the economic environment indirectly fosters a challenging atmosphere for press freedom, where journalists struggle to report independently and objectively.

In Albania, there are currently four national TV broadcasters, one public and three commercial broadcasters. The public service media includes 16 regional and thematic TV channels. There are also 37 local television stations and 21 cable/IPTV/OTT channels.¹⁶ Despite the presence of about 130 online media outlets¹⁷, only a handful have sustainable business models with transparent funding.¹⁸ The print media sector has experienced a decline, with only eight daily newspapers remaining, alongside a weekly business magazine and several monthly publications.¹⁹ There are currently 3 commercial national radio stations and 52 regional commercial ones broadcasting in Albania. The public broadcaster has 11 radio stations.²⁰ There were 922 journalists in Albania in 2023, with an average salary of 72,898 ALL.²¹ The media environment is heavily influenced by political and economic interests, which often results in biased reporting and curbed editorial independence. Albania was ranked 99th out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders' World

11 European Commission. "[Albania 2023 Report](#)," accessed April 5, 2024.

12 Council of the European Union. 2023. "[Council Approves Enlargement Conclusions](#)," accessed on May 31, 2024.

13 World Bank. 2024. "[Albania: Overview](#)," accessed June 18, 2024.

14 Media Ownership Monitor Albania. 2023. "[Albania: Media Ownership Overview](#)," accessed on July 13, 2024.

15 Reports by Safe Journalists Network on Albania [2020](#), [2021](#), [2022](#)

16 Media Ownership Monitor Albania. 2023. "[Albania: Media Ownership Overview](#)," accessed July 13, 2024.

17 The 2024 study by the Albanian Media Council, counts in this figure those online media outlets with at least 1 original piece of news. This study refutes the claim that there are 900 news portals in Albania.

18 Albanian Media Council. 2024. "[Mapping the Albanian Online Media](#)," accessed August 13, 2024.

19 Media Ownership Monitor Albania. 2023. "[Print Media in Albania: Overview](#)," accessed August 13, 2024.

20 Media Ownership Monitor Albania. 2023. "[Radio in Albania: Overview](#)," accessed August 13, 2024.

21 The data is provided by General Directorate of Taxation in January 2024 following a request for information. This average salary is only slightly above the national minimum wage, which was set at 40,000 ALL per month in 2023. Moreover, the media sector in Albania is characterized by a high level of informality, where many media professionals, particularly those working in online outlets, may not be formally registered or declared. Additionally, it is common for journalists to receive part of their salary in cash, which is not reflected in official statistics, further complicating the assessment of their true earnings. These factors contribute to precarious working conditions and limit the financial stability of journalists, undermining their ability to operate independently and effectively in a challenging media landscape that is heavily influenced by political and economic interests.

Press Freedom Index 2024,²² reflecting ongoing challenges confronting the media freedom. The regulatory framework has seen some developments, such as amendments to the Law on Audiovisual Media designed to better align with EU standards.²³ However, issues like politicization of media regulators and insufficient protection for journalists persist. The Government of Albanian (GoA) has been criticized for exerting influence over media content through subsidies and regulatory measures, which further complicates the media landscape and undermines press freedom.

22 Reporters Without Borders. 2024 "[Albania: Freedom of Press Index](#)," accessed July 13, 2024.

23 SCiDEV. 2024. "[Media Freedom in Albania: A Shadow Report](#)," accessed August 13, 2024.



Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety in Albania – Indicators

A. LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

– A.1 BASIC GUARANTEES FOR MEDIA AND JOURNALISTS' FREEDOM AND THEIR APPLICATION IN PRACTICE

The Albanian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, media, and the right to information.²⁴ These freedoms are considered constitutional rights, but may be restricted by law if it serves a public interest or protects the rights of others.²⁵ Such restrictions must be proportionate to the circumstances that necessitate them, must not undermine the core of these freedoms, and should not exceed the limits set by the European Convention on Human Rights.²⁶ However, in practice these rights are not always upheld,²⁷ and Albania faces various implicit and explicit violations of these constitutional guarantees amidst a media landscape marred by the intersection of business and political interests, opaque financial sources, concentrated media ownership and lack of transparency, intimidation tactics, and precarious working conditions.²⁸

Current legislative framework that guarantees the freedom of expression and access to information does not specifically address or stipulates internet access. Nevertheless, in Albania, internet access is supported

24 Articles 22 and 23 of the [Albanian Constitution](#). Article 22 stipulates that freedom of expression is guaranteed. Article 22/1 refers to freedom of the press, television and radio is guaranteed. Article 23/1 stipulates that the right to information is guaranteed.

25 Article 17/1 of the [Albanian Constitution](#).

26 Article 17/2 of the [Albanian Constitution](#).

27 The [EU Annual Report](#) highlighted persistent challenges stemming from the overlap of business and political interests, opaque financial sources, concentrated media ownership, intimidation tactics, and precarious working conditions. These factors collectively impeded media independence, pluralism, and the overall quality of journalism within the country. Echoing similar concerns, the [USA 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#) underscored how various actors, including government entities, political parties, businesses, and criminal organizations, sought to exert undue influence on the media through inappropriate and non-transparent means. The [Freedom House Nations in Transit Report for Albania](#) painted a bleak picture of the country's civil society space and media environment in 2023, characterizing them as deteriorating. Such erosion severely compromised Albania's democratic commitment, as noted in the report. Furthermore, Albania's standing in the [World Press Freedom Index](#) plummeted by three places in 2023, pushing it into the difficult Zone 4 category, out of a total of 5 zones, with 5 representing the most repressive regimes. This downgrade signified a concerning trend towards increased constraints on press freedom and media independence within the country. The Reporters Without Borders (RSF) assessment for 2023 echoed these sentiments, identifying conflicts of interest between business and political entities, deficiencies in the legal framework, and partisan regulatory practices as key threats to freedom of press and media autonomy in Albania.

28 SCiDEV. 2024. "[Media Freedom in Albania: A Shadow Report](#)," accessed on April 13, 2024.

by standards defined by the European Court of Human Rights.²⁹ In 2023, there were no reports that the government restricted or disrupted access to the Internet or censored online content. Also, there were no reports that the Government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authorization.³⁰ The main grounds for possible restrictions on freedom of expression online regulated by Albania's law include defamation and libel, hate speech, copyrighted material, and data protection and obligation of journalists by the court to disclose the source of information in criminal proceedings.

Regarding media legislation, in September 2022, the Government of Albania initiated a public consultation process for a proposed amendment to Law No. 97/2013 "On Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania."³¹ This amendment sought to align the national legislation with the provisions outlined in Directive (EU) 2018/1808.³² This draft legislation underwent approval in April 2023 in the Assembly. Notably, civil society organizations praised the incorporation of a comprehensive definition of sexism within the media content.³³ Additionally, in 2023, the Audiovisual Media Authority enacted a revised Audiovisual Broadcasting Code.³⁴ This updated code delineates the fundamental principles, regulations, prerequisites, and operational standards governing audio and audiovisual broadcasting.³⁵ Further, AMA proposed amendments to Law No. 97/2013 again in December 2023, which are still in the early stages of proposal and consultation with stakeholders, focusing on three main areas: audience measurement, redefining licensing for regional and local media holders, and addressing infringements of broadcasting rights for audiovisual market.³⁶ The frequent changes introduced by AMA throughout the year pose challenges for civil society to keep pace and effectively engage in the consultation process, potentially impacting the stability and predictability of the regulatory environment for audiovisual media. Following the European Commission's screening report, in October 2023, the GoA initiated a consultation process on the Roadmap for the Rule

29 ECHR. 2022. Factsheet "[Access to Internet and freedom to receive and impart information and ideas](#)," accessed April 13, 2024.

30 BIRN's "[Digital Rights Violations Annual Report 2022-2023](#)" reports 156 violations of digital rights in Albania, such as computer fraud, destruction or theft of data and programmes, online hate speech and discrimination. Attributing these cases is challenging, with 55 incidents involving unknown perpetrators, 43 linked to online media, and 35 involving citizens.

31 Law No. 30/2023 "On Amendments and Additions to Law No. 97/2013 'On [Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania](#)'", accessed on May 13, 2024.

32 The public consultation process for the proposed amendment to Law No. 97/2013, "On audiovisual media in the Republic of Albania," commenced in September 2022 and was conducted through an online public consultation portal. The draft legislation remained open for public review and feedback for a duration of 30 days. According to the consultation report, the participation from civil society organizations (CSOs) was limited, with only two CSOs submitting written comments via the designated online portal. Additionally, three media operators opted to provide their feedback directly to the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA). Notably, the consultation process also included engagement with relevant European Commission Directorates-General, including DG Near and DG Connect, as well as the European Union Delegation (EUD). This engagement sought to ensure alignment with the European Union directives and standards. Subsequently, a comprehensive report detailing the outcomes of the consultation process was published.

33 Citizens Channel. "Ndryshon Ligji për Mediat Audiovizive: Nga Sot Shtohet Përkufizimi për Seksizmin / [Amendments to the Audiovisual Media Law: Definition of Sexism Added as of Today](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

34 Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA). "AMA Miraton Kodin e Ri të Transmetimit / [AMA Approves the New Broadcasting Code](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

35 The drafting process of this code included [consultations with civil society groups and media entities](#). The overarching goal of the revised code is to enhance the implementation of gender equality principles, combat hate speech, and counteract the dissemination of misinformation within the audiovisual media landscape.

36 Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA). 2023. "Propozimet për Ndryshime në Ligjin për Median Audiovizive: AMA Zhvillon Tryezën e Parë të Konsultimit me Grupet e Interesit / [Proposals for Amendments to the Audiovisual Media Law: AMA Holds the First Consultation Roundtable with Interest Groups](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

of Law – Chapter 23, “Judiciary and Fundamental Rights” with specific measures on journalist safety and media freedom.³⁷

Government authorities have not implemented licensing or stringent requirements for establishing print and online media outlets. Currently, there is no requirement for print and online media to apply for licenses, apart from the usual business and tax registrations. Online media portals must register their domains with the Electronic and Postal Communications Authority (AKEP)³⁸ and provide essential ownership and contact information. Additionally, if these portals generate revenue through advertising or subscriptions or other means, they must register with the tax authorities. Albania does not maintain a public registry of media ownership. Information on media ownership is available through the National Business Center/ Registry of Beneficiary Owners.³⁹ Given that media outlets can be owned by companies that cover various sectors, it is difficult to identify media owners in the National Business Registry without a public register of media owners or Impressum on media outlets pages. Non-profit media organizations must register with the Tirana Judicial District Court. Law No. 112/2022 “On the Register of Beneficiary Owners” applies to non-profit organizations as well. Like in previous years, there is no established legal definition for online media.

— A.2 INDEPENDENCE AND EFFICIENCY OF THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY

Candidates for the AMA board are nominated by various stakeholders, including civil society, but the selection process allows for significant political influence. Law No. 97/2013, “On Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania”,⁴⁰ allows both the opposition and the ruling party to veto candidates nominated by civil society groups within the Parliamentary Committee for Education and Public Information. The impartiality of some AMA board members has been called into question due to their political affiliations. Additionally, the legal framework for selecting AMA board members does not effectively ensure their independence, given that four members are chosen with the support of the parliamentary majority and three are proposals of the opposition.

In 2023, concerns persist regarding the independence and operational procedures of AMA, the regulatory entity overseeing audiovisual broadcasts. Armela Krasniqi, the chairwoman of AMA, was appointed to her position in July 2021 and is politically affiliated with the ruling party, raising apprehensions about her impartiality. Krasniqi’s close ties to Prime Minister Rama

37 During the 30-day consultation period in October 2023, only three organizations provided [feedback](#), as revealed in the consultation report. Additionally, the Ministry of Justice organized three meetings of the partnership platform for European integration to discuss the draft roadmap. Safe Journalists contributed with suggestions via an [open letter](#), while civil society groups expressed their concerns about the lack of a comprehensive and inclusive consultation on the roadmap. These concerns stem from perceptions of its limited comprehensiveness and inclusivity. The final version of the roadmap is not yet available online (as of June 2024). Its English version is not accessible either. Thus, transparency and accessibility issues further compound concerns about inclusivity.

38 AKEP Director General is a [former advisor](#) of the Prime Minister Edi Rama, thus raising questions about the independence of the institution.

39 Law No. 112/2022, “[On the Register of Beneficiary Owners](#)”.

40 The election of members and the chairperson of the Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA) in Albania is regulated by specific provisions in the [law](#). Candidates for the AMA board are nominated by various stakeholders, including civil society, but the selection process allows for significant political influence. After an initial shortlist, representatives from both the parliamentary majority and the opposition can veto candidates, effectively allowing political parties to block nominees from civil society. This process is detailed in Articles 9 and 10 of the law governing the AMA.

and the Socialist Party, along with her previous roles as the party's spokeswoman and head of the state-owned Albanian Telegraphic Agency, have further fuelled doubts about her autonomy. Additionally, in February 2022, the new Parliament filled six vacancies in AMA's Board of Directors in accordance with the Media Law, allowing both the opposition and ruling party to veto candidates proposed by civil society organizations. The political connections of certain AMA members have raised concerns regarding the authority's impartiality, casting doubt on their ability to operate independently. Additionally, their public statements have displayed a discernible political alignment, adding complexity to perceptions of the AMA's neutrality.⁴¹

In Albania, AMA is responsible for regulating broadcasting activities, including the issuance and revocation of licenses for television and radio services. The regulator's effectiveness and impartiality in monitoring compliance with licensing obligations have been subjected to scrutiny.⁴² The criteria for renewing licenses typically involve assessing whether broadcasters meet their legal and technical obligations, although the specifics can be opaque and influenced by political and economic interests.⁴³ Licensing is not currently a major concern in Albania as most broadcasting frequencies have been allocated and the transition to digital broadcasting is complete.

— A.3 INDEPENDENCE AND AUTONOMY OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

While the autonomy and independence of the Albanian Radio and Television (RTSH) as the public service broadcaster (PSB) are theoretically (legally) guaranteed, practical challenges have emerged. In June 2023, the Steering Council unanimously elected a new Director-General. However, the recent appointment of Mr. Alfred Peza to this position has sparked deep concerns, arising from Mr. Peza's extensive political background, which includes serving as a Member of Parliament for the Socialist Party from 2013 to 2017 and as Secretary of Relations with Civil Society and Media of the Socialist Party until September 2021.⁴⁴ Opposition to this appointment has also been voiced by other stakeholders.⁴⁵

While the RTSH maintains financial independence through its primary funding source of public funds, collected via a special tariff on household electricity bills, challenges have emerged concerning transparency and fund management.⁴⁶ In 2021, the former Director General of RTSH and three Commission members were arrested for violation of procurement rule. Subsequently, in June 2022, the former Director General received a two-year prison sentence and a five-year ban

41 See more [Letter of Concern by Safe Journalists Network](#).

42 For example, in 2023, the AMA revoked the license of the TIBO television platform due to repeated violations related to the pirated transmission of television programs, including sports events and other productions. This decision was upheld by the Administrative Court of Tirana, which dismissed TIBO's attempt to challenge the license revocation.

43 Venice Commission. "[Revised Draft Law on Audiovisual Media Services in Albania](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

44 SafeJournalists Network. "[Safe Journalist Network Letter of Concern about the Election of the General Director of RTSH](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

45 BalkanWeb. "[Zgjedhja e Alfred Pezës në Krye të RTSH, Deputetja Ina Zhupa: Antiligjore, Shkel 4 Kushte të Ligjit dhe Është Kapje Politike / Election of Alfred Peza as Head of RTSH, MP Ina Zhupa: Illegal, Violates 4 Legal Conditions and Is Political Capture](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

46 See RTSH status Article 2, points 1 and 2

from public functions. RTSH's handling of funds faced further scrutiny in 2023, as it failed to promptly publish online the decisions of its Board of Directors and neglected to address concerns raised by stakeholders regarding alleged unlawful staff dismissals. Additionally, the annual report for 2023 remains undisclosed as of May 2024, contributing to ongoing concerns regarding transparency and accountability within the organization. The report for 2022 is published only in the Assembly of Albania website and does not comply with the open data and accessibility requirements.⁴⁷

The supervisory body of RTSH, known as KDRTSH (Steering Council), faces criticism regarding its representation and impartiality. Members of KDRTSH are elected by the Parliament, and there have been instances in 2021 where major opposition parties were not present during these elections, raising concerns about the diversity and representativeness of this body. Regarding engagement with civil society, there is no regular, structured consultations between KDRTSH and civil society organizations vis-à-vis programming issues or any other matters of RTSH. The 2022 Annual Report does not have any information regarding engagement with civil society.⁴⁸

— A.4 FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO QUALITY JOURNALISM AND MEDIA CONTENT OF PUBLIC INTEREST

There are no direct subsidies for the print media sector in Albania and the process of allocating any form of financial support, such as state advertising, is often criticized for lacking transparency and fairness. Currently, Albania does not have a specific fund dedicated to encouraging the production of media content of public interest that encompasses broader issues beyond those addressed by the public broadcaster RTSH, which has a legal obligation to produce minority programs using funds collected from taxes or the state budget. The media environment in Albania is significantly influenced by business and political interests, which affects the diversity and independence of media content. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of a designated fund or financial mechanism to support media pluralism and independence, leaving many media outlets to rely heavily on advertising revenues and, at times, government contracts related to owners' businesses, which can compromise editorial independence. The process of allocating funds and resources within the media sector is often politicized. Some media outlets receive government concessions and public funds for the owner's other business, but these are not typically allocated towards enhancing media pluralism or the production of content that serves the public interest. Instead, these funds can lead to further entrenchment of the existing power structures within the media landscape, consolidating the influence of certain media owners and limiting the scope of free and independent journalism.

47 RTSH. "Raporti i Veprimtarisë 2022 / [RTSH Activity Report 2022](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

48 SafeJournalists Network. "[Safe Journalists Report: Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety in Albania 2022](#)," accessed May on 23, 2024.

In Albania, public funds are allocated to the national broadcaster, RTSH, to provide high-quality services for informing, educating, and entertaining the public, including minorities, as required by law.⁴⁹ It's noted that RTSH publishes cultural news and programs in minority languages, such as Greek, Macedonian, and Roma on one of its channels. In contrast, community media outlets that serve minorities primarily depend on advertising and sponsorships for funding, without any dedicated financial mechanisms to support them beyond these revenue streams. No subsidies or funds for program production have been implemented to date regardless of ongoing efforts by journalists and media associations to advocate for subsidies that would promote media diversity programming.

— A.5 STATE ADVERTISING IN THE PRIVATE MEDIA SECTOR

State advertising practices in Albania are a significant concern due to the lack of clear regulation and transparency. The allocation of state advertising funds has been criticized for being opaque and potentially biased, often favouring media outlets that are supportive of the government.⁵⁰⁵¹ The absence of specific legal frameworks governing the distribution of state advertising means that funds can be allocated selectively, reinforcing clientelism and potentially leading to self-censorship among media outlets reliant on such funding.

The current state of advertising regulation in Albania, particularly within the print and online media, shows a significant gap in specific regulatory frameworks. As it stands now, advertising practices in these media are governed merely by general business tax liabilities, with no specialized oversight on how advertising space is bought, sold, or distributed. Unlike audiovisual media, which is monitored by AMA for the volume of advertisements, print and online media lack similar scrutiny regarding advertising practices.

The Parliament of Albania has repeatedly recognized the need for reform. In its resolutions on AMA's performance for 2023,⁵²⁵³ it urged AMA to propose changes to enhance the legislation governing advertising to align it with international standards. This ongoing⁵⁴ recommendation underscores a legislative acknowledgment of the need for more robust, transparent regulation that could potentially elevate the integrity and fairness of media advertising.

The Rule of Law Roadmap linked to Albania's EU accession process foresees that AMA establishes a transparent media

49 Law 97/2013, Article 91 in conjunction with article 113/1/a

50 Albanian Media Institute. 2019. "[Advertising Market in Albanian Media](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

51 Articles 3 (paragraph 28) and 40 of the Law 97/2013 provide the definition and concept of institutional advertisement, aiming to support the values of democracy, well-being, public health and national security.

52 Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA). 2024. "Raporti Vjetor – AMA – 2023 / [Annual Report – AMA – 2023](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

53 Parliament of Albania, Committee on Education and Public Information Media. 2024. "Rezoluta për Vlerësimin e Veprimtarisë së AMA për Vitin 2023 / [Resolution on the Evaluation of AMA's Activities for the Year 2023](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

54 This recommendation has been reiterated in the Parliament's resolutions on AMA in both 2021 and 2022.

audience measurement system by 2025.⁵⁵ The anticipated audience measurement system aims to provide reliable statistics that would inform the equitable distribution of advertising revenue based on actual audience sizes – a significant shift from the current practice. AMA started the consultation process with representatives from audiovisual media in December 2023,⁵⁶ whereby two roundtables were organized, but civil society organisations or other stakeholders were not invited to participate.⁵⁷ The process can benefit from better transparency and all-inclusiveness of impartial stakeholders.

Currently, advertising distribution is heavily influenced by intermediary companies, which can manipulate advertising flow to favour certain media outlets over others, often based on the outlet's perceived political alignment.⁵⁸ This practice is troubling as it means that media outlets critical towards the government or in opposition may be disadvantaged, receiving less advertising revenue due to fears from businesses about harming their governmental relations.⁵⁹

State institutions may channel funds to media outlets indirectly through utility companies or advertising agencies, often without disclosing the criteria or the specifics of the allocations. This lack of transparency complicates understanding how these funds are distributed.⁶⁰ Additionally, political advertising during electoral campaigns plays a significant role in influencing media content and practices. Media owners, in some cases, leverage their outlets as tools to curry favour with the government or other influential entities, using their platform's reach and influence to negotiate benefits or favourable treatment.⁶¹ This intertwining of media ownership and political agendas can significantly impact the impartiality and credibility of media content. The EC Annual Report 2023 for Albania highlights that Albania still needs to introduce legislation to strengthen transparency in state advertising in line with EU standards.⁶²

— A.6 LEGAL PROVISIONS RELATED TO DEFAMATION AND THEIR APPLICATION DO NOT CREATE A CHILLING EFFECT ON JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA

Albanian legislation classifies defamation as a criminal offense, which contradicts international best practices. The Criminal Code characterizes defamation as the deliberate spreading of false information intended to harm another person's dignity and honour, with fines ranging from 400 to 12,000 Euros. Such penalties increase for defamation committed publicly, against

55 Konsultimi Publik. 2023. "Udhërrëfyese për Shtetin e së Drejtës – Kapitulli 23 'Gjyqësori dhe të Drejtat Themelore' / Public Consultation on "Rule of Law Roadmap – Chapter 23 'Judiciary and Fundamental Rights,'" accessed on May 23, 2024.

56 Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA). 2023. "AMA Organizon Tryezën e Parë për Matjen e Audiencës: Palët Bien Dakord për Krijimin e Grupit të Punës dhe Diskutimin e Modaliteteve për Realizimin e Procesit / AMA Organizes the First Roundtable on Audience Measurement: Parties Agree on Establishing a Working Group and Discussing Modalities for the Process," accessed on May 23, 2024.

57 Audiovisual Media Authority (AMA). 2023. "AMA Organizon Tryezën e Dytë për Matjen e Audiencës: Palët Bien Dakord për Ngritjen e Komitetit të Përbashkët të Industrisë me 9 Anëtarë / AMA Organizes the Second Roundtable on Audience Measurement: Parties Agree on Establishing a Joint Industry Committee with 9 Members," accessed on May 23, 2024.

58 IREX. 2023. "Vibrant Information Barometer: Albania," accessed on May 23, 2024.

59 Interview with media expert, Tirana, 5 March 2024.

60 However, advertising on social media is becoming the prominent feature of electoral campaign and there are no transparency rules there yet. Read more about 2023 local election campaign Reporter.al. "Fushata në Instagram dhe Facebook Kushtoi 91 Mijë USD / Campaign on Instagram and Facebook Cost 91,000 USD," accessed May 23, 2024.

61 IREX. 2023. "Vibrant Information Barometer: Albania," accessed May 23, 2024.

62 European Commission. "Albania 2023 Report," accessed on April 5, 2024.

multiple people, or on multiple occasions, with possible fines going up to 24,000 Euros.⁶³ Prison sentences for defamation were abolished in 2012. Regardless, it creates a double shrinking legal environment for media freedom the fact that in addition to criminal charges, according to the Civil Code, any person (including journalists) is charged with civil liability if he/she makes inaccurate, incomplete or fraudulent publications, which damage the honor, personality, or reputation of the injured person who has the right to go to court civilly⁶⁴. In such conditions, legal framework creates its potential and high burden in disfavour of journalists to suppress free expression and press freedom. Moreover, the substantial criminal and civil fines for defamation could negatively affect the financial viability of media enterprises, especially smaller ones.

Civil society organizations in Albania are advocating for a complete decriminalization of defamation and are calling for a review of the associated fines to align with EU standards.⁶⁵ Their demands stem from an analysis of court decisions over the past years, which shows that excessively high fines, combined with financial costs for journalists, procedural delays, and the threat of criminal charges, can foster self-censorship among journalists. Although the rule of law roadmap includes a specific measure for the decriminalization of defamation, there has yet to be any legal initiative undertaken to address this issue. Civil society organisations have also asked for a clear legal definition of SLAPPs in Albania.⁶⁶

The data collected for this report through official information requests indicate an increase in lawsuits against journalists throughout 2023. As of 2022, there have been a total of 30 court cases filed against journalists or media workers in Albania, under Article 119 (Insult) and Article 120 (Defamation), foreseen by the Criminal Procedures Code. Additionally, there have been 12 civil cases filed in 2022, of which 11 are under Article 617 on fraudulent or inaccurate publications and one case for Article 625 on liability for non-pecuniary damage. As of 2023, the High Court managed two cases, one criminal and one civil. The Court of Appeal dealt with 28 cases, of which 21 were civil and 7 were criminal. The Court of General Jurisdiction in Tirana handled 38 civil cases involving journalists and media workers. Additionally, five civil cases were registered in Elbasan, Gjirokastra, Durres, and Lezha, with no similar cases reported in other courts during the year.⁶⁷

There is yet no specialized electronic registry for lawsuits and cases related to journalists, albeit starting from 2023 the current system at the Court of General Jurisdiction in Tirana does permit such categorization. The setup of this electronic system is also a specific measurement in the rule-of-law roadmap. The available data does not conclusively show whether court decisions against journalists in Albania are influenced by political

63 Article 120 of the Criminal Code.

64 Civil Code, respectively [Article 617](#) on Fraudulent or inaccurate publications; [Article 625](#) on Liability for non-pecuniary damage and [Article 647/a](#) on the manner and criteria for determining civil liability and the amount of non-pecuniary damage.

65 SCiDEV. 2024. "[SCiDEV Organizes Multi-Stakeholder Discussion on Journalistic Safety](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

66 SCiDEV. 2023. "[Input on the Roadmap for Media in Albania: 31 October 2023](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

67 Request for Information to the High Judiciary Council, response received on 14 January 2024.

motives. There are concerns about delays in case processing and a general opacity in the judicial outcomes. It is, however, noteworthy that no journalists were sentenced to prison in 2023. Nonetheless, a more detailed breakdown of the penalties applied in 2023 would provide a clearer picture of the judicial landscape facing journalists. Additionally, some experts have observed a decline in the quality of jurisprudence, attributing this to the turnover of judges, the induction of new judges into the system, and a deficiency in consistent judicial training.⁶⁸

Regarding the lawsuit of Mayor of Tirana against journalist Bledian Koka, in May 2023, the mayor and his lawyer did not appear in the court or provide an explanation for their absence, leading the court to dismiss the case.⁶⁹ However, only weeks later, the Mayor of Tirana re-filed the case, which is still pending with the First Instance Court of Tirana District.⁷⁰ Similarly, the defamation trial against journalist Juli Ristani, initiated in 2020 by Belioza Çoku, former Cabinet Director at the Ministry of Defense, was dismissed by the judge in March 2024 due to the absence of the plaintiff and her lawyers.⁷¹

— A.7 OTHER LAWS ARE ENFORCED OBJECTIVELY AND ALLOW JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS 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, reveal of the sources of information in a criminal proceeding, and data protection have sometimes been invoked as grounds for restraining journalistic activities. Albania's existing legislative framework, unfortunately, does not 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, 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 for professional defend.

In 2023, there were few 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. In 2023, journalist Klodiana Lala faced two defamation lawsuits filed by Jamarber Malltezi, the son-in-law of former Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha. Berisha, a historical leader of the Democratic Party, is currently under house arrest due to an alleged corruption case. In May

68 SCiDEV. 2024. "[SCiDEV Organizes Multi-Stakeholder Discussion on Journalistic Safety](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

69 ResPublica. "Erion Veliaj Tërhiqet nga Padia për Shpifje ndaj Gazetarit Bledian Koka, Gjykata e Vëndos Pushimin e Çështjes / [Erion Veliaj Withdraws Defamation Lawsuit Against Journalist Bledian Koka, Court Decides to Dismiss the Case](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

70 As confirmed by the lawyer of the journalist, September 2024.

71 [Journalist Ristani Wins the Case](#), accessed May 23, 2024.

2019, the United States announced the public designation of Sali Berisha for actions undermining democracy in Albania.

— A.8 THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF JOURNALISTS' SOURCES IS GUARANTEED IN THE LEGISLATION AND RESPECTED BY THE AUTHORITIES

According to the Article 159/3 of the Criminal Procedures Code, the safeguard of the professional secrecy is also extended to professional journalists, regarding the names of the persons from whom they have received data during the exercise of their profession. But when the data are necessary to prove the criminal offense and the authenticity of these data can only be ascertained through the identification of the source, the court can order the journalist to indicate the source of his/her information. Ethical standards also bind journalists to uphold their sources' confidentiality. Despite the complexity of the legal framework that recognizes in principle the protection but also limitations of the source' confidentiality, journalists are ethically bound to protect their sources, barring explicit consent from the concerned individual for disclosure.

In 2023, there was one major public case regarding disclosure of journalistic sources. Elton Qyno, a journalist with Ora News television in Albania, was questioned for nearly seven hours on December 13, 2023, in Tirana by the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecution Office (SPAK) and specifically asked to reveal his sources.⁷² SafeJournalists Network and media freedom organisations⁷³ argued that the actions taken against Mr. Qyno, including the inspection of his residence and office and the seizure of his personal and professional equipment, set a worrying precedent regarding confidentiality of sources for journalists and media professionals in Albania. These organizations argued that law enforcement agencies should prioritize securing and safeguarding information related to investigations before targeting journalists and their sources.⁷⁴ After Albania's Supreme Court⁷⁵ upheld the decision of SPAK and the First Instance Court Against Corruption and Organized Crime, Elton Qyno appealed to the Constitutional Court, seeking the annulment of decisions that allowed the seizure of his personal and work-related materials, and the urgent suspension of any related actions.⁷⁶

As previously reported, in 2023, 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

72 SafeJournalists. 2023. "[Reaction regarding the case of Elton Qyno](#)," accessed on May 4, 2024.

73 SafeJournalists. 2023. "[SafeJournalists Network and Partners Organizations of MFRR Platform and RSF Sent Open Letter to Head of SPAK in Albania](#)," accessed on May 2, 2024.

74 SafeJournalists. 2023. "[SafeJournalists: Dismay Regarding Seizure of Equipment of Albanian Journalist and Pressure to Reveal His Sources](#)," accessed on May 2, 2024.

75 SafeJournalists. 2024. "[Concerns over Decision Made by Albanian Supreme Court Regarding Case of Journalist Elton Qyno](#)," accessed on May 2, 2024.

76 Qendra Respublica. 2024. "[Journalist Elton Qyno Has Appealed to the Constitutional Court](#)," accessed May 15, 2024.

concerns and precarious working conditions that such journalists often face, potentially impacting their freedom and confidence to establish and maintain vital contacts.

— **A.9 JOURNALISTS ARE FREE TO PURSUIT THEIR PROFESSION AND TO ESTABLISH, JOIN AND PARTICIPATE IN THEIR ASSOCIATIONS**

Albania's journalists do not need to be licensed by the state to work, which is a positive aspect of media freedom. In this regard, it should be mentioned that constitutional provisions do not set limitations for the licensing of journalists as they set boundaries only for approval of legislation that may require the authorization for the operation of radio stations or television (Article 22/4 of the Constitution). In 2023, there were no attempts to introduce such license.

Public institutions in Albania generally have media accreditation regulations in place. However, these practices often favour journalists affiliated with media organizations, disadvantaging freelancers, bloggers, and independent journalists. The need for improved accreditation practices accommodating the evolving journalism landscape is evident.

A significant issue impacting journalists' ability to report effectively in Albania is the common practice among public officials, including the Prime Minister, ministers, and political party leaders, of distributing pre-prepared materials (audio, video, and text) instead of engaging directly with the media. In 2023, for example, the Mayor of Tirana continued to avoid press conferences, excluded journalists from public events, and supplied media outlets with ready-made content. This approach severely restricts media freedom, access to information, and transparency, as it prevents journalists from asking critical questions and conducting thorough reporting on issues of public concern. Moreover, this practice reveals deeper problems within the media industry itself, as many outlets routinely accept and disseminate these materials without adequate scrutiny, failing to adhere to journalistic standards. This highlights the urgent need for media organizations to rigorously evaluate information provided by public officials to ensure their reporting is balanced and comprehensive.

While Albania's Prime Minister and ministers have released weekly press statements after Council of Ministers' meetings since September 2021, the opportunities for journalists to ask critical questions remain scarce. In 2023, as was the case in 2022, these events largely continued as one-sided press statements, providing minimal, if any, chances for journalistic engagement. Consequently, these sessions often saw merely the presence of camera operators, with a notable lack of journalists. The format does not allow journalists to receive the agenda in advance or sufficient time to prepare questions. This situation highlights a significant missed opportunity to enhance transparency and accountability within government practices. Furthermore, there is evidence of the government's communication with journalists through unofficial channels like WhatsApp groups, discrimination

against independent media when seeking information or comments, and hostility towards journalists perceived as representing opposition outlets. These practices further emphasize the challenges faced by the press in Albania, limiting their ability to perform their professional duties effectively.

In 2023, journalists face challenges accessing the Parliament of Albania. On November 9th, journalists attempting to engage with ministers and deputies for questioning were impeded by the Republican Guard in the Parliament's yard. Journalist Klesiana Omeri was subjected to physical restraint and filming by a camera operator was prohibited.⁷⁷ The Safe Journalist Network (SJN) in Albania has substantiated these incidents, noting a recurring pattern in line with escalating political tensions in the Parliament.⁷⁸

According to the Regulation on the Communication with Media of the High Prosecutorial Council (HPC),⁷⁹ in force since 2022, the Coordinator for the Right to Information of the HPC, with the approval of the designated Council member, has the authority to request that the head of the accredited media outlet replace a journalist if there are clear and visible violations of objectivity and professionalism, or in cases of violations of the Constitution, the law, or the principles outlined in this regulation. Such regulatory provisions are very broadly defined in terms of the grounds and do not allow the journalist to defend him/herself and be heard regarding the alleged violations. The SafeJournalists Network has also reacted regarding this.⁸⁰

While journalists in Albania are part of professional associations, challenges, such as lack of consolidation, limited resources, and inadequate competencies, persist. In 2023, no pressures were reported on these associations. There is no trade union in Albania.

— A.10 RIGHT TO ACCESS OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION

Journalists in Albania often encounter difficulties in using legal rules to access official documents and information, as authorities frequently fail to follow these rules without delay, leading to limited transparency and challenges in obtaining timely information crucial for their reporting. The legal amendments through the Law No. 78/2023,⁸¹ to Law No. 119/2014, 'On the Right to Information,' which came into effect in November 2023, extended the competences

77 SafeJournalists Network. 2023. "[Actual Attack on Journalists by the Guard of Republic, Albanian Assembly](#)," accessed May 15, 2024.

78 SafeJournalists Network. 2023. "[SafeJournalists Network Sent Letter of Concern to the Assembly of the Republic of Albania](#)," accessed on May 15, 2024.

79 [High Prosecutorial Council Regulation on Communication with Media](#), 2022.

80 [SafeJournalists: New Regulation of the High Prosecution Council Violates Media Freedom in Albania](#), 2022.

81 In 2022, proposed amendments to Law No. 119/2014, 'On Public Consultations', sparked significant concerns. The Ministry of Justice released a draft law in October 2022 aimed at enhancing the existing legislation on the right to information. However, certain aspects of the proposal were troubling. It suggested lowering the fines for public authorities that fail to provide access to information and introduced the concept of "abusive requests," which would allow authorities to automatically reject repeated journalistic inquiries without explanation, potentially obstructing investigative journalism and reducing government transparency. Overall, these proposals represented a step back from the current legal standards. Additionally, the suggested sanctions for non-compliance with the Commissioner's decisions were criticized for not meeting civil society's calls for enforceable actions. The low incidence of enforced decisions by the Commissioner and the absence of enforceable orders were also notable gaps not addressed by the amendments. The Safe Journalists Network and other media organizations raised objections and called for the consideration of civil society's recommendations. Following these concerns, a further consultation meeting was held on April 11, 2023.

of the Commissioner in monitoring law enforcement. The changes foresee that the Commissioner, after conducting an administrative investigation, may fine the head of the institution or the official who has obstructed the provision of information in accordance with the law.⁸² In terms of access to information, the Commissioner's Office processed 957 complaints throughout 2023, with approximately 390 filed by journalists and 170 by civil society organizations, highlighting ongoing challenges in transparency and information accessibility.⁸³

While the Law 'On the Right to Information' provides a framework for requesting and obtaining information, institutions tend to use the maximum allowed timeframe to respond or provide difficult-to-use data. This can delay journalists' reporting. It also undermines the actuality of the news, forcing journalists to seek information from alternative sources. Civil society organizations, media associations, and international press freedom groups have expressed significant concerns about the Albanian Government's decision to centralize public relations and information through the establishment of the Media and Information Agency (MIA) in September 2021. Critics⁸⁴ argue that this centralization restricts access to information and enhances government control over the flow of information.⁸⁵

Despite claims from the MIA director that the agency has improved governmental transparency by reorganizing ministry webpages and streamlining communication with the media,⁸⁶ concerns persist about the agency's role in centralizing public information. There are particular apprehensions regarding its authority to appoint and dismiss spokespersons and its function in monitoring the public activities of ministers, which could potentially increase governmental oversight and control over information.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the Agency's structure is criticized for adding bureaucratic layers that manage and delegate information requests to relevant authorities, complicating the process rather than simplifying it. This centralization is also seen as a form of structured control over the information entering and exiting the executive branch and the Prime Minister's office, which may not necessarily lead to better or faster public information dissemination. After two years in operation, MIA's handling of a minimal number of information requests has led to doubts about its efficiency and the justification for its funding from public resources.⁸⁸ The creation and functionality of MIA, as currently conceived, are viewed as steps that could potentially undermine democratization and transparency rather than support them.

In 2023, there have been instances of excessively high fees charged for providing information from public institutions to

82 Reporter.al. 2023. "[Changes to the Law on the Right to Information Approved Without Debate](#)," accessed on May 3, 2024.

83 Request for Information, response received on January 15, 2024.

84 Faktoje.al. 2023. "Liria e shprehjes dhe medias në raportin e Komisionit Europian: Rekomandimet e grupeve të interesit"/[Freedom of Speech and Media in the EC Report: Recommendations of Interest Groups](#)," accessed on May 14, 2024.

85 Concerns about MIA also [Safe Journalists Network](#), [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) and [Respublica](#).

86 Reporter.al. 2022. "'Dukem naiv, por jam idealist'", Endri Fuga mbron Agjencinë e Medias dhe Informimit/ '[I May Seem Naive, but I Am An Idealist](#),' [Endri Fuga Defends the Media and Information Agency](#)," accessed on June 20, 2024.

87 Concerns about MIA also [Safe Journalists Network](#), [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) and [Respublica](#).

88 Respublica. 2023. "[Report on the Right to Information in Albania](#)," accessed on July 3, 2024.

the interested parties, known as costs of re-production of documents, despite legal guarantees. According to Article 13 of the law, information requested electronically is free of charge, meanwhile fees for re-production of documents that are requested to be accessed must be predetermined and publicly displayed on the websites and public reception areas of the authorities. This article grants fee exemptions to citizens regularly enrolled in social assistance programs, as well as beneficiaries under Law No. 10039, "On Legal Aid." However, as previously mentioned, journalists are not included among the beneficiaries. Other issues persist as well: the fees set by the Commissioner exceed actual market costs for photocopying services, in violation of Article 13 of the law. Additionally, authorities continue to apply inconsistent fees and the provisions for free electronic information are not always respected. Authorities often claim they lack electronic versions of the documents, leading to charges for photocopying at inflated rates.⁸⁹ Another concern is that public authorities refuse to provide information even after the Court decides to provide it, becoming an obstacle to the execution of court decisions.⁹⁰ On a positive note, nearly half of the authorities have met half or more of the legal requirements on transparency programs.⁹¹

Regarding the transparency of the courts, the consolidated online court portal (gjykata.gov.al) does not allow for the access to most of the court decisions, not even for legal professionals who rely on these documents for their work. Lawyers are only allowed to access information pertaining to the cases where they represent a specific party, using a de-anonymization code. This policy of not publishing judicial decisions or providing information about court files after a decision becomes final is prevalent in the operations of the new judicial bodies. The High Judiciary Council's communication strategy for 2022-2025⁹² does not address this issue, regardless of frequent concerns voiced by media and civil society. Meanwhile, journalists and researchers, as potential data controllers, could ensure anonymity in accessing files, thus safeguarding the public interest without breaching privacy.

In 2023, some concerns about media access to Parliament remained.⁹³ In 2021, the Parliament of Albania implemented a new Regulations on Accreditation, Accommodation, and Orientation of Mass Media, which met with critiques.⁹⁴ Despite some changes after consultation with the media community, the regulation still restricts journalists' freedom of movement within the Parliament, limiting private media reporters to a designated newsroom and barring them from direct reporting from plenary session or committee meetings or moving freely throughout the building, unlike their counterparts from public broadcasters RTSH and public news agency ATSH who

89 Example of Mezhgoran Community, [Municipality of Tepelene](#) charged 1,200 euros to provide the information.

90 Respublica. 2023. "[Report on the right to information in Albania](#)," accessed on July 3, 2024.

91 IDP. 2024. [IDP Annual Report 2023](#), accessed on August 12, 2024.

92 [High Judiciary Council's Communication Strategy](#), accessed on July 13, 2024.

93 Focus group discussion with reporters, March 5, 2023.

94 [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), October 4, 2021.

retain broader access.⁹⁵ This has led to concerns about a discriminatory system of access and reduced transparency.

While the current legislature has made some progress towards increasing transparency by providing more statistical data on parliamentary activities and consulting on transparency standards,⁹⁶ there are still significant areas needing improvement. The timeliness and user-friendliness of published parliamentary documentation, such as minutes from sessions and committee meetings, remain inadequate.⁹⁷ Although the Parliament's website has been revamped to better facilitate access to information and live broadcasts of meetings are available on its official Facebook page, these measures are not sufficient to fully enhance transparency and accessibility.⁹⁸

Additionally, in November 2023,⁹⁹ the SafeJournalists Network reported concerns to the Speaker of the Assembly regarding journalistic access within the Parliament. Instances were noted where journalists were prevented from questioning ministers and deputies by the Republican Guard, citing "new directives" that restrict journalists to designated areas even outside, thus impeding their ability to conduct interviews and report effectively. This reliance on vague directives and verbal orders by the Guard risks creating a repressive environment for the media,¹⁰⁰ crucial in ensuring an informed public. Irrespective of promises for regulatory revisions, no changes have been made to date and incidents involving restrictions by the Guard continued in the first part of 2024.¹⁰¹

95 Focus group discussion with reporters, March 5, 2023.

96 ATA. 2024. "Nikolla nënshkruan deklaratën, Kuvendi angazhim për zbatimin e standardeve të Transparencës/[Nikolla Signs the Declaration, the Assembly Commits to Implementing Transparency Standards](#)," accessed on July 20, 2024.

97 IDM. 2024. [National Integrity System in Albania](#).

98 Faktoje.al. 2023. "Liria e shprehjes dhe medias në raportin e Komisionit Europian: Rekomandimet e grupeve të interesit"/[Freedom of Speech and Media in the EC Report: Recommendations of Interest Groups](#), accessed on May 14, 2024.

99 [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), November 9, 2023.

100 In depth interviews with political reporter, Tirana, March 2024.

101 [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), May 30, 2024.

B. LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

— B.1 THE JOB POSITIONS OF JOURNALISTS ARE STABLE AND PROTECTED AT THE WORKPLACE

The situation regarding journalists' working conditions in Albania remained unchanged in 2023: although most journalists are employed under formal contracts, their labor rights are often not fully respected. Common issues include delays in payment, informal payment arrangements, insufficient social security benefits, long working hours, limited vacation days, and illegal dismissals.¹⁰² Additionally, some journalists, like district correspondents or online portal journalists, are employed under service contracts rather than employment contracts.¹⁰³ These contracts include minimal legal protections for these workers, contributing to less favourable working conditions for journalists in these roles.¹⁰⁴

During 2023, the Safe Journalists Network reported multiple instances of journalists' rights violations in Albania. A significant case involved several RTSH reporters and media workers who alleged they were dismissed as part of organizational restructuring after a new Director General took office.¹⁰⁵ Although the Director General is legally empowered to hire and fire head of departments and sectors, these decisions are required to be executed with transparency and in accordance with labour rights that guarantee the protections for journalists. The Safe Journalists Network sought details on the number of journalists and media personnel affected by these dismissals, but RTSH failed to provide a response. Concerns about these practices at RTSH have been raised by Members of Parliament and other stakeholders since June 2023.¹⁰⁶

In 2023, journalists and media employees in Albania faced challenging working conditions and economic insecurity, leading to 26 complaints being filed with the State Labor Inspectorate¹⁰⁷ against 5 entities.¹⁰⁸ These complaints primarily centered around issues such as unpaid salaries, unpaid overtime, and holiday work, as well as problems related to employment termination. Despite the considerable number of grievances, including those from RTSH employees, many journalists and media workers are reluctant to come forward. Their hesitancy is often due to fears of repercussions, limited resources, and concerns over future employment prospects.¹⁰⁹

Journalists in Albania also grapple with escalating digital security threats, such as hacking, and smear campaigns,

102 Focus group discussion, March 5, 2024.

103 In-depth interview with web journalist, April 3, 2024.

104 In-depth interview with local correspondent, April 17, 2024.

105 SafeJournalists Network. 2023. [SafeJournalists Sends a Letter of Concern to RTSH, the Albanian Parliament, AMA](#), accessed on April 23, 2024.

106 Balkan Insight. 2023. [Complaints of Unfair Dismissal at Albanian Public Broadcaster](#), accessed on April 23, 2024.

107 According to [AHC Human Rights Barometer 2023](#), based on the violations widely reported by representatives of trade unions and organizations covering the aforementioned four sectors, it is concerning that the State Inspectorate of Labor and Social Services lacks statistical or qualitative information on complaints filed by employees in toll manufacturing, mines, call centers, and media. The explanation given for this data deficiency is that sector classification follows International Labor Organization (ILO) categories. Objectively, this creates a public perception of the Inspectorate's ineffectiveness in responding transparently and accountably to the challenges faced by the most vulnerable sectors in labor relations.

108 Request for Information, Response received on January 15, 2024.

109 Focus group discussion, March 5, 2024.

which are especially pronounced for women, those working on online media and human rights defenders.¹¹⁰ The absence of formal contracts complicates the protection of their intellectual property rights and the establishment of their professional identities. Additionally, significant personal data breaches in 2021 and a major cyberattack in 2022 exposed sensitive information, including bank account details, heightening concerns about the security and privacy of journalists and their sources.¹¹¹

Freelance journalists in Albania deal with precarious conditions, facing difficulties in accessing institutions, gaining professional recognition, securing timely payments, and obtaining social insurance, which worsens their vulnerability.

Although the Labor Code in Albania permits any group of at least 20 employees to establish a trade union to defend their rights and interests, journalists and media workers in the country typically remain ununionized. Many journalists cite fear of retaliation from media owners as a key reason for this lack of unionization.¹¹² Furthermore, there are no provisions for free legal aid for journalists from their media outlets, nor are there any collective agreements in place to protect the labour rights of journalists in the private media sector. This lack of trade unions and collective bargaining agreements leaves journalists without sufficient protection and support in their workplaces.

— B.2 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE PRIVATE MEDIA

In 2023, no significant factual improvements were identified in editorial autonomy within private media entities in Albania. Resource constraints often result in individuals holding multiple responsibilities, blurring the distinction between newsrooms and managerial/marketing roles. Despite the existence of organizational guidelines in certain larger private media outlets to ensure editorial independence, enforcement remains inconsistent. The influence of partisan media and the intertwined relationships among media proprietors, political affiliations, business interests, and organized crime persistently erode editorial autonomy.¹¹³

Editorial independence stands as a cornerstone of media credibility and trust. Yet, this vital aspect remains precarious in Albania. Dominated by a handful of influential companies with political ties, private media outlets face challenges in maintaining autonomy, especially as owners have interests in regulated sectors like construction. Regardless of the existence of organizational guidelines in larger outlets, partisan influences, business interests, and even links to organized crime often compromise true editorial independence.¹¹⁴ This situation not

110 IDM. 2023. [Study Report: The Freedom to Defend Rights in Online Spaces – Challenges for Women Human Rights Defenders in Albania](#), accessed on May 31, 2024.

111 SCiDEV. 2022. [Mapping Personal Data Violations in Albania: A Short Retrospective on Massive Breaches in the Country](#), accessed on April 30, 2024.

112 According to [AHC Human Rights Barometer 2023](#), employers are the main obstacle to forming trade unions. They often fire applicants or interested parties immediately upon submission of a union creation request or discriminate against them compared to other employees.

113 Media Ownership Monitor Albania. 2023. ["Albania: Media Ownership Overview"](#), accessed on July 13, 2024.

114 In-depth interview with senior journalist, March 17, 2024.

only hampers the media's role as an impartial watchdog but also undermines its capacity to deliver unbiased information to the public. Additionally, there is a lack of proactive transparency regarding media ownership and editorial autonomy across most private media platforms. Private media outlets in Albania continue to rely on external codes of ethics rather than having their own internal policies.¹¹⁵ While there is no significant change in this practice from the previous year, it remains a cause for concern as it leaves newsrooms without a clear, tailored set of guidelines to ensure ethical standards are upheld.

Media ownership in Albania has increasingly influenced the editorial independence of outlets, as owners use their media platforms to secure favours from the government and other influential figures.¹¹⁶ This has led to a concerning symbiotic relationship between politics and business, impacting editorial policies as a result of undue influence from funding sources.¹¹⁷ Additionally, a disturbing trend noted in 2023 as in previous years involves media outlets engaging in the practice of blackmailing businesses, political parties, or individuals by threatening negative coverage. Recent changes in ownership of private broadcasters have resulted in more government-favourable media coverage. Moreover, there are alarming reports that individuals implicated in corruption and money laundering are investing in media operations as part of their strategies to evade justice.¹¹⁸ These practices raise serious questions about the integrity and independence of the media landscape in Albania.

— B.3 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

The RTSH is mandated by law¹¹⁹ to uphold editorial independence and adhere to a code of conduct and ethics. Despite participating in capacity-building projects and publishing its editorial policy online, concerns persist regarding perceived bias in favour of the ruling party in its news coverage.¹²⁰ Compliance with the RTSH's Code of Conduct and Ethics¹²¹ by journalists is essential to uphold editorial independence and foster unbiased reporting, highlighting the ongoing need for vigilance in ensuring adherence to professional standards.

According to the media law,¹²² the RTSH is mandated to maintain its newsroom separate from its managing bodies, with the Steering Council overseeing its operations and the Director-General handling daily management. While these structures seek to safeguard editorial independence, there have been instances where managerial influence has encroached upon the autonomy of editorial departments and journalists. This discrepancy between theory and practice

115 Focus group discussion, March 5, 2024.

116 Media Ownership Monitor Albania. 2023. "[Albania: Media Ownership Overview](#)," accessed on July 13, 2024.

117 Freedom House. "[Albania: Freedom in the World 2024](#)," accessed on June 5, 2024.

118 [USA 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices](#), accessed on July 13, 2024.

119 [RTSH Status](#).

120 Panel discussions on media freedom and safety of journalists organized by [Faktoje.al](#), [Cluster 1](#), [SCiDEV](#), [RsF and AMC](#), [BIRN and SCiDEV](#).

121 [RTSH Editorial Guideline and Ethics](#)

122 [Law No. 97/2013, "On Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania"](#)

highlights ongoing challenges in upholding editorial policies, codes of ethics, and professional standards within RTSH.

The government's influence is primarily indirect and related to the perception that RTSH favors the ruling party in its news coverage, given that its Steering Council is elected by the majority in Parliament.¹²³

The primary concerns regarding pressure on journalism do not stem from direct government pressure but rather from the complex and intertwined relationships between RTSH management, politicians, and other influential actors.¹²⁴ Furthermore, the government indirectly exerts pressure on journalists by devaluing professional journalism and using smear campaigns and anti-media rhetoric. Other forms of pressure include defamation lawsuits, legal threats against investigative journalists, and cyberattacks and breaches of digital safety.

— B.4 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE NON-PROFIT MEDIA SECTOR

The Tirana District Court and Directorate of Taxation have no data on non-profit media as there is no special category for such. Non-profit can only be registered as an organisation, association or centre. Some of the most prominent non-profit media in Albania are BIRN Albania, Faktoje.al, the Albanian Center for Quality Journalism and INA media, Citizen Channel, Albanian Community Reporters, Amfora, Nyje, Bulqizaime, etc.

Non-profit media outlets in Albania, such as investigative and fact-checking media, as well as mission-oriented outlets, demonstrate a stronger commitment to editorial independence compared to for-profit counterparts. These outlets often adhere to a Journalists' Code of Conduct to uphold professional standards and ensure independence. The Albanian Media Institute's Code of Ethics,¹²⁵ updated in 2018 with input from the Albanian Media Council, is commonly followed by non-profit media organizations, further promoting ethical journalism practices and editorial autonomy.

Though fewer and smaller compared to their private counterparts, non-profit media outlets in Albania face significant challenges concerning media freedom, financial sustainability, and safety. These organizations often struggle with inadequate funding for content development and expansion, while SLAPP are commonly employed to deter investigative journalism. Moreover, limited access to public information persists due to the lack of transparency in public institutions¹²⁶ and intimidation of journalists. These factors collectively impede the effective operation and growth of non-profit media in Albania.

123 [Law No. 97/2013, "On Audiovisual Media in the Republic of Albania"](#).

124 Concerns about relations with the [Turkish PSB](#) and [election of Mr. Peza as a Director General](#).

125 [Journalists' Code of Ethics](#)

126 BIRN, 2024 '[Freedom of Information: 2023 Annual Report](#)'.

— B.5 FREEDOM OF JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWS PRODUCTION PROCESS

In 2023, there were still hurdles in ensuring editorial independence and freedom of the press, vital for upholding democratic principles and facilitating access to reliable information. However, journalists often encounter challenges in story selection due to potential conflicts with media owners, political interests, or other influential figures.¹²⁷ Factors such as editorial policies, the dynamics between newsrooms and management, and media ownership structures can affect journalists' freedom to choose stories or their framing. Moreover, self-censorship remains prevalent as journalists may withhold information or alter content to avoid repercussions.¹²⁸ Despite efforts to address this issue, self-censorship persists in Albania's media landscape.

Journalists in Albania acknowledge the impact of various risks and sources of influence, such as safety concerns, government pressure, and intimidation from media owners, leading to widespread self-censorship.¹²⁹ However, there is variability in journalists' awareness and adherence to ethical standards and codes, with a lack of consistent training in this regard. Additionally, unethical reporting practices, especially in coverage of sensitive social issues involving drama, violence, and conflict, are observed among some journalists and media.¹³⁰

Censorship and self-censorship are pervasive issues in Albania's broadcast and print media, largely controlled by a small group of influential families with vested interests in regulated markets.¹³¹ This concentration of ownership often leads media outlets to serve political or business agendas rather than the public interest. Journalists face constant pressure to avoid certain topics and maintain biased editorial lines to appease owners, editors, and politicians, compromising press freedom and journalistic integrity.¹³² Moreover, journalists encounter security risks, including physical assault and threats, especially during crises like protests or natural disasters, with inadequate security measures and with scanty law enforcement support exacerbating the problem.

Conversely, online media outlets offer a more diverse landscape with greater editorial independence. Many are startups led by professional journalists committed to integrity and independence, providing opportunities for reporting from various perspectives without undue influence. Nevertheless, online outlets grapple with challenges such as financial sustainability and digital security threats, despite offering a refuge from the constraints faced by traditional media. However, a significant number of online media outlets do not deploy journalists in the field, relying instead on secondary sources. This indicates a potential gap in original reporting and

127 "Event Proceedings: Roundtable Discussion on Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Albania," accessed on July 30, 2024.

128 Panel discussions on media freedom and safety of journalists organized by [Faktoje.al](#), [Cluster 1](#), [SCiDEV](#), [RsF and AMC](#), [BIRN and SCiDEV](#).

129 "Event Proceedings: Roundtable Discussion on Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Albania," accessed on July 30, 2024.

130 IREX. 2023. "[Vibrant Information Barometer: Albania](#)," accessed on May 23, 2024.

131 Multiple reports confirm this: [MOMA 2023](#), [Freedom in the World 2023](#), [Free Press Index 2023](#), [SCiDEV Shadow Report 2024](#), [NIS 2023](#).

132 [Interview of the Head of Albanian Media Council](#), July 2024.

investigative journalism.¹³³ Also, many op-eds in online media are sourced from authors' social media pages without proper citation or notification to the author, raising ethical concerns about transparency and author rights acknowledgment. There is a notable lack of consistency in providing citations and hyperlinks in articles, which is essential for transparency and allowing readers to verify information.¹³⁴ The lack of proper citations and hyperlinks poses significant copyright issues and raises concerns about the ethical standards of these media outlets. NGO and international media lead in adhering to these ethical practices, while online media show moderate adherence to citations but very low adherence to hyperlinking.¹³⁵

— B.6 WORKING POSITION OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS

In Albania, women journalists face substantial workplace challenges, including gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, online violence, and gender disinformation.¹³⁶ Fear of retaliation and re-victimization often leads to underreporting of these issues. Enhanced support and protective measures, including effective reporting mechanisms and steps to combat discrimination and harassment, are crucial. Women are also underrepresented in leadership roles within media, but the absence of gender-disaggregated data impedes progress tracking. Additionally, a gender pay gap diminishes their economic empowerment and leadership prospects. The issues of unreported sexual harassment, online violence, and smear campaigns are prevalent pressures that inhibit women journalists' career development and participation.¹³⁷

Even though women represent the majority of journalists in Albania, they are often underrepresented in leading editorial positions.¹³⁸ This gender gap is also present in the decision-making processes within media outlets¹³⁹ and triggers the absence of gender-disaggregated data. Without accurate data, it is difficult to measure progress and identify areas that require more attention and resources. This lack of data makes it challenging to design tailored solutions and implement targeted policies and programs to address gender-based discrimination and promote gender equality in the media sector.

133 In-depth interview with web journalist, April 3, 2024.

134 Albanian Media Council. 2024. [Online Media in Albania](#), accessed on August 4, 2024.

135 Albanian Media Council. 2024. [Online Media in Albania](#), accessed on August 4, 2024.

136 IDM. 2023. [Study Report: The Freedom to Defend Rights in Online Spaces – Challenges for Women Human Rights Defenders in Albania](#), accessed on May 31, 2024.

137 Panel discussions on media freedom and safety of journalists organized by [Faktoje.al](#), [Cluster 1](#), [SCiDEV](#), [RsF and AMC](#), [BIRN and SCiDEV](#).

138 Referring to data from the [Media Ownership Monitoring Albania 2023](#), out of 8 printed outlets, only Monitor Magazine's editor-in-chief is a woman; out of 12 main audiovisual media outlets, only 3 have women serving as editor-in-chief.

139 The [structure of ownership of audiovisual media outlets](#) published in 2024 by AMA and the [Media Ownership Monitoring Albania 2023](#) by BIRN Albania demonstrates that the majority of shareholders and decisionmakers are men.

C. JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

— C.1 JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ACTORS HAVE ACCESS TO IMMEDIATE AND EFFECTIVE PROTECTIVE MEASURES WHEN THEY ARE THREATENED

In 2023, Albania saw no progress in creating dedicated mechanisms for reporting hate speech and serious life threats.¹⁴⁰ The state institutions have provided no specific reporting channels for individuals, including journalists and media actors. Although there is a toll-free emergency number (112) managed by the Ministry of Interior for urgent situations, it is not tailored for reporting hate speech or targeted threats and does not meet the unique needs of journalists. Additionally, no specific hotline for hate speech has been established. While the State Police has undertaken capacity building and awareness initiatives about hate speech through donor-funded projects in 2023, these projects do not involve the creation of direct reporting mechanisms. It should be noted that even if such structures or mechanisms were established, their dependence on an executive characterized by strong centralization—and often regarded as a censor of the media—would raise concerns about their impartiality and effectiveness.

Legal aid also remains a challenge as current legislation¹⁴¹ does not recognize journalists or media workers as eligible for free legal aid guaranteed by the state or exemptions from judicial fees, leaving them without specialized state-run legal services. Although some NGOs provide legal support to journalists on a donor-driven basis, this approach lacks long-term sustainability.¹⁴²

While the police have generally been effective in registering complaints from journalists about threats, there are notable deficiencies in conducting thorough investigations, particularly concerning online attacks and hate speech. Interviews and reports suggest that follow-up actions, such as investigations led by prosecutors and holding perpetrators accountable, are often slow and inefficient.¹⁴³ Despite state institutions processing reports of rights violations, limited structures, resources and capacities frequently lead to inadequate responsiveness and ineffectiveness, especially in addressing threats, online harassment, hate speech, and gender-based discrimination against journalists. Many cases are either dismissed or delayed due to insufficient evidence, indicating a weak institutional framework and diminishing the effectiveness of comprehensive investigations.

Furthermore, there is a concerning level of underreporting of such cases by journalists to state authorities.¹⁴⁴ The lack of recent data or statistics on the status of investigations into attacks on journalists exacerbates the issue. Information about

140 In 2024, a dedicated contact person for journalists' attacks was assigned at the Ministry of Interior in the framework of a [project with the OSCE](#).

141 Law No. 111/2017

142 [Qendra Respublica](#), [Albanian Helsinki Committee](#), [MFRR](#)

143 Focus group discussions, March 5, 2024.

144 "[Event Proceedings: Roundtable Discussion on Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Albania](#)," accessed on July 30, 2024.

ongoing investigations is often treated as confidential or is improperly shielded by investigative secrecy, hindering the rights of the victim (journalists) according to the provisions of Article 58 of the Criminal Procedures Code and the ability to monitor externally the progress in these cases.

— C.2 JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS (WHOSE LIVES OR PHYSICAL INTEGRITY ARE AT REAL AND IMMEDIATE RISK) HAVE ACCESS TO SPECIAL PROTECTION OR SAFETY MECHANISMS

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 no cases were registered in 2023 of journalists benefiting from the victim protection mechanism.¹⁴⁵ However, there are alternative forms of support 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.

The data collected for this report clearly shows that Albania's state authorities lack systematic and well-integrated procedures for assessing the risks faced by journalists and media workers.¹⁴⁶ This absence reflects a significant gap in the measures necessary to evaluate and mitigate the safety concerns of those in the media industry. The need to develop and implement specific protocols that prioritize the risk assessment of journalists and media workers is evident, as current practices and cultural norms within state authorities do not adequately address these issues.

Furthermore, the existing victim protection and safety mechanisms in the law are not designed to meet the unique needs of journalists, leading to potential gaps in protection and limited options for internal relocation. While civil society initiatives have attempted to enhance the safety of journalists, these efforts cannot fully compensate for the lack of targeted measures from the state. Center Respublica¹⁴⁷ has made available to journalists a dedicated WhatsApp line, where they now have the opportunity to be advised in real time to fight misinformation/disinformation and to ensure protection against legal bodies.

145 Request for information, Responses received on January 15, 2024.

146 Focus group discussion and in-depth interview.

147 [Hotline for the support of journalists.](#)

— C.3 WOMEN JOURNALISTS HAVE ACCESS TO LEGAL MEASURES AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS WHEN FACED WITH GENDER-BASED THREATS, HARASSMENT, AND VIOLENCE

Although Albania has ratified the Istanbul Convention and reports to the Council of Europe on a regular basis, the full and effective implementation of the Convention remains incomplete. A substantial issue is the absence of data specifically segregated for cases involving women journalists who are victims of violence, threats, or sexual harassment.¹⁴⁸ This lack of specific data may lead to an underestimation of the problem's scope by the authorities responsible for addressing these issues.

The support mechanisms in place are primarily designed for victims of gender-based domestic violence and not only are they fragmented and under-resourced but they also fail to meet the specific needs of women journalists facing unique challenges and threats in their professional environments. Sexual harassment is particularly concerning. Women journalists frequently refrain from reporting such incidents and the institutions tasked with addressing these complaints often lack the capacity to do so effectively.

While free legal aid guaranteed by state is available for victims of domestic violence, sexual harassment, and human trafficking, there is no specific legal provisions for women journalists as direct beneficiaries of these services. Efforts are needed to ensure that women journalists have access to adequate legal aid and protection mechanisms tailored to their unique needs and challenges.

Albania does not have a unified system providing comprehensive support for victims of gender-based violence, including security measures and legal advice. The existing services are fragmented, requiring victims to navigate multiple institutions, which may contribute to re-victimization. For example, although the Article 58/1/d of Criminal Procedures Code allows victims to request updates on their cases, access to such information is often limited unjustifiably from prosecution during the investigation phase under the guise of investigative secrecy.

Local social services, often in partnership with NGOs, provide some support measures for victims of gender-based and domestic violence through local referral mechanisms at municipal level. These measures are primarily designed to address domestic violence and may lack the resources and training to support women journalists specifically. This can result in inadequate professional support and advice for women journalists facing gender-based threats and harassment.

Women journalists in Albania continue to face cases of sexual harassment, online violence, and smear campaigns as the most

¹⁴⁸ Request for information confirm lack of segregated data.

common forms of gender-based pressures they undergo. These pressures often go unreported, with many women journalists feeling that their complaints would not be taken seriously or that they would face retaliation for speaking out. Moreover, there are increasing concerns about gender disinformation and online violence against women journalists. The latter have reported receiving a higher volume of misogynistic and threatening comments on social media platforms, with some comments being explicitly violent or sexual by nature.¹⁴⁹ This type of online harassment and disinformation can particularly damage women's careers, as it may discourage them from pursuing certain stories or taking on certain roles within the media industry. In Albania, women journalists have the option to seek assistance from state institutions like the Commissioner for the Protection against Discrimination and can report cases of gender-based discrimination and harassment to the police.

— C.4 THE PRACTICE OF REGULAR PUBLIC CONDEMNATION OF THREATS AND ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

In Albania, the practice of publicly condemning threats and attacks on journalists and media actors is inconsistent, incoherent and often influenced by political interests. While certain public authorities have denounced these attacks as violations of freedom of expression, their responses generally lack substantive action to resolve underlying problems. Although the police sometimes publicly respond quickly to such attacks, follow-up investigations are typically limited, non-comprehensive, and delayed. There is also a pervasive issue of impunity for those who perpetrate violence against journalists, compounded by a lack of systematic data collection on such attacks. To enhance the safety of journalists and safeguard press freedom effectively, it is crucial to establish a more consistent, coherent and institutionalized approach to public condemnation, supported by thorough investigative processes and measures to hold perpetrators accountable.

The public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists in Albania is heavily influenced by political dynamics, leading to varying responses from influential politicians and political parties. The Democratic Party, serving as the main opposition, often vocally condemns such incidents, attributing the erosion of media freedom to the governing Socialist Party. In contrast, high-ranking officials from the Socialist Party and associated public figures typically downplay these incidents. This partisan approach underscores the politicization of media freedom issues and complicates efforts to establish a unified, consistent stance on protecting journalists. To genuinely foster a climate of press freedom and safeguard journalists' rights, it is imperative for political leaders across the board to prioritize the safety and well-being of journalists, condemning threats and attacks unequivocally and independent of political affiliations.

149 IDM. 2023. [Study Report: The Freedom to Defend Rights in Online Spaces – Challenges for Women Human Rights Defenders in Albania](#), accessed on May 31, 2204.

In July 2023, the SafeJournalists Network strongly condemned the verbal assault by Mayor of Tirana, Erion Veliaj, on woman journalist Ola Xama of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) Albania, following her investigative report on a corruption case involving high-level politicians and public officials. After the publication of the article on 13th of July, which detailed an investigation by SPAK into an incinerator scandal and named Mayor Veliaj among others, he refused an opportunity to comment before publication and subsequently attacked Ms. Xama via WhatsApp, labelling her a “contract killer.”¹⁵⁰ This personal attack, echoed by similar rhetoric from other media, exacerbates the already hostile environment for journalists and underscores significant concerns about press freedom and public discourse in Albania.

On October 23, 2023, BIRN Albania published an investigative article detailing allegations of corruption involving Albania’s former Prime Minister, Sali Berisha, and his son-in-law, Jamarbër Malltezi, citing SPAK documents that accused Malltezi of amassing a fortune through secretive deals and political favours. The next day, Berisha denounced BIRN Albania at a press conference, marking another attack in his ongoing campaign against the outlet, which he accuses of being influenced by external funders like George Soros to discredit the opposition. Simultaneously, BIRN Albania faces slander from anonymous online portals like Prapaskena.al, accusing it of political bias following their publication “Justice or Revenge? Albania’s Former Strongman Battles Corruption Charges.” This multifaceted hostility puts BIRN Albania in a challenging position, accused by both government supporters and the opposition, illustrating the complex environment for independent media in Albania. Such intimidation and discredit efforts are alarming, as they threaten the integrity of journalism. The situation escalated on November 13, 2023, when Malltezi’s lawyer issued a public denunciation of BIRN, accusing them of slandering Berisha and his family, further amplifying the campaign to undermine BIRN Albania’s credibility.¹⁵¹

— C.5 POLICE AUTHORITIES ARE SENSITIVE TO JOURNALISTS’ PROTECTION ISSUE

Trainings funded by international donors¹⁵² were provided to police officers and judges, covering topics such as journalist safety, online security, hate speech, and harassment.¹⁵³ While these initiatives were beneficial, there remains a significant need for additional capacity building and awareness-raising efforts to enhance the understanding and application of best practices in relations and procedures with journalists. There are no specific protocols adopted by the police authorities or other public entities for prohibiting harassment, intimidation or physical attacks on journalists. Council of Europe is supporting the State Police to establish such protocols in 2024.

150 [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), July 2023.

151 [SafeJournalists Network](#), October 2023.

152 [Council of Europe Project in Albania](#).

153 [Manual for Law Enforcement](#).

No cases of ungrounded detention of journalists by Police were reported in 2023. According to data from the Safe Journalists Network, incidents of 2022 highlighted concerns about police officers' treatment of journalists in Albania. For example, journalist Sami Curri was escorted to a police station after covering a protest against rising prices, while photographer Gent Shkullaku had his camera confiscated during clashes with football fans. Journalists covering protests faced targeting by police, with two physically assaulted in Tirana and Durrës. Journalist Ledio Guni was forcibly removed by police while documenting house demolitions in Tirana's "5 Maji" neighborhood, and woman journalist Sonila Musai was dragged by police while reporting on residents' resistance against apartment demolitions. The case of Sonila Musai is being represented by the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC). However, even after two years, the case has not been fully investigated yet¹⁵⁴. These incidents underscore the need to investigate effectively and promptly in reasonable terms, by addressing unwarranted detention and mistreatment of journalists to ensure their safety in Albania.

In 2023, there has been a notable increase in condemning attacks on journalists' safety by state officials, acknowledging them as violations of freedom of expression.¹⁵⁵ The police have demonstrated enhanced responsiveness in publicly addressing these incidents. However, limitations persist in conducting efficient administrative investigations by the Service of Internal Affairs and Complaints and criminal investigations by the Prosecutor's Office. Independent institutions, including the Ombudsman, the Commissioner for the Protection against Discrimination, and the Information and Data Protection Commissioner, have collaborated with journalists' organizations to address safety concerns. Notably, the General Prosecution and Police have also engaged in cooperation with journalists' organizations regarding journalists' safety issues.

— C.6 SPECIALISED INVESTIGATION UNITS AND/OR OFFICERS ARE EQUIPPED WITH RELEVANT EXPERTISE FOR INVESTIGATING ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Albania's justice system lacks specialized units 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 are still short of the necessary resources to effectively investigate attacks and violence targeting journalists. The General Directorate of the State Police has undertaken steps to review and incorporate amendments into the Standard Operating Procedure titled "Planning of Police Services During Gatherings".¹⁵⁶ This procedure now includes a distinct provision outlining the measures mandated

154 In 2023, the Tirana Court of Appeals rejected the appeal from the Prosecution Office of First Instance, upholding the First Instance Court's decision that required the prosecution to continue investigating the case. The Tirana Court of Appeals ruled to return the case for further investigation, assigning specific tasks to the prosecution. [2023-AHC-Report-on-Human-Rights_-002.pdf](#), page 36.

155 [Safe Journalists Alerts for 2023](#).

156 As sanctioned by Order No. 1364, issued on 17.11.2022 by the General Director of the State Police.

for the State Police to ensure and enforce the presence of journalists and other media representatives at gatherings. It also emphasizes safeguarding their right to report and inform the public, along with providing protection against any opposition or attacks they may face while carrying out their duties or due to their professional obligations¹⁵⁷.

Although some state institutions have received training on dealing with journalists and media professionals, the adoption of official protocols remains limited. The police and prosecutors have a basic understanding of the criminal offenses related to violence and attacks against journalists, but they need to further develop and implement comprehensive protocols to address these issues effectively. Enhancing the resources and capabilities of law enforcement agencies in investigating and prosecuting such cases as well as establishing positive case-law in terms of an effective, objective and comprehensive investigations are crucial to ensure the safety and protection 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 that there are no established guidelines or standardized procedures specifically tailored to address the unique challenges and risks faced by journalists in the course of their work. As a result, investigations and responses to threats and attacks against journalists may lack a systematic and coordinated approach.

— C.7 INVESTIGATIONS OF SERIOUS PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE CARRIED OUT EFFICIENTLY (INDEPENDENTLY, THOROUGHLY AND PROMPTLY)

As in previous years, this report points to a concerning trend of unresolved cases involving actual attacks on journalists within the past three years, indicating a lack of proper investigation and prolonged deadlines regarding cases of 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, thus limiting access to the investigation file to prosecutors and police.¹⁵⁸

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

157 These additions were approved through Order No. 1180, dated August 16, 2023, titled "On Approval of the Standard Work Procedure on Planning of Police Services During the Development of Gatherings," issued by the Albanian State Police.

158 For instance, the armed attack on [Top Channel](#) has not been resolved, neither has the actual attack on [Ervis Hila](#) been resolved.

preventing to charge and/or punish criminally the perpetrators. According to statistical data for 2023, six criminal referrals were lodged by journalists in the prosecutor's offices of general jurisdiction due to their duty. The prosecutors of the first degree of general jurisdiction have initiated criminal proceedings for these cases. Four proceedings are currently under investigation, while two cases have been sent for trial. One case involves charges under Article 237 of the Criminal Code, "Assaults because of duty," against two defendants accused of assaulting a journalist. Another case involves charges under Articles 237, "Assaults because of duty," 150, "Destruction of property," and 110, "Unlawful detention," against one defendant. It is important to note that the General Prosecutor's annual report on criminality in the country, even in 2023, does not include public data on criminal offenses involving journalists as victims, including cases of serious physical assaults against them.¹⁵⁹

Multiple reports indicate that the investigation of attacks on journalists is hindered by stalled procedural deadlines, which are extended significantly beyond the usual 3-month deadline 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.

— C.8 JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE EFFICIENTLY PROTECTED FROM VARIOUS FORMS OF ONLINE HARASSMENT

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 behaviour that violates a person's dignity and creates a threatening or offensive environment, including online 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 favourable 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, resulting in separate or simultaneous criminal, civil and administrative liability for the perpetrators. Such legal framework imposes the need for proactive measures from employers, individuals, and society to prevent and address such behaviours.

159 [General Prosecutor Annual Report 2023](#).

Albanian journalists facing smear campaigns¹⁶⁰ endure damage to their professional credibility, fostering public mistrust and potentially compromising their reporting integrity. These campaigns inflict a significant psychological burden, especially in contexts where support systems are lacking. The diversion of resources from investigative endeavours to combat smear campaigns further strains an already constrained media landscape in Albania. The fear of becoming targets themselves can prompt self-censorship among journalists, stifling press freedom. Legal recourse is challenging due to perceptions of judicial impartiality, backlog of cases, and high costs. Moreover, solidarity and support from peers and the community are often insufficient, exacerbating the campaign's impact and jeopardizing valuable sources.

Journalists in Albania face significant challenges, including limited access to free legal aid and protection mechanisms, leaving them vulnerable to threats and violence, especially when reporting on sensitive issues. Fear of retaliation prevents many journalists from seeking justice or protection, as they distrust institutions and fear revictimization. Media outlets often refuse financial or legal support, forcing journalists to navigate legal battles alone, potentially leading to censorship or self-censorship. These issues highlight the urgent need for improved support systems to safeguard journalists' rights and ensure press freedom.

— C.9 INVESTIGATIONS OF ALL TYPES OF ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE CARRIED OUT TRANSPARENTLY

According to Article 58 of the Criminal Procedures 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 sometimes unjustifiably considered as investigative secrets.

Law No. 115/2016, "On Governance Bodies of the Justice System in the Republic of Albania", provides for the creation of new positions in the courts, including some key positions for communication with the media and the public. Through several public officials such as its Designated Member for Public Relations, Media Judges and Media and Public Relations Officers (MPRO) in the courts, the High Judicial Council (HJC) ensures that information provided to the public should be accurate and timely, using a variety of tools, including websites. In 2023, the High Judiciary Council introduced the strategic communication plan for the judicial system as well as the appointment of 16 judges for the media, in the 13 courts of judicial districts and 3 courts of appeals, aiming to increase the level of information and transparency.¹⁶¹

160 [Ola Xama case.](#)
161 [Media Judges](#)

— C.10 QUALITY STATISTICS COLLECTION SYSTEMS ESTABLISHED BY STATE AUTHORITIES TO STEM IMPUNITY

Albania lacks 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. Currently there is no disaggregated data, even though this is a requirement of the Roadmap on the Rule of Law,¹⁶² according to which the General Prosecutor's Office publishes the results of investigations into journalists' cases, case by case from the year 2024 onwards.

The High Council of Justice collects and generates data on cases involving journalists from the year 2023 onwards. Also, it envisages that the State Police and the prosecutorial services designate a contact point within their structure, responsible for handling attacks against journalists until the year 2024 and ensure the informing and public awareness of such cases from the year 2024 onwards.

— C.11 NON-PHYSICAL THREATS AND HARASSMENTS

In 2023, Safe Journalists Network registered 5 non-physical threats and harassments (3 against men and 2 against women). Although the number remains the same as in 2022, the sensitiveness of the cases makes the condition worse. The main case – that of Tirana Mayor Erion Veliaj's public identification of two individuals allegedly behind popular online pages, Lolita and 'Jeta Osh Qef'¹⁶³ during an event on March 29, 2023– has sparked concerns for their safety. The pages engage in satire, parody, and citizen reporting, albeit not always meeting journalistic standards. Veliaj's mention of family ties and threats of legal action without concrete evidence raises alarm, particularly as it triggered verbal assaults and threats towards the individuals on social media. The move also raises ethical questions about media anonymity and professionalism. While Lolita satirizes social and political issues with over 230,000 followers, 'Jeta Osh Qef' boasts a significant online community of over 2 million followers. Veliaj's media practices have drawn criticism previously for limiting press access and controlling information distribution.

In another case, in July 2023, Mayor Veliaj verbally attacked woman journalist Ola Xama,¹⁶⁴ after publishing an investigative piece on the SPAK investigation regarding the Tirana incinerator case, despite being given a chance to comment beforehand. He referred to her as a "contract killer" in a WhatsApp message, sparking a hostile environment amplified by similar rhetoric from other media outlets. This was followed by a smear campaign by online media outlets. Online attacks and harassment were another form of violation of safety of journalists in 2023.¹⁶⁵

162 [Rule of Law Roadmap, 2023](#).
163 [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), March 2023.
164 [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), July 2023.
165 [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), October 2023.

Category	Number	Brief Description of Cases
<p>Non-physical threats and harassment</p> <p>Non-physical threats and harassments include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – surveillance or trailing. – harassing phone calls. – arbitrary judicial or administrative harassment. – aggressive declarations by public officials. – other forms of pressure that can jeopardize the safety of journalists in pursuing their work. <p>These types of threats do not include mobbing and bullying in the working environment.</p>	<p>5 (3 Men, 2 Women)</p>	<p>Threats against journalist Ola Xama by Mayor of Tirana.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Mayor of Tirana, Erion Veliaj, publicly named a woman he claims runs the satirical Facebook page 'Lolita,' accusing her of blackmailing bus companies and mentioning she has two children, without providing evidence. – Mayor of Tirana Publicly Identifies Satirical Online Pages Admins, Sparking Safety Concerns: JOQ. – The Albanian tax authority's communication with journalist Gjergj Erebara is concerning, as it may be interpreted as an attempt to intimidate a journalist. – Journalist Armand Bajrami reported the use of his data by an unauthorized person in the Cybercrime Section of the Tirana Local Police Directorate.

– C.12 THREATS AGAINST THE LIVES AND PHYSICAL SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

In October 2023, Journalist Afrovita Hysaj faced threats and public attacks from the owner of the local TV station 6+1 Vlora, while other journalists reported threats after covering the gang rape of a girl in Vlora earlier in the same month. There was another reported case of a threat against the physical safety of a journalist. Journalist and TV presenter Blendi Salaj received threatening message through his social media profile.¹⁶⁶ In 2022 there was also one case of threat against physical safety of a media crew ([1 men and 1 woman](#)) and the situation has barely changed. In 2021, there was also one case of life-threatening messages online to a woman journalist, [Alice Taylor](#), but the case has not been resolved.

Category	Number	Brief Description of Cases
<p>Threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists</p> <p>This category may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – references to killing journalists, journalists' friends, family, or sources. – references to making physical harm against journalists, journalists' friends, family, or sources. <p>These threats may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – made directly or via third parties. – conveyed via electronic or face-to-face communications. – implicit as well as explicit. 	<p>2 (1 Men, 1 Woman)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Blendi Salaj, a highly respected journalist, recently commented on some noteworthy moments during the "Big Brother VIP2" show and received two threatening messages regarding his safety. – On October 24th, 2023, Channel 6+1 Vlora posted a status on their Facebook account that directly targeted journalist Afrovita Hysaj. The content of this status is highly unethical and undermines the journalist's reputation and professionalism.

– C.13 ACTUAL ATTACKS

SafeJournalists Network recorded 9 actual attacks, involving 12 men and 4 women journalists attacked in 2023, which remains the same as in 2022. On a positive note, the case of Elvis Hila was resolved and perpetrators were brought to justice. Journalist Elvis Hila and his wife were physically assaulted after reporting from a trial in Lezha. The Court of Lezha found guilty two people accused of attacking the journalist in July 2023.¹⁶⁷ Also in 2023, in contrast to 2022,

¹⁶⁶ [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), April 2024.

¹⁶⁷ [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), July 2023.

there were no ungrounded detention by the Police or any other actual attacks against journalists by the Police.

Category	Number	Brief Description of Cases
Actual attacks on journalists Types of actual attacks may include actual physical or mental harm, kidnapping, invasion of home/office, seized equipment, arbitrary detention, failed assassination attempts, etc.	9 (12 man and 7 women)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unidentified individuals viciously assaulted journalist Gjergj Zefi by striking him with blunt objects. - Elton Qyno, a journalist with Ora News television in Albania, was questioned for nearly seven hours on December 13, 2023, in Tirana by the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecution Office (SPAK) and specifically asked to reveal his sources. - Actual attack on journalists by the Guard of Republic/Albanian Assembly. Journalists attempting to engage with ministers and Members of Parliament for questioning were impeded by the Guard in the assembly's yard. - During the plenary session, Democratic Party MP, Flamur Noka hit the cameraman Parid Dado representing Vizion Plus media channel, with the Assembly's regulation book. - Several journalists and media outlets were attacked during the tensions at the meeting of the DP group by supporters of Lulzim Basha. - In Fier, a citizen hit the camera operator of the investigative show "Stop" journalist and broke the journalist's cell phone. - Journalists of the investigative TV show Fiks Fare were physically attacked on February 8th while filming illegal mining at the Zeze River in Nikel, Fushe Kruje, about 30 km north of Tirana, Albania's capital city. - Two persons physically attacked a journalist of Report TV, Elvis Hila, and his wife in Lezhe. - Journalist Marsi Korreshi and her crew from SYRI TV were attacked during their coverage of a Socialist Party gathering in the city of Rrogozhina.

— C.14 THREATS AND ATTACKS ON MEDIA OUTLETS AND JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATIONS

In 2023, Safe Journalists Network registered 9 cases as threats against media outlets and organizations and attacks on media outlets and organizations. There is a slight escalation of threats and attacks against media outlets in Albania, with a rising number of cases reported and increasing severity. However, only a few cases have been resolved, indicating a concerning trend. Organized crime poses a significant threat to journalists' safety, compounded by impunity for these crimes and political efforts to discredit journalists, fostering a climate conducive to further attacks. A major case was the shooting at the national TV station Top Channel in March 2023 where a guard was killed and the case remains unresolved to this date.¹⁶⁸ Other type of attacks on media outlets were digital with the webpage experiencing DDoS attacks such as shqiptarja.com. Report TV, balkanweb.¹⁶⁹

168 [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), March 2023.

169 [SafeJournalists Network Alert](#), October 2023.

Category	Number	Brief description of the cases
<p>Threats and attacks on media outlets and journalists' associations</p> <p>Actual attacks on property of media outlets and organizations, their personnel, seized equipment, aggressive declarations by public officials etc. Also, threats and attacks might include some of the categories listed above.</p>	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A tragic incident occurred at Top Channel. Unidentified individuals opened fire at the Top Channel premises in Mzeze, resulting in the tragic loss of 60-year-old security guard, Pal Kola. - Berisha accused BIRN Albania of slander and tarnishing their moral standing. - Russian hackers targeted Shqiptarja.com and Report TV in a cyber attack. - Unidentified hackers have attacked the popular online portal, Balkanweb, making it inaccessible to thousands of its readers at home and abroad for several hours. - Former PM Berisha issued threats against media outlet BIRN Albania. - Media outlets have reported on the General Directorate of Taxation in Albania imposing fines on two TV stations, News24, and RTV Ora News. - On November 29, 2023, a memorial ceremony was held at the Martyrs' Cemetery where the fallen are honored. During the ceremony, the Albanian Guard of the Republic prevented the presence of the media and journalists in this event. - Reporter Arboja Cibuku and her team were denied access by several Tirana Municipality officials. - Journalist Ronald Qema from the local media outlet "Nyje" was explicitly denied access to the Kamëz Municipal Council meeting.



Conclusions and Recommendations

CONCLUSIONS

LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

Media freedom and the safety of journalists in Albania continue to face significant challenges that merit careful attention, collective commitment and strategic intervention. Despite constitutional guarantees of media freedom and freedom of expression, the effective implementation of these rights is hindered by structural issues, such as concentrated media ownership and the influence of powerful political and economic interests and issues with the rule of law. These factors restrict the diversity of voices and information integrity in the media landscape, limit transparency, and contribute to a decline in public trust. The legal environment, while providing some protections, still allows for the criminalization of defamation and lacks explicit safeguards against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). Furthermore, the increased control over public information by government entities, coupled with disinformation campaigns from various political and economic forces and a decline in information integrity, exacerbates the difficulties faced by professional, independent and mission-driven journalists, particularly those engaged in investigative work.

JOURNALISTS' POSITION IN THE NEWSROOM

The working conditions for journalists in Albania require significant improvement to support their professional integrity and independence. Many journalists face economic insecurity, with delayed payments, insufficient social protections, and a lack of stable employment contracts. These challenges are compounded by the concentration of media ownership, where editorial independence is often compromised due to the overlapping interests of media owners, political figures, and economic stakeholders. This environment fosters a culture of self-censorship,

as journalists are pressured to align their reporting with the interests of media proprietors, leading to a decline in the overall quality of media content. Additionally, the absence of robust labor protections, including union representation and collective bargaining, leaves journalists vulnerable to exploitation and retaliation. These issues are particularly pronounced for women journalists and those working in local or independent media, who face additional barriers, including gender-based harassment and discrimination.

JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

Journalists' safety and security remain areas of concern in Albania. While physical attacks on journalists are relatively rare, the ongoing pressures, intimidation, and digital harassment they face create an environment that can undermine their ability to work freely. Law enforcement agencies, though generally responsive, often lack the specialized knowledge, resources, and protocols needed to investigate threats against journalists comprehensively, promptly and transparently. This situation is further complicated by the absence of specific legal protections for journalists, particularly concerning online harassment, which leaves them vulnerable to digital threats. Lack of a system that enables institutions to collect, process, and segregate data on cases that are related to the violation of safety and security of journalists is concerning. The slow pace of investigations and the lack of transparency in the judicial process contribute to a sense of impunity for those who perpetrate crimes against media professionals.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The overall environment for independent and professional journalism in Albania is currently under considerable strain due to a combination of structural challenges. The intertwining of political, economic, and media interests, coupled with the concentration of media ownership and limited transparency, has created an atmosphere where independent, high-quality journalism is increasingly difficult to sustain. These challenges are further exacerbated by inadequate legal protections, poor working conditions, and persistent threats to the safety of journalists. To foster a more enabling environment for journalism, there is an urgent need for comprehensive reforms that address these underlying issues. This includes strengthening legal protections for journalists, improving their working conditions, and enhancing the capacity of state institutions to safeguard their safety.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DIMENSION A: LEGAL PROTECTION AND FRAMEWORKS

- Decriminalize Defamation: Fully decriminalize defamation to protect freedom of expression and align with international standards, reducing the risk of legal harassment against journalists.

- **Anti-SLAPP Legislation:** Introduce and implement legislation to explicitly protect journalists from Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), in line with the recently adopted EU anti-SLAPP directive.
- **Transparency in Media Ownership and Funding:** Strengthen regulations to ensure full transparency of media ownership and funding sources, avoiding conflicts of interest and ensuring media independence.
- **Protect Journalistic Sources:** Ensure strict enforcement of legal protections for the confidentiality of journalistic sources to safeguard investigative journalism.
- **Amend Criminal Code:** Revise the Criminal Code to include special legal protections for journalists who are attacked or threatened due to their professional duties.
- **Training for Law Enforcement:** Provide systematic training for law enforcement agencies on handling cases of media blackmailing and attacks on journalists, ensuring they have the resources to conduct thorough and impartial investigations.
- **Amend Audiovisual Media Law:** Amend the law to establish clear, transparent, and merit-based criteria for the selection of AMA board members and RTSH Steering Council, ensuring that the process is fully independent from political influence and free from partisan formulas. This should include mechanisms to safeguard the board's autonomy, such as involving independent media experts and civil society representatives in the selection process.

DIMENSION B: JOURNALISTS' WORKING CONDITIONS AND EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE

- **Enforce Labor Rights:** Strengthening the capacities and independence of Labour Inspectorate regarding effective regular inspections of labour rights in the media sector. Ensure strict enforcement of the labor laws, guaranteeing timely payments, social security, and job stability for journalists, while promoting the establishment of unions and collective bargaining mechanisms.
- **Strengthen Public Service Broadcaster:** Enhance the independence of the public service broadcaster to ensure unbiased news reporting, free from political influence.
- **Promote Gender Equality:** Support and incentivize gender equality in newsrooms, promoting diversity and equal opportunities for all journalists.
- **Incentivize Quality Journalism:** Encourage investigative journalism by providing public support for its role in holding power to account and promoting transparency.

DIMENSION C: SAFETY AND SECURITY OF JOURNALISTS

- **Zero Tolerance for Attacks:** Adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards intimidation, threats, and attacks against journalists, ensuring that such incidents are thoroughly, effectively and promptly investigated as well as publicly condemned.
- **Specialized Protection Mechanisms:** Establish specific protection mechanisms for journalists under threat, including options for safe relocation and access to free legal aid.
- **Digital Safety Measures:** Tackle the issue of digital safety by increasing the capacities of public institutions to address online harassment and cyber threats against journalists.
- **Data Collection and Publication:** Create reliable mechanisms within relevant institutions to regularly collect and publish data on journalists' safety, working conditions, and related issues.
- **Prosecution and Police Contact Points, Support, Monitoring and Collaboration:** Once contact points within the Police and Prosecution for addressing attacks against journalists are established, it is crucial to provide continuous support and ensure ongoing monitoring. This should be complemented by fostering close collaboration with journalists' associations and media freedom organizations to enhance the effectiveness of these contacts in protecting journalists.

D. JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATIONS AND SOLIDARITY

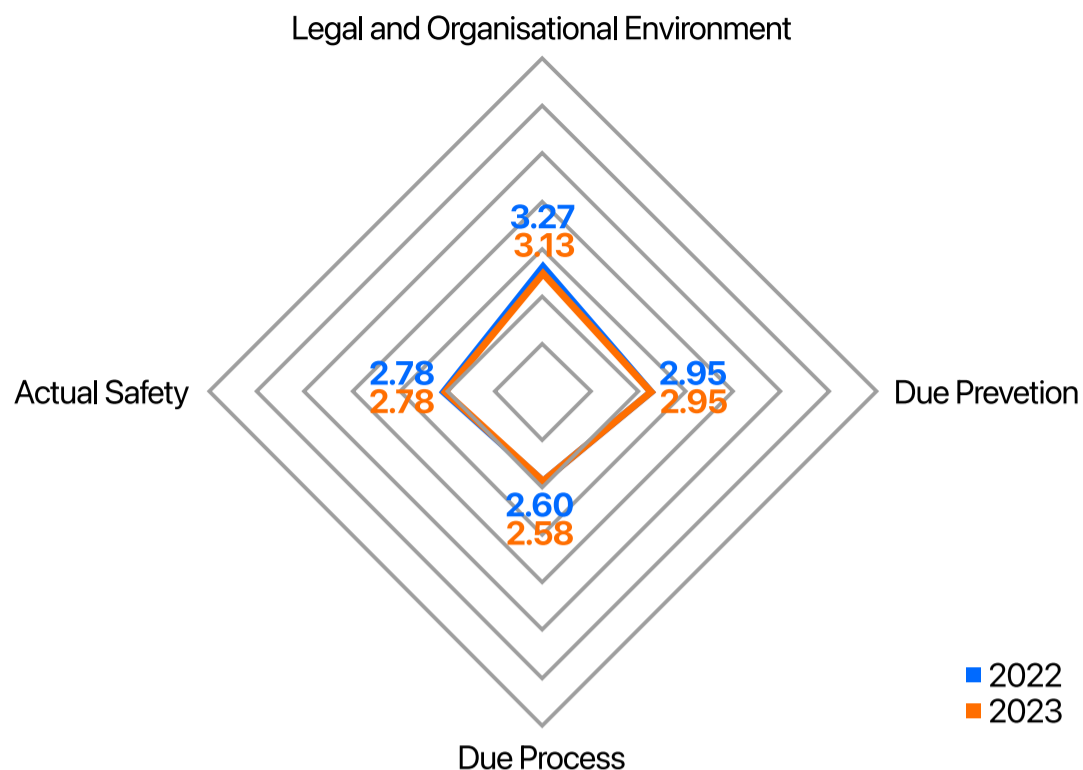
- **Support Fact-Checking and Investigative Journalism:** Establish and strengthen platforms for journalists' associations, media outlets, and support organizations to collaborate on fact-checking, investigative reporting, and the protection of threatened journalists.
- **Build Self-Regulation Mechanisms:** Develop and enforce self-regulation mechanisms within the media industry to uphold ethical standards and protect journalists' rights.
- **Provide Capacity Building and Solidarity:** Enhance the capacity, resources, and solidarity of journalists' associations to support members facing legal challenges, threats, or attacks.

IV Journalists' Safety Index Albania – 2023

This section of the report provides a graphical presentation of the Journalists' Safety Index in 2023, compared to the previous year 2022. A brief explanation of the key changes that occurred in 2023 is presented for each of the four dimensions and for all 19 indicators.

A broader explanation of the data and the changes that occurred for each individual indicator of the Index can be read in the narrative section of the report:

Indicator in the Journalists' Safety Index	Narrative Report
I. Legal and Organisational Environment	
Legal provisions related to defamation and their application do not create a chilling effect on journalists and the media	A.6
The confidentiality of journalists' sources is guaranteed in the legislation and respected by the authorities	A.8
Other laws are enforced objectively and allow journalists and other media actors to work freely and safely	A.7
Journalists are free to pursue their profession and to establish, join and participate in their associations	A.9
The job positions of journalists are stable and protected at the workplace	B.1
II. Due Prevention	
Journalists and media actors have access to immediate and effective protective measures	C.1
Journalists and other media actors have access to special protection or safety mechanisms	C.2
Female journalists have access to legal measures and support mechanisms	C.3
The practice of regular public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media	C.4
Police authorities are sensitive to journalists' protection issue	C.5
III. Due Process	
Specialised units/officers are equipped with expertise for investigating attacks and violence against journalists	C.6
Investigations of serious physical attacks on journalists and other media actors are carried out efficiently	C.7
Journalists and other media actors are efficiently protected from various forms of online harassment	C.8
Investigations of all types of attacks and violence against journalists and other media actors are carried out transparently	C.9
3.5 Quality statistics collection systems established by state authorities to stem impunity	C.10
IV. Actual Safety	
Non-physical threats and harassments	C.11
Threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists	C.12
Actual attacks	C.13
Threats and attacks on media outlets and journalists' associations	C.14



Journalists' Safety Index Albania – 2023

	2022	2023		Main New Developments in Each Dimension
Legal and Organisational Environment	3.27	3.13	↓	In 2023, lawsuits against journalists in Albania increased, many viewed as SLAPPs intended to silence investigative reporting. A significant case raised concerns about source confidentiality when authorities seized a journalist's personal and professional materials. Working conditions for journalists remain precarious.
Due Prevention	2.95	2.95	–	In 2023, journalists in Albania lacked effective protective measures, with no tailored legal aid or dedicated safety mechanisms in place. The state's response to threats, especially online harassment, remained slow and insufficient, leaving journalists vulnerable. Women journalists faced limited gender-specific protections, and public condemnation of attacks was inconsistent.
Due Process	2.60	2.58	↓	In 2023, Albania saw no improvement in the establishment of specialized units or protocols for investigating attacks on journalists. Investigations into serious physical attacks and online harassment remained inadequate, leading to a sense of impunity. There is yet no comprehensive data collection system regarding attacks on journalists.
Actual Safety	2.78	2.75	↓	In 2023, SJN recorded 24 cases. Five cases of non-physical threats and harassment against journalists, often involving public officials, and sparking concerns for safety, were registered in Albania. Two threats to journalists' physical safety and nine actual attacks were also reported, including physical assaults on reporters during their work. Additionally, there were nine cases of threats and attacks on media outlets, including a tragic shooting at a TV station.
Journalists' Safety Index	2.84	2.80	↓	

Legal and Organisational Environment

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

2.89

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

3.79

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

3.10

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

2.11

1.00 Neither law nor practice provides any protection in the workplace for journalists, their sources, and their organizations, which creates an extremely chilling effect.

2.00

3.00

4.00

5.00

6.00

7.00

↑
↓

Both the law and practice provide the highest degree of protection in the workplace for journalists, their sources, and organizations.

INDICATOR 1.1

— LEGAL PROVISIONS RELATED TO DEFAMATION AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION DO NOT PRODUCE CHILLING EFFECTS ON JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA

Score for 2022: 3.08 / Score for 2023: 2.89

Albania categorizes defamation as a criminal offense, which is contrary to international best practices. Although prison sentences for defamation were abolished in 2012, significant fines can still be imposed, which may inhibit free expression and lead to self-censorship among journalists. The existing legal framework does not fully align with the Council of Europe and EU standards, and civil society organizations have advocated for the complete decriminalization of defamation, along with a reduction in the associated fines and a legal definition of SLAPP. The 2023 data reveal an increase in defamation lawsuits against journalists, with delays in case processing and a lack of transparency in judicial outcomes further contributing to the chilling effects on media freedom.

INDICATOR 1.2

— CONFIDENTIALITY OF JOURNALISTS' SOURCES IS GUARANTEED IN THE LEGISLATION AND RESPECTED BY THE AUTHORITIES

Score for 2022: 4.14 / Score for 2023: 3.79

The confidentiality of journalists' sources is legally protected in Albania. Journalists are generally exempt from disclosing their sources, unless a court orders it in criminal proceedings where the information is deemed crucial to proving a criminal offense. However, despite these legal safeguards, in 2023 there was one instance where these protections were challenged, involving journalist Elton Qyno, who was pressured by the Special Anti-Corruption Prosecution Office (SPAK) to reveal his sources during an investigation, raising concerns about the respect for source confidentiality in practice.

INDICATOR 1.3

— OTHER LAWS ARE IMPLEMENTED OBJECTIVELY AND ALLOW THE JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS TO WORK FREELY AND SAFELY

Score for 2022: 3.11 / Score for 2023: 3.10

Albania's legal framework permits journalists to work freely, but the arbitrary enforcement of laws, such as those on defamation, hate speech, and data protection, can intimidate journalists and restrict media freedom. The lack of explicit protections against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) exacerbates these challenges. Additionally, journalists are not covered under state-guaranteed legal aid, making it difficult for them to defend against legal harassment. In 2023, there was one case of a journalist received multiple lawsuits for defamation by a politically related individual.

INDICATOR 1.4

— JOURNALISTS ARE FREE TO PURSUE THEIR PROFESSION AND ESTABLISH, JOIN AND PARTICIPATE IN THEIR ASSOCIATIONS

Score for 2022: 3.73 / Score for 2023: 3.73

Journalists in Albania are legally free to pursue their profession without the need for state licensing, and there were no attempts in 2023 to introduce such requirements. While journalists can establish, join, and participate in professional associations, challenges remain, including restrictions on access to certain events and the common practice of politicians and high-ranking officials to distribute pre-prepared content rather than engage directly with the media. Additionally, independent journalists and freelancers often face difficulties in being recognized and accredited. Despite these issues, there is no significant pressure from public authorities to prevent journalists from joining associations, though trade unions are virtually non-existent, leaving journalists with limited collective representation and support.

INDICATOR 1.5

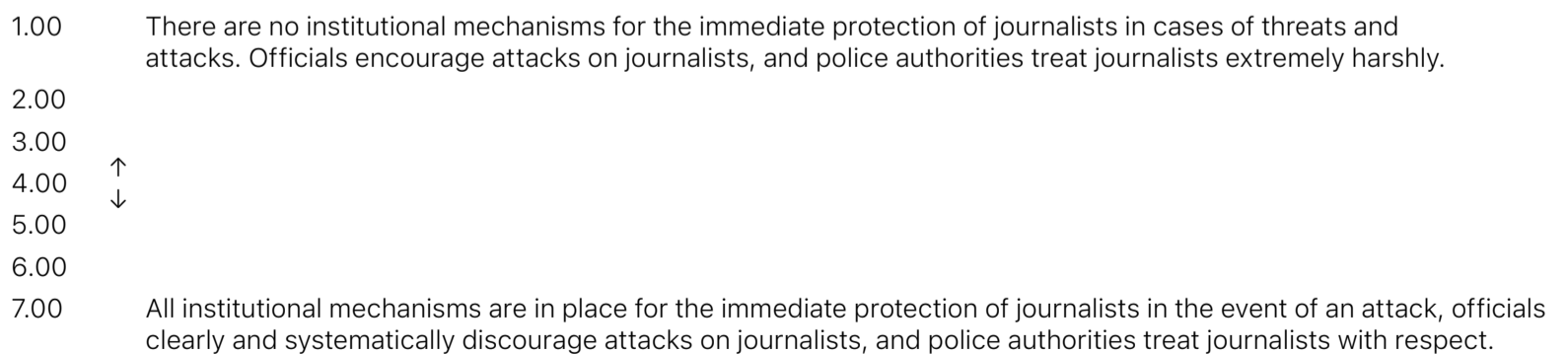
— JOURNALISTS' JOB POSITION IS STABLE AND PROTECTED IN THE WORKPLACE

Score for 2022: 2.27 / Score for 2023: 2.11

While most journalists in Albania have formal employment contracts, their job positions are often not stable or well-protected. In 2023, as in previous years, common issues included delayed payments, lack of social security benefits, long working hours, and informal employment arrangements, especially for district correspondents and online journalists. Additionally, many journalists face precarious working conditions without union representation or collective agreements to safeguard their labor rights. Complaints about unfair dismissals and other labor violations were frequent in 2023, but fear of retaliation and limited resources discourage many from seeking redress. Overall, the protection of journalists' job positions in Albania remains inadequate.



Due Prevention



INDICATOR 2.1

— JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ACTORS HAVE ACCESS TO IMMEDIATE AND EFFECTIVE PROTECTIVE MEASURES WHEN THEY ARE THREATENED

Score for 2022: 2.80 / Score for 2023: 2.80

Albania lacks specific mechanisms dedicated to providing immediate and effective protective measures for journalists and media actors who face threats. While a general emergency number exists, it is not tailored for reporting threats against journalists. With the measures envisaged in the Roadmap on Rule of Law, specific contacts points in the Police and Prosecution are to be set up for journalists. Legal aid is also limited, as journalists are not specifically covered under state-provided legal services. Although some NGOs offer legal support, these efforts are not sustainable or sufficient. Overall, in 2023, the state response to threats against journalists remained often slow and ineffective, particularly regarding online harassment and hate speech, leaving journalists vulnerable and under-protected.

INDICATOR 2.2

— 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 2022: 2.78 / Score for 2023: 2.78

No dedicated protection mechanisms specifically designed for journalists and media actors facing real and immediate threats to their lives or physical integrity are in place in Albania. The existing victim protection mechanisms are not tailored to address the unique risks that journalists encounter. Although some civil society organizations provide legal aid and support, these initiatives are not a substitute for comprehensive, state-backed safety mechanisms. The absence of systematic risk assessments and specialized protection protocols leaves journalists vulnerable, with inadequate options for ensuring their safety in high-risk situations.

INDICATOR 2.3

— WOMEN JOURNALISTS HAVE ACCESS TO LEGAL MEASURES AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS WHEN FACED WITH GENDER-BASED THREATS, HARASSMENT, AND VIOLENCE.

Score for 2022: 3.49 / Score for 2023: 3.49

While Albania's legal framework, including the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, provides some protection against gender-based violence, the specific needs of women journalists are not adequately addressed. Legal measures and support mechanisms primarily focus on domestic violence, with limited resources tailored for women journalists facing workplace harassment or online violence. Many women journalists are reluctant to report incidents due to fear of retaliation and

lack of confidence in institutional responses. The absence of comprehensive and gender-sensitive support systems further exacerbates their vulnerability to threats and harassment.

INDICATOR 2.4

— THE PRACTICE OF REGULAR PUBLIC CONDEMNATION OF THREATS AND ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED

Score for 2022: 2.73 / Score for 2023: 2.59

The practice of publicly condemning threats and attacks on journalists in Albania is inconsistent and often influenced by political interests. While some public officials occasionally denounce such incidents, these statements are typically superficial and lack follow-through. The politicization of media freedom issues leads to uneven responses, with opposition parties more likely to condemn attacks if it provides arguments against the government, while government officials often downplay or ignore them. This inconsistent approach contributes to a climate of impunity, where threats and attacks on journalists are not adequately addressed or condemned, undermining press freedom and safety.

INDICATOR 2.5

— POLICE AUTHORITIES ARE SENSITIVE TO JOURNALISTS' PROTECTION ISSUE

Score for 2022: 2.94 / Score for 2023: 3.09

Some capacity-building initiatives for police officers regarding journalists' safety and human rights have been undertaken in Albania, but these efforts remain insufficient. There are no specific protocols or guidelines adopted by police authorities to prevent harassment, intimidation, or physical attacks on journalists. Although the police generally respond to incidents involving journalists, their actions are often inadequate, particularly in handling online threats and hate speech. Cooperation between police authorities and journalists' associations is limited. No cases of ungrounded detentions of journalists have been recorded in 2023.



Due Process

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

2.93

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

2.60

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

2.53

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

2.55

Quality statistics collection systems established by state authorities to stem impunity

2.28

1.00 Institutions neither investigate nor sanction attacks on journalists, including online harassment, threats to the life and physical safety of journalists, and physical attacks on journalists and the media.

2.00

3.00

4.00

5.00

6.00

7.00



Institutions are fully efficient and transparent in investigating and sanctioning attacks on journalists, including via the internet, threats to the life and physical safety of journalists, and physical attacks on journalists and the media

INDICATOR 3.1

— SPECIALISED INVESTIGATION UNITS AND/OR OFFICERS ARE EQUIPPED WITH RELEVANT EXPERTISE FOR INVESTIGATING ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Score for 2022: 2.96 / Score for 2023: 2.93

Albania lacks specialized investigation units or officers specifically trained to handle cases of violence and attacks against journalists. Even though the general law enforcement handles these cases, the lack of specialized expertise often results in inadequate investigations and delays in addressing threats. This gap in specialized knowledge and training hampers the effective protection of journalists and contributes to a climate of impunity for those who perpetrate violence against media professionals.

INDICATOR 3.2

— INVESTIGATIONS OF SERIOUS PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE CARRIED OUT EFFICIENTLY (INDEPENDENTLY, THOROUGHLY AND PROMPTLY)

Score for 2022: 2.61 / Score for 2023: 2.60

Investigations of serious physical attacks on journalists in Albania are often neither thorough nor prompt. There are frequent delays, and investigations are sometimes conducted without the necessary independence, raising concerns about potential bias or lack of impartiality. The inefficiency of these investigations contributes to a sense of impunity, as perpetrators are not always held accountable, which undermines the safety of journalists and the overall media environment. The armed attack with one victim against a national TV channel in Albania remains unresolved.

INDICATOR 3.3

— JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE EFFICIENTLY PROTECTED FROM VARIOUS FORMS OF ONLINE HARASSMENT

Score for 2022: 2.58 / Score for 2023: 2.53

Albania's journalists and media actors face significant challenges in obtaining protection from online harassment. The legal and institutional frameworks are not adequately equipped to address the growing issue of online threats, harassment, and abuse targeted at journalists. While some civil society organizations offer support, the state lacks effective mechanisms and resources to provide timely and efficient protection. This gap leaves journalists vulnerable to online harassment, with limited recourse to justice or protection from ongoing digital threats.

INDICATOR 3.4

— INVESTIGATIONS OF ALL TYPES OF ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS ARE CARRIED OUT TRANSPARENTLY

Score for 2022: 2.57 / Score for 2023: 2.55

Investigations into attacks and violence against journalists in Albania are often conducted with limited transparency. Consistent public reporting on the outcomes of such investigations is lacking and details are frequently withheld under the guise of investigative secrecy. This opacity undermines public trust in the process and contributes to a perception of impunity, as it is difficult to assess whether justice is being served. The absence of transparency in these investigations further exacerbates the vulnerability of journalists and media actors to violence and intimidation

INDICATOR 3.5

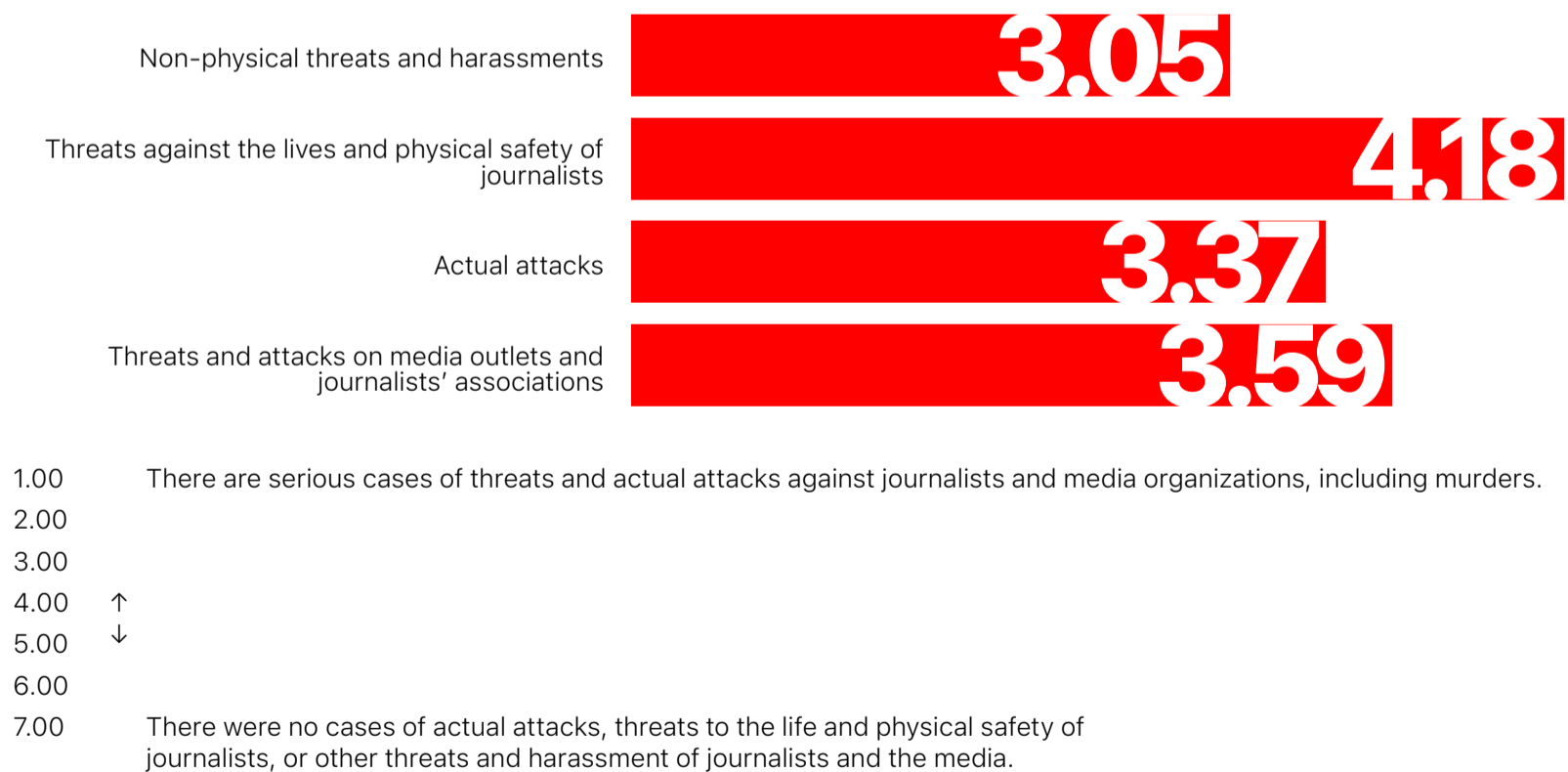
— QUALITY STATISTICS COLLECTION SYSTEMS ESTABLISHED BY STATE AUTHORITIES TO STEM IMPUNITY

Score for 2022: 2.28 / Score for 2023: 2.28

There is a significant deficiency in the collection and management of quality statistics related to attacks and violence against journalists in Albania. State authorities lack a comprehensive system for gathering and analysing data on such incidents, which hinders efforts to address impunity effectively. Without reliable and transparent statistical data, it is challenging to track the frequency, nature, and outcomes of attacks on journalists, thereby weakening the ability to implement informed policies and measures to protect media professionals and hold perpetrators accountable. The Roadmap on Rule of Law has provisions for the setup of data collection mechanism within the Police and Prosecution.

IV

Actual Safety



INDICATOR 4.1

— THREATS AND HARASSMENT THAT ARE NOT RELATED TO PHYSICAL SAFETY

Score for 2022: 3.37 / Score for 2023: 3.05

Non-physical threats and harassment of journalists are a persistent issue in Albania. In 2023, five cases of non-physical threats were reported, involving both men and women journalists. The cases illustrate the concerning trend of public officials engaging in or inciting harassment against journalists, which exacerbates the already fragile environment for independent media professionals.

INDICATOR 4.2

— THREATS AGAINST THE LIVES AND PHYSICAL SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Score for 2022: 4.30 / Score for 2023: 4.18

Threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists are not systemic in Albania. However, two cases were publicly reported during 2023.

INDICATOR 4.3

— ACTUAL ATTACKS

Score for 2022: 3.37 / Score for 2023: 3.37

In 2023, nine cases of actual attacks on journalists were reported in Albania, involving 12 men and 4 women journalists. These attacks ranged from physical assaults to threats during reporting. Notable cases included the physical assault on journalist Gjergj Zefi, who was struck with blunt objects by unidentified individuals, and the violent attack on journalist Elvis Hila and his wife in Lezha after covering a trial.

INDICATOR 4.4

— THREATS AND ATTACKS ON MEDIA OUTLETS AND JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATIONS

Score for 2022: 3.84 / Score for 2023: 3.59

In 2023, Albania experienced a rise in threats and attacks against media outlets and journalists' associations. Nine cases were recorded, illustrating a concerning trend. Notable incidents include the shooting at the national TV station Top Channel, resulting in the death of a security guard, and cyberattacks on several outlets.

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