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

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About the Project

BACKGROUND OF THE INDICATORS

The journalists' associations from the Western Balkan countries, supported by the European Commission¹, have established the platform [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net) to jointly monitor media legislation and practice in their countries and engage in advancing the legal and institutional environment in which the journalists and other media professionals work. Every year, based on a carefully designed methodology², the [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net) partners conduct advocacy research which has provided journalists' associations with evidence-based, reliable, and relevant data on the main problems and obstacles in the implementation of the EU standards in the field of media and journalists' freedom and safety in the Western Balkans. The results of the advocacy research give substance to partners' activities, providing them with new 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 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 for 2022.

The 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 Project [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net), 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](https://safejournalist.net) (02.2020–03.2023). The main objective of the Project is to empower and strengthen the role of the national journalists' associations, members of the Platform [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net), 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://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, Kosovo³ and Serbia.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

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

A range of various research methods were applied to collect and analyse data related to each specific qualitative indicator:

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

At national level, the advocacy research is conducted by national researchers who carry out the data collection and draft the narrative reports, which were then reviewed by local media and legal experts and by lead researcher. In the

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.

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

The following table presents all qualitative indicators for the level of media freedom and safety of journalists, divided into three areas. These qualitative indicators are presented in descriptive or narrative form. Part of the indicators that are used in the conceptual framework for the Journalist Safety Index are marked in gray on the table.

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 (whose lives or physical integrity are at real and immediate risk) 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 Women journalists have access to legal measures and support mechanisms when faced with gender-based threats, harassment and violence
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 has been established
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 (independently, thoroughly and promptly)
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 was 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 range 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 presents the four dimensions and indicators that make up the theoretical model of the "journalists' safety" concept. Data for all these indicators were collected in the first phase of the research, and in the second phase, based on the collected research evidence, nine members of the Advisory Panel from each of the countries⁵ assessed the situation and assigned scores for each of the 19 indicators:

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 (whose lives or physical integrity are at real and immediate risk) 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 (independently, thoroughly and promptly)	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 Women journalists have access to legal measures and support mechanisms when faced with gender-based threats, harassment and violence	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 has been established	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

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.

5 Members of the Advisory Panel in North Macedonia were: Goce Trpkovski, Aleksandra Temenugova, Frosina Fakova Serafinovikj, Sonja Petrushevska-Popovska, German Filkov, Riad Murati, Semra Musai, Martin Pushevski and Teofil Blazhevski.

I. Legal and organisational environment	II. Due Prevention	III. Due Process	IV. Actual Safety
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.

— LIST OF ACRONYMS:

SEC – State Election Commission

AAAVMS – Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services

MRT – Macedonian Radio Television

AJM – Association of Journalists of Macedonia

ITUJMW – Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers

MIM – Macedonian Institute for Media

CMEM – Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia

MIOA – Ministry of information society and administration

RNM – Republic of North Macedonia

MIA – Media Information Agency

IRL – Investigative Reporting Lab

Introduction

Country overview: The Republic of North Macedonia is a parliamentary democracy, in which, after each parliamentary election, the political parties from the Macedonian and Albanian blocs that won the most votes form the government. The state's multi-ethnic character adds complexity to the socio-political dynamics, also affecting the media sphere. According to the Population and Household Census⁶ conducted in 2021, the total resident population of RNM is 1,836,713, categorized according to the declaration of ethnicity as follows: 58.44% are Macedonians, 24.30% are Albanians, 3.86% are Turks, 2.53% are Roma, 0.47% are Vlachs, 1.30% are Serbs, 0.87% are Bosniaks, and a smaller percentage are members of other ethnic communities. According to religious affiliation, 46.14% are Orthodox, 32.17% are Muslim (Islam), 0.37% are Catholic, and a minor percentage have declared themselves as agnostics or members of other religious groups and communities.

Political context: The country still faces challenges in its democratic development and the Euro-Atlantic integrations. In 2023, the coalition government of SDSM and DUI, which won the most votes in the early parliamentary elections two years ago, was in power. The political scene was marked by a growing polarization between the main political parties in power and the opposition. Tensions related to key national issues, including European integration and bilateral relations with neighbouring countries, have created an atmosphere of political instability. This situation also had a direct impact on the media, with frequent accusations of political influence on editorial policies and selective reporting. Given that the country is a candidate for membership in the European Union, it is under constant monitoring regarding the rule of law, media freedom and human rights.

6 State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia. [2021 Population Census](#).

Economy: The economic landscape in 2023 was complex, reflecting the global challenges and local economic trends. The inflation and the energy crisis had a significant impact on the general economic situation, which indirectly affected the media sector. Many media outlets have faced financial difficulties, which further deteriorated the socio-economic status of journalists, leading to budget cuts related to investigative journalism and quality reporting. The advertising market remained limited, with a significant portion of advertising targeting digital platforms, further reducing traditional media revenues. This economic uncertainty has created a breeding ground for increased dependence of the media on political and business interests, potentially compromising their editorial independence.

Regulatory environment: During 2023, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA) initiated a series of media reforms in order to amend the legal framework for the media and bring it in line with European standards. The initiative was supported by technical assistance from national and international experts within the scope of a project financed by the European Commission. The aim of these efforts was to harmonize media laws with EU directives, Council of Europe recommendations and other international standards. During the public consultations organized as part of this process, the private television stations with national coverage exerted strong pressure to bring back state advertising in audiovisual media, despite the warnings of journalist associations and experts that this practice in the past seriously threatened editorial independence of the media and violated media market conditions.



Freedom of the media and safety of journalists in North Macedonia – Indicators

A. LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

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

The basic guarantees for the freedom of expression and the independence of the media, apart from the Constitution of RN Macedonia, are incorporated in the media and several other laws⁷. All these laws include the right to access the Internet, that is, there is no special regulation that only regulates the Internet. The constitutional guarantees provided in Article 16 of the Constitution, pertaining to freedom of expression and free access to information, also apply to online communication.

The right to freedom of expression, including the online space, is freely exercised by citizens, journalists, media and other organizations. In 2023, there was not a single recorded or documented case of the government or other state authority attempting to block or filter online content. Confirming this assessment is the fact that in 2023 the country moved up on the scale of the Reporters Without Borders Index⁸ out of a total of 180 countries, it was ranked 38th, which is 19 places higher than in 2022. The report also states that the overall environment remained favourable for media freedom and allowed for critical reporting, although the transparency of institutions was rather weak. The tendency for government officials to have negative and offensive attitudes towards journalists remains.

In January 2023, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA) announced a transparent and inclusive process of media

7 These guarantees are incorporated in the Law on Media, the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the Law on Free Access to Public Information, the Law on Civil Liability for Defamation and other legal acts.

8 [Annual Reporters Without Borders Index - Republic of North Macedonia 2023](#).

reforms⁹. The process was divided into two phases: (1) bringing domestic legislation in line with the Audio and Audiovisual Media Services Directive of 2018 by May, (2) drafting new laws that would lay the groundwork for solving the structural problems in the media sphere by December¹⁰. The first phase of the process was transparent and it involved all stakeholders, including journalists' associations. However, in the second phase, MISA organized a public debate only on partial solutions, made by the leading private television stations, which proposed the lifting of the ban on state advertising in broadcast media. The journalists' and media associations and organizations opposed this proposal¹¹, warning that the re-introduction of state advertising carries a serious risk for the independence of the media and the freedom of journalists. Nevertheless, in November 2023, the Government submitted this draft Law to be adopted by Parliament.

There are no licenses or other strict requirements for founding, i.e. establishing print or online media outlets in the country. Print media are subject to minimal regulation with the provisions of the Media Law, in terms of their basic obligations for transparent operations, protecting information sources, protecting minors, prohibiting hate speech and incitement to violence and several other obligations related to the internal organization and the necessary acts. Online media are not at all covered by the media legislation, i.e., their contents are subject to self-regulation.

— A.2 INDEPENDENCE AND EFFICIENCY OF THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY

In the context of the work and activities of the regulatory body in the country – the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS), the main remark can again be addressed to the Parliament, which, due to the absence of political consensus between the largest parties, has not yet conducted the election of the members of the new AVMS Council¹², although the mandate of the current members is long expired. It shows that attempts at political influence over the work of the regulator are still present.

During the past year, no cases were documented to indicate a lack of independence of AVMS or that it has taken any unfair or discriminatory actions towards the media whose operations it supervises. Based on the monitoring, in 2023, AVMS issued a total of 12 public warnings to 8 broadcasters¹³. A reprimand was issued to a print media

9 The project "EU on freedom of expression: harmonizing the national media legislation with EU law and European media standards" was implemented in the Republic of North Macedonia this last year. The project was supported by the EU and implemented by a consortium of consulting organizations. Two domestic and two foreign experts were hired. The activities were aimed at complying with the Directive on AVMS from 2018 and with other EU documents and the recommendations of the Council of Europe, as well as solving a series of systemic problems that hindered the development of a pluralistic media system that serves the interests of citizens.

10 RESIS Institute, "[Towards a sustainable, diverse and safe media sector: supporting democracy and pluralism and serving the citizen](#)". Summary of the Workshop held as part of the second phase of the "EU Freedom of Expression: Harmonization of National Media Legislation with EU Law and European Media Standards" project. Skopje: 2023.

11 The Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Media Freedom in North Macedonia: Fragile Progress](#)". Report from the fact-finding press freedom mission. Skopje: 2023.

12 [European Commission - RNM Progress Report 2023](#). Brussels: 2023.

13 Of these measures, 3 were imposed due to failing to ensure publicity, i.e., transparency in the operation, 2 due to failing to broadcast at least 30% of the program originally created in the Macedonian language, and one reprimand for excessive product placement in the program, irregular use of language, failure to fulfill the obligation to publish an imprint; non-compliance with the rules for protection of minor audiences, covert advertising; non-compliance with the rules for broadcasting audiovisual commercial communications, and failure to submit a written report on the implementation of the obligations established in the permit.

publisher for failure to fulfil the obligation to publish data established in Article 14 paragraph 1 of the Media Law.

The regulator acted in a fair and neutral manner when granting permits and applying the relevant by-laws in the audiovisual field. However, with the amendments to Article 79 of the law, adopted in February 2024¹⁴, the independence of the regulatory body has been undermined, i.e., it has been stripped of its authority to decide on the renewal of licenses based on the broadcaster's contribution to the diversity of the program and media pluralism in general¹⁵.

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

The autonomy and independence of the public broadcasting service are partially guaranteed in the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (LAAMS), with the general provision safeguarding the independence of MRTV from the state or from other legal entities and bodies, but the wording of the provision is ambiguous. The law does not provide an explicit provision ensuring that the newsrooms of MRTV are independent and autonomous in their content planning, although it guarantees the independence of editors and journalists, according to Article 61 (general principles for all audiovisual media services). Furthermore, according to Article 104, journalists, editors and other employees involved in program production should not be considered public servants, which means that questions about their employment, work and career progress should not be subject to the provisions of the Law on Public Sector Employees. Over the last few years, MRTV sought approval from three ministries (including the Ministry of Information Society and Administration and the Ministry of Finance) regarding these matters. This created a kind of pressure on the work of journalists and editors employed by MRTV and brought into question their editorial independence. Apart from the provisions provided in LAAMS and the Law on Public Enterprises, to achieve full institutional autonomy of MRT, it is necessary to make additional changes in other laws¹⁶.

The question of stable and independent financing is key for the autonomy of the public broadcasting service. With the amendments to Article 105 of LAAMS adopted in July 2023, the funds for the operation and development of MRT are provided from the state budget, in the amount of 1% of the tax revenues collected as per the last final account of the

14 [Law on Amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services](#), (Official Gazette of RNM No. 55/2024).

15 Not only has this criterion been deleted from Article 79, but an absurd provision has been inserted, implying that broadcasters are allowed to broadcast hate speech, call for the overthrow of the constitutional order, threaten national security, and broadcast content harmful to development. of minors and other harmful content. Namely, according to the new article 79, the regulator cannot refuse to extend the license, unless the broadcaster has committed serious violations, and has failed to abide by the special prohibitions of article 48 of this law at least three times during the duration of the license, for which there are final court judgments or – for the duration of the permit, the media coverage was not done in a fair, balanced and impartial manner in at least one election cycle, for which there are final court judgments.

16 All these issues are elaborated in detail in the analysis entitled "Overview of the legal framework of the public broadcasting service MRT in terms of its role, competences, independence and financing, from the perspective of EU law and European media standards and practice". This analysis was submitted to the competent Ministry of Information Society and Administration at the end of 2023, by the expert team engaged in the project "[EU for freedom of expression: Alignment of National Media Legislation with EU Acquis and Media Standards](#)".

Budget of RN Macedonia¹⁷. Although these legislative changes guarantee MRT more stable funding, there are still potential drawbacks. The first one is that MRTV does not have a multi-year financial projection in its Strategic Plan¹⁸, so the outlook on capital investments does not exceed a one-year period. Second, additional funds for technological development may or may not be allocated from the state budget, leaving room for arbitrary influence by the Government. Thirdly, there is still the risk that the new framework will not be applied, which actually happened: the RNM government did not apply the new adopted formula until the end of 2023.

The situation has not changed regarding Parliament's appointment of new members of the MRT Program Council, due to the lack of consensus among the main political parties. The law stipulates that a two-thirds majority of Parliament votes is required for these appointments, but in the current political context it was not possible to round up the necessary support, so the election of this key MRT body is at a standstill.

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

In 2023, the RNM Government adopted its fifth program to support the printing and distribution of general and news print media¹⁹, in the amount of 10 million denars, which is significantly lower compared to the past four years²⁰. The allocation of the funds is decided by a committee, which, in addition to representatives of the competent institutions, includes one representative each of the Association for the Protection of the National Print Media and of AJM. Of the planned funds, 2 million denars were allocated to the print media at the local level, and 8 million denars to the print media at the national level. AJM's assessment is that the process of allocation of funds was fair, transparent and non-discriminatory.

There is no Pluralism Fund in the country to support the production of media content that serves public interest, but there is an initiative to introduce such a fund. Within the scope of the media reform project, supported by the EU in 2023, the text of a new Media Law was drafted, which also includes provisions for a Content Pluralism Fund. In addition to this proposed law, AJM has published a report dedicating a whole segment to the media content pluralism fund²¹. Also, the Fact-Finding Press Freedom Mission Report²² provides a comparative view and offers concrete solutions that are applicable in the national context.

17 The funds are distributed as follows: 80% for MRT to cover the costs of creating and broadcasting the programs and for technical-technological development, 15% for PE "Macedonian Broadcasting" for maintenance, use and development of the public broadcasting network and 5% for The Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services.

18 Macedonian Radio Television, "[Five-year strategy for the development of MRTV](#)". Skopje: 2021.

19 Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, "[Public call for support for printing and distribution of print media for 2023](#)". Skopje: 2023.

20 Trpkovski, Goce. "[National daily newspapers excluded from subsidies this year](#)". Prisma, December 18, 2023.

21 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Journalists' Rights, Freedom of Expression and Media Independence in North Macedonia – 2023 Metadata report](#)". Skopje: 2023.

22 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Media Freedom in North Macedonia: Fragile Progress](#)". Report from the Mission to assess the situation with freedom of the media. Skopje: 2023.

Apart from the radio and TV programs in the languages of the ethnic communities, the public broadcasting service has no other mechanisms for financing the media in the languages of the different ethnic communities. Media outlets publishing content in the languages of non-majority communities in RNM are not attractive to advertisers, so they have been facing financial difficulties to survive in the market for years. There is no adequate media policy to solve this problem, which is reflected in the overall pluralistic picture of the media sector in RNM.

— A.5 STATE ADVERTISING IN THE PRIVATE MEDIA SECTOR

Once the SDSM-led government came into power, back in 2016, it declared a complete moratorium on state advertising, at the request of AJM and the non-governmental sector. In the years since, this decision has been abided by, but at the local level, municipalities and public enterprises still allocated funds from the budgets intended for private local media, which basically undermined their independent position. In 2023, leading private broadcasters increased the pressure on the government to lift the ban on state advertising. In February 2024, the RNM Assembly passed the amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, which lifted the ban on state advertising on private TV stations.²³ The amount has also been determined: "0.1 percent of the state budget from the tax revenues determined in the previous yearly budget realisation statement". For 2023, that amount would be 2.3 million euros. From the provided funds, 40 percent would apply to national televisions, 40 percent to cable and satellite televisions, 15 percent to regional and local televisions, and 5 percent to radios. Both the state and the municipalities will have an obligation related to broadcasting campaigns.

The new legal solution, which reinstates the practice of state advertising in private audiovisual media, had not been put into practice by the time this report was published and it yet to be subject to observation. Journalists' associations and multiple media policy experts were completely against lifting the ban on state advertising because "it creates a complex financial mechanism of 'legalized' outflow of public money to all private audiovisual media, which ultimately makes them directly dependent on central and local authorities."²⁴ The Association of Private Online Media also objected to this legal solution because it excludes online media entirely, which discriminates by type of media.

The previous provision of Article 102 of LAAMS completely prohibited the financing of private media with state funds. In 2023, AJM reacted to the violation of this provision of the law²⁵. This was the case with the procedure of the Ministry of

23 Maglesov, Vasko. "[The Parliament has reinstated state advertisements to private media](#)". Prisma, February 29, 2024.

24 Opinion of experts engaged in the project "European Union for Freedom of Expression: Alignment of National Media Legislation with the EU Acquis and Media Standards", regarding additional amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services submitted on November 2, 2023. The opinion was submitted to the Ministry of Information Society and Public Administration on November 6, 2023.

25 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[AJM: Media promotion of the MFA with public money is against the ban on government campaigns](#)", January 5, 2023.

Foreign Affairs, which used a public procurement procedure to allocate funds for campaigns in private media for the promotion of the OSCE chairpersonship. For the purposes of this report, AJM sent a written request to the office of the deputy prime minister in charge of anti-corruption and good governance policies, inquiring whether state institutions regularly publish the data on the amounts allocated to various media in the country for the year 2023, but did not receive an answer.

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

On November 17, 2022, the new provisions of the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation were adopted. The purpose of the amendments was to reduce the prescribed penalties so as not to negatively affect free and critical journalism. The law guarantees freedom of expression, and possible restrictions in cases of damage to reputation and dignity are regulated in accordance with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (Article 10) and the practice of the European Court of Human Rights. The main drawback of the law was the amount of compensation that the court can determine to a journalist, as compensation for non-material damage caused by insult or defamation, but with the adopted amendments, this risk has been significantly reduced.

In 2023, according to the data from the Basic Civil Court Skopje, as at 31.12.2023, the number of lawsuits for defamation and insult against journalists and/or media had decreased to a total of 19. In the last few years, with some exceptions, the lawsuits for defamation and insult have not caused a negative effect on professional journalism.²⁶ In 2012, for example, when this offense was decriminalized, there were as many as 330 lawsuits, and in the following years, the number decreased significantly. However, in 2022, the number of defamation and insult lawsuits increased, with a total of 54 active cases in which a party is a journalist or media outlet, in contrast to 2021, when there were 20.

In general, the perception is that defamation and insult suits were used more as an instrument for exerting pressure in the past. In 2023, there were a small number of such attempts. The most characteristic case is the lawsuit for defamation by Kocho Angjushev against IRL and its editor Sashka Cvetkovska for the documentary titled "Conspiracy against the Air". According to the verdict announced by judge Jovanka Spirovska-Paneva, IRL and Cvetkovska have committed defamation by presenting untrue facts in the first episode of the investigative journalism piece called "Conspiracy against the air" broadcast on May 16, 2021 on MRT. After the scandalous decision of the court, AJM and SSNM organized a journalist protest in front of the court.²⁷ Under the motto Citizens' Rights Before the Interests

²⁶ Trpevska, Snezhana. "[Analysis: Verdicts on defamation and insults in cases involving journalists](#)", AJM, January 16, 2018.

²⁷ Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[AJM and SSNM JOURNALISTIC PROTEST – The citizens' right before the powerful people's interests!](#)", November 17, 2023

of those with Power, journalists and media workers raised their voices against injustices against journalists that culminated in the verdict against the Investigative Reporting Lab (IRL), with which the court assigned itself the role of determining who can and who cannot be a journalist. AJM believes that the court has no right to determine which online media and civil society organizations are allowed to engage in journalism.

— A.7 OTHER LAWS ARE ENFORCED OBJECTIVELY AND ALLOW JOURNALISTS AND OTHER MEDIA ACTORS TO WORK FREELY AND SAFELY

In the country, there is no legal protection against the so-called strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) aimed at financially draining media or journalists. This, however, does not mean that the defendants in such processes are left without protection, but they exercise their rights, that is, protection within the framework of the existing positive law. These cases, whatever their nature may be, gravitate around several procedural and substantive laws, such as the Civil Procedure Law (CPL), the Contract Law (CL), or the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation (LCLID)²⁸. In terms of special protective mechanisms of a procedural nature, there are no special provisions in the LCLID, except for the general provisions, which refer to the initiation of proceedings.

In 2023, there were no examples of arbitrary or discriminatory application of other laws aimed at limiting the freedom of journalistic work or burdening the media with legal counsel fees.

Physical attacks, insults, denigration, threats, online violence and defamation lawsuits are occasional occurrences for journalists in Macedonia, which become more frequent in the pre-election period. Even though the country ranked very high for media freedom in 2023 (38th out of 180 places), the penalties for defamation and insult were drastically reduced and a special public prosecutor was appointed to safeguard the rights of journalists, there are still doubts and fears among journalists and media workers that the times of gagging the media may return. These fears exist because at the end of 2023 a verdict was handed down for IRL in the dispute with businessman Kocho Angjushev, in which it is disputed that IRL is a media outlet, and it is said that IRL journalists are “so-called journalists”, that their work cannot be considered public and that state institutions should reconsider their work²⁹. IRL is currently facing eight pending lawsuits, five of which were filed by the same businessman. Consequently, the general conclusion is that the main pressure on critical journalists now comes from the business elite, and less so from politically powerful people.

28 Zharko Aleksov and Zharko Hadji-Zafirov, “[Analysis: How to Ensure More Effective Protection from Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation \(SLAPPS\)?](#)”, Association of Journalists of Macedonia. Skopje: 2023.

29 Jovanovska, Slobodanka. “[Is it Truth or Business that Wants to Silence Journalists with SLAPPS?](#)”. AJM. December 27, 2023.

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

Journalists feel free to contact information sources. The laws provide good protection of journalistic sources³⁰. However, only a small number of whistleblowers report cases to the relevant institutions or to journalists, which means that an atmosphere of fear still prevails among sources, which is ultimately unfavourable for journalism itself.

The protection of journalistic sources is guaranteed and regulated in detail in the Constitution of RNM and in several laws: the Media Law, the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation, the Criminal Code and the Law on Whistleblower Protection. Throughout 2023, the provisions of these laws were respected, that is, AJM did not observe cases of journalists' right to protection of sources being restricted.

During 2023, AJM did not register any reports of pressure on journalists to reveal their confidential sources, and journalists working on investigative texts felt free to contact sources. However, the number of individuals reporting cases of corruption to the relevant authorities and to journalists is still low, even though the Law on Whistleblower Protection guarantees the rights of whistleblowers and regulates protected reporting. In that sense, journalistic sources are encouraged and institutionally better protected, but due to pressures and fear for the workplace, people rarely dare to use this mechanism.

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

The journalistic profession is not subject to licensing, and there have been no attempts by the state to introduce any conditions for someone to work as a journalist. The provisions of the Media Law are already outdated, especially with regard to the restrictive definition of the term journalist³¹. The RNM government has created a new accreditation system, according to which journalists and media workers are required to be members of AJM³². These new accreditation rules were not made in consultation with stakeholders, including AJM, and in the future they may be an obstacle for some journalists to be allowed entry into the Government to cover media events.

In 2023, there was one case where two journalists were prevented or denied the possibility to cover an event, because they did not have an accreditation or another document. Namely, in January 2023, at an event attended by Prime Minister Kovacevski, a person employed in a private security

30 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Western Balkans Journalists Safety Index, Republic of North Macedonia - Narrative Report 2022](#)". Skopje: 2023.

31 Media Law (Article 2), In Article 2 of the Media Law, the term journalist is defined as "a person who collects, analyzes, processes or classifies information published in the media and is employed by the media or has a work for hire agreement with them, or a person who carries out journalistic activities as an independent profession (freelance journalist)".

32 "[AJM and AAVMS condemned the Government's selective approach to media accreditation](#)". Radio MOF. February 4, 2023.

agency prevented two journalists from reporting³³. A positive example is the verdict of the Constitutional Court of the RNM, which found a violation of Goran Trpenoski's freedom of public expression on April 27, 2017³⁴. According to the Constitutional Court, Trpenoski was prevented as a journalist from expressing his opinions and ideas without fear, and it was due to the fact that the state did not fulfil its obligation – to protect him in the specific extraordinary and violent circumstances and to enable him to inform the public about the events in the Parliament. The judgments of the Civil Court and the Court of Appeals failed to reach this conclusion, which presented a violation of his freedom of thought and public expression guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Article 16 of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia.

During 2023, there were no obstacles or pressures on journalistic associations. Journalists were free to organize themselves in their own associations. AJM is a leading journalist association, which has been operating since 1946 and is a member of the International Federation of Journalists and the European Federation of Journalists. AJM is a considerably large organization, with 1,055 members. Two other organizations are also actively working: the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM) and the Council of Media Ethics (SEMM).

— A.10 RIGHT TO ACCESS OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION

In view of the numbers from December 2023, 454 complaints were filed to the Agency for the Protection of Free Access to Public Information by persons who asked for information, 37 of which were from journalists. This data confirms that the provisions of this Law were used more by journalists and media workers compared to last year when out of 327 complaints, 25 were from journalists. However, investigative journalists emphasize that, unlike before, Agency officials show much more understanding and offer assistance to journalists in using the Law. With the amendments to the Law from May 2019, the deadlines for institutions to respond to requests for access to information were shortened, which was an important prerequisite for journalists to use this law more often in their work. The provisions of this Law are mostly used by journalists working in investigative journalism, but they too complain that the institutions often do not abide by the deadlines. A negative example to show in this context is the case of the Investigative Reporting Lab (IRL) and ESM (Power Plants of North Macedonia). In 2022, IRL submitted four requests for access to public information to ESM. However, instead of responding to the requests, ESM decided to sue the Agency for the Protection of the Right to Free Access to Public Information³⁵.

33 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[AJM: Journalists prevented from reporting on an event attended by Prime Minister Kovacevski](#)", November 11, 2023.

34 Constitutional Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, "[It was determined that Goran Trpenoski's freedom of thought and his right to public expression has been violated on April 27, 2017](#)". February 7, 2024.

35 Stojanovski, Bojan. "[ESM submits a lawsuit to the Administrative Court, prevents the publication of information about coal and fuel oil](#)", Investigative Reporting Lab. February 27, 2024.

The perception is that transparency has been improved in 2023 in comparison to previous years³⁶, but the trend of avoidance, i.e. failure to provide specific answers by some institutions, is worrying. Such conduct by some institutions was confirmed by journalists at the meetings with colleagues from the regional centers of AJM across the country, where it was said that some institutions use the maximum period to give answers to the queries they've received, or there is a practice of giving incomplete or irrelevant answers, however, such cases are rare.

According to previous analyses by AJM³⁷, journalists believe that the judiciary is more open and transparent than in the past. Such positive progress, however, is not due to a systematic improvement, an adopted strategy or an implemented reform in the direction of increasing the transparency and openness of the judiciary, but rather a personal decision of individuals to increase the transparency in the work of the institutions they represent. The Basic Civil and Basic Criminal Courts of Skopje do not provide detailed information about court proceedings related to attacks on journalists and media, because they do not have the practice of informing the public about such proceedings. In order to improve transparency, AJM has pointed out the need to establish a register of spokespersons of judicial institutions for years. The register should be publicly available on the websites of the courts and on the website www.sud.mk. However, despite the fact that AJM had consultations and talks with some of the judicial authorities to create a public registry for attacks on journalists, such a practice has not yet been established³⁸.

Journalists reporting from the Assembly of RNM are not being fully and objectively informed by the coordinators of the parliamentary groups about the implementation of the planned activities, especially about the disagreements between the government and the opposition or, on the other hand, between the President of the Assembly and a certain parliamentary group. In 2023, the President of the Assembly continued to hold regular briefings with journalists, in order to keep them up to date with the work of the legislature and its work plans. At the beginning of 2024, the production of new program content on the Parliamentary channel officially began, and the parliamentary studio was equipped, where political debates will be recorded and then broadcast on the Parliamentary channel³⁹.

36 Center for Civic Communications, "[Index of Active Transparency](#)". Skopje: 2023.

37 Pashovski, Davor. "[Journalists' experience and views on judicial transparency in North Macedonia](#)". Association of journalists of Macedonia". Skopje: 2021.

38 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Media Freedom in North Macedonia: Fragile Progress](#)". Report from the fact-finding press freedom mission. Skopje: 2023.

39 See more on the website of the [Assembly](#).

B. JOURNALISTS' POSITION IN THE NEWSROOMS

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

According to the survey regarding the work conditions and rights of journalists and media workers in RNM, conducted in 2023 by the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM) and the RESIS Institute⁴⁰ on a random sample of 343 respondents, of which 206 were journalists and 137 were media workers, 70% of respondents have a full-time employment contract for an indefinite period. 17% of surveyed journalists and media workers have full-time employment, with an employment contract concluded for a limited period of time, they are most common in private television stations, followed by online media. 7% of journalists and 9% of media workers are employed on a freelance basis (with a work for hire agreement or a contract of service). Such work engagements are more common in the online sector, followed by print media and private television stations.

Regarding the work conditions of journalists and media workers, according to the survey conducted by SSNM and RESIS, most of the respondents work within the legally determined number of working hours⁴¹. 28% of journalists and 14% of media workers exceed that limit. Journalists more often than media workers complain about an imbalance between work and private life. More than a third are dissatisfied with their personal income, but almost as many are in the zone of "conformism" (they are neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied). A significant percentage of media workers (52%) and journalists (41%) are dissatisfied with the opportunities for education and skills advancement. About half of the journalists and 77% of the media workers had incomes below the average monthly salary in RNM, which in the period May-October 2023 was MKD 37,065.00. Regular, i.e. timely payment of salaries is not a problem for most of the respondents (85%), but for more than a dozen of them (12%) salaries were paid late, up to a month. Compensation for overtime work (continually or often) is not paid to 38% of journalists and 36% of media workers, and 46% of the total number of respondents were never or rarely paid compensation for working on national holidays. About a fifth of all surveyed journalists and media workers perform tasks outside of their job description, and a fifth of the journalists said that their right to two days off a week is rarely or never respected. Over half of journalists (55%) are exposed to stress very often or often. For media workers, this percentage is 31%.⁴²

SSNM remains the only national trade union that unites journalists and media workers in Macedonia. SSNM was established in 2010 and is a full member of the International Federation of Journalists (which unites journalists' trade unions from all over the world), as well as the European Federation

40 Trpevska, Snezhana. "[Work Conditions In The Media Sector: Professional status and labor rights of journalists and media workers](#)". SSNM, RESIS Institute. Skopje: 2024.

41 Ibid , p.15.

42 Ibid .

of Journalists. At the end of 2023, SSNM had over 360 active members. Last year, there were several instances of exerting subtle pressure on the leadership and members of SSNM, related to journalists becoming members of the trade union, but also with SSNM's position against the lifting of the ban on state advertising in private audiovisual media. There is no signed general collective agreement to protect the rights of journalists in private media. SSNM has signed a collective agreement only with the state-owned Media Information Agency (MIA)⁴³.

— B.2 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE PRIVATE MEDIA

The communication with journalists in the past year indicated that internal organizational acts or rules formally separating the editorial board from the management of the media rarely exist and there are no published data or reviews to determine the number of private media outlets that have them. In larger media organizations, it is common for newsrooms to be separate from management structures. When it comes to the smaller local media, the situation is more complex, that is, the pressures are expressed in a different way and come from both the owners and the locals that hold power.

There is no information that any of the private media have adopted their own separate ethical codes or rules. The only code that applies to all professional journalists, in any media sector, is the Code of Journalists of Macedonia⁴⁴, adopted in 2001. The Code serves as grounds for the actions of the Council of Honor of AJM and the Press Complaints Commission at the Council of Media Ethics (SEMM). SEMM has also adopted Guidelines for ethical reporting of online media, that is, guidelines for the application of the Code of Journalists pertaining to online journalistic work⁴⁵.

The connection between the owners of individual media and the centers of power is often to the detriment of the journalists working in these media. At the focus group with journalists organized by AJM⁴⁶, the participants emphasized that they do not report and do not know where to report pressures, threats and remarks about them and their work. Moreover, they believe that even if they report it, it would not be of any importance for them, due to the inappropriate or inefficient actions of the police and the judiciary. The pressures are usually not expressed directly, but through a series of subtle influences, and especially through the instable employment status of journalists and media workers.

An example of an explicit violation of the principle of editorial independence of journalists is the incident of November 2023, when the director of "Kanal 5" Ivan Mirchevski joined the live show "Samo Vistina" on TV Kanal 5, interrupting

43 Interview with Darko Duridanski, project coordinator at the Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM), February 2, 2024.

44 Association of journalists of Macedonia. "[Code Of Ethics Of Journalists](#)".

45 Council of Media Ethics in Macedonia. "[Guidelines for Ethical Reporting for Online Media - Application of the Code of Journalists in the online sphere](#)".

46 Focus groups with journalists, conducted by Milan Spirovski on May 3, and July 22, 2023.

the journalist who was hosting the show and rudely addressing one of the guests. Journalist associations reacted to this event, stressing that such occurrences compromise the editorial independence of the media and undermine the public's trust in the media in general⁴⁷.

— B.3 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA

In 2017, the national public broadcasting service (Macedonian Radio Television) adopted a Code of Ethics for Journalists⁴⁸, which applies to creative staff and all MRT employees. From the very beginning, the journalistic community criticized the contents of the Code and the non-transparent way in which it was prepared. The biggest shortcoming of the Code is the confusion of journalistic ethics with work discipline and with the rights and obligations of journalists. The Ethics Commission at MRT, which is in charge of monitoring compliance with the Code, has not received a single complaint in the past period. In 2021, AJM called for MRT's Code of Ethics to be amended and procedures for submitting petitions and for the way of work of the Ethics Commission to be established, and to publish procedures on MRT's website. MRT did not take any actions regarding this issue over the course of 2023. Journalist associations have reacted in the past regarding the composition, functioning, visibility and recognition of the Ethics Commission at MRTV as a body that is responsible for dealing with violations of the internal Code⁴⁹.

The expected fundamental changes in the internal structure of the public broadcasting service, which were supposed to be part of the media reform process, were not made in 2023. MRT has adopted its own internal organizational acts, according to which the editorial offices are formally separated from the management structures. However, it is difficult to find information on MRT's website about the rules in the internal organizational setup and about the operation of its bodies. The experts engaged for the regulatory reform proposed a series of changes with regard to the strengthening of a participatory model of a public broadcasting service, but in 2023 the competent ministry did not start a procedure for the adoption of these changes. This is expected after the elections, i.e. after the formation of the new Government, in 2024.

MRT is still not free from systemic political influences, although the existing regulation is designed to ensure the independence in the selection of the bodies of the MRT and its stable and independent financing. As in the past few years, the election of a new independent Program Council and new governing bodies did not take place in 2023. The financing of MRT, until the end of 2023, was not realized according to the new legal framework adopted with the amendments of LAAMS in July 2023⁵⁰.

47 Public announcement. "[AJM, SSNM, SEMM stand for media integrity: comment on yesterday's episode of 'Samo Vistina'](#)", November 2, 2023.

48 Macedonian Radio Television. "[MRT Code of Ethics for the journalists, the creative staff and all MRT employees](#)", Skopje: 2017.

49 Ilievski, David. "[Reform or formality: The functionality of the MRT Ethics Commission](#)", AJM. November 22, 2019.

50 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Media Freedom in North Macedonia: Fragile Progress](#)". Report from the Fact-finding press freedom mission. Skopje: 2023.

In the past few years, including 2023, there was no direct pressure from the government on newsrooms or on individual journalists, but it was more a question of structural forms of pressure: through the postponement of the election of the new bodies of the MRT and through the continuous reduction of the means of financing for the public broadcasting service. The fact is that the composition of the Program Council of MRT and the governing bodies were elected during the period of rule of VMRO-DPMNE, and from that, the journalist associations and media experts have repeatedly emphasized that depoliticization of the public service is needed, i.e. a new independent Program Council and new governing bodies should be elected. However, despite the two announced calls for the election of new members of the Program Council, the Assembly did not complete the procedure, mainly due to the disagreement of the two largest political parties. Regarding the financing of the MRT, in July 2023, amendments to the legal provisions on the financial framework were adopted, which enabled more stable and independent financing from the RNM Budget ⁵¹.

— B.4 EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE IN THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT MEDIA SECTOR

Non-profit media in the country are underdeveloped, primarily due to the lack of policies to support and finance this sector⁵². Although the media regulator has adopted a special policy paper⁵³ for the development of the non-profit broadcasting sector, only four non-profit radio stations have been established so far – three are radio stations intended for the student communities of the state universities in Skopje (Radio Student FM), Stip (UGD FM) and Bitola (UKLO FM), and one is a radio station intended for the religious community in Strumica (Radio Marija Blagovest).

There are different types of non-profit media in the online sector. Several independent newsrooms, which are registered as non-governmental organizations, deal with investigative journalism: Prizma, IRL, SKUP Macedonia⁵⁴, etc. Several non-governmental organizations have also founded information media as part of their program projects, intended for different audiences: Portalb, Radio Mof, Meta.mk, Jasno.mk, Lokal Aktiv⁵⁵ and others. The editorial offices of non-profit media are usually small, comprising only a few journalists, and their funding is unstable and unsustainable.

There is no specific code of conduct for journalists in the non-profit sector, but in December 2020, SEMM adopted Guidelines

51 See more about the financial framework in Indicator A.3 – Independence and autonomy of the public media service.

52 Micevski, Igor; Trpevska, Snezhana. "Monitoring Media Pluralism in the Digital Era: Application of the Media Pluralism Monitor in the EU Member States and Candidate Countries in 2023". European University Institute. June, 2023.

53 Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. "Concept for the development of non-profit broadcasting institutions". December, 2015.

54 Prizma is a website of BIRN Macedonia, intended for the promotion and strengthening of investigative journalism. The Investigative Reporting Lab (IRL) is a non-profit media organization whose reporting focuses on corruption, crime and good governance. SKUP Macedonia is a non-governmental and non-profit organization whose goal is to promote, support and encourage investigative journalism.

55 Portalb is a non-profit Albanian language media outlet, founded by the non-governmental organization Innovative Media, whose goal is to advance journalistic practices. Radio MOF is a program activity of the Youth Educational Forum. Meta.mk is an independent news agency that is a project of the "Metamorphosis" Foundation. Jasno.mk is a digital platform established by ZNM with the aim of raising awareness and building the capacity of local communities to recognize disinformation, especially on a gender basis. Lokal Active is an online media outlet of local communities, including vulnerable groups of citizens and civil society organizations that work with them, founded by the RESIS Institute in partnership with 22 CSOs from the Eastern and Southeastern region and 10 CSOs from the Vardar region.

for Ethical Reporting in Online Media, which elaborate on the application of the basic ethical principles of the Code of Journalists for online journalism. In addition, SEMM and AJM established a Register of professional online media⁵⁶, in which about 120 online news media are members, including some of the non-profit ones. Most of these media outlets have accepted, i.e., adhere to the Code of Ethics and the Guidelines for Ethical Reporting in Online Media, and SEMM oversees the application of both the code and the guidelines⁵⁷.

Although the pressure on non-profit media, especially those engaged in investigative journalism, has decreased compared to 10 years ago, when journalists and editors of non-profit media were often discredited and endured harsh public attacks because of critical articles against the government that was then in power and some powerful people, an increasing trend has been observed over the last three years. In 2023, a glaring example of pressure on a non-profit media outlet was the defamation lawsuit against the Investigative Reporting Lab, by the owner of FERONVEST and former vice-prime minister of the country Kocho Angjushev. The court proceedings for this case resulted in a scandalous court verdict against IRL, a verdict which was assessed as an attack on the dignity of the journalistic profession, the integrity of journalists and the freedom of expression in Macedonia⁵⁸.

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

Journalists who were involved in the research conducted in 2023⁵⁹ believed that they have freedom in choosing topics in the news production process. This especially applies to media that have larger editorial offices. But the choice of topics for reporting in regional and local media is a bigger problem for journalists. The reasons for that are: the small communities in which these media operate, the established clientelist relationships of the owners with the mayors and other locals who are in a position of power, as well as the poor financial situation of those media outlets. Recently, journalists indicated the problem of editors influencing their daily work, but it is not so direct and visible, that is, there is more self-censorship than direct pressures. Basically, the editorial offices know in advance which topics are acceptable, that is, which topics the editor will accept and which will be rejected.

Overall, journalists in North Macedonia work in a more open and free atmosphere compared to the previous decade and they feel freer to investigate and report on complex issues such as corruption. Although the number of investigative media outlets is small, the political environment is now more conducive to investigative journalism. However, it seems that there is still a lot of self-censorship among

56 Register of professional online media in the Republic of North Macedonia [PROMEDIA](#).

57 Council of Media Ethics in Macedonia. "[Guidelines for Ethical Reporting for Online Media - Application of the Code of Journalists in the online sphere](#)".

58 European Federation of Journalists. "[North Macedonia: EFJ demands transparent justice in Kocho Angjushev case](#)". October 23, 2023.

59 Focus groups with journalists, conducted by Milan Spirovski on May 3, 2023 and July 22, 2023.

the journalistic community, due to the fear of political or legal consequences. According to the assessment made by several international experts, the state of independent journalism and editorial freedom is still problematic⁶⁰, because "... many media owners, especially in traditional media (national TV stations), have different core businesses which are often dependent on tenders from ministries and institutions, creating implied or explicit taboo topics."⁶¹

— B.6 ECONOMIC POSITION OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS

According to data from a new survey⁶², there is no significant gap in the salaries between men and women, which applies both for journalists and for media workers. About 57% of men journalists and 42% of women journalists received a salary below the average net salary in the country. The situation is worse for media workers: 80% of men and 73% of women received a salary below the average. About half of the journalists and 77% of the media workers had incomes below the average monthly salary in RNM, which in the May-October period was MKD 37,065.00. Timely payment of salaries was not a problem for most of the respondents (85%). The salaries of 12% were delayed by up to one month. Compensation for overtime work (constantly or often) was not paid to 38% of journalists and 36% of media workers. 46% of the total number of respondents were never or rarely paid compensation for working on national holidays. The highest percentage (72.4%) of journalists in MTV have salaries between 30,000 and 40,000 den. In private national coverage TV stations, 39% of journalists have a salary below 30,000. In the online sector, there are greater variations: 44% have a salary below 30,000, and almost a third of journalists have a salary above 40,000 MKD. In MTV, media workers are better paid than in private TV stations with national coverage. As many as 77% of media workers in private TV stations have a salary below 30,000 denars.

According to the available data, the opportunities for women to develop as professional journalists and advance in their careers are not lower compared to the opportunities of their fellow men journalists. The mapping of the population of journalists and media workers, made in 2023, shows that in the entire media industry there are a total of 188 editors, 89 of which are women (47.3%)⁶³. Official data on the audiovisual sector – radio and TV stations, is collected by the media regulator. According to data published in 2023, there were 155 employed editors in the entire broadcasting industry, 77 of which or almost half were women⁶⁴.

There are no research data on whether women journalists and media workers are exposed to gender-based attacks, pressures and harassment. However, some women journalists state that in this environment they are often exposed to comments

60 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Media Freedom in North Macedonia: Fragile Progress](#)". Report from the fact-finding press freedom mission. Skopje: 2023.

61 Ibid .

62 Trpevska, Snezhana. "[Working Conditions In The Media Sector: Professional status and labor rights of journalists and media workers](#)". SSNM, RESIS Institute. Skopje: 2024.

63 [Mapping the population of journalists and media workers](#), RESIS Institute and SSNM. Skopje: 2024.

64 Audio and Audiovisual Media Services Agency, "[Structure of employees in the audio and audiovisual media industry in 2022](#)". August, 2023.

of a sexist nature, pressure and insults, just because they are women⁶⁵. According to AJM's Register of Violations of the Rights of Journalists and Media Workers in 2023⁶⁶, two cases were registered, one of which was a physical attack on an ALSAT journalist team where the rights of journalists Era Gjakova and Sara Hoxha were violated, the case resulted in a court conviction of the attacker. The second registered case was an explicit online threat directed at journalist Rita Behadini on her Facebook post. The case of Rita Behadini is still in the prosecution procedure. The comments and messages are more often related to their physical appearance or their private life, and less to their professional work. Women journalists often suffer insults and humiliation when reporting on sensitive topics. Qualifications are used that refer only to women, in a pejorative sense, based on prejudice and gender stereotypes⁶⁷. This phenomenon indirectly affects their professional future and their private life. This type of problem seems to be related to firmly rooted patriarchal attitudes about gender roles in society, but also to the lack of clear rules, procedures and internal acts in the media themselves, which will set conditions for ensuring gender equality in this profession.

65 Focus groups with journalists, conducted by Milan Spirovski on May 3, 2023 and July 22, 2023.

66 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, [Official register of threats and attacks against journalists](#).

67 Ibid .

C. JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

— C.1 JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ACTORS HAVE ACCESS TO IMMEDIATE AND EFFECTIVE PROTECTIVE MEASURES

In 2022, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office nominated a prosecutor in charge of monitoring the proceedings in the cases of attacks on journalists⁶⁸. This represents an open line of communication through which journalists can call the prosecutor in regard to the procedures for physical attacks and violence, as well as for serious life threats made on Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp or by email. At the beginning of 2023, as part of the cooperation of AJM and the Ministry of Interior (Mol), a *Protocol for the Online Safety of Women Journalists* was drawn up⁶⁹, based on which a contact person was appointed in the Ministry of Interior in charge of online threats made to journalists and media workers. In November 2023, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office appointed three additional special public prosecutors for the Tetovo, Bitola and Stip appellate regions⁷⁰.

According to the AJM's records⁷¹, since the beginning of 2023, a total of 5 cases of attacks and harsh threats against journalists and media workers have been registered, which is two less than last year. All these five registered cases of threats and attacks against journalists and media workers were reported to the Ministry of Interior. In three cases, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office acted in a timely manner, and two cases in 2023 ended with a court verdict. In the case of the attack on the crew of TV24, in July 2023 near Rosoman, when the cameraman Ivan Kamchev was verbally and physically attacked⁷², the Basic Court in Kavadarci delivered a guilty verdict⁷³ for the attacker, for the crime of preventing an official from performing an official action, according to Article 382 paragraph 3 of the amended Criminal Code. In the case of the attack on the ALSAT team in the old Skopje bazaar, where journalists Era Gjakova and Sara Hoxha were attacked, the court in Skopje also delivered a guilty verdict for the attacker.

AJM has not registered a case of any relevant institution failing to receive or process a report of a journalist or media outlet for violation of their rights in 2023. However, journalists and media workers still do not feel sufficiently safe and protected. We need systemic solutions that will guarantee the long-term protection of the rights and integrity of all journalists and media workers in the country⁷⁴.

68 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, ["AJM's Cooperation With The Prosecutor For Attacked Journalists Has Been Activated; Old Unresolved Investigations Are Also Activated"](#). October 31, 2022.

69 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, ["Protocol for online safety of journalists"](#). December 2022.

70 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, ["AJM and BPPPO: Greater institutional protection of media workers"](#). 02 November 2023.

71 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, [Official register of threats and attacks against journalists](#).

72 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, ["Condemnation for the physical attack on the TV24 cameraman Ivan Kamchev"](#). July 18, 2023.

73 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, ["AJM: Conviction verdict for the attacker of the cameraman Ivan Kamchev from 24TV"](#). November 13, 2023.

74 Ristovski, Dejan, ["In the Name of the People, the Court Stands in Defence of Journalists' Rights"](#). AJM. January 18, 2024.

— **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 Law on Criminal Procedure of RNM contains provisions establishing a procedure for journalists' access to physical protection measures in cases of serious threats to their safety, although it is not clear enough how such a procedure can be applied in practice, especially in the area of safety risk assessment. From a regulatory point of view, we are talking about the precautionary measures regulated in Article 146 of the Law on Criminal Procedure, more specifically paragraph 1, item 6, which reads "... 6) prohibition of approaching or establishing, that is, maintaining contacts or relationships with certain persons ", and it is applied only when there is a known perpetrator of a crime, when there is a specific criminal report and when proceedings have been initiated. These precautionary measures are proposed by the public prosecutor and determined by a judge, based on an assessment of the seriousness of the situation, the type of crime, the danger to the victim, etc. However, according to legal experts, this procedure is practically feasible only if the person threatening the journalists is known, and not in situations of an unknown perpetrator. In 2023, there were no registered cases of journalists requesting physical protection from the Ministry of Interior.

There are victim support organizations in the country. These are mostly non-profit organizations that offer a range of services to crime victims, including psychological support, legal assistance, legal counsel and practical assistance. There are shelter centers, i.e. safe houses that take special care of women and children who are victims of domestic violence or abuse, then legal aid centers that provide legal aid and advice to victims, especially in cases involving domestic violence, sexual assault and other crimes. In addition, there are mental health centers and counselling services that offer therapy and support to victims dealing with trauma, abuse or other psychological challenges. In the country, in recent years, there have been almost no cases of journalists asking for special protection measures from the authorities, due to threats to their safety, so the help offered by the mentioned organizations was not used by journalists. However, in cases where journalists need such help, the first point of contact are the two journalistic associations – AJM and SSNM, which would immediately organize and ask the authorities to provide protection to the attacked journalists.

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

In North Macedonia, the Istanbul Convention was ratified in 2018, and its provisions were incorporated into the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence adopted in January 2021. This Law prohibits any type of gender-based violence against

women and guarantees basic mechanisms for the effective protection of victims from any form of gender-based violence. Also, this Law contains an obligation for the authorities to establish measures to prevent and protect against any type of gender-based violence and for free legal aid for victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence.

A special mechanism for providing legal assistance to victims of gender-based attacks or violence, including women journalists, has not been established. The Ministry of Justice has established a general free legal aid mechanism in all eight regions of the country, which citizens who are in a poor financial position can address for various problems⁷⁵ and request that they be given legal aid or be provided with a lawyer paid from the Ministry of Justice's budget. However, this mechanism hardly works in practice, because few funds are allocated annually for it and it is extremely rarely used to help victims of domestic violence. Accordingly, women journalists who are subject to gender-based threats and violence would not be able to receive free legal aid from the state.

According to the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, institutions competent to receive and act on cases of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, are: the police, social work centers, health institutions, basic prosecutor's offices and courts. In 2023, an Integrated Data Collection Model was developed in the country, which should connect all these data collecting institutions into a single database⁷⁶. According to AJM's practice, women journalists who were victims of gender-based harassment, attacks or threats, have so far reported them mainly to the Ministry of Interior, but also to AJM. Once the integrated data collection system is up and running, gender-based threats and attacks received by women journalists will be included in the total number of cases nationwide. However, in the system they will not be categorized according to profession, so there will still be a need for such a special register to be maintained by journalist associations. In AJM's register of attacks, only two reports from women journalists were registered in 2023, although it is believed that this number is actually higher. The problem is that women journalists can also turn to the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination for cases of discrimination in the workplace. For the purposes of this report, AJM contacted the Commission and they informed us that in the past year they have not received a report of discrimination by a journalist.

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

Recent years have seen an increasing practice of public condemnation of attacks on journalists by government

75 Citizens can receive free legal aid for legal disputes over property, debt-creditor relations, pension and disability insurance issues, legal counsel for victims of domestic violence, welfare, disputes with insurance companies, but also for other needs. See more on this [LINK](#).

76 Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, "[Information Management System on gender-based violence: Proposed national model for the development of integrated data collection on gender-based violence in North Macedonia](#)". Skopje: 2023.

officials, which generally helps to discourage possible future attacks. However, despite the established practice of publicly condemning attacks on journalists, in 2023 there were several cases when public officials, politicians or leaders of political parties publicly labelled, devalued or denigrated media, journalists at press conferences, or on social media.

The most pronounced negative example is the public labelling of TV stations *Telma* and *Alfa* by the president of the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), Ali Ahmeti⁷⁷. In his address to the audience at the party tribune in Gostivar, in an attempt to express his dissatisfaction with the media coverage of the party's activities, he called these two television stations hostile. Then followed an inappropriate statement by Prime Minister Kovacevski⁷⁸ in the context of Ahmeti's media labelling. In both cases, AJM reacted publicly reminding public officials and other government representatives that they should have a higher tolerance level for public criticism of their work, when the professional standards of the journalistic profession are met.

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

AJM believes that both prosecutors and the police are well prepared to cooperate with journalists and media workers⁷⁹, but there is always room for improving knowledge and skills. During the past year, AJM organized several joint meetings and events with the competent authorities aimed at building the capacities and knowledge of police officers regarding international standards for human rights and the role of journalists in society⁸⁰.

In 2023, a Protocol for Online Safety of Journalists was adopted⁸¹, on the basis of which a contact person was appointed in the Ministry of Interior, for online threats to journalists and media workers. The protocol⁸² offers practical steps for journalists to act when they are the subject of threats via social media or the Internet, and how the Ministry of Interior can actively contribute to the protection of journalists and media workers. This is one of the series of activities jointly implemented by the Ministry of Interior and the AJM to improve the safety of journalists, since 2017, when a Memorandum of Cooperation was signed.

The general impression is that in the past year, the police paid adequate attention to the issue of journalists' safety and AJM has not noticed any cases of unjustified arrest and detention of journalists or media workers by the police.

The general perception is that the cooperation between the police and journalists and media workers is good. In the context

77 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[AJM: Ali Ahmeti must not label media](#)". January 16, 2023.

78 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[AJM: Unprecedented labeling of the media by Prime Minister Kovacevski](#)". January 16, 2023.

79 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[AJM and MI: Through better communication to greater safety of media workers](#)". January 28, 2023.

80 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Workshop on the safety of journalists and videographers in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and Basic Public Prosecutor's Office](#)". May 28, 2023.

81 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Protocol for Online Safety of Journalists](#)". December 2022.

82 Ibid .

of this cooperation, AJM has published several manuals, which, in addition to journalists, are also intended for police officers⁸³.

— C.6 SPECIALIZED UNITS/OFFICERS ARE EQUIPPED WITH EXPERTISE FOR INVESTIGATING ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

In October 2022, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office Skopje appointed a public prosecutor from their office as a contact person in connection with the cases related to the safety of journalists, which are under the jurisdiction of the Skopje Public Prosecutor's Office⁸⁴. At the beginning of 2023, the Ministry of Interior also appointed a contact person for dealing with cases related to the safety of journalists and media workers, especially for online threats. In November 2023, to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office appointed three additional public prosecutors for the Tetovo, Bitola and Stip appellate regions⁸⁵.

There are still no special instructions adopted by the Ministry of Interior and the Public Prosecutor's Office for the effective detection and prosecution of perpetrators of attacks and threats against journalists. The legal provisions and the competences of the institutions are clear and officers are familiarized with them, but the communication between the competent authorities must be improved in the direction of a quick and timely reaction and procedure in the context of improving the safety of journalists and media workers.

There is cooperation between the competent institutions, but it has not proven efficient enough to discover the perpetrators of the attacks of the past 10 years. Public prosecutors are quite inert in initiating proceedings. Investigations are mostly slow and ineffective, and no charges have been brought against individual attacks on journalists. More specifically, AJM has registered over 80 cases from 2014 to 2023, only ten of which have ended with a court verdict. That is a very small percentage of solved cases in the past ten years.

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

Over the past two years, a small positive change can be observed in terms of the efficiency of investigations in cases of threats and attacks against journalists. In November 2023, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office appointed three new special public prosecutors for the Tetovo, Bitola and Stip appellate regions. However, there are still no special instructions adopted by the Ministry of Interior and the

83 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Handbook on the Safety of Journalists During High-Risk Events](#)" (2018), "[Protocol for Informing on Cases of Violent Extremism and Terrorism](#)" (2021), "[Manual on Professional, Safe And Ethical Work Of Cameraman In Media](#)". (2019) and others.

84 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Ajm's Cooperation With The Prosecutor For Attacked Journalists Has Been Activated; Old Unresolved Investigations Are Also Activated](#)". October 31, 2022.

85 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[AJM and BPPO: Greater institutional protection of media workers](#)". November 02, 2023.

Public Prosecutor's Office for the effective detection and prosecution of perpetrators of attacks and threats against journalists. Since the beginning of 2023, a total of 5 attacks and harsh threats against journalists and media workers have been registered. All five cases were reported to the Ministry of Interior, and three cases were immediately initiated by the PPO. Two cases have already been finalized with a court verdict, while one was still in prosecutorial proceedings at the end of 2023. The remaining two cases have been reported to the Public Prosecutor's Office, but by the end of 2023 prosecution proceedings had not yet been initiated for them.

Investigations into the cases of past years have been largely slow, and for some of the attacks no charges have been made at all. Although the number of cases was small last year, the efficiency of the competent state institutions increased. This can be confirmed by the handling of the case of the attack on the TV 24 crew in July 2023 – the assailant was arrested and convicted within five months. The same can be concluded from the actions of the institutions regarding the second physical attack on the TV crew of Alsat M in the old Skopje bazaar – the attacker was detained, an indictment was made and a conviction was handed down.

Although impunity is still a big problem, especially for cases from the past, some progress was achieved in 2023, primarily due to the quick and effective sanctioning of the two physical attacks on the journalistic teams of TV 24 and Alsat M. However, the problem of slow and ineffective investigations from past years remains, and no charges have been brought against individual attacks on journalists.

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

The amendments to the Criminal Code adopted in 2023 foresee several key novelties that are very important for the protection of journalists and media workers, which refer to the legal provisions for the acts of murder, coercion and threatening of safety⁸⁶. These crimes received a qualified form when it comes to journalists and media workers, by increasing the penalties for the crimes of murder or coercion, as well as for the crime of threatening of safety. When it comes to threatening safety, apart from the higher penalties for violating these rights of a journalist or other media worker, the prosecutor's office will act ex officio. It is important to consistently apply these changes in the future, in order for the judicial authorities to demonstrate efficiency in protecting the rights of journalists, which will demotivate attackers and contribute to a safer environment for journalists to work.

In 2023, two cases of online threats to journalists were registered. The first case refers to the explicit threats against

86 Bogdanov, Kostadin, Breshkovski, Ivan and Sekulovski, Dragan. "Improving the Safety of Journalists through Amendments to the Criminal Code: An Analysis of International Standards and Domestic Regulation", Konrad Adenauer Foundation in RNM and AJM. Skopje: 2020.

Alsat M's journalist – Rita Behadini, after her post on Facebook related to the public attitude of the imam from Saraj⁸⁷. The second case concerns the founder of *Civil Media* – Jabir Derala⁸⁸, who received direct death threats after he published a column on the official Facebook page of “Nova TV Web”.

During the past year, in general, it was possible to notice an improvement in the actions of institutions in solving cases of threats or attacks against journalists and media workers. However, for the two recorded cases of threats made on Facebook, by the end of 2023 prosecution proceedings had not yet been initiated.

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

The situation regarding the transparency of court proceedings in which the parties are journalists is the same as in the past few years. The basic civil court and the basic criminal court in Skopje do not provide detailed information about court proceedings for attacks on journalists, unless there is a request for a specific case.

The courts do not have the practice of informing the public, nor the associations of journalists (AJM and SSNM) about the procedures related to the attacks on journalists and media. AJM, in communication with the judicial and prosecutorial services, obtains information and data about the procedures related to threats and attacks against journalists or media workers. AJM's assessment is that the courts and the prosecutor's office were transparent in conducting the proceedings for the cases of attacks and threats that occurred in 2023.

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

The situation has not changed compared to previous years. Courts and competent institutions, despite the initiatives of AJM, have not yet established quality statistical systems, on the basis of which they can provide precise data for all court proceedings in which journalists or media are parties. Figures for court cases against journalists are generally provided through direct communication between AJM representatives and spokespeople for judicial authorities. The existing information system – the database, does not provide an option for a precise search of the past and current proceedings in which the parties are journalists, and this serves as an excuse why there is no special register in the judicial bodies for the violation of the rights of media workers.

87 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, [“We demand criminal responsibility for the explicit threats against journalist Rita Behadini”](#). July 24, 2023.

88 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, [“AJM with an appeal to the Ministry of the Interior about threats to the life of Jabir Derala”](#). December 25, 2023.

The Ministry of Interior has established an internal register of statistical data on attacks and threats against journalists. Neither the civil nor the criminal court in Skopje are able to provide detailed information regarding the cases in which the journalists are a party in the proceedings. The databases of the courts do not allow searching by different criteria.

In the data that AJM receives from the competent institutions, there is a certain type of categorization of cases based on gender and ethnicity.

— C.11 NON-PHYSICAL THREATS AND HARASSMENTS

According to the official Register of Attacks and Threats of AJM, no non-physical threats and harassment against journalists and media workers have been registered over the past year.

Category	Number	Brief description of the cases
Non-physical threats and harassments The non-physical threats and harassments include: <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. These types of threats do not include mobbing and bullying in the working environment	0	– In 2023, not a single case falling into this category was recorded.

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

During the past year, according to the official Register of Attacks and Threats of AJM⁸⁹, a total of three death threats and threats to the physical safety of journalists and media workers were registered.

The first is the case of the journalist Ognen Janeski, to whom a viewer directed two explicit threats to his safety, in two phone-in shows on TV 24⁹⁰. In particular, during the phone-in show "Vo tek" on television 24, an anonymous viewer made serious threats to the physical safety of all television journalists. That same viewer called again in the afternoon show "Oci v oci", which also has a phone-in format, and verbally threatened journalist Janeski with the words: "...Thank you for the lawsuit you're filing against me. And we'll meet someplace else, we'll meet where you live!" The case was reported to the Ministry of Interior, as well as to the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office. By the end of 2023, the case was still in pre-trial proceedings.

89 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, [Official register of threats and attacks against journalists](#).
90 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "AJM: Strong condemnation of the public threats of violence against journalists and media workers, presented in a TV show on TV24". June 28, 2023.

The second case is related to the explicit threats directed at the journalist Rita Behadini, due to her Facebook post regarding the public position expressed by the mayor of Saraj⁹¹. She received online messages from a profile named Fisnik Hoxha, instructing the journalist to delete her post and directing insults at her family and threats to her physical safety. The case was reported to the Ministry of Interior and the Public Prosecutor's Office, from where charges are expected to be brought against the person making the threats.

The third case is the direct threat made via a comment addressed to Jabir Derala, founder and director of *Civil Media*⁹², because of his column published on the official Facebook page of "Nova TV Web". The profile named Aleksandar Antic sent a comment stating the following: "Stay visible, you nit, a bullet is soon coming your way." By the end of 2023, the case was still in prosecutorial proceedings.

Although in 2023 there was only one case more compared to 2022, the situation is still assessed as serious, because the degree of impunity for this type of attacks is still high in the country. Of the ten attacks that took place in the previous three years, in 2020, 2021 and 2022, only three have had a judicial resolution.

Category	Number	Brief description of the cases
Threats against the lives and physical safety of journalists This category may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – references to killing journalists, journalists' friends, family, or sources. – references to causing physical harm against journalists, journalists' friends, family, or sources. These threats may be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – made directly or via third parties. – conveyed via electronic or face-to-face communications. – may be implicit as well as explicit. 	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Death threats and threats to the safety of Ognen Janeski by a viewer in two phone-in shows on June 27, 2023, on TV 24. – Threats against Rita Behadini after her post regarding the public attitude of the imam from Saraj, on Facebook. – A direct threat to Jabir Derala in the form of a comment on his published column on the official Facebook page of "Nova TV Web"

— C.13 ACTUAL ATTACKS

During the past year, according to AJM's official Register of Attacks and Threats⁹³, two physical attacks against journalists and media workers were registered.

The first case is the attack on the television crew of TV24 and the cameraman Ivan Kamchev⁹⁴. As witnesses of a traffic accident, Ivan Kamchev and his colleague from MRTV tried to document the event, after which Kamchev was verbally and then physically attacked, during which his equipment was damaged. After the report to the Ministry of Interior and

91 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[We demand criminal responsibility for the explicit threats against journalist Rita Behadini](#)". July 24, 2023.

92 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[AJM with an appeal to the Ministry of the Interior about threats to the life of Jabir Derala](#)". December 25, 2023.

93 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, [Official register of threats and attacks against journalists](#).

94 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[Condemnation for the physical attack on the TV24 cameraman Ivan Kamchev](#)". July 18, 2023.

the submitted indictment proposal, the Court in Kavadarci passed a judgment of conviction for the attacker⁹⁵.

The second case refers to the attack on the television crew of Alsat M in Skopje, in the old Skopje bazaar, when the crew was attacked with scissors by the owner of a barbershop⁹⁶. The incident happened while the crew was filming in the bazaar, the owner of a barber shop came out of the shop with scissors and made verbal insults and death threats, and caused visible injuries to the cameraman's head. The cameraman's equipment was also damaged during the physical attack.

Compared to 2022, 2023 saw one less physical attack. According to information received from the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office, convictions have already been handed down for the attackers in both cases.

Category	Number	Brief description of the 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.	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A television crew from TV24 and the cameraman Ivan Kamchev attacked in Kavadarci L.R. – A television crew from Alsat M attacked in Skopje in the old one Skopje bazaar, by barber-shop owner.

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

AJM has not registered any attacks of this type in 2023. Compared to previous years, the situation remains unchanged for this indicator.

Category	Number	Brief description of the cases
Threats and attacks on media outlets and journalists' associations 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.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – In 2023, not a single case falling into this category was recorded.

95 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[AJM: Conviction verdict for the attacker of the cameraman Ivan Kamchev from 24TV](#)". November 13, 2023.

96 Association of Journalists of Macedonia, "[AJM: Journalists attacked, and the cameraman from ALSAT was injured; we demand an immediate reaction from the Ministry of Interior](#)", August 21, 2023.



Conclusions and recommendations

CONCLUSIONS

LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

At the beginning of 2023, amendments to the Criminal Code of RNM were adopted, according to which an attack on a journalist or media worker shall be treated as an attack on an official. In several criminal acts, a qualified form has been added and a higher penalty has been prescribed for committing that crime against journalists. It is expected that these changes will have a preventive effect because they provide systemic solutions in the legal framework with which journalists and media workers get higher protection while performing their work. It is of particular importance to establish a positive judicial practice in the future with the consistent application of these amendments, in order for the judicial authorities to have a greater influence in the protection of the freedoms and rights of journalists. In 2023, the reform process of the country's media policy took place, which was supported by the European Union. The first phase of this process ended with the harmonization of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services with the key EU Directive in this area and with the improvement of the financing solutions of the regulator and the public broadcasting service. However, in the second phase, towards the end of the year, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA), despite it publicly expressing its commitment to full and transparent implementation of the reforms, only proposed partial solutions, which were of interest primarily to a segment of the private media sector. These decisions were opposed by journalist associations and media associations and organizations, emphasizing that instead of returning state advertising to private media, it is necessary to introduce a fund for media content pluralism. All other shortcomings in the legal framework, identified during the past years as an obstacle to the development of media and journalistic freedoms and to the pluralism of media content, were not taken into account and remain issues of concern

to be resolved in the future. The purpose of the new provisions in the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation, which was passed in 2022, was to reduce the prescribed penalties so as to avoid the negative impact on free and critical journalism. The law guarantees freedom of expression, and possible restrictions in cases of violation of reputation and dignity are regulated in accordance with Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the practice of the European Court of Human Rights. In the country, there is no legal protection against the so-called strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) whose primary goal is to financially drain the media or journalists. This, however, does not mean that the defendants in such processes are left without protection, but they exercise their rights, that is, the protection within the framework of the existing positive law.

JOURNALISTS' POSITION IN THE NEWSROOMS

The employment status of many journalists is uncertain, especially in the private media, because although a large number of journalists are employed with contracts of indefinite duration, their salaries are below the national average, while working more than the legally defined working hours. Also, they do not get compensated for overtime work and work on national holidays and are continuously exposed to stress because they have to multitask and deal with various obligations, in the few newsrooms that exist in the country. About a fifth of all journalists and media workers are still employed with fixed-term contracts or freelance contracts, and this is the most common practice in private television stations and online media. Because of this, journalists are much more vulnerable to pressures from management structures, owners and politicians. The pressures are mostly hidden, i.e., not as visible, and journalists refrain from speaking openly about these phenomena and rarely report when their basic rights are violated. Although it is assessed that journalists in newsrooms generally have greater freedom, there are still many instances of influence exerted on daily work, which are not so evident, that is, there is more self-censorship than direct pressures. The worst is the position of journalists in the local and regional media, due to the fact that these media are in a poor financial condition, and besides, in small communities, local powerful people can more easily exert pressure. The employment status and the position of women journalists in newsrooms does not differ much from that of their fellow men journalists, with the exception of the fact that there are fewer women in management positions in the media.

JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

In 2023, the number of attacks on journalists has gone down. Despite the decreasing number of verbal and physical threats compared to past years, the fact that journalists and media professionals are more and more often the subject of online threats and harassment, that is, on social media, is worrying. Some of these attacks were explicit threats to the physical safety of journalists working on investigations into corruption and other forms of crime and illegal activity. Competent institutions and courts still do not keep sufficiently

up-to-date records of threats and attacks against journalists, nor do they publish such data. On the positive side, the competent institutions are open to cooperation with journalistic associations and show readiness through joint consultations to work on improving the safety of journalists and media workers, through improved prompt measures and prosecution of the perpetrators of attacks and threats. Out of a total of five registered cases of attacks on journalists in 2023, two cases ended with final convictions, while the remaining three cases are under investigation before the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office (BPPO). A positive change is the appointment of a new competent prosecutor in the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office and three separate public prosecutors for the Tetovo, Bitola and Stip appellate regions who will monitor the proceedings in the cases in which journalists are attacked. Journalists can use the special line for communication with the Public Prosecutor's Office to get information about the course of proceedings for physical attacks and violence. However, there are still no special instructions adopted by the Ministry of Interior and the Public Prosecutor's Office for the effective detection and prosecution of perpetrators of attacks and threats against journalists.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

The amendments to the Criminal Code adopted in early 2023 significantly strengthened the legal protection of journalists and media workers. The state recorded positive progress in the indices for media freedom and the safety of journalists, thanks to these legal amendments that provide systemic protection for journalists. Despite this, what remains as a challenge is the consistent and efficient application of these legal provisions, which would allow for positive judicial practices in sanctioning attacks on journalists. The years of prolonging the procedure for selecting members of the AVMS Council and the MRT Program Council poses a serious problem which impacts the work of the key media institutions – the media regulatory body and the public broadcasting service. The proposals for new media laws made in the framework of the media reform process supported by the EU, which recommend the establishment of a Fund for Pluralism and Content Diversity, were not accepted by the competent institutions. Instead, amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services were proposed, allowing the reinstatement of state advertising in private audiovisual media, which carries the risk of strengthening clientelist ties between private media and the government, to the detriment of the public interest and the independence of newsrooms in the media. The provisions of the Electoral Code do not provide clear rules for paid political advertising in various media sectors, which creates opportunities for misuse of public funds. Uncertain socio-economic conditions, low wages and non-compliance with employment rights are among the most serious problems faced by journalists, which directly affects their sense of security and independence in the work environment. Although the number of explicit threats and attacks against journalists and media workers has significantly decreased compared to previous years, the pressure on criticising newsrooms made by powerful people with defamation and insult lawsuits, is a matter of concern.

Competent judicial institutions have not yet established systems for registering and recording attacks on journalists.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A: LEGAL SAFEGUARDS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

- Implementation of the procedure for selecting members of the AVMS Council and the MRT Program Council by the RNM Assembly.
- The procedure should be carried out in a transparent manner, with a public hearing of all candidates, while the principle of a two-thirds majority should be maintained in the decision-making process of the Assembly.
- The provisions of the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services and other relevant laws should be analysed in terms of improving the financial situation of private media and introducing mechanisms for tax relief and similar benefits for the media.
- It is necessary to urgently open a debate on the possible establishment of a media fund, especially focusing on the goals and criteria of financial support (encouraging program diversity, improving the status of journalists, etc.), the method of distribution of funds, independence and objectivity in the implementation of the procedure.
- Amendments to the Electoral Code are needed, which will simplify the rules for the media campaign and reduce the possibility of abuse of paid political advertising in the private media.
- Initiating amendments to the Code of Ethics for Journalists in the public broadcasting service MRT to strengthen internal self-regulation in this media organization.

B: JOURNALISTS' POSITION IN THE NEWSROOM

- Continuation of SSNM's efforts, with the support of AJM, in signing new collective agreements with private media.
- Implementation of campaigns and trainings, through which journalists and media workers would become more familiar with their basic labour rights.
- Continuing the provision of legal assistance and advisory services to journalists and media workers by the guild journalist associations.
- Intensifying the cooperation and dialogue with institutions, in the interest of labour rights protection.

C: JOURNALISTS' SAFETY

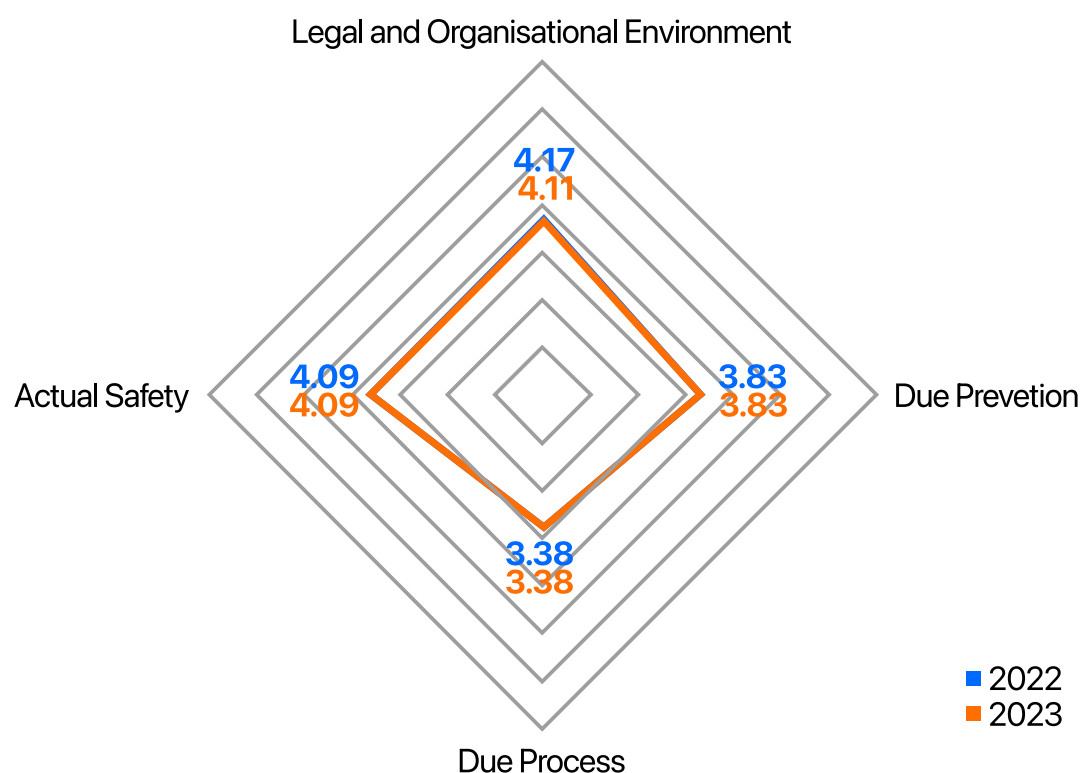
- Establishing special registers for lawsuits against journalists, within the basic civil and criminal courts, including the BPPO.
- Effective implementation of laws in order to increase the safety of journalists and media workers.
- A continuous process in building the capacities of journalists, lawyers, judges and prosecutors on topics related to the sanctioning of attacks on journalists, and the general interpretation of Article 10 of the ECHR.
- Improving cooperation with the newly elected representatives of the RNM Assembly on topics related to freedom of expression and media policies.
- Continuation of AJM's lobbying for the introduction of protocols and improvement of internal procedures in institutions, with the aim of preventing and effectively sanctioning violence against journalists.
- It is necessary for AJM to improve its cooperation with the Ombudsman.

IV Journalists' Safety Index North Macedonia – 2023

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

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:

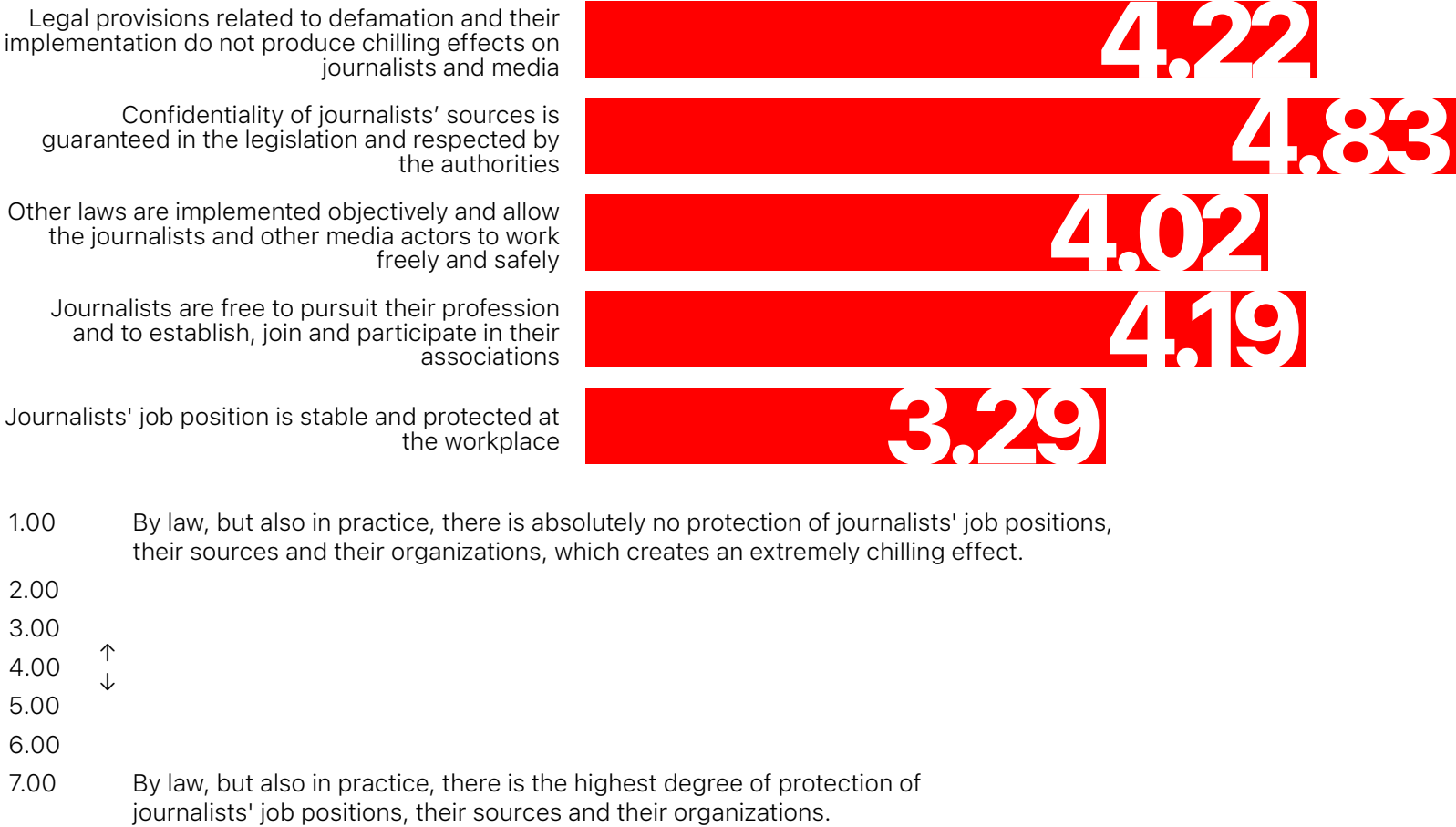
Indicator in the Journalists' Safety Index	Narrative report
I. Legal and organizational environment	
Legal provisions related to defamation and their application do not create a chilling effect on journalists and the media	A.6
The confidentiality of journalists' sources is guaranteed in the legislation 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 (whose lives or physical integrity are at real and immediate risk) have access to special protection or safety mechanisms	C.2
Women journalists have access to legal measures and support mechanisms when faced with gender-based threats, harassment and violence	C.3
The practice of regular public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists and media has been established	C.4
Police authorities are sensitive to journalists' protection issue	C.5
III. Due Process	
Specialized 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



	2022	2023		Main developments in each dimension
Legal and organizational environment	4.17	4.11	↓	Last year, the number of cases against journalists and media in North Macedonia has decreased, but the general policy of impunity continues in relation to the old cases of attacks and threats against journalists and media workers. In 2023, due to a lack of political will, no new members were elected to the Program Council of MRTV and the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. Media reforms were only partially implemented. Of particular concern is the reinstatement of government advertising to private audiovisual media, as well as the growing trend of using strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) to gag journalists and media workers in the country. Amendments to the Criminal Code were adopted in 2023, contributing to the enhanced security of journalists and media workers.
Due Prevention	3.83	3.83	—	Regarding journalists' access to quick and effective protection measures in cases of threats and attacks, there was a slight improvement in 2023. New prosecutors were appointed in three appellate regions across the country, responsible for monitoring proceedings in cases in which journalists were attacked, and a special line was opened for journalists and media workers to call.
Due Process	3.38	3.38	—	The perception of cooperation between the competent institutions in 2023 was improved and resulted in their greater efficiency in detecting the perpetrators of the attacks. Out of a total of 5 threats and attacks against journalists and media workers, two were investigated and ended with a conviction for the attackers. Three cases were still in the prosecution procedure by the end of 2023.
Actual Safety	4.09	4.09	—	The number of physical attacks and threats against journalists has decreased compared to the previous year. However, the degree of impunity for this type of attack is still high, due to the fact that a significant number of cases from past years have not yet been investigated and completed. The trend of increasing online threats against women journalists in the country is worrying.
Journalists' Safety Index	3.92	3.91	↓	



Legal and organizational environment



INDICATOR 1.1

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

Score for 2022: 4.34 / Score for 2023: 4.22

The overall score for this indicator in 2023 is slightly worse compared to the previous one, primarily due to the trend of increasing the number of defamation or insult lawsuits against journalists and the media, as well as due to the defamation court ruling against the Investigative Reporting Lab (IRL) in the case of former Deputy Prime Minister Kocho Angjushev. However, even this year, journalists do not evaluate the Law on Civil Liability for Defamation and Insult as restrictive for their work.

INDICATOR 1.2

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

Score for 2022: 4.80 / Score for 2023: 4.83

Compared to the previous year, in 2023 there is a slight improvement in this indicator, due to the strengthened mechanisms for the protection of journalistic sources – legal guarantees regarding protected reporting, the rights of whistleblowers, as well as the more efficient action of institutions in relation to protected reporting and ensuring protection to whistleblowers. Journalists working on investigative topics related to corruption or crime generally feel free to contact information sources. However, although whistleblowers (as an important group of journalistic sources) are legally and institutionally better protected, only a small number of them report cases to the competent institutions or journalists, on their own initiative.

INDICATOR 1.3

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

Score for 2022: 4.21 / Score for 2023: 4.02

The situation in terms of this indicator is somewhat worse compared to 2022 because the state has not yet taken actions to introduce legal protection against the so-called baseless lawsuits against journalists and media in order to financially exhaust them (SLAPPs). This practice has been registered in the country, which clearly indicates that there are attempts by powerful people to put pressure on journalists. Compared to 2022, in 2023 the number of such SLAPPs against journalists and media workers has increased.

INDICATOR 1.4

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

Score for 2022: 4.14 / Score for 2023: 4.19

In 2023, the situation regarding the free pursuit of the journalistic profession has slightly improved compared to the previous year, primarily due to the fact that awareness and solidarity among the journalistic community have increased, and the number of members in associations and unions has also increased. Three professional associations are active, but it is still important to work on their sustainability. There were no serious pressures on the associations, but there is resistance among owners or managers of private media for journalists to join the journalist union and to establish trade union organizations.

INDICATOR 1.5

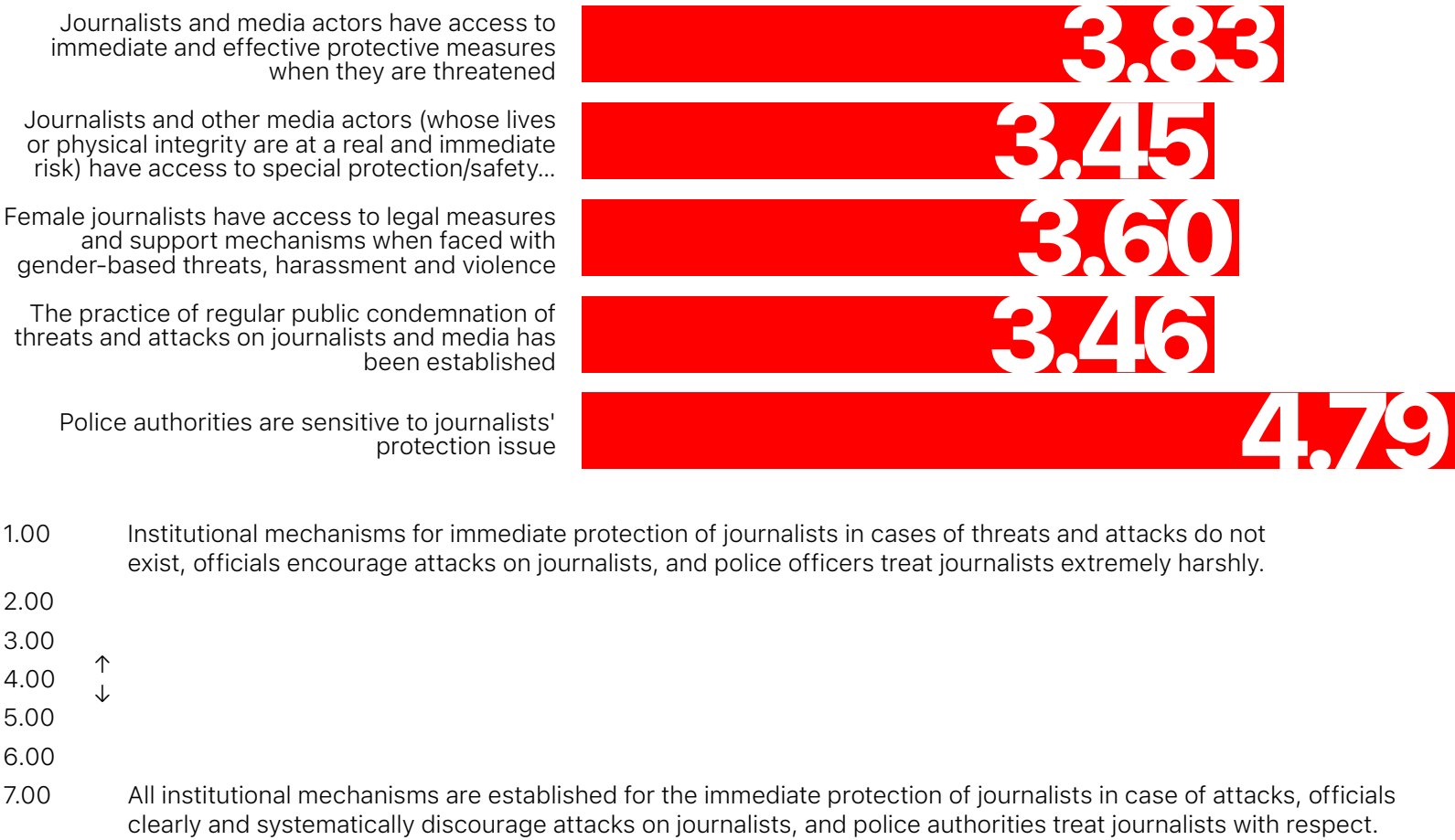
— THE JOB POSITIONS OF JOURNALISTS ARE STABLE AND PROTECTED AT THE WORKPLACE

Score for 2022: 3.34 / Score for 2023: 3.29

The situation with labour rights and the employment status of journalists did not improve in 2023. A large number of journalists in the private media have not signed employment contracts, they work overtime or their income is low and irregular. Journalists in private media are afraid to initiate legal proceedings for mobbing or violation of their labour rights and to establish trade union organizations in the media outlets. In the public broadcasting service, the situation is somewhat better, journalists have employment contracts, and there is also a trade union organization with a representative number of members.



Due Prevention



INDICATOR 2.1

— JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ACTORS HAVE ACCESS TO IMMEDIATE AND EFFECTIVE PROTECTIVE MEASURES

Score for 2022: 3.75 / Score for 2023: 3.83

During 2023, there has been some improvement in journalists' access to quick and effective protection measures in cases of threats and attacks. In addition to the appointed special prosecutor at the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office, in charge of monitoring the proceedings in the cases of attacks against journalists, the competences of three more prosecutors in three more appellate regions have been expanded, and a special line has been opened for journalists. Of the five registered attacks on journalists, only two ended with a court verdict sanctioning the attackers, the remaining three are still in prosecutorial proceedings.

INDICATOR 2.2

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

Score for 2022: 3.42 / Score for 2023: 3.45

During 2023, there were no major changes regarding journalists' access to physical protection measures in cases of serious threats to their safety. There are provisions in the law that guarantee special measures for the protection of journalists, but the procedure for assessing the risk is not clearly defined, so it is unknown how practically applicable it is. Precautionary measures are proposed by a public prosecutor, and determined by a judge in a preliminary procedure, based on an assessment of the seriousness of the situation, the type of the crime, the danger to the victim, etc.

INDICATOR 2.3

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

Score for 2022: 3.64 / Score for 2023: 3.60

In 2023, the situation regarding this indicator has not improved compared to the past years. Despite the measures incorporated in the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the established mechanism for free legal aid at the Ministry of Justice is practically unutilized for supporting victims of gender-based attacks and violence, including women journalists. Two cases were reported to AJM in 2023, one online threat against a woman journalist and one physical attack against women journalists, although when it comes to online threats, they are realistically much higher in number.

INDICATOR 2.4

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

Score for 2022: 3.58 / Score for 2023: 3.46

There is a slight deterioration of the situation in terms of this indicator, compared to last year, as several examples of verbal attacks on journalists by public officials were registered. Otherwise, the general assessment is that in the past years, a practice of public condemnation of attacks on journalists was established, and public officials mostly refrained from verbal attacks on journalists. However, there is a lack of consistency in such practice among all relevant political and government officials.

Indicator 2.5

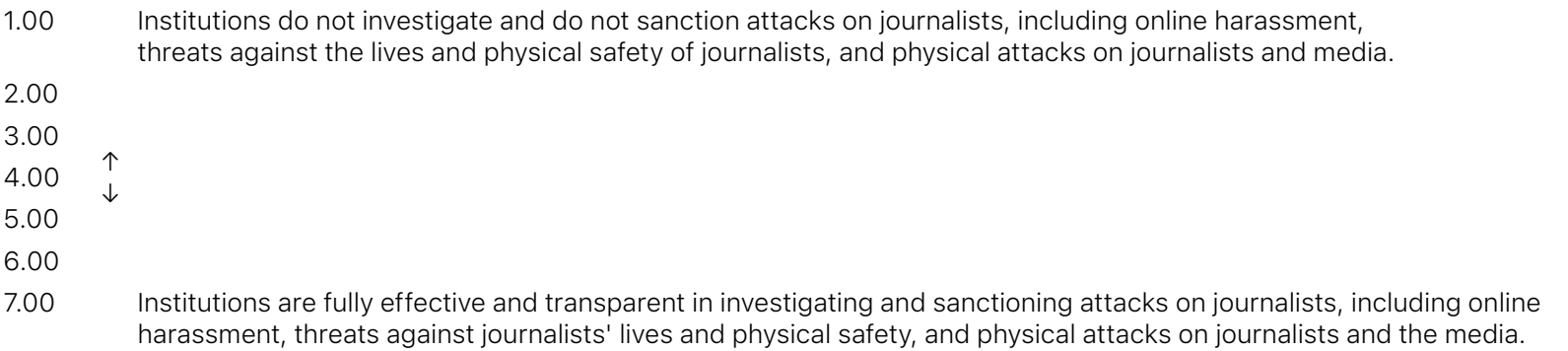
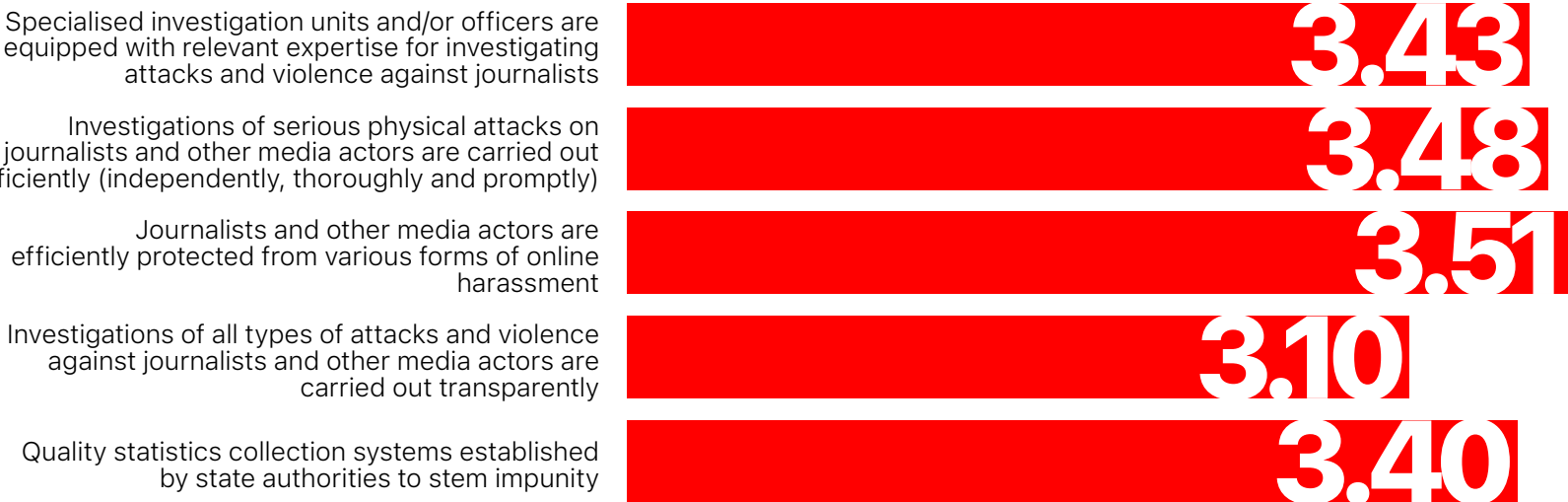
Police authorities are sensitive to journalists' protection issue

Score for 2022: 4.77 / Score for 2023: 4.79

Regarding the behaviour of the police towards journalists, there were no major changes. During 2023, the police showed correct behaviour towards journalists and the media in various situations. This is the result of a series of joint activities of AJM and the police authorities during the past years: AJM, in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior, prepared a Protocol for online safety for women journalists. In the context of this cooperation, several manuals were published, intended for both journalists and police officers.



Due Process



INDICATOR 3.1

— SPECIALIZED UNITS/OFFICERS ARE EQUIPPED WITH EXPERTISE FOR INVESTIGATING ATTACKS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

Score for 2022: 3.43 / Score for 2023: 3.43

In 2023, the situation regarding this indicator remained unchanged. Specific instructions that would allow for more efficient investigations have not yet been adopted. A positive step was the appointment of three more new prosecutors in three new appellate regions, who will monitor the proceedings in the cases of attacks against journalists. However, the public prosecutors are still very inert in terms of initiating proceedings.

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: 3.49 / Score for 2023: 3.48

Although impunity is still a major problem, the perception is that there is a slight setback in 2023, compared to previous years, primarily due to the problem of slow and ineffective investigations, and for separate attacks on journalists in the past ten years, no charges have been brought at all.

INDICATOR 3.3

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

Score for 2022: 3.46 / Score for 2023: 3.51

During 2023, a slight improvement was observed in the protection of journalists from online threats, due to the fact that the competent institutions (in particular, the Ministry of Interior) sought out the persons who sent serious, i.e., death threats to journalists on Facebook. In 2023, three cases were being conducted in the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for three cases of attacks and threats made online, which are still in prosecutorial proceedings.

INDICATOR 3.4

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

Score for 2022: 3.09 / Score for 2023: 3.10

The situation regarding the transparency of court proceedings in which the parties are journalists is almost the same as in the previous year. The Basic Civil Court and the Basic Criminal Court in Skopje do not provide detailed information about the court proceedings for the attacks on journalists. Courts do not have a practice of informing the

public about proceedings related to attacks on journalists and media. The existing information system does not provide an opportunity for a precise search of past and current proceedings in which the parties are journalists.

INDICATOR 3.5

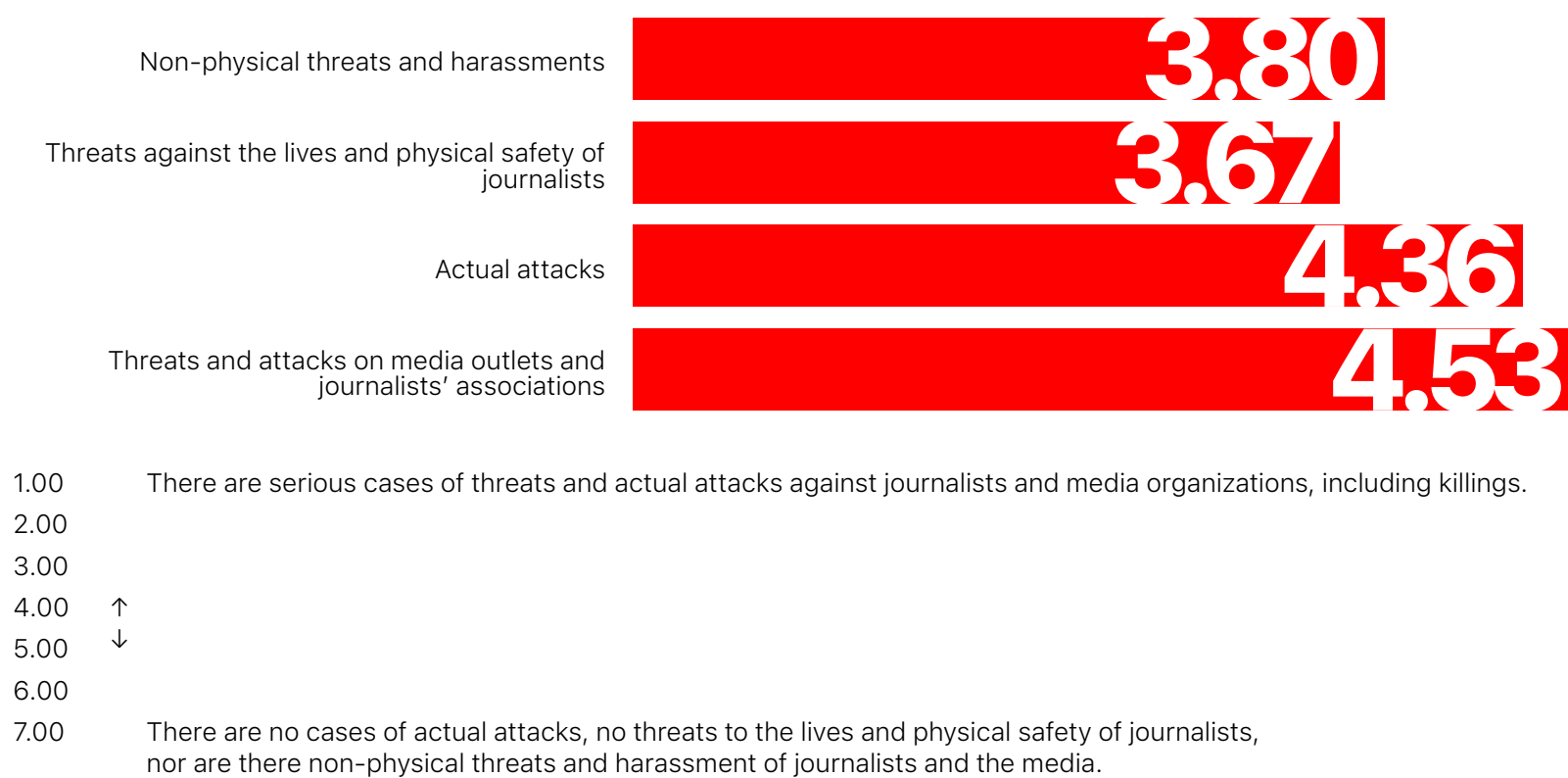
— **QUALITY STATISTICS COLLECTION SYSTEMS
ESTABLISHED BY STATE AUTHORITIES TO STEM
IMPUNITY**

Score for 2022: 3.41 /Score for 2023: 3.40

The situation has hardly changed compared to previous years in terms of this indicator. Courts and competent institutions, despite the initiatives of AJM, have not yet established quality statistical systems, on the basis of which they can provide precise data for all court proceedings in which journalists or media are parties. Neither the civil nor the criminal court in Skopje are able to provide detailed information regarding the cases in which journalists appear as parties to the proceedings.

IV

Actual Safety 4.09



INDICATOR 4.1

— NON-PHYSICAL THREATS AND HARASSMENTS

Score for 2022: 3.87 / Score for 2023: 3.80

Although in 2022 there was a slight improvement in terms of the number of attacks that would fall into this category, the degree of impunity for this type of attacks is still high in the country and therefore there is a slight setback in 2023. Unlike 2020 and 2021, when AJM registered seven and three attacks of this type, respectively, in 2022 and 2023 two attacks on journalists were registered per year. However, out of the twelve attacks that took place in the previous three years including 2020, unfortunately only two cases have been resolved by the courts.

INDICATOR 4.2

— THREATS AGAINST THE LIVES AND PHYSICAL SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Score for 2022: 3.69 / Score for 2023: 3.67

There is a slight deterioration of the situation regarding this indicator, primarily due to the ineffective sanctioning of the threats that occurred in previous years. Compared to 2022, when AJM recorded only two threats, in 2023 only one threat to the life and safety of journalist Ognen Janeski was recorded, and this case is still in the prosecutorial process.

INDICATOR 4.3

— ACTUAL ATTACKS

Score for 2022: 4.25 / Score for 2023: 4.36

Compared to 2022, when there was a positive practice in the conduct of investigations and the actions of judicial authorities, in 2023 two cases of physical attacks against journalists and media workers were recorded. In these cases, the competent authorities acted relatively efficiently and quickly and the attackers were found guilty with final convictions.

INDICATOR 4.4

— THREATS AND ATTACKS ON MEDIA OUTLETS AND JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATIONS

Score for 2022: 4.53 / Score for 2023: 4.53

AJM did not register any attacks of this type in 2023. Compared to previous years, the rating for this indicator remains unchanged.

Original title

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

Publisher

Association of Journalists of
Macedonia, Skopje, 2024



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