

## Assaults against Journalists

*We see the tip of the iceberg*

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In recent years, the issue of safety of journalists has attracted the attention of international organisations. From 2000 to 2016, the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the European Parliament have produced over 122 major documents aiming to deal with the complexity and urgency of protecting journalists. Evidence shows that attacks against journalists and increasingly against public writers, such as bloggers, are becoming more intense and widespread, but at the same time more quickly known across borders. In particular, the urgency of the need to know more about the situation of journalists around the world is largely translated in monitoring and recording incidents. The onerous task of doing so, on a global scale, has fallen on the shoulders of NGOs, whose operations are by-and-large subject to fundraising. The commitment of States to free speech as a concrete goal is put to the test regularly: so far, with very few exceptions, States have failed to provide for the consistent and systemic protective measures for journalists. Yet, this is not all.

Journalism is undergoing important structural and cultural changes, including a broadening in the exercise of journalism, which, despite the many challenges it brings to both journalism itself and to society's relation to the news, has offered the possibility for the generation of news stories and the presentation of multiple viewpoints to audiences across the world. As a consequence, the strict boundaries between professional journalists and journalistic practices by a wider part of the public has prompted the international community to broaden the scope of 'protection of journalism' in an effort to provide legally supported frameworks of protection for writers, especially in autocratic regimes.

### Challenges to monitoring the state of journalists

It is increasingly understood that journalists are not to be considered 'simply' collateral damage in conflict, but rather targets of conflict parties, and not only in situations of armed conflict. Therefore, for the comprehensive understanding of the complexity of safety of journalists, on the one hand, and the transformation required in the jobs on the other, the very practices and mechanisms of monitoring *must reflect* these realities in systematic ways. A crucial element, and constant challenge, underpinning the effort to record and report killings of and assaults on journalists is to provide measurable evidence about the state of freedom of the press and provide tools through indicators for democracy and freedom. The value of such reports cannot be overstated, not least

because of their role as historical records, regarding progress and deterioration in practicing journalism, and as speakers on behalf of victims and survivors. Also, the efficacy of law and the role of the international community and States will be further evaluated and judged in the not so distant future.

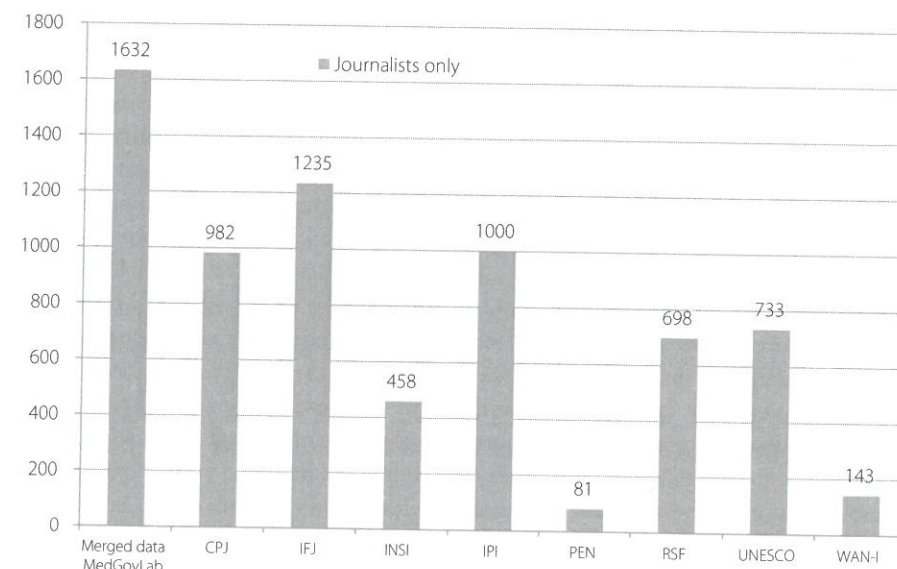
With a look into this future, a major meta-analysis<sup>1</sup> of existing databases was conducted, monitoring the state of journalists' safety around the world, in the period 2000-2016. This project began as an attempt to identify the factors, which seem to indicate highest danger for journalists and to find out a possible 'profile' of the journalist mostly at risk. For example, is it a fixer in Iraq? Is it a corruption investigating journalist in Russia? No satisfactory answers were achieved, not least because, as revealed through network analysis and other forms of analysis, existing databases were not identical qualitatively, in terms of persons identified. A test of two years was conducted between two major organisations bringing up approximately records of 50 journalists not overlapping. There are also further differences in recording methods by organisations, some more significant than others. The decision was made to take a step back and compare the available databases.

All data was examined as listed in the databases and reports from 2000 to 2016 as they were made available<sup>2</sup>, by the following organisations: Committee for the Protection of Journalists; International Federation of Journalists; International News Safety Institute; International Press Institute; Pen International; Reporters sans Frontiers; UNESCO and World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers WAN-INFRA. It became clear that the task to identify and verify the circumstances of assault and death requires and depends on an advanced set of skills and sustained resources: linguistic competencies, on-site witnesses and experts, the collaboration of authorities or official bodies, reliable information from sources and expert data analysts to make sense of the context each time.

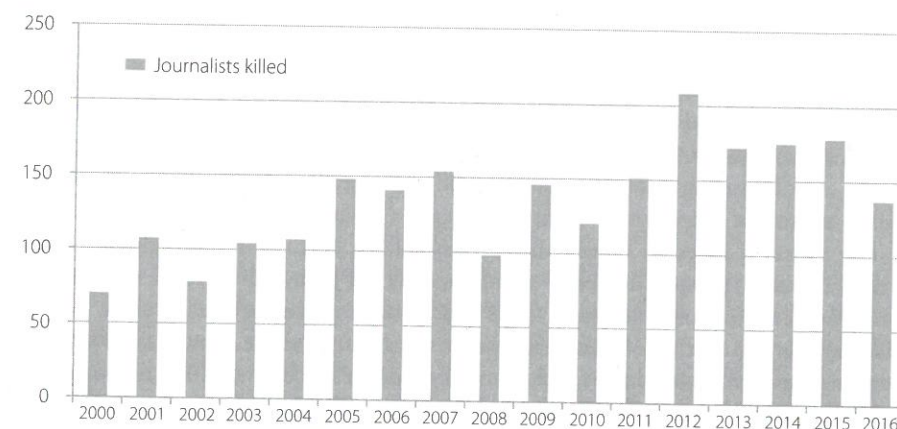
The transformations in what is considered today journalism and who is asserted as journalist, requires the application of a broader, yet well defined, set of definitional criteria to include those immediately and directly involved in the making of a news story in the field. Self-evidently, an enlarged understanding of journalism must be concrete enough to not dilute the aim of the analysis, which is to provide an up-to-date and comprehensive quantitative view of the total cost of human life in the process of finding the truth and providing this information to the public.

The resulting meta-analytical database shows that the numbers of journalists killed are higher than any database has provided so far, separately (Fig 1). The next figure (Fig 2) – a more comprehensive count including media workers – shows an unmistakable rise in deaths of journalists, counting in total 2294 deaths by the end of 2016. This graph is the result of careful cross-referencing across the aforementioned databases, taking into account complex circumstances of deaths and accidents resulting in death. Each entry was examined in each database and report manually, first, across databases to identify overlaps and misses; second, in cases of similar but not identical names or other details, extended searches on the internet were conducted to locate press coverage or other supporting material to confirm identities. This was not simply a case of adding the names of each database – it was neither possible nor methodologically correct. The resulting database, hence, contains further details as to the circumstances of death.

**Figure 1.** Comparative presentation of recorded deaths<sup>3</sup> of journalists by organisation, using strict i.e. traditional definitions of journalism, 2000-2016

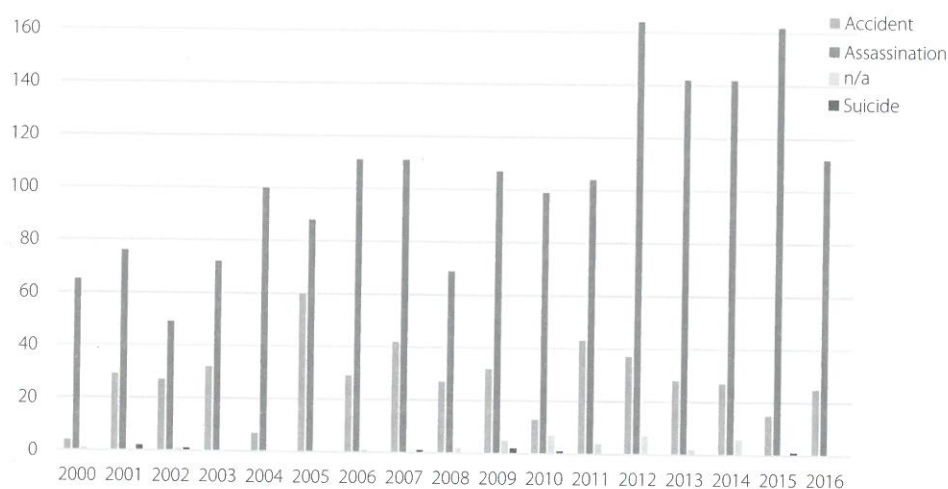


**Figure 2.** Journalists<sup>4</sup> killings worldwide, 2000-2016



Recorded suicides constitute below one per cent of all cases. Information on suicides is consistently missing, is incomplete or uncertain particularly as to whether the recorded number corresponds to the reality of journalism. It is estimated that suicides, due to their social stigma, as well as methodological uncertainties as to whether they are to be attributed to practicing journalism, are severely under-reported. There were no confirmed details as to the type of death for 36 cases, as seen in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Types of death of journalists, 2000-2016

For 33 journalists we have no information on gender; 161 of all journalists were women. For 20 per cent of the cases no information could be found about journalists' citizenship and relation to location of reporting and death. 72 per cent or 1647 were local journalists and eight per cent correspondents i.e. died abroad. We have no information about the job position for three per cent of cases and no information about the type of media journalists worked for, for almost a quarter of the cases. Information about these demographic categories can reveal evidence for changing trends or continuities, as to whether for example the presence of major global television broadcaster might inadvertently provide more safety or whether there are cases where in terrorist assaults, in particular, this might contribute to making journalists even more vulnerable if publicity is sought after by such groups. Information also can reveal gender differences, if any, as well as the role of geopolitical conditions determining at least employment protection.

The collected cases far exceed the database of the best organised and most comprehensive and updated database maintained by CPJ, including total numbers of confirmed and unconfirmed motives as well as type of media worker, since 2000<sup>5</sup>. There are certain methodological observations that can be made about the differences determining each major database that are beyond the scope of this discussion. What transpires from the study of efforts to maintain records about journalists' killings is that first, the multiple approach to the same question by different and variously located actors is an advantage to seeking out the truth about journalists; second, that this multi-perspectival approach results in a degree of fragmentation that will not serve these aims in the long term. Our investigation indicates that journalists and the international community would potentially benefit from a closer synergy and harmonisation of methodological approaches to monitoring, while allowing for more methodological approaches and changes to be implemented *in addition* to a core (but not minimal) set of methodological tools and furthermore, strategies.

As an example, it is worth mentioning the difficulties generated by seemingly 'simple' stages in the recording of cases, such as the existing difference in transcribing non-western names into Latin characters. This, for example, has raised the question several times, whether the records refer to the same person or not. Other points relate to the inconsistency of data generation with regards to age and employment status or more specifics on the stories investigated. Yet, the impressive work of collating data and verifying them, across the organisations we examined cannot be overstated.

The comprehensiveness of IFJ's records as well as the CPJ's (in the cases of strictly defined journalism) lists provides stable points of reference for other organisations. RSF provides also historical records stretching back to the end of Second World War; INSI tracks all staff and freelance casualties during coverage-related activities including accidents; IPI looks strictly at targeted staff. Despite the number of investigations into assaults and deaths, it is striking that there persist considerable information gaps. Dissemination and publication methods do not lend themselves easily to further evaluation and analysis, due to the divergence in definitions and systems of presentation. It has been challenging, for example, to retrieve systematic data for the purposes of research, which might cause considerable problems to the future efforts of proponents of social justice and end to impunity in the policy and activist realm, as well as future efforts by the media industries to enter the debate with concrete anti-impunity measures.

By far, in the examined period, the most dangerous countries for journalists have been war and conflict zones. However, to assume that journalists are safe in their work in Europe, as a region of stability and prosperity and robust legal frameworks for the protection of free speech and free press would be misleading. Understanding the concept of safety as one encompassing the everyday ability to perform one's duties free from assault, intimidation and harassment, in short free from physical and psychological violence, requires that we explore in more detail and during a longer and sustained period the visible but also intangible forms of oppression through intimidation. The next and final section discusses the challenges in doing so, in the context of Europe.

### Safety beyond counting bodies: the case of Europe

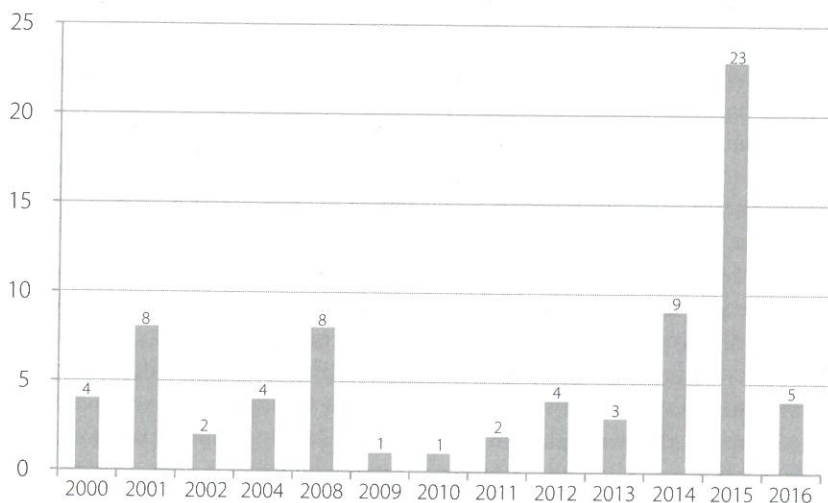
Assaults and intimidation are not exclusively found in autocratic regimes or conflict zones. The aim was to explore the extent to which numbers may be traceable for cases of assault against journalists and media workers in Europe and to analyse what these numbers tell us. The research looked into multiple sources where some form of documentation of an assault took place and this included references in the press, reports of international originations and journalists' unions and news agencies archives. The primary research revealed<sup>6</sup> 1035 cases of journalists who have been threatened, assaulted or ultimately killed between 2000-2016 in Europe alone. Collecting information about historical cases is extremely difficult and points to changes that took place gradually. A major concern is the skeletal information on many victims i.e. survivors of assault, especially during the early 2000s, where even media coverage was quite eschewed.

The consistent attention to free speech and the role of journalists pursued by the UNESCO in particular over the course of thirty years together with the work of civil



society has succeeded in moving the debate towards a more sophisticated and highly sensitised level. This allows the beginnings of a more thorough and systematic approach to monitoring and reporting attacks on journalists and further keeps the issue high on the international community's agenda as a matter of global media policy. The picture emerging shows that the number of assaults in Europe has seen a sharp rise (Fig 4 and 5) and in particular since 2013. Three major geographical points accounting for 689 cases are Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan. Politics is the most common investigation area of victims and survivors, followed by reporting on ethnic issues, predominantly regarding the coverage of the Kurdish minority in Turkey.

**Figure 4.** Deaths of journalists in Europe, excluding Turkey and Russia, 2000-2016

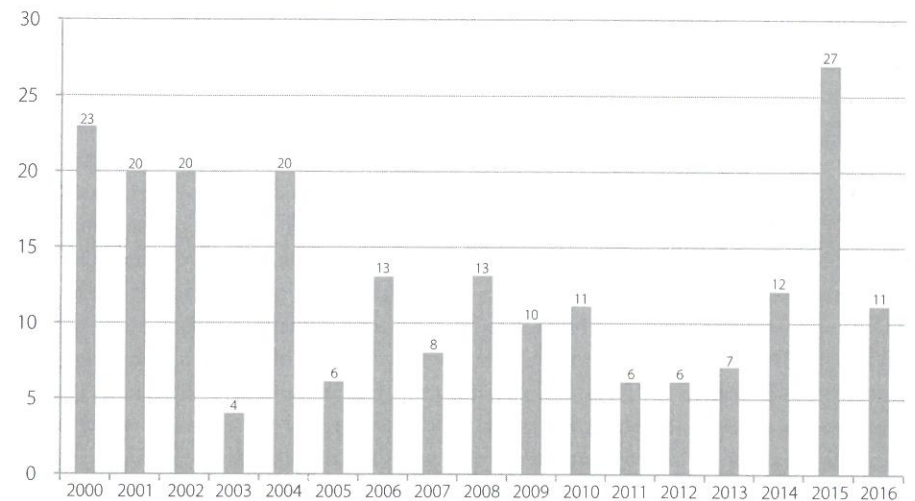


The recorded cases are not exhaustive or conclusive, with the exception of number of deaths: multiple threats or assaults against the same person were not recorded, hence the numbers represent *persons* assaulted. Moreover, it is impossible to capture all reported assaults, if they are not reported in some form- it is not unreasonable to assume that only the worst cases reach some form of reporting. In the cases of deaths, the numbers offer a rather accurate picture, in particular as the numbers include terrorist attacks and assassinations that have been reported widely in the press. The role of the press itself and the international community in bringing to the light the dangers and violations against human rights is crucial. Assaults however are not monitored systematically and neither are threats and intimidation.

We know very little about the everyday realities of investigative journalists who do not necessarily make such cases known or which are considered often as 'part of the job'. The individual experiences, however, make up for social phenomena; their sum, although cannot tell the whole story, provides a powerful context about the 'stories behind the stories'. Of 1035 journalists assaulted, 220 died. Deaths, when not direct

assassinations, come as result of assaults often within a short timeframe. Figures 4 and 5 present a picture of journalists' deaths in Europe. Clearly, the numbers of journalists attacked is the highest in Turkey and Russia. These two countries account for half the deaths of journalists in 2016. Overall, Russia holds the first place in killings of journalists with 132 deaths since 2000, Ukraine is second with 16 deaths and Turkey 15 until the end of 2016. Russia accounts for 17 per cent of all assaults with 176 cases and Turkey makes up 45 per cent of the data with 466 cases of assault in the examined period, with the majority of the cases taking place in 2016.

**Figure 5.** Deaths of journalists in Europe, including Turkey and Russia, 2000-2016

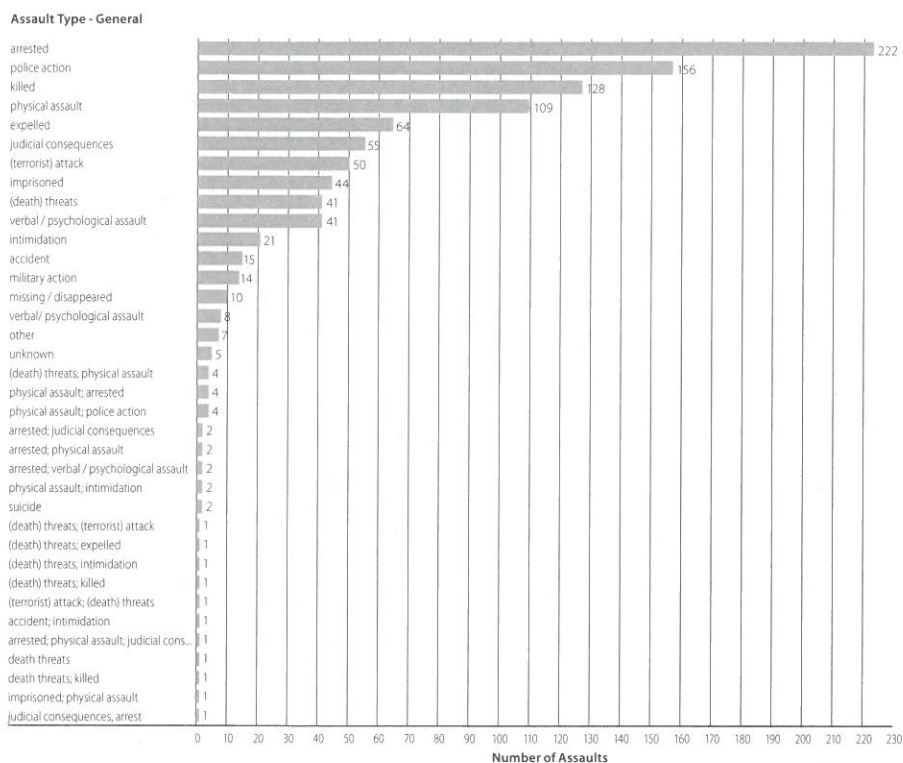


Press freedom in those countries is attributed as 'not free' according to Freedom House, meaning that violence and repression against journalists are frequently committed by the government, authorities, police and there is high degree of impunity. Ukraine and Italy, where press freedom status is 'partly free', are in fourth position with 35 assaults, making up about three per cent of data for each of the countries. Almost the same data are found in France due to the Charlie Hebdo killings in 2015 and Bulgaria (34 assaults). The majority of cases concern journalists working for the print press (over 52 per cent of the total numbers of 539 cases) and a high number of journalists, 124, about whom it has been impossible to locate their employers and/or media.

The nature of assaults included in this database are predominantly arrests, assaults resulting from direct police action as in protests, as well as the use of laws, such as defamation, or seemingly irrelevant to journalism laws, such as accusation of tax evasion, to harass journalists. The data shows that by far the biggest culprit is the State and the police in countries where the State can be classified authoritarian. Figure 5 presents the picture of assaults including Turkey and Russia. The rest of Europe presents a different picture, when Russia and Turkey are not included. It becomes clear that *also* in

relatively stable democratic regimes journalists are physically assaulted, *but their cases become known*. The qualifying difference here is possibly that there is more likelihood that the law will be invoked to restore justice.

**Figure 6.** Method of assault, including assassinations ('killing'), 2000-2016



Hence, deaths have historically been seen as out of the ordinary state of affairs. Physical assaults, judicial measures, verbal and psychological attacks constitute the three main sources of assault against journalists in Europe. Finally, the topics investigated by journalists in these situations are politics (325 cases) coverage of ethnic minority issues (143), coverage of protests (46) and crime (31). Also here, a considerable amount of information about 193 cases remains unknown.

### Concluding thoughts

This chapter aimed to present the complexity in understanding, monitoring and providing for the safety of journalists in widely varying national contexts and often unpredictable and unstable environments. The responsibility of the international community, broadly understood, is to support the organisations, mechanisms and actors

that can surround journalists as a network of support and protection. Other crucial dimensions cannot be covered within a few pages, such as the role of technology in endangering but also potentially protecting journalists, such as surveillance technologies. Yet, the importance of speedy communications to share situations of emergency and seek out safety cannot be overstated. Similarly, the lines of investigation, information and exchange between authorities, the mass media and NGOs must remain rapid, open and pluralistic at all times.

The two cases of reconstructing and recovering data from a variety of reliable sources about the *full cost of human life* in the process of providing access to information for billions of people through journalism shows both the difficulty to collect accurate data and that the scale of the problem is far greater than estimated. Western-based organisations with the task to monitor and record the state of journalists have a difficult job to fulfil. It is clear that for international organisations to perform adequately in this task, it is necessary to overhaul established ways of collecting information and, importantly, disseminating it. A degree of standardisation of fundamental categories of information; methodological revision and further rigour; and of presentation of datasets for further analysis might be desirable.

These tasks very much depend on resources; linguistic competencies; collaborative functions across sectors. It is clear that we lack substantial chunks of information about the employment status, the precise age of journalists as well as the topic covering. We lack information about the actual conditions of work, probably witnessing the tip of the iceberg of harassment and assaults, coming outside the newsroom. The summarised reports in this chapter show that the scope of safety and sacrifice is far greater than each actor alone or their sum can account for. Although the discussion did not offer an investigation into the USA and other mature democracies, it is clear from the survey in the European territory that safe havens are few and in between, and that even in stable democracies the conditions for journalism and free expression remain vulnerable and can deteriorate surprisingly fast.

### Notes

1. Media Governance and Industries research Lab forthcoming report on *Assaults on Journalists: what is the total cost of information?* The team cross-referenced, cleaned and evaluated all available data by examining each and every entry of case of death of journalists manually.
2. Presentation varied from databases to descriptive annual or biannual reports.
3. Not all databases report deaths for the period under study, but for shorter periods.
4. Here the designation of 'journalist' is understood in its broader sense.
5. CPJ provides total numbers of 1371 cases until December 15, 2016.
6. *Report on the Safety of Journalists in Europe: revised numbers on assault and deaths*. Media Governance and Industries Research Lab 2017 forthcoming.