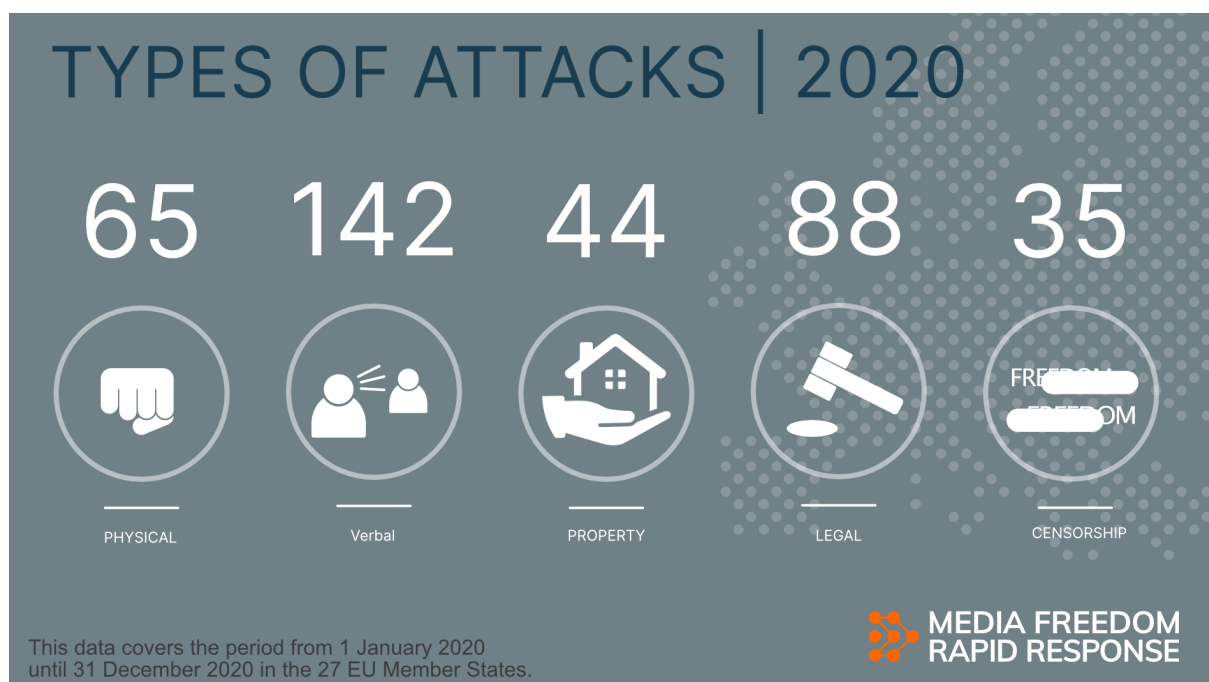**MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE**

9 September 2021

*This report is a selection of statistics and analysis from Mapping Media Freedom (MMF), submitted by the partner organisations in the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR). This data covers the period **from 1 January until 31 December 2020** in the 27 current EU Member States (i.e., it does not include the United Kingdom).*

# Overview 2020

**280 alerts (with 908 persons or entities related to media being attacked) in 23 EU Member States in 12 months**

## Types of attacks



TYPES OF ATTACKS | 2020

| 65 | 142 | 44 | 88 | 35 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| PHYSICAL | Verbal | PROPERTY | LEGAL | CENSORSHIP |

This data covers the period from 1 January 2020 until 31 December 2020 in the 27 EU Member States.

**MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE**

**Physical**: More than 1 in 5 incidents (23.2% - 65 alerts) resulted in journalists and media workers being physically attacked. In 1 out of every 10 incidents (10.4% - 29 alerts) media workers were injured.

**Verbal:** In half of the incidents (50.7% - 142 alerts), journalists and media workers were verbally abused. This includes intimidation/threats, insults/abuse, discrediting, or harassment as well as bullying/trolling behaviour targeting journalists and media

workers which happens online and offline. More than one out of every three alerts (36.4% - 102 alerts) included intimidation/threatening behaviour.

There were 29 alerts (10.4%) related to journalists and media workers being verbally abused online (which includes intimidation/threats, insults/abuse, harassment and bullying/trolling and smear campaigns)
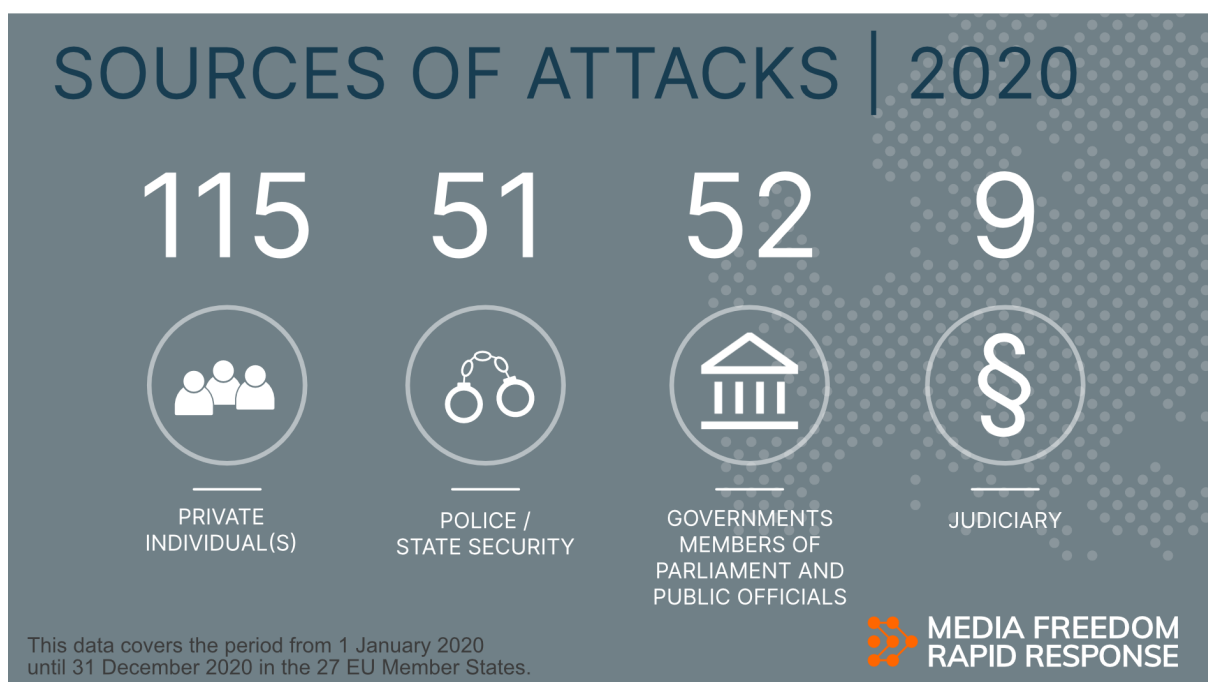
**Property**: In 15.7% (44 alerts), property was attacked. This includes equipment, personal belongings, and also attacks on other property such as cars or houses, as well as hacking/DDoS attacks.

**Legal**: In nearly 1 out of every 3 incidents (31.4% - 88 alerts), media actors faced legal action. This includes civil lawsuits (30 alerts), criminal charges (20 alerts), arrest/detention/imprisonment (17 alerts), legal measures such as laws restricting press and media freedom (15), defamation (19), interrogation (13), surveillance and interception of journalistic data (2), loss of employment (2) and one alert for each of these: bribery/payments, closure of independent or critical media outlets, and expansion of state control over media outlets.

**Censorship:** In 12.5% of the incidents (35 alerts), media actors faced censorship. This includes 11 alerts with arbitrary denial of accreditation or registration (including blocked access to events or press conferences), 10 alerts with commercial interference, 6 alerts with blocked access to information (e.g. blocked websites or no answers to enquiries), and 5 alerts with censorship of articles/published works.

Please note: as one incident can comprise several types of attacks (e.g. verbal attack and physical attack), the numbers above add up to more than the total number of alerts (more than 100%).

## Sources of attacks



## SOURCES OF ATTACKS | 2020

| 115 | 51 | 52 | 9 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| PRIVATE INDIVIDUAL(S) | POLICE / STATE SECURITY | GOVERNMENTS MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS | JUDICIARY |

This data covers the period from 1 January 2020 until 31 December 2020 in the 27 EU Member States.

MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE

**Private individuals:** In more than four out of every ten incidents (41,1% - 115 alerts), journalists and media workers were attacked or prevented from carrying out their work by private individuals.

**Governments, Members of Parliament and public officials**: Almost one out of every five incidents (18.6% - 52 alerts) included incidents caused by members of governments, Members of Parliament and public officials.

**Police**: Almost one out of every five incidents (18.2% - 51 alerts),  journalists and media workers were attacked or prevented from carrying out their work by police officers or representatives of state security forces.

**Judiciary**: Further to this, 3.2% (9 alerts) of the incidents were caused by judicial actors, such as national courts.

Since the start of 2020, the MFRR has documented violations performed by a wide range of sources including private corporations or companies, political parties, criminal organisations, representatives of private security companies, public authorities, representatives of other media outlets, or the journalist or media worker's own employer, publisher or colleague.

# Selected Topics

## Governments, Members of Parliament and public officials

**52 alerts**, affecting 56 journalists, media workers or entities, in 14 countries were caused by governments, Members of Parliament or public officials.

With almost one out of every five incidents caused by governments, Members of Parliament or public officials (18.6%), they are the **second most frequent source of the incident** when journalists and media workers are attacked (after private individuals and closely followed by police).

*Types*: In half of the incidents caused by governments, Members of Parliament or public officials (50% - 26 alerts), journalists and media actors were **verbally abused**. More than one out of every three incidents (36.5% - 19 alerts) included discrediting. In more than one out of every three incidents (36.5%  - 19 alerts), journalists and media workers faced **legal consequences**, which includes legal measures (e.g. laws restricting press freedom), civil lawsuits, criminal charges, defamation, or arrest/detention/imprisonment). In one out of every four incidents (25% - 13 alerts), media actors faced **censorship**, which includes blocked access to information (e.g. blocked websites or no answers to enquiries), commercial interference, arbitrary denial of accreditation or registration (including blocked access to events or press conferences). Further to this we recorded one physical attack and one attack to property (equipment).

*Contexts*: 21.2% (11 alerts) of the incidents caused by governments, Members of Parliament or public officials happened **online/digital**, 17.3% (9 alerts) **at parliament,** 13.5% (7 alerts) **during a press conference,** 11.5% (6 alerts) **via public announcement/TV/news**, 9.6% (5 alerts) **at public authorities** and 7.7% (4 alerts) **in court**.

## Police

**51 alerts**, affecting 100 journalists, media workers or entities, in 8 countries were caused by police or state security forces.

With almost than one out of every five incidents caused by police (18.2%), the police is the **third most frequent source of the incident** when journalists and media workers are attacked (after private individuals and governments, Members of Parliament and public officials).

***Types***: In 47.1% (24 alerts) of the incidents caused by police, journalists and media actors faced **legal consequences**, such as arrest/detention/imprisonment, interrogation, and criminal charges. In 33.3% (17 alerts) of the incidents caused by police, journalists and media actors were **verbally abused** (such as intimidation/threatening behaviour, harassment, discredit, insults/abuse), in one out of every four incidents (25.5% - 13 alerts) they were **physically attacked**. In 15.7% of incidents (8 alerts), journalists and media actors got **injured**.

***Contexts***: The majority of the incidents caused by police (58.8% - 30 alerts) happened during **demonstrations**, 15.7% (8 alerts) on **public places/streets**, 7.8% (4 alerts) at police stations (or other **police environment** such as in a police car).

## COVID-19

Mapping Media Freedom documented **79 alerts in 11 countries related to COVID-19** affecting 141 persons or media entities that were attacked. This means more than **one out of every four incidents** (28.2%) that occurred in EU Member States in 2020 was related to the COVID-19 pandemic, either directly, in response to government responses to the pandemic or connected to public opposition to the situation.

***Types***: Nearly one out of every three (31.7 % - 25 alerts) COVID-19 related incidents included **physical assaults**. In 1 out of every 10 incidents (10.1% - 8 alerts) journalists or media actors were **injured**. More than two-thirds of the incidents related to COVID-19 (70.9% - 56 alerts) included **verbal attacks.** In 16.5% (13 alerts) **property** was attacked, 11.4% (9 alerts) involved **legal** action against media actors, and 11.4% (9 alerts) included a form of **censorship**.

***Sources***: In almost two-thirds of the incidents related to COVID-19 (64.6% - 51 alerts), journalists and media workers were attacked or impeded from carrying out their work by **private individuals**, followed by **governments, Members of Parliament and public officials** (16.5% - 13 alerts), and **police** or representatives of state security (12.7% - 10 alerts). The MFRR also documented two violations committed by unknown sources, and one alert for each of these: political parties, private corporations, private security officers and criminal organisations.

***Contexts***: More than half of the incidents related to COVID-19 happened **during protests** (57% - 45 alerts), where media workers were attacked or prevented from doing their work. However, incidents related to COVID-19 are not confined to protests alone. Other common contexts included public places/streets (13.9% - 11 alerts) and online/digital (12.7% - 10 alerts).

## Demonstrations

**84 alerts**, affecting 175 journalists, media workers or entities, in 11 countries took place during demonstrations.

Nearly one in three incidents occurred during demonstrations (30%). **Demonstrations are the most frequent place** where journalists and media workers were attacked.

*Types*: Almost half of the incidents during protests include **physical attacks** (48.8% - 41 alerts), more than half of the incidents (56% - 47 alerts) include **verbal attacks** including threatening behaviour, intimidation, insults/abuse and harassment. One out of every four incidents (25% - 21 alerts) involved **attacks on or threats to the equipment and property** of journalists and media workers. Thirteen alerts (15.5%) involved **legal measures** such as arrest/detention/imprisonment, interrogation, or criminal charges against journalists and media workers. In 6% of incidents (5 alerts) journalists faced **censorship**, which included arbitrary denial of accreditation or registration and blocked access to locations of journalistic interest.

*Sources*; More than six out of every ten incidents occurring during protests (61.9% - 52 alerts) involved journalists and media workers being attacked or prevented from doing their work by **private individuals**, such as protesters. In more than one third of the incidents during protests (35.7% - 30 alerts), **police officers or representatives of state security forces** were the source of the threat.

## Online/digital

**29 alerts**, affecting 33 journalists, media workers or entities, in 11 countries took place online or in the digital sphere.

*Types*: These attacks include mostly **verbal abuse** (96.6% - 28 alerts) such as intimidation/threatening behaviour (58.6% - 17 alerts), discredit (37.9% - 11 alerts), bullying/trolling (27.6% - 8 alerts), insult/abuse (24.1 %- 7 alerts), or harassment (13.8% - 4 alerts).

**Sources:** In more than four out of every ten incidents (41.4% - 12 alerts ) that happened online/digital, the sources of the attack were **private individuals**. In more than one out of every three incidents (37.9% - 11 alerts) it was **governments, Members of Parliament and public officials** and in 17.2% of incidents (5 alerts), the source was **unknown**.

## Legal threats, including civil lawsuits and SLAPP actions

Mapping Media Freedom includes 36 alerts from 13 countries related to **legal threats against journalists, media workers and outlets** including defamation claims and other types of legal action. Note that situations where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats are currently recorded as one alert.

*Sources*: Legal threats were caused by **private individuals** in almost half of the incidents, followed by **corporations/companies** and **governments, members of parliament and public officials**.

Due to the complexity of categorising legal threats and the need for sensitivity in particular as concerns on-going cases, this category is currently ill-suited for statistical

analysis. We are working to improve the representation of these cases on a more granular and specific level on the MMF platform.