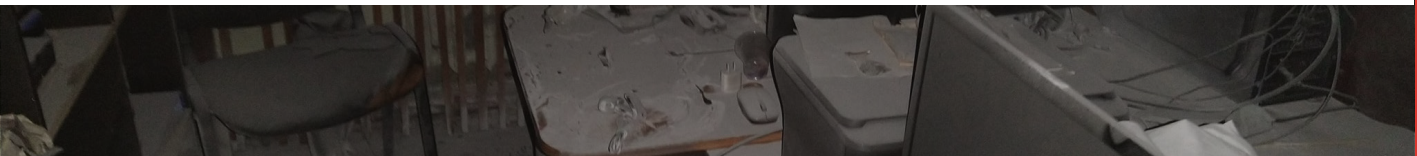


## A collage of images showing various scenes of conflict, police, and media workers, with the text "ATTACKS ON MEDIA WORKERS IN 2020" overlaid. The collage includes: a man being restrained by police; a person in a white face mask; a police officer in a blue uniform and hat; a man in a blue shirt; a close-up of a man's face with a green light reflection; a group of men, some wearing masks; a night scene with a person holding a phone; a scene with a large pile of debris; a group of men with cameras; and police officers in blue uniforms with "ОМОН" (OMON) on their backs.



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# INTRODUCTION

The following report presents the key findings of an analysis of attacks in relation to the workers and editorial offices of traditional and online publications in 12 post-Soviet countries for the year 2020.

For the purposes of this report, the term “media workers” is understood as professional and citizen journalists, bloggers, online activists, camera operators, photo correspondents, and other employees and managers of traditional and non-registered media.

## AUTHORS OF THE REPORT

- **Azerbaijan: Khaled Aghaly**

Lawyer and specialist in media law in Azerbaijan. Aghaly has been working in the field of media law in Azerbaijan since 2002. He is one of the founders of the Media Rights Institute (MRI Azerbaijan). The Media Rights Institute was forced to suspend its activities in 2014. Since then, Aghaly has been working individually. He is the author of more than 10 reports and studies on the state of media rights in Azerbaijan.

- **Armenia: The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression (CPFE)**

Non-profit journalistic non-governmental organisation. It was officially registered on 16 January 2003. Throughout its existence the organisation implemented more than 40 projects. The Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression is a member of the Armenian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and has actively taken part in the activities of the Forum.

The main direction of the CPFE activity is the monitoring of the free speech situation in Armenia, detection of and responding to the violations of the rights of journalists and the media, as well as drafting and publication of periodic reports on the basis of the above data. The CPFE also takes practical steps to protect the rights of the media and their representatives, including before courts. An important area of the Committee's activities is the improvement of the media-related legislation. With a view to this, the CPFE drafts new legislation and amendment packages and submits them to the parliament.

- **Belarus: The Belarusian Association of Journalists**

The Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), is a non-governmental, non-profit and non-partisan association of media workers, promoting freedom of expression and independent journalism ideas in Belarus.

The main goal of BAJ is to facilitate the exercise of civil, social, cultural, economic and professional rights

and the pursuit of legitimate interests of its members, help to develop expertise and get a chance for creative self-fulfillment, as well as to create conditions that enable freedom of the press, including the journalists right to obtain and impart information without any interference.

The main tasks of BAJ activities are:

- BAJ protects journalists' rights and legitimate interests in state bodies and international organizations;
- BAJ helps to create material, technical, organizational and other facilities, vital for improving journalist proficiency;
- BAJ is drawing up an effective program to develop mass media so that it would create favorable conditions for their functioning in Belarus;
- BAJ establishes relations with journalist organizations all over the world.

- **Crimea: Human Rights Centre ZMINA**

A non-governmental organisation, which aims to promote the human rights, the rule of law and the ideas of civil society in Ukraine.

- **Georgia: Oleg Panfilov**

Georgian journalist, commentator and writer. Author of 52 books and of more than one hundred TV programmes about Georgia. He has won various international prizes and is a Cavalier of Georgia's Order of Honour. In the 1990s, he headed the Moscow bureau of the Committee to Protect Journalists (1992-1993), and was in charge, from 1994 to 1999, of the monitoring service of the Glasnost Defence Foundation in Moscow, before setting up the Centre for Journalism in Extreme Situations (Moscow) of which he was director from 2000 to 2010.

- **Kazakhstan: International Foundation for protection of freedom of speech Adil Soz**

Major priority of International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech “Adil Soz” is establishment of open civil society over the statement in daily life of the country free, objective and progressive journalism. The main activity of the Foundation is monitoring of violations of freedom of speech, legal activity, educational activity and legal help to journalists and mass media.

- **Kyrgyzstan: School of Peacemaking and Media Technology in Central Asia**

School of Peacemaking and Media Technology is a nonprofit media development organization encouraging freedom of expression, diversity, researches and training on media issues based in Bishkek.



- **Moldova: Association of Independent Press (API)**

One of the most important Moldovan non-governmental organizations providing assistance to independent media. API was founded in 1997 by the representatives of the first local independent newspapers.

API promotes press freedom and highly appreciated for its media campaigns in various public interest sectors, advocacy activities for mass-media development, defense of the freedom of expression, access to information, promotion of journalistic self-regulation, etc. API's slogan is: "For a professional, objective and strong press".

Since 2015, API and three other media NGOs organize yearly Mass-media Forum in Republic of Moldova, for discussion the problems and challenges faced by the journalistic community and draft a Roadmap for media development in Moldova.

- **Russia: Justice for Journalists Foundation**

Justice for Journalists Foundation (JFJ) is a London-based non-governmental organization. The foundation was created in August 2018 by Mikhail Khodorkovsky, founder of the Open Russia pro-democracy movement, an Amnesty International-recognised prisoner of conscience, and Putin's most prominent critic, together with his former business partner, philanthropist and member of the Free Russia Forum's standing committee Leonid Nevzlin.

JFJ funds journalistic investigations into violent crimes against media workers and helps professional and citizen journalists to mitigate their risks. Our mission is to facilitate journalists' access to existing resources and make them relevant to the specifics of each region. We believe security is the essential basis for work in the media. We help journalists acquire the skills and knowledge to address their professional challenges.

JFJ's activity consists of three main components:

- Grants for investigating violent crimes against media workers;
- Risk mapping via monitoring, analysing and publicising attacks against media workers;
- Risk management and prevention by organising security and safety trainings for non-English speaking media workers in our Orkhan Dzhemal Media Safety Academy.

JFJ cooperates with international media workers and press freedom activists, human rights and educational organisations, and think-tanks on media security issues and investigations into crimes against journalists.

- **Tajikistan: Partner, who preferred to stay anonymous**

- **Turkmenistan: Ruslan Myatiev, Turkmen.news**

Turkmen journalist, human rights activist, and editor of the news and human rights website Turkmen.news – one of the few independent sources covering Turkmenistan. The website is based in the Netherlands, where it was set up in 2010.

Myatiev frequently writes and broadcasts for the media and speaks at various international conferences and seminars as a Turkmen expert on socio-economic subjects, on politics and human rights. Ruslan Myatiev is Turkmenistan expert for the Justice for Journalists Foundation.

- **Uzbekistan: Sergei Naumov**

Freelance journalist for major media outlets – Fergana.ru (Russia) and IWPR (UK). From 2008 to 2017 he authored several reports for international organisations and regional online forums on the state of freedom of speech, expression and the press in Uzbekistan. He is an active participant in the country's activist movement. From 2007 to the present day he has been monitoring the use of child labour on cotton plantations, creating human rights content, and participating in the research projects of European human rights organisations. Naumov has been a volunteer at the School of Peacekeeping and Media Technology in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan) since 2014.

- **Ukraine: The National Union of Journalists of Ukraine**

The National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU) is the biggest organisation that brings together journalists and other media workers in Ukraine. The union is an independent public non-profit organization. The mission is the development of journalism and media in Ukraine and protection of freedom of speech and journalists' rights.

NUJU cooperates with international organizations and institutions of the United Nations, the EU, the Council of Europe, the International Federation of Journalists, the European Federation of Journalists, the RFS (Reporters Without Borders) and communicates with foreign professional media organizations, concludes agreements with them on cooperation in the field of professional activity, exchange of information, establishment of journalistic exchanges (Poland, Belarus, China, Lithuania, Germany, Italy, etc.).

NUJU conducts conferences, public hearings on the topic of freedom of speech and the safety of journalists, actively participates in the preparation of changes in the Ukrainian media-law, provides legal support for journalistic activities, co-organizer of different forums, festivals, promotions, press tours, seminars, etc.

# PHOTOGRAPHERS

**Armenia** — *Photolure News Agency*

**Azerbaijan** — Firi Salim

**Belarus** — Vadim Zamirovsky, *TUT.BY* photographer

**Georgia** — Mariam Nikuradze, co-founder of *OC Media*

**Kazakhstan** — Madina Alihmanova, the international news agency *KazTAG*

**Kyrgyzstan** — Bermet Malikova, *Internews*

**Crimea** — Human Rights Centre ZMINA

**Moldova** — *TV8*

**Russia** — Yuri Beliat, photo correspondent *MBK Media*

**Tajikistan** — *RFE/RL's* Tajik language service — *Radio Ozodi*

**Turkmenistan** — Nurgeldy Khalykov (photo from the personal Instagram account)

**Uzbekistan** — *kun.uz*

**Ukraine** — The National Union of Journalists of Ukraine

## METHODOLOGY

The data for the research was obtained from sources in the English, Russian, and state languages of the countries being analyzed, including social media, using the method of content analysis. Lists of the main sources are presented in Annexes 2-14. Additional data was obtained using the method of expert interviews with media workers, who were reporting to the Foundation's partners about incidents that had not been made public in traditional and social media. All information about these attacks has been corroborated by the Foundation's experts from three or more unrelated sources.

4,611 attacks were registered in 2020 in relation to media workers and the editorial offices of media outlets. Each incident was placed in one of the following categories of attacks:

- Physical attacks and threats to life, liberty, and health
- Non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats
- Attacks via judicial and/or economic means

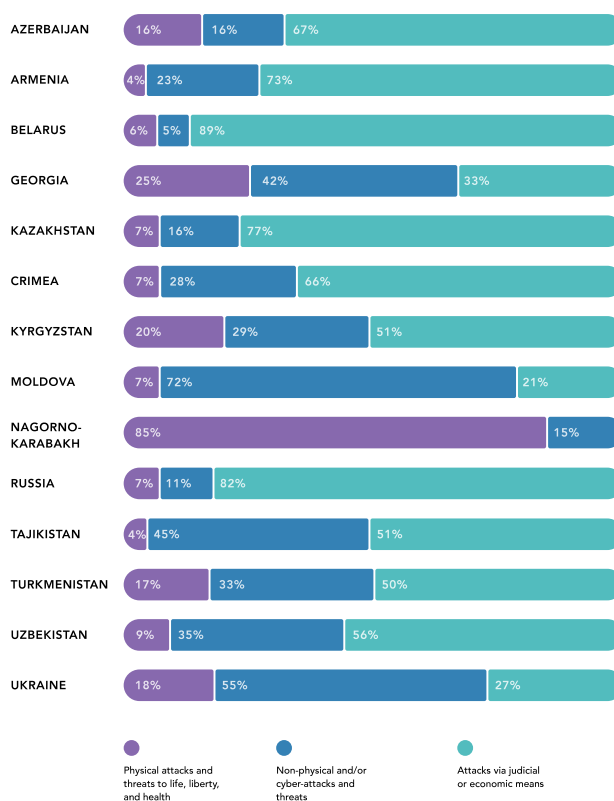
Each of the indicated types of attacks was further divided into subcategories. A complete list of the methods of assaults on media workers is presented on the Foundation's website and in Annex 1.

For the purposes of more precisely reflecting combination assaults on media workers in 2020 we are introducing a new category – hybrid attacks.

We are calling systematic persecution of publications or media workers with the use of tools from two or more categories of assaults – physical, non-physical, and judicial/economic – “hybrid”. Such a combination of means, involving and not involving force with judicial means of pressure on undesirable journalists, is carried out with a view to demoralising them or getting them to self-censor or to abandon the profession or even life itself.

### Attacks on media workers (relative values)

Comparative graphs for 14 countries and territories

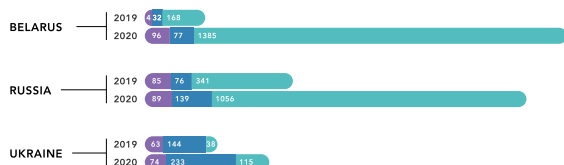


# PRINCIPAL TRENDS

In all countries, except Azerbaijan, the number of attacks on media workers increased two and a half times in 2020 compared to 2019: from 1.907 to 4.611. The most notable increase was in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine.

## Comparison of attacks on media workers in 2019 and 2020 (absolute values)

Comparative graphs for 3 countries and territories

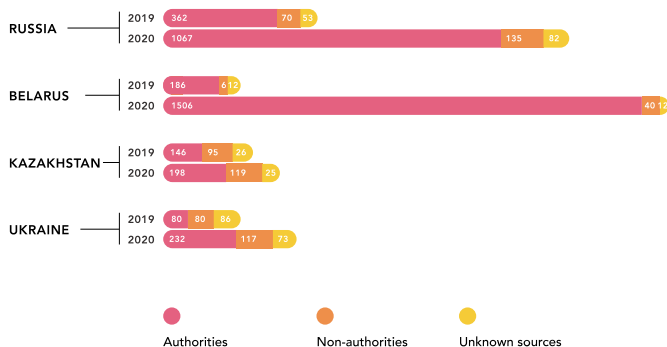


Physical attacks and threats to life, liberty, and health  
Non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats  
Attacks via judicial or economic means

Representatives of authorities remain the main source of threats for media workers: in 57% of cases they are behind physical attacks, in 52% – non-physical and cyber-attacks and in 88% – attacks via judicial and economic means.

## Initiators of attacks on media workers

Comparison of 2019 and 2020



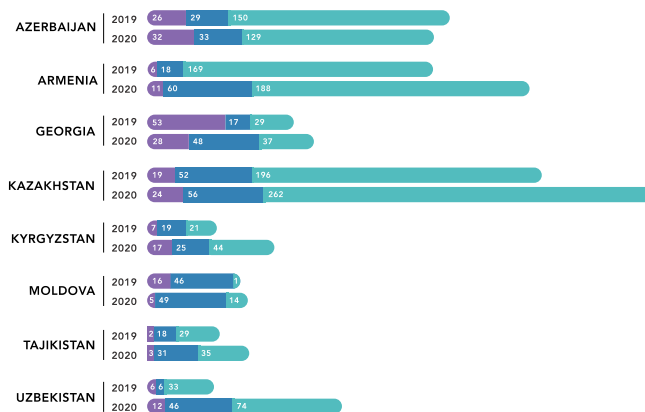
Authorities  
Non-authorities  
Unknown sources

For the purposes of representativity of the analysis, the 12 post-Soviet countries have been grouped based on their ratings in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Press Freedom Index for 2020.

Thus, the first group is composed of countries with rankings in the range from 160th to 180th place in the RSF index, in which the situation with freedom of the

## Comparison of attacks on media workers in 2019 and 2020 (absolute values)

Comparative graphs for 8 countries and territories

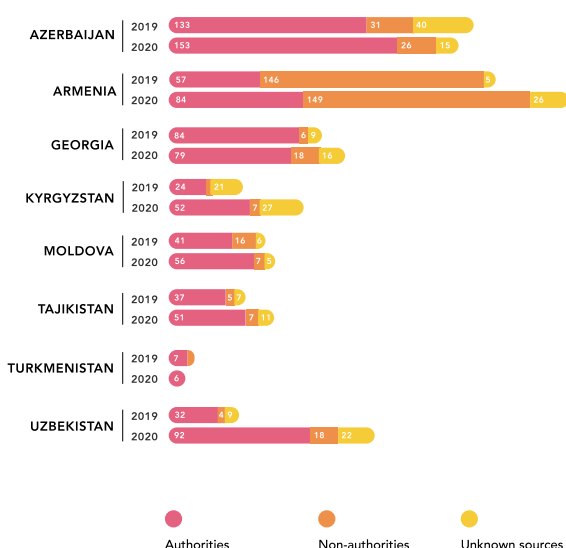


Physical attacks and threats to life, liberty, and health  
Non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats  
Attacks via judicial or economic means

In 2020, 13 media workers lost their lives, which is almost double the figure from last year when 7 journalists lost their lives.

## Initiators of attacks on media workers

Comparison of 2019 and 2020

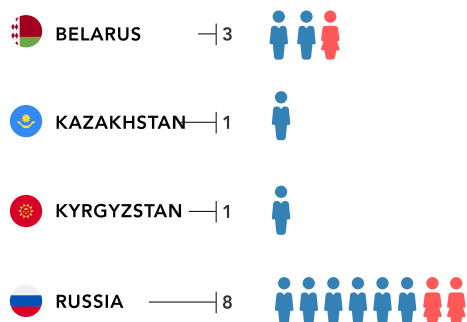


Authorities  
Non-authorities  
Unknown sources

press is labelled as “very serious”. In the second group are countries ranked from 108th through 159th places; the situation in them is characterised as “difficult”. To the third group belong countries located between 49th and 107th place in the RSF index and described as “problematic”. Not one of the countries analysed by the Foundation falls in the group in which the situation is considered “good” or “satisfactory”.



## Media workers who lost their lives



The main factors contributing to the deterioration of the environment for the journalists in the region were:

- New laws and regulations restricting media workers' access to information and freedom of movement under the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic and the fight against so called 'fake news';
- Protest activity and rallies against the worsening of the political, economic and social situation;

- New severe penalties for cooperation between local and foreign media and NGOs;
- The openly hostile attitude of some governments towards independent media.

For the purposes of representativity of the analysis, the 12 post-Soviet countries have been grouped based on their ratings in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) [Press Freedom Index for 2020](#).

Thus, the first group is composed of countries with rankings in the range from 160th to 180th place in the RSF index, in which the situation with freedom of the press is labelled as "very serious". In the second group are countries ranked from 108th through 159th places; the situation in them is characterised as "difficult". To the third group belong countries located between 49th and 107th place in the RSF index and described as "problematic". Not one of the countries analysed by the Foundation falls in the group in which the situation is considered "good" or "satisfactory".

Dividing into three groups allows us to compare the methods and sources of attacks in countries with similar rankings in the RSF Press Freedom Index.

## KEY FINDINGS FOR GROUP 1 (VERY SERIOUS SITUATION)

Place on RSF Index	Country	Population 2001	Total attacks 2020	Attacks per 100,000 (Risk Index) 2020	Attacks per 100,000 (Risk Index) 2019
168	Azerbaijan	10,210,578	194	1.90	2.02
161	Tajikistan	9,717,772	69	0.71	0.51
179	Turkmenistan	6,104,827	6	0.10	0.12

Sources of population data: [worldometers.info](http://worldometers.info), [worldpopulationreview.com](http://worldpopulationreview.com), Rosstat

Of the three countries found at the very bottom of the RSF Index and characterised as "very serious" for journalists, the most detailed monitoring of attacks is being conducted in Azerbaijan. Notwithstanding a slight drop in the overall number of attacks on media workers in this country, physical assaults have increased in frequency: their number grew by a factor of 5 in comparison with 2017. In 94% of the instances journalists are being beaten up with impunity by policemen, who likewise take or damage their equipment. In connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the war in Nagorno-Karabakh (September – November), there was an intensification of harsh restrictive measures in relation to journalists: detentions, arrests, interrogations, searches, confiscations, and court trials. In 8 out of 10 instances, such attacks were initiated by representatives of the authorities. Seven journalists were being subjected to systematic attacks of a hybrid nature –

they accounted for nearly a quarter of all the recorded facts of persecution of media workers in the country.

In Tajikistan, the number of attacks on media workers on the part of the authorities increased significantly. First and foremost this was connected with the parliamentary and presidential elections that took place in 2020. 3 physical attacks were recorded, two of them in relation to one particular journalist. Harassment of journalists living abroad intensified: state bodies were resorting to intimidation, defamation, and bullying in relation to them, as well as dissemination of their personal data and putting pressure on loved ones. The main judicial methods of pressure on media workers as a whole became a ban on entering the country, denial or revocation of a visa and/or accreditation, and shutting down a media outlet/blocking an internet site/request to remove or block articles, seizure of an entire print run.

In Turkmenistan, the situation with political and civil liberties continued to deteriorate. Citizens began to more actively express dissent with the policies of Berdimuhamedov's regime, which led to an intensification of harsh repressive measures, both in relation to those whose work is directly associated with journalism and the dissemination of information, and against those who had reported on social media or through foreign media outlets about their personal problems or about arbitrary actions on the part of representatives of authority structures. A policeman

beat up the 70 year old female journalist Soltan Achi-lova [Açylova] whilst attempting to tear a camera out of her hands. Babajan Taganov [Taganov] was likewise beaten up in a police station as punishment for public statements made by his sister and mother residing in Turkey. The special services reduce all of the recorded instances of detentions and deprivation of liberty of citizens for their activity as reporters or for expressing an opinion to such articles of the Criminal Code of Turkmenistan as fraud or possession of the banned tobacco naswar or narcotics.

## KEY FINDINGS FOR GROUP 2 (DIFFICULT SITUATION)

Place on RSF Index	Country	Population 2001	Total attacks 2020	Attacks per 100,000 (Risk Index) 2020	Attacks per 100,000 (Risk Index) 2019
153	Belarus	9,443,916	1558	16.50	2.16
157	Kazakhstan	18,961,941	343	1.81	1.42
149	Russia (without Crimea)	144,336,422	1284	0.88	0.35
156	Uzbekistan	33,865,670	132	0.39	0.13

Sources of population data: worldometers.info, worldpopulationreview.com, Rosstat

In connection with the revolutionary events surrounding the elections of the president, Belarus became the record-holder for the amount and severity of cruelty of reprisals against media workers. The overall quantity of recorded attacks increased nearly 8 times compared to the previous year. Security personnel in the state service are the main danger for media workers in Belarus – it is specifically such individuals who are the perpetrators in 91 instances of beatings and torture. Belarus belongs to those countries that practice systematic attacks of a hybrid nature – the targets of 10% of all attacks were 13 journalists, whom the authorities were subjecting to a variety of different types of persecution throughout the course of the entire year. Most often it was representatives of *Belsat*, *TUT.by*, *BelaPan*, and *Radio Liberty* who suffered from the attacks of the authorities. The Foundation has recorded 513 instances of deprivation and restriction of liberty of media workers over this year.

Persecutions of media workers in Kazakhstan are implemented primarily with the help of judicial and economic means. In three quarters of the incidents it is representatives of the authorities who are standing behind such attacks. Things are particularly difficult for independent bloggers, online activists, and employees of *Azattyq radio* (*Radio Liberty*) – 12% of all attacks fell on them; their persecutions are of a hybrid nature. The number of physical threats and attacks has increased by a quarter over the last four years. The online activist

Dulat Agadil [Ağadıl] died in a pre-trial detention facility in Nur-Sultan several hours after being detained. The blogger Aygul Utepova [Aigül Ötepo] and the online activist Asanli Suyunbayev [Asanali Süieubaev] were forcibly hospitalised in specialised early treatment psychiatric clinics.

In Russia, the number of attacks on professional and citizen journalists in 2020 exceeded the total aggregate quantity of attacks for the three previous years by a factor of two. The increase took place primarily on account of attacks via judicial and economic means; moreover, in 93% of the incidents representatives of the authorities were responsible. 8 Russian journalists died this year, including Irina Slavina from Nizhny Novgorod who committed suicide as a result of many years of bullying, the opposition Chechen blogger Imran Aliyev was murdered in France, the blogger Mamikhan Umarov ("Anzor from Vienna") was murdered in an Austrian suburb, and the Orenburg journalist Aleksandr Tolmachev, who died one month shy of release from a penal colony after a 9-year term.

There were more attacks/threats in relation to media workers recorded in Uzbekistan in 2020 than in the previous three years combined. 12 media workers and their relatives were subjected to physical assaults, 9 were arrested, and 46 were subjected to non-physical and cyber-attacks. The arrest in Kyrgyzstan and subsequent extradition to Uzbekistan of the journalist Bob-

omurod Abdullaev, who was in Bishkek in transit from Berlin, attracted considerable international attention. The journalist is being charged with assault on the constitutional order of the Republic of Uzbekistan and

on the president. He has been prohibited from leaving Uzbekistan, and his movements inside the country are restricted.

## KEY FINDINGS FOR GROUP 3 (PROBLEMATIC SITUATION)

Place on RSF Index	Country	Population 2001	Total attacks 2020	Attacks per 100,000 (Risk Index) 2020	Attacks per 100,000 (Risk Index) 2019
61	Armenia	2,967,406	259	8.73	6.51
60	Georgia	3,981,263	113	2.84	2.48
82	Kyrgyzstan	6,612,651	86	1.30	0.72
91	Moldova	4,025,573	68	1.69	1.56
97	Ukraine	43,506,666	422	0.97	0.56

Sources of population data: worldometers.info, worldpopulationreview.com, Rosstat

In Armenia, the number of violations of the rights of journalists and media outlets grew by a third, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, an all-out war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the exacerbation of the socio-political situation in the post-war period. Physical attacks on journalists were committed mainly during coverage of mass protests. The number of victims doubled in comparison with the previous year. The predominant method of pressure on media workers remained lawsuits with charges of insult and libel – 79 court cases were initiated over the year.

The number of assaults on media workers in Kyrgyzstan nearly doubled. A record quantity of beatings of journalists was recorded because of the after-effects of the third revolution, while many media outlets' editorial offices were subjected to assaults against the background of raider captures of ownership; a record number of journalists were interrogated; a law was adopted in the country allowing the authorities to demand the deleting of "unreliable" information without a court sanction. The journalist Azimzhan Askarov, who had been in detention for more than 10 years, died in prison. He was accused of inciting inter-ethnic discord and killing a policeman during ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010. The United Nations Human Rights Committee had previously found Askarov a victim of torture and all court decisions in his criminal case to be unjust.

The majority of attacks on media workers in Georgia were related to the parliamentary elections of 31 October. 16 of the 26 physical attacks recorded in 2020 were implemented by representatives of the authorities; a large part of the journalists suffered from tear gas poisoning and the use of water cannons (dousing with water containing chemical reagents) on the night of 9 November outside the Central Electoral Commission

building. The government's main targets were television channels of an opposition orientation – *Mtavari Arkhi*, *Formula*, and *Priveli*, as well as employees of the Public Broadcaster of the Adjara Autonomy who had spoken out against the channel's pro-government policy. Non-physical attacks predominated in the country, above all damage to/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials.

The quantity of attacks via judicial means, above all by means of charges of libel, insult, reputational damage, grew sharply in Moldova in 2020. The main source of non-physical attacks/threats in relation to media workers were representatives of the authorities, including politicians, parliamentary deputies, president of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon (until 15 November 2020), and other persons holding public office at the central and local/regional levels. Of the five physical attacks on journalists recorded in 2020, four were carried out by employees of the State Protection and Guard Service, policemen, and Russian military deployed in Transnistria.

The most widespread method of pressure on media workers in Ukraine remains non-physical attacks, above all illegal impediments to journalistic activity and denial of access to information. Popular ways of intimidating and exacting revenge on journalists remain arson or damage to their dwellings and automobiles. The number of physical assaults on media workers increased by 19% in comparison with the previous year, but, unlike in the other countries of the region, in Ukraine representatives of state structures played the role of aggressors in only one incident out of every three.



# RISK REDUCTION MECHANISMS

Analysis of the types of media risks, as well as of their geography, frequency, and sources, is a necessary condition for working out ways of protection and being prepared. It is not realistic to keep track of all attacks on media employees. Nevertheless, analysis of the data that has been obtained allows us to offer several recommendations for how to most effectively counter attacks in each of the groups of countries.

## GROUP 1 AND BELARUS

The life and work of a journalist in these countries is turning into a never-ending struggle for survival in a hostile environment. International laws and moral constraints in relation to journalists and bloggers do not work; it is therefore impossible to protect oneself systematically from the attacks of the authorities – and it is precisely they who stand behind the majority of assaults. Journalists from these countries working abroad absolutely must:

- secure the safety of their loved ones residing in the country;
- take precautionary measures when moving about or travelling, be aware of suspicious persons and items, be in constant contact with the police of the countries where they have received a residence permit or asylum;
- as much as possible, keep track of their digital security; create backup copies of data, materials, and documents and store them in secure places because the risks of destruction of equipment and seizure of written, audio, and video materials are extremely high;
- not forget about their emotional and mental health – burnout and PTSD often accompany work in such inhuman conditions.
- For those journalists who continue to live and work inside these countries, the methods of protection should be the same as if they were working in a hot spot, covering terrorist attacks or combat operations.

It is pointless to even discuss the judicial security of journalists as often times these are countries where rule of law is absent and laws and directives that are ever more hostile to independent journalism and civil society are constantly being adopted.

The work of truthfully covering what is happening in these countries is impossible without help from beyond the border; it is therefore imperative to ensure secure channels of communication. Besides that, independent media workers must have stable financial support in order to pay fines for working with foreign

media outlets. In the event that foreign channels or contacts have been compromised, it is imperative to have a plan for evacuation from the country or for other actions that will allow them to get out of the sphere of attention of the state's repressive services.

## GROUP 2

If the political situation in these countries does not improve, media workers there are going to end up in the same situation as their colleagues from Group 1 and Belarus. In this case, it will not be long before they are going to find themselves having to choose among three options – to leave the profession, to leave the country, or to change jobs and go to work in propaganda structures connected with the state. It is senseless to wait for protection from the police and nearly impossible to attain justice in courts in Group 2 countries, because these bodies are an integral part of a single repressive system aimed at suppressing any dissident thought and independence. However, as long as media workers in these countries are finding an opportunity to tell their audience the truth, it is imperative that they observe the following rules at a minimum:

- minimise opportunities for an assault on themselves on the part of unknown persons or law-enforcement and security agencies, not walk alone, maintain constant contact with trusted people, reporting via secure channels about their plans and whereabouts, wear maximally protective clothing and footwear when working at events with high physical risks.
- create backup copies of data, materials, and documents and store them in secure places because the risks of destruction of equipment and the seizure of written, audio, and video materials are high; take verbal and telephone threats and cyber-attacks seriously, informing the security services of their media organisations and the police about them.
- know their rights, keep abreast of new legislation in the media sphere and the latest instances of judicial attacks on media workers; have all the documents and identifying markings required by current legislation with them when carrying out editorial assignments; comply to the extent possible with all directives in relation to events attended in a professional capacity; always have a valid agreement with a lawyer and a power of attorney to represent their interests.
- Not to forget about their mental health – emotional burnout and PTSD often accompany work in such difficult conditions.

### GROUP 3

Media workers in this group of countries find themselves in a situation that is dangerous but not catastrophic. In connection with political perturbations and civic protests journalists are not infrequently subjected to physical risks, which can be minimised by observing security measures for journalists when covering mass events.

The most realistic threat for journalists in this region is non-physical and cyber-attacks and threats. To minimise the risks, it is imperative for them to create back-up copies of data, materials, and documents and store them in secure places because the risks of destruction of equipment and the seizure of written, audio, and video materials are high; take verbal and telephone threats and cyber-attacks seriously, informing the security services of their media organisations and the police about them.

Close cooperation between media workers, above all investigative journalists who bring up corruption and other hard-hitting political topics, and human rights non-profits and structures offering legal counsel would appear to be an effective measure of protection from non-physical and judicial attacks. In situations when journalists are being accused of libel and insults, publicity is important, because a public reaction often helps reduce assaulters' enthusiasm and protects media workers from bullying and harassment.



# AZERBAIJAN

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT AZERBAIJAN REPORT

Azerbaijani media lives through one of the most difficult periods in its history. Apart from individual attacks on government critics, the lack of institutional support mechanisms and access to free and fair judiciary have affected its ability to cover news professionally and effectively.

Figures talk for themselves. There is no single opposition or independent print media left in the country. TV channels are heavily controlled and viewers don't recall the last time they have seen or heard any opposition member on TV or radio. Opposition uses internet media to reach out to viewers, but those who provide them airtime are subject to cyber and physical attacks by the government, as described in the report.

The non-government organizations who used to support journalists by representing them in the courts, providing legal and technical assistance are banned in Azerbaijan, leaders of the NGOs had been subject to arrests, freezing of bank accounts, travel bans.

The independent and pro-opposition websites are blocked with and without court orders, cyber-attacks prevent their outreach, while reporters, editors and their family members become targets of despicable blackmailing and harassment campaigns.

Most of the local reporters who work for media outlets and are based in foreign countries for safety reasons, have been pushed to work anonymously as the government prosecutes cooperation with foreign media

without accreditation. Accreditation is supposed to be provided by Foreign Ministry, which simply does not respond to the letters.

Bloggers and journalists who uncover corruption of government officials lack institutional support and the market for their reporting and resources, while being subjected to surveillance, which also makes it difficult to ensure safety of whistleblowers and information sources.

Access to information is more difficult than ever, as the government provides access to officials and documents only to controlled media. The journalists lack resources to file freedom of information lawsuits, while lawyers who defend journalists in the courts are subject to disbarment and attacks by government-controlled Bar Association. Government endorses attacks against critics in controlled media, awarding those who play active role in smearing bloggers and journalists.

Electronic and physical surveillance by state security services is an ongoing problem, and as a result, personal information and private lives of journalists are often exposed in government controlled media.

Social media users who criticize police and the president are punished with administrative arrests, arbitrary detentions and physical violence. Large-scale troll attacks on government critics are also frequent and are evidently directed by the ruling party.

Situation with the media freedom in Azerbaijan is dire but not hopeless. Despite all the difficulties the profession still attracts young generation who seek to boost their capacity in limited number of training projects.

**Khadija Ismayilova**  
Investigative journalist and trainer



# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS AND MEDIA WORKERS IN AZERBAIJAN IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

**194** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional and citizen media workers and editorial offices of traditional and online publications in Azerbaijan in 2020 were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data were obtained from open sources in the Russian, Azerbaijani, and English languages using the method of content analysis. Likewise used were expert interviews of journalists who had been subjected to assault, and of their lawyers. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 2**.

1. The quantity of attacks on journalists and media workers in 2020 in comparison with 2019 remained at the same level – the difference comprises just 5.4%.
2. As before, the main method of pressure on journalists, bloggers, and media workers in Azerbaijan is attacks via judicial and/or economic means. Court trials and short-term detentions predominate.
3. Parliamentary elections took place in Azerbaijan in February. Journalists working at protest events after the elections were subjected to physical pressure on the part of representatives of the authorities.
4. Representatives of the authorities actively used quarantine restrictions and the war in Karabakh to infringe on freedom of speech and create obstacles for journalists.
5. The main method of non-physical pressure was cyber-attacks against the websites of independent media outlets. There were 10 such incidents recorded in 2020.

Attacks on journalists associated with the war in Nagorno-Karabakh were not included in the present report.

## 2/ THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MEDIA IN AZERBAIJAN

According to the **annual reports** by Reporters Without Borders, the situation with freedom of the media in Azerbaijan continues to deteriorate. In 2020 the country took 168th place in the worldwide rating, having dropped by five places in two years.

According to the **Freedom on the Net** report for 2020 drawn up by Freedom House, internet freedom is absent in Azerbaijan – the country garnered 38 out of 100 points. As recently as 2017 the internet in Azerbaijan was considered «partly free» (42 out of 100 points). Freedom House associates the absence of internet freedom with low connection quality, control of the information and communications technologies sector, manipulation of the information space by the state, and blocking of resources on which news unfavourable to the government is posted.

The quantity of mass information media registered in Azerbaijan according to the official data exceeds 5000. In reality there are significantly fewer functioning media outlets and other media structures: there are around 50 news agencies, 300 news and analysis websites, and around 300 newspapers and magazines.

There is an operating Press Council, which was founded as a public association. However this structure is in fact under the government's control. Besides that, in Azerbaijan there is a Fund for State Support of Mass Information Media, which supports the print media. This fund was created by the state and is funded by it. Print media depend on annual state subsidies. The Fund likewise builds houses for journalists, furnishing them with free housing.

94 television and radio broadcasters function in the territory of Azerbaijan: 12 nationwide and 12 regional television broadcasters, 16 radio broadcasters, 3 satellite television operators, 17 cable network operators, 32 IPTV operators, and 2 operators of satellite broadcasting of foreign television channels. The sphere of television and radio broadcasting is regulated by the National Council for Television and Radio – a state structure. Funds are periodically allocated to the Council from the state budget to be distributed among the television and radio broadcasters.

Print and broadcast (television and radio) media outlets are practically completely controlled by the state. These media outlets depend primarily on state subsidies. The overall volume of the media outlet advertising market in the country comprises 5-6 million dollars. This indicator is tens of times smaller than in neighbouring countries. Inasmuch as business is under political control, the media outlets are deprived of their main source of income – advertisement.

Internet media outlets are to a significant degree free from the government's control. However, independent internet media outlets likewise do not receive sufficient income from advertisement. They are funded in the main on account of grants from donor organisations. In recent years the government is coming out with initiatives in the realm of regulating internet media outlets.

Analysis of the data gathered shows that the methods of intimidating media workers in Azerbaijan have remained the same as before:

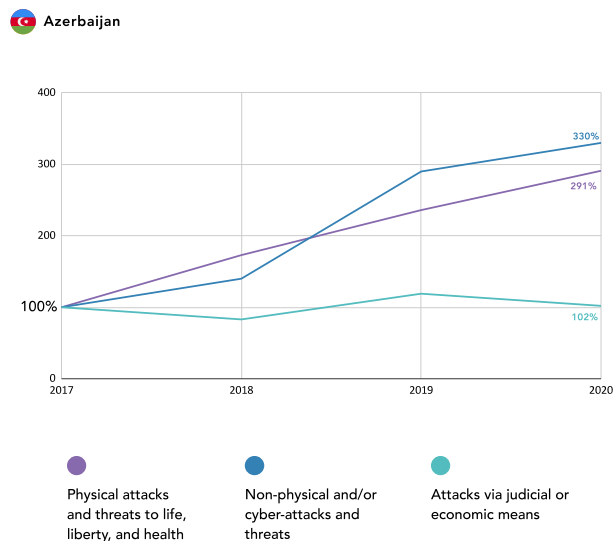
- Subjected to physical and non-physical pressure, as a rule, are independent media outlets that criticise the government and journalists working for such media outlets.
- Independent and opposition journalists and bloggers are detained by law-enforcement agency employees, and their professional equipment is confiscated or damaged.
- Journalists in relation to whom a criminal case has been initiated are as a rule held in custody before trial.
- Journalists are subjected to physical pressure, and are often beaten; the legal mechanisms to protect journalists from brutal physical pressure do not work.
- Journalists and media outlets are frequently criminally and civilly sued for libel and insults; judicial practice in this realm totally does not correspond to the practice of the European Court of Human Rights.
- The blocking of internet media has become an everyday occurrence; the country's parliament has introduced norms into legislation to facilitate blocking.
- Media outlets publishing materials that the government does not like are subjected to cyber-attacks.

### 3/GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

Figure 1 presents the overall quantity of attacks on journalists, bloggers, and other media workers in Azerbaijan from January 2017 through December 2020. In comparison with 2019 the quantity of attacks in 2020 remained at nearly the same level, having gone down by just 5,4%.

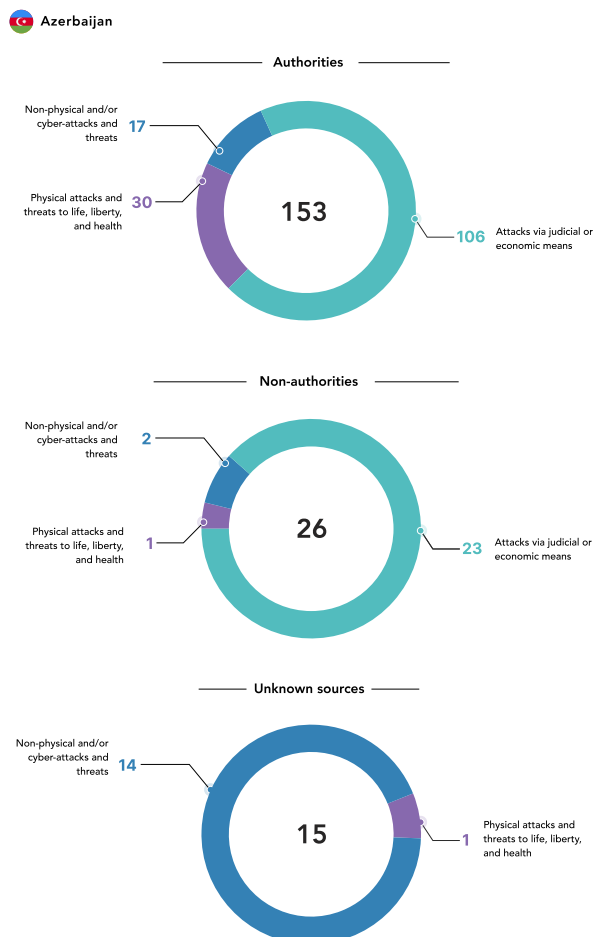
#### Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020

Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)



The number of physical attacks and non-physical and/or cyber-threats remained at just about the 2019 level, having increased slightly. Attacks via judicial and/or economic means continue to remain the predominant method of pressure by the authorities on media workers. However, in comparison with 2019 their quantity shrank by 8%.

#### Initiators of attacks on media workers



It should also be taken into account that harsh restrictive measures were applied in relation to journalists in 2020 in Azerbaijan in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the war in Nagorno-Karabakh (September-November).

For the purposes of more precisely reflecting combination assaults on media workers in 2020 we are introducing a new category of attacks – **hybrid**.

We are calling systematic persecution of some publication or media worker with the use of tools from two or more categories of assaults – physical, non-physical, and judicial/economic – “hybrid”. Such a combination of means involving and not involving force with judicial means of pressure on undesirable journalists is carried out with a view to demoralising them or getting them to self-censor or to give up the profession or even life itself.

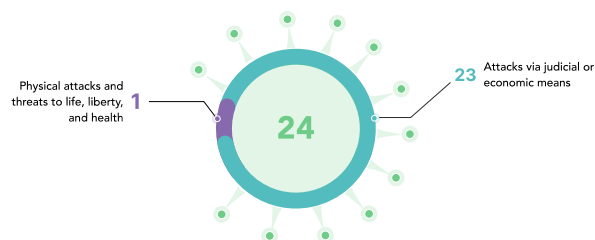
Presented below is the list of the journalists and bloggers who were being subjected to the most intensive hybrid attacks in 2020.

## 4/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The restrictions introduced in Azerbaijan in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic created additional problems for the media. Strict quarantine restrictions and rules came into effect as of March 2020 in connection with the pandemic. Their legitimacy was disputable: the country’s legislation does allow for the application of such harsh measures in the event of the introduction of a state of emergency; a state of emergency was not declared, however.

### Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic

Azerbaijan



At the first stage of quarantine measures, which extended until the end of May, only persons who possessed press cards could freely implement journalistic activity. Journalists, bloggers, and photo reporters who were not on the staff of a media outlet were factually deprived of the opportunity to work freely. A system of text-message permissions for leaving home for a period of 2 hours was introduced across the country. Freelance journalists had to restrict themselves to these time constraints.

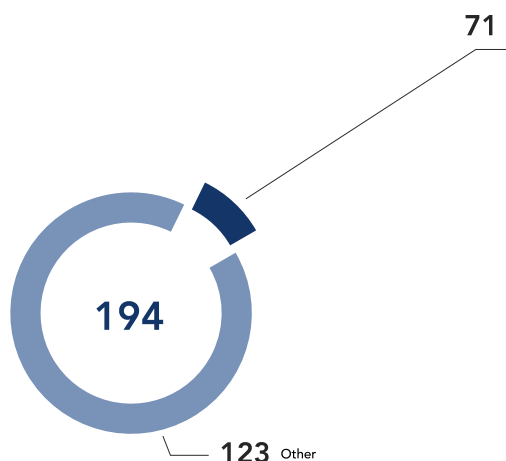
The second stage of tightening quarantine measures began in June: of all journalists, only state television employees were permitted to work. These restrictions were gradually softened. Journalists registered in the state system of permissions could work freely. The restrictions remained in effect in relation to freelance journalists who were not registered, however.

There are 24 incidents connected with quarantine restrictions recorded on the Media Risk Map. In all cases but one, what is being referred to is attacks via judicial and/or economic means:

- On 9 April, 7gun.az news portal employee Natig Isbatov [*“Natiq İsbatov”* in Azerbaijani] was detained whilst executing professional duties and taken to the police. The next day a court found

### Hybrid attacks on media workers

Azerbaijan



#### of which 45 attacks committed against 7 journalists

Media worker	Total	Phys.	Non-phys.	Jud.
Elchin Hasanzade, Yukselish.info	11	1	4	6
Tarzakhan Miralamli, Azadiq newspaper	9	1		8
Sevinj Abbasova (Vagifgizi), Meydan TV	6	1	1	4
Teymur Kerimli, Azad Soz	6	3	2	1
Aysel Umudova, Meydan TV	5	1	2	2
Zaur Gambarov, Anews.az	4	1	2	1
Polad Aslanov, Xeberman.com, Press-az	4	1		3

him guilty and gave him 30 days of administrative arrest. Detained together with Isbatov was azel.tv news portal employee Sevinj Sadigova [*Sevinc Sadiqova*]. After an official warning she was released.

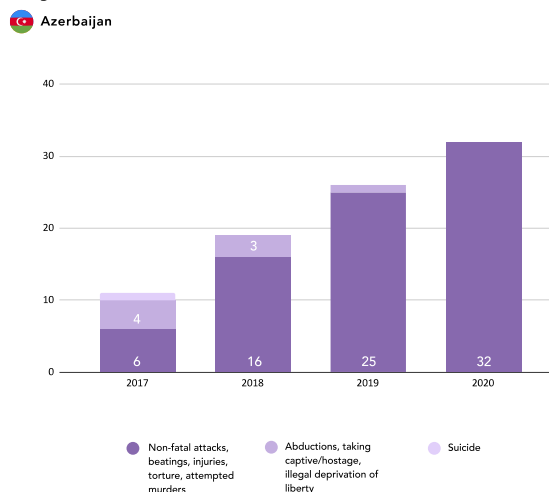
- On 12 April online television channel Kanal24 employee Ibrahim Vazirov [*Ibrahim Vazirov*] was taken to the police administration of the Shıvrın [*Şıvrın*] District for violating the quarantine regime. Vazirov was found guilty of insubordination to the police. The court gave him 25 days of administrative arrest.
- On 14 April, online television channel Doğru TV employee Mirsahib Rahiloglu [*Rahiloğlu*] was delivered to the police administration of Shıvrın District for violating the quarantine regime. They found Rahiloglu guilty of insubordination to the police and sentenced him to 20 days of administrative arrest.
- On 21 April, freelance journalist Elgun Ganjımsoy [*Elgün Gəncimsoy*], writing about the military, was detained by employees of the Ağdam [*Ağdam*] District administration of the police. They charged him with violating the rules of quarantine despite the fact that he produced a journalist's identification document. A court found the journalist guilty of violating the quarantine regime and of resisting the police. Ganjımsoy was arrested for 20 days.
- On 22 April, journalist İsmail İslamoğlu [*İsmayıl İslamoğlu*] was detained by police employees in the Shıvrın District. The journalist produced a press card but was nonetheless charged with violating the rules of quarantine. A court sentenced him to 25 days of administrative arrest.
- On 28 April, at around 12pm, opposition newspaper Azadlıq (azadlıq.info) employee Saadat Jahangirgizi [*Səadət Cəhangirqızı*] was detained outside the entranceway to the building where leader of the Azerbaijani Popular Front opposition party Ali Karimli [*Əli Kərimli*] resides. The journalist was held in the police station until four o'clock in the afternoon and was given a fine of 100 manats for violating the quarantine regime despite the fact that Jahangirgizi showed a journalist's identification document.
- On 1 June, police employees detained independent journalist Vugar Mirzabek [*Vüqar Mirzəbəyev*] at a student protest rally outside the Ministry of Education. He was fined in administrative order for violating quarantine rules.
- On 2 July, blogger Fatima Movlamli [*Fatimə Mövlamlı*] was fined for violating the rules of quarantine. Policemen detained Movlamli on the way to work. She produced a press card but was still fined 200 manats.

- Blogger Ibrahim Turksoy [*Ibrahim Türksöy*] disappeared on 15 July. In the course of five days his whereabouts were unknown, after which his loved ones ascertained that the blogger had been arrested for 15 days for violating the rules of quarantine.

One incident associated with physical pressure took place on 16 May. A case of coronavirus infection was documented in penal colony number 17, and a quarantine regime was declared in the institution. It is being reported that *Azadlıq* newspaper employee Elchin İsmayilli [*Elçin İsmayilli*] was locked up in solitary confinement for five days under the pretext that he supposedly was not wearing a mask. In actuality, İsmayilli had been punished for criticising the sanitary measures adopted by the colony's management personnel.

## 5/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

### Physical attacks



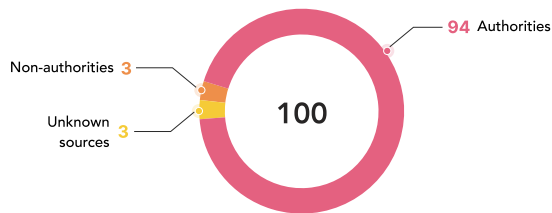
In 2020, journalists and media workers were subjected to physical pressure no fewer than 32 times. All of the recorded incidents belong to the category of non-fatal attacks/beatings/injury/torture. In 30 of the incidents, the physical attacks came from representatives of the authorities. Most often such incidents took place as journalists were working at mass gatherings or protests. Nearly all the journalists who encountered physical pressure were representatives of independent media outlets.

Parliamentary elections took place in Azerbaijan in February. Journalists covering the protests after the elections were subjected to pressure. The majority of the journalists gathering information about the rally outside the Central Electoral Commission building at the beginning of February had obstacles put up in their way, while in some cases force was used against them.



## Initiators of physical attacks on media workers (relative figures)

 Azerbaijan



- On 6 February, at a meeting with voters by the candidate for deputy [MP] Aydın Mirzazade [Aydın Mirzazadə] in the city of Mingachevir [Mingəçevir], journalist Elchin Hasanzade [Elçin Həsənzadə] was not allowed to make an audio recording or conduct a video shoot. Hasanzade was detained with the use of force.
- On 11 February, editor of the Basta.info website Mustafa Hajibeyli [Hacıbəyli] was cruelly beaten by policemen. They detained him during a dispersal of a protest rally in front of the CEC building against falsification of the results of the parliamentary elections. On that same day the Meydan TV journalists Aynur Elgunesh [Elgünəş], Aytaj Taptıy [Aytac Tapdıq], and Sevinj Abbasova (Vaqifgizi) [Sevinc Abbasova (Vəqifqızı)], as well as investigative journalist Khadija Ismayilova [Xədica İsmayilova], were detained and violently beaten by the police, receiving physical injuries.

Physical attacks on journalists were committed during the time of other protests as well.

- A march against violence against women took place on 8 March in Baku. Journalists working at the event were subjected to assaults by policemen. Meydan TV employee Izolda Ağayeva [İzolda Ağayeva] received a scratch on the throat as the result of police interference. Meydan TV journalist Aysel Umudova, shooting video of the detaining of participants in the march, was herself detained for several hours. In the police station representatives of the authorities demanded that she erase the video recording. Toplum TV journalist Zarifa [Zərifə] Novruz was hit on the arm, as a result of which her telephone fell and broke. Her press card was torn up. Likewise subjected to pressure were correspondents from the Turan agency Aziz Kerimov [Əziz Kərimov] and Tatiana Kryuchkina, Fargana Novruzova [Fərqanə Novruzova] (azadliq.info), Nargiz [Nərgiz] Abdsalamova (Mikroskop Media), and Samira Ali [Samirə Əli] (AzNews.az).
- On 18 March, Azadliq radio photo and video camera operator Ramin Deko was beaten up at a protest by a group of citizens in front of the embassy of Turkey. Freelancers Tabriz Mirzayev [Təbriz Mirzəyev], Nurlan Gahramanli [Qəhrəmanlı], and Teymur Kerimli [Kərimli] were likewise subjected

to physical violence and received injuries of varying severity.

- On 27 August, the police clamped down on a protest by defenders of animals organised by Nijat Ismailov [Nicat İsmayilov] in the capital's Narimanov [Nərimanov] District. The event was being conducted in connection with the killing of six homeless dogs in an abandoned construction zone. The police exerted physical pressure on the journalists who were covering the event, Nurlan Gahramanli [Qəhrəmanlı], Teymur Kerimli [Kərimli], and Avaz [Əvəz] Hafizli. Policemen were beating and pushing the journalists, and likewise took away their telephones and photo and video equipment, which they only returned after the rally.
- On 9 September, Azel.TV journalist Sevinj Sadigova suffered during coverage of a protest in defence of the political prisoner Tofig Yagublu [Tofig Yaqublu] outside the Nizami District Court building. In the course of the video shoot policemen shoved Sadigova hard, and she fell, injuring her leg. "Other colleagues suffered too. Some were likewise knocked down, they had cameras and recorders beaten out of their hands", noted Sadigova.

One attack on the part of unknown perpetrators was recorded. Presumably it was committed by representatives of the authorities or at their behest:

- On 31 August, journalist Rafael Husseinzade [Rafael Hüseynzadə] was beaten up by unknown persons. The journalist reported that he submitted a complaint to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the police without delay; nothing was undertaken, however. In the journalist's opinion, he had been beaten up for talking about the violence to which he had been subjected earlier by the police.

Likewise, one instance of a non-fatal attack was recorded in the territory of Belgium:

- On 24 July, REAL TV journalist Khatira Sardar-gizi [Xatirə Sərdarqızı], who was preparing a report about a clash between Azerbaijanis and Armenians in Belgium's capital, Brussels, was beaten up and received minor injuries.

Likewise recorded was one incident connected with torture in prison:

- On 6 August, the arrested founder and editor-in-chief of the Xeberman.com and Press-az websites, Polad Aslanov, began a hunger strike in protest against arrest on a fictitious charge. In the words of the journalist's wife, they are exerting pressure on him in the prison. "Because of the start of the hunger strike Aslanov was taken out of a cell for three people and placed in a toilet; they are exerting pressure on him so he would cease the hunger strike", declared his wife.

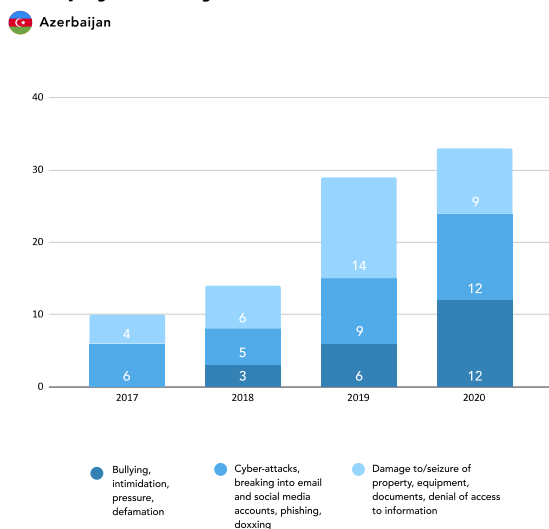
National legislation protects journalists from physical attacks. Criminal liability is prescribed for physically assaulting journalists. However, the criminal code article about impeding the lawful professional activity of a journalist was not applied a single time in the course of the year.

## 6/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

33 incidents connected with non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats were recorded in 2020. In the main it was independent and opposition media outlets that were subjected to such attacks. The main methods in the given category are bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber- (10) and cyber-, DDoS, and hacker attack on a media outlet (10).

In the course of the year the *Bastainfo.com* website, which has close ties to opposition political parties, as well as *Bastainfo.com*'s resources in other domains, were subjected to cyber-attacks a minimum of 4 times:

### Non-physical / cyber-attacks



- On 31 January, the *basta2.com* news portal was attacked. Access to the website was closed for several days.
- On 31 January, *Bastainfo.com*'s Facebook page was subjected to a cyber-attack. The owner of the public channel was changed and the quantity of the page's likes shrank as a result.
- On 22 April, the *Basta* news portal was once again subjected to a hacker attack. "The attack was yesterday, the site is demolished", said the website's editor Mustafa Hajibeyli [*Hacıbəyli*]. "Through great efforts we had managed to restore the site and the page [after the 31 January attacks – Ed.], but yesterday the site was demolished anew. We consider that this was a contract job on order from the authorities", noted Hajibeyli.

- The *Bastainfo.com* website's Facebook page was broken into once again on September 10.

Besides that, from 15 through 19 May the website of the *Turan* news agency and *contact.az* were subjected to a cyber-attack. The content of the websites was changed as a result. Part of the materials was deleted; it did not prove possible to restore them.

On 24 June, other media resources criticising the government – *arqument.az* and *toplum.tv* – were likewise subjected to cyber-attacks. On 22 April, an attack was perpetrated on the *abzas.net* website. Articles on the websites were deleted, and in some cases altered. The *arqument.az* website's Facebook page was likewise subjected to assault. 12,000 subscribers to the page and news published before March were deleted.

In two instances journalists' personal email accounts and social media pages were subjected to attacks:

- On 2 March, the *AzNews.az* news portal was subjected to a cyber-attack. The assailants tried to hijack the website's Facebook page. Attacks also took place against the personal Facebook account of the website's editor Nailya [*Naila*] Bala-yeva. Fragments of correspondence were deleted.
- On 9 July, several activists, journalists, and media organisations in Azerbaijan lost control over their social media accounts; amongst them was freelance journalist Aysel Umudova. Social media accounts on Facebook were broken into and deactivated with the use of identity credentials. The victims received notifications from Facebook about a query by unknown persons using their identity cards for authorisation of their social media accounts. This is spoken about in a statement by the "Civil Society of Azerbaijan Group".

One of the widespread methods of non-physical pressure was bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber-. In 7 of the 10 instances, the attacks came from representatives of the authorities:

- On 4 May, *AzNews.az* correspondent Zaur Gambarov [*Qəmbərov*] declared that he had been beaten up by two people, including an employee of the State Social Protection Fund (SSPF). In Gambarov's own words, the incident took place when he set off on an assignment from the editorial office to a branch of the SSPF to research a complaint that the website had received from a local resident. When the journalist began to record the talk on a telephone, an SSPF driver entered the office and began to threaten him. Later the head of the branch came out to see what all the commotion was and tore the telephone from the journalist's hands. In the words of the journalist, the violence was accompanied by threats to arrest him for critical articles about the administration of the district.

- On 8 May, journalist Khadija Ismayilova reported on her Facebook page that a person in civilian clothing had knocked on the door of her sister's flat, where the journalist was located during the time of the quarantine. The person said that he was from the police, did not introduce himself, and asked for access to recordings from surveillance cameras - supposedly to investigate a robbery. Ismayilova refused to let him in and asked him to come with a court decree. The visitor summoned the neighbourhood police officer. They continued knocking on the door, intimidating the journalist, and threatening her with a fine.
- On 21 May, journalist Elchin Hasanzade turned to law-enforcement organisations and the media with a complaint of harassment. "It's been two days already that the chief of Housing Operations Commission number 4 of the city of Mingachevir is coming to the owner of my rented flat and demanding that he evict me - a 'radical oppositionist'. The bureaucrat is threatening the owner of the flat with problems because by 'harbouring a radical oppositionist' he is taking a stand 'against statehood'. Pressure is being exerted in a similar manner on my wife's parents. And the chief of Housing Operations Commission number 5 is exerting pressure on owners of a tea house that I frequent, so that he would not let me come there any more", notes Hasanzade. In Hasanzade's opinion, the pressure on him is coming from the leadership of Mingachevir's executive power.
- On 16 August, independent journalist Gular Mehdizade [*Gülər Mehdizadə*] was summoned to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The journalist was criticising quarantine measures and the activity of the police. They telephoned her from the ministry and asked her to come in. Mehdizade refused to appear at the MIA without an official summons.

The following incidents belong to attacks that came from unknown perpetrators or non-representatives of the authorities:

- On 23 May, death threats were received by *Reaksiya* TV head Zaur Gariboglu [*Zaur Qəribəğlu*] on social media for his materials.
- On 28 July, a campaign began on social networks against *Yüksəliş.info* journalist Elchin Hasanzade. On Facebook they started demanding the journalist's expulsion from Mingachevir. Commenting on this campaign Hasanzade said he believed that the city's leadership is standing behind this campaign. The journalist said that in such a manner they are trying to force him to shut up.
- On 8 December journalist Arzu Geybullayeva [*Arzu Qeybullayeva*] was subjected to organised bullying on the internet after publication of an article about

her on the *AzLogos* portal. It is asserted in the article that the journalist had displayed disrespect for Azerbaijani heroes and victims of the war with Armenia.

## 7/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

There were 129 attacks via judicial and/or economic means recorded in 2020. In 106 of the instances the attacks were coming from representatives of the authorities. The main methods of pressure were court trials (27), short-term detention (27), and administrative arrests, remand, pre-trial detention or prison (13). Journalists were brought to trial for libel and insults, as well as on other charges. The most noticeable incidents were detentions of journalists whilst executing professional duties, interrogations in law-enforcement agencies, and administrative punishment without the proper legal grounds.

The legislation of Azerbaijan prescribes criminal liability for libel and insults. Journalists were sued no fewer than 12 times under these articles throughout the year. Appearing as plaintiffs in many court cases of this category were government officials or businessmen connected with the government.

### Judicial / economic attacks

 Azerbaijan



- On 10 June, chief of the production amalgamation of the city of Mingachevir's housing and utilities sector Shahriyar [*Şahriyar*] Mustafayev filed suit against journalist, employee of the *yüksəliş.info* website Elchin Hasanzade, working in the city, and blogger Ibrahim Turksoy. A local court sentenced both journalists to correctional work for a term of one year. On 6 November the court likewise gave Turksoy a suspended sentence of a year of deprivation of liberty.

- On 15 June, the well-known lawyer Aslan Ismayilov [*İsmayilov*] filed a civil suit against AzNews.az editor-in-chief Taleh Shahsuvarli [*Şahsuvarlı*] and a suit in special charge procedure. He is demanding the journalist's arrest.
  - On 16 June, the entrepreneuss Malahat Gurbanova [*Malahat Qurbanova*] filed suit in special charge procedure against head of the Criminal.az website Anar Mammadov [*Məmmədov*]. Gurbanova, engaged in pawning activity, had been offended by the expression "Lombard Malahat". The court sentenced the journalist to correctional work for a term of one year with the withholding of 20% of his income to the benefit of the state.
  - On 26 June, the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan decreed to fine *Meydan TV* journalist Sevinj Vagifgizi [*Sevinc Vəqifqızı*] 1000 manats for a publication about falsifications at elections. The suit against the journalist had been filed by a school director [*head teacher*] who was being accused of rigging the results of the voting.
  - On 13 July, the well-known businessman Rasim Mammedov [*Məmmədov*] filed a civil suit in special charge procedure against Reaksiya internet TV editor-in-chief Zaur Gariboglu for his publications. The plaintiff is demanding that the journalist be arrested and fined 4 million manats.
  - On 4 August, the head of the executive power of Neftchala District, Mirhasan Seyidov [*Mirhasan Seyidov*], filed a civil suit against editor-in-chief of the low-budget website bizimxeber.az Adil Huseynli [*Ədil Hüseynli*] because of his articles. The government official was demanding that the journalist be fined 20 000 manats; the court fined the journalist 3000 manats.
  - On 22 August, the head of municipality of one of the villages of Neftchala District filed a suit against the well-known blogger Vafa Naghi [*Naqı*]. The head of municipality is demanding Naghi's arrest for her publications.
  - On 24 September, millionaire Gulaga Gambarov (Tanha) [*Güləğa Qəmbərov (Tənha)*] filed suit against the legion.az, realmedia.az, dia.az, and heqiqixeber.com news websites. The plaintiff, displeased with the publications in these media outlets, had demanded that each of the websites be fined 100 thousand manats. As of the given moment the court has fined only the realmedia.az website 100 manats. The court trials in relation to the other media outlets continue.
- guilty of hooliganism. The court sentenced him to a year of restriction of liberty. The court required Miralamli to wear an electronic tag and not leave his place of residence from 11 o'clock at night until 7 in the morning.
- On 28 July, blogger Aslan Gurbanov, suffering from a severe form of epilepsy, was arrested for four months on a charge of open calls against the state and inciting nationality, religious, and social discord. The trial is still ongoing.
  - On 27 August, blogger Jalil [*Calil*] Zabidov was delivered to the police after critical publications. After some time had passed he was charged with hooliganism. A local court found him guilty and sentenced him to 5 months of deprivation of liberty.
  - On 16 October, editor-in-chief of the Yüksəlişnaminə newspaper and head of the "Legal Education for the Youth of Sumqayıt [*also known as "Sumgait"*]" organisation Elchin Mammadli [*Elçin Məmmədli*] was found guilty under the "theft" and "illegally storing a weapon" articles of the criminal code. He was sentenced to 4 years of deprivation of liberty.
  - On 16 November, journalist and head of the xebberman.com website Polad Aslanov, arrested in 2019, was found guilty of high treason. The court sentenced him to 16 years of deprivation of liberty. On 24 February 2020, Aslanov had a new charge brought against him under article 134 of the CC (threatening murder or the causing of grave harm to health).
  - On 8 September, a criminal case was initiated in relation to a group of Azerbaijani bloggers working abroad. In particular, Ordukan Temirxan [*Orduxan Təmirxan*], Gurban Mammadov [*Qurban Məmmədov*], Orkhan Aghayev [*Orxan Ağayev*], Rafael [*Rafael*] Piriye, Ali Hasanaliyev [*Əli Həsənalıyev*], and Tural Sadigli [*Sadıqlı*] were declared internationally-wanted fugitives, charged with making anti-state appeals.

In 2020 several journalists and bloggers were convicted on various charges. Their lawyers declared that the charges were fabricated and that the journalists had been arrested because of their materials.

- On 19, June Azadlıq newspaper journalist Tarzakhan Miralamli [*Təzəxan Mirəmlı*] was found

The websites of several independent media outlets – *Radio Azadlıq*, the *Azadlıq* newspaper, the *Azərbaycan-saati* programme, *Meydan TV*, and the *Turan* internet television channel have been blocked by court decision since 2017. Along with this, on 19 March 2020, the Plenum of the Supreme Court of Azerbaijan repealed all court decisions in connection with these media and adopted a decision on reviewing the case. The initiator of the closure of the websites is the Ministry of Communications. The Ministry is demanding that not only the websites of the media enumerated above be blocked, but all internet resources, including resources on social networks, that are distributing the content of these media outlets.





# ARMENIA

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT ARMENIA REPORT

In 2020, attacks and threats against journalists in Armenia dramatically increased as compared with the previous years. This was largely due to the unprecedented events that unfolded in the last year such as: restrictions caused by the COVID 19 pandemic, the full-scale war in Nagorno Karabagh, the stressful post-war situation after the heavy toll casualties and military losses, which resulted in political crisis in Armenia.

Journalists experienced physical attacks, arbitrary apprehension and arrest, unprecedented number of defamation lawsuits, blocking and removal of their content from Internet, administrative fines for violation of the COVID-19 related state of emergency and later the Martial law imposed by the government as the war started. During the Martial law, the journalists and the media outlets were bound by overly restrictive rules limiting the spread of critical information that deviated from the official version of the war events. As a punishment, journalists were subjected to disproportional administrative fines that often exceeded those for criminal offences under the penal code. Those fines, often imposed repeatedly against the same media entity, had a chilling effect on the freedom of reporting on controversial war and pandemic related events that the government was not inclined to make public.

The number of incidents of attacks, assaults, threats, bullying, lawsuits and administrative fines increased 3 to 5 times in comparison to previous years. Often the journalists were assaulted, verbally and physically, by protestors at rallies and demonstrations for their perceived affiliation to a given political force. In such instances, the journalists and camera operators were forced to stop the news coverage and leave the public event, hence, being discriminated on the account of their profession. The authorities, in turn, discriminated against certain media outlets by failing to open criminal investigation or take preventive measures against assaults as a redress to the situation.

The rise of civil defamation court cases against media entities with high award demands was another disturbing trend of the year 2020. Along with that, government officials started bringing defamation and insult lawsuits against media entities and individual journalists which had not been practiced before. In addition, the law enforcement bodies introduced the summoning of journalists for questioning about the content of their posts on the social networks, such as Facebook. Moreover, the authorities initiated legislative reform that will increase the statutory reward for defamation and insult lawsuits fivefold. This initiative was highly criticised by the civil society and media community.

**Ara Ghazaryan**  
Legal expert

# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS, AND MEDIA WORKERS IN ARMENIA IN 2020

**259** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional and citizen media workers and editorial offices of traditional and online publications in Armenia in 2020 were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data were obtained from open sources in the Russian, Armenian, and English languages using the method of content analysis. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 3**.

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

1. In 2020 the growth in the number of violations of the rights of journalists and media outlets in Armenia was attributable to the introduction of restrictive measures connected with the COVID-19 pandemic, the all-out war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and an exacerbation of the socio-political situation in the post-war period. The number of attacks in 2020 in comparison with 2019 increased by 34%.
2. Physical attacks on journalists were perpetrated for the most part during coverage of mass protests; moreover, facts have been recorded of assaults on media representatives both on the part of participants in the protests and on the part of the police. In comparison with 2019 the number of media workers who have suffered from physical attacks increased two-fold. Armenian and foreign journalists carrying out their professional duties were wounded in the course of the Karabakh war.
3. 37 facts of clamping down on the media were registered in the course of the state of emergency introduced in Armenia in connection with the spread of COVID-19.
4. The tendency to use judicial mechanisms to exert pressure on journalists and media outlets, characteristic of previous years, continued in 2020. Courts agreed to hear 88 lawsuits against them over the year. The overwhelming majority of these court cases (79) were connected with accusations of insult and libel.
5. In comparison with the previous year, the number of non-physical attacks in relation to media workers increased more than two-fold in 2020.

## 2/ THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MASS MEDIA IN ARMENIA

In Reporters Without Borders' **annual rating** for 2020 Armenia took 61st place, as it had in 2019. According to the **Freedom on the Net** report for 2020 drawn up by Freedom House, the internet in Armenia is free (75 out of 100 points). The authors of the report declare that "internet freedom in Armenia has improved since the Velvet Revolution swept Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan into power in 2018."

The year 2020 became a period of extremely severe tests for Armenia and the Armenian media. On 16 March the government of the RA introduced a state of emergency in the country to combat the spread of COVID-19. Tight restrictions were introduced on the movement of citizens and a prohibition on public events and gatherings, including marches, demonstrations, and any protests.

4 of the items in the government decree concerned media activity. Journalists were prohibited from disseminating anything other than official information, as well as from publishing materials that could evoke panic among the populace. At the same time, it was not specified what type of publications were being referred to. After journalists' organisations sharply criticised the items of the decree that concerned the media in a joint declaration, the government of the RA first noticeably relaxed the restrictive measures, and afterwards lifted them altogether.

Nevertheless the state of emergency was being extended month by month, which was becoming a pretext for political speculations. The opposition, including those forces that had been removed from power as a result of the Velvet Revolution, accused Nikol Pashinyan's government of artificially restraining the protest movement. Gagik Tsarukyan, leader of the second-largest parliamentary faction, Prosperous Armenia, declared that the government as a whole must resign as it had botched the fight against the coronavirus and had brought the country to economic collapse.

The authorities in turn asserted that Tsarukyan's sudden flurry of activity and his desire to organise protests were connected with the fact that a criminal case had been initiated against him on a charge of bribing voters in the period of the parliamentary elections of 2017 and the fact that he had been stripped of his parliamentary immunity.

When the leader of Prosperous Armenia was summoned to the National Security Service to give testimony, his supporters conducted a demonstration outside the NSS building even though, as has already been noted, mass events were prohibited. During the time of the dispersal of the demonstrators the police used physical force against journalists as well, as a result of

which 7 representatives of various media outlets suffered. Several days earlier a policeman had used force under analogous circumstances against a photo correspondent from the *Photolure* news agency.

The socio-political situation in Armenia became even more acute as the result of the all-out war unleashed by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh on 27 September. Whilst bloody combat was taking place at the front, the opposition was demanding the prime minister's resignation. This demand intensified after the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia signed a tripartite declaration on the cessation of military operations, which in essence became a capitulation for the Armenian side.

From the outset of the armed conflict Pashinyan's government declared martial law in the country. Besides other harsh measures, restrictions were introduced concerning the media. In particular it was demanded that nothing but official information be published in the coverage of military operations and those connected with them. Materials that criticised or cast doubt on the government's policy and the military leadership's decisions were prohibited. Any publications that might evoke panic likewise turned out to be under prohibition, although this wording was not concretised. In the period of martial law the authorities were forcing the mass media, with the help of the police, not only to remove "prohibited materials", but also to pay a fine in an amount of 700 thousand drams (around 1400 US dollars) for their publication. 13 Armenian media outlets encountered such problems.

Martial law was extended even after the cessation of military operations. This was primarily attributable to the mass disorders that took place in Yerevan on the night of 9-10 November: when it became known about the content of the tripartite agreement, enraged mobs forced their way into the parliament and government buildings and began to smash everything they could lay their hands on. The chairman of the National Assembly, Ararat Mirzoyan, was beaten unconscious. Searching for prime minister Nikol Pashinyan, the mob found its way into his residence but he turned out not to be there.

These and subsequent protests numbering many thousands of participants were led by an opposition coalition of 17 parties that had formed, the core of which consisted of the political forces that had been removed from power as the result of the Velvet Revolution of 2018. Their main demand was the immediate resignation of Pashinyan, the appointment of a candidate from the united opposition to the post of prime minister, and the formation of a transition government that would lead the country out of the crisis and organise extraordinary parliamentary elections.

Although the actions of protest by the united opposition did not find sufficient mass support, the socio-political situation in Armenia remained extremely tense. In these conditions the activity of the media was ex-

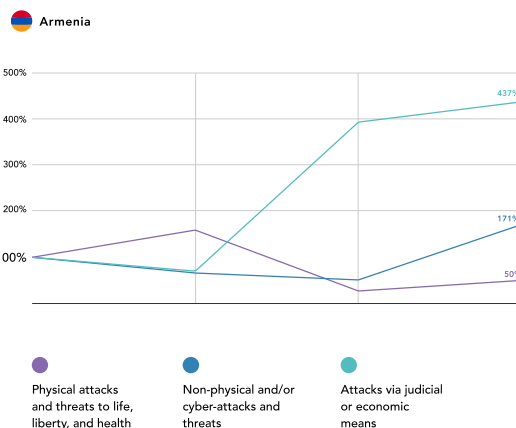
ceedingly complicated. Their polarisation intensified, and the overwhelming majority of the media primarily serve the interests of political sponsors, ever more frequently ignoring their public mission. The increase in attacks on journalists and media outlets, including the flood of legal claims against them, is driven by these realities.

## 3/ GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

Of all the years of observation of the state of freedom of speech in Armenia and violations of the rights of journalists and media outlets, 2020 became the most unfavourable one for activity in the news sphere. Presented in Figure 1 are data that bear witness to a rise in attacks on journalists in all three categories. In comparison with 2019 the quantity of attacks in 2020 increased by 34%. Although the number of physical assaults on journalists and camera operators is significantly lower than the indicators for 2018 and 2017, a two-fold increase can be observed in this category in comparison with 2019.

**Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020**

Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)



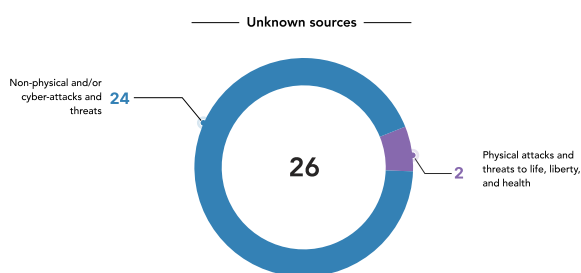
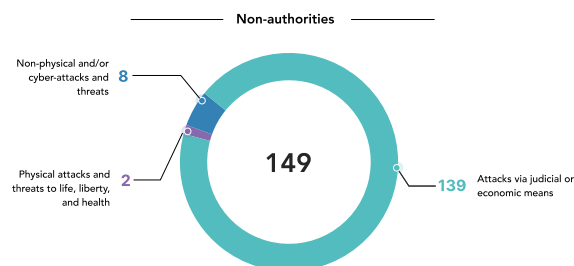
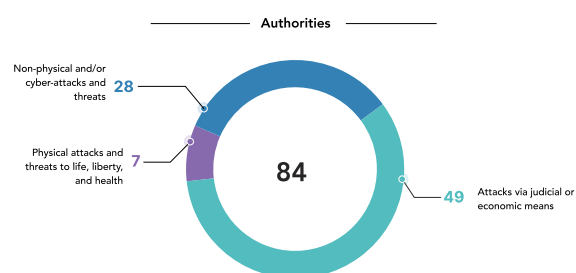
In 2020 the quantity of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks was 3.5 times higher than in 2019. The number of attacks via judicial and/or economic means too turned out to be unprecedented: it exceeded the 2017 indicator by 4.5 times and the 2018 one by 6 times. 47% of the attacks of the given category consist of legal claims against journalists and media outlets. 78 of the 88 new cases that courts agreed to hear are connected with charges of libel, insult or reputational damage.

In total there were 259 incidents recorded in 2020. Of the overall number of attacks 84 came from the authorities, 148 from non-representatives of the authorities, and 27 from unknown perpetrators.



## Initiators of attacks on media workers

Armenia



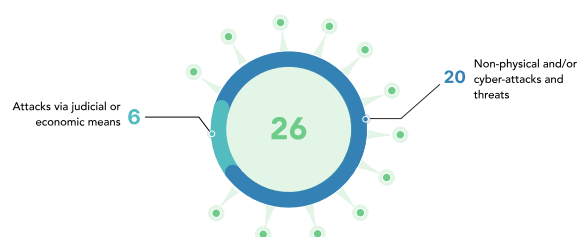
The main factors that fuelled the growth in the number of violations of the rights of journalists and media outlets became:

- the restrictions introduced by Armenia's authorities in the period of the state of emergency associated with the COVID-19 pandemic;
- the harsh demands during the martial law that was introduced from the first day of the all-out military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh;
- the acute socio-political crisis that broke out after the military defeat, and an intolerant attitude towards media employees, especially during their coverage of mass protests.

## 4/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic

Armenia



As has already been noted, the government of the RA adopted a decree on introducing a state of emergency in the country on 16 March 2020 in connection with the spread of COVID-19. 4 of the items in the document directly concerned media activity and prescribed tight restrictions on the coverage of the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, disseminating anything other than official information was prohibited, as was publishing materials that could evoke panic among the populace. The government entrusted control over implementation of the decree to the police.

Although the demands being made had been worded with insufficient clarity and precision and left broad scope for subjective interpretation, the media community was actively protesting against the restrictions that had been introduced. Against a background of sharp criticism, representatives of the government of the RA organised a meeting on 21 March with the heads of the country's journalistic organisations in order to discuss the immediate situation. On 25 March the restrictions relating to the media were relaxed, and on 13 April they were lifted altogether.

27 instances of pressure on the media were nevertheless recorded during the period that the four mentioned items of the government decree were in effect. In all of these instances the attacks were coming from representatives of the authorities. Of the incidents recorded, 20 belong to non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats and 6 to attacks via judicial and/or economic means. Recorded over the period under review were 20 instances of bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of force and violence including cyber-, 5 incidents in the "shutting down a media outlet/blocking an internet site/request to remove or block articles, seizure of an entire print run" category, and one incident in the "administrative offence/fine" category.



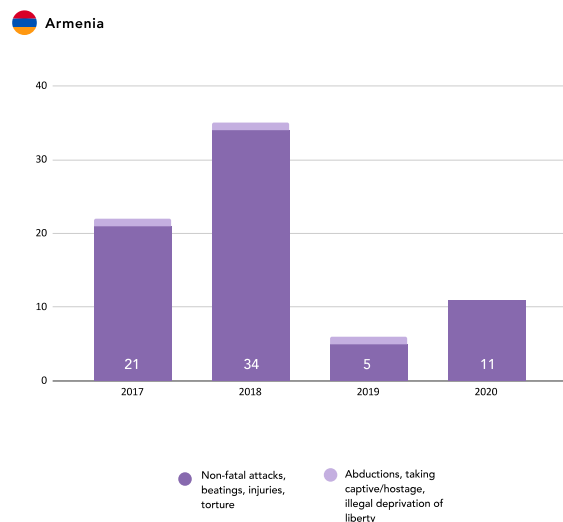
- On 20 March the police commandant's office demanded of the *Pastinfo.am* news website that it delete material under the headline "An elderly female inhabitant of Echmiadzin has been diagnosed with pneumonia, she has a fever, however she has not passed a test and is not hospitalised". The editorial office carried out the demand, but immediately published the warning letter and paraphrased the content of the deleted publication.
- On 20 March editor-in-chief of the *167.am* website Satik Seyranyan declared that she had been telephoned by the 6th administration of the police of the RA, who demanded that she delete from their website a publication of a video recording on Facebook by former prime minister of the RA Grant Bagratyan in which accusations addressed at the authorities with respect to the spread of COVID-19 were contained. The same kind of warning letter was sent to the *Armday.am*, *Hayeli.am*, and *Yerkir.am* websites.
- On 26 March editor-in-chief of the *Politik.am* website Boris Murazi reported live on his Facebook page that the editorial office had posted an item about a resident of the city of Gyumri who had died, presumably of COVID-19; however, it had not proven possible to get clarifications in this regard from the police commandant's office responsible for compliance with the state of emergency. In Boris Murazi's words, the commandant's office press secretary, Mane Gevorgyan, refused to answer questions, citing busyness, while on account of the live transmission the editor-in-chief faced the threat of policemen being despatched to the editorial office and of being fined.
- On 31 March the police sent a warning letter to the editorial office of the *Lurer.com* news website with a demanding that they delete one of the publications about COVID-19, as it violated the government decree of 16 March. Similar warning letters were sent to the editorial offices of the *Zham.am*, *Hraparak.am*, and *News.am* websites, which had reposted this publication.
- On 13 April editor of the *Pastinfo.am* news website Sona Truzyan reported on Facebook that the police had initiated administrative proceedings in relation to the editorial office for reposting information from another media outlet about someone ill with COVID-19. The *Pastinfo.am* editorial office was ultimately not fined.
- On 3 July policemen visited the *Armnews* and *Channel 5* television companies with the aim of initiating administrative proceedings in connection with the fact that employees of these television companies were not wearing masks during television air time.

It is worth noting that having received warning letters from the police about the necessity of deleting the material, in 11 instances the media outlets did not fulfil this demand. However, in contrast with the period of martial law, when a fine in an amount of 700 thousand drams (around 1400 US dollars) was imposed for any "prohibited" publication, in the course of the state of emergency brought about by the pandemic the authorities refrained from applying financial measures of liability in relation to the media.

## 5/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

The overall number of physical attacks on media workers from 2017 through the year 2020 is presented below. In 2020 all recorded incidents took the form of non-fatal attacks/beatings/injury/torture. In 7 of the 11 instances, the attacks came from representatives of the authorities.

### Physical attacks



The greatest number of physical attacks were recorded during the mass protests brought about by the exacerbation of the socio-political situation in the country. Whilst covering rallies, demonstrations, and marches media employees were subjected to assaults not only on the part of policemen (7), but on the part of participants in these events as well (1):

- On 14 June police impeded the professional activity of Photolure news agency photo reporter Lusi Sargsyan during a protest held by supporters of Prosperous Armenia party leader Garik Tsarukyan. She reported that a policeman grabbed her by the arm and threw her onto the sidewalk.
- On 16 July, when the police were pushing supporters of Prosperous Armenia party leader Gagik Jhangiryan away from the National Security Ser-

vice building where the politician's interrogation was taking place, journalists covering the protest suffered from the actions of the police. Some of them received bodily injuries. In particular *News.am* correspondent Liana Sargsyan, *Tert.am* journalist Ani Gevorgyan, *Yerkir.am* correspondent Tatevik Kostandyan, *Kentron* television journalist Artur Hakopyan, and *MegaNews.am* website editor Margarita Davtyan suffered.

- On 1 December policemen twisted *Erkin-media* television company video camera operator Hayk Sukiasyan's arms and seated him in a car during a dispersal of demonstrators demanding the resignation of prime minister Nikol Pashinyan. After some time had passed they released him. During the incident they broke his video camera.
- On 19 December *Radio Liberty* camera operator Davit Harutyunyan was subjected to physical violence in Yerevan's Yerablur military pantheon, where a commemoration ceremony for those who had perished in the Karabakh war was taking place. Opposition supporters had organised a picket in order to not let the participants in the funeral procession with prime minister Nikol Pashinyan at the head into the cemetery. Having noticed the radio station's camera operator filming the ceremony, the picketers assaulted Harutyunyan with cries of "Here's 'Liberty'!", knocked him to the ground, and inflicted a multitude of blows. Procession participants from among Pashinyan's supporters managed to protect the journalist and move him away to safety.

Besides physical attacks associated with protests, the following incidents were recorded.

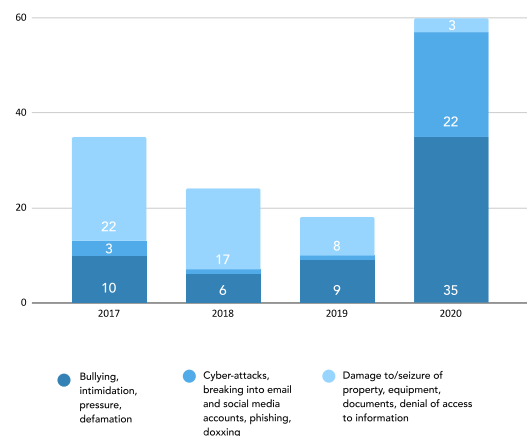
- On 10 November at approximately 4 o'clock in the morning, around forty men tried to storm the *Radio Liberty* office. They were kicking and banging on the doors, as well as shouting insults at the employees. In the words of executive producer Artak Hambardzumyan, when he started filming what was taking place on a telephone, an unknown person punched him, while another hit and pushed cameraman Sevak Mesropyan. "We came to take away the servers, so you wouldn't go on the air. You are traitors, you're Turks, you're not going to get on the air", the assailants were saying. The group abandoned the office when the radio station employees called the police.
- On 16 November editor-in-chief of the *BlogNews.am* news portal Konstantin Ter-Nakalyan was assaulted. According to media reports, several people on the street got into an argument with Ter-Nakalyan regarding the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, and when a fight broke out one of the assailants inflicted knife wounds to his ear and face. Despite the fact that Ter-Nakalyan refused to submit a report of crime to the police and to give testimony, one of the suspects was detained.

## 6/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

Figure 4 presents non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats. 61 incidents were recorded over the period under consideration, which is significantly more than in 2017-2019. The main methods of pressure in the given category became bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber- (33) and cyber-, DDoS, and hacker attack on a media outlet (22).

### Non-physical / cyber-attacks

Armenia



2020 turned out to be an unprecedented year for Armenia in terms of the number of cyber-attacks: 22 cyber-, DDoS, and hacker attacks on media outlets were recorded. In the main this stemmed from the information war in the period of all-out military operations in Nagorno-Karabakh, when Azerbaijani and Turkish hackers were arranging mass attacks on Armenian websites.

- On 12 July the internet publication *Hetq.am* was subjected to a hacker attack. The website was restored the next day. In the words of specialists, the attack had been undertaken from abroad.
- On 14 July the *News.am*, *Tert.am*, *Armtimes.com*, *A1plus.am*, and *Aysor.am* news portals were subjected to a hacker attack. Experts connect this with the Armenian-Azerbaijani military clashes in the border zone of Tavush Province. In particular DDoS attacks on the *Tert.am* website were undertaken from Azerbaijan's side by means of nearly 10 thousand IPs.
- On 27 September Azerbaijani hackers subjected the leading Armenian news websites to DDoS attacks: *a1plus.am*, *armenpress.am*, *armtimes.com*, *blognews.am*, *hetq.am*, *mamul.am*, *mediamax.am*, and *zhamanak.com*. Operation of these websites was restored several hours later. The *1in.am* and

*news.am* news websites were likewise broken into. Azerbaijani hackers were trying to disseminate their own information by means of these resources. Operation of the websites was restored several hours later.

Bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber-, were the predominant method of pressure on journalists. It is noteworthy that 27 of the 33 attacks in the given category came from representatives of the authorities.

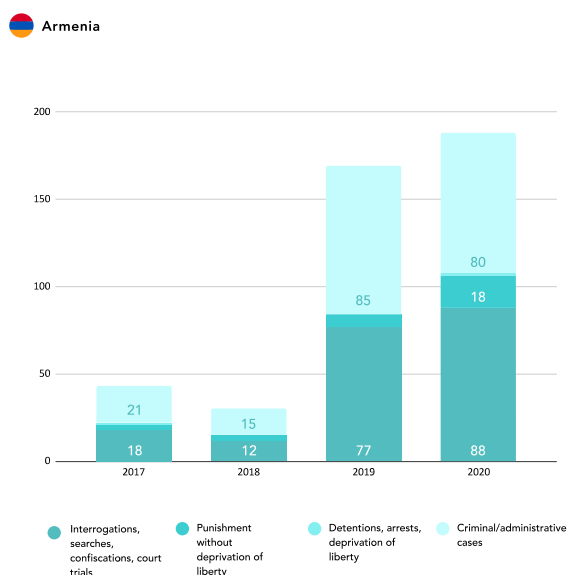
- On 15 February the Court Acts Execution Enforcement Service contacted the editorial office of the *Aravot.am* news website and demanded a retraction of material representing an abridged version of an article from the Haykakan zhamanak newspaper, despite the fact that the website, remaining true to the code of journalistic ethics, had not reproduced that part of the article which had contained offensive expressions. *Aravot.am* refused to carry out the agency's demand.
- On 24 June the Main Administration for Criminal Investigation of the RA police called the editorial office of the *Raparak* newspaper and said that they had received a letter from a prosecutor in which he gave directions "to study the facts set forth in the article 'Small circulation and we' under the byline of Edik Andreasyan, and to resolve the question of holding the author criminally liable".
- On 1 July the founder of the internet publication *Ankakh.com*, Vardui Ishkhanyan, was invited to the Main Administration for Criminal Investigation of the RA police to give explanations in connection with posts on Facebook about former military prosecutor and deputy general prosecutor of the RA, Gagik Jhangiryan. In these publications Ishkhanyan had called Jahangirian "the father of falsifications" and had written that he is suspected of having committed murders in the army. Ishkhanyan refused to appear at the police station.
- On 19 December on Yerevan's Republic Square, before the start of a procession of lamentation dedicated to the memory of those who had perished in the Karabakh war, deputy [MP] from the My Step parliamentary faction Andranik Kocharyan subjected journalist Lara Arakelyan from the *Channel 5* television company to discrimination. Having refused to answer her questions, the deputy openly declared that he was prepared to talk with any of the mass media correspondents found on the square but not with a representative of *Channel 5*, whose activity he considers unacceptable. Before and after this dialogue, some participants in the procession, having noticed the television company's logo, were being rude to the journalist and demanding that she leave and not cover the event.

Journalists were frequently subjected to bullying and pressure on the part of participants in protest rallies, who were actively impeding their work.

- On 5 December in Yerevan at a rally and march of opposition forces the demonstrators displayed intolerance in relation to *Radio Liberty* correspondent Sarkis Harutyunyan. They were shouting obscenities addressed at him and were demanding that he vacate the place of the event.
- On that same day, 5 December, participants in a rally of opposition forces were impeding the work of Rafael Karamyan, a camera operator for the *1in.am* news website. Having noticed the *1in.am* logo on the video camera, a group of rally participants came up to the journalist and demanded that he cease filming. This was accompanied by unprintable expletives and threats addressed at the cameraman and his media outlet. Karamyan was forced to turn off the camera and leave.
- On 21 December in Goris *Radio Liberty* correspondent Robert Zargaryan, covering the visit of prime minister Nikol Pashinyan, was subjected to an attack. Demonstrators were verbally attacking the journalist, impeding his work, and demanding that he leave the place of the event.

## 7/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

### Judicial / economic attacks



In comparison with 2019, the quantity of attacks and threats via judicial and/or economic means increased by 11%. The previous year's trend of an increasing number of legal claims against journalists and media outlets continued. Of these, 77 incidents are connected with publications in which, in the plaintiffs' opinion, insults

and libel are contained. In yet another instance such charges were laid against the head of a media outlet on the part of the prosecutor's office, but without recourse to a court. The initiation of court trials and charges of libel, insult, and reputational damage are the most widespread methods of pressure on journalists and media outlets.

Only in 20 cases were representatives of the authorities the initiators of the court trials.

- On 22 June minister of territorial administration and infrastructures of Armenia Suren Papikyan submitted a legal claim against the *Hzham.am* news website with demands for a public retraction of libellous data and payment of compensation. The occasion for the lawsuit became an article in which it is said that governors, with the ministry at the head, are getting flats in the capital as a gift for services rendered.
- On July 6th Yerevan's court of general jurisdiction received a bill of indictment from the prosecutor's office in a criminal case in relation to director of *Skizb Media* Kentron LLC Hasmik Martirosyan. He is charged with wilful non-fulfilment of a judicial act that has entered into force in a case involving the second president of Armenia, Robert Kocharyan. On 18 January 2019, a court of the first instance partially satisfied Kocharyan's claim, having obligated Martirosyan to publicly retract the data that had been found to be libel, and to pay compensation in an amount of 400 000 drams. The court has agreed to hear the criminal case of non-execution of a court decision.
- On 10 July the chief of staff of the government of the RA, Eduard Aghajanyan, submitted a legal claim against the founder of the *168.am* news website with demands on the retraction of information that the plaintiff considers libel, and the payment of compensation. The occasion for the lawsuit became the article "Party – at the ruling circles' club «Fermata»". In it, it is asserted that the night club, which belongs to Aghajanyan, had violated a police commandant's office decree by having organised a party with the participation of several dozen people in a closed space, which is prohibited in the conditions of the state of emergency that was introduced in connection with COVID-19. The court has agreed to hear the lawsuit; a judicial inquiry is ongoing.
- On 25 November National Assembly deputy [MP] Hayk Sargsyan filed suit in Yerevan's court of general jurisdiction against *ArmDaily* News Agency LLC with a demand for recovery of damages caused to honour, dignity, and business reputation by means of insult and libel. The lawsuit became about the expression "holder of the bottle" used at Sargsyan's address on the *ArmDaily.am* news website. The court agreed to hear the lawsuit on 4 December; a judicial inquiry has begun.

In 68 instances, court trials were initiated by non-representatives of the authorities (current or former).

- On 24 February citizen Hayk Stepanyan submitted a legal claim against the *Hayeli (Mirror)* press club and its founder, the journalist Angela Tovmasyan, with demands to publicly retract libellous information and pay compensation. The occasion for the lawsuit became pronouncements addressed at Stepanyan at a press conference on January 22nd. The court agreed to hear the lawsuit; a judicial inquiry is ongoing.
- On 29 June Olimp Construction LLC filed a lawsuit in Yerevan's court of general jurisdiction against the founder of the *Hetq.am* internet publication – Hetq LLC – with demands for retraction of libellous information and payment of compensation, despite the fact that the author of the material had taken the commentary from a representative of the real estate development company. The court agreed to hear the case; a judicial inquiry has begun.
- On 31 August former National Security Service employee Ara Harutyunyan submitted a legal claim against the founder of the *1in.am* news website – *Skizb Media* Kentron LLC – with demands for a public retraction of libellous data and recovery of damages caused to honour and dignity. The occasion for the lawsuit became an article, in which states that Harutyunyan had been getting payoffs in envelopes for years in exchange for turning a blind eye to looting on the railroads and was organising illegal trade in smuggled goods.

Against the background of a rising tide of legal claims against media outlets and their employees, serious concern was evoked in the journalistic community by an initiative from vice-speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan, who proposed increasing 5 fold the size of the monetary recovery for insult and libel prescribed by article 1087.1 of the Civil Code of the RA. The draft law's author proposed instead of the maximum sums currently in effect – up to 1 million drams (around \$2000) for insult and up to 2 million drams (around \$4000) for libel – to prescribe 5 million (\$10000) and 10 million drams (\$20000), respectively. On 7 September 2020 this initiative was approved by the standing parliamentary commission on public law questions. 10 journalistic organisations noted in a joint declaration that the draft law poses a serious threat to freedom of speech and goes against the requirements of the Constitutional Court of the RA and international norms, and should therefore be withdrawn. As of the end of the year this draft law had not been placed on the agenda for plenary sessions of the National Assembly.



Also it is important to note the not-insignificant number of dismissals (10), including forced ones, and the resolution of labour disputes between editorial office employees and their employers through the courts.

- On 2 October Marine Kyureghyan, an employee of the daily newspaper Hayastani Hanrapetutyun (Republic of Armenia), was dismissed as the result of an internal conflict at the editorial office. On 23 November Kyureghyan referred to Yerevan's court of general jurisdiction with a lawsuit against the legal successor of the publisher – *Armenpress State News Agency CJSC*. She demanded that orders on the application of a disciplinary penalty be ruled invalid, that she be reinstated at her former job, and that compensation be paid for forced unpaid time off. The journalists Naira Karapetyan, Tatevik Hambardzumyan, Gayane Antonyan, Lusine Mesrobyan, Khachik Sargsyan and Emil Sargsyan were also dismissed.
- On 21 December the Committee for the Protection of Freedom of Speech received a letter from employees of the Hayastani *Hanrapetutyun* newspaper in which it was reported that the editor-in-chief had dismissed his deputy Samvel Sargsyan and technical employee Mergevos Saakyan. The authors of the letter were complaining about arbitrariness on the part of the head of the publication and the unfavourable working conditions created by him.



# BELARUS

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT BELARUS REPORT

The Justice for Journalists Foundation's report seems to me to be a document that is rather precise, clear, concrete, and comprehensive from the point of view of the facts. In the report, the principal cases of violation of freedom of speech and of the rights of journalists in the course of 2020 – the beginning of the year 2021 are recorded, while the violators of these rights and the main trends in the suppression of freedom of expression in the country are clearly indicated.

It is worth adding that the largest independent internet portal in Belarus, Charter97.org, is being subjected to illegal blocking since 2018. In 2020 the blocking of the website intensified: in particular, "mirror" sites were blocked; likewise, mass DDoS attacks were used against our media, and Charter97.org's documentary films were being blocked on YouTube at the demand of Belarusian structures of power.

Besides that, it is important to mention the criminal cases in relation to Belarusian bloggers Sjarhej Pjatruchin, Dzmitryj Kazloŭ, Aljaksandr Kabanav, Ŭladzimer Cyhanovič, Ihar Losik, Paval Spiryn, and others. They are being held in detention for over half a year already on made-up charges, and face the spectre of a prison term.

I hope that the given report on violation of freedom of speech in Belarus will be taken notice of by international structures: both human-rights ones and those responsible for the foreign policy of the states of the EU and the USA, because the violations enumerated in the report are compelling grounds for introducing serious sanctions against Belarus's dictatorial regime.

**Natallia Radzina,**  
Editor-in-chief, **Charter-97 website** (Belarus)

# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS AND MEDIA WORKERS IN BELARUS IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

**1558** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional and citizen media workers and editorial offices of traditional and online publications in Belarus in 2020 were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data were obtained from open sources in the Russian, Belarusian, and English languages using the method of content analysis. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 4**.

1. The quantity of attacks on journalists, bloggers, and media workers in 2020 exceeded the sum total of attacks throughout 2017-2019 (1079) by 1.4 times.
2. Attacks via judicial and/or economic means were the most widespread form of pressure on journalists, bloggers, and media workers in Belarus. 1385 incidents were recorded in the given category.
3. The majority of physical attacks could be attributed to attacks on the part of representatives of the authorities (91 out of 96 incidents). During a protest against the falsification of the results of the presidential elections, riot police were deliberately targeting journalists for beating and humiliation.
4. More than 30 journalists were deported from Belarus and banned from entering the country for a period ranging from 5 to 10 years, including at least 19 journalists from foreign media outlets.
5. In 96% of the instances, the attacks against journalists were coming from representatives of the authorities (1506 out of 1558 incidents).

## 2/ THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MEDIA IN BELARUS

Belarus holds 153rd place out of 180 in the Reporters Without Borders annual **freedom of the press index** for 2020, falling between Brunei and Turkey.

In the Freedom on the Net rating of the international human rights organisation Freedom House, Belarus's level of freedom on the net put it into the category of countries with an unfree internet in 2020, with 38 points out of 100.

Two events had the biggest impact on the situation in the media sphere in Belarus in 2020. First, this was the authorities' attempts to restrict the dissemination of information about COVID-19 in the country. And second, the political and legal crisis after the elections of the president that took place on 9 August 2020.

The mass protests, which began in the country after the Central Electoral Commission announced the official results, were cruelly suppressed by riot police. The demonstrators were demanding the conducting of new elections, the release of political prisoners, a stop to violence, and punishment for the persons guilty of using it. The authorities were responding with harsh measures, administrative detentions, and the opening of criminal cases.

According to the assessment of the Vesna human rights centre, 33 thousand people were detained in the country during the time of the elections and in the post-election period; many of these were subsequently arrested or fined in administrative order. Vesna documented about 1000 witness accounts of torture; no fewer than four people perished. By the end of 2020, 650 people had become subjects in criminal cases connected with the elections and the mass protests; Vesna recognised 169 of them as political prisoners. However, not a single criminal case was opened due to the acts of violence on the part of the riot police and the death of protesters.

Pressure on media workers, journalists, and bloggers intensified sharply in 2020. The vast majority of the attacks on them fell in the post-election period. The situation in which journalists had to work sharply deteriorated.

### State media outlets

According to the data of the Ministry of Information, as of 1 January 2021 there were 1626 print media outlets registered in Belarus (there were 1614 a year earlier). Of these, 438 print media outlets are state-owned. The state media outlets receive preferential advantages and funding from the state budget allocated on a non-competitive basis. In 2020 the funding exceeded 73 million US dollars; the main part of this sum was directed towards funding *Belgosteleradiokompaniya* [the state broadcaster] (more than 55 million US dollars).

Of the 261 registered television and radio programmes, the overwhelming majority (188) are state-owned. The remaining television and radio channels are under the total control of the authorities, be they local or national, thanks to the system of registration and licensing.

As a sign of protest against violence and the need to justify it on the air, after the elections dozens of employees of the state media outlets resigned or were dismissed after participating in protests. Some of them were arrested, and likewise one criminal case was initiated.

## Independent media outlets

The vast majority of non-state print media outlets are strictly entertainment and advertisement. According to the data of the *Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ)*, there are no more than 30 registered non-state media outlets of a socio-political nature. Six of them ran into problems with distribution and printing in the second half of 2020 and were forced to cease coming out in printed format.

## Foreign media outlets

The state monopoly on broadcasting is undermined by foreign stations. A particular role is played by *Radio Svoboda* [*Radio Liberty*], *European Radio for Belarus*, *Radio Ratsyia*, and the *Belsat* satellite channel (the last three of which are registered in Poland). Their broadcasts are oriented towards Belarusians and are prepared predominantly by Belarusians.

However, neither *Belsat* nor *Radio Ratsyia* have lawful status in Belarus, despite attempts to open correspondent offices and obtain accreditation for their journalists. Freelancers who work with them are subjected to pressure on the part of the authorities; they are fined for “violating the order for the production and dissemination of mass information media output” (art. 22.9 of the Code on Administrative Violations).

Previously, *Radio Svoboda* and *European Radio for Belarus* journalists had received MFA accreditation every year; however, after the elections, under the pretext of elaborating a new statute on accreditation, the MFA revoked the accreditation of all foreign correspondents, including the employees of these media outlets. *Radio Svoboda* and *European Radio for Belarus* had still not been able to get new accreditation for their correspondents as of the end of the year.

## The internet and social media

The freest sector of Belarus’s information space remains the internet. In all, there are seven non-state and 26 state net publications registered in Belarus as of 1 January 2021. Over the course of the year, only two non-state internet sites obtained registration as a media outlet. This is associated with the complexity of the registration requirements, while the advantages of having such registration are not self-evident in light of the existing conditions.

After eight months of unsuccessful attempts to register as a net publication, the *Media-Polesye* internet site received this status concurrently with a warning from Mininform, which is in fact how the editorial office found out about the registration in the first place. Subsequently, this allowed the police to fine *Media-Polesye* a hefty sum for violating the legislation on mass information media.

Pursuant to a lawsuit by the Ministry of Information, the largest Belarusian internet portal, *TUT.by*, had its status as a media outlet revoked.

All internet sites with an independent editorial policy were blocked on election day. Access to many of them is restricted in the country to this day. What is more, for three days the internet in Belarus was factually shut down. Later, shutdowns of mobile internet in Minsk took place regularly on the days of protests.

In these conditions, Telegram has acquired widespread popularity. However, the owners and administrators of many popular Telegram channels have been subjected to criminal prosecution. One of the vivid examples - pressure on the *NEXTA* Telegram channel, which was recognised as extremist.

Representatives of the authorities are declaring that the journalists of internet sites not registered as net publications do not enjoy the status of journalists and are not implementing professional activity as journalists.

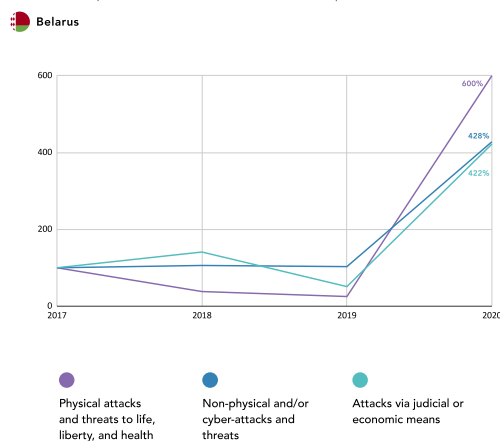
## 3/ GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

2020 turned out to be the most difficult one for Belarusian media and journalists in all the period that the situation with the media in Belarus has been monitored. The number of attacks against journalists, bloggers, and media outlets significantly exceeded the numbers for the three previous years combined. 1558 attacks on media workers were recorded in 2020; 88% of these (1385) fell into the category of attacks via judicial and/or economic means.

The graph below represents the general analysis of attacks of the three main categories of attacks/threats on media workers in Belarus.

### Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020

Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)

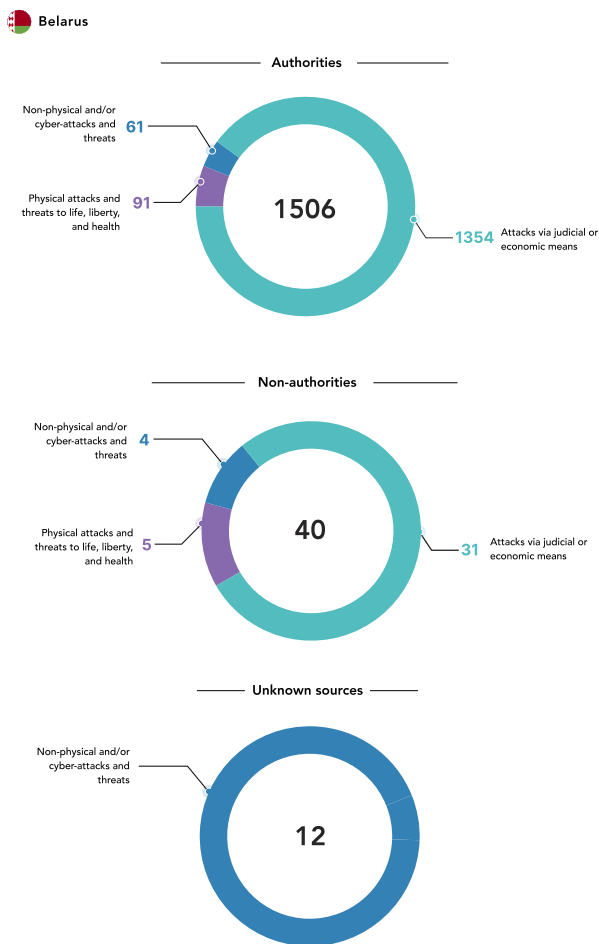


In addition to this, 2020 saw the largest number of physical attacks and threats in relation to journalists and bloggers – 96, which is four times more than over the three previous years in aggregate.

In 96% of the instances, the attacks in relation to journalists came from representatives of the authorities (1506 incidents out of 1558). 40 attacks were from non-representatives of the authorities and 12 from unknown perpetrators.



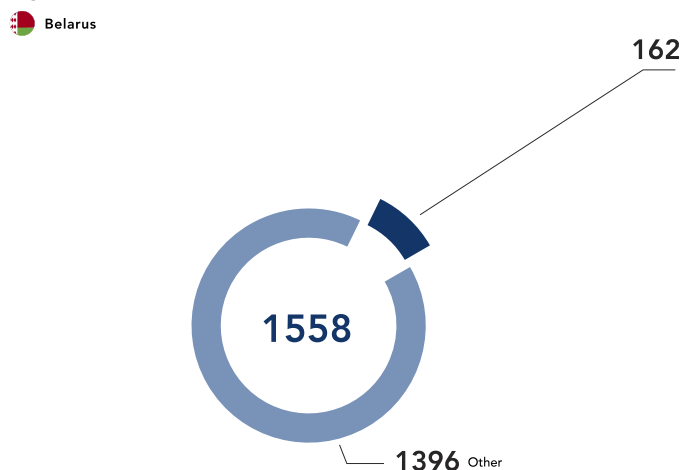
## Initiators of attacks on media workers



In 2020, the actions of the authorities with respect to restricting freedom of expression of opinion acquired a systemic nature and a hitherto unseen scope. Pressure was being exerted in all spheres associated with the media, with the use of the following repressive measures:

- detentions and arrests of journalists, oftentimes with the use of violence, damage to and impounding of professional equipment, and removal of material that had already been shot;

## Hybrid attacks on media workers



- initiation of criminal cases against journalists and media specialists;
- blocking of the internet in the first days after the elections and constant restrictions on mobile internet during mass protests;
- restriction of access to internet sites independently covering the political situation, obstacles to the printing and distribution of several non-state newspapers;
- revocation of the status of a media outlet for the largest internet portal in Belarus, *TUT.by*;
- recognition of *NEXTA*'s popular Telegram channel and logo as extremist materials;
- denials of accreditation to foreign correspondents who had come for the elections and subsequent revocation of accreditation for all correspondents of foreign media outlets;
- dismissals, harassment and persecution of state media outlet journalists who had spoken out against the dissemination of unreliable propagandistic information.

For the purposes of more precisely reflecting combination assaults on media workers in 2020 we are introducing a new category of attacks – hybrid.

We are calling systematic persecution of some publication or media worker with the use of tools from two or more categories of assaults – physical, non-physical, and judicial/economic – “hybrid”. Such a combination of means involving and not involving force with judicial means of pressure on undesirable journalists is carried out with a view to demoralising them or getting them to self-censor or to give up the profession or even life itself.

In 2020, 162 hybrid attacks were recorded. Presented below is the list of the journalists and bloggers who were being subjected to the most intensive hybrid attacks in 2020.

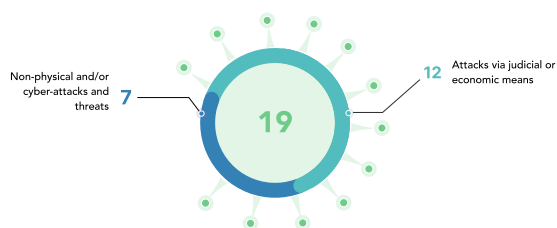
### committed against 13 journalists

Media worker	Total	Phys.	Non-phys.	Jud.
Larisa Shchiriyakova, Belsat TV	27	1	1	25
Alexander Sidorevsky, Belsat TV	22		1	21
Katerina Andreyeva, Belsat TV	19		1	18
Alina Skrabunova, Belsat TV	17		1	16
Sergei Tikhonovskiy, YouTube channel "Country for Life"	11		1	10
Alexander Burakov, DW	8	1		7
Andrey Pauk, YouTube channel "Rudabelskaya Pakazukha"	7		3	4
Ales Piletsky, TUT.BY, Narodnaya Volya	6	1		5
Alexander Levchuk, Belsat TV	6	1	2	3
Milana Kharitonova, Belsat TV	6	2	2	2
Stanislav Korshunov, TUT.BY	6	2	1	3
Tatiana Korovenkova, BelaPAN	5	1	1	3

## 4/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Belarus turned out to be one of the few European countries in which quarantine was not declared in connection with COVID-19. Furthermore, for a long time the authorities were denying the seriousness of the illness. President Alexander Lukashenko [*“Lukashenka” in Belarusian*] was calling the pandemic a “psychosis” and an “infodemic” and called upon the Ministry of Information and the state security services to fight the disseminators of “hype” on the subject of COVID-19.

### Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic



On 21 March, Lukashenko publicly **addressed** the chairman of the State Security Committee with a call to “deal with the lowlives who are putting out these hoaxes” [*about deaths from COVID-19 - Ed.*]: “Enough of looking at this. We need to go through these sites and channels nice and thorough”.

A total of 19 attacks on journalists in connection with the coronavirus were recorded: 7 non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats and 12 attacks via judicial and/or economic means. All of the attacks came from representatives of the authorities.

The most widespread method of pressure was illegal impediments to journalistic activity or denial of access to information (8 incidents), when journalists were not being allowed into hearings and/or court sessions due to quarantine restrictions (in the absence of an announced quarantine). The last briefing by the Ministry of Health for journalists at which they could pose questions to representatives of the ministry took place on 17 April. After this, the Ministry of Health has been furnishing contradictory information only through its press releases.

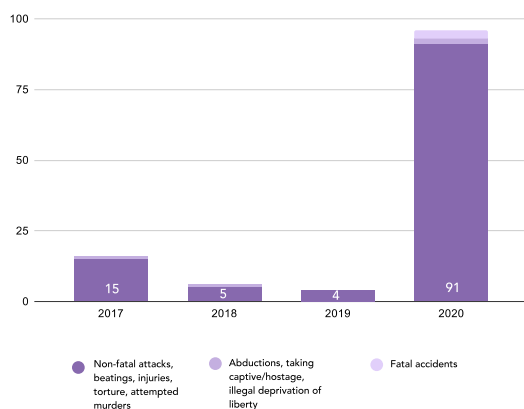
Another widespread method of pressure became charges of administrative violations and fines for “illegal dissemination of information in the mass information media” (5 incidents).

- On 6 April, the Ministry of Information issued the owner of the net publication *Media-Polesye* a written warning about violation of the law On Mass Information Media. The pretext became a publication about the spread of the coronavirus in Luninets, which contained erroneous information about the death of a patient. It is worth noting that the error was corrected 15 minutes after the appearance of the text on the site.
  - On 21 April, journalists Larisa Shchiryakova [*Larysa Ščyrakova*] and Andrey Tolchin [*Andrej Tolčyn*] were served with an administrative offence report from the Homyel [*formerly spelled “Gomel”*] central district administration of the police for illegal dissemination of information in the mass information media. On 20 March, they had recorded a short video interview about the quarantine due to the coronavirus with students at the Francisk Skorina University. The video was used by the Belsat satellite channel.
  - On 13 May, the court of Luninets District fined the editorial office of the *Media-Polesye* internet site 120 base values (about 1250 euros). The court decreed that information on *Media-Polesye* associated with the coronavirus had inflicted harm to the national interests of the Republic of Belarus.
  - On 2 June, a Homyel Region court fined independent journalist and *BAJ* member Larisa Shchiryakova 675 roubles. The court found her guilty under article 22.9 of the CoAV (violation of legislation on the mass information media). Serving as the reason was a photo essay for the Belsat channel from the village of Kommunar of Buda-Kashalyova District of Homyel Region, about the first case of coronavirus in a year three [*third grade*] pupil and the hospitalisation of 39 residents of the village - schoolchildren, their parents, teachers, and a doctor from the local polyclinic.
- Three journalists had their accreditation cancelled under the pretext of the pandemic:
- On 6 May, the MFA of Belarus revoked the accreditation of journalists from the *Russian Channel* One Alexey Kruchinin and Sergey Panasyuk. MFA press secretary Anatoly Glaz [*Anatol Hlaz*] clarified that “the decision has been adopted in connection with the dissemination of information not corresponding to reality”. This took place after the appearance of a story on the situation with the coronavirus in Belarus.
  - On 11 June, journalists of the leading independent news agency, *BelaPAN*, who had previously received accreditation for a session of the Chamber of Representatives (the lower chamber of the Belarusian parliament), had it cancelled under the pretext of the pandemic (which was officially not being acknowledged in Belarus).

## 5/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY AND HEALTH

### Physical attacks

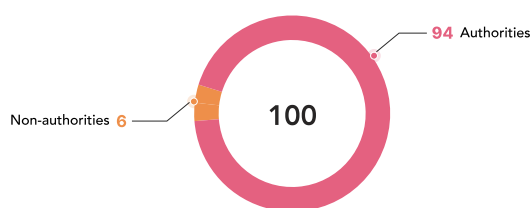
Belarus



The number of physical attacks on journalists in 2020 grew more than four-fold in comparison with the sum total number of such attacks over the three preceding years. The vast majority of such attacks were associated with coverage of mass protests by reporters. Police employees were assaulting the journalists in 91 instances out of 96. Violence was used against journalists from both Belarusian and foreign media outlets, when they were executing their professional duties, as they were being detained, and in places of detention.

### Initiators of physical attacks on media workers (relative figures)

Belarus



Three instances were recorded in Minsk of the use of firearms in relation to female journalists during work at protests, as a result of which they were wounded:

- On 9 August, Emilie van Outeren, a journalist with the *NRD Handelsblad* newspaper (Netherlands), was wounded in the thigh by an unknown projectile after riot police began strafing demonstrators.
- On 10 August, *Nasha Niva* journalist Natalia Lubnevskaya [*Natallja Lubneŭskaja*] was wounded by a rubber bullet when one of the employees of

the law enforcement agencies stopped 10 metres from a group of journalists in blue “Press” vests and shot the journalist in the leg. Lubnevskaya spent over a month in hospital; the after-effects of the injury are still ongoing.

- On 11 August, a *BelaPAN* freelance journalist was wounded by a rubber bullet whilst covering a forcible dispersal of a peaceful protest.

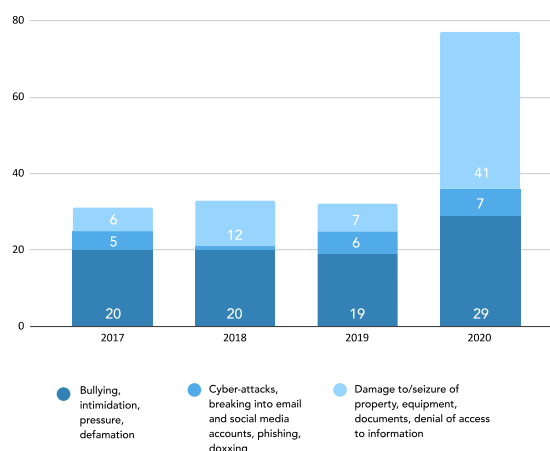
Another three journalists - documentarians with the *Neizvestnaya Belarus'* [*The Unknown Belarus*] project (*Nastoyashchee vremya* [*Current Time*]) Vladimir Mikhailovsky, Maksim Gavrilenko, and Lyubov Zemtsova - perished as the result of an automobile crash that occurred on 14 May on the Homyel - Minsk road. In Homyel, the documentarians had been shooting a film about how volunteers are helping medical personnel in the fight with the coronavirus.

## 6/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

The most widespread types of non-physical attacks and threats over the period under consideration were illegal impediments to journalistic activity (28 incidents); bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber- (27 incidents and damage to/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, printed copies of a periodical (12 incidents). The quantity of such attacks grew significantly in comparison with previous years.

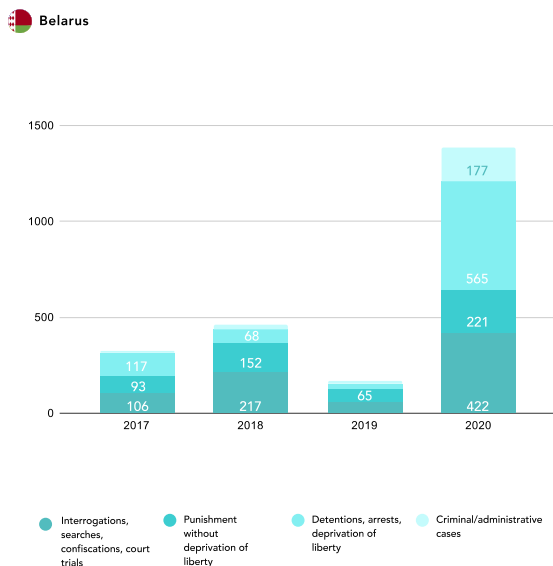
### Non-physical / cyber-attacks

Belarus



## 7/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

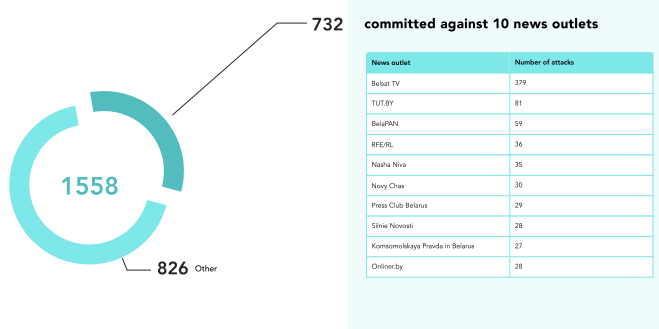
### Judicial / economic attacks



Appearing as the main initiator of attacks against media outlets, journalists, and bloggers in Belarus were representatives of the authorities. They stood behind 1354 out of 1385 recorded attacks via judicial and/or economic means (84% of the incidents).

### The most frequent targets of judicial/economic attacks

Belarus



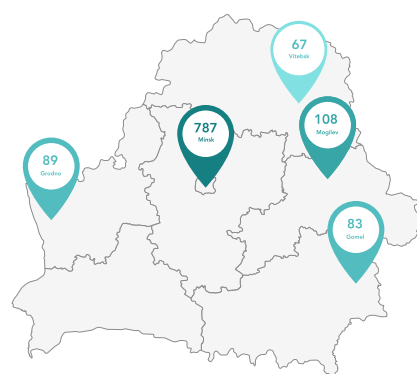
The top 5 methods of pressure on journalists in Belarus in 2020:

- short-term detention (297 incidents)
- administrative arrests/remand/pre-trial detention/prison (216 incidents)
- court trials (217 incidents)
- administrative offence, fine (175 incidents)
- confiscation/seizure of property, equipment, documents (83 incidents)

The quantity of fines for Belarusian freelance journalists working with foreign media outlets without the accreditation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs declined somewhat - 33 (journalists were held administratively liable under this article of the CoAV 118 times in the "peak" year of 2018). This is connected above all with the fact that in the majority of the situations, instead of fines the courts were selecting another form of liability - administrative arrest for participation in illegal mass events and resisting employees of the police. Taking instances of longer-term detention in criminal cases into account, journalists and media workers spent 1200 days in aggregate behind bars in the course of the year.

### Top 5 regions for judicial / economic attacks

Belarus



- Sparking the biggest outcry was the criminal prosecution of *Belsat* television channel journalists Katerina [Katsjaryna] Andreyeva and Daria Chultsova for broadcasting a live stream from a mass protest event (they are charged with organising mass protests). On 18 February 2021, a court sentenced the journalists to two years in a prison colony.
- Internet portal *TUT.by* journalist Katerina Borisevich [Barysevič]'s "zero per mille" case became a high-profile one. She was charged with violating doctor-patient confidentiality: she had reported information furnished by a doctor that contrary to the authorities' assertions, there was no alcohol in the blood of the dead activist Roman Bondarenko [Raman Bandarenka]. On 2 March 2021, a court sentenced the journalist to six months in a prison colony and fined her 100 base values (1000 US dollars).
- A criminal case was initiated against the investigative journalist Sergey [Sjarhej] Satsuk for supposedly receiving a bribe whilst raising funds for investigations.
- A criminal case was initiated against the managers and journalists of the "Press-club" under the pretext of the violation of tax legislation by them.





# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS, AND MEDIA WORKERS IN CRIMEA IN 2020

## 1/KEY FINDINGS

**58** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional media workers and citizen journalists, editorial offices of traditional and online publications and Telegram channels, as well as online activists, that took place in 2020 on the Crimean Peninsula were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data for the study were obtained from open sources in the Russian language using the method of content analysis, as well as with the use of the Human Rights Centre ZMINA's own sources in Crimea (the information was checked by Centre employees). A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 5**.

1. The principal method of pressure on journalists, bloggers, and media workers in Crimea is attacks via judicial and/or economic means.
2. The main source of threats for media workers are representatives of the authorities (in 50 instances out of 58), while the most widespread method of pressure is charges of extremism, links with terrorists, inciting hate, rehabilitation of Nazism, high treason or calling for the overthrow of the constitutional order.

3. There were 9 attacks connected with quarantine restrictions recorded in 2020. These were predominantly expressed in the actions of court bailiffs, who were not granting journalists access to politically-motivated court trials.
4. There were 4 instances of physical attacks and threats to the life, liberty, and health of media workers recorded in Crimea in 2020. The given kind of attacks is no longer dominant, in contrast with 2014, when a record number of violations of the rights of journalists with the use of force was recorded.
5. The course taken by the new authorities from the moment of the occupation in 2014 to totally suppress independent journalism and establish full control over Crimea's information space continues.

## 2/THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MEDIA IN CRIMEA

Crimea was not studied as a separate region in the Reporters Without Borders **World Press Freedom Index 2020** rating. In the Freedom House human rights organisation's **Freedom in the World – 2020** annual report about the situation with civil and political rights, Crimea has been included in the group of "not free countries and territories" with a score of 7 points out of 100; furthermore, a deterioration of 2 points is noted in the situation in the sphere of political rights. A situation with freedom that is worse than that in Crimea, according to Freedom House's assessments, can be **observed** in only 9 countries/territories of the world, including Turkmenistan, North Korea, Tibet, Syria, and the territory of the Donbass that is not under the control of the Ukrainian authorities.

## Persecution of citizen journalists

After the occupation of Crimea in 2014, the peninsula's independent media outlets were completely destroyed. Professional journalists and editorial offices that tried to continue their work were being subjected to systematic pressure, intimidation, and other forms of systematic persecution, including harassment and other methods of attacks by the new authorities and those helping them. Many journalists left the profession or were forced to leave for the mainland part of Ukraine's territory.

In subsequent years, the occupation forces switched to using judicial mechanisms for intimidating journalists and bloggers. This trend continued in 2020 as well.

In the conditions of an "information ghetto" and a lack of independent sources of news on the peninsula, the phenomenon of "citizen journalism" has appeared. Nowadays, it is entirely thanks to ordinary citizens and civic activists that events taking place on the peninsula are receiving coverage, especially arrests, searches, and politically motivated court trials.

One of the best-known initiatives, which has brought together many citizen journalists, is Crimean Solidarity, which was founded in 2016 through the efforts of the relatives of political prisoners, lawyers, and activists as an informal human rights organisation to protect victims of political repression. With time, the Crimean Tatar citizen journalists who were creating and disseminating news about politically motivated criminal and administrative cases in Crimea became a new target for prosecutions. Charges were brought against many of them within the framework of the "case of the Crimean Muslims" for involvement in terrorism and Hizb ut-Tahrir (an organisation that was banned in the Russian Federation by a Supreme Court decision in February 2003; however, it functions legally in Ukraine and the majority of the world's countries). As of the end of 2020, 8 Crimean Solidarity citizen journalists find themselves in places of deprivation of liberty (Server Mustafayev, Timur İbragimov, Marlen Asanov, Seyran Saliyev, Remzi Bekirov, Ruslan Suleymanov, Osman Arifmemetov, and Rustem Şeyhaliyev); yet another one (Amet Suleymanov) finds himself under house arrest. On 21 September 2020 the Crimean Solidarity media coordinator, Crimean Tatar activist and blogger Nariman Memedeminov, who spent 2.5 years in a Russian penal settlement-colony, was released from prison.

Several trials of Crimean Tatar citizen journalists were heard in court in 2020. On 16 September 2020, the Southern District Military Court of the RF issued a verdict in the so-called case of the "second Bağçasaray [also spelled "Bakhchysarai"] Hizb ut-Tahrir group", the figurants in which were found guilty of preparing a forcible seizure of power and participating in the activity of a terrorist organisation. The defendants in this case included 4 citizen journalists from the Crimean Solidarity civic association: Server Mustafayev was sentenced

to 14 years of imprisonment in a strict regime colony, Seyran Saliyev to 16 years, Timur İbragimov to 17 years, and Marlen Asanov to 19 years.

In December, the Southern District Military Court of the RF began hearing the so-called case of the "second Simferopol Hizb ut-Tahrir group", the members of which are being charged with preparing a forcible seizure of power and participating in the activity of a terrorist organisation. The defendants in this case include 4 citizen journalists from the Crimean Solidarity civic association: Remzi Bekirov, Osman Arifmemetov, Rustem Şeyhaliyev, and Ruslan Suleymanov.

## Blocking of Ukrainian media outlets

The situation regarding the blocking of access to a whole series of Ukrainian media resources on the territory of Crimea remained unchanged in 2020. According to the data of a Crimean human rights group, a minimum of 11 providers in 9 Crimean population centres have completely blocked 20 Ukrainian media websites: *Ukrinform*, *Censor.net*, *QHA Crimean News Agency*, *SLED.net.ua*, *Information Resistance*, *UAInfo*, *BlackSeaNews*, *Apostrophe*, *Glavnoe*, *Hromadske Radio*, *Centre for Journalistic Investigations*, *Levyi Bereg [LB.ua]*, *Podrobnosti*, *Strichka*, *ToNeTo*, *TSN*, *Ukrayinskapravda*, *RBK Ukrayina*, *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia [Mirror Weekly]*, and *Kherson Daily*. Additionally, some providers are blocking another 4 Ukrainian media outlets: *the Glavcom*, *5 Kanal*, *112 Ukraine*, and *Depo* websites are inaccessible through nine out of eleven providers. It is worth noting that some of these resources are accessible for users in Russia. Additionally, reception of the signal of Ukrainian FM radio stations in the north of Crimea has worsened significantly, while in many population centres Russian radio stations are broadcasting on these frequencies.

Representatives of the occupation authorities continue to regard independent sources of information on the territory of Crimea as a threat and as the adversary's tools in an information war, while considering the principal task of media outlets in the region to be a defence against "enemy" distortion of the facts.

## Legislative regulation of the activity of media outlets and journalists

A whole series of new normative-legal acts, the effects of which extend to the territory of Crimea, were adopted in the Russian Federation in 2020.

On 1 April 2020, president Vladimir Putin signed a law that introduces new articles to the Criminal Code: 207.1 ("public dissemination of knowingly false information about circumstances presenting a threat to the life and safety of citizens") and 207.2 ("public dissemination of knowingly false socially significant information entailing grave consequences"). Falling under the norms of these articles is information about measures being undertaken to ensure security in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to this, in the Code on Administrative Offences, article 31.15 ("abuse of free-



dom of mass information”) was supplemented by two items: “dissemination of knowingly unreliable information about circumstances presenting a threat to the life and safety of citizens” (item 10.1) and “dissemination of knowingly unreliable information entailing death, harm to health, mass breach of security” (item 10.2).

Changes to the law “On the federal security service” [the FSB] entered into force on 1 August; its article 7 now has the language: “Publication (posting, dissemination) of informational materials, concerning the activities of bodies of the federal security service, without a corresponding opinion from a body of the federal security service shall not be permitted.” It can not be said with confidence from the general context of the article whether this restriction is only for FSB employees or if it extends to all citizens.

Amendments to article 280.1 of the Criminal Code (“public calls for implementing acts aimed at violating the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation”) entered into force on 8 December; prescribing administrative prejudice and the onset of criminal liability in the event of a repeat violation over the span of a year. A new article, 20.3.2 on “calls for separatism”, prescribing punishment in the form of fines, was introduced into the Code on Administrative Offences at the same time.

### 3/ GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

Presented in Figure 1 is the distribution of the three main types of attacks in relation to journalists and media workers on the territory of Crimea in the period from January through December 2020. 38 attacks via judicial and/or economic means, 16 non-physical and/or cyber-attacks, and 4 physical attacks were identified in the course of the research.

Physical attacks were not dominant in 2020, in contrast with 2014, when the greatest quantity of violations of the rights of journalists with the use of force were committed. Thus, more than 100 instances of physical attacks on journalists were recorded during the active phase of the armed occupation from 26 February through 22 March 2014, including beatings, abductions, and torture. Arbitrary detentions, damage to property, prohibition of video shoots and denial of access to the peninsula, as well as various threats and intimidations, took place as well. Such acts were perpetrated primarily by paramilitary formations of “Cossacks” and “militias” under the control of the RF.

## 4/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A “state of high alert”, not prescribed in legislation, has been introduced in Crimea as of 17 March 2020 in connection with the pandemic. The set of restrictions within the framework of this state has been changed on numerous occasions, and a series of prohibitions continues to be in effect to this day.

On 3 April, within the framework of the “state of high alert”, everyone except life-support services workers was prohibited from leaving their place of residence. An exception was made for journalists from the pro-government Krym television channel. Journalists from other registered media outlets having the opportunity to draw up official editorial assignments received the right to leave their place of residence on 14 April. Bloggers, citizen journalists, and non-staff employees of media outlets were restricted in the right of movement until 18 May 2020.

On 10 June, by decree of the “Council of Judges of the Republic of Crimea”, access to court sessions was completely ruled out for persons who are not participants in the trial. As such, journalists were deprived of the opportunity to cover socially significant court trials, including political and religious persecutions, as well as examinations in environmental damage cases. This restriction continues to be in effect to this day; that being said, judges can establish the quantity of journalists for whom it is permitted to be present as attendees at their own discretion.

9 attacks connected with quarantine restrictions were recorded in 2020. All of them consist of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats. They were predominantly expressed in the actions of court bailiffs, who were not granting journalists access to politically motivated court trials, citing coronavirus restrictions.

- On 24 March, the press service of the head of Crimea asked representatives of the mass information media to temporarily restrict visits to the Council of Ministers due to the situation with the coronavirus. Despite the recommendatory character of the request, access for journalists to the Council of Ministers building was terminated and has not been reinstated to this day.
- On 19 and 22 May, two sessions took place in the Central District Court of Simferopol in the case of former political prisoner Edem Bekirov, released in an exchange and subsequently declared a wanted fugitive. Bailiffs announced to a Crime-

an Process journalist and other attendees at the entrance to the courthouse that only participants in the trial were being let into the building in connection with measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus infection.

- On 26 June, an examination took place in the Kiev District Court of Simferopol of a complaint by lawyer Nikolai Polozov, a motion for whose dismissal had been brought by an investigator in a criminal case in relation to the head of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, Refat Çubarov. Bailiffs announced to a Crimean Process journalist and other attendees at the entrance to the courthouse that only participants in the trial were being let into the building.
- On 19 October, a repeat examination of a criminal case in relation to a participant in the Jehovah's Witnesses religious community, Viktor Stashevsky, began in the Gagarin District Court of Sevastopol. Bailiffs announced to a Crimean Process journalist and other attendees at the entrance to the courthouse that only participants in the trial were being let into the building.

## 5/PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

4 physical attacks and threats to the life, liberty, and health of media workers were recorded in 2020, including two instances of the use of punitive psychiatry and two non-fatal attacks in the course of a conflict situation with a *Krym 24* television channel camera crew.

- It became known on 24 June that Crimean Solidarity citizen journalist Ruslan Suleymanov had been forcibly sent to the Crimean Psychiatric Hospital for the conducting of a forensic psychiatric evaluation. Suleymanov spent no less than a month in the psychiatric hospital.
- On 26 October a *Krym 24* camera crew (journalist Dmitry Popov and camera operator Maxim Savenkov) entered onto the territory of a private housing estate in search of the owner of an illegal building site in a nature reserve. A man lunged at the journalist, and then inflicted several blows to the camera operator and damaged the video camera. Later the assailant caught up with Popov and Savenkov and was throwing stones.
- On 16 January, Crimean Solidarity citizen journalist Rustem Şeyhaliyev was forcibly sent to the Crimean Psychiatric Hospital for the conducting of a forensic psychiatric evaluation. Şeyhaliyev spent no less than a month in the psychiatric hospital.

## 6/NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER ATTACKS AND THREATS

Figure 2 presents the quantity of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats. The most widespread method of pressure on media workers, bloggers, and online activists is illegal impediments to journalistic activity, denial of access to information (12 incidents, 9 of which are attacks connected with restrictions within the framework of quarantine measures). In 11 instances out of 16, the attacks came from representatives of the authorities.

Illegal impediments to journalistic activity, denial of access to information was expressed primarily in the actions of court bailiffs and the conducting of trials behind closed doors.

- On 24 April, during the filming of a story about illegal construction inside the boundaries of the Qaradağ nature reserve, a camera crew from the *Vesti Krym* television channel encountered attempts by the site's security to prohibit the shoot and threats to block the camera operator's movements.
- On 27 October, examination began in Crimea's Kirov District Court of a criminal case in relation to a participant in the Asker volunteer organisation, Mecit Ablâmitov. Bailiffs at the entrance to the courthouse announced to a Crimean Process journalist and other attendees that the session was going to take place behind closed doors. They refused to let the journalist enter the building. All further sessions in the case were likewise taking place without the participation of attendees and journalists.
- On 2 September, an appellate complaint against a measure of restraint in relation to the participant in the Asker volunteer organisation Mecit Ablâmitov was examined in the Supreme Court of Crimea. Bailiffs at the entrance to the courthouse announced to a Crimean Process journalist and other attendees that the session was going to take place behind closed doors. They refused to let the journalist pass through into the building for the reading of the court decree.

Likewise noted were single isolated cases of attacks such as "bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber-", "breaking into email/social media accounts/computer/smartphone", "defamation, spreading libel about a media worker or media outlet", and "damage to/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials, print run".



- On 18 November, a publication without a byline appeared on the *Novoros.info* publication's website, in which editor of the Crimean Tatar newspaper *Qırım Bekir Mamut* was called a supporter of a banned organisation and a radical and was accused of publishing anti-Russian articles, as well as doubt being cast on the legality of the activity of the *Qırım* publication in Crimea.
- On 24 November, after a three-day absence of publications on the *Zorro iz Kryma* [*Zorro from Crimea*] Telegram channel, a report appeared about how the authors of the social media channel had been "revealed, identified, and conducted educational work" [*sic*], while all their correspondence with sources of information had been "documented". Contained in the report was a call addressed to "all who have not passed the point of no return" to come to their senses. After this the channel stopped being updated.

## 7/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

Figure 3 presents the sub-categories of attacks via judicial and/or economic means. The principal methods of pressure in the given category are charges of extremism, links with terrorists, inciting hate, high treason, calling for the overthrow of the constitutional order, rehabilitation of Nazism (12), short-term detention (5), and court trials (5).

Blocking of Ukrainian online publications (including Crimean media outlets working in exile on the mainland part of Ukraine) and FM radio stations continued throughout the course of 2020. Thus, monitoring of access to internet resources in December 2020 conducted by a Crimean human rights group among 11 of Crimea's internet providers showed that a minimum of 25 Ukrainian websites were being fully blocked, and another 5 partially (in individual districts and/or by individual operators). Monitoring of FM band broadcasting in the north of Crimea showed that the signal of Ukrainian radio stations is accessible in only 7 out of 19 population centres. Blocking of signals is implemented by way of broadcasting Crimean and Russian radio stations on the frequencies of Ukrainian broadcasters.

Attacks on Crimean citizen journalists and bloggers by means of visits to them at home by employees of the law-enforcement agencies became more frequent in 2020. Cautions about the impermissibility of extremist acts were read out in the course of such visits (8 incidents). It was being asserted that it was supposedly known with certainty to the police that that or the other journalist was an organiser of or participant in planned disorders and other extremist actions.

- On 25 March, blogger Rolan Osmanov received a "warning about the impermissibility of extremist activity". What was being spoken of in the caution was that supporters of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, which is banned in the RF, were planning to conduct unapproved mass events in this period.
- On 26 March, in Nizhnegorsk, cautions about the impermissibility of extremist acts were issued to at least 10 Crimean Tatars. Among them was the citizen journalist with Crimean Solidarity Ayder Kadyrov, who was detained 5 months later as a suspect in a criminal case related to terrorism.
- On 2 April, a police employee drove to Crimean Solidarity citizen journalist Nuri Abdureşitov's home and was trying to conduct an interrogation, and later read out a caution about the impermissibility of extremist activity to the journalist.
- On 17 April, three Crimean Solidarity citizen journalists from different regions of Crimea — Kulamet İbraimov, Emin Rustemov, and Nuri Abdureşitov— received cautions from law-enforcement agencies about the impermissibility of extremist activity. Rustemov and Abdureşitov noted that they had already received such cautions earlier.
- On 21 April, a field operative drove up to the home of Elmaz Akimova, a citizen journalist with the *Nefes* publication, conducted questioning about the place of her work and plans for the immediate future, and posed a series of other questions, after which he served her with a caution about the impermissibility of extremist acts.
- On 1 May, police precinct employee Vladislav Sadovoy served citizen journalist Lutfiye Zudiyeva with two cautions about the impermissibility of extremist acts. Zudiyeva subsequently appealed these acts in court, and during the time of the examination MVD [*Ministry of Internal Affairs*] employees could not substantiate the necessity of such a caution.

Court trials on charges of terrorism have likewise been one of the widespread methods of pressure on citizen journalists, bloggers, and online activists in Crimea over the span of recent years (5 incidents in 2020). All criminal cases such as these, in relation to citizen journalists, end with guilty verdicts. The charges in these cases are preceded by searches, detentions, interrogations, arrests, and often forced forensic psychiatric evaluations with the persons under investigation being held in psychiatric treatment institutions for a lengthy period of time.

- On 11 March, searches took place in the homes of five Crimean Tatar families in Bağçasaray [*Bakhchysaray*], including the house where Crimean Tatar television channel *ATRC* journalist Seytumer Seytumerov previously resided. FSB employees consider him to be the organiser of a terrorist cell, but the journalist himself asserts that the accusations are baseless. During the time of the first search in 2017 no charges were brought against him, and after that he was able to leave Crimea.
  - On 11 March, a search was likewise conducted in the home of Crimean Solidarity citizen journalist Amet Suleymanov. The next day a measure of restraint in the form of house arrest was selected for Suleymanov in a case of “participation in the activity of a terrorist organisation”. The measure was subsequently extended on several occasions.
  - On 11 March, the Kiev District Court of Simferopol extended the measure of restraint in the form of detention for citizen journalist Remzi Bekirov of the Crimean Solidarity association. In the course of the session it became known that an additional charge had been laid against Bekirov under article 278 of the Criminal Code (“violent seizure of power”). Bekirov has been in detention since 28 March 2019. He is being charged under part 1 of article 205.5 of the CC (“organisation of the activity of a terrorist organisation”).
  - On 23 March, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Crimea extended the measure of restraint in the form of detention for Crimean Solidarity citizen journalist Osman Arifmemetov, who had earlier (in March 2019) been charged with having taken part in a terrorist organisation. In the course of the session it became known that an additional charge had been laid against him under article 278 of the CC (“violent seizure of power”).
  - On 17 December, a preliminary court session began in Crimea’s Nizhnegorsk District Court in a criminal case in relation to Crimean Solidarity citizen journalist Ayder Kadırov, who had been charged with failure to report a crime for a supposedly existing correspondence with a member of the ISIS terrorist grouping. The start of the court trial was preceded by a restriction on leaving the region. Before this, on 3 August, Kadırov was detained for 15 hours and was interrogated in the absence of a lawyer.
- 6 instances of unjustified short-term detentions of journalists and bloggers were recorded. The detentions were likewise frequently accompanied by searches and administrative offence reports.
- On 30 October, after an unsanctioned search in his house, blogger Ilya Bolshedvorov was delivered to a police station for the drawing up of an administrative offence report for a single-person picket that the blogger had been shooting video of on a mobile telephone.
  - On 3 November, Crimean Solidarity citizen journalists Vilen Temeryanov and Ablâmit Ziyadinov, who were filming a protest at the Crimean Garrison Military Court building, were detained outside the courthouse by police employees and delivered to the “Central” Department of Internal Affairs [*police station – Trans.*]. As a result, two administrative offence reports were drawn up in relation to Temeryanov – under part 5 of article 20.2 of the Code on Administrative Offences (“violation by a participant in a public event of the established order for conducting a meeting, rally, demonstration, march, or picketing”) and under article 20.6.1 (“non-observance of the rules of conduct after the introduction of a state of high alert”). On 28 December, police employees detained Vilen Temeryanov outside his house in order to deliver him to court for the examination of an administrative case pursuant to the report drawn up on 3 November.



# GEORGIA

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT GEORGIA REPORT

In Georgia, like in many other countries, media is essential for safeguarding transparency and thus preserving democracy in the country. While often referring to its role as 'watchdog', many media workers or journalists act as human rights defenders, especially those representing independent media, reporting on human rights violations, or expressing critical voices.

Unfortunately, last year, we have seen the alarming trend of intensified government pressure against critical voices in Georgia: attempts of interference with journalistic activities, cases of attacks against journalists, threats to the safety and ability to work of journalists during the protest actions. Of particular concern was the use of disproportionate and unjustified force against the peaceful activists, including journalists, at the rally of November 8, 2020. The journalists were implementing their professional activities, some of them live-streaming the demonstration in front of the central election commission. As a result of the dispersal of the rally, a number of journalists were injured, and several cameras were damaged. Unfortunately, this is not the only case of physical injuries of journalists during the protest action in the last years. During the dispersal of the June 20, 2019 demonstration, about 40 journalists were injured, some of them severely. However, the government did not adequately investigate or respond to these cases.

The developments over the Adjara Public Broadcaster – TV and Radio, dismissal of the journalists due to their critical and independent views, changing the organization's editorial policy exemplified the pattern of fighting critical, opposition, or independent media. It also shows the challenges of the Public Broadcaster and the need to be a "real" representor of public interest.

Furthermore, in the cases where the problem was related to the professional or ethical issue of a particular media/journalist – the government or public officials' response on that was not adequate and followed by unhealthy debate, harassment of a journalist, or attempts to interfere in media company activities. Together with extremely polarized media in the country, it is noteworthy that - self-censorship becomes a real challenge for quality journalism and media freedom. This refers not only to the government-friendly but also to the opposition-media.

It is vital to support and express solidarity to the journalists, especially while there is a rising number of attacks and killings of journalists in the world. The government of Georgia must publicly support the journalists, particularly independent journalists, and accept the critical views, condemn the attacks and intimidations against media representatives, and adequately and effectively investigate crimes committed against journalists.

**Natia Tavberidze**  
Magistra Legum Europae/LL.M. EUR. with Merit  
Coordinator of **Human Rights House Tbilisi**



# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS AND MEDIA WORKERS IN GEORGIA IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

**113** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional and citizen media workers and editorial offices of traditional and online publications in Georgia in 2020 were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data were obtained from open sources in the Russian, Georgian, and English languages using the method of content analysis. Data that has previously not been made public and was obtained using the expert interview method was likewise used in the report. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 6**.

1. The main method of pressure on journalists and media workers in 2020 became non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats, above all damage to/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials, print run.
2. The majority of the events associated with restrictions on freedom of speech and judicial prosecution of journalists are associated with the 31 October parliamentary elections.
3. 79 of the 113 attacks came from representatives of the authorities.
4. The increase in the number of non-physical attacks and the reduction in the quantity of physical assaults on journalists can most likely be explained by the increased attention to the situation in the country on the part of international organisations, including human rights groups.
5. 16 of the 26 physical attacks recorded in 2020 were carried out by representatives of the authorities; the greater part of the journalists suffered from tear gas poisoning and the use of water cannons (dousing with water containing chemical reagents) on the night of 8–9 November 2020 at the Central Electoral Commission building.

## 2/ THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MASS MEDIA IN GEORGIA

According to the data from the Reporters Without Borders NGOs **annual rating**, in 2020 Georgia held 60th place among 180 countries of the world in terms of the level of freedom of the press.

According to the research by DFRLab, almost 3 million people out of a total population of 3.7 million in Georgia have access to the internet, which represents a 79% rate of penetration for the internet. 96% of Georgian internet users use social media, especially Facebook. It is on Facebook that various online attacks against civilian and professional journalists are actively perpetrated, and disinformation and propaganda are systematically disseminated.

Television channels are the main source of news for the country's population, the activity of which is regulated by the National Commission for Communications of Georgia and the Law On Electronic Communications, adopted in 2005. As of the beginning of 2021, there are 128 television channels and radio stations registered in Georgia; the majority of these are included in cable channel packages and offer viewers entertainment programmes and films.

Of all the mass media outlets, the only ones which receive state funding are Public Broadcasting (two television channels and one radio station) and the parliamentary bulletin, which publishes laws. A supervisory council consisting of representatives of the authorities and opposition parties oversees Public Broadcasting's editorial policy.

There are about twenty private news television channels operating in the country, amongst which the leaders are *Rustavi 2* and *Imedi*. Their ratings are roughly the same – these two channels together account for more than 80 percent of the country's on-air space. According to surveys as of the beginning of 2020, many people preferred to watch these two channels.

The main television channels have a clear-cut political position, and their news policy is in line with this.

On the side of the Georgian Dream party of power is the *Teleimedi* holding company, which includes the *Imedi* and *Maestro* channels and the *GDS* network of channels, which belong to the founder of this party, Bidzina Ivanishvili. In July 2019, the formerly opposition *Rustavi 2* acquired new owners and a new team of journalists, and is now also loyal to the authorities.

In another group are channels that reflect the political priorities of the opposition: *Mtavari Arkhi*, *Formula*, *Pirveli*, and several regional television channels.

Entirely separate from these as a news source is the *Obiyektiv* television channel, which belongs to the



founders of the pro-Russian party Alliance of Patriots of Georgia and has a stable viewing audience of 3.14% of the population.

On 17 July 2020, the Georgian parliament adopted amendments permitting the National Commission for Communications to appoint a “special manager” for a term of two years for operators of electronic communication networks, that is those broadcasting companies that are violating the commission’s instructions. This is a special administrator endowed with the right to fire and hire employees, enter into and tear up agreements, and revoke the decisions of directors, boards of governors, and shareholders.

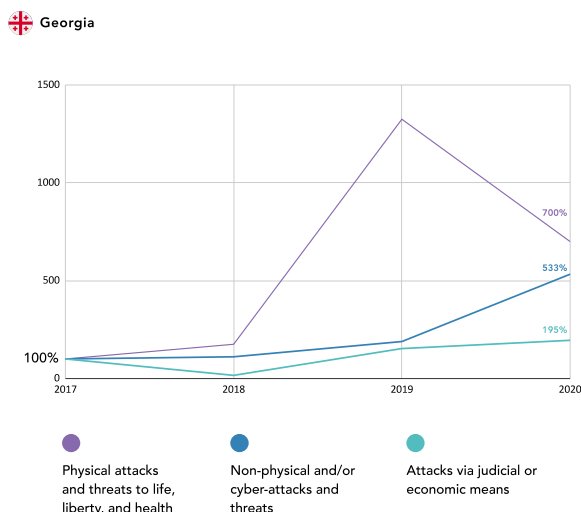
Non-governmental organisations - members of the Coalition for Defence of the Interests of the Mass Information Media - have criticised the amendments numerous times: they indicated that the National Commission’s meddling in content is illegal and unacceptable. Members of the Coalition have roundly condemned the regulator’s actions in relation to the *Mtavari Arkhi* television channel, which was subjected to sanctions for an “indecent” story about coronavirus. Human rights advocates noted that establishing a practice that is incompatible with the legislation of Georgia represents a direct threat of censorship.

### 3/ GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

The quantity of attacks on journalists and media workers in Georgia has increased by nearly 3.5 times since 2017. The number of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats increased sharply in 2020.

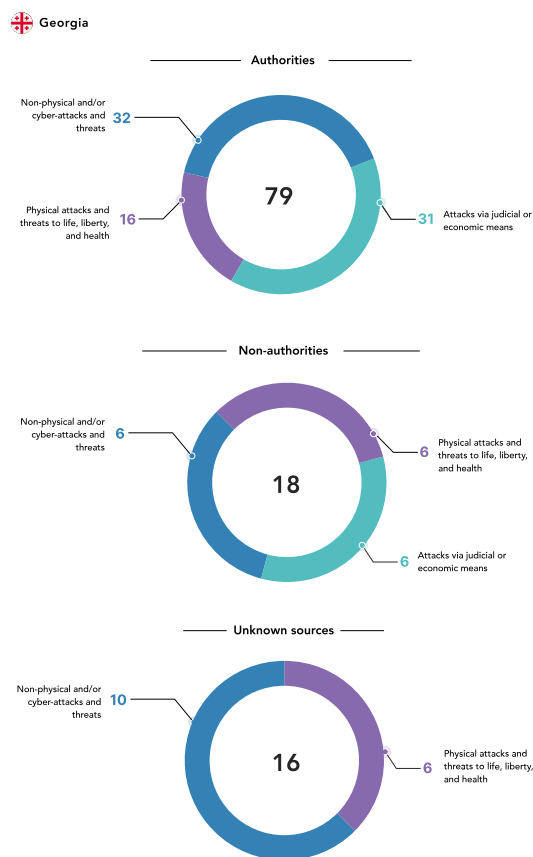
#### Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020

Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)



In 2020, 79 of the 113 recorded attacks came from representatives of the authorities. They are also responsible for 16 of the 28 physical attacks.

#### Initiators of attacks on media workers



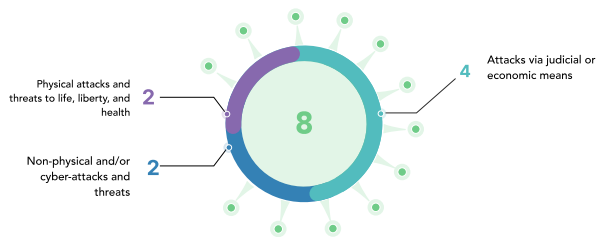
As in 2019, the government’s main targets were opposition-oriented television channels – *Mtavari Arkhi*, *Formula*, and *Pirveli*, as well as employees of the Public Broadcaster of the Adjara Autonomy who had spoken out against the channel’s pro-government policy. Tensions intensified as the elections approached: according to the data of NDI and IRI surveys, the coalition of opposition parties was running ahead of Georgian Dream. The government chose a tactic of pressure on the opposition channels with the use of the administrative resource, financial, judicial, and law-enforcement mechanisms.

### 4/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Eight incidents of persecution of journalists in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic were recorded in 2020: seven in Tbilisi and one in Svaneti, in the municipality of Mestia.

## Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic

Georgia



Of the eight incidents, two were physical attacks:

- On 14 April in Tbilisi, theologian and political columnist Gocha Barnovi was subjected to an assault during an interview with the *Rustavi 2* television channel. An unknown person came up to him with grievances regarding Barnovi's critical remarks addressed at Patriarch Ilia II (the Georgian Orthodox Church had refused to introduce quarantine restrictions during Easter divine services). This person hit the commentator.
- On 17 August, during a protest in Mestia against the prohibition on entering and leaving the municipality, mayor Kakha (Kapiton) Zhorzholiani tried to take a mobile telephone by force from the blogger Giorgi Chartoliani while the latter was filming Zhorzholiani's talk with residents on the camera.

Two attacks are associated with non-physical threats:

- On 28 March, journalists from the *Pirveli* television channel became the object of verbal abuse and criticism on society's part in connection with questions that had been posed by Vakho (Vakhtang) Sanaia during an interview with Centre for Disease Control head Amiran Gamkrelidze and his deputy Paata Imnadze on *Pirveli's* daytime news programme.
- On 10 September, the government of Georgia prohibited correspondents from being present at a session of parliament on the grounds that "there may be persons infected with the coronavirus among the journalists".

Four attacks were carried out via judicial and/or economic means.

- Chair of the opposition Republican Party and popular blogger **Khatuna Samnidze** was summoned for interrogation to the State Security Service (SGB) of Georgia. Serving as grounds were her comments to a post on another person's Facebook page on the topic of coronavirus mortality statistics.

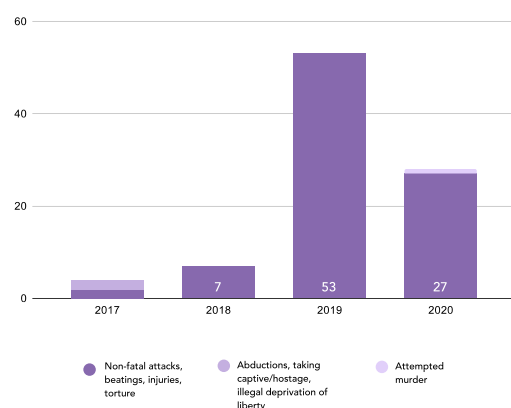
- On 26 June, independent journalist **Nino Chelidze** declared that she had been summoned to the SGB because of her Facebook status. "The questions concerned whether the Facebook account was mine. Likewise they asked me about whether it was I who had written this post. They asked if I happened to know anybody to whom, for example, money had been offered. Needless to say, I don't have such information", said Chelidze after the interrogation.
- On 2 July, the Tbilisi City Court issued a ruling in favour of the SGB, which had accused the *Mtavari Arkhi* television channel of sabotage and attempts to "disinform the populace by way of spreading false news about the novel coronavirus epidemic", for the programmes *Subbotnyaya sessiya* on 20 June and *Priobreteno COVID-19* on 25 June 2020. The court forced the channel to give the full and unedited material to the SGB for investigation. Director of the *Mtavari Arkhi* television company Nika Gvaramia accused the State Security Service of defaming the opposition television channel.

## 5/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

28 incidents of physical attacks on journalists were recorded in 2020. All of these incidents except for one attempted murder fall under the category of attacks of a non-fatal nature.

### Physical attacks

Georgia



- On 15 June, director-general of the *Mtavari Arkhi* television channel Nika Gvaramia announced that an RF citizen, the Ingushetian native Vasambek Bokov, detained on 12 June as the result of a special operation in Tbilisi, had been preparing an attempt on the life of journalist Georgiy Gabuniya on assignment for head of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov.

All the instances of physical violence against journalists can be divided into three groups.

1. Assaults perpetrated by people not associated with the authorities directly, for example the security guards of private enterprises or ideological supporters of the authorities. Thus, during the time of the siege of the *Rustavi 2* television channel, representatives of the pro-authorities and pro-Russian organisation Georgian March perpetrated an assault on director-general of the *Mtavari Arkhi* television channel Nika Gvaramia and other journalists.

In two instances – in Martvili and Davidgaredji – the initiators of the assault were members of the clergy.

2. Targeted actions by the police or representatives of the authorities against journalists carrying out professional duties.

On 8 November, the police used water cannons and tear gas to disperse people protesting against the falsification of elections at the Central Electoral Commission building. A group of journalists were amongst those targeted: Papuna Khachidze – a camera operator with the Pirveli television channel, Nika Matiashvili, Giorgi Japaridze, and Soso Tsiklauri – camera operators with the *Formula* television channel, correspondent Ani Baratashvili with the *Formula* channel, and a *Rustavi 2* camera operator. All of them had their cameras damaged.

Journalists in Georgia do not wear special vests or other markers identifying themselves as a member of the press; however, it is entirely possible that the policemen had applied targeted force against the journalists in order to intimidate them.

The rest of the instances of assaults were the result of physical effect, when journalists were being pushed away or blows were being inflicted with the hands.

3. Assaults on journalists not connected with their professional activity.

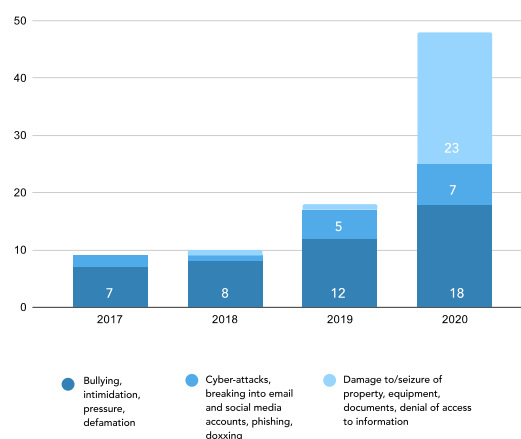
On 6 March, an assault was perpetrated on Beslan Kmuzov, a correspondent with the *Caucasian Knot* website, after his quarrel with neighbours. Kmuzov was detained by the police as the initiator of the quarrel; he was let out on bail by a court decision on 8 March, and released on 10 March.

## 6/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

The most widespread type of attacks in 2020 became non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats. 48 instances were recorded, which is nearly three times more than in 2019. The overwhelming majority of the attacks took place during the pre-election campaign, in the period from August through October 2020.

## Non-physical / cyber-attacks

Georgia



- 12 instances were connected with equipment being damaged whilst journalists were carrying out their professional duties;
- 11 instances were connected with illegal impediments to journalistic activity and denial of access to information;
- 10 – with defamation and spreading libel about a media worker/media outlet;
- 6 – with bullying and intimidation of journalists.

The geographic breakdown of the offences in this category looked as follows. 25 incidents took place in Tbilisi; the rest in practically all the regions of the country, including occupied Abkhazia: 9 in Batumi and Khelvachauri of the Adjara Autonomy; 3 in Telavi, administrative centre Kakheti; 3 in Abkhazia; 2 in Akhaltsikha; 2 in Marneuli; and one each in Poti, Vani, and Duisi.

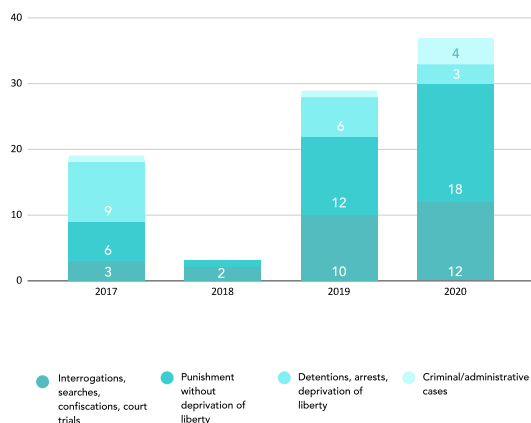
## 7/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

In general, Georgia's legislation was raised to European standards in the period of reforms in 2004-2012; however, in the past few years the judicial system has been put into a position of dependence on the political will of the party of power.

Of the 37 instances of attacks against journalists and editorial offices of mass media outlets via judicial and/or economic means, 21 took place in Tbilisi.

In 2020, as in 2019, dismissal/involuntary dismissal/forced quitting of the profession was the most widespread means of pressure on journalists. All 12 instances of attacks of the given category were associated with the Public Broadcaster of the Adjara Autonomy, when journalists became outraged over censorship and the news policy of the television channel's management, which had taken a pro-government position.

## Judicial / economic attacks



- Dismissed employees Bacho Gurabanidze, director of the *Dilistalgis* (Morning Wave) programme; Giorgi Murvanidze, creative manager; and Guram Kadidze, graphics editor, declared that the channel's director-general, Giorgi Kokhraidze, was harassing them for belonging to alternative trade unions and for participating in a protest rally on 26 June.

The second widespread means of pressure is interrogation/questioning: seven incidents of the given category were recorded in 2020.

- Five of the seven interrogations are associated with a criminal case of "misappropriation of funds" at the *Rustavi 2* channel that was initiated back in 2019, in which the suspicion was placed on Niko (Nikoloz) Gvaramiya, who is currently director-general of the *Mtavari Arkhi* channel, the leading opposition broadcaster. Inasmuch as the channel is privately owned, the crime of "misappropriation" is not applicable to it. The channel's lawyers deem that the criminal prosecution is a part of state policy in relation to the opposition.

4 instances were noted in the category of court trials – two of them are connected with the Niko Gvaramiya case, and one with the domestic conflict involving the journalist Beslan Kmuzov.

On 20 March, the revenue service of the Ministry of Finance of Georgia imposed a collection order on the bank accounts of the *Mtavari Arkhi* and *Pirveli* television companies.

Since November 18, 2109 Giorgi Rurua, co-owner of the main opposition TV channel *Mtavari Arkhi*, has been in prison on charges of illegal acquisition, possession and carrying of firearms. The European Parliament has officially recognized Giorgi Rurua as a political prisoner. Nika Gvaramia, the director of this TV channel is constantly dragged to court. This situation cannot but have a negative impact on the functioning of the TV channel itself.

## A BIT OF HISTORY: RUSTAVI 2 AND IMEDI

Rustavi 2	Imedi
<p>The history of the television channel began in 1994 with a studio in a small flat in the metallurgical city of Rustavi, after two separatist wars in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali.</p> <p>In 1998 <i>Rustavi 2</i> was already the country's leading television company, with its own agency and newspaper.</p> <p>With the growth in the channel's popularity came problems with the authorities – abductions, beatings of journalists, searches, denial of airtime, an attempt by supporters of Eduard Shevardnadze to buy out the channel. In 2001, the popular presenter Giorgi Sanaya was murdered in his own flat.</p> <p>In November 2003 <i>Rustavi 2</i> made it into the top leagues of world television brands – CNN and BBC broadcast live footage of the "Rose Revolution" from Tbilisi.</p> <p>In June 2004, already under Mikheil Saakashvili's new reformist power, the channel unexpectedly announced its bankruptcy, and 90% of the shares in <i>Rustavi 2</i> were sold to an entrepreneur from Batumi, <b>Kibar Khalvashi</b>, owner of the Georgian marketing network of the Procter &amp; Gamble company.</p>	<p>The <i>Imedi</i> (Hope) channel was created by a Russian entrepreneur of Georgian origin, Bardi (Arkady) Patarkatsishvili. The idea for the appearance of the channel emerged in a symbolic year for Russian journalism, 2001 – it is precisely at this time that the Kremlin destroyed the <i>NTV</i> television channel and Yevgeny Kiselev's team.</p> <p>Patarkatsishvili was at that time director-general of the Russian ZAO <i>MNVK</i> (TV-6), simultaneously holding the post of deputy director-general of the <i>Public Russian Television</i> (ORT) television channel for commerce; he was the first deputy chairman of the OAO ORT board of directors.</p> <p>Patarkatsishvili invited those who had at one time created <i>NTV</i> - Vsevolod Vilchek's group - to create <i>Imedi</i>, but announced right from the start that the new channel would be opposition-oriented. Huge sums were spent on <i>Imedi</i> with one purpose – to overtake <i>Rustavi 2</i>. The main topic of the news agenda was advancing Patarkatsishvili for president of Georgia.</p> <p>On 8 November 2007, a group of <i>spetznaz</i> state security forces burst into the <i>Imedi</i> studio, stopping a live broadcast, when the presenter of the news programme was calling the population to insurrection.</p>



In 2006, Khalvashi sold his block of shares to the deputy [MP] David Bezhuashvili. After that, the television channel entered into a media holding, the co-owners of which were the Georgian Industrial Group and Geomedia Group.

In 2008, 30% of the shares in *Rustavi 2* were acquired by the channel's director-general Irakli Chikovani; Geomedia Group was left with 40%, and the Georgian Industrial Group with 30%.

In 2009, *Rustavi 2* director-general Erosi Kitsmarishvili filed a lawsuit in which he demanded that Khalvashi return the 30% of the television company's shares, while the stakes owned by Chikovani and Geomedia Group should be transferred to the Degson Limited company.

The founder of *Rustavi 2*, Erosi Kitsmarishvili, died unexpectedly in June 2014. The authorities announced it as a suicide, but neither the family nor friends believe this hypothesis, deeming that he had been murdered, while the motive may have been information about who is the real owner of *Rustavi 2*.

After the falsification of the results of the 2016 parliamentary elections, *Rustavi 2* was constantly criticising the authorities, speaking about the revival of corruption, nepotism, the rise in crime, and the struggle with the political opposition.

On 7 July 2019, *Rustavi 2* channel television presenter Georgiy Gabuniya cursed out Vladimir Putin live on the air in his original programme *Postscriptum*. By 18 July, the owner of *Rustavi 2* once again became the businessman Kibar Khalvashi, who fired all the leading journalists.

An absurd charge of misappropriating the funds of *Rustavi 2* was brought against former director-general of *Rustavi 2* Niko Gvaramiya.

In September 2019, Gvaramiya registered a new channel, *Mtavari Arkhi* (Main Channel), which is gaining in popularity whilst *Rustavi 2*'s ratings are falling.

Patarkatsishvili lost the elections, and a month later, on 12 February 2008, he died suddenly as the result of a cardiac seizure in his home in the county of Surrey in the south of England. Before this, the Georgian and Russian press had published his secretly recorded conversation with colonel of the Georgian special services Irakli Kodua, in which Patarkatsishvili boasted that it was he who had brought Vladimir Putin into politics: "He (Putin) was in Saint Petersburg, was working as Sobchak's deputy, was providing a 'roof' [protection] for my St. Pete businesses".

After Patarkatsishvili's death, the new owner of *Imedi* became the American Joseph Kay (Iosif Kakalashvili), a first cousin of the deceased. Badri Patarkatsishvili's family declared that Joseph Kay was a "usurper".

In 2009, the channel became the property of the Arab-Georgian company RAK Georgia Holding. After Georgian Dream's victory, Patarkatsishvili's family managed to get back the channel, which then became the main propagandist of the new power - the old *no-menklatura* from the Georgian Dream party under the leadership of yet another Russian oligarch, Bidzina Ivanishvili.



# KAZAKHSTAN

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT KAZAKHSTAN REPORT

Despite Kazakhstan's regular efforts to demonstrate democratic changes, the situation with journalistic freedoms remains dismal. Cosmetic amendments to legislation unfortunately do little to promote real reforms, while media workers find themselves under a constant onslaught of pressing.

The period from 2017 through the year 2020 was intense and dramatic for Kazakhstani journalists: a several-times "patched up" law on the mass information media, changes to normative legal acts regulating the activity of the press, claims for huge sums made in cases of defamation, and the old tried and true methods of influencing the press – threats and intimidation.

Although 90% of the media in Kazakhstan take positions in support of the ruling power and are dependent on state bodies, the old-fashioned, weak, and inefficient government continues to fear the utterance of free thoughts. It is precisely for this reason that government officials remain the main threat to the media – the number of assaults and attacks on journalists is not falling, but rising.

As has been rightly noted in the report, the methods of attacks in recent years have changed. Today the bodies of state prefer to "avoid needless bloodshed", using judicial and economic means in relation to the media. With the development of the internet and the migration of part of the audience there, blocking of websites has begun to be applied more frequently, which represents not only a restriction of citizens' right to access to information, but also an attack on free expression of opinion. Blocking "for no reason", when not a single state agency takes responsibility for having restricted access to a website, has acquired particular popularity in Kazakhstan. All the while there are no official violations and charges, and yet the website remains blocked. In the opinion of human rights advocates, the motives for such blocking are political.

The pandemic of 2020 exacerbated practically all of the problems in the mediasphere. The situation with access to information deteriorated significantly; as before, many court cases are connected with publications on the internet. Online briefings and press conferences afford the opportunity for state agencies to duck questions, interrupt journalists, and limit their participation. The same thing concerns court trials as well. Such incidents represent a real threat for journalists inasmuch as they impede their professional activity.

The adoption of a law on peaceful rallies has transformed the Kazakhstani practice of control over the mass media somewhat. In 2020 state bodies changed the tactic of detention: now journalists and activists are simply rounded up in a circle and held there for hours – a practice that has received the name "kettling". As a result, representatives of the media are not subjected to physical beatings, but are deprived of the opportunity to carry out their professional duty.

Nor can we fail to mention self-censorship as well. The articles of the Criminal Code on inciting hate and disseminating knowingly false information are rarely applied in relation to journalists, but they do serve as a deterrent factor during the publication of investigations and hard-hitting materials.

In recent years citizen journalists and bloggers have started getting subjected to threats more frequently – to cyber-threats as a rule. That being said, the registered media also continue to experience difficulties connected with repressive legislation, dependence on state agencies, and political pressure.

A series of NGOs are working in Kazakhstan, rendering legal aid to journalists and bloggers, consulting, teaching, and lobbying the government on the urgent questions facing the media community. It ought to be noted that their activity has been quite effective in some spheres. Thus, with the active participation of NGOs, amendments were adopted to the law on the mass information media concerning protection of the rights of children, libel has been decriminalised, and appropriate language has been used in the law on peaceful rallies concerning the participation of journalists.

**Diana Okremova,**  
Director, **OF Legal Media Centre** (Astana)

# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS, AND MEDIA WORKERS IN KAZAKHSTAN IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

**342** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional media workers and citizen journalists, and editorial offices of traditional and online publications, as well as online activists in Kazakhstan in 2020 were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data for the research were obtained from open sources in the Russian, Kazakh, and English languages using the method of content analysis. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 7**.

1. The main type of attacks in relation to media workers, as well as bloggers and online activists, is attacks via judicial and/or economic means.
2. The main source of threats for media workers, bloggers, and online activists in Kazakhstan are representatives of the authorities, while the most widespread methods of attacks on media workers and civilian journalists in this category are court trials, charges in administrative offence cases, summonses for interrogations, and short-term detentions.
3. Mass short-term detentions are directly connected with the growth in protest sentiments in society. Short-term detentions of journalists take place in the course of their coverage of mass protests in the large cities of Kazakhstan.
4. The second most popular type of attacks in relation to traditional media journalists and civilian journalists (according to openly available statistics) are non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats, especially illegal impediments to journalistic activity and denial of access to information. The main source of threats in this category are likewise representatives of the authorities.
5. 24 instances of physical attacks and threats to the life, liberty, and health of media workers were recorded in 2020 (for comparison: there were 19 such attacks in 2019).

## 2/ THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MEDIA IN KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakhstan has improved its position in the Reporters Without Borders **2020 World Press Freedom Index**, having taken 157th place out of 180 (the country held 158th place in the rating for 2019). In the Freedom House human rights organisation's annual **Freedom in the World 2020** report about the situation with civil and political rights, Kazakhstan, with a score of 23 points out of 100, remains in the category of "unfree countries", as it had been in the previous year (22 points out of 100).

It is possible that some improvement in the country's position in the ratings is associated with the long-awaited decriminalisation of libel. In December 2019, the president made an announcement about a decision to remove libel from the ranks of criminal offences. On 10 July 2020, a law entered into force whereby libel was moved from the Criminal Code to the Administrative Code.

According to the data of the Ministry of Information and Social Development, as of 19 October 2020 there were 4597 media outlets registered in Kazakhstan, of which 3432 comprise periodical publications, 175 are television channels, 74 are radio, and 660 are news agencies and online publications. There are 256 foreign television channels registered on the list of media outlets.

### The COVID-19 pandemic and the status of the media

A state of emergency was introduced in Kazakhstan as of 16 March 2020 in connection with the pandemic. It was extended several times and ended on 11 May. However, quarantine restrictions of various degrees of severity continue to this day.

As of 16 March, the head state sanitary doctor [*chief public health officer –Trans.*] introduced a prohibition on audio, photo, and video shoots in health care organisations, ambulances, in quarantined premises, and during the rendering of in-home medical assistance by medical workers and the conducting of epidemiological research in a focus of infection. Both interview and questionnaire surveys of patients and of "contacts" were prohibited. The prohibition became the reason for the detaining of KTK television channel journalists in Atyrau Region on 11 April.

In the conditions of the state of emergency and quarantine, all sessions of state bodies are being conducted remotely via online means. Online transmissions of sessions take place with disruptions. In response to journalists' complaints with respect to the bad quality and disruptions of the online transmissions, the officials responsible for ensuring access to information cite technical problems.

At briefings and press conferences, the majority of which take place online, journalists, who are obliged to send in their questions in advance, encounter a situation where the moderators pose only the “convenient” questions to the spokespersons.

In the period that the state of emergency and quarantine regime has been in effect, the most defenceless category of journalists have become bloggers, whose status is not defined in any way in Kazakhstan’s legislation. It is specifically bloggers and online activists who are most frequently charged with libel and with violating the state of emergency regime.

Kazakhstan’s mass media outlets have encountered economic hardships as a result of the pandemic. This especially concerns the print media, which has been deprived of the opportunity not only to distribute print runs among subscribers, but also to sell them in retail outlets and specialised kiosks. According to the official data, the forecast loss of advertising incomes in 2020 sits between 30% and 60%.

### **Elections to the lower chamber of parliament and local executive bodies: legal-and-normative acts and the status of the media**

On 21 October, the president of Kazakhstan made an announcement about upcoming regular elections to parliament and local executive bodies. The elections were scheduled for 10 January 2021.

On 4 December, the Central Electoral Commission published a decree defining the rights and duties of candidates’ agents, observers, and representatives of the media. Representatives of NGOs, civic activists, and journalists declared that this document seriously restricts the opportunity to independently observe the elections. In particular, the items about the prohibition on video transmission from polling stations, about the need to get citizens’ approval to use their images, and about how only those legal entities that have this activity explicitly included in the organisation’s charter can send observers to the elections were subjected to criticism.

In addition to this, mass media outlets were prohibited from conducting pre-election surveys without fulfilling a series of conditions: they must notify the Central Electoral Commission in advance, confirm that they have five years of experience conducting surveys, and have employees with a sociological education and employment history on staff.

A “Checklist for mass information media and journalists in the period of elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan” issued by the relevant ministry prescribes “refraining from the publication of agitational materials and other information knowingly tarnishing the honour, dignity, and business reputation of a candidate or political party” and reminds about civil and criminal liability.

With the start of the pre-election campaign, bloggers and online activists began to be called to the prosecutor’s office in connection with surveys on the topic of the elections; they were warned about administrative liability for violating electoral legislation. Thus, in December the blogger Kairat Abdrakhman [*“Qairat Äbdirahman” in Kazakh*] (Almaty Region) was fined by a court for a survey published on social media on 9 November. The blogger had expressed interest about whether or not his subscribers trusted the elections and what they thought about the deputies to the city *mäslihat* [*members of the city council – Trans.*].

A requirement that agents, observers, and representatives of the media present at polling stations strictly comply with safety measures and maintain social distancing of no less than one and a half to two metres was introduced on 29 December by decree of the head state sanitary doctor.

Legislative regulation of the activity of media outlets and journalists

Laws significant to society, in particular about rallies and about the decriminalisation of libel, were discussed and adopted in Kazakhstan in 2020 without the participation of the public.

A law “On the introduction of changes and additions to some legislative acts of the RK with respect to questions of enforcement proceedings and criminal legislation”, removing the “Libel” article from the Criminal Code, entered into force on 10 July. Libel is being moved to the Code of the RK “On administrative offences” and prescribes a fine or administrative arrest with a maximum term of up to 30 days. With the decriminalisation of libel, the quantity of criminal cases in relation to journalists declined insignificantly. Human rights advocates continue to insist on moving libel into the sphere of civil law: administrative proceedings infer the participation of the state and the police.

On 25 May, the president of the RK signed a law “On the order for organising and conducting peaceful gatherings in the Republic of Kazakhstan”. A norm about the duty of a journalist or an organiser and a participant in a peaceful gathering to turn over a photo shoot or video recording of peaceful gatherings at the demand of state bodies and/or official persons thereof did not make it into the final version. Likewise removed were norms about the rights and duties of a journalist that replicate the law on the mass information media. The law entered into force on 6 June 2020.

On 30 December, the president of Kazakhstan signed a law “On the introduction of changes and additions to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on questions of information”. These changes are aimed at resolving two main tasks - strengthening control and responsibility and expanding the sphere of application of the law. In the opinion of journalists, the law does not expand access to information for media employees,



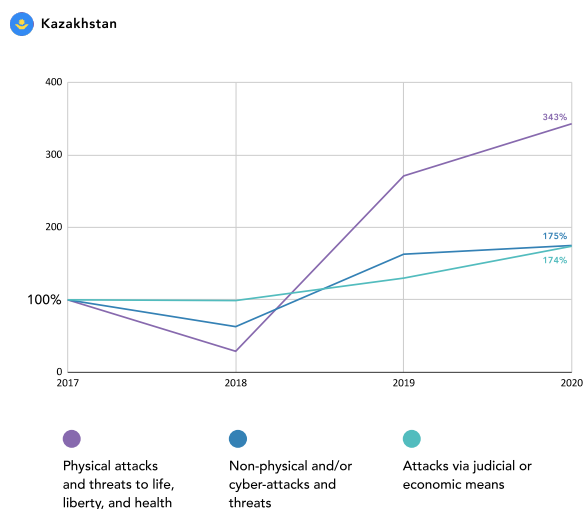
citizens, and non-governmental organisations. According to this new law, a journalist may be stripped of accreditation for violating the rules of accreditation: i.e. furnishing an incomplete package of documents, incorrectly filling out an application, a court decision on suspending/terminating the activity of a media outlet, and for spreading information that does not correspond to reality and tarnishes the business reputation of the state bodies that had accredited it and civic associations and organisations, as well as upon application by an owner of a media outlet or an editorial office. It is not indicated in the law who is going to determine that that or the other information does not correspond to reality and is tarnishing the business reputation of state bodies.

### 3/ GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

Graph below represents a quantitative analysis of the three main types of attacks in relation to journalists on the territory of Kazakhstan in the period from January 2017 through December 2020.

#### Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020

Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)

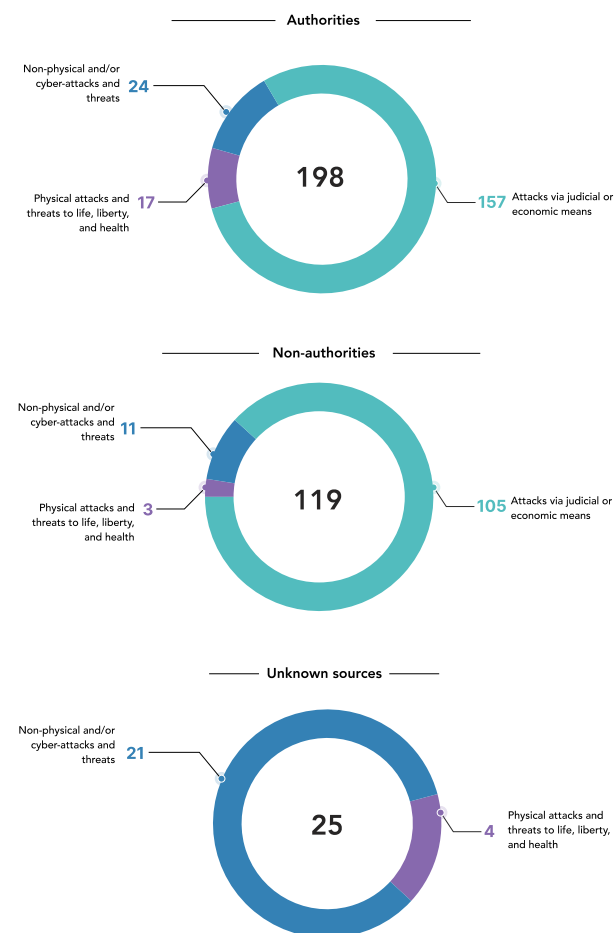


The number of attacks in all three categories rose from 2017 through 2020. In comparison with 2017, in 2020 the quantity of attacks via judicial and/or economic means increased by 34%; there were 6% more non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats, and 26% more physical attacks and/or threats to life, liberty, and health.

The main objective of the threats is to impede the publication of materials and to suppress civic activism. Threats of physical violence remained unpunished in practice: cases with respect to the not large number of claims lodged by representatives of the media were either quietly dropped or closed “due to the absence of the event of a crime” in nearly one hundred percent of the cases.

#### Initiators of attacks on media workers

**Kazakhstan**



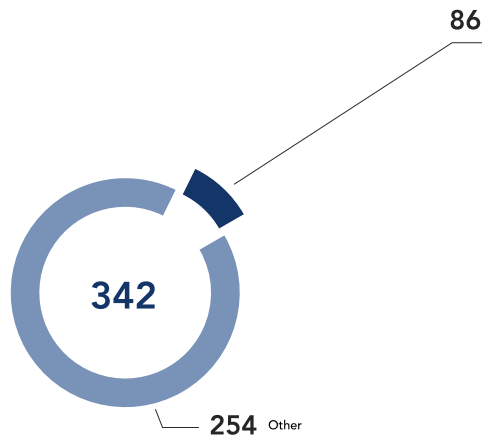
For the purposes of more precisely reflecting combination assaults on media workers in 2020 we are introducing a new category of attacks – **hybrid**.

We are calling systematic persecution of some publication or media worker with the use of tools from two or more categories of assaults – physical, non-physical, and judicial/economic – “hybrid”. Such a combination of means involving and not involving force with judicial means of pressure on undesirable journalists is carried out with a view to demoralising them or getting them to self-censor or to give up the profession or even life itself.

In 2020, 86 hybrid attacks were recorded, of which 63 attacks committed against 7 journalists. Presented below is the list of the journalists and bloggers who were being subjected to the most intensive hybrid attacks in 2020.

## Hybrid attacks on media workers

Kazakhstan



### of which 63 attacks committed against 7 journalists

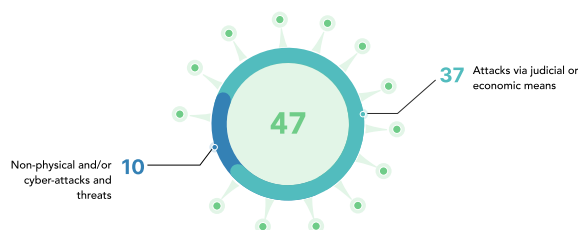
Media worker	Total	Phys.	Non-Phys.	Jud.
Aslan Sagutdinov, blogger	12	1		11
Aygul Utepova, blogger	9	1		8
Alnur Ilyashev, online activist	9		1	8
Maria Melnikova, Radio Azattyk	8	1		7
Aktamak Koptleuova, blogger	7	1		6
Azamat Baykenov, blogger	7	1		6
Roman Reichert, online activist	6	2		4

## 4/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A state of emergency was introduced in Kazakhstan in connection with the spread of COVID-19, and quarantine restrictions remained in effect after it had been lifted. In this context, attacks were undertaken in relation to journalists, bloggers, and online activists via judicial and/or economic means (37 instances), as well as non-physical attacks and threats (10 instances). The main source of the threats (43 instances) are representatives of the authorities.

### Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic

Kazakhstan



The graph represents the sub-categories of attacks/restrictions within the framework of the quarantine measures. Remaining in the top troika of methods of pressure on media workers, bloggers, and online activists are court trials (12) on charges of dissemination of knowingly false information in the period of a state of emergency and violation of the state of emergency regime, illegal impediments to journalistic activity (9), and administrative arrests and remand (7).

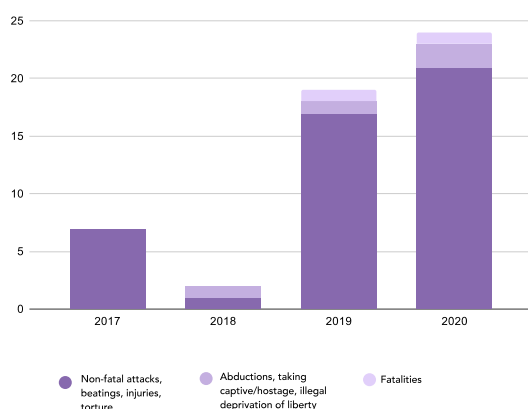
- On 28 March, blogger and civic activist Dias Moldalimov [*Moldaälimov*] was detained and delivered to the Almaty Police Department in connection with a pre-trial investigation into dissemination of knowingly false information in the conditions of a state of emergency (article 274 of the Criminal Code of the RK). The investigator proposed that Moldalimov give confessional testimony; Moldalimov, however, exercised his constitutional right and refused. The reason for the prosecution became a video address on a YouTube channel from 27 March, in which Moldalimov had severely criticised the actions of the authorities during the time of the quarantine.
- On 18 April, civic activist Alnur [*Älnür*] Ilyashev was arrested for two months on suspicion of “dissemination of knowingly false information during the time of a state of emergency”. On 22 June, the online activist was sentenced to three years of restriction of liberty, 100 hours of community service, and a five-year prohibition on public activity. His posts on Facebook criticising the ruling party, Nur Otan, formed the basis of the charges. Ilyashev declared that the verdict was a way of silencing him.
- On 18 April, a well-known public figure, former head of the KTK television channel Arman Shurayev [*Şoraev*], was detained in Karaganda [*Qarağandı*] on suspicion of dissemination of knowingly false information in the conditions of a state of emergency. Shurayev was placed in a temporary holding pre-trial detention facility. On 20 April, with the sanction of the court, he was released against a signed pledge not to leave the city.
- On 24 April, a production team from the KTK television channel – correspondent Beken Alirakhimov [*Älirahymov*] and television camera operator Manas Sharipov [*Şärpov*] – was detained on the territory of the regional hospital in Atyrau at the time of shooting a story about the transfer of 257 medical personnel who had been in contact with

infected people to a specialised early treatment tuberculosis clinic in Mahambet District. The journalists were charged with violation of the state of emergency regime. An administrative court issued them a penalty in the form of a warning.

## 5/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

### Physical attacks

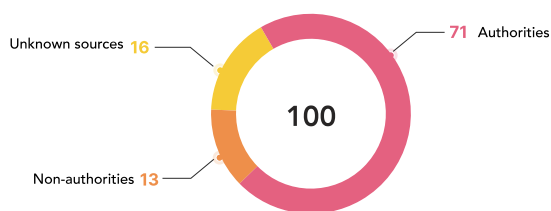
Kazakhstan



24 physical attacks and threats to the life, liberty, and health of media workers were recorded in 2020. Of these, 20 were non-fatal attacks, beatings, and injuries, in 13 of which the journalists suffered as the result of the actions of police and security service employees.

### Initiators of physical attacks on media workers (relative figures)

Kazakhstan



- On 10 January, security at the KazMedia Ortalygy [Ortalığı] television centre grabbed Vlast.kz journalist Tamara Vaal and began twisting her arms as she was trying to record Kazakhstan vice-premier Roman Sklyar's commentary after a briefing.
- On 22 February, civic activist and blogger Aslan Sagutdinov was detained next to the place of an alleged unsanctioned rally in Uralsk. During the arrest, they tore his jacket; one of the policemen split his lip with a blow to the head. After Sagutdinov started feeling unwell in the police station (as the result of the ensuing aneurysm), they drove him in an ambulance to a hospital.

- On 17 March, head of the 101tv.kz public internet television Botagoz [Botaköz] Omarova was beaten, by a security employee working for a construction company, to which she had come with an editorial query.
- On 25 September, *Radio Azattyq* journalist Khadisha Akayeva [Aqayeva], covering detentions in Semey, reported that she had been subjected to a brutish detaining by police. "When they were dragging me into the police van, they injured my finger, broke my nails, and tore out some of my hair", recounted Akayeva.
- On 24 October, *Radio Azattyq* reporter Saniya Toyken was subjected to an assault by a policeman while covering an event in support of political prisoners.

The only fatal incident took place on 24 February 2020: the online activist Dulat Agadil [Ağadıl] died in a pre-trial detention facility in Nur-Sultan several hours after being taken into custody. According to the official story, death came due to acute cardiac insufficiency. Many activists and human rights advocates do not believe this story. They consider that the civic activist had been subjected to torture in the pre-trial detention facility, after which he passed away.

Two instances of the use of punitive medicine are known about:

- On 12 November, a court decreed to place blogger and journalist Aygul Utepova [Aigül Öteпова] in a specialised early treatment psychiatric clinic for involuntary observation. The author of critical posts had been detained on suspicion of participation in the banned DCK movement and placed under house arrest on 17 September 2020.
- On 16 April, online activist Asanali Suyunbayev [Asanali Süieubaev] was detained, and after that placed in a psychiatric hospital. The hospitalisation was implemented with the participation of the police officers who had stopped Suyunbayev on the street.

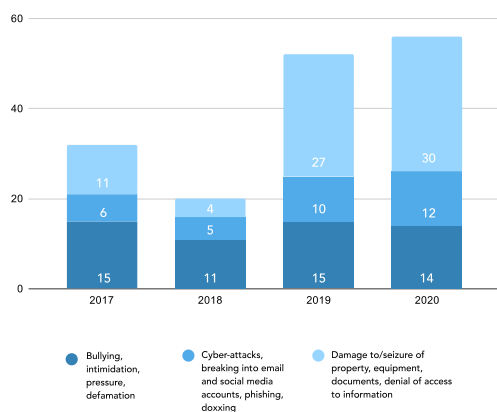
One instance of pressure on a media worker by means of physical pressure on relatives and loved ones was recorded:

- On 31 March, a criminal case of "organisation and participation in the activity of a civic or religious association or other organisation after a decision of a court on the banning of their activity or liquidation in connection with the implementation by them of extremism or terrorism" (article 405 of the Criminal Code of the RK) was initiated in relation to civic activist Roman Reichert. On 31 March, policemen conducted a search in his house. They used violent force on Reichert and his wife when the activist tried to get dressed. His wife Regina Belalova tried to film what was happening, but they snatched the smartphone from her.

## 6/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

### Non-physical / cyber-attacks

Kazakhstan



The most popular methods of pressure on media workers, bloggers, and online activists are: illegal impediments to journalistic activity, denial of access to information (25); bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber- (11); and damage to/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials, print run (5).

It ought to be noted that in 19 of the 25 instances, representatives of the media encountered impediments to journalistic activity on the part of representatives of the authorities. The impediments were expressed in refusing admittance or denying an online connection for media representatives to sessions of state bodies and courts, creation of obstacles to coverage of various events, and prohibitions on commenting on high-profile court trials.

- On 6 June, when *Radio Azattyq* reporter Dilara Isa was conducting a video shoot of rally participants being detained in Shymkent [*Şymkent*], two unknown persons tried to prevent the detainings from getting into the shot by blocking the camera with umbrellas. One of them introduced himself as an employee of the internal policy administration of the Shymkent akimat. Besides that, a man working in the press service of the city police department was continuously shooting video of the reporter as she was working.
- On 3 August, news resource *iagorod.kz* journalist Irina Starikova was not allowed into a meeting between entrepreneurs and the deputy *akim* [*mayor*] of the city of Rudny. "An employee of the Rudny akimat's internal policy section reported that the upcoming meeting was 'closed' and admission is not allowed," writes Starikova. After that an employee of the security service tried to prohibit

the journalist from shooting video and photos on a smartphone camera.

The second widespread method of attacks on journalists was bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber- (11 instances):

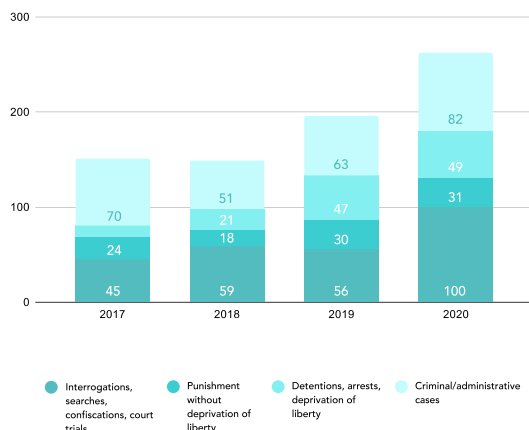
- On 2 March, MIA «KazTAG» correspondent Mahambet Abzhan [*Äbjan*], who had earlier been released early on parole, received a notification on WhatsApp from the precinct police inspector. The policeman reported that the journalist must come to division No. 28 of Saryarka District of Nur-Sultan and stay in a temporary holding cell until morning, because a session related to his case was scheduled to take place in the administrative court in the morning. As the precinct inspector said, "now there is such a way of doing things, that everybody's trial goes like this". After Abzhan wrote about this on Facebook, the question of spending the night in the police division was taken off the table.
- On 17 June, it became known that pressure is being exerted on civic activist Alnur [*Älnür*] Ilyashev in a pre-trial detention facility. "They're planting provocateurs and people who threaten me in the cell! It has likewise become known to us that Alnur's state of health has deteriorated sharply and they're not providing him with the proper medical care! His chronic illness, asthma, has become acute! The system is trying to break him or physically destroy him!", reports the prisoner's close associate Marat Türymbetov.
- On 12 September, journalist Tairbek Bozekenov [*Täuirbek Bözekenov*] declared that he was being threatened with judicial prosecutions because of publications on Facebook. The journalist writes about the environmental situation in the region of Atyrau. The threats came after Bozekenov's refusal to remove the publications.
- On 2 December, a well-known blogger from Shymkent, Kirill Pavlov, reported about a threat of reprisal and the police's refusal to take his statement reporting the crime: "There is a threat to my life. A person who had previously openly expressed dislike for my ethnicity writes that he will come to Shymkent, deal with me, cut me, stab me. I had to go to the police, but the report of the crime was not accepted, they asked me to wait for someone. Just in case, I will post this video so that you know that if something happens to my family or me, blame Shyngys Sadenov [*Şynğys Sädenov*] for it", said Pavlov in a video on Facebook.



# 7/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

## Judicial / economic attacks

Kazakhstan



In 2020, the top five main methods of pressure on media workers included: court trials (59), charges of libel and reputational damage (53), summonses for interrogation and questioning (28), short-term detention (22), and administrative arrests, remand, and pre-trial detention (16). The majority of short-term detentions of journalists took place during coverage of protests.

Court trials are the most widespread method of pressure on journalists, bloggers, and online activists in Kazakhstan. In the majority of situations, criminal cases on charges of dissemination of false information, inciting hate, and participation in the activity of an extremist organisation, as well as administrative cases for violating the state of emergency regime, end with guilty verdicts. Short-term detentions and arrests precede the charges in such cases.

- On 16 May, the Petropavlovsk city court sentenced blogger Azamat Baykenov to one year of restriction of liberty, suspended, on a charge of "participation in the activity of a banned organisation". Besides that, the court obligated Baykenov to pay 10 monthly calculation indices (around 27 thousand tenge, or on the order of 65 dollars) into the Victims' Compensation Fund. The blogger was prohibited from using social media over for three years. Baykenov denies the charges.
- On 20 September, blogger and journalist Aygul Utepova [Aigül Ötepova] was placed under house arrest in connection with the investigation of a criminal case of participation in the activity of a banned organisation. Utepova was prohibited from leaving her place of residence except to visit medical institutions "based on the state of her health and the health of close relatives". On 12 November, the court sanctioned Utepova's

hospitalisation in a specialised early treatment psychoneurological clinic "for the conducting of a psychological-medical expert evaluation". The journalist's lawyer and relatives appraise the court's decree as an attempt to isolate the author of critical posts. On 23 November, the police took Utepova from her home to the clinic, where she remained until 11 December. Doctors concluded that she is perfectly healthy.

- On 20 November, the court of Turkestan Region sentenced online activist Murat Baidautov [Mūrat Baidäuletov] to one year of restriction of liberty for "participation in the activity of a banned organisation". The activist was likewise assigned four hours of compulsory work per day until the moment he finds a permanent job. As the judge declared, Baidautov had made a live broadcast on Facebook in which he had spoken out in support of the programmes of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan and Koshe [Köşe] partiyasy movements, which were banned by a Kazakhstani court.

In 40 out of 53 instances, the accusations of journalists with libel, insult, and reputational damage came from non-representatives of the authorities.

- On 2 March, the Sino-Kazakh oil production company «SP «Kazgermunai» turned to the Bostandyq District Court of Almaty with a claim for the protection of business reputation against the owner of the *Caravan.kz* media resource - the Kazakhstan Today agency and the correspondent Adil Urmanov.
- On 18 May, a court ruled in favour of businessman Malik Yesenbayev's claim against the editorial office of the newspaper *Vremya* and the journalist Mikhail Kozakov. The editorial office has to publish a retraction of the controversial information presented in the article "Porochnye svyazi" ["*Nefarious Ties*"], remove this material from the newspaper's website *time.kz*, and pay out 80 thousand tenge (around \$200) to the plaintiff as compensation for pain and suffering.
- On 28 May, a statement of claim for the protection of honour, dignity, and business reputation was received by the Pavlodar City Court from the entrepreneur Georg Speiser [Shpeyzer]. The object of the suit became a publication posted on 1 April by Pavlodar journalist Alexander Baranov in his Facebook account. The author of this "April Fool's joke" fantasy article had warned that all the heroes and events had been made up and that any similarities to actual persons or events were coincidental. However, Speiser discerned the dissemination of unreliable information in the publication. He is demanding retractions and a payout of compensation from the journalist in an amount of 1 million tenge (around \$2500) for infliction of pain and suffering.



# KYRGYZSTAN

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT KYRGYZSTAN REPORT

Kyrgyzstan, which only recently was known for its high level of freedoms in the sphere of journalism in comparison with the neighbouring countries of Central Asia, has tumbled in the ratings to the dangerous level of a “not free” country.

For a long time the turbulence inherent in the political space of Kyrgyzstan did not affect the mass media; however, it has now gripped the entire media sector, including social media.

Journalists and bloggers covering the most sensitive topics of the previous year in Kyrgyzstan – the revolution in October, the government’s incommensurate reaction to the COVID-19 epidemic and its inability to prevent the socio-economic fallout from it, the large-scale corruption in the state customs inspectorate, the mass violations during the time of the parliamentary elections – were subjected to a comprehensive attack on the part of the authorities and political influence groups involved in corruption.

Aggression in relation to media workers and bloggers was being expressed in threats, hacker attacks, raider capture of an entire media enterprise, and physical violence, including in retaliation for publishing the results of an independent investigation of facts of corruption, as well as in exceeding official powers and vigilantism.

The extraordinary situation that has emerged in Kyrgyzstan, including as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the revolution of 5 October 2020, has been marked by unprecedented pressure on independent media outlets and a sharp rise in the level of impunity for state bodies of power.

Thus, the recognised prisoner of conscience Azimzhan Askarov [*Alimjon Asqarov*] perished under extremely murky circumstances in prison, despite a multitude of requests for him to be rendered urgent medical assistance.

Editor-in-chief of Factcheck.kg Bolot Temirov, famous for his anti-corruption investigations, was beat up right next to his office.

An entire online campaign of threats and insults with features of xenophobia and misogyny was rolled out against independent journalist Alena Khomenko.

Security personnel were torturing foreign journalist Bobomurod Abdullayev, temporarily found in Kyrgyzstan, and extradited him at the request of Uzbekistan, despite his request to be granted asylum.

Judicial authorities likewise played a role in restricting freedom of speech. In 2020 the verdicts issued by courts in lawsuits against journalists did not appear just, as they were protecting the positions of individual state officials the source of whose assets was raising questions among the public.

The authorities were in essence encouraging aggression in relation to the media, leaving journalists’ and bloggers’ police reports about threats and the impeding of their work without attention. But things were not limited to this. A series of legislative acts was adopted that significantly restricted freedom of speech and access to information. Besides that, violence against professional and citizen journalists on the part of the law-enforcement agencies demanding the retraction of publications in online publications and on social networks acquired a systematic character.

**Ernest Zhanaev**  
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# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS, AND MEDIA WORKERS IN KYRGYZSTAN IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

**86** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional and citizen media workers and editorial offices of traditional and online publications in Kyrgyzstan in 2020 were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data were obtained from open sources in the Russian, Kyrgyz, and English languages using the method of content analysis. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 8**.

1. The main method of pressure on journalists, bloggers, and media workers in Kyrgyzstan, as in previous years, were attacks via judicial and/or economic means.
2. A record quantity of summons of journalists for interrogations was recorded in 2020 – 15 (there had been 6 such incidents in 2019, 4 in 2018, and one in 2017).
3. The greatest number of attacks occurred in the period after the civil disobedience on 6 October.
4. A general narrowing of the space for freedom of speech was observed in 2020 in Kyrgyzstan against a background of legislative initiatives encouraging censorship, sanctions for “manipulating information”, and crackdowns on investigative journalists and bloggers.
5. The journalist and human rights advocate Azimzhan Askarov [*“Alimjon Asqarov” in Uzbek*] died on 25 July 2020. He had been imprisoned for more than 10 years for his anti-corruption investigations. The State Service for the Execution of Punishments had been asserting that the journalist, who had been sentenced to life imprisonment, did not have problems with health, and was not providing him medical assistance.

## 2/THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MEDIA IN KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan took 82nd place in the Reporters Without Borders non-profit’s **annual rating** for 2020. The situation with freedom of the press in the country improved insignificantly over the year: Kyrgyzstan held the 83rd spot in the rating in 2019, and 98th in 2018.

According to the rating of the international human rights organisation Freedom House, for the first time in the last 11 years, Kyrgyzstan moved from the list of “partly free countries” to “not free” ones. It is **clarified** in the report that “Kyrgyzstan’s status declined because the aftermath of the deeply flawed parliamentary elections featured significant political violence and intimidation that culminated in the irregular seizure of power by a nationalist leader and convicted felon who had been freed from prison by supporters”.

55 television companies (3 of them state-owned), 26 radio stations, 68 newspapers, and 75 news agencies and online publications operate in Kyrgyzstan as of 1 September 2020. Such data was cited in the mass media on the eve of the the agitational campaign before the **parliamentary elections**. There is no other data as of the moment of publication of the report.

By law, 50% of media content must be published in the state (Kyrgyz) language; therefore, practically all media outlets in Kyrgyzstan are multilingual. The bulk of them come out in two or three languages – Kyrgyz, English, and Russian.

Pluralism is present in a series of media outlets, especially in the Kyrgyz language; a narrowing of the space for freedom of speech is being observed in recent years, however, due to the strong informational influence of Russian propaganda channels, the greater part of which broadcast as part of free digital bundles on the territory of Kyrgyzstan.

2020 in Kyrgyzstan was marked by large political upheavals. A third revolution took place unexpectedly in the country: on 6 October, thousands of citizens who disagreed with the results of the parliamentary elections stormed a series of administrative buildings in Bishkek, including the House of Government.

The ensuing events – the declaration of the results of the elections as invalid, the resignation of the president, extraordinary presidential elections, and initiatives with respect to changing the Constitution – merely worsened the situation with rights and liberties, which reflected on the media and journalists. Against the background of the raider captures of ownership that accompany all revolutions in Kyrgyzstan, many media outlets’ editorial offices were subjected to assault and takeover.



Alarm was raised by the initiatives of the new authorities. For example, within the framework of an Edict on the Mass Information Media, it was recommended to “propagandise the values of traditional society”, which many interpreted as an introduction of censorship.

The situation was exacerbated by the adoption by parliament of a law On Manipulating Information, which establishes censorship. The law allows the authorities to demand the removal of information which in the opinion of bureaucrats is “unreliable” from internet sites without a court’s sanction. The concept of an “authorised body” that is going to issue decrees about the removal of “false” information is introduced; however, it is not clarified exactly who is going to be identifying such content, in what manner, and by what criteria. The adoption of the law evoked mass protests in Bishkek. Thousands attended the “ReAction” **march in defence of freedom of speech** on 29 June.

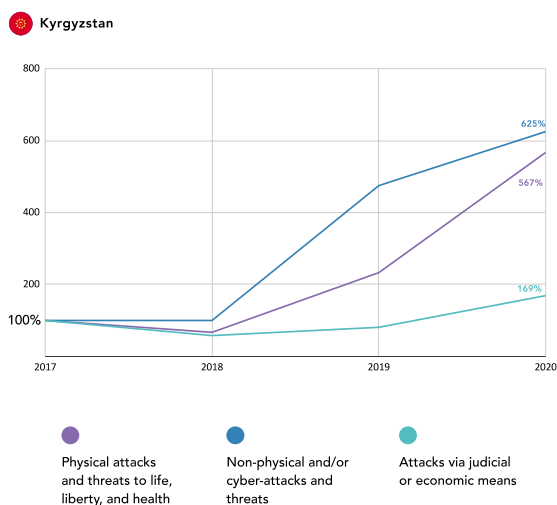
Uncovering corruption in the bodies of power continued after the high-profile journalistic investigations of 2019. This work encountered obstacles; harassment of the media and attacks on freedom of expression intensified.

### 3/ GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

86 attacks/threats in relation to journalists, bloggers, media workers, and editorial offices of traditional and online publications were recorded throughout 2020, 83 percent more than in 2019. The number of physical attacks and attacks via judicial and/or economic means increased two-fold; the quantity of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks increased somewhat as well.

#### Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020

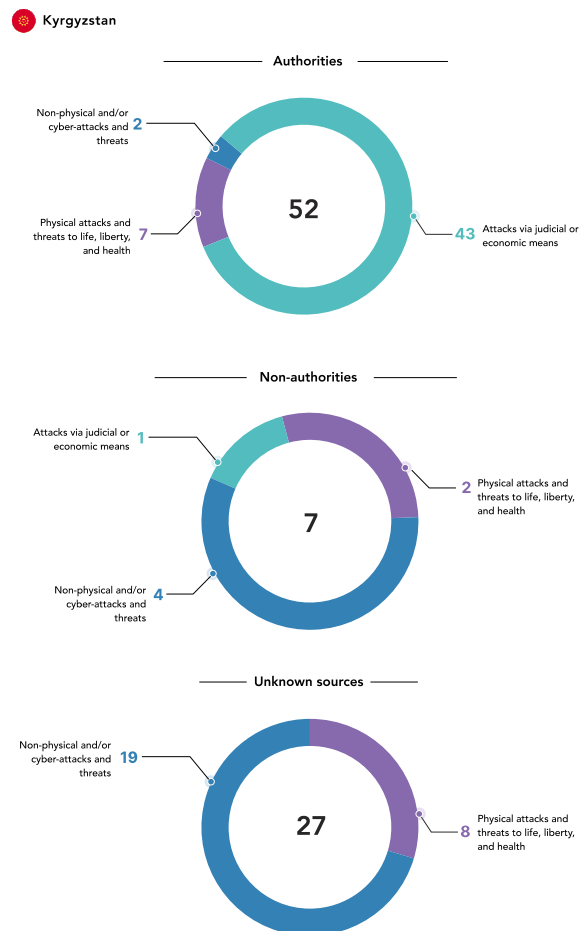
Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)



The upsurge in attacks was connected with the political upheavals and the pandemic:

1. At least 10 journalists and media workers suffered physically whilst covering street protests and dispersals of demonstrators in the period from 5 through 10 October 2020. In three of these instances, the correspondents were attacked by the police and spetsnaz.
2. The revolutionary events in the country reflected on the cyber-security of journalists as well: in private conversations they were reporting about constant trolling and online threats during coverage of sensitive socio-political topics. Many of the correspondents, fearing direct threats, were deleting their social media accounts and creating new ones, trying not to advertise this.
3. In the first days after the revolution, a series of attempts were undertaken at raider captures of media outlets, which were accompanied by assaults.
4. Emergency regimes were introduced in a series of Kyrgyzstan’s cities and regions in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, which turned into disproportionate restrictive measures in relation to media outlets and journalists.
5. New laws were adopted encouraging censorship, sanctions for “manipulating information”, and a continuation of crackdowns on investigative journalists and bloggers.

#### Initiators of attacks on media workers



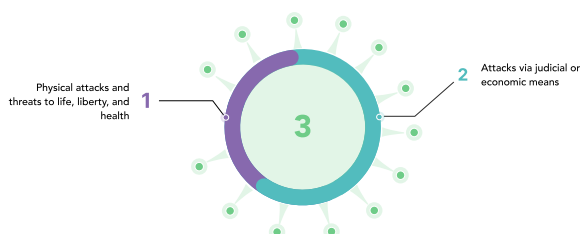


## 4/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The precise quantity of media outlets that were denied accreditation during coverage of the topic of COVID-19 in the quarantine period is unknown. According to expert estimates, it is around 25-30 media outlets.

### Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic

Kyrgyzstan



In March-April 2020, the authorities forced bloggers and journalists to apologise for criticism addressed at the government in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. The Foundation has recorded three attacks connected with the adoption of quarantine measures in the period of the pandemic:

- On 30 March, the authorities denied Kyrgyzstan's media outlets accreditation in the period of the state of emergency for coverage of the coronavirus pandemic. Bishkek's police commandant Almazbek Orozaliyev explained this as concern for the health of the journalists.
- On 11 June, *Kaktus.media* correspondent Marat Uraliyev was conducting a video shoot in the vicinity of the Kaynar restaurant in Bishkek, where many high-level politicians and officials had gathered, including parliamentary deputies [MPs]. The journalist was intending to raise the question of violation of quarantine rules - the prohibition on mass events. However, during the time of the video shoot one of the security guards assaulted Uraliyev and began to choke him. The journalist managed to free himself and report the incident to the police.
- On 13 August, Marat Uraliyev was summoned for interrogation to the police of Kara-Suu District of Osh Region. They did not explain the reason; however, in the editorial office they are confident that this is connected with his professional activity. In July, the journalist had been shooting vid-

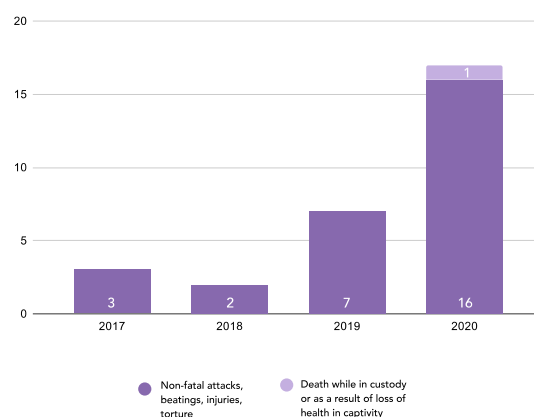
eo for a report about how there was a wedding being conducted in the Bayastan restaurant, situated in Kara-Suu District, in the period of the pandemic despite the prohibition. In his material the journalist showed that the guests at the event were deputies [MPs], employees of the GKNB [State Committee for National Security], and other high-level officials. Earlier, in June, a criminal case had been initiated in relation to the administration of the cafe under the criminal code article "Violation of sanitary-epidemiological rules".

## 5/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

Physical attacks and/or threats to life, liberty, and health in relation to journalists and media workers were most often perpetrated in the moment they were carrying out professional duties.

### Physical attacks

Kyrgyzstan



In comparison with the previous year, the quantity of physical attacks increased more than two-fold: from 7 incidents in 2019 to 17 in 2020. 15 episodes are attributable to the "non-fatal attack/beatings/injury/torture" category. One incident of attempted murder was recorded during the period of the October protests:

- On 5 October, *Nastoyashcheye vremia* [Current Time] correspondent Aybol Kozhomuratov published a video recording on his Twitter account in which a spetsnaz soldier is firing at him during a video shoot of the disturbances on the street. In the journalist's words, he was wearing a reflective vest, and the security man could see that he was filming the incident.

One journalist died while incarcerated:

- Journalist and human rights advocate Azimzhan Askarov, sentenced to life imprisonment, died on 25 July in penal colony No. 19 in the village of Jany-Jer of the Chuy Region. He had had problems

with his health; they were however denying this at the State Service for the Execution of Punishments. Askarov was locked up in prison in June 2010 for covering ethnic conflicts in the south of Kyrgyzstan, and prior this he had been writing about corruption among law-enforcement agency employees for more than ten years.

More than half (9 out of 17) of the documented attacks occurred in October 2020. In the majority of cases attacks of the given type were likewise accompanied by damage to/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials:

- On 4 October, an unknown woman attacked Radio Azattyk journalist Aygerim Asylbekova, who was broadcasting live on the air from a polling station during the time of parliamentary elections. The assailant damaged a camera and was demanding that the video shoot be stopped.
- On 5 October, *Vesti.kg* journalist Eldos Kazybekov was conducting a video shoot of a clash between rally participants and state security personnel in the centre of Bishkek. One of the law-enforcement agency employees threw a rock at him.
- On 6 October, correspondents and camera operators from the *Reporter.kg*, *24.kg*, and *Kloop.kg* news agencies were subjected to an assault on the part of protesters in the centre of Bishkek. Several people were aggressively trying to take away recording equipment from the *Kloop.kg* camera operators. The correspondents from *Reporter.kg* had their smartphones taken away, which they had been using to conduct a video shoot.
- On 6 October, *Radio Azattyk* regional correspondent Dastan Ümötбай Uulu was subjected to an assault from an aggressively disposed crowd when he was covering a rally in the city of Osh.
- On 7 October, *kaktus-media* journalist Tanzilya Mingaliyeva was broadcasting live on the air from a rally by supporters of ex-parliamentary deputy [MP] Sadyr Japarov. At this moment several drunk people surrounded the journalist, assaulted her, and took away a smartphone with force. Neighbourhood watch citizen volunteers who happened to be passing by helped Mingaliyeva fight off the assailants. They returned the telephone to the journalist.
- On 10 October, freelance photoreporter Igor Kovalenko was setting off for a photoshoot in the village of Koy-Tash, where the residence of former president Almazbek Atambayev is situated. When Kovalenko got close to a checkpoint, three military service personnel blocked his way and grabbed a camera from his hands, declaring that taking photos is prohibited. The journalist managed to hold on to his camera and to break through the checkpoint.

Other assaults on media workers connected with their professional activity were recorded over the reporting period as well:

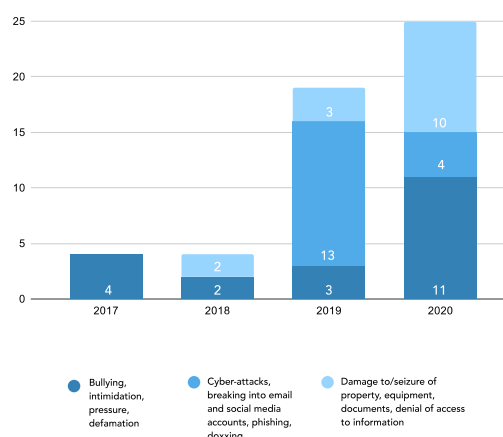
- On 9 January, editor-in-chief of *Factcheck.kg* Bolot Temirov was beaten up near his office in Bishkek. Three unknown men of an athletic build assaulted him, knocked him down, were beating him for several minutes, and took away a telephone. *Factcheck.kg* is famous for its investigations of contentious topics.
- On 8 March, *Aprél* television channel journalist Kanat Kanimetov was beaten in Bishkek by five policemen, sustaining injuries to his head and kidneys. He was broadcasting live on the air from a march by feminists against violence and for women's rights. A fight broke out at the event when members of a right-wing extremist group attacked the march participants.
- On 8 March, *Kloop.kg* journalist Ayzirek Imanaliyeva was assaulted by a radical right grouping during the feminists' march. One of the nationalists grabbed her smartphone from her and smashed it.

## 6/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER ATTACKS AND THREATS

The most widespread methods of pressure in the given category are damage to/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials, print run (8) and bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber- (8).

### Non-physical / cyber-attacks

Kyrgyzstan



The most common category were threats to journalists and bloggers from unknown perpetrators (19 of the 25 incidents) – on the internet, by telephone, or on the street. All of the threats were connected with journalistic activity, while the main goal of the assailants was to silence the media workers.

During the October events, trolling of journalists was so intense that many of them were simply deleting their social media accounts and setting up new ones. As one of the journalists at a seminar on fighting against gender stereotypes and online harassment organised by the [School of Peacemaking and Media Technology in Central Asia](#) clarified, in some cases “it was easier to delete your social media account and start a new online life, than it was to try and sort things out with them and to complain, because you’re not going to get to the truth anyway”.

- On 3 March, unknown persons broke into the editorial office of the online publication *PolitKlinika* and took away a hard drive and journalists’ writing pads. Prior to this, the publication’s reporters had been conducting investigations dedicated to the property of the now already former mayor of Bishkek, Albek Ibraimov, charged together with ex-president Atambayev with crimes in office.
- In the period from 10 to 12 May, trolls were calling for protests in the name of the *April TV*. The calls to attend rallies were disseminated on social media supposedly on behalf of journalists from the opposition television channel, which belongs to former president Almazbek Atambayev. Management of the television company called the provocative calls a “ludicrous and outrageous fake”, while media experts assessed this as a deliberate attack with the aim of discrediting *April’s TV* journalists.
- On 7 June, unknown persons threw a bottle with an incendiary mixture into the office of the independent television channel 3 in the city of Talas. All equipment necessary for broadcasting was incinerated during the time of the fire. The head of the media outlet, Jannat Toktosunova, declared that the arson had been “deliberate and planned with the aim of intimidating journalists”.
- On 6 October, a group of people with a former journalist from state television of the KR at the head broke into the office of the independent *Channel Five [5TV]*. The ringleader of the group was demanding to be granted air time and declared that he intended to become the new general director.
- On 7 October, Erkin Ryskulbekov, a presenter with the Public Television Channel (KTRK), reported receiving threats of retaliation addressed to him after participating in the *Eksperttertaldyt* (The Experts Analyse) show on Radio Azattyk.
- On 9 October, independent journalist Alena Khomenko was being threatened on Facebook after she had expressed her opinion on social media about the illegitimacy of the then-acting president of the KR, Sadyr Japarov. 15 hateful comments addressed at her contained xenophobic comments based on ethnicity and calls to get


out of Kyrgyzstan, as well as threats and insults based on gender. Khomenko reported to an expert at the Justice for Journalists Foundation, that publications in which she was criticising the authorities had begun “disappearing” from her Facebook page.

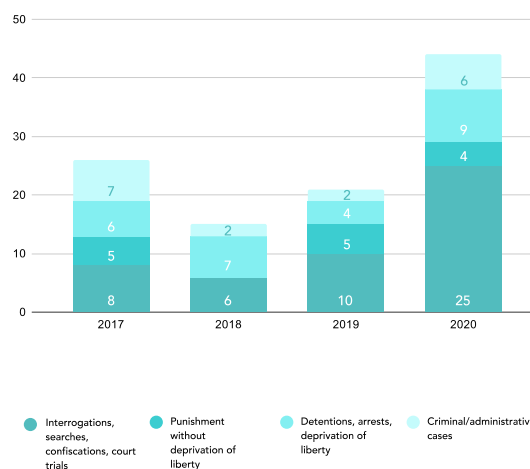
Only two non-physical attacks came from representatives of the authorities:

- On 2 June, the State Committee for National Security [GKNB] accused *Radio Azattyk* investigative journalists of receiving bribes. Deputy chief of the investigative administration of the GKNB of Kyrgyzstan Saghyrbek Samidin uulu, appearing at a session of a parliamentary commission, declared that 100 thousand dollars had supposedly been passed on to the journalists. President of the *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* corporation Jamie Fly described this statement as “threatening and attempting to intimidate the journalists”.
- On 14 August, an employee of the Sverdlov District Internal Affairs Department of Bishkek called 24.kg journalist Ruslan Kharizov on the telephone and asked him to come to the police. The journalist refused to appear before an investigator without a summons: the caller had not clarified with respect to what case or in connection with what publication Kharizov had been summoned..

## 7/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

### Judicial / economic attacks

 Kyrgyzstan



The main methods of pressure in the given category were interrogations and questioning (15) and court trials (9). It ought to be noted that in comparison with 2019 the quantity of attacks and threats via judicial and/or economic means more than doubled.

- On 15 January, editor-in-chief of the *Asia News* newspaper Aslanbek Sartbayev was summoned for interrogation to the Military Prosecutor's Office in the case of former deputy head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Kursan Asanov, charged with abuse of official powers. At that moment Asanov was under house arrest in a case of the storming of the residence of former president Almazbek Atambayev in August 2019. The majority of the journalists covering this event were summoned for interrogations to law-enforcement agencies and the GKNB after the storming.
- On 12 February, *Yntymak* television channel journalist Mimoza Janybek Kyzy, citing her own sources, wrote on Facebook about the collection of passports from local students for participation in elections. On 6 March, the journalist was summoned for interrogation by telephone without an official subpoena. In her words, the investigator at the interrogation was asking her to reveal the source of the information.
- On 15 July, blogger Nazgul Aymkylova, presenter of the satirical project "Stand Up", was summoned for interrogation to the State Committee for National Security. Earlier, she had posted a video on social media into which she had inserted the face of the president of Kyrgyzstan with the help of a special app. The blogger had written "That rapper guy has such a swift reaction - hacked us from Almaty! I wish he'd react to the situation in the country with the same speed", hinting at the dire epidemiological situation. After the post was published there were attempts to break into the Stand Up webpage.
- On 29 July, blogger Adyl Akjol Uulu was summoned for interrogation for a published video report from the burial of a taxi driver whose charred body had been found in Uzgen District of Osh Region. The blogger was summoned for a talk to the Osh administration of the GKNB without a subpoena – the investigator had called him and asked him to come "as quickly as possible". The GKNB employee demanded that he delete the video recording of the live broadcast from the burial, inasmuch as it could supposedly "incite inter-nationality enmity".
- On 25 November, *Kloop.kg* journalist Askarbek Myrzabekov was summoned for interrogation to the internal affairs department of Chatkal District of Jalal-Abad Region in connection with a video shoot of a meeting of an *aiyl kenesh* [*aiyl* - a Kyrgyz village; *kenesh* - a representative body of local self-administration, elected by citizens of Kyrgyzstan for a term of five years] with the participation of eco-activists and representatives of gold mining companies. In Myrzabekov's words, at the interrogation the investigator was demanding that he show the video that had been shot of the meet-

ing, was reading the journalist's personal correspondence on the WhatsApp messaging service, and forced him to delete the video that had been uploaded to YouTube.

Court trials are yet another widespread method of pressure on journalists:

- On 22 January, the Ministry of Health of Kyrgyzstan filed suit in court against the *Achyk sayasat plus* newspaper. The publication was accused of causing harm to the reputation of one of the officials at the ministry. The occasion became an investigative publication about inflated prices for medicines and bootleg medicinal products. The Pervomaysky District Court of Bishkek partially satisfied this claim and obligated the newspaper to pay out compensation for pain and suffering in an amount of 50 thousand Kyrgyz soms (800 US dollars), as well as to publish a retraction.
- On 17 June, the Bishkek City Court obligated the *Asia News* newspaper to pay out 50000 Kyrgyz soms (around 700 US dollars) in a lawsuit on defence of the honour and dignity of former vice-premier Jenish Razzakov. In March 2019, after armed clashes on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border, the newspaper's journalists published an article about Razzakov's collaboration with Tajikistan's special services.
- On 23 June, the Pervomaysky District Court of Bishkek decreed to confiscate the property of the *April* television channel along with other personal property of former president of the KR Almazbek Atambayev, sentenced to 11 years of deprivation of liberty. The *April* television channel is now working in internet broadcast format.
- On 23 September, the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan obligated the *Asia News* newspaper to pay out compensation in an amount of 300 thousand Kyrgyz soms (around 2400 US dollars) to minister of internal affairs Kashkar Junushaliyev. The minister had filed suit for defence of honour and dignity against the publication in 2019 because of information published as well as a collage. The minister demanded 5 million Kyrgyz soms (around 40 thousand dollars) from the journalists. Courts of all instances supported Junushaliyev's complaint, but the sum of the claim was reduced.

Four journalists were arrested:

- On 20 January, editor of the *Chyndyk* newspaper Tursunbek Beyshenbekov was detained after a repeat interrogation in the Military Prosecutor's Office. The next day they transferred Beyshenbekov to serve under house arrest for two months. As the media reported, citing lawyers, the detained journalist is being suspected of complicity in abuse of official position (article 320 of the CC of the RK), as well as of knowingly false reporting



of the commission of a crime (article 344 of the CC of the RK). They are connecting the case with the fact that the newspaper had been criticising vice-premier Jenish Razakov. Former deputy minister of internal affairs Kursan Asanov may be involved with these publications.

- On 19 February, according to a decision of the Oktyabr District Court of Bishkek, blogger Elmir Sydymanov (Sydyman) was placed in an investigative pre-trial detention facility for two months. Earlier Sydymanov had published a video on his Instagram page in which he had declared that the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan – Osh, Batken, and Jalal-Abad – were undeveloped. He was detained on suspicion of inciting inter-nationality hate (article 313 of the Criminal Code of the KR). However, experts did not find features of inciting hate in his pronouncements. On 28 February, the blogger was transferred from the SIZO-1 pre-trial detention facility to house arrest.
- On 31 July, in Karakol of Issyk-Kul [*“Ysyk Köl” in Kyrgyz*] Region, Achyk sayasat newspaper journalist Asylbek Bektenov was detained for 48 hours and placed in a temporary holding pre-trial detention facility. The region’s administration of internal affairs reported that the journalist was being suspected of extortion. However, the newspaper’s editor-in-chief declared to Azattyk radio that Bektenov had been “detained because in his materials he was pointing to the shortcomings of the authorities in Issyk-Kul Region”.
- On 10 August, Bobomurod Abdullayev, an independent journalist from Uzbekistan, while visiting Kyrgyzstan, was placed in detention in a GKNB pre-trial detention facility until 8 September 2020. This decision was issued by the Pervomaysky District Court of Bishkek, after Abdullayev had been detained on the evening of 9 August by employees of the State Committee for National Security in one of the cafes of Kyrgyzstan’s capital at the request of Uzbekistan’s special services. After a month they handed the journalist over to Uzbekistan, despite the protests of international human rights organisations.

Pre-trial proceedings under the criminal code article on stirring up enmity were opened against one journalist:

- On 15 February, the law-enforcement agencies of Kyrgyzstan began pre-trial proceedings in relation to blogger Timur Bolcharov under article 313 of the Criminal Code of the KR - “stirring up racial, ethnic, nationality, religious, or inter-regional enmity (hate)”. As media reported, the blogger is being prosecuted for a post on social media in which he was discussing the mass disorders and inter-ethnic pogroms in Qordai District of Kazakhstan, situated 20 km from the border with Kyrgyzstan.



# MOLDOVA

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT MOLDOVA REPORT

In 2020, media outlets and journalists on duty did not enjoy the degree of security provided for in the legal framework in force. Although Moldova no longer witnesses the liquidation of media outlets and the seizure of newspaper circulations, unlawful sanctions and the intimidation of journalists remain routine.

Journalists have been charged penalties for slander (misdemeanor) and many journalists have complained of being intimidated verbally, physically or through legal cases, including by high-ranking public officials. The attitude of the authorities, including state leaders, toward the independent press has encouraged behavior that must be repudiated.

The pandemic and chronic political instability of 2020 drastically fueled the problems in the media sector. The extensive powers rendered to the Commission for Emergency Situations (CSE) after declaring a constitutional state of emergency, threatened the right of access to information. In addition, officials' persistent refusal to provide complete and timely information resulted in an inaccessible and opaque government. On March 18, CSE extended the deadline from 15 to 45 days for government agencies to respond to information requests. A few days later, the Security and Intelligence Service blocked access to more than 50 websites for allegedly "promoting fake news about the evolution of the coronavirus and protection and prevention measures." On March 24, the Broadcasting Council (CA) ordered broadcasters to present only the government's official position in their coverage of the pandemic and prohibited journalists from expressing their opinions on related topics. These moves spurred fierce criticism from the media, civil society, and the country's ombudsman.

Journalists' personal security was certainly affected by the pandemic, but with no pertinent statistics at hand, it is impossible to tell how much it has affected the health of those working in the media sector. The front-line media representatives could benefit of vaccines only after the Journalists' Crisis Cell **urged** the Ministry of Health to include the journalists at high risk of getting infected in the group of people eligible for the second phase of vaccination.

As evidenced by the numerous precedents reported by media NGOs, the independent media did not enjoy cyber, economic, legal or physical security to a proper extent. Moldovan journalists cover sensitive issues at their own risk and understand that the state will not protect them, as it should, as reprehensible cases of harming media continue to be ignored by law enforcement bodies. The cases of **journalists being intimidated by military men** of the joint peacekeeping forces in the Transnistrian region shows that the Republic of Moldova is unable to ensure citizens' rights guaranteed by the national legislation and through the angle of commitments undertaken at international level.

In 2020, national media NGOs (including watchdog groups, professional associations, and free speech advocates) were those who came in support of the journalists, stating publicly their concern about these dangerous precedents and asking the authorities to intervene. Regrettably, in most of the cases, the authorities neglected the calls.

**Cristina DURNEA**  
Legal Advisor, **Independent Journalism Center**

# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS AND MEDIA WORKERS IN MOLDOVA IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

**68** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional and citizen media workers and editorial offices of traditional and online publications in Moldova were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data were obtained from open sources in the Russian, Romanian, and English languages using the method of content analysis. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 9**.

1. In 2020 the most frequent forms of intimidation and persecution of Moldova's media workers were non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats, namely: defamation, spreading libel about media outlets or media workers, and illegal impediments to journalistic activity/denial of access to information.
2. The main source of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats in relation to media workers were representatives of the authorities, including politicians, parliamentary deputies [MPs], president of the Republic of Moldova Igor Dodon (until 15 November 2020), and other persons holding public office at the central and local/regional levels.
3. Of the five physical attacks against journalists recorded in 2020, four were carried out by employees of the State Protection and Guard Service, policemen, and Russian military personnel stationed in Transnistria.
4. Charges of libel, insult, and reputational damage are the most widespread variety of judicial attacks on journalists and media workers in Moldova. Six cases of the given subcategory were recorded in 2020.
5. The most attacks on journalists were recorded during protests and important political events, for example: 2 March – a protest by veterans of the Transnistrian conflict; 20 July – consideration by the parliament of a vote of no confidence in the government; 12 August – a protest by the workers of private preschool day care centres; 9 September – registration of Igor Dodon as a candidate for president; 15 November – the second round of the presidential elections; 16 December – a protest by farmers.

It should be noted that some attacks and threats do not become known to the public and are not reflected in the media because many journalists consider attacks in the virtual space and non-physical threats to be an unavoidable part of their everyday professional activity and therefore do not report them.

## 2/ THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MEDIA IN MOLDOVA

In 2020, the Republic of Moldova remained in 91st place out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders annual freedom of the press rating.

According to the data of the Broadcasting Coordinating Council, the state television and radio broadcasting regulator, there were 60 television channels and 55 radio stations in the country in 2019.

According to the data of the National Statistical Bureau, 126 newspapers with an overall annual circulation of 40 million copies and 205 magazines and other periodical publications with an overall annual circulation of 1.5 million copies were published in Moldova in 2018. In the conditions of COVID-19, print media circulation shrank significantly, while some newspapers and magazines ceased publishing altogether.

According to the **Barometer of Public Opinion** – a survey conducted by the Institute for Public Policy of Moldova in October 2020 – the main source of news for citizens is television: 71% of those surveyed watch television daily. In second place – the internet, which is used by 66.2% of the population daily, and in third place – radio, which is listened to by 34% daily, while the press and books remain the choice of a minority. Television is likewise the source of news that elicits the greatest trust among the population – that is what 22.8% of those surveyed responded (this is 8 percentage points less than in June 2020). The internet holds second place in terms of level of trust with 20.8%, followed by family (9.9%), radio (3.8%), and friends and neighbours (3.2%).

After the 2019 parliamentary elections, the Democratic Party of Moldova was toppled from power; its chairman Vladimir Plahotniuc, an oligarch associated with criminal schemes, fled the country, while his media holding, General Media Group (GMG), the largest in the country, lost its influence. In the course of 2020, Moldova's pro-Russian president Igor Dodon and the ruling Party of Socialists subordinated the main institutions of state to themselves, including the Broadcasting Coordinating Council, while the media group affiliated with this party, which includes a minimum of four television channels (*Primul în Moldova*, *NTV Moldova*, *TNT Exclusiv TV*, *Accent TV*), the newspapers *Argumenty i fakty Moldova* and *KP v Moldove*, and more than ten websites, gained significantly in size and strength. As such, the situation in the country's media market changed marginally: a sig-

nificant part of the media institutions remain under the direct or indirect ownership of politicians, while their editorial policy depends on the political and business interests of the owners.

National media experts were bringing attention in 2020 to the ruling Party of Socialists' unwillingness to improve legislation and adopt measures to stimulate the development of independent media outlets. According to the **2020 Moldovan press status index** produced by the Independent Journalism Centre, the unfavourable situation is brought about, on the one hand, by the government's lack of concern for improving legislation, and on the other hand, by the frequently inadequate application of the legal provisions in force for regulating media activity. At the same time, the problem with access to socially significant information became more acute in 2020, especially after the decision by the Supreme Court of Justice, adopted in June, according to which the Law on Access to Information is "obsolete" and "not applicable" after the new revision of the Administrative Code entered into force. After a multitude of filings and pleas by representatives of non-governmental organisations, media outlets, and lawyers, the Supreme Court of Justice reversed its decision.

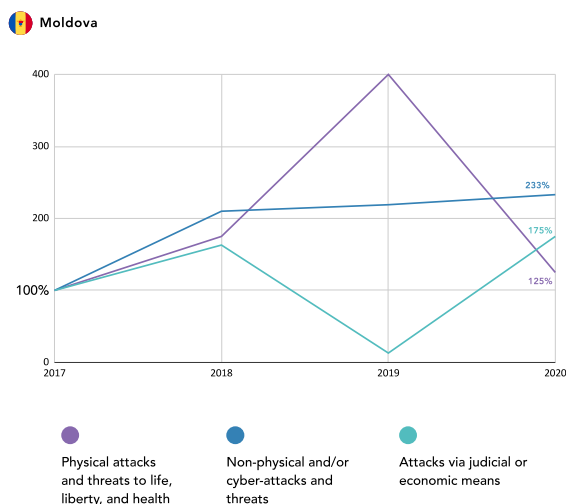
Presidential elections took place in November 2020, in which Maia Sandu, leader of the pro-European Action and Solidarity party, became the country's new president. Sandu does not have any of her own or party media resources.

### 3/GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

Below presented the generalised data concerning the three main types of attacks/threats with respect to media workers in Moldova in 2020: physical attacks and threats to life, liberty, and health; non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats; and attacks via judicial and/or economic means.

#### Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020

Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)

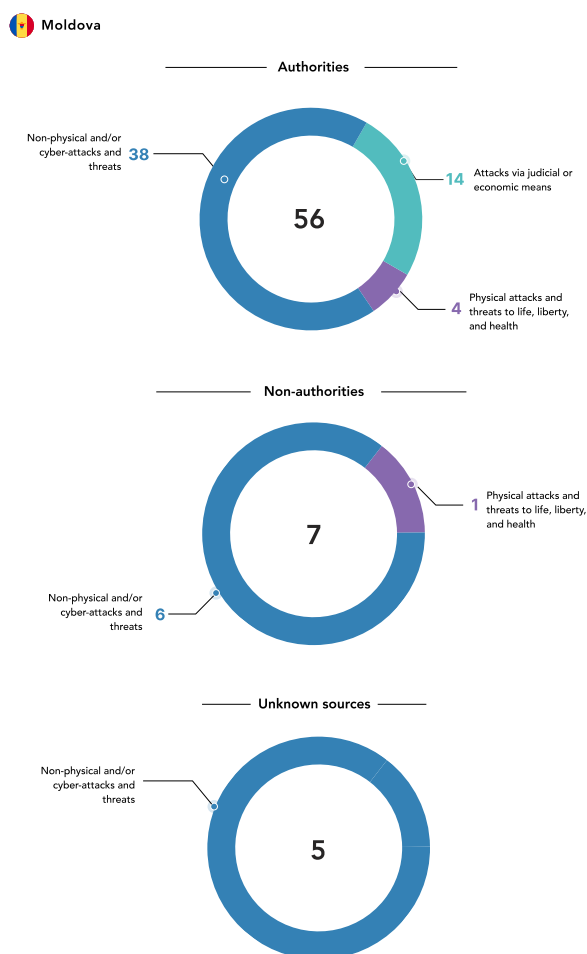


68 instances of attacks/threats were recorded in the course of 2020; the greater part of these (49) have the nature of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats, including defamation campaigns, illegal impediments to journalistic activity, bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence, and online harassment on social media.

In three of the five instances of physical assault on media workers, what is being referred to is physical attacks and threats to the life, liberty, and health of journalists who were covering protests.

In 2020, representatives of the authorities continue to remain the sources of the attacks/threats in relation to media workers in 82% of the incidents. Among their number: government officials, parliamentary deputies [MPs], other persons holding public office at the central and local/regional levels, and employees of state guard services, who defamed and spread libel about journalists/editorial offices or impeded journalists in the implementation of their professional duties, in some cases resorting to violence. In 11% of the instances, journalists and other media workers became the victims of attacks and threats on the part of private persons or companies, while in 7% of the instances it proved impossible to establish from whom the threat was coming.

#### Initiators of attacks on media workers



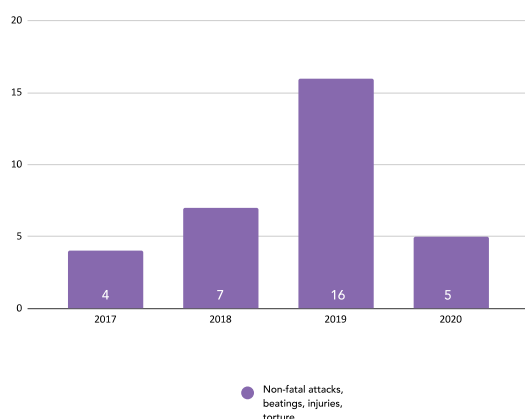


In 2020, employees or editorial offices of 22 media institutions, as well as media-related NGOs, were subjected to attacks/threats. The most attacks were recorded against the *TV8* television channel (13 instances), the *Ziarul de Gardă* newspaper (11 instances), the *PRO TV Chişinău* television channel (8 instances), and the *Nordnews.md* regional internet portal (5 instances).

## 4/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

### Physical attacks

Moldova



The quantity of physical assaults on media workers fell from 16 incidents in 2019 (the majority of these being recorded during the political standoff in the country in May-June) to 5 incidents in 2020.

- On 2 March 2020, during a protest by veterans of the Transnistrian conflict, one of the protesters approached Nicolae Paholniţchii, a correspondent for the *Newsmaker.md* internet portal who was doing a live broadcast from the place of the protest, demanded that he not speak in Russian, and tried to take a telephone away.
- On 2 July 2020, employees of the State Protection and Guard Service used force on *TV8* television channel journalist Mihaela Dicusar, who was trying to pose questions to president Igor Dodon, chairwoman of the parliament Zinaida Greceanîi, and prime minister Ion Chicu after a flower-laying ceremony at the monument to prince Ştefan cel Mare on the day of the anniversary of his death.
- On 21 July 2020, *TV8* television channel journalist Viorica Tătaru was subjected to an assault on the part of Russian military personnel from the contingent of peacekeeping forces in the Transnistrian Region. She was forbidden to photograph or film, and was hit on the arm. She dropped her telephone, after which one soldier tried to erase all the images from it.

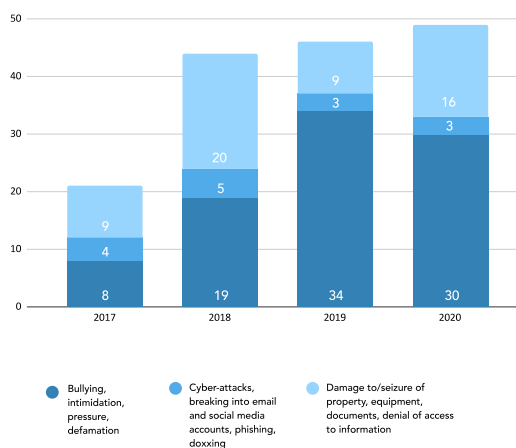
- On 16 December 2020, during a protest by farmers in front of the parliament building, masked employees of law-enforcement agencies used tear gas against *Jurnal TV* television channel journalist Iulia Sarivan, who was covering the protest.
- At that same protest, tear gas was used against *PRO TV Chişinău* television channel camera operator Sergiu Bîrlădianu.

## 5/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

Non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats remain the most widespread form of pressure on journalists in Moldova – in 2020, 73% of attacks and threats were of a non-physical nature (this indicator increased a little over the year). Compared with 2019, the quantity of attacks of two types increased sharply – defamation, spreading libel about a media worker/media outlet, and illegal impediments to journalistic activity, denial of access to information. In 38 of the 49 instances, the source of the attack was representatives of the authorities, primarily government officials.

### Non-physical / cyber-attacks

Moldova



Attempts at defamation were undertaken most often in relation to the *TV8* television channel (4 instances), the *Ziarul de Gardă* newspaper, and the *PRO TV Chişinău* television channel (3 instances each). The following are characteristic examples:

- Speaking at a plenary session of the parliament, a deputy [MP] from the ruling Party of Socialists, Vlad Batrîncea, accused journalists of receiving thousands of euros in envelopes, without payment of payroll taxes. The deputy underscored that during the pandemic western partners are sending financial support to Moldovan media outlets and not to the state.

- Former vice-premier Iurie Roșca accused the Mold-street.com internet portal of publishing commissioned material-for-hire to defame him.
- In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, some clergymen accused journalists from the *Ziarul de Gardă* and *Gazeta de Chișinău* newspapers of lying about the novel coronavirus.
- Russia's embassy in Moldova accused the *TVR-Moldova* television channel of falsifying history after a report was aired about events of the years 1940-1941 in Bessarabia.
- 8 instances of attacks were recorded on 12 October, when at the height of the presidential election campaign, a deputy [MP] with the ruling party, Bogdan Țirdea, published a book in which he accused a series of independent media outlets of being "hirelings" and "foreign agents" and promoting the candidate Maia Sandu for president. Among the media outlets and NGOs mentioned were the television channels *TV8*, *PRO TV Chișinău*, and *Jurnal TV*, journalist Alina Radu of the *Ziarul de Gardă* newspaper, *API* (Association of Independent Press), the Independent Journalism Centre, the Centre for Investigative Journalism, and *RISE Moldova*.

The majority of instances of illegal impediments to journalistic activity and denial of access to information were recorded in the second half of 2020, during the pre-election campaign. The regional internet portal *Nordnews.md* and the *TV8* television channel reported more frequently than anybody else about such attacks addressed at them. It is worth noting that in 9 of the 15 recorded instances journalists were not allowed into meetings of then-President Igor Dodon or then-Prime Minister Ion Chicu.

In particular, during the 20 July vote in the parliament on the question of confidence in the government, the State Protection and Guard Service closed off access for journalists into the plenary sessions hall, while on 9 September, on the day of Igor Dodon's registration as candidate for president, this same service was holding journalists back in the hall of the Central Electoral Commission and not letting them pose questions to Dodon.

Likewise, in April, one incident was recorded of illegal surveillance upon the direction of the authorities: after critical statements addressed at the ruling party by the journalist Natalia Morari on the *TV8* television channel, a series of websites and Telegram channels published still photos of her private meeting with a group of political activists.

Several DDoS attacks and hacker attacks were recorded in 2020. In particular, *Moldova 1* public television, the *Radio Orhei* radio station, and the *Moldpres* news agency were subjected to cyber-attacks.

Likewise recorded were two incidents associated with the COVID-19 pandemic:

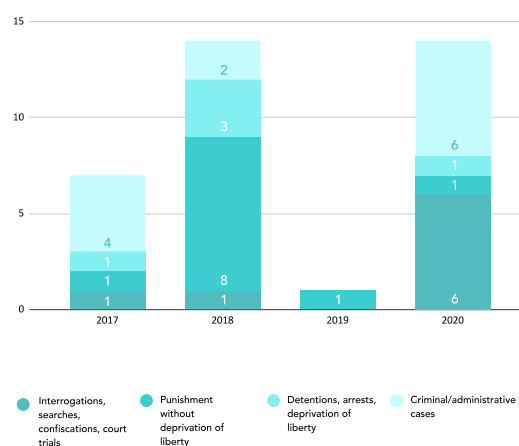
- On 29 April, after the publication of material in which a newspaper was criticising former vice-premier Iurie Roșca, who was advancing various conspiracy theories about microchip implantation through vaccine and 5G technology, Roșca unleashed a torrent of invectives at *Ziarul de Gardă* newspaper journalist Diana Gațcan through his Facebook page.
- On 30 July, a *NordNews* camera crew was denied entry onto the territory of a sunflower seed oil plant that prime minister Ion Chicu was visiting. The reason - compliance with restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the meantime, a camera crew from a television channel affiliated with Igor Dodon was allowed into the plant.

## 6/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

14 instances of attacks via judicial and/or economic means were recorded in 2020; this comprises 19% of the overall number of attacks and threats.

### Judicial / economic attacks

 Moldova



They affected six editorial offices and the employees of two newspapers – *Ziarul de Gardă* (6 instances) and *Znamya* (2 instances), two television channels – *PRO TV Chișinău* (2 instances) and *TV8* (2 instances), and two internet news portals – *Deschide.md* and *Ziarulnațional.md*.

- In March 2020, president Igor Dodon filed a lawsuit against the *Ziarul de Gardă* newspaper after publication of an investigative journalism piece on the topic of Dodon's and his family's expensive holidays abroad.

- In May 2020, parliamentary deputy Eugeniu Nichiforciuc filed a lawsuit against the Deschide.md internet portal, after the portal's journalists had shot video of his meeting in a hotel with other politicians and businessmen.
- In July 2020, an employee of the *Ziarul de Gardă* newspaper was summoned for interrogation in the capacity of a witness: the investigator was demanding that he reveal his source of information in connection with the publication of an investigative journalism article.
- In September 2020, the ruling Party of Socialists filed a lawsuit against the *PRO TV Chişinău* television channel and the journalist Lorena Bogza, who had supposedly libelled the party in one of the broadcasts.
- On 15 November 2020, on the day of the second round of the presidential elections, *TV8* television channel journalist Cătălin Goră was detained by the police of the Transnistrian Region. After some time, the journalist was released. They also confiscated his documents.
- In December 2020, deputy editor-in-chief of the *Ziarul de Gardă* newspaper Victor Moşneag was summoned for interrogation in the capacity of a witness. The investigator from the prosecutor's office for fighting organised crime and for special cases demanded that the journalist reveal who had furnished the editorial office with the documents published in an investigative journalism piece.





# RUSSIA

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT RUSSIA REPORT

Described in detail in the Justice for Journalists Foundation's report is the "legal framework" of repressions in relation to journalists and violations of freedom of speech and freedom of the media. New laws on "foreign agent" media outlets and on the rules for coverage of mass public assemblies, as well as excessive restrictive measures in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, are making the work of professional and citizen journalists and the ability to help them on the part of human rights organisations even more difficult.

Russian journalists working at protest actions are ever more frequently being held liable under the criminal code article on participation in public events. Short-term detentions of journalists take place despite their carrying editorial assignments and wearing distinguishing markings: yellow "Press" vests and badges on the chest.

More and more often the authorities have begun having grievances against not-large regional (both registered and unregistered) mass information media within the framework of the so-called "Yarova's law". Roskomnadzor is demanding that they voluntarily join the register of organisers of disseminators of information. For a not-large regional media outlet or a blog this signifies closure of the publication, because the cost of the hardware required comprises several million roubles.

Among those receiving such demands were *Svobodnye novosti* (Saratov) and *Dovod* (Vladimir). The *Dovod* publication managed to escape inclusion in the register. Likewise, not-large publications are being subjected to pressure — for example the website *The Vyskha*, which constitutes a student media outlet. Roskomnadzor blocked the website, having accused it of disseminating prohibited content. In many cases Roskomnadzor blocks a publication's website in its entirety without warning.

Lawsuits on defence of honour, dignity, and business reputation (article 152 of the Civil Code) from companies and persons affiliated with the state have become more frequent as well. Thus, "Putin's chef" Yevgeny Prigozhin filed a lawsuit against the publications *Meduza* and *Dovod* with a demand to delete publications and refute the facts of his criminal past. The *Russia Today* television channel and Anton Krasovsky filed an analogous lawsuit on defence of honour, dignity, and business reputation against *Novaya gazeta* and the political columnist Leonid Gozman.

Lawyers with the Human Rights Project by Open Russia are actively working in Moscow and the Russian regions on the cases mentioned and others, helping independent media outlets and media workers lodge complaints about assaults, illegal detentions, and arrests, as well as Roskomnadzor's demands, and to make their case in Russian courts. Among the people we are defending — journalists with such publications as *Ekho Moskvy* (Saint Petersburg), *Kommersant*, *Novaya gazeta*, *Meduza*, *ZakS.ru*, *Fontanka*, *Vazhnye istorii*, and others.

**Anastasia Burakova**  
Coordinator, Human Rights Project by Open Russia



# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS, AND MEDIA WORKERS IN RUSSIA IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

**1284** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional and citizen media workers and editorial offices of traditional and online publications as well as Russian journalists abroad in 2020 were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data were obtained from open sources in the Russian and English languages using the method of content analysis. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 10**.

1. The number of attacks against professional and citizen journalists in 2020 was unprecedented for Russia and was more than double the total quantity of attacks over the three previous years.
2. 8 Russian journalists perished in this year, including Irina Slavina from Nizhny Novgorod who committed suicide as the result of many years of harassment, opposition Chechen blogger Imran Aliyev who was killed in France, blogger Mamikhan Umarov ("Anzor from Vienna") killed in an Austrian suburb, and Orenburg journalist Aleksandr Tolmachev who died one month shy of release from a penal colony after a 9-year term.
3. The rise in the number of attacks against journalists took place primarily via judicial and economic means. Representatives of the authorities stood behind them in 93% of the cases.
4. COVID-19 offered additional pretexts to persecute journalists: 188 attacks were recorded in this category from the end of March through the end of December 2020, including 3 beatings, 47 charges of disseminating unreliable information, and 48 fines and administrative offence reports for violating rules on self-isolation.
5. 133 instances were recorded of illegal short-term detentions (for a period of up to 24 hours) and arrests (for a period from 24 hours to 30 days) of media workers at various protest rallies despite their having editorial assignments and press cards.

One can certainly consider the improvement in the system for collecting and updating data on assaults on Russian professional and citizen journalists as a positive phenomenon. Organisations engaged in monitoring attacks on journalists and media workers include:

OVD-Info, Roskomsvoboda, Human Rights Project by Open Russia, the Journalists' and Media Workers' Union, the Glasnost Defense Foundation, and the international human rights group Agora.

## 2/ THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MEDIA IN RUSSIA

A high degree of state influence on the media is a distinguishing feature of the media landscape in Russia. Russia holds 149th place out of 180 for the second year in a row in the Reporters Without Borders **annual freedom of the press index** for 2020, between Honduras and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Russia has dropped 28 places in the 19 years that have passed since the first rating took place. As Reporters Without Borders note: "As TV channels continue to inundate viewers with propaganda, the climate has become very oppressive for those who question the new patriotic and neo-conservative discourse, or just try to maintain quality journalism".

According to the **Freedom on the Net** report for 2020 drawn up by Freedom House, internet freedom is absent in Russia (30 out of 100 points in comparison with 34 points in 2017). By this indicator Russia finds itself in the same group of countries as Belarus, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, China, Cuba, and Saudi Arabia. Freedom House associates the absence of internet freedom with draft laws, particularly those on the "sovereign internet", aimed at increasing online censorship.

Freedom House notes that "In spring 2020, the government deployed intrusive surveillance systems, ostensibly to enforce its COVID-19 quarantine regime, and worked to censor or deter the circulation of any content that conflicted with official reports on the pandemic."

### Overall quantity of media outlets and audience reach

According to the **data** of Roskomnadzor [*the Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media*], as of 30 September 2020 the overall quantity of actively functioning registered mass information media outlets comprises 62,876, which is 6.6% less than in the analogous period of 2019. Of these, 40,413 are print media, 21,356 are electronic, and 1107 are news agencies.

The leading TV channels in 2020 **remain** *Russia-1* (average daily audience in Russia's large cities– 1.3 million people), *Channel One* (audience– 1 million 128 thousand), and *NTV* (a million viewers per day). There is not a single channel in the main broadcasting line-up that offers independent, objective information.

The only such channel is *Rain*, which is accessible on the internet, on devices with the Smart TV function, and on cable television. On 3 February 2014, represen-

tatives of *Trikolor TV* announced that they were terminating cooperation with *Rain* due to the channel's editorial policy.

According to Deloitte's report "Media consumption in Russia 2020", the number of people reading print media continues to fall, having reached the lowest indicator in the past five years. A mere 38% of respondents read print publications (down from 57% in 2015). From 2009 to 2019, the quantity of newspapers and magazines in Russia shrank by 40%. According to Deloitte's data, the main source of news for Russians is the internet, including news, analytical, and official websites (72%). 40% get information from social media and blogs. Only 58% get their news from television programmes.

Proceeding from the data of the Levada-Center's annual report on the media landscape in Russia in 2020, television continues to be the main source of information for 74% of the population. The Levada-Center analysts note that trust in television has increased: 48% of respondents consider that it objectively covers economic topics and 57% feel that way about foreign policy. The use of internet sources (38%) and social media (39%) are continuing to grow. However, only 22% of those surveyed trust the news about the world and their country from internet publications and social media.

According to the data of the Mediascope company's establishment survey within the framework of the WEB-Index project, "In February-November of the year 2020 an average of 96.6 mln people, or 78.1% of the population of the whole country older than 12 years, used the internet in Russia at least once per month. On average 87.1 mln people, or 71.1% of Russia's population, went on the internet in a day".

### State media outlets

The main sources of funding for state media outlets, as was the case in 2019, are the state, AO Natsionalnaya Media Gruppa, and Gazprom-Media. 101.2 bln roubles were allocated for the state media in 2020, while in 2021 it is planned that 102.8 bln roubles of funding for the mass media will be allocated.

- At present, *Channel One* is owned by Rosimushchestvo [the Federal Agency for State Property Management] (38.9%), AO Natsionalnaya Media Gruppa (29%), VTB Capital (20%), TASS (9.1%), and Ostankino (3%). However, in December 2020 president of Russia Vladimir Putin enjoined the government to conduct the privatisation of *Channel One* in the shortest time possible in order to increase its financial stability.
- The founder of the private media holding company Natsionalnaya Media Gruppa is the Russian billionaire and owner of Severstal Alexey Mor-dashov. Among the number of Natsionalnaya Media Gruppa's media assets — *Channel One*, *REN TV*, *STS*, *Channel Five* [5TV], *Telekanal 78*, the *Izvestia* newspaper, and others.

- Gazprom-Media belongs to Gazprombank and owns the television channels *NTV*, *TNT*, *TV-3*, *Pyatnitsa*, and a multitude of other entertainment channels, magazines, internet platforms, and radio stations, including *Ekho Moskvy*. Ex-head of Roskomnadzor, Alexander Zharov, has been the director-general of Gazprom-Media Holding since 24 March 2020..
- The All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company [VGTRK] was founded by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR in 1990. The channels *Russia-1*, *Russia-2*, *Russia-24*, and others are a part of the corporation.
- The most popular Russian-language channel abroad is *Russia Today*, funded out of the budget of the RF. In 2020 the state spent 24.7 bln roubles on funding it. In 2021 this sum will increase to 27.3 bln roubles.

On 3 March 2021, information appeared about how the government of the Russian Federation was planning to increase the funding of the state programme "Informatsionnoe obshchestvo" [Information society], one of the goals of which is to increase the audience reach of the RT television channel and the citation rate of the *Rossiya segodnya* [Russia Today] agency, which includes *RIA Novosti*, radio *Sputnik*, and other projects. It is being reported that the authorities are planning to spend no less than 211.1 bln roubles "on support for the creation of television and radio programmes and electronic media outlets". 52.3 billion roubles are being earmarked for these tasks in 2021, 52.9 bln in 2022, and 53.4 bln roubles in 2023.

### Independent media outlets

Despite the fact that independent media outlets lag far behind the state media in terms of audience size, they often top the citation rate ratings in social media (quantity of links on social networks). According to the data of the Medialogia mass media monitoring and analysis service (63% owned by VTB bank), as of January 2021:

- The five most cited newspapers, as in 2019, include *Novaya gazeta* (5th place).
- The *Rain* television channel holds first place on the list of the most cited TV channels (657,957 hyperlinks on social networks per month).
- Among the most cited radio stations, first place is held by *Ekho Moskvy* and second by *Radio Liberty*.
- The top 4 places in the citation rate rating for internet resources belong to independent media: the *Meduza* portal holds first place, second is *Open Media*, third is *MBK Media* (having risen one spot in comparison with 2019), and fourth is *MediaZona*.

## Social media

According to the **data** of the Levada-Center for February 2021, the most popular social networks in Russia are VKontakte (43%) and YouTube (35%); third place is shared by Instagram and Odnoklassniki (31%), and in fourth place is TikTok (14%). The most popular messaging services are WhatsApp (59% of Russians use it), Viber (31%), and the VKontakte messaging service (18%). 12% of those surveyed use the Telegram messaging service. In comparison with 2019 the quantity of Russians who do not use messaging services shrank by 29%.

The most highly paid socio-political bloggers on YouTube according to *Forbes* **are** Yury Dud (8.81 million people are signed up to his channel; advertising income comprises \$980 000), Alexey Pivovarov (the *Redaksiya* YouTube channel, 2.3 million subscribers, income comprises \$920 000), Ksenia Sobchak (the *Ostorozhno Sobchak* YouTube channel, 1.94 million subscribers, advertising income – \$840 000), and Irina Shikhman (the *A pogovorit?* YouTube channel, 1.63 million subscribers; the channel's income from advertising is estimated at \$650 000).

According to Medialogia's **data** the top 5 Telegram channels covering socio-political topics, as of the end of 2020, included *Davydov.Index* (516.8 thsd.) and *Stalingulag* (368.8 thsd.). Indicated in the brackets is the size of the channel's audience (the rating is compiled on the basis of the average quantity of views of a single post, however).

## Legislation on the media

Restrictions on freedom of speech in 2020 were tightened even more against the background the COVID-19 pandemic:

- On 31 March 2020, amendments **were adopted** to the Criminal Code that strengthened punishments for public dissemination of knowingly false information. Pursuant to article 207.1 of the CC, such an act shall be punishable by a fine in an amount from 300 thousand to 700 thousand roubles or in an amount of one [*monthly*] salary or other income of the convict for a period from one year to 18 months, or by compulsory work for a term up to 360 hours, or by correctional work for a term up to one year, or by restriction of liberty for a term up to three years.
- Administrative liability for dissemination of unreliable information was increased as well. The punishment pursuant to article 13.15 of the Code on Administrative Offences prescribes a fine up to 300 thsd. roubles for individuals and up to 10 mln roubles for legal entities.
- A **law** was adopted on fines for violating quarantine, which in 2020 was widely used against professional and citizen journalists. For individuals

the fine comprises from 15 to 40 thsd. roubles, and for legal entities from 200 to 500 thsd. roubles or administrative suspension of activity up to 30 days. If the violation of quarantine entailed the causing of harm to health, then the fines go as high as 300 thsd. roubles for citizens and 500 thsd. roubles for legal entities.

In the **words** of director and lead lawyer of the Mass Media Defence Centre Galina Arapova, "the coronavirus has likewise had an impact on access to information – journalists were not being granted access to court trials. In many regions such a practice is continuing at the beginning of 2021 as well".

A large-scale offensive against civil rights continued in Russia in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. As Roskomsvoboda's **Pandemic Big Brother** monitoring shows, the Russian authorities were actively using drones, and surveillance through online state services websites and through mobile telephones, as well as video surveillance and facial recognition, for surveillance over citizens.

A package of repressive laws **was adopted** at the end of 2020, including ones on "foreign agent" legal entities, sanctions for "censorship of Russian mass information media", fines in the millions for refusing to remove information from websites, and criminal liability for "foreign agents", as well as criminal penalties for libel on the internet.

- On 28 December 2020, individual citizens were included for the first time in the **register** of foreign mass information media carrying out the function of a foreign agent: journalists Lyudmila Savitskaya, Denis Kamalyagin, and Sergei Markelov, human rights advocate Lev Ponomarev, and artist Daria Apakhonchich. Included in the register of "foreign agent" media outlets were *Voice of America*, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, their joint project *Nastoyashcheye vremya* [*Current Time*], and *Radio Liberty* sister projects: *Idel.Realii*, *Kavkaz.Realii*, *Krym.Realii*, the Tataro-Bashkirian service, *Sibir.Realii*, *Sever.Realii*, and *Faktograf*. Likewise entered in the register is the Czech news agency *MEDIUM-ORIENT*. The effect of the law on "foreign agent" media outlets extends to journalists working with foreign media outlets.
- Likewise **being introduced** from March 2021 is criminal liability for "foreign agent" individuals – citizens receiving funding from abroad and conducting political activity in the interests of a foreign source. "Foreign agent" individuals are required to label their materials as such. The founders, members, participants, and managers of "foreign agent" political associations and NGOs must do the same thing as well. Media outlets must likewise indicate a foreign agent's status in publications about them (this requirement does not extend to the publications of internet users,

including bloggers). For not furnishing documentation and other violations of the repressive law, persons designated as having “foreign agent” status can now be punished with a fine of up to 300 thousand roubles, or in the amount of a [monthly] salary or other income for a period up to two years, or by compulsory work for a term up to 480 hours, or by correctional work for a term up to five years, or by deprivation of liberty for that same term.

- Publication in the media of **information** about a “foreign agent” individual, as well as about materials produced by him or her, without the corresponding labelling, will entail a fine for individuals in an amount from 2 thsd. to 2.5 thsd. roubles, for corporate officers from 4 thsd. to 5 thsd. roubles, and for legal entities from 40 thsd. to 50 thsd. roubles. By 10 March 2021, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* and the director-general of its Russian division, Andrei Shary, were **fined** 53.9 mln roubles in cases of absence of labelling on the materials of a foreign agent.
- The **Law on sanctions** for censorship against Russians and Russian media outlets prescribes blocking, slowing down internet speeds, and administrative fines in relation to foreign internet platforms and social networks - YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. The slowing down of Twitter’s traffic “with the aim of protecting citizens” took place on 10 March 2021 at the request of Roskomnadzor. The agency is threatening this social network with total blocking in Russia.
- The State Duma **adopted** a draft law on fines for the owners of websites, including social networks and video hosting sites, for refusing to remove banned information. Fines for citizens will comprise from 50 thsd. to 100 thsd. roubles, for corporate officers from 200 thsd. to 400 thsd. roubles, and for legal entities from 800 thsd. to 4 mln roubles. The same kind of measures are prescribed for web hosting providers as well.
- On 30 December 2020, president Putin signed a **law** that stiffens the criminal liability for libel. Now the corresponding article prescribes a fine in an amount up to 1 mln rub. or in the amount of a [monthly] salary or other income of the convict for a period up to one year. Compulsory work for a term up to 240 hours, or forced work for a term up to 2 years, or arrest for a term up to two months, or deprivation of liberty for a term up to two years, can be assigned instead of a fine. The most serious punishment – deprivation of liberty for a term up to five years – faces those who disseminate libel about the commission of grave crimes, ones such as murder or rape.
- On 30 December 2020, a law was adopted that classifies information about employees of the law enforcement and security agencies and their rel-

atives as secret. The new document **introduces amendments** into the federal law “On the state protection of judges, official persons of law-enforcement and regulatory bodies”. In the **opinion of Galina Arapova**, lead lawyer of the Mass Media Defence Centre, the given amendment became a reaction to the anti-corruption investigative journalism of 2020.

The beginning of 2021 was marked by new repressive legislative initiatives, which make journalists more vulnerable:

- On 4 February 2021, the Federation Council’s commission on information policy and cooperation with the media **proposed** that the possibility of blocking social networks on which calls to participate in unsanctioned protests are being disseminated be prescribed in legislation. This proposal came after protests in support of Alexei Navalny.
- On 24 February 2021, a **law** was signed on increasing the fine for not carrying out the demands of law-enforcement and security agencies. For citizens the fine will comprise from 10 thsd. to 20 thsd. roubles, for corporate officers from 20 thsd. to 40 thsd. roubles, and for legal entities from 70 thsd. to 100 thsd. roubles.
- On 17 February 2021, the State Duma **approved** in the third reading a draft law on blocking illegal agitation on the internet. The law will allow Roskomnadzor, at the request of the Central Electoral Commission, to block pre-election agitation posted on the internet in violation of electoral legislation from the day elections are scheduled until five days after their results have been announced. Pursuant to this law, any pronouncement by citizens on the internet about their political preferences is going to be regarded as a violation of electoral legislation. Roskomnadzor **can** likewise force providers without going to court to temporarily block a resource where “illegal agitation” has been posted. If media outlets violate the law, the electoral commission must turn to the law enforcement agencies, a court, and Roskomnadzor in order for them to be held liable.
- On 10 March 2021, a draft law on blocking websites for “justifying extremism” was **adopted** in the first reading. It expands the opportunities for extrajudicial blocking implemented at the demand of the General Prosecutor’s Office.
- On 31 March 2021, the Federation Council **approved** a package of amendments to the Criminal Code and Code on Administrative Offences, which stiffens the punishments for rehabilitation of Nazism and publicly insulting veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Offenders face a fine up to 3 mln roubles or deprivation of liberty for a term up



to 3 years. If the same thing is committed with the use of the internet, then the prison term increases to 5 years. Administrative liability includes a fine up to 5 mln roubles and confiscation of the item used to commit the offence. According to the amendments the same kind of punishment will be faced for denying the decisions of the Nuremberg Tribunal, approving of fascism, and public dissemination of knowingly false information about veterans and the actions of the USSR in the years of the Second World War.

- As of 1 June 2021, a **law** on educational activity **will enter** into force. Any educational activity, defined by the law as “dissemination of knowledge”, must be approved by government officials, while the procedure therefore is going to be determined by the government.
- On 24 February 2021, a **law** was signed that prescribed large fines for non-compliance with the law on a reliable internet and violation of the rights of Russians on the net. A change will be made to the Administrative Code.
- On 11 March 2021, deputies [MPs] likewise **proposed** introducing administrative liability in the form of a fine for mentioning terrorist organisations in the mass information media without indicating that they are banned or liquidated.

It is likewise worth noting that a **practice** that is widespread in Belarus is gradually being introduced in Russia – fines for absence of Foreign Ministry accreditation. For the first time under this article on 4 March 2021, Kemerovo journalist Roman Yanchenko was fined while working with *Belsat TV*.

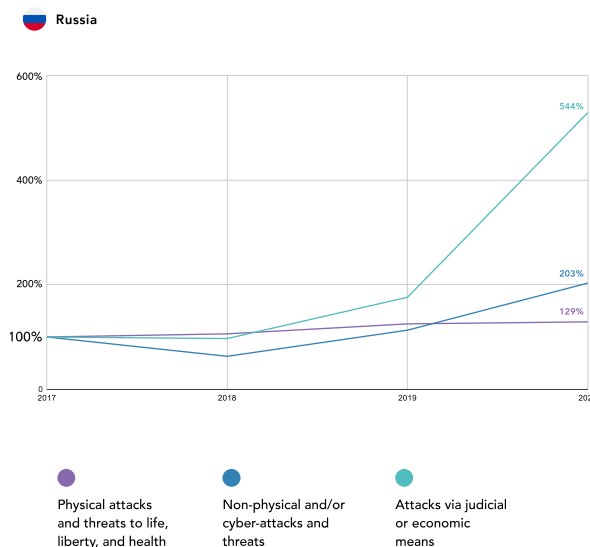
### 3/GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

The graph below represents the general analysis of the three main categories of attacks / threats on journalists in Russia and Russian journalists who left the country but continued their professional activities abroad in 2020.

In 2020, Russian authorities finally stopped being coy and unleashed all the might of the state’s machinery of repression against any manifestations of free thinking, including freedom of speech. The quantity of recorded attacks on journalists in this year exceeded the sum total indicator for the three previous years: **1284 as opposed to 1133** in the years 2017-2019. The explosive rise in the overall quantity of attacks took place on account of a three-fold increase in the number of judicial and economic attacks in 2020 in comparison with 2019.

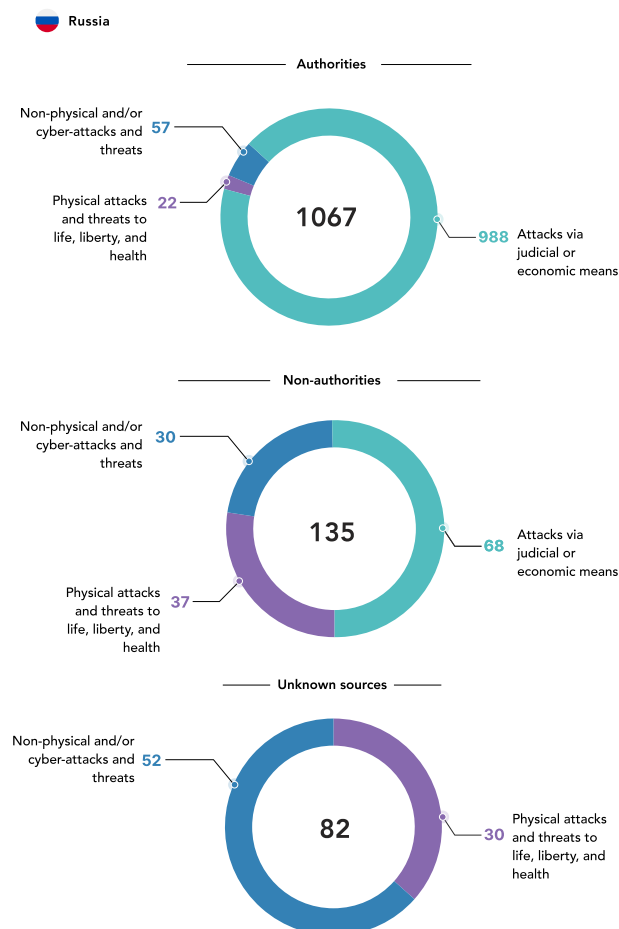
#### Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020

Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)



The overwhelming majority of attacks – 83% (1067) – came from representatives of the authorities. It is specifically them, as a rule, who stood behind the 1056 **attacks via judicial and economic means**, including short-term detentions, interrogations, confiscation, fines, and prison terms under articles of the criminal code.

#### Initiators of attacks on media workers



In 2020 the number of **physical attacks** remained nearly unchanged (89); that said, **eight journalists perished** – in 2019 there had been three. Incidents of death as the result of infection with COVID-19 are left out of the given report on attacks on media workers.

**Non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats** recorded in 2020 were nearly double the previous amount – 139 as opposed to 76 – on account of a sharp rise in instances of bullying, pressure, and threats of violence and death, as well as cyber-attacks.

A particular pretext for attacks on professional and citizen journalists became the COVID-19 pandemic and the new restrictions and laws associated with it. 177 out of the 188 incidents represent attacks via judicial means – above all charges of dissemination of knowingly false information or of violating the rules for self-isolation and quarantine, and fines and short-term detentions associated with this.

Cited in the report are examples of the most widespread kinds of attacks on media workers. All the facts of assaults from 2017 through the present moment have been gathered together on the [Media Risk Map](#) on the Justice for Journalists Foundation website.

### Hybrid attacks

For the purposes of more precisely reflecting combination assaults on media workers in 2020 we are introducing a new category of attacks – **hybrid**.

We are calling systematic persecution of some publication or media worker with the use of tools from two or more categories of assaults – physical, non-physical, and judicial/economic – “hybrid”. Such a combination of means involving and not involving force with judicial means of pressure on undesirable journalists is carried out with a view to demoralising them or getting them to self-censor or to give up the profession or even life itself.

In 2020, 33 journalists and bloggers were victims of hybrid attacks. Moreover, the most frequent kind of such attacks (14) was the use of non-physical assaults in combination with judicial means.

- The tragic death on 2 October 2020 of Irina Slavina, editor-in-chief of the Nizhny Novgorod publication *Koza.Press*, became the consequence of many years of hybrid attacks. The systematic harassment of the journalist included several administrative violation cases, fines, leaflets with abusive language in the entrance to the block of flats where she lived, and constant denunciations and police checks. The last straw became a search in her flat at 6 in the morning on 1 October

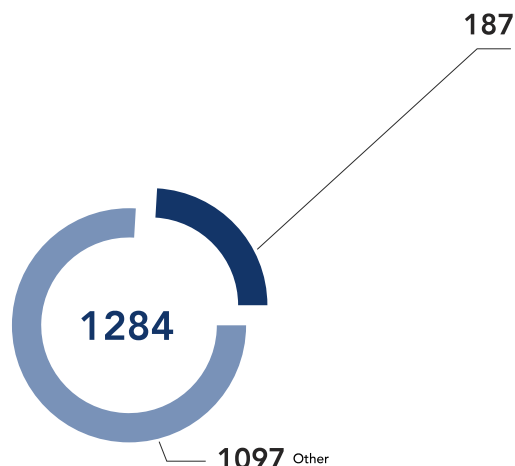
as part of a criminal case about participation in an “undesirable organisation” (her denunciation had been written by Ilya Savinov). 12 employees of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, the police, and the SOBR [*Special Rapid Response Unit*] seized all the electronic information storage media, computers, and telephones of the journalist and her family, and all work-related writing pads. Besides that, the *Koza.Press* website was subjected to a DDoS attack. The next day the journalist committed suicide, having inculpated the Russian Federation in her death in a Facebook post.

- Being subjected to systematic hybrid attacks is the founder and editor-in-chief of the *Novosti Kiselevska* website, Natalia Zubkova, who gained international prominence after the publication of a video address by the inhabitants of the settlement of Podzemgaz to prime minister of Canada Justin Trudeau concerning a catastrophic environmental situation. In May 2020, a case was started up against Zubkova for dissemination of unreliable information (article 13.15 of the Code on Administrative Offences); she and her family were threatened with death on numerous occasions for her investigations; in August the focus of one of her articles, the lawyer Anton Reutov, struck her in the presence of bailiffs who had come to take the journalist’s car as recovery of damages in a lawsuit on defence of honour and dignity. In December the *Novosti Kiselevska* website was subjected to a series of DDoS attacks.
- On 30 June, in St. Petersburg at polling station N2191 during the time of voting on amendments to the Constitution, policeman Denis Dmitriev beat up photographer David Frenkel and broke his arm. On 27 July, the Dzerzhinsky District Court of Saint Petersburg fined Frenkel 500 roubles in a case of failure to obey a policeman (article 19.3 of the Code on Administrative Offences) at the polling station. The court likewise set him a two thousand rouble fine in a case of interference in the implementation of the work of an electoral commission (article 5.69 of the CoAO) and issued a warning in a case of violation of the “self-isolation regime” (article 20.6.1 of the CoAO). On 27 August, all the windows of the photographer’s car were smashed and all the tyres punctured, while the day before this his lawyer received notification of a refusal to initiate a case with respect to Frenkel’s report of crime about policemen having assaulted him.

Presented below is the top-10 list of the journalists and bloggers who were being subjected to the most intensive hybrid attacks in 2020.

## Hybrid attacks on media workers

Russia



of which 107 attacks committed against 10 journalists

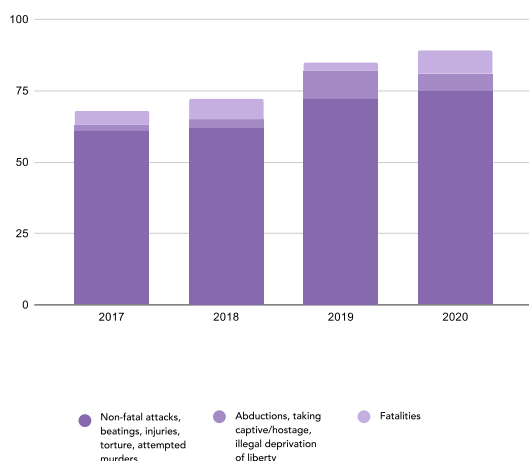
Media worker	Overall	Phys.	Non-phys.	Jud.
Mikhail Alferov, video blogger from Kemerovo	21	1		20
Pyotr Verzilov, Mediazona	19	1	1	17
Natalya Zubkova, Novosti Kiselyovska (News of Kiselyovsk)	10	1	2	7
Aleksandr Dorogov, YouTube channel "Ya.N", Rosderzhava	10	3	1	6
Yan Katelevskiy	9	1		8
Irina Slavina, Koza Press	9	1	1	7
Sergey Belyaev, Public group "Ya Grazhdanin" (I am a citizen)	8	1	1	6
Andrey Solomakhin (Angel ID) Sota.Vision	8	1		7
Malika Dzhikaeva, Instagram blogger	7	2	1	4
David Frenkel, Mediazona	6	2	1	3

## 4/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

The quantity of physical attacks in 2020 grew by a quarter in comparison with 2017. The level of cruelty of the crimes against journalists also increased, no doubt contributing to which is the fact that year in and year out the majority of them remain unsolved.

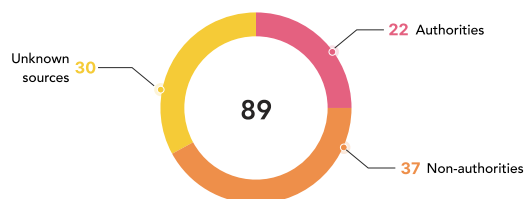
### Physical attacks

Russia



### Initiators of physical attacks on media workers (relative figures)

Russia



### Fatal incidents and attempted murders

The most high-profile incidents in 2020:

- A Chechen blogger and critic of Ramzan Kadyrov, Imran Aliyev (Mansur Sary), was stabbed to death on 30 January in the French city of Lille. The main suspect, 34 year old Usman Mamadiyev, returned to Chechnya.
- On 26 February, another opposition Chechen blogger, Tumso Abdurakhmanov, who had fled from Chechnya in 2015, was able to fight off his would-be murderers. Russian citizens Ruslan Mamayev and Elmira Shapiyeva were convicted, while the Swedish court named the blogger's criticism of former president of Chechnya Akhmad Kadyrov and current head of the republic Ramzan Kadyrov as the reason for the attempt on his life.
- Mamikhan Umarov, known as "Anzor from Vienna" - yet another popular Chechen blogger speaking out against Kadyrov and his retinue - was killed with a shot to the back of the head on 4 July in a suburb of Vienna.

- An attempt on the life of opposition Chechen blogger Musa Lomaev, residing in Finland, was thwarted with the help of information passed on to him by the *1ADAT* Telegram channel. The suspect was detained in Finland on 10 September.
- In those same days the moderator of the *1ADAT* Telegram channel chat room, Salman Tepsurkaev, was abducted in Gelendzhik by people with Ministry of Internal Affairs identification documents, after which, judging from his telephone's geolocation data, he was driven out onto the territory of the police patrol and checkpoint service's Akhmad Kadyrov Regiment in Grozny. A video was posted on the internet in which he is being subjected to humiliation, torments, and sexual violence. At the time of the writing of the report (February 2021) it is unknown if Tepsurkaev is still alive.
- On 15 October, the Khabarovsk journalist for *Rus-News* Sergey Plotnikov, who had been conducting live video reports from protest events, was abducted by unknown persons. They drove the journalist out into a forest and were intimidating him by shooting at the legs and feet. After several hours of tormenting him they released him.
- The Rostov journalist and human rights advocate Aleksandr Tolmachev, who had spent nearly nine years in prison on a charge of extortion, died suddenly on 9 November in an Orenburg penal colony a month before release. Activists consider the case against him to have been fabricated in retaliation for articles exposing corruption in the courts and police.

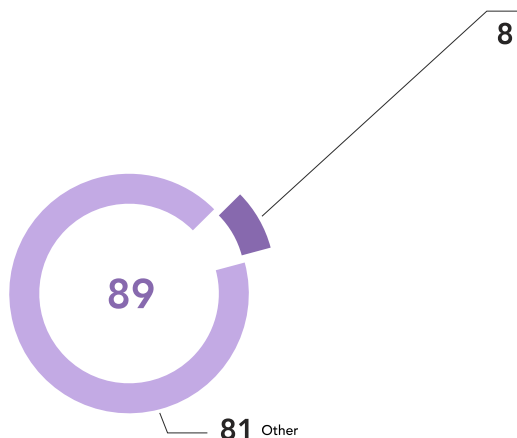
## Non-fatal attacks, beatings, injury, torture

There were 70 recorded incidents of non-fatal assaults, beatings, and torture of journalists in 2020. As before, revenge beatings are widespread, committed after hard-hitting material has come out. Investigations of such beatings, committed by unknown provocateurs or hired thugs known as "titushki" are, as a rule, not conducted or do not lead to any results. Here are some examples:

- The beating of former *VGTRK* camera operator Leonid Krivenkov, which occurred after he had given an interview about political censorship at the state channel.
- Oleg Anisimov, founder of the *Vklader* portal and initiator of investigations into financial machinations, was beaten unconscious by unknown persons as he was returning home from a shop.
- Polina Ryabova, correspondent for the independent Altai newspaper *Listok*, was assaulted in a cafe. The journalist was beaten and humiliated for her publications about the district authorities.
- Dmitry Nizovtsev, formerly a journalist with the Khabarovsk Region television channel *Gubernia*, and subsequently presenter of the programme *Navalny Live*, was beaten up after his latest live video broadcast from a protest rally in Khabarovsk.
- Blogger and *Ekho Moskvy* radio presenter Yegor Zhukov was twice subjected to assault by unknown persons who addressed him by name.
- Aleksandr Dorogov, video blogger and *Rosderzhava* journalist, was beaten by four cellmates in Yegorievsk's pre-trial detention facility "for the stories that he shoots".

## Attempts on life, freedom and health

 Russia



### Media workers who lost their lives

Attack sub-category	Media worker
Murder	Imran Aliev (Mansur Stariy, or Old Mansur)
Murder	Mamikhon Umarov (Anzor of Vienna)
Fatal accident	Alexander Koltovoy
Fatal accident	Natalia Michurina
Fatal accident	Anton Luchansky
Death while in custody or as a result of loss of health in captivity	Alexander Tolmachev
Sudden unexplained death	Mikhail Budaragin
Suicide	Irina Slavina



Journalists are frequently assaulted and beaten, often having their equipment seized or damaged, right as they are working – whilst taking pictures or videos for stories, conducting interviews, etc.

- In Surgut, three men beat *SurgutInform-TV* correspondent Yevgeny Neupokoyev unconscious while he was filming a story at an impound car park.
- In Nizhnevartovsk, tour firm director Ruslan Ivashko beat up Megapolis television channel camera operator Ilya Beglenok and damaged his equipment.
- In Anapa, a journalist filming the demolition of a house on video was beaten and had her telephone taken away by a lawyer representing a law-enforcement officer who was a beneficiary of the building's demolition.
- In Moscow, *Kommersant* journalist Andrei Zhdanov was beaten up and robbed as he was shooting pictures of currency exchange rates on assignment from the editorial office.
- In Krasnoyarsk, businessman Alexey Talyuk knocked down *Dezhurnaya chast* programme correspondent Pavel Brykin with his Mercedes as the latter was trying to interview him.
- In Syktyvkar, three unknown persons sprayed pepper spray in *Novaya respublika* publication journalist Viktor Kokarev's face while he was filming a story about pre-election agitation.

Parishioners and security guards at Orthodox churches are noted for their heightened level of aggressiveness:

- Video blogger Mikhail Baranov was beaten up by NOD [*National Liberation Movement*] and SERB [*South East Radical Block*] militants and Orthodox activists during a funeral service for the proto-priest Vsevolod Chaplin.
- Television presenter Ksenia Sobchak and her camera crew were beaten up and robbed in the Sredneuralsk Women's Convent during shooting of video for a story about the Schema-Hegumen Sergii.

Three incidents of beatings of journalists shooting pictures at Easter services during the time of a prohibition on the conducting of mass events are reflected in the section on Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Beatings of professional and citizen journalists in the republics of the North Caucasus form an entirely separate topic. Besides the above-mentioned Salman Tepsurkaev, abducted in Gelendzhik and subjected to torture and abuse on the territory of Chechnya, the following were also subjected to beatings in the past year were :

- *Novaya Gazeta* journalist Elena Milashina in Grozny;
- blogger Said Gubdenskiy in Makhachkala;
- blogger and journalist Devid Mamendov in Vladikavkaz.

In a series of instances, deputies [MPs] and civil servants were assaulting journalists:

- Sergey Kozin, the head of a district in Penza Region, beat up journalist Alexander Rogozhkin, who had asked questions he found inconvenient.
- In the office of the Tagansky Electoral Commission, head of Moscow's TEC Rimma Bakhtiyarova beat up the journalist Svetlana Vidanova and damaged camera operator Igor Vinkovsky's camera.
- Duma deputy [MP] from the Saratov Region, Sergey Kurikhin, beat up Chetvertaya vlast publisher Vadim Rogozhin.
- Yugorsk's Duma deputy [MP] Vladimir Bendus assaulted TochkaNews journalist Anton Pantin on the street and took away his telephone.
- Kirill Tsvetkov, an employee with the press centre of the city administration of Berdsk, beat up Svidetel newspaper correspondent Sergey Boldyrev in the editorial office for a comment on social media.

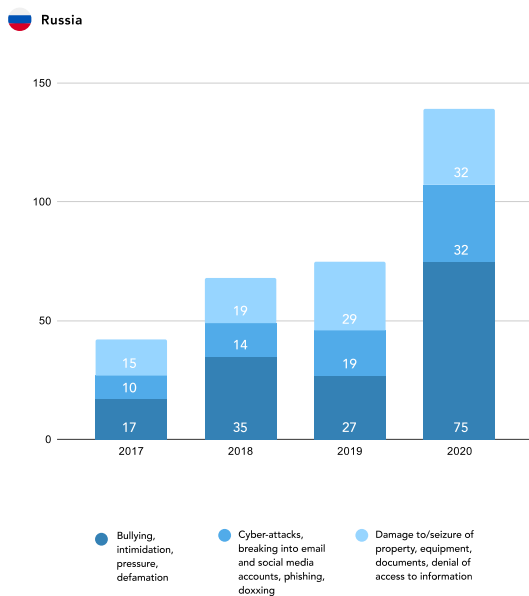
As a rule, the police and state security services were assaulting journalists during short-term detentions at protests, searches, or simply during a document check.

- Khabarovsk police 5th precinct employee Vitaly Grebenyuk was dismissed from the bodies of internal affairs for an assault on a camera crew from the *Gubernia* television channel, while they filmed a road accident that had taken place due to the fault of a female acquaintance of his. He received a suspended sentence.
- *Sovremennaya Kalmykia* editor-in-chief Valery Badmayev was beaten up by a police lieutenant colonel in the police station where he was being questioned about participation in a picket showing solidarity with Khabarovsk.
- The administrator of the public channel *YaGrazhdanin!* Sergey Belyayev was beaten up in a Saint Petersburg police station after being detained in the course of protests against amendments to the Constitution.
- At the Prazhskaya metro station in Moscow, police inflicted bodily injuries to *RusNews* journalist Sergey Kouk in the course of a rough detaining as he had supposedly refused to show documents.
- Journalist Alexey Malinovsky of Kaliningrad's *Novye kolesa* was beaten during a search of his flat in a libel case.

## 5/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

The number of attacks and threats of this type in 2020 exceeded the indicators for the previous year more than two-fold (139 and 76 respectively). The number of incidents associated with bullying, intimidation, and death threats increased nearly three-fold: from 22 to 59. The quantity of recorded cyber-attacks comprised 14 as opposed to 3 in 2019. Recorded break-ins and attempted break-ins to email and social media accounts numbered 13 as opposed to 9 in 2019.

### Non-physical / cyber-attacks



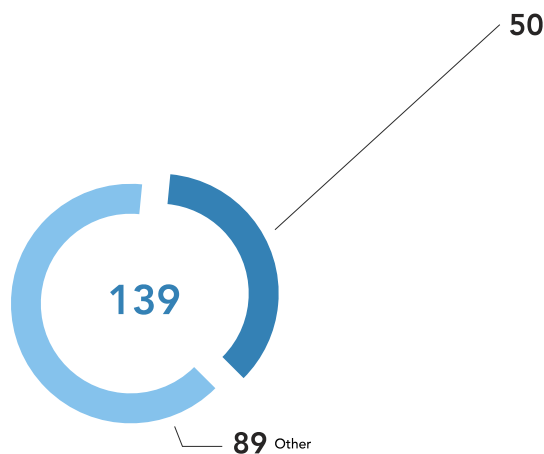
As a rule, bullying, pressure, and threats are accompanied by either physical assaults on media workers or arrests and short-term detentions, or cyber-attacks, and sometimes even a whole series of attacks of different types. This year religious fundamentalists and so-called “defenders of traditional values” stand out among the assailants. Some of those receiving verbal abuse and threats from them included:

- television presenters Ivan Urgant – for jokes on religious topics (“offending the sensibilities of believers”) and Ksenia Sobchak – for critique of the reaction of Islamists to the Charlie Hebdo caricatures;
- editor of the magazine *Daptar* Svetlana Anokhina – for creating emergency care centres for women who had been subjected to domestic violence. After numerous death threats, Anokhina was forced to flee Dagestan.
- Instagram and TikTok blogger Maria Magdalena Tunkara from St. Petersburg – for clips talking about racism in Russia;
- blogger Nika Vodvud, about whom a complaint was made for “propaganda about non-traditional sexual relations”;
- bloggers and journalists covering the activity of the artist Yulia Tsvetkova, the prosecution of the Khachatryan sisters, and Pussy Riot’s protest performances.

Subjected to attacks most frequently were:

### The most frequent targets of non-physical /cyber-attacks

Russia



#### attacks committed against independent media workers and 6 news outlets

Media worker/ News outlet	Number of attacks
Independent journalists and bloggers	19
Dozhd (TV Rain)	7
Mediazona	6
Novaya Gazeta	6
Istories	5
Baza	4
7X7	3

### Pressure on journalists through relatives

In comparison with the previous years, the number of incidents of pressure on journalists by means of intimidating their loved ones increased. Among the victims were:

- friends and acquaintances of the Khabarovsk video blogger Sergey Naumov,
- relatives of the Ekaterinburg video blogger Ruslan Sokolovsky,
- the wife and children of the editor of St. Petersburg's *MK* Maxim Kuzakhmetov.

Pressure was exerted by the police, the Centre for Combating Extremism, and the police together with children's services agencies, respectively.

According to a number of witnesses, the father of Salman Tepsurkaev, who had been subjected to torture, involuntarily recorded a video with a renunciation of his son.

Karina Dzhikayeva, sister of the North Ossetian Instagram blogger Malika Dzhikayeva who had been arrested in Grozny, was found dead in a flat in the north of Moscow.

### Damage to and seizure of property, equipment, documents, journalistic materials, print run

20 attacks of the given type were recorded in 2020. Most often the equipment is deliberately broken, simultaneously with the beating and/or detention of the journalists or with the impeding of their professional activity. There are other incidents as well, however.

### Destruction of/damage to a journalist's automobile in retaliation for professional activity:

- *TNT Vorkuta* head Gennady Knyazev's car was set on fire (after he had released material on the non-payment of bonuses to ambulance crews).
- The windows of *Dzerzhinskoe Vremya* editor-in-chief Sergey Kulakov's car were smashed in July, while on New Year's Eve the vehicle was completely destroyed by fire as the result of arson recorded by surveillance cameras.
- *Znak.com* Chelyabinsk correspondent Marina Malkova's car was set on fire.

### Cyber-, DDoS-, and hacker attacks and break-ins to social media accounts:

The main targets of the cyber-malefactors in 2020 were:

- the *Navalny Live* YouTube channel
- the accounts of the editor of *Fergana.ru*
- the accounts of employees of the *Vazhnye istorii* publication

- *MediaZona*
- the servers of the *Rain* television channel
- the website and the computers of employees of *Ekho Moskvy*
- *TheInsider*
- *Znak.com*
- the website of the *Sobesednik* newspaper
- *Pskovskaya gubernia*
- *Bloknot*. Taganrog
- the *Kuzbass* internet newspaper *Novosti Kiselevska*
- the social media accounts of Ekaterinburg political scientist Fedor Krashennikov
- the social media accounts of Ufa blogger Ruslan Nurtidinov.

The account break-ins and hacking and other cyber-attacks were as a rule taking place after the publication of high-profile investigations of crimes and corruption in circles of power and near the power. There were 26 such incidents recorded, however we maintain that there were actually far more of them as journalists accept such attacks as a normal part of their work and rarely report them.

### Doxxing

A minimum of three journalists and bloggers this year were subjected to doxxing, or publication of information about their place of residence:

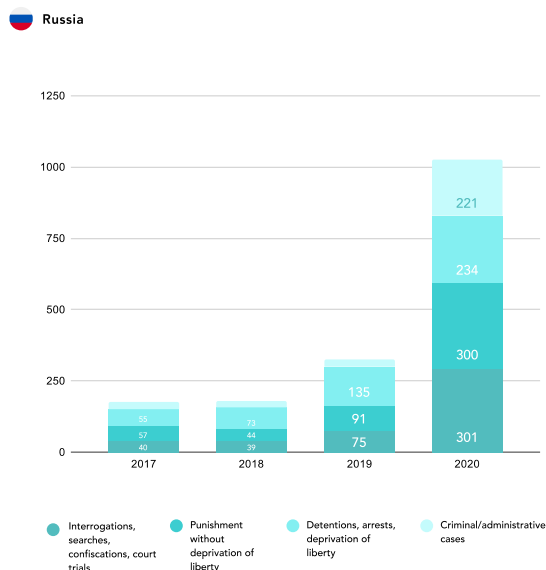
- Yuri Izotov, a journalist with the banned *Grani.ru*, who was forced to flee Russia because of persecution;
- a journalist with *UralPress* from the city of Zlatoust, whose data were posted by unknown persons on a sex services website;
- Maria Magdalena Tunkara, an Instagram and TikTok blogger (submitted a report of crime to the police about a person threatening to kill her, who had also revealed her address).

## 6/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

The number of such attacks in 2020 exceeded the aggregate indicator for the three previous years by a factor of two and consisted of 1056 incidents. On the whole, we can speak of the state's system of repression against professional and citizen media workers finally having come together: they are being prosecuted under a concrete list of Administrative and Criminal Code articles. Once a media worker ends up in the meat grinder of this system, each new punishment becomes more severe: from relatively insignificant fines for vi-

olating the rules on protesting, to 19 years in a strict regime penal colony for participating in an extremist and terrorist organisation.

## Judicial / economic attacks



69 journalists were subjected to arrest, including remand – four times more than in 2019.

There were no fewer than 211 court trials of journalists, which exceeds last year's indicator by a factor of six.

## Court trials

Nearly a third of all the court trials against journalists (62) took place in Moscow: professional and citizen media workers were most often tried under administrative code articles on:

- violation of the rules for picketing (part 5 of article 20.2 of the Code on Administrative Offences)
- repeat violation of the rules for participating in a public event (part 8 of article 20.2 of the CoAO)
- failure to obey the police (article 19.3 of the CoAO)
- organisation of an unapproved public event (part 2 of article 20.2 of the CoAO)
- participation in a public assembly creating an obstruction to traffic (part 6.1 of article 20.2 of the CoAO)
- violation of the self-isolation regime (article 3.18.1 of the CoAO of Moscow)

The methods of prosecuting journalists under criminal and administrative code articles connected with the pandemic are examined separately below, in the section on "Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic".

## The most frequent targets of judicial/economic attacks





## Administrative cases

Many Moscow journalists were **fined and/or sentenced to compulsory work** and administrative arrests for participating in or covering protests against:

- the arrest of former *Kommersant* journalist Ivan Safronov, charged with high treason;
- the arrest of journalist and politician Ilya Azar for 15 days for a single-person picket in support of the previously arrested activist Viktor Nemytov and administrator of the Ombudsmen politicii public channel Vladimir Vorontsov;
- the prosecution of Pskov journalist Svetlana Prokopieva under the article on justification of terrorism.

Based on the results of a minimum of 20 court trials of journalists covering the protests in Khabarovsk, 17 people received fines and various terms of administrative arrests. It is specifically in Khabarovsk that the “revolving door” mechanism for the arrest and conviction of journalists has been successfully implemented. For example, the Central District Court of Khabarovsk thrice tried video blogger Anton Kurdyumov: after each term he had completed he was once again being detained and driven off to court, where he would be given his next term.

## Criminal cases

The quantity of charges against journalists and media outlets for **libel, insult, and reputational damage** grew nearly seven-fold: from 13 in 2019 to 85 in 2020. In the vast majority of instances, the journalists and media outlets were found guilty and required to pay compensation for pain and suffering.

The greatest number of lawsuits under these articles was examined in Moscow (26). Among the plaintiffs ought to be mentioned senators Suleyman Kerimov and Yelena Mizulina, the state company Rosneft, Russia Today, ex-minister of culture Vladimir Medinsky, MGIMO [*Moscow State Institute of International Relations*] prorector Natalia Kuzmina, the Aeroflot airline, the Concord firm which belongs to Yevgeny Prigozhin, and Roscosmos head Dmitry Rogozin.

The harshest punishments were borne by **12** journalists, whom military courts sentenced to lengthy prison terms in strict and general regime penal colonies on **charges of extremism, links with terrorists, calls for terrorism, high treason, justification of Nazism, and calling for the overthrow of the constitutional order.**

- The Southern District Military Court in Rostov-on-Don sentenced four independent citizen journalists from Krymskaya solidarnost under part 2 of article 205.5 of the Criminal Code (participation in the activity of a terrorist organisation) and article 278 (preparation of a violent seizure of power) with the application of part 1 of arti-

cle 30 of the CC. Bloggers Marlen Asanov, Server Mustafayev, Seyran Saliyev, and Timur İbragimov received from **14 to 19 years in a strict regime penal colony.**

- The 2nd Western District Military Court in Moscow sentenced Dagestani blogger Alibek Mirzekhanov to **10 years of strict regime** on a charge of participating in the activity of a terrorist organisation (part 2 of article 205 of the CC).
- The Central District Military Court in Samara sentenced Bashkir activist Ayrat Dilmukhmetov to **9 years of strict regime.** He was declared guilty under four articles of the CC at once: on two counts of public calls for separatism on the internet (part 2 of article 280.1 of the CC; 3 years for each count), of financing extremism (part 1 of article 283.1 of the CC; 5 years), of public calls for extremism (part 1 of article 280 of the CC; 2 years), and of public justification of terrorism on the internet (part 2 of article 205.2 of the CC; 6 years).
- An appellate military court in Vlasikha near Moscow upheld the sentence for Kaluga blogger Ivan Lyubshin: **5 years and 2 months of general regime.** The blogger was found guilty under part 2 of article 205.2 of the CC (public justification of terrorism through the internet) for a comment on VKontakte about the bombing of the Arkhangelsk Administration of the Federal Security Service [*FSB*]. The blogger was being beaten and tortured upon being detained in October 2019. In 2017, Lyubshin became a figurant in cases under part 1 of article 282 of the CC (arousing hate or enmity), part 2 of article 354.1 (rehabilitation of Nazism), and item «b» of part 3 of article 242 (distribution of pornography) for posts on VKontakte.
- The Second District Military Court, at a circuit session in Kursk, sentenced local citizen journalist Sergey Lavrov to **five years in a general regime penal colony** on a charge of public calls for terrorist activity on the internet (part 2 of article 205.2 of the CC).
- The Southern District Military Court sentenced blogger Valery Klimenchenko from Rostov-on-Don to **four years and one month in a general regime penal colony** in a case of justification of terrorism (part 2 of article 205.2 of the CC) and insulting the authorities (article 319). In 2018 Klimenchenko had published the post “Mikhail Zhlobitsky’s Feat” about the bombing of the Arkhangelsk FSB Administration, as well as two posts about policemen, on VKontakte.
- Kaliningrad blogger Aytahaji Halimov was **sentenced to three and a half years in a general regime penal colony** under part 2 of article 205.2 of the CC (public calls for terrorism on the internet) for three documentary video clips about the Chechen war published on VKontakte.

- A military appellate court in Vlasikha near Moscow upheld the sentence for Crimean Tatar blogger Nariman Memedeminov, having denied the defence's appellate complaints. He served **two and a half years in a settlement-colony** in a case of public calls for terrorism (part 1 of article 205.2 of the CC) for three videos published on his personal YouTube channel even before the annexation of Crimea, and two reposts of other peoples' video recordings on VKontakte.

We shall note several more high-profile criminal cases that gained momentum in 2020. Some of the journalists have already been convicted; others are awaiting hearings.

- The 2nd Western District Military Court sentenced Pskov journalist Svetlana Prokopieva to a fine of 500 thousand roubles, having found her guilty of **public justification of terrorism** (part 2 of article 205.2 of the CC). The prosecutor had requested that Prokopieva be given 6 years in a penal colony with a four-year prohibition on her profession. The journalist was being tried for a comment on the air of *Ekho Moskvy* in Pskove concerning the bombing of the Arkhangelsk FSB Administration.
- Bryansk video blogger Alexander Kolomeytsev was sentenced to one year three months of deprivation of liberty to be served in a settlement-colony. He had been accused of **battery, insulting representatives of the authorities, and violation of the inviolability of private life**. Five criminal cases in all were initiated against Kolomeytsev. He was shooting exposé stories about Bryansk public officials.
- The Zavodskoy District Court of Grozny sentenced video blogger Ilham Nukhanov to 4 years in a settlement-colony in a fabricated case of **storing cartridges and use of force on a policeman**. Nukhanov was abducted and subjected to torture in November 2019 after publication of a video from the elite residential community of Baronovka in the centre of Grozny, where the top Chechen public officials and their relatives live.
- Since 7 June, advisor to the head of Roscosmos and former *Kommersant* and *Vedomosti* correspondent Ivan Safronov has been awaiting trial in the SIZO-2 Lefortovo pre-trial detention facility on suspicion of **high treason**. The FSB suspects him of working for one of the NATO special services; he faces from 12 to 20 years in a penal colony.
- Blogger Karim Yamadayev, from Naberezhnye Chelny, spent about a year in Samara's pre-trial detention facility on a charge of **insulting the authorities** (article 318 of the CC) and **public calls for terroristic activity, justification or propaganda of terrorism** (part 2 of article 205.2 of the CC) for a video clip about a trial of Putin, Peskov, and

Sechin (sentenced to a fine of 510 thousand roubles and released on 4 March 2021).

- Blogger Vladimir Vorontsov, a retired police major and founder of the popular public channel *Ombudsmen politsii*, is in the Muscovite SIZO-4 pre-trial detention facility since 7 May 2020; no fewer than 14 criminal cases have been initiated against him, including on charges of **extortion** (article 163 of the CC), **distribution of pornography** (article 242 of the CC), **libel** (article 128.1 of the CC), and **insulting a representative of the authorities** (article 319 of the CC).
- In Kemerovo, two participants in the "Don't be inert" project — the video bloggers Maxim Lavrentiev and Sergey Kamensky have been in custody since the end of July. They are charged with **hooliganism committed by a group of persons** (part 2 of article 213 of the CC). A report of crime was written up against the bloggers when they were filming a clip about an illegal car park. According to another story, the YouTubers are being persecuted for shooting a clip about the FSB.
- *Rosderzhava* journalists Yan Katelevsky and Alexander Dorogov, who were detained after publication of an investigation about the funeral business, have been in custody since 29 June 2020. They are being charged in three criminal cases: under part 3 of article 163 of the CC (**extortion**), part 2 of article 167 (**deliberate destruction or damaging of another's property**), article 213 (**hooliganism**), and article 319 (**insulting a representative of the authorities**).

#### Confiscation/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, and materials for exposé stories in 2020 during searches and detainings of journalists

No fewer than 23 such incidents were recorded in 2020, in particular:

- The police seized all of *MBK Media* chief editor Sergey Postakov's professional equipment and bank cards in the course of a search of his Moscow flat.
- Police seized *Belsat* correspondent Dmitry Lebedev's telephone while he was being detained at a NYET movement protest against amendments to the Constitution.
- Policemen took away flash cards from photographer Alexey Molotorenko, who was shooting pictures of a CPRF [*Communist Party of the Russian Federation*] rally "For honest elections" in Kostroma, and drew up an official record of the seizure.
- In Komsomolsk-on-Amur policemen took away all the material that had been shot by a camera crew from *The New York Times* working on a film about the activist Yulia Tsvetkova.
- Policemen took away all the professional equip-

ment from an FBK [Anti-Corruption Foundation] camera crew as they were working on an investigation in Tatarstan.

- In the Penza Region, employees of the Roads Patrol Service stopped an automobile with the print run of the newspaper *Novaya alternativa*, which is critical in relation to the governor, and seized it.
- In the course of a detaining them during a performance by Pussy Riot, policemen took away *Radio Liberty* journalist Artyom Radygin's and Activatica reporter Denis Styazhkin's telephones and did not return them.

In connection with the rise in systemic persecution of a series of journalists for working with non-Russian organisations and individuals, in 2020 the Foundation added a new sub-category of judicial attacks — **designation of foreign agent status and/or judicial prosecution for non-compliance with the law on "foreign agents"**.

At the very end of 2020, the Ministry of Justice included three journalists in the register of "foreign agent" media: Denis Kamalyagin and Lyudmila Savitskaya from Pskov, and Sergei Markelov from Petrozavodsk. They became the first journalists - individual persons designated as "foreign agents" under the new law.

## 7/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The overwhelming majority of instances of attacks on journalists under the pretext of sanitary restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic fall in the category of attacks via judicial means – 177 of 189. Besides that, three beatings of journalists shooting video of Easter services and nine non-physical and cyber-attacks have been recorded.

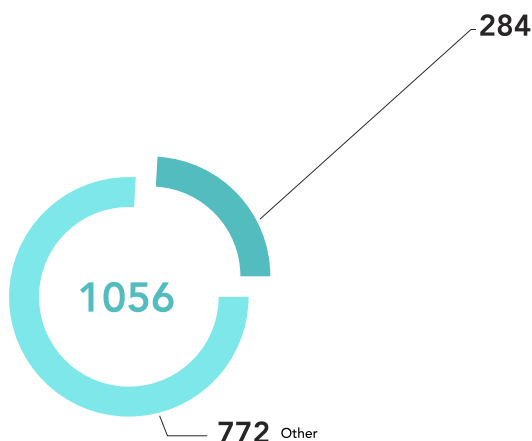
Three **beatings** took place in churches conducting Easter services in spite of the prohibition on mass events due to the threat of the spread of COVID-19:

- *MediaZona* photographer David Frenkel was beaten up and kicked out of a temple in Vsevolozhsk.
- A female journalist with the *BAZA* publication shooting pictures of a VIP service in the Sophia Wisdom of God temple in Moscow was beaten up by the actor Ivan Okhlobystin.
- Clergy and parishioners of the temple of the icon of the Mother of God "The Sign" in Omsk assaulted *BK55* journalists and used force to try to take a telephone away from them.

### The most frequent targets of judicial/economic attacks



Russia

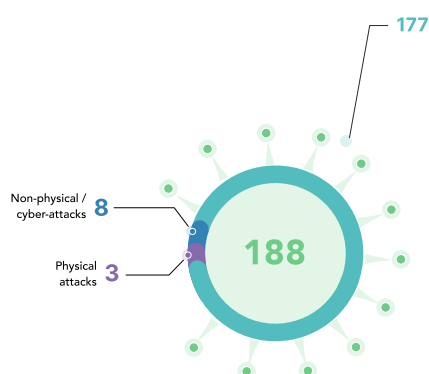


#### attacks committed against 10 news outlets

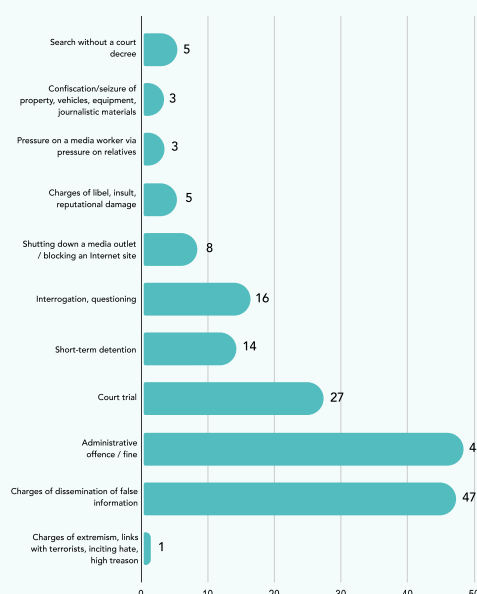
News outlet	Number of attacks
Kommersant (including Kommersant Ufa and Kommersant FM)	47
Sota Vision	37
Novaya Gazeta	35
Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (including Krym.Realiz, Sibir.Realiz, Sever.Realiz and Ural.Realiz)	32
Mediazona	28
Echo of Moscow (including Echo of Moscow in Ufa, Pskov, Yekaterinburg and Orenburg)	26
Vedomosti	21
YouTube channel "Mikhail Aiforov Live"	20
Arsen'yevskie Vesti (arsvest.ru)	20
RusNews	18

## Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic

Russia



### Judicial / economic attacks



**Non-physical attacks** included verbal abuse, humiliation, and threats addressed at media workers, and forcing them to remove publications under the pretext that they are “fake” or “deliberately false information” or “promote extremist activity”. Attacks of such a kind came, *inter alia*, from state television propagandists, the police, local authorities, president of the Chechen Republic Ramzan Kadyrov, the «E» Centre [for Combating Extremism], the FSB, the General Prosecutor’s Office, and the embassy of the RF in the USA. In the majority of instances such pressure and bullying were accompanied by the initiation of administrative or criminal cases.

- Thus, Kadyrov demanded that FSB “stop the non-humans who are writing, provoking my people” after Elena Milashina’s publication about the realities of the coronavirus situation in Chechnya.
- The police came with a check to the Nizhny Tagil newspaper *Mezhdru strok* on the basis of a denunciation from the head doctor at the city hospital after an article was published about the coronavirus situation.
- Two criminal investigation workers conducted an interview with Krasnodar blogger Sergey Dorovskikh, threatening to initiate a criminal case for his critical publications.
- *Zhivaya Kuban* editor Konstantin Zvyagintsev was subjected to a similar visit from a local policeman, and was being threatened with a criminal case for extremism for his article about mass gatherings of people in the period of the pandemic.

- The prosecutor’s office “recommended” to Denis Volin, editor-in-chief of *Orlovskie novosti*, to remove part of a published interview about the shortage of beds in hospitals.
- *The Bloomberg* agency was forced to enter changes into material on the coronavirus in Russia after a strongly worded statement from Russia’s embassy in the USA.

Leading among **attacks via judicial means** were **charges of disseminating false information or fakes**.

At the end of March, the authorities hastily added a new article (207.1) to the Criminal Code (**public dissemination of knowingly false information about circumstances presenting a threat to the life and safety of citizens**), which carries up to 3 years of deprivation of liberty. No fewer than 12 publications and journalists were subjected to prosecutions under this article (searches, initiation of a criminal case, interrogations as witnesses or accuseds), including:

- three independent journalists from Karachay-Cherkessia – editor-in-chief of the *Cherny Kub* YouTube channel Vladimir Bidzhiyev, *Region Online* journalist Yana Toporkova, and *Zhizn bez barierov* journalist Anna Dargan;
- blogger Alexander Torn from Moscow;
- *Novaya gazeta* and *Ekho Moskvy* observer Yulia Latynina from Moscow;
- *Reporter-NN* editor-in-chief Alexander Pichugin from Nizhny Novgorod;



- administrator of the VK group Sestroretsky aktiv Anna Shushpanova from Sestroretsk.

Besides that, widely applied was part 9 of article 13.15 of the Code on Administrative Offences (**publication of false information creating a threat to public order**), under which cases were initiated in relation to no fewer than 35 journalists and media outlets. As a rule, the authorities were calling information about the existence and quantity of infected persons, about shortages of beds in hospitals, about deaths from COVID-19, and expert estimates of the number of victims of the virus “a fake news about the coronavirus”. Fines under this article ranged from 15 thousand roubles (for Novokuybyshevsk journalist Anna Krylova for publication of information about a patient which had been taken from his personal social media page) to 750 thousand roubles (for the Perm internet magazine *Zvezda* for publication of the number of medical personnel infected with the virus). Among others there was also Irina Slavina, fined 65 thousand roubles for the article “First case of coronavirus identified in Kstov”.

In second place by the number of attacks via judicial means associated with COVID-19 was the imposition of **fin**es against journalists. Besides “dissemination of fakes”, the pretexts for handing out fines were, as a rule:

- Violation of the self-isolation regime– article 20.6.1 of the CoAO (among others – Yevgeny Domozhirov from the Permian *Pozitsia*, Pyotr Verzi-lov from *MediaZona*, Ilya Azar, Elena Chernenko from *Kommersant*, Roman Ivanov from *Pravda studiya*, Alexey Melnikov from the *Orenburgian Orenday*, Denis Kamalyagin and Vladimir Kapustinsky from *Pskovskaya gubernia*, Ivan Zhuravkov from *7X7*, Lyudmila Savitskaya from *Severo-Zapad. MBK Media*, Steven Derix and Konstantin Salomatin from *NRC Handelsblad*, Andrei Kysh from *Sota.Vision*, Sergey Belyayev from *YaGrazhdanin!*, blogger Ilya Varlamov and Elena Kostyuchenko and Yuri Kozyrev from *Novaya Gazeta*).
- Violation of the rules pertaining to public assembly – article 20.2 of the CoAO (Ilya Azar).
- Violation of the rules for picketing - part 5 of article 20.2 of the CoAO (Viktoria Ivleva).
- Failure to obey the police - article 19.3 of the CoAO (Sergey Poznyakov from *Kommunisty Rossii*).

Practically all the journalists indicated above were detained and interrogated; Murat Tokov, Anna Dargan, and Anna Shushpanova had equipment and work materials seized. Five were subjected to searches; moreover, in the case of Vladimir Vorontsov (*Ombudsmen politzii*) and Anna Dargan (*Zhizn bez barierov*), searches likewise took place at their relatives' homes.



# TAJIKISTAN

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT TAJIKISTAN REPORT

The mounting pressure on the mass media on the part of Tajikistan's authorities is driven by several factors. First of all, this is the population's intensifying discontent with the socio-economic situation. Fearing they might lose control over the situation, the authorities are applying various methods of intimidation in relation not only to journalists but to human rights advocates and civic activists as well, including those found beyond the confines of Tajikistan. Following the example of other totalitarian countries, the Tajik authorities have created "troll factories", which systematically engage in bullying independent journalists on the internet. Such "factories" protect the interests not only of the authorities, but those of private companies belonging to the president's relatives as well.

The law enforcement agencies too engage in intimidation of journalists and their relatives. Several journalists convicted in Tajikistan in recent years serve as an example for those who have remained at liberty and continue to write the truth.

Instead of blocking the websites of independent media outlets, the authorities have begun to apply a new technology in relation to foreign news resources writing about Tajikistan: these websites are not blocked, but their loading speed in the browsers of users in Tajikistan is artificially slowed down. Internet speed in the country is – once again artificially – reduced to a minimum. In such a manner, the authorities are trying to block off the country's population from any truthful information about Tajikistan.

A huge quantity of "independent" media outlets are registered in Tajikistan, but 90 percent of them were created from the outset for business purposes and disseminate only information of an entertainment and advertising character. Practically all of them are loyal to the ruling regime from the moment of creation; their management will never go for confrontation with the authorities in order not to put their business in jeopardy.

A series of media outlets positioning themselves as independent have begun publishing openly propagandistic materials discrediting independent journalists. In the meantime the managers of these media outlets continue to declare about their independence, and even receive grants from international organisations.

Official Dushanbe practically always leaves without commentary the multitude of reports, presentations, and statements by international organisations and democratic countries about the deteriorating situation in Tajikistan with freedom of speech and human rights as a whole, but in so doing it unfailingly indicates that the country is a partner of the international community in the fight against extremism and terrorism. In Dushanbe they know perfectly well that this is a sufficiently strong argument that will make European politicians shut their eyes to everything else. Tajikistan's authorities cite impressive statistics about verdicts in extremism cases, thanks to which they continue to receive western loans and other aid, including for modernisation of the law-enforcement agencies. However, not many realise that 90 percent of those convicted for extremism in Tajikistan are absolutely innocent people.

**Khayrullo Mirsaidov**  
Independent journalist

# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS AND MEDIA WORKERS IN TAJIKISTAN IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

**69** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional and citizen media workers and editorial offices of traditional and online publications in Tajikistan in 2020 were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data for the research were obtained from open sources in the Russian, Tajik, and English languages using the method of content analysis. Facts that have previously not been made public and were obtained using the expert interview method were likewise used in the report. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 11**.

1. The number of attacks on media workers on the part of the authorities increased significantly in Tajikistan in 2020. This was connected first and foremost with the elections to Tajikistan's parliament and the presidential elections that took place in 2000.
2. The overall quantity of attacks on journalists and media workers in Tajikistan in all three categories increased by a third in comparison with the previous year. 49 attacks were recorded in 2019, while in 2020 the number was 69.
3. In 2020, the quantity of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats increased from 18 incidents in 2019 to 31 in 2020.
4. The main target of attacks on the part of Tajikistan's authorities this year was journalists collaborating with publications accused of being involved with terrorist and extremist groups that are banned in the republic. The main method of pressure on the part of the authorities was publication of journalists' stolen personal information.
5. Attacks on journalists within the framework of quarantine restrictions began even before mass media editorial offices were prohibited from furnishing alternative information about the spread of COVID-19 in Tajikistan. After a law on penalty sanctions in relation to media outlets entered into force, Tajik journalists began publishing only official data about the pandemic.

## 2/ THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MEDIA IN TAJIKISTAN

In 2020, as in 2019, Tajikistan took 161st place out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders annual **freedom of the press rating**, ending up between Burundi and Iraq.

There were two important political events in Tajikistan in 2020: elections to the republic's parliament took place in March, and presidential elections in November.

According to the data of Tajikistan's Central Electoral Commission, the majority of the votes in the parliamentary elections were garnered by the presidential party - the People's Democratic Party. At the elections of the president, the current head of the republic, Emomali Rahmon, who has been in power since 1992, won for the fifth time.

The parliamentary elections in Tajikistan went by practically unnoticed; the attention of society and the press was riveted to the situation with the coronavirus. Despite the large quantity of sick people with a confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, Tajikistan's authorities wholly refused to acknowledge the existence of infected persons in the republic.

The media's attempts to provide at least some kind of coverage of the topic of the pandemic were harshly thwarted by a "troll factory", which was working actively on social networks.

The existence of the coronavirus in Tajikistan was announced on 30 April, 24 hours before a large World Health Organisation delegation arrived in the country. After this, journalists began to more actively cover the topic of the pandemic, including putting together lists of those who had died from the coronavirus. According to the data that independent publications managed to confirm, more than 400 people perished in Tajikistan in the period between April and December 2020 from COVID-19 and its effects. Officially, the death of 90 people has been acknowledged. Among the victims of the pandemic - a minimum of five Tajik journalists.

In July 2020, administrative liability was introduced in Tajikistan for spreading information about the coronavirus pandemic in the republic. If a media outlet publishes information that differs from the Ministry of Health's data, it faces a fine of up to 1000 US dollars; an individual can be fined 50 US dollars for such an act.

Taking into account that Tajikistan's independent publications are experiencing financial difficulties, they all stopped seeking alternative data about the situation with the coronavirus in the country.

On the eve of the presidential elections, in the summer of 2020, the authorities intensified harassment of Tajik

dissident journalists. Shown on all the state television channels was the three-part documentary film *Hiyonat (Betrayal)*. The film is devoted to the activity of the banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT). The party is being accused of inciting civil war in Tajikistan in the 1990s and of an attempt to overthrow the state in 2015.

One of the episodes of the film is devoted to the activity of dissident journalists, in particular the Akhbor.com internet portal, founded by Mirzo Salimpur, a Tajik journalist living in Prague. The authors of the film cite the private personal data of Tajik journalists who had worked with this internet publication: places of residence and bank transfer data.

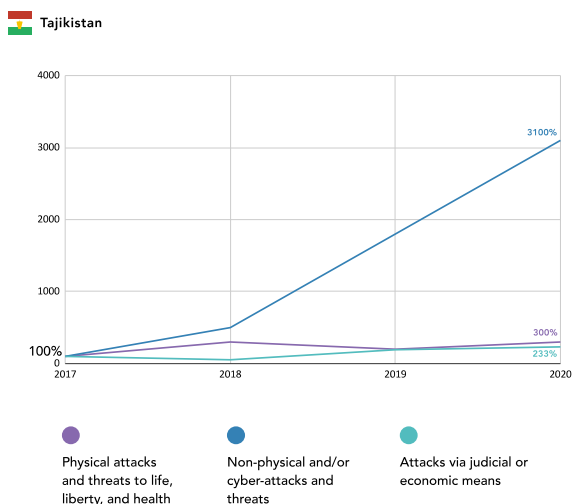
After the film had been shown, the publication was recognised in Tajikistan as banned, and Salimpur was forced to shut it down. In his announcement, he clarified that after the Supreme Court's decision on including Akhbor in the list of banned internet sites in Tajikistan, "many legal problems arose in the site's activity". "Unfortunately, because of this baseless decision, journalists cannot freely send their materials, while experts and government officials cannot speak with us on topics of current interest. They all could be charged with cooperating with a banned publication", declared the Akhbor editor-in-chief.

### 3/GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

The graph below represents an overall analysis of the three main categories of attacks/threats in relation to journalists of the territory of Tajikistan and on Tajik journalists who had abandoned the country but were continuing professional activity beyond the border in 2020. The number of attacks on media outlets and journalists has increased by 25% in Tajikistan over the past year in comparison with 2019.

#### Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020

Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)



In 2017-2019, 64 out of 81 incidents consisted of attacks by the authorities, while in 2020 representatives of the authorities became the initiators of 51 out of 69 attacks. The quantity of attacks in all three categories increased in 2020. The number of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats went up noticeably - from 18 instances to 31.

#### Initiators of attacks on media workers



And this is only those instances that could be recorded from open sources or in personal conversations with journalists. As before, it is not customary in Tajikistan to record cyber-attacks and threats. Journalists prefer not to file reports of crime about attacks, as it is complicated to prove them; besides that, they have grown accustomed to threats and do not attach great significance to them.

In 2020, a repressive measure was selectively applied in relation to an entire editorial office during the time of the presidential elections. None of the journalists and camera operators of the *Asia-Plus* media group received accreditation to cover the electoral process after applying.

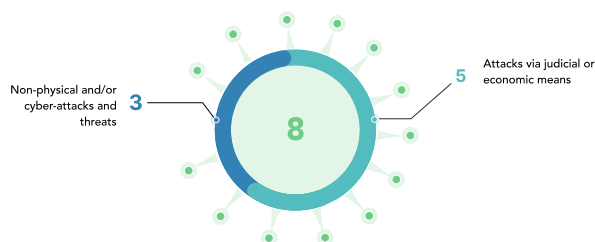


## 4/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Eight attacks on journalists associated with quarantine restrictions were recorded in Tajikistan: five attacks via judicial and/or economic means and three attacks that were in the nature of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats. Above all, they are associated with journalists' attempts to bring the attention of the authorities and the population to cases of death from pneumonia in Tajikistan.

### Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic

Tajikistan



Until 30 April, Tajik authorities officially did not recognise the existence of coronavirus in the country, even though journalists had begun reporting on deaths of patients with symptoms resembling those of COVID-19. The authorities officially refuted the information of the independent publications, while journalists who dared write about people getting infected with the coronavirus were subjected to harassment on social media.

- On 5 March, two journalists from the independent publication CCCP, Sitora Safarova and Sherali Davlatov, were **subjected to a lengthy interrogation**. They were detained as they were trying to photograph people buying products. The population in the republic had begun mass stockpiling of food at that time. The journalists were accused of sowing panic among the population. After the publisher intervened, the journalists were released.
- On 30 March, unknown persons, most likely using fake accounts, spread libellous material on Facebook against a journalist for her commentary about how the real situation with COVID-19 may be being covered up in Tajikistan. The unknown perpetrators posted a letter from a "doctor", who was insulting the journalist, calling her a fallen woman.

- On 1 April, journalists from *Radio Ozodi* (the Tajik service of *Radio Liberty*), who were among the first to report on cases of death from the coronavirus, **did not get extensions** of their accreditation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- On 26 April, an anonymous call was made to the *Asia-Plus* editorial office, with threats of reprisals and insults addressed at the journalist Avazmad Gurbatov (Abdullo Gurbati). Besides that, a video was posted on YouTube in which unknown persons called Abdullo a traitor because he was covering events connected with the COVID-19 epidemic in Tajikistan. In their words, he was deliberately stirring up the situation in the country, carrying out an order from dissidents.

## 5/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

Three instances were recorded in 2020, two of which were non-fatal attacks while one falls under the category of "abduction, illegal deprivation of liberty".

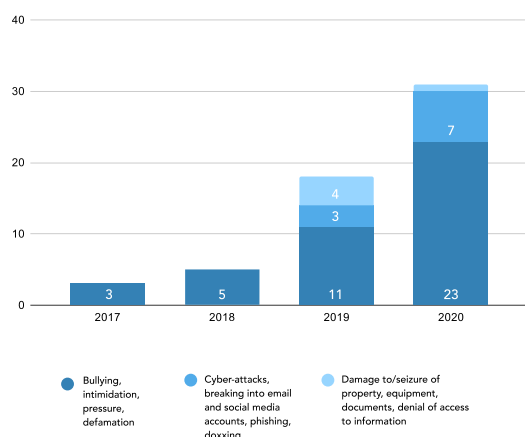
- Twice – on 11 and 29 May – the young Tajik journalist Avazmad Gurbatov (Abdullo Gurbati) was subjected to beatings. In the **first incident**, the culprits were not found, despite the fact that Gurbatov had promptly informed law-enforcement agencies about the incident. The journalist was beaten in the immediate vicinity of his home after work at that time.
- The second incident **took place** in Khuroson District, where Gurbatov had travelled on assignment from the editorial office in order to write a story about how this population centre was recovering after a mudslide. The journalistic community managed to get law enforcement structures to intervene. The culprits were found and were fined by court decision.
- On 17 March, the journalist Nisso Rasulova, who is actively fighting violence against women, was abducted near her home. The journalist was returned home after several hours. What was taking place with her at this time is unknown, but after the abduction Rasulova stopped conducting active civic work.

## 6/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

In comparison with 2019, in 2020 the quantity of recorded attacks increased by 13. As we have already noted, in Tajikistan journalists are in no hurry to report about such attacks; for this reason their real quantity is likely much higher.

### Non-physical / cyber-attacks

Tajikistan



The main method of non-physical pressure on journalists in 2020 became defamation and spreading libel about media workers or media outlets, as well as identity theft/ phishing/doxing. In 2020, there were more attacks on the part of representatives of the authorities (20) than from unknown perpetrators or non-representatives of the authorities (11).

The state used everything at their disposal to defame journalists, especially dissidents who had been forced to leave Tajikistan under pressure from the authorities: state television channels and internet publications, and a “troll factory” that functions with the support of state bodies, as well as independent publications collaborating with the security agencies.

- In particular, the **CCCP newspaper** accused seven Tajik journalists working beyond the country's borders, including the editors of the Radio Liberty Tajik service based in Prague, of links with the banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. This party had been the only opposition force to pose any real competition to the presidential party. In 2015, the leadership of the IRPT was charged with attempting to overthrow the state and the party was recognised as a terrorist organisation.

- Libellous and offensive material about the independent journalist Rajabi Mirzo was **published** in the state newspaper *Jumhuriyat*. The author was named as a graduate of the Centre for Journalistic Investigations. Immediately after the publishing of this article, the director of the Centre, Khurshed Atovullo, declared that he had never had any graduates with such a name.

## 7/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

The three main methods of pressure on media workers in 2020: ban on entering the country, denial or revocation of a visa/accreditation; shutting down a media outlet/blocking an internet site/request to remove or block articles/seizure of an entire print run; and court trial.

### Judicial / economic attacks

Tajikistan



In 2018, an amendment was introduced to the law on elections of the president, according to which Tajik publications require accreditation, just like foreign media outlets, in order to cover the voting. Registration at the Ministry of Culture is necessary for this.

- On 28 September, the Central Commission for Elections and Referendums of the Republic of Tajikistan denied accreditation for the upcoming presidential elections to nine *Asia-Plus* journalists. This was the result of time wasting with respect to registration at the Ministry of Culture, which in its turn explained that it had not received permission from the State Committee for National Security.

- Another such incident, likewise associated with the elections of the president, took place with a journalist from the *Nastoyashcheye Vremya* [Current Time] television channel, Anurshervon Arifpov. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan did not like how he had covered the president's pre-election meetings with the populace. As a result, the journalist **had his accreditation revoked**.

Shutting down a media outlet/blocking an internet site/request to remove or block article/seizure of an entire print run is the second of the most important methods of pressure.

- On 10 March, the internet sites of Tajikistan's large independent publications (*Radio Ozodi*, *Avesta*, *Faraj*, *Asia-Plus*) were blocked. All of the news websites were unblocked on the eve of the presidential elections that took place in Tajikistan in November, but they were blocked once again after the results of the voting had already been announced.
- On 9 April, the Supreme Court of Tajikistan adopted a decision on the blocking of the *Nahzat.ru* internet portal, a mirror of which is accessible through the internet address *Nahzat.org*. This is the portal of the banned Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan. The court granted the request of the general prosecutor, in which it was said that *Nahzat.ru* is associated with terrorist and extremist organisations banned in Tajikistan.
- On 13 November, the *Akhbor* portal announced its shutdown due to pressure from the authorities on journalists working with the publication.

Several court trials were initiated in relation to journalists and media outlets in 2020:

- On the basis of a decision of the Supreme Court of Tajikistan on 15 February 2020, also adopted on the basis of a request from the General Prosecutor's Office, *Akhbor* ([www.akhbor.com](http://www.akhbor.com)) was included in the list of internet sites banned on the territory of Tajikistan. The authorities accused the website of servicing terrorist and extremist organisations banned in Tajikistan – the Islamic Renaissance Party, the National Alliance of Tajikistan, and others. Then began harassment and persecutions of journalists working together with this internet publication. On 13 November, the internet site's editor was forced to shut the publication down completely.

- On 16 April, a court sentenced the independent journalist Daler Sharifov to a year of deprivation of liberty. The court found him guilty of inciting religious hate. The state prosecutor was demanding that the journalist be sentenced to 2 years 4 months of imprisonment. Sharifov **was released from prison** on January, 29 2021.
- A third court trial has been unprecedented for Tajikistan. On 1 October, the publication *Vecherka* became the co-defendant in a lawsuit brought by the businessman Tohir Ibrohimov against the fashion designer Parvin Jahongiri, who had accused her former employer of battery. After *Vecherka* published a story on the subject, Ibrohimov filed suit against Jahongiri. Her lawyer considered that the only defendant in the given lawsuit can be the publication, and filed an objection. After this, the publication was recognised as a co-defendant. The plaintiff is demanding recovery of damages for emotional distress in an amount of 100 thousand somoni for offence to his honour and dignity.
- On 15 October, the General Prosecutor's Office of Tajikistan initiated a criminal case under the criminal code article on fraud in relation to the editor-in-chief of the *isloh.net* site, Muhammadiqboli Sadriddin. It was suggested that the opposition journalist had misappropriated 430 thousand dollars worth of funds of three citizens of Tajikistan. The journalist called the charge "groundless" and declared that he himself has still not been repaid a debt of many thousands.



# TURKMENISTAN

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT TURKMENISTAN REPORT

The report offers a very detailed picture of the dismaying context in which independent media continue to operate in Turkmenistan. Beyond censorship, verbal and physical harassment—a practice that is now endemic—has represented the default approach regulating government-media relations for much of the post-Soviet era: this proposition explains the very limited number of independent media operators working in Turkmenistan. The report does an excellent job in capturing both the niche nature of independent journalism in Turkmenistan and the punitive approach whereby the regime continues to repress the activities of these few operators. Interestingly, it also brings forwards a series of worrying new opportunities for repression intrinsic to the politics of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Here, the report sketches out with great precision the repressive efforts complementing the government-imposed media ban on infection rates in Turkmenistan: this was a taboo topic, one that the regime was willing to contain even by policing Instagram posts and scouting the telephone contacts' list of ordinary citizens.

This report makes an equally important contribution when it describes the violence defining regime efforts to present Turkmenistan under Berdymukhammedov as living through a Golden Age. Here, the report describes the capillary control exerted by the regime on Turkmenistan's information flows, offering detailed examples of citizens being harassed, verbally and physically, for even the smallest complaint about the disastrous state in which Turkmens live their daily lives. Turkmenistan is not a place where people can speak their mind freely: the report offers a series of very detailed, and—even for the expert eye—hard-to-find data to describe another year in Turkmenistan's inhospitable media landscape.

**Dr Luca Anceschi**  
Senior Lecturer in Central Asian Studies,  
University of Glasgow



# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS AND MEDIA WORKERS IN TURKMENISTAN IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

2020, the year of COVID-19, was notable in Turkmenistan not only for the introduction of public health restrictions, the closing of the country's borders, the deepening of the economic and food crisis, and a rise in protest sentiments. For Turkmen citizen and professional journalists, the year brought new prohibitions on freedom of speech, an increase in the number of physical, non-physical, and judicial attacks, persecutions of those who exercised or attempted to exercise their right to freedom of information, and harassment of relatives.

Data about the attacks was obtained from open sources in the Russian, Turkmen, and English languages using the method of content analysis. Material that has previously not been made public and was obtained using the expert interview method was likewise used in the report. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 12**.

Considering the lack of openness of information in Turkmenistan and the hollowed out information field in this country, the number of non-physical, judicial, and economic attacks and threats (of blackmail, intimidation and humiliation, firing or demotion, and the like) recorded in 2020 corresponds to the 2017-2019 level.

1. **One physical attack** on a journalist and **one on a relative** of someone who had publicly voiced criticism of G. Berdimuhamedov was recorded in 2020. This quantity more or less corresponds to the average indicator for 2017-2019.
2. **Six instances** have become known in the past year of the authorities conducting judicial attacks on citizen activists who were suspected by the Ministry of State Security (MNB) of Turkmenistan of working with foreign media outlets or on those who had expressed their position on social media with regards to events that had taken place. This indicator is also equal to the average annual numbers for 2017-2019.
3. Compared with the data for 2017-2019, more became known in the year under consideration about

incidents of non-physical attacks on sources of information. About thirty such incidents were recorded.

4. In 2020, attacks or restrictions for media outlets under the guise of COVID-19 pandemic quarantine measures were not recorded in Turkmenistan.

## 2/ THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MEDIA IN TURKMENISTAN

Turkmenistan has consistently ranked near the very bottom (177-180) of the Reporters Without Borders NGO's **annual rating** since 2015. In the rating for 2020, Turkmenistan took 179th place, ending up between Eritrea and North Korea.

Analysis shows that in comparison with the previous year, the situation with political freedoms and civil liberties in Turkmenistan did not improve in 2020, and even fell for some of the indicators. Over the period under analysis, there began to be more public expression by citizens of their dissent toward the policies of president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov's regime. As can be expected, one can see a rise in incidents of the use by authorities of harsh repressive measures towards both those whose work is directly connected with journalism and the dissemination of information, and those who had reported on social media or through foreign media outlets about their personal problems or about arbitrary actions on the part of representatives of the structures of power.

The dynamics of the growth of civic activism in Turkmenistan and its harsh suppression are associated with the deep economic and financial and social crisis that has gripped the country, as well as the introduction of severe restrictions on movement in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, the existence of which the authorities continue to stubbornly deny. Life has become unbearably difficult for the overwhelming majority of the country's population. The number of people who have been left without a means of subsistence and have fallen into a desperate situation increased in 2020. People's desperation consists additionally of the fact that they cannot obtain justice, or have their problems resolved inside the country. They understand the futility of resorting to the courts, the prosecutor's office, to local media outlets, and even personally to the country's president. This desperation forces many to overcome their internal fear of the state and to seek help or protection abroad.

Protest sentiments are growing both inside the country and among citizens of Turkmenistan living abroad. Many citizens have begun using protected methods of transmitting information to human rights organisations and foreign media outlets that pose no danger to themselves.

### 3/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY AND HEALTH

On 12 August 2020, in Ashgabat, yet **another attack was perpetrated** on the journalist **Soltan Achilova** [*“Açylowa” in Turkmen*] - one of the few people who is openly working with foreign media outlets while still living in the country. S.Achilova is 70 years old. In previous years, she had been subjected to numerous assaults by unknown persons of an athletic build who were trying to forcibly take a camera from her during photo shoots, hurting her in the process.

Achilova is convinced that employees of the Ministry of State Security and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), as well as their henchmen from among people with a criminal past, are behind all the attacks against her. This time, a policeman assaulted S.Achilova during a photo shoot of a school fair. His aim was to impede S.Achilova in carrying out her professional duty and to snatch the camera from her hands. The scuffle between the policeman and the elderly woman was accompanied by loud accusations that the journalist was “going against state policy” and threats to take her to a police station. It all ended with S.Achilova managing to break free and flee the location of the photo shoot without receiving serious bodily injuries in the form of bruises and abrasions, as had been the case in prior years.

On 15 October, a knife wound was received by a relative of a person who had openly voiced criticism of G. Berdimuhamedov’s regime on the internet. **A resident of the village of Agalan** of Serdarabat [*now Çärjew*] District of Lebap Region, **Babajan Taganov** [*Taganow*] is the brother of **Dürsoltan Taganova**, who, whilst in Turkey, criticised the dictatorial regime in Turkmenistan in her video statement on the internet. On the eve of the attack, B. Taganov had been forcibly taken to a police station, where he had been beaten up as a result of his sister’s statement and his mother **Merýemgül Taganova** on the internet and for their participation in a protest movement abroad. The fact that the criminal case that was launched into the stabbing of B. Taganov was subsequently dropped indicates that the stabbing was perpetrated by people having a direct relation to the Ministry of State Security or the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

### 4/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL OR ECONOMIC MEANS

On 15 September in Turkmenistan, Ashgabat resident **Nurgeldi Halykov** [*Halykow*] was **sentenced to four years of deprivation of liberty**. Formally he was convicted for fraud, but in reality it was because he had forwarded a photograph of members of a WHO mission who had visited Turkmenistan in June to the editorial office of the *turkmen.news* publication. Nurgeldi had taken this photo from the Instagram page of an

acquaintance of his. The special services first tracked down this young woman, and then found N. Halykov through the contacts in her telephone. Turkmenistan’s criminal code does not have a punishment for forwarding a photograph that does not contain a state secret abroad. However, the fabrication of criminal cases in relation to undesirable people is widely practiced in the country. And that is just what happened with N. Halykov. Employees of the Ministry of State Security fabricated a case of fraud against him (ostensibly he had borrowed a large sum of money from his friend and not returned it) and locked the young person away for 4 years.

“Nurgeldi Halykov’s conviction exemplifies the absurdity of the trumped-up charges used by the authorities to gag the free press’s few remaining representatives. He risks being tortured in prison”, underscores the international organisation Reporters without Borders in its announcement, and calls upon Turkmenistan’s authorities to free Nurgeldi at once, and likewise asks OSCE representative on freedom of the media Teresa Ribeiro to strongly **condemn the young person’s arbitrary detention**.

Yet another instance of an analogous combination attack is associated with resident of the city of Mary, **Irina Misnik**, and her common-law spouse **Muhamed Shamsetdinov** [*Şamsetdinow*], whom the local special services, in connection with the appearance on the internet of still photos and articles from the Mary region, had begun to suspect of **working with media outlets abroad**. Irina Misnik’s detention took place on 10 December, International Human Rights Day. Irina could not move about on her own, because not long before this she had had a bad fall that had resulted in a compound fracture in her leg. Despite this, she was held for 48 hours in detention. Her spouse Muhamed was arrested for 15 days by the sentence of a court. Employees of the Ministry of State Security presented the case as though Muhamed had caused harm to Irina’s health out of motives of hooliganism. It is assumed that the spouses had been tortured or had been intimidated to such a great extent that after the expiration of the term of arrest, I. Misnik and M. Shamsetdinov are afraid to talk even with their loved ones about what had been done to them during the interrogation. Both were fired from work after this whole story (both had been working at private firms). It can be said with confidence that workers of the Ministry of State Security are behind the firing.

Yet **another instance of a judicial attack** was perpetrated on 5 September 2020 in relation to 48-year-old «Nebitdagneft» directorate lawyer **Pygamberdy Allaberdyev** [*Allaberdyýew*]. Even though this incident is not connected with journalistic activity directly, it does have a relation to freedom of speech and to freedom of expression of opinion. P. Allaberdyev had expressed his position in relation to calls for protest voiced in opposition chat rooms by way of a comment or a like. For

this, a criminal case was fabricated against him under the “hooliganism” article of the criminal code and he was sentenced to six years of deprivation of liberty.

P. Allaberdyev’s case, just like all analogous incidents, simply does not hold water. This is the crude, ham-fisted work of Ministry of State Security employees, who arranged for a stranger to approach him and at first verbally, and then physically, provoke a fight. As expected, the police appeared at the scene of the incident and the unknown person, having pointed at P. Allaberdyev as the instigator of the fight, calmly walked away while P. Allaberdyev was detained. His trial took place behind closed doors, in the building of the pre-trial detention centre; every lawyer in the country refused to represent P. Allaberdyev’s interests, understanding that the Ministry of State Security was behind this case and that doing so might lead to trouble for them.

A similar story also took place in June with Ashgabat resident **Murat Dushemov** [*Duşemow*], who had also openly voiced his opinion about the regime online. Human rights advocates reported on his detention; however, nothing about the subsequent fate of M. Dushemov is known with certainty. Radio Azatlyk has reported that the man has been transferred to **house arrest**.

In August 2020, the Turkmen Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and the Memorial human rights association reported about the detention of 24-year-old Turkmenabat resident **Reimberdi Kurbanov** [*Gurbanow*] for a statement made online, and of yet another resident of Lebap Welaýat (Region), whose name is not given, who **was arrested for 10 days** for attempting to send photographs abroad.

As in the 2017-2019 period, the special services reduce all incidents of the detention, arrest, and deprivation of liberty of citizens for correspondent activity or for freedom of speech cited above to concrete articles of Turkmenistan’s criminal code. This was the case with G. Matalayev [*Matalayew*], S. Nepeskulyev [*Nepeskulyýew*], H. Allashev [*Allaşow*], and others who received a real or suspended term of punishment ostensibly for fraud, possession of prohibited tobacco, *naswar* [*a moist powdered tobacco snuff popular in the region – Trans.*], or for narcotics.

## 5/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

Nearly all of the instances of physical and judicial attacks described above were combined by Turkmenistan’s special services with non-physical attacks. In 2002, the practice of using threats to life and health was significantly expanded, and affected many more citizens than in all previous years.

There is an unspoken prohibition on women driving motor vehicles that is in effect in Turkmenistan. In September, a group of approximately 30 women in Ashgabat initially applied in writing to the head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the general prosecutor, and the president with a demand to be issued new drivers’ licenses to replace licenses with an expired term of validity. Not having gotten a reply, they brought the work of the road police office to a standstill. After a week had passed, the women made an appointment to see head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs M. Chakiyev [*Çakiýew*], but he refused to see them. When the women went to the GAI [*State Automobile Inspectorate, the road police – Trans.*], an attempt was made to disperse them by force. As a result, one woman was knocked unconscious, while another received bruises and abrasions from the policemen’s actions.

The story went on for nearly two years and received **coverage in media** outlets abroad, after which each of the women began to be summoned, one at a time, by place of residence, to a police station, where they were warned that “they should not henceforth go to the GAI, that they are now being spoken to nicely, but if they don’t listen, then problems will be created for them and their relatives.”

If a citizen of Turkmenistan makes contact with publications abroad or posts his or her appeal on the internet, then he or she will certainly be subjected to repressions on the part of employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of State Security. If a citizen of Turkmenistan is not living in the country, then the state’s machine of repression will start to target the relatives of those who dare to make a statement online.

Thus, the parents and relatives of 36-year-old **Azat Isakov** [*Isakow*], who has been living in Russia for ten years, were **subjected to humiliations and threats**. The Ministries of Internal Affairs and State Security are thereby striving to get the parents to influence A. Isakov and demand that he not to make statements criticising the regime online.

Serving as a classic example is the story of 26-year-old Ashgabatian **Rozygeldi Choliyev** [*Çoliýew*] – a former student at a higher educational establishment in Karachay-Cherkessia [*in Russia – Trans.*]. R. Choliyev, using the online handle “Oraz”, had posted several video appeals with a critique of G. Berdimuhamedov’s regime on the internet. Through its colleagues from the FSB and Turkmenistan’s consulate in Moscow, Turkmenistan’s Ministry of State Security attained R. Choliyev’s expulsion from the higher educational establishment. **Pressure** began on Rozygeldi’s relatives inside the country.

His father, **Annamyrat Choliyev**, age 59, a nurse at a military hospital in the settlement of Bikrova (just outside Ashgabat), was taken to the building of the Ministry of

State Security in the vicinity of Ashgabat's Russian bazaar, where they demanded from him to summon the son home; otherwise, they threatened him with dismissal from work and confiscation of their three-room flat. After the Ministry of State Security, R. Choliyev's father and his mother, the pensioner Ogulmaral Choliyeva, were taken on numerous occasions to the police station, where they were interrogated for several days in an effort to get them to ensure that their son would no longer make statements on the internet.

A brother, **Merdan**, a specialist in installing video cameras, was demoted and warned of dismissal in the event of the appearance of new video statements from Rozygeldi on the internet. A sister, **Gulshat Choliyeva** [*Gülşat Çoliýewa*], who had worked 10 years at the state company «Altyn Asyr» (the mobile communications operator), was demoted at the end of September and transferred from the company headquarters to work at one of the outlets selling SIM cards. Before this, a high-ranking official at the company gave orders to conduct an audit of her work for the past 4-5 years.

The Turkmen authorities do not tolerate those who, in their opinion, air their dirty laundry in public. Even a statement on the internet or in media outlets abroad about one's purely personal everyday problems comes back to cause problems and trouble for the one who made the statement.

On 16 December, **Anna Kumykova**, a mother of two children who had been left homeless with the two children and belongings, published a video appeal to president G. Berdimuhamedov in the *turkmen.news* publication, with a request to render her assistance in restoring justice and the allotment of housing. Communication with the woman has been lost since 17 December. **Nothing is known** to this day about her fate and about the fate of her children.

**Gülsevenem Taganova**, working as a gardener for the closed joint-stock company «Hyzmat» of the «Turkmenneftegaz» amalgamation, was waiting in a queue for 13 years for the flat she is entitled to. Housing is furnished to employees with a 50% discount. In this time, both those who had been ahead of her in the queue and many who had come after her had received flats. The woman had filed statements and complaints with all the state bodies of Turkmenistan, but to no avail. Then she spoke about this to the *Khronika Turkmenistana* publication. After this, Gülsevenem **was fired**, while an unknown person, on instructions from the Ministry of State Security, left the woman without communication, having cut through the home's telephone wire in a one-room flat.





# UZBEKISTAN

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT UZBEKISTAN REPORT

Ever since coming to power in late 2016, President Mirziyoev has announced his commitment to media freedom and to end censorship. On the onset of his presidency, upon his initiative, a number of media representatives, including some from Western media outlets as well as a few formerly outcasted foreign based Uzbek media outlets, such as BBC Uzbek and Fregghana.ru, were invited to participate in this grand media event. However, though certain improvements have been made, largely, the situation with the intimidation of journalists and bloggers remains the same.

The report clearly and rightly states the number of cases when journalists were under attack. However, the most alarming conclusion that comes out of this report is that the majority of attacks on media representatives are taking place not in the capital, Tashkent, rather in the Uzbek regions where local administration and governors have ultimate control.

President Mirziyoev's calls for media openness go in sharp contradiction with what is really happening in the media landscape. There are several cases of attacks on journalists, stated in the report, which were not investigated by the Uzbek authorities and no perpetrator of crime has been punished. Sadly, we continue to witness the same impunity as regards to attacks on journalists during Mirziyoev's era, as it was during his predecessor, President Karimov.

Ambiguity as regards to the newly added article in the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan regarding spreading false information also didn't help. The law doesn't define "false information" and therefore is open to interpretation of the authorities and law enforcement agencies.

This again reminds of the old times of President Karimov, when the law makers left a lot of important and potentially controversial clauses in the laws open to interpretation which has resulted in a number of arrests of opposition members, journalists and anyone critical to the regime.

The report rightly emphasizes the role of Asadjon Khodjaev, the Head of the Agency on Mass Media and Communications under the President of Uzbekistan, as one of the obstacles to media freedom in the country. Being part of the previous regime, born and bred under the strict dictatorial environment of the previous president, Mr. Khodjaev's idea of the media is one to spread government propaganda. Anything else is considered either fake news or an attempt to undermine the government. Having somebody like Mr. Khodjaev in charge of the main agencies overseeing mass media says a lot about the commitment of President Mirziyoev to free media.

It apparent from the report that Uzbek authorities who are used to traditional media, such as TV and newspapers, now are facing a new challenge -bloggers. It is obvious that popularity of telegram channels and Instagram is something which they did not expect and were not prepared for. However, it is obvious from the report that they are committed to carry on silencing independent voices, especially at times of pandemic or during catastrophic events such as the Sardoba water reservoir falling.

In conclusion, it is beyond disappointing to see that during 2017-2020 reviewed by authors of the report, the progress on media freedom was minimal and it looks like the government of President Mirziyoev doesn't have a real commitment to media reforms, rather it is busy giving an impression of doing so to appease potential Western investors and to create a positive image of the country.

**Shahida Tulaganova, War journalist, Producer**

# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS, AND MEDIA WORKERS IN UZBEKISTAN IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

**129** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional and citizen journalists, media workers, and editorial offices of traditional and online publications, as well as online activists in Uzbekistan in 2020 were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data for the research were obtained from open sources in the Russian, English, and Uzbek languages using the method of content analysis. Data that have previously not been made public and were obtained using the expert interview method were likewise used in the report. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 13**.

1. The main type of attacks in relation to journalists, bloggers, and media workers are attacks via judicial and/or economic means (71 incidents).
2. The main source of threats are representatives of the authorities; they became the initiators of 89 attacks.
3. The quantity of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats has increased eight-fold since 2019.
4. 23 attacks connected with restrictions in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic were recorded over the monitoring period; non-physical attacks and threats account for six of these, attacks via judicial and/or economic means account for 16, and physical attacks for one.
5. The most highly publicised attack in 2020 became the extradition from Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan and the short-term detention of the independent journalist Bobomurod Abdullayev [also spelled *Abdullaev*].

## 2/ THE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THE MEDIA IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan took 156th place out of 180 in the Reporters Without Borders annual **freedom of speech rating** for 2020. In 2019, Uzbekistan held the 160th position.

In the international human rights organisation Freedom House's 2020 rating of internet freedom in the world ("Freedom on the Net"), Uzbekistan took 57th

place out of 65 (58th in 2019) and remains in the category of countries with unfree internet. Freedom House asserts that the level of access to the internet in the country continues to grow, although the authorities have not loosened control over the communications and information technology infrastructure.

Those who touch upon "prohibited" topics in reports or comments – who criticise the president or blow the whistle on corruption – can meet with stern punishment. Extensive non-technical censorship of online content exists in Uzbekistan, although it is not always reported about, notes Freedom House.

According to data given by a representative of the Agency of Information and Mass Communications under the Administration of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the OSCE's 22nd Central Asia Media Conference, 1800 media outlets are registered in the country (in 2019 there were 1765), of which 643 are state-owned.

One of the main sources of information has become the Telegram messaging service; in Uzbekistan it boasts no fewer than 18 million active users. The number of channels is constantly growing; as of today, there are no fewer than 30 thousand of them.

In the course of the realisation of the Digital Uzbekistan-2030 strategy, internet speeds have increased, which has contributed to growth in the quantity of users - in excess of 22 million.

In January 2020 former press secretary of the head of state Komil Allamjonov and the president's daughter Saida Mirziyoyeva became heads of the board of trustees of a new Foundation for Support and Development of National Mass Media. They became Uzbekistan's main representatives on various international platforms. Announced as the main goals of the new civic organisation were development of mass information media, promotion of the exercise of the rights of journalists and bloggers, strengthening of the role of civic institutions in consolidating freedom of speech in the country, and improving Uzbekistan's international image.

In the meantime, censorship in the country has intensified. Online publications, as had been the case in 2019, were being forced to delete publications. A new trend has emerged, however: the largest online publications were reprinting the articles of competitors that had been deleted at the demand of the authorities.

Bloggers express their point of view more freely in comparison with traditional media outlets. Texts have appeared about language policy, opposition to the state propaganda about "national spirituality", LGBT people, human rights and political prisoners, torture and the work of the law-enforcement services, the events of 2005 in Andijan [*Andijon*], and the harm caused by state monopolies and corruption. The blogger Ali Kaxxorov **conducted** an anonymous survey among the subscrib-

ers to his Telegram channel; 827 people took part in it. To the question “Who is more courageous and more independent?” 89% of those surveyed responded that it is bloggers and 9% that it is electronic media outlets. To the question “What for you is domestic journalism in our country”, out of 684 people 78% gave the response “Just a business, where the interests of advertisers and personal connections with the elites stand above journalistic ethics”. In the situation that has emerged, editorial offices and bloggers are compelled to go for compromises, taking into account both the need to monetise content and the threat of repressions.

The head of the Agency of Information and Mass Communications, Asadjon Xodjayev [*Khodjaev*], an electrical engineer by education, regards mass media outlets and bloggers as a part of the state propaganda apparatus. In November 2020, he accused an online publication of lack of objectivity and warned about “serious legal consequences”. The reason for the threats was critical posts on social media and in media publications with respect to problems with electrical and gas supply. The head of the AIMC discerned “an accusation addressed at the government of Uzbekistan of having committed a crime in relation to the populace” in these texts. Also incurring the displeasure of the AIMC chief was the fact that bloggers had brought attention to inconsistencies in the open statistical data about the number of persons who had fallen ill with COVID-19 and patients in special hospitals.

On 25 December 2020, punishment for dissemination of false information was added to legislation. The concept of “false information” is not concretised in the law, which opens the door to broad opportunities for abuse in criminal and administrative prosecution. After the introduction of amendments to the Administrative Code for false information that leads to an affront to dignity or defamation of character, offenders will face a fine in an amount of 1065 dollars, while for disinformation creating a threat to public order or safety the fine increases to 2130 dollars.

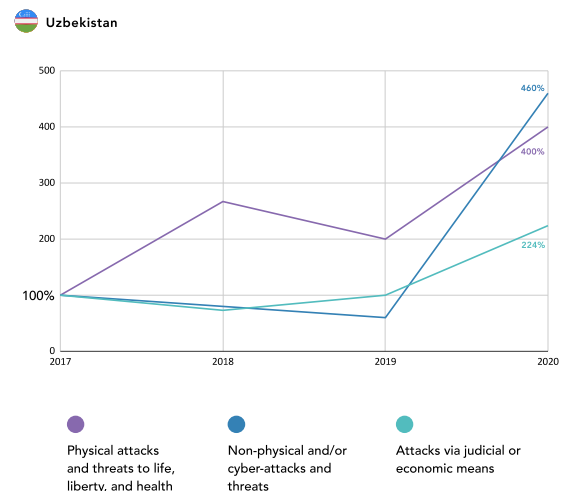
The Criminal Code has been supplemented with an article for repeat dissemination of false information: the fine will increase to 3195 dollars; besides that, the violator can be ordered to perform up to 240 hours of community service or correctional work up to two years, or have his or her liberty restricted for that same term. For information that threatens public safety, offenders face a fine up to 4200 dollars or community service up to 300 hours. If from judges’ point of view the violator’s actions have caused significant loss, then the fine can go as high as 85 thousand dollars, while restriction of liberty will comprise up to three years. If the violation took place during mass events or during a time that a state of emergency was in effect, then the terms of restriction or deprivation of liberty can increase to five years.

### 3/ GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

The graph below represents a general analysis of attacks on journalists, bloggers, and media workers in 2020 in Uzbekistan.

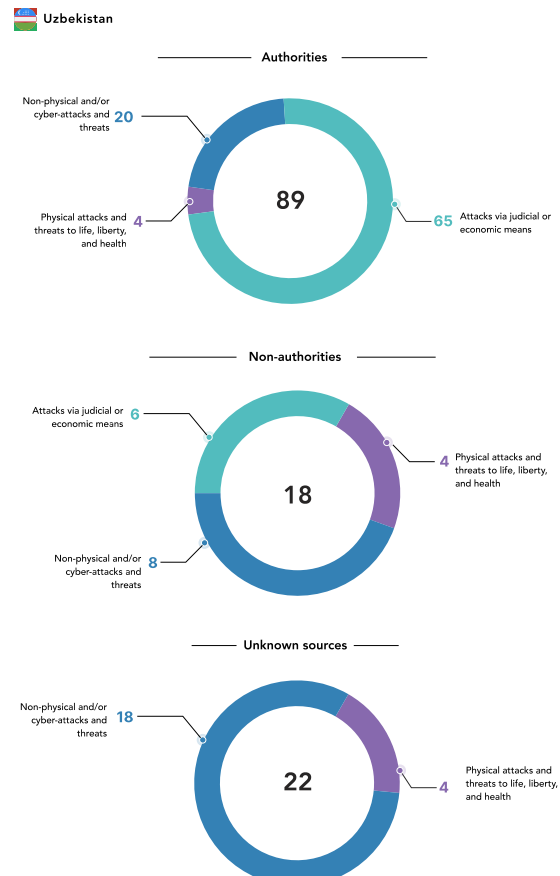
#### Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020

Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)



The number of attacks increased in all the categories, but non-physical and/or cyber-attacks/threats became particularly greater in frequency –an eight-fold rise is observed in this category in comparison with 2019. The number of attacks via judicial and/or economic means increased more than two-fold. There were 12 physical assaults recorded.

#### Initiators of attacks on media workers



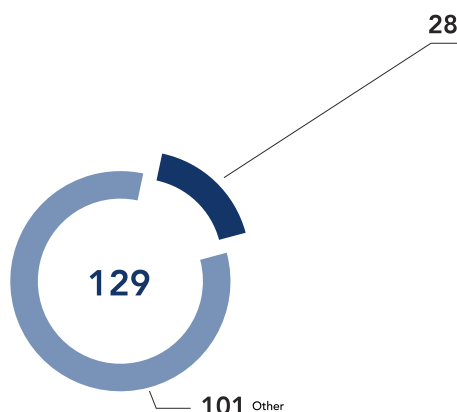
For the purposes of more precisely reflecting combination assaults on media workers in 2020 we are introducing a new category of attacks – hybrid.

We are calling systematic persecution of some publication or media worker with the use of tools from two or more categories of assaults – physical, non-physical, and judicial/economic – “hybrid”. Such a combination of means involving and not involving force with judicial means of pressure on undesirable journalists is carried out with a view to demoralising them or getting them to self-censor or to give up the profession or even life itself.

In 2020, 28 hybrid attacks were recorded, of which 20 attacks committed against 4 journalists. Presented below is the list of the journalists and bloggers who were being subjected to the most intensive hybrid attacks in 2020.

#### Hybrid attacks on media workers

 Uzbekistan




#### of which 20 attacks committed against 4 media workers

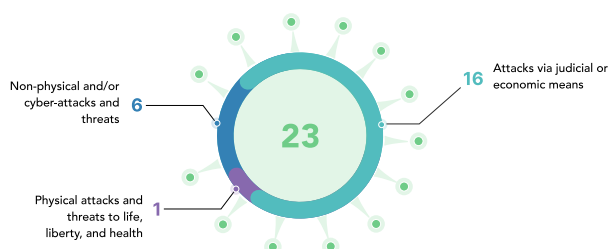
Media worker	Total	Phys.	Non-phys.	Jud.
Otabek Nurtdinov, blogger	6	1		5
Vlad Avdeyev, blogger; Hook.report, Telegram channel BlackRaven	5	1	4	
Giyosbek Eshov, Effect.uz	5	2	3	
Abu-Alli Niyozmatov, Podrobno.uz	4	2	2	

## 4/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In the period of the pandemic, all registered media outlets and bloggers became rebroadcasters of the reports of the Special Commission for Fighting the Coronavirus.

#### Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic

 Uzbekistan



From March through May, the authorities were restricting the movements of media workers, which elicited a sharply negative reaction on their part. As of 16 March the authorities began introducing harsh administrative measures and on 26 March they introduced fines in a sum from 650 to 900 dollars for creating panic amongst the populace.

Changes to article 244 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan prescribe that “dissemination of information not corresponding to reality about the spread of quarantinable and other infections dangerous to humans” in “a printed or otherwise duplicated text or in the mass information media, as well as the Internet worldwide information network”, shall be punishable by a fine in an amount from 200 to 400 base calculation values or compulsory community service

from 300 to 360 hours, or correctional work from two to three years, as well as restriction of liberty up to three years.

Journalists switched to working online. They made do with information from a cabinet of ministers working group and the *Coronavirus info* Telegram channel, created by the Foundation for Support and Development of National Mass Media. This foundation is also involved in the *Antifake.uz* project: the channel’s administrators look for inaccuracies in the publications of the local media and try to refute the reports of *Radio Liberty’s* Uzbek service. At times things could get rather bizarre – the reports of special groups affiliated with the government were being refuted as fakes. However, the first to fall under the watchful eye of the police were bloggers and independent journalists.

23 attacks associated with pressure and restrictions in the period of COVID-19 were recorded over the monitoring period, six of which represent non-physical attacks and threats and 19 are attacks via judicial and/or economic means; one attack was physical in nature.

- Baxtiyor Karim, editor-in-chief of the print publication *Adabiyot gazetasi* (*Literary newspaper*), found himself in compulsory quarantine in a special zone. His colleagues are confident there is a political undercurrent to the isolating of the journalist.



All non-physical attacks belonged to the “bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber-” subcategory:

- On 23 March, unknown persons telephoned journalist and blogger Yuri Chernogayev and reminded him about criminal liability for “dissemination of panic” in posts about the situation with COVID-19 in Uzbekistan.
- On 24 March, an employee of the Urgench department of internal affairs and a sanitary-epidemiological station worker compelled freelance journalist Sergey Naumov to sign on for self-isolation for 14 days, despite the fact that he had returned long before the introduction of quarantine and had flown in from a “green zone” - Georgia. Subsequently a precinct police officer tried to force Naumov to take a test for AIDS and venereal diseases after a three-day sojourn in Georgia, supposedly as a labour migrant.
- On 31 March, an employee of the law-enforcement agencies called photojournalist Timur Karpov and demanded that he set off with him to a shipping container camp for quarantine, despite the fact that three weeks had passed since the journalist’s return from Georgia. The need for the compulsory isolation was not explained to Karpov. The journalist ignored the unlawful demands.
- On 20 November, the editorial offices of the *Gazeta.uz*, *Daryo.uz*, and *Podrobno.uz* publications received a letter from the director-general of the Agency of Information and Mass Communications under the Administration of the President, Asadjon Xodjayev, who was threatening them with serious legal consequences for publication of statistics and news about COVID-19.

The main methods of pressure via judicial and/or economic means were court trials (6), administrative arrests, remand, pre-trial detention, prison (5), and criminal/administrative case (5).

- On 7 April, bloggers Umid Hamidov, Kamola Majidova, and Olmosbek Razikov [*Razikov* (sic)] were arrested for 15 days for “violation of quarantine rules” and “petty hooliganism”. They were circulating a video taken at a monument to Amir Temur: Majidova was jokingly asking the monument “when will the coronavirus leave Uzbekistan?” Being found in public places without personal protection equipment should carry a fine, not 15 days of arrest. The court discerned disrespect for a historical figure in the video. Besides that, it deemed that “actions expressing deliberate flouting of the rules of conduct in public” had been “demonstrated” in the video.
- On 8 April, the blogger Heydar Aliyev was arrested for seven days under article 183 (petty hooliganism) of the Code on Administrative Liability. As the judge asserts, the blogger “was demon-

strating disdain for sanitary-epidemiological requirements, as well as ridiculing, with the use of explicit language, the work of employees of internal affairs bodies being conducted in the days of quarantine”.

- On 19 May, employees of the law-enforcement agencies fined Sabina Bakayeva, a journalist with the online publication *Gazeta.uz*, for not wearing a mask. They did not display video evidence of the violation of the quarantine regime - their body cameras had been shut off in violation of an agency instruction. According to eyewitness evidence, Bakayeva had been wearing a mask.
- On 25 May, the administrative court of Mirobod District of Tashkent fined the journalist Sabina Bakayeva for riding a bicycle, even though she was not violating the authorised procedure for travel during the time of quarantine.
- On 27 May, the Fergana city administrative court found Fergana Regional Television and Radio Company journalist Usmonjon Qodirov [*Kodirov*] guilty of the offences prescribed by part 1 of article 54 (violation of the rules for fighting epidemics), article 183 (petty hooliganism), and part 1 of article 194 (not carrying out the lawful demands of an employee of internal affairs bodies) of the Code on Administrative Liability. The journalist was meted out 15 days of arrest. The real reason for his administrative prosecution was a post on Facebook about medical personnel being called to do landscaping work before the arrival of the president.
- On 22 July, “handlers” at one of the law-enforcement agencies compelled administrator of the Telegram channel *Troll.uz* Umid Gafurov to remove a post about corruption in the period of the pandemic. He had conducted an anonymous survey among readers and had brought to light that patients were signing receipts that they had supposedly undergone a course of treatment costing 3 thousand dollars, for which they were promised monetary compensation. Several dozen people had confirmed the fact of corruption.

## 5/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

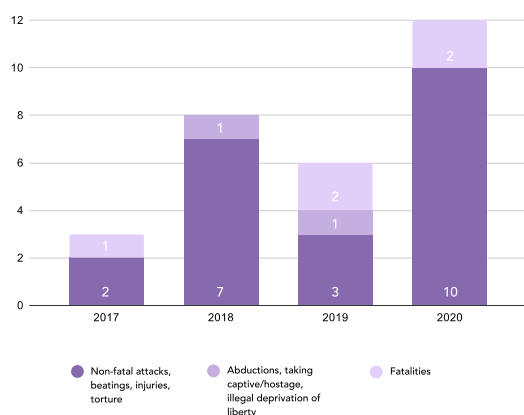
As compared with 2019 the quantity of attacks on journalists and bloggers in 2020 grew significantly; the geography of the attacks expanded and the degree of their cruelty increased. 8 of the 12 recorded attacks were physical assaults:

- On 18 February, blogger Otabek [*Abdufatto*] Nuritdinov was cruelly beaten up by the owners of a shop for a post on social media about the sale of alcohol next to the Khalid ibn al-Walid [*Xolid*

*Ibn Valid*” in Uzbek] mosque in Asaka District of Andijan Region. They ripped apart Nuritdinov’s mouth. Doctors had to put five stitches in his oral cavity and one on his face.

## Physical attacks

Uzbekistan



- On 13 May, online publication *Effect.uz* video operator Giyosbek Eshov [G’iyosbek Eshov] ended up in hospital in Quva District of Fergana Region after being assaulted by four unknown persons as he was carrying out an editorial assignment. They sprayed him from a gas canister and impaired his vision. The assailants also stole a camera from an automobile.
- On 6 July, in the Tashkent Region four employees of the law-enforcement bodies beat up and illegally detained the blogger Saodat Abduzakirova. During the time of the detaining, they ripped her blouse and inflicted mild bodily injuries.
- On 23 July, two unknown persons beat up the journalist Vlad Avdeyev of the independent on-line publication *Hook.report* and took away his smartphone. Threatening reprisal, they forced him to pay ransom for his telephone. The journalist did not have the necessary sum with him; he was forced to let the unknown persons into his flat and to give them the money there. After the criminal incident the journalist wrote a report of crime to Tashkent’s Uchtepa District Department of Internal Affairs; however, an investigation was not duly conducted. The journalist connects this attack with his publications about the LGBT community.
- On 7 October, the journalist Abu-Ali Niyozmatov was shooting pictures of the illegal felling of trees next to a cafe in Tashkent Region. Unknown persons dragged him into the establishment, beat him up, took away his smartphone, and locked him up inside the premises. After a call from Niyozmatov’s friend, internal affairs employees arrived and freed the journalist. The forcible confinement was not investigated.

- On 23 October, in Tashkent, checkpoint-and-patrol service employees beat up online publication *Kun.uz* journalist Alisher Ruziohunov [Alisher Ro’zioxunov] with truncheons. Being behind the wheel, the journalist had lightly brushed against a police inspector, who deliberately provoked a road accident. One of the employees took his telephone from him, whilst another inspector in a mask hit the journalist full force with a truncheon in the stomach.
- On 18 June, the moderator of the *Sukut Saqlama* Telegram channel, Nigora Adizova, was threatened with murder by a neighbour. In the presence of law-enforcement agency employees, Gulnoza Mamatova, armed with a knife, was breaking down Adizova’s door shouting “I’m going to butcher you and your children!”

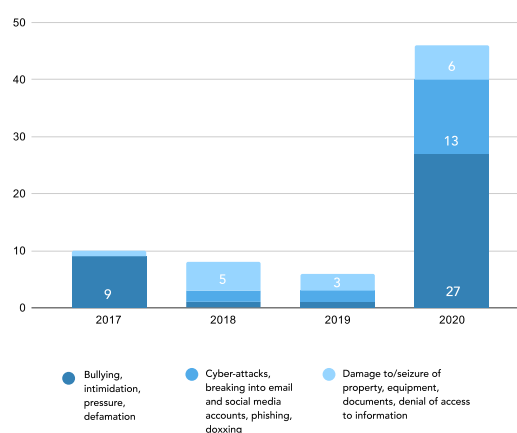
One instance of pressure on a media worker by means of physical pressure on relatives and loved ones was recorded:

- On 4 September, the father of print publication *Navoiy ziyosi* journalist Mahfuza Pulatova was beaten up by acquaintances of the chairman of the «Bog’i Shamol» *mahalli* (quarter) of Karmana District of Navoiy Region. Earlier, the chairman had threatened her with consequences for a critical article. The publication “Blagotvoritel’nost’ dlya efira” [“Charity for the cameras”] contained sarcastic remarks addressed at the chairman of the *mahalli*.

## 6/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

### Non-physical / cyber-attacks

Uzbekistan



In comparison with 2017-2019, twice as many non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats were recorded in 2020 – 46 as opposed to 24. The most widespread forms of pressure were bullying, intimidation, pressure,

threats of violence and death, including cyber- (20), defamation, spreading libel about a media worker or media outlet (6), and breaking into email/social media accounts/computer/smartphone (6).

Only a few attempted cyber-attacks have been documented. In reality there were far more of them.

- On 23 March, the *Hook.report* website was subjected to a DDoS attack and was working intermittently. Texts of dubious content appeared on the website instead of the normal materials.
- On 25 July, a hacker attack was perpetrated on the *Repost.uz* news agency website. The malefactors posted news about the death of Musa Yerniyazov, chairman of the Joqarg'i Ken'es [*Supreme Soviet*] of Karakalpakstan [*Qaraqalpaqstan*]. In the course of several days the headline was not visible on the website; the publication did open with a direct link, however. According to the editorial office's story, the hackers had gained access to the editorial control panel of one of the editors. The news went viral on Telegram channels.
- On 31 July, journalists from the independent website *Hook.report* published material about the summons to the State Security Service of the blogger Miraziz Bazarov. After this, announcements about the rendering of sexual services appeared on the net in the name of two employees of this publication, Vlad Avdeyev and Darina Solod. The journalists' personal data and telephone numbers and photographs were published. It is assumed that Uzbekistan's special services are behind the attack.
- On 6 August, unknown persons tried to break into the Telegram accounts of several bloggers, including Zafarbek Solijonov, Alexandra Ivanyuzhenko [*Sasha Ivanyujenko*], Feruzkhan Yakubkhodjaev [*Feruzxon Yoqubxo'jayev*], and Shukhrat Kurbanov [*Shuxrot Qurbonov*].

Three attacks associated with trolling were also recorded:

- Blogger Kirill Altman was subjected to trolling by students from the University of Journalism and Mass Communications on 29 January. As if by command, dozens of students began posting angry posts threatening Altman with court and indicating at his having mental health problems.
- On 1 September, Artel, an Uzbek group of companies producing household appliances and electronics, forced their employees to engage in trolling in relation to *Troll.uz* administrator Umid Gafurov after he had posted a satirical clip about Tashkent mayor Jahongir Ortiqhojaev [*Jahongir Ortiqxo'jayev*].
- On 3 September, blogger Aqida Hanum organised a live interview on Facebook with a victim of domestic violence. The woman recounted

that she was an orphan and that her husband had been regularly beating her for eight years and was forcing her to eat soiled diapers. As a result, trolls attacked the blogger and she received threats addressed to her.

Bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber- were the most widespread methods of pressure in 2020. In roughly half of the incidents, attacks of this type came from representatives of the authorities:

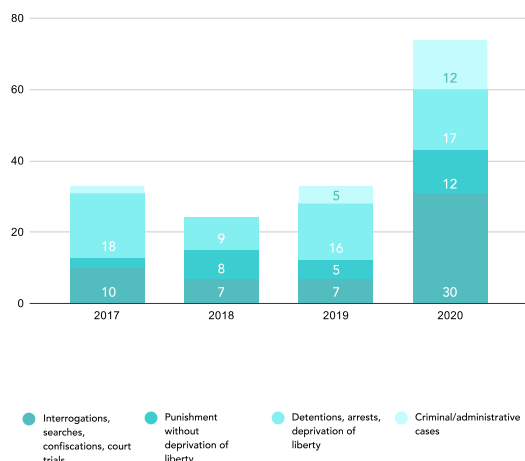
- On 8 January, former manager of the government Citizen Reception Office of Samarkand [*Samarqand*] Jamshid Umarov was verbally abusing the blogger Timur Sattarov, who had come to a polling station to observe the course of the voting, and was trying to get him to leave.
- On 17 January, a major of the local police, accompanied by a precinct police officer, lay in wait for the independent journalist Sid Yanishev by his house in Tashkent. Without introducing himself, the officer demanded that Yanishev produce a passport and said to him "Remember me!".
- On 27 April, an unknown person was intimidating an *asiaterra.info* journalist (name withheld in the interests of security) by telephone, having introduced himself as an employee of the Ministry of Justice.
- On 3 September, Mahfuza Pulatova, a journalist with the *Navoi ziyosi* newspaper, was threatened with consequences by the chairman of the «Bog'i Shamol» mahalli (quarter) of Karmana District of Navoiy Region for a critical article.
- On 23 November, director-general of the Agency of Information and Mass Communications under the Administration of the President Asadjon Xodjayev accused the online publication Kun.uz of lack of objectivity and warned of "serious legal consequences". The threats were associated with the publication of critical posts in regard to problems with electric power and natural gas in Uzbekistan.

## 7/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

In 2020, the quantity of attacks in the given category more than doubled, reaching 74 incidents. The main methods of pressure were court trials (12), criminal and administrative cases, excluding libel, insult, and charges of extremism and dissemination of false information (12), confiscation/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials (10), and administrative arrest, remand, pre-trial detention, prison (9).

## Judicial / economic attacks

Uzbekistan



The most highly publicised attack against a journalist in 2020, one that attracted the attention of international human rights organisations, became the incident with Bobomurod Abdullaev. Abdullaev, a journalist from Uzbekistan, was detained by employees of the State Committee for National Security of Kyrgyzstan in one of Bishkek's cafes. The Uzbek journalist had arrived in Kyrgyzstan from Berlin, where he had spent several months at the invitation of Reporters Without Borders after he had been convicted and had served punishment in Uzbekistan for his journalistic activity.

The leading international human rights organisations were calling on Kyrgyzstan's authorities not to extradite the journalist to Uzbekistan, where earlier he had already been subjected to torture on the part of the local special services. However, after a two-week spell in a pre-trial detention facility, Bishkek's SCNS handed Abdullaev over to Uzbekistan. There, employees of the State Security Service subjected him to an eight-hour interrogation, after which the state security service disseminated a video in which the journalist expresses appreciation to president Mirziyoyev for concern for his fate and humaneness.

The journalist is under investigation on charges of assault on the constitutional order of the Republic of Uzbekistan and assault on the president of the Republic of Uzbekistan. He is prohibited from leaving Uzbekistan, and his movements within the country are restricted. In the meantime, the authorities have given him a three-room flat in order to placate the international community, which had been fighting for his release.

Confiscation/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, and journalistic materials have become the main methods of attacks on journalists in this category:

- On 22 April, special correspondent for the newspaper *Ma'rifat* and member of the Farg'ona regional section of the Creative Union of Journalists of Uzbekistan Sharifa Madrahimova was being held over the course of two hours in the department

of internal affairs of Uchko'prik District of Fergana Region for shooting video of a food fair. The *hokim's* (head of the local administration) secretary was trying to grab her telephone from her as she was recording. After the journalist's release from the department of internal affairs, the recordings on her device turned out to have been deleted.

- During the detaining of a *Human.uz* camera operator on 3 May, employees of the department of internal affairs damaged his camera, after which they deleted footage with victims of the Sardoba reservoir dike breach he had filmed. A *Human.uz* journalist was likewise detained. After the detaining employees of the local law-enforcement bodies deleted the material that had been shot.

Another widespread method of pressure on journalists and bloggers was interrogation.

- On 26 July, six Karakalpak journalists and bloggers were summoned for interrogation to the prosecutor's office. The reason became a repost of a report on the *Repost.uz* website about the death of the long-time leader of Karakalpakstan. The interrogation went on until three o'clock in the morning; some people had smartphones and notebooks confiscated.

One incident of forced emigration was recorded in 2020:

- On 19 January, the blogger Nafosat Olloshukurova fled Uzbekistan, fearing another hospitalisation in a specialised early treatment psychiatric clinic. Earlier Olloshukurova had been arrested for covering a local journalist's individual protest, had announced a hunger strike, and had spent three months in the Xorazm [*Khorezm*] specialised early treatment psychoneurological clinic.

Besides the criminal and administrative cases connected with the COVID-19 pandemic and described in the corresponding section, several more incidents of judicial persecution ought to be mentioned:

- On 4 January, the Andijan Administrative Court found the blogger Otabek Nuritdinov guilty of libel, insult, and petty hooliganism and set him punishment in the form of a fine in an amount of 1365 US dollars and administrative arrest for 15 days.
- On 4 March, the Military Court of Uzbekistan sentenced Vladimir Kaloshin, a former journalist with the print publication *Vatanparvar* (Patriot), to 12 years in a general regime prison colony. Kaloshin was found guilty under article 157 (high treason) of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan. The evidence of the crime was not read out in court.
- Dadaxon Haydarov, administrator of the YouTube channel *DENGIZ TV*, the lone blogger in Sokh District of Fergana Region, was arrested on August 25. Haydarov is suspected of organising mass disturbances and resisting representatives of the authorities.





# UKRAINE

## AN INDEPENDENT EXPERT OPINION ABOUT UKRAINE REPORT

The situation in the Ukrainian media space looks far from ideal, but on the whole quite satisfactory indeed.

Its distinguishing feature – and a positive one at that – is the fact that there are not very many state media outlets, and they do not occupy, nor have they in the past (not even in the years when the pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich was in power), a dominant position in the media market.

The state-owned Ukrainian Television and Radio Company (UTRK), having nearly 100 percent coverage, could never boast of having either high ratings or a substantial audience share. The main reason for this is that the state had neither the will nor the financial capabilities to put large amounts of money into its operations and development. In 2017 UTRK was transformed into the National Public Television and Radio Company of Ukraine (NOTU). The idea was that his company would become an analogue of an independent public-law broadcaster along the lines of the *BBC* or *Deutsche Welle*. However, the process of reforming UTRK has not yet brought the desired results in connection with a lack of the necessary funding and likewise because of a problem with the selection of top management personnel. NOTU's supervisory board, whose competence includes resolving all key personnel questions, is formed out of representatives of the deputies' [MPs'] factions of the Ukrainian parliament and a series of public organisations, which find themselves in a state of political and ideological competition with one another.

The most popular television channels with nationwide coverage belong to various financial-industrial groups, have divergent political and business interests, and are fiercely competitive with one another. Thanks to this, the overall picture on Ukraine's television market is reminiscent of the situation in the 1990s in Russia, with a polyphony of opinions, assessments, and interpretations of events, as well as fierce competition for viewers. As a result, the channels offer audiences a product of sufficiently high quality, including from the point of view of observing generally accepted journalistic standards.

A significant majority of politically active Ukrainian citizens supported the authorities' decision on the closure of the three niche television channels 112, *NewsOne*, and *Zik* that belonged to the pro-Russian businessman and politician Viktor Medvedchuk, who for many years now is regarded by a significant part of Ukrainian society as an undisguised agent of influence for Russia.

On the strength of a certain conflict of interests the author of these lines (working on one of the competitor television channels, as well as having a many-year history of unfriendly personal relations with Viktor Medvedchuk) does not feel he has the right to give an extensive assessment of these events. Let me limit myself to just asserting the fact that the enumerated channels, without any doubt whatsoever, had existed at the expense of sources of funding found in neighbouring Russia – a country that has for many years been waging an undeclared war against Ukraine – as well as having engaged in heavy-handed pro-Russian propaganda, which in the conditions of a factual time of war can hardly be considered acceptable.

Print media outlets that still have any kind of noticeable influence no longer exist in Ukraine, and nearly all of them have transitioned to producing exclusively electronic versions. A dozen or so popular, influential, and quality, from the point of view of journalistic standards, socio-political publications ensure pluralism of opinion and a very lively discussion on the broadest range of problems of the country's foreign and domestic politics.

Besides television channels and print publications, users of the Ukrainian segment of the internet and the leading international social networks (Facebook, Twitter, and others) have a mass of opportunities to access alternative points of view, including pro-Russian ones, on events in the country and the world. A multitude of popular bloggers exist in Ukraine, offering the entire spectrum of opposition views. It is gratifying to note that there have been no recorded cases of significant pressure on these persons, and all the more so of their targeted persecution, on the part of the Ukrainian authorities, especially with the use of law-enforcement agencies and the special services, as has become the norm of life in neighbouring Russia.

**Yevgeny Kiselyov, Presenter,  
Ukrayina 24 news channel**

# ATTACKS ON JOURNALISTS, BLOGGERS, AND MEDIA WORKERS IN UKRAINE IN 2020

## 1/ KEY FINDINGS

**422** instances of attacks/threats in relation to professional and citizen media workers and editorial offices of traditional and online publications in Ukraine in 2020 were identified and analysed in the course of the research. The data were obtained from open sources in the Ukrainian, Russian, and English languages using the method of content analysis. A list of the main sources is presented in the **Annex 14**. Likewise used were the data of an expert survey of more than 50 victimised media workers, conducted within the framework of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine's "Index of Physical Safety" project.

1. Ukraine falls into the group of countries in which physical attacks on media workers are highly pervasive. 74 incidents were recorded in 2020, which exceeds the 2019 indicator (63 incidents) by 19%.
2. In 55% of the incidents the attacks on journalists, bloggers, and media workers were perpetrated by representatives of the authorities; 28% of the attacks came from non-representatives of the authorities, and 17% from unknown perpetrators.
3. As before, the most widespread method of pressure on media workers remains non-physical attacks, primarily illegal impediments to journalistic activity and denial of access to information.
4. Popular ways of intimidation of or revenge on journalists remain arson or other forms of damage to their homes and cars.
5. 51 instances of attacks/restrictions within the framework of quarantine measures were recorded in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ukraine.

Far from all the information about threats and attacks of various types ends up in the mass media or on social networks. Non-physical threats and non-fatal attacks take place with such frequency that they are considered by the majority of journalists working in Ukraine to be an unavoidable part of their everyday professional activity. They are not given broad publicity and do not become an occasion for turning to the law-enforcement agencies for protection.

## 2/ THE OWNERS OF THE LARGEST UKRAINIAN MEDIA OUTLETS

Ukraine took 96th place in the Reporters Without Borders' **annual freedom of the press index** for 2020, having risen by six positions throughout the year.

According to the rating of the international human rights organisation Freedom House, the internet in Ukraine is "partly free" (61 out of 100 points). Internet freedom in Ukraine is gradually improving in comparison with 2017, when Ukraine picked up 55 out of 100 points.

More than 70% of the assets on Ukraine's television market are divided among six groups, which are under the control of influential businessmen and politicians – Victor Pinchuk, Ihor Kolomoyskyi, Rinat Akhmetov, Dmytro Firtash, Viktor Medvedchuk, and Petro Poroshenko.

To oligarch Victor Pinchuk, owner of the Interpipe pipe manufacturing company and son-in-law of ex-president of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, belongs the largest television holding company, StarLightMedia, which includes six television channels. The holding company's leading channel – *ICTV*.

Oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyi's *1+1 Media* holding company includes six channels, among them one of the most popular television channels in Ukraine, *1+1*. Information appeared in 2020 about how part of the holding company's shares had been bought out by a company registered to the wife of opposition politician Viktor Medvedchuk.

Ranked among the largest television holding companies is Media Group Ukraine, belonging to the wealthiest Ukrainian, Rinat Akhmetov. The holding company's flagship television channel is *Ukrayina*. A new news television channel, *Ukrayina 24*, was launched in 2020; many popular presenters from other news channels came over to work there. It is worth noting that the media group is consistently growing its audience.

The Inter Media Group media holding company, the key television channel of which is *Inter*, belongs to oligarch Dmytro Firtash, who at the given moment is in Austria. A minority co-owner of *Inter* is opposition parliamentarian Serhiy Lyovochkin. At the present time this media group is losing audience share.

Under the influence of opposition politician and businessman Viktor Medvedchuk are three news television channels: *112 Ukraine*, *NewsOne*, and *ZIK*. Their official owner – Medvedchuk's associate in political activity, parliamentarian Taras Kozak.

Fifth president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko officially owns the news channel *5 Kanal*. Besides that, political

support for Poroshenko and his European Solidarity party is provided by the Pryamyi television channel.

According to the results of research studies, 75% of television viewers watch for the most part the television channels *STB*, *Novyi*, *ICTV* (belong to Pinchuk); the *1+1* television channel (owner – Kolomoyskyi), *Inter* (Firtash), and *Ukrayina* (Akhmetov).

92% of radio listeners prefer the four main media groups: *TAVR Media* (belonging to Pinchuk), *UMH* (belonging to Serhiy Kurchenko), *Business Radio Group* (belonging to Anatoliy Yevtukhov), and *Radio Lux* (belonging to Andriy Sadovyi's family).

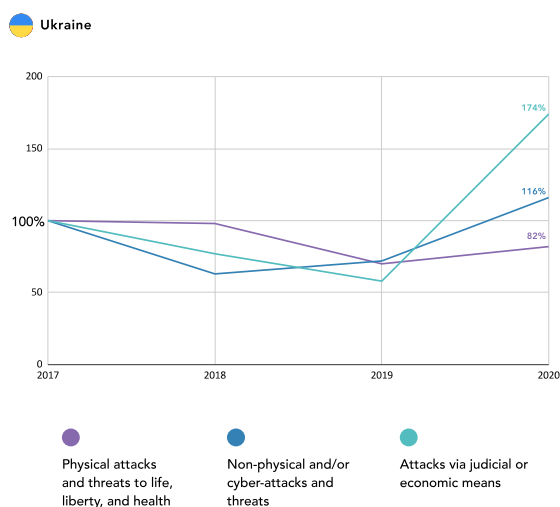
It is worth noting that the *24 media group*, which includes television channels and print and online media, likewise belongs to family members of Sadovyi (a Ukrainian politician, the current mayor of Lviv).

### 3/ GENERAL ANALYSIS OF ATTACKS

The graph below represents the quantitative analysis of the three main types of attacks on journalists on the territory of Ukraine in the period from 2017 through the year 2020.

#### Attacks on media workers, 2017-2020

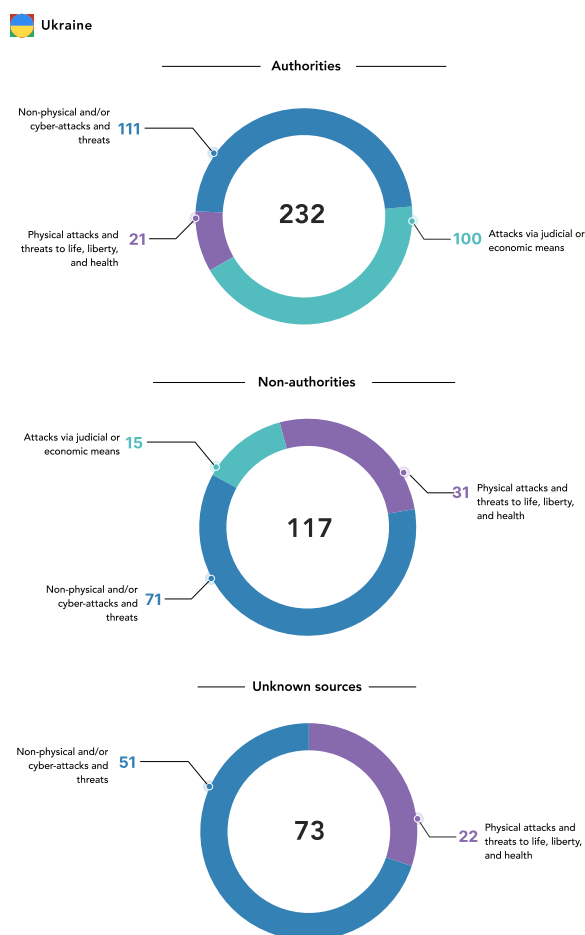
Relative values (data for 2017 are taken as a baseline -100%)



The quantity of attacks in all three categories increased in 2020. Although the number of physical attacks grew in comparison with the previous year, it is lower than the indicators recorded in 2017 and 2018. It ought to be noted that the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine has managed to achieve a constructive working relationship with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the National Police of Ukraine. Police agencies are opening up cases more speedily than in previous years upon receiving complaints concerning impediments to journalistic activity.

The quantity of non-physical attacks, as well as of attacks via judicial and/or economic means, increased by 62% in 2020. This dynamic can be connected with two main events of 2020 – quarantine restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as local elections. Hiding behind the cover of sanitary norms and restrictions, representatives of the authorities and of political parties were illegally impeding journalistic activity, denying journalists accreditation to various events and access to information.

#### Initiators of attacks on media workers

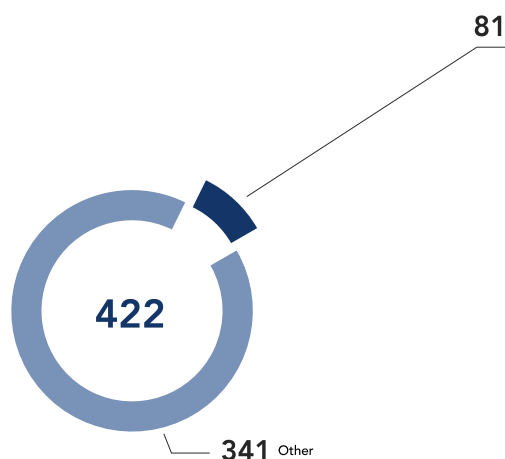


A reduction in the number of attacks on journalists via judicial and/or economic means could be observed from 2017 through the year 2019. This trend was interrupted in 2020, however.

For the purposes of more precisely reflecting combination assaults on media workers in 2020 we are introducing a new category of attacks – hybrid.

We are calling systematic persecution of some publication or media worker with the use of tools from two or more categories of assaults – physical, non-physical, and judicial/economic – “hybrid”. Such a combination of means involving and not involving force with judicial means of pressure on undesirable journalists is carried out with a view to demoralising them or getting them to self-censor or to give up the profession or even life itself.

## Hybrid attacks on media workers



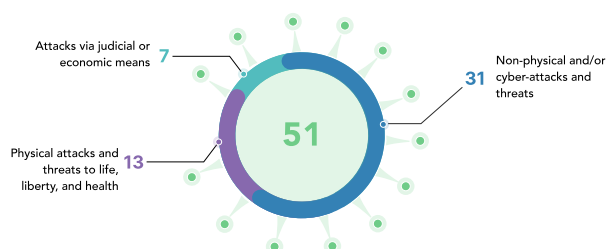
### of which 45 attacks committed against 10 journalists

Media worker	Total	Phys.	Non-phys.	Jud.
Denys Bihus, Bihus.info	11		5	6
Oleg Baturin, Newspaper "Novy den"	6		4	2
Artem Polikovsky, StopCor	5	1	2	2
Kateryna Sergatskova, Zaborona	4		3	1
Lyubov Velychko, Mind.ua, Texty.org.ua	4		3	1
Anna Babinets, Slidstvo.Info	3		2	1
Vitaly Romas, MIA "Russia Segodnya"	3		1	2
Krystyna Malikova, Vidkrytyi [Open] TV channel	3	1	2	
Roman Varshanidze, newspaper Alternative.org	3	1	2	
Taisiya Kutuzova, freelance journalist	3	2	1	

In 2020, 81 hybrid attacks were recorded, of which 45 attacks committed against 10 journalists. The most frequent type of attack was the use of non-physical attacks combined with judicial and economic attacks. Presented above is the list of the journalists and bloggers who were being subjected to the most intensive hybrid attacks in 2020.

## 4/ PRESSURE ON JOURNALISTS UNDER THE PRETEXT OF RESTRICTIONS CONNECTED WITH THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

### Pressure on journalists under the pretext of restrictions connected with the COVID-19 pandemic



Quarantine restrictions in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic have led to new threats and prohibitions for Ukrainian media workers.

51 instances of attacks and restrictions within the framework of quarantine measures were recorded in Ukraine. Of these, 28 came from representatives of the

authorities. 14 came from non-representatives of the authorities and 9 from unknown perpetrators. The majority of the recorded incidents consist of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats (31). Likewise recorded were 13 instances of physical attacks and 7 via judicial and/or economic means.

The majority of the recorded instances of non-physical attacks were connected with illegal impediments to journalistic activity and denial of access to information because of quarantine restrictions (20 out of 51).

- On 27 October, journalists from the National Public Television Company of Ukraine, the *Pryamyy* television channel, and 1+1 television channel journalist Marichka Kuzhyk were denied access to a court session in the case of people's deputy [MP] Sofiya Fedina and volunteer Marusya Zveroboy. The pretext was quarantine measures.
- On 21 December, journalists from a series of internet publications, including *Times.Zt*, *Zhitomir.info*, and *IA Ukrinform*, reported that they had been denied access to a press conference by the head of the regional administration. Only representatives of television channels were given access to the meeting with the press.

All 7 attacks via judicial and/or economic means were connected with denials of accreditation.

- On 19 September, a journalist with the *Tochka opory* publication (name unknown) was denied access to a conference of the Volhynia Region organisation of the Servant of the People political party. An application had been sent in advance; however, the denial of accreditation came 20 minutes before the event was to start. The party's press service cited quarantine restrictions. Journalist Mariya Smyk with the *Syla pravdy* publication was likewise denied accreditation.



- On 19 September, those same journalists received a denial of accreditation to a conference of the Lviv Region Servant of the People party organisation to advance candidates for local councils. The letter with the denial of accreditation came at the moment of the start of the event.

Of the recorded physical attacks and threats to life, liberty, and health, non-fatal attack/beatings/injury/torture accounted for 11 instances, and abduction, taking captive/hostage, illegal deprivation of liberty for 2.

- On 27 March, during the filming of a story about the quarantine in Kamianka-Buzka (Lviv Region), a local businessman invited the camera crew from the *Pershyi Zakhidnyi* [First Western] television channel consisting of journalist Maryna Pityliak and camera operator Yuriy Makovetskyi into his shop. After this he locked the door and was not letting the journalists out until the police arrived.

The majority of physical attacks were accompanied by non-physical ones, namely damage to/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials, print run.

- On 24 March, as a journalistic investigation was being conducted in the town of Krasyliv of Khmelnytskyi Region, an assault was perpetrated on *NewsOne* television channel journalist Tetyana Syvokon. The camera crew was preparing a story about unsanctioned trade in medical masks. When the journalistic group arrived to clarify the situation, the seller of the masks began impeding the video shoot in every way: he threw himself at the correspondent, tore the microphone from her hands, hid the masks, and caused bodily injuries to the journalist.
- On 2 April, an assault was perpetrated on a camera crew from the *Espresso TV* television channel during preparation of a story about quarantine compliance in cafes and restaurants. Right after correspondent Illya Yevlash went live on the air, an unknown man ran up to the camera crew, grabbed the camera, and threw it in the river. Journalist Dina Zelenska started shooting video of these acts on her mobile telephone. The man ran up to her, threw her to the ground, and grabbed her by the hair. Following that, he ripped the telephone away from the journalist and threw it in the river. After this the malefactor absconded.
- On 1 May, *InformByuro* journalist and cyber-security specialist Nykyta Knysh was beaten up in Kharkiv. In Knysh's words, he had decided to film the boisterous night life at the car park next to the Nauchnaya metro station, where the "golden youth" like to gather. The journalist called the police in connection with the violation of quarantine, but the patrol that arrived did not do a thing. A matter of seconds after the policemen had driven away, unknown persons assaulted Knysh and

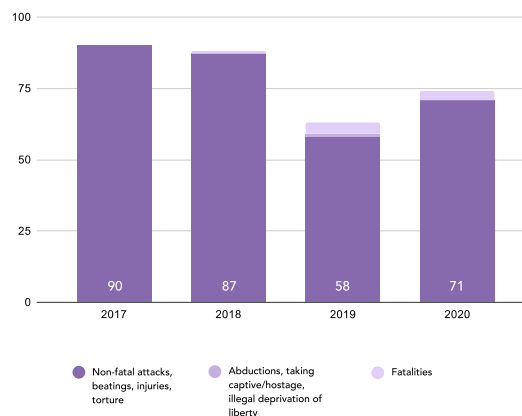
brutally beat him up. The malefactors took away a telephone and a backpack with a notebook and personal items from the journalist.

- On 18 June, during preparation of a story about the work of food shops in quarantine conditions, the proprietress of one of the shops flung herself with fists at a camera crew from the *Vidkrytyi* [Open] television channel and journalist Krystyna Malikova. Soon the female owner of the Assorti shop joined in. In the end they took away Malikova's telephone and deleted the video that had been shot on it.

## 5/ PHYSICAL ATTACKS AND THREATS TO LIFE, LIBERTY, AND HEALTH

### Physical attacks

 Ukraine



74 instances of physical attacks and threats to life, liberty, and health were recorded in 2020, including:

- Non-fatal attack/beatings/injury/torture – 67
- Attempted murder – 3
- Abduction, taking captive/hostage, illegal deprivation of liberty – 3
- Sexual harassment – 1

A significant number of non-fatal attacks on journalists, beatings, and injuries were once again recorded in 2020. A high level of aggression remains in Ukrainian society. In 2020 the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU) managed to build effective communications with law-enforcement agencies. A special department was created in the National Police of Ukraine which, inter alia, investigates crimes against journalists; a centralised hotline has been launched. Besides that, an agreement has been reached with the Ministry of Internal Affairs about developing a specialised chat bot on the Telegram messaging service. At the given stage the NUJU can assert that the law-enforcement

agencies are reacting more swiftly to complaints from journalists and that the effectiveness of investigative actions has gone up.

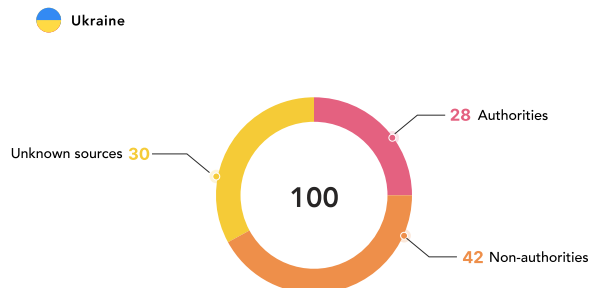
- On 7 April, in Donbass, journalists from the *Ukrayina* television channel came under fire from “Donetsk People’s Republic” insurgents. As journalist Oleksandr Makhov recounted, the insurgents tried to destroy the automobile with the camera crew – they dropped a targeted projectile onto the car from a drone.
- On 31 July, *Inter* television channel journalist Anastasia Lugovaya was subjected to an assault on the Mariupol-Kyiv train. Vitaliy Rudzko, who had three prior convictions, cruelly beat up and tried to rape the journalist, who was travelling with her son. The assailant was arrested; he faces 5 years in prison.
- On 14 October, during a video shoot of a story in one of the villages of Dnipropetrovsk Region, a figurant in a journalistic investigation, Dnipropetrovsk Regional council deputy Volodymyr Roy, blocked off the road for journalists from the *StopKor* project and tried to run over camera crew participant Maksym Tomilov. After some time had passed, employees of a private security firm arrived and at Roy’s direct instruction beat up the journalists, as well as taking away equipment, personal items, and documents.

The majority of instances of non-fatal attack/beating/injury/torture come from non-representatives of the authorities or from unknown perpetrators (47); however, in one case out of three the aggressor is the police or representatives of other state structures:

- On 26 May, during the storming of the Ivan Honchar museum, employees of the State Bureau of Investigations struck *Pryamiy* television channel journalist Hanna Dzoba several times with their elbows in the chest and stomach.
- On 6 October, policemen were impeding the activity of journalist Taisiia Kutuzova during a session of an electoral commission in one of the villages of the Kyiv Region. The policemen were demanding that the video shoot of a spontaneous rally outside the building where the commission was sitting cease; they were trying to grab the camera away and broke a microphone, as well as wringing the journalist’s arms.
- On 25 October, a sitting Ternivka Town Council deputy beat up editor of the town newspaper *Vis-ti Ternivky* Al’ona Podduyeva at a polling station, as well as trying to knock a telephone out of her hands. Podduyeva had discovered people with “non-staff journalist” credentials from the same publication at five polling stations.
- On 23 December, in the village of Lavochne of the Lviv Region, people who were presumably

engaging in illegal felling of timber assaulted *Antikoruptsiynyi visnyk* [Anti-corruption herald] newspaper journalist Vasyl Vasylytyn. Four unknown persons beat up the journalist, took his telephone away, and tied him to the bumper of their lorry. The journalist was saved by the inhabitants of a nearby village.

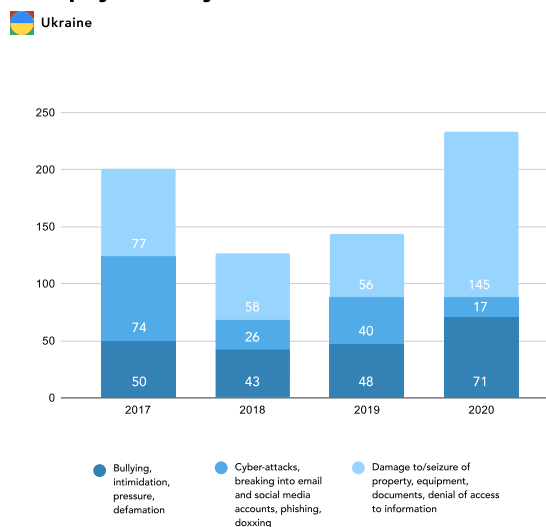
### Initiators of physical attacks on media workers (relative figures)



## 6/ NON-PHYSICAL AND/OR CYBER-ATTACKS AND THREATS

The sub-categories of non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats are presented below. The main methods in this category: illegal impediments to journalistic activity, denial of access to information (103); bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber- (57); damage to/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials, print run (36).

### Non-physical / cyber-attacks



The number of attacks connected with bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber- increased in 2020. Cause for uneasiness is the fact that it is not only radicals and displeased heroes of publications who are resorting to such meth-

ods, but also well-known political figures, activists, and opinion leaders. Some media workers ended up having to change their place of residence, flee the country, or discontinue their activity because of such threats.

- On 11 July, journalist Katerina Sergatskova, co-founder of the *Zaborona* internet publication, reported that she personally and members of her family are receiving threats. Sergatskova's personal data were published on Facebook, in particular her home address and a photo of her five-year-old son. A bullying campaign with the participation of celebrities began on social media: information about Sergatskova's personal life and a story about her collaboration with the Russian special services were being disseminated. The journalist was forced to flee Kyiv, and soon afterwards, Ukraine.

One of the most popular methods of intimidating Ukrainian journalists is damaging a personal automobile or setting them alight. Likewise, there are frequent instances of deliberate damage to, or theft of work tools – photo and video cameras, smartphones, memory cards, etc.

- On 10 June, unknown persons smashed NTA television channel general director Roman Lyubytskyi's automobile. The assailants climbed over a fence and tried to also break into the house where the journalist's wife was together with children, but the security system stopped them.
- On 17 June, editor-in-chief of the *Khroniky hromad* newspaper Pavlo Hunzhel reported that his automobile had been set alight. He associates the arson with his journalistic activity. "Materials that the publication is preparing concern the theft ... of clay and sand on the territory of the Poltava Region by one firm, which is violating construction norms, labour legislation. On the day when they torched [my car] I had come from a quarry where I had blocked traffic and interfered with the extraction of sand, having summoned the police", recounted the journalist.
- On 22 July, unknown persons torched blogger Slava Masonsky's automobile. The victim reported that a conflict had recently arisen between him and the owner of the STYLUS.ua shop, Andriy Karpyuk.
- On 17 August, unknown persons torched the automobile of a participant in the camera crew of the investigative television programme *Schemes* ["*Skhemy*" in Ukrainian], Borys Mazur (a joint project of *Radio Liberty* and the *UA:Pershyi* television channel).
- On 26 November, arson was perpetrated on an automobile belonging to *Sudokhodstvo* [Shipping] magazine publisher Oleksandr Sivak. Information about shady schemes is often published in

the magazine. The publisher had been receiving threats on numerous occasions, including from government officials.

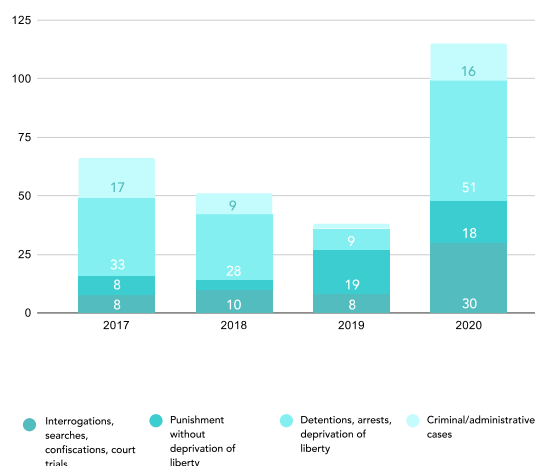
A series of incidents are associated with damage to/seizure of the residence/work premises.

- At night on 25 April, a window in the house of journalist Ihor Savluk in Kyiv Region was smashed, a bottle with petrol thrown into the house, and the doors doused with a flammable liquid. After this the journalist was called from an unfamiliar number and advised to "quit doing what you're doing". In recent times Savluk had been doing stories about the transporting of rubbish from Lviv.
- On 4 June, a group of unknown perpetrators committed an armed assault on the private house of the family of *Lux* television and radio company general director Roman Andreyko in Lviv.
- On 16 September, the collective of the *Tsentralna* radio station discovered that the premises where the transmitter, studio, and workspaces are located had been shut with padlocks and placed under police seal. As a result, the morning's airtime was disrupted. The television and radio company's premises belong to the Krasnohrad district rada [council], and it was its leadership that had ordered the offices to be placed under seal.
- Arson of the *Alternativa.org* editorial office in Odessa Region was committed on the night of 21 October. Two unknown perpetrators smashed a window and threw a bottle with an incendiary mixture through the editorial office window.

## 7/ ATTACKS VIA JUDICIAL AND/OR ECONOMIC MEANS

### Judicial / economic attacks

 Ukraine



The sub-categories of attacks via judicial and/or economic means are presented below. The three main methods of pressure: ban on entering the country, denial or revocation of a visa/accreditation (49), court trial (12), and charges of libel, insult, reputational damage (11).

Foreign journalists who had earlier been caught violating the legislation of Ukraine face being banned from entering the country.

- On 28 February Alexey Pivovarov, editor-in-chief of RTVi and author of the Redaktsiya YouTube channel, was not allowed into Ukraine. "I hadn't been in Ukraine for several years and, apparently, it's not meant to be. A couple of hours ago I flew into Kiev, but they didn't let me into the territory of the country", wrote Pivovarov on Instagram.
- On 29 November, Russian television channel RBK news presenter Svetlana Cheban was prohibited entry into Ukraine for three years for illegally visiting Crimea.
- On 29 December, Russian blogger Oksana Kacheva was not let into the territory of Ukraine upon arrival at Borispol airport and was prohibited entry for three years. Her visit to Crimea was cited as the reason for the decision.

The president of Ukraine's team denies accreditation to undesirable media outlets. Only selected journalists can be present at the head of state's press conferences or cover his visits to the regions. The COVID-19 pandemic became a convenient pretext for such denials. Political parties were denying journalists accreditation during the time of the local elections of 2020 under this same pretext.

- On 20 May, representatives of a series of media outlets were not accredited for a press conference by the president of Ukraine. A denial was received, in particular, by the *Nastoyashcheye vremya* [Current time] television channel, *Bukvy* [bykvu.com], *Delo.ua*, *Babel*, a camera crew from *Ukrayinskyi tyzhden*, and *Hlavkom* [glavkom.ua].
- On 28 October, the committee of the Supreme Rada of Ukraine for freedom of speech revoked the parliamentary accreditation of 22 media outlets, including that of the *Dobrovolets Ukrayiny* publication, *Kosatka.media*, *IA Stop koruptsiyi TV*, *Mind.ua*, *Slidstvo.info*, *Zhurnalisty proty koruptsiyi* [Journalists against corruption], and *IA Russkaia pravda*. The edict on the revocation of the accreditation was repealed on that same day after protests by the journalistic community.

Charges of libel, insult, and reputational damage are used most often for judicial prosecutions of media workers:

- On 5 March, acting director of the State Bureau of Investigations Iryna Venediktova declared that she had filed a lawsuit on protection of honour and dignity against the publication *Ukrayinska pravda*. A lawsuit was likewise filed against the Anti-Corruption Action Centre. Venediktova is demanding 150 thsd. hryvnias from each respondent.
- On 24 July, colonel of the Security Service of Ukraine Oleh Nazaruk filed a lawsuit against the publication *Chetverta vlada* (The fourth estate) - he had become one of the figurants in a journalistic investigation about a scheme to misappropriate land. Nazaruk is demanding publication of a retraction and payment to him of compensation in an amount of 60 000 hryvnias.
- On 27 October, *Mind.ua* and *Texty.org.ua* journalist Lyubov Velychko reported that entrepreneuss Al'ona Shevtsova, an owner of Ukrainian online casinos, had filed a lawsuit against her. Velychko had filed a lawsuit for a sum of one million hryvnias after the publication of a journalistic investigation about the gaming business. As the journalist notes, Shevtsova's husband holds a high position in the National Police of Ukraine. Besides that, IBOX Bank filed a lawsuit against the *Mind.ua* publication in connection with that same publication by Velychko. The plaintiff is demanding compensation for pain and suffering in an amount of two million hryvnias.



# ANNEXES

## ATTACK TYPES, IDENTIFIED BY JFJ FOUNDATION - ANNEX 1

### Physical attacks and threats to life, liberty, and health

- Abduction, taking captivity/hostage, illegal deprivation of liberty
- Attempted murder
- Beating / injury / torture resulting in death
- Death while in custody or as a result of loss of health in captivity
- Disappearance
- Fatal accident
- Murder
- Non-fatal accident
- Non-fatal attack / beating / injury / torture
- Pressure on a media worker via physical pressure on relatives and loved ones
- Punitive psychiatric treatment not resulting in death
- Punitive psychiatric treatment resulting in death
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual violence
- Sudden unexplained death
- Suicide
- Suicide attempt
- Unlawful military conscription

### Non-physical and/or cyber-attacks and threats

- Breaking into email / social media accounts / computer / smartphone
- Bullying, intimidation, pressure, threats of violence and death, including cyber-
- Cyber-, DDOS, and hacker attack on a media outlet
- Damage to / seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials, print run
- Damage to/seizure of the residence/work premises
- Defamation, spreading libel about a media worker or media outlet
- Identity theft / phishing / doxxing
- Illegal impediments to journalistic activity, denial of access to information
- Pressure on a media worker via non-physical pressure on relatives and loved ones

- Pressure on a source, including threats of violence and death
- Trolling
- Wiretapping/surveillance without a court decree

### Attacks via judicial or economic means

- Administrative arrest, remand, pre-trial detention, prison
- Administrative offence / fine
- Arrest of bank account
- Authorised travel ban (movement inside a country or specific region/town)
- Ban on engaging in journalistic activity
- Ban on entering the country, denial or revocation of a visa/accreditation
- Ban on leaving the country
- Charges of dissemination of false information (3)
- Charges of extremism, links with terrorists, inciting hate, high treason, calling for the overthrow of the constitutional order, rehabilitation of Nazism (2)
- Charges of libel, insult, reputational damage (1)
- Confiscation/seizure of property, vehicles, equipment, documents, journalistic materials
- Court trial
- Criminal/administrative case, excluding (1), (2) and (3)
- Dismissal / involuntary dismissal /forced quitting of the profession
- Forced deportation, Extradition
- Forced emigration as a result of legal/economic pressure
- House arrest
- Interrogation, questioning
- Designation of foreign agent status and/or judicial prosecution for non-compliance with the law on "foreign agents"
- Pressure on a media worker via judicial and/or economic means on relatives and loved ones
- Punishment in a criminal case without deprivation of liberty (community service, compensation for moral damage and etc.)
- Search with a court decree
- Search without a court decree
- Selective application of repressive laws
- Short-term detention
- Shutting down a media outlet / blocking an Internet site/ request to remove or block articles, seizure of an entire print run
- Suspended sentence

- Unauthorised travel ban (inside country, region or town)
- Wiretapping/ surveillance with a court decree

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (AZERBAIJAN) - ANNEX 2

- **Turan** – an independent news agency. The agency distributes news, analytical articles, and overviews from Azerbaijan.
- **Meydan.TV** – a weekly online television channel. Its mission – to inform active members of society about the state of affairs in politics, the economy, and social life; to offer a platform for open and diverse discussions on all topical questions concerning Azerbaijani society.
- **Voice of America** – a multimedia news organisation in the USA that produces content in over 45 of the world's languages for audiences with limited access to a free press.
- **Toplum.TV** – an Azerbaijani news site.
- **Xural** – an Azerbaijani news site.
- **Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center (EMDS)** – a non-governmental organisation. Main goals – elections monitoring and the formation of democratic institutions in Azerbaijan.
- **US Embassy in Azerbaijan** – America's embassy in Azerbaijan.
- **Gözətçi** – a news site of Azerbaijan. The aim of the website is to collate information on human rights violations.
- **Azadlıq Radiosu** – the Azerbaijani service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.
- **Human Rights Club** – founded on Human Rights Day (December 10) in 2010 by a group of young Azerbaijani human rights advocates. The organisation's main objective is to promote the protection and observance of human rights and fundamental liberties, as well as broader democratic development in Azerbaijan.
- **Novator** – a news site of Azerbaijan.
- **BBC** – the British Broadcasting Corporation's service in Azerbaijan.

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (ARMENIA) - ANNEX 3

- **Committee to Protect Freedom of Expression** – a civic organisation operating in Armenia, engaged in studying the situation in the realm of freedom of speech and publishing periodic reports, as well

as defending the rights of journalists and media outlets.

- **Yerevan Press Club** – an NGO, the principal goal of which is support and development of free, independent, and quality media.
- **Media Initiatives Center** – an Armenian NGO, the main mission of which is to create and disseminate free and independent content and by means of this to promote the all-encompassing and harmonious development of society.
- **Hetq.am** – the internet publication of the Armenian civic organisation Investigative Journalists.
- **Freedom House** – an international human rights NGO that evaluates and publishes reports on the level of freedom in 210 countries and territories worldwide, including on freedom of speech and media activity.
- **Reporters Without Borders** – an international NGO whose aim is to protect journalists who are being subjected to persecution for doing their job.
- **The Committee to Protect Journalists** – an international organisation engaged in defending the rights of journalists.
- **DataLex.am** – the database of Armenia's judicial system.
- **Region research center** – an Armenian civic organisation that studies the regional problems of the South Caucasus, including those concerning media activity.
- **Haykakan zhamanak [Armenian Times]** – a daily newspaper.
- **Factor.am** – an Armenian multimedia news portal.
- **Radio Azatutyun** – the Armenian service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (BELARUS) - ANNEX 4

- **Belorussian Association of Journalists** – non-governmental, non-profit and non-partisan association of media workers, promoting freedom of expression and independent journalism ideas in Belarus.
- **Ministry of Information of the Republic of Belarus** – a national government agency in the field of mass media that has serious administrative and sanction powers (from registering mass media to initiating their closure, as well as extrajudicial blocking of Internet resources).
- **Belsat** – a Polish free-to-air satellite television channel aimed at Belarus.
- **Belapan** – an independent news agency of Belarus.

- **Belta** – state news agency created to disseminate information about the activities of the state bodies of Belarus.
- **TUT.BY** – leading information website of Belarus.
- **Reporters without Borders** – an international non-profit and non-governmental organization that safeguards the right to freedom of information.
- Belarusian and English-language resources that are available online.

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (CRIMEA) - ANNEX 5

- **The Crimean Human Rights Group** – an initiative of representatives of human rights organisations, the aim of which is to promote the observance and protection of human rights in Crimea.
- **Crimean Solidarity civic movement** – an informal human rights organisation for protection of the victims of political repressions.
- **Krym. Realii** – a service of the international media company Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; an internet media outlet providing detailed coverage of political persecutions in Crimea.
- **Crimean Process [Krymsky protsess] civic initiative** – an association of experts and volunteers who evaluate the peculiarities of judicial proceedings in political cases on the territory of Crimea.
- **Sova Center for Information and Analysis** – a Russian non-governmental organisation researching such topics as nationalism and xenophobia, relations between the churches and the secular society, and political radicalism.
- The Facebook social network
- Open source Russian-language media on the internet.

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (GEORGIA) - ANNEX 6

- **Gruziya Online** – a news agency about events in Georgia (in the Russian language).
- **On.ge** – a news website about events in Georgia and the Caucasus (in the Georgian language).
- **Media.ge** – a news and analysis website, a project of the Internews-Georgia organisation (a media portal in the Georgian, Russian, and English languages).
- **Civil.ge** – a news and analysis website, a project of the UNO Association of Georgia (in the Georgian, Russian, and English languages).

- **Caucasian Knot** – a news and analysis website about events in the Caucasus (in the Russian language).
- **Sova** – an online magazine about politics, economics, and society (in the Russian language).
- **Radio Tavisupleba** – the website of Radio Liberty's Georgian service (in the Georgian language).
- **Formula TV** – a news television channel (in the Georgian language).
- **Detals.net** – a news portal about events in Georgia and the surrounding region (in the Russian language).
- **IPN** – a news website about events in Georgia (in the Georgian, English, and Russian languages).
- **Tabula** – a news and analysis website about the politics and economy of Georgia (in the Georgian language).
- **Novosti-Gruziya** – a news website about events in Georgia (in the Russian language).
- **Newsreport.ge** – a news website about events in Georgia (in the Georgian language).
- **Batumelebi** – a newspaper and website with news about events in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara and Georgia (in the Georgian language).
- **Mtavari Arkhi** – a television channel (in the Georgian language).
- **First Channel** – the news website of the Public Broadcasting of Georgia television channel (in the Georgian and Russian languages).
- **Netgazeti.ge** – a news and analysis website about events in Georgia (in the Georgian language).
- **Adjara TV** – the news website of Public Television Broadcasting of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara (in the Georgian language).
- **Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics** – the website of an NGO engaged in problems of ethics in the work of the media and journalists (in the Georgian and English languages).
- **Caucasian Echo** – the website of a project of Radio Liberty's Georgian service (in the Russian language).
- **GHN** – a news and analysis website about events in Georgia and the world (in the Georgian, English, and Russian languages).

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (KAZAKHSTAN) - ANNEX 7

- **The International Foundation for Protection of Freedom of Speech Adil Söz** – a Kazakhstani human rights organisation whose major priority is “establishment of open civil society over the statement in daily life of the country free, objective and progressive journalism”.

- **The Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law** – a non-governmental organisation whose aim is to promote the observance of civil and political rights and liberties in Kazakhstan.
- **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)** – an international non-governmental organisation engaged in defending the rights of journalists.
- **Radio Azattyq** – the Kazakh service of the international media company Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty; an internet media outlet that provides detailed coverage of political persecutions.
- **MIA "KazTAG"** – a news agency.
- The Facebook social network
- Russian- and Kazakh-language open access media on the internet.

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (KYRGYZSTAN) - ANNEX 8

- **24.kg** – a website, a news agency covering events in Kyrgyzstan
- **Kaktus.media** – an online media outlet covering events in Kyrgyzstan
- **Kloop.kg** – an online media outlet covering and analysing events in Kyrgyzstan
- **School of Peacemaking and Media Technology in Central Asia** – a non-profit organisation specialising in research in the sphere of media, annual ratings of freedom of expression, and media monitoring
- **Radio Azattyk** – the Kyrgyzstan service of Radio Liberty, providing daily coverage and analysis of events in Kyrgyzstan
- **K-news.kg** – a news agency, news and analysis
- Telegram channels and social media accounts of Kyrgyzstan's journalists and media outlets

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (MOLDOVA) - ANNEX 9

- **Reporters Without Borders**
- **Broadcasting Coordinating Council of the Republic of Moldova**
- **National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova**
- **Institute for Public Policy of Moldova**
- **Association of Independent Press (API)**
- **Independent Journalism Centre (CJI)**
- **Nordnews.md** – a regional internet news portal in the Romanian language (city of Bălți).

- **Ziarul de Gardă** – a daily newspaper in the Romanian and Russian languages in electronic and print formats.
- **NewsMaker.md** – an internet news portal in the Russian and Romanian languages.
- **PRO TV Chişinău** – a branch of the Romanian television channel in Moldova.
- **Agora.md** – an internet news portal in the Romanian language.
- **TV8** – a television channel.
- **Nokta.md** – a regional internet news portal in the Romanian language (city of Comrat).
- **Jurnal.md** – an internet news portal in the Romanian language.
- **Ziarulnational.md** – an internet news portal in the Romanian language.
- **Stopfals.md** – a fact-checking internet portal in the Romanian and Russian languages.
- **Rise.md** – the internet portal of a group of investigative journalists.
- Social networks, including Facebook and Telegram channels.

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (RUSSIA) - ANNEX 10

- **Agora International Human Rights Group** – Agora International Human Rights Group is an association of more than 50 lawyers working on landmark human rights cases.
- **Caucasian Knot** – an online news site that covers the Caucasus region in English and Russian. It has a particular focus on politics and on human rights issues, including freedom of the press.
- **Committee to Protect Journalists** – an American independent non-profit, non-governmental organization. CPJ promotes press freedom and defends the rights of journalists.
- **Council of Europe** – a platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists.
- **Delovoy Peterburg** – Russian language daily business newspaper published in Saint Petersburg.
- **Deloitte Analysis Media Consumption in Russia**
- **DW** – a global English-language news and information programme from German public international broadcaster Deutsche Welle.
- **Federal Agency on Press and Mass Communications** of the Russian Federation – a federal executive body responsible for providing government services and managing government property in the field of press, mass media and mass communications, including public computer networks used in electronic media as well as in printing and publishing.



- **Freedom House** – a U.S.-based, U.S. government-funded non-profit non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights.
- **Journalist** – the website of the magazine Journalist
- **Journalists' and Media Workers' Union** – an independent organization for the protection of journalists and media workers.
- **Kommersant** – a nationally distributed daily newspaper published in Russia mostly devoted to politics and business.
- **Obshaya Gazeta** – online newspaper with socio-political focus.
- **Mass Media Defence Centre** – an NGO working in the field of media rights protection and the promotion of freedom of expression standards in Russia.
- **Mediascope** – a media research and advertising monitoring company.
- **Medialogia** – a leading developer of media monitoring systems and social networks. In real-time, we collect data from the media and social media – tens of millions of messages per day.
- **Mediazona** – Mediazona focuses on the judicial, law enforcement and penal system in Russia.
- **Novaya Gazeta** -Russian newspaper well-known for its critical and investigative coverage of Russian political and social affairs.
- **OVD-Info** -a Russian non-governmental human rights media project aimed at combating political persecution.
- **Open Media** – an online publication about politics, economics, science and culture.
- **Official Internet portal of legal information**
- **Official website of the State Duma**
- **Roskomsvododa** – a public organization whose activities are aimed at protecting digital rights, promoting the ideas of freedom of information, the inadmissibility of state censorship and interference in private life.
- **Glasnost Defence Foundation**-a non-profit organization with the stated goals of defending journalists, journalism, and freedom of expression in Russia.
- **Index on Censorship** – an organization campaigning for freedom of expression, which produces a quarterly magazine of the same name from London.
- **The Bell** – media startup founded by Elizaveta Osetinskaya.
- **Levada-Center** – a Russian non-governmental research organization. The Centre regularly conducts sociological research. Levada-Center is one of the largest Russian centers in the field.
- **MBK Media** -an independent online news outlet that focusses on what is happening in Russia and its regions.
- **Pandemic Big Brother** – monitoring of digital rights and freedoms of citizens during the epidemic (the Roskomsvoboda project)
- **Reporters without Borders** – an international non-profit, non-governmental organization that conducts political advocacy on issues relating to freedom of information and freedom of the press.
- **Roskomnadzor** – The Federal Service for Supervision of Communications, Information Technology and Mass Media or Roskomnadzor is the Russian federal executive body responsible for censorship in media and telecommunications.
- **RIA Novosti** – a Russian state-owned domestic news agency, which since 9 December 2013 has operated under Rossiya Segodnya. RIA Novosti is headquartered in Moscow.
- **Znak.com** – news website.
- Russian and English-language resources that are available online.

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (TAJIKISTAN) - ANNEX 11

- **Radio Ozodi** - the Tajik service of Radio Liberty.
- **Reporters Without Borders** - an international non-profit, non-governmental organisation that conducts political advocacy on issues relating to freedom of information and freedom of the press.
- **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)** - an international non-governmental organisation.
- **Akhbor** - a news portal founded in Prague by the Tajik journalist Mirzo Salimpur.
- **Asia-Plus**- an independent news agency of Tajikistan.
- **Jumhuriyat** - the state newspaper of Tajikistan.
- **NIAT Khovar** - the national news agency of Tajikistan.
- **Mediamarker.info** - a media internet portal in the Tajik language, based in Poland.
- **Payom.net** - the news portal of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan.
- Other open source media in the Tajik, Russian, and English languages accessible on the internet network, as well as social networks.

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (TURKMENISTAN) - ANNEX 12

- [Alternative News of Turkmenistan](#) – now Turkmen.news. An independent news and human rights organisation based in Netherlands.
- [Chronicles of Turkmenistan](#) (Austria) – a publication of the Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights.
- [The Fergana Information Agency](#) (Russia) – a resource covering events in Central Asia.
- [Radio Azatlyk](#) (Czech Republic) – the Turkmen Service of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty.
- [Radio France Internationale](#) (Paris) – a radio station broadcasting news around the world, in French and in 15 other languages.

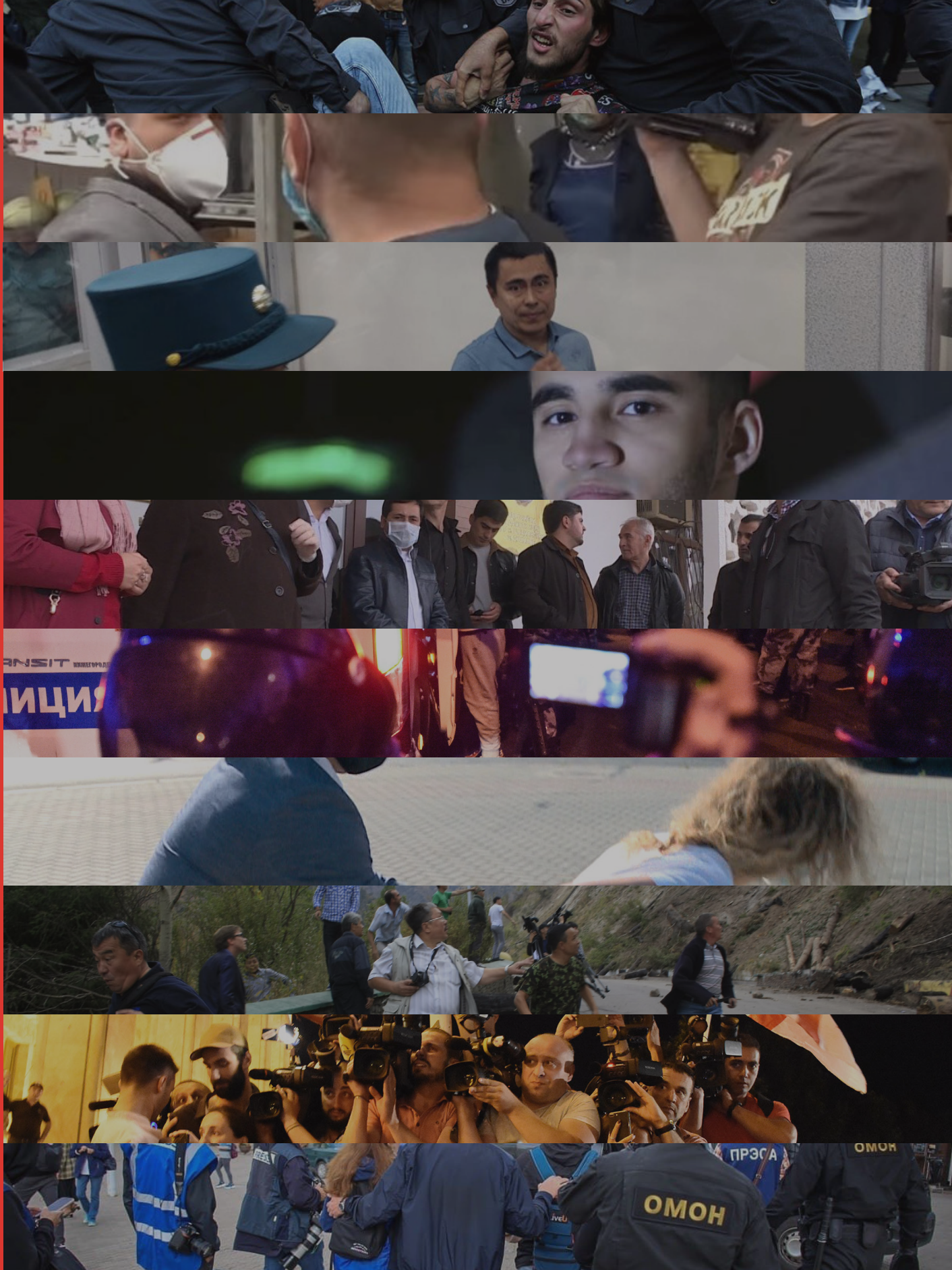
## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (UZBEKISTAN) - ANNEX 13

- [The Fergana Information Agency](#) (Russia) – a resource covering events in Central Asia.
- [Radio Ozodlik](#) – the Uzbek Service of *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*.
- [Centre1.com](#) – an independent media organisation specialising in Central Asian news.
- [AsiaTerra](#) – an information and analysis site covering Central Asia
- [Front Line Defenders](#) – an international defence foundation and Irish human rights organisation set up in Dublin, Ireland, in 2001.
- [International Partnership for Human Rights \(IPHR\)](#) – an international non-profit organisation with its headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. Established in spring 2008.
- [Committee to Protect Journalists](#) – an international non-governmental organisation that defends the rights of journalists.
- [The Association for Human Rights in Central Asia \(AHRCA\)](#) – an independent human rights organisation. The initiators behind the founding of the AHRCA were citizens of Central Asian countries who had experienced politically motivated persecution.
- [ACCA.media](#) – an independent human rights media project that writes about human rights violations.

## OPEN SOURCES USED FOR GATHERING DATA (UKRAINE) - ANNEX 14

- [National Union of Journalists of Ukraine](#) – the biggest organisation, which brings together journalists and other mass information media workers in Ukraine.
- [National Council of Television and Radio Broadcasting of Ukraine](#) – a constitutional, constantly operating collegial supervisory and regulatory public authority in the sphere of television and radio broadcasting.
- The web resources of the agencies of the [National Police of Ukraine](#).
- A special “Protection of the Rights of Journalists” section on the official website of the [Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine](#).
- [Ukrinform](#) – state news agency.
- [Ukrayinski novyny](#) [Ukrainian news] – one of the largest private news agencies.
- Human Rights Centre [ZMINA](#) – a non-governmental organisation, which aims to promote human rights, the rule of law and the ideas of civil society in Ukraine.
- [Platforma prav lyudyny](#) [Human Rights Platform] – a non-profit organisation with a high level of expertise in the realm of development of civil society.
- [Magnolia-TV](#) – a Ukrainian 24-hour television channel specialising in coverage of accidents and disasters.
- [ZIK](#) – a Ukrainian news television channel. As of December 2019, it holds 4th place in the ratings for Ukrainian news channels.
- [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#) – an international non-profit media corporation (USA).
- Facebook – a social network.
- Russian and Ukrainian language open source media accessible on the internet network.





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