

FIRST QUARTERLY REPORT 2023

Under Threat: 145 Women Journalists Attacked

On Feb 15, 2023, journalist Maria Ponomarenko is sentenced to six years in prison by a Russian court.

At least 100 women journalists spent the first quarter of 2023 behind bars, 4 less than in the first quarter of the previous year. Although there is a small decline in imprisoned women journalists, the number should be zero.

Additionally, we are worried with the increase of physical and legal harassment against women journalists compared to the first quarter of 2022. More needs to be done to ensure that women and LGBTQI journalists can work in a safe and supportive environment that enables them to carry out their duties without fear of violence or intimidation.

women journalists in prison 100

women journalists physically assaulted 24

women journalists legally harassed 23

Increase in transnational repression

IMPRISONMENT



The Coalition For Women In Journalism documented 4 less women journalists imprisoned, a decrease of almost 4% compared to the previous year. The decrease in numbers could be an indication that measures to protect journalists may have some impact.

Chinese-Australian journalist [Cheng Lei](#) has been held without access to legal counsel since 2020. CFWIJ has reported on the high-profile diplomatic case of Lei, a former TV anchor, who has been detained in China for more than two and a half years on national security charges. Lei's trial was held behind closed doors in Beijing on March 31, 2022, and she has been under "residential surveillance" since her detention by Chinese authorities on August 14, 2020, on suspicion of illegally supplying state secrets overseas.



"She's not had one phone call with family, with her children. Nothing," says Lei's partner, who is not the father of her children. "I can't imagine what it would be like for them ... they're dealing with things as well as they can deal with them. I think it's tough."

Various factors have contributed to this decrease



Protection measures and increased awareness:

In some countries, the conditions under which journalists are reporting in the field have changed, **resulting in fewer imprisonments, detentions, and police brutality**. This could be attributed to better protection measures and increased awareness of the challenges faced by journalists, especially women and non-binary journalists. However, the situation is not the same everywhere, and many journalists continue to work in dangerous environments.



Self-censorship

The overall intimidation of the press in some of the most censored countries has **led to self-censorship, resulting in fewer journalists taking risks and more cautious reporting under censorship**. This creates a situation where journalists are unable to report freely and without fear of retaliation, which ultimately affects the quality of the information that is disseminated to the public.



On March 17, 2023, Le Media TV's Chloé Gence manhandled, strangled, and forcibly arrested by police while covering pension reform protests.

TRENDS AND PATTERNS

Physical Assaults

The Coalition For Women In Journalism documented 24 physical assaults on women journalists in the first quarter of 2023. The number of assaults increased by 4.3% compared to first three months of 2022.



Physical assaults on women journalists have a detrimental impact on press freedom. When women journalists are assaulted, they suffer not only emotionally and physically but the attack or the fear of being attacked can deter them from reporting entirely. It is vitally important that women can report safely, perpetrators of assaults on journalists must be identified and prosecuted immediately.

12 women journalists physically assaulted while reporting

In the first three months of 2023, CFWIJ documented numerous incidents of women journalists being physically assaulted while reporting. Violations were recorded in Albania, France, Georgia, Turkey, Ukraine, Palestine, and Germany.

Georgia

Four journalists were harassed, obstructed, and assaulted during protests in March. Tamuna Gegidze was forcibly removed from the Georgian Parliament by officers despite showing press passes and accreditation. Formula TV reporters Mari Tsakadze and Tea Tetrashvili were obstructed by police while covering protests on March 7. Photojournalist Mariam Nikuradze was also hit with tear gas while covering the protests.



Turkey

Relatives of drug operation suspects attacked journalist Melek Firat and three other journalists while filming outside a courthouse in Turkey on March 31, 2023.

Palestine

Israeli soldiers attacked Palestinian journalist Sondos Al-Talbishi on March 15 while she documented the obstruction of Palestinian traffic and the interrogation of residents attempting to cross a checkpoint.

Ukraine

In Ukraine on March 30, 2023, Valeriya Pashko and Daria Nematian Zolbin were harassed and assaulted by clergy members at a monastery.

France

On March 13, 2023, reporters Tiphaine Niederlaender and Christelle Rewiako were launched at, spat at, and insulted by art thief Stéphane Breitwieser while covering his trial in France.

Albania

Fiks Fare journalist Antela Lika and her crew were attacked and threatened at gunpoint while investigating an illegal mining operation on February 8, 2023.

Germany

Dance critic Wiebke Hüster was attacked by a choreographer who smeared her face with excrement in Germany on February 11, 2023.

6 Turkish journalists assaulted while reporting on the aftermath of earthquakes

Journalists covering the devastating impact of the February earthquakes in Turkey not only faced practical challenges trying to access victims on the ground but were also frequently harassed and assaulted by citizens. CFWIJ recorded 6 incidents where women journalists were prevented from filming at disaster sites, threatened, or assaulted by locals.

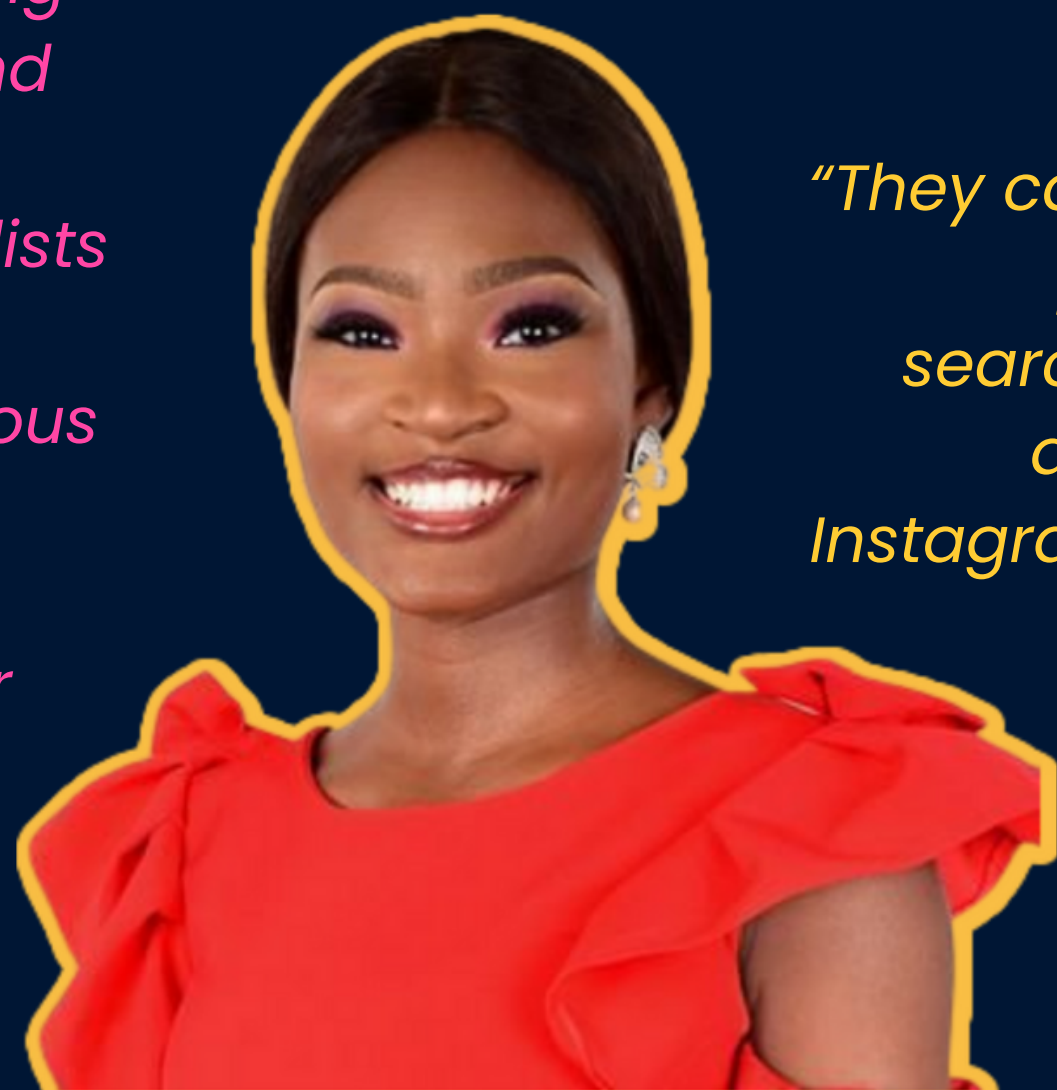
- Journalist [Arzu Efeoğlu](#) reported that citizens in Gaziantep attempted to attack her and her team and demanded to see their ID cards.
- Fox TV reporters [Sevgi Şahin](#) and [Ömür Dikme](#) were attacked during a live broadcast, while Halk TV correspondent [Şirin Payzın](#) and her team were harassed while filming a collapsed building in Antakya.
- In Malatya, ArtıGerçek reporter [Yağmur Kaya](#) was nearly physically attacked by a group who accused her of being a provocateur and smearing the ruling party and the state.
- [Gülbahar Altaş](#) was also targeted by locals in Diyarbakır Sümer Park while trying to film an altercation, and TELE1 reporter [Hazal Güven](#) and cameraman Umutcan Yitik were obstructed by armed individuals in Hatay.





A climate of distrust of media workers, particularly journalists with foreign media outlets, has been consistently cultivated by the Turkish government. Negative political rhetoric targeting the press can create hostility, leading to threats against journalists and media outlets.

The litany of assaults on journalists covering the country after the earthquakes show how dangerous this rhetoric can be. Mobs of private citizens threatened and assaulted women journalists for simply recording disaster sites.



5 women journalists assaulted while reporting Nigerian election

Five women journalists were assaulted while covering the second round of Nigerian presidential elections on March 18. Journalists were attacked by security personnel, chased out of polling stations, and forced to hand over their phones to unknown persons.



"They came and took my phone, went through my private chats, deleted pictures and videos, searched my entire gallery, checked my official and election group chats. They went on my Instagram and checked my feed and private DMs. They threatened me and this was under the rain and I was shivering"

— **Bolanle Olabimtan**

- [Ima Elijah](#), a reporter for Pulse.ng, and her camera operator were forced out of a polling unit in Ikeja by unidentified individuals who insisted that the elections should not be reported by the media.
- [Henrietta Oke](#), a correspondent for AIT, was chased out of a polling station in Lagos by unidentified people.
- [Nkiru Nwokedi](#), also a correspondent for AIT, had her phone confiscated at a polling unit in Lagos, but it was returned 20 minutes later following intervention from community leaders.
- [Bolanle Olabimtan](#), a reporter at TheCable, was attacked and injured by security personnel and political activists at a polling unit in Delta State. Her phone was seized, and voters were chased away from the premises.
- Unidentified people seized People's Gazette reporter [Ajayi Adebola](#)'s phone and deleted its content at a polling site in Lagos.

Nigerian journalists were forced to work in a climate of tension, fearing for their safety.

This is unacceptable, the Nigerian government has previously acknowledged that violence against journalists covering elections is rampant but failed to address these issues during the latest elections.



Violence against journalists covering elections can create a climate of fear and intimidation, making it difficult for them to report freely and without bias. Preventing journalists from accessing polling stations or other areas where they need to report, limits their ability to cover the elections.

Violent mob assaults journalists and LGBTQI activists in Bosnia–Herzegovina

A group of hooded attackers armed with sticks and bottles assaulted journalists and LGBTQI activists at a meeting in Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina on March 21, 2023. The police were present when the attackers arrived but did not offer any protection, and the activists had to flee to escape the assault. Editor for E-Trafika Vanja Stokić and her colleague were beaten, and the police refused to help them. They also believe that the police gave the attackers the address of the meeting.

“It was terrifying. The most terrifying thing was when I saw two (attackers) after me and I started running. But I saw that I’m not fast enough and they will catch me”

— Vanja Stokic





Homophobic rhetoric from politicians in Republika Srpska and police inaction resulted in violent attacks on journalists and activists. Assaults on LGBTQI journalists can have a chilling effect on free speech and discourage other journalists from reporting on sensitive topics. These attacks can also perpetuate a culture of hate and intolerance, which can have a detrimental effect on LGBTQI individuals and communities.



TRENDS AND PATTERNS

Legal Harassment

23 women journalists were legally harassed in the first quarter of 2023 as documented by CFWIJ. Using the law to pressure journalists continues to be a serious threat to press freedom.



- **States abused their powers to intimidate journalists critical of their actions.**
- **Wealthy private actors pursued bogus legal actions to hamper investigations.**

Turkey's Legal Harassment of Critical Journalists

The Turkish government leads the list of countries weaponizing the law to silence women journalists. Similar to the first quarter of 2022, Turkey has the highest number of legal harassment cases.

- Authorities have consistently resorted to travel bans, and bogus legal charges, including "insulting of public officials."
- Kurdish women journalists are targeted most by the government, cynically using terrorism charges to censor and persecute them.

8 journalists were targeted with legal proceedings in January and February 2023

- Ceylan Şahinli and Öznur Değer who have been detained for five years without knowing the charges against them.
- Sibel Tekin was arrested and detained for 43 days falsely accused of being a member of a terrorist organization.
- Ayşegül Doğan remains banned from travel despite having charges of "membership in a terrorist organization" overturned.
- Pınar Gayip was investigated for "insulting, slandering, disturbing the peace and tranquility of people, targeting those who fight terrorism" after her reporting.
- Al-Monitor's Nazlan Ertan accused of 'publicly insulting a public official'

- **Dicle Müftüoğlu** was sentenced to six months on terrorism-related charges.
- An investigation was launched against **Hale Gönültaş** after a police officer filed a criminal complaint for reporting on the disappearance and rape of a 12-year-old girl.

In March 2023,

- **Sedef Kabaş** again sued for “insulting the President.” This time, Kabaş was accused of insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan by posting tweets ‘aimed at damaging his honor’
- **Nagihan Yilkin** accused of ‘publicly insulting a public official’ after working on corruption investigation.
- **Yağmur Kaya** faced a 3rd trial hearing on the accusation of “targeting people involved in the fight against terrorism.”



Egyptian government targets journalists of Mada Masr

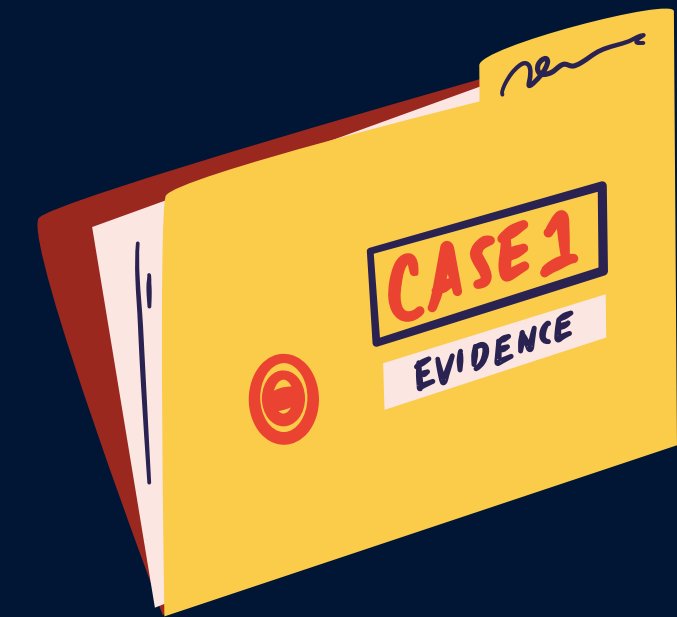
In February 2023, Rana Madouh, Beesan Kassab, Sara Seif Eddin from Mada Masr, Egypt's leading independent news outlet, went on trial on charges of **offending members of parliament from a pro-government leading party and misusing media channels.**

The charges stem from an article published on August 31, 2022, that accused several senior members of the Nation's Future Party of corruption and financial misconduct. The journalists could face up to two years in prison and fines of up to 300,000 EGP if convicted. Mada Masr's defense team has affirmed the integrity of its reporting and its commitment to professional journalistic standards.

SLAPPs, the leading legal tool of choice in Eastern Europe

Governments and powerful individuals continue to abuse their positions of wealth and power to silence journalists who dare to investigate.

In the first quarter of 2023, CFWIJ documented four new SLAPP cases launched against women journalists, of those two are in Eastern Europe. The abuse of law to intimidate journalists from investigating powerful figures is on the rise.



Greece

In April 2023, a Greek court ordered a cooperative media outlet to pay €3,000 in damages to a former high-ranking executive of a gold mining company. The lawsuit was based on a court report published by [Stavroula Poulimeni](#) regarding the criminal conviction of two executives from Hellas Gold over the company's alleged pollution of water sources. The court dismissed the defamation allegation but ruled in favour of the plaintiff on the GDPR claim, awarding compensation for "moral damage". Critics argue the verdict undermines the principles of open justice and court reporting, as reporting details about a first-instance criminal conviction is standard journalistic practice.

Turkey

Journalists Hazal Ocak, Olcay Büyüktaş Akça, and two other defendants are standing trial on the criminal charge of “insult through an oral, written or visual medium message” on the complaint of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s son Bilal Erdoğan. In May 2022 JinNews reporter Zelal Tunç was sentenced to eight months and 22 days in prison for allegedly insulting Harun Yücel, the trustee appointed to Muradiye Municipality. The lawsuit was brought against Tunç by Yücel, who alleged that she “insulted” him in a report about missing funds.



SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation) cases have a significant impact on women journalists, both personally and professionally. These lawsuits are often used as a tool to intimidate and silence journalists who report on issues that powerful individuals or organizations want to keep hidden.



Serbia

Journalist Jelena Veljkovic is facing a defamation case brought against the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) by Predrag Koluvija, the owner of the company Jovanjica. Koluvija claims that Veljkovic reported false information when covering a trial, and is demanding financial compensation for mental pain suffered. BIRN believes this case is an attempt to intimidate the media and is calling on Serbian courts to dismiss the case and for the government to implement anti-SLAPP policies immediately.



Bulgaria

Insurance company Lev Ins is suing independent media platform Mediapool for €500,000 over an article by journalist Tsvetelina Sokolova on international motorist insurance Green Pass. The article included quotes about Lev Ins and the company claims the report caused reputational damage. The lawsuit could potentially bankrupt the small, privately-owned news outlet.



SLAPP cases harm individual journalist. They undermine press freedom and the public's right to information. It is crucial that we recognize the harm caused by SLAPP cases and take action to protect women journalists and their important work.

- Women journalists often experience stress, anxiety, and even trauma because of the legal harassment they face.
- Financially, these cases can be ruinous, with legal fees and lost income adding up quickly.
- The threat of a SLAPP case can also impact women journalists' work, causing them to self-censor or avoid reporting on certain issues altogether.

TRENDS AND PATTERNS

Transnational repression

The Coalition For Women In Journalism has documented an **increase in transnational repression**. Chinese journalists working overseas have reported incidents of harassment and surveillance by Chinese officials. They have been followed, received threatening messages, and had their personal information leaked online.

Chinese authorities have been known to use advanced surveillance technology, such as facial recognition systems and data tracking software, to monitor the activities of journalists and dissidents both inside and outside of China.



The Chinese government's efforts to monitor and suppress the activities of journalists and dissidents are part of a broader campaign to control the flow of information and limit criticism of the government. This campaign includes strict censorship of the internet and social media, as well as the arrest and detention of journalists and other critics of the government.

Su Yutong, exiled Chinese journalist, has been subjected to persistent abuse since leaving her home country more than a decade ago. The frequency and intensity of these attacks have escalated recently, with perpetrators even resorting to posting fake escort advertisements. Yutong said that she is now being approached by strangers on a daily basis, each claiming to be seeking sexual services from an Asian woman.

Marije Vlaskamp faced pressure online to retract a critical article about China. She received an email from Booking.com thanking her for booking a hotel near the Binnenhof, the political center of the Netherlands. The email was sent to Vlaskamp's work email address in Chinese. Subsequently, Chinese embassies in The Hague and Oslo received bomb threats in the name of journalist on October 15, 2023.

"The suspects booked hotels under my name reported bomb threats, and later sent thousands of threatening messages, claiming to kill me, rape me"

— **Su Yutong**

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

The imprisonment, physical and legal assaults on women journalists this quarter show how journalism is continuously being criminalized. An alarming trend is legal harassment, paralyzing journalists and leading to self-censorship. For some other media workers, fleeing their country won't keep them safe either, with transnational repression growing slowly but surely.

Women and LGBTQI journalists are the first targeted when press freedom is under attack: online, offline, legally, and physically. The attacks are organized campaigns growing across borders, with powerful people avoiding accountability. But we have the right to fact-based, truthful information. This is why CFWIJ has been monitoring press freedom violations against women journalists since its inception in 2017.



"You don't have to kill a journalist anymore to silence them"

— Maria Ressa



CFWIJ is working hard to change these circumstances everyday.

Join us in this mission



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