Interviewing journalism II

Needs and gaps in support for women and local journalists

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1. INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY[1]

Interviewing Journalism II builds on the findings of a research carried out in 2021[2] and moves towards a targeted analysis, both thematically and geographically. The previous report clearly indicated the need to focus on women journalists[3] and local journalists as among the most vulnerable categories of media workers in Europe.

This choice is also inspired by recent EU institutional initiatives: the European Commission Strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU that invites all Member States to "promote a supportive and safe environment for civil society organisations and rights defenders in their country, including at local level" (COM(2020) 711 final: 10) and the Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy, which sets the priority to "support independent fact-checking and research, investigative reporting and quality journalism, including at local level" (JOIN(2020) 5 final: 8).

As for the EU Gender Action Plan III, it recognises the fact that women in public life, including journalists, are subject to different forms of gender-based violence, amid shrinking civic space. Therefore, EU actions should contribute to "promoting an enabling and safe environment, including online, for civil society, girls and women's rights organisations, women's human rights defenders, peacebuilders, women journalists and representatives of indigenous people. Strengthen protection mechanisms and to support women's leadership roles will include global and regional hubs, and advocacy and actions that document violations against defenders of women's human rights" (JOIN(2020) 17 final: 17).

Finally, the EC Recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists provides specific recommendations for female journalists, acknowledging their under-representation in the media sector and their particular exposure to threats and retaliation (C(2021) 6650 final). The Recommendation was announced in December 2020 in the European Democracy Action Plan, which called for a particular attention to threats against women journalists (COM(2020) 790 final).

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1 To this report contributed as well Serena Epis for the chapter on Sweden, Fazıla Mat. Paola Rosà and Luisa Chiodi with a generous revision of the entire work.

2 https://www.rcmediafreedom.eu/Dossiers/Interviewing-journalism.-Needs-and-gaps-in-support-for-European-journalists

3 "Women journalists" refers to all journalists and media workers who identify as women.

Accordingly, this report focuses on:

- local and international responses to protection needs for local journalists and media workers;
- local and international responses to protection needs for women journalists.

Furthermore, *Interviewing Journalism* outlined the need for more country-specific research. Therefore, this analysis develops four case-studies. The countries were chosen taking into account the diversity of local contexts across Europe (Bulgaria - South-East Europe, Ireland - Anglo-Saxon region, Italy - South Europe, and Sweden - Scandinavian peninsula).

This research is primarily based on 15 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with relevant actors in the field. Among our interlocutors, 12 were journalists - 4 were also representatives of local and national organisations - 2 were academics and 1 was representative of an international organisation. In terms of gender distribution, 12 were women and 3 men.

We deemed it essential to hear primarily the voices of journalists and collect a first hand account of their perspectives, as well as the challenges and solutions presented by them, but due to the limitations imposed by Covid-19, we had to conduct our interviews on virtual platforms between September 2021 and April 2022.

In addition to the interviews, the analysis is based on a critical review of the academic literature in the field, as well as grey literature, official documents, articles, surveys and online sources accessible on support organisations' websites and platforms. The stakeholder map created for *Interviewing Journalism* was further enriched with new entries, with a focus on those organisations specifically involved in the protection of women journalists (see Annex 1 and Annex 2).

1.1 Women journalists

Women journalists often appear to be more exposed and vulnerable to threats than their male colleagues - especially online, as confirmed by many studies (Chocarro et al., 2020; Slaughter and Newman, 2020). The results of a global survey promoted in 2020 by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and UNESCO into the incidence and impact of online violence against women journalists led Julie Posetti to identify three converging online threats that target women journalists, namely:

- misogynistic harassment and abuse;

- orchestrated disinformation campaigns based on misogynistic narratives;
- digital privacy and security threats that increase physical risks associated with online violence[4].

Attacks are hardly connected to a difference of opinions on a given issue, taking specific and gender-based forms focused on brutal consequences for the journalist and her family, and/or focus on the victim's looks and use sexist stereotypes. As confirmed also by Posetti, Harrison, and Waisbord, "online attacks against women journalists are often accompanied by threats of harm to others connected to them, or those they interact with, as a means of extending the 'chilling effect' on their journalism"[5].

As will be further discussed below, journalists who are committed to exposing improper conduct should be included in the group of human rights defenders. A common feature of the attacks against women human rights defenders and journalists is that they usually "**face a double struggle**", as Luciana Peri, coordinator of the EU Relocation Platform at Protect Defenders, told us. Peri notes that these women

> "[...] are facing powerful actors trying to violate their rights, but at the same time they have to try to gain a space in their communities. [...] Women human rights defenders are attacked not only because of the role they have, but the role people think they should have in society".

What emerges in the cases analysed is that, although no topic is completely free from harmful reactions, talking about **social issues and human rights**, including for instance migration and gender issues, is most risky for women journalists.

Attacks against women journalists are frequently **underreported**. According to the platform Mapping Media Freedom[6], in the years 2020-2021, out of 1,086 alerts registered in EU countries and candidate countries, only 19 fell under the category 'gender-related'. The reasons are different but often **fear of professional retaliation** discourages the reporting of the case to the police. Another reason is that there is a general perception that they should not be considered as important.

Although many newsrooms are active in the protection of their journalists, it is not rare that a

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4 https://www.icfj.org/news/online-violence-new-front-line-women-journalists

5 https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/new-research-alarming-evidence-of-online-attacks-on-women-journalists-leading-to-real-world-violence

6 https://www.mappingmediafreedom.org/

woman journalist is moved away from a topic when receiving attacks as she is perceived as "incapable" of dealing with the consequences of her work. Moreover, although attacks take place most of the time online by unknown individuals or groups, it is also not uncommon that women are harassed in their newsrooms.

Attacks against women journalists do not occur only in Europe. The higher exposure of women journalists to threats is described as a global trend in a survey[7] conducted in 2017 by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which revealed that, in the fifty countries examined, almost one in two women journalists suffered gender-based violence at work.

According to Silvia Chocarro (Article 19), online harassment against women journalists is specifically about **silencing** them. Therefore, the measures that should be taken include "legislation [...], capacity building of public officials [...], monitoring and documentation, and mobilisation by civil society and other actors; commitment to human rights by Internet intermediaries and to protect journalists by media outlets"[8].

It is essential for newsrooms to adopt **gender-sensitive policies** first of all to raise awareness among the colleagues of the condition in which women journalists work. Together with support centres, unions, and policymakers and with the support of social media and big tech companies, it is necessary to enable a working environment for women journalists equal to that of their male colleagues.

Although not related to verbal or physical aggression, the underrepresentation of women in the newsrooms, especially in managerial positions, is an aspect that should not be overlooked. Ensuring women's presence in top management positions through transparent job selections and family-friendly working conditions is essential to ensure diversity and gender equality in newsrooms, and it would have strong repercussions also in reporting and in the trust of the public opinion, as discussed in a conference recently organised by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)[9].

Much remains to be done to pursue gender equality in the media sector. Nevertheless, a growing attention by European institutions is emerging. The European Parliament resolution Strengthening Media Freedom: the Protection of Journalists in Europe, Hate Speech, Disinformation

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7 https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/reports/detail/ifj-survey-one-in-two-women-journalists-suffer-gender-based-violence-at-work/category/press-releases.html

8 https://www.dw.com/en/violence-against-women-journalists-it-is-about-silencing-women/a-55732723

9 https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2022/03/21/takeaway-from-final-conference-how-can-gender-equality-and-diversity-promote-trust-in-the-media/

and the Role of Platforms acknowledges the existence of specific, gender-based forms of violence against women journalists and calls on Member States "to take a gender-sensitive approach when considering measures to address the safety of journalists" (European Parliament, 2020a).

The Council of Europe addresses these issues in the recent Recommendation on promoting a favourable environment for quality journalism in the digital age. Adopted on 17 March 2022, the recommendation calls on trade unions and journalists' associations to collaborate with media organisations for "strengthening gender-ethical journalism and fighting discrimination, including discrimination in the workplace in terms of pay, treatment and working conditions. In addition, trade unions and journalists' associations should develop initiatives and lead the way in eradicating harassment, threats and violence against women journalists, especially online, and increasing diversity and gender equality in the newsrooms. To that end, they should adopt concrete support measures such as gender-specific training manuals and practical training in safety, health and working conditions" (CM/Rec(2022)4).

1.2 Local journalism

For the purpose of this study, with the term local journalism we refer to print, broadcast, and online media operating at sub-national levels. It comprises regional, local, urban, rural and community media, each of which responds to the different information needs. Local media are more developed in those countries where minorities are extensive, where the geographical extension is wider, and where there is a higher population density (AGCOM, 2017).

Local journalism is rarely in the spotlight, but the attention that institutions pay to the local dimension has been slowly growing in recent years, particularly in relation to the effects of the pandemic. As stressed in the European Democracy Action Plan, the local dimension of journalism is the most affected by revenue losses (COM(2020) 790 final), and actions for the recovery of such realities are being implemented in many different European countries, as we will see in the case studies.

It is particularly difficult to keep up with the **digitalisation challenges**, accelerated by the pandemic, at the level of local media. According to Bousquet and Smyrnaios (2014), the online shift of local information led to the development of three models: first, a model of local investigative journalism (which is the most exposed to attacks); second, the hyper-urban information websites dealing with cultural issues, which often take the form of citizen journalism; third, local journalism that reflects local administration's communication (something our interlocutors often referred to as PR, in contrast with

the local media function of holding institutions to account). Although the emergence of digital forms of local media has generated optimism, there is no evidence that digital-only operations can sustain local journalism (Nielsen, 2015).

While local journalism is going through a crisis due to its precarious economic situation, it serves a fundamental purpose for communities. Local journalism is indeed a more and more important reference point for the individuals who, through a sense of attachment to a community, keep their identity in a world increasingly globalised (AGCOM, 2017). Furthermore, "local news media leverage the **relationship of trust** with their local communities. This trust makes local news media pivotal in the war against disinformation and misinformation" (Park, 2021: 27).

What is more, local journalists play a crucial role in difficult local contexts where the intertwining of criminal organisations, the business world, and local administrations is particularly intricate. In this case they are full-fledged **human rights defenders** committed to exposing the improper conducts that have a strong negative impact on the livelihood of the communities themselves.

Local journalists are therefore particularly exposed to threats and attacks by the three above-mentioned categories of actors. Moreover, given the fact that they are well-known in their community, there is less of a buffer with the local public which, while an advantage for obtaining information, could also mean higher exposure to attacks. As argued below, this exposure is lower on social media, where journalists have less visibility than their colleagues working for national, mainstream media. Their lower visibility means also a difficulty to be protected, both online and offline.

Due to this particular vulnerability, local journalists are in dire need of support. As described in *Interviewing Journalism*, public authorities appear less prepared in this sector; support centres and unions tend to be more active in bigger cities, overlooking the single little episode that happens on the territory, as will be discussed below; media lawyers, particularly important in the local context for protecting journalists and newsrooms from lawsuits, are forced by financial constraints to engage only in mediatic cases that could create a precedent and greater echo in the public opinion (Rita et al., 2021).

FOUR CASE STUDIES

2. BULGARIA

2.1 The context and the pressure on media freedom

Bulgaria's Constitution safeguards freedom of speech and media freedom. However, "while in most cases the legal framework introduces necessary standards, they are frequently not effectively implemented in practice" (Wehofsits and Martino, 2019: 9).

Smear campaigns, harassment - including judicial harassment, intimidation, and violence by the state are only a few of the most serious threats for independent journalists in Bulgaria according to Reporters Without Borders[10]. The World Press Freedom Index 2021 places the country at the 112th position out of 180. Bulgaria retains the last place in the EU, and its position has worsened in comparison to 2020, when it ranked 111th.

The severe issues undermining media freedom and the safety of journalists in the country include **lack of transparency of media ownership and of allocation of state advertising and public funding**, as extensively denounced by a variety of international observers, including the European Commission in its last Rule of Law Report (SWD(2021) 703 final). According to the Media Pluralism Monitor 2021, the indicator "State regulation of resources and support to the media sector" is the most at risk, with a score of 97%. This is due to the absence of regulatory safeguards for a fair, non-discriminatory distribution of state advertising, which is used as a tool of political influence. **Bulgarian media outlets are indeed highly dependent on political and economic influences** (Spassov et al., 2021).

All the elements mentioned above contribute to this concerning situation, "which in these last years has earned Bulgaria the infamous title of 'black sheep' of EU media freedom" (Martino, 2021).

The Association of European Journalists (AEJ) - Bulgaria uses '**culture of pressure**' as a blanket term that comprises different forms of undue pressure. In its latest survey on media freedom in Bulgaria, AEJ highlights that in the last years culture of pressure gained in both prominence and strength: 81% of respondents to the survey state they witnessed undue pressure being exerted on colleagues. Such a strong pressure exerted on reporters often leads to **self-censorship** as a form of self-defence. Self-limitations "have evolved into a disquieting unwritten rule" (Valkov, 2020: 3).

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10 https://rsf.org/en/bulgaria

According to respondents, a large range of actors contributes to this climate of pressure: institutions and public administrations, criminal groups, directors of agencies, advertisers, and anonymous profiles on social media.

Although the situation has been slightly changing[11] in recent years, as stressed in the Media Pluralism Monitor 2021, many media outlets (TV, print, and online) are still owned by businessmen and oligarchs with political connections. The most notorious example of this practice was MP and media tycoon Delyan Peevski, who controlled an impressive share of Bulgaria's print media of up to 80% of the market and a large share of the newspaper distribution system (Wehofsits and Martino, 2019). In January 2021, United Group announced the purchase of Peevski's newspapers[12]. However, Reporters Without Borders warns that Peevski's influence over the media remains problematic. In its analysis, the International Press Institute (IPI) confirms the fact that Peevski's influence over the media sector goes beyond direct ownership. For years, the editorial policy of his newspapers was indeed replicated by mainstream media, while his close relationship with Borisov earned him a strong influence in the executive and the judiciary realms.

Media ownership was the focus of the ECPMF-OBCT fact-finding mission conducted in Bulgaria in 2018. The mission report highlighted that even when a media is foreign-owned, it can still be dependent on political and/or economic pressure through advertisement by local political structures. Overall, the mission highlighted the disruptive pressure that advertising applies on Bulgarian media.

The Globsec Vulnerability Index 2021 highlights that although there is a legislative framework on media ownership transparency, it has been poorly implemented. "Regulatory mechanisms, notably, were designed to purposefully protect some players and harm others on the market. A 2019 amendment, for example, imposed fines for non-disclosure of ownership that disproportionately impacted smaller media companies" (Hajdu et al., 2021: 41).

As mentioned above, control over public and private advertising is a strong instrument for media influence in Bulgaria. The government **allocation of public and EU funding** to media outlets takes place with no transparency. As stressed by the Vulnerability Index 2021, favouritism, censorship, and distortion abound in the distribution of state advertising. Direct state transfers and indirect subsidies are used to provide a preferential treatment to selected media outlets. Several interlocutors of the

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11 According to the Reuters Digital News Report 2021, as domestic oligarchs started retreating from the media market in 2020, foreign owners moved in. The United Group, a Slovenia-based company active in eight countries, acquired the Nova Broadcasting Group which belonged to pro-government oligarch Domuschiev. This and other changes resulted in a less pro-government editorial line.

12 https://ipi.media/bulgaria-magnitsky-sanctions-against-mogul-delyan-peevski-shift-media-landscape/

ECPMF-OBCT mission in Bulgaria described the government as one of the biggest media advertisers. Many voices denounced the fact that EU funds are used as a tool to increase the control over the editorial policies of private media.

Irina Nedeva, President of AEJ - Bulgaria[13], who we had the chance to *interview for Interviewing Journalism*, described the pressure that mainstream and pro-government media put on critical voices: "It seems that some of the media, mainly newspapers and tabloid press, don't have any kind of incentives to follow the ethical standards, because they count on popularity, they count on sensationalism and quite often their media are used to blackmail oppositional, civil rights activists, NGOs. [...] It is very strange when you see that this type of media, they are doing these smear campaigns against independent and professional journalism, at the same time the powerful personalities of the government, they are giving interviews exclusively to these media, what does it mean?".

The **Covid-19** related crisis led to increasing economic hardship for media outlets, in particular at the regional and local levels, as will be further discussed below. Although no measures directly supporting the media sector have been put in place, "Bulgaria's media seem to have weathered the Covid-19 pandemic better than some others" (Newman et al., 2021: 68). The Reuters Digital News Report goes on to say that to avoid inconvenient questions from journalists, then-Prime Minister Borisov decided in May 2020 to just share pre-prepared statements.

Year 2020 in Bulgaria was not only marked by the pandemic, but also by the protests against Prime Minister Borisov and his centre-right government accused of corruption. The protests saw thousands of citizens asking for his resignation and early elections (Martino, 2021), while journalists covering the protests were often arrested and beaten, as in the case of Dimitar Kenarov[14]. A sudden change of the editorial policy of the most popular daily newspapers in the country followed Borisov's setback[15]. Elections in April 2021 led to the appointment of Yanev as Prime Minister, and after months of political deadlock Petkov, leader of "We continue the change", became the Prime Minister of Bulgaria in December 2021 at the head of a four-party coalition.

The Mapping Media Freedom Platform recorded 27 alerts concerning the country in the period between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021[16] (3.55% of the EU27 total), out of a population that

13 https://aej-bulgaria.org/en/

14 https://mappingmediafreedom.ushahidi.io/posts/23472

15 https://ipi.media/bulgaria-magnitsky-sanctions-against-mogul-delyan-peevski-shift-media-landscape/

16 https://www.mapmf.org/explorer?f.from=2020-01-01&f.to=2021-12-31&f.country=Bulgaria

corresponds to about 1.55% of the EU population. Most of the alerts are classified as legal incidents (14), followed by harassment/psychological abuse (10), physical assault (5), and intimidation/threatening (5). The most common sources of the incidents were private individuals, followed by police, state security, and public officials. During the same period, the Council of Europe Platform recorded 13 alerts. Worryingly, not one has been addressed yet[17].

2.2 Women journalists: highly present, but with few guarantees

A look at the Gender Equality Index[18] developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality reveals that in 2021 Bulgaria ranked 18th in the EU. Improvements in the economic domain (which measures gender inequalities in the access to financial resources and in the economic situation) led to an increase in Bulgaria's score since 2018.

The climate in which women journalists operate is part of a wider context of systemic sexism. In recent years, many voices are denouncing the need to improve the legislation to combat **gender-based violence**, including the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, as recalled by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. "Ineffective laws, as well as practices of the public institutions, do not provide adequate protection" (Katchaunova et al., 2021: 35). An example of the worrying situation is the ongoing failure to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the so-called Istanbul Convention, which the Constitutional Court declared anti-constitutional[19]. In its Resolution on the rule of law and fundamental rights in Bulgaria, the European Parliament expresses concern for the misrepresentation of the Convention by media outlets and for the consequent stigmatisation of groups at risk of gender-based violence. The European Parliament therefore calls on Bulgarian authorities to "do what is necessary to allow for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention" (European Parliament, 2020b).

Gender-based hate speech is rife in Bulgaria and its media. According to AEJ - Bulgaria, while the problem is underestimated, victims of domestic violence and sexual harassment in the workplace often suffer a secondary victimisation in the media through insinuations that they "deserved" it (Spasov

17 https://fom.coe.int/accueil

18 https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/country/BG

19 https://balkaninsight.com/2021/10/27/bulgarian-courts-rejection-of-istanbul-convention-alarms-activists

et al., 2021). As denounced in the Media Pluralism Monitor 2021, hate speech systematically **targets women's rights activists**.

In Bulgaria, women are not underrepresented in the news production. Rather, as confirmed by our interlocutors, the opposite occurs, and the situation is described as "heterogeneous" by Nelly Ognyanova, academic and media expert. However, according to Padovani and Bozzon (2020), Bulgaria is listed among the countries that are **gender-blind** when it comes to the adoption of gender-related policies in media organisations. The authors affirm that although women's presence in media organisations is dominant, there is a very low level of adoption of gender-sensitive policies. As confirmed by Maria Cheresheva, journalist and member of AEJ - Bulgaria:

> *"In Bulgaria, we have a maternity leave for one year in which we have 90 percent of your salary, which is quite good, [...] but actually [...] you are secured on the minimum wage and you get your other part of the money as like outers contracts or something like that [...]. In many media, it's like that. So in the end, when you get pregnant, [...] you actually end up with a very, very low maternity. [...] We have a lack of places in the nurseries and in the kindergartens. So very often women cannot go back to work when they want to because there is no place for the kids. So I would say that with women, there are certain social factors that make it even more complicated".*

An explanation of the predominance of women in the news field might come from 20th century history. "In the nations of Eastern Europe, the field of journalism went through a process of **feminisation** under Soviet occupation, when pay was relatively low and news workers were subject to 'news management' and censorship by communist authorities. Under these conditions, men were less likely to be attracted to the profession, and women filled the professional gap, remaining to the present time" (Byerly and McGraw, 2020: 194). This feminisation of the news profession is still present, as Cheresheva told us:

> *"In Bulgaria, journalism is a very feminine, feminised profession. And so the majority of the journalists are women. And I don't think it's because in Bulgaria women are braver or tougher or they're better journalists. It's just because the conditions for doing the job are really bad and men would turn to, you know, more well-paid jobs".*

Representation does not mean that women in the news media are not discriminated against. In their analysis, Byerly and McGraw (2020) also highlight that pay is often lower for women than men,

and women journalists are often the first to lose their jobs in difficult times. However, they conclude that women journalists are still in the higher ranks of reporting in Bulgaria, and there are large amounts of news content about women, although they are sometimes portrayed in a "stereotyped way or subject to sexism" (Spassov et al., 2021: 17).

The Media Pluralism Monitor 2021 confirms the trends described above, highlighting that no specific gender equality policy has ever been elaborated. With figures related to women's presence at the **management** level, the report shows that:

- managerial positions in Bulgarian National Television (BNT) and Radio (BRT) are occupied by women in 40% of cases;
- women make up 25% of editors-in-chief in the leading news media;
- women are virtually 0% of top management of private TV companies.

In an analysis of the condition of women journalists in Eastern Europe, the Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ) raises concerns about their safety in Bulgaria. According to the report, in the period January 2021-October 2021 the country registered four violations of women journalists' rights (Kiran, 2021). One of the most serious **attacks against women journalists** in the country happened in summer 2021, when Polina Paunova and Genka Shikerova were harassed and verbally abused while covering the National Conference held by former ruling party GERB. Outside the event, the scene quickly turned violent due to the clash between anti-government protesters and supporters of Borisov's government. When journalists started filming the events, supporters of the ruling party turned on them and threw away Paunova's phone. Shikerova captured the incident on camera and posted it on social media. The two journalists denounced the fact that no one intervened[20].

Women journalists are particularly exposed to threats and attacks when reporting on issues related to human rights, as Maria Cheresheva told us:

> *"Journalists are mostly harassed when they report about human rights and mostly women journalists work on human rights. [...] I've been specialising in migration for many years and during the refugee crisis it's been like horrible hate speech online also sexualised against me [...] I think it's mostly human rights and mostly when we are talking about women's rights, which are also human rights. [...] Then it turns to the journalist. I mean, you become part of the problem, so you become a target of hate speech as well".*

Although all journalists in Bulgaria face difficult times, what is different when we look at women

20 https://www.mapmf.org/alert/24249

journalists is the form that pressure and threats take. As explained by Marieta Dimitrova, editor-in-chief of Blagoevgrad News[21]:

> *"The forms of pressure against women are certainly different from those taken against men, [...] it's just the nature of the discrediting that is different".*

Cheresheva adds the fact that when people want to discredit a journalist, they usually use the feminine form: "Very often when somebody wants to discredit journalists, [...] offences against journalists are in feminine form". And again, in the case of online harassment, although it is a threat common to both male and female journalists, "when people who comment do not agree with something that a guy did, they would say that he's not honest or something like that, but if it's a woman, they would start offending her about her looks".

Although journalism is predominantly a profession for women in Bulgaria, **solidarity** with a colleague is virtually non-existent when something goes wrong. In Cheresheva's words:

> *"I think the saddest thing very often is that women don't support women in these cases. And for this reason, in Bulgaria, I don't see a potential for something like a MeToo movement, because there is a lack of solidarity among women as well. [...] I have been sexually harassed by some of the people I've interviewed, by their attitude, you know? But I don't have a protective environment in which I would like to share. I think that even in the community, most of the crowd would say that you're trying to attract attention [...] You know, this has happened to me, but it's something normal. You're trying to make yourself like a victim or something like that. This is the widespread attitude".*

2.3 Local journalists: an endangered species

AEJ - Bulgaria defines local journalism 'a truly endangered species'. Data from their latest survey show that only 25.7% of respondents work for a media outlet located outside Sofia (Valkov, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has further deepened the **financial crisis** of local and regional media, causing media bankruptcies, closures, and reductions in circulation (Spassov et al., 2021). In the last two years, the pandemic has had a strong impact on the media sector and its sustainability. The Rule of Law Report 2021 acknowledges that although media plurality and economic security of journalists

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21 https://blagoevgrad-news.com/

are endangered at the regional level, no specific measure has been put in place.

Political independence of the media in Bulgaria is under threat at all levels. However, local and regional media are particularly at risk due to their strong dependence on funds coming from municipalities and local owners. Moreover, as described above, the use of EU funds by local authorities to strengthen the control over local newspapers and TV channels has been denounced[22]. A 2015 investigation[23] by Spas Spasov revealed that in the period between 2013 and 2015 Bulgarian municipalities spent at least 2.7 million leva of their own or EU funds (equivalent to 1.5 million Euros) on local newspapers, TV stations, and radio. The investigation focused on 10 municipalities: the five largest municipalities (Sofia excluded) and five smaller ones. All municipalities had issues related to press freedom and freedom of expression. The investigation proved that these funds are used to buy acquiescence and to influence editorial policy. However, the irony is that those funds are vital for the existence of such media, where sometimes municipalities themselves directly pay the salaries of journalists[24]. According to Spasov, the low level of pay outside Sofia (three to four times lower) makes journalists much more **vulnerable** to pressure mechanisms. In such a context, journalism often takes the form of PR (Wehofsits and Martino, 2019), while there is little room for investigations. **Self-censorship** is the resulting practice at the level of regional media, of course linked to the risk of being sued when publishing something that does not please those in power, as explained by Marieta Dimitrova:

> *"A deafening silence and self-censorship is imposed by many of my colleagues because they are afraid of precisely what I mentioned about lawsuits. They prefer to contract politicians and local authorities in order to have some secure income, and in return they simply remain silent in the face of corruption".*

Moreover, due to the difficult conditions they have to work in, local journalists feel **isolated** from their professional community, which is often afraid to express solidarity. This is particularly true in the case of journalists who do not rely on public funds and adopt a critical stance against the local administration. Dimitrova explained this with regard to her work in Blagoevgrad:

22https://www.rcmediafreedom.eu/content/download/6363/59600/version/1/file/IT%2C+HR%2C+BG+-+Osservatorio+Balcani+e+Caucaso+Transeuropa+-+Centro+per+la+Cooperazione.pdf

23 https://www.dnevnik.bg/bulgaria/2016/03/25/2725257_regionalnata_jurnalistika_v_bulgariia_se_prodava

24https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Bulgaria/Bulgaria-where-the-local-press-can-be-bought-for-cheap-177272

> *"The sad thing is that colleagues with whom I work in the same city have never dared to stand openly by me. I have received support from local journalists 'covertly' on the phone, in private conversation, but never publicly. They are just afraid that if they are associated with me, they are also threatened by such pressure".*

It appears overall necessary to find external and alternative ways of supporting local media, as remarked by Ognyanova:

> *"Local journalism has specific needs, as it is extremely difficult to be funded especially during the digital transition. [...] Local journalism is in a state of emergency and often loses its independence because it accepts commitments to local government and local business. New funding mechanisms are needed to preserve its independence".*

The Ethical Journalism Network is quite optimistic about the development of **new business models** in the country. Independent media outlets are emerging online with an aim of contesting mainstream narratives, tackling corruption, and holding public authorities accountable. These new models can attract journalists at the local level, but the challenge is to attract alternative financial revenues like local and community-based support (Kaisy, 2020).

Lastly, it is important to present Dimitrova's personal experience as editor-in-chief of Blagoevgrad News through some examples of the pressure she is subject to. "My team and I were subjected to a police raid during a protest in Blagoevgrad three years ago, which was created in a ridiculous way, and all this happened only [...] because I dare to investigate the powers [...] and shine a light on their abuses, which is frightening at times".

Such a choice is difficult and risky. It leads to financial insecurity, legal threats, and pressure exerted not only on the journalist, but also on her or his family. "I have received threats to the life and health of me and my family, I have been the subject of two lawsuits and countless threats of more", she explains. "Some time ago, after publishing one of my investigations, which highlighted corrupt practices of the mayor of a large municipality, an article came out in several paid, yellow media, which defined me as an incompetent journalist, following orders, and to hit my dignity as much as possible. They attributed to me intimate extramarital affairs which, although it was an outright lie, the first moment I read them I felt crushed emotionally. This was repeated about a year later, after another investigation involving the same politician". This last quote summarises the entire picture:

> *"Politicians and business people have a lot of money with which they can buy any small editorial office. If they fail to buy it, they start intimidating, suing, and can practically destroy any small regional media".*

2.4 What support for journalists in Bulgaria?

The literature review and the interviews carried out for this case study show that journalists in Bulgaria are under an enormous pressure exerted by politicians, local authorities, the business world, the management of the news organisations, and many other actors. A delegitimation process of the role of independent journalism is in place in the country. The reputation of traditional media is low, and only 30% of Bulgarians **trust** the media (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee and AEJ - Bulgaria, 2022). Such results show that "overall support towards journalists in Bulgaria is very low, and this is a problem because when somebody is pressured, [...] if we don't have a broad public support, [...] they don't believe that journalists are really doing their job", Cheresheva explains.

Lack of trust is strictly connected to the low level of **media literacy**, measured by the Open Society Institute of Sofia[25] through indicators taking into account the level of education, the state of the media, trust in society, and the use of new tools of participation. Bulgaria ranks 30th in Europe, five places from the last position which in 2021 is occupied by North Macedonia (Lessenski, 2021).

The only organisation that provides steady practical support at the national and local level to media workers in Bulgaria appears to be the Association of European Journalists - Bulgaria. According to Marieta Dimitrova, **there is a need for "a global solution to the problems of pressure on journalists**. [...] I would not say that women journalists in Bulgaria have specific needs, rather the journalistic community in Bulgaria as a whole needs support, the creation of unions to protect journalists. Both male and female journalists are often subject to persecution, to threats, to lawsuits, and then we all need collegial support. At the moment, the only organisation that provides such support is the Association of European Journalists - Bulgaria".

Our respondents denounced the usual passivity of the Union of Bulgarian Journalists[26], which rarely reacts to attacks. There is a general critical stance towards the union among journalists, and it is believed that it should play a stronger role in the protection of media workers[27]. This problem is connected, according to Cheresheva, to a wider problem in Bulgaria, which is the **lack of unionism**

25 https://osis.bg/?p=3750&lang=en

26 https://www.sbj-bg.eu/index.php?t=31159

27 We tried to reach the Union of Bulgarian Journalists (SBJ), but we got no answer.

and workers' rights in general.

Training opportunities for Bulgarian journalists are available both in the country and abroad. However, according to our respondents, fewer and fewer journalists participate in such training. AEJ - Bulgaria is the main actor providing training in the country, for example on fact-checking, while during the pandemic it started initiatives of psychological support.

The last issue that needs to be analysed is the role played by the EU. As highlighted also in I*nterviewing Journalism*, "among the main shortcomings of the existing support mechanisms [...] there is a lack of focus and resources in local contexts" (Rita et al., 2020: 20). There is a demand, confirmed also by our respondents, for simplified application processes for European funds and for funds that are more oriented to the local dimension, in addition to the work for promoting transnational networks.

> *"You are a small investigative media from central Bulgaria. It's your job to do your investigation in central Bulgaria and to inform the local community. You don't necessarily have to work with some people from Poland or wherever, where they have totally different problems. So I think that this practice [...] does not take into account local needs. [...] These people need targeted support on a local level so that they can escape this dependency from local authorities", Cheresheva explains.*

In conclusion, Bulgarian journalists under threat need more solidarity and visibility. The AEJ experience proves that when a journalist is backed by a support organisation, the pressure lowers. "Very often the local authorities or the local oligarchs would back off, because they do not want negative publicity in some of the cases", Cheresheva says. Moreover, it is important to stress that AEJ - Bulgaria is the local partner of an international network, which can be activated in most serious cases. This intertwining of local and international dimensions is what is needed to protect journalists under threat.

3. IRELAND

3.1 What threatens media freedom?

Although freedom of expression and of information is strongly guaranteed in Ireland by Constitutional provisions, there are risks to market plurality due to the small scale of the domestic market (Flynn and O'dell, 2021).

According to the latest Reuters Digital News Report 2021, the web is the main source of news in Ireland, while the pandemic has accelerated the decline in print newspapers sales. The need to regulate online content and platforms led to the proposal of the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill with an aim to create an Online Safety Commissioner and reorganise the Irish broadcast media regulator (BAI, Broadcasting Authority of Ireland) into a Media Commission responsible for the entire audiovisual industry. The government approved the publication of the Bill in January 2022, and in the same month the Bill was initiated in the Seanad Éireann of the Parliament for consideration for enactment[28].

The Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced the position of the media outlets that are regarded as reliable, such as public broadcaster RTÉ, which remains the most trusted brand (Newman et al., 2021). Moreover, the Media Pluralism Monitor 2021 acknowledges that RTÉ is the most-accessed news source both online (where it is followed by the digital outlet The Journal) and offline.

Journalists' precarity has been exacerbated by the pandemic, which led to an increasing crisis of traditional media outlets, including radio, which have often been saved by state advertising (Flynn and O'dell, 2021). However, threats to journalists are particularly low, while from the economic point of view the category has benefited from the state's Pandemic Unemployment Payment schemes (SWD(2021) 715 final).

According to the Media Pluralism Monitor 2021, one of the biggest concerns for journalists in Ireland is **digital safety**, in particular with regard to the protection of journalistic sources.

Moreover, in 2020 the government set up a Future of Media Commission[29] to analyse the sustainability of the Irish media sector in the future. One of the main issues highlighted by the commission in its thematic dialogues with stakeholders is the **destructive role of big tech** companies in the digital advertising market (Newman et al., 2021).

One big threat to media freedom is the existing **defamation law**, for which amendments were expected to be adopted by the end of 2021. "The current regime enables to impose a disproportionately high amount of damages for defamation, which can have a negative impact on journalistic freedom." (SWD (2021) 715 final: 15). The process has been characterised by enormous delays, but a review was published in March 2022 with the aim of examining whether Irish defamation law is still appropriate. The text gave the Justice Minister the green light to amend the 2009 Defamation Act. The abolition of juries in High Court defamation cases and the introduction of an anti-

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28 https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/88404-publication-of-the-online-safety-and-media-regulation-bill/#

29 https://futureofmediacommission.ie/

SLAPP mechanism are among the review's recommendations[30].

The defamation law was cited by our interviewees as one of the biggest threats to media freedom in Ireland. Susan Daly, news editor at TheJournal.ie[31], stated:

> *"Our defamation laws are extremely, extremely archaic, and extremely hardline, and the press comes out the worst in it. There is a real chilling effect [...] because juries of people, regular people decide [...], and they can't be given any direction by the judge, so we've had situations in the past where the awards could bankrupt an outlet. [...] The legal system is weaponized against the press".*

Although a reform of the defamation law is coming, "it is not coming fast enough", as Sheila Reilly, head of editorial development at The Irish Examiner [32], explained.

> *"There is a law reforming the defamation act going forward. [...] There is a recognition that it is too stringent, it's tied up with a lot of other elements as well. Our freedom of information is ridiculous, it used to be much better, and now it got much worse. [...] It's really difficult to get information, public information. It's actually an issue that is not kind of highlighted enough to be honest. So it's all related to that".*

Only one alert concerning the country has ever been recorded on the Council of Europe Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists[33]. The alert, registered in 2020, concerns a lawsuit filed against the Dublin Inquirer by a political activist and anti-eviction campaigner.

This situation of relative safety for Irish journalists is confirmed also by the Mapping Media Freedom Platform, which in the period between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021 recorded three alerts[34] (0.37% of the EU27 total, against a population that corresponds to about 1% of the EU population), one of which is the same recorded on the Council of Europe Platform.

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30 https://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Report-of-the-Review-of-the-Defamation-Act-2009.pdf/Files/Report-of-the-Review-of-the-Defamation-Act-2009.pdf

31 https://www.thejournal.ie/

32 https://www.irishexaminer.com/

33 https://fom.coe.int/accueil

34 https://www.mapmf.org/explorer?f.from=2020-01-01&f.to=2021-12-31&f.country=Ireland

3.2 Women journalists and online harassment

Ireland ranks 7th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index[35] 2021 developed by the European Institute for Gender Equality. Its score (73.1 out of 100 points) is above the EU average and its ranking has improved, mainly due to progress in the domains of power and money.

Women journalists in Ireland account for only a third of media professionals. A look at heads of news and editors reveals that this position is occupied by women only in two out of eight of the largest television, radio, print, and online news media outlets (Flynn and O'dell, 2021).

According to the 6th Global Media Monitoring Project, data on presenters show that in Ireland 39% of presenters are women. The percentage drops to 36% with regard to reporters, and to only 28% in terms of news subjects and sources (Macharia et al., 2020).

In 2018, the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland launched a Gender Action Plan[36] to promote diversity in terms of content and involvement in the production within the audio-visual sector. The review[37] of the Action Plan published in 2020 envisions new actions to strengthen this commitment, such as the creation of a data collection framework and the comparison of the structures of boards across the community broadcasting sector.

With regard to compensation, the Gender Pay Gap Information Act implemented in 2021 will require workplaces to report on the pay differences between female and male employees[38]. This rule will apply for an initial period of two years only to employers with more than 250 employees.

In the media sector, and specifically inside RTÉ, in 2021 a FOI request revealed that one in five women earns less than 40,000 Euros per year, compared to almost one in 10 men; moreover, 68% of media workers earning between 100,000 and 150,000 Euros per year are men. This picture reflects the fact that management positions are predominantly held by men[39].

Gender issues are especially risky topics for women journalists. The coverage of the abortion referendum in 2018, which led to the approval of an amendment of the Constitution to modify the extremely tough legislation around abortion, was described by our respondents as one of the hardest topics to report about. Although things appear to be better than in the past, in most prominent cases

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35 https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/country/IE

36 https://www.bai.ie/en/media/sites/2/dlm_uploads/2018/04/20180423_BAI_GenderActionPlan_vFinal_AR.pdf

37 https://www.bai.ie/en/media/sites/2/dlm_uploads/2020/03/20200304_GAP-Review-Report-Proposals_vFinal.pdf

38 https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/act/2021/20/eng/enacted/a2021.pdf

39 https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/rte-staff-demand-answers-on-depressing-gender-pay-gap-40175074.html

there is a strong polarisation of opinions, as Deirdre O'Shaughnessy, news editor at The Irish Examiner, puts it:

> *"If people are writing about gender quotes or people are writing about rape culture, or for example the Sarah Everard case[40], [...] you just know you are going to get some kind of backlash. I do think that's actually changing".*

Overall, the level of hate is highest against female journalists who report about issues that affect women. "Anything in which women appear to be complaining about how women are treated just causes huge amounts of abuse", as Aoife Moore, political correspondent at The Irish Examiner, said.

In addition, it can be argued that **any social issue** is a sensitive topic to report about. And the paradox is that these themes are usually explored only by women journalists, as Hilary McGouran, Deputy Managing Director of News and Current Affairs and Managing Editor of TV News at RTÉ[41], puts it:

> *"Some of the work [women] have done has been really impactful in terms of societal change or bringing issues to attention... You know, around drugs, around homelessness, stories that maybe people don't necessarily want to know about".*

Immigration, access to refugee services, racism are only the other side of the same coin. Susan Daly described an investigation that her team is carrying out about the life of travellers' children, who are often subject to institutionalised prejudice. She is aware that the authors of the investigation, who are women, will receive a lot of abuse once it is published.

> *"We can't have that happening. So that is affecting our publication model, you know? [...] You always have to look out for... I want to cover this, but I also have to think about whether my journalists would be targeted for it".*

These considerations take place even when the newsroom needs to decide how to present the author of an article.

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40 The Sarah Everard case, who was kidnapped in South London, raped and strangled by a police officer in March 2021, raised an extensive debate about women's safety and violence against women, and the role of police. For more information see: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/sarah-everard

41 https://www.rte.ie/

> *"If we cover things to do with race, which we are increasingly doing, that does attract a lot of vitriol. We [...] have contributors of colour, and I know that when we feature them [...] we need to be very careful with how we put things on social media for them, what sort of phrasing we use, and even whether we use a picture of them. You know, that's a limitation on them"*, says Deirdre O'Shaughnessy.

According to our interviewees, one of the biggest threats that women journalists face in Ireland is **online harassment**. The above mentioned Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill addresses the issue of online harmful content, providing for the appointment of an Online Safety Commissioner. This commissioner will be empowered with compliance, enforcement, and sanction powers, and will establish both binding online safety codes and a non-binding online safety guidance[42]. However, as Susan Daly told us, although "the government has done some legislation around hate speech and online harassment, [...] it is not specific to the media, and in my mind the media have specific problems".

Social media brought a new threat to women journalists, and particularly to TV journalists as Hilary McGouran says, because they are well-known and receive all kinds of inappropriate messages and comments.

Being active on social media is, according to Aoife Moore, the worst part of the job.

> *"The insinuation is that I'm bad at my job and that I should be sacked. [...] I have had people comment on my looks when I go on TV. Also about the way I speak, I have a very different accent compared to people in Dublin or Cork, [...] things like I need subtitles when I am on TV. Anytime I'm on TV, I get comments about that, about my looks, about whether I've had botox, [...] that I can't be taken seriously because I'm a barbie, all of these very gendered types of attacks. I just want to do my job".*

Many of our interviewees confirmed the fact that online harassment is particularly bad in Ireland against two categories: women journalists and women politicians.

> *"I don't think there is enough knowledge about how threats and abuse on social media affect people mentally. [...] I think there is a level of acceptance, that we should just put up with it. And I think that is something that needs to be tackled, because it's not acceptable. It's not acceptable against a journalist, it's not acceptable against a politician. It wouldn't be acceptable if I worked in a*

42https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d8e4c-online-safety-and-media-regulation-bill/

> *supermarket, so I don't know why it's acceptable if I work in journalism", concludes Moore.*

Moore's is actually one of the few cases in which a journalist initiated legal actions for online harassment and defamation. The case involves a former columnist who put in place a campaign of online abuse on Twitter clearly targeted against her. Moore also called on Twitter to disclose the identities of the different persons who controlled those Twitter accounts, but the social media giant argues that it should not be compelled to provide such information[43]. The behaviour of **social media companies** is a very big issue that was highlighted by many of our respondents, who stressed the need for big tech companies to take responsibility for what happens on their platforms. This issue will be tackled at the EU level in the forthcoming EU Digital Services Act[44], a common set of rules on intermediaries' obligations and accountability.

The main problem with online harassment and social media companies is that "you can get away with things on Twitter and Facebook that you can't get away with in real life", as Deirdre O'Shaughnessy says. As said, women journalists are particularly exposed to online harassment, but the interest of social media companies in doing something to protect them seems very low. As the case of Aoife Moore demonstrates, it took a lot of time for Twitter to suspend the accounts that were spreading defamatory contents against her, and the fact that she is a famous and visible journalist in Ireland surely helped. That is not the case for local journalists who are harassed, as we will argue in the next paragraph.

Recognising the problem posed by current content moderation by social media platforms, ARTICLE 19 elaborated a model for a multi-stakeholder voluntary-compliance mechanism called Social Media Council (SMC). The functions of a SMC are to review content moderation decisions on the basis of international human rights standards and to act as a forum for recommendations. With the idea that a SMC should be established at the national level, ARTICLE 19 launched this initiative in Ireland. The choice is due to the current debates on the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill and to the fact that the country hosts the headquarters of the main social media platforms. As described in Article 19 report (2021), different stakeholders would be part of the Irish SMC: social media companies, media and advertising industries, journalists, academics, and CSOs would all be involved.

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43 https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/courts/high-court/twitter-opposes-order-sought-by-journalists-in-defamation-case-1.4731555

44 https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act-ensuring-safe-and-accountable-online-environment_en#documents

Recent updates reveal that meetings have been carried out to establish the working group of interested stakeholders , but a SMC has not been developed yet.

3.3 Local dimension: independence of media outlets and safety of journalists

Ireland is a small country with 5 million inhabitants, of which almost 1.5 live in Dublin[45]. The local dimension of journalism is not as extensive as in bigger and more populated European countries, and the problems that are specific to local journalism and local journalists are not so many. However, local newspapers are facing precarious times.

One of the biggest threats to the independence of the local media environment is the **ownership** issue. As stated in the European Commission's 2021 Rule of Law Report, the high level of concentration in the Irish media sector is particularly impactful at the local level. This is the reason why the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland undertakes a review of the ownership every three years. The ownership issue of local journalism is well described by Sheila Reilly:

> *"Independent titles, they are very few, there are maybe five or six of them. You may have some hyperlocal websites. [...] In most cases, most titles are owned by either Iconic, Celtic Media, Independent, and then the Irish Times owns four of them. And then, after that there's just a few scattered around".*

While confirming this trend, Hilary McGouran highlights the fact that most local outlets focus on the entertainment space and that, in comparison with bigger countries, there is little need for investigative journalism at the local level. This means that being part of a bigger group, being owned by bigger newspapers, looks like a guarantee for these outlets, because it allows them to be structured and viable.

If, on the one hand, this might be good news for the economic stability of local and regional media outlets, on the other hand the ownership issue raises concerns with regard to their **independence**. However, each media owner has its specificities, and there is no lack of good practices in big companies. Deirdre O'Shaughnessy described the positive aspects of being owned by The Irish Times:

> *"We are now owned by a national newspaper based in Dublin. [...] The future is probably looking a lot better than it was. Our purchaser is a trust, so it's not a private for profit company, which makes a huge difference". Although with the*

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45 https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2021pressreleases/pressstatementpopulationandmigrationestimatesapril2021/

> *previous owner there was no editorial interference, "it was particularly commercial and particularly commercially driven, whereas I think working in a not for profit environment is quite different".*

Exceptions to the ownership trend are very few, and one of the most successful is based in Dublin. The Dublin Inquirer[46] is an independent newspaper founded in 2015 which provides coverage of the capital city. It is entirely **reader-supported** and carries no advertising. Its readers are almost entirely based in Dublin, and subscriptions have increased significantly during the pandemic. This example appears to be difficult to replicate in local media outlets outside the capital city. Although the figure is in line with other EU countries, only 16% of Irish readers pay for online news (Newman et al., 2021). Adding to this data the issue of detachment of local communities from local affairs, as pointed out by our interviewees, it appears difficult to convert local information to this model.

The challenges that local media outlets will need to face in the near future can be summarised as follows:

- combating bad media ownership models;

- moving forward with digitalisation, in order to go where the readers are;

- attracting investments;

- reconnecting with local communities.

Loss of coverage at the local level is linked to all the factors listed above, as Sheila Reilly told us. The lack of investment in resources and people has, in her words, "put massive **pressure on local journalists**. So you're looking at essentially titles where you'd have [...] people doing one or two features a week for the weekly titles. Essentially there would be a lot of public relations going into these papers, a lot of PR going on without investigations. [...] If somebody is doing a big investigation in a local paper, I guarantee you they are doing it 95% on their own time".

The relationship between public authorities and local titles is tight. "Sometimes you would say maybe too cosy", Reilly says. This became necessary to cope with the economic difficulties of local media outlets. It is increasingly difficult for small newsrooms to cover public meetings, and if they are, "they are not delving into stories that come up at Council meetings. In a way this kind of suits everybody, and in another way it's a great travesty obviously, because miscarriages of justice if you like, or misappropriation of funds, or mishandling of issues are kind of going under the radar as a result of that. So that's the kind of concern. [...] **It's not as sharp as it should be**", she concludes.

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46 https://www.dublininquirer.com/

However, local journalism is fundamental for providing information on local public affairs, holding local elites accountable, and creating ties inside a community (Nielsen, 2015). Loss of coverage at the local level, which has been described as "**news desert**" (Friedland et al., 2012), is a very serious issue in Ireland, where the lack of resources led to the shutting down of numerous newspapers that were important for providing plurality and coverage of political affairs. The Irish Examiner may exemplify a good practice as it is trying to expand its coverage of the province, but "it's very resource inefficient and I suppose the death of a lot of the local newspapers has led to this, [...] a lot of their reporters are now desk-bound and they are just phoning for stories. [...] We are trying to make sure that we have as much of an area covered as we can, but it's difficult given the local infrastructure in towns is gone", Deirdre O'Shaughnessy explained.

This problem is strictly connected to the d**isappearance of freelance journalists at the local level**. As the news editor of The Irish Examiner told us, it is difficult even to find one freelance reporter in each county. She cited the example of Limerick, which is the third city of Ireland:

> *"In the whole city and county there is only one freelance reporter. And he sells to all of the national titles, so essentially if something happens in that area and he doesn't know about it, it never happened. That is so bad for historical records, and for news and for news gathering, and for just ensuring that people's stories are told".*

The condition of freelance journalists at the local level is extremely difficult, and it has changed a lot in the last few years. Local titles cannot afford to pay external contributors, so local freelancers almost entirely rely on national titles that need a story from that area from time to time. But this makes their profession extremely unstable, as Sheila Reilly told us:

> *"As a freelancer I don't know how you could make a living in this country. You would if you were doing something else yourself, if you have another part-time job. That's why there are so few of them".*

Aside from their economic conditions, local journalists are particularly exposed and more vulnerable to other categories of threats. The main trait that distinguishes local journalists from national or mainstream journalists is the fact that they are well-known in their community. In Sheila Reilly's words:

> *"It's the advantage and the disadvantage of local journalism. On one side, everybody knows you [...], you are one of only three or four in the county. So when you are at a Council meeting or at Court people are seeing you, and that has an advantage. [...] On the other hand, you are the person they come to if things go wrong or if they don't like a story. In a way, local journalists have less of a buffer between the public, and that's an advantage. But the disadvantage of that can be when the public is not happy with the story, they can come directly to you".*

By comparison, such exposure is lower on **social media**, where local journalists have less visibility. However, not being in the spotlight might create a risk for local journalists who are harassed online. Aoife Moore explained that there is a need to gain large public attention for abuse received online to make social media companies intervene.

> *"I am very certain that if I had worked in a regional paper they would have not suspended the accounts. But because I have a lot of followers, and I tweeted about it, straight away the next morning".*

Finally, local newspapers and their staff are more vulnerable to the destructive effects of **defamation** laws. A local paper with few resources cannot provide legal protection for its employees, and as a consequence "a defamation case in a local paper is a disaster, it could potentially close [...] They would be overly cautious to the point that they would avoid risk at all", Sheila Reilly told us. This last aspect, linked to the chilling effect of a lawsuit, was confirmed by Deirdre O'Shaughnessy, who said "they have to be so careful that they actually can't cover most stories".

Acknowledging the challenges that local journalism will face in the future if it does not adapt to digital changes, Sheila Reilly expressed her idea about how to face the problem of coverage loss at the local level:

> *"There needs to be some sort of an agency supplying independent content from local authority meetings, courts, inquiries, things like that. That they are supplying local titles at a kind of subsidies costs basically, I think that needs to be part of any answer, because if you don't have that, we are losing that coverage. [...] There's no journalists in court today. And does that matter? It does matter. We need to have a journalist in every court every day there's a court on, and the same with the local authority meetings, and that is not happening. Local papers are not going to provide that. So I think we need an agency setup that provides that".*

3.4 Newsrooms in defence of their journalists

Our interviewees pointed out the **lack of training opportunities** related for example to safety issues, digital threats, or legal protection other than the ones provided by the newsroom itself. But leaving it to the outlet's choice means that only well-resourced media outlets can organise courses for their employees. For example, RTÉ provides training on how to protect oneself while covering protests or on coping with trauma.

Recalling one of the few training opportunities provided by an external organisation, specifically Headline[47], Susan Daly highlighted the presence of journalists from many different newsrooms.

> *"We all looked at each other and went Well, «we never talk about this, we never see each other most of the time anyway, but I didn't know you were worried about this too». So I think that it needs to be facilitated by some sort of platform where the media outside of business interests can talk about [...] how we want our newsrooms".*

Her plan is to provide **resilience training** for every new hire at The Journal:

> *"Universities don't do anything about this kind of threats that people would face, there are no tools that we know are available. And as I started talking to people in other media outside of Ireland [...] I realised there are tools, there are trainings. We give training to reporters going into war zones, we need to give emotional flak jackets to the reporters that we have here, and women are absolutely receiving more abuse".*

All our respondents found it very difficult to name support centres and organisations active for journalists' safety in Ireland, or on media freedom. Instead, there are some small groups and campaigning journalists that advocate for specific issues, in particular the defamation law, and are vocal on social media. An example is Right To Know[48], a not-for-profit focused on access to information and publishing stories based on using those rights.

There are mixed feelings towards **unions** in Ireland[49]. Although active through statements and press releases, they do not appear to be particularly active in specific cases of journalists and media

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47 Headline is the national monitoring organisation responsible for reporting and representation of mental ill health and suicide: https://headline.ie/

48https://www.righttoknow.ie/

49 We tried to reach the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) at different times, but never got a chance to have a meeting with a representative.

outlets under threat. This is particularly true at the local level, where there are fewer everyday problems, but there are long standing issues that would require constant attention.

Given the difficulties in finding support outside, some newsrooms have put in place mechanisms for the protection of their employees, especially women journalists. One solution to the problem of online harassment could be not to tag the author on social media. The Irish Examiner is currently evaluating this option. However, despite taking off pressure from journalists, this represents a limitation of their work. In Deirdre O'Shaughnessy's opinion, "it may be something we'll bring back, or maybe some people will prefer to stay tagged, but some of them certainly don't want to be". Aoife Moore has a strong position on this issue:

> *"I think taking my name off certain stories and being quiet is a defeat. I think people want me to go away, they want female voices to be silenced. For me, that is just something that I'm not willing to do".*

A different path to take is that of clearly **expressing solidarity** towards the journalist who is harassed in the newsroom, and providing **practical support**. In Moore's case, her newsroom was completely supportive, but that is not the case for every newsroom. Offering **financial support for counselling**, supporting the journalist in the decision to turn to the police, and in general creating an environment of understanding within the newsroom are necessary steps to avoid the journalist feeling isolated.

Lastly, a **good practice** that deserves to be mentioned is the one provided for over six months now by the managing editor of The Journal. In collaboration with the HR manager, Susan Daly set up a reporting system through a specific email address to which employees can send examples of abusive behaviours they feel are impacting on them and their job. The abuse is then codified, and this system has already led to positive results in identifying those responsible. Probably, however, the most important effect of this practice is that of "let[ting] the staff know, like as a **company we take responsibility** for this, as a company we are hearing you, as a company we are finding ways to take action, as a company we are giving you feedback". However, this is not the end point. It is necessary to move from reactive to **proactive solutions**:

> *"The reporting process I have is mostly reactive, isn't it? It's proactive as much as people feel a bit looked after but I haven't yet got resilience training, I haven't yet got other ways of protecting the team. I'm thinking about it, and I hope other*

> *media are thinking about it too. So I think that's the next challenge, the next problem going forward. If we are not tackling this, we are already behind the next phase of abuse".*

4. ITALY

4.1 Background information: the state of media freedom

In Italy, media freedom and media pluralism are enshrined in a solid legislative framework. However, a few issues remain unsolved, including the reform of the **defamation law**, which was the subject of two rulings by the Constitutional Court.

The country was one of the first in Europe hit by the pandemic, and the government adopted different measures to counteract its impact on the media sector, mostly with emergency funds and tax credits.

Italy is classified as medium-risk in all four dimensions analysed by the Media Pluralism Monitor 2021 (fundamental protection, **market plurality**, political independence, and social inclusiveness), with the market plurality dimension scoring the highest level of risk with 66%. **Public service** media independence in governance and funding is another matter of concern (Carlini and Brogi, 2021).

Looking at employment conditions, regular employment in the media sector has been steadily decreasing in recent years. Active workers with a regular employee contract in December 2020 amounted to 14.719 units, marking a decrease by 616 units in comparison to 2019 (-4.02%)[50]. At the same time, the number of journalists without a regular contract is increasing, while social security benefits for this category are decreasing due to Covid-19[51]. The gap between regularly employed journalists and the rest of media workers is further aggravated by the Covid-19 crisis: "whereas the impact of the crisis on regular employment has been curbed by the job retention schemes, the freelancers have suffered most. Cuts in production (local and special outlets, number of pages, collateral products) and newsroom budgets have forced employers to end temporary and precarious contracts, and the remuneration for freelancers has decreased consistently" (Carlini and Brogi, 2021: 13-14).

50 http://www.inpgi.it/sites/default/files/INPGI%20-%20Bilancio%20Consuntivo%202020%20AGO.pdf

51 http://www.inpgi.it/sites/default/files/INPGI%20-%20Bilancio%20Consuntivo%202020%20GS.pdf

Attacks and threats against journalists remain an issue of concern, and the Mapping Media Freedom Platform recorded 74 alerts[52] (9.07% of the EU27 total, out of a population which corresponds to about 13% of the EU population) in the period between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021. These figures are only the tip of the iceberg. Many cases remain unreported, and at the same time there are numerous other ways to classify and register threats that would lead to higher numbers, as stressed by Ossigeno per l'Informazione. This is not a limit, but rather proof of the high level of risk that journalists face in Italy.

The European Commission's 2021 Rule of Law Report also highlighted the need for Italy to ensure journalistic sources are protected and to reform the framework law on p**rofessional secrecy of journalists** (SWD(2021) 716 final). This issue has raised particular concern in recent times, after the emergence of the case[53] of Italian prosecutors wiretapping several journalists covering migration stories.

In good news, institutions are paying growing attention to the safety of journalists. At the end of 2017, a **Coordination Centre**[54] was established within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Headed by the Interior Minister, the centre involves the Chief of the Police, the President and Secretary General of FNSI (the Italian journalists' union), the President and the Secretary General of the Order of Journalists (OdG). Its role is to monitor, analyse, and guarantee the exchange of information about the phenomenon, bringing forward proposals for preventing and combating it. The setting up of the Coordination Centre has been identified by the European Commission as a best practice[55] at the EU level at the release of the Recommendation on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists.

In addition, a committee dedicated to the protection of journalists under threat was set up within the Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission in 2014. The committee conducts hearings and publishes reports on the state of the press and the condition of journalists threatened by organised crime.

All these initiatives are examples that deserve to be in the spotlight, as they allow a better understanding at the political level of the condition of journalists, thus fostering alliances between institutions and the media sector.

This is particularly true for the committee set up within the Anti-Mafia Commission, as journalism

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52 https://www.mapmf.org/explorer?f.from=2020-01-01&f.to=2021-12-31&f.country=Italy

53 https://www.rcmediafreedom.eu/News/Italy-wiretapping-of-journalists-reporting-on-migration-must-be-investigated

54 https://www.interno.gov.it/it/ministero/osservatori-commissioni-e-centri-coordinamento/centro-coordinamento-sul-fenomeno-atti-intimidatori-nei-confronti-dei-giornalisti

55 https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirection/document/79308

issues are inextricably linked to the country's biggest problems, as Graziella Di Mambro, journalist and member of Articolo 21[56], says:

> *"Every day, in any order and degree of judgement […] there is at least one trial for crimes against the PA, […] at least one trial for organised crime and at least one trial for major economic crimes, therefore tax evasion, laundering. The defendants usually, statistically, are members of organised crime, politics, business or all three. […] As long as we have a country with five crime organisations, including three among the most important in the world, and we have the rate of corruption and tax evasion that we have, in my opinion it is difficult to get out of this problem, because there is a pact between very strong political and economic powers and people do not want to let that kind of news out".*

4.2 Condition of women journalists

Italy still has a lot to do for gender equality. The Gender Equality Index[57], which tracks progress in six core domains in the EU, shows that in 2021 Italy is progressing at a fast pace. However, it ranks 14th in the EU and its score is 4.2 points lower than the EU average. **Gender inequality is pervasive** in the country and concerns all dimensions of women's life. Work is one of the most affected domains, and this is true also for women employed in the media sector. Inequalities take different forms, including, but not limited to, the following:

- different degrees of freedom to choose what to report about - usually, women journalists do not cover politics or economics, a phenomenon that is defined as "**horizontal segregation**" (Padovani et al., 2021);

- economic treatment and wage gap, which is registered mostly in the higher positions. Looking at age groups, **wage gaps** are bigger during the first years in the profession and in the most advanced ages. In 2017, regularly employed women journalists' wage was on average around 52,000 Euros, against men's 65,000[58];

- imbalance in **presence at the management level** - a research conducted by EIGE in selected media organisations shows that "women constitute around one tenth (11%) of senior staff placed in decision-making positions" (EIGE, 2014: 8), much less than the EU average of 30%.

Starting from the most concerning and most specific category of threat, i.e. **sexual harassment**,

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56 https://www.articolo21.org/

57 https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/country/IT

58 https://inpginotizie.it/contratti-macelloni-piu-attenzione-ai-redditi-delle-donne-da-parte-di-sindacati-e-direttori/

in 2019 the Italian national press federation (FNSI) conducted a survey which confirmed the fact that women often feel unsafe and uncomfortable in their workplace, whether a newspaper, a radio, or a tv station. The report[59] shows that the reality of sexual harassment in the media sector is pervasive: 85% of the respondents confirmed instances of sexual harassment in their professional life. The most common forms of harassment include jokes and looks causing discomfort and inappropriate or offending questions. Moreover, 19.3% were asked to provide sexual services in exchange for a job, and 13.8% in exchange for a step forward in their career. Data on physical and sexual harassment are also worrying: 34.9% of women journalists confirm they have experienced unwanted hugs, kisses, and touches up to attempted sexual violence (8%) and sexual violence (2.9%).

A significant aspect is that in 57.7% of all cases the episode took place in the newsroom, and in 35% of cases other colleagues were present. Only in 18.4% of instances did someone intervene or try to intervene. These alarming figures show that there is a **climate of acceptance** of the gravity of such facts. These data have been confirmed also by our respondents, like Claudio Silvestri, Secretary of the Unitary Union of Journalists in Campania[60] (SUGC):

> *"Apart from the fact that in the profession itself there is a gap between men and women as the data from the INPGI [National Insurance Institute for Italian Journalists] tell us, men earn more than women, there is a strong criticality. There is already a first discrimination here. Then there is even more annoying discrimination in the workplace, where women are often victims of all sorts of harassment".*

The FNSI report ends with more worrying data: only 2.2% of women journalists reported the facts to the police, and 3.2% turned to the union. The choice not to report such episodes to the authorities is mostly due to the idea that the fact was not serious enough, the fear to be judged or not to be believed.

Looking outside the newsroom, it is pretty clear that being a woman increases the risk when reporting about particularly sensitive issues, because the attack starts from the sole fact of being a woman. As stressed by Reporters Without Borders, harassment takes specific, gendered forms[61].

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59 https://www.fnsi.it/upload/70/70efdf2ec9b086079795c442636b55fb/888388a4bf3ad115e1a76504fc73fd2e.pdf
https://www.fnsi.it/upload/70/70efdf2ec9b086079795c442636b55fb/309ba66c49f8316b7b7b28c46957f8a9.pdf

60 https://sindacatogiornalisti.it/

61 https://rsf.org/en/news/women-journalists-commitment-and-challenges

Silvia Garambois, President of GiULia Giornaliste[62], co-author of the book "#staizittagiornalista! Dall'hate speech allo zoombombing, quando le parole imbavagliano" with Paola Rizzi, confirmed this aspect, also highlighting the fact that the risk extends to the journalist's family:

> *"If you are a female journalist there is something more. The fact that you are a woman doing what is still identified as a man's job, sticking your nose into mafia things, crime, is seen as a kind of aggravating circumstance where the aggression is always at a higher level and a little different, the attack is sexual, it is against the family. [...] Things get heavy, sexist and heavy, we know where you live, we know where your children go to school, there is a very strong personal aggression".*

Women journalists are often the target of online harassment and attacks by organised groups of haters, people discrediting their investigations, fake profiles, but also private citizens who feel entitled to do that, up to businessmen and politicians. "Online violence has since become a new frontline in journalism safety - a particularly dangerous trend for women journalists" (Posetti et al., 2020: 1).

In Italy, a big share of online attacks targets those journalists who cover "hot topics". Politics, organised crime, court reporting, and migration issues are the four subjects that attract most threats. It is interesting to note that another untouchable argument for women journalists is sports, and specifically soccer. Migrant issues that normally attract hate speech are the most dangerous topic for women. As Di Mambro said:

> *"There are colleagues, for example those covering the phenomenon of migration in the Mediterranean, who have been victims of terrible attacks, have been wished upon death, violence, everything. It must be said that all this comes very often by invented, unknown profiles. [...] And it is very ugly, it is the mirror of the times, of social media, but then it affects the colleague psychologically".*

Angela Caponnetto, a reporter of the public broadcaster Rai we interviewed for Interviewing Journalism, directly experienced this situation. "Some photos of me behind a lot of muscular black men started circulating. [...] In the beginning I did not pay it much attention; then they became increasingly heavy, like 'you need to die', 'you need to end up like Ilaria Alpi'".

It is necessary to pay attention to these episodes. Silvia Garambois believes that "physical attacks often start from verbal harassment, and in particular harassment on social networks".

The DART Center for Journalism and Trauma pays huge attention to the issue of online

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62 https://giulia.globalist.it/

harassment. In a study published in 2020, Slaughter and Newman confirm the fact that at a global level women are particularly vulnerable to online harassment. For example, female TV journalists are three times more likely to receive harassing tweets than their male colleagues. Moreover, the journalist's responses to such episodes range from physical to emotional and cognitive symptoms that, besides causing serious harm for the journalist's wellbeing, could lead to damages to the profession. Turning away from social media, publishing articles anonymously, and leaving journalism are all consequences that increasingly contribute to a **chilling effect**.

Because of the fear that the attacks against a given journalist could turn to their media outlet, the management often proposes for the journalist to move on to other subjects. As Silvia Garambois told us, the administration goes to the journalist saying:

> *"You are covering that, you are a professional expert in that, you are being threatened, move to cinema. [...] It is not like the newspaper is protecting you by moving you, it humiliates you, in some way the haters win".*

The apparent lack of solidarity inside the newsroom is a topic discussed below when examining the situation of local journalists. But, as clearly emerged from our interviews, solidarity with a colleague under threat is not automatic, it needs to be encouraged and fostered by third actors.

Fortunately, a strong support system for journalists under threat does exist in Italy. Promoted by FNSI, and with particular attention for women journalists by GiULia Giornaliste, the "**media escort**" is a very useful tool that should be considered in other countries too. Starting from the fact that a journalist under threat tends to feel isolated and usually does not have the strength and the time to react, especially when considering online harassment, it is essential to build a network around her. The dimension of **networking "is already a form of protection"**, as freelance journalist Nancy Porsia reminded us. First, this network can help the journalist by publicising her case and her investigation, to avoid losing visibility. Second, by assisting the reporter on her social networks, answering for her, and filtering hurtful comments. Such a practice has been highlighted by the President of GiULia Giornaliste as the first and fastest thing to do, also to avoid professional and economic losses for the journalist:

> *"What can be done immediately? Moderating, we have seen that there are colleagues who had left social media and lost ground professionally because they were freelancers who advertised their work, because they could not take more*

aggression".

Besides this activity, and the work of GiULia in general, it is also important to remark on the existence of an **Equal Opportunities Commission**[63] within the FNSI, born precisely to introduce a debate on the gender gaps that characterise the profession in general, but also the FNSI. It covers different issues, from wage gaps to sexual harassment to the representation of women in media, with the aim to overcome the obstacles for a real equality.

4.3 Condition of local journalists

The vulnerability of local journalists is intertwined with the decline of the **local news industry**. Although the demand for local news has not changed over time, different factors are reducing the possibility for local outlets (and local journalists) to survive. Local news is vulnerable, among others, to digitalisation, the fall of advertising revenues, and the globalisation of information flows.

A report published in 2017 by AGCOM shows that 86% of Italian citizens look for news that is related to their region, province or city, regardless of the source (local newspaper, local television, public service media, social networks, web). In the regions where there is a high percentage of minorities, like Valle d'Aosta, the percentage rises even more. In 14 regions out of 20, the local newspaper or television is the first source of news (AGCOM, 2017).

The report stresses the fact that public service media plays a key role in the Italian local news landscape for citizens' informed participation in democracy. However, "in the period between 2005 and 2015, a decrease by 7 percentage points was registered in the number of journalists employed in local public service media" (AGCOM, 2017: 46).

Although the condition of local journalists employed in public service media is difficult, they are undoubtedly in a better position than their colleagues employed in local newsrooms. Media outlets are less and less able to cover local issues due to economic restrictions, and this means that local reporters are increasingly working as freelance journalists or even independent bloggers, as Claudio Silvestri told us:

> *"The newspapers that used to manage to cover the small news, the news that concerned the neighbourhoods, are now no longer able to do so because they do not have staff in the territories that they can pay, so the work is now only in the*

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63 https://www.fnsi.it/cose-la-commissione-pari-opportunita

> *hands of volunteers who open a space on the web".*

Some of these reporters, who often cannot formally qualify as journalists, may be included in the category of **human rights defenders** for their commitment to expose political wrongdoings and criminal activities in difficult territories[64]. The desire to know and understand what happens at the local level is strong everywhere, but it becomes a pressing need in those places where corruption, organised crime, and shady economic activities take place. It is even more difficult to exercise the journalistic profession in those places, and it goes without saying that those reporters are particularly exposed to threats and attacks. But due to the economic crisis of local journalism they are left alone in this fight, becoming particularly vulnerable. Graziella Di Mambro explained this:

> *"In general, journalists who are employed by large outlets enjoy a stronger, more protected status which also provides legal assistance, as opposed to the local journalist who is often hired as a freelance collaborator and therefore does not have legal assistance by the company's attorney or even union coverage".*

Di Mambro herself experienced attacks as a local journalist, and her case is relevant to the extent that it allows to understand how much more attention to the local context is needed. While covering a case related to a waste management tender and the involvement of organised crime in the firm that won, she was cited by people belonging to the firm who wanted to sue her for her articles and hoped for physical attacks against her. She knew about these threats only three years later, and only because a trial started and those affirmations were wiretapped. Two aspects are important in this episode: first, the lack of knowledge of the actual threats faced by local journalists; second, the value of their work for the community, as they allow the start of investigations in important cases.

It is in this context that human rights defenders who are committed to exposing local wrongdoings are forced to open personal pages on social networks, because it is hard to find an alternative. Mimmo Rubio is one of them and his case, also reported on the Mapping Media Freedom platform[65], is pretty explanatory of the difficult conditions local reporters have to work in. In 2020 Rubio was a reporter who on his Facebook page exposed the camorra affairs in Arzano, a municipality in the province of Naples where the local administration has been dissolved numerous times because of

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64 In April 2022 OBCT, as part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response, organised a press freedom mission in Italy. One of the two main topics was the safety of journalists, and in order to shed light on their condition, the delegation met with reporters under threat in Campania: https://www.rcmediafreedom.eu/News/MFRR-to-hold-press-freedom-mission-to-Italy

65 https://mappingmediafreedom.ushahidi.io/posts/23547

camorra infiltrations. In October 2020, after receiving threats and intimidation from individuals connected to the group, he was given police protection. His work, together with the work of similar pages and websites, is an "**actual outpost of civil resistance** in some territories", as Silvestri said.

What is almost entirely missing in the local dimension is **solidarity** from colleagues.

> *"On the territory you will never get any kind of solidarity. [...] There is usually the opposite phenomenon, the marginalisation of the colleague who is threatened [...]. A very dangerous process of delegitimisation is triggered, which we later noticed also happened for the most serious cases, those of murdered journalists. [...] It happened with Siani, it happened with other Sicilian journalists who were killed",* Silvestri told us.

In a situation where it would be necessary to turn the spotlight on, the opposite occurs. So the work of support organisations is very much needed, starting from the local and regional level, also to ensure their connection with national and international organisations in order to **build a solidarity network**. This is part of the SUGC's work in the Campania region:

> *"The union has this strength, when you enter the network of solidarity, you also enter the network of acquaintances of journalists, professionals, with whom you can discuss anything at any time. So they come out of that very small niche where they had been relegated. [...] In my opinion, our job is also to get them out of those territories".*

4.4 Media outlets, unions, support centres, institutions: what is missing

Women journalists work in a difficult environment starting from their own newsroom, where problems arise even with the recognition of the worthiness of their work.

> *"The only real way we have [to be treated like workers] is to write a better article than the male colleague, [...] and then talk about it, talk about it among ourselves, networking is very important, to have success, get scoops, tell stories that others have not told out of laziness or fear, to build our autonomy",* as Di Mambro said.

This **recognition**, together with the expression of solidarity when a colleague is threatened or harassed, is what is necessary to achieve at the level of the single media outlet.

Looking at the unions, it is not possible to draw conclusions that are valid for the entire Italian territory, where many different services are offered. However, a good practice that should be taken up

is that of the SUGC in Campania Region where, as said before, a significant part of the journalistic work is carried out by **non-professional journalists** that are less and less protected. It is with the aim to protect those figures that the union provides legal advice services on the territory.

Support centres and organisations are particularly needed at the local level, where journalists are more vulnerable also because they are not as visible as their colleagues working for national media outlets. As highlighted in *Interviewing Journalism*, support organisations usually overlook local journalists due to financial restrictions. "They can't take care of everyone, so they choose to deal only with cases that could create a precedent and greater echo in the public opinion and in the legal community. Italian media lawyer Andrea Di Pietro confirmed to us that «the donors of our legal office expect strategic cases [...] This need to handle mediatic and strategic cases frustrates the expectations of local journalism». For this reason, a need emerged for grassroots organisations to support local journalists" (Rita et al., 2021: 18).

An interesting aspect that emerged from the literature review is that at a global level there is in general a "lack of training on gender-based violence as well as other gender- and culture-related topics" (Slaughter et al., 2017: 5). In Italy, GiULia Giornaliste plays an important role in this sense, providing **training with a gender perspective**, open to everyone, and deontologically sound, that attracts also those who are not interested in these issues.

Looking at the institutions, networking has led to numerous positive experiences like the Coordination Centre within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Challenges remain in the judicial system, where it is hard for journalists to carry forward their complaints because of the **slowness of trials**. As Garambois pointed out talking about online harassment against women journalists:

> *"You may be the best known TV face, but your complaint will end up on file. [...] Because the courts are already drowning, and therefore this type of complaint is regarded as less important and there are courts where you just cannot hope that they will go forward [...] If we need a norm, it is a norm of attention".*

5. SWEDEN

5.1 A generally safe environment for media workers

In Sweden there is a strong legal framework for freedom of expression and media pluralism based on the Constitution, the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, and the Freedom of the

Press Act - dating back to 1766 - which also includes provisions that ensure public access to information to hold public authorities accountable (Macharia and Mir, 2022). In addition to the aforementioned laws, radio and television services are regulated by the Radio and Television Act which has recently been amended to transpose the Audiovisual Media Service Directive; the amended act entered into force on 1st December 2020.

The Swedish Press and Broadcasting authority is the central body responsible for regulating the sector. In addition, The Media Ombudsman and the Media Ombudsman ethical committee are two independent and self-regulatory bodies that handle complaints regarding the editorial content of different media, including newspapers, broadcast media, websites, and social networks[66].

The European Commission's 2021 Rule of Law report considers the state of media freedom in Sweden to be overall good, with journalists enjoying mostly **favourable working conditions** (SWD(2021) 725 final).

Moreover, the Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) 2021 found a generally low risk for media pluralism in the county (Färdigh, 2021). Among the four key dimensions measured by the MPM 2021, only market plurality registered a medium risk, while the others were classified as low risk (fundamental protection, political independence, social inclusiveness). Considering market plurality, the highest risk was registered on the indicator for **news media concentration** (96%). This high risk is linked to medium risk on transparency of media ownership and can be connected to the fact that the Swedish legal system does not set specific rules on transparency of media ownership.

Sweden is by tradition a newspaper-reading country, as confirmed also by our respondents. According to the Reuters Digital Report 2021, public broadcasters such as the Swedish Television SVT and the Swedish Radio SR are the other fundamental elements of the Swedish media market. However, alternative information sources, such as online media, are becoming a more and more serious competitor (Newman et al., 2021), as a larger part of the audience is moving from traditional to online media services (Färdigh, 2021). To improve the range of their online services (podcast, storytelling), and to reach a wider audience especially among the youngsters, public broadcasters are increasingly exploring cooperation with social networks and digital platforms, e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Spotify (Newman et al., 2021), a trend which is increasingly undertaken also by legacy media.

In 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively affected the media market. Revenues from advertising have decreased and paid subscriptions and subsidies have become the main source of

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66 https://www.presscouncils.eu/members-sweden

financing for traditional and commercial news journalism (Newman et al., 2021). In the last year, Sweden has registered one of the highest percentages of paid subscription for online news: the Digital News Report survey reports that almost 30% of Swedes have paid for online news. While the largest part of paid subscription was registered by 4 national newspapers, i.e Aftonbladet, Expressen, Dagens Nyheter, and Svenska Dagbladet, the local news sector successfully attracted more than a third (37%) of the total **online subscriptions** (Newman et al., 2021).

Thanks to the higher revenues coming from online subscription (which in 2020 were up 45% compared to 2019), in 2020 national and local newspapers were able to increase their readership revenues, counteracting the decrease in the income from print subscription and the decline in advertising revenues (Newman et al., 2021).

The deterioration of media finances impacts the employment stability of journalists, especially freelance journalists and those without a permanent working contract (Färdigh, 2021). In order to address and minimise the impact of the economic crisis caused by the pandemic on media and journalists, in 2020 the Swedish government granted €144 million in direct support to commercial Swedish news media (Newman et al., 2021).

Together with the lack of permanent employment, threats - including physical violence and harassment - are the main challenge that Swedish journalists have to face. **Targeted campaigns** against investigative journalists are frequently reported by the journalists' association and the Media Ombudsman (SWD(2021) 725 final). These campaigns, coupled with hatred from the public and increasing cases of SLAPPs, often result in journalists' self-censorship (SWD(2021) 725 final).

The latest survey on threats against journalists, conducted by the Swedish Journalists' Association in collaboration with the University of Gothenburg in 2019, shows that around 30% of Swedish journalists had been threatened in the previous 12 months and about 70% had received offensive comments[67].

The Mapping Media Freedom Platform recorded 9 alerts[68] concerning the country in the period between 1 January 2020 and 31 December 2021 (1.1% of the EU27 total), out of a population that corresponds to about 2.32% of the EU population.

5.2 Women journalists in Sweden: measuring safety through data

Sweden is among the most advanced countries in the EU and in the world for gender equality,

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67 https://www.sjf.se/system/files/2020-11/nyhetsbrev_jmg_2019.pdf

68 https://www.mapmf.org/explorer?f.from=2020-01-01&f.to=2021-12-31&f.country=Sweden

as shown for example by the Gender Equality Index 2021, which ranks the country at the **first place in the EU27**, with a 83.9 score well above the EU average of 68[69].

Women are well represented in the media sector, making up 45.9% of the journalistic community (Löfgren Nilsson, 2016). These results are confirmed by the Global Media Monitoring Project 2020, which highlights that 44% of reporters in Sweden are women. In particular, women make up 43% of reporters in newspapers, 47% in radio, and 51% in television (Macharia et al., 2020).

A report recently published by Fojo Media Institute addresses the question of what regulation and self-regulation on gender equality exists in the media in over 100 countries. Sweden is considered a case of a high level of gender equality in society being reflected in the media sector. An example of such strong protection is the Swedish Gender Equality Agency[70], an authority specifically created in 2018 to deal with matters related to gender equality. However, gender equality is not mentioned in media legislation, nor in self-regulatory mechanisms. Although **gender equality policies do exist** in some cases, "most Swedish major media houses do not have their own special ethical codes. [...] However, all companies have to follow the Discrimination Act and its measures for gender equality at the workplace" (Macharia and Mir, 2022: 30). SVT, the Swedish National Television, has a policy covering both personnel issues and programming content (Färdigh, 2021). Swedish Radio is committed to providing support and protective measures in dialogue with the media worker who received threats and her immediate managers[71]. Swedish Radio, SVT, and the Swedish Educational Broadcasting Company commit to equality and diversity. "These notions are only broadly presented, without a clear definition or practical development indicators" (Macharia and Mir, 2022: 42).

Although women journalists in Sweden appear to be better off than in other EU countries, surveys conducted in the journalistic community reveal that women journalists are particularly exposed to certain categories of threats that their male colleagues do not receive. Speaking about online harassment and hate speech, our respondent Leonard Wallentin, journalist at J++[72], says:

> *"As a man, I don't get nearly as much of that as female colleagues get, especially when going into somewhat controversial topics".*

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69 https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2021/SE

70 https://jamstalldhetsmyndigheten.se/

71 https://www.ebu.ch/news/2021/03/journalism-and-society-simply-cannot-afford-silence

72 https://jplusplus.org/en/

The survey initiated by the Department of Journalism, Media, and Communication of the University of Gothenburg in 2012 shows that a third of women journalists had received sexist comments and 15% had been threatened with forms of sexual violence, while the equivalent figures for male journalists are 3 and 5% (Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring, 2016). Moreover, the authors highlight that in 16% of cases feminism and gender issues are mentioned as triggers of the intimidation or harassment episode. As a consequence, "there is quite some discussion in Swedish newsrooms about the risk of something not being covered. Because we know that if you are doing a story on immigration, feminism, women's rights, you know you will be threatened", told us Kersti Forsberg, director of Fojo Media Institute, interviewed last year for *Interviewing Journalism*.

Another study, mentioned by the European Parliament in a recent assessment of gender-based violence and cyber violence, shows that seven out of ten women in Swedish media, from editors to journalists, had experienced threats or harassment online. Even more worrying is the **chilling effect** of such attacks, as "two out of five of these women journalists refrained from researching or reporting on particular subject matters, groups, people or organisations after receiving threats" (Lomba et al., 2021: 86). Such incidents in 30% of cases cause a level of harm and concern that leads journalists to consider leaving the profession (Griehsel et al., 2018).

Moreover, according to Cilla Benkö Lamborn, CEO of Swedish Radio and member of EBU Executive Board, "women are more frequently subjected to hatred campaigns that last a long time than similar campaigns to which their male colleagues are subjected"[73].

Another element that should be considered is the **lack of gender-inclusiveness in the Swedish hate crime legislation** which, together with the lack of knowledge by criminal authorities of how to deal with hate-crimes, enables Internet trolls to deny their actions or to pass them off as 'jokes'[74].

The most recent case[75] involving a woman journalist in Sweden registered on the Mapping Media Freedom Platform dates back to December 2021. On 15 December, journalist Frida Sundkvist was fired from the newspaper Expressen after she turned to an investigative journalist from another newspaper to denounce **sexual harassment** conducts at Expressen. Sundkvist reported problems related to pay gaps and a general propensity to cover up the misconduct of editors and famous male reporters. The Expressen editor-in-chief claimed that she got fired for being an internal problem for

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73 https://www.ebu.ch/news/2021/03/journalism-and-society-simply-cannot-afford-silence

74 https://fojo.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Fojo-Special-Report-on-line-hate-women-journalists-FINAL.pdf

75 https://www.mapmf.org/alert/24509

many years. After a negotiation which involved the Swedish Journalists' Union, the two parties reached an agreement in March 2022[76].

Looking at the authors of the attacks, it appears that the most severe threats online come from unidentified private individuals and right-wing extremist groups[77].

5.3 Changes in the local media ecosystem and consequences for journalists

Local and regional newspapers play an important role in the Swedish media ecosystem, and are able to reach almost every part of the country. This is confirmed by the Media Pluralism Monitor, where the indicator 'access to media for local/regional communities' scores a low risk of 19 percent (Färdigh, 2021). Sweden has over 150 daily and weekly newspapers, a vast majority of which is local (Lindén et al., 2021).

The country has a long tradition of subscribed printed daily newspapers, and the level of coverage of public service television and radio is high (Macharia and Mir, 2022). Public service coverage is more regional than local, while newspapers have strong local ties (Nygren et al., 2018). However, in the past 10-15 years, newspapers have become more regional due to the crisis of legacy media, which is connected to a decline in coverage and in staff. Here our respondent, J++ journalist Leonard Wallentin, summarises the condition of local newsrooms in Sweden:

> *"Local newsrooms are under such immense, immense economic pressure, I think that's like overshadowing everything else at the moment, like they're struggling to survive".*

As in many other countries, the media landscape has changed in recent decades in Sweden. The report of a mission organised by ECPMF, EFJ and OBCT in Scandinavia shows that pluralism is largely gone, and in many cases only one legacy newspaper remains in the local market (Rat, 2020). Advertising revenues are declining while online news is taking over. Advertising losses hit particularly high on local and regional media. A useful instrument to track how the media landscape is changing is curated by J++[78], an international team of data journalists based in Stockholm. It consists of a local media database which provides data on all local newsrooms in Sweden[79].

76 https://www.dagensmedia.se/medier/dagspress/expressen-och-frida-sundkvist-har-natt-en-overenskommelse/

77 https://fojo.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Fojo-Special-Report-on-line-hate-women-journalists-FINAL.pdf

78 https://jplusplus.org/en/

79 https://jplusplus.org/en/work/local-media-database/

According to Nygren et al. (2018), regional newspapers have reduced their staff by 35-40% in the last twenty years, 55-65% locally. The consequence is that **remaining journalists have to produce more**, both for the paper and the online version of the newspapers they are working for. Therefore, they have to be multiskilled and have less time to spend in the field: "local reporters have become more dependent on easily accessible sources like the police and municipal officials" (Nygren, 2020: 160).

A good example of a project carried out in support of local newsrooms is Newsworthy[80], an automated story-finding instrument developed by J++ that looks for local story leads in large amounts of statistical data. The instrument is increasingly used, as Wallentin told us:

> *"We have around fifty newsrooms that pay for this subscription service. [...] We are kind of trying to focus on climate, because climate reporting is something that is quite data intensive, and also it can be a bit scary for local reporters to try and dig into this kind of data. So we're trying to make it more accessible on a local level".*

This process is also connected to the centralisation of production and **ownership**. The strong ownership concentration is the reason why there has been no massive closing of local newspapers in recent years, notwithstanding the difficult economic conditions. One issue that makes this trend even more relevant is the lack of legislation limiting media ownership. Concentration is nowadays higher than ever, while the number of journalists is declining. At the regional level, few newspapers do not belong to the main media owners groups (Nord and von Krogh, 2021). The centralisation of production that characterises these groups means that less content is dedicated to the coverage of local issues, which is usually limited to crime and accidents (Nygren, 2019).

To counter the loss of local coverage, a differentiated spectrum of **hyperlocal media** is developing both on paper and online. They include local media which involve journalists laid off from legacy media, but also readers and non professional journalists, free newspapers, and community radio. Hyperlocals are particularly oriented towards producing news about local politics and civil society (Jangdal, 2020). The major problem with hyperlocal media is their **sustainability**. According to Wallentin:

> *"But will they still be around in ten years? [...] We don't know. I guess it will have a lot to do with what happens with the ad revenue issue as well. Like, will Facebook*

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80 https://jplusplus.org/en/work/newsworthy/

> *completely kill the local ads industry [...]? There are some pretty, pretty good examples of people pulling it off. For instance, Siljan News[81] in western Sweden. [...] They have been able to run off local ad money for a couple of years, actually, which is impressive".*

However, it can be observed that hyperlocal media usually grow in municipalities with strong legacy media, while sparsely populated areas are becoming '**news deserts**'. Local journalists are absent or really weak in roughly a quarter of Swedish municipalities (Nygren et al., 2018).

There is a high level of professionalisation in the Swedish journalistic community (Löfgren Nilsson, 2016) and this is true also at the local level. However, a tendency towards de-**professionalisation** is taking place because of the increased involvement of non professional journalists in the media environment. The new local media ecosystem appears to be composed of a variety of actors. According to Nygren (2019), there is an increasing influence of social media and local municipalities together with the already mentioned legacy media, public service, and hyperlocal media. In the last few years, people rely more on social media than on newspapers to get information, but the local newspaper is still regarded as more **trustworthy**. Finally, local municipalities' websites, being the voice of the local politicians, cannot act as watchdog on local power, but are increasingly contributing to the local media ecosystem. Local authorities are building their own media platforms online, and in some cases - as in Gothenburg - local officials working with information outnumber local journalists, at the expense of professional autonomy. It appears that the role of journalists at the local level is decreasing, and that they "have become only one group among many different producers of local media content" (Lindén et al., 2021: 155).

According to the Media for Democracy Monitor 2021, **external pressure** on newsrooms is low, and this is also true when looking at advertisers' influence, which is decreasing concurrently with the decrease of advertising revenues. According to Gunnar Nygren, professor at the Södertörn University, "when it comes to external pressure, I would say that Swedish journalism has quite a high degree of autonomy". Our respondents pointed out that the group which mostly harasses media workers in Sweden is the **extremist right wing**. They "pressure journalists not to write about this or why don't you write about immigration that is a threat to our ethnic society", in Nygren's words. Wallentin confirms that "there is a rise in right wing attacks against journalists", and more in general "there is widespread scepticism towards journalists on the political right".

In conclusion, local journalists in Sweden appear to be less under threat than their colleagues in

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81 https://www.siljannews.se/norra-dalarna/

other European countries. The big difference in terms of protection between a journalist working in a big city and a journalist working in a rural area is in the level of awareness local institutions have of the problems a journalist might face. According to Kersti Forsberg, director of the Fojo Media Institute, interviewed for Interviewing Journalism, "the biggest problem is that it's very dependent on what police officer you meet when you try to file your complaint. Because some of them are really good and they know what this is, and they take it seriously, and if you state that you are a journalist they have a certain box that they can check, because then it is regarded as a crime against democracy. But not everyone knows that. [...] If you call the police in your hometown, out in the middle of nowhere, they don't know this. They are not trained enough. So you are very differently treated depending on where you live".

5.4 Who defends media workers

Although journalists in Sweden are subject to different threats, many actors are committed to their protection. This is how professor Nygren summarises the variety of stakeholders engaged in protecting journalists:

> *"I think the union is important because in Sweden [...] 80 to 85% of all journalists are members in the union. And we have one union. So, I mean, this union is very important for the strength of the professional community and professional values. But also [...] the Association of Newspaper Publishers, they support the autonomy and independence of journalism. [...] So also the employees support. We also have an association of investigative journalism in Sweden. It organises about seven or eight hundred members. [...] They have their own journal and they give education in methods in investigative journalism. [...] We have a special institute for the further education of journalists. [...] This was founded in the 1970s as a kind of state support for local journalists, mainly because at that time local journalists were less educated and it [...] gives a lot of good courses. Also at my university, we have had training for journalists also in some special kind of single courses [...] for example, in data journalism, in verification, fact checking".*

With regard to online hate against journalists, in 2016 the Swedish government organised a roundtable with media representatives and subsequently initiated an action plan. The Swedish Union of Journalists developed a roadmap for newsrooms named "Guidelines to Manage Threats against Journalists". Different civil society and academic actors offer safety trainings, that are also planned by newsrooms themselves in collaboration with security companies[82].

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82 https://fojo.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Fojo-Special-Report-on-line-hate-women-journalists-FINAL.pdf

The **training** offer for journalists is overall high. Many training opportunities with different goals are organised by newsrooms, the Swedish Union of Journalists[83], and Fojo Media Institute, committed to improving the education of journalists. However, "training opportunities for journalists in regional news media companies are less frequent" (Nord and von Krogh, 2021: 376).

The Fojo Media Institute, which operates for the development and strengthening of media across the world, set up a global hub named #journodefender[84] to monitor and take action against trolling. Through a survey conducted in 2018, Fojo illustrates how differently journalists are affected by trolling based on gender, political environment, and culture. One issue analysed in the survey is the l**ack of action of online platforms and social media** to tackle the problem. The main answer to the question about how to deal with online hate and harassment proves to be 'harsher regulation of social media companies' (Griehsel et al., 2018). The feeling that digital platforms should take more responsibility for removing threats is widespread. According to Cilla Benkö Lamborn, there are promising initiatives in this direction. In 2020, Swedish Radio and forty other media companies participated in a number of meetings with Google and Facebook thanks to a project run by the International News Safety Institute aimed at finding practical solutions to the problem[85].

Despite their commitment to gender equality and protection of women journalists, Swedish institutions should take action to **amend the hate crime legislation** which lacks a gender component. According to Fojo Media Institute, haters are rarely held to account due to this lack of legislation, which enables them to deny their actions or pass them off as jokes[86].

Good practices carried out in Swedish media - also at the local level - in terms of gender equality are illustrated by Macharia and Mir (2022):

- Bonnier News is committed to the achievement of gender balance both in the newsroom and in the news;
- the regional public service television SVT Umeå monitors the news for gender balance;
- Mediekompaniet works with local newspapers for monitoring content and training the staff.

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83 See for example the courses organised by the Swedish Union of Journalists for freelance journalists: https://www.sjf.se/frilans/kurser/tidigare-frilanskurser

84 https://journodefender.org/

85 https://www.ebu.ch/news/2021/03/journalism-and-society-simply-cannot-afford-silence

86 https://fojo.se/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Fojo-Special-Report-on-line-hate-women-journalists-FINAL.pdf

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present work confirms the key findings that emerged in *Interviewing Journalism* and include:

- the need to increase the provision of training on safety and security for journalists and to adopt an intersectional perspective which takes into consideration gender issues;
- the need to improve in particular women journalists' working conditions;
- the need to support local journalists with language and context-based activities;
- the need to make relocation programmes more accessible at the regional level.

Europe is generally perceived as a safe environment for media workers. Although this may be true in comparison to other regions in the world, the achievements concerning freedom of expression and the safety of journalists should not be taken for granted. The needs and the existing support for journalists in Europe are diversified. As seen above, even in contexts where there seems to be a lower degree of challenges, the specific needs of the journalists at the core of this study tend to be overlooked.

More specifically, the support offered to journalists under threat should pay particular attention to the gender component. For instance, relocation programmes should adopt a gender perspective. Moreover, relocation programmes, and practical support activities in general, should be aware of the difficulties encountered by local journalists to even get to know the existence of the available support mechanisms. In addition, the sense of isolation that a journalist under threat feels increases the difficulties to build the solidarity network that, together with the "media escort", is a key practice to support journalists under threat.

Based on the case studies carried out in this report, we conclude with a series of recommendations to address the specific needs of women and local journalists.

For media outlets:

- Encourage the participation of women and local journalists in training opportunities related to safety issues, digital threats (including online harassment) and provide legal protection.

- Adopt and commit to gender policies related to both personnel issues and programming content.

- Take actions to overcome the gender gap in the media sector: women journalists must have the same opportunity as their male colleagues to be at the management level, to choose what to report about, and receive the same salary for the same position.

- Combat tolerance towards sexual harassment in newsrooms.

- Engage support centres and unions in fostering solidarity with journalists who received threats, who are often left alone in their newsroom and in the field.

- Foster a supportive professional environment, for instance offering financial aid for counselling and assisting the journalist in their decision to report to the police.

- Set up a reporting system to establish a safe communication channel with employees as the one provided by the best practice of *The Journal* in Ireland.

- Create occasions for meeting outside of business interests to talk about how to create an environment that is more attentive to journalists' needs.

For unions and national support centres:

- Strengthen networks with state institutions and ensure to become a point of reference to every journalist.

- Develop mechanisms to support women journalists in the fight against online harassment and hate speech.

- Collect relevant data on media and gender equality.

- Offer and promote compulsory training on gender-related topics in the media sector.

- Increase the provision of training opportunities related to safety issues, digital threats, and legal protection outside of bigger cities.

- Provide legal advice services regardless of the professional status of journalists.

- Keep in mind that vulnerability of local journalists has to do with their lower visibility compared to colleagues working for national media outlets.

- Facilitate local journalists' connection with national and international organisations in order to build solidarity networks.

- Monitor systemic issues (e.g. bad ownership models, economic hardship) at the local level.

- Work for the recognition of the risks journalists face at the local level (e.g. organising training for local authorities).

For international actors:

- Strengthen advocacy activities related to the judicial system, in order to address the problems related to, for instance, the slowness of trials and the defamation laws.
- Promote the "media escort" model put in place by FNSI in Italy as best practice to combat the sense of isolation of a journalist under threat, as a good practice for other EU countries.
- Commit to identifying alternative, external ways of financing independent media, especially at the local level.
- Stimulate EU Member States to implement policies to increase women's rights.
- Compel big tech to take responsibility for what happens on their platforms in a more systematic way.

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LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Cheresheva Maria, founder and member of the Association of European Journalists Bulgaria and journalist at BIRN, Bulgaria, February 9, 2022

Daly Susan, managing editor of The Journal, Ireland, September 23, 2021

Di Mambro Graziella, representative of Articolo 21 and journalist, Italy, September 2, 2021

Dimitrova Marieta, editor in chief of Blagoevgrad News, Bulgaria, February 15, 2022

Garambois Silvia, president of GiULiA giornaliste and journalist, Italy, September 2, 2021

McGouran Hilary, deputy managing director of News and Current Affairs, managing editor of TV News at RTÉ, Ireland, October 8, 2021

Moore Aoife, journalist at The Irish Examiner, Ireland, December 2, 2021

Nygren Gunnar, professor at Södertörn University, Sweden, April 5, 2022

O'Shaughnessy Deirdre, news editor at The Irish Examiner, Ireland, October 1, 2021

Ognyanova Nelly, professor at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Bulgaria, March 1, 2022

Peri Luciana, coordinator of the EU Relocation Platform at Protect Defenders, September 9, 2021

Porsia Nancy, freelance journalist, Italy, October 6, 2021

Reilly Sheila, head of editorial development at The Irish Examiner, Ireland, November 19, 2021

Silvestri Claudio, Secretary of the SUGC (Sindacato Unitario Giornalisti della Campania) and journalist, Italy, September 8, 2021

Wallentin Leonard, journalist at J++, Sweden, April 7, 2022

ANNEX 1 - Support centres with a specific focus on women journalists

International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF)

Website: https://www.iwmf.org

Target: women journalists (staff or freelance) having worked full time within six months of applying

Where: worldwide

How to get in contact: preliminary questionnaire

What support is provided: emergency fund for legal and medical bills; legal aid to counter threats of imprisonment or censorship; three months of temporary relocation assistance; small grants for psychological and medical care for incidents directly related to threats and crises caused by their work.

IWMF founded the Coalition Against Online Violence, a collection of global organisations working to find better solutions for women journalists facing online abuse, harassment, and other forms of digital attack. In addition to seeking solutions for online violence, the Coalition offers journalists collective support, bolstering their digital security and empowering the news media at large to keep their employees safer online. Check out their Resources section to find the latest research, guides, and tools. The Online Violence Response Hub is a resource centre where women journalists can find the latest information on online abuse. From psychosocial trauma response to the latest digital safety guides, the Hub puts everything in one place, allowing the journalist to focus on their safety instead of having to comb the Internet for answers.

Coalition for Women in Journalism (CFWIJ)

Website: https://www.womeninjournalism.org/

Target: women journalists

Where: worldwide

How to get in contact: online form

What support is provided: mentorship program and advocating for a safe and flourishing professional environment; creating spaces for women journalists where they can be nurtured, stay safe, and expand their skills. The Coalition follows any case of violation that women journalists face. The CFWIJ mentorship program is an effort to address the gaps that women journalists encounter in advancing in their careers. The long-term mentorship programme connects selected fellows to senior women journalists who have tackled some of the biggest challenges in their own careers. CFWIJ manages the JSafe App: a free mobile application for women journalists to report threats and access the resources they need when in dangerous situations.

International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT)

Website: https://iawrt.org/

Target: women journalists

Where: worldwide

How to get in contact: email

What support is provided: IAWRT is committed to promote women's role and participation in media. It organises conferences and training activities and carries out research. It is a network of 14 national chapters and members in 54 countries.

TrollBusters

Website: http://www.troll-busters.com/

Target: women journalists and writers

Where: worldwide

How to get in contact: email

What support is provided: support for women journalists and writers that are victims of online harassment. TrollBusters provides tools and services such as personal endorsements, just-in-time coaching, and reputation repair services to support victims of online abuse or other troll behaviour. Training like the "Digital hygiene course": 16 lessons on how to combat online harassment, each taking 5-10 minutes to complete.

Global investigative journalism network (GIJN)

Website: https://gijn.org/

Target: journalists

Where: worldwide

How to get in contact: email

What support is offered: GIJN is an international hub for investigative reporters around the world. It established the group GIJN Women, which discusses issues related to women in investigative journalism, including non-binary identities. The page GIJN Guide: Resources for Women-Identifying Journalists collects resources to help women journalists around the world find networks, resources, and tools to handle issues such as online harassment, workplace discrimination, and gender-based violence, as well as easily locate opportunities and support designed specifically for women journalists.

GiULia (Giornaliste unite libere autonome)

Website: https://giulia.globalist.it/

Target: women journalists

Where: Italy

How to get in contact: email

What support is provided: born in 2011, GiULia (United Free Autonomous Women Journalists) is an Italian association that unites women professional journalists and freelancers who have signed the democratic, antifascist, and solidaristic manifesto. It has two main goals: to change information imbalance about women, also using a language without stereotypes, and to fight for equal job opportunities for women. GiULia contributed to 100esperte.it, an online databank with the names and CVs of female STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) experts, a sector where women are historically underrepresented, but a strategic one for the economic and social development of Italy, and to the European Network for Women Excellence (ENWE), an advocacy group focused on building a network of databases of female professionals selected from various fields of knowledge.

Prenons la Une

Website: https://prenonslaune.fr/

Target: women journalists

Where: France

How to get in contact: email

What support is provided: an association of women journalists advocating for fair representation of women in the media and professional equality in newsrooms. The network provides support to women facing discrimination and harassment through a support platform.

Vita Activa

Website: https://vita-activa.org/

To whom it is addressed: women journalists, activists and women's rights defenders.

Where: worldwide.

How to get in contact: email.

What support is offered: a helpline and solutions laboratory for women journalists, activists, and women's rights defenders who are facing online violence and want to change the ways they deal with harassers and attacks. Responders are trained in psychological first aid, conflict resolution, and strategic thinking work with women journalists who have faced harassment to build solutions tailored to their cases.

Digital Women Leaders

Website: https://digitalwomenleaders.com/

Target: women and non-gender binary people working in news

Where: worldwide

How to get in contact: select a mentor on the website

What support is provided: advice from someone who understands their experience, facilitating conversations with mentors who might otherwise be hard to find.

ANNEX 2 - Stakeholder mapping

WHO	TARGET	WHERE	HOW	WOMEN SPECIFIC FOCUS	LEGAL	RESIDENCIES	PSYCHOLOGICAL	TRAINING	DIGITAL SAFETY	RESEARCH
ECPMF	Journalists Bloggers Activists Media	Europe	online form	https://bit.ly/3s8KYvW	yes	yes	yes			yes
Article 19	Everyone	Worldwide	email	https://bit.ly/3MSvRhM https://bit.ly/3vJqXxS https://bit.ly/3MM4SVi	yes			yes		yes
European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)	Anyone in the news reporting business	Europe	email		yes			yes		yes
Free Press Unlimited (FPU)	Journalists, media workers and media	Worldwide	online form	https://bit.ly/37eFDff https://bit.ly/3Fdnb30	yes		yes	yes	yes	yes
International Press Institute (IPI)	Journalists	Worldwide	email	https://bit.ly/3scR667			yes			yes
Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT)	Everyone	Europe	email					yes		yes
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)	Professional journalists and citizen journalists	Worldwide	email		yes	yes	yes	yes		yes
Lifeline	CSOs with at least two activists who are threatened as a result of their activities		See below Freedom House /FLD	https://bit.ly/3kEOLg9	yes		yes			
Freedom House	CSOs	Worldwide	email to Lifeline		yes	yes		yes		yes
Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)	All journalists (including freelancers and media support workers)	Worldwide	email	https://bit.ly/3w2hy3t	yes			yes		yes
International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)	Anyone in the news reporting business	Worldwide	online form	https://bit.ly/38RN10j	yes	yes				yes
Journalists in distress network (JID)	Journalists and media workers	Worldwide	email		yes		yes			
Media Legal Defence Initiative	Journalists Bloggers Independent media	Worldwide	online form		yes			yes		yes
Protect Defenders	Human rights defenders	Worldwide	email			yes	yes	yes		yes
Front Line Defenders (FLD)	CSOs	Worldwide - Ireland based	online form		yes	yes		yes		yes
International Federation for Human Rights	Human rights defenders	Worldwide		https://bit.ly/3KQ5OGY	yes					
Civil Rights Defenders	Human rights defenders	Worldwide - Sweden			yes	yes	yes	yes		yes

Organization	Target	Location	Contact	Link						
		based								
Digital Freedom Fund (DFF)	Organisations and entities that pursue a public interest objective; individuals, lawyers or litigators seeking to protect digital rights	Council of Europe Member States	online form	https://bit.ly/3OWl08z	yes			yes	yes	yes
The Rory Peck Trust (RPT)	Freelance journalists and their families	Worldwide	online form		yes	yes	yes	yes		yes
International Cities of Refuge Network ICORN	Journalists, human rights defenders, bloggers, writers, translators, publishers	70 cities around the world (HQ Norway)	email			yes	yes	yes		
PILnet's Global Clearinghouse	Everyone	Worldwide	online form		yes					
International News Safety Institute	Journalists	worldwide		https://bit.ly/39DFAdJ				yes		yes
Access now - Digital security helpline	Everyone	Worldwide	email						yes	yes
Clifford Chance	NGOs	Worldwide			yes					
Association of European Journalists - Bulgaria	Bulgarian journalists	Bulgaria						yes		yes
Fojo Media Institute	Journalists and media	Worldwide - Sweden based	online form or email	https://bit.ly/3vFJ3B6	yes			yes		yes
CILD	Everyone	Italy based	online form or email		yes					
Pro Bono Italia	Associations, NGOs, third sector entities	Italy			yes					
Ossigeno per l'informazione	Journalists, freelancers, bloggers	Italy	email		yes			yes		yes
Q Code Magazine	Media workers of any nationality based and professionally active in Italy	Italy - Milan	online form or email			yes				yes
Associazione Stampa Romana	Journalists in Lazio Region	Lazio Region		https://bit.ly/3ye1YEL	yes		yes	yes		yes
Pers Vrij Heids Fonds (Netherlands)	Media	Focused on the Dutch media community but also support elsewhere in Europe			yes					
Justice and Peace Netherlands	Non-profit organisation based in The Hague that is dedicated to defending and promoting respect for human rights and social justice	Worldwide					yes	yes		yes
La Maison des Journalistes	Media professionals finding refuge, exiled journalists	France - Paris	online form			yes	yes			

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