

Serbia: A dangerous spiral of violence against journalists

Record levels of physical violence against journalists, death threats and online smear campaigns, entrenched impunity, and tight political control over the media landscape – media freedom in Serbia is in a deepening crisis with a rapidly closing window for independent journalism to operate.

The partners of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) and the Council of Europe's Safety of Journalists Platform today present a [report](#) which outlines the deteriorating situation for media freedom and safety of journalists in Serbia. The report is a result of an international mission to Belgrade that took place in March 2026.

Read the full report

In 2025, Serbia [recorded](#) 209 press freedom violations – more than double the 84 documented in 2024 – affecting 359 media workers and entities. As of 16 June, 100 cases affecting 170 media workers have been [recorded](#) since January 2026.

Since the deadly collapse of the Novi Sad railway station canopy in November 2024, which triggered the largest protests in Serbia's history, attacks on journalists covering demonstrations have surged. Law enforcement has not only failed to protect journalists, but police officers have increasingly acted as perpetrators themselves, with at least 38 documented police attacks on journalists since 2025.

The crisis extends well beyond physical safety. Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) continue to threaten public-interest reporting, with Serbia ranking third in Europe for the number of SLAPP cases, according to the CASE Coalition data for 2025. The continued criminalisation of insult compounds the chilling effect on journalists' work.

In addition, media pluralism is under severe pressure. The majority state-owned Telekom Srbija has expanded its media holdings, consolidating pro-government narratives across the media landscape. Serbia's media regulator, the REM Council, has been non-functional for over 18 months, making Serbia the only EU candidate country without a functioning media regulatory body. Coordinated bot attacks and spyware, including NSO Group's Pegasus, have emerged as tools of digital censorship against journalists and media outlets.

The government has launched several legislative initiatives, including efforts to incorporate provisions of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) into domestic law. However, journalists and civil society actors have largely stopped engaging with these processes, citing a lack of transparency, rushed timelines, and most prominently a profound absence of trust in the government's intentions. The international community has a critical role to play to

safeguard swiftly deteriorating press freedoms in Serbia and stem the wider democratic decline.

The partners of the MFRR and the Council of Europe's Safety of Journalists Platform call on the Serbian authorities to:

Immediately cease inflammatory rhetoric targeting journalists and refrain from all verbal, physical, and legal attacks against the press, including the use of SLAPPs. The authorities should also introduce specialised training programmes for police and judicial actors to ensure the consistent application of protective measures for journalists.

The partners further call on the European Union to publicly and unequivocally condemn attacks on journalists in Serbia, and to make direct funding to Serbia in strategic areas conditional on measurable improvements in journalist safety and media freedom standards.

The full report includes detailed recommendations to Serbian authorities, including the government, parliament, police, and prosecution, on the concrete steps needed to counter this crisis.

The mission was coordinated by ARTICLE 19 Europe and joined by the following international organisations: Association of European Journalists (AEJ); European Broadcasting Union (EBU); European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF); European Federation of Journalists (EFJ); International Press Institute (IPI); Reporters Without Borders (RSF); Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT); Index on Censorship; and Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). The local partner was the Independent Journalists' Association of Serbia (NUNS). The delegation met with journalists, editors, media associations, civil society organisations, law enforcement, the Parliamentary Speaker, and the Chief Prosecutor, among others.

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