

Press Freedom Status For Women Journalists

September 2023

The Coalition For Women In Journalism



Daily Maverick journalist Lerato Mutsila is thrown out of the Standard Bank headquarters in Rosebank, Johannesburg, on 19 September 2023. PHOTO CREDIT: Kiara Affat

Objective of report

Every day, worldwide, women journalists face severe threats to their safety. These threats exist online and offline, from misinformation and discrediting campaigns rooted in misogyny and sexism to more serious problems such as harassment from the state. The problems women journalists contend with are not broadly recognized. Newsrooms are often tight-lipped about them; governments take little action to counter violations against women journalists.

CFWIJ's monthly reports are drawn from our daily and feature research that offers a landscape view of what press freedom looks like from a gender angle. Each morning CFWIJ team register new violations against them, marshaling ever more evidence of the severity of the threats they face and the urgent need to raise awareness about these issues. Many of these cases are documented internally by The Coalition, to maintain anonymity and ensure the safety of targeted journalists. Our work shows the incredible courage and conviction women journalists work with in spite of the hurdles they face. Our job is to ensure their circumstances are made visible so accurate resources can be directed for their safety and growth.

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September Sees Rise in Detentions, Sentencing, and Legal Harassment Compared to August

With elections over, Turkey is packing up its pace again with suppressing free press, leading global press freedom violations in September alongside Venezuela. In September last year, Turkey was responsible for 20% of all violations, just below Iran with 25%, as the Coalition For Women In Journalism documented. In 2023, while still topping the list in attacks on journalists, it had seen a stark decline. But this September, Turkey is back at its game with increased legal harassment, imprisonment, detention, and sentencing.

Russia, meanwhile, is steadily continuing to stifle the media. In a concerning trend, Russia labeled journalist Kseniya Larina as a "foreign agent." Meanwhile, in Czechia, two Russian journalists, Alesya Marokhovskaya and Irina Dolinina, living in exile, were sent detailed threats about their upcoming travels. "I started to feel like a toxic element," confided Dolinina, reflecting the weight of living constantly under threat. Russia also sentenced renowned Ukrainian TV presenter Maria Efrosinina in absentia to seven years in prison for spreading alleged false information. Russia tops the list of most violations after Turkey and Venezuela this month.

Legal harassment has been particularly prevalent in several countries, including India, Uzbekistan, Paraguay, and Turkey. These incidents appear part of systematic efforts to silence critical or dissenting voices.

This alarming surge in violations emphasizes the importance of safeguarding press freedoms. The Coalition For Women In Journalism calls on the global community to address these trends and ensure journalists can continue their essential work without fear of reprisal. The sweeping wave of intimidation and hostility is an attack on journalists and a threat to free speech and democracy. As the world becomes increasingly complicated, the role of journalism as the fourth estate becomes ever more vital. The protection and safety of these brave women must be paramount.



Iran:

On September 2, journalists **Negin Bagheri** and **Elnaz Mohammadi** were sentenced to a three-year partly suspended prison term for charges of "conspiracy and collusion." They will serve approximately one month in prison.

Turkiye:

On September 14, an Istanbul court issued a suspended 15-month sentence to **Rojin Altay**. The journalist with Kurdish outlet Yeni Yaşam was charged with spreading terrorist propaganda for retweeting a photo depicting Sakine Cansız, one of the PKK's founders who was killed alongside two other Kurdish women at a cultural center in Paris in 2013.

"Rojin is a diligent and aspiring journalist. It is unacceptable that she was imprisoned solely for sharing a post on her social media account,"

-Habibe Eren, editor at Jinnews

Cumhuriyet newspaper columnist **Miyase Ilknur** was given a suspended sentence of 20 months for defaming judges of the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court of Appeals. The journalist was charged on September 21 concerning a column criticizing the investigation of politicians' use of the Isle of Man for tax evasion.

Russia:

On September 15, renowned Ukrainian TV presenter **Maria Efrosinina** was sentenced to seven years in absentia by a court in Moscow, Russia. She was convicted of spreading false information about the Armed Forces, motivated by political and national hatred.



5 women journalists
sentenced

A woman journalist arrested

France: Ariane Lavrilleux, an investigative journalist and co-founder of Disclose, was arrested and had her home raided by intelligence officers in Marseille. Disclose believes the authorities are trying to pressure Lavrilleux into revealing her sources. The arrest and raid come after Lavrilleux published a groundbreaking investigation into the French government's involvement in "arbitrary executions" in Egypt.

4 women journalists detained

Turkiye: On September 15, two women journalists were detained by authorities in separate incidents in Turkiye. In Izmir, **Zeynep Kuray** was detained by police while covering a workers' protest in Bergama, Izmir. She was released after spending a night in custody.

In Istanbul, journalist **Ilknur Bilir**, who resides in Germany, was detained at Sabiha Gökçen Airport. She was taken to the airport police station, and her passport was confiscated. After providing a statement to the prosecutor, she was eventually released.

Lebanon: Mariam Laham was taken into custody and detained for 11 hours by authorities in Beirut. During her detention on September 6, security services searched her Beirut home, and her laptop was tampered with. Laham was summoned and questioned regarding a tweet she posted in July, accusing a judge of accepting a bribe.

Niger: On September 30, 2023, **Samira Sabou** was taken into custody by authorities in Niamey. After being held for eight days incommunicado at the premises of Niger's external security services, the DGDSE, Sabou's location was revealed on October 9, 2023. It is unclear what charges the reporter is facing.



A woman journalist
arrested, 4 detained





Malaysia: Two women journalists from Johor media were harassed while covering events organized by the Home Ministry during the Pulai parliamentary by-election. One journalist was inappropriately touched on her hand by a bodyguard while recording a press conference on her phone. Another journalist had her work impeded when the same bodyguard allegedly pinched her back. In an audio recording, the journalist can be heard shouting, "Don't touch me."

Spain: On September 12, a man was taken into custody by the police in Madrid for inappropriately touching reporter **Isa Balado** while she was reporting live on a robbery for Cuatro's En Boca De Todos. The chief magistrate of Investigative Court number 54 in Madrid decided to release the man under the custody of the Forces and Bodies, without imposing any restraining order.

3 women journalists
sexually harassed



Russia: The Russian government has labeled journalist **Kseniya Larina** as engaging in "undesirable" activities and added her to the Ministry of Justice's register of "foreign agents." Larina, who fled Russia in 2017 for her safety, continues to report on Russia and criticize its government for The Insider. This action by the Ministry of Justice is part of a wider attack on press freedom, intending to intimidate journalists and suppress dissenting voices.

Bolivia: Independent journalist **Dalia Surubí Salvatierra** faced pressure from the Prosecutor's Office to reveal her confidential source after a defamation complaint was filed against her for a report published on her Facebook news site, Entre Comillas. Surubí disclosed the identities of two women under investigation for allegedly threatening an elderly person, prompting the women to file a complaint accusing her of slander and defamation and demanding the disclosure of her source.

India: Police filed two separate first information reports (FIRs) against journalists **Seema Guha** and **Seema Mustafa**, President of the Editors Guild of India (EGI), on September 3. The cases were initiated following complaints made in response to EGI's report that criticized the biased coverage by local media regarding the ongoing ethnic violence in Manipur since May. EGI has approached the Supreme Court, seeking redress against the filed FIRs.

Uzbekistan: In Tashkent, prosecutors demanded a six-year prison term for journalist **Mavjuda Mirzaeva**, who is facing charges of slander, insult, and extortion. They also seek a three-year prohibition on Mirzaeva's ability to work as a journalist following her potential imprisonment. Mirzaeva and three others are accused of being involved with Kompromatuzb, a popular telegram channel with more than 130,000 subscribers, which is known for exposing corruption involving governmental agencies and public officials.



10 women
journalists legally
harassed

Cuba: Neife Rigau, a journalist from La Hora de Cuba, was interrogated by State Security just one day after the conclusion of the G77+China Summit hosted by Cuba. The authorities have intensified their crackdown on dissenting voices during the summit, as evidenced by the detention of Rigau's partner, the renowned journalist Henry Constantín Ferreiro, at the beginning of the event. Since 2021, both Rigau and Ferreiro have faced persistent harassment from authorities due to their journalistic work. They have been targeted with multiple instances of arbitrary detention by State Security and have been summoned for interrogation numerous times.

Turkiye: Journalist **Pelin Özkaptan**, affiliated with Gazete Karınca, faces a libel lawsuit as a result of the outlet's reporting on the trial of Mehmet Ardiçoğlu, who stands accused of raping 18-year-old Eda Nur Kaplan in Ankara. Ardiçoğlu has taken legal action against Gazete Karınca, alleging defamation. This lawsuit is part of a concerning trend where alleged abusers sue women journalists in Türkiye for defamation.

"It has become so easy for acquitted people to file lawsuits against us because they know they won't be punished."

-Pelin Özkaptan

Zülal Kalkandelen, a journalist for Cumhuriyet, is being investigated for her article criticizing the activities of a religious group involved with children under state protection. On September 13, she took to Twitter to reveal that she was being investigated by the Press Office of the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office.



10 women
journalists legally
harassed

China:

Journalist **Sophia Huang Xueqin**, a prominent figure in China's MeToo movement, made a court appearance on September 22 in Guangzhou under tight security measures. This appearance comes after more than 700 days since her initial detention. Xueqin is currently facing subversion charges, which, if proven guilty, could result in a prison sentence of up to 15 years.

Paraguay:

Journalist **Angie Preito** is involved in a legal dispute following her public disclosure of sexual harassment within Albavisión, a multinational media group. As a result of her allegations, Preito is facing a defamation lawsuit filed by Marcelo Fleitas, the director of Albavisión. The revelations made by Preito and her colleagues have ignited a nationwide discussion on the issue of sexual harassment faced by women journalists in the workplace.

“This demand is nothing other than the criminalization of women’s fight for decent places to work”

-Angie Preito



10 women
journalists legally
harassed

Colombia: **Estefanía Colmenares**, the director of La Opinión newspaper, disclosed on September 6 that she had received alarming WhatsApp messages indicating that a reward had been offered for her life. The Attorney General's Office has initiated a criminal inquiry into these threats against the journalist. Although the reason behind the threat directed at Colmenares is still unknown, the media speculates that it could be connected to La Opinión's recent reporting on Ramiro Suárez Corzo, a former mayor of Cúcuta who is also a convicted criminal.

Czechia: Russian journalists **Alesya Marokhovskaya** and **Irina Dolinina**, currently residing in Czechia, have faced escalating threats that seriously endanger their safety. On September 14, prior to a planned trip to Sweden for an international conference for investigative journalists, they received alarming messages containing detailed information about their flights and hotel reservations. The sender's possession of insider knowledge was evident, as they explicitly warned the journalists against attending the event and claimed to know their whereabouts. These threats further emphasize the growing concerns surrounding the safety of Russian journalists living in exile.

"It didn't affect my work much because I got used to working under pressure, but it surely affected my social life. I started to feel like a toxic element for people who just live a normal life in Europe, and I don't want anyone to be harmed just because they appeared to be near me."

-Irina Dolinina



6 women journalists
threatened and
intimidated

PRESS

Iran: Journalist **Isobel Yeung** and her VICE News crew faced intimidation, surveillance, and harassment by Iranian officers during their reporting in Iran. They were investigating the aftermath of the one-year anniversary of Mahsa Amini's death when they were held at gunpoint and forced to hand over their footage and belongings. On September 16, Yeung, a renowned documentarian, shared her experience of fear and intimidation throughout their investigation in Iran, starting from the moment they arrived in the country.

Denmark: On September 14, **Tine Johansen**, the President of the Danish Union of Journalists, disclosed that she had received a threatening email. The email's subject line read, "Call for attack on national traitor and fake Jew Tine Johansen." The email contained a screenshot of a tweet containing derogatory comments about Johansen and her private address. The sender explicitly stated that the journalist was a "100% legitimate target for Danish patriots."

Venezuela: On September 19, an unidentified white van approached the National College of Journalists (CNP) in San Cristóbal. People inside the vehicle threw threatening pamphlets specifically targeting reporter **Luzfrandy Contreras**. The leaflets included photographs of Contreras and carried a message stating, "Luzfrandy politicizes journalistic work. You will end up like Seir Contreras. Hiding and unemployed." These threats against Contreras are evidently aimed at silencing her reporting and are a direct consequence of the Venezuelan authorities' years-long campaign of inflammatory rhetoric to undermine and discredit journalists and their work.



6 women journalists
threatened and
intimidated



Bosnia and Herzegovina:

Bosnian journalists **Alena Beširević** and Harun Dinarević were targeted with a series of misogynistic, sexist, and homophobic insults by the Mayor of Šipovo municipality in Republika Srpska. The abusive phone call occurred following their exposé on corruption and mismanagement in the forestry sector, implicating the mayor.

A woman journalist
insulted



Colombia:

Journalist **Carola Briceño**, currently living in exile in Colombia after exposing corruption in Venezuela, faces possible deportation. Her passport was confiscated by SAIME at the Colombian Ministry of Foreign Affairs while registering with UNHCR for refugee status. Briceño believes UNHCR shared her information without considering her safety. She went on a hunger strike for three weeks but had to stop due to declining health.

Indonesia:

Indonesian security officials attempted to obstruct White House pool reporter **Patsy Widakuswara** from covering the United States and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Jakarta on September 6. The efforts were made in response to Widakuswara's questions directed at U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and Indonesian President Joko Widodo.

Canada:

Freelance journalist **Nora Loreto** was denied media accreditation to the Conservative Party of Canada convention on September 8 and faced harassment from event security. Loreto fulfilled all the required criteria and had previously been granted accreditation for Conservative events.

"You can't intimidate me. You don't scare me,"

-Nora Loreto



7 women journalists
arbitrarily denied
access

Russia: On September 1, **Luzia Tschirky**, a correspondent with Swiss public broadcaster SRF News, resigned from her position as Moscow correspondent due to the challenges and uncertainties of the Russian bureaucratic system. After reporting on the aftermath of the invasion in Ukraine, Tschirky's status as a permanent correspondent was revoked, and she was forced to leave Russia.

Ukraine: On September 5, 2023, journalist **Olena Kozubovska** and the NikVesti crew encountered resistance from council member Anzhela Savastru during a city council meeting in Yuzhnoukrainsk, a town in southern Ukraine. Savastru tried to block Kozubovska and Serhiy Ovcharyshyn from attending and reporting on the session. Police intervened and granted the journalists permission to cover the event, ensuring their access to information and the freedom to report.

Venezuela: On September 28, members of the Bolivarian National Guard blocked journalists **Marinelid Marciano** of Diario El Tiempo and **Gianna Rodríguez** of Diario El Tigrense from covering an indigenous protest. The officers, citing safety concerns, requested the journalists' documentation and subsequently denied them access to the protest area.



7 women journalists
arbitrarily denied
access



South Africa:

On September 19, 2023, journalist **Lerato Mutsila** and photographer Felix Dlangamandla were covering the Extinction Rebellion protest at Standard Bank's headquarters in Johannesburg. While Mutsila was using her phone to record the demonstration, security guards harassed her. Despite Mutsila's attempts to explain her role as a journalist, they continued to intimidate her and made an effort to remove her from the building forcibly.

Venezuela:

During the 82nd-anniversary event of Democratic Action (AD), a Venezuelan social democratic and center-left political party, journalists **Mishelle Agreda** from Globovisión, **Nelsy Delgado** from Canal i, as well as reporters from Televen, El Martillo Venezuela, and Venevisión, were physically assaulted. The incident occurred on September 13 when party activists engaged in a fight, inadvertently involving the journalists covering the event.

Mexico:

Mexican journalist **Estrella Pedroza**, who frequently contributes to the progressive daily La Jornada, was physically assaulted by around ten police officers from the state of Morelos while performing her professional duties at the office of the special prosecutor. Pedroza, a well-known journalist based in Morelos, was documenting the presence of police officers at the Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office in response to citizen complaints about police conduct when she was attacked by the officers stationed there.

4 women journalists
physically assaulted





United Kingdom:

Following derogatory comments made by host Laurence Fox about journalist **Ava Evans** during a live discussion, GB News has taken the host off the air. Additionally, sexist comments made by GB News presenter Nick Dixon about journalist **Rosanna Lockwood** have come to light in relation to the incident.



2 women journalists
targeted with sexist
attacks



United States:

Crime reporter **Sabrina Schnur** and the Las Vegas Review-Journal faced online harassment and abuse following a tweet from Elon Musk that misinterpreted a report, resulting in a social media backlash.

Slovakia:

In a first in Europe, a deepfake audio imitating journalist **Monika Tódová** circulated online in Slovakia. It attempted to manipulate voters two days before the country's general election on September 28. Despite being denounced as fake, the clip spread rapidly on social media, particularly Facebook.

Venezuela: Investigative journalist Ronna Rísquez was targeted with online harassment by supporters of the ruling party following her publication of a video analyzing the government's operation to regain control of the Tocarón Penitentiary Center in Aragua. Rísquez raised concerns about the motives and execution of the operation, which led to a staunch supporter of the ruling party launching a personal attack against her on social media.



Organized troll
campaign targets 2
woman journalists, 1
faced online
harassment



A woman journalist
faced blocked access
to information

The Coalition For
Women In Journalism



Azerbaijan:

On September 16, Azerbaijani news outlet Mikroskop was targeted in a ransomware attack, with attackers demanding payment of 0.5 bitcoin (\$13,000) to unblock the website. The founders of Mikroskop, including editor-in-chief **Fatima Karimova**, suspect possible government involvement in the attack due to their independent coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and their refusal to support the war.

"It's because of our publications, our general independent media activity, but especially our investigations on the Karabakh conflict and because we never supported the war,"

-Mikroskop co-founder and editor-in-chief Fatima Karimova

A woman journalist deported

Morocco:

On September 20, 2023, French photojournalist **Thérèse Di Campo** and reporter Quentin Müller were forcefully deported from Morocco. Following critical reporting on the rule of King Mohammed VI, a subject considered taboo within the North African nation, the journalists were forcefully removed from their hotel room in Casablanca and placed on the earliest flight to Paris by ten plainclothes police officers.

A woman journalist's book banned

United Arab Emirates:

The UAE has banned the book "All She Lost" by Lebanese journalist **Dalal Mawad**, which explores the aftermath of the Beirut explosion in 2020 and the experiences of women affected by the tragedy. The book ban, reported to the author on September 28, apparently stems from a section discussing alleged financial support from Saudi Arabia and the UAE to a Lebanese political party.

"Media outlets have refrained from addressing this issue. Prominent journalists, who often assert themselves as advocates for freedom, have chosen to remain silent"

-Dalal Mawad



One woman
journalist's book
banned, one
deported

Turkiye: Journalist **Pınar Gayıp** was acquitted of all charges brought against her by Lieutenant General Musa Çitil by Istanbul's 25th Heavy Penal Court on September 19. Gayıp was on trial for commenting on and retweeting a news article about the army officer. The court found that Gayıp had not committed the alleged offense of "marking counterterrorism officials as a target for terror groups," and the prosecutor recommended her acquittal.

Philippines: Renowned journalist **Maria Ressa** and her news outlet, Rappler, were acquitted of all tax evasion charges on September 12 after years of legal battles. The charges against Ressa and Rappler were related to the 2015 sale of Philippine depository receipts and the alleged failure to disclose financial information accurately on their tax return. This acquittal is a significant legal victory for Ressa, as she could have faced imprisonment and Rappler a substantial fine if convicted.



2 women journalists
acquitted

Ukraine: The Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ) and 23 other organizations have come together to denounce the war crimes committed by the Russian Federation against journalists in Ukraine. We are calling for immediate action to hold the perpetrators accountable. The deliberate targeting of journalists, shelling their facilities, and arbitrary detentions and torture violate international humanitarian law and press freedom. We urge authorities to address these violations and provide increased support for front-line reporters. We call on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate and charge those responsible. While also asking for collaboration between the ICC, the United Nations, the European Court of Human Rights, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe to ensure accountability and protection for journalists.



CFWIJ led a joint
statement for an End
to Russian War
Crimes Against
Journalists in Ukraine

A woman journalist denied legal action



Northern Ireland:

Patricia Devlin received a threat of sexual violence against her child in 2021 and has been seeking justice ever since. On September 5, the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) decided not to prosecute a suspect, stating there was no reasonable prospect of proving their guilt in court. Devlin is pursuing legal action against the Police Service of Northern Ireland, arguing they failed to investigate the threat properly.

A woman journalist wins defamation claim

Australia:

The Australian Press Council has determined that an editorial published by The Australian newspaper was defamatory and intended to damage the reputation of journalist **Louise Milligan**. Upon examining the matter, the Council found that the editorial contained factual errors, demonstrated bias, lacked objectivity, caused distress, and failed to prioritize the public's best interests.



A woman journalist
denied legal action,
another one wins
defamation claim



**CFWIJ is working hard to change these
circumstances everyday.**
Join us in this mission



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