ATTACKS ON ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING 2020-2025

MAPPING MEDIA FREEDOM
by European Centre for Press and Media Freedom

MEDIA FREEDOM RAPID RESPONSE

Co-funded by the European Union

Between January 2020 and December 2025, 254 attacks in relation to environmental reporting were documented on Mapping Media Freedom in EU Member States and candidate countries. Journalists and media workers reporting on climate protests and environmental issues were subjected to attacks, abusive lawsuits, arbitrary arrests, and attempts to discredit investigative reporting. The topics covered ranged from natural disasters and environmental crimes to pollution and corporate malpractice. For reporting on these issues, journalists suffered physical attacks, verbal abuse – online and offline – or legal threats post-publication. These attacks highlight the urgent need to protect journalists covering environmental issues safely and without intimidation as part of public interest reporting in Europe.

245 ATTACKS ON ENVIRONMENTAL REPORTING

425 AFFECTED JOURNALISTS OR MEDIA ACTORS

156 attacks were recorded in EU Member States, and 98 in EU candidate countries.

Climate protests

Attacks on environmental reporting occur most frequently in the context of protests (29%).

Journalists covering environmental protests faced several major risks, including arrest or detention, interference with their reporting, physical assault, and damage to equipment.

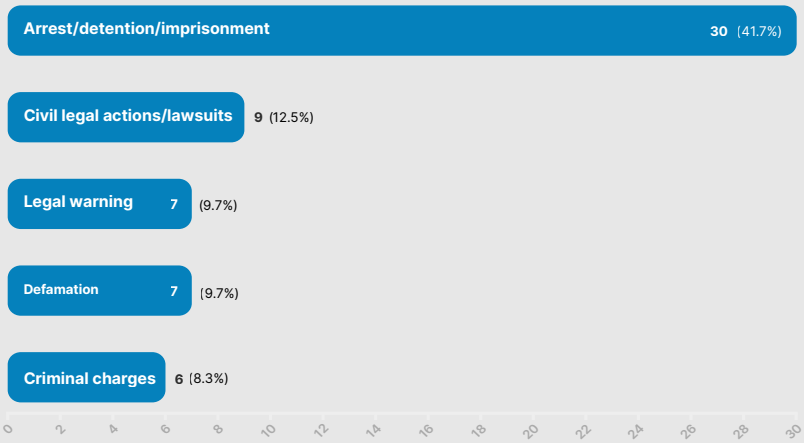
Police are by far the biggest threat for media workers at environmental and climate protests, accounting for 64.4% of all attacks. Private individuals account for 30%.

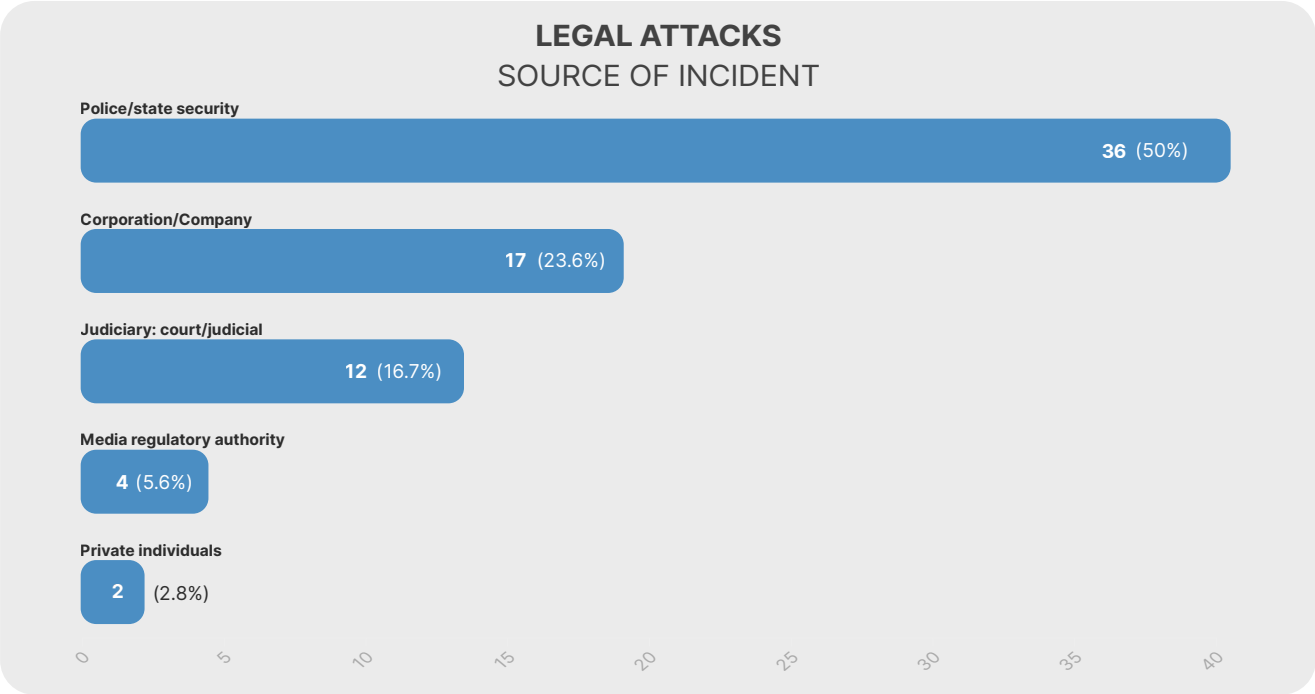
Legal attacks

Journalists reporting on environmental issues are targeted through legal intimidation, including arrests, abusive lawsuits and formal legal threats.

Police are the main perpetrator of legal attacks (50%) – mainly through arrests, detention, or imprisonment – followed by corporations and companies (23.6%), and the judiciary (16.7%).

Of the 22 lawsuits and legal warnings documented, corporations and companies are the main perpetrator (68.2%).





Natural disasters and environmental hazards

The MFRR has documented a number of attacks related to reporting on natural disasters. Examples include reporting on earthquakes (58 alerts), pollution (10), forest or wildfires (6), storms (6), and toxic chemical or PFAS (4). Reports on illegal logging, mining, or pests exposed journalists to attacks.

Critical reporting on both the aftermath of the 2023 Turkey–Syria earthquake and the state response accounts for 57 attacks against journalists recorded on the platform. Journalists were blocked from documenting post-quake sites, the ensuing humanitarian crisis and rescue efforts. They were threatened for critical reporting or arrested.

Firefighters monitor the flames burn beside them during a wildfire in Vila Real, Portugal, August 2025.
picture alliance / Anadolu | David Oliveira

Alerts on Environmental Reporting

This section spotlights alerts from the MapMF database where journalists and media workers were attacked for reporting on environmental and climate issues. To get the whole picture, take a deep dive into all 254 attacks related to environmental reporting here.

Turkey: Journalist and environmental activist Hakan Tosun dies after assault

On 13 October 2025, journalist and environmental activist Hakan Tosun, known for his reporting on ecological destruction and local corruption, died from his injuries, a few days after he was brutally assaulted in Istanbul. On 10 October, Tosun was attacked while returning to his home in the Mehmet Akif neighborhood of Esenyurt, Istanbul. He was found severely injured and taken to Çam Sakura City Hospital, where he remained in intensive care with life-threatening injuries. On 13 October, he was declared brain-dead as a result of the attack, and ultimately died the same day from his injuries. While investigations remain ongoing, the attack is likely related to Tosun's professional and personal engagement with environmental and ecological issues in Turkey (see MapMF Alert).

France: Investigative journalist Stéphane Horel targeted with theft and break-ins over reporting on toxic chemicals

On 23 February 2026, the French newspaper Le Monde and investigative journalist Stéphane Horel filed a complaint against persons unknown for "obstruction of freedom of expression, invasion of privacy, attempted trespassing, theft and damage to private property." The complaint follows a series of thefts and attempted break-ins at Horel's home between 2023 and 2025, believed to be linked to her reporting on PFAS, or "forever chemicals." Horel coordinated the Forever Pollution Project, a cross-border investigation that mapped PFAS contamination across Europe, and later launched the Forever Lobbying Project, which examines industry efforts to block stricter regulation or bans on the substances (see MapMF Alert).

Denmark: Investigative outlet Denwatch threatened with legal action reporting on Russian oil vessels and environmental risk

Between December 2024 and January 2025, investigative outlet Danwatch received four strongly worded legal letters from Moscow-based law firm ELWI on behalf of Ingosstrakh. The letters followed a joint investigation by Danwatch and the Financial Times into how Ingosstrakh insures oil vessels suspected of helping Russia circumvent Western sanctions. Published in March 2024, the investigation warned that the policies offered no coverage if sanctions were breached, potentially leaving European coastal states exposed to costly environmental disasters in the event of an oil spill. Ingosstrakh claimed the report contained inaccuracies and requested corrections and clarifications, some of which Danwatch addressed. However, the outlet refused to provide documents requested by the law firm, arguing that doing so would endanger its journalistic sources (see MapMF Alert).

Croatia: Faktograf journalist Melita Vrsaljko assaulted twice following reporting on illegal waste dump

In July 2025, Faktograf journalist Melita Vrsaljko was attacked twice after reporting on an illegal waste dump in Nadin, Croatia. While filming the site from a public road for a documentary by Faktograf.hr and the Climate Portal, Vrsaljko and a freelance cameraman were confronted by a man who threatened the cameraman, damaged his camera, assaulted Vrsaljko, and seized her phone. After reporting the incident, Vrsaljko was unexpectedly issued a restraining order requiring her to stay 50 meters away from the attacker. The following day, the attacker's daughter allegedly repeatedly demanded that Vrsaljko delete

footage of her father before later confronting her at home. “Three hours later, Iva Perić knocked on my door. Thinking it was my mother, I opened the door. After snatching my mobile phone and threatening to delete the footage of her father, she pulled my hair and strangled me.” Both alleged attackers are reportedly related to Dario Vrsaljko, a Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) councilor in the Zadar County Assembly (see MapMF Alert).

Germany: Journalist Max Ludwig subjected to police measures at Munich Airport after covering protest

On 21 August 2024, journalist Max Ludwig was harassed and subjected to police measures at Munich Airport while travelling privately, one week after covering a protest by Last Generation activists there. On 14 August, Ludwig had documented a Last Generation protest at the airport as a press photographer. Although Ludwig repeatedly showed a press card, police initially suspected the journalist of being an activist and threatened an airport ban before eventually recognising the accreditation and withdrawing all measures. A week later, while departing on vacation with friends, Ludwig and the group were repeatedly stopped by police, accused of planning another protest, surrounded by officers, and subjected to repeated identity checks and searches despite Ludwig again presenting a valid press card. Police also informed Lufthansa about the incident. Although no evidence was found, officers retained the group’s passports, escorted them through the airport and onto the plane, accompanied toilet visits, and questioned one traveller again after another passenger alleged protest plans. When the group returned from vacation, police were waiting and escorted them out of the airport (see MapMF Alert).

More information: Mapping Media Freedom (MapMF) is part of the Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR). The MFRR is organised by an alliance led by the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) including ARTICLE 19 Europe, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), Free Press Unlimited (FPU), International Press Institute (IPI) and CCI/Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBC Transeuropa). Click here to explore the data in full. The MFRR is a Europe-wide mechanism which tracks, monitors and responds to violations of press and media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. It is co-funded by the European Commission.

Disclaimer: The numbers presented in this Fact Sheet cover all press freedom violations related to ‘Environmental Reporting’ documented between 01 January 2020 and 31 December 2025 (Status of May 2026) in the current EU Member States and candidate countries. MFRR currently monitors all 27 EU Member States and all nine candidate countries, following changes within the EU membership and accession status of countries. As ‘Environmental Reporting’ is also present in the countries that were added to the monitoring mandate at a later point, the Fact Sheet includes the total number of incidents recorded for each topic for current European Union Member State countries and candidate countries monitored until 31 December 2025. If cases are reported and published after the publication of this Fact Sheet, they will still appear in the data available under the links provided above.

One incident – and thus alert – can include multiple types of attacks (e.g. verbal and physical attack performed within the same incident) affecting more than one journalist or media actor and performed by more than one type of actor. In particular, legal incidents where journalists or outlets receive multiple related or similar legal threats, are currently recorded as one alert. This means, when showing e.g. how many alerts included a certain type of attack, the sum of all shown numbers can be more than the total number of alerts and thus more than 100%.

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