

JOURNALISM IN EXILE AND TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION

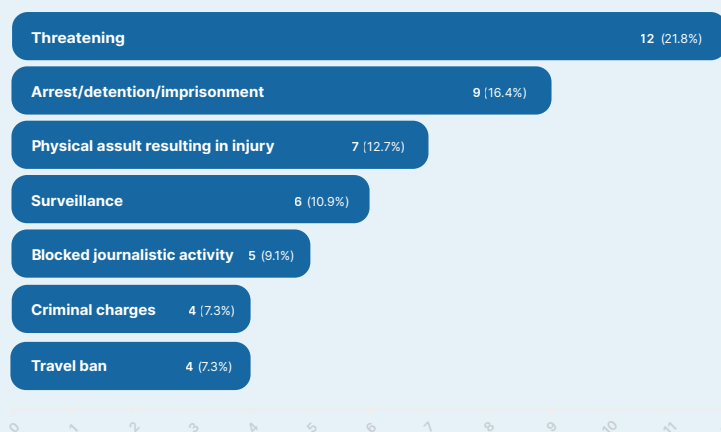
This factsheet looks at attacks against journalists in exile documented on the [Mapping Media Freedom](#) (MapMF) database between January 2020 to June 2026. Monitoring attacks against journalists in exile maps the unique challenges faced by journalists that were forced to leave their country of origin because of their work. Transnational Repression (TNR) is a key concern as states continue to extend repressive tactics across state borders to silence public interest journalism in diaspora communities.

55
ATTACKS AGAINST JOURNALISTS
AND MEDIA OUTLETS LIVING AND
WORKING IN EXILE SINCE 2020

The ongoing risk for journalists in exile

Mapping Media Freedom has recorded 55 [attacks](#) against journalists and media outlets living and working in exile in 12 EU Member States and candidate countries.¹ These cases concern journalists, media workers, and other media actors who were forced to flee their home countries due to threats, persecution, or political pressure connected to their reporting. The data shows that many journalists remain at risk even after seeking refuge abroad, facing legal insecurity, professional restrictions, Transnational Repression, and discrimination in host countries.

TYPES OF ATTACKS FACED BY JOURNALISTS IN EXILE SINCE 2020



Types of attacks faced by journalists in exile

Exile does not guarantee safety. The documented cases reveal that many journalists in exile continue to face a combination of legal, physical, verbal, and digital threats that endanger their personal safety, the safety of their family members and other people close to them, and their ability to report freely. Many of these attacks are forms of Transnational Repression, where state actors seek to intimidate or silence journalists reporting from abroad.

Since 2020, journalists in exile have faced numerous attacks:

Legal attacks (20 alerts): Arrests, detention, and imprisonment (9), travel bans (4) and criminal charges (4).

Verbal assaults (15 alerts): Threats (12), including especially severe cases of death threats (3).

Physical assaults (10 alerts): Resulting in injury (7) and 1 exiled journalist found dead.

Data attacks (8 alerts): Including spyware (5), hacking (1), and doxxing (2).

Obstruction of work (7 alerts): Blocking or disrupting journalistic activities.

Disclaimer: The list of attacks against journalists and media outlets in exile is not exhaustive. Cases are often underreported due to security concerns, limited recognition of Transnational Repression, gaps in monitoring mechanisms, and lack of awareness.

¹ **Note:** The Mapping Media Freedom database is limited to attacks that fall within its geographical mandate (EU Member States and candidate countries). Legal threats originating from the journalist's country of origin – like pending arrest warrants or trials – can only be documented if these countries fall within the mandate.

Transnational Repression against journalists

Transnational Repression (TNR) against journalists is a structured system of cross-border targeting through which states, state-linked actors, or their proxies, deliberately extend power beyond national borders to restrict, deter, punish, or silence journalists and media actors living abroad, in exile or in diaspora for their reporting, criticism, or public engagement.

TNR against journalists can take the form of direct violence, but repression increasingly involves indirect methods carried out through intermediaries, digital actors, private companies, state-aligned media, or criminal networks. Key tactics range from physical violence, such as killings, assaults, and enforced disappearances, to surveillance and espionage, including digital monitoring, cyber-attacks, and stalking. Actors also employ psychological pressure through online harassment and threats against family members remaining in the country of origin, alongside legal and administrative abuse like revoking passports, pressuring host countries for detention or deportation, misusing Interpol channels, and exploiting financial regulations to freeze assets.

The primary purpose of these actions is to create a climate of fear, aiming to suppress free expression, disrupt professional activity, force self-censorship or return to the persecuting state. The impacts are cumulative and layered, producing long-term chilling effects not only on individual journalists but on the broader media ecosystem in exile. By undermining an individual's ability to work safely and maintain income, TNR erodes the conditions necessary for independent journalism and accountability globally.

Source: ECPMF

Disclaimer: There is currently no single, universally accepted definition of Transnational Repression. This is a working definition adopted by ECPMF for its advocacy, monitoring, and support activities.

Case Studies

Afgan Sadygov: Azerbaijani journalist suffers years of legal harassment in Georgia

Afgan Sadygov, editor-in-chief of Azel.TV, lived in exile in Georgia before being deported to his home country Azerbaijan in April 2026 after years of legal harassment by Georgian and Azerbaijani authorities.

Sadygov fled Azerbaijan in 2023 due to crackdowns on media freedom in his home country Azerbaijan. He had been arrested in Baku multiple times before, including on controversial charges of extortion in 2020, which resulted in an initial seven-year prison sentence, later reduced to four years by the Supreme Court. In total, Sadygov spent two years in prison in Azerbaijan and was on a hunger strike for 242 days.

In Georgia, Sadygov was exposed to repeated harassment by the Georgian authorities, reportedly in response to pressure from the Azerbaijani government. He was banned from leaving the country, was denied asylum, arrested and detained several times. Eventually, on 5 April 2026, Sadygov was deported to Azerbaijan and immediately arrested upon his arrival.

See all MapMF alerts about Afgan Sadygov [here](#).

Trung Khoa Lê: Vietnamese journalist targeted with civil litigation across continents

Berlin-based Vietnamese journalist Trung Khoa Lê is the editor-in-chief of the exiled investigative outlet Thoibao, which regularly reports critically on the Vietnamese government. In October 2025, Vietnamese electric vehicle manufacturer VinFast and its CEO, Phạm Nhật Vượng, sought a temporary injunction from a Berlin court against Lê over Facebook posts alleging that individuals linked to VinGroup had attempted to bribe him to remove critical reporting on the company. VinFast also challenged statements in which Lê described the company as intimidating and expressed fears for his safety.

In November 2025, the Berlin court prohibited Lê from repeating the bribery allegation due to insufficient evidence but upheld his right to make the remaining statements under freedom of expression. While the ruling partly favoured VinFast, the case illustrates how civil litigation can be used to burden and intimidate exiled journalists.

The legal action in Germany was followed by repression in Vietnam. In December 2025, Vietnamese authorities issued an arrest warrant against Lê under Article 117 of the Criminal Code, and later that month sentenced him in absentia to 17 years' imprisonment. Together, these measures exemplify how legal proceedings across jurisdictions can reinforce Transnational Repression against journalists in exile.

See all MapMF alerts Trung Khoa Lê [here](#).

Basma Mostafa: Systemic repression by the Egyptian government in Germany

Basma Mostafa, an Egyptian investigative journalist, has lived in exile in Germany since 2021. In Egypt, she was arrested three times between 2016 and 2020 as a result of her critical reporting work. Despite being granted political asylum in Germany, repression against Mostafa continues. She has been the target of repeated attacks, many of which appear to be linked to the Egyptian authorities.

On 18 July 2022, Basma Mostafa experienced several forms of harassment and attacks in connection with a visit by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi to Berlin. During a demonstration at Bellevue Palace and the Federal Chancellery in Berlin, she was reportedly threatened, insulted, photographed, and physically assaulted after openly criticising the president. She was later the target of an intensive online smear campaign, and also received a letter to her private address, threatening her children.

Since then, the journalist has repeatedly become the target of attacks, which could in part be connected to the Egyptian government or representatives. These incidents involved threats as well as being stalked and surveilled. For example, on 1 July 2024, Basma Mostafa noticed a man sitting in close proximity to her at a café that she regularly visits to work. She recognised him as being connected to the previous attacks against her during the visit of President Al-Sisi in July 2022. When Mostafa moved to a different café, the man was following her. She then called the police, who arrested the man for questioning. A few hours later, Mostafa discovered that her Facebook account had been accessed from another browser.

Basma Mostafa's case is one of the best documented cases on Transnational Repression on Mapping Media Freedom, and has been supported by the former [UN Special Rapporteur](#) for Freedom of Expression, as well as the [Human Rights Commissioner](#) of the German government.

See all MapMF alerts about Basma Mostafa [here](#).

Spyware: Surveilling journalists in exile from afar

MapMF documented five incidents where journalists in exile were targeted by spyware. For journalists reporting from exile, spyware can jeopardise personal security, expose sensitive contacts, and undermine independent reporting.

Amongst the known targeted individuals are the journalists Trung Khoa Lê from Vietnam, Galina Timchenko from Russia, Nataliia Radzina from Belarus, and Evgeny Pavlov from Latvia. Spyware softwares identified were Predator (Intellexa Alliance) and Pegasus (NSO Group).

Attackers tried to breach the journalists' devices in a variety of ways. The Vietnamese journalist Trung Khoa Lê, living in Germany, received a malicious link on a comment thread on X, that would have infected his phone with the Predator software. Journalist Galina Timchenko, reporting from Latvia, reportedly had the Pegasus software installed on her iPhone while at a conference in Berlin, Germany.

See all MapMF alerts about spyware attacks on journalists in exile [here](#).

ECPMF's Journalists-in-Exile Programme

The European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) supports journalists in exile through its [Journalists-in-Exile \(JiE\) programme](#). The programme offers structured, short- to long-term assistance, including professional development, networking, and financial support to journalists in exile in Germany.

It tries to ensure that journalists in exile can access resources and opportunities regardless of their origin. Support includes legal and psychosocial counselling, equipment, language courses, and security measures.

ECPMF advocates for policy changes and raises awareness about challenges faced by journalists in exile, including [Transnational Repression](#), working with stakeholders across the EU to protect press freedom.

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 in this factsheet cover press freedom violations related to journalists in exile documented between 01 January 2020 to June 2026 in EU Member States and candidate countries. If cases are reported and published after the publication of this factsheet, they will still appear in the data available under the links provided above, but might conflict with the numbers stated in the text. One incident/alert can include multiple types of attacks, perpetrators, and affect several journalists at once. For example, a journalist is insulted and pushed at the same time, amounting to both a verbal and a physical attack. Because a single alert can contain multiple attack types, an alert may be counted more than once. As a result, the sum of the displayed counts can be higher than the total number of alerts, and the percentages may add up to more than 100%.

