



Strengthening Journalistic Safety through Engaged Stakeholder Collaboration and Journalists' Capacity Development in Albania

Overview of the Journalists' Safety in Albania

In Albania, despite constitutional guarantees of media freedom and freedom of expression, media freedom has declined due to the influence of powerful economic, political, and organized crime actors. The rapid growth of media outlets, particularly online, has not improved the quality of content. Compliance with ethical standards, copyright rules, and professionalism is lacking, and the safety of journalists is threatened, undermining journalistic integrity and democracy.

Albanian legislation does not provide tailored protection for journalists, who may face risks. Although local and international organizations offer pro-bono or legal aid, sustainable safety mechanisms are needed. Public condemnation of threats and attacks on journalists is inconsistent. More systematic public denunciation of these acts and emphasis on the importance of protecting journalists is needed.

Efforts to enhance law enforcement agencies training on interactions with journalists and human rights standards have been done primarily with donors' support. Due process for journalist safety is problematic. Law enforcement have limited knowledge, capacity, and resources to effectively investigate attacks against journalists. The Criminal Code does not provide special protection, and investigation protocols are absent. Cases are often slow, inefficient, or dismissed. Transparency is limited due to overapplication of investigation secrecy rules, hindering public information access.

Women journalists face sexual harassment, online violence, and smear campaigns. Gender disinformation and online violence are increasing concerns, with female journalists receiving higher volumes of misogynistic and threatening comments. This harassment and disinformation may discourage women from pursuing stories or roles in the media. The lack of a comprehensive harassment definition, limited resources, and inadequate procedures exacerbate the issue. State institutions' response to these challenges has been insufficient. Police registration of threats is satisfactory, but follow-up is slow and ineffective, especially in online cases. There is no reliable data collection on threats and attacks against journalists, hampering efforts to assess the problem's extent.

Journalists are increasingly exposed to digital security threats. Journalists in online media are particularly vulnerable due to informal employment, leading to difficulties in protecting intellectual property and building professional profiles. Recent data leaks and cyberattacks have raised concerns about the safety and privacy of journalists and sources. There is a growing need for journalists to prioritize digital security and for media organizations to implement better cybersecurity measures.

For more information please refer to the [Indicators of Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Albania](#) and the [Index of Journalists' Safety 2022](#). The [Safe Journalists Network](#) with the support of SCiDEV will

publish the 2023 Indicators of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety Index as a comprehensive report in June 2024.

About the project

Our project, "Strengthening Journalistic Safety through Engaged Stakeholder Collaboration and Journalists' Capacity Development in Albania" addresses the problem of declining media freedom and journalists' safety in Albania by prioritizing the engagement of stakeholders (state and non-state actors) in contributing to an enabling environment for the safety of journalists and media professionals. The project seeks to establish a comprehensive mechanism for journalist safety through baseline research of existing practices and actors, annual roundtables with stakeholders, awareness raising campaign and capacity building programmes. This initiative aims to develop concrete proposals for a law enforcement database to track attacks on journalists and create specific investigation protocols for cases of attacks, thereby adopting a holistic approach to journalist safety also in line with the measurements in the EU accession Roadmaps for the Rule of Law and Functioning of Democratic Institutions.

Furthermore, we will empower local and young journalists with training, mentoring, and content production support. This will include training/e-courses on digital security, ethical reporting, and mobile journalism, as well as a safety reporting manual for journalists working in precarious environments. Additionally, our "Unheard" campaign and podcast series will raise awareness about the challenges faced by journalists, featuring interviews with those who have encountered danger, experts in journalism safety, and media organization representatives ensuring public support and increased sensitivity and awareness towards safety of journalists and media freedom.

This project strives to foster a secure and supportive environment for journalists in Albania, where they can carry out their work without facing threats, violence, or intimidation. By emphasising the crucial role of media as a pillar of democracy, the project promotes accountability, transparency, and informed public discourse. Its key activities encompass stakeholder engagement to ensure journalist safety through the establishment of a protective mechanism, awareness-raising campaign to promote ethical reporting, and capacity development and mentoring initiatives specifically tailored for local and young journalists.

Implemented from December 2023 to December 2025, through the planned interventions, and collaboration with partners and stakeholders, this project seeks to mitigate un-investigated attacks on journalists, diminish impunity, and enhance reporting protocols in Albania. Ultimately, it will empower journalists with improved professional capabilities to work freely and produce higher-quality content, while fostering public support for media freedom and journalist protection.

This project is implemented by Center Science and Innovation for Development ([SCiDEV](#)) in collaboration with [Citizens Channel](#) and [Free Press Unlimited](#), with the support of the [Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Albania](#), within MATRA program.

What have we have done so far and what the next steps are

1) Stakeholders' Engagement

Panel Discussion on “Advancing Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom in Albania: Charting the Course for EU Integration”

SCiDEV is working with our partners to engage stakeholders to establish a mechanism ensuring journalist safety. The first gathering took place on **5 March 2024**, titled “*Advancing Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom in Albania: Charting the Course for EU Integration*” organised by SCiDEV in the framework of the Month of EU Integration Civic Engagement by [Cluster 1](#).

In the context of Albania's progression towards European Union accession, a key focus is on improving the safety of journalists and media freedom. The Government of Albania has prepared the “[Roadmap for the Rule of Law](#)” and the “[Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions](#)”, both addressing, among other priorities, the protection of journalists and the freedom of the media.

To mark the [Month of Civic Engagement for EU Integration](#), and discuss these initiatives while highlighting key data from 2023 gathered by SCiDEV' advocacy and research work, SCiDEV hosted a multi stakeholder panel on “[Advancing Safety of Journalists and Media Freedom in Albania: Charting the Course for EU Integration](#)”, which brought together representatives from the Albanian Parliament, independent institutions, law enforcement agencies, media community, media organisations, civil society, international actors and development partners in Albania.

During this discussion, the focus was on journalists lived and shared experiences, and on the strengthening of open dialogue among them and state actors. Journalists, part of the panel, shared their perspectives on the challenges that journalists face in their everyday work and called for more coordination and concrete work in addressing such challenges. Concerns were raised about working conditions, economic security, access to information, and the need for inclusive processes in government roadmaps. Panellists discussed challenges faced by journalists, including censorship, job insecurity, and legal threats, while calling for greater independence, transparency, and capacity building. In conclusion, SCiDEV emphasised ongoing efforts to enhance journalist safety through stakeholder collaboration, awareness campaigns, and training programs.

To read the full event proceedings and summary please click [here](#). To access the full meeting recording, please visit [this link](#).

Stakeholders' Roundtable Discussion on “Strengthening Journalistic Safety through Engaged Stakeholder Collaboration”

This roundtable discussion is taking place on **17 May 2024**, building upon the discussions during the first gathering and its proceedings, while marking the framework of the [International Press Freedom Day](#). This event will provide a platform for sharing more data and findings on the safety of journalists and engaging stakeholders on the way forward towards strengthening concrete mechanisms for an enabling environment for independent and quality journalism.

Upcoming events:

The next planned stakeholders gathering and discussion for 2024 will take place during November 2024 to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists where we hope stakeholders will take stock of the measures and progress, discuss challenges and next steps to improve safety of journalists. In 2025, roundtables will be organised again during May 2025, and November 2025 with the same approach and with data presented in terms of achievements and challenges. SCiDEV is committed to working closely with relevant institutions to ensure stakeholders engagement and commitment, as well as to generate evidence-based recommendations before implementing capacity building programmes for journalists in the next project phase.

2) Research and Advocacy, Coordination and Synergies with other Actors

In November 2023, SCiDEV provided inputs to the consultation of the Roadmap on Rule of Law. SCiDEV urged for the establishment of a comprehensive national framework dedicated to ensuring the safety of journalists, addressing awareness, prevention, protection, and prosecution, with particular attention to the unique vulnerabilities of women journalists and the need for robust protective measures for journalists in the digital realm facing the growing menace of cyberthreats and surveillance. To read our comments on the Roadmap please click [here](#).

Later on, in January 2024, SCiDEV provided inputs also on the Roadmap for the Functioning of Democratic Institutions. SCiDEV notes that generally the measures are declarative, non-specific and unclear and this may affect the way they are interpreted and implemented. SCiDEV reiterates again the vital importance of a transparent and comprehensive consultation process through structured dialogue tables such as European Integration Partnership Platform, the National Council of European Integration, specific discussion tables and forums set together with the relevant actors of the media, civil society, media organisations, experts, independent institutions, and academia to consult the roadmap for the functioning of democracy. To read our comments on the Roadmap please click [here](#) for the full document in English language, and [here](#) to access the full document in Albanian language. We are still waiting for the public consultation report about this Roadmap from the Ministry of Justice and further information regarding the final version of the Roadmap.

SCiDEV has actively participated in various events advocating for media freedom and safety of journalists with specific input and recommendations: Early this year, SCiDEV has participated in the Meeting with the Members of the Partnership Platform for European Integration for the Political Criteria organised by the Ministry of Justice in Albania on 11 January 2024, and the "Workshop on the negotiation process for Chapter 24 - Justice, Freedom, Security - opportunities for civil society involvement in the negotiation process" organised on 22 January 2024 by European Movement in Albania in cooperation with Partners Albania for Change and Development and the Albanian Center for Population and Development with the support of the EU. We joined the advocacy Event "Advocating for better representation of women in the media" organised by Albanian Media Institute on 21 March 2024; Virtual meeting and open discussion with EU Commission colleagues in Brussels held at the premises of the EU Delegation on 18 March 2024 on the consultation of the Rule of Law report, Working Breakfast with Stakeholders, at the premises of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Netherlands in Albania held on 20 March 2024; Meeting within the framework of the European Integration Partnership Platform for the negotiation steps held on March 29, 2024, by the Ministry of Justice; Meeting of the National Council of European Integration held on April 3, at the Albanian Parliament; Public Consultation I: Democracy, fundamental rights, rule of law, held on 16 April 2024 at the premises of EU Delegation in Albania; Forum "Open dialogue with civil society and young people on integration issues with a focus on justice and the rule of law", organised by Ministry of Justice in Albania,

held within the framework of Europe Week on 8 May, and will soon take part in Regional SLAPPs multi-stakeholder workshop: “Joint Action against SLAPPs in the Western Balkans” during 28-29 May. To learn more about our participation at such advocacy events please visit our website at [Media and Communication Pillar](#).

To strengthen our advocacy and awareness raising efforts in the regional and international level too, SCiDEV participated at the conference on “The Right to Information,” which was held on April 3, in Tirana, under the organisation of [Reporters Without Borders \(RSF\)](#) and the [Forum on Information & Democracy](#), in partnership with the [Albanian Media Council](#). To read our contributions to the event please click [here](#).

To inform the public and raise awareness on the current threats and challenges posed to the journalists and media outlets, with one of the recent cases being the attacks experienced by Citizens Channel, SCiDEV called on the wider Albanian cyber security community to assist and offer support to endangered independent media to safeguard freedom of speech and independent reporting. Read more about it [here](#).

Recently, SCiDEV has also issued a statement regarding the special parliamentary committee on disinformation, about which you can find out more [in this link](#). While SCiDEV acknowledges the significance of addressing disinformation, there are substantial concerns about the process, necessity and scope of the proposed parliamentary committee in Albania.

SCiDEV recommendations regarding the process:

- Assess the essential need for the special committee in light of existing mechanisms in place and the predominance of domestically generated disinformation and ensure that its scope and actions do not unduly impact free speech.
- Implement strict protocols to ensure the committee operates with impartiality and is not used as a tool for political gain or to suppress dissent, in line with concerns raised by media freedom reports.
- Incorporate independent research and ground the committee’s actions in independent research to ensure an evidence-based approach to disinformation.
- Publicly disclose any intelligence related to foreign interference to ensure the committee’s transparency and accountability, but also credibility and need for its creation.
- Make use of existing legal mechanisms like the Audio-visual Broadcasting Code before introducing new regulatory bodies, avoiding unnecessary overlap.
- Engage in a genuine consultation process, ensuring the committee’s decisions are well-informed by a spectrum of stakeholder insights, including structured expert collaboration with clear methodologies for expert engagement to bolster the committee’s effectiveness and credibility.

SCiDEV recommendations on tackling disinformation in Albania:

- Align with the EU Digital Services Act and upcoming Media Freedom Act to effectively tackle disinformation while maintaining a realistic approach to Albania’s influence on global digital platforms.
- Follow through on ODHIR’s recommendations to increase transparency in political financing, addressing potential sources of disinformation.
- Enhance conditions for journalists to foster a media landscape that is resilient to disinformation and supports free expression, tackling issues such as precarious employment and self-censorship.
- Strengthen media and information literacy programmes.
- Encourage self-regulation in the media.
- Support capacity development of media and journalists, including building cyber security resilience.

3) Awareness Raising

Through awareness-raising campaigns, the project is informing the public about the challenges faced by journalists and fostering public trust in the media. Project partners aim that the increased awareness and support will urge relevant institutions to prioritise the safety of journalists and hold them accountable for creating a safer environment for journalists. To check out some of the most recent awareness raising and informative campaigns, visit the social media platforms of Citizen Channel (for example [here](#)) or SCiDEV ([here](#)), and learn more about the “Unheard” (or in Albanian: Të padëgjuarit) campaign.

This campaign aims to raise awareness about the critical challenges faced by journalists and promote support for their safety and ethical reporting practices. In response to the growing threats against journalists, both physical and digital, this campaign seeks to educate and engage the public, media professionals, and stakeholders on the importance of protecting press freedom and upholding media integrity. Through a series of 25 targeted social media content pieces and a 10-episode podcast series, it will address key issues such as physical safety, cybersecurity threats, ethical dilemmas, and the impact of misinformation.

The “Unheard” campaign will be executed online, and its approach involves leveraging compelling visuals, storytelling, user-generated content, and expert insights to support public dialogue and action. By highlighting the experiences of journalists at risk and showcasing best practices for safety and ethical reporting, we aim to empower both journalists and the wider population.

4) Capacity Development for Journalists

In the next steps of the project, SCiDEV together with its partners will ensure training and mentoring programs that enhance digital security, ethical reporting, and safe field reporting for local and young journalists. In cooperation with FPU, which brings best experiences and practices from the Netherlands and the EU, the development of a safety reporting manual will provide comprehensive guidelines for safely reporting from volatile situations in Albania.

For more information on the overall project goals, its expected results and targeted stakeholders, please check [this file](#) or check our [website](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [LinkedIn](#).

