

Journalist imprisonments highest recorded in years

The number of journalists imprisoned worldwide is the highest ever recorded in 30 years.



Source: www.unsplash.com

A record 363 journalists were behind bars as of 1 December 2022, a 20% increase over 2021, CPJ's annual prison census showed.

Iran has soared to become the world's worst jailer of journalists, with 62 imprisoned on 1 December, rising from tenth place in 2021, a reflection of authorities' ruthless crackdown on the women-led uprisings that erupted in September.

The regime has imprisoned a record number of female journalists—22 out of the 49 arrested since the start of the protests are women. Iran is followed by China, Myanmar, Turkey, and Belarus.



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12 Dec 2022



"The record number of journalists in jail is a crisis that mirrors an erosion of democracy globally," said CPJ president Jodie Ginsberg. "This year's prison census brings into sharp relief the lengths governments will go to silence reporting that seeks to hold power to account. Criminalizing journalism has impacts far beyond the individual in jail: it stifles vital reporting that helps keep the public safe, informed, and empowered."

Governments resort to retaliatory charges and the abuse of legal structures to punish the press, such as by crafting legislation with vague wording that criminalizes factual reporting.

The 2022 census shows that anti-state charges are used most frequently to imprison journalists, ranging from alleged terrorism to sharing information contrary to official narratives. Alarming, in 131 cases, no charge has been registered at all, leaving journalists to languish behind bars with little legal recourse.

“The prospect of lengthy legal processes and long jail sentences is a way to intimidate journalists into silence. It sows distrust in the media, creating an environment in which abuses of power can flourish,” said Ginsberg.

Punitive tactics include predawn raids, the seizure of journalists’ devices, and the removal of licenses required to legally operate a news entity.

Russia’s legal reforms, enacted after the invasion of Ukraine, outlaw “fake” reporting on the war and have served to practically snuff out the country’s independent news outlets. In many countries, even those with lower numbers of imprisoned journalists, complex and drawn-out legal cases have a chilling effect that forces journalists to stop publishing, news outlets to close, and in extreme cases result in journalists fleeing into exile.

CPJ’s data consistently shows that those imprisoned are overwhelmingly local journalists covering their own countries and communities. The incarceration and treatment of Kurdish journalists held in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey underscore the systemic persecution experienced by this group.



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Asif Shahzad 6 Dec 2022



After a 12-year hiatus, Afghanistan returns to CPJ’s census with three imprisoned journalists, as conditions for the press have faced serious setbacks since the return of the Taliban regime. Georgia, an emerging democracy with a mixed press freedom record, which is increasingly home to exiled journalists from elsewhere in the region, is listed in the census for the first time.

Media suppression in China (43 journalists imprisoned), Myanmar (42), and Vietnam (21) have placed those countries among the world’s worst offenders.

In sub-Saharan Africa, Eritrea (16) remains the region’s worst jailer of journalists, ranking ninth globally. Journalists there have been held without trial or access to their families or lawyers for periods ranging from 17 to 22 years.

The relatively low number of jailed journalists in the Americas—two in Nicaragua, one in Cuba, and one in Guatemala—belies the continued decline of press freedom across the region, as 2022 was especially deadly for journalists reporting in Mexico and Haiti. The U.S. Press Freedom Tracker, a CPJ partner, recorded 12 arrests and detentions of journalists across the U.S. during 2022, all of whom were freed by the time of the 1 December census.



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Joe Hamman 13 Dec 2022



Throughout Europe and Central Asia, press freedom is still under attack. Authorities in Turkey (40) continue to pursue journalists, as evidenced by the report's in-jail interview with Hatice Duman, Turkey's longest-jailed journalist who was imprisoned in 2003.

As of 2021, Belarus (26) is the fifth worst jailer of journalists in this year's census. Russia (19) assumes eighth place with several journalists facing sentences of up to 10 years on charges of spreading "fake news."

In addition to Iran, in the Middle East and North Africa, Egypt (21) and Saudi Arabia (11) remain among the world's top 10 jailers of journalists.

CPJ's prison census is a snapshot of those incarcerated at 12.01am on 1 December 1. It does not include the many journalists imprisoned and released throughout the year.

Find the full data report [here](#).

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