

Freedom of the press in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Fact Sheet



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Bosnia and Herzegovina has officially incorporated all international human rights conventions into its constitutional framework. The Constitutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with those of its constituent entities, explicitly state that the rights and freedoms outlined in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its Protocols are directly applicable in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Additionally, these rights and freedoms take precedence over all other laws. Defamation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been decriminalised, while the Law on Free Access to Information mandates that authorities are obligated to grant citizens access to all information. This obligation applies without a priori excluding information falling under the purview of national or military security. The Law on Free Access to Information foresees that freedom of expression and a variety of opinions are essential, all within the bounds of widely accepted standards of decency, non-discrimination, fairness, accuracy, and impartiality.

Currently, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, **76.7%** of the population has access to the internet. This suggests that besides online media, the population also highly relies on other sources like television or the radio. There are three main broadcasting services in the country, which are financed by licence fee and advertising. Yet, this financing is limited, thus they receive additional funding from the state or entity budget, exposing them to increased political pressures. As the allocation of public funds to the media lacks transparency, the main obstacle to media freedom in Bosnia and Herzegovina remains their financial dependency. The financial sustainability of media outlets is intricately tied to the networks that link media owners with political and economic power centres and lobbyists. Media owners and managers often have close familial or direct connections with Presidents, Prime Ministers, or Ministers, leading to the development of mutually advantageous relationships, which may often lead to self-censoring.

A notable concern centres around the increasing tendency for media reporting to be influenced by political dependency and significant biases. This encompasses instances of using the media to attack and exert pressure on political adversaries and, in some cases, completely omitting opposition voices from reports due to their opposition to a media owner or editor. Furthermore, there are occurrences, though not uncommon, where hate speech is employed in the media against political opponents belonging to different ethnic or religious groups. These incidents often transpire during election campaigns and can have a discernible impact on the official stance regarding editorial policy.

The procession of a journalist lacks a common definition or official specific requirements, which means that journalists are entitled to the same general employment rights safeguarded by the Labour Code without special protection. Journalists typically receive insufficient compensation, with pay ranging from 250€ per month in both local public and private media to an average of 700€ for those working in the public service as journalists and editors. Journalists face a deficiency in safeguards that extends beyond their vulnerability to political influence and even jeopardises their physical safety, which is inadequately assured by the legal system. Journalists frequently encounter various forms of pressure, and their challenging financial circumstances and dependence often result in complete subordination. This compels them to serve political pressures, often compromising professionalism and impartiality.

Empirical Evidence

- In March 2023, the cars of journalists Aleksandar Trifunovic of *Buka* and Nikola Moraca from *EuroBlic* and *Srpskainfo* websites were damaged, which was considered a "typical intimidation attempt".
- In March 2023, Sinisa Vukelic, the head of *the Journalists' Club in Banja Luka* and her team were verbally assaulted and called "assholes who have been lying, subverting, racketeering for years and want to buy off the journalistic community to supposedly protect it" by former President Milorad Dodik.



- In August 2018, Vladimir Kovačević, an investigative reporter for *BN TV*, was brutally beaten up outside his home in Banja Luka after covering opposition protests.

Resources

- [Digital 2023: Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), DataReportal
- [Freedom of Media in the Western Balkans](#), European Parliament
- [Insults and a anti-defamation bill : RSF concerned about threats to journalists in Bosnia's Republika Srpska](#), Reporters Without Borders
- [RSF sounds alarm after TV reporter badly beaten in Banja Luka](#), Reporters without Borders