

UNESCO Research Conference on Safety of Journalists 3-4 May 2016 in connection with World Press Freedom Day in Helsinki

Knowledge is key: the contribution of research to securing the safety of journalism

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right. It underpins other democratic freedoms such as the right to share political ideas or scrutinize the actions of public officials, and in that sense it enables democracy, good governance and accountability. Press freedom safeguards the public use of the general right to freedom of expression in media and journalism. From that it also follows that those who exercise the right to freedom of expression to do journalism need to be free and safe to carry out their work. While everyone is entitled to protection of their rights, the social significance of journalism has led to particular attention to the safety of the actors engaged in this process.

Not everyone who does journalism is a 'journalist', in the traditional sense of the term. Besides for media workers employed by a media organization or formally organized in a professional body, there are also, in the digital age, social media producers engaged in journalistic activities as well as other actors who may produce journalism.

Within this wider perspective, it is nevertheless evident that the majority of those attacked for journalism are journalists, and 'classical' journalists around the globe face serious threats. Attacks on foreign correspondents are well known. Less publicised is the fact that local journalists make up the bulk of those who are killed for doing journalism. The same applies as regards non-lethal attacks, which range from intimidation, harassment and arbitrary detention to misogynistic attacks directed against women journalists. According to UNESCO's data, more than 700 journalists, media workers and social media producers who generate journalism have been killed during the past 10 years, and 2015 seems to be among the deadliest. Silencing these actors by killing them constitutes a serious threat to freedom of expression and is the ultimate act of censorship. Equally worrying is the fact that more than nine in ten cases of journalists' killings, the crimes remain unsolved. The end result is a vicious cycle of impunity and a likely chilling effect on society in a climate of fear and self-censorship.

UNESCO Academic Research Agenda on Safety of Journalists

Threats to journalists – and others who do journalism - in their public exercise of freedom of expression are widely acknowledged. But in order to more effectively prevent such threats, there is a need for a proper understanding – knowledge is the key. Research could for example reveal patterns in the societal conditions, legal frameworks, journalistic practices or actions of media institutions that are crucial for the safe practice of journalism. Research could also help to unpack the huge rate of impunity for lethal attacks on journalists: According the data set information received from those UNESCO member states who respond to queries, the Organization has confirmation of only 32 cases out of more than 500 that have been resolved between 2009 and the start of 2015. It is for these reasons that UNESCO has recently developed the [Academic Research Agenda on Safety of Journalists](#), in order to encourage academic research on the topics and to strengthen cooperation with the academia.

Call for Papers

To strengthen this new initiative, UNESCO and the UNESCO Chair at University of Gothenburg is organising in collaboration with IAMCR, University of Sheffield, University of Helsinki and University of Tampere a two-day research conference on Safety of Journalists during the celebrations of World Press Freedom Day in Helsinki Finland, on 3 and 4 May 2016.

The conference organizers are calling for papers and posters from various research fields that examine this important aspect of freedom of expression and press freedom, and that cover the issues mentioned in the UNESCO research agenda on safety of journalists, including

- Media development, democracy, human and civil rights and journalists' safety
- Societal causes and effects of journalists' (un)safety
- Legal frameworks, law and journalists' safety, including impunity
- Journalistic practices, ethics and journalists' safety
- Journalism education, professionalism and safety
- Media institutions, economics, working conditions and safety
- Journalists' safety in conflict and non-conflict situations
- Specific safety threats (digital safety, gender-specific threats, topic specific threats such as war or crime reporting)
- Psychological effects of safety threats
- Measuring journalists' safety.

The topics are described in more detail in the [Academic Research Agenda on Safety of Journalists](#), which the interested participants are encouraged to read.

Guidelines for abstracts

Abstracts for paper and poster presentations should be sent to Reeta Pöyhtäri (r.poyhtari(at)unesco.org) and Ulla Carlsson (ulla.carlsson(at)gu.se) by 11 December 2015 at the latest.

Abstracts of a maximum of 300 words (in English) should include, besides author's contact details and affiliation, a clear description of the research focus, methodology and main (expected) results. Abstracts should also indicate specifically how the topic relates to safety of journalists. Full papers of approximately 5000 words at the most and posters are expected to be submitted by no later than 4 April, 2016. Conference publication of selected conference papers is in planning.

Acceptance of the abstracts will be notified by 22 January. For further questions concerning the conference and the Call For Papers, please contact (r.poyhtari(at)unesco.org).

Links:

Theme page:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/freedom-of-expression/safety-of-journalists/unescos-research-agenda-on-safety-of-journalists/>

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