WORLDWIDE ROUND-UP

of journalists killed, detained, held hostage, or missing in 2019



1	OVERVIEW: FIGURES AT A GLANCE	р. З
2	HOW WE CALCULATE THESE FIGURES	p. 4
3	JOURNALISTS KILLED	p. 5
	3.1 The figures	р. 5
	3.2 Less deadly front lines	p. 8
	3.3 Latin America sets worst records	p. 10
	3.4 Today's dangers – investigative reporting	
	and covering protests	p. 11
4	DETAINED JOURNALISTS	p.12
	4.1 The figures	p. 12
	4.2 Mass imprisonment in China	р. 13
	4.3 Detained arbitrarily in the Middle East	p. 15
	4.4 Detainees endangered by mistreatment, lack of care	p. 17
5	JOURNALISTS HELD HOSTAGE	р. 19
	5.1 The figures	р. 19
	5.2 Hostages who are given heavy sentences	p. 21
	5.3 No end to hostage ordeals in Syria	p. 22
6	MISSING JOURNALISTS	p. 23
7	ACTION TAKEN BY RSF	p. 24

About RSF

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) is an independent NGO that defends and promotes journalistic freedom and independence worldwide. Based in Paris, it has six international bureaux (in Washington, Rio de Janeiro, Taipei, Tunis, London, and Brussels), six European sections (Austria, Finland, Germany, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland) and a network of more than 130 correspondents across the world. It has consultative status with the United Nations, UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the International Organization of the Francophonie (OIF).



OVERVIEW: FIGURES AT A GLANCE





HOW WE CALCULATE THESE FIGURES

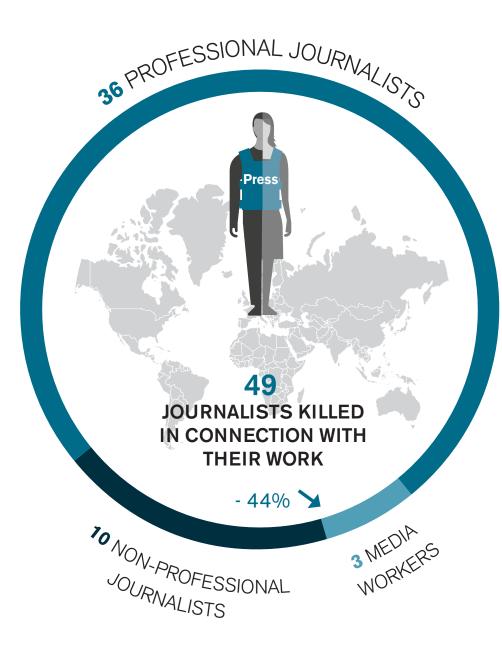
The 2019 round-up figures compiled by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) include professional journalists, non-professional journalists and media workers. As far as possible, the round-up distinguishes these categories in its breakdowns, in order to facilitate comparison with previous years.

Compiled by RSF every year since 1995, the annual round-up of abusive treatment and deadly violence against journalists is based on data gathered throughout the year. We gather detailed information that allows us to affirm with certainty or a great deal of confidence that the death, detention, abduction or disappearance of each journalist was a direct result of their journalistic work.

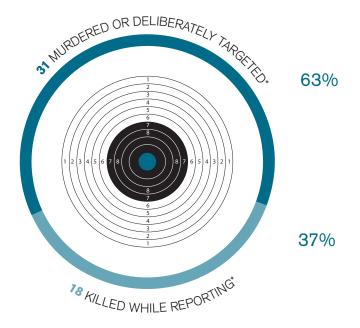
With regards deaths, we distinguish between journalists who were deliberately targeted because of their work and those who were killed while reporting in the field without being specifically targeted. If we are still in the process of investigating the death, detention, abduction, or disappearance of a journalist, we do not include them in the round-up while we are not yet confident that it was linked to their work.



3.1 The figures





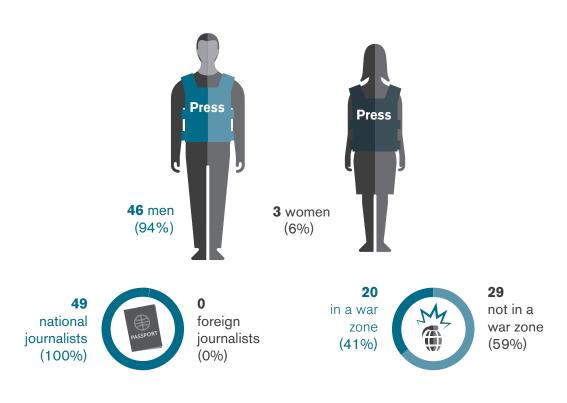


* MURDERED OR DELIBERATELY TARGETED:

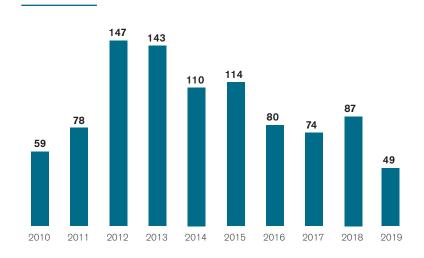
Journalists deliberately killed because of their work

* KILLED WHILE REPORTING:

Journalists killed while in the field without being targeted as journalists



941 journalists killed in the past 10 years



Least deadly year in 16 years

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) has registered 49 cases of journalists killed in connection with their work in 2019 (from 1 January to 1 December). **This is low compared with the average in recent decades, a trend which above all is due to a fall in the number of journalists killed in armed conflicts.** The number of deaths in countries not at war is much the same as in previous years. In Mexico 10 journalists were killed this year - the exact same number as last year. But the conflicts in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan were much less deadly for journalists than in previous years.

You have to go back to 2003 to find so few journalists killed. The sharp fall in the number killed in 2019 (44% fewer than in 2018) is seen in all categories: 36 professional journalists killed (instead of 66 in 2018), 10 non-professional journalists killed (instead of 13 in 2018) and 3 media workers killed (instead of 5 in 2018). For the first time, no journalist was killed while reporting abroad. All victims were killed in their own country.

This year has also seen a distribution change. The proportion of deaths in countries not at war (59%) was greater than deaths in countries at war. Last year, most of the journalists killed (55%) were the victims of a war or a low-intensity conflict. These figures explain another one: 63% of the journalists killed were murdered or deliberately targeted. This is 2% more than in 2018.



The deadliest countries



3.2 Less deadly front lines

Middle East

Evolution in the Middle East's continuing conflicts is largely responsible for the falling figures. This was the least deadly year for journalists in Syria since its civil war began more than eight years ago. **Ten journalists were killed in 2019**, two of them recently during <u>Turkey's cross-border offensive against the Kurdish</u> People's Protection Units (YPG) and a third during a Russian air strike in the Idlib region. Syria continues to rank as one of the world's two deadliest countries for the media (along with Mexico) but the toll is now much lower than in the darkest years of 2012 and 2013, with tolls of 64 and 69 journalists killed, respectively.

As the Islamic State was <u>driven back to the eastern-most confines of Syria</u>, to areas now controlled by Arab and Kurdish forces backed by an international coalition, <u>foreign reporters and photographers were able to cover</u> the end of the Islamic State's self-proclaimed caliphate without suffering any fatalities.



Yemen

This year's less deadly toll in Yemen (2 dead compared with 8 in 2018) is above all indicative of a decline in reporting activity by Yemeni journalists rather than any let-up in the fighting. Fewer and fewer Yemeni journalists are able to work with acceptable security conditions. As well as dangers directly linked to the fighting, journalists are also liable to be attacked, kidnapped or arrested arbitrarily by the various belligerent forces. They also risk being mistreated and tortured before being sentenced to death (see Section 5 – Journalists held hostage).

The information that RSF has been able to gather in Yemen confirms that the risks have increased to the point that many journalists have opted to stop working. A former editor of the newspaper *Al Tafaseel* now sells second-hand goods. A former reporter for the daily *Al-Thawra* is now working as a restaurant waiter in the capital, Sanaa. A journalist who used to work for the newspaper *Akhbar al-Youm* is now selling ice.

Afghanistan

In South Central Asia, media coverage has also declined in Afghanistan. The number of Kabul-based foreign correspondents has halved since 2014. The decline in the foreign media presence and reporting can be attributed to worsening security conditions (due to an increase in bombing attacks against civilians) and to a fall in international media interest linked in part to the gradual withdrawal of foreign troops. Other factors also helped reduce the number of journalists killed in Afghanistan in 2019 to 5 –compared with 16 in 2018, 15 in 2017 and 10 in 2016. Unlike in previous years, bombings and attacks directly targeting journalists or media outlets were less deadly. Afghan journalists have learned to minimise their exposure in groups and to reduce their movements in order to limit the possibility of being targeted.

Elsewhere, reporters are increasingly better prepared and trained for conflict zones and often better supplied with protective equipment – all of which helps to reduce the dangers in a hostile terrain.



3.3 Latin America sets worst records

The fall in the number of journalists killed in countries at war has shifted attention to an often forgotten reality, that Latin **America continues to be an especially unstable and dangerous region for the media.** With a total of **14 journalists killed in 2019** (ten in Mexico, two in Honduras, one in Colombia and one in Haiti), Latin America has become as deadly for journalists as the Middle East with all its internal conflicts. The gravity of the situation may be worse than these figures suggest because, in all, a further eight journalists were murdered in Brazil, Chile, Mexico, Honduras, Colombia and Haiti in 2019 but their cases have yet to be added to RSF's barometer because they are still being verified. The slowness and failings of the judicial systems in these countries makes it harder to establish the facts of these murders.



Norma Garabia Sarduza © Excélsior Televisión (Youtube)





Francisco Romero Diaz

The murders of two crime reporters in southeastern Mexico <u>were particularly symptomatic</u> of how ineffective the authorities are in reining in the spiral of violence against the media. One of the victims, <u>Norma Garabia Sarduza</u>, was murdered in Tabasco state in June after failing to obtain protection despite having been threatened over a series of articles about local police corruption. The other, <u>Francisco Romero Díaz</u>, was murdered in Quintana Roo state in May although the Federal Mechanism for Protecting Journalists had given him a "panic button" and a police bodyguard, who was not with him when he was gunned down.



Mauricio Lezama © Source : Facebook

Honduras, where two journalists were gunned down in broad daylight, is also overwhelmed by corruption and organized crime, while Colombia is having to confront its old demons again. After a relative respite linked to the signing of peace accords in 2016, the return of armed groups and a resumption of clashes between paramilitaries and the army in many rural areas have contributed to the creation of "zonas silenciadas" – black holes from which no news emerges. The documentary filmmaker **Mauricio Lezama** was murdered in May while making a documentary about the victims of Colombia's armed conflicts.



After an even longer respite, **Haiti** has seen a return to turmoil since the summer of 2018. **Néhémie Joseph**, a radio journalist working for *Panic FM* in the town of Mirebalais, who openly criticized the government and local authorities, was murdered in October at a time of tension and violent protests throughout the country calling for the departure of President Jovenel Moïse, the target of corruption allegations.



3.4 Today's dangers – investigative reporting and covering protests

Three journalists have also been injured, <u>one of them seriously</u>, while <u>covering protests</u> in recent months in Haiti, which is far from being unique in this respect. **The explosion** of unrest and protests seen in many countries around the world has posed a real security challenge for reporters.



tinaphotographer.co.uk

The death of Northern Irish journalist **Lyra McKee**, who was fatally shot while covering rioting in Derry in April, was a reminder of the vulnerability of reporters and the many different kinds of danger involved in covering such moments of public anger and confusion. McKee was killed by one of the shots fired towards the police by a gunman believed to be a member of the New IRA, a dissident Irish republican paramilitary group. **Precious Owolabi**, a young reporter with one of Nigeria's most popular TV channels, was fatally shot while covering a demonstration in the capital, Abuja, in July. The police opened fire with live rounds to disperse the demonstration after clashing with protesters.

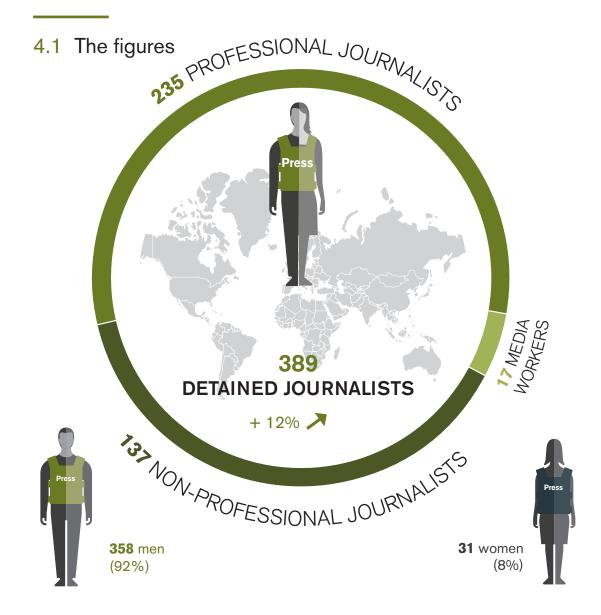


Ahmed Hussein-Suale © Reuters

Outside war zones, the other great threat to journalists is as invisible as it is predictable – organized crime. As RSF confirmed in its report "Journalists: the bête noire of organised crime," journalists expose themselves to a great deal of danger if they take too much interest in organized crime's activities. This was the case in Ghana, where Ahmed Hussein-Suale was gunned down as he was returning home one night in January after participating in Tiger Eye's major exposé of corruption in Ghanaian soccer. Other members of the Tiger Eye team of investigative journalists had previously been threatened – to widespread public indifference.



Two investigative journalists were also gunned down in cold blood this year in Pakistan. The first, Ali Sher Rajpar, was investigating a municipal official suspected of corruption. The second, TV reporter Mirza Waseem Baig, had covered the activities of a criminal gang specializing in extorting money from local elected officials. Both were riddled with bullets and died on the spot or while being taken to hospital. Vadym Komarov, a Ukrainian journalist who was well known for investigating corruption in the city of Cherkasy and who had been the target of several murder attempts in recent years, died in June from the severe head injuries he had sustained in a violent assault in May. His murder remains unpunished.



The number of detained journalists keeps on rising. Worldwide, a total of 389 journalists were held in connection with the provision of news and information at the start of December 2019. This is 12% more than the number held on the same date last year, which was in turn 7% more than the 2017 figure. Only the number of non-professional journalists has fallen. The proportion of women among detained journalists is the same as in 2018, namely 8%.

The figure of 389 detained journalists does not include the many journalists who have been detained arbitrarily for a few hours, days or even weeks in the course of the past year. RSF's monitoring has established that this figure has also risen significantly because of the protests that have been taking place in many countries such as <u>Algeria</u> and Hong Kong, which have been <u>accompanied by an increase in attacks on journalists</u>, as in <u>Chile</u> and <u>Bolivia</u>.



The biggest jailers of journalists



Nearly half of the world's imprisoned journalists (186 out of 389) are being held in just three countries – China, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. China alone is holding a third of the world's imprisoned journalists.

4.2 Mass imprisonment in China



Seventy years after taking power, the Chinese Communist Party continues to be the world's biggest jailer of journalists. The Chinese regime took its cynicism to a new level in 2019 by publishing a white paper portraying China as a real democracy while doubling the number of detained journalists in the space of a year – to 120.

More than 40% of the imprisoned journalists are non-professional ones who, despite the growing censorship of online social networks, have tried to compensate for the Communist Party's increasingly tight control over the traditional media. Most of the newly detained journalists are Uyghurs, members of China's Turkic-speaking, Muslim ethnic minority who are the largest demographic group in the northwestern region of Xinjiang.



© Fundang Sheng. Contact Press Images

The Chinese authorities have steadily intensified their crackdown on the Uyghurs. **Lu Guang**, a well-known photographer who has received three World Press Photo awards, was <u>arrested</u> in Xinjiang in October 2018 simply for travelling to the region with the aim of meeting and training local photographers. He was released after several months but is now living under police surveillance in Yongkang, his home town and is no longer taking photos.



Gulmira Imin

Two well-known Uyghur journalists were already serving sentences of life imprisonment before the internment camps began spreading across Xinjiang. One is **Gulmira Imin**, the editor of the news website *Salkin*, who has been jailed for the past ten years for "separatism" and "divulging state secrets." The other is **Ilham Tohti**, an academic and citizen-journalist who edited the *Uyghurbiz* website, in which he commented freely about economic, political and social developments in Xinjiang. Detained since 2014 and convicted of "separatism," he was awarded both the Council of Europe's <u>Václav Havel Prize</u> for Human Rights and the European Parliament's <u>Sakharov Prize</u> for Freedom of Thought in 2019.

Arbitrary detention is far from being limited to Xinjiang. An ironic post about party corruption by the <u>blogger</u> **Wu Gan** and a satirical cartoon about human rights in China by the <u>cartoonist</u> **Jiang Yefei** sufficed to get them arrested and tortured for "inciting subversion of state authority." The authorities don't fuss over details. Any old charge will do to imprison a journalist. **Zhang Jialong**, a former professional journalist known for <u>combatting censorship</u>, has been held since August in Guizhou province on a charge of "picking guarrels and provoking trouble."



Gui Minhai

Having foreign citizenship affords no protection against arbitrary detention. Yang Hengjun, a Chinese-born Australian writer and political commentator, has been held in southern China since January on a spying charge, while Gui Minhai, a Chinese-born Swedish author and book publisher who was kidnapped in Thailand in 2015, continues to be held pending trial, despite having the symptoms of a serious neurological disease. He is accused of disclosing state secrets and "illegal" contacts with foreign diplomats. To Beijing's annoyance, the Swedish branch of PEN awarded him its Tucholsky Prize in November.



4.3 Detained arbitrarily in the Middle East

Throughout 2019, Saudi Arabia and Egypt fought for the title of the Middle East's biggest jailer, closely followed by Syria. Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt are holding more than 30 journalists each and both tend to leave journalists in prison for a long time after arresting them. In both Riyadh and Cairo, most of the detained journalists have not been tried or charged. Of the 32 detained Saudi journalists registered by RSF, 22 have not been formally charged. In Egypt, 30 of the 34 detained journalists have not been convicted.



Raif Badawi

When trials are held, they are often grossly unfair and the journalists are often unjustly sentenced to extremely long jail terms. The Saudi blogger **Raif Badawi**, for example, was sentenced in 2014 to ten years in prison and a thousand lashes for "insulting Islam." In Egypt, the journalist **Abdel Rahman Shaheen** has paid dearly for working for the Qatari broadcaster *Al Jazeera*, which the Egyptian regime reviles. After initially being sentenced to a total of six years in prison on charges of membership of a terrorist group and broadcasting false news, he was sentenced three years later to life imprisonment on an unsubstantiated murder charge that he has always denied.



Esraa Abdel Fattah

Both regimes also have torture in common. It is regarded as virtually systematic in Saudi prisons. In Egypt, the blogger **Esraa Abdel Fattah** went on hunger strike in October in protest against the mistreatment and torture to which she was subjected after refusing to give her interrogators the password to her mobile phone.



Eman al Nafjan

As well as being located in the bottom 20 of RSF's 2018 World Press Freedom Index – Egypt is ranked 161st out of 180 countries and Saudi Arabia is 172nd – both countries are characterized by their constant harassment of journalists even after they have been released. In Riyadh, *SaudiWoman.me* website editor **Eman al Nafjan** has not resumed writing or participating in any public activities since her conditional release in March, and she did not attend the 2019 RSF Press Freedom Awards ceremony in Berlin in November despite being awarded the Prize for Courage. She is still facing a possible 20-year jail sentence.

Many journalists in Egypt are no more than half free after their official release. They include the photojournalist known as **Shawkan**, who was freed in March under <u>such strict</u> <u>judicial supervision</u> that he is supposed to spend 12 out of every 24 hours, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., in a police station for the next five years. Release under such close supervision means living under the constant threat of re-imprisonment. The blogger **Mohamed Oxygen** was re-arrested at the end of July, two months after his conditional release. **Alaa Abdel Fattah**, a blogger and human rights defender who had been spending every night in a police station since his conditional release in March, <u>has not been let out of the police station since 29 September</u>. Both are the victims of a <u>new wave of arrests</u> of journalists in response to anti-government protests.



RSF has managed to confirm the presence of 26 journalists in Syrian jails but the real figure is probably higher. Hundreds of professional journalists and citizen-journalists have been arrested over the years but all trace of them has then been lost in the regime's jails. The Assad government recognized last year, by issuing updated civil records, that hundreds of missing persons died in detention, including the journalist **Niraz Saied**.

No justice in Turkey

Although the number of detained journalists fell for the second year running, Turkey continues to be one of the world's biggest jailers of media personnel and continues to expose them to an entirely arbitrary justice system.

No judicial decision seems to hold for long. Little more than a week after his <u>conditional release in November</u>, the well-known journalist **Ahmet Altan** was back in <u>prison again because prosecutors appealed against the decision.</u> Six <u>Cumhuriyet newspaper journalists</u> – **Musa Kart**, **Güray Öz**, **Hakan Kara**, **Önder Çelik**, **Ahmet Şık** and **Mustafa Kemal Güngör** – were <u>freed conditionally</u> in September only to learn two months later that an Istanbul court had convicted them again at the end of a retrial. Of the six other <u>Cumhuriyet</u> journalists to be prosecuted, only one, **Kadri Gürsel**, was acquitted. The others could be returned to prison if their convictions are upheld on appeal.

Similarly, after initially being acquitted in July, RSF Turkey representative **Erol Önderoğlu**, human rights defender **Şebnem Korur Fincancı** and the writer and publisher **Ahmet Nesin** learned that prosecutors have appealed against their acquittal in order to have a second go at convicting them for participating in a solidarity campaign with the Kurdish newspaper Özgür Gündem.

Dozens of journalists and media representatives were released over the course of the year after completing their prison sentences or as a result of a new court ruling, but around ten others opted for self-imposed exile in order to avoid an arbitrary trial.

The risk of prosecution has increased because, as well as the usual charges of "terrorist propaganda," "collaborating with an illegal organization" and "membership of an illegal organization," journalists can now also be charged with "insulting the president." This happened to Ozan Kaplanoğlu, a journalist in the city of Bursa and local representative of the Association of Progressive Journalists (CGD).

In addition to the cases included in RSF's tally, dozens of other media representatives are currently in prison and being prosecuted on a charge of "affiliation to illegal or terrorist political groups."



4.4 Detainees endangered by mistreatment, lack of care

The health of imprisoned journalists is extremely worrying in some parts of the world. Often sentenced to very long jail terms or even life imprisonment, mistreated and denied medical attention for the illnesses that many are suffering, some journalists are slowly dying in detention.



According to the information gathered by RSF, <u>at least ten Chinese journalists</u> risk suffering the same fate as Nobel peace laureate <u>Liu Xiaobo</u> and the blogger <u>Yang Tongyan</u>, who died in detention from untreated illnesses (cancers) in 2017. They include **Huang Qi**, a two-time RSF Press Freedom laureate who was <u>sentenced to 12 years in prison in July despite serious health problems.</u> The founder of the *64 Tianwang* human rights website, Huang suffers from heart and liver problems attributable to the years he has spent in prisons and labour camps, and the beatings and injuries he has sustained in detention. Given the state of his health, this punishment is tantamount to a death sentence.



Narges Mohammadi

The plight of the well-known Azerbaijani investigative journalist **Afgan Mukhtarly** is equally alarming. Although diabetic and suffering from high blood pressure, he staged a hunger strike in September in protest against the arbitrary treatment that he and his lawyer are receiving in prison. He was unable to maintain the hunger strike for very long because of his poor health but he is still being denied normal access to health care.

The lack of medical treatment is a constant issue in Iran's prisons, as recently highlighted by the case of journalist and human rights defender Narges Mohammadi. Against the advice of her doctors, she was returned to her prison cell immediately after undergoing a hysterectomy in May 2019 because both the judicial and prison authorities refused to let her stay in the hospital. A week after the operation her husband discovered that she was being denied antibiotics and other drugs and a medical examination confirmed that she had an infection that was spreading in her blood.



Amadou Vamoulké

<u>Erick Kabendera</u>, an investigative reporter detained in Tanzania since 29 July, is suffering from respiratory problems and signs of paralysis in his legs that prevent him from walking normally. Several of his relatives have said they believe that the decline in his health is linked to his imprisonment.

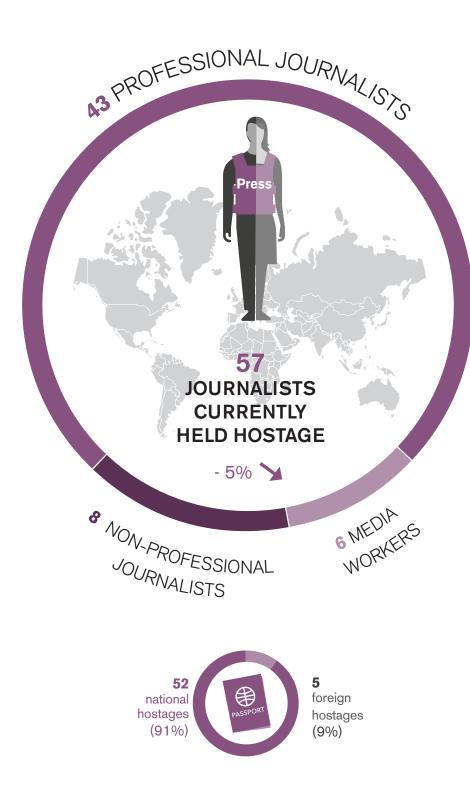
On the other side of the African continent, the Cameroonian authorities have so far ignored two medical reports saying former national radio and TV chief **Amadou Vamoulké**, 69, who has been held for more than three years on unsubstantiated charges of misusing state funds, needs to be medevacked abroad to receive treatment for his neuropathy that is not available in Cameroon. One of the reports, written by a neurologist at the American Hospital of Paris, recommends "hospitalization in France" for an "unfavourable clinical condition in both limbs that is acute and progressive."

The opposite is happening in Vietnam, where unnecessary forced treatment could be slowly killing **Le Anh Hung**, an outspoken journalist held since July 2018. For refusing to cooperate and for staging a hunger strike in protest against his prolonged provisional detention, the authorities transferred him to a psychiatric hospital in April 2019 where he has been force-fed through a tube inserted up his nose, causing him to bleed from the nose and mouth, and he has been heavily dosed with strong neuroleptics. His mother sounded the alarm but without success. She learned in early November that the injections and drug doses have been doubled, plunging him ever deeper into a dangerous and potentially deadly chemical prison.



JOURNALISTS HELD HOSTAGE

5.1 The figures

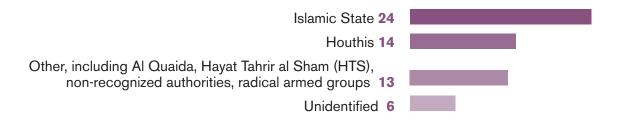




High risk countries



The biggest hostage takers



Worldwide, at least 57 journalists are currently held hostage, virtually the same number as last year. The figure's stability is indicative of the lack of evolution on the ground. The hostages are still concentrated in the same four countries (Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Ukraine) and this year has seen no significant release despite the major changes in Syria, which are a source of concern for the fate of many of those held hostage there.

Hostages: RSF regards journalists as hostages when they are being held by non-state actors who threaten to kill or injure them or continue to hold them as means of pressure on a third party (a government, organization or group) with the aim of forcing the third party to take a particular action. Hostages may be taken for political reasons or for economic reasons (for ransom) or both.



5.2 Hostages who are given heavy sentences

Islamic State and the various other radical armed groups mainly use their hostages as bargaining chips or for propaganda purposes. But the Houthi militias in Yemen and the unrecognized separatist authorities in eastern Ukraine also treat their hostages as prisoners guilty of crimes for which they must be severely punished.

Ten Yemeni journalists held by the Houthis since 2015 are facing the possibility of "death sentences." After being detained for more than three years in appalling conditions and forced to make confessions, they learned that, as former employees of media regarded as supportive of the Islah party, a Houthi special criminal court has accused them of "collaborating with the enemy," a charge punishable by death. A sham trial was planned for March but in the end did not take place. The ten journalists nonetheless continue to be held in unknown locations in the capital, Sanaa, which is still under Houthi rebel control.



Stanislav Asseïev

Stanislav Aseyev, a journalist better known by the pen-name of Stanislav Vasin, was given a 15-year prison sentence in August by the pro-Russian separatist "authorities" in eastern Ukraine's self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic (DNR)," where he has been held since June 2017. After the separatists seized control of Donetsk in the spring of 2014, he was one of the few independent reporters to continue working in the city, covering daily life there for Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty and several Ukrainian newspapers. No outsider has been able to visit Aseyev and no observer attended his sham trial, which ended with him being convicted of espionage, organizing an "extremist community" and inciting "violation of the territory's integrity." The only hope for Aseyev, one voiced by colleagues and friends, is that he could be released soon in a prisoner swap between the DNR and the Ukrainian government.

JOURNALISTS HELD HOSTAGE

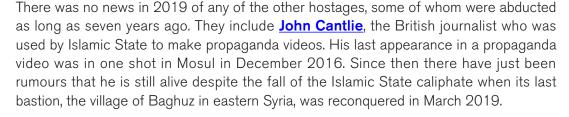
5.3 No end to hostage ordeals in Syria

Syria continues to have the most hostages, with 30 journalists still believed to be held by their abductors, albeit without any recent confirmation in most cases. Only one has been released in the past year and he had been held for only a few weeks. It was **Fateh Aslan**, who was abducted in late August in the Idlib region by the Jihadi group Hayat Tahrir Al Sham (HTS) and was released six weeks later in return for a promise to never again work for the media outlet, the *Step Feed News* website, regarded by HTS as "opposed to the revolution."



Shiraaz Mohamed

For the other hostages, the ordeal has continued and their fate is extremely uncertain. Only the abductors of **Shiraaz Mohamed**, a South African photographer abducted near the Turkish border in January 2017, provided proof that he is still alive. They did this twice in 2019. In a video in April, he repeated his abductors' request for a ransom. In a second video in August, in which he was clean shaven and wearing the kind of orange jump suit issued to Islamic State prisoners, he appealed to the international community to intercede on his behalf and asked Gift of the Givers, the South African NGO for which he was working when he came to Syria, to do everything possible to obtain his release.





John Cantlie

There was also no further news of Mauritanian reporter **Ishak Moctar** and Lebanese cameraman **Samir Kassab**, who were reportedly last seen alive in Raqqa province three years after their abduction by Islamic State members in October 2013, while working for *Sky News Arabia*. In April, <u>Kassab's fiancée denied having been told that he had died</u>, explaining that a Lebanese foreign ministry official had told her that, in the absence of any evidence, "the probability that he is still alive is equal to the probability that he has been killed."



Austin Tice

Austin Tice, a US journalist reporting for the Washington Post, McClatchy News and others, has been missing ever since his detention at a checkpoint near Damascus in August 2012. The FBI's offer in April 2018 of a one million dollar reward has helped generate valuable information regarding Austin's circumstances, and his family continues to press for his safe return. On 11 August 2019, his 38th birthday, his parents, Debra and Marc Tice, announced the launch of a new campaign, "Ask About Austin," urging US citizens to ask their representatives in Congress to express support for Austin's release. As a result, a bipartisan group of 52 US Senators and 121 US Representatives signed a letter to President Trump requesting he use every diplomatic means to secure Austin's safe return.



MISSING JOURNALISTS

No journalist has been newly reported missing during 2019.

RSF regards journalists as missing when there is not enough evidence of their death or abduction and no credible claim of responsibility for their death or abduction has been made.



ACTION TAKEN BY RSF

This year has been marked by the release of emblematic journalists for whom RSF's staff had campaigned intensively. They included the Egyptian photojournalist known as **Shawkan** in March, *Reuters* reporters **Kyaw Soe Oo** and **Wa Lone** in Myanmar in May, and the Mauritanian blogger **Mohamed Cheikh Ould Mohamed Mkhaïtir** in July.

RSF's <u>#MyPicForShawkan campaign</u> received massive support on online social networks from photographers and reporters throughout the world. <u>RSF wrote to the head of Myanmar's government</u>, Aung San Suu Kyi, taking her to task about the two Reuters journalists and launched <u>a petition</u> for their release to heighten public awareness of their case. Mohamed Mkhaïtir' release was the fruit of constant <u>international campaigning</u> for nearly six years, to which RSF contributed along with other NGOs and his lawyers.

In an effort to obtain the release of the at least 30 detained Saudi journalists, secretary-general Christophe Deloire led an RSF delegation on an <u>unprecedented visit to Saudi Arabia</u> in April and held direct talks with government officials about ending their <u>arbitrary detention</u>. At the same time, RSF maintained pressure on the Saudi regime. To mark the first anniversary of Saudi journalist **Jamal Khashoggi**'s murder in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul on 2 October 2018, RSF staged protests in Pars, Berlin, Madrid and Washington. In a reminder of the gruesome methods used to dispose of Khashoggi's body, <u>dozens of dismembered shop window models</u> were left outside the Saudi consulate in Paris.

RSF's commitment often played a decisive role in 2019, whether in getting journalists out of prison or out of war zones. After months of negotiations and lobbying of several European governments, RSF – in coordination with its partner organization, the Syrian Centre for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM), and the Committee to Protect Journalists – managed to evacuate 30 journalists from the Deraa region in southern Syria, where they were in great danger from the Assad regime's advancing forces.

In addition to its constant provision of assistance to journalists, media outlets and local NGOs in terms of protection, legal aid and capacity building, RSF also seeks justice for murdered journalists. In Malta, two years after **Daphne Caruana Galizia**'s murder, RSF renewed its calls for justice and stressed the need for concrete action to address the decline in the press freedom climate in this island state. In Mexico, where the rate of impunity for crimes of violence against journalists exceeds 90%, RSF referred cases of impunity for murders and disappearances of journalists from 2006 to 2016 to the International Criminal Court.

RSF also launched a new campaign in Afghanistan in 2019 with the aim of getting the participants in peace talks to commit to guaranteeing press freedom as an <u>essential mechanism for achieving a "just and lasting peace."</u> At the same time, the RSF-led <u>#ProtectJournalists</u> campaign for the appointment of a special representative of the UN Secretary-General to act as a "journalists' protector" continues to win support all over the world.





