

Dear partners,

Happy World Mental Health Day! Today, on this important occasion, we are excited to share with you our latest newsletter focused on safety and security for journalists.

In this first edition, you'll get a snippet of our series dedicated to physical safety, digital security and psychological wellbeing of media workers, which will be delivered monthly to our subscribers in the journalistic community and among organizations working in media development. And we are pleased to introduce our Helpline, exclusively for media professionals seeking free psychological support.

However, should you wish to stop receiving it, you can always hit the unsubscribe button at the end of the newsletter.

We hope you will enjoy it!

More than half of journalists surveyed in a **study** published this year said they had considered quitting because of burnout. While the causes are many, this election year has added to the stress and workload. The same study also says that on a stress scale of 1 to 10, most would rank 7. The pressure is even greater for journalists who work in complicated environments, write about complex social issues, or even face personal safety risks.

But **where do we draw the line?** In this monthly newsletter delivered to your inbox, we'll talk about the challenges of physical and digital security, as well as the mental health of journalists. We know that a line must and can be drawn, and that can help us do our jobs, but with care for our own safety and well-being.



"Because of anonymity or lack of consequences, people think they can write anything in the comments."

When she decided to become a journalist, it never occurred to her that journalism could be dangerous for her. **Anghelina Chirciu** has been a journalist for more than five years and spent the first years of her career in the newsroom of the independent portal Nokta in TAU Gagauzia, which often earned her slanting looks or critical comments, even from people she knew. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine introduced her to professional burnout for the first time, and she feels she has been navigating journalism against a backdrop of uncertainty ever since. "People have become more aggressive in their comments. Probably because of the anonymity or the lack of consequences, they think they can write anything, including death threats." But she says she's braver now because she's learned to take care of her own mental health and safety, even though her work is in the even more complicated Transnistrian region.

The Security Zone, the portal for which she does research and fact-checking, has clear security guidelines with response scenarios for different situations, as well as a list of emergency contacts: "When I joined, they talked to me about these issues so I could make an informed decision. We are constantly subjected to comment abuse by pro-Russian people. There is even a Telegram channel run by people close to the so-called Transnistrian special services who comment on our every post, often attacking us personally."

Every journalist should learn to help themselves in difficult situations, she says. This is why she decided to take part in a practical **training** on psychological and physical security organized by the Association of Independent Press and DW Akademie this summer. She was particularly interested in digital security. "It seems to me that this is a very fast-moving area, and I can't keep up."

She advises her guildmates to make a few safety rules a daily habit. These include knowing all exits when entering a room and being mindful of their belongings, not using personal phones during protests or work trips, and regularly updating their devices. Equally important, journalists need psychological support, especially from the newsroom. "Feeling safe is a very individual feeling. Some people can continue to work under stress and anxiety, while others cannot. And that's okay. I think feelings of insecurity should be discussed in the newsroom. Your moral state comes first. The limit is where your psychological state starts to suffer," Anghelina Chirciu says.



Gavin Rees
Dart Center for
Journalism and Trauma

Four tips (and a bonus) for journalists' mental well-being

Gavin Rees, from Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, works with journalists on trauma awareness. At the API and DW Academy training, Gavin spoke to Moldovan journalists about psychological safety and found that they were particularly concerned about dealing with online harassment and the difficulty of doing journalism in a polarized society. Below is a brief guide to navigating these challenges.

Understand stress and how it works

It's important not to be surprised by your reactions, to know that it's normal to feel upset and that it takes time to calm down. If journalists are not good at monitoring their own well-being when working with trauma, all sorts of problems can arise, including situations in which their interviews may increase the distress of those they are interviewing. This can be very distressing for those being interviewed, but it also has implications for the mental health and well-being of the journalist. It is very important for journalists to have tools, resources and a clear understanding of what it is like to work in a threatening environment before they enter one.

Get support from peers and managers

The issue is not so much the amount of trauma, but how well people feel supported by the organization they work for. An isolated journalist who is attacked may have conflicting thoughts. Part of them may think the attack is unfounded, but the other part may begin to doubt their own work. At this point, it is crucial that a peer step in and reassure them that their article is good and that these people are just attacking them unfairly. We need each other's validation to protect and strengthen each other.

Know your limits

When you're faced with situations that are beyond you, you need to step back and learn the things you need to grow. At the same time, you need to be clear about your responsibilities. If you're interviewing vulnerable people, you need to be sure of what you can and can't do, so that you don't somehow promise help that you can't deliver.

Differentiate between types of network commenters

Some truly malicious actors want to hurt journalists. At the same time, there are people who have no malicious intent, but who do not know how to communicate, who are angry and frustrated, and who do not perceive journalists as human beings. If you're confronted by bad actors, don't get involved in conversations and don't talk back - protect yourself. But at the same time, don't see other members of the audience as enemies. As journalists, we should not judge the audience for their opinions. We may disagree with them, but we must be open to their humanity in order to better understand what is happening in society. Instead, we should not be open to the humanity of troll factories controlled by organized crime. We need to make a distinction.

Right to disconnect

Journalists need to feel that they have the right to take a break from negative material, and that they don't have to be constantly checking their phones or watching the news. We need to set boundaries, and if we decide to change them, we need to understand why we are doing it and discuss appropriate ethical solutions in the newsroom.



Useful tip!

Collect the positive messages you receive on the networks, print them out, and post them on the wall in front of your desk. Return to them when you are overwhelmed by negative comments.



Opportunity!

Newsrooms in Moldova can receive grants of up to €2,500 for team-building and legal support. Details are available [here](#).

If you'd like us to include one of your announcements or opportunities for journalists that fit into the topics of this newsletter, send us a message at info@api.md.



Get Help!

If you are experiencing ongoing stress and anxiety, you can request a free and confidential consultation with a psychologist [here](#). You will be connected with a specialist within 48 hours.

If you liked what you read, please recommend our newsletter to a colleague. Feedback helps us get better. Let us know what you think about the newsletter at api@api.md.