



**MEDIA
DEFENCE**

Journalist Impact Survey 2020

Key Findings

MARCH 2021



**If I didn't
have Media
Defence's
support...**

*“It would be more
difficult for me to
defend my rights.”*

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Background and Methodology

Background and Methodology

In 2020, we carried out our fourth annual Journalist Impact Survey to assess longer-term impact of our support on our primary beneficiaries, journalists. We have sent the survey to all journalists who received judgment in their case in 2020. The survey questions are designed to understand:

- How journalists rate the quality, efficiency and quantity of Media Defence's financial and legal support during their case;
- The impact of our support on case outcomes and journalist's ability to continue reporting; and
- The wider impact of our support on press freedom laws and environments in active countries and to test our theory of change.

Background and Methodology

Questions were consistent with those asked in previous years to allow for analysis of trends. However, we found that due to the ongoing pandemic the context in which we are currently operating is vastly different from previous years which impacted the extent to which we could make comparisons.

We changed the way in which we obtain responses from journalists we have supported which successfully increased the response rate from 32% in 2019 to 54% in 2020. The higher response rate can also be attributed to court closures and delays to proceedings resulting in a 44% decrease in judgments we received in the year.

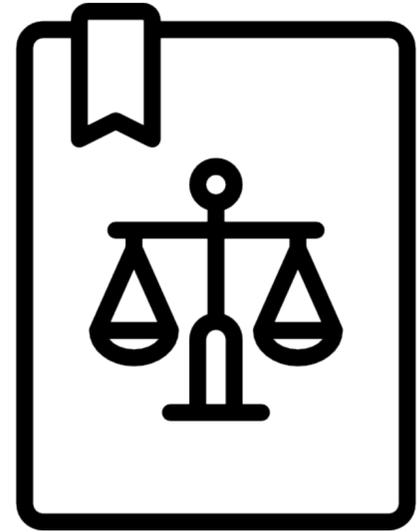
If we didn't have Media Defence's support...

“We would need to cover the legal fees from the money people donate to us. It means less money to do journalism and produce good investigations.”

The Headline Statistics

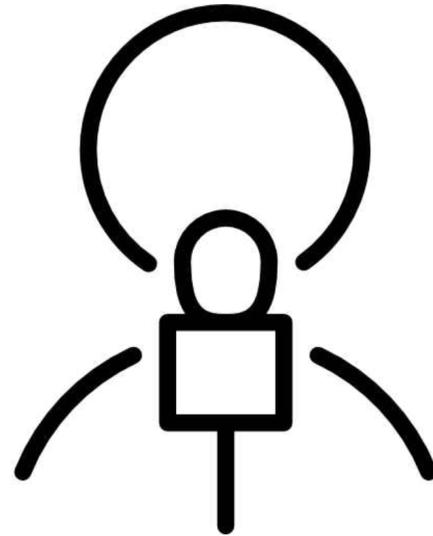
2020

Headline Statistics



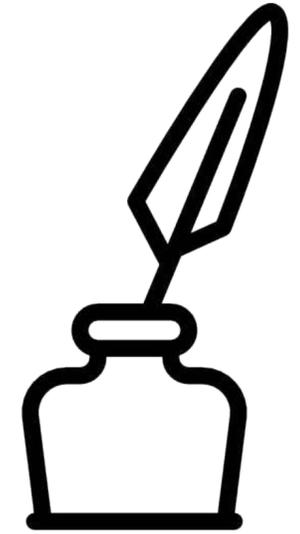
43

**Media Defence cases
closed in 2020**



39

**Journalists
contacted (including
ten partner
organisations)***



21

**Journalists
responded to the
English language
survey**

*** We were unable to contact journalists for whom we did not have contact details or who were in detention. We also excluded third party interventions in which we represented ourselves.**

2020

Headline

Statistics

95%

of respondents were satisfied with the outcome of their case

95%

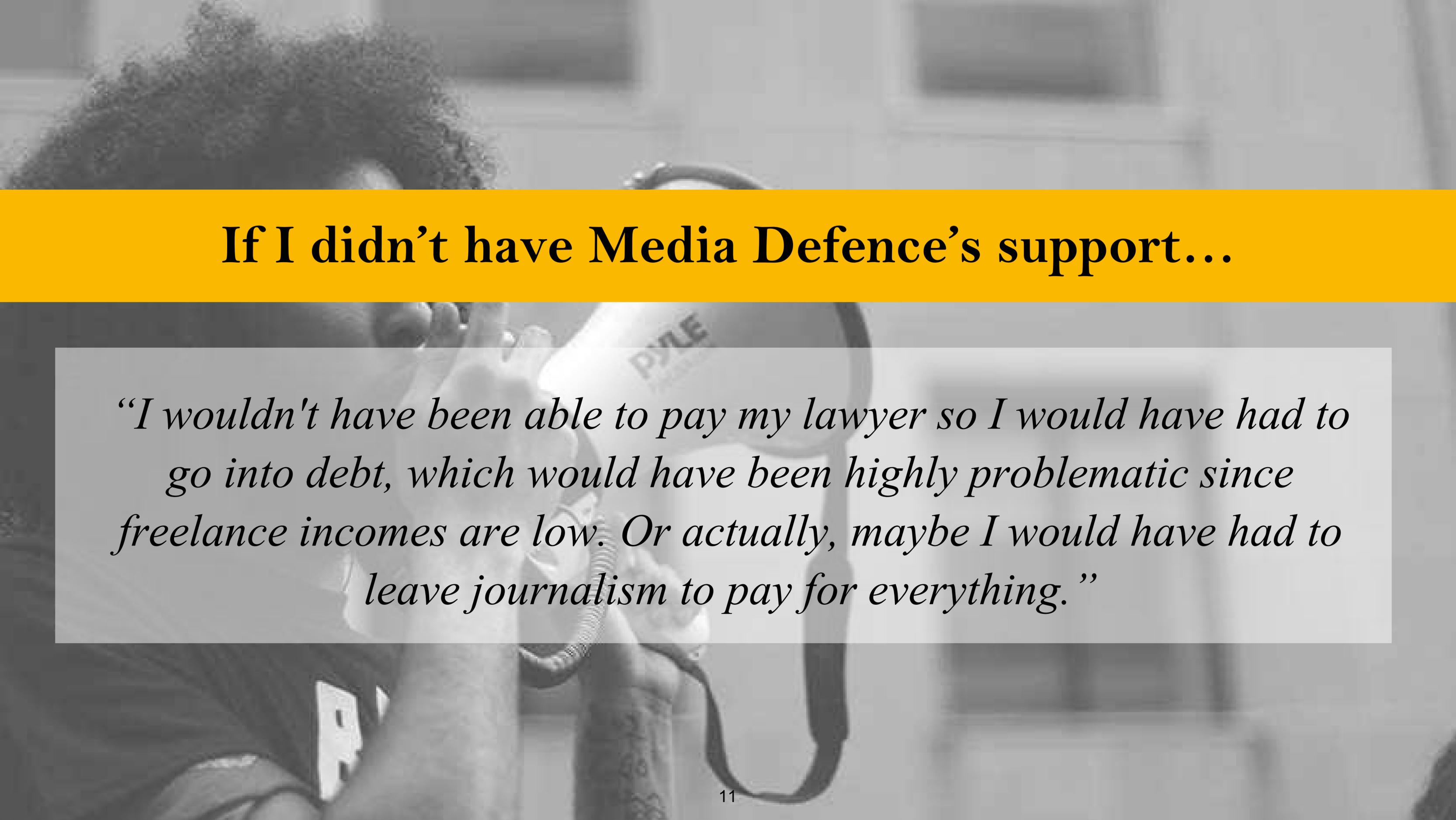
of respondents would recommend our support to other journalists facing legal action

90%

of respondents were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the lawyer who handled their case

90%

of respondents have continued to report on public interest issues

A black and white photograph of a person holding a microphone. The microphone has the word 'DYZLE' written on it. The person's face is partially visible on the left side of the frame. The background is out of focus, showing what appears to be a wall with some electrical outlets.

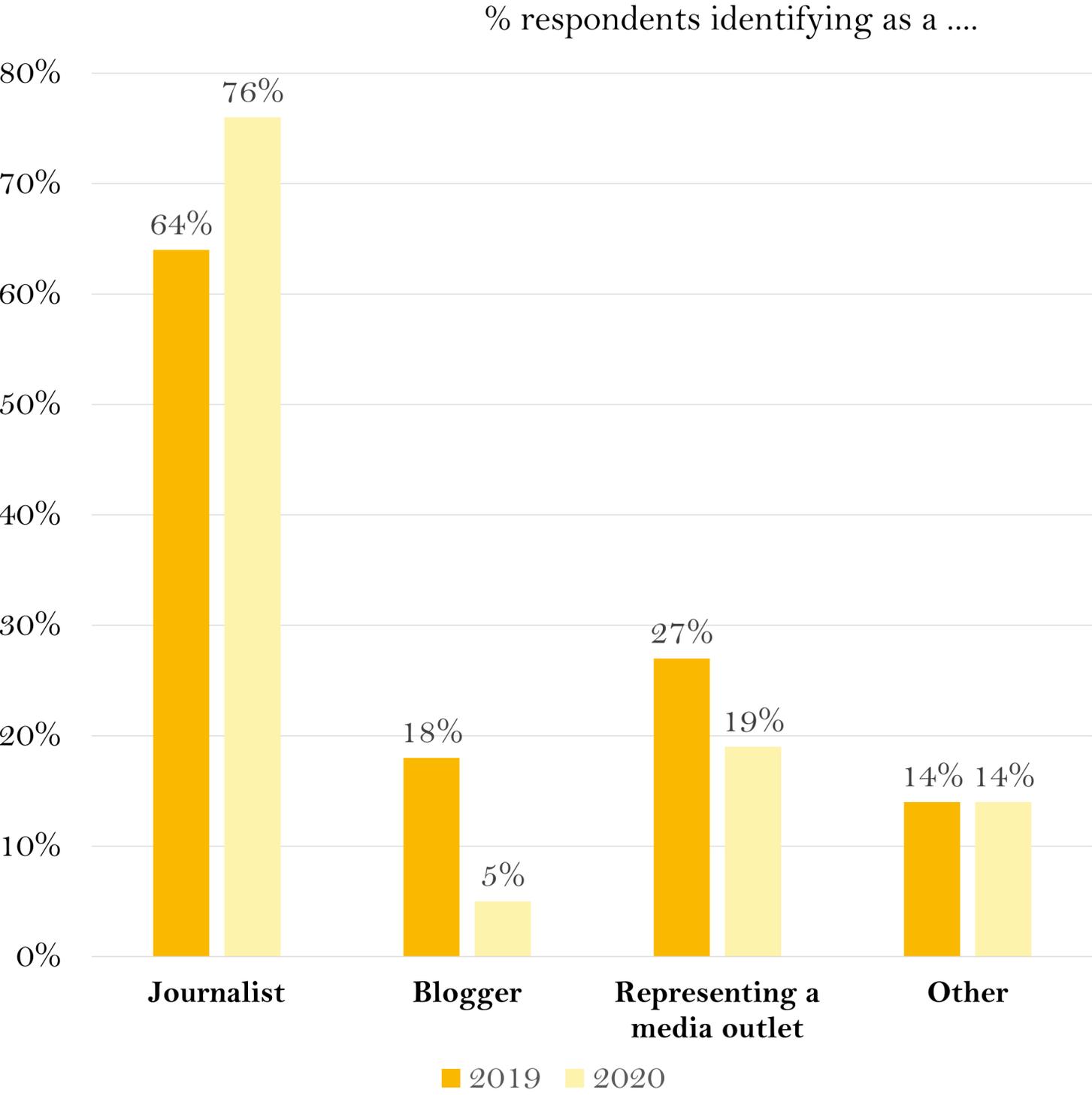
If I didn't have Media Defence's support...

“I wouldn't have been able to pay my lawyer so I would have had to go into debt, which would have been highly problematic since freelance incomes are low. Or actually, maybe I would have had to leave journalism to pay for everything.”



The Respondent Profiles

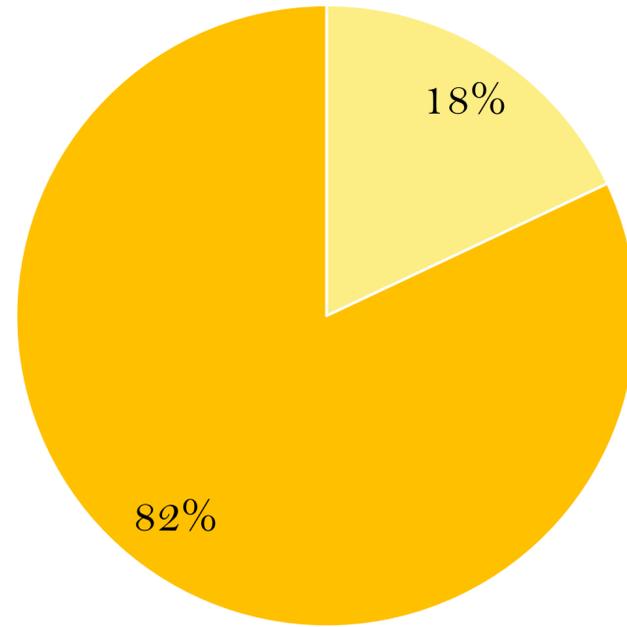
Occupation



Gender

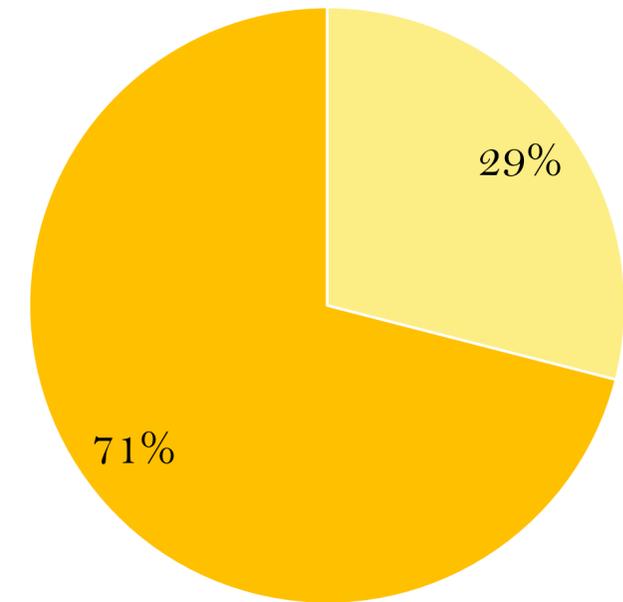
Since 2019, there has been a 61% increase in female survey respondents.

2019



■ Female ■ Male

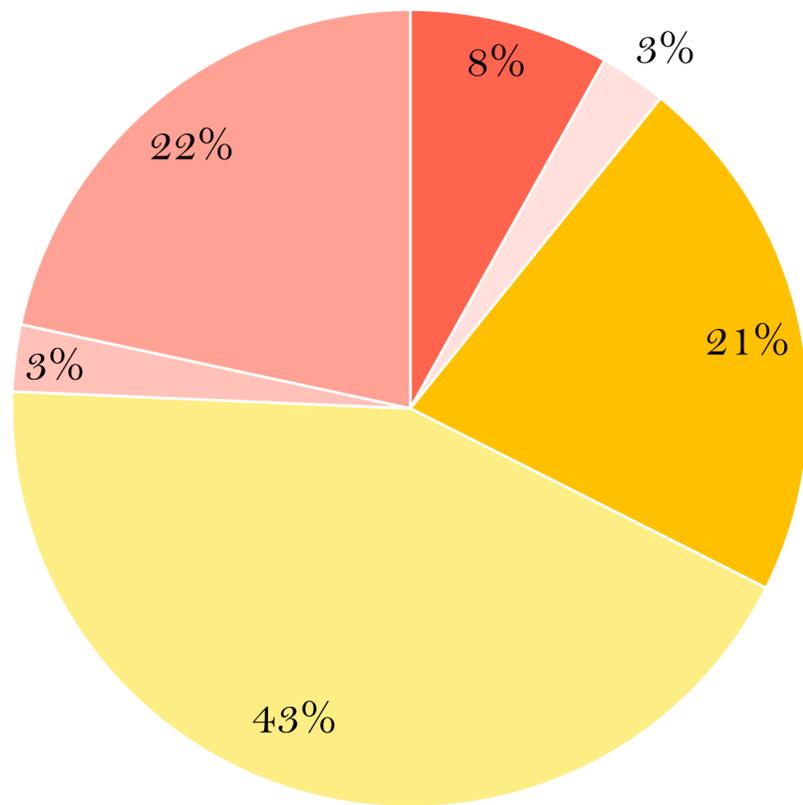
2020



■ Female ■ Male

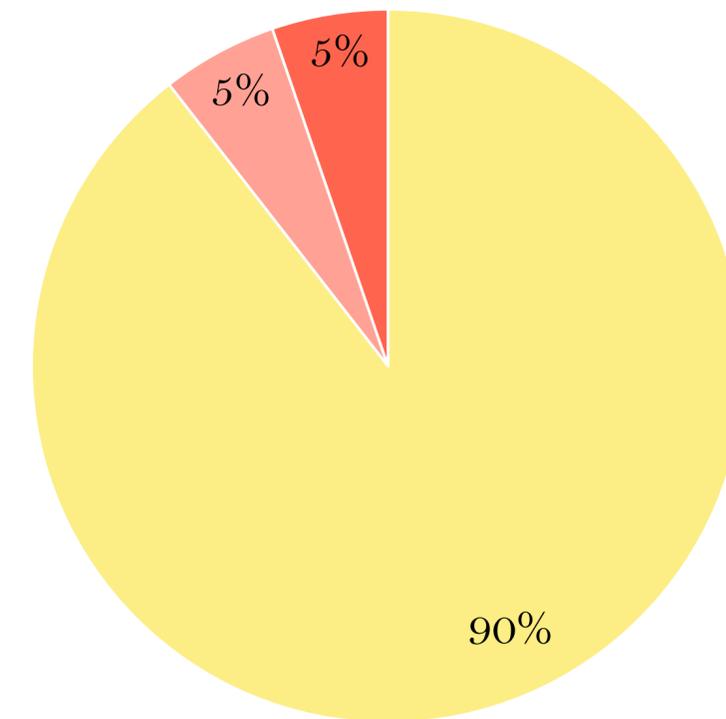
Region

Cases closed 2020 by region



- Americas
- Europe
- Asia-Pacific
- MENA
- Central Asia and Russia
- Sub-Saharan Africa

Respondents by region



- Europe
- Asia Pacific
- Americas



PRESS

**If I didn't
have Media
Defence's
support....**

“It would be harder to make a decision about the lawsuit. With the Media Defence support, you get an understanding that this is important, especially when the organisation is reaching out to you out of its own initiative.”



The Cases

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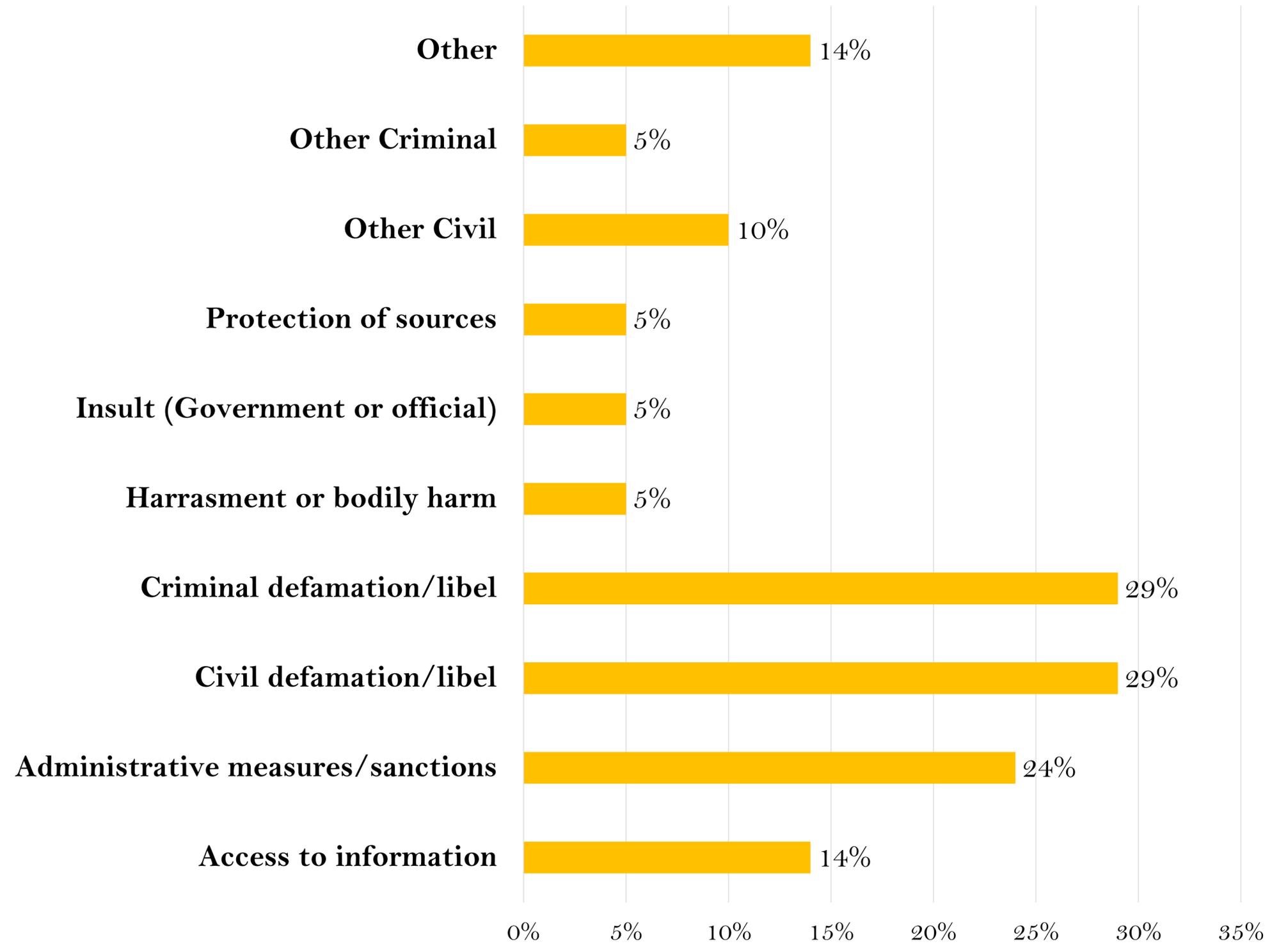
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Case Type

We asked survey respondents what type of case(s) they received support for. Similar to 2019, the most common type of cases was civil and criminal defamation, with 29% of respondents reporting that they received support for criminal defamation cases and a further 29% reporting that they received support for a case related to civil defamation.

Furthermore, 24% of cases concerned administrative measures/sanctions. This was not a common theme in previous years. We also saw a greater number of cases in domestic courts than in previous years. All cases that closed took place at domestic courts, whereas in 2019, only 68% of respondents' cases were at domestic courts. This could be due to delays in proceedings at regional courts due to the pandemic.

Case Type



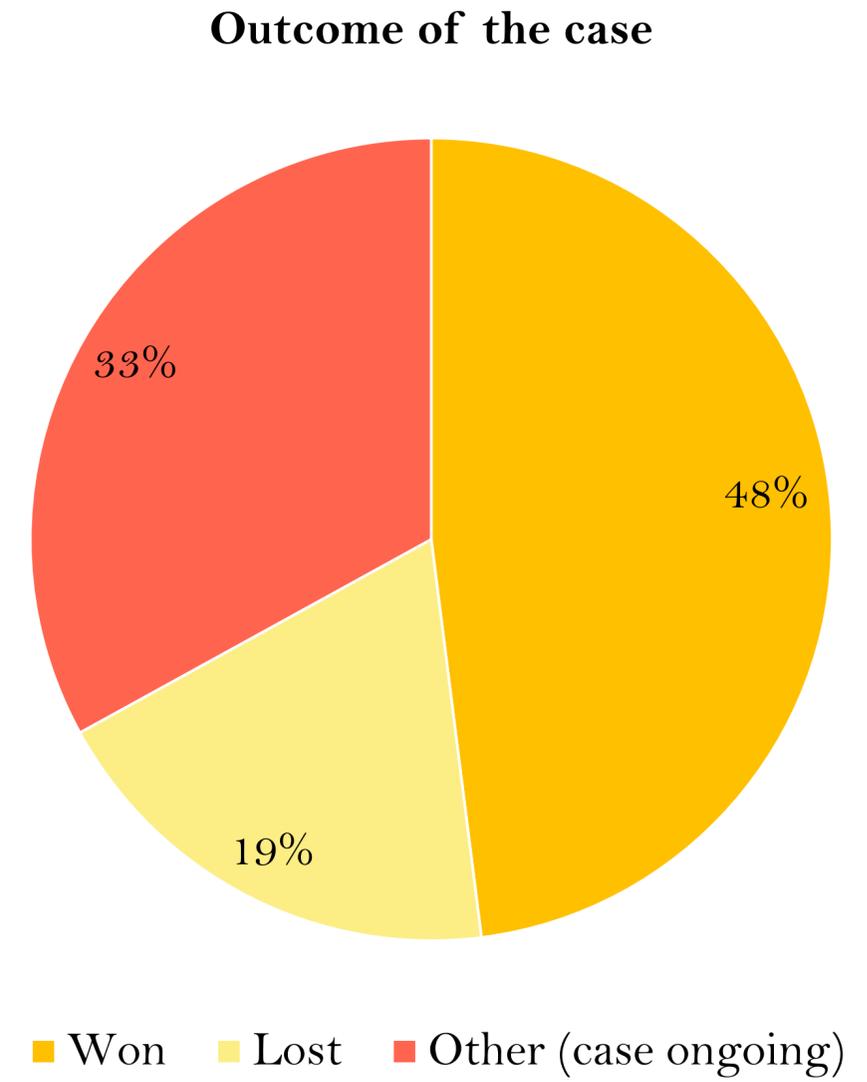
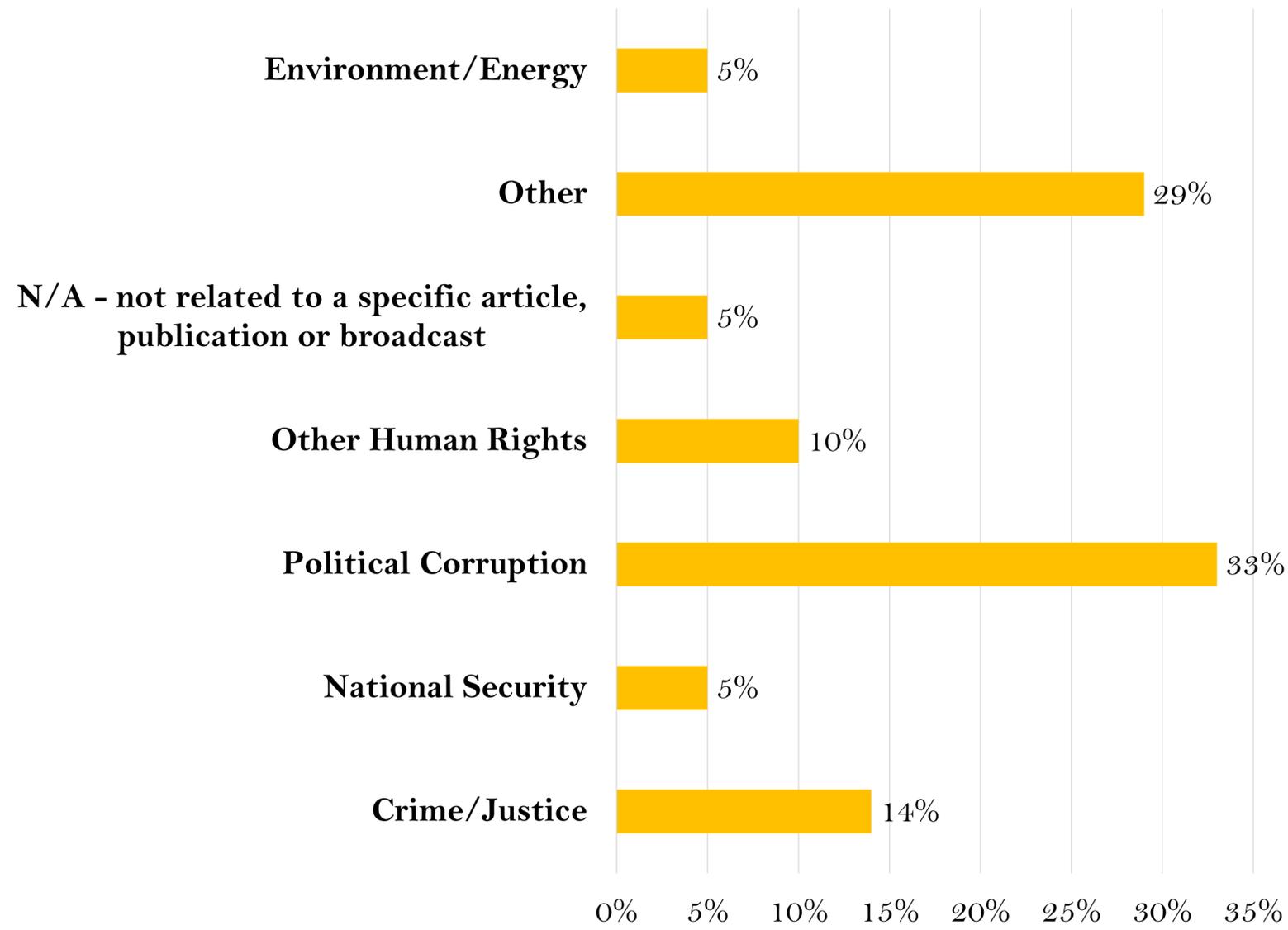
Journalistic Issues and Outcomes

In line with the trend from 2017, 2018 and 2019, coverage of political corruption most frequently leads to legal action (33%). None of the respondents' cases concerned business corruption or health/welfare. 29% of journalists selected 'Other', which included fact-checking, the rise of neo-fascist movements and access to information.

In 2020, the cases that closed had an average success rate of 65%, which means that we fell short of our target of securing a 70%+ success rate. This year's lower success rate is partially on account of a larger number of cases closing in countries where we aimed to exhaust domestic remedies and as such expected to see an unsuccessful outcome.

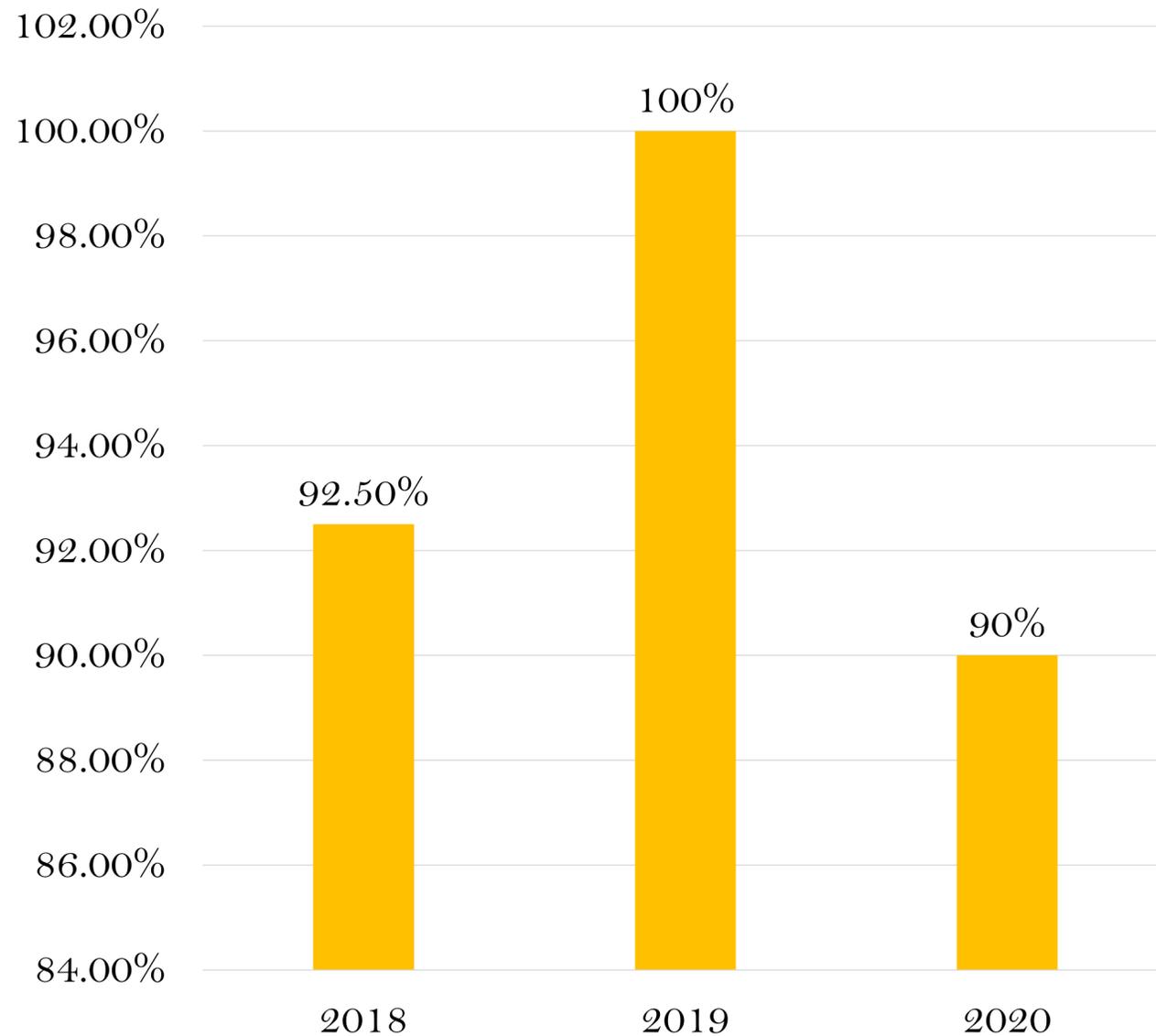
48% respondents said that their cases were successful, a further 19% said their case was unsuccessful, and 33% selected 'Other'. From the 33% who selected 'Other' none elaborated further on why they made this selection. As in previous years, many of the respondents continue to face legal action.

Journalistic Issues and Outcomes

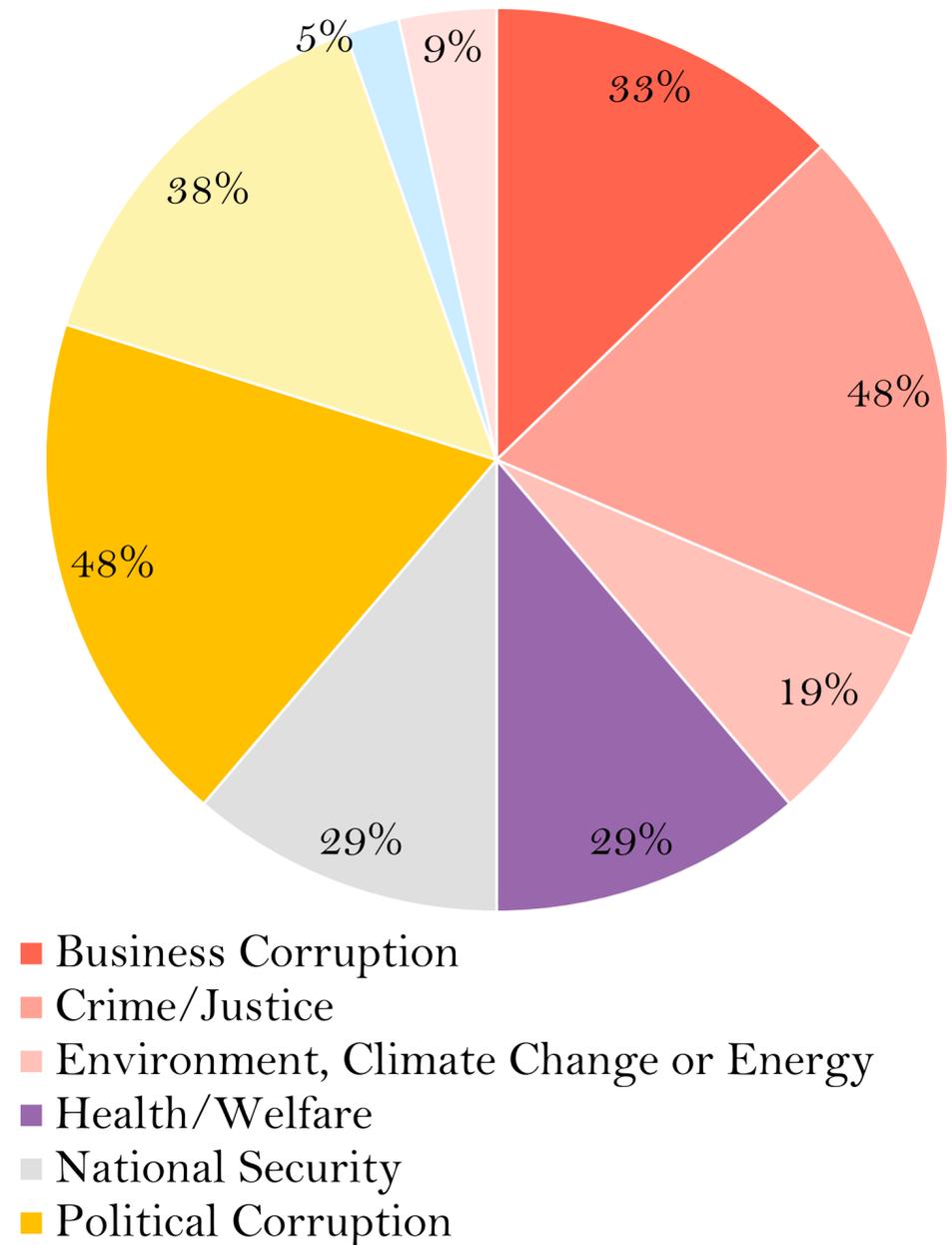


Ability to Continue Reporting

% of respondents reporting they are able to continue practising journalism after their case



Issues they report on



Change in Journalistic Practices

When asked “As a result of the legal action you faced, have you changed your journalistic practice in any way?”, 20 journalists responded as follows:

- 67% (14) of respondents said that they have not changed their journalistic practice in any way;
- 5% (1) made logistical changes to their work for safety (avoiding travelling or working alone);
- 5% (1) stopped reporting;
- 14% (3) felt more cautious about what and how they report on;
- 5% (1) said they now seek pre-publication advice more frequently; and
- 5% (1) did not answer the question.

“My journalism has only become more principled so it has changed for the better.”



Change in Journalistic Practices

We asked journalists “What has prevented you from practicing journalism?”

- One journalist reported that as a consequence of his journalism, he is now living in exile.
- Another wrote that legal costs slowed down the outlet’s print production and defamation cases against them led to a reduction in income from advertising.
- Lack of security, protection, continued legal support, financial support for maintenance of work teams, purchase of equipment as well as deteriorating health and general fear over reporting were also cited as issues.
- One journalist was physically harassed and became a victim of mobbing. This was followed by disciplinary action and subsequent dismissal from his job.



“I haven't changed a millimetre, I'm writing even more freely and I'm even more convinced that I shouldn't stop”.

Change in Journalistic Practices

- One journalist was moved by his employer to another department;
- Self censorship, as a result of editors and publishers being increasingly afraid of taking up topics that cause legal problems with the authorities or companies; and
- Self censorship due to pressure from government officials.

*“I became
even more
careful and
suspicious”.*



A stylized illustration of two hands, one larger and one smaller, holding each other. The hands are rendered in shades of gray with black outlines. The background consists of a circular pattern of overlapping, semi-transparent gray shapes, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall tone is somber and supportive.

The Support

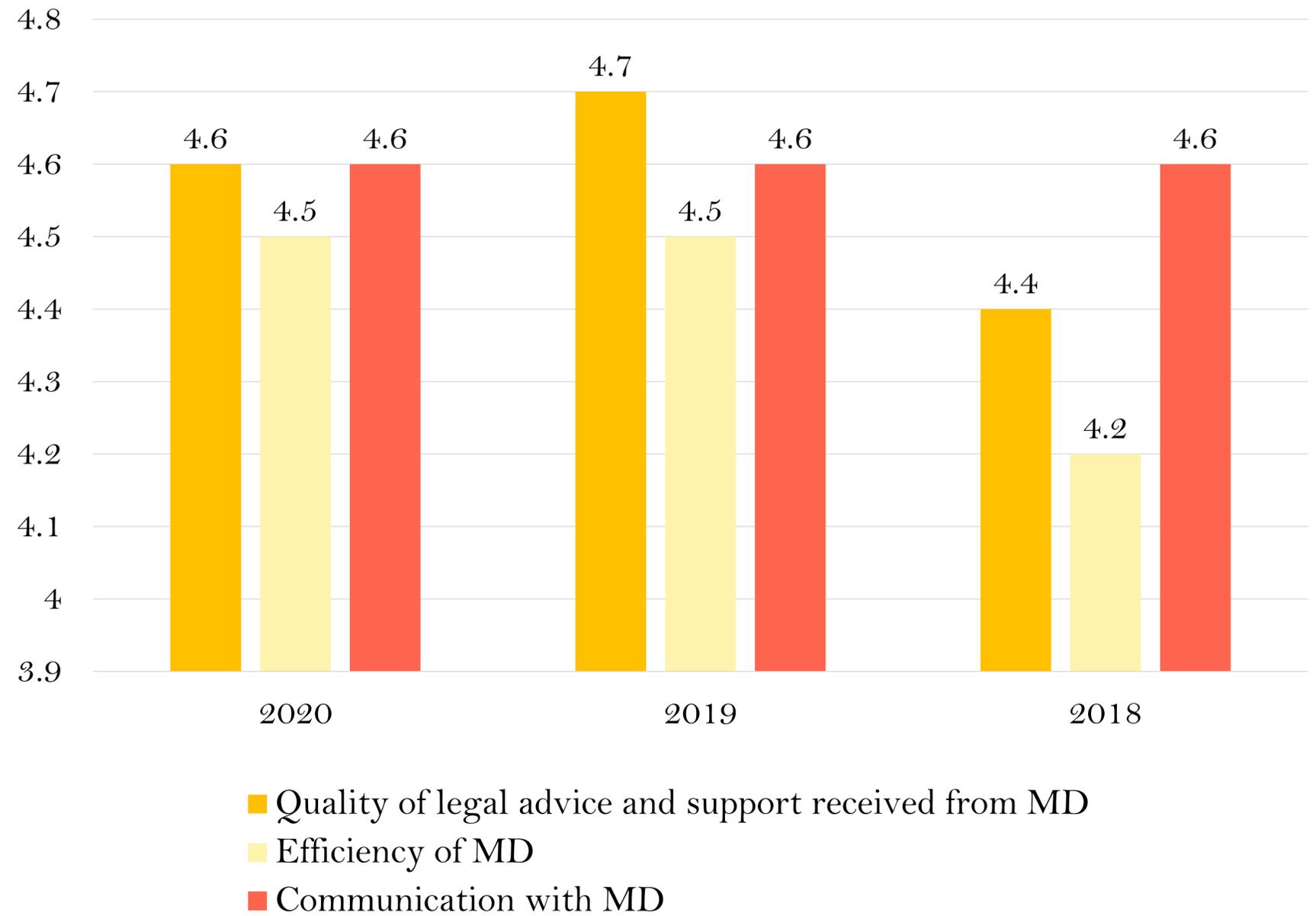
Quality and Efficiency

Respondents were asked to rank the quality and efficiency of Media Defence's support and communication on a scale of 1-5 (whereby 1 is the worst and 5 is the best).

The quality of our legal advice and support, our efficiency and communication with beneficiaries continue to be at a very high level. The responses don't vary much from 2019, despite the unexpected transition to remote working in 2020 and increase in our workload.

Quality and Efficiency

Quality and efficiency of Media Defence's support and communication



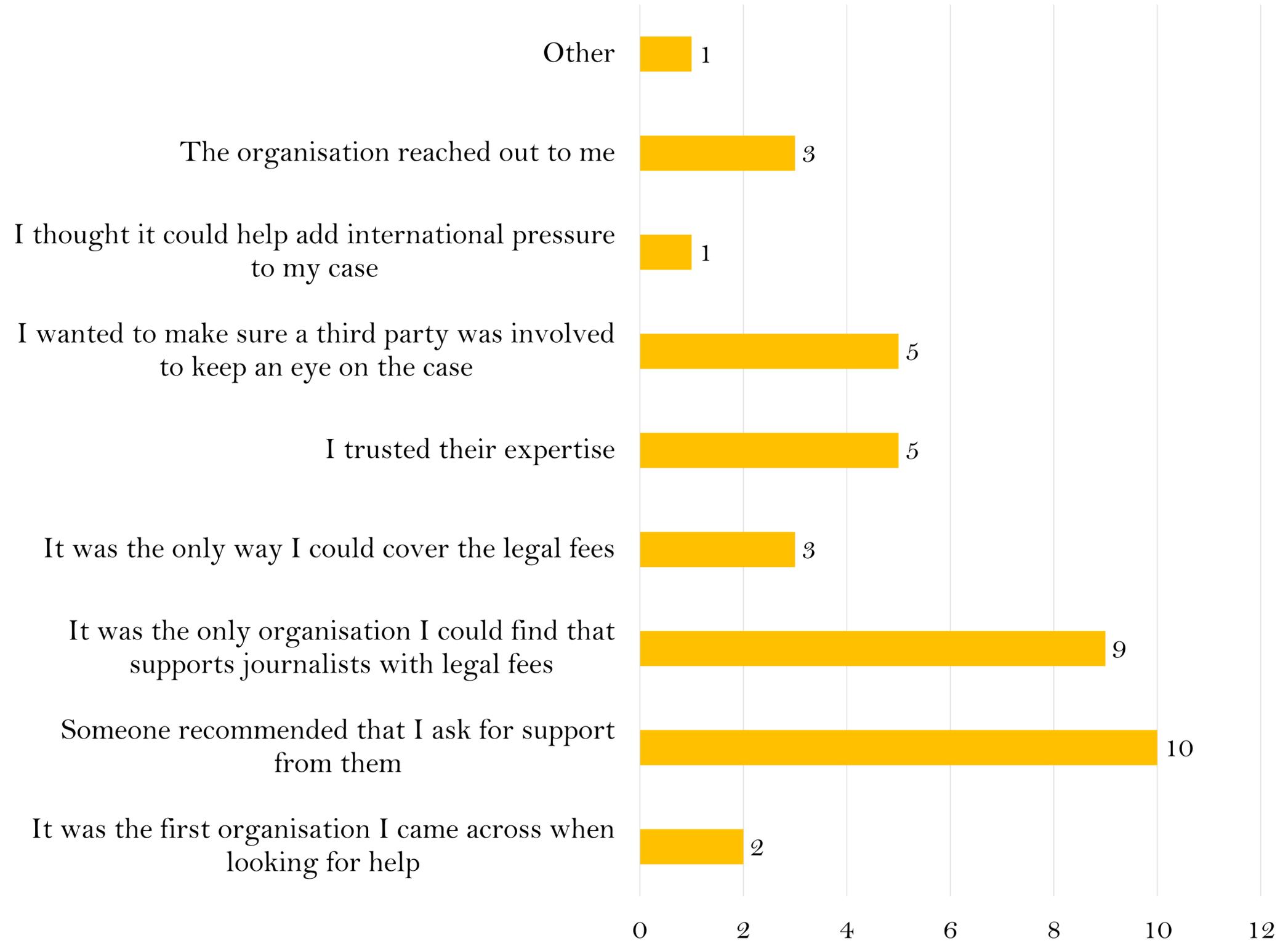
Why Respondents Approached Us

When asked “Why did you choose to approach the organisation for support with your case?” the majority of the 21 respondents said they had approached Media Defence because someone recommended us to them.

Nine respondents said that they approached Media Defence because it was the only organisation they could find that supports journalists with legal fees. To date, we are the only organisation around the world that is solely focused on providing legal help to journalists, combining grants with pro bono legal support.

Three respondents requested support to their case because we reached out to them.

Why Respondents Approached Us



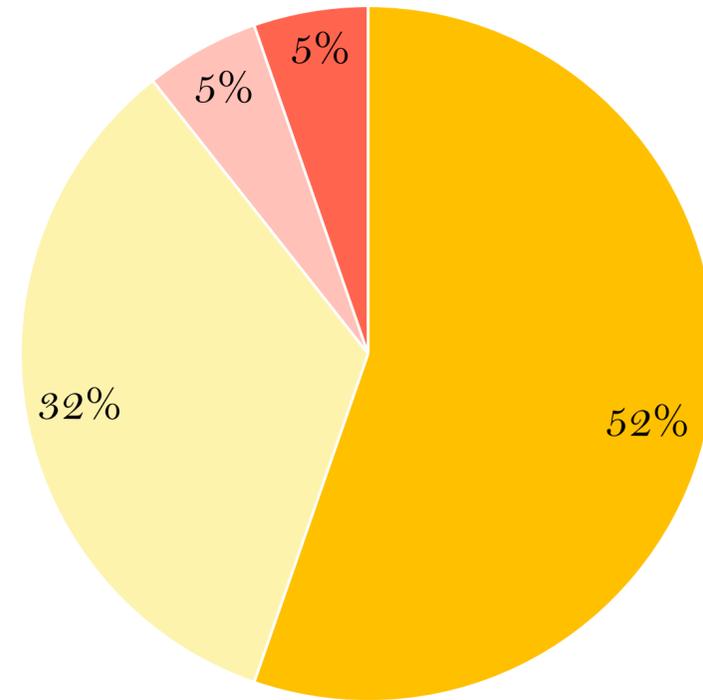
How We Can Improve

Respondents were asked to rank the quality and efficiency of Media Defence's support and communication on a scale of 1-5 (whereby 1 is the worst and 5 is the best). 76% of respondents ranked the quality of legal advice and support received from Media Defence as 5.

However, we always strive to improve the support we provide and are keen to hear our beneficiaries' thoughts on this. Suggestions for improvement included:

- Improving communication between Media Defence and grantees;
- Expanding our outreach;
- Creating a public database of cases we work on which would have a psychological impact for those who need help for the first time;
- Ensuring application forms and subsequent processes are available in various languages; and
- Expanding the legal support we provide by providing legal consultation, assistance and representation in legal cases before the court.

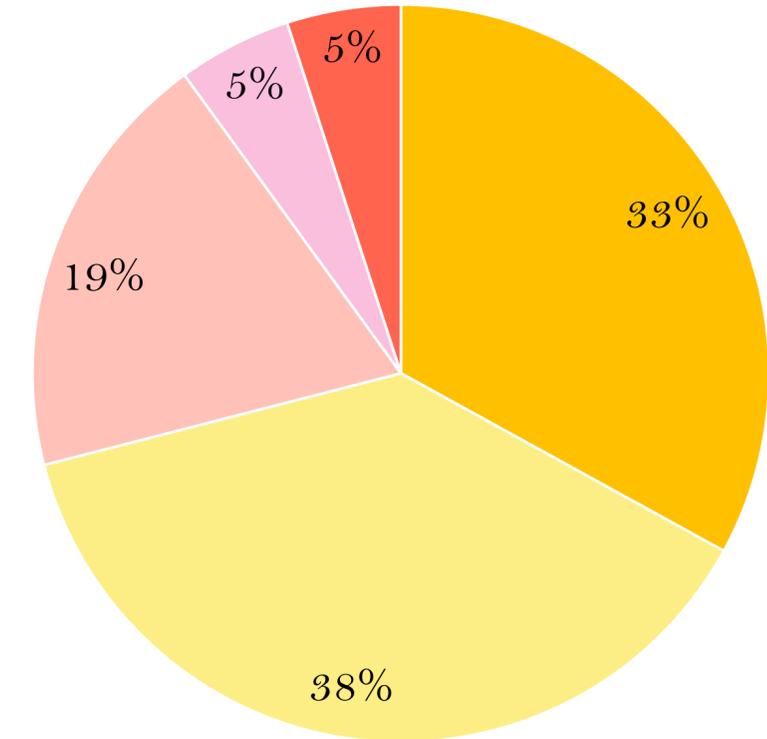
How satisfied were you with the lawyer that defended you/handled your case?



■ Extremely satisfied ■ Satisfied
■ Unsatisfied ■ N/A or unsure

2018 (Extremely satisfied or satisfied)	2019 (Extremely satisfied or satisfied)
100%	82%

How satisfied were you with the outcome of your case?



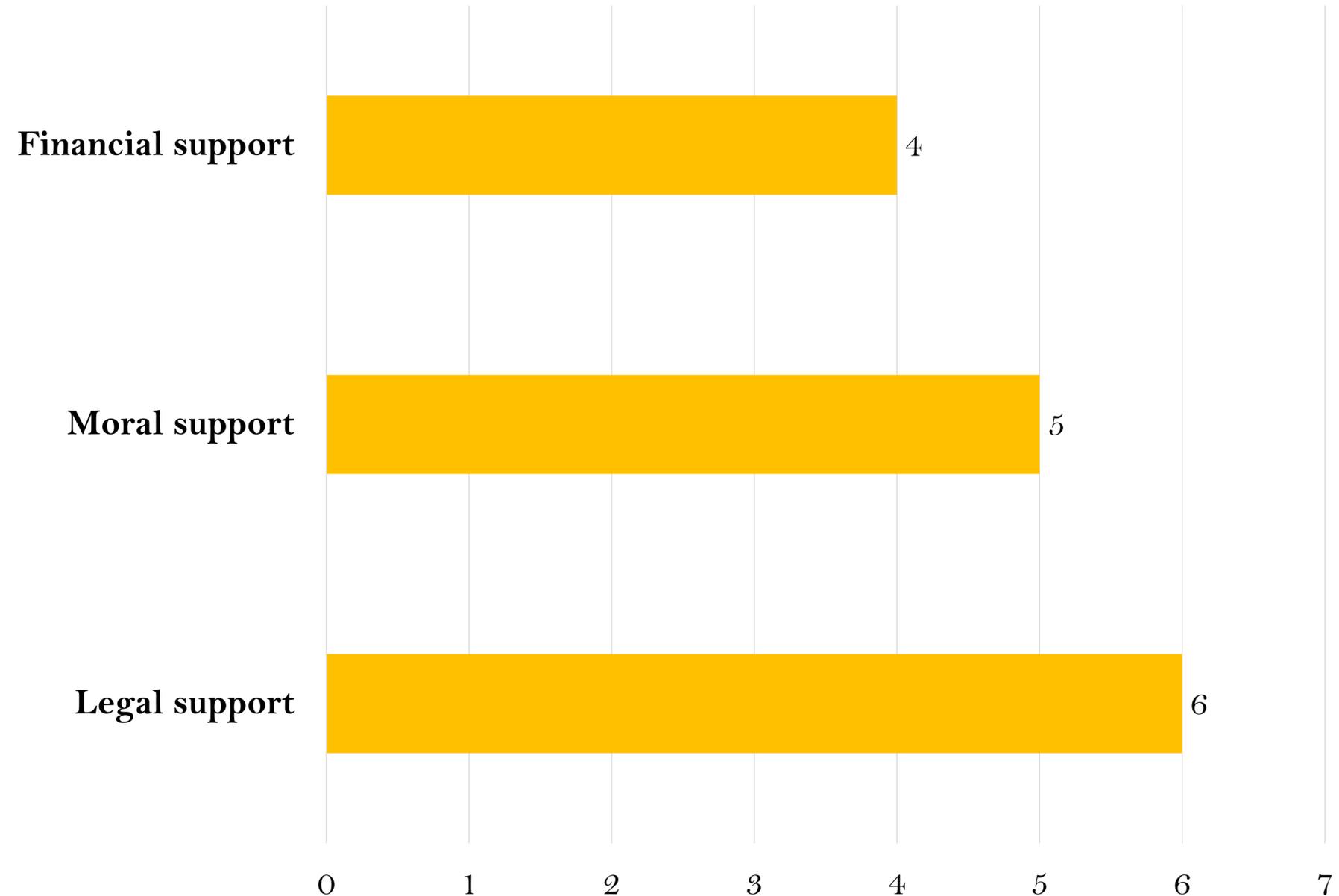
■ Extremely satisfied ■ Satisfied
■ Unsatisfied ■ Extremely unsatisfied
■ N/A or unsure

2018 (Extremely satisfied or satisfied)	2019 (Extremely satisfied or satisfied)
100%	50%

Most Valuable Support

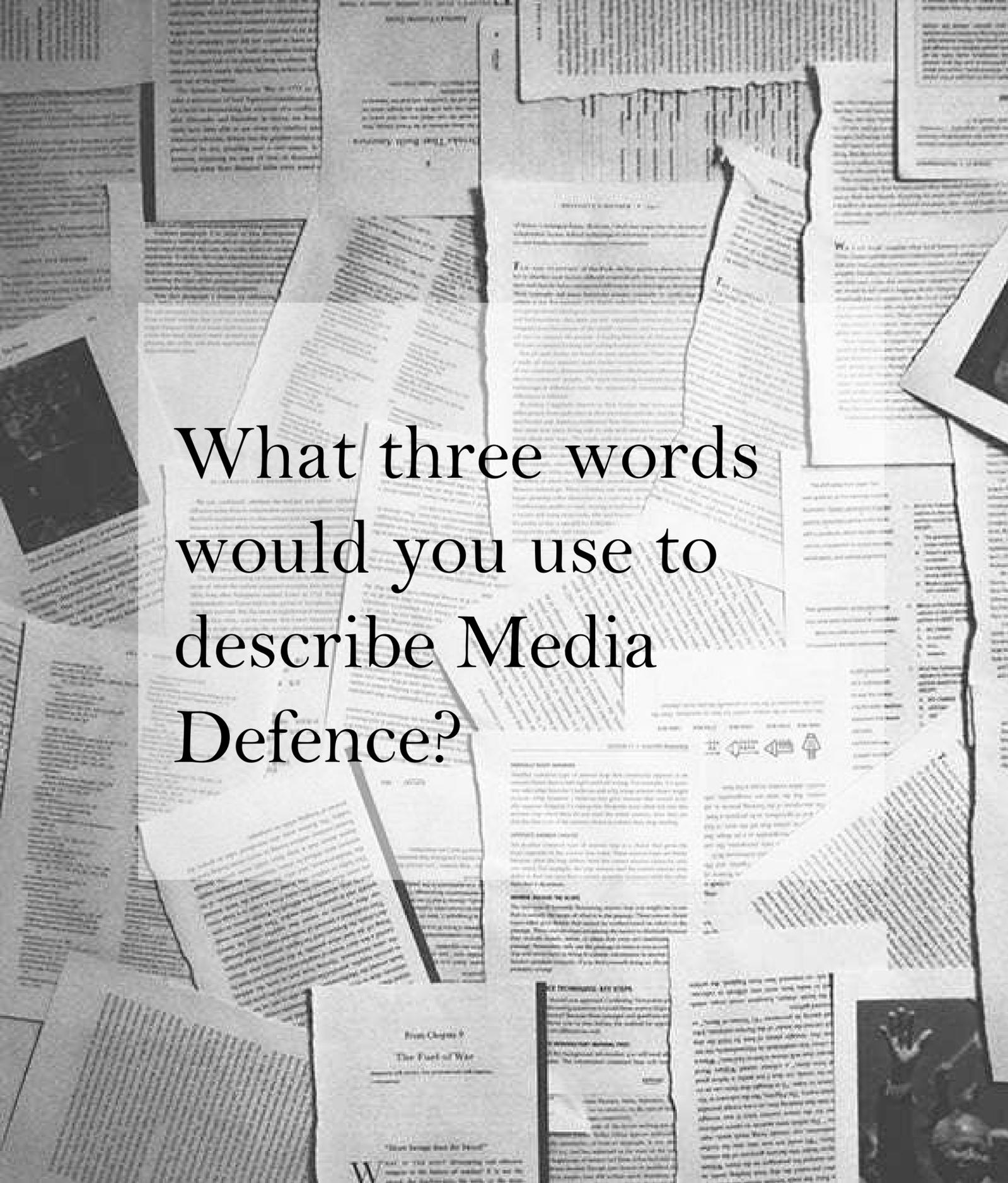
Respondents were asked: “Thinking about the different individuals or organisations that supported your case, which was the most valuable form of support for you?” and were given a free text box. Their responses have been coded).

Five respondents said that moral support listed amongst the most valuable form of support they received; this is an increase from previous years where financial and legal support were listed as the most important.



If we didn't have Media Defence's support...

“We would certainly have been convicted or could have been forced to pay indemnities without financial means.”



What three words
would you use to
describe Media
Defence?

“Life saver, professional, expertise”

“Safe, efficient & quality”

“Help in need”

“Serious, reliable and balanced”

“Rescue, hope & solidarity”

“Trust, understanding & courage”

“Professional, helpful & essential”

An aerial, top-down view of a dense urban city grid, showing numerous buildings and streets. A semi-transparent white rectangular box is centered over the image, containing the title text.

The Wider Context

Wider Impact of Cases

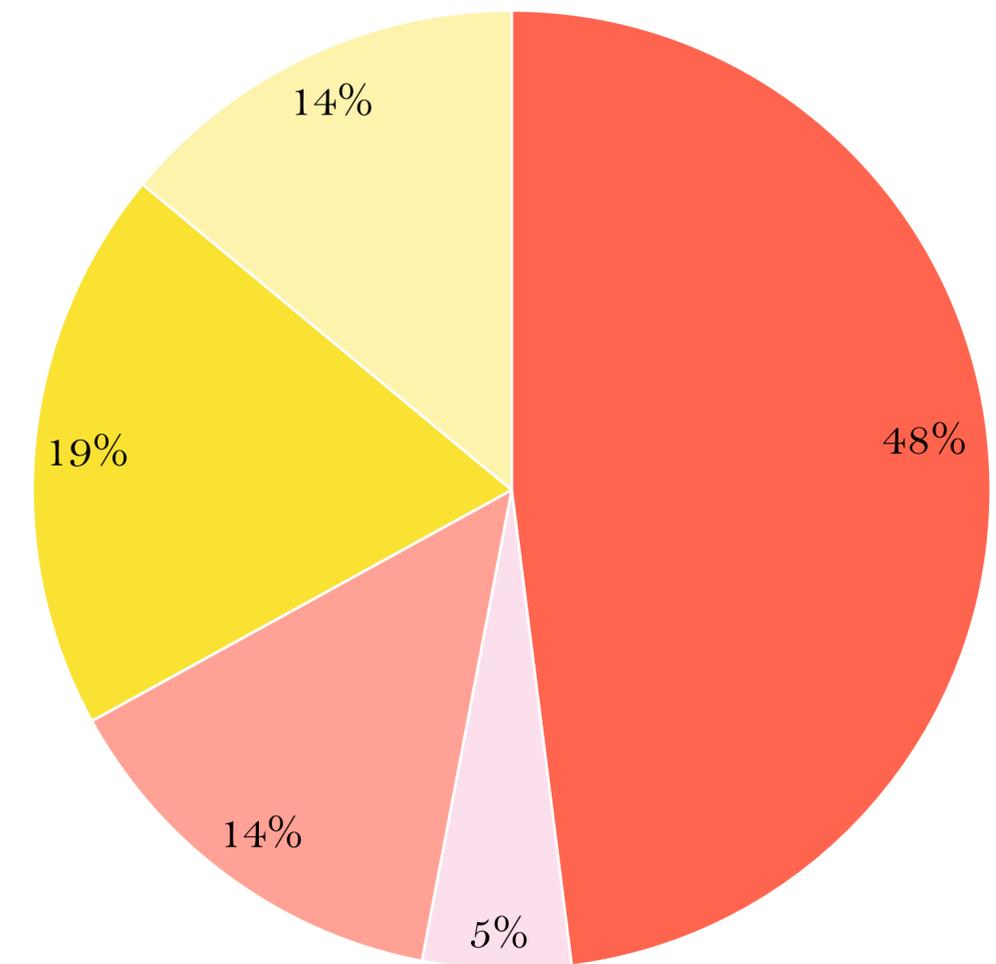
Respondents were asked “Do you think your case has had a wider impact, either positive or negative, in your country or region?”. In comparison to 2019, fewer respondents expressed that their case had a positive impact (48% in comparison with 68%), but only 5% reported that their case had a negative impact.

Positive impacts included:

- Increased public support of/respect for journalists; and
- Journalists are not alone or abandoned and that serious institutions can help them.

Negative impacts included:

- Neo fascist groups continued to attack journalists; and
- Adversaries were not repelled and continue to press charges against journalists.



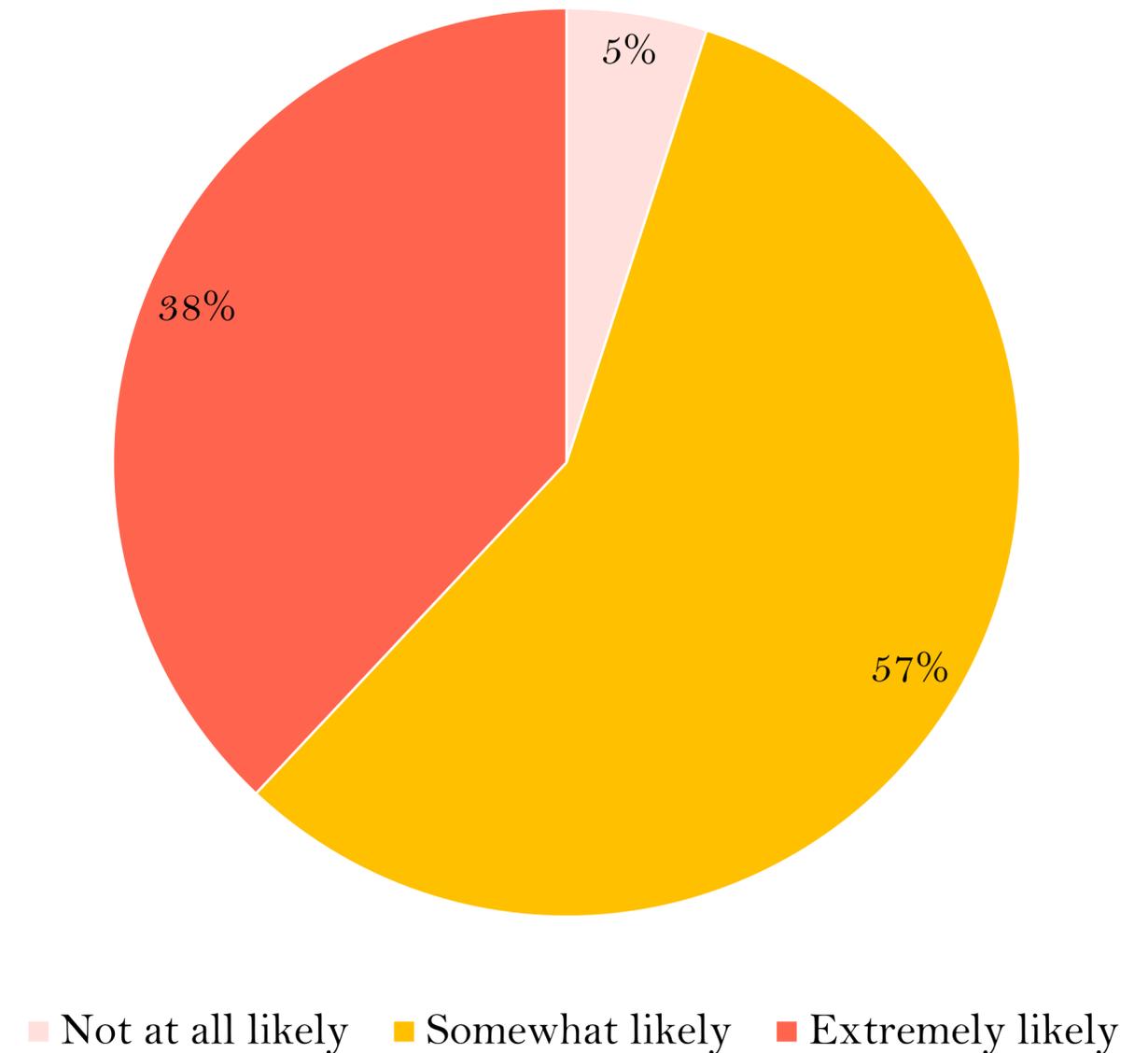
- Yes, a positive impact
- Yes, a negative impact
- Both positive and negative impacts
- No impact
- Unsure

Likelihood of Future Legal Challenges

Respondents were asked “How likely do you think it is that your journalistic activity will result in more legal challenges in the future?”

95% of respondents believe that their journalistic activity will result in more legal challenges in the future, which is a slight increase from last year where 91% of respondents felt their activity would result in more legal challenges.

The majority of journalists continue to believe that their case had a positive impact on freedom of expression, yet they also believe that it is somewhat or extremely likely that their journalistic activity will result in more legal challenges the future. This response is in line with the ongoing deterioration of press freedom globally.



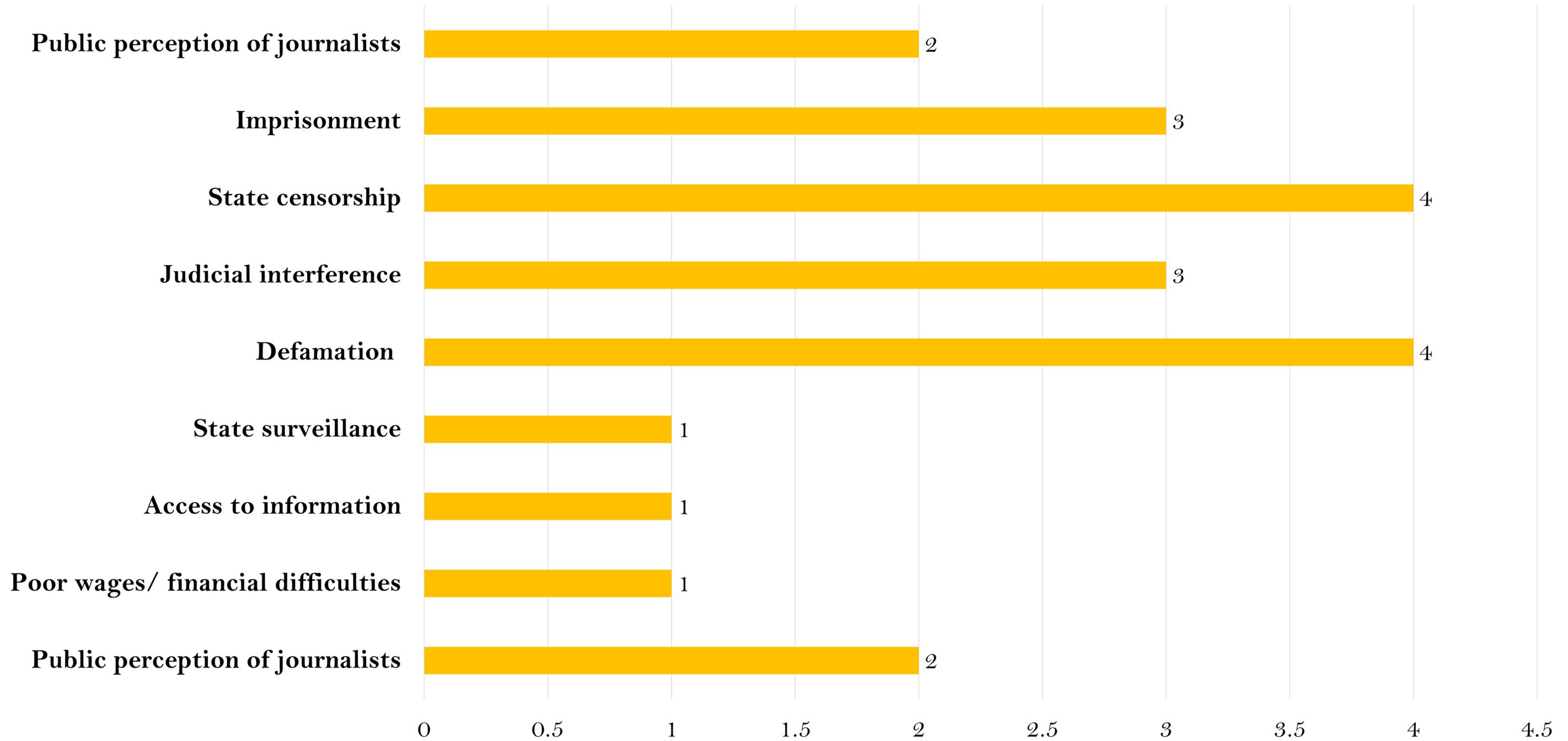
Biggest Challenges Faced

“Publishers who give up controversial topics in exchange for advertising revenues. The politicization of more and more traditional and new media. Slowly flattening and trivialization of the image of the world in the media to the level of clickbait infotainment.”

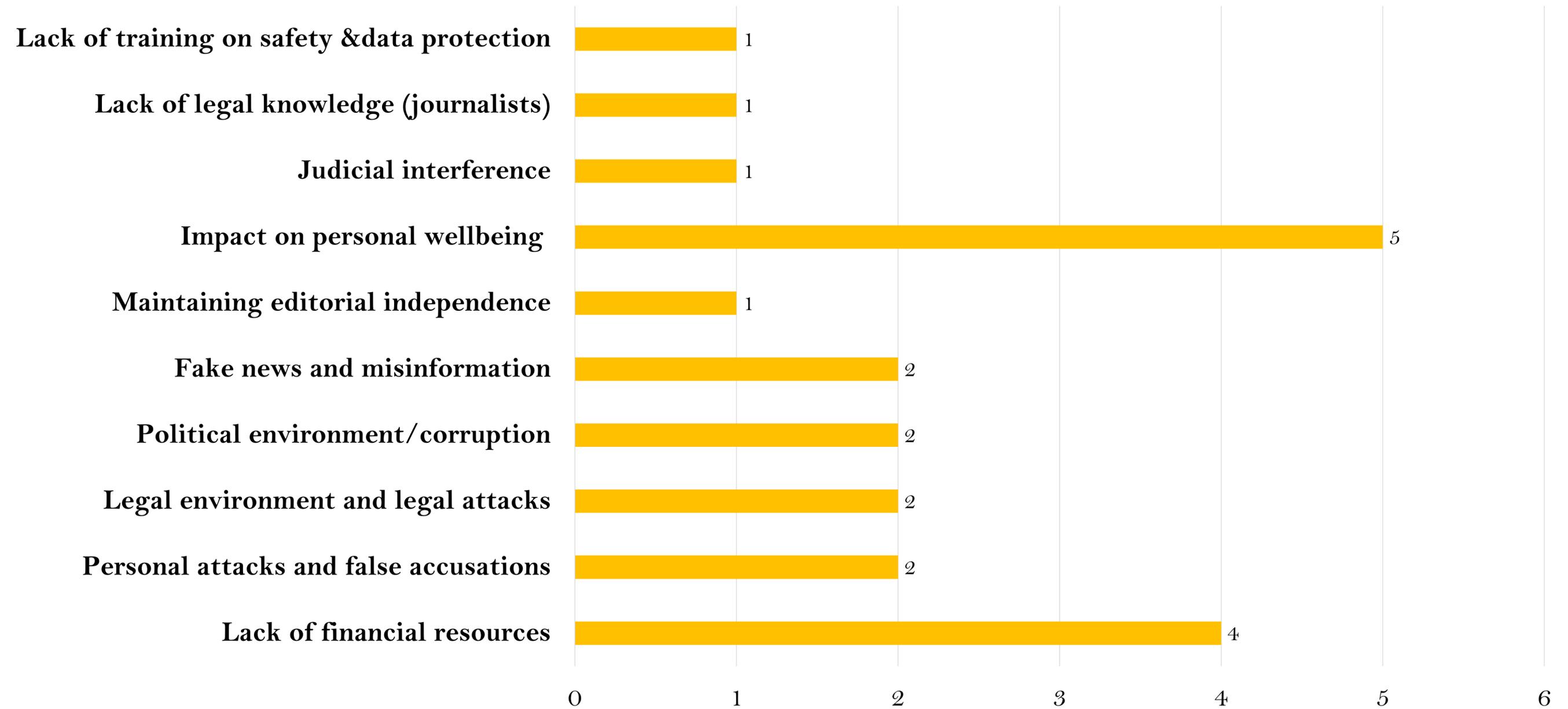
“Constant struggle to get funding, shrinking trust of the public to the media and increasing amount of fake news/disinformation. Unregulated social media, which push up conspiracy theories, including attacks and fake information about media and journalists. We are facing personal attacks online.”

“Maintaining editorial independence, without interference from party political groups. Among the other difficulties are the scarcity of financial resources, which will make it possible to close our news portal for not being able to pay for work staff, internet costs such as servers, and maintenance of work equipment, acquisition of new ones, in addition to lack of legal support and training on safety, data protection. Another challenge is to know successful experiences in journalism that have managed to overcome these challenges.”

Biggest Challenges Faced

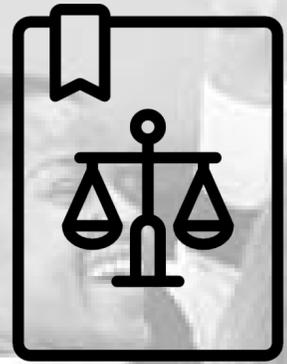


Biggest Challenges Faced





Conclusions



Impact Themes and Learnings

Legal Support

Journalists continue to be highly satisfied with Media Defence's support. 95% of respondents would recommend our support to other journalists facing legal action, 84% were satisfied with the lawyer that defended their case and a further 71% satisfied with the outcome of their case. Many journalists felt that Media Defence's support was critical for helping them defend their rights. Increased outreach by Media Defence staff was considered helpful in making a more informed decision about defending a case. We were pleased to see that respondents not only appreciated our financial support, but also our pro bono legal support and moral support throughout the case: 24% of respondents were happy that Media Defence kept a close eye on their case.



Impact Themes and Learnings

Economic Relief

43% of participants approached Media Defence as the only organisation they found that supported journalists with legal fees. A further 14% said that our support was the only way they could cover their legal fees.



Impact Themes and Learnings

Enabling journalists to continue to hold public officials to account

Irrespective of the outcome of their case, 90% of respondents continued to report on public interest issues following the closure of their case, with the majority continuing to report on cases related to political corruption (48%), crime/justice (48%), business corruption (33%), national security (29%) and health/welfare (29%). The majority of respondents (67%) said that they did not make changes to the way they report following the judgment in their case.

Key Recommendations

- We will continue to share the survey to journalists on a rolling basis, one month after they have received judgment in their case, as this has been effective in improving the response rate.
- As the surveys are anonymous, we were unable to distinguish whether Media Defence or its partner organisations supported the respondent. We will therefore carry out a separate Partner Journalist Impact Survey bi-annually.
- Since the launch of the Journalist Impact Survey in 2017, all questions have remained standardised to enable comparability between years. However, as evident with the 2020 survey, we are living in a vastly different context. Therefore, additional questions will be included in the 2021 survey around the impact Covid-19 on journalistic practice.
- Depending on where cases have closed in the year, we will consider translating the survey into additional languages, such as Azeri, Portuguese and Arabic.

Media Defence

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DEFENCE**