



Journalist Impact Survey 2023

Key Findings



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Background and Methodology

Our Journalist Impact Survey provides an important opportunity to seek feedback from journalists that we have supported during the year.

Based on our theory of change, our financial and legal support to journalists and media outlets means that journalists are successfully defended in cases against them and can continue reporting. 2023 marked our seventh Journalist Impact Survey.

Through this survey, we hope to assess:

- The quality of our support;
- The success of cases supported;
- Our contribution towards journalists being able to continue reporting.

Background and Methodology

The survey was sent by email in six languages: Azeri, English, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish.

We approached 52 lawyers and journalists, regarding 110 cases - some lawyers represent several clients at the same time, and some clients are represented multiple times in different cases. Due to our working model, we sometimes need to reach out to the applicant through their lawyer. In some instances, the risk is too high to contact the applicant. We therefore excluded contacting some journalists and applicants on this basis. We received 25 responses in total.

Limitations

It is important to note that there are limitations to this survey method. The use of convenience sampling (whereby participants are approached based on ease of access) carries inherent sampling bias. While we have taken steps to widen inclusion, for instance by providing the survey in relevant languages, providing alternative response options and contact methods (for example, through verbal confirmation and using Signal instead of email), it should not be used to make wider generalisations beyond the group of respondents.

Our Findings

The quality of our support

The legal advice and support provided by Media Defence was rated excellent.

Replies also reflect an efficient and communicative organisation. Financial support remains crucial for journalists; 25% told us that Media Defence was the only way they could cover the legal fees, with others noting the severe legal penalties they could have potentially faced if they had lost their case.

The success of cases supported

From the responses, 56% won their case at a national or domestic level, and 76% were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the outcome of their case. Significantly, 64% believed that their case had a broader positive impact, either in their country or wider region.

Our contribution towards journalists being able to continue reporting

100% of respondents continued reporting after their legal case. In addition, we found that journalists are often reporting on multiple issues, highlighting that by continuing to support journalists, we can contribute to a broader media landscape.



**Headline Statistics
and Key Learnings**

Key **Statistics**

Some of the key statistics showing the impact of our support for journalists:

76%

of respondents were satisfied or extremely satisfied with the outcome of their case.

100%

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

64%

of respondents believe that their case had a positive wider impact, either in their country or their region.

100%

of respondents have continued to practice journalism since the conclusion of their case.

Broader Impact: **Key Learnings**



Crucial Economic Relief

Our financial support continues to be pivotal in allowing journalists to continue their critical work.

A **quarter** of the journalists we surveyed told us that Media Defence support was the only way they could cover their legal fees.

In addition, 40% felt that without our support, they would have faced significant challenges covering legal fees and may otherwise have had to resort to raising funds in different ways, such as cutting editorial budgets, depleting organisation reserves, or dipping into personal funds.

At least two journalists surveyed feared that their associated organisations would have become financially unsustainable if they had lost the case, or that they would have lost support from the organization. Others noted that the long-term financial implications would have harmed their ability to continue reporting.

Behind the numbers



**Crucial
Economic
Relief**

“

Yesterday, after 7 years of legal battle, I was unanimously acquitted by the Athens Military Court of Appeals [from accusation of libel]...The court judged that only true facts were published in my fact-checks. When this whole case began back in 2017, we didn't have any funds to pay for legal fees.

Media Defence was practically our only option to cover the preliminary costs. Your help was crucial to hire a good lawyer to represent me in court.

Thanos Sitistas, fact checker, Greece

Broader Impact: **Key Learnings**



Building trust & providing quality legal support

Media Defence continues to be recognised as a trustworthy and reliable organisation.

75% of respondents chose to approach the organisation for support based on recommendations from others. This indicates a high level of trust as journalists are actively seeking out our assistance based on positive experiences shared by their peers. Furthermore, all respondents noted that they would recommend our services.

Moreover, the feedback from respondents indicates that Media Defence continues to deliver high-quality services and improve upon previous results year-on-year.

Behind the numbers



Building trust & providing quality legal support

“

It will be an understatement to say I appreciate what Media Defence did for me and my spouse during our hurdles.

But we would like to restate that the financial support for our legal crisis was successful because of Media Defence.

Journalist B, Liberia

**Who took part
in the survey?**



Who took part in the survey?

We received 25 responses from journalists supported by us, from different regions and backgrounds.



Professional Identity

Similar to 2022, **71%** of those who completed the survey identified themselves as **journalists**.

Other respondents identified themselves as **bloggers**, representatives of **media outlets**, as well as **human rights defenders**.



Who took part in the survey?

We received 25 responses from journalists supported by us, from different regions and backgrounds.

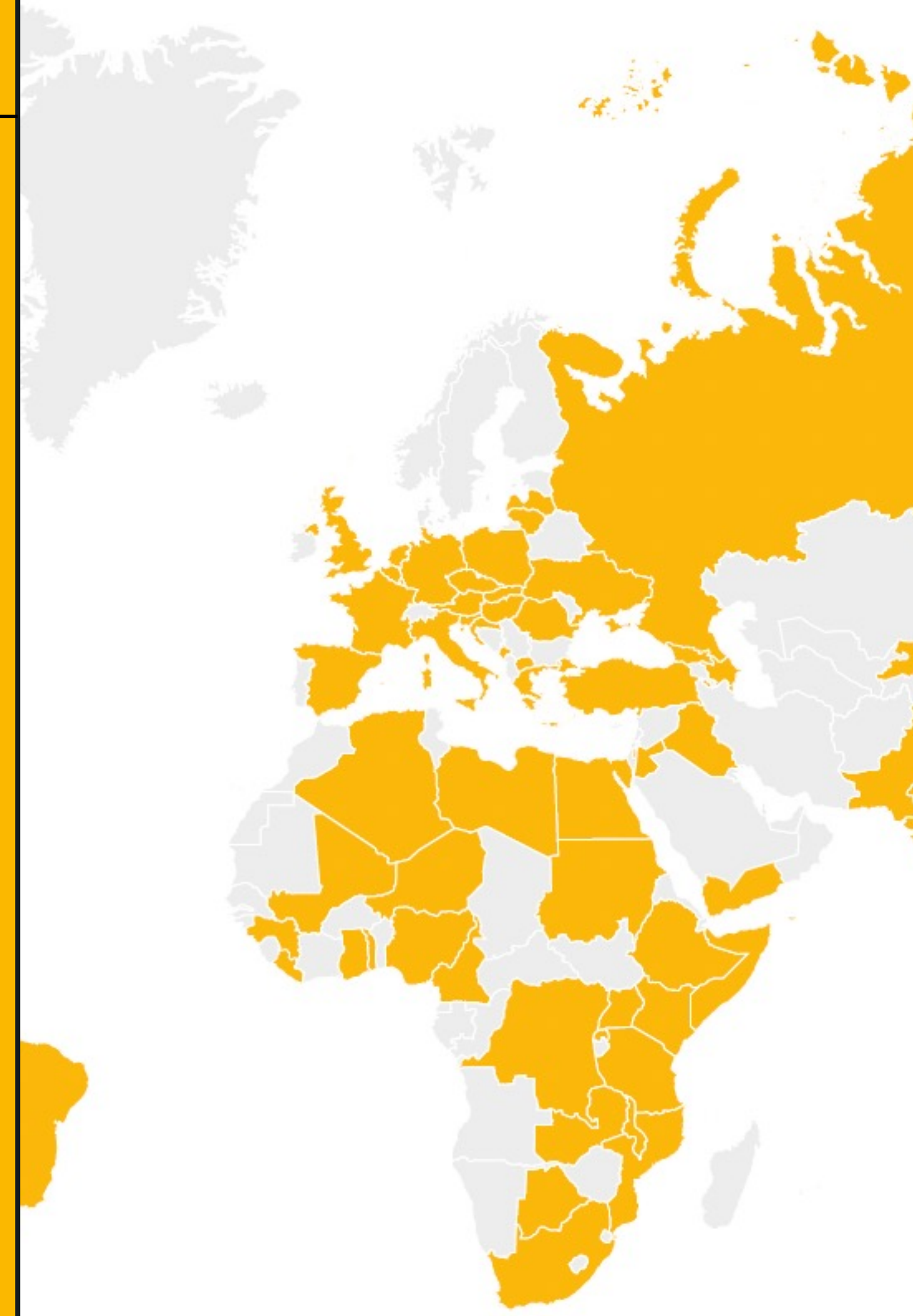


Geographic spread

In 2023, our survey found a significant shift: Most respondents (33%) were in Europe, followed by the Americas (29%), Sub-Saharan Africa (21%), and Asia Pacific (13%).

This contrasts with 2020, where 90% of respondents were from Europe.

The change underscores our increased global diversity in cases. The survey availability in multiple languages may also have contributed to gaining wider global perspectives.



Case Study: Maintaining quality while addressing urgent need in new regions

The Case of Brazil



In our 2023 Journalist Impact Survey, 20% of respondents were from Brazil, reflecting our considerable work in the country. In 2023, Media Defence supported 43 cases in Brazil, issuing individual grants totalling £82,850. Cases from Brazil constituted around 15% of our overall active case load.



Country Context

Today, Reporters Without Borders ranks Brazil as 92 out of 180 in its World Press Freedom Index. Under President Jair Bolsonaro, freedom of expression in the country witnessed significant backsliding, with aggressive rhetoric from the administration towards the media fuelling an increasingly hostile environment for journalists. In 2022, it was ranked as 110 out of 180. Since 2012, at least 30 journalists have been killed in Brazil, and online harassment and attacks on journalists, particularly women, are on the rise. While the election of Lula da Silva in 2022 restored some trust and stability, there remain concerns around local and state-level government officials' overreach, widespread SLAPP lawsuits and a polarised digital environment.

Case Study: Maintaining quality while addressing urgent need in new regions

Broadcast and telecommunications laws are antiquated and inefficient, which leave reporters and the media open to abusive lawsuits by politicians and business interests, who use their influence to intimidate the press.

Although we started supporting legal defence of journalists in Brazil in 2011, the number of cases we support in the country significantly increased from 2020 onwards. In addition to our emergency defence work, we have also undertaken strategic litigation cases addressing issues on criminal defamation and violence against journalists at the Inter American Court of Human Rights and the Supreme Court.

We also held our first national Litigation Surgery in São Paulo in 2023, with 15 participants from eight states.

The workshop covered topics such as cyber-crime, general principles of Freedom of Expression and the Inter-American Human Rights System. Feedback was very positive; one participant said *“the event was very rich in knowledge. I leave with a much more complete view of freedom of expression, in Brazil and in the world.”*

Brazil continues to be a strategic priority country for Media Defence.



Who took part in the survey?

We received 25 responses from journalists supported by us, from different regions and backgrounds.



Gender Identity

Almost a third of respondents identified as female (28%).

68% of respondents identified themselves as male.



**Deeper Analysis
and Observations**

Trends in legal action against journalists

Civil defamation	36%
Criminal Defamation	28%
Closure of Media Outlet	20%

We asked survey respondents what type of case(s) they received support for.

Civil defamation remains the biggest legal issue for respondents (36%); a 16% increase from 2022's survey. **Criminal defamation** also increased from 20% in 2022 to 28% amongst respondents.

Interestingly, **closure of media outlet** was the third most common case (20%) that respondents received support for. In 2022, it was 2%. In 2023, Kyrgyzstan, Cambodia and Hungary saw a severe decline in independent media outlets being able to operate.

While respondents in our survey came from a wide range of countries, this may indicate that legal action against media outlets as institutions is more widely practised than initially reported.

52% of respondents cited **corruption** as the public issue most likely to result in legal action. Respondents cited **business corruption** as the most frequent issue (32%) that resulted in legal action and 20% referred to reporting on **political corruption**. This follows from previous years' trends on increasing legal action in this area and may be linked with the global increase in the use of **SLAPPs** by powerful individuals and businesses.

Continuing **legal threats** to independent journalism

84% of respondents believed that they would face some form of legal action in the future as a result of their journalistic activity.

Legal pressures continue to threaten independent journalism.

Respondents indicated that draconian libel and defamation laws specifically remain a problem. Several respondents also cited that anti-terror and blasphemy laws are used to gag independent press in their countries.

Legal fees also posed a threat to journalists, with media outlets usually unable to provide sufficient funds to cover costs.

The financial burden of representation was not the only concern, as journalists also often face the prospect of high penalties in legal cases if they lose.

Lack of good quality representation was also a problem, with three respondents noting that more lawyers needed to be trained in defending journalists and freedom of expression issues.

The Voices Behind the Data



Journalists face heavy fines and even possible imprisonment for defamation.

I was ordered by the Supreme Court to pay 95,000 euros in legal costs and advance civil damages as well now having a criminal record.

Journalist C, Italy



Criminal defamation is a huge issue and there are not enough good lawyers working on this issue; the fee is also very expensive, almost comparable to London. So often journalists will go to jail because they can't afford representation.

Journalist D, Thailand

Ability to Continue Reporting

Supporting journalists to continue reporting in the long term is an important facet of Media Defence's work. 100% of our respondents have continued reporting since the conclusion of their case.

Not only do they continue reporting, but they often report on multiple issues. 52% report on at least two or more public interest issues, such as crime and justice, environment and climate change, and business corruption.

A positive outcome from supporting these journalists is being able to contribute to a vibrant array of public interest reporting, and subsequently, a broader independent coverage of important issues.

Following the end of their case, the most frequently reported issues amongst respondents were: political corruption (56%); other human rights issues (48%); and national security (44%).

Case Study: Ability to Continue Reporting

The Case of Chutima Sidasathian

Chutima Sidasathian has dedicated herself to reporting on corruption and the plights of rural communities and refugees. This dedication comes despite repeated attempts to silence her through intimidation and legal attacks. Chutima has reported on the alleged involvement of Thai naval officers in the trafficking of stateless Rohingya migrants. She subsequently faced charges of defamation brought by senior naval officers. Media Defence supported her during this case, and she was eventually acquitted of the charges.

Chutima carried on reporting. In early 2021, Chutima posted on her Facebook page about corruption in a local government community banking scheme. In December 2022, she was charged with three counts of defamation, each carrying a two-year sentence, and was briefly detained.





Case Study: Ability to Continue Reporting

In early 2024, three of the charges against her were dropped.

Media Defence supported Chutima's legal defence in both the 2015 case and the more recent cases in 2023. By supporting Chutima through her legal actions, we have been able to contribute towards her continuing her fearless reporting, exposing corruption and investigating public interest stories in Thailand. Her stories have led to the instigation of a Special Commission of Investigation into the corruption scheme and criminal charges being brought against a local mayor for involvement.



Criminal defamation [legal action] has a chilling effect - are you brave enough to speak out, or potentially go to jail because of your work?

My case proves that we can win, but we had to go through the process; the financial burden, [and] psychological burden to get to the end result. This is a big ask.

The **positive broader impact** of individual legal cases

A significant 56% of respondents successfully resolved their cases at the national or domestic level, while 20% are still navigating ongoing legal battles, and 16% faced setbacks.

Remarkably, 64% believe their cases had a positive broader impact, resonating within their countries or regions.

One respondent highlighted, that after a positive case outcome
"Local people fear less, [it] shows that freedom of speech needs to be protected and that international organisations are interested in these issues."

Notably, 40% of respondents credit Media Defence for their case victories, with two stating they could have faced imprisonment without our support.

These insights underscore the vital role Media Defence plays in protecting press freedom and supporting those who defend it.

Change in **Journalistic Practices**

While respondents reported resilience in continuing to practice journalism some indicated that their legal cases had brought changes to their journalistic practices.

One respondent wrote that they now limit their social media activity as a self-protection mechanism. Another noted that the court case had caused *'intimidation'* to report on new issues due to perceptions that *"courts do not guarantee freedom of the press"*. Perhaps most significantly, a media outlet changed the registration country of its administrative headquarters following the case.



Biggest Challenges Faced

Physical security and online harassment were the key issues highlighted by respondents as the biggest challenges they faced as journalists. This reflects our own observations that there has been a sharp escalation in violence against journalists in the past few years.

Respondents noted that they had experienced threats of sexual assault; other threats of physical violence; smear campaigns to discredit their reputation; online trolling; and intimidation, including of family members.

Violence against journalists is a priority litigation issue for Media Defence.





**Media Defence
Support**

The Voices Behind the Data

“

I don't know really.. honestly.. I dread thinking about it.

I did not have money to pay for legal fees. I might not be a journalist today, if not for Media Defence. Honestly, I would have left journalism.

Journalist E, India

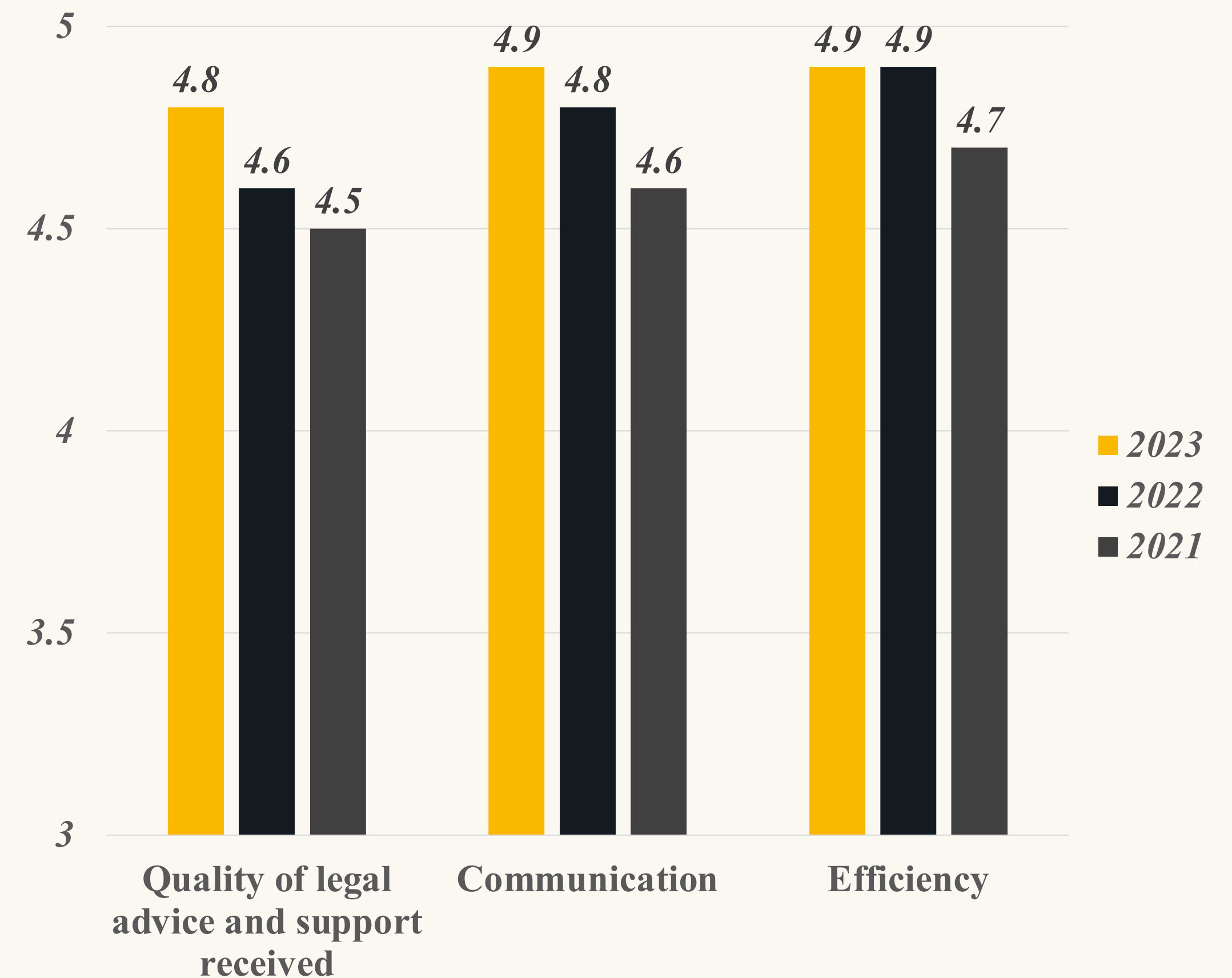


Maintaining High-Quality Legal Advice as we Grow

Respondents were asked to rank support provided by Media Defence on a scale of 1-5 (*1 is the worst and 5 is the best*), across three areas: *quality of legal advice and support received; communication; and efficiency*. The results indicate that Media Defence continues to provide excellent services to journalists.

Our biggest increase has been in the quality of legal advice provided. This may be linked to our recent expansion of our legal team, particularly in Latin America and the ability to dedicate more resources to this region.

Average ratings from respondents in 2021-2023



Kind, helpful and understanding

Helpful, tolerant and trustworthy

Responsive, patient, dependable

What **three words would you use to describe Media Defence?**

Effectiveness, professionalism, precision

Trustworthy, compassionate, inspiring

Defence of press freedom



Media Defence

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