

2011-2012 Press Freedom Index How the index is compiled

Paris, 20 January 2012

The Reporters Without Borders index, which is published each year, measures the state of media freedom throughout the world. It reflects the degree of freedom that journalists, news media and netizens enjoy in each country, and the efforts made by the authorities to respect and ensure respect for this freedom.

A score and a position are assigned to each country in the final ranking. They are complementary indicators that together assess the state of media freedom.

In order to have a bigger spread in the scores and increase the differentiation between countries, this year's questionnaire had more answers assigning negative points. That is why countries at the top of the index have negative scores this year. Although the point system has produced a broader distribution of scores than in 2010, each country's evolution over the years can still be plotted by comparing its position in the index rather than its score. This is what the arrows in the table refer to – a country's change in position in the index compared with the preceding year.

The ranking reflects the situation during a specific period. This year's index takes account of events between 1 December 2010 and 30 November 2011. It does not look at human rights violations in general, just press freedom violations.

To compile this index, Reporters Without Borders prepared a questionnaire with 44 main criteria indicative of the state of press freedom. It asks questions about every kind of violation directly affecting journalists and netizens (including murders, imprisonment, physical attacks and threats) and news media (censorship, confiscation of newspaper issues, searches and harassment). And it establishes the degree of impunity enjoyed by those responsible for these press freedom violations.

It also measures the level of self-censorship in each country and the ability of the media to investigate and criticize. Financial pressure, which is increasingly common, is also assessed and incorporated into the final score.

The questionnaire takes account of the legal framework for the media (including penalties for press offences, the existence of a state monopoly for certain kinds of media and how the media are regulated) and the level of independence of the public media. It also reflects violations of the free flow of information on the Internet.

Reporters Without Borders has taken account not only of abuses attributable to the state, but also those by armed militias, clandestine organizations and pressure groups.

The questionnaire was sent to Reporters Without Borders' partner organizations (18 freedom of expression groups in all five continents), to its network of 150 correspondents around the world, and to journalists, researchers, jurists and human rights activists. A scale devised by the organization was then used to give a country score to each questionnaire.

The 179 countries ranked are those for which Reporters Without Borders received completed questionnaires from a number of sources. Some countries were not included because of a lack of reliable, confirmed data. Where countries tied, they are listed in alphabetical order.

The index should in no way be taken as an indication of the quality of the media in the countries concerned.