



REPORTING ON TERRORISM AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

**A Handbook Based on the Practice and
Experience of Balkan Investigative Reporting
Network Journalists**



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INTRODUCTORY NOTES

This handbook is about experiences and best practices in reporting on terrorism by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network Bosnia and Herzegovina, BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Terrorism is a complex and sensitive topic, and so is reporting on terrorism. There are several practical ways in which to report on the phenomenon of terrorism. For journalists, reporting on an actual terrorist incident is certainly the most stressful and demanding.

Since the 1992-95 war, there have been several terrorist attacks in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Journalistic reporting on those acts has contributed greatly to the public understanding of and response to these incidents. Journalists can have a substantial impact on the way the public responds to terrorist attacks and people they feel during and after such attacks. The way in which journalists report is therefore important, while at the same time they also have to look after their own safety and mental health. Part of this handbook will be about reporting on incidents of terrorism, although fortunately, journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina seldom have the opportunity to do such reporting.

There are several excellent international and domestic manuals and books on how to cover terrorism. One we can recommend is 'Terrorism and the Media: A Handbook for Journalists' by Jean-Paul Marthoz, which covers all aspects of terrorism reporting in an extremely high-quality and comprehensive manner, and endeavours to be useful for journalists in all countries. BIRN's handbook, which you are reading right now, focuses specifically on the challenges and specifics of terrorism and violent extremism coverage in Bosnia and Herzegovina.



BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina's journalists often report on terrorism and investigate the subject of radicalisation leading to violent extremism and potentially terrorism. We are interested in the causes and processes involved in radicalisation, which in rare cases can lead to acts of terrorism, but also in the way these processes affect individuals, their families, local communities and society as a whole.

This handbook will mostly be about that kind of reporting – doing analyses, investigations and interviews, making TV programmes and reporting from terrorism trials.

Some of the most significant stories include those about people leaving the country to fight for the so-called Islamic State, their subsequent return and the reintegration of their families into Bosnian society. Reporting on the way that society is working with them and managing their return to local communities is not breaking news, but it is important in terms of covering the issue of terrorism.

This handbook will look at various ways of reporting on terrorism; mistakes, traps and positive experiences; the journalistic formats that can be used when doing reports, and also practical advice on how to make your reporting better and more relevant.

The handbook is intended as your introduction to terrorism coverage, with clear guidelines on where to find additional knowledge and sources for your reporting. It is part of BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina's wider coverage of terrorism and an expanded part of a webinar that we produced on this subject, which you can watch in the Resource Centre section of our Terrorism and Foreign Fighters Database (terorizam.detektor.ba).

Who is this handbook intended for?

This handbook is intended for journalism students and young journalists who are involved in their first coverage of terrorism, but it can also be useful to more experienced journalists who have not reported on terrorism before. To make the best use of this handbook, you should have a basic knowledge of journalistic formats, know how to write articles and have a grasp of fundamental journalistic techniques. Previous knowledge of the phenomenon of terrorism is desirable, but not a precondition for using this handbook.

How does BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina report on terrorism?

BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina is a media outlet that specialises in reporting on war crime trials and transitional justice issues. It has utilised its expertise and adjusted it to reporting on terrorism trials, but also on the phenomenon of radicalisation. Our reporting also covers corruption and similar topics, but terrorism coverage makes up an important part of our everyday operations.

In addition to reporting from every terrorism hearing held at the Bosnian state court, we use other journalistic formats, such as in-depth analysis, video reports and investigations about terrorism. Our output is mainly text-based, but we have also reported on terrorism in our monthly 'TV Justice' video magazine. BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina also addresses terrorism issues the databases that it produces.



A page on our website detektor.ba¹ contains all the articles we have written about terrorism.

BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina's reports from trials are important for the public, researchers and other professionals interested in terrorism issues. Our analysis pieces contribute to the way that the authorities deal with terrorism, while our reporting on the challenges involved in working with returnees from territories formerly controlled by Islamic State has resulted in raised awareness of and attention to the problems facing local communities dealing with former members of one of the most notorious terrorist organisations of our time.

We recently published a database of all the terrorism convictions in five Western Balkan countries. Go to toterorizam.detektor.ba to find this useful data about terrorism judgments.

What is terrorism?

Terrorism has no official definition!

Defining terrorism is one of the most demanding parts of terrorism coverage. In every society, terrorism is a particularly sensitive issue, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Journalists should familiarise themselves with the terms such as radicalisation, non-violent and violent extremism and terrorism and its manifestations, but it is certainly better to stick to the official classification of crimes made by state institutions such as the police or prosecution.

The Global Terrorism Database defines terrorism as “the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation”.

The Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina says that a terrorist act involves one of several actions, which given their nature or context can cause significant damage to the state or to an international organisation. These include an attack on people's lives or the integrity of the state, unlawful detentions, causing major damage to facilities, and the hijacking of planes or other means of transportation. Article 201 of the Criminal Code governs the financing and public incitement of terrorism, and recruitment for and training and organising of terrorist groups.

Amendments to the law classify going to fight abroad and joining foreign military or paramilitary units as criminal offences, unless this is done within an -proved peace mission. However, it is important to note that fighting in Ukraine is not considered terrorism, unlike joining Islamic State, because military groups in the eastern Ukrainian region of Donbas have not been declared terrorist organisations by the United Nations as Islamic State has.

It is important to differentiate between radicalisation and terrorism. The process of radicalisation that leads towards violent extremism or terrorism is not a criminal offence in itself, while terrorism is.

It is also important to know how and when an organisation can be called a terrorist one. BIRN is guided by an official list of terrorist organisations declared as such by the UN. The Bosnian state court uses the same list when handing down its verdicts.

¹ <https://detektor.ba/terorizam/>



On some occasions when Turkey has requested the extradition of some of its citizens from Bosnia and Herzegovina, claiming that they were members of an organisation headed by cleric Fethullah Gulen, which Ankara considers a terrorist organisation, the Bosnian state court has refused to grant the requests. This is because Gulen's movement, which Ankara calls the Fethullahist Terrorist Organisation or FETO, has never been declared a terrorist organisation by the UN. When reporting on Turkish citizens and requests for their extradition, it is important to understand this.

TYPES OF REPORTING ON TERRORISM

Reporting on acts of terrorism

The most important thing to know about covering an act of terrorism is that journalists should always, with no exception, obtain data about the classification of the incident, the victims and the perpetrators from official sources.

Due to the need to be fast and boost readership, journalists often resort to using unofficial sources, which has proven harmful and counter-productive. An unofficial source might speed up your report, but there is even a bigger possibility that you will have to publish a correction.

Statements by eyewitnesses are certainly desirable, but eyewitnesses cannot be used as a source of information about the number of casualties or the perpetrator's identity. That should come from the police and prosecutors, or doctors who can give a confirmation of the number of people injured or killed. Witnesses can say what happened to them and share their own experiences.

One of the reasons why the police or prosecutors do not reveal victims' identities immediately is that they want to inform the families first. Think about that when reporting - whether someone's family will learn about what happened to their loved ones from your articles.

When there was an attack on soldiers in Rajlovac in Bosnia and Herzegovina, many media outlets reported live on the perpetrator and the victims, long before their families learned about it, or aired



live broadcasts of the moment that the families heard about the deaths of their loved ones. The privacy and rights of such families must be considered when journalists are writing their reports.

Use this advice from the OSCE's handbook²

- In their first reports from the field, journalists should be guided by verified information. Comment pieces, opinion articles and analysis should be left for later. On-the-spot reports should be kept separate from analysis.
- Journalists have a responsibility to use official, credible and verified sources, to check them and, if necessary, to protect their identity.
- The information should be reported as precisely and unambiguously as possible, so there is no space for interpretation.
- Only official information from institutions dealing with the investigation should be used when classifying the crime.
- The publication of photographs and videos requires balance between protecting the dignity of the victims and their families, and the public interest.
- Victims and survivors have to be the focus of media reporting. When publishing their names, and reporting the size and circumstances of the attack and the number of deaths and injuries, journalists should follow official sources of information in their reports.
- Journalists should not allow eyewitnesses and bystanders to analyse and interpret the perpetrator's motives.
- Media should not publish the names or initials of the victims before the authorities confirm them.

² Reporting on Violent Extremism and Terrorism - Guidelines for Journalists <https://www.osce.org/mission-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina/442381>

The correct classification of the crime and correct naming of the perpetrators are important.

Make sure to check the official definition of the act - was it terrorism, a hate crime or something else? Never classify it yourself. Only say what you can confirm - that there was a shooting or an attack, without using the word 'terrorism'.

Until you have received official confirmation, attackers should just be referred to as attackers. Even when the police or prosecutors confirm that it was a terrorist act, attackers are still not terrorists, but attackers or terrorism suspects or defendants. Learn the difference between a suspect, someone who has been charged, and someone who has been convicted.

Bear in mind the presumption of innocence and never call someone a terrorist until they have been definitively convicted.

Terrorism trials

Every journalist has the right to follow terrorism trials in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Such trials are public unless the Bosnian court decides otherwise, in order to protect a witness, or if parts of the trial need to be closed for the public for some reason. Never publish details from closed parts of the trials, even if you are given that information.

Witness protection is the most important issue while following a trial. You will often find yourself in situations in which you know the identity of a protected witness, but you are required not only to conceal the person's name, but also not to give out details that might reveal the person's identity. This is particularly important in the case of witnesses from smaller towns where any detail might reveal the person's identity.



Revealing the identity of protected witnesses is a crime and you could go to prison for it.

It is also important to learn basic legal terms and about the stages of criminal proceedings in domestic courts in order to follow terrorism trials. Learn the difference between the role of the prosecution, the defence, judges and juries.

Prepare for the trial by reading the indictment if possible. The Bosnian state court does not publish indictments but lawyers or prosecutors can sometimes get you the document. The indictment is read out at the beginning of every trial. If you write it down, it could help you during the proceedings.

While reporting, make sure to give enough space to the defence and the prosecution, but always begin with the prosecution allegations if that is how the trial went.

Make sure you correctly write down the names of people and places, as well as the definitions used by the prosecutor and defence in court. Take care to convey the prosecutor's responses to the defence and vice versa.

While conveying legal terms correctly, don't forget that your readers might not be familiar with these terms, so make sure you explain them in comprehensible language.

IMPORTANT: Make sure that you always point out whether it is a first-instance, non-final judgment or a second-instance, final judgment. If it is only a first-instance judgment, it is important that you point that out in your article. You should also indicate whether the parties have the right to file an appeal, as is the case with first instance verdicts.

Reporting on ongoing investigations

Journalists seldom report on cases before they are brought to court. In that particularly sensitive period, it is important to respect clear rules. When publishing sensitive information, pay attention to whether it might jeopardise the investigation, as has happened before.

Do not hesitate to talk to your sources in the police and prosecution about whether the publication of the information might jeopardise their investigation, but ultimately, it is up to you to decide.

"Relations with security and intelligence services must be clearly defined," Jean-Paul Marthoz wrote in his handbook on terrorism coverage.

"Even though attacks can create a sort of 'sacred union' with authorities and the public calling for patriotism, the media are not government aides. They retain their task of monitoring the authorities and providing citizens with independent information," he said.

Journalistic ethics, as well as methods and good sources, play a special role in reporting on ongoing investigations and terrorism in general. In the past, journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina who were reporting on police operations and arrests have published the names of suspects or people who were arrested. In some of those investigations, the suspects were later released and no charges were ever filed against them. In a large number of these cases, these journalistic reports remain the only traces that appear among online search results for these individuals. Journalists, of course, are neither policemen nor prosecutors and they do not bear responsibility for the work of investigators, but it is always important to consider the



balance between the public interest and the suspect's right to privacy and the presumption of innocence.

When reporting on events that are still developing, in order to base your report on hard facts as much as possible, you can use a format which is often used by international media: what we know and don't know. In such articles, you can list everything that the police or investigators have already discovered, and also list all the elements of the story that are still missing, either because the police don't know or because the facts have not been confirmed. This allows you to provide your readers with a correct overview of what is going on, with no need to enter into speculation.

When reporting on a developing event, or doing any other type of reporting on terrorism, always bear in mind that the victims should be the focus of every story. If you report on terrorism in a way that can spread fear, you contribute to terrorism's intended goal of spreading fear. But if you show how terrorism affects individuals, families or societies, you can illustrate its real impact.

Analytical reports and research

Analysis articles and research form an important part of BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina's reporting on terrorism. Before starting an analytical report on terrorism, we recommend that you first follow terrorism trials and write news reports about them in order to understand the topic better.

When writing analytical articles, take into account of the context of your story.

The OSCE strongly suggests that media space should not be given to analysts who do not have credibility in academia or other spheres, nor to those who might use a tragedy for their own ideological or political goals.

It is important to be socially responsible and beware of sensationalism.

In analysis pieces and research, it is particularly important to counter sensationalism with social responsibility.

OSCE recommendations on terrorism reporting

Terrorism cannot be called 'Islamic', 'Christian' or 'Jewish', but the perpetrator of a terrorist act can be a Muslim, a Christian or a Jew.

Incorrect definitions spread stereotypes and prejudices towards an entire community, and they quite often lead to violence against the innocent. They stigmatise a community just because the perpetrator shares a certain value system, skin colour or ethnicity, or comes from the same origins. Clumsily formulated definitions can cause damage on multiple levels.

Analysts should be relevant to the subject. Their profile can and should be diverse, from security experts to political, social and psychological experts, in order to understand the broader context of violent extremism and terrorism.

In the case of violent extremism and terrorism of a religious nature, interviewees should be sought in officially-registered religious organisations – in other words, credible interviewees from religious communities rather than self-appointed spokespeople.



If you dedicate yourself to reporting on terrorism, you will always have enough topics to cover.

Here are some examples of how BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina reports on terrorism and radicalisation leading to violent extremism. The Detektor website has a section dedicated to terrorism which could also be useful to you.

Several years ago we reported on deradicalisation processes in prisons, sparking public debate about the issue. As many former Islamic State fighters have already served their sentences or will have served them in the coming years, this topic will remain relevant for a long time to come. As this handbook went to press, a convicted man called Bilal Bosnic was serving the remaining part of his sentence for inciting terrorism. What the years he has spent in prison have meant to him, how will he behave when he is released and how he will affect the community to which he will return, as well as society as a whole, are questions of great importance and worthy of coverage.

Annual reviews of terrorism trials can also make for good stories. Such articles can help identify trends in terrorism in the country and assess the work of police and judicial institutions, for example in sentencing policies. Bosnia and Herzegovina has often been criticised by its international partners for giving lenient sentences to returnees from Syria. BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina has also reported³ on the fact that domestic judicial authorities has not been emulating efforts by European Union countries to increase sentences given to former Islamic State members. One of the ways of doing this is to also charge them with war crimes, which can increase the total sentence. Despite

³ <https://detektor.ba/2020/08/06/moze-li-se-bivsim-borcima-isil-a-u-bih-suditi-i-zaradne-zlocine/?lang=en>

photographs and videos being available that could be used for such accusations, the Bosnian state prosecution has still not made use of this option.

The trials in Bosnia and Herzegovina and subsequent reintegration of former members of Islamic State will attract a lot of public attention in the coming period. Journalists should consider meeting their relatives and gaining their trust in order to get timely information about the challenges they are facing. Reporting on the consequences of terrorism is an important part of your coverage.

BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina has often reported on living conditions for women and children at detention camps that were set up in Syria after the collapse of Islamic State. We also produced a show about Dino Pecenkovic, who was under investigation for assisting in a terrorist act and whose entire family left for Syria. His story, about how he got out of the radicalisation process, is an excellent counter-narrative to stories about radicalisation.

BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina has made a series of stories about the implementation of the state strategy for countering terrorism. Strategies are dry documents, but they provide a direction for the country and its institutions in the fight against terrorism. One of our stories about the implementation of the strategy started with the example of two radicalised girls from Zenica who had gone to a safe house, but due to lack of communication and official preparations, it was unclear where they should go from there, so they were sent back to their families where they had been radicalised in the first place.

Always attempt to start your stories with examples of how terrorism affects the lives of people and their families.



Follow what expert organisations such as the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism public on the subject. Recently BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina published a story about whether returnees from the Syrian battlefield should be prosecuted for war crimes and not just terrorism, after the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, EUROJUST, did an exhaustive analysis of the issue.

You can always find material for investigative stories in court judgments and reports. For example, several verdicts have said how money was sent from the diaspora to finance terrorism in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Syria. Detailed research into money flows is a good topic related to terrorism.

You can also use open-source intelligence (OSINT) to investigate individuals who have joined terrorist organisations, or the organisations themselves.

In the future, right-wing terrorism could become the dominant form of terrorism. Given that Bosnia and Herzegovina has followed previous trends in terrorism, the same can be expected here, so start reading up and getting acquainted with this type of violent extremism in time. Numerous podcasts, Twitter accounts and books can help you with this.

Pay attention to the growing trend of cyber-terrorism - the phenomenon of terrorism online.⁴ Learn how to use advanced search and tools to follow this type of terrorism. For example, some groups and individuals from Bosnia and Herzegovina that are connected with terrorism have accounts on the Signal app.

⁴ <https://detektor.ba/2021/03/10/cyber-napadi-kao-rastuca-teroristicka-prijetnja-nespremim-balkanskim-zemljama/?lang=eng>

Terrorism databases

You can compile the data you collect during your research in a database and publish it to be used by other journalists or researchers. Even as a journalist at the start of your career, you can make use of free tools for creating databases.

BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina has created an extensive database of terrorism convictions.⁵ It can serve as an excellent source of verified information which you can use for background in your stories, but also as a source for new stories and analysis pieces.

The database contains data about all the individuals who have final convictions for terrorism in five Western Balkan countries. There is data on when and why each of them was convicted, plus indictments, photographs and verdicts, as well as other details like previous criminal records or information about incidents that happened after or during their imprisonment. Reports from their trials are another important part of the database.

The database is divided into two main sections - verdicts in cases against people who went to fight abroad, and verdicts for domestic acts of terrorism.

The Resource Centre is the part of the database containing videos about professional reporting on terrorism, as well as details of resources suggested by BIRN that can be used to improve the quality of terrorism reporting. The Resource Centre contains a detailed webinar prepared by BIRN journalists about professional reporting

⁵ terorizam.detektor.ba



on terrorism and the use of the BIRN database, as well as short videos with basic reporting rules prepared in co-operation with the OSCE and the Press Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are also links to two manuals that can be of great use to journalists.

TV, podcasts, multimedia stories

As well as publishing written reports, BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina produces television reports on terrorism. Our videos about radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism can be watched on our YouTube channel.

Terrorism is a complex and broad topic, so you can use various formats in order to tell your story. Nowadays journalists also use podcasts to tell their stories, so familiarise yourself with the basis of making a podcast and what you will need for that.

Multimedia projects which combine photographs, videos and documents also make an excellent way for you to tell your story. As an example, watch the *New York Times*' story about how the newspaper's reporter searched for Islamic State documents so she could give a better insight into the terrorist organisation.

Do not limit yourself to the basic reporting formats. Look at what other journalists are doing and make use of their examples.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE YOU START REPORTING ON TERRORISM

Becoming knowledgeable about the phenomenon of terrorism and the radicalisation process is crucial for journalistic reporting. We can recommend several publications by the OSCE and the Atlantic Initiative that give detailed explanations of the differences between violent extremism and terrorism, for example, which will help journalists avoid mistakes. At the end of this handbook, here are links to these publications, which will help journalists to clarify the differences between these terms and become thoroughly familiar with the challenges of reporting on terrorism.

Knowledge of domestic laws is also of the utmost importance. This primarily refers to the Criminal Code of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which legally defines terrorism and acts of terrorist.

It is very important to become familiar with specific details of the law, such as, for instance, why is going to fight in Ukraine not considered an act of terrorism, while joining Islamic State in Syria is. This is because under Bosnian law, what matters is whether the United Nations have officially characterised an organisation as a terrorist one. Al-Qaeda and Islamic State were officially labelled terrorist organisations years ago, while paramilitary units in the Ukrainian region of Donbas have never been officially characterised as such by the UN.

Such details are important for avoiding journalistic errors.

For reporting from terrorism trials, it is important to be familiar with the Law on Criminal Proceedings. Other important official documents



include the State Strategy for Preventing and Countering Terrorism, as well as action plans stemming from this strategy.

Look after your safety and your sources

When reporting on terrorism, first look after your own safety and the risks to which you are exposing your newsroom team, but also the safety of your sources. Make sure that you do not jeopardise your sources as a result of your own negligence. Protect your telephone and computer from hacking and use encrypted communication channels.

When you go into the field, try to always take someone with you. It would be good if you inform your colleagues where you will be at any point and who you are communicating with. Before working in particularly dangerous areas, you should first take a safety training course for journalists.

If you report on terrorism intensively, be careful about the content that you are seeing on social media and the internet in general.

Take care of your mental health too. Long-term reporting on radicalisation and terrorism can affect you. Consult with your editor and colleagues, as well as experts, on how to best deal with the stress and pressure. If you feel that your work is affecting you a lot, consider working on other topics for a certain period of time. Even if you do reports that are not a direct result of work in the field, exposure to radical content can affect you indirectly.

List of sources

A good journalist always has a good-quality list of sources and experts, police and prosecutors' offices, spokespeople and other

important contacts for stories on terrorism. Take the time to make a list of contacts and put their numbers in your phone so they are always accessible. Meet your sources and relevant spokespeople so you can obtain information from them more easily when you need it.

At the end of this handbook are some of the basic contacts used by BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina's journalists, which may be of use to you, although you will find it necessary to regularly update the list.

As well as personal sources, it is important to have other sources such as official reports and databases.

The annual official security report in Bosnia and Herzegovina is a good basic source on the threat of terrorism. Reports from the US State Department and US intelligence agencies on terrorism are also good-quality sources.

Indictments, verdicts, statements by ministries, prosecutors' offices and the police are also important sources of information. Databases on terrorism created by relevant organisations can also help you. Do not use anonymous sources as the basis of your reporting on terrorism.

Doing interviews

Interview techniques are important when reporting on terrorism. When you talk to victims of terrorist attacks or families whose members have been affected by terrorism, be guided by best practices, be fair and give them an opportunity to tell their part of the story, although, in the final article, it is up to you to decide how you will use their statements. Be aware that their views might be different from yours and their stances are subjective.



If you speak to a terrorism suspect or defendant, be sure to verify what you are told. Do not convey statements unless you are able to verify them. For example, it is not that difficult to contact people who have gone abroad to fight, but you must find a way to verify what they say or else you may become a channel for propaganda.

Jean-Paul Marthoz, author of a handbook on reporting on terrorism, gives clear recommendations for doing interviews:

- 1.** *Retain full control over the journalistic project and reject any restrictions on the type of questions or method of interview that the terrorist group want to impose.*
 - 2.** *Use the written-through format rather than the question-and-answer format, as the latter allows less scope for explaining the context and complexity of the subject of the interview, and for correcting the interviewee's statements when necessary.*
 - 3.** *Explain the reasons for conducting the interview clearly and unambiguously to the readers, as well as the conditions under which the interview was conducted.*
 - 4.** *Correct false or incorrect statements made by the interviewee and give others who are involved (the relevant authorities, victims, etc.) the opportunity to speak.*
-

The importance of experts and where to find them

Bosnian journalists have the problem that there are very few experts who monitor and investigate the phenomenon of terrorism. There

is a shortage in particular of experts who do this in a high-quality way. Therefore journalists often have to use the same expert in several stories. From our experience, that is a much better solution than resorting to less competent experts who might make your investigation weaker, or give it the wrong tone.

As it is important to refrain from sensationalism when reporting on terrorism, it is important that you do not use experts who speak about terrorism in a sensationalism way. A good example is Dzevad Galijasevic, who often describes himself as an expert on terrorism in the domestic and regional media, but is considered an unreliable and poor choice of interviewee by journalists who are experienced in reporting on terrorism.

BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina dedicated an entire TV show to sensationalist reporting on terrorism. We recommend that you watch it.

At the end of this handbook, there is a list of domestic and international experts recommended by BIRN Bosnia and Herzegovina.

One of the ways to deal with the lack of domestic experts is to use international experts. Always use well-known and accepted experts who have non-sensationalist opinions and have been considered relevant for years. We also recommend you follow prominent international and domestic terrorism experts on social media in order to keep up to date with the issues.

The choice of experts is one of the most important elements that will improve the quality of your story. Take your time and choose carefully.



What you should and should not do

When it comes to reporting from terrorism trials, journalists should not make any conclusions at all. The best kind of reporting on trials is to simply say exactly what happened in the courtroom.

When you write an article, never assume or draw conclusions. Describe events the way you see them and be honest about what you know and what you do not know. When reporting on terrorism, you should be particularly cautious, because your reporting might jeopardise someone's safety or affect someone's life.

Journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina often use operational data obtained from intelligence or police agencies or criminal charges as their sources, but in the case of terrorism, doing this is particularly sensitive. It is best to use data from indictments or, even better, verdicts. In verdicts, you can find verified facts that can serve as good background.

However, journalists who want to produce high-quality reports on terrorism in Bosnia and Herzegovina need to go a step further and take other factors into consideration. Recently, at the beginning of a trial of an alleged fighter who had returned from Syria, the names of two female witnesses, also returnees from Islamic State-controlled territory, were mentioned.

These witnesses were due to testify in the trial, but at the hearing, the court did not order their identities to be protected. However, it did do this few months later. In the meantime, after their identities were published by media, they received unpleasant messages and decided not to testify in court. Instead, the statements they had given to investigators were read out in the courtroom.

As journalists were not obliged to refrain from publishing their names until the court ordered it, the question of whether to do so or not was a decision for individual journalists and editors. When making such a decision, the public interest and the interests of all parties to the proceedings should be taken into consideration.

Tips and tricks

- *Prepare background information in advance that you can use for articles, with information such as the amount and length of sentences imposed for terrorism or for going to fight abroad.*
 - *Follow the social media accounts of organisations and experts dealing with terrorism issues.*
 - *Activate Google News notifications about important topics that you are following.*
 - *Provide context and never oversimplify your story - terrorism does not happen in a vacuum.*
 - *Never speculate, use facts that can be verified.*
 - *Do not jeopardise your own or other people's security with your reporting.*
 - *Do not be sensationalist.*
 - *Use multiple sources.*
 - *Tell positive stories about communities' resistance to terrorism.*
 - *Do not to become a medium for spreading fear, as that is the goal of terrorism.*
 - *Don't allow your own fears and prejudices to affect your reporting.*
 - *Put the story in an international framework, as terrorism is usually part of a bigger picture.*
 - *If you make a mistake, be transparent and correct it, making it clear that there has been an amendment to your article.*
-



FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Reporting on radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism is demanding journalistic work. In order to do high-quality work, journalists need to be dedicated, constantly follow new trends and expand their knowledge about the phenomenon and all its manifestations.

Such commitment can yield important stories that might have influence on society. But at the same time, reporting on radicalisation and terrorism could also affect journalists in the long term. Keep an eye on how you are feeling, and if you notice that your work is affecting you more than usual, consider not reporting on this topic for a certain period of time, consult one of your colleagues or seek professional assistance.

This kind of reporting can affect you, but you are not alone in this. The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma offers useful advice that you can use.⁶

Long-term reporting, including watching extremist video content or messages from extremists or terrorists, can and will affect you and your private life. It is therefore important that you react in a timely manner and learn to do your job in a way in which this does not negatively affect you – although this is easier said than done.

⁶ <https://dartcenter.org/blog/2016/11/storyful-releases-podcast-confronting-vicarious-trauma>.



- **Appendices to the handbook**

Excellent list of international sources: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16B_A_CMJIBkC0JcKE-AtOl7ikUBAS0uOiTG96XWh17c/edit#gid=0

- **Organisations and experts**

International Centre for Counter-Terrorism

<https://icct.nl>

Atlantic Initiative

<https://atlantskainicijativa.org>

- **Handbooks**

Terrorism and the Media: A Handbook for Journalists:

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000265733>

Terrorism Codebook:

<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/downloads/Codebook.pdf>

Global Terrorism Database:

<https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

Reporting on Violent Extremism and Terrorism -Guidelines for Journalists:

<https://www.osce.org/bs/mission-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina/442396>

- **Books and publications**

The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent, Vlado Azinovic and Muhamed Jusic

https://atlantskainicijativa.org/wp-content/uploads/ZOV_RATA_U_SIRIJI_PDF/Zov_rata_u_Siriji_i_bosanskohercegovacki_kontingent_stranah_boraca.pdf

The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent, Vlado Azinovic and Muhamed Jusic

https://atlantskainicijativa.org/wp-content/uploads/Novi_zov_rata_u_Siriji_i_bosanskohercegovacki_kontingent_stranah_boraca.pdf

Between Salvation and Terror: Radicalisation and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in the Western Balkans, Vlado Azinovic

https://atlantskainicijativa.org/wp-content/uploads/BETWEEN_SALVATION_AND_TERROR/BetweenSalvationAndTerror.pdf

Extremism Research Forum - Bosnia and Herzegovina Report, Edina Bećirevic

https://atlantskainicijativa.org/wp-content/uploads/erf_bih_report2.pdf

Al-Qaeda in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Myth or Real Danger?, Vlado Azinovic

https://docs.rferl.org/sh-SH/specials/al_kaida/index.htm

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Investigative Reporting Network, BIRN, 2021. - 32 pgs.; 21 cm

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