

JUDGING PROCEDURE HANDBOOK AND ETHICS CODE

EUROPEAN PRESS PRIZE 2027

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MISSION

In 2012 representatives of several media-owning foundations in Europe came together – inspired and informally led by former The Guardian editor Peter Preston – because of a shared concern about the quality of the public debate and the role of the media in Europe.

As a result, the European Press Prize was founded by seven independent European foundations. The European Press Prize exists to recognise, honour, and encourage quality journalism across Europe – empowering journalists to uphold journalistic standards, contributing to reinforcing trust in media and strengthening democratic values.

Quality journalism is vital to healthy democracies, especially under the pressure of a transforming media landscape. We offer a network of solidarity for journalists in Europe. In a fragmented and oversaturated information environment, we aim to be a trusted reference point for journalism.

OUR MAIN ACTIVITIES AND AMBITIONS

- Serving as a widely recognised steward of quality journalism in Europe by defining, communicating and showcasing quality journalism in Europe, upholding and refining European judging standards, and by following and facilitating European conversations on independent journalism and its role in democracy.
- Serving as a catalyst for connection in the European media landscape by connecting journalists throughout Europe that share our mission both online and offline, and building and maintaining relationships with strategic partners.
- We aim for greater resilience of journalistic standards in a changing political and media landscape, more acknowledgement of the role of journalism in European democracy, and a clearer understanding of what quality journalism in Europe is.
- We aim for greater exchange of ideas in the European media landscape, a larger community of European journalists with shared democratic values, and stronger representation of European journalistic values in the wider media ecosystem.

THE ORGANISATION

The Board

The foundation is legally represented by the Board, who are appointed for a four-year period, with possible re-appointment for up to one additional term. The Board is responsible for policy and the realisation of the mission and objectives of the foundation.

The Board approves members of the Preparatory Committee and the Panel of Judges that are proposed by the PrepCom Chair and Executive Director.

You can view current Board members of the European Press Prize [on our website](#).

The Bureau

The Bureau, based in Amsterdam, runs and manages the daily affairs of the foundation, which entail the operation behind the Awards, facilitating the entry period from November to mid-December, coordinating and facilitating the judging procedures in close cooperation with both Preparatory Committee as well as Panel of Judges, and organising annual in-person events.

In relation to the judging procedure, the Bureau facilitates and coordinates all judging procedure meetings and supports the Chairs of both judging bodies – monitoring the atmosphere and structure of all judging meetings. The Bureau is also in charge of all practical arrangements, such as the reading division, entry verification process, note taking and the organisation of all meetings.

The current Bureau team can be found [on our website](#).

The Preparatory Committee

The Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) consists of members from different European countries, speaking a multitude of languages. The Preparatory Committee is in charge of selecting the longlist and shortlist for each category for the Judges. PrepCom Members are appointed for a term of three (3) years, and are eligible for reappointment twice. In total they can be PrepCom Members for a maximum of nine (9) years.

The PrepCom is also the judging body of the Prize that can suggest category changes – from altering category descriptions to proposing the addition or scrapping of categories altogether. Since the PrepCom assesses all work entered for the Prize and is compiled of renowned journalists, editors and media professionals from all over the continent, this is the body that has the best overview of the developments and trends that affect (European) journalism. Every year, at the end of the judging procedure, the PrepCom will evaluate the overall judging procedure, as well as the categories and assess whether the judging procedure and categories continue to reflect developments in the journalism and media landscape – and the organisation.

The Chair of the Preparatory Committee prepares a PrepCom report for the Panel of Judges, detailing the choices of the Shortlist and general summary of the quality of entered work. The Chair of the PrepCom is present at the Panel of Judges' meeting to present that information to the Judges.

The current PrepCom can be viewed [on our website](#).

The Panel of Judges

The Panel of Judges reads and examines each shortlisted project and selects Winners and Runners-up within the context of each single category. The Chair of the PrepCom is present at the Judges' meeting for information, background and motivation of the Shortlist. Judges are appointed for a term of three (3) years, and are eligible for reappointment once. In total they can be Judges for a maximum of six (6) years.

The Chair of the Judges makes a Judges' report, detailing why the winning projects and the Special Award deserve the recognition of an award.

View the current Panel of Judges [on our website](#).

PRIZES

There are six categories, five set categories and one Special Award – which is awarded at the discretion of the Judges (upon a recommendation from the PrepCom in some, but not all cases) . The winners in all six categories each receive prize money of 10,000 EUR.

- **The Investigative Reporting Award:** for discovering and revealing facts, exposing hidden news to the public.
- **The Distinguished Reporting Award:** for exceptional reporting, telling a story in the best possible way.
- **The Innovation Award:** for challenging the boundaries of how journalism is done or presented.
- **The Migration Journalism Award:** For acclaimed coverage of one of Europe's most pressing issues.
- **The Public Discourse Award:** for a remarkable textual interpretation of the world we live in.
- **The Special Award:** The judges award a special prize for excellent journalism to one striking entry which defies categories and disciplines.

The full category descriptions are [on our website](#).

JUDGING & JUDGING ROUNDS

Judging

Members of the European Press Prize's **Preparatory Committee** and **Panel of Judges** will, at all times and during all judging rounds, abide by:

- The **Judging Criteria** (pages 10, 11, 12);
- The **Fair Procedure Rules** (pages 13, 14);
- The **Code of Conduct** (pages 15, 16);
- The **Ethics Code** (page 17).

The European Press Prize **Bureau** will ensure:

- The **Entry Rules** (pages 18, 19) to be followed;
- The **Verification Process** (page 20) to be set in motion when required.

First judging round Preparatory Committee: longlist meetings

In the first round of judging, Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) Members mostly assess submissions in their original project language, providing national and regional contexts on work from their respective countries/regions. To ensure that all entries in this first round also stand a fair chance in the case of conflicts of interests or languages we do not have represented in the PrepCom, applicants are also asked to supply an English translation of their work; either a professional or an AI-generated translation. The PrepCom makes a longlist of 15 to 20 projects in each of the categories. This first round of judging takes place around mid to late January.

An important question to help judge at this early point, **apart from an entry matching the necessary category criteria**: is the entry a potential candidate for the shortlist? If there are any doubts or questions to be raised before being certain whether the entry is a strong enough contender, this should be discussed with the other PrepCom Members.

The longlist meetings take place **online**.

Second judging round Preparatory Committee: category meetings

During the second round of judging, in February, the Preparatory Committee selects a shortlist of 7 to 12 projects per Award Category.

In this round of judging, PrepCom Members are divided into groups per Award Category and all members in a category-group read the same articles within that category. The division is made based on areas of expertise of PrepCom Members, and personal preferences are also taken into account when possible.

The main task in this round of judging is narrowing down the number of entries per category. PrepCom Members in every category meeting reach consensus on the entries that are going through to the next round of judging.

The preliminary shortlist meetings take place **online**.

Final judging round Preparatory Committee: Shortlist Meeting

After selecting 7 to 12 projects per category, the Shortlist Meeting takes place, where the PrepCom narrows the contenders in all categories down to 5 projects per category. This final judging round takes place at the beginning of March.

Additionally, the Preparatory Committee has the right to suggest candidates for the Special Award to the Judges.

The Shortlist Meeting takes place **in person**, and rotates yearly in cities around the continent.

Shortlist Announcement

The Shortlist is announced in April, depending on the time needed by the Bureau to prepare the republications of all nominated projects to the European Press Prize's website, and depending on any potential partnerships in light of the announcement. Since 2023, the announcement is taking place during the International Journalism Festival in Perugia.

Judging round Panel of Judges

The Panel of Judges makes the final selection and decides on Runners-up and Winners in five categories. The Panel of Judges also chooses the recipient(s) of the Special Award, after consideration of potential suggestions from the Preparatory Committee's side. Judges adhere to the same general and category-specific criteria in their decision-making as the Preparatory Committee.

The Panel of Judges' judging round takes place in the same week the Shortlist is being announced, in April.

Announcement of Winners and Runners-up

Winners and Runners-up are announced live during the annual European Press Prize, taking place at the end of May or early June. Each edition of the European Press Prize is organised in different cities around Europe.

JUDGING CRITERIA

Both the Preparatory Committee and the Panel of Judges assess entries based on a set of criteria, as well as guidelines per category. As a general rule, entries should first be assessed based on the generic criteria, and compared against the other entries that are read in this round of judging. Secondly, entries will then be assessed based on the guidelines for the specific category the entry belongs to. Thirdly, in an effort to honour quality journalism across Europe, the Preparatory Committee takes both equality for the general criteria as much as equity into account.

Generic criteria

All entries are assessed based on the following overall criteria:

- Accuracy: Does the entry accurately reflect what happened? How well/completely does the entry reflect what happened, at the moment of publication? Does it avoid misleading the audience through omission, framing or presentation of the facts?
- Verification: Is the entry clear in terms of verified facts and transparent about methods?
- Originality: What does the story add to an issue or a public conversation in terms of information or approach?
- Impact: What kind of impact did the story produce? E.g. What was the impact on the parties involved, on communities, and on society?
- Quality of storytelling: How does the storytelling convey the information and bring readers into the story?
- Quality of presentation: How do all elements of the publication serve the storytelling?
- Fairness: How and to what extent are all parties in the story represented/given the opportunity to respond? Does the story fairly represent the relevant perspectives and evidence?

Guidelines categories

Entries for the **Distinguished Reporting Award**:

- Should focus on exceptional reporting, and on telling a story in the best possible way, using evocative prose that puts readers in the story;
- Capture events with eloquence and originality.
- *Examples (non-exhaustive): feature writing, reportages*

Criteria:

- How deeply reported and engagingly told is the story?
- Does the story contain original, firsthand reporting or field work?
- Is the angle original, e.g. does the story feature an underreported perspective?
- How does the story make a case for its importance or relevance?
- Is enough context given in which the story is embedded?
- Is the human angle strong enough?

Entries for the **Investigative Reporting Award**:

- Discover, reveal or expose facts that would otherwise remain hidden;
- Serve the public interest;
- *Examples (non-exhaustive): stories of corruption, neglect in business, secret political deals, war crimes*

Criteria:

- Has the investigation revealed something previously unknown or hidden, and did it explain why it matters?
- Is the methodology adequate and described transparently?
- Are the claims/findings justified, based on facts, and presented fairly?
- Does the storytelling make the investigation accessible and compelling?

Entries for the **Innovation Award**:

- Should be innovative either in the journalistic process, the presentation or how they are conceived and run;
- Technical developments that enhance journalistic work, both online and offline;
- *Examples (non-exhaustive): new ways of collecting information, innovative packaging or presenting, or new models to connect to audiences or run the business.*

Criteria:

- What kind of innovation is it: in the way it uses new technology, in reporting or presentation methods, in the ways it involves the audience or something else all together?
- How does innovation facilitate or improve the audience's understanding or experience of the story?

Entries for the **Public Discourse Award**:

- Include a remarkable textual interpretation of the world we live in;
- Should include the use of arguments commenting on issues that impact daily lives, or help the public understand a topic, issue or moment;
- Attempt to interpret or explain society;.
- *Examples (non-exhaustive): reflections or opinion pieces about the state of the universe, identity and gender; opinion pieces or analyses of international political or economic developments, explanatory journalism seeking to illuminate the meaning of current events.*

Criteria:

- Is the argument or explanation grounded in evidence, reporting or sound reasoning?
- Is the argument made or explanation done in a clear, convincing, and creative way?
- How does the project expand the audience's understanding of the topic or present a different way to look at a known subject?
- How understandable is the story outside of the local context?

Entries for the **Migration Journalism Award**:

- Deal with the phenomenon of migration in a broad sense;
- Illuminate one of Europe's most important/pressing topics;
- Go beyond the narrative of displacement to provide a social, economic and cultural context.
- *Examples (non-exhaustive): projects that raise awareness about the situation of migrants, their rights or their contributions to society (not journey stories)*

Criteria:

- What is the new/original angle the story brings to the larger topic?
- How does it expand the audience's understanding of a facet of migration?

- Criteria from other categories will apply here as well, based on the type of entry.

The **Special Award**:

- Is awarded to a striking entry which defies categories and disciplines – and deserves special recognition;
- Gives room to the judging bodies to single out some area of special excellence in European journalism (with an additional Shortlist consisting of five pieces) or to choose to salute an individual journalist, a team or an editor for memorable service to journalism.

FAIR PROCEDURE RULES

- Preparatory Committee Members and Judges **cannot enter the contest** in the years they are judging. Submissions to which they have **directly** contributed in any way (e.g. as a co-contributor, project manager or editor), will be disqualified. Situations not explicitly covered will be handled in conversation between the European Press Prize Bureau and Chair of the PrepCom and Jury.
- Each Preparatory Committee Member and Judge, whether an ordinary member or Chair, has **one equal vote**.
- All proceedings and deliberations of both the Preparatory Committee and Judges are conducted **in confidence** while the meetings' outcomes remain strictly confidential as well. All members of the judging bodies will sign a confidentiality agreement to ensure this confidence.
- If Preparatory Committee Members, once entered projects have been divided before the first round of judging, become aware of the fact that they are personally involved in submitted work, through either a personal or professional relationship (e.g. a befriended journalist or submission from an outlet they used to or currently work for), **they must declare their interest openly as soon as possible**, but at the latest **10 working days after receiving their reading list**. This declaration needs to be sent via email to the entire Preparatory Committee to ensure everyone is aware. That ensures that the Chair of the PrepCom can, together with the Bureau, adjust the reading divisions based on this involvement and assign these projects to other members of the PrepCom.
- If Preparatory Committee Members or Judges, at a later stage of the judging rounds, become aware of the fact that they are personally involved in submitted work, through either a personal or professional relationship (e.g. a befriended journalist or submission from an outlet they used to or currently work for), **they must declare their interest openly at the beginning of any discussions on the work**. They will **abstain from voting** on that particular project.
- In all categories, the Preparatory Committee selects five (5) projects per Award Category in order to form a Shortlist.
- In all categories, the Judges will select one Winner and one Runner-up, but deserve the right to select two Runners-up in cases where it deems this fit.
- The Judges have the liberty of selecting a Special Award, after reviewing potential suggestions from the Preparatory Committee.
- The Chair of the Preparatory Committee will sit in at the Judges' meeting, to elaborate on the year's entries and choices made by the Preparatory Committee, and to provide context where needed. The Chair of the Preparatory Committee does not hold a formal vote during the meeting of Judges.
- The Nominees will be announced during the annual Shortlist announcement in April. The Winners and Runners-up in all categories, including the Special Award will be announced during the annual European Press Prize.
- Once appointed, the Preparatory Committee and Judges work **independently** from the Board and the Bureau. The Bureau, however, facilitates and coordinates the meetings of both PrepCom as well as Judges and provides both judging bodies with all information they need

in order to properly judge all projects entered. The Bureau does not interfere with the judging process in any way.

- No member of the Board or Bureau has a vote on which story wins. At least two representatives of the Bureau sit in on the judging meetings to take notes, to answer any logistical or practical questions and to ensure a fair judging procedure.
- Once the Nominees have been decided and announced, they are all presented to the world on the foundation's website and social media channels, and a large selection (in original language and translated) is made available for republishing among the European Press Prize's media partners.

CODE OF CONDUCT

1. Scope

The Code of Conduct applies to all parties involved in the judging procedure; namely the Bureau members, the members of the Preparatory Committee as well as the members of the Panel of Judges.

2. Policy

The European Press Prize is committed to providing a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment for all participants – and during each stage of the judging procedure. To ensure this, the European Press Prize aims to recruit judging body members as well as Bureau members of upstanding character. The Board and Executive Director reserve the right to request a certificate of conduct or similar police clearance at any time from any individual involved with the organisation, including Bureau members and members of the judging bodies. This measure may be considered in cases where individuals are entrusted with sensitive data, decision-making authority, or roles involving vulnerable persons, and will be applied with discretion and respect for privacy.

3. Behaviour

All participants in the judging process (as outlined under Section 1) must follow behaviour that can ensure the environment outlined in Section 2. Participants are therefore expected to:

- Treat all information relating to submissions and judging meetings as strictly confidential and agree and adhere to corresponding Confidentiality Agreement;
- Be considerate, respectful, and collaborative;
- Behave professionally and therefore refrain from any discriminatory, demeaning, or harassing behaviour;
- Be mindful of all fellow participants and act with courtesy and respect towards all fellow participants and Bureau members;
- Contribute to fostering a safe environment for all participants;
- Achieve judging agreements in a respectful manner. Disagreement is part of the process, being disrespectful is not.
- Be prepared to explain and justify their evaluations and selections when required, regardless of their (perceived) standing in the community;
- Be willing to re-examine their opinion if the collective agreement during deliberations differs from their own;
- Set aside any personal preferences, prejudices and biases when judging;
- Be free from external pressures or influences in their judgement decisions;
- Adhere to the organisation's Ethical Use of AI Policy as laid out [here](#);
- Adhere to the [European Press Prize Terms and Conditions](#);
- Adhere to all clauses related to confidentiality as laid out in the Confidentiality Agreement;
- Adhere to all points made in this Judging Handbook;
- Attend all meetings being fully engaged and participate adequately;
- Refrain from engaging in any conduct that may harm the integrity or reputation of the organisation;
- Consider and respect diversity in perspectives, approaches, and backgrounds in submissions;
- Consider and respect diversity in perspectives, approaches, and backgrounds in their fellow judging body members;
- Be open to feedback from Bureau members or fellow judging body members;
- Complete reading and scoring within the given time frame, and notify the Bureau members as soon as possible in case of any delays.

4. Consequences of Unacceptable Behaviour

Any breaches of the points outlined above will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, taking into account their nature and severity. Possible consequences may range from a reminder or request to adjust certain behaviour, to being asked to leave a meeting, or, in exceptional cases, termination of involvement with the organisation. Transgressive behaviour should be reported to the Executive Director, who will determine if an investigation is warranted or if an amicable solution can be reached.

ETHICS CODE

1. The European Press Prize strives:
 - a. To serve as a widely recognised steward of quality journalism in Europe.
 - b. To empower independent journalists in their endeavour to contribute to reinforcing trust in media and strengthening democratic values.
 - c. To align journalists and be a catalyst for connection in the European media landscape.
 - d. To utilise the full extent of its resources, including, but not limited to, its Bureau, its Board, its Laureate network, and any other means made available to it in order to realise these aforementioned goals.
2. *With regards to its entries, the foundation will:*
 - a. Accept submissions regardless of race, gender, sex, sexuality, abilities, religion of submittee.
 - b. Acceptance of submissions and eligibility is based on the applicant meeting at least two out of three of the following criteria:
 - i. The submitter's nationality is European or their country of residence is in Europe (specifically from any of the 47 countries in the Council of Europe, or Belarus and Russia);
 - ii. The publication or outlet is based in Europe;
 - iii. The topic or subject matter is European in nature, or relevance.
3. *With regards to the applicants and their entries, the foundation emphasises that submissions must comply with generally accepted basic principles of journalism, and with the foundation's own standards. Compliance with this list does not replace or reduce the obligation to adhere to generally accepted basic principles of journalism:*
 - a. Projects should be published with journalistic intent in mind.
 - b. Applicants should uphold the principle of media freedom, the right of freedom of expression and the right of the public to be informed – and are independent.
 - c. Applicants should strive to ensure that information disseminated is honestly conveyed, accurate and fair.
 - d. Applicants seek truth based on facts.
 - e. Applicants report in a balanced way and do not instigate hatred discrimination and racism. Projects should not be unnecessarily inflammatory, or otherwise serve as a platform for blatant disparagement of a particular group based on their racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, sexual, gender, identity or identities, etc.
 - f. Applicants work transparently.
 - g. Applicants protect sources and respect privacy.
 - h. Applicants correct inaccuracies and/or errors.
 - i. If applicable, applicants should make use of AI transparently, responsibly and ethically.
 - j. Projects should be accurate and should markedly distinguish between fact and opinion.
 - k. Projects should be produced independently from the influence of the interests that they discuss.
 - l. Claims made in projects should be impartial and evidence-based.
 - m. Projects do not engage in plagiarism, libel and slander.
 - n. Projects that involve ongoing criminal proceedings should do well to respect a suspect's fair trial rights. Crimes of suspects should always be referred to as "allegedly" committed, unless a verdict has been reached by an official court or other judicial mechanisms which have explicitly implicated guilt.

ENTRY RULES

Who can enter?

- Journalists who meet two out of three of the following criteria:
 - The nationality is European or their country of residence is in Europe (specifically from any of the 47 countries in the Council of Europe, or Belarus and Russia);
 - The publication or outlet is based in Europe;
 - The topic or subject matter of their work is European in nature, or relevance.
- The work must have been published by an organisation whose primary mission is independent journalism, rather than lobbying, activism, or political advocacy. Eligibility is determined by the organisation's journalistic mission and independence, not by the medium or platform through which its work is published.
- The work submitted must have a publication date between December 1st of the previous year and December 31st of that same year. If a project published in the month of December is entered two years in a row, it will be disqualified in the second year.
- Another journalist or editor can nominate and submit a project on behalf of a colleague.

What can be entered?

- In the categories Distinguished Reporting, Innovation, Investigative Reporting and Migration Journalism one project per person. For the Public Discourse Award, up to three projects per person.
- If the project is part of a series, the submitter will only be allowed to submit one part of the series and cannot merge several publications into one submission. The submitter needs to disclose that the project they are entering is part of a series, and provide relevant context in the entry form.
- The project is submitted in the original language of publication. Additionally, an English translation of the project or transcript is to be submitted; either a professional or an AI-generated translation.

How should projects be entered?

- An entrant must complete the questionnaire in the online form to provide requested information and background on the entry.
- All material must be submitted electronically with the main material being an online link that **does not contain a paywall**. Submissions based on written text should be additionally submitted as a Word document. Audio and visual entries should be accompanied by a transcript (in Word format). Both text-based articles as well as transcripts should be accompanied by an English translation; either a professional or an AI-generated one.
- To facilitate access for PrepCom and Judges, entrants are required to place URLs **outside any paywall**. If that proves infeasible, the submission form should contain a simple username and password for jurors, plainly indicated in the label for that URL. If a link is not accessible via the means described above, the Bureau and PrepCom reserves the right to disqualify the entry.

Nominated projects

- As constituted in the European Press Prize's [Terms and Conditions](#), copyright holders retain copyright of their work. For nominated projects, copyright holders grant the European Press Prize unlimited non-exclusive use of the project for activities in all media, including social media, online and print, in relation to the Prize and its archive without any remuneration being due.

VERIFICATION PROCESS

The European Press Prize has a verification process to ensure compliance with its code of ethics and entry rules.

- The Bureau checks if information on the entered project is complete and in line with eligibility criteria (such as the date of publication, the type of project, and whether the project meets the *two out of three rule* for geographical eligibility).
- Entrants must submit a reference, preferably an editor-in-chief or a colleague who can vouch that the entrant has upheld the European Press Prize code of ethics in case doubt arises.

Process for alleged breach of the entry rules

If at any time after a Nominee or Award is announced, an entry is alleged to have broken one or more of the entry rules, or contravened the code of ethics, this will be investigated.

The process for determining the status of an Award alleged to have broken the entry rules is as follows:

- The allegations must be presented to the Bureau of the European Press Prize, in the person of the Executive Director and the Chair of the Board, with a signed statement containing supporting evidence. The Bureau can seek legal and other advice, and the Board will determine whether the allegation warrants an investigation.
- If an investigation is considered necessary by the Board of the European Press Prize, the foundation will convene an independent fact-checking team selected by the Executive Director and Board and ask it to conduct an investigation of those allegations, and present the Executive Director and Board of the foundation with a written report.
- A review panel will be established, comprising four members – the Executive Director, the Chair of the Board, the Chair of the PrepCom and the Chair of the Judges – to review the fact-checking report.
- The post-award review panel must reach a unanimous decision on whether or not the entry should be disqualified.
- Once a decision has been reached, the European Press Prize will publish a statement on the investigation and the decision. If a Nominee or Winner is disqualified, the award will be revoked and the project will be removed from the European Press Prize website and if applicable from other output.