



PATFOX FINAL

PROJECT REPORT



Co-funded by
the European Union

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DISCLAIMER

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Detailed information about the project can be found on: <https://www.antislapp.eu/>



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SLAPPs-Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation-are a concerning and fairly recent phenomenon targeting journalists, independent media outlets, human rights defenders (HRDs), academics, whistleblowers, as well as all those involved in building civil society and acting in the public interest. In the last few years, the SLAPP phenomenon has gone global, with actions taking place in a variety of jurisdictions, despite differences in legal traditions and judicial systems.

In a political climate characterized by the progressive erosion of the rule of law and an increasing lack of compliance with the most basic human rights standards around the world, knowledgeable and skilled **justice professionals** can play a fundamental role in reversing the slide in democracy. Every actor involved in the administration of justice has a role and responsibility in the way human rights are protected in their countries. Judges and prosecutors both have a vital mission in protecting individuals against abuses through the affirmation of their rights and freedoms.

Defence lawyers are another of the pillars upon which human rights and the rule of law rest. In protecting the rights of their clients and in promoting the cause of justice, lawyers are required to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms recognized by national and international law.

The **Pioneering anti-SLAPP Training for Freedom of Expression (PATFox)** project, co-funded by the European Commission, was designed to upskill the cadre of European lawyers who defend journalists and media organisations, NGOs and activists against the companies and governmental figures who use lawfare to shut down legitimate criticism in some of the countries with Europe's worst SLAPP problems.

In the two-year duration of the project, the Consortium managed to train **364** lawyers in **11** Member states: Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Malta, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain.

The **target groups** reached during the life of the project were general lawyers, human rights lawyers, independent lawyers focusing on environmental cases, lawyers working with/for independent media and NGOs, representatives of bar associations and associations of lawyers, state attorneys and lawyers from public institutions.

In addition to doing the practical training, we designed, developed, and implemented the **first European anti-SLAPP curriculum**, based on video lectures, case studies, and handbooks. All materials are freely available in all 11 languages on the Curriculum Hub section on the project website: <https://antislapp.eu>

This **Final Report** aims to document all the project's activities and results as well as evaluate its success.

Chapter One outlines the original objectives of the PATFox project and the context in which it was designed. **Chapter Two** introduces the partner consortium more in detail, followed by the documentation of the various project activities in **Chapter Three**. **Chapter Four** describes the project approach and activities, while **Chapter Five** presents the outcomes of the project. **Chapter Six** focuses on the dissemination of the project. Last but not least, the **final chapter** examines PATFox's reception among its target group, based on evaluation activities and dissemination of the curriculum content beyond the trainings themselves. Finally, we provide an assessment of the success of PATFox overall, along with some recommendations and conclusions.

1. CONTEXT

Courts are designed to right wrongs—to achieve justice. But courts can be abused. Vexatious litigation has been around for as long as courts have, but the 2000s have seen an epidemic of a new kind of legal harassment.

SLAPPs-Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation-are a concerning and fairly recent **phenomenon** targeting HRDs, along with journalists, independent media outlets, academics, whistle-blowers, as well as all those involved in building civil society and acting in the public interest.

Often masquerading as ordinary lawsuits, **SLAPPs** are generally based on meritless, frivolous, or exaggerated claims, and inherently have, in theory, no chance of prevailing in court. They are used for a variety of tangential and overarching abusive purposes including retaliating against, or punishing targets for speaking out, halting particular acts, or opposing political activities, and offering a highly visible warning to others who might wish to express an opinion.

The **aim** of distracting or intimidating is often achieved by rendering the legal proceedings expensive and time-consuming through motions, injunctions, and other costly disclosure processes. Demands for damages are often exaggerated. In some cases, several lawsuits are initiated at once in an effort to overwhelm the counterpart in expensive litigation. Another **common feature** of SLAPPs is the engagement in the practice of “forum shopping” as a further hurdle for the defendant. By tying their targets up in abusive, lengthy, and therefore costly legal proceedings, SLAPPs can be a nerve-wracking and frightening experience for the victims and their families as well as deter organizations’ human rights work.

In addition, they can have a chilling effect on the exercise of freedom of expression if others are afraid to speak out because they might be sued. In the last few years, the SLAPP phenomenon has **gone global**, with actions taking place in a variety of jurisdictions, despite differences in legal traditions and judicial systems, and is now taking place not just in countries that are led by repressive or autocratic governments, but also in several generally considered to be “developed” or “consolidated” European democracies.

The **data** suggests that the use of legal threats to silence speech in Europe has grown exponentially over the past few years, especially in some EU member states. According to the [last report](#) released by the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (CASE), an estimated 161 such lawsuits were filed in 2022. A significant number of SLAPPs were lodged in Malta, France, Croatia, Greece, the United Kingdom, Turkey, and Georgia.

Regrettably, the limited anecdotal evidence collected so far likely represents just the tip of a **sizeable iceberg**. Given that an unknown number of legal threats are issued that do not ever reach court and many on the receiving end of legal threats feel unable to talk about them, these figures almost certainly understate the scale of the problem.

Without specific legislation aimed at addressing this phenomenon, SLAPPs are treated in most Member States as **regular lawsuits**, and the usual procedural rules are applied. The absence of specific safeguards against SLAPPs makes national judicial systems vulnerable to this kind of abuse and leaves targets with limited protection offered by existing norms of general or sectorial application, such as provisions on damages and costs and safeguards against abusive practices such as vexatious, frivolous, or excessive claims.

Consequently, **lawyers** stand as the last line of defense against this type of abusive action.

Not surprisingly, a substantial chapter of both the [European Commission Recommendation \(EU\) 2022/758](#) of 27 April 2022 on protecting journalists and human

rights defenders who engage in public participation from manifestly unfounded or abusive court proceedings ('Strategic lawsuits against public participation'), adopted in 2022 by the European Commission as part of its anti-SLAPP package, and the [Draft Recommendation CM/Rec\(20XX\)XX](#) of the Committee of Ministers to member states on countering the use of SLAPPs proposed by the Council of Europe, is the invitation to **educate the legal community** on the harm that SLAPPs cause, both to their targets and to democratic societies more broadly, so as to avoid normalizing the practice.

Evidently, when it comes to SLAPPs, there is no silver bullet to tackle the problem, but strengthening the role of judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and representatives of judicial training institutes in promoting freedom of expression standards, including freedom of the press, and access to information can be tremendously effective.

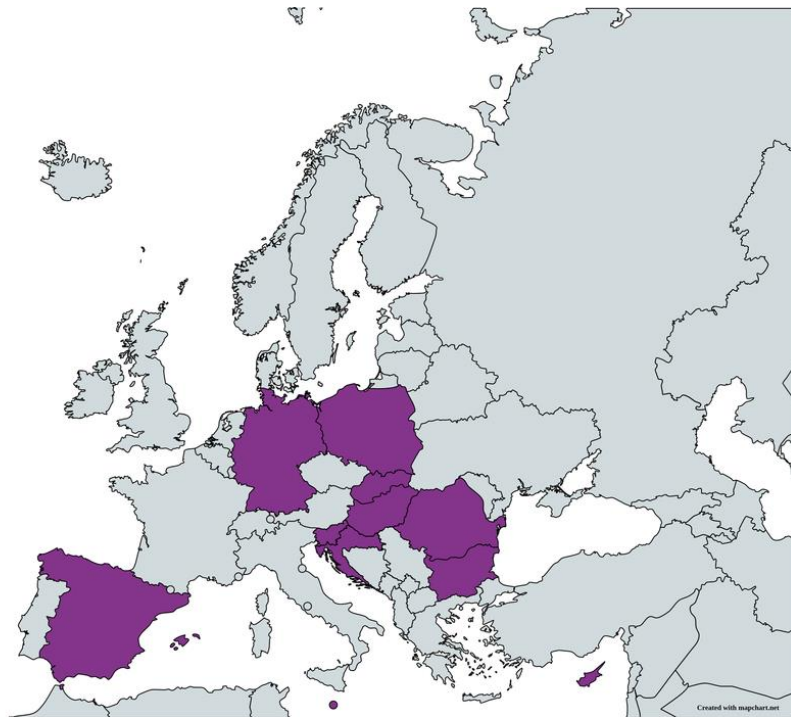
Unfortunately, despite the increasing number of SLAPPs being filed in many European countries, **knowledge** of defending against SLAPP suits is still a **young field**, which has only recently received sustained attention. In many cases, the legal professionals dealing with these cases on the ground are not equipped with the required knowledge and skills to successfully identify abusive litigation and react appropriately.

Consequently, the effective defence of journalists and activists against often unfounded accusations often fails because they are unable to find legal representation that is familiar with the SLAPP problem and knows appropriate defence strategies. Defending against SLAPPs requires, in fact, **solid knowledge** of international human rights principles and the incoming EU legislation, together with **detailed know-how** on domestic legal systems and procedures.

The project Pioneering Anti-SLAPP Training for Freedom of Expression -PATFox - was **designed** to address exactly this need, responding to the call of action included in the EC Recommendation.

2. THE PROJECT

The PATFox project ran from February 2022 to February 2024 and was co-funded by the European Union's Justice Programme. It has been implemented in 11 EU Member states (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Malta, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain)



Objectives

PATFox was a pioneering project, set up to make a fundamental contribution to some **major objectives**, namely:

- *raising awareness and extending relevant knowledge about SLAPPs among European lawyers*
- *improving lawyers' knowledge and skills to effectively deal with SLAPPs and to better represent those targeted by these abusive actions*
- *promoting front-line SLAPP defense efforts across the European Union.*

More **specifically**, the Consortium worked towards:

- *identifying and connecting lawyers that would be likely to face or defend against SLAPPs*
- *increasing the capacity of legal professionals (10-20 lawyers per country) by delivering innovative legal training*
- *designing, implementing, and continuously refining a SLAPP defence training a cross-country curriculum, based on both international experience and European human rights principles and local procedural knowledge and jurisprudence.*

Targets

The project mainly **targeted** general lawyers, human rights lawyers, independent lawyers focusing on environmental cases, lawyers working with/for independent media and NGOs, representatives of bar associations and associations of lawyers, state attorneys, lawyers from public institutions practising in the project countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Germany, Malta, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain).

In addition to this, the Consortium put effort into promoting education and awareness-raising initiatives for **lawyers-in-training** and **postgraduate students** in law with the goal of broadening the professional knowledge of legal professionals and preparing them with the commitment and skills to recognise SLAPPs, defend human rights, and respect ethical principles in their work.

3. CONSORTIUM

The PATFox **partnership** was founded by ten **civic society organizations** and one **university** from eleven European countries, each of whom brought invaluable local expertise to the project. With their unique position and in-depth knowledge of the human rights situation in their countries, the PATFox project partners were well suited to take the lead in promoting this anti-SLAPP initiative.



Lead partner was **Fundación Internacional Baltasar Garzon (FIBGAR)**, in Spain. FIBGAR is a private, social, non-profit foundation, deeply committed to the defence and promotion of Human Rights, Universal Jurisdiction, and the fight against impunity.

In Germany, the project partner was **Blueprint for Free Speech**, a non-profit charity that works internationally to promote the right to freedom of expression without undue interference or intrusion. Blueprint's research and advocacy strive to defend Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which asserts the right to freedom of opinion and expression for all people.



**MEDIA
DEVELOPMENT
CENTER**



The partner in Bulgaria was **Media Development Center (MDC)**, a non-profit, non-partisan organization founded in 1998. It

was established to promote independent media in Bulgaria, and to foster capacity-building of the media by encouraging good practice in journalism, stimulating the professional ethics, institutionalizing the dialogue among the state administration, the media and the NGO sector and and to boost the networking and cross-border cooperation in the region of Southeast Europe.

In Croatia the project was represented by **GONG**, a civil society organization focused on enhancing democratic processes and institutions as well as developing democratic political culture and encouraging active and responsible participation of citizens in political processes, particularly in decision-making processes related to good governance of public and collective property, protection and promotion of the rule of law, human rights and solidarity.



The partner in Cyprus was the **Cyprus University of Technology (CUT)**, a public university located on the coastal city of Limassol. In its relatively short history CUT has earned international recognition as one of the

top-ranked universities in Cyprus and Greece, incorporating sustainability in its strategic pillars while preparing its graduates for the new era. The University has consistently ranked as one of the top 60 Young Universities and as one of the leading 600 universities in the world by Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE) in recent years.

In Hungary, the project was represented by the **Budapest Center for Independent Journalism (CIJ)**, established by the New York based Independent Journalism Foundation in 1995. Since then CIJ has sought to support quality and ethical journalism and aimed at contributing to a media environment where freedom of expression and freedom of the press are protected and promoted.



FÜGGETLEN MÉDIAKÖZPONT
Center for Independent Journalism



The PATFox Maltese partner was **aditus**, a human rights NGO working towards a society where all persons in Malta may enjoy all their fundamental human rights and have access to remedies where necessary.

In Poland, the project was represented by **OKO.press**, a non-profit, investigative journalism and fact-checking project, created to preserve freedom of speech and secure access to information in Poland. In less than four years, OKO.press has become a widely recognised, often cited, medium supported by the unique community of its readers.



CENTER FOR
**INDEPENDENT
JOURNALISM**

The project partner in Romania was **the Center for Independent Journalism**, a non-profit organization with 25 years of experience, which acts as a watchdog for professional and quality journalism, by protecting journalism standards and developing a balanced, honest and responsible media environment.

The Slovakian PATFox partner was **MEMO 98** which helps people to receive fair and comprehensive information about public affairs.



Finally, **Open** from Slovenia took part in the project. The Institute for Culture of Diversity Open is a non-governmental organization focusing on the respect for human rights, spreading diversity and fighting against discrimination.

4. PROJECT APPROACH

In order to accomplish its key objectives, the Consortium took a **systematic approach** to the training program's development based on the following methodological principles:

- **Learner-centered.** The content and methodology were tailored to the needs and experiences of the audience (lawyers) as well as their context.
- **Practical approach.** The Consortium promoted hands-on learning with real-world applications.
- **The participants' experience.** The professional expertise and practical experience of trainees were acknowledged, and the exchange of expertise and experience was facilitated.
- **Peer learning and Participatory methodology.** The training team included experts and created environments in which participants were comfortable sharing their knowledge and experiences with each other.
- **Flexibility.** Training materials have been tailored to the needs and reality of the lawyers, and the situation on the ground, and designed to be flexible and adapt to the

feedback from participants and the training team. Training sessions were held in a mixture of in-person, online and hybrid formats.

- **Complementary expertise.** The project partners and the PATFox experts ensured the multi-dimensional expertise.
- **Gender mainstreaming.** The project sought gender parity in both the training and trainee cohorts.
- **Respect for EU values.** Anti-SLAPP efforts are inherently protective of fundamental rights – and counterstrategies usually involve the practical application of Charter rights.

On the basis of these principles, project activities were implemented according to the following four **major phases**:



Needs assessment and analysis

Any attempt to have a constructive impact on a human rights problem must be guided by a thorough understanding of the context and the factors that contribute to it. Therefore, in line with the work plan, the partnership initially focused its efforts on:

- *Examining the state of the art of SLAPPs in each country and gathering resources on legal defense against SLAPPs*
- *Identifying interested trainees as well as other relevant stakeholders*
- *Assessing the learning needs, which would be later specified in terms of a set of learning outcomes*

Given that the project was operating in **11 different socio-cultural environments**, the targeting of beneficiaries and the need assessment were done in accordance with those national contexts.

Initially, partners conducted a holistic, in-depth investigation of the phenomenon of SLAPP in their countries by carrying out data collection and mapping activities to determine general trends and patterns. This **mapping exercise** was an ongoing process, repeatedly expanded and improved during the project time to help inform additional information gathering and analysis.

In this process, the following **guiding questions** were considered:

- *What advice lawyers should give their clients to minimize the chances of being sued and/or to increase your chances, in case of being sued, of prevailing quickly?*
- *What to do when you receive threatening letters?*

- *Which kinds of suits bear the hallmarks of SLAPPs and are thus amenable to SLAPP-back techniques?*
- *How to quickly file a petition for summary (pre-discovery) dismissal on the basis of the suit's vexatious nature, likely failure, improper venue, and the public policy interest in preventing SLAPPs from proceeding?*
- *How to engage the court of public opinion as an anti-SLAPP tool?*

An **inventory of cases** was undertaken to form the basis of a comprehensive review of the factual circumstances of SLAPP in local contexts, to understand the extent of victimisation caused and how laws are being implemented and enforced in different jurisdictions in relation to abusive actions. Partners mapped the substantive and procedural tools used in each partner's country for the purposes of SLAPP, along with the tools used for defending targets. Broader incident mapping was especially necessary in those countries where the data available was limited.

Consequently, on the assumption that **legal cases** are important sources of analytical patterns, and, hence, can play a vital role in building arguments, organizing analyses, and conveying points of view, partners proceeded to case selection and qualitative analysis. As part of this effort, over the project time, the partners continuously monitored and followed up individual cases.

In parallel, the Consortium conducted **legal and legislative analysis** to fully uncover the strengths and weaknesses of the legal protections and develop strategies for improving legal outcomes. Information was gathered from a desk review of existing documentation, interviews and formal conversations, training application forms, pre-training assessments and consultation meetings with stakeholders.

Partners reached out to **key stakeholders** who might be familiar with the situation in the country or interested in the project activities. Interviews and informal conversations

helped to determine what needed to be taught and improved. In particular, interviews with targets and possible targets of SLAPP were carried out to gain insights regarding their experiences and determine needs and challenges from their perspective. Data collection and mapping activities also offered important opportunities for **dialogue** with those actors with the official mandate to provide professional education, in particular local bar associations, or associations of lawyers.

Ultimately, through their in-country communities, and **extensive invitation campaigns** project partners sought out lawyers to participate in PATFox's training, targeting:

- lawyers, law firms, and legal experts
- local Bar Associations, requesting them to forward the invitations to all their members
- law faculties
- online platforms specializing in legal content
- non-governmental organizations
- Journalists' Association and the Journalists' Union
- Institutions, i.e., Judicial Associations and the Associations of State Prosecutors, prosecutors' offices, and courts, urging them to distribute the information among their staff

The resulting analysis enabled to designing of the curriculum materials and the fostering anti-SLAPP legal networks in the project countries.

During this stage, the following **challenges** were detected:

- **general lack of knowledge and awareness of SLAPP among beneficiaries and legal stakeholders, both in terms of knowledge and direct experience with the phenomenon**

In most cases, SLAPP turned out to be a completely unknown term to lawyers and the public alike. Similarly, there appeared to be limited awareness of the European Commission's anti-SLAPP package, both the Recommendation, which urges Member states to implement training and raising awareness activities, and the draft Directive. This could have resulted in a lack of interest in the anti-SLAPP training. To mitigate this risk, partners resorted to extensive promotion campaigns.

- **diverse socio-cultural environments and SLAPP scenarios**

The Consortium operated in 11 European countries, some of them characterized by the rule of law backsliding and extreme polarization of political discourse.

When the project kicked off, in some countries, the discussion of SLAPP as a topic was in its infancy, and little attention was given to its potential consequences and impacts on society in general as well as on legal professionals. In those countries, the judicial sector, including legal professionals and their representative institutions did not always acknowledge the chilling effects abusive actions were generating in their countries (i.e., Spain). On the contrary, in other countries, SLAPP was already perceived as an emerging legal issue and topic of interest for professionals potentially involved in anti-SLAPP defence (i.e., Poland).

- **few and scattered data available on SLAPP cases**

When the project started, only a few cases had been reported, and reports contained limited information. No official data were available for other countries.

- **limited resources**

None or limited academic journals and scientific papers to gather data and insights related to a topic were available.

- **SLAPP targets' fear of being interviewed**

In some cases, victims were afraid of being SLAPPED again for sharing information about their cases.

- **number of lawyers possibly interested in the training**

In some countries (Malta, Cyprus) the small size of the legal community impacted the number of lawyers interested in attending training events.

- **concern from trainers about sharing professional knowledge and experience and the risk of being SLAPPED**

Some partners warned about the challenges faced during the selection of the attendees. In particular, they shared their worries that lawyers representing the plaintiff's side in SLAPP cases could get interested in the Anti-SLAPP training to learn what strategies and tactics the defendants are developing and sharing. To mitigate this risk, a vetting mechanism to select trainees in some countries (Poland, Germany).

- **minimum support from local bar associations**

Bar associations, as professional bodies of lawyers, are responsible for providing continuous legal education to their members, and, therefore, their support is essential. However, only six project partners could count on the support of the local Bar Associations.

Training material design

The aim of the second stage was to provide materials that could fill a gap in the training and education of lawyers in the 11 EU member states. Therefore, based on the input, learning **materials** were tailored and adjusted to the needs identified.

The learning outcomes identified, along with the training environment, audience characteristics and needs, determined the **learning methods** and the choice of the appropriate methodology. Partners properly developed **educational materials** based on a combination of learning methods which included slide presentations used during the workshops, video lectures, case studies, handbooks and practical toolkits.

All materials were designed with experienced practitioners with a thorough understanding of the local context, and expertise in human rights, press and media law, copyright, media, information and IT law, defamation law, criminal, civil and labor law, the **PATFox legal experts**.

Materials have been continuously evaluated through the design **review**, the expert review, and the learner review. The design review sought to ensure that, in the process of developing the materials, there was coherence between the findings of the training needs assessment, and the learning objectives. In addition, the materials have been adapted to the feedback received from trainees and legal experts.

During this stage, the following **challenges** were detected:

- **meeting different learning needs**

Different countries had different starting levels of knowledge and familiarity with SLAPPs. The Consortium adopted an educational strategy which includes introductory and more advanced materials, as well as legal and extra-legal content.

- **covering a wide range of topics**

SLAPPs involve different legal issues. Consequently, materials entailed several SLAPP-related topics from criminal, civil, administrative law, international private law, and local and European case law.

- **establishing and maintaining consistency**

SLAPP is a rapidly changing phenomenon. Therefore, materials have been constantly updated until the end of the project to ensure that they tackle the most current developments.

Training delivery

Training sessions were organised according to the different **needs** detected.

As for the **participants**, they were identified as early as possible, to allow adequate time both for assessing training needs and for making administrative arrangements. Gender balance was taken into consideration.

The workshops were **delivered** in-person, in capital cities or close to courts and numerous law offices, or in a hybrid format. Time and location were decided according to local lawyers' needs. In some cases, in-person workshops were organised with the support of the local bar associations which provided the location and supported the partners in communicating the training initiatives through their official channels. Moreover, in one case (Cyprus), as an additional incentive for participants, the bar association awarded lawyers credit hours for their continuing professional development.

The workshops were led by **trainers** from in-country partners and legal experts. In addition, speakers with expertise in SLAPP (academics, NGO representatives and so on) and victims of SLAPP were invited to participate with the goal of fostering networks and collaboration and exchanging experiences.

The **participatory approach** was ensured by fostering debates on the practical experience, case studies, peer-learning discussions, and post-workshop interactions in informal environments. Trainers engaged participants in discussions and kept the forum open for feedback, queries, and suggestions, and - value the participants' experience and perspectives they bring to the discussion, about practical problems encountered by practising lawyers in different matters - criminal, civil, and administrative - and with different knowledge. Also, workshops included a networking session to encourage the creation of anti-SLAPP alliances. In addition, partners fostered a continuous dialogue with the participants after the event through e.g., mailing lists. These discussions and interactive sessions were supported through training material such as pre and post-tests, slide presentations and handouts.

During this stage, the following **challenges** were detected:

- **mixed audience**

In some cases, the audience included trainees with different professional backgrounds and levels of knowledge on SLAPP. Providing discussion sessions and shared practical problems encountered by practising lawyers in different matters - criminal, civil, and administrative and with different knowledge, in such an environment proved to be very effective and useful.

- **need for a safe space for discussion**

In some countries where the SLAPP discussion was already active, it was important to enable a 'safe space' for lawyers to discuss tactics in the absence of those who might be engaged in initiating SLAPP suits. Different strategies were adopted to respond to these situations (i.e., an open applications process accompanied by vetting, or alternatively an invitation-only system distributed by direct referral).

In addition, since SLAPPs as an issue are still not routinely addressed at law schools and other training institutions, a series of **lectures** were delivered with the goal of raising awareness about the phenomenon among postgraduate law students and lawyers-in-training, as well as promoting high ethical standards among the next generation of legal professionals. Also, the lecture supported the communication of the project and the dissemination of its results.

Assessment & Evaluation

The Consortium implemented a process of gathering information for evaluating the **effectiveness** of the curriculum and ensuring that the intended, implemented and attained curricula were aligned. The process considers relevance, consistency, practicality, effectiveness, scaling-up and sustainability, as well as whether learners were achieving the expected learning outcomes, and aims at measuring the extent to which the curriculum is commensurate with the diverse needs of all learners.

Materials were tested and evaluated during the workshops, which provided interesting feedback for new materials or revisions to the existing curriculum.

Training activities were evaluated through an evaluation questionnaire based on quantitative and qualitative approaches. Qualitative questions were used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations, and provide insights into the participants' thoughts to dive deeper into the experience of the training. Quantitative questions were used to quantify the participants' views on the training or trainers.

In addition, partners followed up with trainees to hear from them the degree to which the information provided to them in their SLAPP defence workshop proved useful, to ascertain what new challenges they face on the SLAPP front, and to learn whether they have devised new anti-SLAPP measures based on their recent experience.

During this stage, the following **challenges** were detected:

- **keeping the trainees interested and engaging them in continuous feedback**

To mitigate this risk, partners fostered anti-SLAPP legal networks, and promoted the training materials through their communities

5. MAIN RESULTS

Patfox Legal Network

The Consortium has successfully **networked lawyers** in eleven European countries, providing opportunities to learn and establish connections.

Prior to PATFox, still very few lawyers were known for having deep knowledge of, and expertise in defending against SLAPPs. Now, there is a new cohort of professionals equipped with the tools necessary to meet the demands of this specific category of clients.

In the dynamic world of law, staying abreast of the latest developments is not just beneficial; it's essential. The project helped connect lawyers from different fields and created legal communities which can serve as platforms for sharing information, best practices, and legal updates.



The network includes the experts who supported the project activities (the PATFox legal experts), and the trainees who attended the workshops

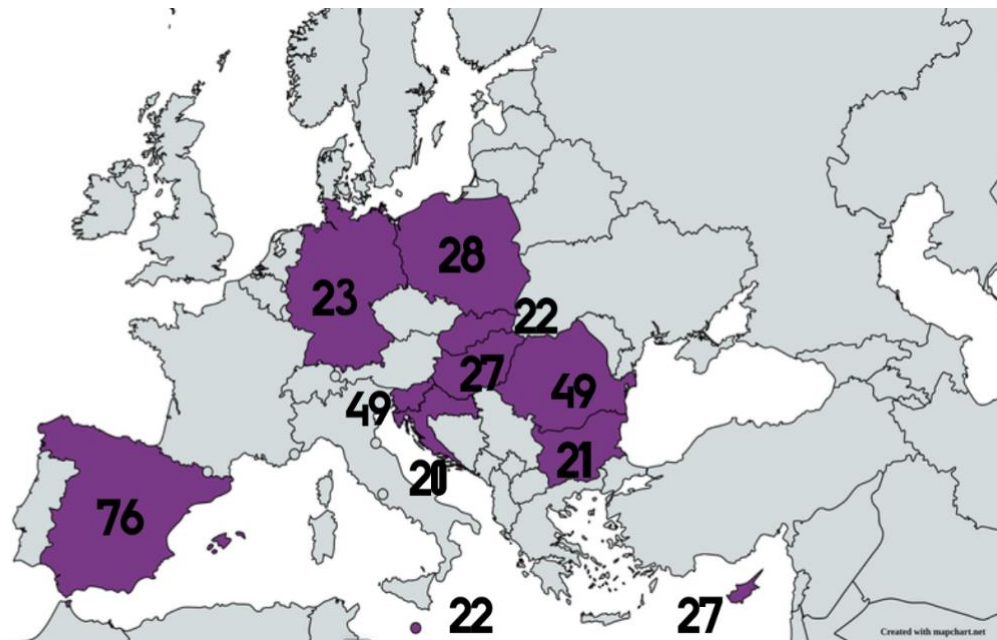
The lists of experts and their contact details are available: <https://www.antislapp.eu/experts>

The network includes, also, all other participants in the workshops, including victims, journalists, civil society organizations, and activists.

PATFox training

The Consortium organized **25 workshops** and trained a total of **364 lawyers**, exceeding the initial target of a maximum of 200 lawyers (10-20 lawyers per country).

The **first round** of training run between November 2022 and February 2023, while the **second** between March and December 2023. Demand exceeded our expectations. In fact, some countries, partners were not able to satisfy the demand for lawyers interested in attending the second round of training.



The **participants** included human rights lawyers/focusing on environmental cases, lawyers working with/for independent media and NGOs; representatives of bar associations and associations of lawyers; state attorneys, lawyers from public institutions, and national human rights commissions. The quantitative data highlighted a high degree of female participation (2:3). Additionally, academics, government representatives and judges attended the training.

Participation in the workshop enabled trainees to **gain knowledge** of the phenomenon, the mechanisms, and tools currently available under national law to tackle SLAPP cases, and the EU anti-SLAPP Directive proposal. Furthermore, through interactive sessions, the workshops offer a **unique platform** for legal professionals to engage in discussion on the challenges posed by SLAPPs and explore and share effective strategies to counter such lawsuits.

In addition, the workshops included **discussion sessions** where shared practical problems encountered by practising lawyers in different matters - criminal, civil, and administrative and with different knowledge, in such an environment. This proved to be very effective and useful mainly because of emerging issues that require an analysis of domestic law and the proposed mechanisms of the Directive.

The trainees showed **high responsiveness** to the training and expressed high satisfaction, which was demonstrated during the workshops and after them. As such, we can determine that, in general, the training programme succeeded in the satisfaction of the training needs of the participants and in the achievement of the learning objectives.

Participants were greatly pleased with the opportunity to attend training on the subject, which was valued as very useful and extremely important:

98%

changed their perception of the topic

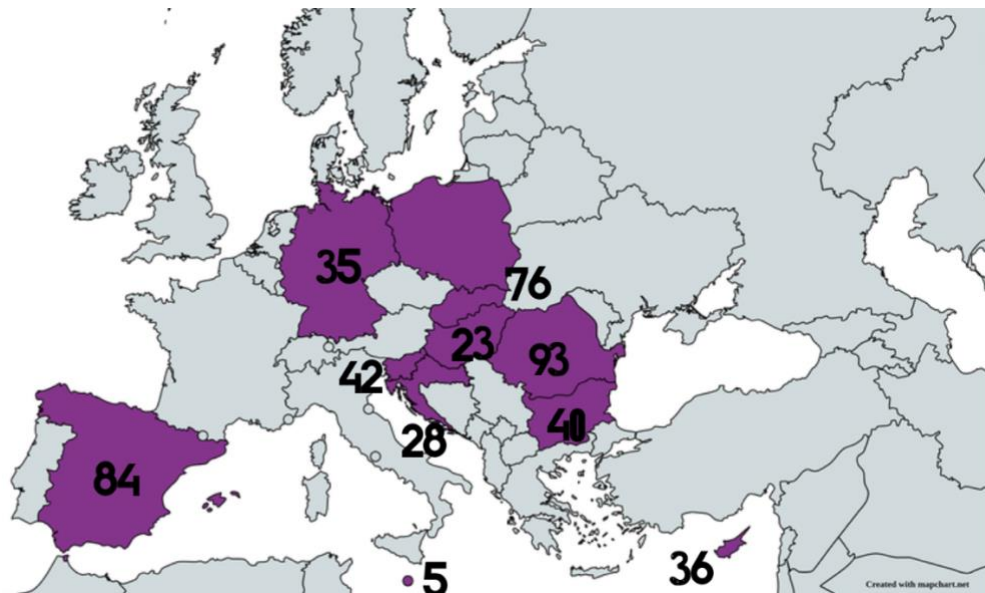
98%

would react differently when they came across the issue

96%

would use the content of the seminar in their professional practice

Furthermore, as an additional activity, 22 **lectures** were organized with the support of local universities with the goal of raising awareness about the phenomenon among postgraduate law students and lawyers-in-training. A total of **462 students** (law students and trainee lawyers) attended the lectures.



Curriculum HUB

The Consortium developed the first Europe's **first anti-SLAPP curriculum** provides legal professionals defending journalists and media organizations, NGOs, and activists with the necessary tools to properly identify and challenge this form of abuse.

The **Curriculum Hub** (available at <https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub>) is a user-friendly training tool composed of **73 learning materials**, both in English and local languages, drawing both on international expertise and European human rights principles as well as local procedural knowledge and case law.



Curriculum Resources for Anti-SLAPP training

PATFox is developing **Europe's first anti-SLAPP curriculum**, drawing both on international expertise and European human rights principles, as well as local procedural knowledge and case law.

A [handbook](#) for our **core EU and international law** module is now available, alongside [SLAPP case studies](#) drawn from 11 EU member states, [local curriculum materials](#) and [videos](#).

You can use the **drop-down menu** on the left to sort these curriculum materials by:

- country
- format (eg video, core curriculum)
- language

Alternatively, you can view a [full index](#) of resources posted to date.

Details of future PATFox training events can be found on our [calendar](#).

Sort by country, format or langua... ▾

The curriculum is composed of two main sections: central and local.

The **central section** is designed to provide a brief overview of the characteristics of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) and how they can be identified, and then to set out the parameters for the legal topics relevant to the phenomenon. As such, it provides guidance on the interaction between SLAPPs and human rights and includes an analysis of the Proposed EU Anti-SLAPP Directive. Finally, the central curriculum analyses the implications of SLAPPs in terms of private international law, and the issues related to the freedom of information and subject access requests.

Also, additional modules cover other relevant aspects such as protecting personal data (cybersecurity), financial forensics and whistleblowing, and legal communications.

<p>Anti-SLAPP Legal Toolkit</p>	<p>This guide aims at becoming a long-lasting companion to all those involved, now or in the future, in anti-SLAPP defence.</p> <p>It provides a step-by-step guide to the considerations that should inform a defence to a SLAPP suit and references useful resources produced by the PATFox project.</p>	<p>https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/antislapp-legal-toolkit</p>
<p>Anti-SLAPP Legal Curriculum for Layers in the European Union- Handbook</p>	<p>This handbook is designed to provide to European lawyers a brief overview of the issues related with SLAPP defense.</p>	<p>https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/anti-slapp-curriculum</p>
<p>Anti-SLAPP Legal Curriculum for Layers in the European Union- slide decks</p>	<p>These slide decks focus on the Proposed Directive and Freedom of information and subject access request.</p>	<p>https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/the-proposed-eu-anti-slapp-directive-and-existing-eu-instruments</p> <p>https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/freedom-of-information-and-subject-access-requests</p>

<p>Anti-SLAPP Legal Curriculum for Layers in the European Union- video lectures</p>	<p>These videos lectures represent the core elements of an Anti-SLAPP Curriculum.</p>	<p>https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/video-an-anti-slapp-curriculum-introduction</p>
<p>ECtHR Case Law for Anti-SLAPP Defense- Handbook</p>	<p>This handbook is intended to offer an analysis of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights ("the Court") and summaries of pertinent decisions to provide practitioners with useful guidance on how to use these precedents to support their arguments against SLAPP lawsuits.</p>	<p>https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/ecthr-case-law</p>
<p>Cybersecurity Module</p>	<p>This module provide advice to secure information and resources.</p>	<p>https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/cybersecurity-best-practices-for-anti-slapp-lawyers</p>
<p>Financial Forensic Module</p>	<p>This module focuses on financial forensic.</p>	<p>https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/forensic-investigation-what-you-need-to-know-to-avoid-being-caught-up-in-a-slapp-case</p>
<p>Whistleblowing Module</p>	<p>This module presents several practical defensive approaches, that may help legal practitioners and their SLAPP clients.</p>	<p>https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/guide-to-whistleblowing</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Strategi Legal Communication Module</p>	<p>This module provides advice on how to develop a communication strategy for anti-SLAPP litigation.</p>	<p>https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/strategic-legal-communication</p>
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The **local section** focuses on the phenomenon and its manifestations in the different contexts of the **11 countries** that are part of the PATFox consortium: Germany, Malta, Cyprus, Slovakia, Spain, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. This section includes 11 case studies , 11 slide decks, 25 video lectures and 11 curriculum handbooks in local languages.

Bulgaria	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/bulgaria
Croatia	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/croatia
Cyprus	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/cyprus
Germany	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/germany
Hungary	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/hungary
Malta	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/malta
Poland	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/poland
Romania	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/romania
Slovakia	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/slovakia
Slovenia	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/slovenia
Spain	https://www.antislapp.eu/curriculum-hub/tag/spain

All materials have been made freely available on the PATFox website, after having been **tested and evaluated** during the two training, according to the feedback provided by the trainees and the legal experts, and widely disseminated through mailing lists, local bar associations, legal magazines, media, etc.

The Curriculum Hub is an innovative and practical platform which provides European lawyers and legal practitioners access to high-quality curriculum resources for learning about anti-SLAPP defense to better meet the needs of an evolving profession. For this, it has been highly appreciated by both the trainees and legal education providers.

6. DISSEMINATION

To ensure the **communication** of the project and the **dissemination** of the results, the Consortium implemented a mixed strategy which included website development, social media dissemination, public events, active advocacy and participation in relevant national and international scenarios and targeted multiple audiences, the public and relevant stakeholders.

As part of the project, two knowledge-sharing events were organized in Brussels.



**ANTI-SLAPP
LEGAL TRAINING**
Experiences from the PATFox Project

28 FEBRUARY 2023
09:00 - 13:00 CET
European Parliament
Room SPAAK 7C50 & online
Event hosted by MEP
Juan Fernando López Aguilar
Chair of the Committee on Civil
Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of
the European Parliament (LIBE)

 PATFox  Co-funded by the European Union  European Parliament

On the 28th of February 2023, PATFox Consortium gathered in Brussels for the project first project's sharing-knowledge event, **Anti-SLAPP Legal Training: Experiences from the PATFox Project**. The event was hosted by the Chair of the European Parliament's Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice, and Home Affairs (LIBE), Mr Juan Fernando Lopez Aguilar MEP. The President of the European Parliament, Madame Roberta Metsola MEP who together with Mr Lopez Aguilar, delivered the closing remarks.

The event was aimed at showcasing the first draft Anti-SLAPP curriculum and the resources that can now be found online on our Curriculum Hub and sharing initial insights from the first round of local workshops. The event itself was attended by MEPs and members of their offices, lawyers, academics, NGO representatives, and journalists. More information is available here: [agenda](#); [event report](#) and [recording](#).



On the 31st of January 2024, the PATFox Consortium gathered in Brussels for the project second project's sharing-knowledge event, **Improving anti-SLAPP defense: Lessons learned from the PATFox Project**. The event was co-hosted by MEP Ramona Strugariu, rapporteur on the European Media Freedom Act, and MEP Tiemo Wölken, JURI Rapporteur on the Anti-SLAPP Directive. The event was aimed to present the project's main achievements and legacy. More information is available here: [agenda](#); [event report](#) and [recording](#).

To strengthen visibility of the action, the Consortium organized **additional activities**, such as:

- [Virtual workshop Everything you need to know about SLAPPs, organised in partnership with the European Young Bar Association \(EYBA\);](#)
- [Project presentation at the 67th Congress of the International Union of Lawyers \(UIA\);](#)
- [Project presentation at the Annual Association of Human Rights Institutes \(AHRI\) Network Conference;](#)
- Panel discussion at [Rightscon 2022](#) and [Rightscon2023](#)

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As demonstrated by the activities and results described throughout this report, PATFox accomplished **numerous successes** going beyond its expected results. This work was on occasion very challenging but also proved to be very successful. Working across its objectives, the project took an integrated approach to addressing **capacity shortfalls** and creating **materials** that will last long after the end of the project and successfully contribute to the anti-SLAPP effort.

Overall, PATFox has:

- **improved anti-SLAPP defense effort** by creating a cohort of lawyers interested in anti-SLAPP defense
- **strengthened the capacity** of European lawyers by improving the legal understanding and abilities of 364 lawyers in 11 Member states
- **contributed to the human rights education** of legal professionals by producing the first anti-SLAPP curriculum.

At a more general level, the activities implemented in the context of PATFox will have a direct positive impact on the efforts to tackle SLAPP in Europe, since the project has:

- **raised awareness** of SLAPP among different stakeholders (legal professionals and institutions, universities, media, organizations, society) in the EU as well as of its emerging trends. emphasizing their detrimental impact on individuals and society as a whole. Although the perception of SLAPP is actively changing, awareness among the European citizenry still need attention through public knowledge-building.
- **supported the implementation** of the EC Recommendation, and **improved knowledge** of the content of the proposal Directive
- **provided tools** for the anti-SLAPP defense to better defend targets and victims, especially in those cases where the Directive will not apply.
- **shared** with policy makers concrete **suggestions** for the implementation of future anti-SLAPP initiatives. The Consortium submitted its feedback to the [proposed Directive](#) text in June 2022, to draft text of the [Committee of Ministers Recommendation on Countering Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation \(SLAPPs\) of the Council of Europe](#) in August 2023, as well as FIBGAR submitted its recommendations to the [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) on the possible focus for the fifth phase of the World Programme, stressing the importance of human rights training of justice by sharing the experience of the PATFox project.
- **created the necessary environment** for key stakeholders to further collaborate and cooperate

- **contributed to empower civil organisations** to fulfil a watchdog role and demonstrate that they can build a united front and make a tremendous contribution to filling the gaps
- **fostered networks and collaboration** between key stakeholders.

In a **nutshell**, by equipping legal professionals in 11 member states, the project has produced direct results on the visibility and public perception of SLAPPs and on the way these lawsuits can be tackled. By creating the first European anti-SLAPP curriculum, it has provided legal resources that can be freely used in the future and also by legal professionals exercising in European jurisdictions outside the project countries. In doing so, the project benefited the possible targets of SLAPPs, who can count on better-prepared defence lawyers, and ultimately the European citizenry.

In doing so, the project has revealed some **interesting facts** which are worth flagging as they underline some of the considerations that have gone into shaping the recommendations.

More precisely,

- PATFox's experience clearly demonstrates that there is a great need and – indeed – significant **untapped demand** for anti-SLAPP educational, training and awareness-raising initiatives.
- Lawyers typically **grapple with the challenge** of identifying SLAPP actions, especially of defining the threshold beyond which legal means transition from legitimate defense to oppressive tactics.

- Concern was raised by a number of legal professionals about the **limited protection** offered by the Directive.
- Another key aspect highlighted during the workshops has been the **significance of collaborating** with relevant stakeholders.
- There was a general acknowledgement that special **extra-legal efforts** are needed to tackle SLAPPs as lawyers play a crucial role in not only providing legal representation but also shaping public perceptions and mobilizing support for their clients.
- In addition, participants frequently pointed out the **need for detailed, in-depth, and effective human rights education of legal professionals**, especially judicial officials, enabling them to apply such standards in concrete situations, be aware of how existing procedures can be abused, and keep up to date with the ever-evolving standards and case law. Law faculties and professional associations of lawyers do not usually offer appropriate education. They pointed out the limited number of judges able to attend such education programs and stressed that this type of education, which they consider highly necessary, should be accessible to a larger number of justice professionals.
- Finally, law faculties and professional associations of lawyers have the ability to reach across the range of legal professionals, from those in training and early in their careers to those who are more established. However, these at present do not generally offer **appropriate education on SLAPPs and related issues**.

Building on this, the Consortium proposes the following recommendation:

- **Promote anti-SLAPP legal training and share the Curriculum Hub materials**
- **Foster exchange of knowledge** based on best practice examples
- **Ensure that training content remains relevant** to the situation on the ground, as the SLAPP landscape is constantly evolving
- Stress the importance of **extra-legal strategies**
- Ensure **cooperation with civil society organisations**, including - but not limited to – those who have been the targets of SLAPPs themselves
- Provide detailed, in-depth, and effective **human rights education** for present and future legal professionals.