



**safejournalists.net**

# **Kosovo** **Women Journalists' Safety** **2024**

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# Introduction

This chapter presents the background of the report, scope and structure.

## – 1.1 ABOUT SAFEJOURNALISTS NETWORK

Supported by the European Commission, journalists' associations from the Western Balkan countries have established the [Safejournalists.net](https://safejournalists.net) platform (SJN)<sup>1</sup> to jointly monitor media legislation and practices in their countries, while actively engaging in efforts to enhance the legal and institutional frameworks that govern the work of journalists and media professionals. Utilizing carefully designed research methodologies, SJN conducts annual advocacy research that provides journalists' associations and stakeholders with reliable, evidence-based data regarding critical challenges and obstacles to the implementation of European Union (EU) standards on media freedom and the safety of journalists in the Western Balkans.

SJN employs two complementary research instruments to comprehensively evaluate media freedom and journalists' safety. The first qualitative research tool, *Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety*, was developed in 2016 and has since been continually refined. It assesses three key areas: (A) Legal Protection, (B) Journalists' Position in the Newsroom, and (C) Journalists' Safety. In parallel, the Network developed a quantitative research instrument known as the *Journalists' Safety Index* in 2020, piloted in the same year and further implemented in 2021 and 2022. This index measures changes in conditions that directly or indirectly affect the safety perceptions and practices of journalists and media professionals, structured around four indicator groups: (1) Legal and Organizational Environment, (2) Due Prevention, (3) Due Process, and (4) Actual Safety.

Starting from 2023, SJN integrated both qualitative and quantitative tools into one comprehensive advocacy research framework titled *Indicators*

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://safejournalists.net/>

on the *Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety Index*,<sup>2</sup> enabling a more robust and nuanced understanding of media freedom and journalist safety across six Western Balkan countries: Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo, and Serbia; and Croatia. Since 2020, SJN has produced annual advocacy research reports for Kosovo,<sup>34</sup> meticulously documenting and assessing the country's progress and challenges regarding media freedom and journalists' safety. In Kosovo, this research has been led by national researcher Blerjana Bino, who has authored all annual reports, including the current specialized study on women journalists.

## —1.2 RATIONALE FOR FOCUSING ON THE SAFETY OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN KOSOVO

Despite Kosovo's legal guarantees for gender equality and freedom of expression, as well as its commitments under international human rights frameworks, women journalists in the country continue to face severe and disproportionate risks. Reports from the SafeJournalists Network and the Association of Journalists of Kosovo show that women media workers are frequently targeted through gender-based violence and discrimination, including online harassment, intimidation, verbal abuse, SLAPP lawsuits, exclusion from editorial decision-making, and in some cases, physical threats or attacks. These ongoing violations undermine not only their rights but also their psychological well-being, career development, and personal safety, contributing to a broader climate of insecurity for women in journalism.

Since 2016, the SafeJournalists Network (SJN) has continuously documented the specific threats and challenges faced by women journalists in Kosovo<sup>5</sup>, pointing to the lack of adequate institutional mechanisms and tailored protection. Building on this body of evidence, the current report sheds light on the nature and scope of gender-based violations reported between 2023 and 2025. It examines key incidents and emerging trends that affect women in journalism, and puts forward actionable, evidence-informed recommendations aimed at enhancing legal, institutional, and professional safeguards to ensure safer and more equitable newsroom environments for women media professionals.

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2 The advocacy research is designed and coordinated by Snezana Trpevska and Igor Micevski, research fellows of the [Research Institute on Social Development RESIS](#), from North Macedonia.

3 Indicators of on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety Kosovo [2020](#), [2021](#), [2022](#) and [2023](#).

4 Journalists' Safety Index Kosovo [2020](#), [2021](#), [2022](#), [2023](#).

5 All publications can be assessed here: <https://safejournalists.net/publications/>

## – 1.3 SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This specialized report analyses the violations of rights faced by women journalists and media workers in Kosovo during the period from 2021 to 2024. Using the SafeJournalists Network's established methodology, the report covers the following key areas:

- **Legal and Institutional Framework** – An examination of Kosovo's national legislation, policies, and institutional mechanisms relevant to the safety of women journalists, alongside the country's international obligations and standards on media freedom and gender equality. This includes brief analysis of the effectiveness, shortcomings, and structural challenges in addressing the gender-specific threats faced by women journalists.
- **Types and Trends of Violations** – An analysis of physical and verbal threats, digital harassment, workplace discrimination, intimidation, censorship, and legal threats specifically targeting women journalists in Kosovo as monitored by the SafeJournalists Network and the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, based on in-depth interviews with women journalists and media workers.
- **Impact on Women Journalists** – An assessment of how these violations affect the psychological well-being, professional opportunities, and personal safety of women journalists, and how such impacts ultimately weaken media pluralism and media freedom based on data from SafeJournalists Network, other independent reports and interviews with women journalists and media workers, experts and stakeholders.
- **Conclusions and Recommendations** – Evidence-based recommendations aimed at policymakers, media organizations, law enforcement authorities, and civil society to effectively enhance protections, promote gender equality, and improve the overall safety and working conditions for women journalists.

By highlighting gender-specific issues and providing clear recommendations, this report aims to strengthen advocacy efforts, inform policy discussions, build synergies with other efforts and encourage proactive steps toward a safer, more inclusive media environment in Kosovo.



# Methodology

This report employs a qualitative and explorative research methodology specifically developed by SJN to investigate the safety, rights, and professional experiences of women journalists in Kosovo. To ensure comprehensive coverage, the methodology integrates desk research, primary qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews and online focus groups, as well as insights from stakeholder consultations and relevant public events.

The primary data collection in Kosovo was conducted between December 2024 and March 2025 through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. A total of seven in-depth interviews were carried out with women journalists representing a diverse range of media, including national investigative platforms, mainstream private television channels, local online outlets, and newsrooms covering political and social issues. Some of the interviewees had directly experienced violence, harassment, or threats related to their journalistic work. Their testimonies provide valuable insights into the gender-specific and institutional challenges faced by women journalists in Kosovo.

Interviews were supplemented by insights from media experts, representatives of journalist associations, and civil society organizations, ensuring a broad range of perspectives on professional safety, institutional responses, and the effectiveness of protective mechanisms. Furthermore, an interview with a legal expert specialized in media freedom and human rights was included to provide insights into existing legal frameworks and their implementation.

*Table 1: Individual Interviews Conducted (December 2024 – March 2025)*

Name	Position/Role	Media Type
Woman journalist	Journalist	Public Broadcaster
Woman journalist & activist	Journalist	private media, TV
Woman journalist & activist	Journalist	local online satirical media
Woman journalist	Advisory Panel WJNK	NGO media
Woman journalist (attacked)	Investigative Journalists	private media
Man Journalist	Chair of Association of Journalists of Kosovo	Association
Media expert	Independent Media Expert	Civil Society Organization
Lawyer	Legal Expert of Asociacion of Journalist of Kosovo	Civil Society Organization

Due to practical limitations, the originally planned online focus group exclusively with editors-in-chief in Kosovo had to be adapted, as it was not possible to gather a sufficient number of editors-in-chief or managing editors. Consequently, the methodology was adjusted to include three online focus group sessions. Editors-in-chief and managing editors, most of whom were women journalists, participated in these sessions. Two of the focus groups were composed entirely of women journalists, including several women editors-in-chief, while the third included participants of all genders. These sessions provided valuable qualitative data on experiences with violence, discrimination, perceptions of safety, and institutional response mechanisms.

*Table 2: Focus Groups Conducted (December 2024 – March 2025)*

Participant Group	Number of Participants	Main Topics Discussed
Women Journalists (Group 1)	9	Safety risks, online threats, harassment, and perceptions of safety
Women Journalists (Group 2)	8	Safety risks, online threats, harassment, and perceptions of safety
Journalists (Group 3)	12	Safety risks, online threats, harassment, and perceptions of safety

The report further benefits from insights gathered through key initiatives undertaken in the framework of strengthening the position and safety of women journalists in Kosovo. As part of this effort, the Kosovo Women Journalists' Network was officially established, marking a significant milestone in gender-focused media advocacy. Within this context, two consultative meetings were held with women journalists and relevant stakeholders to identify priority areas, followed by a regional conference on March 8th specifically dedicated to women in journalism. The third panel of the conference focused on the unique challenges faced by women journalists in Kosovo.

All research activities were conducted in line with rigorous ethical standards, ensuring that participants gave informed consent and that their confidentiality and anonymity were fully respected throughout the process. Interviews and focus group discussions were recorded only with explicit permission, then transcribed, anonymized, and stored securely. Where consent was granted, direct quotes were included in the report. The collected qualitative data were analyzed thematically, with findings structured around three main dimensions: (I) safety risks faced by women journalists; (II) specific forms of violence and discrimination experienced; and (III) the impact on psychological well-being, professional development, journalistic work, and personal security.

The research in Kosovo was conducted with methodological rigor, though certain limitations are acknowledged, including possible underreporting due to fear of stigma or retaliation, and the voluntary nature of participation, which may affect representativeness. Sensitive topics such as violence and harassment also posed challenges for open discussion. To enrich the analysis, the report integrates data from AJK's recent internal survey with over 90 journalists (including

women in leadership roles), findings from previous monitoring on media freedom and safety, and information gathered through Freedom of Information requests. This report also includes the findings from the first-ever “Needs Assessment Report on the Safety and Position of Women Journalists in Kosovo” published in 2025. providing essential data and targeted recommendations for action. The findings of this report were further amplified through a national conference marking World Press Freedom Day 2025, which centered its agenda around the safety and working conditions of women journalists. According to the current media freedom strategy, 2025 has been declared the “Year of Women Journalists in Kosovo,” reflecting a strategic commitment to addressing gender-based disparities in the media sector. These events and milestones have contributed significantly to enriching the contextual understanding of institutional challenges and fostering dialogue between journalists, law enforcement, judiciary, and policymakers in Kosovo.



# Gender-Based Violence in Journalism – International Framework

Gender-based violence (GBV) remains a pressing issue across many professional sectors in Kosovo, including journalism. Women

journalists face a layered and distinct set of risks—targeted not only because of their professional role but also due to their gender. Although awareness of gender-based violence has grown at the global and regional level, cases involving women journalists in Kosovo often remain underreported and insufficiently addressed, both by institutional mechanisms and within broader societal responses.

## – 3.1 GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IMPACT ON WOMEN JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

In Kosovo, women journalists including freelancers, fixers, and field reporters, frequently face gender-based violence in multiple forms, including verbal abuse, sexual harassment, psychological intimidation, and online smear campaigns. These attacks are often rooted in gender norms and societal prejudices and occur both within and outside newsroom settings. Such violence has a deep and lasting impact on their mental health, professional confidence, and career progression, frequently leading to self-censorship, withdrawal from public engagement, or a complete shift away from critical reporting roles<sup>6</sup>. While public awareness around gender-based violence in the media sector is gradually increasing, institutional responses remain inconsistent and largely inadequate. Findings from AJK's 2025 focus groups with women journalists show that more than 60% of participants had experienced or witnessed forms of harassment, yet only a small fraction reported the incidents formally, largely due to fears of retaliation, loss of work, or being stigmatized.

This mirrors patterns identified by GREVIO's 2021 Recommendation No. 1, which stresses that online and workplace-based gendered violence is systematically underreported due to institutional mistrust and the

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6 Interviews with women journalists part of Kosovo's Women Journalists' Network

normalization of abuse<sup>7</sup>. AJK's internal consultations further highlighted that newsroom cultures in Kosovo often lack formal anti-harassment policies, and there are no dedicated contact points or reporting structures within most media outlets, making it extremely difficult for victims to speak out.<sup>8</sup> These internal failings contribute to hostile work environments, diminished team morale, increased turnover, and organizational instability. In some cases, the lack of gender-sensitive leadership in editorial management exacerbates the problem, as many newsroom leaders are not trained to recognize or address gender-based abuse. This not only harms individual journalists but also damages the public reputation and ethical standing of media organizations, which may be seen as complicit or indifferent when harassment goes unaddressed.

The economic cost of such environments is also considerable. International studies, including those by the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA), have found that unchecked harassment in media workplaces contributes to higher absenteeism, burnout, and staff turnover, and undermines editorial independence<sup>9</sup>. To counter these trends, Kosovo media outlets must institutionalize anti-harassment protocols, create confidential reporting channels, and adopt intersectional approaches that address the unique vulnerabilities faced by women journalists from marginalized communities. This includes regular gender-sensitivity training for editors and managers, the inclusion of gender equality indicators in media performance assessments, and the active participation of the Kosovo Women Journalists' Network in policy development.

## – 3.2 INTERSECTIONALITY AND SPECIFIC VULNERABILITIES

In Kosovo, women journalists who belong to multiple marginalized groups such as freelancers, those working without formal contracts, ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, younger journalists, or those reporting from rural and underrepresented areas often face heightened risks to their safety and well-being. These intersecting vulnerabilities become even more acute when covering politically sensitive issues, including corruption, human rights violations, or topics related to post-conflict accountability. The lack of institutional support, combined with societal bias and limited access to protection mechanisms, places these journalists in an especially precarious position, both professionally and personally.

In Kosovo, intersectional risks faced by women journalists are further intensified by newsroom cultures often influenced by entrenched patriarchal norms. In such environments, gender-based harassment frequently appears in the form of sexualized

7 GREVIO. (2021). Recommendation No. 1 on the Digital Dimension of Violence against Women. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147>

8 In depth interview.

9 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). (2023). Media Monitoring Report – Gender Equality in Media Decision-Making. <https://eige.europa.eu>

or demeaning comments, subtle or overt efforts to undermine credibility, and the exclusion of women from high-visibility assignments, editorial decision-making roles, or leadership positions. These practices not only diminish the professional contributions of women journalists but also discourage their active participation in public discourse, ultimately weakening media pluralism and limiting the representation of diverse voices in Kosovo's democratic landscape.

### — 3.3 INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS TO ELIMINATE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

In the context of Kosovo, where institutional responses to gender-based violence in journalism remain limited, key international instruments such as the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* and the *Istanbul Convention* provide essential legal and policy frameworks for addressing these challenges. CEDAW explicitly defines gender-based violence as including harmful cultural, ideological, and political practices directed at women professionals—such as journalists, politicians, and human rights defenders—and obliges signatory states, including Kosovo through its constitutional integration of international treaties, to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. It also mandates the use of mass media to raise awareness and combat gender stereotypes, thereby indirectly supporting women's participation in journalism<sup>10</sup>.

The *Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention*, although it does not explicitly mention journalists, offers the most comprehensive international legal standards for preventing and combating violence against women, covering physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence in both private and professional settings<sup>11</sup>. For Kosovo, which has incorporated the Convention through Article 22 of its Constitution, effective implementation remains a challenge, particularly in cases involving digital violence and harassment in journalistic environments.

In its monitoring role, GREVIO has raised critical concerns about the growing prevalence of online and digitally facilitated gender-based violence, noting that women journalists, human rights defenders, and public-facing figures are disproportionately affected. In Recommendation No. 1, GREVIO classifies such violence not only as gender-based, but as a severe violation of women's human rights under international law<sup>12</sup>. It emphasizes that online abuse—while not always criminalized—can result in serious psychological harm due to its repetitive nature, mob dynamics, and viral spread across digital platforms. Furthermore, GREVIO calls for structural

10 CEDAW (1979). Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

11 Council of Europe (2011). Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention>

12 GREVIO (2021). Recommendation No. 1 on the Digital Dimension of Violence against Women. <https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence/1680a3f69f>

reforms within media institutions, stressing the need to dismantle entrenched male-dominated power dynamics and to develop safety mechanisms that reflect the intersectional vulnerabilities many women journalists in Kosovo face<sup>13</sup>.

Complementing these frameworks, the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists has played a significant role in encouraging countries to establish legal protections for journalists, particularly women, against both online and offline threats. Notably, the Plan advocates a shift in terminology from “violence against women journalists” to “gender-based violence in journalism” to better reflect intersectionality and acknowledge the diverse, overlapping risks that women journalists experience globally and in Kosovo<sup>14</sup>.

### **– 3.4 PARTICIPATION OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE MEDIA (ARTICLE 17 – GREVIO FINDINGS)**

According to the GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report on Kosovo (2024), the Independent Media Commission (IMC) plays a central role in regulating and overseeing media broadcasts. It holds the authority to sanction licensed media outlets that breach licensing conditions, including violations related to respect for human dignity, non-discrimination on the basis of gender, and the broadcasting of content involving extreme violence or potentially harmful material for children. Sanctions may range from withdrawal of specific materials and financial penalties to the revocation of licenses. The IMC can receive and investigate complaints on discriminatory or harmful broadcasting; however, no data on such complaints was made available for GREVIO’s review, indicating a lack of transparency or underreporting of gender-related violations.

The Kosovo Programme for Gender Equality (2020–2024) explicitly involves the IMC and the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) in promoting gender equality in the media. Measures include training journalists on gender equality and gender-based violence, as well as awareness-raising initiatives on anti-discrimination and gender equality legislation. To advance these commitments, the IMC has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Agency for Gender Equality and the Kosovar Institute for Gender Studies to cooperate on implementing these measures.

In addition, the National Strategy on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (2022–2026) outlines several media-related measures:

13 GREVIO Monitoring Reports. Kosovo-specific reports and observations. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention/grevio>

14 UNESCO (2012). UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. <https://en.unesco.org/un-plan-action-safety-journalists>

- Encouraging media outlets to adopt self-regulatory guidelines to ensure respect for women’s dignity and prevent violence against women;
- Cooperation with media and information technology companies to address online violence and sexual harassment against women and girls;
- Providing educational information to children and parents on safe digital communication;
- Training media professionals to report on violence against women in compliance with ethical standards and personal data protection;
- Engaging the private sector to improve working conditions that prevent sexual harassment and creating incentives for private companies to combat violence against women.

GREVIO underlines that, if fully and promptly implemented, these measures could significantly strengthen the role of the media and the private sector in preventing violence against women. The report therefore recommends that Kosovo authorities actively encourage media and private-sector involvement, particularly through the consistent and timely implementation of measures under the 2022–2026 National Strategy.

## – 3.5 EUROPEAN UNION FRAMEWORKS FOR PROTECTING WOMEN JOURNALISTS

The European Union has established key legal and policy frameworks that Kosovo as a potential candidate for EU membership has begun aligning with, particularly regarding the safety and empowerment of women journalists. The European Commission’s Recommendation (EU) 2021/1534 recognizes the essential role of civil society and media organizations in preventing and responding to both online and offline harassment and threats, especially those targeting women, minority groups, and journalists reporting on equality and human rights issues<sup>15</sup>.

While Kosovo is not an EU Member State, its institutional frameworks increasingly reflect EU priorities, particularly through the national Law on Gender Equality and ongoing media law reforms. The recently adopted EU Directive 2024/1385<sup>16</sup> on combating violence against women, including digital violence, sets a precedent Kosovo is encouraged to follow, especially in addressing the growing problem of online harassment targeting women journalists. This aligns with findings from AJK

15 European Commission. (2021). Recommendation (EU) 2021/1534 on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32021H1534>

16 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (2024). Indicators on the level of media freedom and Journalists’ Safety Index 2023. Available at: [https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng\\_2024\\_1-1.pdf](https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng_2024_1-1.pdf)

reports that show digital abuse, threats, and smear campaigns as key challenges affecting journalists' safety, particularly women working on politically sensitive topics. Additionally, the EU Gender Action Plan III (2021–2025) promotes a gender-transformative approach that is increasingly relevant in Kosovo, where initiatives such as the establishment of the Kosovo Women Journalists' Network and the first Needs Assessment on their safety have opened important policy discussions<sup>17</sup>. Despite these efforts, AJK monitoring shows that incidents of gender-based violence remain significantly underreported due to fear of retaliation, lack of trust in institutional responses, and internal newsroom pressures that often lead to self-censorship<sup>18</sup>. To break this persistent culture of silence, Kosovo needs to implement structural reforms that include safe reporting mechanisms, effective legal protections, and newsroom policies that actively prevent and respond to gender-based violence in journalism.

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17 European External Action Service (EEAS). (2020). EU Gender Action Plan III 2021–2025. Available at: [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gender-action-plan-iii-towards-gender-equal-world\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/gender-action-plan-iii-towards-gender-equal-world_en)

18 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2025). Needs Assessment Report: Position and Safety of Women Journalists in Kosovo. [https://Agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3619/position\\_and\\_safety\\_of\\_women\\_journalists\\_in\\_kosovo\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://Agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3619/position_and_safety_of_women_journalists_in_kosovo_final_en.pdf)

# IV

## National Framework Protecting Women Journalists

This chapter offers an analytical overview of Kosovo’s national legal and institutional frameworks concerning the protection of women journalists. It examines constitutional guarantees, criminal legislation, the Law on Gender Equality, anti-discrimination provisions, labour rights, and workplace safety regulations, along with the country’s limited responses to digital violence. While Kosovo has adopted several key legal instruments aligned with international standards—such as Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality<sup>19</sup> and Law No. 2004/3 on Anti-Discrimination<sup>20</sup>, their implementation within the media sector remains inconsistent and often insufficient to address the specific challenges faced by women journalists. These legal frameworks provide a solid foundation for promoting equality and protecting against discrimination, yet enforcement mechanisms and sector-specific application, particularly in journalism, remain weak or underdeveloped. The analysis highlights significant gaps in addressing the specific risks faced by women journalists especially in relation to online abuse, informal employment, and lack of union representation. Through a critical lens, the chapter underscores the need for gender-sensitive enforcement, targeted legal reforms, and intersectional policies that specifically recognize and address the compounded vulnerabilities of women journalists in Kosovo.

### — 4.1 CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTIONS AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Women journalists continue to face harassment, intimidation, and various threats that compromise journalistic integrity, professional safety, and public trust in the media. Despite the country’s constitutional commitment to equality and the existence of legal frameworks such as the Law on Gender Equality (No. 05/L-020) and the Anti-Discrimination Law (No. 2004/3), specific protections against gender-based violence in journalistic contexts remain lacking and poorly enforced. These gaps

19 Republic of Kosovo. (2004). Law No. 2004/3 on Anti-Discrimination. Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo. Available at: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2554>

20 Republic of Kosovo. (2015). Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality. Official Gazette of the Republic of Kosovo. Available at: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=10923>

are especially evident for women journalists facing intersecting vulnerabilities such as economic insecurity, precarious employment, freelance status, or minority backgrounds.

Kosovo's Constitution affirms equality before the law and prohibits discrimination based on gender and other grounds (Article 24). Furthermore, Kosovo has incorporated international human rights instruments into its constitutional order, including the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, which is applicable under Article 22 of the Constitution<sup>21</sup>. However, implementation remains limited, as AJK's monitoring reports show that women journalists continue to experience online abuse, threats, and workplace discrimination, with few institutional remedies and insufficient legal accountability.

While these constitutional and legal provisions set a critical foundation, they are not effectively operationalized to address the specific risks women journalists face. Without dedicated enforcement mechanisms, tailored protocols, and gender-sensitive institutional responses, constitutional guarantees alone fall short of protecting women in journalism from gender-based violence, harassment, and exclusion.

## **– 4.2 CRIMINAL LEGISLATION AND INSTITUTIONAL GAPS IN PROTECTING WOMEN JOURNALISTS**

In Kosovo, the Criminal Code addresses gender-based violence primarily in the context of domestic and sexual violence, but it does not provide explicit protections tailored to journalists or their professional vulnerabilities. Provisions such as Article 248 (threat), Article 185 (light bodily injury), Article 190 (defamation), and Article 195 (insult) offer general protections, but lack recognition of journalists—especially women—as a specific at-risk group due to their public visibility and investigative role<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, stalking and sexual harassment are both criminalized under the Criminal Code and while the law does not explicitly unclude the digital dimension of the offences, these offences can be prosecuted if they are committed through digital tools. Although these legal provisions provide a foundation for addressing online violence, enforcement remains weak due to the lack of specific protocols, institutional training, and public awareness. Victims, including women journalists, often face inadequate institutional responses, particularly in cases involving anonymous threats or harassment online. To ensure effective protection, it is crucial that Kosovo explicitly recognize digital forms of stalking and sexual harassment in the law and in the legal practice, strengthen the capacity of law enforcement to investigate

21 Council of Europe. (2011). Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention>

22 Republic of Kosovo. (2018). Criminal Code No. 06/L-074 of the Republic of Kosovo. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=18413>

digital crimes, and develop gender-sensitive institutional protocols for reporting and responding to these offences.

Articles like Article 402 ("Attack on official person performing official duty") refer only to public officials and do not extend protection to journalists, despite their role as watchdogs in a democratic society<sup>23</sup>.

According to AJK monitoring, enforcement remains inconsistent. Women journalists facing digital threats, smear campaigns, or targeted harassment often choose not to report due to fear of retaliation or mistrust in the justice system. AJK's findings from the Index of media freedom and journalists safety for 2023 show that in most of the documented cases involving women, institutions failed to act effectively or to recognize the gendered nature of the threats<sup>24</sup>. No dedicated protocols or specialized police or prosecutorial units currently exist to handle journalist safety cases, and even less so with a gender-sensitive approach.

Some institutional progress has been made. In 2023, the State Prosecutor's Office appointed a focal point for cases involving attacks on journalists, and the Kosovo Police introduced a reporting line for threats against journalists. However, none of these mechanisms currently provide specialized training or procedures that address the specific risks faced by women in the media. Law enforcement and judicial training on media-related violence is minimal, and no gender component has been systemically integrated into the curricula of the Kosovo Judicial Institute or the Police Academy.

This gap between the actual number of threats and the very low number of formally reported or investigated cases highlights the need for structural reform. Strengthening data collection, building trust in reporting mechanisms, and establishing dedicated institutional responses are essential steps toward improving protections for women journalists in Kosovo.

### **— 4.3 GAPS IN ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN THE DIGITAL SPACE**

In Kosovo, digital violence has become an increasingly serious threat to the safety, well-being, and professional integrity of women journalists. This includes online harassment, smear campaigns, sexualized threats, doxxing, and gendered disinformation, most commonly through social media platforms and anonymous accounts. AJK monitoring and journalist testimonies indicate that women reporters, especially those covering politics, corruption, or gender based

23 Ibid. Article 402 – Attack on an official person performing official duties.

24 Ibid. <https://Agk-ks.org/en/publications/indicators-on-the-level-of-media-freedom-and-journalists-safety-index-2023/>

violence—are frequent targets of digital abuse, often aimed at discrediting their work and silencing critical voices<sup>25</sup>.

Despite the relevance of international standards such as the Istanbul Convention and the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, Kosovo’s legal and institutional framework still lacks clear definitions and mechanisms to address online gender-based violence against journalists<sup>26</sup>. The Criminal Code of Kosovo does not specifically recognize digital violence in general nor in the context of professional journalism, nor does it provide adequate tools for addressing anonymous threats, cyberstalking, or AI-generated content used for harassment, such as deepfake<sup>27</sup>. While the Law on Protection from Domestic Violence and the Law on Gender Equality establish general protections, they are not designed to respond to violence in professional digital spaces<sup>28</sup>.

Currently, there are no dedicated institutional mechanisms, such as a specialized prosecutor or police unit, to handle online attacks against journalists in a gender-sensitive manner. Law enforcement agencies often lack the technical and legal capacity to investigate complex harassment cases committed in the online world through digital tools, and training on digital safety is minimal<sup>29</sup>. As a result, women journalists in Kosovo frequently refrain from reporting such incidents due to a well-documented lack of institutional trust, fear of retaliation, or simply because previous cases have gone unresolved<sup>30</sup>. This environment of impunity contributes to a chilling effect, leading many women journalists to self-censor, withdraw from online engagement, or avoid reporting on sensitive issues. AJK’s findings confirm that the majority of digital attacks go unpunished and uninvestigated, creating a normalized climate of online abuse where women in the media are left without meaningful institutional support<sup>31</sup>.

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25 Three focus groups with journalists (2024-2025)

26 Council of Europe. (2011). Istanbul Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention>

27 Republic of Kosovo. (2018). Criminal Code No. 06/L-074. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=18413>

28 Republic of Kosovo. (2015). Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=10923>

29 Three focus groups with journalists (2024-2025)

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

# V

## Gender Equality Strategic Framework

Kosovo has adopted a national legal framework that affirms gender equality, most notably through the Law on Gender Equality (No. 05/L-020)<sup>32</sup> and the National Strategy on Protection from Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women 2022–2026. While these instruments align with international standards, they are primarily designed for domestic and familial settings and do not sufficiently extend to the professional risks faced by women journalists.

The National Strategy for Gender Equality 2020–2024, now being revised for a new cycle, addresses broad goals of women’s empowerment, but lacks concrete, sector-specific actions for gender-based discrimination and violence in media workplaces<sup>33</sup>. Despite ongoing efforts from civil society, including AJK and the Kosovo Women Journalists’ Network, gender-responsive measures in institutions such as courts, police, and labor inspectorates remain weak or underdeveloped when it comes to protecting journalists<sup>34</sup>.

Training for judges and prosecutors on sexual harassment and workplace violence is available but generalized, without modules that specifically cover media-related violence or the professional risks women journalists face<sup>35</sup>. Similarly, institutional support services are fragmented. No centralized mechanism exists to report or respond to harassment or intimidation in professional settings, leaving women journalists to navigate between multiple bodies, often without clear outcomes or accountability<sup>36</sup>.

Data collection remains another critical gap. Kosovo does not systematically collect or publish gender-disaggregated data on violence against journalists. As AJK reports have highlighted, this absence

32 Republic of Kosovo. (2015). Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality. Available at: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=10923>

33 Republic of Kosovo. (2020). Program for Gender Equality 2020–2024. <https://abgj.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Programi-per-Barazi-Gjinore-2020-2024.pdf>

34 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2024). Needs Assessment Report: Position and Safety of Women Journalists in Kosovo. [https://Agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3619/position\\_and\\_safety\\_of\\_women\\_journalists\\_in\\_kosovo\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://Agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3619/position_and_safety_of_women_journalists_in_kosovo_final_en.pdf)

35 Kosovo Judicial Institute (KJI). (2023). Training Catalogue. <https://igjk.rks-gov.net/>

36 Three focus groups with journalists (2024–2025)

hinders effective policy development and weakens institutional responses to gender-specific risks in the media sector<sup>37</sup>.

Overall, while Kosovo demonstrates a formal commitment to gender equality, meaningful protection for women journalists requires stronger institutional implementation, targeted policy tools, and integrated reporting mechanisms that recognize and address the specific nature of violence in journalism.

## — 5.1 ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LEGISLATION

Kosovo's Law No. 05/L-021 on Protection from Discrimination prohibits unequal treatment on various grounds, including gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and social or economic status. Although the law does not explicitly name the media sector, it applies to all areas of public and private activity including employment and access to services, which cover media organizations as employers and service providers., article 12<sup>38</sup> of the law specifically prohibits harassment and sexual harassment in employment and vocational training contexts, providing a legal basis for women journalists to seek protection and redress in cases of workplace discrimination or abuse. In principle, this legislation offers important safeguards for women in journalism, though its practical enforcement remains limited and underutilized in the media sector. AJK reports highlight that newsroom discrimination often goes unreported, in part due to the lack of targeted institutional mechanisms to address these risks.

Although the Office of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination is mandated to investigate cases and apply sanctions, it operates on a broad mandate and has not established specialized processes for the media sector<sup>39</sup>. As a result, women journalists who face gender-based discrimination or harassment are rarely encouraged or equipped to report these violations to the Commissioner or the court.

Additionally, Kosovo lacks systematic data collection on gender-based discrimination in media environments. This absence significantly limits both institutional accountability and the ability to formulate evidence-based policies<sup>40</sup>. AJK monitoring has shown that even when cases of discrimination arise, many women journalists hesitate to engage legal mechanisms due to fears of workplace retaliation, lack of trust in procedures, or low expectations of meaningful outcomes.

While the legal foundation for anti-discrimination exists, its application to the media sector and to women

37 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (2024). Indicators on the level of media freedom and Journalists' Safety Index 2023. Available at: [https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng\\_2024\\_1-1.pdf](https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng_2024_1-1.pdf)

38 Republic of Kosovo. (2015). Law No. 05/L-021 on Protection from Discrimination. Available at: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=10924>

39 Office of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination. <https://abgj.rks-gov.net>

40 Ibid.

journalists in particular remains limited in practice and requires stronger institutional focus and outreach.

## — 5.2 LABOUR RIGHTS AND WORKPLACE SAFETY

Kosovo's Labour Law No. 03/L-212, as amended by Law No. 04/L-161, explicitly prohibits all forms of discrimination and harassment in employment relationships under Article 5<sup>41</sup>, while also obliging employers to guarantee safe working conditions and ensure equal treatment in the workplace. These provisions, in principle, apply to all sectors, including media. However, enforcement remains limited, particularly in addressing the gender-specific risks faced by women journalists, such as verbal abuse, exclusion from editorial decisions, and sexual harassment. Reports by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo<sup>42</sup> and SafeJournalists Network<sup>43</sup> underline that institutional mechanisms often fail to respond effectively to such violations, leaving many cases unreported and unresolved due to fear of retaliation or lack of trust in complaint procedures.

Also, women journalists in Kosovo challenges balancing work with caregiving responsibilities, especially in the absence of supportive workplace policies. According to Kosovo's Labour Law (No. 03/L-212), maternity leave is structured as follows: six months paid by the employer at 70% of the base salary; three additional months covered by the government at 50% of the national average wage; and an optional three months unpaid leave<sup>44</sup>. However, the law regulates only maternity leave and does not provide for shared or flexible parental leave, effectively placing the full burden of newborn care on women.

Another persistent challenge is informal employment. Many journalists, particularly in smaller or local outlets work without formal contracts, often under short-term service agreements. This deprives them of essential rights, including maternity leave, pension contributions, and health insurance<sup>45</sup>. AJK reports confirm that some women journalists receive partial salaries in cash or have contracts that underreport their income, which negatively impacts their access to social protections, especially during pregnancy or family care.<sup>46</sup> While there is no comprehensive quantitative dataset publicly available that disaggregates informal employment by gender, qualitative evidence from AJK's internal assessments and testimonies strongly suggests a gendered pattern. Women journalists, especially those working freelance or in regional media, consistently report greater exposure to economic instability and lack of labor protections. Although no officially documented

41 Republic of Kosovo. (2010). Labour Law No. 03/L-212 (amended by Law No. 04/L-161). Available at: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2735>

42 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2024). Needs Assessment Report: Position and Safety of Women Journalists in Kosovo. [https://Agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3619/position\\_and\\_safety\\_of\\_women\\_journalists\\_in\\_kosovo\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://Agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3619/position_and_safety_of_women_journalists_in_kosovo_final_en.pdf)

43 Ibid.

44 Maternity leave law regulation in Kosovo. Diellza Gashi. Published 04.06.2021 <https://sbunker.org/en/opinion/rregullimi-i-pushimit-te-lehonise-ne-kosove/>

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

cases of pregnancy-related discrimination are known, several women journalists expressed concerns that pregnancy often negatively affects hiring decisions or the renewal of engagement agreements, particularly in smaller newsrooms.<sup>47</sup>

Workplace protections against harassment are rarely implemented. Despite legal obligations, most media outlets do not have internal anti-harassment policies, nor are journalists informed of their rights or procedures for filing complaints<sup>48</sup>. This institutional vacuum creates a culture of silence and fear, discouraging women journalists from reporting abuse due to concerns over job security and retaliation.

Furthermore, Kosovo does not have an active journalists' union, and collective bargaining agreements are nearly non-existent in the media sector. The lack of organized labor representation significantly reduces journalists' ability to seek redress for workplace violations, leaving women particularly exposed to unsafe or exploitative conditions<sup>49</sup>.

As a result, women journalists in Kosovo navigate a precarious employment environment characterized by informality, institutional inaction, and weak legal enforcement, undermining their safety, job security, and professional dignity.

## — 5.3 LEGAL AID AND INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Kosovo's Law No. 04/L-017 on Legal Aid provides free legal support for individuals with low income, victims of domestic violence, or those belonging to vulnerable groups as defined by law<sup>50</sup>. While this framework offers a general safety net, women journalists, especially those not officially recognized as vulnerable by income or status, are often excluded, despite facing specific threats due to their profession<sup>51</sup>.

Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) are also a growing concern as critical reporting is increasingly met with legal intimidation. This absence leaves journalists vulnerable to legal challenges, including Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), which can be used to intimidate and silence them.<sup>52</sup> Although, there is no gender pattern in the SLAPPs cases initiated against journalists, these lawsuits are a general threat to freedom of expression and safety, especially economic safety of both men and women journalists. Kosovo lacks a dedicated public or institutional system offering legal support for media professionals under

47 Three focus groups with journalists (2024-2025)

48 Ibid

49 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (2024). Indicators on the level of media freedom and Journalists' Safety Index 2023. Available at: [https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng\\_2024\\_1-1.pdf](https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng_2024_1-1.pdf)

50 Republic of Kosovo. (2016). Law No. 04/L-017 on Legal Aid. Available at: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=2803>

51 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2024). Needs Assessment Report: Position and Safety of Women Journalists in Kosovo. [https://Agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3619/position\\_and\\_safety\\_of\\_women\\_journalists\\_in\\_kosovo\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://Agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3619/position_and_safety_of_women_journalists_in_kosovo_final_en.pdf)

52 Kusari, F. (2024). *Regional baseline assessment of legislative and policy needs for implementing Council of Europe and European Union standards on countering the use of SLAPPs: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia*. Council of Europe Division for Cooperation on Freedom of Expression.

threat<sup>53</sup> and Kosovo's legal aid framework is not yet aligned with EU standards on anti-SLAPP protections, leaving journalists vulnerable to pressure from powerful actors. As a result, women journalists in Kosovo are left with minimal institutional protection when confronted with legal or administrative threats, limiting their ability to defend themselves or pursue justice when their safety and professional rights are violated.

## — 5.4 AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA LEGISLATION

Kosovo's Law No. 04/L-044 on the Independent Media Commission (IMC)<sup>54</sup> and related bylaws regulate audiovisual media content, licensing, and standards. While the law outlines principles of equality and prohibits discriminatory or hateful content, it does not explicitly define or prohibit sexism in audiovisual media, nor does it provide detailed guidelines on gender representation or gender-based stereotypes<sup>55</sup>.

Unlike some European counterparts, Kosovo's media legislation does not include a definition of sexual harassment or gender-discriminatory content in media, nor does it assign institutional responsibility to monitor or sanction such practices. This legal gap contributes to the underregulation of harmful narratives, particularly those that target women journalists or reinforce stereotypes about women in public life<sup>56</sup>.

AJK has consistently noted the lack of regulatory intervention in cases where women journalists are targeted with misogynistic language or portrayed in a degrading manner in TV debates, talk shows, or commentary programs. Although Kosovo's Law on Gender Equality and Anti-Discrimination Law are applicable across all sectors, including media, enforcement in the audiovisual field remains minimal. Despite having these laws in place, the IMC rarely addresses gender-based content issues proactively, and no dedicated complaints mechanism exists for women in the media to report sexist or discriminatory treatment. To ensure media pluralism and safe participation of women in journalism, Kosovo must integrate gender-specific provisions into audiovisual policy and empower the IMC to monitor and respond to sexist and discriminatory media portrayals.

53 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (2024). Indicators on the level of media freedom and Journalists' Safety Index 2023. Available at: [https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng\\_2024\\_1-1.pdf](https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng_2024_1-1.pdf)

54 Republic of Kosovo. (2011). Law No. 04/L-044 on the Independent Media Commission. Available at: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=2809>

55 Independent Media Commission (IMC). Code of Ethics for Audiovisual Media Services in Kosovo. Available at: <https://www.kpm-ks.org/materiale/dokument/1637058039.6585.pdf>

56 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2024). Needs Assessment Report: Position and Safety of Women Journalists in Kosovo. [https://Agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3619/position\\_and\\_safety\\_of\\_women\\_journalists\\_in\\_kosovo\\_final\\_en.pdf](https://Agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3619/position_and_safety_of_women_journalists_in_kosovo_final_en.pdf)

# VI

## Safety of Women Journalists 2021-2024

This chapter provides an overview of the safety situation of women journalists in Kosovo from 2021 to 2024, based on alerts from the SafeJournalists Network and AGK monitoring. It highlights key patterns such as online harassment, verbal abuse, and smear campaigns, which disproportionately affect women journalists, particularly those covering politics, corruption, and gender issues. The analysis includes data trends and selected case examples, offering insight into the gender-specific threats women journalists face and the broader lack of institutional protection.

### — 6.1 SJN AND AJK ALERTS REGARDING ATTACKS AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS 2021-2024

Between 2021 and 2024, women journalists in Kosovo were targeted in a range of incidents, including digital harassment, smear campaigns, verbal abuse, and institutional pressure<sup>57</sup>. Physical violence mainly took part in northern part of Kosovo in may-june 2023, however the persistence of online threats and coordinated intimidation reflects a hostile environment for women in media, particularly those covering corruption, politics, and gender-based violence.

According to the AJK and SJN's database, 36 alerts involving exclusively women journalists were recorded in Kosovo between 2020 and June 2025, compared to 87 involving male journalists. The majority of cases involving women were related to online threats and defamation, often using gendered language and personal attacks, particularly on social media. Some incidents were registered as group attacks, and especially in 2023, most included women. While men faced a higher number of recorded attacks overall, women journalists experienced threats that were more personalized and

57 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2024). Annual Report on Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety in Kosovo. Available at: <https://Agk-ks.org>

gender-specific. These cases frequently go unreported due to fear of retaliation or lack of trust in institutions, reinforcing a climate of self-censorship and impunity.<sup>58</sup>

Table 3: Alerts on Threats and Attacks against Journalists in Kosovo (2021–2024)

Categories	Gender	2021	2022	2023	2024	Overall Total
Non-physical threats and harassment	Men	5	9	4	7	25
	Women	2	5	6	4	17
	Group	6	4	10	5	25
Threats against life and physical safety	Men	3	0	5	6	14
	Women	0	0	1	0	1
	Group	3	0	5	3	11
Actual physical attacks on journalists	Men	1	1	8	1	11
	Women	1	1	4	3	9
	Group	1	3	8	3	15
Total Alerts (per year)	Men	9	10	17	14	50
	Women	3	6	11	7	27
	Group	10	7	23	11	51

## — 6.2 PATTERNS OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS SAFETY

Women journalists in Kosovo face ongoing threats and pressures, primarily in the form of digital harassment, smear campaigns, and verbal abuse, rather than physical attacks<sup>59</sup>. Online abuse is particularly widespread, with women journalists, especially those working in television and investigative reporting, frequently targeted through gendered insults, defamation, and coordinated trolling aimed at damaging their credibility and silencing their reporting<sup>60</sup>. According to AJK’s monitoring, these attacks often lead to self-censorship and withdrawal from public debate, with some journalists choosing to avoid specific prime-time debate shows or reduce their visibility online. Many women journalists report limited support from their newsrooms, with few media organizations offering internal protocols or legal assistance when their staff faces threats<sup>61</sup>.

In addition, legal intimidation, such as defamation lawsuits or public denunciations, is increasingly used to deter critical reporting. While exact figures disaggregated by gender are lacking, AJK has documented that these tactics contribute to heightened stress and reluctance to pursue sensitive stories.

The broader media environment remains challenging, with gender disparities in editorial representation and political talk shows dominated by male voices.<sup>62</sup> Women are often considered to be more able to report on “soft topics”

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Three focus groups with journalists (2024-2025)

62 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (2024). Indicators on the level of media freedom and Journalists’ Safety Index 2023. Available at: [https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng\\_2024\\_1-1.pdf](https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng_2024_1-1.pdf)

even-though this is not the case, however their superiors often fail to recognise their professionalism and hard work by limiting both their professional advancement and public influence.

# VII

## Experiences and Perspectives of Women Journalists

This chapter presents key insights from interviews and focus groups with women journalists in Kosovo, highlighting their experiences with digital harassment, verbal threats, gender-based pressure, and legal intimidation. Many described a hostile environment, especially when reporting on politics, corruption, or gender-based violence. These threats have impacted their mental health, sense of safety, and independence—often leading to self-censorship or reduced public presence. A number of journalists also noted a lack of support from their media outlets, particularly during online attacks or smear campaigns. Although legal mechanisms exist, most participants were hesitant to report incidents due to fear of backlash, stigma, or distrust in institutional responses<sup>63</sup>. Their accounts stress the need for gender-sensitive protections, accessible legal aid, and stronger newsroom policies that prioritize women journalists' safety.

### —7.1 FREQUENT THREATS AND INTIMIDATION ON THE JOB

Women journalists in Kosovo routinely face verbal harassment, online abuse, and professional intimidation, particularly when reporting from the field or covering politically sensitive issues. Several journalists interviewed by AJK described frequent confrontations while reporting live, especially during protests or public events where hostile individuals or groups attempt to discredit or intimidate them<sup>63</sup>.

While physical threats remain limited, women journalists are regularly subjected to gendered insults and derogatory language both in public spaces and on digital platforms<sup>64</sup>. Threats often escalate when journalists report on corruption, institutional abuse, or gender-based violence. In some cases, intimidation extends beyond the journalist to their family members, reinforcing the chilling effect and contributing

63 Three focus groups with journalists (2024–2025)

64 Ibid.

to self-censorship<sup>65</sup>. While AJK has documented incidents where journalists faced targeted smear campaigns and retaliation, including pressure from media owners or political actors following critical reporting, there has been a slight increase in cases of sexual harassment in online spaces. Several women journalists reported that they avoid denouncing or publishing information about these attacks due to fear of job loss, reputational harm, or being publicly labeled as problematic or overly sensitive. In local context it is perceived that women who speak out are “difficult,” “unprofessional,” or seeking attention, which can damage their standing in newsrooms or among peers. These gendered stereotypes discourage reporting and contribute to a culture of silence, reinforcing self-censorship and institutional inaction.<sup>66</sup>

Institutional inaction remains a key concern to some of the participants, however the majority agreed that the Kosovo Police is the most proactive institution. This perception is largely based on the police’s relatively quick response times, regular follow-up with journalists who report threats, and the establishment of designated officers for cases involving journalists. Several participants noted that police representatives maintain direct communication with the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, which helps in providing immediate protection when threats escalate. Nonetheless, many perpetrators of threats or harassment are not held accountable, which contributes to a normalization of threats and growing mistrust in reporting mechanisms<sup>67</sup>. This ongoing climate of intimidation has a direct impact on women journalists’ well-being, editorial freedom, and safety, and highlights the urgent need for stronger institutional protection and support systems.

## — 7.2 ONLINE HARASSMENT AND SMEAR CAMPAIGNS

Online harassment remains one of the most increasing and damaging threats faced by women journalists in Kosovo. These attacks typically occur through social media and public commentary forums, where women are subjected to sexist insults, character assassination, and defamation, often aimed at discrediting their professional work or intimidating them into silence.

A notable and recent case is that of journalist Ardiana Thaçi, who was targeted by the anonymous platform AlKings, which published a defamatory post questioning her integrity and linking her personal life to her professional reporting<sup>68</sup>. This platform, as a self-styled “gossip outlet” with large online reach, used misogynistic language, insinuations about her morality, and unverified claims to damage her reputation.

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65 In depth interview.

66 Three focus groups with journalists (2024-2025)

67 Ibid.

68 AJK (2024). Journalist Ardiana Thaçi Mehmeti is the target of attacks by the Albkings group. <https://agk-ks.org/en/news/gazetarja-ardiana-thaci-mehmeti-cak-i-sulmeve-ne-grupin-albkings/>

The attack followed her investigating this platform and quickly went viral, triggering a wave of online abuse and threats in the comments section, mostly from anonymous accounts, even on her whatsapp and viber accounts.

This case is not isolated. Focus groups organized by AJK confirm that women journalists in Kosovo face frequent online abuse, especially when reporting on politics, gender-based violence, or holding public officials accountable. As one journalist shared, "Every time I publish a piece that involves a political figure or sensitive social issue, I prepare myself mentally for days of insults, private messages, and sometimes threats. It's become part of the job."<sup>69</sup>

Common forms of digital harassment include:

- Sexist slurs and attacks on appearance ("ugly", "slut", "sell-out")
- Threats of violence or sexual assault
- Defamation and false accusations about journalists' personal lives
- Linking women's credibility to their male employers or peers

Women journalists interviewed for AJK's 2024 Needs Assessment emphasized that newsrooms rarely provide any support, and in some cases, employers even discourage them from filing complaints to "avoid making it worse"<sup>70</sup>.

Despite the growing evidence base, law enforcement responses remain weak. AJK's monitoring shows that digital threats are rarely investigated or prosecuted, especially when coming from anonymous accounts.

One journalist stated that "at some point you start to 'grow a thick skin' and that these threats become a routine."<sup>71</sup>

In parallel, most journalists lack digital literacy training, making them more vulnerable to online attacks. Many don't know how to protect their accounts, document abuse, or use reporting mechanisms effectively. This is especially true for younger women and those outside Prishtina, who also face geographic and institutional isolation<sup>72</sup>. AJK and other media organizations have condemned such attacks publicly, but women journalists consistently express the need for concrete support, legal aid, trauma-informed counseling, and training in digital security. Civil society initiatives have started offering workshops, but sustained, institutional backing especially from their work place, is still missing<sup>73</sup>.

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69 Three focus groups with journalists (2024-2025)

70 Interviews with women journalists part of Kosovo's Women Journalists' Network

71 In depth interview.

72 Three focus groups with journalists (2024-2025)

73 Ibid.

This hostile digital climate, coupled with limited protection and high visibility, leads many women journalists to self-censor or exit public discourse entirely, which poses a serious threat to media pluralism and press freedom in Kosovo.

### — 7.3 SEXUAL HARASSMENT AS A HIDDEN, BUT PERSISTENT CONCERN

In Kosovo, sexual harassment remains an underreported yet recurring issue for women journalists, often occurring in newsrooms or during field assignments. While there are few formal complaints, focus group participants and interviewees confirmed that inappropriate comments, unwanted advances, and subtle intimidation are part of their professional reality<sup>74</sup>. What's most concerning is that many women working in media still don't fully identify certain behaviors as workplace sexual harassment, or worse, they've come to normalize them as part of the job. This doesn't reflect naivety, but rather the result of years of working in environments where protocols are not introduced, support is minimal, and speaking up often leads to retaliation or being pushed out.<sup>75</sup>

These incidents frequently come from colleagues and/or sources, and are rarely addressed due to fears of retaliation or professional damage. As one journalist shared in a focus group: "You know it's not okay, but you also know that reporting it could cost you your job, or your credibility in the newsroom."<sup>76</sup> AJK's findings also highlight a culture of silence, driven by stigma and lack of institutional mechanisms. Most media outlets in Kosovo do not have anti-sexual harassment policies or reporting protocols, leaving women to manage these experiences alone<sup>77</sup>.

Women journalists often adopt avoidance strategies, such as distancing themselves from certain assignments or individuals, which can hinder their professional growth and reinforce structural gender inequality<sup>78</sup>. The fear of being labeled as "difficult" or "problematic" also contributes to the decision not to speak out.<sup>79</sup>

Journalists' association and professional bodies currently do not provide structured support for sexual harassment cases, and there are no sector-specific complaint mechanisms available at the institutional level<sup>80</sup>. Although Kosovo has ratified the Istanbul Convention, implementation in media-related contexts remains weak and uncoordinated<sup>81</sup>. This lack of specialized support mechanisms means that many

74 Three focus groups with journalists (2024-2025)

75 Interviews with women journalists part of Kosovo's Women Journalists' Network

76 Interviews with women journalists part of Kosovo's Women Journalists' Network

77 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (2024). Indicators on the level of media freedom and Journalists' Safety Index 2023. Available at: [https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng\\_2024\\_1-1.pdf](https://agk-ks.org/site/assets/files/3564/kos-eng_2024_1-1.pdf)

78 Interviews with women journalists part of Kosovo's Women Journalists' Network

79 In depth interview.

80 Ibid.

81 Council of Europe. (2023). Istanbul Convention: Ratification Status and Country Monitoring – Kosovo. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/istanbul-convention>

incidents remain unreported and unresolved, deepening women's vulnerability in the media sector and limiting efforts to build safer and more equitable newsrooms in Kosovo.

## — 7.4 LEGAL THREATS AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS

In Kosovo, legal threats including defamation lawsuits, public accusations, and strategic use of institutional pressure, constitute an emerging tool used to silence critical reporting by women journalists. While gender-disaggregated data on SLAPPs is not systematically collected, AJK's 2024 monitoring shows that women are disproportionately targeted when covering politics, corruption, or gender-based violence<sup>82</sup>.

In focus group discussions conducted with women journalists across all types of media in Kosovo, nearly 40% of participants stated they had received threats of legal action, often verbal, from public officials or political party representatives. Another 30% said they were warned either directly or through editors to "be careful" or "avoid legal trouble" after publishing critical articles<sup>83</sup>. However, most journalists agree that even the threat of a lawsuit is enough to provoke some level of self-censorship. One participant explained, "You don't need to go to court. Just a public post from a minister calling you a liar can damage your credibility overnight. This has mainly to do with the narratives imposed to the citizens by influential people, but there may be cases where even close people look at you differently".<sup>84</sup>

A recent high-profile case further illustrates the use of legal mechanisms and institutional pressure to intimidate journalists. Flutura Kusari, a well-known media lawyer and advocate for press freedom, filed a lawsuit against Mentor Llugaliu, accusing him of prolonged harassment. The case, widely covered by journalist associations across the region, highlights how women professionals, even those with strong legal expertise, are not immune to intimidation tactics that combine public smear campaigns with legal threats. AJK and regional partners publicly expressed support for Kusari, emphasizing that such cases set a worrying precedent for women journalists who may be discouraged from seeking justice due to fear of retaliation or reputational attacks.

In 2012, Kosovo officially decriminalized defamation, treating it as a civil matter rather than a criminal offense<sup>85</sup>. This shift aimed to align with international standards on freedom of expression. However, journalists can still face civil lawsuits for defamation, which may result in financial penalties. These civil cases can be burdensome, as the burden of proof often falls on the defendant, potentially leading to self-censorship among media professionals. Despite the decriminalization, concerns

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82 In depth interview.

83 Three focus groups with journalists (2024-2025)

84 Ibid.

85 BTI (2024). Kosovo Country Report 2024. [https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/RKS?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/RKS?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

persist about the misuse of civil defamation laws to intimidate journalists and hinder investigative reporting. Additionally, although the Law on Civil Procedure provides some protections, Kosovo does not yet have an anti-SLAPP framework aligned with EU recommendations<sup>86</sup>. AJK has consistently raised the need for legal reform, calling for explicit recognition of SLAPPs, early dismissal procedures, and support for journalists facing legal harassment.<sup>87</sup> Until structural protections are adopted, legal pressure will remain a powerful silencing mechanism, particularly for women journalists working outside major urban centers or with limited access to legal representation.

## — 7.5 INTERNAL PRESSURES AND SELF-CENSORSHIP

Alongside external threats, women journalists in Kosovo face growing internal pressures within newsrooms, often driven by political affiliations, commercial interests, and newsroom hierarchies dominated by men<sup>88</sup>.

During the meeting with members of KJWN, over 50% of participants said they had been discouraged by editors or colleagues from pursuing sensitive stories, especially those involving political figures or business elites. One journalist said, "It's not always direct censorship. It's subtle. They'll tell you to 'maybe wait' or assign the story to someone else."<sup>89</sup> Women also noted that editorial decisions are frequently influenced by ownership interests. "If your story affects someone connected to the outlet, it doesn't always see the light," is the general opinion for those working in private media outlets. AJK's Indicators report confirmed that financial influence over editorial lines remains a systemic issue, limiting journalistic independence<sup>90</sup>. These pressures disproportionately affect women, who are often excluded from editorial leadership. Although women make up a significant portion of the journalistic workforce, as well as up to 65% of AJK's database, they are underrepresented in decision-making roles across major national and local media outlets<sup>91</sup>. Women journalists are often portrayed as covering "soft" topics like entertainment, lifestyle, or culture and not because that's all they report on, but because men continue to dominate the most visible and prestigious media spaces. In reality, most of women journalists are deeply engaged in hard-hitting journalism, covering politics, corruption, and social justice, however their work is systematically pushed to the margins, while prime-time exposure and editorial power remain largely reserved for men.

Self-censorship is further reinforced by precarious employment conditions. Many women journalists work on short-term

86 Council of Europe. (2022). Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16 on SLAPPs. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680aeadf4>

87 In depth interview.

88 AJK. (2025). Focus Group Summary on Journalist Safety and Institutional Response Mechanisms

89 Interviews with women journalists part of Kosovo's Women Journalists' Network

90 Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2024). Annual Report on Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety in Kosovo. Available at: <https://Agk-ks.org>

91 Interviews with women journalists part of Kosovo's Women Journalists' Network

contracts or without contracts at all. One journalist from a local TV station stated, "I've been working for six years and never signed a proper contract. If I push too hard, they might even terminate the non-existent one I have".<sup>92</sup>

The economic fragility of the media sector in Kosovo also plays a role. With many outlets dependent on advertising, editorial independence is routinely compromised. According to AJK, "The same newsroom may apply different editorial standards depending on whether they're writing for a donor-funded platform or a business funded outlet."<sup>93</sup> On the other hand, Journalists also claim that they would rather not cover a topic at all than compromise their credibility in front of their audiences. These dynamics create a media environment where self-censorship becomes a survival strategy, particularly for women. Yet, most of the journalists interviewed emphasized that they would not drop or delay investigations out of fear of backlash or reputational attacks.<sup>94</sup> They acknowledged the risks that come with the profession, and noted that if they ever withdrew from a story, it would more likely be due to pressure from family members rather than personal fear or intimidation. Family members often don't fully understand the nature of journalistic work and may fear for the journalist's safety, though, according to participants in the focus groups, such situations occur rarely.

Institutional responses remain insufficient. Most media outlets lack internal policies that protect journalists from political pressure or offer legal and psychological support. AJK has advocated for gender-sensitive editorial guidelines, newsroom codes of conduct, and training on journalist rights, but implementation remains limited<sup>95</sup>. Without stronger editorial safeguards and labour protections, women journalists in Kosovo will continue to bear the burden of both internal and external pressures undermining not only their professional integrity but also media freedom and democratic accountability in the country.<sup>96</sup>

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92 AJK. (2025). Focus Group with women journalists  
93 In depth interview.  
94 AJK. (2025). Focus Group with women journalists  
95 In depth interview.  
96 Ibid.

# VIII Conclusions

The safety, dignity, and professional advancement of women journalists in Kosovo remain under persistent threat due to a combination of digital violence, workplace harassment, informal labor conditions, gender discrimination, and institutional inaction. These challenges though often subtle and normalized undermine women's full participation in journalism and constrain the role of the media as a democratic watchdog.

## — 8.1 PERVASIVE BUT UNDERREPORTED WORKPLACE HARASSMENT

Workplace harassment emerged as one of the most troubling findings of this assessment. Nearly half of participants across focus groups reported knowing a colleague or personally having experienced verbal harassment, inappropriate remarks, or hostile behavior, particularly from male colleagues or supervisors. These incidents rarely result in formal complaints due to a deep-rooted culture of silence, fueled by fear of professional backlash and the absence of clear reporting mechanisms in most media outlets. AJK's research found that very few media organizations in Kosovo have adopted anti-harassment or whistleblower protection policies, leaving women journalists without recourse when abuses occur. This gap is especially harmful in smaller outlets or local branches, where hierarchical dynamics and lack of human resources departments amplify women's isolation. The lack of structural response has normalized informal avoidance strategies, such as ignoring such situations.

## — 8.2 ONLINE HARASSMENT AND FIELD- BASED THREATS

Outside the newsroom, the majority of women journalists reported experiencing or witnessing gendered online abuse, ranging from sexualized insults and rape threats to coordinated smear campaigns following their reporting on sensitive topics such as corruption or gender-based violence<sup>5</sup>. Majority of women that

participated in the focus groups discussions reported online harassment in the last 12 months. Many described how attacks focused on their appearance, marital status, or sexual morality, rather than their professional work<sup>6</sup>.

In the field, women journalists covering protests, political events, or court proceedings face verbal and sometimes physical intimidation. Yet, these incidents are rarely documented, much less followed up by newsroom managers. Women overwhelmingly described harassment during fieldwork as “part of the job,” indicating a normalization of public hostility that discourages reporting and contributes to a growing trend of self-censorship<sup>7</sup>.

### **— 8.3 INSTITUTIONAL INACTION AND FRAGMENTED SUPPORT MECHANISMS**

Despite Kosovo’s legal commitments under the Law on Gender Equality, Anti-Discrimination Law, and ratification of the Istanbul Convention, institutional responses to harassment and threats remain slow, fragmented, and reactive. Law enforcement and authorities often fail to act on online harassment reports. Meanwhile, most journalists are unaware of their rights or do not trust institutions to handle their cases seriously. Professional organizations, including AJK, have played a critical role in issuing public condemnations and offering ad hoc support, but structural assistance, such as access to media-specialized legal aid, trauma-informed psychological care, and digital safety training, as they are still lacking.

### **— 8.4 SYSTEMIC GENDER INEQUALITY AND LEADERSHIP EXCLUSION**

Though women constitute a significant percentage of Kosovo’s journalism workforce, they remain underrepresented in editorial and managerial positions, limiting their influence over newsroom policy, sometimes even content direction, and especially safety standards. Editorial boards and media management are still male-dominated, which reduces the visibility of gender-specific issues and perpetuates structural inequality. This gap is partly due to rigid work structures and lack of shared parental leave and family-friendly policies, which lead many women to avoid demanding roles or career advancement in favor of stability. The absence of flexible scheduling, caregiving accommodations, and menstruation-sensitive practices reinforces workplace inequality. Addressing this imbalance requires not only implementing existing rights but also adopting gender-conscious newsroom policies across the media sector.

Women journalists, also, frequently report that internal censorship and soft editorial control disproportionately affect them. Women journalists are often linked to “soft” topics, not due to lack of substance, but because men

dominate prime-time exposure and editorial control. In reality, women in general cover hard-hitting issues like politics and corruption, yet their work is sidelined and underrepresented.

## **— 8.5 NEED FOR A COORDINATED, MULTI-STAKEHOLDER RESPONSE**

The stakeholder analysis conducted through this assessment highlights the urgent need for coordinated, cross-sectoral action. Media outlets, institutional regulators, justice system actors, donor-supported initiatives, and civil society must collaborate to implement:

- Gender-sensitive newsroom policies and anti-harassment protocols
- Digital safety and psychological support services
- Access to free, media-specialized legal aid
- Training for law enforcement and prosecutors on journalist safety and gender-based violence, including in digital spaces and through digital tools
- Accountability for media owners and managers who enable or ignore harassment

Without a coherent and resourced safety framework, women journalists in Kosovo will continue to face harassment and institutional abandonment, severely undermining press freedom and gender equality.

## **— 8.6 FINAL CONSIDERATION**

Creating an inclusive and safe environment for women journalists in Kosovo is central to sustaining a diverse and accountable media sector. This is not only a gender equity imperative, it is a democratic necessity. A media landscape where women are silenced, sidelined, or excluded from frontline reporting is one that cannot fulfill its duty to the public. Protecting women journalists is protecting the public interest.

# IX

# Recommendations

## A. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

- Adopt and implement a national safety framework for journalists, with a gender-sensitive lens, aligning with the EU Anti-SLAPP Directive, the Council of Europe's Recommendation CM/Rec(2022)16, the Istanbul Convention, and the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime. Ensure that the framework includes digital safety, workplace protections, and legal safeguards specifically for women journalists.
- Amend the Criminal Code to recognize psychological violence and harassment, including sexual harassment and stalking against journalists as distinct offenses. Journalists should be explicitly protected under provisions addressing public service, ensuring they fall under Articles 402 (Attack on Official Person) and related protections.
- Ensure law enforcement and judiciary responsiveness by institutionalizing specialized units to handle cases involving journalists, particularly those involving gender-based threats or digital abuse. These should include trained female police officers, mental health professionals, and dedicated prosecutors.
- Establish a clear inter-institutional protocol on the safety of journalists, in cooperation ensuring timely response, evidence preservation, and public reporting of progress.
- Develop a national mechanism for systematic, gender-disaggregated data collection on violence against journalists, including typology of threats, institutional follow-up, and legal outcomes. Data should be collected and reported biannually by an independent oversight body (such as NWJK).
- Increase the resources and authority of the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, including by appointing a dedicated focal point for media cases and accelerating complaint investigations involving women journalists.

- Strengthen the role of the Ombudsperson Institution in monitoring and addressing gender-based discrimination and harassment in the media sector, including by appointing a media-specific focal point, issuing public opinions on systemic violations, and conducting ex officio investigations into institutional failures to protect women journalists.
- Provide legal aid and procedural guidance for journalists facing SLAPPs or other legal harassment through a an independent journalists' defense fund or through agreements with bar associations.
- Ensure proactive labor inspection of media outlets, focusing on formal contracts, declared wages, and protections for women, with published compliance reports.

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA OUTLETS**

- Comply fully with labor and anti-discrimination legislation, ensuring formal contracts, social security coverage, and equal pay. Ensure women journalists have equal access to high-profile assignments and are not presented with "soft" reporting roles when they cover all topics equally.
- Establish and enforce internal anti-harassment policies, including confidential and independent reporting mechanisms. Provide in-house or external psychological and legal support for victims.
- Implement gender equality policies that include mentorship programs, promotion tracking, and measures to address underrepresentation of women in editorial and decision-making roles.
- Create family-friendly and health-conscious newsroom environments, by institutionalizing paid maternity leave, flexible scheduling, and, where possible, menstruation leave. Normalize work-life balance as part of professional sustainability.
- Offer digital safety training and crisis response protocols, ensuring all journalists have tools to prevent and respond to online abuse. Implement newsroom SOPs on documenting, reporting, and escalating threats.
- Establish partnerships with the Kosovo Women Journalists' Network and AJK, to develop newsroom-level risk assessments, trauma training, and field safety briefings, especially for journalists working in conflict-prone environments or on sensitive beats.

## **C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JOURNALISTS' ASSOCIATION AND NETWORK OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS**

Strengthen AJK's and the Women Journalists' Network's capacity to provide structured support, including legal

counseling, psychological aid, emergency response, and follow-up assistance. Establish a dedicated women's safety desk.

Go beyond declarative support by maintaining a publicly accessible threat-monitoring platform, issuing legal briefings, and publishing safety guidelines specific to women in media.

Actively lobby for the creation of an anti-SLAPP framework and judicial reforms to ensure journalists facing abusive litigation have access to early dismissal mechanisms and cost recovery options.

Proactively advocate for labor rights protections for freelancers, local correspondents, and informally employed women journalists, including minimum wage enforcement, parental leave, and social insurance coverage.

Coordinate regular dialogue between journalists and institutional stakeholders, including the IMC, Prosecutor's Office, and Kosovo Police, to improve communication, response timelines, and mutual understanding of journalist safety needs.

#### **D. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS**

- Develop and institutionalize digital literacy and cybersecurity programs targeting women journalists, with a focus on rural, local, freelance, and marginalized communities. Ensure training is trauma-sensitive and accessible in Albanian and Serbian.
- Lead national awareness campaigns on gendered violence in media, targeting the public, newsroom culture, and youth. Include digital storytelling and survivor-led advocacy to reduce stigma and promote solidarity.
- Monitor and publish annual safety audits that evaluate government, police, and media responses to harassment and threats against journalists. Use these findings to push for legislative change and institutional accountability.
- Promote intersectional strategies by centering women with multiple vulnerabilities, including ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ journalists, and those under represented. Design response mechanisms that reflect this complexity.
- Partner with academic institutions and media schools to integrate gender-based safety and ethics modules into journalism curricula, cultivating safer professional standards from the outset.

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