Women in Media

and Gender-Based Disinformation in Kosovo

Research Report

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The Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK)

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The views, findings, conclusions and recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official position of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo.

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Name
AIP	Agency for Information and Privacy
AJK	Association of Journalists of Kosovo
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
CM	Committee of Ministers (Council of Europe)
EU	European Union
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GREVIO	Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IMC	Independent Media Commission
KJC	Kosovo Judicial Council
KLI	Kosovo Law Institute
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
NWJK	Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
QIKA	Qendra për Informim, Kritikë dhe Aksion (Centre for Information, Critique and Action)
RTK	Radio Television of Kosovo
TV	Television
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Executive Summary

Women journalists play a vital role in safeguarding media freedom and democratic debate. At the same time, digital communication has created new forms of risk, including online harassment, gender-based disinformation, and technology-facilitated violence that particularly affect women active in public life. These attacks frequently extend beyond criticism of journalistic work and instead target women's professional credibility, private lives, appearance, morality, or perceived political affiliations, with the effect of discouraging their participation in journalism and public debate.

This report examines the nature and impact of gender-based disinformation affecting women journalists and women working in the media sector in Kosovo. Prepared by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) and the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo (NWJK), the study combines desk research, a quantitative survey of 54 women journalists and women media professionals, qualitative interviews with experts, consultations with journalists whose experiences informed selected case studies, and a focus group discussion with members of the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo. Together, these methods provide an initial evidence base for understanding how gender-based disinformation manifests in Kosovo and how institutions and media organizations can respond more effectively.

The findings indicate that online abuse, harassment, and gender-based disinformation represent significant concerns for participating women journalists. Sixty-one per cent of survey respondents reported experiencing online abuse or harassment in connection with their professional work, while half of those respondents stated that they had also been targeted by false or misleading narratives exploiting their gender. Participants described attacks focusing on their morality, appearance, private lives, and professional credibility rather than the substance of their reporting. Many respondents also reported consequences extending beyond individual incidents, including reluctance to participate in public debates, avoidance of sensitive reporting topics, stress, anxiety, and reduced professional confidence.

The research further demonstrates that gender-based attacks rarely occur in isolation. Instead, it frequently intersects with other forms of technology-facilitated abuse, including threats, harassment, doxxing, manipulated sexual imagery, and reputational attacks. While these forms of conduct should remain legally and analytically distinct, together they contribute to an increasingly hostile environment for women journalists and other women participating in public life. The report also highlights broader structural factors, including entrenched gender stereotypes, anti-gender narratives, and political rhetoric that questions women's professional independence and legitimacy.

Illustrative case studies demonstrate different manifestations of these challenges. They include collective online harassment associated with the AlbKings Telegram group, sustained online harassment targeting media lawyer Flutura Kusari, threats and doxxing directed at investigative journalists, public attacks questioning the independence of women journalists, and the physical assault of journalist Tatjana Lazarević

while reporting in northern Kosovo. Rather than presenting these incidents as isolated events, the report analyzes them as examples of wider systemic issues relating to digital safety, institutional protection, legal responses, and women's participation in journalism.

The report concludes that Kosovo possesses an important legal and policy framework for protecting women from violence and discrimination, including the direct applicability of the Istanbul Convention and broader commitments under international and European human rights standards. Nevertheless, implementation challenges remain in areas such as institutional coordination, evidence collection, digital investigations, newsroom procedures, and support mechanisms for women journalists experiencing technology-facilitated abuse. At the same time, the report recognizes important positive developments, including the continued work of AJK and NWJK in documenting attacks against journalists and supporting victims, as well as the Kosovo Judicial Council's recent strategic commitment[1] to strengthening responses to violence against journalists.

The report recommends a coordinated, multi-stakeholder response involving public institutions, law enforcement and justice institutions, independent regulatory bodies, media organizations, journalists' associations, civil society organizations, technology platforms, and international partners. Priority actions include strengthening institutional capacity to respond to technology-facilitated abuse, improving digital evidence collection, establishing newsroom reporting mechanisms, expanding legal, psychosocial, and digital security support for women journalists, improving data collection and institutional coordination, and promoting media literacy and gender-sensitive professional practices. Collectively, these measures can contribute to a safer media environment, strengthen women's freedom of expression, and support greater gender equality within the media sector in Kosovo.

[1] Kosovo Judicial Council. *Judicial Strategic Plan 2025–2030*. Adopted 12 February 2026. Available at: https://www.gjyqesori-rks.org/2026/02/12/kgjk-miraton-planin-strategjik-2026-2028/

1.

Introduction

1.1 Background

Gender-based disinformation has emerged as an increasingly important challenge at the intersection of media freedom, gender equality, and democratic participation. False, misleading, or manipulated narratives that rely on gender stereotypes can undermine women's credibility, discourage their participation in public debate, and contribute to broader patterns of online abuse and intimidation. Women journalists, alongside women active in politics, civil society, and public life, may be particularly affected when public criticism or disinformation relies on narratives targeting their gender, appearance, morality, family roles, or professional competence.

For the purposes of this report, gender-based disinformation refers to false, misleading, or manipulated information that uses gender stereotypes, sexist narratives, or socially constructed expectations about women and men to discredit individuals, undermine their credibility, or discourage their participation in public debate. Unlike disinformation more broadly, gender-based disinformation exploits gender stereotypes and socially constructed gender norms to amplify reputational harm and restrict women's participation in public life.

Recognizing the importance of better understanding this phenomenon, the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) established the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo (NWJK) to examine how gender-based disinformation affects women journalists and women working in the media sector in Kosovo. Drawing on desk research, a survey, qualitative interviews, and a focus group discussion, the report explores the experiences and perceptions of women journalists, examines selected illustrative cases, reviews the applicable legal and policy framework, and identifies recommendations aimed at strengthening institutional responses, journalist safety, and gender equality in the media sector.

1.2 Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to examine how gender-based disinformation affects women journalists and women working in the media sector in Kosovo. Drawing on a mixed-methods research approach, the report explores the forms and manifestations of gender-based disinformation, its impact on women's professional work, safety, and public participation, and the institutional responses available to address these challenges. The report also identifies gaps in the existing legal, policy, and institutional framework and proposes recommendations aimed at strengthening the protection of women journalists, promoting gender equality, and enhancing the resilience of the media sector against gender-based disinformation.

1.3 Structure of the Report

Following this introduction, the report presents the research methodology and explains the mixed-methods approach used to collect and analyze the data. It then provides the broader context of women journalists and gender-based disinformation in Kosovo before examining the applicable international, European, and domestic legal and policy framework. The central chapters present the research findings, analyze broader trends and patterns, and discuss a number of illustrative case studies that demonstrate how gender-based disinformation manifests itself in practice. The report concludes with key conclusions and recommendations directed at public institutions, media organizations, journalists' associations, civil society, international partners, and other relevant stakeholders.

2.

Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design combining desk research, qualitative interviews, a focus group discussion, and a quantitative survey to examine how gender-based disinformation affects women journalists and women working in the media sector in Kosovo. The methodology was jointly designed and implemented by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) and the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo (NWJK), bringing together AJK's expertise in journalist safety and newsroom realities with NWJK's experience in promoting gender equality and supporting women journalists.
The research adopted a mixed-methods approach to combine quantitative and qualitative evidence, enabling the study to examine both the prevalence of selected experiences among the respondents and the broader context in which gender-based disinformation affects women working in the media sector. The research was guided by several methodological principles, including the triangulation of multiple sources of evidence, the application of a gender-sensitive approach, the protection of participants' dignity and confidentiality, and the adaptation of international standards to the Kosovo media environment.

2.2 Data collection

Desk Research

The research began with a desk review of local and international literature on gender-based disinformation, online violence against women, journalist safety, media freedom, and gender equality. The review also examined reports produced by journalists' associations, fact-checking initiatives, international organizations, and other relevant publications.

This was complemented by a review of traditional and digital media content[2] to identify recurring narratives involving gender-based disinformation, online harassment, hate speech, and reputational attacks targeting women journalists and other women active in public life. While the report focuses primarily on developments during 2025, it also draws on selected documented cases from previous years to provide broader contextual understanding of emerging trends. The findings from the desk review informed the development of the survey questionnaire, interview guide, and focus group discussion guide.

Qualitative Interviews

The qualitative component of the research included five semi-structured interviews with experts, stakeholders, and women directly affected by gender-based disinformation. The interviews explored participants' experiences and perspectives regarding gender-based disinformation, journalist safety,

[2] The media content review focused primarily on Kosovo and was based on publicly available cases, media content, monitoring materials, and existing documentation produced by the Association of Journalists of Kosovo, the SafeJournalists Network, fact-checking and research initiatives, civil society organizations, and relevant media reports. The reviewed materials were mainly in Albanian and English, with Serbian-language sources included where relevant to specific cases or available documentation. While the report focuses mainly on developments during 2025, selected documented incidents from previous years are also included based on their relevance to the research questions, the availability of sufficiently documented public information, and their value in illustrating recurring patterns or contextual developments.

newsroom practices, institutional responses, legal challenges, and possible measures to strengthen protection mechanisms.

Interview data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, contextual factors, and issues relevant to women journalists in Kosovo. Selected interview quotations are used throughout the report to illustrate key findings and provide additional context.

Focus Group Discussion

A focus group discussion involving twenty members of the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo (NWJK) was conducted to further contextualize the findings of the research. Participants reflected on their professional experiences, exposure to gender-based disinformation, strategies for responding to online abuse, and the institutional support available to women journalists. The discussion also provided additional qualitative insight into how gender-based narratives influence women's working environment, public visibility, and professional resilience.

Quantitative Survey

A quantitative survey was conducted with 54 women journalists and women working in the media sector across Kosovo using a structured online questionnaire. The survey collected demographic information together with the respondents' experiences of online abuse and harassment, exposure to gender-based disinformation, the forms of attacks experienced, their impact on professional participation and wellbeing, perceptions of newsroom and institutional responses, the digital platforms where abusive content was encountered, and recommendations for improving protection mechanisms. The survey dataset is not intended to constitute a Kosovo-wide representative sample of women journalists in Kosovo. Rather, it provides an analytical dataset that helps identify recurring patterns, perceptions, and experiences relating to online abuse, misinformation, disinformation, and gender-based disinformation affecting women working in the media sector.

The quantitative survey was conducted between 13 and 26 December 2025. Respondents were recruited using a non-probability purposive and convenience sampling approach, with the aim of reaching women journalists and women media professionals working across different media sectors, professional roles, and community backgrounds in Kosovo. The invitation to participate was disseminated through the professional networks of the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) and the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo (NWJK), including direct email invitations and messaging outreach to women journalists, editors, media organizations, and other relevant professional contacts. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. As the sample was not designed to be statistically representative, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of the experiences and perceptions of the surveyed participants rather than as estimates for all women working in the media sector in Kosovo.

2.3 Regional validation of findings

Regional perspectives shared during the April 2026 SafeJournalists Network meeting in Belgrade indicated that many of the experiences documented in Kosovo are reflected across the Western Balkans. Participants reported similar patterns of misogynistic and sexualized attacks against women journalists, reputational smears, collective online harassment, political amplification of hostile narratives, weak institutional responses, and limited internal newsroom mechanisms. The discussions also highlighted that such attacks contribute to self-censorship, reduced public visibility, and a reluctance among women journalists to report on politically sensitive or gender-related issues. At the same time, participants noted differences in institutional capacity and legal responses across countries, reinforcing the importance of regional cooperation, the exchange of good practices, and stronger documentation standards.

2.4 Ethical considerations

All research activities were conducted in accordance with ethical and gender-sensitive research principles. Participation was voluntary, confidential, and anonymized, while expert interviewees and journalists consulted for the illustrative case studies are identified by name in the report. Particular attention was given to protecting participants discussing experiences of harassment, intimidation, or other forms of abuse. Throughout the research process, efforts were made to minimize the risk of stigma, discrimination, or retraumatization.

2.5 Profile of Survey Respondents

The survey included 54 women journalists and women working in the media sector across Kosovo.
Among the respondents, 47 identified as Kosovo Albanian, four as Kosovo Serb, two as Kosovo Roma, and one as Kosovo Turkish. Most respondents (81%) worked in television or online media, while the remainder worked in radio, social media, or as freelance journalists. Nearly two-thirds (64%) occupied reporting or mid-level editorial positions, whereas 5% held senior editorial or managerial positions.

2.6 Limitations

The findings presented in this report should be interpreted in the light of the study's methodological scope. The survey provides insight into the experiences and perceptions of participating respondents but it is not intended to constitute a statistically representative sample of all women journalists and women working in the media sector in Kosovo. Similarly, the qualitative interviews and focus group discussion provide contextual understanding and illustrative perspectives rather than population-level conclusions. The use of multiple research methods was intended to strengthen the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation.

In addition, the relatively small number of respondents from individual non-majority communities and other subgroups does not permit robust community-level or intersectional analysis. Where subgroup data are presented, they should be interpreted as descriptive only and are reported in a manner that protects the confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

3.

Context: Women Journalists and Gender-Based Disinformation in Kosovo

3.1. Women in Journalism in Kosovo

Women play an important role in Kosovo's media sector. According to the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK), approximately 65% of its members are women, reflecting women's strong representation within the association. AJK also observes increasing numbers of women pursuing journalism studies and careers in the media sector.

However, numerical representation does not necessarily translate into equal influence, leadership, or institutional protection. Women journalists continue to face challenges in their professional environment, including sexist comments, professional discrediting, pressure from editors or sources, online harassment linked to their reporting, and limited internal mechanisms within newsrooms to report or address such incidents. Stakeholders consulted during this research also highlighted concerns regarding women's participation in senior editorial and decision-making positions and the need to strengthen institutional support within media organizations.

3.2. Professional Risks and Working Environment

Like their male colleagues, women journalists regularly report from politically sensitive and high-risk environments, including protests, security operations, and areas of heightened tension. This report does not present exposure to such environments as a women-specific phenomenon. Rather, it highlights that when women journalists are targeted in these contexts, they may also experience gender-specific forms of intimidation, including sexualized harassment, reputational attacks, threats to privacy, and online abuse targeting their personal lives or professional credibility.

> These risks became particularly visible during the protests and security incidents in northern Kosovo in May and June 2023, when several women journalists were subjected to intimidation, threats, physical assaults, and other forms of pressure while reporting from the field.[3] Beyond the immediate physical danger, some incidents also raised concerns regarding digital security, source protection, and privacy, including cases in which journalists were unable to recover their mobile phones after attacks, potentially exposing confidential sources, personal data, and professional communications.

While such risks may affect journalists regardless of gender, they may acquire a distinct gender dimension when combined with sexualized harassment[4], reputational attacks, doxxing[5], and threats[6] directed at

[3] Documented cases include attacks against Venera Xhoxhaj, Saranda Ramaj, and Doruntina Thaçi, alongside other incidents involving women journalists registered by AJK in mid-June 2023.

[4] For the purposes of this report, harassment refers to repeated or targeted conduct, online or offline, that intimidates, humiliates, threatens, or creates a hostile environment for a journalist or public-facing woman because of her work, public visibility, gender, or perceived views. Sexualized smear campaigns refer to coordinated or repeated attempts to discredit a woman by using false, misleading, degrading, or insinuating sexual content, including attacks on her morality, appearance, private life, relationships, or body, rather than engaging with her professional work or public statements.

[5] Doxxing refers to the publication or sharing of a person's private or identifying information, such as phone numbers, home addresses, personal photographs, family details, or workplace information, without consent and often with the purpose of exposing them to harassment, intimidation, or further abuse.

[6] This formulation refers to gendered threats and intimidation that go beyond criticism of professional work and instead target women's personal safety, bodily integrity, family members, private relationships, reputation, or perceived moral and professional legitimacy.

women's private lives, families, bodies, or professional credibility. These developments illustrate that threats against women journalists in Kosovo are not confined to the digital sphere but may also affect their physical safety, privacy, source protection, and ability to perform their professional duties.

3.3. Why Gender-Based Disinformation Matters

Women journalists and other women active in public life increasingly encounter misinformation[7] and disinformation[8] that draws upon gender stereotypes and discriminatory narratives. Such content may target women's professional competence, personal integrity, appearance, morality, family roles, or perceived political affiliations, with the effect of undermining their credibility and discouraging their participation in public debate.

In Kosovo, these narratives frequently reinforce harmful stereotypes affecting women in journalism, politics, civil society, and other visible public roles. Beyond their impact on individual women, gender-based disinformation may contribute to broader patterns of exclusion by discouraging civic participation, reinforcing discriminatory social norms, and weakening the quality of public discourse.

Against this background, this report examines the experiences of women journalists and women working in the media sector in Kosovo, analyzes selected illustrative cases, and identifies institutional and policy measures that may contribute to strengthening journalist safety, gender equality, and resilience against gender-based disinformation.

[7] Misinformation refers to false, inaccurate, or misleading information that is shared regardless of whether there is an intention to cause harm. In this report, the term is used to describe incorrect or misleading content that may affect public understanding of women's roles, rights, credibility, or participation in public life.

[8] Disinformation refers to false, misleading, or manipulated information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the intention of deceiving, harming, discrediting, or manipulating individuals, groups, or public debate. In this report, the term is used particularly in relation to narratives that target women journalists, public figures, activists, or gender equality issues.

4.

Legal and Policy Framework

4.1 International Legal Framework

International human rights instruments provide the normative framework for preventing and addressing violence against women, including forms of violence facilitated through digital technologies. Two instruments are particularly relevant to the subject of this report: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention).

Although these instruments do not specifically regulate the protection of journalists, they establish obligations for public authorities to prevent, investigate, and respond to violence against women across different spheres of life, including conduct occurring through digital technologies and online environments.

The Istanbul Convention is directly applicable in Kosovo under Article 22 of the Constitution.[9] Its provisions are therefore relevant when considering technology-facilitated forms of violence affecting women journalists and other women active in public life. In particular, Article 17 of the Convention[10] emphasizes the role of the media as well as information and communication technology sector in promoting policies and practices that contribute to preventing violence against women.

> The Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the independent monitoring body established under the Istanbul Convention, has also highlighted the growing digital dimension of violence against women. In its General Recommendation No. 1 on the Digital Dimension of Violence against Women, GREVIO notes that technology-facilitated violence, including online harassment and other forms of gender-based abuse, remains significantly underreported and often inadequately addressed by existing institutional protection mechanisms.[11]

4.2 Kosovo Legal Framework

Kosovo has established a legal and policy framework aimed at promoting gender equality and protecting women from violence and discrimination. Relevant domestic instruments include the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, Violence against Women and Gender-Based Violence, together with broader domestic strategies and policies addressing gender equality, violence against women, journalist safety, and media accountability.

Taken together, these instruments provide an important framework for protecting women from discrimination and violence while promoting equality and participation in public life. Although they do not

[9] Rezniqi, Arrita. (2022). *The Istanbul Convention in the Verdicts of Courts in Kosovo*. Kosovo Law Institute (KLI). Available at: https://kli-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/The-Istanbul-Convention-in-the-verdicts-of-courts-in-Kosovo_ENG.pdf (accessed July 2026).

[10] Article 17 of the Istanbul Convention concerns the participation of the private sector, the information and communication technology sector, and the media in preventing violence against women. It calls on states to encourage these actors, while respecting freedom of expression and media independence, to take part in developing policies, guidelines, and self-regulatory standards that prevent violence against women and promote respect for women's dignity.

[11] GREVIO. (2021). *General Recommendation No. 1 on the Digital Dimension of Violence against Women*. Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), Council of Europe. Adopted on 20 October 2021. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147 (accessed July 2026).

specifically regulate gender-based disinformation affecting women journalists, they establish principles that are relevant for preventing gender-based violence[12], promoting equality, and strengthening institutional responses where women experience technology-facilitated abuse.

4.3 European Policy Developments

Kosovo institutional efforts to strengthen protection against gender-based violence also take place within a broader European policy environment. European initiatives, including EU Recommendation 2021/153[13] on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and other media professionals, Directive (EU) 2024/1385[14], on combating violence against women and domestic violence, as well as the Digital Services Act framework and the Code of Conduct on Disinformation, provide additional guidance for developing institutional responses to technology-facilitated violence and improving protection mechanisms for women.

These emerging European standards[15] provide important guidance for strengthening institutional responses to technology-facilitated violence against women. In the context of Kosovo institutional alignment with relevant European Union standards and broader European policy frameworks, they encourage improvements in reporting mechanisms, institutional coordination, victim support services, and safer working environments for women, including women working in the media sector. While these instruments are not directly binding in Kosovo, they offer an important reference for legislative and policy development.

4.4 Kosovo Policy Commitments

The policy framework in Kosovo also recognizes the importance of cooperation between public institutions, media organizations, journalists' associations, and civil society in addressing violence against women and promoting gender equality. Relevant policy documents, including the Kosovo Strategy on Protection against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (2022–2026)[16] and the former Kosovo Programme

[12] For the purposes of this report, gender-based violence (GBV) refers to violence, harm, abuse, or intimidation directed against a person because of their gender, or which disproportionately affects persons of a particular gender. It includes offline and technology-facilitated forms of abuse, including threats, sexual harassment, online harassment, doxxing, sexualized smear campaigns, and reputational attacks affecting women journalists and women in media.

[13] European Commission. (2021). *Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/1534 of 16 September 2021 on Ensuring the Protection, Safety and Empowerment of Journalists and Other Media Professionals in the European Union*. Official Journal of the European Union. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reco/2021/1534/oj/eng (accessed July 2026).

[14] European Parliament and Council of the European Union. (2024). *Directive (EU) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*. Official Journal of the European Union. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2024/1385/oj/eng (accessed July 2026).

[15] For the purposes of this report, "emerging European standards on disinformation" refers primarily to the EU Digital Services Act framework and the Code of Conduct on Disinformation. The Digital Services Act establishes obligations for online platforms to create a safer and more transparent online environment, including by addressing systemic risks linked to harmful and illegal content. The Code of Practice on Disinformation, strengthened in 2022 and integrated into the Digital Services Act framework in 2025 as the Code of Conduct on Disinformation, sets commitments for online platforms, search engines, advertisers, fact-checkers, researchers, and civil society actors in areas such as demonetisation of disinformation, transparency of political advertising, cooperation with fact-checkers, user empowerment, and access to data for researchers.

[16] Ministry of Justice. (2022). *National Strategy on Protection Against Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women 2022–2026*. Government of the Republic of Kosovo. Available at: https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ENG-Strategjia-Kombetare-per-Mbrojtje-nga-Dhuna-ne-Familje-dhe-Dhuna-ndaj-Grave-2022-2026.pdf (accessed July 2026).

for Gender Equality (2020–2024)[17], encourage measures such as developing newsroom anti-harassment policies, strengthening media literacy, and promoting gender-sensitive professional practices.

From a regional perspective, the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)'s[18] 2024 thematic evaluation report on Albania highlights the importance of greater institutional transparency and effective complaint-handling mechanisms in addressing harmful gendered content and technology-facilitated violence.

[17] Agency for Gender Equality. (2020). *Kosovo Programme for Gender Equality 2020–2024*. Office of the Prime Minister, Government. Available at: https://www.prishtinaonline.com/uploads/programi_i_kosoves_per_barazi_gjinore_2020-2024_-_anglisht.pdf (accessed July 2026).

[18] Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO). (2024). *Building Trust by Delivering Support, Protection and Justice: First Thematic Evaluation Report on Albania (GREVIO(2024)6)*. Council of Europe. Available at: https://www.ecoi.net/en/document/2116954.html (accessed August 2026).

5.

Research Findings

This chapter presents the principal findings of the research, drawing on evidence from the quantitative survey, qualitative interviews, and focus group discussion. The survey provides quantitative insight into the experiences and perceptions of participating women journalists and women working in the media sector, while the qualitative research offers additional context and illustrative examples that help explain the reported patterns.

5.1 Exposure to Online Abuse and Gender-Based Disinformation

The survey findings indicate that online abuse, harassment, and gender-based disinformation are significant concerns among participating women journalists and women working in the media sector in Kosovo. Of the 54 respondents, 61% (33 respondents) reported having experienced online abuse or harassment in connection with their professional work. Among those who reported such experiences, half (approximately 17 respondents) indicated that they had also been targeted by false or misleading narratives that exploited their gender, including attacks on their professional credibility, morality, appearance, private life, or perceived political affiliations.

Interview and focus group participants similarly described gender-based disinformation as a recurring challenge, particularly when women report on politics, corruption, gender equality, or other issues perceived as socially or politically sensitive.

> *"Once you become visible as a woman journalist, the attacks are not about your work anymore- they are about who you are as a woman."*
>
> **(Survey respondent)**

These findings suggest that gender-based disinformation extends beyond criticism of journalistic work and frequently targets women because of their gender and public visibility.

5.2 Characteristics of Gender-Based Disinformation

Respondents described gender-based disinformation as primarily targeting their personal integrity rather than the substance of their reporting. False or misleading narratives frequently questioned women's morality, relationship status, professional independence, or personal credibility. Among the respondents who experienced gender-based disinformation, 38% reported that the attacks also included derogatory comments concerning their physical appearance, further reinforcing sexist stereotypes and attempts to undermine their professional legitimacy.

Focus group participants observed that criticism often shifted quickly from journalistic work to personal attacks, particularly when women covered politically sensitive issues or topics relating to gender equality.

> *"They don't argue with the story. They attack your looks, your character, or imply you're someone's 'tool.'"*
>
> **(Focus group participant – television journalist)**

The findings indicate that gender-based disinformation frequently combines misinformation with personal attacks, sexualized narratives, and reputational harm aimed at discrediting women rather than engaging with their reporting.

5.3 Impact on Professional Participation and Wellbeing

The research indicates that experiences of gender-based disinformation have important professional and personal consequences for participating women journalists.

More than one-third of the respondents (19 women) reported that they had declined invitations to participate in political talk shows or public debates because of the previous experiences of online abuse or fear of future harassment. Several respondents also described avoiding coverage of topics such as politics, gender equality, corruption, or human rights because they anticipated gender-based attacks.

One respondent explained that after reporting on a case of femicide she received anonymous threats and derogatory online content that discouraged her from pursuing investigative reporting for several months. Another participant reported being advised by an editor to avoid reporting on gender-related issues because such topics would attract online hostility.

> *"I stopped accepting debate invitations. It's not worth the psychological cost."*
>
> **(Survey respondent)**

The survey also found that nearly half of the respondents (48%) reported experiencing longer-term effects on their wellbeing and professional motivation. Respondents described stress, anxiety, burnout, isolation, and reluctance to publish under their own byline. Several participants noted that repeated online abuse, combined with limited institutional support, reduced their confidence and motivation to engage in public debate.

5.4 Institutional Support and Reporting Mechanisms

Respondents were asked which institutions they would be most likely to approach after experiencing online abuse or gender-based disinformation. The Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) emerged as the institution most frequently identified by the respondents, with 46 out of 54 respondents including it among their preferred sources of support. The Kosovo Police was the second most frequently cited institution.

In contrast, relatively few respondents indicated that they would report incidents to prosecutors or courts, reflecting limited confidence in existing institutional responses to online abuse and gender-based disinformation. Several respondents also explained that they chose not to report incidents formally because they feared their complaints would not be taken seriously or because they wished to avoid further distress.

> *"AJK is the only place where I feel someone will actually listen and react."*
>
> **(Focus group participant – online media)**

The findings suggest that professional associations currently play an important support role for women journalists experiencing online abuse, while formal reporting mechanisms appear to be used less frequently by the respondents.

5.5 Newsroom Environment and Organizational Support

Among survey respondents, most occupied reporting or mid-level editorial positions, while comparatively few held senior editorial or managerial roles. Respondents also reported limited institutional support within media organizations when facing online abuse or gender-based disinformation.

Only 22% of the respondents (12 women) indicated that their newsroom had an internal mechanism or protocol for reporting harassment or disinformation attacks. Many participants described relying on informal support from colleagues rather than formal organizational procedures.

Several respondents considered the absence of gender-sensitive newsroom policies and designated reporting mechanisms to contribute to a culture in which women often manage online abuse individually.

> *"Decisions are made by men who have never experienced this kind of abuse."*
>
> **(Focus group participant – editor)**

5.6 Digital Platforms and the Information Environment

Facebook was identified as the platform where the respondents most frequently encountered gender-based disinformation and abusive content. Overall, 81% of the respondents identified Facebook as the principal platform where such content appeared, followed by Instagram (44%) and TikTok (33%). Twitter/X and YouTube were mentioned less frequently, although several respondents observed that content originating on Facebook was often amplified across multiple platforms.

These findings are consistent with broader international research[19] identifying social media platforms as key spaces for the dissemination and amplification of gender-based abuse targeting women journalists and public figures.

5.7 Respondents' Priorities for Action

Survey respondents consistently emphasized the need for stronger institutional and organizational responses to gender-based disinformation affecting women journalists. Participants highlighted the importance of effective reporting mechanisms, greater institutional accountability, stronger newsroom support, public condemnation of gender-based attacks by political actors, and improved protection measures for women journalists experiencing online abuse.

Several respondents also emphasized the importance of creating safer working environments that enable women journalists to participate fully in public debate without fear of intimidation or harassment.

> *"We're expected to be fearless in our reporting, but we're left alone when the attacks come."*
>
> **(Survey respondent)**

Overall, the findings demonstrate that participating women journalists perceive gender-based disinformation not only as an issue of online abuse, but also as a challenge affecting professional participation, personal wellbeing, institutional trust, and the broader media environment.

[19] Posetti, Julie, & Shabbir, Nabeelah (Eds.). (2022). *The Chilling: A Global Study of Online Violence Against Women Journalists*. International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) and UNESCO. Available at: https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/ICFJ_UNESCO_The%20Chilling_2022_1.pdf (accessed July 2026).

6.

Trends and Systemic Patterns

The research findings and reviewed material indicate that gender-based disinformation affecting women journalists in Kosovo forms part of a broader and longer-standing pattern of misogynistic narratives, online abuse, and attempts to discredit women active in public life. While the available evidence does not provide a systematic longitudinal measurement of changes between 2015 and 2025, the reviewed cases, stakeholder interviews, and relevant publications suggest that the range of narratives directed at women has broadened over time.

Earlier documented cases were frequently associated with sexist stereotypes, gender-based violence, or attacks on women's personal integrity. More recent examples reviewed for this report also involve narratives concerning reproductive rights, gender equality, LGBTIQ+ rights, sexuality education, and the legitimacy of women journalists, activists, and public figures. These developments suggest that attacks directed at individual women increasingly intersect with wider anti-gender narratives that portray gender equality and women's rights as threats to family, religion, tradition, or collective identity.

6.1 Structural and Socio-Cultural Drivers

Gender-based disinformation cannot be understood separately from broader structural and socio-cultural conditions. According to Vlora Tuzi-Nushi, Head of UN Women in Kosovo, deeply rooted patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes continue to influence public perceptions of women's roles and legitimacy in public life.[20] Such norms may position men as natural leaders and public actors while associating women more closely with private, supportive, or family roles.

Within this environment, women who assume visible roles in journalism, politics, activism, or public debate may be more readily subjected to narratives questioning their authority, independence, competence, morality, or right to participate. Gender-based disinformation can therefore reinforce existing inequalities by drawing upon familiar stereotypes and adapting them to contemporary political and digital communication.

The research findings also suggest that the personal cost of visibility may be considerable. Survey respondents and focus group participants described reluctance to participate in public debates, avoidance of sensitive reporting topics, anxiety, reduced professional motivation, and other forms of self-censorship. These experiences indicate that the effects of gender-based disinformation extend beyond individual reputational harm and may also influence women's participation in journalism and public life.

6.2 Anti-Gender and Misogynistic Narratives

Stakeholder interviews identified anti-gender narratives as an important contextual factor affecting women journalists and activists. According to Leonida Molliqaj from NGO QIKA, such narratives are frequently framed as a defense of "traditional values," while presenting gender equality, women's rights, sexuality education, and LGBTIQ+ rights as threats to family, religion, or collective identity.[21]

[20] Tuzi-Nushi, V. (2025). Interview with UN Women Kosovo, conducted for the report Women in Media and Gender-Based Disinformation in Kosovo.

[21] Molliqaj, L. (2025). Interview conducted for the report Women in Media and Gender-Based Disinformation in Kosovo.

Molliqaj observed that these narratives often rely on alarmist or conspiratorial language and may be circulated through anonymous pages, online communities, and multiple social media accounts. In some cases, broader ideological narratives are subsequently directed at individual women through personal attacks, sexist insinuations, degrading language, or content questioning their morality, private lives, appearance, or professional credibility.

This pattern is particularly relevant for women journalists and activists reporting or speaking publicly on gender-based violence, reproductive rights, equality, or labour rights. Rather than responding to the substance of their arguments or reporting, attacks may portray them as "radical," "anti-family," or influenced by foreign interests.[22] The reviewed material suggests that this personalization of anti-gender narratives may contribute to intimidation and discourage women and girls from entering or remaining in journalism and other public-facing professions.

6.3 Political Criticism and Attacks on Professional Credibility

The reviewed cases indicate that political rhetoric can contribute to an environment in which journalists are publicly discredited and exposed to further hostility. Public officials and political actors may legitimately criticize journalistic work[23]; however, concerns arise when criticism relies on unsubstantiated allegations, personal attacks, or narratives portraying journalists as controlled by political, commercial, or foreign interests.

Some cases reviewed for this report involved women journalists whose questions or reporting were publicly described as politically instructed, externally commissioned, or undertaken on behalf of media owners or other actors.[24] Such statements are not necessarily gender-based in themselves, and similar allegations may also be directed at male journalists. They should therefore not automatically be classified as gender-based disinformation.

Nevertheless, where such claims are combined with false or misleading information and draw upon broader stereotypes portraying women as lacking autonomy, authority, or professional competence, they may contribute to patterns of gendered delegitimization. The relevant analytical question is not simply whether the journalist concerned is a woman, but whether the narrative relies upon gendered assumptions or false claims to undermine her professional independence.

The reviewed examples suggest that public statements questioning journalists' legitimacy may contribute to further online hostility, weaken public trust in journalism and normalize personal attacks against media

[22] Ibid.

[23] Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2025). *U.S. Department of State Report: Journalists in Kosovo Faced Pressure and Defamatory Attacks*. Available at: https://ajk-ks.org/en/news/raporti-i-dash-it-gazetaret-ne-kosove-u-ballafaquan-me-presion-dhe-sulme-denigruese/ (accessed July 2026).

[24] Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2024). *Attack against Media, Prishtina, 27 September 2024*. Available at: https://ajk-ks.org/en/cases/sulm-ndaj-mediave-prishtine-27.09.2024/ (accessed July 2026).

professionals. For women journalists, these risks may be compounded when criticism shifts from their reporting to their personal lives, appearance, morality, family relationships, or perceived gender roles.

6.4 Technology-Facilitated Abuse and Reputational Attacks

The research identified recurring links between gender-based disinformation and other forms of technology-facilitated abuse. These include online harassment, doxxing, threats, cyberbullying, non-consensual intimate imagery, manipulated sexual imagery, and reputational attacks. These forms of conduct overlap in practice but should remain analytically and legally distinct.

Gender-based disinformation involves false, misleading, or manipulated information that exploits gender stereotypes. Harassment, threats, doxxing, and physical violence may accompany such disinformation but do not automatically constitute it. Maintaining this distinction is important for accurately describing individual cases and determining which institutional or legal response may be appropriate.

According to Vlora Tuzi-Nushi, technology-facilitated violence increasingly affects women in Kosovo through a combination of online harassment, stalking, threats, doxxing, and manipulated content.[25] UN Women's regional research found that 43.3% of women in Kosovo had experienced at least one form of technology-facilitated violence. While this figure is not specific to women journalists, it provides relevant context for understanding the broader digital environment in which women working in the media operate.

> The reviewed cases further indicate that reputational attacks frequently focus on women's morality, sexuality, family relationships, appearance, or professional credibility. In some cases, false claims or manipulated content are used alongside harassment or the disclosure of personal information, increasing the potential harm and the risk of further abuse.

6.5 Impact on Women's Participation and Media Pluralism

The survey and qualitative findings suggest that gender-based disinformation and related forms of abuse may affect women's willingness to participate in public debate[26], report on sensitive topics, or maintain a visible professional profile.[27] Respondents described declining invitations to political debates, avoiding particular reporting areas, withdrawing temporarily from investigative work, or becoming reluctant to publish under their own names.

[25] Tuzi-Nushi, V. (2025). Interview with UN Women Kosovo, conducted for the report Women in Media and Gender-Based Disinformation in Kosovo.

[26] Media Freedom Coalition. (2025). *Media Freedom Coalition Statement on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists*. Available at: https://mediafreedomcoalition.org/joint-statement/2025/mfc-statement-on-idei-2025/ (accessed July 2026).

[27] Rashiti, Valmira. (2025). *Mapping Gendered Disinformation in the Western Balkans: Kosovo*. Reporting Diversity Network. Available at: https://www.reportingdiversity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Gendered_Disinformation_KS_fin.pdf (accessed July 2026).

According to Flutura Kusari, sustained online attacks can make the personal cost of public participation increasingly difficult for women journalists and activists. She emphasized that repeated harassment, disinformation, threats, and personal attacks may discourage women from entering or remaining in journalism and public debate.[28]

These consequences extend beyond the individual women targeted. When journalists reduce their public visibility or avoid certain subjects, the range of perspectives represented in the media may also narrow.[29] The findings therefore indicate a potential connection between gender-based disinformation, women's freedom of expression, journalistic participation, and media pluralism.

6.6 Implementation Challenges

Kosovo institutions have an applicable legal and policy framework addressing gender equality, violence against women, privacy, personal-data protection, journalist safety, and certain forms of unlawful online conduct. However, interviews and reviewed material indicate that the practical implementation of this framework remains uneven.

According to Flutura Kusari, existing legal mechanisms, including criminal-law provisions and civil remedies relating to defamation, may provide avenues for protection in cases where the conduct meets the elements of an applicable offence or legal violation. She nevertheless identified concerns relating to evidence collection, institutional understanding of technology-facilitated abuse, and the seriousness with which prolonged online harassment involving women journalists is addressed by police and prosecution authorities.[30]

These observations should not be understood as suggesting that gender-based disinformation is itself a single or clearly defined criminal offence. Depending on the facts of an individual case, the relevant conduct may involve threats, stalking or harassment meeting the applicable legal threshold, unlawful disclosure of personal data, non-consensual intimate imagery, manipulated sexual imagery, defamation, discriminatory or hateful conduct, or harmful but lawful speech. The appropriate institutional response will therefore depend on the applicable legal framework and the mandate of the institution concerned.

The research also points to implementation gaps within media organizations. Survey respondents reported limited access to internal reporting mechanisms, designated contact persons, or formal newsroom protocols for responding to harassment and disinformation attacks. This can leave women journalists dependent on informal support from colleagues or professional associations.

Initiatives in Kosovo, including the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo and AJK's work on journalist safety, provide an important foundation for stronger protection and support. However, the reviewed material suggests that further progress depends on more consistent implementation, clearer institutional responsibilities, improved documentation of cases, stronger newsroom procedures, and greater coordination among public institutions, media organizations, journalist associations, civil society, and technology platforms.

[28] Kusari, F. (2025). Interview conducted for the report Women in Media and Gender-Based Disinformation in Kosovo.

[29] UNESCO. (2025). *CTRL + ALT + MUTE: Silencing One Woman Journalist Is Silencing a Thousand Women's Voices*. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Available at: https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/ctrl-alt-mute-silencing-one-woman-journalist-silencing-thousand-womens-voices (accessed July 2026).

[30] Kusari, F. (2025). Interview conducted for the report Women in Media and Gender-Based Disinformation in Kosovo.

7.

Illustrative Cases and Systemic Lessons

The cases presented in this chapter illustrate different ways in which women journalists and women active in public life may be exposed to gender-based disinformation, online harassment, threats, doxxing, reputational attacks, and physical intimidation. These forms of conduct may overlap, but they are not interchangeable. Accordingly, the cases are analyzed according to the nature of the conduct involved, the available evidence of false or misleading information, the gendered elements of the attack, and the broader institutional or systemic issue demonstrated by the case.

AJK and the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo have documented numerous incidents involving smear campaigns, sexualized insults, threats, doxxing, and other forms of abuse directed at women journalists. Much of this conduct has reportedly been anonymous and highly personal, focusing on women's appearance, morality, private lives, family members, or professional credibility[31]. The cases below are therefore presented not as a comprehensive account of all incidents, but as illustrations of recurring risks and institutional challenges.

7.1 Digital Abuse and Manipulated Sexual Content: The AlbKings Case

The 2024 "AlbKings" Telegram group case represents a serious documented example of technology-facilitated abuse affecting women journalists in Kosovo. According to the sources cited in the report, the group, which had attracted more than 100,000 members, was used to circulate intimate images and personal information concerning women and girls without their consent.[32]

Investigative journalist Ardiana Thaçi-Mehmeti reported on the group and subsequently had her personal telephone number shared within it. She then received harassing calls and messages from individuals associated with the group. Participants reportedly also discussed collecting information concerning members of her family.[33]

The material reviewed for the report further indicates that manipulated sexual images resembling women journalists who reported on the group were circulated, while personal information was accompanied by false and sexualized claims, including allegations that particular women were offering sexual services. Two journalists from KALLXO.com were also reportedly targeted after publishing reports concerning sexual harassment and domestic violence. Their telephone numbers were shared with messages encouraging group members to contact them, resulting in further harassment and threats.

The AlbKings case illustrates several overlapping forms of harm: the unlawful or non-consensual sharing of personal information, manipulated sexual imagery, false sexualized narratives, harassment, and threats. The gender-based disinformation element lies particularly in the use of false claims and manipulated content drawing upon stereotypes concerning women's sexuality, morality, and reputation.

[31] Sankar, Sonia. (2025). *"Hostile and Unsafe Environment": Kosovo's Women Journalists Face Harassment Online and Offline*. Missing Perspectives. Available at: https://missingperspectives.com/posts/kosovo-women-journalists-face-harassment/ (accessed July 2026).

[32] Telegrafi. (2024). *How Were the Phone Numbers of Journalists Published in the 'AlbKings' Group on the Social Network "Telegram"?* Available at: https://telegrafi.com/en/how-were-the-phone-numbers-of-the-journalists-published-in-the-albkings-group-on-the-Telegram-social-network/ (accessed July 2026).

[33] Ibid.

The case also demonstrates the scale and speed with which harmful content can circulate through closed or semi-closed digital platforms. It raises questions concerning the preservation of digital evidence, platform accountability, the protection of personal data, and the ability of institutions to respond rapidly to emerging forms of technology-facilitated violence.

The AlbKings case illustrates how gender-based disinformation may be combined with doxxing, manipulated sexual content, and collective online harassment, creating risks that require coordinated responses from law-enforcement institutions, data-protection authorities, digital platforms, media organizations, and journalist-support bodies.

7.2 Sustained Harassment and the Limits of Institutional Response: The Case of Flutura Kusari

Media lawyer and media-freedom advocate Flutura Kusari reported experiencing sustained online harassment between 2021 and 2024.[34] According to the sources cited in the report, a social media user, reportedly a supporter of the ruling party, the Vetëvendosje Movement, published at least 101 Facebook posts concerning Kusari in connection with her advocacy for the independence and governance of the public broadcaster.[35]

The posts reportedly included derogatory and misogynistic language, allegations concerning Kusari's professional activities and political influence, and references to members of her family. In March 2025, Kusari filed a criminal complaint alleging harassment and intimidation directed against her and her family.

The Kosovo Law Institute (KLI), which supported the preparation of the complaint, described the case as a serious documented example of prolonged online harassment against a woman active in public life.[36] AJK, NWJK, KLI, and international media-freedom organizations publicly supported Kusari and called for an effective investigation.

The Basic Prosecutor's Office initially dismissed the complaint on the grounds that the posts constituted commentary relating to Kusari's public role. Kusari subsequently appealed the decision. In an interview conducted for this report, she argued that the posts amounted to sustained harassment involving misogynistic content, disinformation, threats, and derogatory language rather than legitimate criticism.[37]

> The case highlights the difficulty of distinguishing protected expression and criticism of a public figure from prolonged harassment, intimidation, or other conduct that may meet an applicable legal threshold. It also demonstrates the importance of assessing cumulative harm rather than considering individual posts in isolation.

[34] European Federation of Journalists (EFJ). (2025). *Kosovo: Steadfast Support for Flutura Kusari as She Seeks Justice against Mentor Llugaliu's Harassment*. Available at: https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2025/06/20/kosovo-steadfast-support-for-flutura-kusari-as-she-seeks-justice-against-mentor-llugalius-harassment/ (accessed July 2026).

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Kusari, F. (2025). Interview conducted for the report Women in Media and Gender-Based Disinformation in Kosovo.

7.3 Threats, Doxxing, and Escalation Beyond Online Criticism

AJK has documented several cases in which women journalists received explicit threats or had their personal information exposed following their professional reporting.

Investigative journalists Ardiana Thaçi-Mehmeti and Erjona Gjikolli reportedly received death threats through Facebook after broadcasting an investigation into alleged fraud.[38] One message included a threat directed at their children. In another case, ATV journalist Albina Haliti's personal telephone number was shared publicly by a political actor. AJK subsequently requested action from the Agency for Information and Privacy.[39]

These cases are not necessarily examples of gender-based disinformation in every respect. The reported conduct includes direct threats and doxxing, which should be described and assessed under the relevant legal categories. Where threats or the disclosure of personal information are accompanied by false claims, sexist language, or attacks on women's morality or private lives, they may also form part of a broader pattern of gender-based abuse.

The cases nevertheless demonstrate how criticism or hostility directed at journalistic work may escalate into threats against journalists and their family members or the exposure of personal information. They also highlight the importance of rapid institutional response, preservation of evidence, and preventive protection measures.

7.4 Political Delegitimization and Challenges to Journalistic Independence

Women journalists have also faced public criticism and personal attacks from political figures. In one case, RTK journalist Blerta Foniqi-Kabashi was publicly accused of being "commissioned from abroad" after questioning a representative of the ruling party. In another case, Prime Minister Albin Kurti responded to a question from Klan Kosova journalist Arbëreshë Uka by asking her to tell the media owner to return funds allegedly owed to Kosovo Telecom.[40]

AJK, in some instances jointly with NWJK, criticized such statements as attempts to discredit journalists and undermine their professional work. These cases involve political criticism and allegations concerning journalistic independence. Similar allegations may also be directed at male journalists and should therefore not automatically be classified as gender-based disinformation.

Their relevance to this report lies in the broader pattern through which women journalists' autonomy, authority, or professional legitimacy may be questioned. Where such statements rely on false or misleading claims or draw upon gendered assumptions that women lack independence or act under the direction of others, they may contribute to gendered forms of delegitimization.

[38] Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2023). *Threats towards Journalists Ardiana Thaçi-Mehmeti and Erjona Gjikolli*. Available at: https://www.ajk-ks.org/en/cases/kercenim-ndaj-gazetareve-ardiana-thaci-mehmeti-dhe-erjona-gjikolli-prishtine-30.11.2023/ (accessed July 2026).

[39] Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2025). *Other Threats towards Journalist Albina Haliti*. Available at: https://ajk-ks.org/en/cases/kercenime-te-tjera-ndaj-gazetareve-albina-haliti-decan-28.09.2025/ (accessed July 2026).

[40] Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK). (2025). *Other Threats towards Journalist Arbëreshë Uka*. Available at: https://ajk-ks.org/en/cases/kercenime-te-tjera-ndaj-gazetareve-arbereshe-uka-prishtine-06.08.2025/ (accessed July 2026).

However, the gender dimension must be established through the content and context of each case rather than inferred solely from the fact that the targeted journalist is a woman.

7.5 Physical Insecurity and Gender as a Risk Multiplier

During protests in Mitrovica/Mitrovicë North in June 2023, Tatjana Lazarević, editor-in-chief of the Serbian-language portal KoSSev, was physically assaulted by masked individuals while reporting from the scene.[41] According to the cited documentation, the attackers attempted to prevent her from filming, tried to seize her mobile telephone, and pulled her by her press vest, which was clearly marked with media insignia.

The available evidence does not establish that the physical assault itself was explicitly gender-based. It should therefore primarily be understood as an attack on a journalist working in a high-risk and politically sensitive environment.

> Nevertheless, the case is relevant because it illustrates the intersection between physical insecurity, privacy, source protection, and gender-related vulnerability. Women journalists working in hostile environments may face the same physical risks as their male colleagues while also being exposed to sexualized threats, reputational attacks, or subsequent online abuse targeting their gender or private lives.

7.6 Personalized Smear Campaigns and Wider Anti-Gender Narratives

Drawing on QIKA's engagement with women activists and media professionals, Leonida Molliqaj observed that attacks targeting women in public life have increasingly relied on highly personalized narratives. Women advocating for gender equality may be labelled "radical," "anti-family," or agents of foreign interests, with attacks frequently focusing on their morality, appearance, private lives, or professional legitimacy.[42]

According to Molliqaj, content may also be taken out of context or circulated through anonymous pages and multiple social media accounts in ways that amplify reputational harm. These narratives are particularly directed at women speaking publicly about gender-based violence, reproductive rights, equality, or labour rights.

Such content should be assessed carefully. Not every insulting or misogynistic statement constitutes disinformation. The concept applies where false, misleading, or manipulated information is combined with gender stereotypes or sexist narratives to discredit women or discourage their public participation.

The wider significance of these attacks lies in their potential chilling effect. Where young women observe journalists and activists being repeatedly subjected to personal attacks, false claims, or sexualized narratives, they may become less willing to enter journalism, activism, or other public-facing roles.

[41] KoSSev. (2023). *Lazarević: They Strike Where It Hurts Most – At Media Outlets Targeted by Both the Kosovo and Serbian Authorities as the Source of All Evil*. Available at: https://kossev.info/en/lazarevic-udaraju-tamo-gde-je-najslabije-u-medije-koje-i-kosovska-i-srpska-vlast-targetiraju-kao-vinovnike-zla/ (accessed July 2026).

[42] Molliqaj, L. (2025). Interview conducted for the report Women in Media and Gender-Based Disinformation in Kosovo.

8.

Conclusions

This report examined how gender-based disinformation affects women journalists and women working in the media sector in Kosovo through a combination of desk research, a quantitative survey, qualitative interviews, and a focus group discussion. While the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the study, they consistently indicate that gender-based disinformation represents an important challenge for women's participation in journalism and public life.

The research suggests that women journalists encounter a combination of online abuse, gender-based disinformation, harassment, reputational attacks, and other forms of technology-facilitated abuse that frequently target their gender, personal integrity, professional credibility, or private lives rather than the substance of their journalistic work. Survey respondents and qualitative participants described consequences extending beyond individual incidents, including self-censorship, reluctance to participate in public debate, reduced professional confidence, and concerns regarding institutional support.

The discussions at the SafeJournalists Network regional meeting further indicated that many of the patterns identified in Kosovo—including misogynistic and sexualized attacks, collective online harassment, political amplification of hostile narratives, and limited institutional responses—are also reported across the Western Balkans, underscoring the importance of continued regional cooperation and exchange of good practices.

The report further illustrates that gender-based disinformation rarely occurs in isolation. In practice, it often intersects with broader forms of online abuse, including threats, doxxing, manipulated sexual imagery, harassment, and political delegitimization. While these forms of conduct should remain legally and analytically distinct, they collectively contribute to an environment in which women journalists may face additional barriers to participating safely and equally in public life.

The review of illustrative cases demonstrates that institutional responses remain uneven. Existing legal and policy frameworks provide an important basis for protecting women from violence, discrimination, and unlawful online conduct; yet, implementation challenges remain in areas such as evidence collection, institutional coordination, newsroom procedures, digital safety, and support mechanisms for journalists experiencing technology-facilitated abuse.

At the same time, the report identifies a number of positive developments that provide a foundation for further progress. These include the work of the Association of Journalists of Kosovo and the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo in documenting incidents and supporting journalists, growing public recognition of technology-facilitated violence against women, and the continuing alignment of the legal and policy framework with relevant international and European standards.

A particularly important recent development is the adoption of the new Kosovo Judicial Council (KJC) Strategy, which identifies addressing cases of violence against journalists as a strategic priority.[43] This represents an important opportunity to strengthen institutional responses and improve coordination between justice institutions, law enforcement agencies, journalists' associations, and other relevant stakeholders. Building on this commitment, while integrating a gender-sensitive approach to violence affecting women journalists, could contribute significantly to improving both journalist safety and women's equal participation in the media sector.

[43] **Betimi për Drejtësi.** *Çka parasheh Plani Strategjik 2026–2028 për përmirësimin e qasjes në drejtësi?* Published 13 February 2026. Available at: https://betimiperdrejtesi.com/cka-parasheh-plani-strategjik-2026-2028-per-permiresimin-e-qasjes-ne-drejtesi/ (accessed August 2026).

Addressing gender-based disinformation therefore requires a comprehensive response that combines effective implementation of existing legal protections, stronger institutional cooperation, improved newsroom practices, greater digital resilience, and sustained support for women journalists. The recommendations presented below are intended to support these efforts by identifying practical measures that can be undertaken by different institutions within their respective mandates.

9.

Recommendations

The findings of this report indicate that addressing gender-based disinformation affecting women journalists requires coordinated action by public institutions, media organizations, journalists' associations, civil society organizations, technology platforms, and international partners. While many of the challenges identified are interconnected, different stakeholders have distinct mandates and responsibilities. The recommendations below are therefore addressed to specific groups of actors and distinguish between short-term and medium- to long-term priorities.

9.1 Public Institutions, Law Enforcement and Justice Institutions

Short-term priorities

- Ensure timely, impartial, and gender-sensitive responses to reported cases involving threats, stalking, harassment, doxxing, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, manipulated sexual imagery, and other conduct that may constitute an offence or legal violation when directed against women journalists.
- Strengthen the capacity of police officers, prosecutors, and judges to distinguish between harmful but lawful expression and conduct that may constitute a criminal offence or other legal violation, while fully respecting freedom of expression, privacy, and due process.
- Improve evidence collection, preservation of digital evidence, and documentation of technology-facilitated abuse affecting women journalists.
- Implement the commitments contained in the Kosovo Judicial Council Strategy relating to violence against journalists, ensuring that cases involving women journalists are addressed through a gender-sensitive approach where appropriate.[44]

Medium- to long-term priorities

- Develop practical inter-institutional guidelines for identifying, documenting, investigating, and responding to technology-facilitated violence and conduct associated with gender-based disinformation that may fall within the mandates of the relevant institutions, in line with relevant international standards
- Improve institutional coordination among police, prosecution authorities, courts, data protection authorities, and other competent institutions responsible for responding to online abuse.
- Strengthen the collection of disaggregated data on attacks against journalists, including, where legally feasible, data disaggregated by gender and type of incident, in order to improve policy development and institutional monitoring.

9.2 Independent Institutions and Media Regulators

Independent Media Commission (IMC)

Short-term priorities

- Strengthen cooperation with journalists' associations, media organizations, and civil society to improve responses to gender-based online abuse affecting journalists.
- Encourage broadcasters to adopt or strengthen internal policies on preventing harassment and technology-facilitated violence against women journalists.

[44] **Betimi për Drejtësi.** ***Çka*** *parasheh Plani Strategjik 2026–2028 për përmirësimin e qasjes në drejtësi?* Published 13 February 2026. Available at: https://betimiperdrejtesi.com/cka-parasheh-plani-strategjik-2026-2028-per-permiresimin-e-qasjes-ne-drejtesi/ (accessed August 2026)

Medium- to long-term priorities

- Promote regulatory guidance and awareness on ethical reporting relating to violence against women and gender-sensitive media content.
- Support media literacy initiatives addressing gender stereotypes, online harms, and technology-facilitated violence against women.

Agency for Information and Privacy (AIP)

Short-term priorities

- Improve public guidance on complaint mechanisms related to unlawful disclosure of personal data, doxxing, and other privacy violations affecting journalists.
- Strengthen cooperation with relevant institutions and civil society organizations to improve awareness of digital privacy rights.
- to long-term priorities
- Publish aggregated information on complaints concerning privacy violations, while respecting legal confidentiality requirements.
- Continue awareness-raising activities on personal data protection in digital environments.

Ombudsperson Institution

Short-term priorities

- Monitor complaints involving gender-based discrimination, online abuse, and violations of the rights of women journalists within its mandate.
- Strengthen cooperation with journalists' associations and civil society organizations to facilitate referrals and improve access to available remedies.
- to long-term priorities
- Produce thematic analyses and recommendations on the protection of women journalists from discrimination and technology-facilitated violence.
- Promote institutional cooperation to strengthen the protection of human rights in digital environments.

Press Council of Kosovo

Short-term priorities

- Promote the consistent application of ethical standards in cases involving online abuse, gender-based harassment, and harmful reporting.
- Increase awareness among journalists and the public about available self-regulatory complaint mechanisms.

Medium- to long-term priorities

- Continue strengthening ethical guidance and professional standards on reporting violence against women and gender-sensitive issues.
- Support professional training and awareness initiatives on ethical reporting and online safety.

9.3 Media Owners, Editors and Newsroom Managers

Short-term priorities

- Adopt clear internal protocols for responding to online harassment, gender-based disinformation, and offline intimidation affecting journalists.
- Establish confidential internal reporting mechanisms, designated contact persons, and procedures for supporting journalists subjected to abuse.
- Ensure that women journalists receive visible institutional backing when targeted because of their professional work.

Medium- to long-term priorities

- Institutionalize newsroom policies covering prevention, reporting, documentation, response, and post-incident support for online and offline attacks.
- Promote greater gender balance in editorial, managerial, and decision-making positions.
- Integrate gender-sensitive approaches into editorial policies, workplace safety procedures, staff management, and professional development programmes.
- Provide regular training on digital safety, online harassment, and gender-sensitive newsroom management for editors and senior management.

9.4 Journalists' Associations, Women's Journalist Networks and Civil Society Organizations

Short-term priorities

- Maintain or strengthen confidential reporting and referral mechanisms for women journalists experiencing gender-based disinformation or other forms of technology-facilitated abuse.
- Expand access to legal assistance, psychosocial support, digital security advice, and emergency response mechanisms for affected journalists.
- Continue documenting cases and publicly advocating for effective institutional responses.

Medium- to long-term priorities

- Monitor recurring patterns of gender-based disinformation to support evidence-based advocacy, policy development, and strategic litigation where appropriate.
- Strengthen peer-support networks, particularly for freelance journalists, young journalists, journalists working outside major urban centres, and women from non-majority communities.
- Promote professional dialogue on ethical reporting, digital resilience, and gender equality within the media sector.

9.5 International Partners and Donors

Short-term priorities

- Support research and systematic documentation of gender-based disinformation and technology-facilitated violence affecting women journalists.
- Support programmes providing legal assistance, psychosocial support, digital security, and capacity-building for women journalists.

Medium- to long-term priorities

- Support the development of sustainable systems for collecting and analyzing data on attacks against women journalists, including gender-disaggregated information where appropriate.
- Promote regional cooperation and exchange of good practices on protecting women journalists from gender-based disinformation and online abuse.
- Support initiatives that strengthen media literacy, gender equality, and institutional capacity to respond to technology-facilitated violence.

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Annexes

Annex 1. Data Collection Instruments

This annex provides an overview of the research instruments used for data collection. The instruments were designed to ensure consistency across the different components of the study while allowing flexibility to explore emerging themes during qualitative discussions.

A. Quantitative Survey

A structured questionnaire was administered to women journalists and women working in the media sector in Kosovo. The questionnaire consisted of demographic questions, multiple-choice questions, and two open-ended questions.

1. How do you self-identify in terms of community or ethnicity?

- ☐ Kosovo Albanian
- ☐ Kosovo Serb
- ☐ Kosovo Roma
- ☐ Kosovo Turkish
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

2. What is your primary area of work in the media sector?

- ☐ Television
- ☐ Online media or news portal
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Social media-based media
- ☐ Freelance journalism
- ☐ Other: _____

3. Which option best describes your current professional position?

- ☐ Junior-level position
- ☐ Mid-level reporting or editorial position
- ☐ Senior editorial, managerial, or leadership position
- ☐ Other: _____

4. Have you experienced online abuse or harassment in connection with your work in journalism or media?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

5. If you answered "Yes" to Question 4, have you been targeted with false, misleading, or manipulated information that exploited your gender?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Not applicable

6. If you have experienced online abuse or gender-based disinformation, did it include comments or false claims about your appearance, body, sexuality, morality, private life, relationships, or family?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Not applicable

7. Have concerns about harassment or online attacks ever caused you to decline or avoid a political talk show, panel, interview, public debate, or another high-visibility media appearance?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

8. Does your newsroom or media organization have a clear internal mechanism, protocol, or designated person for reporting harassment, threats, or disinformation attacks?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ I am not currently attached to a newsroom

9. Have online abuse, harassment, or gender-based disinformation had lasting effects on your mental wellbeing, professional motivation, confidence, public visibility, or willingness to publish under your own name?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Prefer not to answer
- ☐ Not applicable

10. Which institutions or actors would you be most likely to approach for support? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Association of Journalists of Kosovo
- ☐ Kosovo Police
- ☐ My employer or newsroom
- ☐ A civil society organization or women's rights organization
- ☐ Prosecution
- ☐ Courts

- ☐ A colleague, friend, or family member
- ☐ I would not report or seek support
- ☐ Other: _____

11. On which platforms have you most often encountered false, abusive, or gender-based content targeting women journalists or women in public life? Select all that apply.

- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ TikTok
- ☐ X / Twitter
- ☐ YouTube
- ☐ Online news portals or comment sections
- ☐ Messaging applications or private groups
- ☐ Other: _____
- ☐ I have not encountered such content

12. Please briefly describe any experience of online abuse, harassment, or gender-based disinformation that you believe is important for this research.

13. What changes would make newsrooms, institutions, and digital platforms safer and more supportive for women journalists?

B. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts and stakeholders working in the fields of journalism, media freedom, gender equality, digital rights, and women's rights.

While individual interviews varied according to the interviewee's expertise, they explored the following themes:

- perceptions of gender-based disinformation in Kosovo;
- emerging trends affecting women journalists;
- institutional responses and legal challenges;
- technology-facilitated violence against women;
- newsroom practices and organizational support;
- anti-gender narratives and their impact on public participation;
- recommendations for strengthening prevention, protection, and institutional responses.

Interview questions were adapted where appropriate to reflect the professional background and experience of each interview participant.

C. Focus Group Discussion Guide

A focus group discussion was organized with members of the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo (NWJK) to validate and further contextualize the research findings.

The discussion focused on:

- participants' experiences of online harassment and gender-based disinformation;
- recognition of recurring gendered narratives;
- effects on professional confidence and public participation;
- newsroom responses and available support mechanisms;
- institutional reporting experiences;
- digital safety practices;
- recommendations for improving protection and support for women journalists.

The focus group was conducted using a semi-structured discussion guide, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring consistency across the principal research themes.

Annex 2. Meetings and Interlocutors

As part of the qualitative component of this research, the study team conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with experts working in the fields of media freedom, gender equality, and women's rights. In addition, individual consultations were held with journalists whose experiences informed the illustrative case studies presented in this report. A focus group discussion with members of the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo (NWJK) was also organized to validate and contextualize the research findings.

A. Expert Interviews

Interviewee	Institution / Organization	Expertise
Vlora Tuzi-Nushi	UN Women Kosovo	Head of Office
Flutura Kusari	Independent media lawyer	Media freedom and freedom of expression
Leonida Molliqaj	QIKA – Centre for Information, Critique and Action	Gender equality and women's rights

These interviews explored broader trends relating to gender-based disinformation, technology-facilitated violence, institutional responses, legal challenges, anti-gender narratives, and recommendations for strengthening the protection of women journalists.

B. Consultations Informing the Illustrative Case Studies

Interlocutor	Organization	Purpose
Ardiana Thaçi-Mehmeti	KIKS Kosova / TV Klan	Consultation concerning documented cases of online harassment and the AlbKings case.
Tatjana Lazarević	KoSSev	Consultation concerning the documented physical attack against a woman journalist while reporting from northern Kosovo.

C. Focus Group Discussion

Activity	Participants	Purpose
Focus Group Discussion	Twenty (20) members of the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo (NWJK)	To discuss experiences of online harassment, gender-based disinformation, newsroom practices, institutional responses, and to validate emerging research findings.

D. Themes Explored During the Qualitative Research

The interviews and focus group discussion addressed the following thematic areas:

- experiences of gender-based disinformation affecting women journalists;
- online harassment and technology-facilitated violence;
- newsroom policies and organizational support mechanisms;
- institutional responses by law enforcement, justice institutions, and regulatory bodies;
- anti-gender narratives and their impact on women's participation in public life;
- recommendations for strengthening prevention, protection, and accountability.

E. April 2026 – SafeJournalists Network Regional Meeting, Belgrade, Serbia

Regional perspectives shared during the April 2026 SafeJournalists Network meeting indicated that the experiences documented in Kosovo are not isolated. Partner organizations reported similar patterns across the Western Balkans, including misogynistic and sexualized attacks against women journalists, reputational smears, collective online harassment, political amplification of hostile narratives, weak institutional responses, and limited internal newsroom mechanisms. Participants also highlighted that such attacks increasingly contribute to self-censorship, reduced public visibility and reluctance among women journalists to cover politically sensitive or gender-related topics. At the same time, the discussion pointed to differences in institutional capacity and legal responses across countries, reinforcing the need for stronger exchange of practices, documentation standards and regional cooperation.