

Stand Up for Journalism

Ending the Silence on Online Harassment of Journalists



ELODIE VIALLE

EUROPEAN FEDERATION OF JOURNALISTS
NOVEMBER 2025

How organisations of journalists, newsrooms, social media platforms, and policymakers can strengthen the defences of public debate - and better protect journalists facing online harassment.

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Publisher: European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

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International Press Centre, Residence Palace
155 Rue de la Loi, 1040 Brussels, Belgium



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union (DG EMPL). Neither the European Union nor DG EMPL can be held responsible for them.

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About the Organisation

[The European Federation of Journalists \(EFJ\)](#) is the largest organisation of journalists in Europe, representing over 296,000 journalists in 74 journalists' organisations across 44 countries. It fights for social and professional rights of journalists working in all sectors of the media across Europe through strong trade unions and associations.

About the Project

The EFJ's [Stand Up for Journalism](#) project aims to improve the capacity of national journalists' unions and associations in addressing challenges brought by the

digital transformation in the media; and the social, economical as well as political development in Europe.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to those EFJ members who took time to complete the survey. The report has also been informed by discussions among participants at the [EFJ workshop on online harassment against journalists](#) held in March, 2025.

The author is deeply grateful to EFJ members and partners who dedicated time and contributed to this report through significant insights, and would like to thank particularly the following people for sharing their time and expertise: Camille Magnissalis, Bojana Kostic, Mira Milosevic, Pauline Adès-Mével, Zoey Tung, Maksym Dvorovyi, Tamara Filipovic, Christoph Schmon, Pavol Szalai and Victoire Rio. The author would like to extend special thanks to the many journalists, civil society advocates, and other experts who agreed to be interviewed for this report, including those who are not acknowledged by name.

We would like to express appreciation for the support for this report provided by the European Union.

Disclaimer: This report includes examples of content frequently directed at journalists, which some readers may find disturbing or offensive.



I have always been deeply committed to journalism, believing in its power to expose truth and promote justice. Yet, from a single fake video widely shared online, the threats against me and my family have escalated far beyond the digital realm. I never imagined that my dedication to these principles would force me to fear for my life and the safety of my loved ones in my own country.



Dinko Gruhonjić

Journalist, University Professor and Program Director of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV), Serbia



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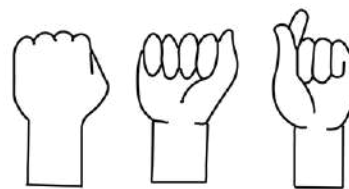
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INTRODUCTION



Online intimidation, threats, and impersonation, often linked to disinformation campaigns, are undermining journalists' safety and public trust in the media. In a context of growing polarisation and democratic backsliding, journalists are frequently targeted by political forces and troll networks.

To assess the scale of the problem and identify solutions for unions and other stakeholders, the European Federation of Journalists ([EFJ](#)) conducted a Europe-wide study on online harassment of journalists as part of its Stand Up for Journalism ([SUJ](#)) project. The report draws on a **survey** among EFJ members, interviews, and a [workshop](#) held in Belgrade in March 2025.

This report also combines **policy analysis** and desk research to document trends, highlight good practices, and identify key challenges for journalists' organisations. It includes **recommendations** for unions and associations, newsrooms, social partners, policymakers, and online platforms to strengthen the online protection of journalists.

"The EFJ study shows how widespread and dangerous this threat is, so read the statements of colleagues who face these attacks every single day. This doesn't happen in a virtual world where, once you shut your laptop, it all simply vanishes. Behind every threat is a real person whose life, safety, and dignity have been harmed. We must stand together to support and protect journalists from the personal and professional consequences of online harassment."

Maja Sever, EFJ President

Reported incidents include death threats, insults, smear campaigns, or derogatory comments - sometimes misogynistic or sexual in nature. Data show that women and minority journalists are disproportionately targeted. A 2022 [UNESCO survey](#) found that 73% of women journalists reported experiencing online violence related to their work.

This is confirmed by EFJ's survey: 87% of respondents said most cases concern women with frequent gender-based attacks. Half of the respondents reported racist abuse. [Journalists in exile are also vulnerable](#) amid rising digital transnational repression, while freelancers are particularly exposed. Two-thirds of all cases between

January and August 2023 came from freelance journalists that were reported to [PersVeilig](#), a Dutch-based multi-stakeholder platform to monitor violence against journalists in the Netherlands.

Despite more journalists speaking out about the harassment they face, the problem remains largely underreported and is therefore, difficult to monitor exhaustively. This normalisation makes the phenomenon harder to address. 60% of EFJ respondents reported an increase in online attacks, while 40% said these incidents are normalised and under-reported, often seen as “part of a journalist’s job.” New tactics such as spoofing, impersonation through falsified or AI-generated content, are spreading rapidly, undermining both personal safety and trust in journalism.

Online harassment also intersects with other forms of violence and pressure. These include legal intimidation such as Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation ([SLAPPs](#)), as well as physical and verbal attacks, particularly during [protests and elections](#). Journalists are sometimes regarded as [extensions](#) of the established political order. They are facing both pressure from authorities and political groups, and are on the [frontline](#) of democratic contestation itself.

Good practices are emerging. [PersVeilig](#) in the Netherlands,

[SafeJournalists](#) in the Balkans, and initiatives like the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) provide key examples. The International Press Institute (IPI) has developed newsroom [safety protocols](#) and, with partners, launched a platform tracking disinformation narratives targeting journalists. Some media outlets are adopting internal protocols, and unions offer training, legal assistance, and psychological support. Building structured dialogue among newsrooms, public authorities, and social media platforms remains essential to addressing the issue effectively.

However, EFJ’s research shows that many of these safety mechanisms remain poorly implemented by governments, public authorities, platforms, and media outlets. Challenges include weak enforcement of legal protections, limited newsroom prioritisation, low platform accountability, and scarce resources within journalists’ organisations. Although 77% of EFJ-affiliated organisations report having plans to address online harassment, most lack the capacity to implement them effectively.

This report aims at sharing good practices and offering actionable recommendations for all actors - journalists’ unions and associations, newsrooms, social partners, policy makers, as well as online platforms - to take action in order to better protect journalists online.

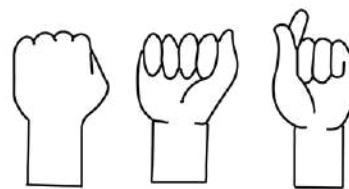
Methodology

This report draws on research conducted in 2025 by the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), representing 74 unions and associations and over 296,000 journalists across 44 European countries. It is based on testimonies from 23 union representatives collected through a survey and a two-day workshop held in Belgrade, Serbia, in March 2025, which gathered EFJ members from across Europe to exchange experiences and develop solutions. Additional input came from

structural interviews with union members, as well as consultations with social media workers, legal experts, civil society groups, and journalist-support organisations. This mixed-method approach offers a direct account of the challenges faced by journalists' unions and informs the recommendations presented in this report, providing a foundation to strengthen advocacy, build alliances, and ensure journalists can report freely in a democratic Europe.



MAPPING ONLINE HARASSMENT



"Most of my colleagues have been harassed online. Me too."

A **Hungarian journalist**, EFJ survey

One day, while he was going back home, Serbian journalist Dinko Gruhonjić found graffiti written on the wall of the building where he lives with his family in Novi Sad.

"The eternal home, Dinko-Sakic, you are ready" was the [death threat](#) he received that raised alarm bells internationally. This threat was just a new step in the smear campaign faced by Dinko, who is also a university professor and the leader of the Vojvodina Association of Independent Journalists (NDNV). "At one point, they produced a false online video which became viral to discredit me." Regularly targeted as an "Enemy of the State," Dinko Gruhonjić has become one of the emblematic cases of the sustained harassment faced by journalists in Serbia.

His colleague **Ana Lalić Hegediš** has also [endured](#) persistent smear campaigns. *"This is more or less one of the average days in my life in the last couple of years,"* says Ana, describing a message she received: *"B**ch, you will be slaughtered."*

Dinko and Ana's experiences mirror a wider phenomenon.

Across the 44 European countries where the EFJ operates, journalists face a digital battlefield where intimidation and disinformation intertwine to silence critical voices. What begins as an isolated threat or smear often reveals a coordinated campaign that exploits the virality of social media platforms.

Online harassment refers to the pervasive or severe targeting of journalists through digital means, ranging from intimidation and threats to identity theft, smear campaigns, and coordinated disinformation. It takes multiple forms and serves different purposes, but the goal is often the same: to silence, discredit, or manipulate public opinion by undermining journalists' credibility and safety. See more on the definition [here](#).

Tactics and emerging trends

"Trash bottom journalist, when I see you around town, I will first slap you and then spit on you"

A threat [targeting](#) a **Croatian** journalist

Online harassment tactics include coordinated smear campaigns, threats, and manipulation.

Numerous EFJ members reported cases where journalists or media outlets were impersonated with the intent to deceive the public. These tactics encompass altered photos, voices, or videos, sometimes AI-generated deepfakes, as well as fake websites and articles imitating legitimate news outlets or professional journalists.

Instances of "spoofing" and "cybersquatting" have indeed been observed, whereby false profiles or cloned websites imitate trusted brands to spread propaganda or lure readers into financial scams.

"It is crucial to remain vigilant, as these fakes are extremely convincing. The consequences include not only disinformation and scams, but also serious reputational damage to journalists, erosion of public trust, and online harassment, including death threats in certain cases,"
[says Camille Magnissalis](#), EFJ Press Freedom Monitoring & Comms Officer.

These attacks can be also [intertwined with other types of cyberattacks](#), such as hacking or DDoS attacks against media outlets' websites or spyware attacks against journalists.

Across Europe, examples illustrate the scale of the threat. In **Serbia**, 41% of journalists targeted by online violence experienced impersonation. In **Denmark**, journalists from DR and TV2 were featured in thousands of deepfake ads promoting cryptocurrency scams, while in **Germany**, AI-generated audio clips circulated during protests, [impersonating public broadcasters](#) and sowing distrust in mainstream reporting. In **Romania**, even family members were targeted online, as a journalist's wife was attacked on social media by a local influencer ([MFRR report](#) p.24).

What happens online doesn't remain online. The boundary between online and offline attacks is increasingly blurred: according to a [UNESCO-ICFJ study](#), 20% of women journalists who experienced online harassment also reported offline threats or assaults. In **the Netherlands**, journalist Willem Groeneveld, founder and editor-in-chief of *Sikkom*, faced intimidation following his reporting on landlords and corruption. After his address was published on Facebook, a practice known as doxing, [Molotov cocktails were thrown into his home at night](#).

Gendered violence and intersectional patterns

"They shared AI-generated fake nudes of women journalists and their phone numbers to invite the members of a Telegram group to contact these women for sexual favours... The group counted 100,000 members, primarily men"

A representative from the **Association of Journalists of Kosovo** ([see more](#))

Online harassment also reveals strong gendered and intersectional dimensions: according to [UNESCO and ICFJ](#), 73% of women journalists have faced online harassment; EFJ survey data show that 87% of respondents said women in their organisations were targeted; and 17% mentioned attacks against gender minorities. Racist attacks were reported by half of the EFJ survey respondents. The forms of abuse range from hate speech (82%) and insults (78%), to rape threats (40%) and other forms of gender-based violence (65%).

[PersVeilig](#) found that 82% of Dutch women journalists experienced digital violence. *"The violence faced by women differs from that experienced by men as they are much more often confronted with sexual harassment and threats,"* **PersVeilig** reported. This relates to attacks faced by women in the public sphere, such as politicians.

Deepfake pornography and scamming: new frontiers of abuse

A growing concern across Europe is the use of deepfake pornography, where AI-generated content pastes journalists' faces onto explicit material. In March 2024, Algemeen Dagblad [revealed](#) deepfake pornographic videos featuring dozens of public figures, including journalist Hélène Hendriks, circulating on pornographic websites. Similar abuses were reported in other countries, blurring the line between sexualised violence, defamation, and digital manipulation.

The spread of deepfakes targeting journalists extends beyond pornography. In Denmark, an unprecedented number of fake stories and deepfake videos used journalists' images to promote fraudulent investment platforms. The situation led DR and TV2 to launch a [joint campaign](#) urging Meta to take responsibility.

[Similar](#) deepfakes and fake websites impersonating journalists and media outlets were reported in **France**, **Malta**, and **Germany**, where journalists' names and images were used to promote scams, unreliable health products, and gambling ads.

"What our employees are exposed to is deeply transgressive and defamatory," DR and TV2 said in a [joint statement](#). "These deepfakes include violent and racist undertones, implying that journalists are criminals or even dead. This content affects not only them but also their families. And it seems unstoppable, as the fake content is allowed to flourish completely uninhibited on your platforms."

Political attacks and amplification by public figures

"I frequently receive online messages accusing me of bias in favour of one side or the opposite. The paradox is that these accusations come from both extremes, which, despite their differences, converge in the same violent rhetoric."

A **Greek respondent** in EFJ survey

Online harassment is frequently triggered or amplified by politicians and public figures.

"Assessing the scale of online harassment of journalists is a key challenge," says Pavol Szalai, Head of the EU-Balkans desk at Reporters Without Borders. Political motive for online harassment was indeed mentioned in 95% of the surveyed members of EFJ.

In **Slovakia**, Deputy Speaker Ľuboš Blaha [targeted](#) journalist Zuzana Kovačič Hanzelová with personal insults and fabricated rumors about her private life. This was later [amplified](#) by far-right influencer Daniel Bombic ("Danny Kollár"), who shared her phone number on Telegram. In **Croatia**, following coverage of alleged corruption within the Ministry of Culture and Media, Minister Nina Obuljen Koržinek [accused](#) journalist Dora Kršul of spreading false information.

*Assessing the scale of online harassment of journalists is a key challenge," says **Pavol Szalai**, Head of the EU-Balkans desk at Reporters without Borders. "It is very frequent in well-ranked Western countries and in lower-ranked countries where online harassment often goes hand in hand with other attacks, frequently fueled by political motives"*

In **Spain**, MEP Alvis Pérez [published](#) manipulated screenshots alleging sexual misconduct by journalist Raúl Solís, triggering a wave of homophobic abuse.

In Finland, after a smear campaign against journalist Ida Erämaa, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights **Dunja Mijatović** [reminded](#) officials that "hate speech is not protected speech."



"A little bit of poetry." **French journalist Salomé Saqué** shared a few screenshots of multiple violent insults and rape threats she receives daily on social media. One of the quotes said, *"Wait for the election, and you won't be able to speak again."* *"This is my daily routine, and it's getting worse,"* she said. Salomé Saqué recently announced she's having a "media break" exactly because of what she receives on social media.

Young journalists and journalists not covering politics also reported attacks: *"Sometimes, there is this idea that there is a 'noble' harassment and a less noble one,"* says a French journalist covering culture. *"Influencers can raise violent smear campaigns against journalists, mobilising their fans to target journalists."*

Impact on journalists and newsrooms

Online harassment can lead to offline violence, and also undermines credibility, creates financial and reputational harm, and directly threatens journalists' ability to do their work. The consequence is often self-censorship, withdrawal from social media, or even leaving the profession altogether.

According to a [2018 survey](#) led by the International Women Media Foundation, one-third of women journalists envision leaving the profession because of these attacks. 56% of the respondents of the EFJ survey mentioned withdrawing from social media.

Online harassment impacts on the reputation and [mental well-being of journalists](#). 69% of EFJ survey's respondents mentioned fear for their safety and loved ones. [Several documented cases](#) of online harassment indeed highlight the impact on the family. Intertwined with other threats such as direct and indirect pressure, such online harassment can be traumatising or even re-traumatising for journalists. Several of the journalists we spoke with mentioned feeling guilty about being traumatised by the online

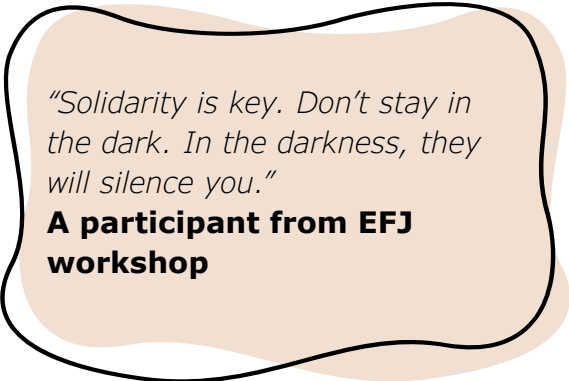
harassment they face. The idea that having a “thick skin” to do this job doesn’t help.

Left unchecked, online harassment becomes normalised, creating a chilling effect on free expression and media freedom, and reducing trust in journalism.

As women and minority groups are [disproportionately targeted](#), this not only endangers individuals but also narrows the diversity of voices in the public sphere.

A collective response is essential.

For journalists’ unions, this challenge lies at the core of their mandate. The EFJ’s mission is to defend press freedom, improve working conditions, protect journalists’ rights, and promote equality. Online harassment has become a systemic risk that unions cannot ignore.

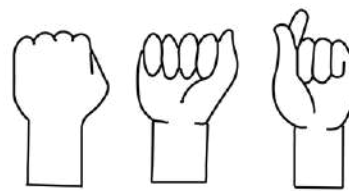


“Solidarity is key. Don’t stay in the dark. In the darkness, they will silence you.”

A participant from EFJ workshop

Addressing this crisis requires a collective effort: newsrooms must adopt stronger safety cultures and support mechanisms, social media platforms must engage in structured dialogue with journalists’ organisations. Policymakers must ensure that online violence is integrated into broader strategies for press freedom and rule of law.

LESSONS LEARNED AND GAPS REMAINING



"Oh, it's Facebook, people write stuff"

A **police officer**, responding to a journalist reporting threats

Some safety mechanisms involving organisations supporting journalists and authorities have been put in place to ensure the safety of journalists in Europe. In

the EU, the [implementation](#) of the Recommendation 2021/1534 on the protection, safety, and empowerment of journalists led to a reinforced dialogue between authorities and organisations of journalists, such as in



Denmark.

However, this recommendation is not yet implemented in many countries, and safety mechanisms for journalists don't always consider the specificity of online harassment. Some [interesting](#)

[specific measures](#) to support journalists facing online harassment have been created in **Germany, Italy** and **Sweden**, and some other national initiatives more targeted on online harassment exist, but for all citizens and they don't address the specificity of journalists.

It's also very challenging to assess the effectiveness of these mechanisms, as the different schemes of governance on safety

of journalists remain fragmented.

In addition, smaller newsrooms and independent journalists often lack the resources and capacity to implement any safety protocols. Developing a common set of indicators and addressing challenges related to sharing sensitive information can be also an obstacle to collaboration.

The lack of training of police and judges on this type of attacks, particularly women and minorities groups, is also an obstacle to fight impunity of online attacks of journalists.

Data on assaults against journalists is not necessarily gender-disaggregated, resulting in little to no understanding of online gender-based violence and gendered disinformation against women journalists. The lack of specific measures to ensure investigation and prosecution of crimes against journalists also.

The lack of collaboration with social media platforms is another huge gap in addressing online safety of journalists in the Europe, although some informal agreements with social media platforms might have been [developed](#).

Finally, the lack of resources is also a huge issue and one of the main gaps to enforce efficient multi-stakeholders safety mechanisms for journalists in Europe.

Unions develop safety mechanisms with authorities

Unions of Journalists have been proactively involved in these multi-stakeholders initiatives aimed at better addressing the online harassment of journalists across Europe.



In Serbia, a Permanent Working Group for the Safety of Journalists was established in 2016, bringing together six journalists' and media associations (including the Independent Journalists Association of Serbia ([NUNS](#)), as well as the prosecution and the police. The group has no dedicated budget. NUNS reports cases to both the police and the prosecutor's office, mostly by email with a short description of the incident, and sometimes orally.

"Cases involving international cooperation (international mutual legal assistance in criminal matters) and collaboration with big tech companies are the most difficult to resolve," says

Tamara Filipović Stevanović,
Secretary General of NUNS.

Serbian law criminalises specific offences against journalists, but according to survey responses, it is not enforced effectively. [70% of respondents](#) believe state authorities fail to react adequately. "Despite the low efficiency, we believe it is essential to report every single case of threats and pressure against journalists, without exception," says Tamara Filipović Stevanović, Secretary General of NUNS.

In the Netherlands, PersVeilig is often described as a pioneering model for journalist safety.



[PersVeilig](#) is a joint initiative of the Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten ([NVJ](#)), the Dutch Society of Editors-in-Chief, the Police and the Public Prosecution Service. It is aimed at strengthening the position of journalists against violence and aggression on the street and social media, and against frivolous legal claims. The various parties, who signed a Press Safety Protocol, work to reduce threats, violence, and aggression against journalists and people in the media. In 2023 and 2024, 218 and 249 incidents were reported respectively.

EU countries such as **Belgium, Slovakia, Slovenia,** and **Germany** also have advanced mechanisms to protect journalists. These countries have implemented national-level safety systems that include training, rapid response protocols, and legal

protections, although the Netherlands and its PersVeilig system are often cited as a very good practice.



In **Slovakia**, the non-governmental platform [SafeJournalism.sk](https://www.safejournalism.sk), set up with the support of RSF, monitors attacks on journalists and assists them in reporting them. The cooperation with the police continues despite the difficult political context.



In **Germany**, the [Verfolgen statt nur Löschen](#) initiative (*Prosecute Not Delete*), includes 26 partners. It led to collaboration between the State Media Authority and various entities, enabling journalists to report online hate through a form to the police via their media companies.

Although good practices, these programs need further resources to be developed and adapted in other countries. They also need more political support to be efficiently implemented.

Unions monitor online attacks, provide support & capacity-building

Over the last few years, unions of journalists have developed strategies to tackle the issue of rising online harassment of

journalists. 86% of surveyed members mentioned developing protocols.

Unions surveyed mentioned monitoring online threats, documenting and reporting cases to the platforms or to the police, providing psychological advice/contacts to journalists when they had some, and providing them with digital safety and online harassment self defence training.

60% of the organisations participating in the EFJ survey provide digital trainings for journalists, such as:

- ▶ Syndicate of Journalists in [Czech Republic](#)
- ▶ Association and union in North Macedonia ([AJM](#) and [TUMM](#))
- ▶ Union of Journalists in Finland ([UJF](#))
- ▶ Deutscher Journalisten-Verband in Germany ([DJV](#))
- ▶ Association de Journalistes Professionnels ([AJP](#)) in Belgium

In **Kosovo**, the Association of Journalists organises regular training sessions on safety, digital security, and ethics to equip journalists with the tools to navigate risks and challenges in their work. They also hold one-on-one meetings with journalists who have been attacked to provide personalised support and ensure their cases are followed up effectively. AJK established the



[Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo](#), a safe space for addressing gender-specific online harassment.

Almost all of the unions surveyed have a legal service. More than half mobilise a [peer support network](#), enabling the journalist to feel supported by other journalists and not alone in a moment of crisis.

Still, monitoring online attacks and offering support to journalists is highly challenging for unions. Indeed, [journalists don't necessarily report](#) because of the fear of retaliation, the incapacity to fight the insults, and trying to avoid further threats.

"We do not have a realistic picture of how many such attacks there really are because journalists do not report them, as they consider them part of their job," says digital safety trainer **Monika Kutri**, from the Croatian Journalists' Association

It's also important to mention that the method of collecting information from the victims can be retraumatising and it's important to ease the processes. That's why multistakeholder assistance approaches help to make reporting trauma-informed and do not harm.

The interplay of different European mechanisms, such as the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) and the Safety of Journalists platforms, also over a fora for unions of journalists to leverage their voice and create accountability mechanisms.

Inspiring initiative (Network of women journalists)

Women in Media is a network of Ukrainian female journalists in the media operating on peer-to-peer principles. Their [Map of Gender-based online attacks against Ukrainian women journalists](#) uses data journalism and user-friendly interactive visualisation to support independent investigative reporting on online violence, documenting various types of online violence in an [incident database](#).

This initiative is part of a broader support system for women journalists, including community-based [research](#), advocacy strategy valuing solidarity among [Ukrainian journalists](#), [coalition building](#), organisation of [support circles](#) (self-help groups for Ukrainian women journalists), consultations on cybersecurity, psychological support, and legal protection. The Women in Media is for instance advocating for the inclusion of "cyberstalking" in Ukrainian legislation.

Such initiatives, highlighted by UNESCO as good practice for the safety of women journalists, are particularly crucial at a time marked by conflict, when women account for [77% of active journalists](#) in the country. Access to information relies therefore predominantly on women journalists, whose voices should be [protected](#).

"We didn't choose this war – but it has accelerated how we respond to crises and forced us to find creative, often unconventional solutions," says **Liza Kumenko**, Co-Founder of Women in Media. Recently, Women in Media started documenting new types of online attacks connected to the use of AI.

Unions develop social dialogue with newsrooms and employers

News organisations have a legal and moral duty of care to ensure safe and dignified working conditions for their staff, in line with occupational safety and labour standards. As online harassment has become a systemic risk for the media sector, this duty must explicitly encompass the digital environment. While some outlets have started to develop internal protocols, training, and support mechanisms, these responses remain fragmented and insufficient.

Strengthening the employer accountability is therefore essential to prevent online attacks, protect those targeted, and promote a culture of safety within newsrooms. 52% of the

surveyed EFJ members mentioned involving newsrooms and employers in responding to online hate speech and trolling by notifying them about journalists' rights and emphasising their responsibility to ensure a safe working environment, including online.

"Through regular communication and advocacy, we encourage them to prioritise the safety and well-being of their staff by implementing preventive measures and providing support when incidents occur," says **Getoarbë Mulliqi**, Executive Director and Researcher at the Association of Journalists in Kosovo

Do employers satisfy their duty of care? Half of the respondents say yes, but half are not satisfied by the employers' response! The International Press Institute (IPI) developed clear and actionable [safety protocols](#) for online safety for newsrooms around key elements: assessing the threat, establishing clear escalation protocols, point of contacts and peer-support groups.

"Sometimes employers want to do things but don't know how to. We provide additional training sessions to get their knowledge and practical skills, as well as protocol, at a decent level." says **Selma Ali**, Safety Advisor at Persveilig, in the Netherlands.

Good examples of media management employing safety protocols can be seen at [KRIK](#).

This investigative media outlet in Serbia created a preventive and reporting system that sensitises new and often young journalists of the attacks they might face.

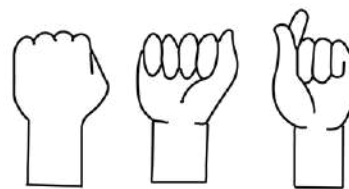
*"We always dedicate part of an interview to talk about the potential threats and safety risks of any kind that they might face when working for us. We give the worst examples, and we have lost a few good candidates in the past because of this," explained **Milica Vojinovic**, Social Media Editor at KRIK.*

Unions develop dialogue with social media platforms

A few unions mentioned informal engagement with the platforms, wishing to have a more structured dialogue with them, as their lack of responsiveness is a huge problem to address the impunity of journalists attacked online.

Establishing this dialogue is now a legal requirement for EU based countries under the EMFA and the DSA (see box below; *How organisations of journalists can leverage the EU tech policy laws*).

RECOMMENDATIONS



Online harassment should be considered not as a personal issue, but a systemic professional risk that should be mitigated through preventive and proactive measures taken by newsrooms, platforms and enforced through legal safety mechanisms. The burden of taking care of online harassment should not rely only on journalists but on media companies, the social media platforms and national and EU regulation.

An important part of the solution is to reinforce the dialogue between authorities, newsrooms, platforms and journalists representatives through [meaningful stakeholder engagement](#).

The following recommendations are designed to support different stakeholders who have the responsibility to build a safe working environment for journalists online and offline.

For journalists' organisations



Acknowledge and Monitor.

Journalists' unions and associations should acknowledge online attacks (impersonation, doxing, intimidation, threats, insults, hacking) as part of attacks against journalists. They should monitor them and integrate online harassment support into collective bargaining. They should monitor actions taken towards social media platforms and authorities and the impact of online harassment in a holistic way, including the impact on mental safety of journalists and self censorship, and provide data such as statistics of gender-based attacks.

Provide assistance. Journalists organisations should provide as much contact as possible with journalists who have been attacked to provide personalised support and ensure their cases are followed up effectively.

Strengthen capacity building.

Journalists organisations leverage safety training of journalists, on digital safety training including online

harassment and mental health resilience training. These trainings should entail preventative measures for journalists, strengthening personal digital safety practices (including threat modelling) a basic safety plan and a crisis response plan; legal advice; documentation and reporting to employers, social media platforms and law enforcement; advocating for their rights; seeking support and self care). In these trainings, advocate for more solidarity and empathy on online harassment among journalists. If possible, the person being targeted should not be the point-person in dealing with the attacks. [Train journalists](#) to become allies for their targeted colleagues. Defend the idea that **being targeted is not part of the job.**

Use and share resources such as the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) [risk assessment template](#), International Women Media Foundation (IWMF) [Guide to Protecting Newsrooms and Journalists Against Online Violence](#) and IPI [protocols](#) for journalists and newsrooms, as references to take action.

Cooperate with employers' organisations and raise awareness of their responsibility over the safety of journalists, especially for freelance journalists.

Cooperate, when relevant, with the police. Find a specific contact for journalists unions/associations. Develop broader strategies together and raise their awareness on the work of journalists. Develop protocols, giving specific attention on how to handle cases involving journalists.

Advocate. Journalists' organisations should join coalitions and networks to strengthen advocacy and social dialogue with platforms, build connections between CSOs and investigative journalists, or monitoring platforms like [Mapping Media Freedom](#) or [SafeJournalists Network](#), to enhance strategic collective bargaining. When advocating for journalists' safety, avoid presenting them as heroes, as this might represent an additional burden for those who face this violence - they did not choose to be in this position.

Adopt an inclusive and intersectional approach. Consider online harassment of journalists in exile, small newsrooms and of independent journalists, women and minority journalists. Develop empathy and [peer-support groups](#) as a first aid system.

How organisations of journalists can leverage the EU tech policy laws

A few EU laws can be leveraged by organisations of journalists to better advocate for online protection of journalists, particularly the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA). If they engage in advocacy around these instruments, they should call for measures that are targeted, necessary, and proportionate, ensuring full compliance with international human rights standards.

The **Digital Services Act (DSA)** creates obligations for social media platforms (VLOPs) on risk management, transparency, data access, and crisis response.



- **Before electoral processes:** invoke DSA Articles 34–35 to [develop assessment media-specific metrics](#) and demand targeted risk assessments with union participation; request mitigation plans and metrics addressing journalist-specific harms.



- **Transparency of platforms:** in line with Articles 15, 17, and 24, expand platform transparency obligations ([e.g. content moderation reports, statements of reasons, and recommender system explanations](#)) to explicitly address safety-related risks, with data disaggregated by country, form of assault, and type of perpetrators.



- **Safety-related complaints:** collaborate with tailored [out-of-court and appeal mechanisms](#), or establish dedicated operational channels within existing frameworks, to handle journalists' safety-related complaints, as envisaged under Article 21.



- **EU candidate state countries:** ask the anticipated Digital Service Coordinators (DSCs), under the condition that they are independent, which is also part of the official partnership process of the European Commission, to build that independent regulatory capacity, to establish [bilateral administrative](#) arrangements with Digital Service Coordinators in EU countries. Cooperate with the EU Commission to develop links with social media platforms in the wake of [elections](#) and [seek observer status with the European Board for Digital Services](#).

The **European Media Freedom Act (EMFA)** is aimed at safeguarding media pluralism/independence and interfaces with DSA obligations for platforms.



- **Emphasise DSA–EMFA interplay** (risk mitigation + media protections) in complaints and regulatory engagement.



- **In line with Article 19, support regular and structured meetings and dialogue with representatives of media service providers and of civil society with VLOPs** (Very Large Online Platforms) **and VLOSEs** (Very Large Online Search Engines). Ensure that journalists' organisations, as bodies entitled to represent journalists, **actively engage in a dialogue with VLOPs**. Through a collaborative process involving media and civil society representatives, established in advance the priorities and strategy for engagement with VLOPs and VLOSEs.



- **Monitor and investigate EU Member States' compliance with Article 4 on protection against digital surveillance and spyware.** Encourage cross-sectoral dialogue with Member States, in particular law enforcement and judiciary, to ensure that human rights compliant, effective safeguards and redress mechanisms are in place to protect journalists and their sources from digital surveillance. **Establish a media-led body** that monitors and records the cases of digital surveillance/spyware and can become a pan-EU oversight board for the implementation of Article 4.



- **EU candidate state countries:** engage in EMFA implementation processes with the aim of guaranteeing the pluralistic media environment free of journalists' rights abuses.

The **General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** entails a privacy/data-protection toolbox against doxing, unlawful processing, deepfake misuse of personal data.



- **File GDPR complaints** (including Art. 17 Right to erasure, Art. 6 Lawfulness of processing, Art. 21 Rights to object) for doxing/deepfake cases of journalists, coordinate with national Data Protection Authority (DPA) for urgent action.



- **Actively liaise with platforms to address doxing** as a data protection breach instead of a content moderation violation (Art. 33).



- **Emphasise DSA - GDPR [interplay](#)** to advocate for better safety. DSA requires platforms to address systemic risks to media freedom and safety, which should translate in practice into enforcement efforts on [unlawful disclosures](#) of personal data under GDPR.



- Articles 24-25 (data protection by design and by default) holds platforms accountable to **detect and prevent unlawful disclosures of personal data**. Journalists organisations need to advocate platforms for proactive moderation tools and workflows focused on protecting journalists' personal data. They can help reduce individual burden by insisting on systemic enforcement from platforms.



- Journalists' organisations should call on national Data Protection Authorities (DPAs) and **support the creation of dedicated escalation channels** to address online harassment and doxing cases in real-time (similar to escalation channels already established for cybersecurity threats).

Consider the interplay with other regulations that can help to advocate for journalists' online safety:

EU Directive on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence

Explicitly recognises women journalists as particular targets of online violence and urges Member States to introduce aggravating circumstances when crimes are committed against someone because they are a journalist. It aligns with and reinforces the [Istanbul Convention](#), integrating online forms of violence such as doxing and cyber-harassment. This Directive can be leveraged by organisations of journalists to demand national transposition measures that explicitly cover online violence against journalists and ensure effective reporting, investigation, and

sanctions. Advocacy actors can use it to push for cross-sector cooperation between media regulators, equality bodies, and law enforcement, and to highlight journalists' safety as a press freedom and gender equality obligation under EU law.

EU Artificial Intelligence (AI) Act

Introduces a risk-based approach to ensure that AI systems are safe, transparent, and respect fundamental rights. Under **Article 5**, the Act prohibits manipulative or deceptive AI practices that cause significant harm. This provides a legal basis to challenge AI-enabled disinformation, impersonation, deep fakes, or automated harassment campaigns targeting journalists as potential “unacceptable-risk” uses.

Articles 8 and following establish strict obligations for “high-risk” AI systems, including risk-management, transparency, and accountability requirements. These tools can be used to demand stronger oversight of generative and recommender systems that amplify online abuse.

Article 85 gives affected individuals and organisations the right to file complaints when AI systems infringe the regulation, creating an avenue for journalists and media actors to seek redress. Enforcement should be guided by independent oversight, due-process guarantees, and respect for media freedom, in line with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the EMFA.

The priority is to ensure that the AI Act's implementation explicitly recognises the safety of journalists and the integrity of democratic discourse as central to AI governance. This means calling for transparency of datasets and model training, robust accountability for harmful AI-generated content, and redress mechanisms that empower journalists, without legitimising new forms of surveillance or prior control over their work.

The Digital Markets Act (DMA)

Curbs “gatekeepers” and addresses self-preferencing/data abuses that can amplify harms against journalists.

The Digital Fairness Act

An upcoming legislative proposal by the European Commission to complement and align existing frameworks such as the DSA, DMA, and key consumer protection directives, such as **dark patterns**; addictive designs that can amplify toxic engagement and fuel online harassment campaigns against journalists. Journalists' organisations can use it to leverage advocacy to [counter dark patterns](#).

European Commission Recommendation 2021/1534 ([Safety of Journalists](#))

Includes concrete actions for Member States (hotlines, protection orders, gender-sensitive measures); advocacy anchor to demand efficient national implementation.

Consider also the interplay with international mechanisms and texts:

UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity

A global standard for holistic, multi-stakeholder responses (awareness, policy, monitoring, capacity-building, research, coalitions), that is used to frame state/platform accountability and cross-border coordination.

Istanbul Convention ([Council of Europe](#))

Obliges parties to prevent, protect and prosecute violence against women, including online forms. Press governments to implement 2021/1534 and Istanbul Convention measures (gender-sensitive procedures, shelters, hotlines, prosecution).

Intersectional approaches: [EU LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy \(2020–2025\)](#), [UN SDGs \(esp. Goal 16\)](#), [UNESCO's Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platform](#)

Cite these texts to support rights-based, inclusive responses and national transposition/implementation efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS



For media organisations

Exercise your duty of care for ALL journalists, including freelancers.

Employers have to make sure that [risks are properly assessed](#) before assignments. This can include legal support, public advocacy, dedicated counselling, and training courses. Develop training programs for all staff on digital security, harassment prevention, and trauma-informed care. Increase support tailored specifically for freelance journalists to reduce their isolation.

Build a [culture of safety](#) inside newsrooms.

Set up internal protocols, and [reporting mechanisms](#) for online harassment; establish confidential points of contact or ombudsperson roles; improve communication between management and staff; promote [peer-support groups](#); start conducting [internal surveys](#) on online harassment; and ensure regular and up to date holistic safety training (physical, digital, psychological), including threat modelling for both targeted and non-targeted staff. The lack of empathy from colleagues is re-traumatising for those who face online harassment,

and one of the reasons why people under-report those threats. Appoint a trusted person in charge of receiving testimonies and taking appropriate action with management.

Make safety part of your budget.

Include [holistic security](#) (physical, digital, legal, financial, psychological) and [mental health](#) assistance.

Adopt a gender-sensitive approach.

Strengthen gender-responsive policies and inclusive policies for groups particularly targeted to ensure a more intersectional approach in newsroom safety measures. Create a safer and more diverse working environment.

Collaborate with professionals who understand journalists,

for example lawyers and psychologists, and who understand the need for journalists to use social media to do their work.

Engage externally on safety issues.

Build a coalition which moves beyond competition concerns to collaborate with social media platforms on journalists safety online, amplify the voices of smaller media, and investigate online attacks through collective efforts.

Consider broader collective initiatives such as launching awareness-raising campaigns with other media outlets and secure access to emergency response funds to support journalists requiring immediate security assistance.

For social media platforms

Strengthen reporting and moderation systems through structured escalation channels.

- ▶ [Establish early warning](#) mechanisms that connect directly with escalation channels developed in partnership with journalists' organisations.
- ▶ Ensure escalation channels are responsive, transparent, trauma-informed, and provide clear explanations of moderation decisions.
- ▶ Create an obligation to loop back to journalists' organisations when action is not taken, so outcomes are not left in a black box.

Conduct robust and transparent risk assessments in line with the DSA.

- ▶ Assess, through multistakeholder processes including organisations of journalists, risks related to impact, likelihood, and priority, including gender-based online violence, coordinated inauthentic behaviour, special focus on repeated abusers and bot-driven attacks on journalists.

- ▶ Publish outcomes of these multistakeholder processes and set clear mitigation metrics, with disaggregated data by gender, type of risk, and geography.
- ▶ Dedicate staff to monitoring attacks on journalists and report metrics per country on cases addressed.

Enhance data access and transparency for accountability.

- ▶ Provide vetted researchers and investigative journalists with timely access to platform data on attack patterns, themes, and networks, as required under Article 40 of the DSA.
- ▶ Commit to public reporting on measures taken against inauthentic coordinated behaviour and hate speech.
- ▶ Ensure transparency policies explicitly address the safety of journalists, including women and those from vulnerable groups.

Ensure meaningful stakeholder engagement beyond major geographies and languages.

- ▶ Engage journalists, unions, associations and civil society in ongoing dialogue, including in smaller markets and in languages other than English, on issues related to safety and the effectiveness of redress mechanisms and safety features.
- ▶ Incorporate feedback into policy design and crisis response, ensuring inclusivity across communities.

Align engagement practices with international policies such as the DSA (see *Tech 101* above on DSA). Enforced with a [human rights framework](#) such as the [Viennese Principles](#) for Embedding Global Considerations into Human-Rights-Centred DSA enforcement.



For governments

Strengthen existing safety mechanisms through funding and cooperation.

- Reinforce support, emergency response funds, and visa mechanisms [for journalists at risk](#), including those in exile or facing (digital) transnational repression.
- Support points of contact in the journalists' unions/associations or similar independent bodies and state authorities, in particular law enforcement and the judiciary. Support the creation of dedicated teams to investigate online attacks, establish cooperation with social media platforms, and ensure follow-up with journalists.
- Ensure national frameworks integrate gender-sensitive protocols, as well as investigative procedures and psychosocial support for targets of online harassment.

Build institutional capacity with training and accountability.

- Train law enforcement, judiciary, and military personnel on the particularities of online threats and

[TFGBV](#), especially against women journalists.

- Guarantee that criminal provisions explicitly cover online violence and recognise journalists' status as protected targets. Conduct a review of existing criminal law provisions and criminal justice procedures to facilitate unhindered access to justice and to strengthen efforts to prevent impunity.
- Ensure that regular systematic risk assessments of the safety landscape lead to follow-up actions and bolster accountability mechanisms.

Institutionalise multistakeholder governance and international cooperation.

- Establish permanent working groups within regulatory bodies with governments, platforms, civil society, and journalist organisations.
- Join and strengthen the [Media Freedom Coalition](#), and expand cooperation with UNESCO, the UN, and other international actors.

Invest in resilience and innovation for democratic societies.

- Provide diplomatic and financial support to international press freedom organisations and fund research on cross-border threats.
- Support technology development for secure journalism tools and require platforms to implement safety-by-design features.

For the European Commission

Push back against collusion undermining democracy and press freedom.

- ▶ Scale up media literacy initiatives as long-term democratic investments to foster critical thinking and resilience in polarised societies.

For EU governments: Enforce EU regulation and safeguard fundamental rights.

- ▶ [Fully implement Recommendation on safety of journalists](#) and align national measures with the DSA and EMFA.
- ▶ Invest in multistakeholder frameworks to guide DSA/EMFA enforcement with media freedom and journalist safety at the core.
- ▶ Expand transparency obligations to cover safety-related risks (country-level data, forms of assault, case outcomes, perpetrators).
- ▶ Introduce periodic systemic risk impact assessments and expand the work of the existing appeals mechanisms for journalists.
- ▶ Ensure all interventions comply with international human rights standards, with checks and balances.

For EU Candidate and non-EU countries:

- ▶ Enforce global standards with a human rights framework; on safety of journalists, digital governance, media freedom. Apply the [UNESCO recommendations](#) on the protection mechanisms for journalists.
- ▶ Transparent content moderation standards across all countries.

- ▶ Do not allow collusion between governments and corporations to erode the rule of law, civil rights, and free press. [Follow OSCE's recommendations](#) on Safeguarding Media Freedom in the Age of AI and Big Tech.
- ▶ Promote unambiguously full transparency and clear labeling of AI-generated and AI-amplified content to safeguard information integrity and journalistic safety.
- ▶ Use retaliatory measures under the EU Anti-Coercion Instrument and export controls to limit access to EU technologies when corporations fuel repression.
- ▶ Uphold the UN General Assembly [Resolution of 13 November 2017](#) on the safety of journalists and the fight against impunity and the [Istanbul Convention](#).

Enforce EU regulation with independence.

- ▶ Enforce the EMFA, using the Media Pluralism Monitor ([MPM](#)) to identify and address risks to pluralism.
Investigate the impact of platforms' revenue redistribution programs on systemic risks, including the risk of

platforms incentivising and financing copyright infringement of media content, as well as the harassment and targeting of journalists. Require transparency from actors benefitting from these incentives, as well as a complaint mechanism to report abuse of the monetisation of these services.

- ▶ Ensure Member States guarantee adequate, independent funding for public service media, free from political or corporate interference.
- ▶ Enforce the [EU Recommendation](#) on the Safety of Journalists, ensuring its principles are applied across Member States.
- ▶ Provide resources to civil society organisations so they can independently contribute to enforcement and accountability processes.
- ▶ Guide EU Candidate States explaining the requirements of the respective acts, thereby avoiding abuse/overregulation at the local level.

Prioritise accountability and democratic resilience.

- ▶ Counter online harassment through appropriate mechanisms and regulatory measures.
- ▶ Place media literacy, media pluralism, independent journalism, and fact-checking networks at the core of EU initiatives such as the [European Democracy Shield](#), ensuring full consistency with human rights standards.

- ▶ Include journalists' CSOs in risk assessments and enforcement under the EMFA and the DSA.
- ▶ Allocate resources to ensure that protections are not limited to the largest or most profitable markets.

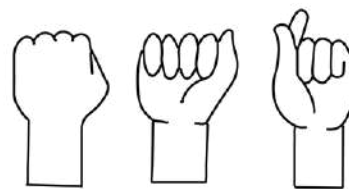
For the Council of Europe



Keep strengthening its role as a leading platform for advocacy for the protection of journalism and the safety of journalists.

- ▶ Strengthen its leadership on journalist safety by fostering coherence with regional institutions. Dedicate a specific focus on online harassment within the [Journalists Matter campaign](#). Member States should reflect this priority in their national action plans.
- ▶ Improve accountability within the [Safety of Journalists Platform](#), as responses to alerts remain voluntary and uneven. Member States should systematically address all alerts and ensure concrete follow-up, including safety assessments conducted by the authorities when journalists face death threats.
- ▶ Build structured engagement with States where journalist safety is particularly at risk, involving civil society, media organisations, and international partners.

RESOURCES



safejournalists.net

The SafeJournalists Network ([SJN](#)), a network to strengthen the protection and safety of journalists in the Western Balkans.

Established in 2015 amid the persistent deterioration of media freedom and the rise of threats, harassment, and impunity, the network brings together journalists' associations and unions from **Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro**, and an independent researcher from **Albania**.

Acting as a coordination platform and data hub, SJN documents violations against journalists through a shared methodology, generating comparative evidence that has become a reference for both national advocacy and international monitoring. The network's work exemplifies how sustained regional cooperation can strengthen accountability mechanisms, advocating to ensure that attacks — including online harassment — are swiftly investigated, and contributing to create an environment where journalism can be exercised safely.



Media Freedom Rapid Response ([MFRR](#)), a strategic collaboration to better support European journalists facing attacks

The Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR) tracks, monitors and reacts to violations of media freedom in EU Member States and Candidate Countries. This project provides legal and practical support, public advocacy and information to protect journalists and media workers. This includes support for legal defence and

opinion, emergency support legal defence and opinion, emergency support such as covering travel, psychological support and family costs, offering residencies in Germany and delivering and supporting training across the continent.

The MFRR also deploys a systematic and comprehensive monitoring of media violations in all EU member states and candidate countries. By capturing and presenting every threat, whether legal, physical, psychological or a form of censorship, the MFRR encourages further advocacy and public support for greater protections for all journalists and media workers. The MFRR is organised by an alliance led by the **European Centre for Press and Media Freedom** (ECPMF) including **ARTICLE 19 Europe**, the **European Federation of Journalists** (EFJ), **Free Press Unlimited** (FPU), **International Press Institute** (IPI) and **CCI/Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa** (OBC Transeuropa). The project commenced in 2020 and is co-funded by the European Commission.



The Safety of Journalists Platform, a collaborative effort between the Council of Europe and [press freedom organisations](#)

The primary objective of this initiative involving a network of 15 [media freedom organisations](#), including the **European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)**, is a real-time mechanism for monitoring and addressing threats against journalists and media professionals, ranging from harassment and physical attacks to legal and political pressures. The Platform operates by collecting and verifying alerts on serious threats to media freedom and the safety of journalists. These alerts, submitted by the Platform's [partner organisations](#), are published to raise awareness and prompt action from national authorities.

By making these alerts public, the Platform seeks to ensure accountability and encourage member states to fulfill their commitments under the [European Convention on Human Rights](#) to protect freedom of expression. It also facilitates dialogue between journalists, civil society, and governments to address systemic issues affecting media freedom.

5 must-reads for journalists and newsrooms on online harassment of journalists

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- ▶ Newsrooms Protocols. [Measures for Newsrooms and Journalists to Address Online Harassment](#), IPI
- ▶ Newsrooms Protocols. [A Guide to Protecting Newsrooms and Journalists Against Online Violence](#), IWMF
- ▶ Newsrooms Protocols. [Best Practices for News Organizations: How to Protect and Support Journalists Harassed Online](#), PEN America, Coalition Against Online Violence
- ▶ Online self-defence resource for journalists. [Online harassment Field Manual](#), PEN America
- ▶ Risk assessment for journalists. The Committee to Protect Journalists'(CPJ)' [risk assessment template](#)

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- ▶ AJK establishes the [Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo](#)

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Gender-based online violence

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Silence is not a choice

Dinko Gruhonjić

Journalist, University Professor and Program Director of the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDNV), Serbia

