



**safejournalists.net**

# **NORTH MACEDONIA** **Challenges and Progress:** **Safety of Women Journalists in** **North Macedonia 2024**

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# Introduction

This chapter presents the report's background, scope and structure.

## – 1.1 ABOUT THE SAFEJOURNALISTS NETWORK

Journalist associations from the Western Balkans have established the *Safejournalists.net* (SJN) platform<sup>1</sup>, with support from the European Commission, to jointly monitor media legislation and practices in their countries, and at the same time actively engage in efforts to improve the legal and institutional frameworks governing the work of journalists and media professionals. Using carefully designed research methodologies, SJN conducts annual surveys that provide reliable and evidence-based data to journalist associations and relevant stakeholders on critical challenges and obstacles to the implementation of European Union (EU) standards on media freedom and safety of journalists in the Western Balkans.

SJN utilises two complementary research instruments for a comprehensive evaluation of media freedom and journalists' safety. The first, a qualitative research instrument titled **Indicators of the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety** was developed in 2016 and is continuously improving. This instrument assesses three key areas:

- (A) Legal protection,
- (B) The position of journalists in newsrooms,
- (C) Journalists' safety.

Parallel to this, the Network developed a quantitative research instrument in 2020 known as **the Journalists' Safety Index**, which was piloted the same year and continued in 2021 and 2022. This index measures changes in conditions that directly or indirectly affect the perception and practices related to the safety of journalists and media professionals, structured around four groups of indicators:

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

- (1) Legal and organizational environment,
- (2) Due Prevention,
- (3) Due Process,
- (4) Actual safety

As of 2023, SJN has integrated both – the qualitative and quantitative instruments – into one comprehensive, representative research framework entitled **Media Freedom Level Indicators and Journalists' Safety Index<sup>2</sup>**, enabling a more robust and nuanced understanding of media freedom and journalist safety in six Western Balkan countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia, as well as Croatia.

Since 2020, SJN has been preparing annual advocacy reports for North Macedonia<sup>3</sup>, carefully documenting and assessing the country's progress and challenges in terms of media freedom and the safety of journalists.

## – 1.2 REASONS FOR FOCUSING ON THE SAFETY OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS

Despite the existing legal frameworks and international commitments on gender equality and media freedom in all SJN member states, women journalists continue to face significant and disproportionate threats, pressures and intimidation. Violence against women journalists is a persistent problem, both globally and in the Western Balkans, including physical attacks, online harassment, death threats, increased surveillance, false impersonation and various other online and offline threats.

Evidence collected by SJN<sup>4</sup> and other media freedom organizations indicates that women media professionals are frequently targeted by various forms of gender-based violence, including digital harassment, workplace discrimination, threats, intimidation, defamation lawsuits, and occasional physical attacks. These persistent infringements not only violate the rights of women journalists, but also have a profound impact on their mental health, professional development, and personal safety and well-being.

Data from the SJN *Journalists' Safety Index* reports<sup>5</sup> show that violence against women journalists is underreported. For example, in 2023, the SJN recorded a total of 195 incidents: 37 of them were threats and attacks against women journalists, 68 against male journalists, and 81 against mixed groups (men

<sup>2</sup> The research methodology was designed and coordinated by Snezana Trpevska and Igor Micevski, research associates at the [Research Institute on Social Development RESIS](#), North Macedonia.

<sup>3</sup> All reports on the countries and organizations that are part of the SJN can be found at the following link: [Publications - SafeJournalists](#)

<sup>4</sup> All incidents monitored and recorded by the SafeJournalists Network for North Macedonia since June 2020 can be found [here](#)

<sup>5</sup> The SafeJournalists Network (SJN) is a regional informal network that unites journalists' associations from seven Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and Croatia. One of the network's key activities is monitoring the state of media freedom and the safety of journalists, which is reflected through an online [register of attacks on journalists](#), as well as annual [national and semi-annual regional comparative reports](#).

and women). These reports consistently highlight gender-specific threats and emphasize the urgent need for dedicated protection measures and institutional responses. However, further analysis is needed on the different types of violence and the reasons why women journalists often do not report the attacks they experience. Therefore, this report explicitly addresses the rights violations and gender-based challenges faced by women journalists in the period from 2021 to 2024. It provides focused analysis of incidents, trends and impacts, and proposes evidence-based recommendations to strengthen protective frameworks and practices, ensuring a safer working environment for women journalists and media workers.

## – 1.3 SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This specialized report analyzes the rights violations faced by women journalists and media workers in North Macedonia in the period from 2021 to 2024. Using SJN's established methodology, the report addresses the following key areas:

- **Legal and Institutional Framework** – An overview of national legislation, policies and institutional mechanisms relevant to the safety of women journalists in North Macedonia, along with international obligations and standards on media freedom and gender equality. This includes a brief analysis of the effectiveness, gaps and structural challenges in addressing gender-specific threats.
- **Types and Trends of Violations** – Analysis of physical and verbal threats, digital harassment, workplace discrimination, intimidation, censorship, and legal threats directed at women journalists in North Macedonia, based on SJN monitoring and in-depth interviews with women journalists and media workers.
- **Impact on Women Journalists** – An assessment of how these violations affect the psychological well-being, professional opportunities and personal safety of women journalists, and how these impacts ultimately undermine media pluralism and media freedom. The analysis is based on data from SJN, independent reports and interviews with women journalists, media workers, experts and stakeholders.
- **Conclusions and recommendations** – Evidence-based recommendations, aimed at decision-makers, media organizations, competent institutions and civil society, with the aim of effectively strengthening protective mechanisms, promoting gender equality and improving the general working conditions and safety of women journalists.

By highlighting gender-specific issues and providing clear recommendations, this report aims to strengthen advocacy efforts, inform policy discussions, foster synergy with other initiatives, and encourage proactive steps towards a safer and more inclusive media environment in North Macedonia.



# Methodology

This report uses qualitative and quantitative research tools through a methodology specifically developed by SJN, in order to examine the safety, rights and professional experiences of women journalists in North Macedonia. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the methodology combines research based on existing documents and primary qualitative data collected through interviews and online focus groups. It also includes insights gained from stakeholder consultations and relevant public events.

The report is structured to answer the following research questions:

- What are the safety risks for women journalists and how do they affect them?
- What are the forms of violence and discrimination that women journalists are most often exposed to?
- Why do women journalists decide not to report violence and what is the institutional reaction and support when they do report it?

The research forms the basis of this study, based on international frameworks and standards such as: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Istanbul Convention, as well as relevant guidelines and reports from UNESCO, the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the European Union. In addition, the national legislation and strategic documents of North Macedonia related to gender equality, violence against women and media freedom were analyzed. This comprehensive review also included previous research and advocacy reports published by SJN.

Primary data collection was conducted between December 2024 and March 2025, through semi-structured interviews and two online focus groups. A total of ten in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Of these, five interviews were with women journalists who had directly experienced violence, harassment or threats related to their journalistic work. These women journalists came from various media outlets, including national investigative platforms, national and private television stations, and regional online media.

An additional twelve in-depth interviews were conducted with women journalists working in various types of media, including national broadcast media (public and private television stations), print media and prominent online media in the country. These interviews captured individual perspectives and different contexts from professionals, providing an overview of professional safety, institutional responses and the effectiveness of the existing protection mechanisms.

*Table 1: Individual interviews conducted (December 2024 – March 2025)*

Participant	Position/role	Media type
Participant	Position/role	Media type
Woman journalist (attacked)	Investigative journalist	A non-profit media organization that deals with investigative journalism topics.
Woman journalist (attacked)	Investigative journalist	A non-profit media organization that deals with investigative journalism topics.
Woman journalist	Editor	Private television station
Woman journalist	Editor	Printed weekly and online edition
Woman journalist (attacked)	Journalist who covers political and judicial topics	Online media outlet
Woman journalist	Investigative journalist	Private television station
Woman journalist	Journalist	National Service MRTV
Woman journalist (attacked)	Editor	Regional online media
Woman journalist (attacked)	Editor	Print media
Woman journalist	Editor	Private national television station
Woman journalist	Editor	Private national television station
Woman journalist	Journalist	National Broadcasting Service MRTV

Three online focus groups intended specifically for women journalists were successfully conducted, with a total of sixteen participants. These focus groups generated rich qualitative data on personal experiences with violence, threats and discrimination, perceptions of safety, as well as the perceived efficiency of actions by institutions and support mechanisms.

*Table 2: Online focus groups (December 2024 – March 2025)*

Participants	Number of participants	Main topics of conversation
6 Editorial, investigative journalists, editors from local and regional media	6 (women journalists)	Editorial policies in the context of security, cooperation with stakeholders in the context of security, as well as the institutional response related to the safety of journalists and media workers.
6 women journalists (national television, online media, investigative media, print media)	6 (women journalists)	Experiences with violence, discrimination, institutional response and support mechanisms
4 women journalists and editors from local and regional media	4 (women journalists)	Editorial policies in the context of risks and safety of journalists at the local and regional level, cooperation with stakeholders in the context of safety as well as the institutional response related to the safety of journalists and media workers.

All research activities were conducted in accordance with strict ethical standards, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity of participants throughout the process. Interviews and focus group discussions were recorded only with the explicit consent of the participants, after which they were transcribed, anonymised and securely stored. Where consent was obtained, direct quotes are included. The qualitative

data collected were analysed thematically, and the findings are organised around three main dimensions: (1) risks to the safety of women journalists; (2) specific forms of violence and discrimination they faced; and (3) impact on psychological well-being, professional opportunities, reporting and personal safety.

The methodology acknowledges certain limitations, including the possibility of underreporting due to fear of stigma or reprisal, the voluntary nature of participation, which may impact representativeness, and the inherent difficulty of openly discussing sensitive experiences of violence and harassment. The analysis in this report also draws on data from recent surveys of journalists in North Macedonia, as well as additional findings from independent reports on the safety of journalists and media freedom.



# The safety of women journalists and gender- based violence in journalism – International framework

Gender -based violence (GBV) remains a serious concern in several professional fields, including journalism<sup>6</sup>. Women journalists face a unique and complex risk profile, suffering violence as media professionals and specifically because of their gender. Despite increasing global awareness, gender- based violence against women journalists remains significantly underreported and underaddressed by societal and institutional mechanisms.

## – 3.1

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

Women journalists, including freelancers, local assistants and other media personnel, often face physical threats, psychological intimidation and digital harassment that is strongly gender-motivated. These forms of abuse have a profound impact on their professional work and personal well-being, often causing trauma and limiting their career opportunities. Intersectional factors, such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, age or freelance status, further increase these vulnerabilities, highlighting the need for inclusive and tailored institutional support.

In response to the increasing global threats, UNESCO launched the *Journalism Without Fear or Favour* initiative in 2020 to specifically address sexual harassment, discrimination and gender-based violence faced by women journalists around the world. UNESCO research subsequently revealed a worrying pattern of victim-blaming attitudes among newsroom management when women journalists report online harassment<sup>7</sup>. In addition, the World Association of Newspaper Publishers emphasizes that sexual harassment and gender- based violence in media organizations have serious organizational consequences – less

6 Violence against women is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life” (Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women). See [here](#).

7 UNESCO, [Gender-sensitive safety policies for newsrooms: guidelines + checklist](#) (Paris: UNESCO, 2021).

productivity, weakened teamwork, lower levels of trust among the staff, increased staff turnover and significant financial costs<sup>8</sup>. These conditions also pose a risk to the reputation of media organisations, which can undermine public trust and credibility. Therefore, addressing gender-based violence requires a comprehensive approach: effective internal policies, efficient reporting mechanisms and intersectional support systems.

According to the Report of the *Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women Journalists*, adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in 2020, violence against women is a global epidemic affecting one in three women during their lifetime<sup>9</sup>. This widespread violence creates a culture of normalization and tolerance, with women journalists often working in environments where systemic and structural gender-based violence is part of their daily lives. They are exposed to various forms of abuse, including rape and sexual harassment in newsrooms and in the field, as well as threats against their families.

Women journalists covering protests and riots face a rising risk of sexual assault, including groping and harassment – but very few choose to report these incidents. Those reporting on feminist issues are also targeted because of the topics they cover, often covering stories that help shift public discourse and have contributed to the dismissal of gender-based violence as a human rights violation.

## – 3.2 INTERSECTIONALITY AND SPECIFIC VULNERABILITIES

Women journalists with intersecting identities and vulnerabilities – freelancers, local contributors, members of ethnic and racial minorities, LGBTIQ+ individuals, young journalists, and those working in rural or marginalized areas – are often exposed to heightened safety risks and discrimination. These interconnected vulnerabilities are particularly exacerbated when journalists report on politically sensitive topics, such as corruption, human rights abuses, or conflict.

Moreover, these risks are intensified in male-dominated newsroom cultures. In such environments, harassment often manifests itself through derogatory, sexualized comments, attempts to undermine professional credibility, and systematic exclusion from important assignments, editorial decisions, and career advancement opportunities. Such practices not only delegitimize women's professional contributions, but also discourage their active role in public discourse, which undermines media pluralism and democratic representation.

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8 See [here](#).  
9 See [A/HRC/44/52](#)

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

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>10</sup> explicitly defines gender-based violence as encompassing harmful cultural, ideological and political practices directed at women professionals, including journalists, politicians and human rights defenders. CEDAW obliges signatory states to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and requires them to implement awareness-raising campaigns through mass media, with the aim of dismantling gender stereotypes and barriers to women's active public participation, thus indirectly supporting their role in journalism.

In this regard, it is important to highlight CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women<sup>11</sup>, which affirms that harmful practices and crimes against women human rights defenders, politicians, activists or journalists constitute forms of gender-based violence fuelled by cultural, ideological and political factors.

Another key legal framework is the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention<sup>12</sup>, adopted in 2011. Although it does not explicitly mention women journalists, its comprehensive provisions effectively extend protection to them in their professional role. This convention is the most comprehensive international treaty on preventing violence against women and it addresses physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence.

In the process of monitoring the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO)<sup>13</sup> has expressed serious concern about online and digitally facilitated gender-based violence. According to GREVIO's Recommendation No. 1, digital gender-based violence disproportionately affects women journalists, human rights defenders, public figures and influencers. GREVIO recognizes this phenomenon not only as a form of gender-based violence, but also as a serious violation of women's broader human rights under international law.

The systematic online targeting of women journalists is also confirmed by a survey by UNESCO and ICFJ, according to which almost three quarters (73%) of respondents reported experiencing online violence in the course of their work<sup>14</sup>. GREVIO underscores that while online violence is not always criminally punishable, it can cause serious

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10 See [CEDAW](#)

11 See [CEDAW General Recommendation No.35](#)

12 See [Istanbul Convention](#)

13 See [GREVIO](#)

14 Jordaan, L. (2023, October 9). [Global guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists](#). WAN-IFRA.

psychological consequences due to its repetitive nature, group dynamics and rapid spread through digital platforms.

Additionally, GREVIO highlights the need to address entrenched male-dominant structures in the media and calls for structural reforms that promote equality, diversity and safety for women journalists, especially those with intersecting vulnerabilities<sup>15</sup>.

The United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists has significantly influenced global efforts to encourage states to establish legal frameworks to protect journalists from online and offline threats, with a particular focus on the vulnerability of women journalists<sup>16</sup>. The plan also proposes a change in terminology from "*violence against women journalists*" to "*gender-based violence in journalism*," to better reflect the intersectionality and diverse experiences of journalists facing complex risks<sup>17</sup>.

Additionally, the UN General Assembly Resolution 72/175 explicitly calls on Member States to recognize and actively address attacks that disproportionately affect women journalists.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the Human Rights Council Resolution 33/2 (2016)<sup>19</sup> unanimously condemns targeted attacks on women journalists, including sexual and gender-based discrimination, violence, intimidation and harassment in both digital and physical environments.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders<sup>21</sup>, obliges states to take measures to protect individuals, including journalists, from violence, threats, retaliation and discrimination on account of their work in defence of human rights.

## — 3.4 EUROPEAN UNION FRAMEWORKS FOR THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS

The European Union has set up robust policy and legal frameworks to promote the safety and empowerment of women in journalism and the wider media sector. The European Commission Recommendation (EU) 2021/1534 on the protection, safety and empowerment of journalists and media professionals<sup>22</sup> explicitly recognises the key role of civil society and the media in combating online and offline harassment, threats, discrimination and incitement to hatred, especially when targeting women journalists, members of minorities and those reporting on equality issues.

15 GREVIO. [General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women](#), p.24, 2021

16 See [here](#).

17 UNESCO. (2022). [Outcomes of the Regional and Thematic Consultations](#).

18 Article 19 (2019) Ending Impunity. [Acting on UN standards on the Safety of Journalists](#).

19 See [here](#)

20 Human Rights Council (2020). [Combating violence against women journalists](#) - Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences.

21 See [here](#)

22 [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.

In addition, Directive (EU) 2024/1385 on combating violence against women and domestic violence represents a crucial legal step towards comprehensive protection of women and girls, with specific provisions on digital violence.<sup>23</sup> For women journalists, this directive requires Member States to adopt and implement policies to protect them from harassment and abuse, online and offline, thus strengthening their safety at work. In addition, the EU Gender Action Plan (GAP III, 2021–2025)<sup>24</sup> advances gender empowerment through an explicitly gender-transformative and intersectional approach.

Despite robust international standards and consistent advocacy, gender-based violence in journalism remains widely underreported. This is largely due to cultural stigma, fear of professional repercussions, and inadequate institutional responses. Ending this “culture of silence” requires structural reforms, accessible and transparent reporting mechanisms, effective implementation of safeguards, and broad societal and institutional change.

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23 See [Directive \(EU\) 2024/1385 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence](#).

24 See [here](#).

# IV

## Overview of violence and threats faced by women journalists

Violence and threats against journalists are a global problem that threatens not only their professional engagement but also freedom of expression in general. Women journalists often face threats that not only affect their work but also deeply affect their privacy, psychological health and professional integrity. This phenomenon particularly stands out due to the combination of gender stereotypes, high public exposure and the sensitivity of the topics they cover in their professional work. Violence and threats against women, i.e., women journalists, are expressed in various forms, starting from physical attacks, verbal threats and sexual harassment, to online abuse through social media and cyber-attacks<sup>25</sup>. Physical attacks and threats are the most obvious and direct, but no less worrying are online threats, which often leave long-lasting psychological consequences. Women journalists who report on sensitive topics such as corruption, human rights, or gender issues are most exposed to attacks.<sup>26</sup> Research shows that their focusing on these topics makes them particularly vulnerable to threats and attacks, resulting in self-censorship, withdrawal from the public eye or even the termination of their professional careers<sup>27</sup>. Online harassment, which is on the rise, includes offensive and obscene malicious comments, sexist insults, public exposure of private data (so-called “doxxing”) and even threats of violence against them or their close friends or family members. This form of violence has the power to demoralize women journalists, isolate them and create a sense of constant insecurity and fear. In addition, these threats are often aimed at undermining their personal credibility, rather than just their work. Abuse through social media is one of the most dangerous tools, as it enables attackers to remain anonymous and it allows for disturbing content to spread rapidly<sup>28</sup>. Sexual harassment is another form of violence that women journalists face and is particularly harmful because it discourages their professional engagement and reduces their motivation to report. This type of harassment manifests itself through lewd comments, inappropriate physical touching, or even outright offers of sexual

25 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/6/532223.pdf>

26 From normalization to self-censorship – Analysis of online harassment of women journalists in North Macedonia, [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/5/526988\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/5/526988_0.pdf)

27 Statement by a woman journalist participating in a focus group organized for the needs of this report, on December 26, 2024.

28 Statement by a woman journalist in an interview conducted for the purposes of this report, on 12.01.2025.

favours in exchange for professional advancement. Such situations often go unreported due to the feeling of shame, fear of consequences, or distrust in the institutions that are supposed to ensure their protection.<sup>29</sup>

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29 The consequences of online violence on the mental health of women journalists, <https://balkansmedia.org/mk/korisni-savjeti-i-alati/posledicite-od-onlajn-nasilstvoto-vrz-mentalnoto-zdravje-na-novinarkite>

# V

## National Framework - Existing Laws and Policies in North Macedonia

The legal framework in North Macedonia provides for the protection of journalists and the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex and gender, but there are serious shortcomings in the effectiveness and implementation of these laws<sup>30/31</sup>. The Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia guarantees the freedom of expression (Article 16) and the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex (Article 9)<sup>32</sup>. Based on these provisions, as well as the ratification of international documents guaranteeing the principle of equality in the exercise of human rights, the national framework is further developing, which refers to protection from discrimination, gender-based violence, but also freedom of expression.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, there are several key laws and international documents that relate to the promotion of equality in the media and the protection of women from discrimination and violence, which also apply to women journalists.

### — 5.1 LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN THE MEDIA SECTOR

The Law on Media, the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, and the Criminal Code contain provisions that aim to protect journalists from threats and violence. The Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (LAAVMS)<sup>33</sup> in the Republic of North Macedonia is an important legal instrument that actively contributes to the promotion of equality and protection from discrimination in the media. The Law explicitly prohibits hate speech and discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion and other grounds. Article 48 of the Law prohibits programs or media content that incite discrimination,

30 Improving the safety of journalists through amendments to the Criminal Code - analysis of international standards and domestic regulations, <https://www.kas.de/documents/281657/281706/Belegexemplar+2020+Improving+the+safety+of+journalists+MK+web.pdf/1866ee0b-d92e-756e-2d34-880e19e352e4?version=1.0&t=1608021648138>

31 Law on Amendments to the Criminal Code, Official Gazette No. 188, 07.09.2023, <https://www.slvesnik.com.mk/issues/421e4360348c4bb2907899576f7c07bd.pdf>

32 Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://www.sobranie.mk/content/Odluki%20USTAV/UstavSRSM.pdf>

33 Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (LAAVMS), Media Development Center, <https://mdc.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Zakon-za-Audio-i-audiovizuelni-mediumski-uslugi-prechisten-tekst-na-memorandum.pdf>

intolerance or hatred, including content that promotes violence or gender inequality. This regulation is key to creating a safe media environment that protects women journalists from discrimination and violence. In addition, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAVMS) plays an important role in monitoring gender equality in the media. The Agency annually prepares analyses on the way gender issues are treated and how women and men are represented in the programming concepts of the broadcasters. These reports are submitted to the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia and the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, in order to encourage policies that promote gender equality. The Agency also initiates campaigns against sexism in the media, raising public awareness of the importance of overcoming gender stereotypes. These activities emphasize the commitment to creating an inclusive media landscape that protects the rights of women journalists.

## **– 5.2 LAW ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEN AND WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY**

The Law on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women is a fundamental legal instrument that guarantees gender equality in all spheres, including the media. This law provides for measures to promote gender sensitivity, as well as an obligation for public and private broadcasters to report in a manner that promotes gender equality and non-discrimination. In addition, the law also provides for the adoption of a Gender Equality Strategy<sup>34</sup>, which includes guidelines and measures for achieving gender equality in specific areas of social life. In the most recently adopted Gender Equality Strategy for the period 2022-2027, the media are highlighted as a special area due to the fact that women are less represented in decision-making positions, especially as owners, but also due to the fact that there are not enough programs related to gender issues, as well as programs that address topics from a gender perspective. To this end, greater representation of women in decision-making positions, editors and directors, as well as education and awareness-raising on gender issues among all media workers is needed. The Gender Equality Strategy in the Republic of North Macedonia is a crucial document that sets the path towards a more inclusive, just and equal society. This strategy focuses on strengthening institutional mechanisms for gender equality, preventing and protecting against gender-based violence, ensuring economic and political empowerment of women, as well as integrating a gender perspective into all public policies and budgets. With clearly defined goals, activities and indicators, the strategy aims not only to reduce existing inequalities, but also to promote active gender equality at all levels of social life.

34 Gender Equality Strategy 2022-2027, Official Gazette No. 170 of 28.07.2022, available at the following link: [Gender\\_Equality\\_Strategy\\_2022\\_2027.pdf](#)

## **— 5.2 LAW ON PREVENTION AND PROTECTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION**

The Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (hereinafter referred to as the LPPD) in the Republic of North Macedonia is a comprehensive legal instrument that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics. The law covers all forms of discrimination, including direct and indirect discrimination, as well as harassment and sexual harassment – forms that are particularly manifested in the online space, where women journalists often face attacks that criticize their appearance, biased comments or threats related to their gender. The LPPD is the legal grounds for the establishment of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD), an independent body with a mandate to act on complaints, conduct investigations and make recommendations. According to the CPPD reports for the period 2022–2024, the media are among the areas where gender-based discrimination is most frequently observed. However, the challenge remains of having no available data on the number of women journalists who use this protection mechanism, as they are not recorded as a separate vulnerable group, which further complicates the visibility and addressing of their specific experiences with discrimination.

## **— 5.3 CRIMINAL CODE**

The Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia provides for penalties for endangering the safety and obstructing an official in the performance of official duties, which can also be applied in cases of attacks on journalists and media workers, given their role in the public interest. In addition, provisions are provided that criminalize discrimination on multiple grounds – including sex and gender – as well as hate crimes motivated by prejudice and stereotypes, including those based on gender and gender identity. It is important to emphasize that the definitions and legal qualifications for these crimes have been significantly expanded to include committing crimes through digital or IT tools, which is particularly relevant in the context of increased online attacks and harassment that women journalists are facing.

## **— 5.4 LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR GENDER- BASED VIOLENCE**

North Macedonia ratified the Istanbul Convention (IC) in 2018, which is the most comprehensive international treaty on preventing and combating violence against women. As a result of this ratification, the Law on the Prevention of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was adopted in 2019,

which provides a definition of gender-based violence, as well as definitions of the different forms of gender-based violence that are largely aligned with the definitions provided in the Istanbul Convention. The first report by the Group of Experts on Monitoring the Implementation (GREVIO) highlights the country's commitment to implementing the IC through the adoption of the Law on the Prevention of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, as well as amendments to the Criminal Code that criminalize sexual harassment and stalking. In the context of this analysis, it is particularly important that GREVIO mentions women journalists as a specific category vulnerable to violence, especially misogynistic hate speech, threats and digital harassment. GREVIO expresses concern about the passivity of institutions in protecting women journalists, including situations where violence was reported by a woman journalist who has experienced a particular type of violence. GREVIO therefore recommends that a gender perspective be included in the necessary measures to promote the safety of journalists and protect them from any unjustified interference in their work. In order to see and hear the perspectives of women in the media, institutions should respond promptly to reports of women journalists who are the target of attacks because of their sex and gender and their profession<sup>35</sup>.

#### **5.4.1 CRIMINAL CODE**

The Criminal Code contains a specific definition of gender-based violence, which recognizes the specificity and seriousness of this form of violence. In this regard, the Code covers several specific crimes related to gender-based violence, such as sexual assault, sexual harassment, stalking, domestic violence and other forms of violence against women. The Criminal Code does not qualify violence against women journalists as a specific type of crime and it does not provide for a more severe punishment if crimes related to specific forms of gender-based violence are committed against women journalists.

#### **5.4.2 LAW ON PREVENTION AND PROTECTION FROM VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence<sup>36</sup> is an important legal instrument that fortifies the state's commitment to address all forms of gender-based violence. This law introduces, for the first time, a clear definition of gender-based violence, in accordance with the Istanbul Convention, and establishes the principles of prevention, protection, sanctioning and inter-institutional cooperation. The law covers a wide range of forms

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35 GREVIO - Baseline Evaluation Report on North Macedonia, paragraph 303, published on 07.09.2023, available in English at the following link: [1680ac76ab](#)

36 Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2021/1a28a922f364401e94935d4d694b9d75.pdf>

of gender-based violence, including physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence, as well as contemporary forms such as online sexual harassment. In this way, the digital space is also recognized as a potential context for violence against women and opens up the possibility of protection through mechanisms adapted to new technologies. Although the law provides for special attention for vulnerable categories of women – such as women with disabilities, women from rural areas, migrants and others – women journalists are not explicitly mentioned as a separate category, despite the specific risks they face in public and online spaces. This indicates the need for further improvement of the normative framework that would recognize these professionals as a group exposed to specific forms of violence. However, according to the law, all the services provided – such as care, psychological and legal support, emergency protection and long-term rehabilitation – are available to all women who have faced gender-based violence. This means that women journalists, although not specifically distinguished as a category, can access all protection and support mechanisms when they are exposed to violence related to their gender.

### 5.4.3 LAW ON FREE LEGAL AID

The Law on Free Legal Aid<sup>37</sup> is a key mechanism for ensuring access to justice for citizens who are in a vulnerable or disadvantaged position. The law provides for two types of free legal aid: primary legal aid, which includes basic legal counselling and information, and secondary legal aid, which includes representation in court, drafting of submissions and other more complex legal support. Persons with low income and limited assets are entitled to free legal aid, under conditions established by law. In order to obtain this assistance, they need to submit an application and submit documentation confirming their financial situation. In addition, free legal aid can also be provided through authorized providers, such as citizens' associations that meet certain criteria. A significant provision in the law is that victims of domestic violence are the only group of applicants that is exempted from the obligation to prove their financial situation in order to receive free legal aid. This is a positive step towards protecting these persons, but it still indicates the limitations of the law in relation to other forms of gender-based violence. Victims of sexual violence, sexual harassment, digital violence or other forms of gender-based violence that are not domestic must still prove their financial situation, which constitutes a barrier to access to justice. This opens up space for improving the law towards equal treatment and protection of all victims of gender-based violence, regardless of the form in which it manifests.

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37 Law on Free Legal Aid, 16.05.2019, <https://www.pravda.gov.mk/upload/Documents/Zakon%20za%20besplatna%20pravna%20pomos.pdf>

## — 5.5 LABOUR LAW FRAMEWORK

The legal framework regulating employment relations in the Republic of North Macedonia is mainly based on the Labour Law, which establishes the fundamental rights and obligations of workers and employers. The law prohibits discrimination in employment and during employment on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity and other grounds, and guarantees equal pay for equal work or work of equal value. It also contains provisions on protection against harassment and mobbing, but despite this, challenges still exist in the consistent application of the law and in the sanctioning of such cases. The law allows for fixed-term employment contracts for a maximum of five years, which is a practice often applied for journalists and media workers, with a large number of them working under such contracts. This directly affects their economic security, stability and the ability to plan their professional future. The Law on Protection from Harassment at the Workplace further strengthens the legal protection of workers, providing for internal and external complaint procedures, as well as sanctions for employers who fail to take appropriate measures. However, the effectiveness of this law depends on the level of awareness of workers and the willingness of institutions to act on complaints. In terms of collective bargaining, the public broadcasting service (MRTV) has its own collective agreement that regulates working conditions, salaries and rights of media workers in that system. However, a collective agreement at the level of the private media sector does not yet exist, which leaves journalists and media workers in private media with less legal and union protection, especially in terms of working hours, salaries and working conditions.

## — 5.6 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Despite the existence of these laws, their effectiveness in protecting women journalists is limited. One of the key problems is investigation. In practice, many cases of threats and violence against journalists are not investigated effectively, and attackers are rarely brought to justice. This creates a culture of impunity that encourages further attacks. Furthermore, inadequate sanctions and a light sentencing policy are also a problem: even when sentences are imposed, they are often mild and do not correspond to the seriousness of the cases and crimes. Civil protection through the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, which also regulates harassment and sexual harassment, applies to the media, but so far there is no information that a woman journalist has used this legal mechanism to protect herself from sexual harassment that she experienced at work or outside the workplace, including social media, when it was related to her profession<sup>38</sup>. Laws

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38 This conclusion is drawn from the interviews and focus groups conducted with women journalists, but also through AJM data, according to which such a procedure for the protection of a woman journalist has not been initiated.

on protection against defamation and insult are not always applied effectively in the digital space, where online harassment and hate speech are widespread. There is also a lack of a gender-sensitive approach in the legal framework, especially that relating to the media, given that the laws do not take into account the specific challenges faced by women journalists.<sup>39</sup>

The government of North Macedonia has taken some initiatives to improve the safety of journalists. The Ministry of Interior has established special units to investigate attacks on journalists, and the public prosecution has appointed prosecutors in charge of cases involving media workers<sup>40</sup>. However, these initiatives often face challenges such as:

- Insufficient resources and training: Police and judicial officials often lack sufficient resources and training to effectively deal with complex cases of violence against journalists, especially digital violence.
- Slow and inefficient procedures: Investigations often take a long time, and court proceedings are slow, which reduces journalists' trust in institutions.
- Lack of coordination: There is a lack of coordination between the institutions, which hinders effective processing of cases of violence.

The regulatory bodies, such as the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAVMS), have a role in promoting media freedom and professional standards. However, their mandate is primarily focused on regulating broadcasting and they have limited powers to address online harassment and other forms of violence against journalists. Civil society organizations, such as the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) and the Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers (ITUJMW), are key in advocating for media freedom and providing support to journalists. They offer legal and psychological assistance, monitor attacks on journalists, and raise awareness of the challenges faced by women in the media. However, the lack of sufficient support systems for women journalists facing violence and threats is a significant challenge. Although the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) and the Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers (ITUJMW) offer support through legal aid and psychological counselling, these services are often limited in scope and availability, given that these associations are not financially supported by the state. In addition to the financial assistance needed for legal and psychological support, it is necessary to provide emergency funds **that will include** financial support for women journalists who have to relocate due to serious threats.

39 NORTH MACEDONIA Indicators on the Level of Media Freedom and Journalists' Safety Index 2023, <https://znm.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/MK-MK-2024.pdf>

40 Improving the safety of journalists through amendments to the Criminal Code - analysis of international standards and domestic regulations, <https://www.kas.de/documents/281657/281706/Belegexemplar+2020+Improving+the+safety+of+journalists+MK+web.pdf/1866ee0b-d92e-756e-2d34-880e19e352e4?version=1.0&t=1608021648138>

# VI

## Data Analysis – Safety of Women Journalists 2021 to 2024

This chapter provides an analytical overview of data related to the safety of women journalists in North Macedonia between 2021 and 2024, highlighting key trends identified through documented cases and reports from the *SafeJournalists Network* (SJN). It examines the primary forms of threats, harassment and intimidation faced by women in journalism, highlighting the prevalence of online harassment, verbal abuse and negative campaigns as the dominant forms of violence. The analysis includes statistical data, thematic categorization of types of attacks and case studies illustrating specific types of gender-based intimidation and pressure, thereby offering a comprehensive understanding of the environment in which women journalists operate in North Macedonia.

### – 6.1 OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

In North Macedonia, the safety situation of women journalists reflects global challenges, but also has its own specificities that make their line of work more difficult. Women journalists are often the target of physical and verbal threats, as well as online attacks that often include gender-based insults and disparagement. These threats are particularly present when women journalists cover sensitive topics such as political corruption, organized crime or gender equality. Attacks are not limited to their professional work, but often also intrude on their privacy, with threats to their safety and that of their families. This increases the psychological burden they face and can lead to self-censorship or withdrawal from the public sphere. Societal norms and cultural barriers in North Macedonia further complicate the situation for women journalists. Women journalists also face prejudice within media outlets, where they may face less support and respect from their male colleagues. Political pressures and threats coming from powerful figures or groups, who have an interest in silencing critical debate, further exacerbate the situation. Although there are attempts at institutional protection and support for women journalists, such as through legal amendments or protection programs, these measures are often perceived as insufficiently

effective.<sup>41</sup> The justice system does not always provide prompt and adequate protection or sanctions for attackers, which further undermines the sense of safety of women in the media. Professional associations and organizations of journalists and international partners play an important role in raising public awareness of this issue and in strengthening capacities to protect women journalists, but continued commitment and a systematic approach are needed in order to make real change. Media freedom and the safety of journalists are a key pillar of any democratic society and an important component for the protection and promotion of human rights. They enable the public to have access to reliable and independent information, which is the basis for transparency and accountability of government and other social structures. The safety of journalists is essential for media freedom, as it provides the conditions for journalists to be able to carry out their duties without fear of repression, violence or intimidation.

New research findings<sup>42</sup> show that the gender wage gap is almost non-existent in the media sector, but there is generally economic insecurity, given that 57% of journalists and 42% of women journalists earn less than the average net salary. The situation is even worse for media workers: 80% of men and 73% of women fall below that line. In general, nearly half of journalists and as many as 77% of media workers earn below the average monthly salary in RNM. 38% of journalists and 36% of media workers do not receive compensation for overtime work (permanently or frequently). And when it comes to working on national holidays, 46% of all respondents stated that such work was never or rarely paid to them. Journalists and media workers in the public broadcasting service, i.e. MTV, are in a better position than their colleagues in the private sector, given that they have higher salaries.

In terms of career advancement, the figures show that a gender gap is emerging in editorial positions, given that although women journalists represent 56% of the total number of journalists in the media, women are still 6% less represented than men in editorial positions. The mapping conducted in 2023 reveals that there are 188 editors in the media sphere, of which 89 are women, or 47.3%.<sup>43</sup> When it comes to radio and television, data is collected by the media regulator. According to information from 2023, out of a total of 155 editors in the broadcasting sector, 77 are women – almost half of the total number.<sup>44</sup>

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41 Improving the safety of journalists through amendments to the Criminal Code - Analysis of international standards and domestic regulations, <https://shorturl.at/s76w0>

42 Trpevska, Snezana, "Working conditions in the media sector: "Professional status and labor rights of journalists and media workers", ITUJMW, RESIS Institute, Skopje, 2024.

43 Mapping the population of journalists and media workers, RESIS Institute and ITUJMW, Skopje, 2024

44 Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, "Structure of Employees in the Audio and Audiovisual Media Industry in 2022", August, 2023.

## — 6.2 PATRIARCHAL NORMS THAT INFLUENCE THE TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

Patriarchal values, which are still present in many social structures, play a significant role in shaping the treatment of women in the media. Traditional norms and expectations place women in a subordinate position, imposing limits on their autonomy and influence in the public sphere. Women in the media face challenges such as reduced visibility, underrepresentation in leadership positions and lack of decision-making opportunities. These norms, which emphasize traditional gender roles, make the fight for gender equality even more difficult, fostering a culture of belittling and ignoring their work and influence. In the media industry, patriarchal values and norms are often reflected in internal editorial and reporting policies. Women journalists who challenge these norms by covering sensitive or controversial topics are often exposed to hostile and sexist reactions from the public. These attacks, fuelled by deep-rooted prejudice and resistance to change, aim to silence women and preserve the dominance of male voices in the public sphere. Some women journalists report that in this environment they are often exposed to sexist comments, pressure or insults, simply because they are women<sup>45</sup>. "When publishing an investigative story or text, threats and intimidation against women journalists most commonly occur on social media and they are made by anonymous men, and the comments are frighteningly derogatory, sexist and quite chauvinistic just because the author of that text or story is a woman."<sup>46</sup>

## — 6.3 STATISTICAL DATA

Year	Number of attacks	Gender	Type of attack
2024	2	Woman	Unauthorized surveillance and recording, online threats
2024	2	Man	Vehicle arson/destruction of property, physical assault
2023	3	Man	Explicit online threat, physical and verbal attack
2023	3	Woman	Physical attack, explicit online threat
2022	7	Man	Physical attack with an axe, verbal attack, online death threat, unlawful detention, physical assault
2022	1	Woman	Verbal attack
2021	3	Woman	Threat, verbal attack
2021	2	Man	Threats to the life of a group, attack on a TV crew

According to reports by the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) and other organizations, cases of intimidation and threats, of which there have been many, rarely end with adequate legal consequences, resulting in a culture of impunity

<sup>45</sup> Focus groups with journalists, conducted by Milan Spirovski on 26.12.2024 and 24.01.2025.

<sup>46</sup> Statement by a woman editor-journalist from a print and online media outlet for the purposes of this report, participant in a focus group on December 26, 2024.

and a sense of insecurity among the women journalists concerned. Most often, women journalists are exposed to threats when reporting on political issues, corruption or human rights issues. Online platforms and social media have been used for aggressive attacks and digital persecution, making the violence more difficult to monitor and sanction<sup>47</sup>. In many cases, the comments and threats they receive are of a highly sexist and derogatory nature, including attempts to silence them through discrediting them on the basis of their gender. Although there have been increased efforts to address this problem, such as through initiatives to strengthen the safety of media workers and cooperation with international organizations, challenges remain. The institutional system faces weaknesses in identifying and sanctioning perpetrators, as well as obstacles in implementing protection measures. Women journalists often have limited access to legal aid and institutional support, which further increases their vulnerability. This situation requires authorities and societal stakeholders to reinforce their efforts to create a safe and supportive environment for all media professionals.<sup>48</sup>

At least 23 cases of attacks on journalists and media workers were recorded in North Macedonia between 2021 and 2024. The attacks include physical and verbal threats, destruction of property, unauthorized surveillance and filming, and are often accompanied by serious psychological consequences. Some of these cases have been legally resolved, while others remain incompletely investigated or insufficiently prosecuted. 2021 saw the highest number of incidents – as many as 10, most of which were in the context of political and electoral processes. Women journalists were particularly vulnerable to threats and verbal insults, often by representatives of institutions or the public. This trend continued in 2023, when three women journalists were targeted with online threats or physical attacks. In 2022 and 2024, the focus also shifted to physical attacks and destruction of property, most often against journalists reporting from the field, outside of Skopje. These types of attacks, although less frequently reported, are also the most dangerous – including the use of weapons or the setting of vehicles on fire. Women journalists are significantly more exposed to online violence, unauthorized surveillance, and verbal attacks, especially when it comes to their public engagement and presence on social media. The reasons for this are multifaceted – from low institutional protection, to gender stereotypes that treat women journalists as a “convenient target” for public condemnation and harassment. There is also a notable geographical distribution – most incidents occur in Skopje, but the intensity and severity of the violence is often more intense outside the country’s capital (Gostivar, Kicevo, Rosoman, Shtip), where journalists are both more isolated and have less access to protective mechanisms.

Women journalists are more often exposed to online threats and hate speech (Facebook, Twitter), verbal insults tete-a-tete or at public events, unauthorized surveillance and recording (including distribution of video materials). These

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47 Statement by a woman journalist and editor in print and online media, participant in a focus group organized for the needs of this report on 24.01.2025.

48 [АЛАТКИ ЗА ОНЛАЈН ВОЗНЕМИРУВАЊЕ, ДИСКРИМИНАЦИЈА И РОДОВО БАЗИРАНО НАСИЛСТВО](#)

attacks often aim to discredit, embarrass or intimidate them into stopping their professional activity. According to numerous international reports (such as those of UNESCO<sup>49</sup> and IFJ<sup>50</sup>), such gender-based violence against women journalists is a global trend, but especially pronounced in transitional societies where the media are under increased political pressure.

## — 6.4 CASES OF ATTACKS ON WOMEN JOURNALISTS REGISTERED BY THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE IN NORTH MACEDONIA

In recent years, women journalists in North Macedonia have faced an increasing number of cases of violence and threats, reflecting a broader crisis in media freedoms and security in the country. According to the Register of violations of the rights of journalists and media workers, kept by AJM since 2014, in the period from 2021 till present, 23 cases have been registered of gross violations of the rights of women journalists who reported the incident to AJM<sup>51</sup>. These incidents manifest themselves in various forms, including physical and verbal attacks, online harassment and gender-based discrediting, which limits their ability to report freely.

The trend observed in 2024 is that journalism is changing, and the forms of violence are also changing. Today, attacks on journalists do not necessarily mean only physical violence, given that verbal threats and harassment are being registered more frequently. Compared to 2024, AJM registered a total of 4 cases of attacks and serious threats against journalists and media workers, which is a decrease compared to previous years. All of these cases were reported to the Ministry of Interior (Moi). Among them, two incidents stand out as the most characteristic: the attacks on journalists Lepa Dzundeva and Miroslava Simonovska

### THE CASE OF LEPA DZUNDEVA

In 2024, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) registered two serious incidents of violations of the rights of women journalists. The first case concerns journalist Lepa Dzundeva from *TV24*, who was the target of life-threatening comments on Facebook made by third parties, in relation to her interview with Greek MP Syrigos. A segment of this interview, taken out of context, was posted on TV evening show host Bogdan Ilievski's Facebook profile, which incited hate speech and threats that could lead to violence. Some online media such as *Off.net.mk* continued the smear campaign against Dzundeva, using her picture on social media, which further

49 UNESCO's Global Survey on Online Violence against Women Journalists, [https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unescos-global-survey-online-violence-against-women-journalists?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unescos-global-survey-online-violence-against-women-journalists?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

50 International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Survey, [https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/reports/detail/ifj-survey-one-in-two-women-journalists-suffer-gender-based-violence-at-work/category/press-releases?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/reports/detail/ifj-survey-one-in-two-women-journalists-suffer-gender-based-violence-at-work/category/press-releases?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

51 Register of cases of violations of the rights of journalists and media workers of the AJM, <https://znm.org.mk/povreda-na-novinari/>

provoked personal insults, calls for disparagement, sexist comments, as well as explicit threats to the journalist's life by third parties commenting on these posts. Regarding this case involving journalist Lepa Dzundeva, AJM publicly reacted<sup>52</sup> and offered free legal assistance, and notified the prosecutor's office. The case is still in prosecutorial proceedings.

## THE CASE OF MIROSLAVA SIMONOVSKA

The second incident involves journalist Miroslava Simonovska from *Sloboden Pечат*, who was the victim of unauthorized surveillance, recording and distribution of video material in 2024. According to information, Simonovska was secretly followed and recorded, and a video of her allegedly receiving a document was distributed to the media without her consent. According to the data available to AJM, such a gross violation of rights has never happened to fellow male journalists. These cases highlight the continued concern about the safety of journalists in North Macedonia, especially for women journalists who face specific forms of intimidation and harassment.

It is important to mention the case of journalist Rita Behadini in 2023, where the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) requested an immediate response to the explicit threats directed at Rita Behadini in response to her post regarding the public stance of the Saraj imam shared on Facebook. Journalist Behadini addressed AJM with a report that she had been the target of threats from people with Facebook profiles, but one in particular stands out as containing an explicit threat. The post from a certain profile named Fisnik Hoxha contained an explicit threat of sexual violence against the family of journalist Behadini and a direct threat of physical violence addressed to her<sup>53</sup>. Such a post endangers her safety, the safety of her family, and potentially the safety of other colleagues from this media outlet. This explicit threat to the life of journalist Behadini has been reported to the Ministry of Interior (Mol) to the Department for Cybercrime and Digital Forensics, and at the same time, AJM insisted on a swift and efficient investigation in the interest of finding and sanctioning the author or authors of this threat. The case is in court proceedings and AJM is actively monitoring it until its resolution.

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52 AJM, Public reaction, [Online harassment and threats against Lepa Dzundeva and other women journalists are unacceptable](#), 06.06.2024

53 The full text of the threatening post is given below: threat: "Delete the post you wrote against the imam, I'll f\*\*\*\* your family. Tomorrow I'll be in front of Alsat's offices tomorrow, I'll cut off your ear with a knife."

# VII Experiences and perceptions of the safety of women journalists

This chapter provides qualitative information and insight obtained through interviews and focus groups with women journalists, experts and editors, highlighting their personal experiences with the various forms of harassment and violence they encounter in their professional activities. The analysis contains direct testimonies from women journalists regarding the various forms of violence and intimidation and the lack of institutional support mechanisms, as well as an exploration of their reasons for often choosing not to report on the incidents they experience. The qualitative data in this section is further supported by trends identified in other analyses focusing on the safety aspects of women journalists in North Macedonia.

In the context of North Macedonia, women journalists face specific challenges that are rooted in the socio-political context, in gender norms and in the media culture of the country. North Macedonia faces constant tensions between the need for media freedom and the political and economic pressure that often affects journalists. In this situation, women journalists are particularly vulnerable, as they often have to deal with a double burden – to prove their professional competence in a male-dominated industry and to deal with societal expectations and prejudice<sup>54</sup>. One of the crucial problems in North Macedonia is the lack of protection and support from institutions. Although there are laws guaranteeing the freedom of expression and the protection of journalists, their implementation is often ineffective.<sup>55</sup> Institutions do not respond quickly and adequately to reports of violence and threats, which leaves room for impunity and further victimization of victims. This is especially true in cases of online violence, where laws are still insufficiently developed to deal with the complexity of digital threats. Political pressure and influence on the media further exacerbate the situation. Women journalists who report critically on government activities or political parties are often targeted through threats, smear campaigns and verbal attacks. Political actors, through their platforms or supporters, use various tactics to silence critical voices, and women are often the most vulnerable due to gender biases that present them as “less competent”

54 Statement by a woman journalist participating in a focus group organized for the needs of this report on December 26, 2024.

55 Women as the workforce, men in decision-making positions - the most common image in the media, [link](#)

or “more emotional”. Another major obstacle is the cultural and social non-acceptance of women in the public sphere. Macedonian society, although it has achieved significant progress in terms of women’s rights, still carries elements of patriarchy that affect the treatment of women journalists. These biases make women more exposed to belittling, ridicule and sexualized harassment. The safety of women journalists requires serious engagement and a multidimensional approach to address it. This includes legal reforms for more effective protection, educating the public about the importance of gender equality, improving institutional mechanisms to address threats, and creating a support network for women journalists. Preserving their safety is not only a matter of justice, but also an essential condition for pluralism and democratic stability in society.<sup>56</sup>

Violence against women journalists poses a serious threat not only to their personal and professional well-being, but also to society as a whole. Women journalists, who face various forms of attacks, including physical, psychological and digital violence, are forced to operate in an environment of constant fear and uncertainty. Such experiences leave deep scars on their mental health and limit their professional impact, which has wider consequences for media freedom and democratic processes in the country.

## TYPES OF VIOLENCE

The main challenges faced by women journalists include constant threats of physical, verbal and online violence. In North Macedonia, these threats are amplified by social norms and political pressures, with women reporting on sensitive topics (corruption, politics, human rights) often becoming targets of attacks. Online abuse has increased significantly, with violent comments and cyber threats threatening the personal safety and professional stability of women journalists<sup>57</sup>. In this climate, victims are forced to self-censor and deviate from investigative topics, further weakening media pluralism and the influence of public discourse. However, some progress has been made. Legislative initiatives that provide for the protection of journalists, the efforts of civil society and the support of international organizations are important steps towards improving safety.<sup>58</sup> Solidarity and training platforms provide increased support for women journalists, although the need for further reforms and increased implementation of existing laws remains urgent.

56 Media Freedom in North Macedonia: Fragile Progress, Report from the Media Freedom Fact-finding Mission, <https://znm.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/MK-Fact-Finding-PFM-Report-251023-web-final.pdf>

57 Statement by a woman journalist participating in a focus group organized for the needs of this report on December 26, 2024.

58 Improving the safety of journalists through amendments to the Criminal Code - analysis of international standards and domestic regulations, <https://www.kas.de/documents/281657/281706/Belegexemplar+2020+Improving+the+safety+of+journalists+MK+web.pdf/1866ee0b-d92e-756e-2d34-880e19e352e4?version=1.0&t=1608021648138>

## PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND ASSAULTS

Violence against women journalists is a serious problem that threatens the integrity of the journalism profession and the freedom of the media. Women journalists, who are often the target of violent acts, are at significant risk of physical attacks, especially when reporting on sensitive topics, such as corruption or gender issues. Physical violence against women journalists has multiple and long-term consequences. In addition to immediate physical injuries, attacks also cause psychological trauma, which can lead to anxiety, depression and other psychological, social or health problems. Women journalists often face threats of physical violence that are made as a form of intimidation or to send a message that they must discontinue their investigative work. These threats are made by government officials, business interests, or other powerful groups who feel threatened by journalistic investigation.

In many cases, attacks on women journalists are not isolated to physical violence, but can be part of a larger context of gender inequality and discrimination. As a result of physical violence, women journalists face serious obstacles in their work. Many of them consider ending their careers, requesting enhanced safety measures, or withdrawing from reporting on sensitive topics.

## ONLINE HARASSMENT, CYBERBULLYING AND PUBLICLY EXPOSING PRIVATE DATA (DOXXING)

In recent years, online harassment, cyberbullying and publicly exposing private data (doxxing) have become a serious challenge for women journalists in the Republic of North Macedonia. These forms of digital violence not only threaten their rights and safety, but also undermine media freedom and independence in the country. With the increased use of digital tools and platforms, women journalists are increasingly targeted by attacks that aim to discredit, silence and intimidate them. Online harassment manifests itself through threats, insults and other forms of unwanted behaviour manifested via digital channels. Women journalists in North Macedonia often face cyberbullying, which most often manifests itself through threats of physical violence, hate speech and discrediting their professional integrity.<sup>59</sup> These attacks often strike a personal chord and are gender-based and they negatively affect their psychological health, self-esteem and level of public engagement.

Verbal attacks are usually motivated by gender stereotypes and aim to discredit women journalists by humiliating and marginalizing them. In the digital sphere, this form of violence can reach terrifying dimensions through online attacks, which further increases their exposure to psychological pressure and public shame. To address these threats, inclusive strategies and strong support from institutions, the public and media

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59 Data obtained from interviews and focus groups and the analysis entitled Building support systems for women journalists, <https://pina.mk/8106-gradene-sistemi-za-poddrshka-na-zhenite-novinarki/>

associations are necessary, in order to create an environment where women can freely and safely express themselves.

Sexual harassment is a serious form of gender-based violence that threatens the safety and professional integrity of women journalists in North Macedonia. According to recent research, over 30% of women in the media sector report having experienced sexual harassment at work or in the digital world, which includes verbal comments with sexual content, inappropriate suggestions and even physical threats. This type of violence is often perpetrated by colleagues, superiors or strangers online. As previously mentioned, the consequences are serious – they negatively affect psychological well-being, encourage women to self-censor and reduce their visibility. The lack of effective mechanisms for reporting and sanctioning such cases, as well as the constant fear of retaliation or of losing their jobs, further encourages these phenomena. Threats of sexual violence are a particularly frightening form of sexual harassment that targets women journalists, especially those who report on sensitive or unconventional topics or have visible public positions on certain social segments or issues. Such an example was observed in February, 2025 when Dragan Pavlovic Latas – manager of the website *Vecer*– published a series of statuses on his social media profiles (Facebook and X) within four hours that targeted the staff of the Investigative Reporting Lab (IRL), provoking a barrage of hate and calls for lynching and sexual violence<sup>60</sup>. Such threats are often linked to the aim of silencing women and undermining their professional work by instilling fear and a sense of insecurity. These threats often have a gender context and are aimed at belittling and degrading women journalists on a personal and professional level. In the last few years, the activities of civil society organizations and media associations to protect and support victims have intensified, but deeper structural changes and stronger legal protection are necessary to eradicate such violence and ensure a safe working environment for women journalists.

The public exposure of private data, or doxxing, is a tactic of exposing and abusing the personal information of women journalists in order to increase their vulnerability and incite violence against them. In North Macedonia, this practice is evident and often targets investigative journalists, who dedicate their work to topics related to corruption, abuse of power and human rights. By publishing their personal data – addresses, phone numbers or private photos – the attackers incite a public lynching and expose them to additional risks of physical violence.

## **DISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEX AND GENDER**

Gender-based discrimination and verbal abuse pose significant challenges for women journalists in North Macedonia, affecting their professional and personal safety, as well as their role in

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60 Investigative Reporting Lab, Official statement, <https://irl.mk/od-shto-se-plashi-latas-koga-ve-pottiknuva-da-ne-siluvate-i-linchuvate/>

public discourse.<sup>61</sup> Gender -based discrimination manifests itself through derogatory comments, belittling and systematic ignoring of their contributions to the media, which undermines their ability to carry out their work with integrity and freedom.<sup>62</sup> Often, women journalists face unfair treatment compared to their male colleagues, which leads to unequal opportunities for professional growth and career development and places them in a vulnerable position within media outlets.<sup>63</sup> Research by the Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers (ITUJMW) clearly shows that women journalists in Macedonia are placed at a disadvantage, especially when it comes to their representation in management positions. Although women dominate newsrooms, men are still predominant in editorial and especially executive positions. This inequality is due to structural barriers, stereotypes and prejudice that limit the ability of women to move up in the media hierarchy, despite the fact that journalism is increasingly considered a “women’s profession”. Moreover, women often face discrimination, under-valuation and influence from superiors, which further complicates their position. In addition to the low representation of women in key decision-making positions, research also indicates that they are more often exposed to mobbing, public discrediting and various forms of pressure compared to their male colleagues. Statistics show that 27% of women journalists reported strong influence from editors, and 21% from managers, which further limits their professional development and autonomy. These data emphasize the need for systemic changes and the promotion of gender equality in the media, in order for women to gain a deserved place as editors and directors and to be true drivers of change in the profession.

Sociological and cultural bias against women fuel this discrimination and are often used as a means to minimize their influence and their voice in the workplace. Women journalists who participated in focus groups for this report noted that they also face discrimination and unequal treatment due to pregnancy. There are cases of women journalists being fired while pregnant, but also those who find it more difficult to get a job than male journalists, due to the assumption that they may be planning a child. “Such examples are common, but women journalists rarely report them and rarely speak out,”<sup>64</sup> noted a focus group participant. The Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and the Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers are adamant that they cannot help if women journalists do not report and speak out<sup>65</sup>.

Gender stereotypes pose a significant barrier for journalists, as they influence the way women are treated, evaluated and

61 Annual report on the work of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for 2023, <https://kszd.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/%D0%93%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%88%D0%B5%D0%BD-%D0%B8%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%88%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%98-%D0%BD%D0%B0-%D0%9A%D0%A1%D0%97%D0%94-%D0%B7%D0%B0-2023-%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%B0.pdf>

62 GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report on Legislative and Other Measures Implementing the Provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) NORTH MACEDONIA, <https://mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2023/ednakvi%20moznosti/GREVIO%20%20INF%202023%205%20FINAL%20REPORT%20MK.pdf>

63 ANALYSIS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN SPORTS IN NORTH MACEDONIA, [https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/MK-Gender\\_Equality\\_in\\_Sport-web.pdf](https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/MK-Gender_Equality_in_Sport-web.pdf)

64 Statement by a woman journalist and editor of an online media outlet in Macedonia who was a participant in a focus group held on December 26, 2024.

65 <https://pina.mk/8547-novinarkite-soocheni-so-diskriminatsija-i-neednakov-tretman-poradi bremenosta/>

accepted in society and the media. Women often face the assumption that their abilities, especially when dealing with “difficult” or “masculine” topics such as politics, the economy and corruption, are less valuable or relevant than their male counterparts<sup>66</sup>. These stereotypes are also perpetuated through media editorial policies, where women are limited to topics traditionally considered “feminine”, such as family, health and culture, as well as topics related to gender equality. With their credibility being challenged on a daily basis, comes increased psychological pressure, which further reduces their motivation and opportunities for professional advancement. Additionally, in situations of crisis or conflict, women journalists face increased risks of discrimination and attacks, which makes them even more vulnerable.

## UNIQUE CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN JOURNALISTS

Women journalists in North Macedonia face specific challenges arising from their gender, professional engagement and public exposure. Gender-based stereotypes and discrimination put women in media under increased pressure compared to their male colleagues. On the one hand, as women, they are often perceived as weaker or less capable of handling “difficult” topics, which leads to unequal treatment in the workplace, limited opportunities for advancement and additional stress. On the other hand, their professional engagement and public role as information providers make them visible targets for various types of online and offline attacks, including personal threats, discrediting and attempts at intimidation. The connection between gender and profession also create a particular challenge for women journalists, in terms of clashing with society’s expectations and perceptions of their work and public role. This exposes them to two-fold discrimination: as women in public spaces and as journalists who are committed to creating informative content. This combined dynamic escalates when they deal with sensitive topics, such as politics, corruption or women’s rights. Covering these topics not only exposes them to professional and political pressures, but also to direct attacks that are often gender-based – with offensive comments about their appearance, personal relationships or morals. These attacks can have a chilling effect on their work, forcing them to withdraw or self-censor. In addition, women journalists covering topics such as corruption or women’s rights are particularly vulnerable to increased targeting. Their work, which highlights injustice, often makes them targets of attacks by influential political and economic groups that seek to silence them through threats or public discrediting. Attackers, taking advantage of public discourse and digital platforms, are intensifying their attacks to diminish their reputations and undermine public trust in their work.

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66 GENDER IN THE MEDIA 2023: RESEARCH ON HOW GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS REPORTED ON NATIONAL TELEVISION CHANNELS, <https://isppi.ukim.edu.mk/sites/default/files/isppi/print/istrazuvalki-studii/rodot-vo-mediumite-2023.pdf>

## PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONSEQUENCES

One of the most obvious impacts of violence against women journalists is the negative consequences on their mental health. This is particularly true for those working on topics related to corruption, politics and human rights, especially gender equality, where the risk of violence is significantly increased. Pressure and fear of reprisals often lead to self-censorship – a self-imposed limitation of the scope and content of their work, in order to avoid further attacks or threats. In this way, not only is freedom of expression restricted, but the quality and objectivity of journalistic work is also diminished. Violence also has serious professional consequences for women journalists. Due to fear of attacks or constant pressure, some of them decide to withdraw from journalism, especially when institutions do not provide adequate protection. Another common reaction is the avoidance of sensitive or “dangerous” topics, which directly affects the informative function of the media and reduces the range of issues covered. In this way, women journalists face a double blow – restriction of their professional freedom and discrediting by perpetrators who achieve their effect through intimidation. This reduces women journalists’ influence in the media industry and creates inequality in access to important topics and public debates.

## ONGOING EFFORTS AND GOOD PRACTICES TO IMPROVE SAFETY

Addressing the challenges of the safety of women journalists requires a comprehensive approach that involves local and international actors in creating a safe and supportive environment. In North Macedonia, as well as globally, significant efforts are being made to strengthen capacities and provide support to women journalists through initiatives by journalist associations, support networks and international programs<sup>67</sup>. For example, in October 2024, the Journalists’ Safety Manual was promoted by the AJM<sup>68</sup> in cooperation with the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Ministry of Interior, which offers a more efficient first response in the event of an attack on a journalist, and then an efficient protection procedure.

Furthermore, the establishment of the *Ednakva (Equal)* network in 2024 represents a positive example of raising awareness and strengthening the fight for gender equality in the media. This initiative unites women journalists, media professionals and organizations with a common goal – creating conditions for equality and safety for women in the media industry. *Ednakva* actively works to promote gender-sensitive reporting, provide support to women journalists facing discrimination or violence, as well as advocate for improving the legislative framework and institutional mechanisms. Through its activities, the *Ednakva* network encourages public debate on the importance of gender equality in the media and emphasizes the role of women journalists as key actors in a democratic

67 EDNAKVA, women’s media network, <https://ssnm.org.mk/ednakva>

68 MKD\_ZNM\_Priracnik-za-bezbednost-na-novinari-010824-2.pdf

society. Organizing trainings, workshops and awareness-raising campaigns contributes to creating an inclusive media environment that recognizes and addresses the specific challenges faced by women journalists. This example shows that with solidarity, coordinated efforts and commitment, significant changes can be achieved towards advancing the rights and safety of women in the media sector. These efforts are of great importance in raising awareness and protecting women who face threats, harassment and violence.

In North Macedonia, journalist associations play a key role in supporting women journalists. Associations such as the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) conduct awareness-raising campaigns on the rights of women journalists and provide mechanisms for legal support and protection. They represent the interests of women journalists before institutions and demand appropriate sanctions for violence and threats. In addition, there are networks to support women journalists that offer platforms for sharing experiences, strengthening their solidarity and mobilizing society to protect the rights of women media workers. Internationally, good practices and models for the protection of women journalists encompass a range of activities that are also applicable at the local level. Organizations such as the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) provide standards and guidelines for the protection of journalists, including programs for women journalists. Collective protection models, such as early warning networks and incident reporting platforms, have proven effective in enhancing the safety of publicly active women. These models encourage institutions and media organizations to take a proactive role in protecting women journalists. Safety training for women journalists is an important step towards building their resilience to violence and threats. These trainings often include physical safety, self-protection, and stress-management techniques<sup>69</sup>. In North Macedonia, as well as in the region, journalistic organizations and civic initiatives organize trainings that help women develop skills in identifying and deterring potential dangers.

In addition to physical safety, the focus is also on mental health, in order to provide emotional support and appropriate coping strategies for traumatic experiences. Digital safety is a key aspect of protection for women journalists, given the increased online harassment and cyber-attacks. Digital safety training includes practical tools for protecting online identities, safe use of communication platforms and prevention of cyber-attacks. Media organizations collaborate with experts to provide women journalists with access to security software, encrypted communication and techniques for reducing digital risks. These trainings enable women journalists to remain active and engaged, even in conditions of increased threats.

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69 Building support systems for women journalists, <https://pina.mk/8106-gradene-sistemi-za-poddrshka-na-zhenite-novinarki/>

## POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

Political pressures and targeting of women journalists pose a serious challenge to media freedom and the protection of women journalists in North Macedonia.<sup>70</sup> Often, women who publicly express their criticism of the ruling structures or raise issues of corruption, human rights and social injustice are exposed to political attacks and pressures. These attacks can manifest themselves through public discrediting, threats, pressures for censorship or even legal proceedings aimed at intimidating and silencing them. Political influences on the media are often used to manipulate public opinion, and women journalists, due to their specific position, are vulnerable to targeted attacks that call into question their personal and professional integrity. These attacks not only affect their personal safety, but also undermine their credibility as messengers of the public interest. Institutional failures to address violence and harassment the situation for women journalists even worse. Despite the existence of legislation and mechanisms for protection against violence, in practice there are significant shortcomings in their implementation. Women journalists who face threats, harassment or physical attacks rarely receive timely and effective support from institutions. Often, institutional inertia or insufficient commitment to law enforcement creates a culture of impunity, which further encourages attackers. Systemic strengthening of institutions and provision of real protection are needed in order to overcome the insufficient institutional response and create a safe environment for women media workers<sup>71</sup>.

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70 DISCRIMINATION AND HATE SPEECH IN THE MEDIA AND PUBLIC COMMUNICATION, <https://ima.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/diskriminaczi%D1%98ata-i-govorot-na-omraza-vo-mediumite-i-%D1%98avnata-komunikaczi%D1%98a-analizi.pdf>

71 From normalization to self-censorship – ANALYSIS of online harassment of women journalists in North Macedonia, [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/5/526988\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/5/526988_0.pdf)

# VIII Conclusions

Women journalists face a wide range of threats and attacks, including physical and sexual violence, online harassment, discrimination and political pressures. These threats stem from multiple factors, including social, political, economic and technological aspects. The causes of such threats are deeply rooted in the social context, where patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes create a hostile environment for women in public discourse. They are often the target of sexualized discrediting, verbal harassment and attacks that target their appearance, sex or gender.

Political influences, in turn, play a significant role in generating pressure on journalists, especially when they investigate issues of public interest that involve corruption and abuse of power. In such cases, women journalists are exposed to serious threats from politically motivated individuals and structures, which further deteriorates their professional safety.

The consequences of such threats are profound and complex. First, they cause psychological trauma and anxiety among the journalists concerned, which can lead to self-imposed censorship, giving up on professional obligations or leaving the profession altogether. Second, violence against women journalists not only threatens individual journalists, but also has a significant wider impact on media freedom and pluralism in society. When women journalists are silenced through violence or intimidation, the balance of different voices and perspectives in the media space is disrupted. Media pluralism is essential for a democratic society, as it enables informed public debate and the exchange of ideas. When women's voices are silenced, the public is deprived of their views, experiences and analyses, leading to a one-sided discourse and the dominance of certain groups or interests. The effects of this situation on public debate and democratic participation are far-reaching.

Violence against women journalists, as part of a broader culture of intimidation, is structural and undermines trust in the media and discourages other women from participating in the public sphere. When public debates are limited by fear and pressure, the democratic process becomes vulnerable to manipulation and corruption. A media environment that tolerates or does not respond appropriately to violence

against women journalists undermines the credibility of the media as the “Fourth Estate” and reduces their ability to hold governments to account. Tackling violence against women journalists is therefore imperative for protecting media freedom, but also for strengthening democracy and justice in society.

Economic factors also affect their vulnerability. Insufficient financial independence of the media can lead to editorial pressures or conditions for self-imposed censorship. ITUJMW research and relevant analyses show that women are underrepresented as managers and owners in the media industry in Macedonia. Although women are more numerous in editorial offices and are often considered the “workforce” in the media, the highest positions – executives, managers and owners – are dominated by men. For example, according to the data, the difference in the number of managers / executives is 47 in favour of men, and in terms of ownership, there is only one woman-owner of a media outlet in the country<sup>72</sup>. When it comes to editorial positions, although there are media outlets where women are editors-in-chief (such as MIA and MRT), at the industry level, men are more numerous in these functions as well, which confirms that gender inequality is most pronounced precisely in the positions where key decisions are made.

In terms of media as employers, the support they offer is often limited. Some newsrooms have basic policies to prevent discrimination or harassment, but structural measures such as safety protocols or mental health programs are rarely implemented. Research shows that in many cases; media outlets do not adequately prepare their employees to deal with the stress and risks associated with their work.

Finally, the weak legal response to perpetrators reinforces the sense of impunity and sets a dangerous precedent for future cases of violence. Responses to such threats, although present, are still ineffective and insufficient. Existing laws protecting journalists are not always adequately enforced, and institutional protection mechanisms are inadequate or unprepared to respond to the specific needs of women journalists. These shortcomings require priority institutional reform and support.

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72 Women as the workforce, men in decision-making positions – the most common image in the media 08.03.2024, <https://nezavisen.mk/zhenite-rabotna-sila-mazhite-na-odluchuvachki-pozicii-naichesta-slika-vo-mediumite/>

# IX Recommendations

## —LEGAL AND POLITICAL REFORMS

### STRENGTHENING EXISTING LAWS AND ENSURING GENDER-SENSITIVE IMPLEMENTATION:

It is necessary to review and strengthen existing laws that protect journalists and women, explicitly addressing the specific forms of violence and discrimination that women journalists face.

Given the frequent cases of gender-based violence against women journalists, especially online, the competent institutions should consider the possibility of introducing a qualified form of the criminal offense of sexual harassment, provided for in the Criminal Code, with stricter penalties when the offense is committed against journalists in the performance of professional duties. This amendment would recognize the special role and vulnerability of journalists, particularly women journalists, as providers of public information and would contribute to stronger protection from threats, insults, and harassment aimed at silencing or discrediting them. In addition, it would send a clear message of zero tolerance for gender-motivated attacks on female media workers.

Additionally, proper implementation of the laws in practice should be ensured, with a particular focus on effective investigation of cases and imposition of appropriate sanctions.

Developing mechanisms for the prevention of online abuse and ensuring accountability: Effective mechanisms for the prevention of online violence and for ensuring accountability on social media and other digital platforms need to be developed. This includes establishing procedures for the prompt removal of offensive content and sanctioning users who engage in cyberbullying. It also requires cooperation with digital platforms to develop tools to protect journalists from online attacks and to identify and remove fake profiles and bots that spread disinformation and disturbing content.

## — INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENTS

Training for police and judicial authorities on dealing with gender-based threats: It is necessary to implement specialized training programs for police officers and judicial authorities on dealing with the specific threats and challenges faced by women journalists. This training should cover topics such as gender sensitivity, cybercrime, psychological aspects of violence and journalists' rights. The aim is to improve their understanding of the complexity of these cases and to ensure effective and timely responses to reports of violence.

Establish units to respond to and protect women journalists at risk: It is necessary to consider the possibility of creating specialized units within the police and prosecutors' offices that would be responsible for investigating and resolving cases of violence against women journalists. These units should be composed of trained professionals with expertise in the field of gender-based violence, including digital violence, and media freedoms. Their task would be to ensure a rapid and effective response to threats, protect the journalists concerned, and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Additionally, educational programs in secondary education and higher education, especially journalism studies, should be developed. for digital security, recognizing and dealing with online violence and self-protection techniques.

## — SUPPORT MECHANISMS

Psychological and legal support for affected journalists: It is necessary to provide accessible and available psychological counselling, legal aid and other necessary support services for women journalists facing violence and threats, including the establishment of emergency helplines. It is important to ensure confidentiality and discretion in the provision of these services, in order to encourage women journalists to seek help without fear of stigmatization or reprisals. In addition, legal aid for women journalists is essential for their protection and empowerment. Legal aid programs include access to legal counselling, filing lawsuits and representation before the courts, with the aim of sanctioning offenders. This legal protection strengthens the confidence of women journalists that they can seek help and that institutions will protect them<sup>73</sup>. By integrating legal, digital and psychological support, a comprehensive system is created that can effectively address the challenges of violence and threats faced by women journalists.

These services are partly provided by the associations of journalists and media workers in which journalists have the most trust, and hence it is important for the state to provide financial support to the associations. Journalists should also use the existing counselling centres and legal clinics that already provide specialized services for victims of gender-based

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73 Safety guide for journalists: a handbook for reporters in high-risk environments, [https://www.osce.org/files/MAK%20Guidebook%20Safety%20on%20Journalists\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/MAK%20Guidebook%20Safety%20on%20Journalists_FINAL.pdf)

violence. In addition, the Law on Free Legal Aid should be amended in a way that will provide primary and secondary legal aid to all victims of gender-based violence, regardless of their financial situation, which will also provide legal support to journalists who have faced gender-based violence.

Promoting solidarity and gender-sensitive work environments in media organizations: Media organizations need to promote policies and practices that support gender equality and create a safe and inclusive work environment. This includes adopting codes of conduct that prohibit discrimination, harassment and sexual harassment, as well as establishing procedures for reporting and addressing such cases. In addition, media organizations should encourage their employees to participate in gender-sensitivity and safety training, including online safety, in order to increase their awareness of the challenges faced by women journalists and develop skills to address threats.

The media needs to take a proactive role by creating safe working environments, providing regular training, and introducing mechanisms for reporting and resolving cases of harassment and violence<sup>74</sup>.

## — PUBLIC AWARENESS RAISING AND ADVOCACY

Public campaigns to address societal norms and gender-based violence: Public campaigns need to be implemented to raise awareness about the importance of media freedom and the challenges faced by women journalists. These campaigns should aim to challenge societal norms and gender stereotypes that contribute to violence and discrimination against women in the media. It is important to promote positive examples of women journalists who are successful and influential in their work and to encourage dialogue on gender equality and the importance of free and independent reporting.

Involving civil society organizations and the media in advocacy efforts: There is a need to encourage cooperation between the government, civil society organizations and the media in joint efforts to promote the safety of women journalists and to strengthen democracy and human rights. This includes forming partnerships to conduct awareness-raising campaigns, organizing conferences and seminars to exchange experiences and knowledge, as well as monitoring cases of violence and pressure on journalists and advocating for the effective protection of their rights.

Finally, it is necessary to work on raising public awareness about the importance of media freedom and the specific challenges faced by women journalists. Partnerships of professional associations of journalists with women's civic associations and the media, as well as public discussions, will help change societal attitudes and reduce gender

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74 Information obtained through focus groups and interviews with women journalists and media editors

bias. With joint efforts by government institutions, civil society and international partners, North Macedonia can make significant strides towards protecting women in the media and strengthening democracy and human rights..

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