

The safety of women journalists and media workers - Bosnia and Herzegovina Brief 2025

Author: Maja Radevic

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1. Introduction and Methodology

This policy brief provides an analytical update on the safety, working conditions and institutional protection of women journalists and media workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) during 2025. It builds on previous monitoring of attacks on journalists and aims to identify emerging trends related specifically to gender-based threats, harassment and discrimination affecting women in the profession.

The analysis covers the period from January to December 2025 and draws on several sources. Quantitative data were collected from the SafeJournalists Network (SJN) database and the Free Media Help Line (FMHL)¹ register on attacks and threats against journalists. Qualitative data were obtained through desk research, review of public reports and documents, interviews and insights gathered from a focus group discussion with women journalists.

The focus group was organized in January 2026 and included eight (8) participants from different types of media (television, online portals, print media, radio and freelance journalism), with professional experience ranging from three to twenty-two years. The discussion explored three key areas: the position of women journalists within newsrooms, pressures and threats coming from outside the media sector and experiences with gender-based violence and harassment. Participants represented both national and local media outlets, allowing insight into how risks vary depending on media type, editorial environment and reporting topics.

The brief also draws on reported cases of threats, attacks and legal proceedings involving women journalists in BiH in 2025. These cases illustrate broader patterns in the safety environment for journalists and highlight both progress and persistent shortcomings in institutional responses.

¹ Free Media Help Line is a part of BH Journalists Association (BHJA), which functions as an internal service for mapping the media freedom's violations, rights and safety of journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and which provides free legal and psychological assistance to journalists and media outlets in the country.

One of the key methodological limitations concerns underreporting. Many incidents of threats, harassment and discrimination against women journalists are never formally reported to authorities or recorded in monitoring databases by media outlets or media and journalists associations. Interviews and focus group discussions indicate that this underreporting is largely driven by distrust in institutions, fear of additional victimization and the perception that threats are an unavoidable part of journalistic work.

Despite these limitations, the data provide a reliable overview of key developments and trends affecting women journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina during 2025. This overview also reflects broader structural challenges within the media environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Gender-based threats against women journalists rarely occur in isolation, but rather intersect with political pressures, economic insecurity within the media sector and weak institutional responses to attacks on journalists more broadly. Understanding these interrelated dynamics is essential for assessing both the scale of risks faced by women journalists and the effectiveness of existing protection mechanisms.

2. Protection of women journalists and media workers

Bosnia and Herzegovina has made certain legislative steps toward aligning its legal framework with international standards on gender-based violence, particularly those stemming from the Istanbul Convention. However, existing legal and policy mechanisms still do not sufficiently address the specific risks faced by women journalists. In practice, this gap reflects a broader disconnect between formal legal guarantees and their implementation. While BiH has adopted several laws addressing discrimination and violence, these frameworks rarely translate into targeted protection for journalists facing gender-based harassment. As a result, women journalists often remain dependent on general legal provisions that are not designed to respond to the specific patterns of intimidation and harassment characteristic of attacks against media workers.²

In 2025, the Federation of BiH started implementing amendments to the Criminal Code³ that introduced new criminal offenses committed through information and communication technologies, including provisions on the online psychological violence, harassment and threats to safety through social networks. For the first time, it is defined in domestic law that the Internet, social networks, mobile phones, computers and similar electronic means are possible instruments for the commission of criminal acts, and that any act committed in this way can be prosecuted.⁴ The importance of these amendments is reflected in the fact that, according to data from law enforcement agencies, around 70 percent of reported attacks on journalists occur in the online sphere, that is, through information and communication technologies.

2 BHA and SafeJournalists, „[Safety of Women Journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2024](#)“, author: Lajla Zaimović Kurtović

3 Službene novine Federacije BiH broj: 58/25
[https://parlamentfbih.gov.ba/v2/userfiles/file/Usvojeni%20materijali_2025/Krivi%C4%87ni_zakon_izmjene_BOS\(1\).pdf](https://parlamentfbih.gov.ba/v2/userfiles/file/Usvojeni%20materijali_2025/Krivi%C4%87ni_zakon_izmjene_BOS(1).pdf)

4 <https://www.akta.ba/vijesti/bih/197226/izmjene-zakona-fbih-prosle-nezapazeno-rodno-i-digitalno-nasilje-vise-nije-nekaznjivo>

The practical relevance of the legal changes became particularly evident in the case of Amir Pašić⁵, who was arrested following a series of online threats and misogynistic attacks targeting several women in the public sphere, including journalists. Prosecutors classified his actions as psychological violence and threats to safety, citing numerous statements containing sexualized insults, hate speech and degrading language directed at women journalists and public officials. The suspect was arrested shortly after the incident was reported and placed in pre-trial detention. The trial of the defendant Pašić is currently ongoing at the Municipal Court in Sarajevo. Although still an isolated example, this case demonstrates that the amended legal framework can be used to address severe forms of online harassment and gender-based violence against women journalists.

Despite these developments, institutional responses remain uneven. In practice, the level of protection provided to women journalists often depends on individual assessments by law enforcement authorities rather than on consistent and systematic risk evaluation.

Legal support is available primarily through civil society organizations. The Free Media Help Line, operated by the BH Journalists Association (BHJA), provides free legal and psychological assistance to journalists facing threats or violations of professional rights. Several NGO's, such as "Vaša prava BiH", also offer legal aid in cases involving labor rights violations and discrimination. While these services represent an important safety net, they cannot substitute for effective and systematic institutional protection.

At the same time, internal support mechanisms within media organizations remain limited. Most newsrooms in Bosnia and Herzegovina still lack formal protocols for responding to threats, harassment or gender-based violence against journalists. The results of a survey⁶ conducted by the BH Journalists Association, in which 116 journalists from 40 media outlets participated, showed that the majority of media organizations in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have developed internal mechanisms to protect their employees.

⁵ <https://safejournalists.net/incident/druge-prijetnje-novinarima-rabija-arifovic-magazin-stav-sarajevo-17-10-2025/>

⁶ <https://bhnovinari.ba/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Interni-kapaciteti-i-potrebe-medija-u-oblasti-zastite-novinarar-i-novinarki-u-BiH-4.pdf>

A significant number of them (48.4%) do not have a rulebook on work or any other legal act regulating the safety and protection of media professionals. At the same time, a large number of journalists are not sufficiently familiar with the legal regulations governing their rights—51.7% do not know whether any decision, rulebook, or other internal act exists, nor whether management plans to adopt such an act. Although the research was conducted in 2022, nothing significant has changed to date. As a result, many women journalists continue to rely primarily on informal solidarity networks rather than structured institutional support within their media organizations.⁷ The absence of institutionalized safety mechanisms within newsrooms increases the vulnerability of women journalists, particularly freelancers and those working in smaller local media outlets. Without clear internal procedures for reporting threats, assessing risks and providing support, journalists are often left to manage security threats on their own. This institutional gap can further discourage reporting of harassment and contributes to the normalization of hostile behavior toward women journalists.⁸

⁷ Focus group with women journalists, January 2026.

⁸ BHJA and SafeJournalists, Bosnia and Herzegovina - Journalists' Safety Index 2025., author: Maja Radević

3. Patterns and forms of incidents affecting women journalists

Incident category	Number of cases		Number of cases reported to competent authorities (police, prosecutor)		Number of cases in which formal proceedings were initiated		Number of cases containing gender-based elements
	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	
Death threats	3	0	3	0	3	0	0
Other threats	27	5	8	3	5	2	4
Physical attacks	5	3	5	3	5	3	0

Table 1: Incidents against journalists in BiH, 2025 ([SafeJournalists database](#))

In total, eight (8) cases of threats and attacks against women journalists from Bosnia and Herzegovina were registered within the SafeJournalists Network monitoring system in 2025. Five incidents targeted individual women journalists, while three were directed at groups of journalists including women. Importantly, around half of the recorded incidents contained explicit elements of gender-based violence. This pattern suggests that women journalists are not only exposed to the general risks faced by the profession but are also disproportionately targeted through gender-specific forms of intimidation. The presence of gender-based elements in nearly half of the recorded incidents indicates that harassment frequently aims to undermine the credibility, professionalism and public participation of women journalists by attacking their gender identity rather than their reporting. Such dynamics contribute to a chilling effect, discouraging women journalists from engaging in investigative reporting or participating in public debate.

3.1 Other threats and harassment

Threats and harassment represent the most frequent type of incident affecting women journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. These include verbal threats, intimidation, insults and harassment both online and offline. Gender-based elements are particularly visible in this category. Women journalists often face attacks targeting their physical appearance, personal lives or perceived morality rather than their professional work. Sexualized insults and attempts to undermine their professional credibility are common forms of harassment.

A highly visible example occurred in the case involving online threats and harassment directed at journalists Rabija Arifović and Dalija Hasanbegović-Konaković, as well as BHJA Secretary General Borka Rudić and Deputy Minister for Human Rights and Refugees Duška Jurišić. The suspect was accused of using misogynistic language, sexualized insults and hate speech through social media platforms. Authorities responded by arresting the suspect and filing an indictment against the suspect.⁹ This case illustrates how digital platforms have become a primary channel for gender-based harassment against women in public life, including journalists. Effective institutional response in such cases is therefore essential not only for individual protection, but also for signalling that misogynistic hate speech and intimidation in the online space will not be tolerated. Consistent prosecution of similar incidents could contribute to strengthening trust in institutional protection mechanisms among journalists.

3.2 Threats to life and physical safety

Threats to life and physical safety remain less frequent than harassment, but they are particularly alarming due to their potential to escalate into physical violence.

⁹ <https://federalna.ba/potvrdena-optuznica-protiv-amira-pasica-face-tdonb>

One of the most concerning cases involved journalist Nataša Miljanović Zubac from Trebinje. She had been exposed to repeated threats, including the burning of a car in front of her family home, threatening messages written on the entrance door of her house and leaving a doll with its head cut off and covered in red paint in front of the entrance door of the house where she was staying. Despite multiple warnings and requests from journalist protection organizations, authorities in Republika Srpska did not provide adequate police protection measures.¹⁰ With the support of BH Journalists Association and international organizations, Miljanović Zubac eventually managed to hire a private security for her protection.

The case illustrates serious weaknesses in institutional risk assessment mechanisms. Even when credible threats exist, protective measures are not always implemented in a timely or consistent manner.

3.3 Physical attacks

Physical attacks against journalists are relatively rare compared to other forms of pressure but remain a serious threat to media freedom. In 2025, one recorded attack occurred in a group context involving women journalists. CIN journalist Renata Radić-Dragić and cameraman Dženat Dreković were attacked at the end of February in Brčko while working on a story about politician and businessman Zoran Kokanović. The woman who attacked them was found guilty in August 2025 by the Basic Court of the Brčko District and was fined. This case is a good example of an efficient and swift investigation and the sanctioning of attacks against journalists.¹¹ Although women journalists were not individually targeted in this particular incident, such attacks still contribute to a broader climate of insecurity.

Experience from previous years indicates that physical violence against journalists often occurs during field reporting, particularly in politically sensitive environments or during coverage of protests and local political events. In some cases, online harassment campaigns precede or accompany physical intimidation, creating an escalation dynamic from digital threats to offline violence.

10 [International Federation of Journalists: Letter of Support for Nataša Mijanović-Zubac](#), 13.06.2024.

11 <https://safejournalists.net/incident/actual-attacks-to-journalist-renata-radic-dragic-and-cameraman-dzenet-drekovic-cin-sarajevo-27-2-2025/>

4. Online harassment

Online harassment remains one of the most widespread forms of violence against women journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Social media platforms have become the primary space where gender-based attacks are expressed. Digital environments enable harassment campaigns to spread rapidly and reach large audiences, amplifying their impact on targeted journalists. Unlike traditional forms of intimidation, online harassment often involves coordinated attacks by multiple users, making it more difficult to identify perpetrators and pursue legal accountability. This dynamic intensify the psychological impact on women journalists and further complicate institutional responses.¹²

Focus group participants reported that online harassment frequently includes:

- insults targeting physical appearance
- sexualized comments and threats
- questioning of professional competence
- attempts to discredit journalists by referring to their private lives.

One participant described that when she reports about politics, online comments rarely address the content of her reporting but instead focus on her appearance or personal life.

Online threats	Number of cases		Number of cases reported to competent authorities (police, prosecutor)		Number of cases in which formal proceedings were initiated		Number of cases containing gender-based elements
	Total	Women	Total	Women	Total	Women	
Death threats	2	0	2	0	2	0	0
Other threats	8	5	4	2	1	1	2

Table 2: Online harassment against women journalists, 2025

¹² Research on mental health of journalists in BiH, conducted in 2025, by ProEduca with BHJA and SafeJournalists, showed that female journalists are more prone to anxiety, depression and fear than their male colleagues

Although several cases have been reported to authorities, institutional responses remain inconsistent. Many women journalists perceive online threats as insufficiently investigated unless they involve explicit death threats.

Nevertheless, the arrest of a suspect in the case of online harassment against several women journalists indicates a potential shift toward greater recognition of online violence as a serious offence.

5. Investigations into attacks on journalists and media workers

Investigations into threats and attacks against journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina remain uneven in terms of effectiveness, speed and consistency. Out of a total of 35 incidents recorded in 2025 by FMHL and the SafeJournalists network, only 5 cases were investigated and resolved in favor of journalists. In terms of the overall number of cases - which, in addition to threats and attacks, also include SLAPP lawsuits, defamation lawsuits, discrimination, and workplace harassment - the situation is somewhat better. In 2025, a total of 11 cases were resolved in favor of journalists.¹³

Some cases demonstrate progress in judicial recognition of gender-based harassment. In November 2025, the Basic Court in Banja Luka issued a first-instance judgment against the mayor of Šipovo for discrimination and harassment against journalists of “Naratorium” web portal. The court concluded that the mayor’s statements included degrading and sexualised language targeting a woman journalist, constituting harassment and discrimination. The court states in its ruling that the woman journalist (Alena Beširević) was attacked and insulted via telephone and discriminated against because of her gender, while the male journalist (Harun Dinarević) was discriminated against due to his presumed sexual orientation. This decision represents the first judicial recognition in BiH of gender-based harassment against journalists as a form of unlawful conduct.¹⁴

At the same time, other cases reveal problematic institutional practices. The investigation involving journalist Nataša Miljanović Zubac illustrates the risks of disproportionate investigative measures.¹⁵ Acting on an order from the BiH Prosecutor’s Office, police searched her home and confiscated equipment on suspicion of revealing official secrets. However, the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina rejected the prosecution’s request for restrictive measures, finding no reasonable suspicion that a criminal offence had been committed.¹⁶

¹³ Free Media Help Line database

¹⁴ <https://safejournalists.net/bs/prva-presuda-za-diskriminaciju-novinara-u-bih-kao-pobjeda-protiv-politickih-mocnika/>

¹⁵ [BH JOURNALISTS: We demand freedom for Nataša Miljanović Zubac and a hearing in the presence of a lawyer and SafeJournalists and EFJ: Immediately release and drop charges for journalist Nataša Miljanović Zubac in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), 08.08.2025.

¹⁶ [Detektor.ba, Sud BiH odbio odrediti mjere zabrane novinarki Nataši Miljanović Zubac](#), 20.08.2025.

This case raises concerns about the potential chilling effect of investigative actions against journalists, particularly when such actions are later found to be unjustified.

Another challenge relates to the classification of incidents. Gender-based aspects of threats are often not adequately recognised during investigations. Authorities frequently treat such cases as general threats rather than addressing the misogynistic or discriminatory elements of the attack. As a result, the gendered nature of these attacks often remains invisible in official statistics and policy responses. This limits the ability of institutions to design targeted protective measures and undermines broader efforts to address gender-based violence in the media sector. Recognising and documenting misogynistic motives in threats against women journalists is therefore essential for developing more effective prevention and accountability mechanisms.

Communication between law enforcement institutions and journalists' organizations somewhat improved with establishing 33 contact points for the journalist's safety within¹⁷ the police agencies and prosecution offices. Still, their effectiveness varies significantly. Their responsibilities include monitoring reported cases, assigning cases to the competent prosecutors, overseeing actions taken ex officio and improving communication between institutions, journalists, and civil society organizations. Although journalists state that contact persons are generally helpful, due to a lack of trust in the judiciary, a significant number of cases still remain unreported.

17 HJPC BiH, <https://vstv.pravosudje.ba/vstvfo/B/103/kategorije-vijesti/122926/122946/123043>

6. Impact on women journalists

Threats, harassment and discrimination have significant professional and psychological consequences for women journalists. Focus group participants reported that gender-based attacks often affect their sense of personal safety and professional confidence. Several participants stated that threats received online or in person created lasting stress and anxiety, particularly when authorities failed to respond effectively.

One women journalist noted that threats directed at male colleagues are usually treated as attacks on media freedom, while threats against women are sometimes dismissed or minimised.

These dynamics contribute to self-censorship. Some women journalists reported avoiding certain topics (especially politics, corruption or organised crime) to reduce the risk of harassment.

Gender dynamics also influence professional opportunities within newsrooms. While formal equality largely exists, informal hierarchies persist. Political and security-related topics are still more frequently assigned to male journalists, while women are often expected to cover “softer” topics, such as culture or lifestyle.

Several participants of the focus group also described burnout and professional fatigue resulting from the combination of economic insecurity and safety concerns. Four of the eight journalists participating in the focus group indicated that they had considered leaving journalism altogether.

Such trends have broader implications for media pluralism. If women journalists withdraw from reporting on politically sensitive issues due to safety risks, important perspectives may disappear from public debate.

7. Conclusions

Key conclusions

The safety environment for women journalists in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2025 is characterised by several key trends.

1. Threats and harassment remain the most common form of pressure, particularly in the online environment. These attacks frequently contain explicit gender-based elements such as misogynistic language, sexualized insults and attempts to discredit journalists on the basis of gender.

2. Institutional responses remain inconsistent. While some cases demonstrate progress—such as court recognition of gender-based harassment—many incidents still face slow investigations, limited prosecution and inadequate protection measures.

3. Underreporting remains a significant challenge. Many women journalists choose not to report threats due to lack of trust in institutions and insufficient support within newsrooms.

4. Threats and harassment have tangible consequences for the profession. They contribute to self-censorship, professional burnout and reduced participation of women journalists in reporting on politically sensitive issues.

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action by institutions, media organisations and international actors.

8. Recommendations

Decision-makers and policy makers

- Develop a national strategy or action plan specifically addressing the safety of journalists (women and men), including gender-sensitive protection measures.
- Ensure consistent application of the Criminal Code and other laws in cases involving gender-based harassment against women journalists.
- Improve data collection on threats and attacks against journalists (women and men), with systematic gender disaggregation.

Police, prosecution and courts

- Introduce specialized trainings/educations on gender-based violence and online harassment directed at women journalists.
- Ensure that investigations into threats against all journalists, especially ones involving online harassment, consider gender-based motivations and misogynistic elements.
- Improve risk assessment procedures and ensure timely protective measures in cases involving credible threats.

Media outlets and editorial teams

- Develop internal gender policy and safety protocols for responding to threats and harassment against women journalists.
- Provide legal and psychological support for women journalists exposed to attacks.
- Promote gender equality in editorial decision-making and ensure equal opportunities for women journalists to cover all reporting areas.

Professional associations and trade unions

- Strengthen monitoring mechanisms for gender-based attacks against women in media.
- Expand legal and psychological support programmes for women journalists facing threats or harassment.
- Promote awareness campaigns addressing misogyny and online violence against women in media.

Civil society and international actors

- Continue supporting monitoring and advocacy initiatives on journalist safety, especially focused to women journalists.
- Encourage institutional reforms through international cooperation and funding mechanisms.
- Support research and regional cooperation on gender-based violence against women journalists and other women in media.

