

# The safety of women journalists and media workers - Kosovo Brief 2025

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# Executive Summary

Women journalists in Kosovo face a range of threats and harassment that undermine media freedom and gender equality. Monitoring by the SafeJournalists network and the Association of Journalists of Kosovo - AJK shows dozens of incidents targeting women reporters each year. For example, between 2021 and 2025 AJK documented 37 attacks exclusively against women journalists. The vast majority of these incidents involve non-physical harassment 17 cases and online intimidation, while direct physical attacks on women and threats to life are comparatively rare. Nonetheless, the form of abuse women face is often gendered, including coordinated online smear campaigns, sexist insults, threats of sexual violence and doxxing, which research finds causes significant psychological harm. One survey of women journalists found that hostile incidents “impact their mental health, professional confidence, and career progression,” frequently leading to self-censorship or even withdrawal from critical reporting.

These patterns point to a hostile environment for women in media. Kosovo’s legal and institutional framework offers some general protections (for example, an anti-discrimination law covering gender), but lacks clear provisions or enforcement mechanisms specifically for journalists (current media laws do not define or sanction sexual harassment and gender-based content). Institutional responses are often slow or insufficient; as a result, many women reporters do not formally report abuses for fear of retaliation. In response, Kosovo’s journalist community has mobilized: in late 2024 the Association of Journalists of Kosovo helped found the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo (Rrjeti i Grave Gazetare të Kosovës) to provide support and advocate for safety.

This report compiles AJK and RrGGK data on incidents affecting women journalists and analyzes their impacts. It shows that harassment (especially online) is the most pervasive threat, while physical violence is less common. Weak investigation and accountability have left many attacks unresolved, further chilling press freedom. Drawing on qualitative research and official records, the report concludes that urgent measures are needed to strengthen protections, from better laws and capacity building, to workplace policies and support networks. Key recommendations are offered for policymakers, law enforcement, media outlets, journalist associations, and civil society to create a safer, more inclusive media environment.

# 1. Introduction and Methodology

This report examines threats, harassment and violence against women journalists and media workers in Kosovo. It draws mainly on data and analysis produced by Kosovo's media community itself, notably the Association of Journalists of Kosovo (AJK) and the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo (RrGGK) supplemented by regional monitoring (SafeJournalists Network). The core findings come from two recent AJK reports: "Position and Safety of Women Journalists in Kosovo" (2025)<sup>1</sup> and "Kosovo – Women Journalists' Safety 2024"<sup>2</sup>, as well as AJK's public incident database<sup>3</sup> and press releases. These combine quantitative tracking of individual attack alerts with qualitative evidence (interviews, surveys and focus groups) among women reporters.

The AJK 2024 report, is based on interviews, focus groups and analysis of national data. It reviews Kosovo's international obligations and legal framework, compiles all recorded safety alerts for women journalists (2021–2024), and gathers testimonies on experiences of online abuse, workplace harassment, defamation suits and other pressures. AJK's Cases portal and SafeJournalists alerts were mined for incident counts and patterns. The new Kosovo Women Journalists' Network (RrGGK), established October 2024, also provided contacts and insights; its stated mission is "to create an inclusive environment for women in media" and a "safe space" to address workplace problems. Where available, AJK's findings are cross-checked against police reports and court records. Overall, this report is grounded in local data and expertise (over 70% of citations are from AJK/RrGGK sources) and aims to give a comprehensive picture of the threats facing Kosovo's women journalists.

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1 POSITION AND SAFETY OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN KOSOVO, AJK 2024, <https://AJK-ks.org/en/publications/position-and-safety-of-women-journalists-in-kosovo/>

2 Kosovo women Journalists Safety 2024, AJK, 2025 <https://agk-ks.org/en/publications/kosovo-women-journalists-safety-2024/>

3 AJK CASES <https://AJK-ks.org/en/cases/>

## 2. Protection of women journalists and media workers

The legal framework in Kosovo provides general protections against gender-based discrimination, but lacks specific safeguards for journalists, especially online. For example, Law No. 05/L-021 on Protection from Discrimination<sup>4</sup> prohibits unequal treatment on grounds of gender. In principle this forbids sexual harassment and misogyny, including in media workplaces. However, enforcement is weak: AJK reports that the law's safeguards are "underutilized in the media sector". There are no explicit legal provisions on cyber-harassment of journalists or on preventing gendered hate speech in the media. Notably, Kosovo's media laws do not define sexual harassment or gender-discriminatory content, nor impose institutional duties to address them. This gap means that sexist abuse often slips outside formal legal remedies.

Institutionally, Kosovo has begun to focus on gender and media. International partners (OSCE, UN Women, British Council) and local NGOs have funded training and monitoring on hate speech and online safety. In 2024, AJK established the Kosovo Women Journalists' Network (RrGGK)<sup>5</sup> to address these needs. The network brings together senior women editors and reporters to share best practices and advocate collectively. Its mission, as announced by AJK, is "to create an inclusive environment for women working in the media, to prevent the use of sexist and misogynistic language in public discourse, and to create a safe space for addressing problems encountered on the field or within the workplace". Membership is open to all women media workers, aiming to increase solidarity.

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4 LAW NO. 05/L-021 ON THE PROTECTION FROM DISCRIMINATION <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=10924&langid=2>

5 AJK ESTABLISHES THE NETWORK OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS OF KOSOVA, AJK, 2024 <https://AJK-ks.org/en/news/AJK-ja-themelon-rrjetin-e-grave-gazetare-te-kosoves/>

Despite these steps, on-the-ground protection remains limited. There are no standard safety protocols in most newsrooms, no dedicated helpline for journalists, and few cases where police or courts have been proactively guided to treat crimes against women journalists as a priority. AJK and RrGGK have repeatedly called on authorities to adopt a national safety framework (following EU and Council of Europe recommendations), train police on gender-sensitive response, and track cases by gender. To date, however, Kosovo lacks a unified action plan or public report on violence against journalists. In practice, most support for women reporters has come from within the profession (AJK) and civil society networks, rather than from state institutions.

# 3. Patterns and forms of incidents affecting women journalists

## 3.1 Quantitative Overview

Between 2021 and 2025, Kosovo's media monitors recorded 37 reported incidents exclusively targeting women journalists. The vast majority of these cases fall into non-physical categories. According to AJK's database, women journalists faced 14 instances of non-physical threats and harassment (e.g. intimidation, hate speech), compared to only 1 recorded threat to life/physical safety and 9 cases of actual physical attacks. These figures point to three key trends. First, harassment clearly dominates over physical violence: 24 of the 37 incidents (63%) targeting women fall into non-physical categories. Second, life-threatening attacks remain rare for women journalists, with only two cases recorded over the five-year period (in 2023 and 2025), compared to 28 such cases targeting men. Third, while physical attacks against women do occur, they are less frequent overall (9 cases), though often linked to group incidents or high-risk reporting environments. Notably, in 2023, group incidents disproportionately involved women journalists, highlighting their exposure in collective reporting situations.

This pattern is also reflected in the 2025 data. A total of 42 incidents against journalists were recorded, of which 15 involved women. The majority of cases fall under "other threats," with 25 incidents (7 involving women), followed by 13 physical attacks, of which 7 targeted women journalists. Death threats were less frequent, with 4 cases recorded, including 1 involving a woman journalist. Out of all cases, only 4 were reported to competent authorities, and none resulted in formal proceedings. At the same time, 8 cases contained gender-based elements, all of which involved women journalists.

Table 1: Incidents against journalists in Kosovo, 2025 (AJK and RrGGK database)

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	4	1	1	/	/	/	1
Other threats	25	7	3	/	3	/	7
Physical attacks	13	7 <sup>6</sup>	/	/	/	/	/
<b>TOTAL</b>	42	15	4	/	3	/	8

Note: some cases involve two or more women victims. Gender-based = attack primarily uses gender as vector; gender-contextual = exposure in shared professional setting.

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6 All incidents occurred on election day and involved group situations, typically including two women journalists from Klan Kosova TV in each case.

## **3.2 Other threats and harassment**

Since 2021, 95 cases of non-physical threats and harassment have been recorded, of which 37 targeted women journalists. A significant share of these cases carries a gender-based dimension, making this category the primary space where gendered risks are expressed. Incidents include defamatory content, coordinated social media attacks, verbal harassment, and public statements by officials, often accompanied by misogynistic language, sexist insults, and attempts to undermine professional credibility. A defining feature of these attacks is their targeted and coordinated nature, particularly online, where multiple accounts or platforms amplify pressure within a short period. These incidents are rarely random; they are frequently linked to journalists' visibility or reporting on politically sensitive issues, aiming not only to intimidate but also to discredit. While male journalists are more often subjected to political and institutional pressure, women are disproportionately exposed to identity-based harassment.

## **3.3 Threats to life and physical safety**

In between 2021 and 2025, 30 cases (two out of which towards women journalists) of threats to life and physical safety of journalists were recorded. These included explicit death threats, threats of physical violence, and serious intimidation, delivered both online and through direct communication. Although the number of cases remains relatively low, their severity is high, with threats targeting journalists covering sensitive issues such as elections, corruption, and social topics. In some instances, police responded promptly, including identifying suspects and making arrests, which indicates a degree of institutional capacity to react in high-risk situations. However, available information on prosecutorial follow-up and final outcomes remains limited, making it difficult to assess overall effectiveness and deterrence. These threats are not isolated, but rather linked to broader political and social tensions, particularly in an election year context. Their objective extends beyond immediate intimidation, contributing to a climate of fear and pressure, with a potential chilling effect on journalistic work.

### **3.4 Actual / physical attacks**

During 2025, 13 cases of actual/physical attacks against journalists were recorded, contributing to a total of 48 cases documented between 2021-2025. In 2025 alone, 7 of these physical attacks involved women journalists, indicating a significant increase in their exposure within this category. None of the cases were reported to competent authorities, nor did any result in the initiation of formal proceedings, and no gender-based elements were formally identified in these incidents. (All incidents occurred on election day and involved group situations, typically including two women journalists from Klan Kosova TV in each case.) These incidents included physical obstruction, verbal intimidation in the field, interference with reporting, and pressure during live coverage, particularly in politically sensitive contexts such as elections. A defining feature of these attacks is their occurrence during on-the-ground reporting, where journalists are most exposed. Many incidents were not isolated, but repeated across locations and events, often taking place in group settings. While both men and women journalists were affected, the increased presence of women among victims in 2025 highlights their growing exposure in field reporting.

## 4. Online harassment

Between 2021 and 2025, online harassment has become one of the most persistent and structured forms of pressure against journalists in Kosovo, with data from AJK and RrGGK showing clear gender patterns. Across this period, at least 87 cases targeted male journalists and 36 targeted women journalists, mostly involving online threats, smear campaigns, and coordinated attacks. This trend is reflected in 2025 data, where 21 cases were recorded, 4 involving women. Of these, 19 fell under “other threats” (including defamatory and coordinated attacks), while 2 were death threats. Six cases were reported to authorities, but only four led to formal proceedings, none involving women. Notably, all cases involving women contained gender-based elements.

Women journalists report three main forms of online harassment: smear campaigns, coordinated misogynistic attacks, and direct threats. These are often multi-platform, politically triggered, and linked to public visibility. While men are more frequently targeted overall, women face more personalised, gender-based abuse. Institutional response remains limited, with many cases unreported or not leading to prosecution. Overall, online harassment functions as a systemic tool of pressure, reinforced by polarised discourse and weak enforcement mechanisms.

Table 2: Online harassment against women journalists, 2025

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	/	2	/	1	/	/
Other threats	19	4	4	1	3	/	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	21	4	6	1	4	/	4

Source: AJK, SJN and RrGGK dataset 2025, cross-referenced with institutional data<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The cases documented here reflect only the most visible or publicly recorded incidents. Daily harassment, abusive comments, insulting posts and lower-intensity attacks remain largely unrecorded, as they fall below the threshold for AJK, RrGGK and SafeJournalists Network alerts and are not systematically reported by women journalists themselves. The figures in this section should therefore be read as indicative of the forms of harm that reach public visibility, not of the overall prevalence of online harassment.

## 5. Investigations into attacks on journalists and media workers

Institutional follow-up to attacks on journalists in Kosovo remains uneven and often insufficient. Data and monitoring by Association of Journalists of Kosovo show that while some cases reported to the police result in arrests or referral to prosecution, many others stall at early stages or receive no meaningful follow-up. According to recent AJK and regional findings (including SafeJournalists Network reports), responses by law enforcement and judiciary institutions continue to be inconsistent and slow.

Cases are handled within general criminal frameworks, without prioritization or tailored expertise for media-related risks, including gender-based harassment. To this day, legal and procedural gaps persist. Threats and online harassment are often treated under general provisions (e.g., “threat” or “harassment”), without recognition of the specific role of journalists as actors of public interest. This limits both the qualification of cases and the consistency of prosecution. AJK has repeatedly called for the establishment of specialized mechanisms or focal points within police and prosecution to address attacks against journalists, including gender-sensitive approaches.

Kosovo institutions do not publish comprehensive, disaggregated data on prosecutions or conviction rates for attacks against journalists. While AJK and partners occasionally report individual cases, such as court decisions involving suspended sentences or fines, these remain exceptions rather than the norm. In many instances, cases are delayed, dismissed, or remain pending for extended periods. The cumulative effect is a weak deterrence environment. When attacks particularly threats, intimidation, and online harassment do not lead to timely and effective accountability, trust in institutions declines and journalists become less likely to seek protection through formal channels. Overall, while there are instances of institutional response, the prevailing pattern in Kosovo remains ad hoc and reactive, falling short of ensuring consistent protection and justice for journalists and media workers.

## 6. Impact on women journalists

The increasing impact of threats and harassment on women journalists in Kosovo is significant, particularly in terms of mental well-being, professional security, and working conditions. Findings from Association of Journalists of Kosovo and the Network of Women Journalists of Kosovo consistently show that exposure to threats especially gender-based and online abuse, creates stress, anxiety, and a heightened sense of vulnerability. At the same time, these impacts should be understood in a nuanced way: despite the hostile environment, women journalists in Kosovo remain highly present and active in the profession, making up approximately 65% of AJK's membership and the broader journalism community.

While threats are neither normalized nor accepted, women journalists do not generally report being discouraged from continuing their work. On the contrary, many demonstrate resilience and continued engagement in public-interest reporting. However, a key challenge repeatedly highlighted in AJK and RrGGK findings is the lack of adequate institutional and editorial support. In many cases, media organizations fail to provide protection mechanisms, legal backing, or psychosocial support, leaving women journalists to navigate risks largely on their own. This absence of support contributes to feelings of exposure and insecurity, even when journalists remain professionally committed.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Focus group with women journalists, 28.03.2026

Reporting patterns further illustrate this complexity. There has been a noticeable increase in the reporting of cases to AJK and RrGGK in recent years, indicating growing trust in professional associations as safe channels. However, this does not fully reflect the scale of the problem. A substantial portion of incidents, remain unreported. In some cases, women journalists choose to report anonymously to AJK or RrGGK to avoid stigma or to protect their families from concern. In other instances, cases are reported only to the Kosovo Police, often without full identification (e.g., using initials), in order to maintain strict privacy and confidentiality.<sup>9</sup>

The most underreported and sensitive category remains workplace harassment, including sexual harassment. Evidence from AJK and partner research indicates that such incidents frequently occur within media organizations themselves, yet are rarely formally reported due to fear of professional consequences, reputational harm, or lack of internal reporting mechanisms. This creates an additional layer of vulnerability that is less visible but deeply impactful.

Beyond professional implications, the personal toll is evident. Women journalists report experiencing anxiety, sleep disturbances, and constant alertness as a result of repeated exposure to threats and harassment. Balancing these pressures with family responsibilities often as primary caregivers, further intensifies the burden. Despite this, the prevailing trend is not withdrawal from the profession, but rather adaptation and persistence in difficult conditions.

In sum, while the impact on women journalists in Kosovo is real and multifaceted, it does not translate into widespread disengagement. Instead, it highlights a gap between individual resilience and systemic support. Addressing this gap, particularly through stronger newsroom accountability, safer reporting mechanisms, and institutional backing remains essential not only for the well-being of women journalists but also for safeguarding media pluralism and diversity in Kosovo.

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<sup>9</sup> Meeting with Kosovo Police Representatives, 05.02.2026 <https://agk-ks.org/en/news/mbahet-takimi-koordinues-me-policine-e-kosoves/>

# 7. Conclusions

## Concluding remarks

In Kosovo, women journalists occupy a precarious position. Although outright violence is relatively infrequent, persistent harassment (especially online) significantly constrains their work. Incidents targeting women journalists often involve sexist and misogynistic elements, signaling that these attacks are as much about gender as about journalism. The data show that digital and verbal abuse dominate: 17 out of 27 recorded incidents were non-physical threats against women. Meanwhile, the state's response has lagged behind the problem. Constitutional and media laws provide no clear remedy for gendered harassment, and police responses are "inadequate" and "inconsistent". This gap in protection has real consequences: women reporters frequently modify their behaviour or avoid sensitive topics to stay safe, which undercuts Kosovo's media freedom and gender equality goals.

At the same time, the professional community is mobilizing. The creation of the Kosovo Women Journalists' Network and AJK's safety reports mark important steps in recognizing the gender dimension of media safety. Regional initiatives such as the Western Balkans Declaration on Women Journalists' Safety signed in 2025 demonstrate growing awareness. However, the findings here make clear that further action is required. The following recommendations synthesize AJK and RrGGK proposals for building a safer environment for women journalists in Kosovo.

## 8. Recommendations

- **For Decision-Makers and Policymakers:** Adopt a national safety framework for journalists that explicitly includes women's needs. This should align with EU and CoE standards (e.g. Anti-SLAPP Directive, Istanbul Convention) and cover online safety and workplace protections. Amend criminal law to recognize cyber-harassment (e.g. online stalking, doxxing, misogynistic threats) as distinct offenses. Ensure that journalists are covered under laws protecting public figures (so attacks on them cannot be trivialized). Allocate specialized police resources: create a dedicated investigative unit (with trained female officers) for crimes against journalists. Implement clear inter-agency protocols so that any threat to a journalist is followed up swiftly, with evidence properly collected and case progress publicly reported. Finally, mandate regular, gender-disaggregated data collection on violence against journalists, so policymakers can track trends and hold agencies accountable.
- **For Police, Prosecution and Judiciary:** Train law enforcement and courts on the nature of gendered threats. As AJK advises, form media-protection units in the police and prosecution, staffed by officers and prosecutors knowledgeable about online and gender-based crimes. Ensure that female victims can be interviewed by female officers if desired, and have access to counseling. Expedite investigations of death threats or assaults on journalists up to and including immediate detention if risk is high. Improve victim support: inform women journalists of their rights under the Protection Against Domestic Violence Act (which includes stalking) and fast-track restraining orders when applicable. In summary, build trust in the system so that women journalists feel safe reporting crimes, and know that justice will follow.

- **For Media Organizations and Editorial Leadership:** Strengthen internal policies and culture to protect women staff. Fully comply with labor and anti-discrimination laws: employ women on formal contracts with social benefits and equal pay. Give women equal access to high-profile assignments and ensure that “soft” topics are not seen as the only roles for female reporters. Adopt clear anti-harassment policies: set up confidential reporting channels (with an independent ombudsperson or HR officer) so that staff can report sexism or abuse without fear. Offer support to victims, such as free legal advice or counseling. Implement gender equality programs in the newsroom: for example, mentoring schemes and promotion targets to raise women into decision-making roles. Make the workplace family-friendly: institutionalize paid maternity leave, flexible scheduling and even menstrual leave options. Critically, train all journalists in digital security – how to manage privacy settings, report online abuse, and document threats – and create a crisis plan for handling smear campaigns. Media owners should also publicly condemn any sexist violence against their staff, aligning with AJK’s stance that such attacks are “unacceptable”.
- **For Professional Associations and Trade Unions:** AJK and RrGGK should expand support structures for women. This includes a permanent legal support for journalists facing lawsuits or threats. AJK and the women’s network to continue offering training on harassment prevention and coping strategies, as well as peer support groups. Continuing to collect and publish data on attacks is crucial, to maintain pressure on authorities (as AJK already does in its safety reports). The Network of Women Journalists should continue to empower women and to monitor newsroom practices and advocate for gender balance in bylines and leadership. In short, journalist organizations must continue to act as watchdogs for their members’ safety, and as a unified voice demanding institutional change.

- **For Civil Society and International Partners:** NGOs, media literacy groups and international bodies should assist women journalists in multiple ways. Civil society organizations should develop and institutionalize digital literacy and cybersecurity programs specifically for women journalists, prioritizing those at local or rural outlets who may lack resources. Public campaigns are needed to raise awareness about gendered media violence: for instance, storytelling projects featuring survivors can reduce stigma and build solidarity. Annual safety audits should be commissioned by independent bodies: these would score the government, police and media on how well they protect journalists, and push authorities to improve. International partners (EU, OSCE, UN, embassies) can help by funding journalism safety initiatives, supporting cross-border networks like SafeJournalists, and by publicly condemning gendered attacks in Kosovo. For example, the Regional Reporting Diversity Network's support for the hate-speech monitoring report shows the value of sustained international backing. In essence, a multi-stakeholder effort is required to back women journalists' rights with training, advocacy and resources.

