

Safety of Women Journalists and Media Workers - Serbia Brief 2025

Authors: Marija Babic and Rade Djuric

This publication was produced with the support of the Australian Embassy in Serbia through Direct Aid Program. The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the donor.



Content

- 1 Introduction and Methodology
- 2 Protection of women journalists and media workers
- 3 Patterns and forms of incidents affecting women journalists
- 4 Online harassment
- 5 Investigations into attacks on journalists and media workers
- 6 Impact on women journalists
- 7 Conclusions
- 8 Recommendations

1. Introduction and Methodology

This brief report follows the methodology developed by the SafeJournalists Network (SJN) in the Western Balkans, combining desk research, analysis of quantitative data from the SJN database, and qualitative insights gathered through three interviews with three women journalists who were victims of various attacks during 2025, as well as a focus group held in February 2026 with six women journalists of different profiles.

The report builds on the findings of the 2024 research and provides an updated assessment for 2025, with a particular focus on the implementation of existing legal and institutional protection mechanisms in a context marked by continuous political pressure and rapid digital transformation.

The analysis covers the period from 1 January to 31 December 2025 and examines patterns of risk, forms of gender-based violence and discrimination, institutional responses, as well as their impact on the professional work and psychological well-being of women journalists. Given that there were no changes to the legal framework, the analysis is largely based on statistical data on attacks against women journalists from the SJN database and the records of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, as well as on testimonies of women working in the media.

2. Protection of women journalists and media workers

Legal framework

In Serbia, there are no specific provisions in relevant documents that recognise the specific risks faced by women journalists. However, in general, the Criminal Code contains provisions that classify work of public importance in the field of public information as a profession involving an increased safety risk for the person performing it.¹ In addition, under the Criminal Code, persons performing work of importance for public information, in connection with the work they carry out, enjoy a higher level of protection in relation to three criminal offences: Endangering Safety, Aggravated Murder and Serious Bodily Injury. In the case of certain offences, women are particularly vulnerable, such as Stalking and Sexual Harassment.

The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia guarantees equality between women and men and provides for the development of equal opportunities policies.² The Media Strategy recognised the need for gender equality, and the Law on Public Information and Media introduced an obligation for media outlets to submit to the Media Register, among other documents, a document setting out internal measures and procedures for achieving gender equality.³

In addition, the Law on Public Information and Media prohibits any form of direct or indirect discrimination against media editors, journalists and other persons in the field of public information, particularly on the grounds of their political affiliation and beliefs or any other personal characteristic.⁴

The Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination regulates the general prohibition of discrimination, forms and cases of discrimination, as well as procedures for protection against discrimination.⁵

1 Criminal Code, Article 112, paragraph 32

2 Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, Article 15

3 Ibid., Article 47

4 Law on Public Information and Media, Article 4

5 Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, Article 12

In 2024, Serbia adopted the Law on Gender Equality, which ensures equal status for women and men and regulates measures aimed at combating and preventing all forms of gender-based violence.

However, immediately after the law entered into force, the Constitutional Court issued a decision temporarily suspending its implementation pending the Court's final ruling. Eight initiatives have been submitted for the assessment of the constitutionality of this law.⁶

6 Ana Krstic, [Temporary suspension of the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality](#), Open Doors of Judiciary, 30 August 2024

Safety of women journalists in practice

The safety of women journalists has been one of the key problems they have faced for many years. However, over the past year and a half, there has been a marked increase in serious incidents, pressure, and misogynistic and sexist insults. The records of attacks against journalists kept by the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office represent an important indicator of the state of safety in the media sector.

During 2025, a huge increase in the number of cases was recorded. In that period, public prosecutor's offices opened 140 cases related to incidents against journalists. The records show a large number of attacks against women journalists — 50 cases — and, when it comes to cases in the online sphere, a higher number of cases were recorded in which the victims were women journalists compared with men journalists.

Out of 103 individual persons who were targeted in attacks, 55 victims were male, or 53.4%, while 48 were female, or 46.6%. Of that number, the Special Department for High-Tech Crime opened 71 cases involving 46 individual persons, of whom 20 were male, or 43.48%, and 26 were female, or 56.52%.

Compared with the previous year, the trend of greater vulnerability of women in the online sphere has continued, while the number of women journalists attacked in the offline environment was slightly lower than the number of men journalists. However, this does not diminish the problem, given that, overall, a much larger number of women journalists were targeted in attacks compared with the previous year.

In 2025, there was a drastic deterioration in the response of competent institutions to attacks against women journalists. A large number of cases were recorded in which the police failed to react to attacks against women journalists in situations where officers were present at the scene, as well as cases in which women journalists were attacked by police officers while reporting from protests and other sensitive locations.

On the other hand, the actions of public prosecutors' offices in the early stages of proceedings were somewhat satisfactory. However, given the insufficient number of resolved attack cases, this points to a lack of efficiency and to the inadequate attitude of institutions towards journalists, both women and men.

A decline in women journalists' trust in the competent institutions that should protect their safety is noticeable, as a consequence of inadequate and indifferent responses.⁷

Although there are regulations concerning the prohibition of discrimination and the protection of equality, as well as certain internal acts within the Ministry of the Interior concerning treatment of victims, there is no noticeable significant sensitivity or understanding on the part of institutions when it comes to their treatment of women journalists and women media workers. The competent authorities lack sensitivity towards women journalists, and this problem is even more pronounced in smaller local communities.⁸

Support is a key protection mechanism for women journalists who are exposed to attacks, threats and pressure. Legal support for women journalists from their newsrooms exists only in some larger newsrooms. However, most newsrooms do not provide this type of assistance.

The situation is particularly poor in smaller local media outlets, which, due to their very difficult financial situation, are rarely able to provide this kind of support and therefore largely rely on assistance from journalists' and media associations.

When it comes to psychological support, newsrooms generally do not provide this type of assistance, while some journalists' associations do offer such support. Journalists' and media associations also organise workshops aimed at improving safety and the implementation of safety protocols.

In some cases, insufficient support from newsrooms is also highlighted, with attacks on women journalists being used to draw attention to the vulnerability of the newsroom itself rather than the individual, while the women journalists are left to cope on their own.

7 Interviews conducted for the report by Rade Djuric and Marija Babic

8 Ibid.

3. Patterns and forms of incidents affecting women journalists

3.1 Other threats against women journalists

In 2025, women journalists were the targets of 16 different forms of threats, classified as “other threats”. These cases include hate speech and verbal attacks by government representatives, various attacks in tabloid media through orchestrated video campaigns, and messages accusing women journalists of being opponents of Serbia and the Serbian people.

They were also warned by members of security services, while in some cases persons presenting themselves as officials approached women journalists and asked them for their documents. Particularly dangerous are cases in which women journalists were threatened in local multi-ethnic communities.

Women journalists were subjected to various forms of pressure affecting their work. They were exposed to different forms of gender-based discrimination, which women journalists generally do not report.⁹ Lawsuits with elements of SLAPPs were also filed against women journalists, including private criminal lawsuits seeking prison sentences and bans on practising journalism.

3.2 Threats to life and physical safety

In 2025, women journalists received serious threats in 26 cases. Threats were made directly, in the streets of cities and during events they were reporting from, as well as via social media, in comments and direct messages, in emails, and in comments on portals and media websites.

Women journalists were threatened by organised groups, individuals and activists connected to government representatives, but also by police officers. The most dangerous threats were made in person, while women journalists were reporting from gatherings of supporters of the Serbian Progressive Party.

⁹ Nezavisnost, Mass Discrimination against Women Media Workers in Serbia!, 19 December 2025

They were threatened with murder, burning, hanging, rape, other forms of injury and violence, or attacks on their children and family members. More severe forms of hate speech included threats of expulsion from the country or being sent to concentration camps.

3.3 Actual/physical attacks

In 2025, women journalists were physically attacked at least 30 times. The most dangerous attacks occurred while they were reporting from student and civic protests in cities across Serbia, as well as during rallies and election days in local self-government units throughout the country. These attacks were carried out by police officers.

Women journalists were also physically obstructed in their work by police officers. At the same time, failures in police conduct at the events themselves are a cause for concern, particularly in cases where officers witnessed attacks but refused to act and provide assistance to the women journalists who had been attacked.

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	126	29	116	25	116	25	21
Other threats	37	15	4	3	4	3	2
Physical attacks	113	34	49	13	49	13	12

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

4. Online harassment

Women journalists reported a wide range of online harassment — from death threats, threats of bodily harm, rape and other forms of physical violence, to insults, defamation and trolling, as well as cyber violence, impersonation and various forms of sexual harassment.

Attempts to take over accounts were also recorded, as were attacks on portals or websites of media outlets run by women journalists in local communities. These incidents are often part of coordinated campaigns, indicating an extremely hostile digital environment.

A particularly serious example was an attempt to install communication-monitoring software on the devices of BIRN women journalists through digital channels. In another case, the installation of software tools for monitoring communication was confirmed.

The response of the competent institutions to these phenomena remains limited. Activities are mainly focused on providing support to victims and collecting evidence, while systemic prevention and protection measures remain insufficiently developed. A large number of cases remain classified as involving unknown perpetrators.

What is specific to the online sphere is the fact that the vast majority of threats contain elements of gender-based violence and are usually accompanied by a series of misogynistic and sexist insults. In addition, a large number of cases of online targeting of women journalists are accompanied by a worrying volume of threats, insults and negative comments, which further affect women journalists, both in terms of their psychological well-being and their work.

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	94	17	89	17	89	17	16
Other threats	13	6	1	1	1	1	2

Table 2: Online harassment of journalists in Serbia, 2025 ([SafeJournalists database](#))

5. Investigations into attacks on journalists and media workers

In 2025, a general decline was observed in the actions of the competent authorities, including the conduct of investigations into attacks against journalists, especially when women journalists were concerned. This points to the inadequacy of the current approach and the need to strengthen protection mechanisms.

In addition to the drastic increase in recorded attacks over the previous year, institutional inefficiency and impunity became even more evident. In 2025, out of 140 cases recorded in the prosecutor's office records, women journalists were the injured parties in 50 cases.

In total, convictions were handed down in only three cases, while in one case the institute of deferred criminal prosecution was applied. Only one conviction concerned a case in which the injured party was a woman journalist — Verica Marničić.¹⁰

In these 50 recorded cases, a total of 44 women journalists were injured parties, while multiple cases were opened in relation to some of them. In 12 cases, a decision was issued dismissing the criminal complaint, or an official note was made stating that there were no grounds to initiate criminal proceedings. In addition, an indictment proposal was filed in three cases, while proceedings are still ongoing in 34 cases.¹¹

All of this indicates that investigations into attack cases are not conducted efficiently or swiftly. Judicial authorities do not consider the broader context of the threats made and other acts committed, but instead adhere strictly to legal formulations and prosecutorial and judicial practice.

They do not take into account all relevant circumstances of the case, such as the socio-political context, the topics the woman journalist was working on at the time, who made the threats in the specific case, or the gender aspect.

¹⁰ SafeJournalists database: [the case of Verica Marničić](#) of 26 February 2025

¹¹ The data were processed from the records of attacks against journalists maintained by the [Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office](#), as of February 2026

Another area of concern is communication between journalists and institutional contact points. The current socio-political situation and the increase in attacks and pressure against journalists have contributed to the deterioration in this area.¹²

Relations and communication with institutions are generally worse than in previous years, particularly when it comes to communication with the police, given their conduct and attacks against women journalists, while communication with police contact points is almost non-existent. The situation regarding communication with public prosecutors' offices is somewhat better, but still insufficient.

The data indicate that the actions of the competent authorities, particularly the police, have been significantly less effective than before, which is especially problematic when it comes to the protection of women journalists. Serious attacks and threats against women journalists have been recorded.

From March to the end of December 2025, NUNS recorded 77 cases involving attacks by police officers against journalists, both women and men, unjustified detentions and identity checks, as well as failures by the police to react when present at the scene. Of these, 26 cases involved women journalists.

Institutions fail to recognise the fear of sexual violence and the psychological consequences suffered by women journalists. One of the problems is that institutions do not link stalking to the safety of women journalists, and even examine whether there was a prior history of emotional relations between the victim and the perpetrator.

Unacceptable comments are made, completely ignoring the connection with journalistic work, such as: "maybe he just fell for her a little."¹³

All of this led to a further erosion of journalists' trust in the police and public prosecutor's offices over the past year — trust that had not been at a satisfactory level even before.

¹² Interviews conducted for the report by Rade Djuric and Marija Babic

¹³ Ibid.

Such an attitude further undermines their sense of safety and reduces their willingness to report incidents to the competent authorities, which was another problem recorded in the previous period.

This problem is particularly pronounced in smaller communities, both because of mistrust and because of fear that they may face consequences for reporting incidents.

6. Impact on women journalists

Women journalists face a conspicuous sense of insecurity, as they are often exposed to attacks and threats, which has a significant impact on their psychological well-being. A sense of insecurity in the field while reporting is prevalent, and the fact that they do not receive protection from the police, but instead see police officers as among the perpetrators of attacks, causes additional concern and makes them feel even less safe.

This has consequences for the psychological well-being of women journalists, including burnout and psycho-physical exhaustion caused by numerous and daily tense events.¹⁴

Low pay, poor working conditions, external pressure and threats, financial uncertainty, and reporting on traumatic events lead to stress and burnout among women and men media workers, which often remains unrecognised, underestimated or misunderstood by their superiors.¹⁵

A constant sense of insecurity, fear and uncertainty, as well as everyday stress and tension, lead some women journalists to avoid certain topics, engage in self-censorship and, in some cases, withdraw from journalism, especially in smaller communities.

However, for some women journalists, this has a different effect. Withdrawal or avoiding certain topics is not an acceptable option for them; they do not want fear to define them or their work. They do not want to become the subject of media reporting themselves, but to continue doing their job and fighting.¹⁶

The position of women journalists also depends on other factors. Financial uncertainty, changes in media ownership, and shifts in editorial policy also affect women journalists.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ OSCE, *Analysis of Journalists' Mental Health*, 2026, p. 31.

¹⁶ Interviews conducted for the report by Rade Djuric and Marija Babic

In some cases, a media outlet ceases to exist or completely changes its editorial policy, and journalists, both women and men, do not want to be part of such a newsroom. In these circumstances, women journalists are often forced to search again for their place in a dynamic media market, where resources are limited and insufficient for all participants.¹⁷

The visibility of women journalists' work in the public sphere is complex and does not always stem solely from their professional engagement. In some situations, their visibility increases, but the question arises as to whether this is due to their work or to an attack against them. In some cases, however, the integrity of their work is recognised by the public, and this is precisely what strengthens their connection with citizens.¹⁸

Developments in society over the past year and a half indicate that the presence of women journalists in the field has not decreased, even when reporting from high-risk events. Although they are targets not only of attacks and threats, but also of misogynistic and sexist insults, women journalists continue to report professionally from such events and do not want this to prevent them from doing their job.

Some believe that the reason for this is the fact that more women work in the journalistic profession.¹⁹ However, even within newsrooms there is not full understanding of these challenges, and in some cases there is a lack of an adequate response.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

7. Conclusions

Laws do not recognise specific protection for women journalists. However, the existing legal provisions, although they could be improved, would provide a good basis for better protection of women journalists if they were properly implemented.

The safety of women journalists deteriorated significantly in 2025, given that they were targeted by a large number of attacks and threats, including attacks by police officers and the failure of police to react to attacks against them.

This was accompanied by the generally insufficiently effective response of competent institutions, impunity, and the absence of institutional sensitivity in the treatment of women journalists and women media workers. Taken together, all of this creates a serious risk for their work in the field and their professional engagement.

Prosecutor's office records indicate a drastic increase in incidents against women journalists, while the number of attacks against women journalists is also higher than against men journalists when it comes to threats to safety in the online sphere.

Women journalists were exposed to a large number of physical attacks while reporting from protests, and some of the perpetrators were police officers. They were targeted with serious threats to their lives at events they were reporting from, as well as in the online sphere.

They were exposed to gender-based violence and threatened with murder, burning, hanging, rape, other forms of injury and violence, or attacks on their children and family members. They were also subjected to various forms of hate speech and verbal attacks by government representatives and tabloid media.

In addition, they were targeted by gender-based discrimination and SLAPP lawsuits.

In addition to death threats, threats of rape and other forms of physical violence in the online sphere, women journalists were exposed to insults, defamation and trolling, as well as cyber violence, impersonation and various forms of sexual harassment.

Online threats were accompanied by a large number of misogynistic and sexist insults and comments. Attempts to take over accounts were also recorded, as were attacks on portals or websites of media outlets run by women journalists in local communities, as well as attempts to install spyware.

A decline in the response of the competent institutions has been recorded. Police conduct in 2025 directly contributed to endangering the safety of women journalists and to their sense of insecurity.

Communication with institutions is also at a lower level than in previous years. Investigations are not conducted swiftly or efficiently, and the competent authorities do not take all relevant circumstances into account. Impunity represents a particular problem.

All the above circumstances have led to a significant decline in women journalists' trust in the work of institutions, which has direct consequences for their willingness to report attacks and threats.

As a result, an increase in unreported cases has been recorded, further hindering a timely response by the competent authorities and adequate protection of women journalists.

The classification of offences by the competent authorities continues to be marked by standard problems. At the same time, when it comes to cases involving women journalists, institutions fail to recognise the fear of sexual violence, as well as the psychological consequences to which they are exposed.

A complete lack of institutional sensitivity is evident in the treatment of women journalists.

The psychological well-being of women journalists has significantly deteriorated due to continuous pressure and exposure to risks. Within newsrooms, there is a lack of coordinated and effective support for women journalists. Legal assistance is available in some larger media outlets, while psychological support is almost non-existent, and the situation is particularly difficult in smaller local media.

In a large number of cases, women journalists rely on the support of journalists' and media associations. For some of them, this situation leads to self-censorship, avoidance of certain topics and reporting from crisis events, and in some cases even withdrawal from the profession.

8. Recommendations

Given that no improvement has been recorded in any segment, the recommendations from the previous report remain largely unchanged, with an additional focus on the actions of the competent institutions.

Decision-makers and competent institutions:

- Given the current social situation, the recommendation is not to initiate legislative amendments, especially considering that, although there is room to improve legal provisions, the existing laws do provide protection. The problem lies in the implementation of the law;
- Consider legislative amendments, once the socio-political conditions are in place, to the Criminal Code and the Law on Misdemeanours, with the aim of introducing additional protection for journalists, both women and men. In this regard, it is recommended to introduce qualified forms of the criminal offences of Stalking and Sexual Harassment when committed against journalists;
- Competent institutions should, in accordance with their legal powers, take all necessary measures in cases involving criminal offences committed against women journalists and act urgently in line with the Mandatory Instruction of the Supreme Public Prosecutor's Office, conducting proceedings efficiently while taking into account all circumstances of the case;
- The police should begin acting in accordance with the law, respond in cases of attacks against women journalists, and react appropriately in cases where individual police officers exceed their powers, including by conducting adequate criminal and internal proceedings through the Internal Control Sector;
- They should act in accordance with the internal act regulating the treatment of injured parties, which specifically refers to women and which the police themselves cite as one of the special forms of support for women journalists;

- Updating contact points in public prosecutor's offices and police departments, and ensuring adequate action in accordance with the Mandatory Instruction;

Media outlets and newsrooms, journalists' associations:

- Training within media outlets on all issues that may endanger the safety of women journalists;

- Developing and/or improving internal mechanisms that help prevent safety risks and define the steps to be taken when safety is endangered;

- Training aimed at recognising all forms of discrimination, especially more subtle forms;

- Developing, both through media outlets and journalists' associations, the capacities for legal and psychological support that is provided, or should be provided, to journalists. This support should be continuous and accessible, or more accessible, to women journalists working in smaller communities;

- Strengthening cooperation between journalists' associations and organisations that provide assistance to victims of gender-based violence, in order to enhance support for women journalists who have been exposed to such violence;

- Insisting that the state provide adequate financial support to journalists' associations so that they can ensure continuous legal and psychological support for women journalists who have experienced some form of discrimination or violence;

- Mandatory notification of independent institutions, particularly the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and the Protector of Citizens

Wider community:

- Strengthening solidarity among women and men colleagues and becoming familiar with examples, both domestic and international, of good institutional and collegial practice;
- Developing support for local organisations by ensuring conditions for financing their basic operating costs, building their capacities through training and strategic planning, ensuring their sustainability and independence, and enabling support for advocacy and public engagement;
- In cases of gender discrimination, for example, unequal pay between women and men journalists for performing the same work, the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality should be contacted with a view to initiating strategic litigation;
- Work on networking both foreign and domestic newsrooms with the aim of exchanging experiences and good practices.

