



Guidelines for media and unions to combat online harassment of women journalists

The online trolling of women journalists on social media and via websites targets women from all political, religious and ethnic backgrounds. One of the main aspects of these attacks is that they are gendered and sexualized. Online harassment often leads to fear and self-censorship, as well as female journalists temporarily or permanently quitting social media. It is unacceptable and should not be tolerated, either by media or by unions.

One of the difficulties women face is that they do not get the level of support from colleagues and newsroom managers that they should. Few report the attacks and, if they *are* reported, very little action is taken. An [IFJ survey](#), conducted in 2018, showed that only half the victims of online abuse (53%) reported the attacks to their media's management, their union or the police, and, in two-thirds of cases, nothing was done.

Online trolling is a health and safety issue and must be considered as such by the media industry.

Media employers have a duty to ensure a safe workplace and provide a solid mechanism for women to come forward and be protected when subject to online abuse.

Unions have a duty to support their members who are targeted online.

What can you do?

Media should:

- Check legislation to identify what resources are legally available to abused journalists and disseminate them widely in your newsroom
- Provide mechanisms in workplaces for women journalists to speak up against abuse they receive, including dedicated and trained staff to listen. This includes:
 - the setting up of a cyber cell to overview complaints, provide support and organize a response to the abuser
 - the adoption, in full consultation with staff and unions, of policies on online harassment and guidance to handle it
 - the information and training of all staff on these policies
- Raise awareness among your staff about digital security and safety from harassment and abuse

- Train your staff on the tools available for secure and confidential communication and any reporting mechanism on social media for abuse
- Respond officially, as a media organization, to online attacks so that the trolls see that their target is not isolated. Arrange for supporting messages to be sent to the abused journalist on their social media feed, not as private messages
- Ensure responsibility of intermediaries including “notice and take down” regimes
Define and adopt proper guidelines on online comments moderation, including a definition of acts of misogyny
- Ensure the moderating team is composed of women and staff representing diversity
Treat online abuse in the workplace as a health and safety issue
- Provide full support to your staff abused as well as contributors, even after the story is published and remuneration paid.
- Reflect on the way gender-based violence is portrayed in your media, organize a specific meeting to address this with all staff
- Reflect on where women stand in leading roles in media, reflect gender equality in your recruitment policies
- Provide an annual evaluation of what has been done to eradicate the online abuse faced by your workers

Unions should:

- Analyze your national legislation to identify how online trolling is covered and the tools to confront it
- Support your members in bringing their case to court or to be addressed via workplace complaints mechanisms
- Campaign nationally for the ratification of the ILO Convention 190 on violence and harassment which also applies to online abuse
- Provide a space in your union for women journalists to speak up against abuse they receive including dedicated and trained staff to listen. Organise a collective response to online abuse on your members’ social media
- Open a special section of your web site dedicated to online trolling and include useful numbers to contact, actions to take and legislation in place
- Organize training for ALL unions members to help them counter online trolling and identify trolls

More on the IFJ campaign against online trolling: <https://www.ifj.org/actions/ifj-campaigns/online-trolling-you-are-not-alone.html>