

2024-2025 findings

Journalists' Safety Tracker



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Introduction

This report analyses instances of abuse, harassment, and intimidation encountered by journalists in the course of their work, using data collected in the first year of the NUJ's Journalists' Safety Tracker.

Content warning: this report contains offensive language and descriptions of distressing incidents - including threats of sexual violence.

The union launched the online tool on 1 November 2024 to form an evidence base in its campaign for improved journalist safety.

The NUJ, through its seat on the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists, engaged with ministers and key stakeholders on action to improve journalists' safety prior to launching the tracker, with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport also supporting its creation.

Journalists can report physical and online incidents to the tracker, including threats received on social media platforms, impersonation via malicious emails, and the use of spyware. They can also provide information on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs), which are baseless lawsuits brought by the powerful and rich against journalists to influence and stymie reporting.

The data collected through the tracker and analysed in this report includes information on the types of abuse journalists have experienced, where it has occurred, the groups responsible, and whether discrimination based on characteristics such as gender and race played a role. It also examines the extent to which these instances of abuse have been reported to and addressed by the authorities and employers.

The purpose of this report is to shed light on the nature and scale of abuse against journalists in the UK and Ireland, and to highlight the broader implications for press freedoms and the ability of journalists to carry out their work without fear. It also seeks to identify where journalists face the greatest threats and guide potential action by lawmakers, employers, and technology companies.

*The NUJ is grateful to **Kathryn Torney** for her research and analysis, which forms the basis of this report.*

Executive summary

Disturbing reports of death and rape threats, racism, physical attacks and intimidation have been logged during the first year of the NUJ's Journalists' Safety Tracker.

The tracker received 32 detailed reports of abuse from journalists in the UK and Ireland. As the trade union representing professional journalists, we know from our own direct contact with members and media organisations that these figures represent only a fraction of the true scale of abuse and harassment journalists face. Many incidents remain unreported for a variety of reasons, which are also addressed in this report.

The tracker documented 18 reports of physical attacks against journalists. More than half of the reports contained an element of online abuse with the majority occurring on X/Twitter.

The findings reveal a gravely worrying pattern of violent, graphic abuse directed at women journalists. Multiple journalists also reported a discriminatory aspect to the abuse they faced.

Several journalists told us their experiences caused “physical and psychological harm”, with some stating that this had impacted the ability to do their job.

The results from the tracker show an urgent need for action. It is clear that journalists in the UK are the targets of “shocking” abuse and harassment both online and in-person, restricting their ability to do their work, and, consequently, freedom of the press.

Findings

By the end of 2025, 32 detailed reports had been submitted confidentially online by 26 freelance and staff journalists based in the UK and Ireland. Some reported details have been redacted to prevent identification of individuals.

While the forms of abuse reported varied significantly between individual cases, there were certain patterns that emerged from the data. We have categorised the reports from the first year of the tracker into four key areas: online abuse, physical abuse, abuse targeting women, and discriminatory abuse.

Who reported ‘incidents’?

Eleven of the respondents were women journalists and 15 were men. Of the 23 who provided details on their employment status; 14 were freelancers and nine directly employed.

Many of the reports (25) related to specific journalistic work or reporting.

When asked who was responsible, 15 reports stated an “organisation”, ten blamed members of the public, five said it was anonymous, and two pointed to the police. Most reported incidents occurred in Greater London.

Tip of the iceberg

It is important to note that the cases in this report reflect a small fraction of the abuse, harassment, and intimidation we know journalists face across the UK and Ireland.

The NUJ surveyed its members in January 2026 to find out the degree to which journalists have been logging incidents to the Journalists’ Safety Tracker and to understand why many cases have gone unreported.

Almost half (71 members) of the 151 who replied to our survey said they had experienced abuse during the course of their work. However, only two of these respondents reported an incident to the Safety Tracker. The forms of abuse our survey respondents flagged are also detailed in this report, illustrating the types of incidents that often go unreported.

Those who said they had not reported to the tracker cited various reasons - the most common was not knowing that the tracker existed. Others felt their experiences were not serious enough to report, preferred to keep them private, or believed doing so would have no impact.

Online abuse

Eighteen of the 32 reports to the NUJ tracker related to online abuse, with 13 incidents occurring on Twitter/X.

This included reported online abuse sent publicly or by direct message, impersonation using malicious emails, a social media account being hacked, suspected state surveillance, and online abuse related to race, religion, age and sex.

One journalist said they received “threats by thousands” of people on X/Twitter, Facebook and TikTok because of a court report they wrote on protestors being charged with public order offences. The vile threats included finding where the journalist lived, burning down their home, and following them to and from work. “The threats [...] made me unable to sleep or function and left me in fear of doing my job,” the journalist said.

Another journalist who had posted on X/Twitter referencing industrial action at their workplace received a comment that said: “I hope you all get Hebdo’d” - a reference to the massacre at the offices of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris in 2015.

In one case, a journalist said footage of them covering an anti-immigration protest was recorded and then circulated in a Facebook group, with people in the comments working together to identify and locate them.

In the NUJ's separate survey of members in January, two-thirds of members (46 of 71) who indicated they had faced abuse in the line of work said they had experienced this online. This included "trolling", "offensive comments", and even "death threats". One journalist said they had been forced to disable all comments on LinkedIn due to the amount of hate they were getting. Members also flagged doxxing as an issue, with one journalist stating that their personal details were shared on social media by a source they had approached in good faith, leading to a host of intimidating phone calls.

Physical abuse

The NUJ tracker documented 18 reports of physical attacks against journalists. This included two reports of sexual assault; six reports under the heading stalking/harassment; six involved in-person verbal abuse; and two cases of people being arrested.

Numerous journalists reported physical abuse while covering protests and riots. In one case, a reporter said they were punched, strangled and pepper-sprayed by several members of the public, "causing physical and psychological harm" - including struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They added that the attack has caused them to be "more cautious with what events I attend and report on."

Another journalist reported an assault by a security guard outside a venue in London after being challenged for filming the obstruction of the barriers on the footway. While waiting for the manager, they said they were "spat on, shouted at, and my wheelchair was pushed and a camera/torch waved in my face." They added: "As I moved it away, I was cut by it, and was bleeding profusely. I called the police, but they were far from helpful."

Eleven people who reported to the tracker said they considered themselves to have a disability or health condition.

In Northern Ireland, a journalist reported that a viable pipe bomb was thrown from a car at their house three days after the Police Service of Northern Ireland uncovered and delivered a death threat message to them. They said the police have delivered seven further death threats as a result of intelligence.

A 2025 Amnesty International report confirmed that journalists in Northern Ireland face regular death threats and attacks while living and working in the most dangerous place in the UK to do their job.

In our follow-up survey of members conducted in January, 13 individuals said they experienced some form of physical abuse during the course of their work. This included being spat at, shoved, and having projectiles and fireworks launched at them by members of the public while covering protests. One journalist said they were attacked by a group of men while taking general photos of the city centre. “They ran towards me shouting ‘paedophile’ and started to punch and kick me. I luckily got away, but another person was badly beaten up - his eye socket was broken.”

Abuse targeting women journalists

Eleven women submitted an incident to the Journalists’ Safety Tracker.

Research has shown that new technologies are proliferating online violence, harassment and misogyny, with generative AI tools in particular facilitating the creation and spread of non-consensual sexual deepfakes.

According to UNESCO, in 2025 75% of women journalists experienced online violence while doing their jobs.

One woman journalist reported receiving “daily” rape and death threats. “Images of me were taken from my public platforms, doctored to make me look naked and sent to all of the councillors in my local council and various charities,” she said.

Some women journalists who submitted to the tracker reported incidents to the police, their employer, and/or local MP, while others did not. One journalist who received anonymous rape threats to her work email said she deleted the message immediately because of a “stiff upper lip culture” in the office and feeling “too embarrassed to share it with anyone or escalate.”

The union’s survey of members in January revealed further examples of the types of abuse that went unreported to the Safety Tracker, including “threats of rape” and “sexually motivated emails and harassment”.

One woman journalist said that while covering the far right ‘Unite the Kingdom’ march, they were catcalled by a section of the crowd who chanted “get your t*ts out for the lads” at them, with the footage later uploaded to social media.

The NUJ has warned that these types of abuse can create fear for women in all areas of life and can cross over into physical assaults and femicide. It also has the potential to limit the right of women to express themselves freely and carry out their work.

Discriminatory abuse

Some journalists who reported incidents to the tracker noted a discriminatory element (based on the victim’s protected status) within the abuse they received.

One journalist who wrote a comment piece involving their experience of being a migrant said they were subsequently targeted on social media with racial slurs and told to “f*ck off back home”.

In one incident, a Pakistani freelance journalist described being “grabbed and shoved by a police officer” at a London protest in 2025. “[The officer] said I wasn't a real journalist after I showed him my press pass,” they said. “I felt very upset and felt targeted for the colour of my skin as the white journalists around me and in front of me were not pushed, shoved and questioned if they were press.”

A similar theme of discriminatory abuse emerged from the NUJ’s survey of members in January. One of the respondents said they are “constantly harassed” whenever they broadcast live in a different language in public. Another reported receiving personalised threats after putting transgender and LGBTQ+ flags on their X/Twitter profile during Pride month. They said someone found a photo of their children on Facebook and posted it to X along with the words, “You’re going to lose a lot more than your column by the time I’ve finished with you.”

‘Part of the job’

Fewer than half (15) of those who submitted an incident to the Journalists’ Safety Tracker had informed the police, while only 13 told their employer, and five approached their MP for support.

When asked why they did not report abuse to the police, respondents said they were "embarrassed" and “too shocked to know how to proceed clearly”. One person said they felt it would be a “waste of time” given that previous incidents they reported did not result in a prosecution.

They also listed reasons for not reporting incidents to their employer, including sensing a “lack of support”, a “poor culture” or that “they don't care”. Some respondents were freelance journalists, so they would not have had that option.

Those who did not go to their MP about the abuse they had experienced listed reasons such as not knowing it was an appropriate avenue, not wanting the threats made public at the time, and feeling it was not worthwhile as the attackers could not be identified.

Recommendations

We need strong government policy alongside concerted efforts from social media companies, employers, union representatives and police forces to make serious inroads in tackling abuse against journalists in all its forms:

- **Government** should protect journalists from online and offline harassment, threats and intimidation – including through promotion of the Journalists’ Safety Tracker, enforcement of provisions in the Online Safety Act relating to illegal content, and introduction of urgent anti-SLAPP provision to prevent powerful actors abusing the law to intimidate journalists and suppress reporting.
- **Social media companies** should recognise their responsibility as publishers in preventing the abuse and harassment occurring on their platforms and pushed by their algorithms. The union encourages transparency around how journalists’ complaints are monitored, investigated, and addressed.
- **Employers** working with trade union representatives should fulfil legal obligations to look after the health and safety of staff and freelance workers. This includes updating safety policies in line with best practices, providing digital safety training, and promoting tools such as the NUJ/Society of Editors’ Journalists Safety Toolkit.
- **Police forces** to continue taking steps to uphold the right of bona fide professional newsgatherers to work freely and without impediment - including at protests and other public events. The NUJ continues to emphasise the importance of the UK Press Card as a key aspect of identifying professional newsgatherers. Police training should continue to facilitate safe working and prevent the harassment and wrongful detention or arrest of journalists. The NUJ welcomes the introduction of journalist safety liaison officers (JSLOs) in every UK police force and encourages police bodies to continue engaging with the union as well as the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists.



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