NUSOJ
Ururka Qaranka Suxufiyiinta Soomaaliyeed
National Union of Somali Journalists

Funded by the European Union
Waxaa maalgeliyay Midowga Yurub

UNDP

UNSAFE, UNDERPAID AND UNHEARD

The Workplace Crisis Facing Women Journalists in Somalia

Rapid Assessment of the Workplace Challenges Faced by Women Journalists in Somalia



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Acknowledgements

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Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect those of the UNDP, the European Union (EU) or Bilan Media. None of these agencies, institutions or organisations can be held responsible for them.

1. Executive summary

This report presents the results of a research study led by the National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) that explored the challenges faced by women journalists in Somalia as well as the discriminatory recruitment and employment practices that contribute to existing inequities. Based on the views of women journalists and media managers in Mogadishu and the six Federal Member States, the study reveals serious and overlapping concerns relating to employment security, sexual harassment, financial exploitation and occupational safety.

Just 10% of respondents to a survey of women journalists across Somalia said they felt safe at work. In a series of group discussions, they cited a range of threats to their safety and well-being including gender-based violence and cyber bullying (e.g. the use of AI-generated sexualised deepfakes to discredit and humiliate women). Institutional protection remains weak: just one in five respondents was satisfied with the reporting systems that exist in their media houses.

However, despite widespread evidence of sexual harassment across the industry, women are reluctant to speak out for fear of social stigma and various forms of retaliation including dismissal, salary cuts and refusal to provide professional references. The culture of silence allows harassment to continue and places responsibility for managing its consequences on the women who experience it rather than on those who have a duty to prevent it.

Other workplace concerns include long working hours, the absence of basic facilities, particularly for pregnant women or those with childcare responsibilities and unreasonable demands from supervisors (e.g. long working hours and the need to be available to their editors throughout night shifts). These conditions directly affect women's health, dignity and ability to remain in employment while also exposing them to greater risk of workplace harassment.

Informal and precarious employment arrangements are widespread. Nearly half of all journalists participating in the survey confirmed that they work without a written employment contract, exposing them to the risk of arbitrary dismissal, unpredictable wages, unpaid overtime and denial of maternity benefits. More than half experience chronic salary arrears or sporadic payments, or report that they work without any form of remuneration.

Furthermore, the research showed that multiple barriers and discriminatory practices prevent women from achieving leadership positions. These include lack of access to training programmes or to editorial meetings where strategic or financial issues are discussed. Although women often have highly visible positions at media houses (e.g. TV presenters), their participation in editorial leadership and institutional decision-making remains marginal. Just 11% of respondents to the survey believed that they had the same opportunities as men to advance their careers.

These experiences point to the need for stronger employment protections, written contracts, fair and predictable remuneration, effective safeguards against sexual harassment including

confidential complaints mechanisms, equal career opportunities and appropriate arrangements for occupational safety. Above all, the research findings underline the importance of recognising women journalists not only as media professionals who are vulnerable to external security threats but also as workers entitled to fair treatment, safe and decent working conditions and effective protection of their labour rights.

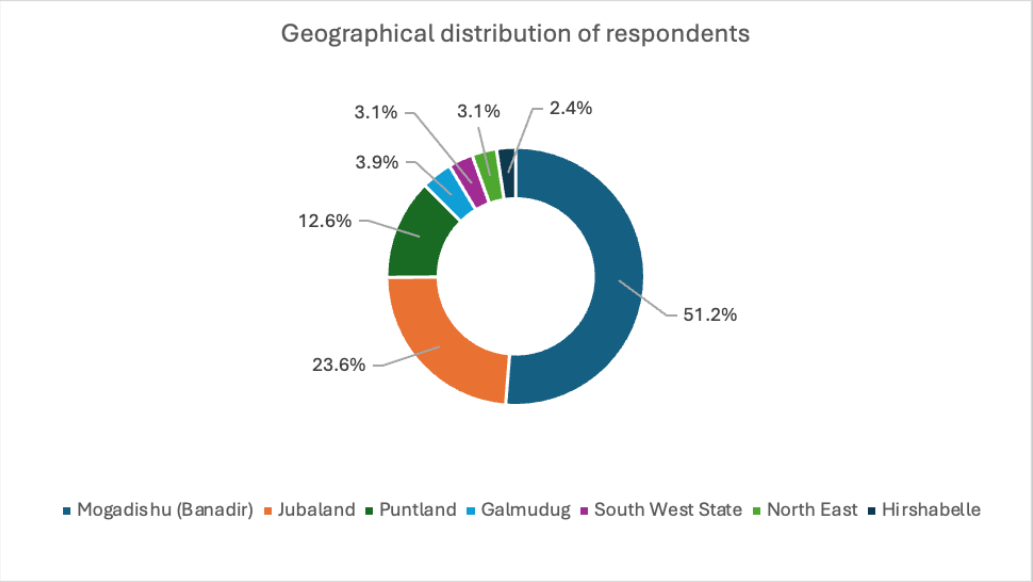
In addition, a series of consultations with media owners and managers provided important insights into the reasons why discrimination, exploitation and inadequate workplace protections are allowed to persist. Managers blame financial insecurity and the vagaries of the media market for their inability to address these issues. However, they have an obligation to ensure fair treatment, equal opportunities and a safe working environment. The question is not simply whether media managers recognise the problems affecting women journalists but whether they accept responsibility for practices within their control and are prepared to address them.

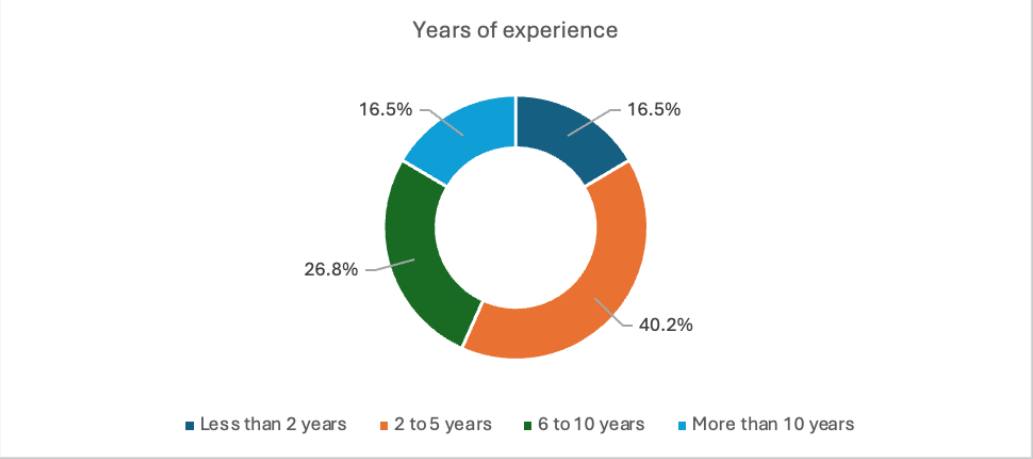


2. Methodology

This report draws on the findings of a quantitative survey of 127 women journalists in Mogadishu and the six Federal Member States as well as group discussions with 41 women journalists and consultations with 12 media owners and managers. Full details of these activities are given below.

Quantitative survey: The survey was based on a questionnaire covering key concerns shared by women journalists in Somalia. It reached out to employees of both state media (35.4%) and private media (64.6%) with the majority working in radio (44.1%) and television (33.9%). More than half of the respondents were reporters while other roles represented include presenters (14.2%) and producers (13.4%). Just 17 of the 127 respondents were editors or managers which reflects the paucity of women in senior positions across Somalia.





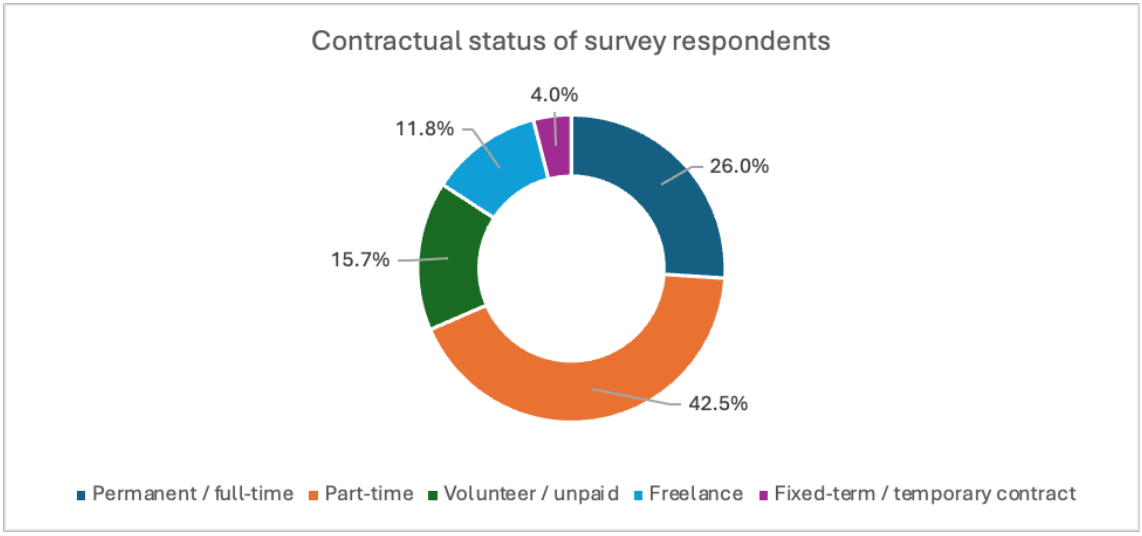
Group discussions: NUSOJ conducted group discussions with 41 women journalists in the following four locations: Garowe (11 participants), Kismayo (seven), Baidoa (six) and Mogadishu (23). The women consulted included TV presenters, reporters from radio stations and online platforms, senior women journalists and women who had left the profession. To protect participants from retaliation, further harassment and reputational harm, their names and identifying details are not disclosed in this report.

Consultations: Consultations were held with 12 media owners and managers from public and private media institutions who have the authority to hire and fire staff. Employers were asked to comment on employment practices, including unequal remuneration, the absence of written employment contracts and gender-based discrimination. The discussions also focused on media managers' perceptions of their responsibilities towards female editorial staff.



3. Contractual status

Women journalists across Somalia reported precarious employment conditions that expose them to various forms of exploitation. Only a quarter (26%) of those participating in the survey had full-time contracts. The majority were part-time (42.5%), volunteer/unpaid (15.7%), freelance (11.8%), or working on fixed-term contracts (4%).



Just under half of the survey respondents (49.6%) said that they had a written contract setting out their salaries, working hours, job responsibilities, leave entitlements, notice periods, or grievance procedures. As a result, they are at risk of arbitrary dismissal, unpredictable wages, unpaid overtime and denial of maternity benefits.

This trend was confirmed by participants in the group discussions who said that oral agreements (whereby they are verbally hired and verbally fired) are widely regarded as an established way of recruiting journalists, particularly in private media organisations. Women entering into such agreements encounter significant headwinds when challenging sexual harassment or other workplace violations. In such cases, media managers and directors can simply deny that a woman was formally employed or dispute the terms under which she worked.

During the consultation with media owners, interviewees argued that verbal agreements gave them the flexibility they needed to deal with the vagaries of the market and the resulting fluctuations in income levels for media organisations. However, they also recognised that poor employment conditions are among the chief reasons why women journalists leave the profession and seek jobs in less precarious sectors.

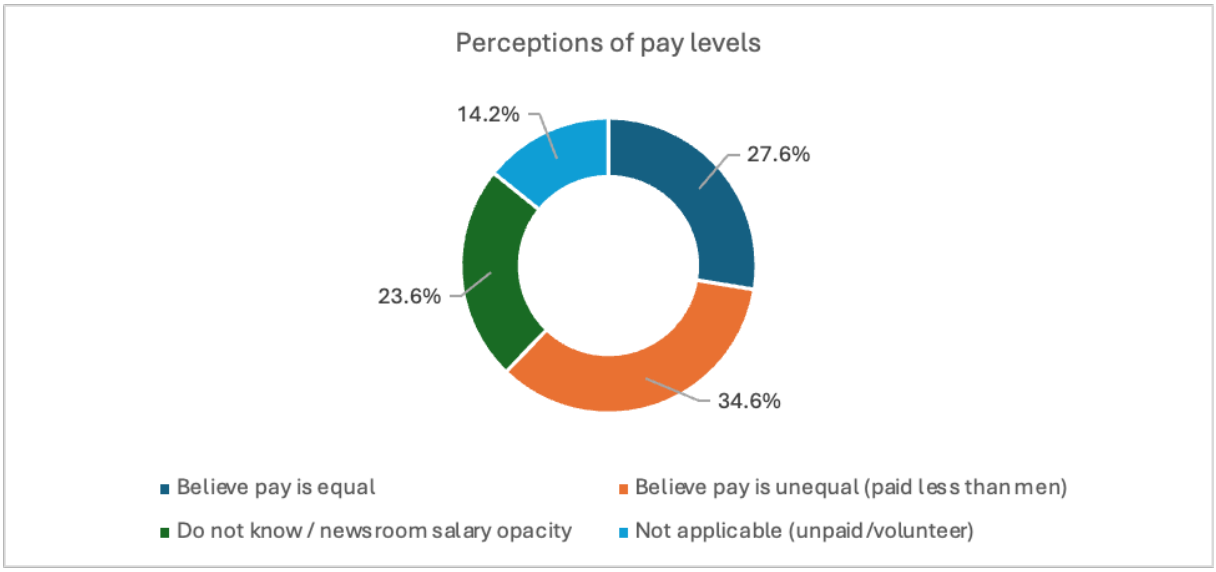
Case study

Participants in the group discussions shared the story of a young female journalist who joined a private radio station without a written employment contract. Her editor repeatedly invited her to private meetings and implied that her continued employment depended on accepting his sexual advances. When she refused, she began losing reporting assignments and her salary was delayed. She was subsequently dismissed without notice or compensation. The case illustrates how the absence of written contracts and financial insecurity can expose female journalists to workplace harassment and abuse of authority.

4. Remuneration

Low pay and unequal salaries were identified as major concerns across the research study. Only a minority of respondents to the survey (27.6%) believed that their pay was equal to that of men. More than a third (34.6%) said that they earned less than male colleagues with similar responsibilities while nearly a quarter (23.6%) were unable to give an informed response due to the opacity that surrounds pay levels in many newsrooms.

In addition, participants in the group discussions described a range of abusive practices including unexplained salary deductions, delayed wages and non-payment for completed assignments. They agreed that discriminatory workplace cultures meant they had less access to better paid assignments, senior positions and professional development opportunities than male journalists.



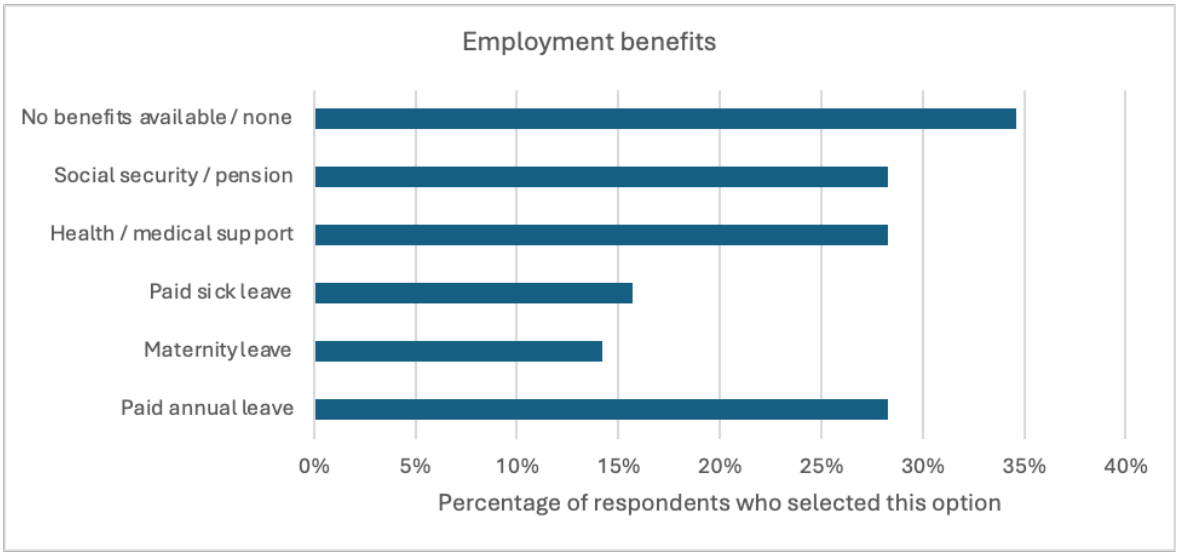
Less than half of respondents to the survey said they were always or usually paid on time (36.2% and 9.5% respectively). Around a third sometimes experienced delays with payment or were rarely paid on time while one in five said that they were never paid. Salary arrears and non-payment create an impossible situation for women overwhelmed by the rising cost of living and, in particular, for those raising families.

Participants in the group discussions noted that several media houses remunerate reporters according to the income that they generate for the organisation rather than paying them a monthly salary. For example, if a journalist brings in a news story for which the newsmaker has paid USD 150, the journalist receives USD 50 while the media house retains the remaining USD 100. This arrangement

makes journalists' earnings dependent on their ability to attract paid news coverage and raises serious concerns about editorial independence, income security and the commercialisation of news coverage.

Furthermore, accessing income-generating sources can expose women journalists to sexual harassment, inappropriate demands and threats to their personal safety. At the same time, women with family responsibilities find it more difficult to pursue opportunities for paid coverage that entail travelling to remote locations or working outside normal office hours.





In addition to precarious payment and unfair working arrangements, women journalists in Somalia struggle to secure benefits such as paid annual leave or maternity cover. Just 28.3% of respondents to the national survey said that they were entitled to paid annual leave while the proportion who could claim maternity leave or sick leave was substantially lower (14.2% and 15.7% respectively). Social security, pensions and medical support were available to less than a third.

Media owners interviewed during the project blamed discrepancies in pay or delays in payment on the difficult financial situation facing private media organisations across the country. Limited advertising revenue, irregular commercial income and high operating costs were identified as factors that undermine the ability of employers to provide regular and adequate salaries. Moreover, respondents argued that financial pressures affect men just as much as women and, thus, dismissed the suggestion that these practices were symptomatic of institutional discrimination.

It is worth noting that the salaries offered by state-owned media such as Radio Mogadishu, Somali National Television (SNTV) and the Somali National News Agency (SONNA) are generally higher and more stable than those offered by private media. This is because their journalists are paid under the government's civil service salary grading system and, as a result, jobs in the public sector are much sought after and private media have greater difficulties in attracting and retaining talented editorial staff.

5. Exploitation and abuse of authority

Women journalists taking part in the group discussions described several forms of exploitation that often remain concealed within employment relationships and are, thus, underreported. They included:

a. **Sexual extortion involving unpaid salaries:** Eleven female journalists reported concerns about sexual extortion linked to the payment of earned wages. They described situations in which media managers or owners demanded sexual favours in return for releasing the salaries of women journalists.

b. **Forced resignation following marriage:** Five respondents described situations in which women were told to choose between marriage and continued employment. Such practices effectively make women's marital status a condition of employment and violate the right of married women to pursue professional careers.

c. **Sexual harassment disguised as mentoring:** Women described how senior colleagues exploited professional relationships established for training, mentoring and career development. Opportunities aimed at supporting women's professional advancement were instead used to pressure female staff into sexual relationships.

d. **Discriminatory dismissal following harassment complaints:** Participants in the group discussion cited cases in which media directors, editors and owners had dismissed women who made complaints of sexual harassment rather than investigating



the alleged perpetrators. This practice discourages whistleblowing and protects those who abuse positions of authority.

e. **Abuse during work-related travel:** Several women journalists reported being pressured to accept shared accommodation or travel arrangements that compromised their privacy, human dignity and personal safety.

f. **Economic exploitation through freelance arrangements:** Respondents said that it was common for journalists on freelance contracts to perform the same duties as permanent employees. This arrangement allows employers to avoid the obligations associated with formal employment while maintaining a larger and more flexible workforce.

In addition, participants in the group discussions shared details of working arrangements that place considerable pressure on their health, personal safety and family responsibilities. Reported violations included:

a) Working between 12 and 16 hours without appropriate compensation or rest.
b) Being required to remain available to directors and editors throughout the night.
c) Receiving reporting assignments at very short notice despite known security risks.
d) Facing discriminatory scheduling that makes no allowances for family responsibilities.

Respondents explained that these practices can be particularly harmful to women who have childcare responsibilities. The expectation that journalists must remain constantly on call also creates opportunities for inappropriate advances by supervisors and, according to interviewees, routine briefings can be used as an excuse to initiate unwanted personal interactions.



Journalist Suways Jama Mohamud (Suways Gacayte, center) pictured immediately after her release in Garowe, Puntland, accompanied by NUSOJ Executive Committee member Khadar Awl Ismail (left) and a fellow female journalist (right)

6. Workplace facilities

Some of the most serious daily challenges faced by women journalists in Somalia arise from the absence of basic facilities in the workplace. These conditions directly affect women's well-being, dignity and ability to remain in employment. Participants in the group discussions cited the following concerns:

a) The absence of separate, secure and hygienic toilets for women.
b) A lack of privacy for changing clothes or managing menstrual hygiene.
c) The absence of suitable breastfeeding spaces, forcing mothers to leave their children at home for prolonged periods without adequate arrangements for feeding.
d) A lack of secure places where women can rest during extended working shifts.
e) The absence of private spaces for confidential discussions, including those related to complaints of sexual harassment.

Case study

The participants shared the example of a pregnant journalist who was required to work extended shifts in a newsroom without functioning toilets, adequate drinking water, or reasonable rest arrangements. Such conditions demonstrate how the failure to provide basic workplace facilities can make it impossible for women journalists to combine their professional ambitions with their desire to start or build a family.



7. Gender-based discrimination

The survey results suggest that gender-based discrimination is endemic within Somali media houses. More than half of the respondents (53.5%) said they had experienced discrimination in their careers while 37.8% were unsure or preferred not to say, suggesting that discrimination is so much a part of the working culture that it passes unnoticed or is considered an occupational hazard. The sections below look at the prevalent dimensions of discriminatory and abusive practices in Somali newsrooms.

7.1. Discriminatory recruitment processes

According to participants in the group discussions, discriminatory employment practices often begin during the recruitment process and continue throughout their professional careers. They agreed that recruitment decisions were often influenced by a woman's physical appearance rather than her professional qualifications and married women had fewer chances of being hired than their unmarried peers. Once hired, female recruits commonly underwent longer unpaid probation periods than their male colleagues.

Furthermore, women journalists said they were rarely given the same opportunities and responsibilities as men. They were usually asked to cover "soft" topics such as entertainment, family and social affairs reporting while men received political, investigative and economic reporting assignments. These practices restrict women's career development from the outset. When they are denied access to demanding reporting assignments or extended professional training, they are also denied the possibility of accruing the experience required for senior editorial positions.

7.2. Discrimination due to pregnancy and motherhood

Women journalists said that pregnancy and motherhood exposed them to various forms of employment discrimination including:

a) Dismissal following disclosure of pregnancy.
b) Pressure to resign before maternity leave.
c) Permanent replacement of journalists during their maternity leave.
d) Denial of promotion because a woman is pregnant or intends to have children.
e) Penalising mothers who need time to care for sick children.
f) Assigning unfavourable shifts to women returning from maternity leave.
g) Treating maternity-related absence as misconduct or poor performance.

These practices create additional employment insecurity for women and can force them to choose between family responsibilities and their careers. Respondents also linked such discrimination to the absence of written contracts and clear workplace policies, which makes it harder for women to establish their entitlements or challenge unfair treatment. Informal employment arrangements further complicate the provision of maternity-related benefits.

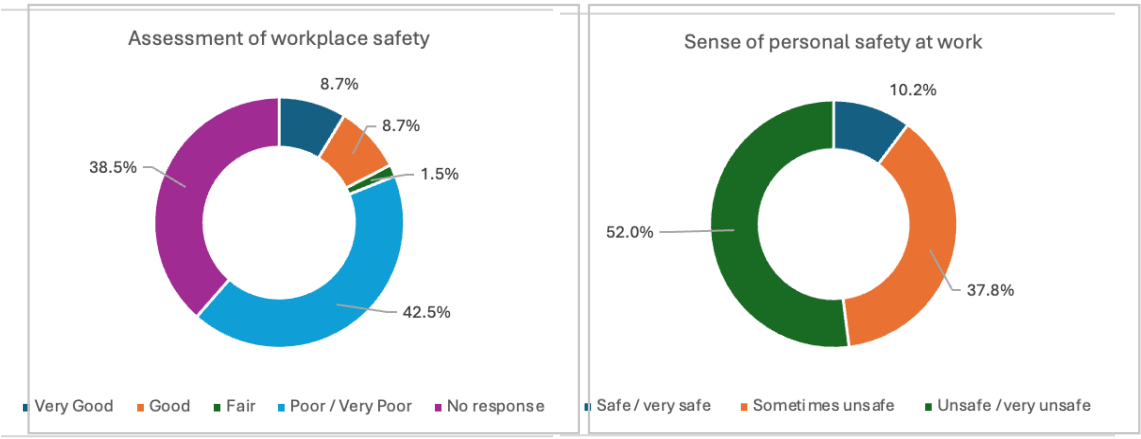
Managers of private media outlets who took part in the consultation exercise contended that maintaining salary payments during maternity leave while also covering the costs of replacement staff placed significant pressures on operating budgets that were already very tight.

8. Safety at work

Women journalists in Somalia operate in one of the most dangerous environments in the world. They routinely face threats from extremist groups such as Al-Shabbab and Islamic State proxies as well as from government security services or political groups seeking to curb or control their professional activities. Thus, routine reporting assignments can expose journalists to violence, intimidation and harassment.

Nevertheless, participants in the group discussion complained that, while journalists – both male and female – are often required to travel alone at night after completing assignments, employers fail to provide safe transport between workplaces and homes. These conditions place additional burdens on women who must make their own arrangements for safe transport and personal protection. Similarly, women are regularly assigned to interview armed individuals or powerful officials without adequate security support.

The results from the survey confirm these disturbing trends. A minority of respondents considered that workplace safety and institutional reporting of harassment were good (8.7%) or very good (8.7%). A far higher percentage rated them as poor/very poor (42.5%) while more than a third (38.6%) did not respond to this question. Alarmingly, over half of respondents (52%) said that they felt unsafe or very unsafe at work while only 10% felt safe or very safe.



Although media employers have limited power to prevent intimidation originating from armed actors, security personnel, or powerful political figures, they have an obligation to conduct basic risk assessments, make arrangements for safe reporting, implement emergency communication procedures and ensure that responses to threats are effective and timely. There was little evidence that senior managers have a proper understanding of their responsibility to provide duty of care.

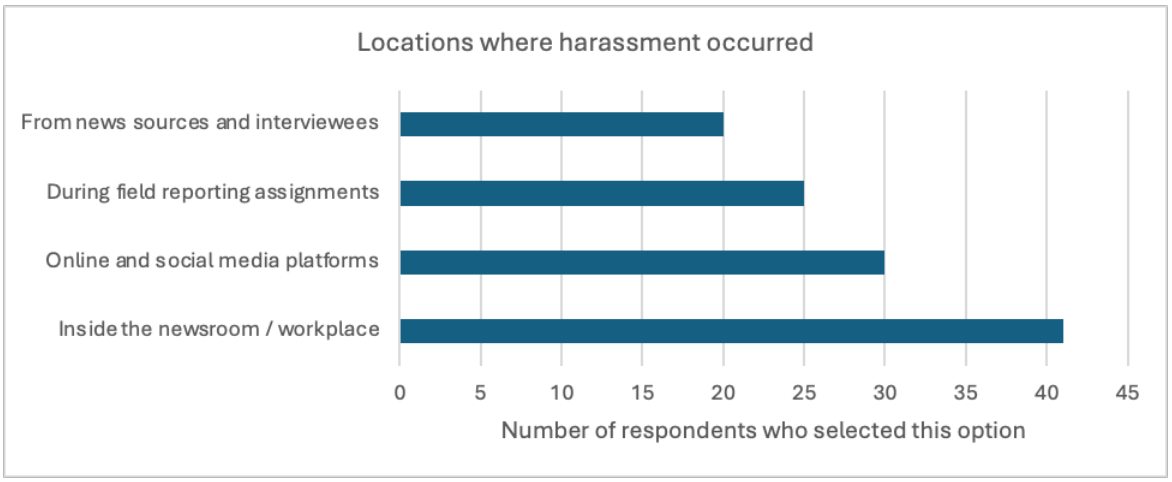
Media managers interviewed during the project said that, when women journalists came under threat, they were generally removed from the assignment in order to prevent further harm. They went on to say that private media organisations also faced financial limitations which affect their ability to provide secure transport, protective equipment, emergency accommodation and other safety arrangements. However, financial constraints do not absolve employers of their responsibility to take all reasonable preventive measures to safeguard their staff.

9. Sexual intimidation and harassment

Female reporters say they are subjected to sexual intimidation and harassment while carrying out assignments outside their workplaces. Participants in the group discussions reported experiencing inappropriate treatment at security checkpoints, harassment during searches, threats of sexual assault while detained and unwanted sexual attention from interviewees.

Of the survey respondents, nearly half (48%) said they had experienced harassment in their careers while a similar proportion (45.7%) preferred not to share this information. The most common place where harassment took place was in the newsroom or workplace (32.5% of respondents chose this answer), however they also reported attempts to intimidate them online (23.6%) and during field reporting assignments (19.7%). Worryingly, just over one in eight of those interviewed said they had been harassed by news sources and interviewees.

The overall assessment of working conditions with regard to safety, harassment and institutional reporting at media houses was bleak. Of the survey respondents, 42.5% considered conditions to be poor or very poor while another 38.5% declined to respond to this question, suggesting that they were not comfortable with criticising their employers, even in conditions of strict anonymity.



Case study

A female reporter in Kismayo was detained at a checkpoint and subjected to invasive questioning about her personal life. She was also threatened with sexual assault and humiliating body searches. Such incidents demonstrate that women journalists face risks that differ markedly from those experienced by male colleagues. In addition to the general security threats associated with reporting in Somalia, women can face sexualised intimidation that is intended to discourage them from carrying out their professional duties.

9.1. Leveraging family relations and social reputation to threaten women

One of the more distinctive dimensions of women's occupational vulnerability in Somalia is the deliberate use of family relationships and social reputation as instruments of intimidation. Women journalists explained that harassment sometimes spills beyond the confines of the workplace or the wider professional sector with perpetrators attempting to undermine their standing within their families and communities. Participants described situations involving:

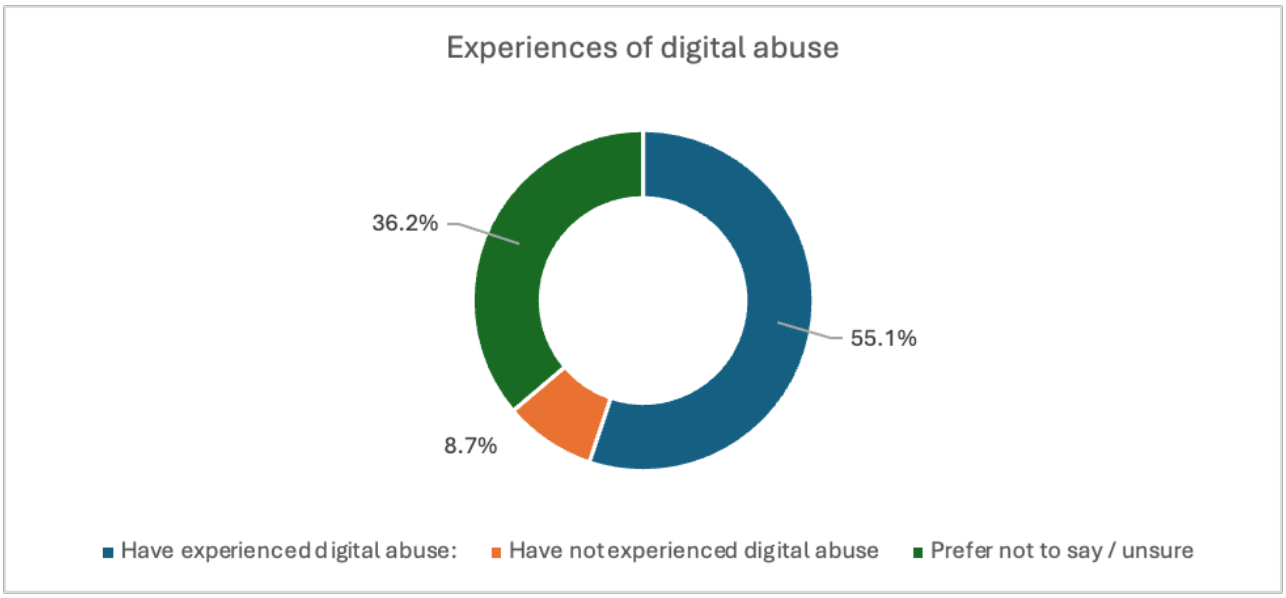
a. Perpetrators exploiting fears of family dishonour to prevent women from reporting sexual abuse.
b. Married female journalists facing pressure to leave employment following online defamation campaigns.
c. Women being publicly shamed for travelling on professional assignments or reporting late at night.

Case study

One particularly disturbing case involved a female journalist who received threats that a fabricated intimate photograph, believed to have been created using artificial intelligence, would be sent to her husband and mother unless she abandoned a complaint. This case illustrates how the threat to ruin a woman's reputation can be used to obstruct complaints and force victims into silence. The potential involvement of family members makes such intimidation especially damaging because the consequences extend beyond the workplace.

9.2. Online sexual harassment and digital attacks

Most survey respondents (over 55%) stated that they had experienced digital abuse as a result of their professional activities while one in three preferred not to say. Women journalists reported that digital attacks are especially damaging because they compromise both their professional credibility and their social standing.



The forms of abuse identified during the consultations included:

a) Sexualised insults directed at women presenting news or reporting political developments.
b) Threats of rape and other forms of sexual violence disseminated via social media.
c) AI-generated sexual deepfakes falsely depicting female journalists.
d) Fake social media accounts created to impersonate women journalists.
e) Publication of private telephone numbers, residential addresses, or family information.

Participants in the group discussions explained that, as well as having a devastating effect on their reputations, these attacks can expose women to further abuse and discourage them from continuing to engage in public-facing professional activities. The use of manipulated sexualised images and threats to distribute fabricated material represents a particularly serious form of intimidation because it exploits the social consequences of sexual allegations, even when the images are entirely false.

Although news media organisations can do little to curb online harassment, they have an obligation to assist targeted employees by documenting threats, reporting abuse and taking appropriate digital security measures to limit exposure to online harms.

9.3. Psychological and emotional consequences

Women journalists who took part in the group discussions emphasised that the cumulative effects of harassment, insecurity and economic exploitation are substantial and have become normalised in many working environments. They highlighted the psychological and emotional consequences, including anxiety, depression, trauma-related symptoms, reduced professional confidence and withdrawal from public life.

As a result, some women become reluctant to accept assignments involving public interaction with powerful individuals because of previous experiences of intimidation and harassment. The group discussions highlighted that workplace abuse should not be assessed only through visible injuries, dismissal, or loss of income. Its longer-term psychological consequences can force women to adopt a range of extreme coping measures, including leaving the profession.

9.4. The culture of silence

Women journalists identified sexual harassment as a major occupational health, safety and labour rights concern that is rarely discussed openly. They described a prevailing culture of silence in which women are discouraged from speaking about sexual harassment and violence or pursuing related complaints. The expectation is often that incidents will not be mentioned publicly and that women will avoid actions that could damage the reputation of their employer or themselves.

This culture is reinforced by the absence of independent complaints mechanisms. In the survey, more than 42.5% of respondents said that no reporting mechanisms existed at their media houses while a further 31.5% were unable to say whether they existed or not. Only one in four said there was a clear and confidential reporting mechanism in their newsroom.

Participants explained that women can remain silent even when misconduct is repeated because they do not believe their complaints will be investigated fairly or that they will be protected from retaliation. The passive response allows harassment to continue and places responsibility for managing its consequences on the women who experience it rather than on those responsible for preventing and addressing misconduct.

According to the study, the motivations for not reporting sexual violence and harassment or discrimination vary but the prime reason given by respondents was fear of losing their job or termination of their contract (25 and eight women respectively). Eight respondents said that they did

not believe that their management would take any action in response to a complaint. Furthermore, women journalists pointed towards several forms of retaliation following complaints about sexual harassment, discrimination, or unfair treatment, including:

a) Dismissal or salary reductions after reporting sexual harassment.
b) Removal from television presenting duties or reporting assignments.
c) Pressure to withdraw complaints to protect the reputation of the media organisation concerned.
d) Forcing complainants to confront the alleged perpetrators.
e) Refusal to provide professional references or recommendations when women leave media organisations where they have experienced mistreatment.
f) Intimidation by influential individuals linked to the owner of the media house.

This lack of effective reporting procedures allows harassment and other abuses to continue without meaningful accountability. The fear of losing employment, income and professional opportunities creates a powerful incentive for women to remain silent, particularly when the person accused of misconduct is responsible for assigning work, approving salaries, or making decisions about extending contracts or providing future employment.



9.5. Institutional responsibility

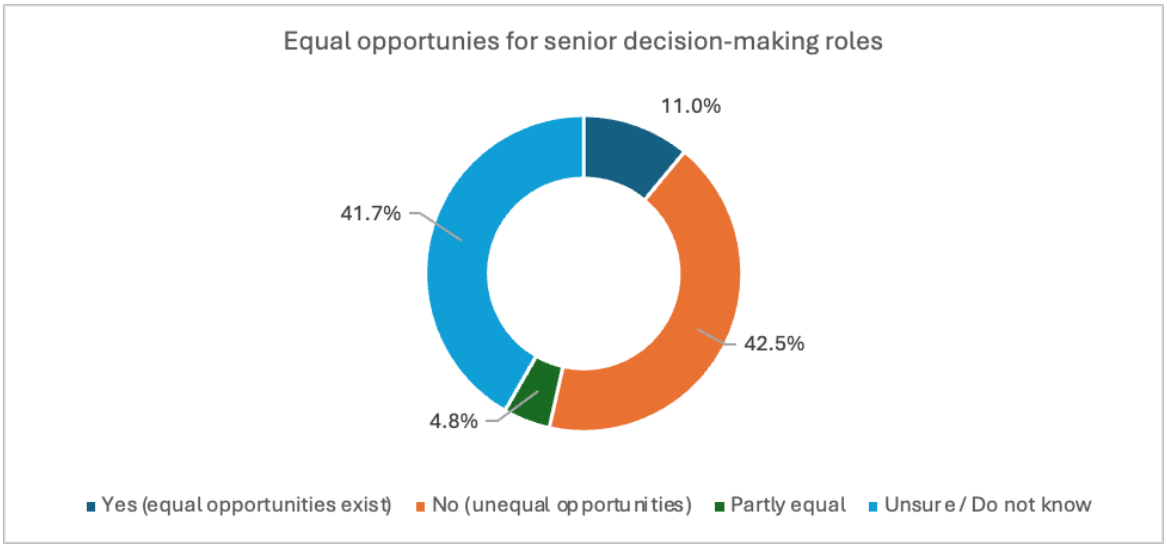
Media managers interviewed as part of the consultation exercise contended that harassment was generally a case of individual misconduct and, thus, employers could not be held responsible for every inappropriate interaction between workers. This explanation, however, does not resolve the issue of institutional responsibility or line managers' obligations to provide duty of care. Media organisations that lack clear policies against sexual harassment, confidential complaints procedures and independent investigation mechanisms expose women to greater risks that are often downplayed or ignored.

The use of informal mediation to resolve complaints related to sexual violence and harassment is a major concern. Managers often regard private settlement as a practical way to prevent disputes from escalating or attracting unwanted public attention. However, such arrangements can place pressure on women to withdraw complaints, forgive perpetrators, or continue working in unsafe environments.

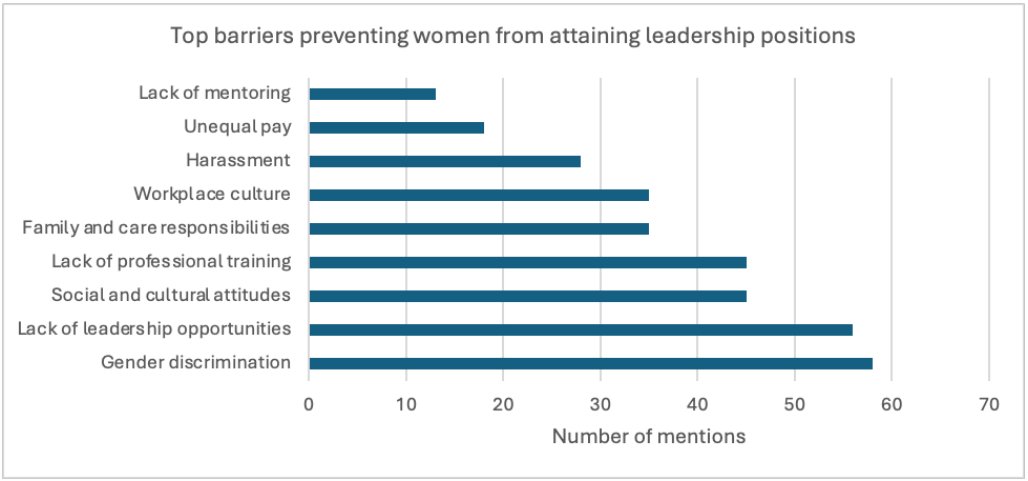
Fear of social stigma is another influencing factor. Women who report sexual violence and harassment may be concerned about damage to their reputation, family relationships, or future employment opportunities. While confidentiality is essential, protecting a woman's privacy must not become a justification for concealing misconduct or failing to investigate serious allegations.

10. Barriers to career advancement

In general, respondents to the survey did not believe that they had the same opportunities as men to advance their careers. Only 11% gave a positive answer to this question. Tellingly, nearly half of the respondents (46.5%) said they had been denied promotion or key assignments due to their gender.



Gender discrimination tops the list of the perceived barriers that prevent women from achieving leadership positions. A large proportion (44.1%) also cited the lack of leadership opportunities. However, social and cultural attitudes and a lack of professional training were commonly seen to be major obstacles. The survey provided additional insight to this latter challenge: nearly two-thirds of respondents (63.8%) said that they had received no training in their workplace. Nevertheless, the vast majority of those surveyed (93.7%) confirmed that they were interested in leadership opportunities, despite these obstacles.



Gender discrimination was characterised as being widespread and persistent, including among women with considerable professional experience and qualifications. Participants in the group discussions identified the following discriminatory practices:

a. Qualified women being overlooked for positions as editors, news directors and station managers.
b. Male colleagues with less experience being promoted ahead of them.
c. Women being excluded from editorial meetings where reporting assignments and the financial resources allocated to those assignments are decided.
d. Female journalists being denied opportunities to engage in investigative reporting.
e. Training and international professional development opportunities being allocated disproportionately to men.
f. Women being expected to accept male editorial supervision even when they hold senior professional positions and have extensive experience.

These accounts demonstrate a distinction between women's public visibility and their actual influence within media organisations. Although women are employed as presenters, reporters and programme hosts, their participation in editorial leadership and institutional decision-making remains limited. Respondents stressed that professional experience and qualifications do not necessarily insulate them from discrimination in promotion, assignment allocation, or access to training.

During the consultation exercise, media managers argued that differences in salaries and professional advancement are determined by experience, qualifications, responsibilities and the nature of journalistic assignments rather than by gender. However, the explanation that male journalists possess greater managerial experience does not stand up to close scrutiny. Women who are not given opportunities to undertake investigative assignments, supervise editorial teams, or receive management training are less able to acquire the experience required for promotion. Disparities in senior positions can, therefore, reflect longstanding inequalities in access to professional opportunities.





Case study - Bilan Media

Established in 2022 through an initiative implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and funded by the European Union (EU), Bilan Media became Somalia's first all-women newsroom, marking an important step towards challenging the chronic barriers that have prevented many talented Somali women from advancing their journalistic careers.

Bilan started off with six women journalists, including a female editor, who were given the freedom and responsibility to decide which stories to pursue and how to tackle them. Its editorial team began reporting on subjects that were often overlooked or considered taboo, including gender-based violence, discrimination and the experiences of marginalised communities. By April 2025, Bilan had produced more than 300 stories and expanded its network to include female freelance journalists from different parts of Somalia.

In a media industry where women journalists have long struggled to secure professional recognition, Bilan offers something different: an opportunity for women to take charge of editorial decision-making, develop their professional judgement and demonstrate their abilities. Its experience reinforces the need to move beyond simply increasing the number of women employed in journalism and focus on the quality of their employment, safety, professional independence and leadership potential.

Sustaining this progress and extending opportunities to women journalists in other Somali regions, especially those with limited access to professional training and leadership, is crucial. Bilan should be seen as positive example for other Somali women, bringing lasting improvements to the working lives of women journalists and fostering a professional environment where respect, safety and equal opportunities are the rule rather than the exception.

11. Recommendations

The following recommendations take their cue from the key findings of the research and identify the main areas where change is needed in the Somali media industry, if women are to fulfil their true potential and enjoy the same rights and opportunities as their male colleagues.

a. **Provide mandatory written contracts and regular wages:** Media management across state and private outlets must phase out undocumented and informal employment practices, establishing standardised written contracts that safeguard basic labour rights, leave allowances, overtime payments and maternity benefits in line with Somalia's new Labour Code (Law No. 36). Monthly salaries must be paid on time.

b. **bIntroduce or upgrade appropriate facilities in the workplace:** Facilities for pregnant women, safe areas for rest and confidential discussions and privacy for managing menstrual hygiene and breastfeeding should be offered by default in all newsrooms. Women should be consulted during the creation or improvement of such facilities.

c. **Establish confidential reporting and anti-harassment safeguards:** Media houses should establish independent reporting mechanisms in newsrooms with robust non-retaliation policies to protect victims of physical and online harassment. All cases should be heard in the strictest confidence and in a safe environment.

d. **Maintain leadership and editorial pipelines for women:** Women journalists should have access to targeted editorial tracks, investigative grants, training opportunities and management mentorship programmes for mid-career female journalists, thereby empowering them to break the glass ceilings that exist across the media industry in Somalia.

e. **Adopt digital security and field safety protocols:** Newsrooms have an obligation to equip female field reporters with practical security support, safe transportation on assignments and cybersecurity training to counter digital abuse and stalking. Editors need to introduce and abide by gender-sensitive guidelines for operating in remote or conflict-affected regions.

11.1. Roles for media support actors

A broad cohort of political, social and development actors have an essential role to play in protecting and promoting the rights of Somali women working in the media industry. This work is integral to their existing mandates and stands to benefit from their wide expertise and experience in this and adjacent fields. The paragraphs below summarise the key areas for future engagement and intervention as part of a whole-of-society approach to tackling and overcoming the challenges faced by women journalists in Somalia:

a. As the largest and most influential trade union representing media professionals in Somalia, the **National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ)** should continue to design and deliver capacity-building programmes that equip media managers with the knowledge and skills to fulfil their duty of care towards women journalists and media workers. NUSOJ should also be supported in developing and negotiating collective bargaining agreements that safeguard women journalists' rights at work, ensure fair and decent working conditions and protect them from all forms of exploitation, discrimination, sexual harassment, violence and workplace abuse. The union should promote effective workplace policies, address complaints and protect survivors in the media sector.

b. Women's media organisations, which have a strong track record in building women journalists' resilience to external pressures, online harassment and discrimination, should receive greater support to advance not only women's empowerment but also their emancipation, professional independence and leadership. These organisations should be supported in strengthening women journalists' management skills and expand leadership opportunities. They must also be meaningfully included in all decisions affecting the rights, well-being and professional advancement of women journalists in Somalia.

c. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and Federal Member States (FMSs) should foster an enabling environment for inclusive journalism that amplifies women's voices and strengthens their participation in democratic debate. Federal and state authorities must ensure that women journalists are fully protected under labour laws, rigorously enforce measures against sexual violence, harassment and discrimination and ensure that perpetrators of crimes against women journalists are investigated, prosecuted and held accountable, ending the culture of impunity.

d. Somalia's international partners should prioritise supporting women journalists by investing in sustainable, home-grown and people-centred initiatives that build a lasting movement for their safety, rights, economic independence, professional autonomy and equal access to leadership opportunities. They should also engage with federal and state authorities to strengthen policies and their implementation while working with media organisations to remove discriminatory barriers and expand women journalists' access to training, career advancement and decision-making roles.



NUSOJ

Ururka Qaranka Suxufiyiinta Soomaaliyeed

National Union of Somali Journalists

About NUSOJ

The National Union of Somali Journalists (NUSOJ) is an independent trade union and media freedom advocacy organisation representing journalists across Somalia. The union defends journalists' rights, promotes conducive working conditions and works to ensure that journalists can practise their profession freely, safely and without fear of reprisal. NUSOJ also advocates for gender equality, public interest journalism, stronger labour protections, human rights and an end to impunity. Its work is guided by the four Cs: **Convening, Campaigning, Communicating and Convincing,** bringing together stakeholders, mobilising collective action, raising public awareness and influencing policies and practices.

NUSOJ is a full member of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) and a partner organisation of Reporters Without Borders (RSF). It also enjoys consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Through its national work and international engagement, NUSOJ promotes media freedom, defends journalists' rights, advances human rights, develops professional skills and contributes to democratic governance and public accountability.

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