

Block 6 | Institutional and other support to address online harassment

How do journalists find legal help or aid? Should journalists be seeking protections from employers to get legal support if needed? What should media outlets be doing to support their journalists? How can an individual case be leveraged for positive change? What options are there to lighten the burden of litigation by finding the right partners?

As discussed in the previous video, there is a wider landscape to consider when assessing the options in responding to harassment. It is therefore important to always get proper legal advice from someone qualified to assist you in properly understanding and weighing your options.

In addition to getting support for your individual situation, it sometimes is possible to bring about change and a better landscape for all journalists that might find themselves in a similar situation. This video will address different routes to explore for getting support for your case and the possibility of having your battle contribute to positive change, or: strategic litigation.

We will now look at the **options for getting legal advice and support for your situation**. There are different potential sources for receiving legal advice and sometimes legal assistance.

To start with, your **employer** might be able to offer support in different ways if you were harmed in the context of your work for them. What they are obliged to do from a contractual perspective may depend on the formal relationship you have with them: are you an employee or a freelancer? It is good to understand your position and what the implications are for the support they can provide.

Even if the media outlet you work with does not have a contractual obligation to do so, they may very well want to help. One can also argue that there is a moral obligation to do so. Therefore, it is always a good idea to have a conversation about this.

Besides supporting the identification and costs of a lawyer, there may be inhouse counsel at the organisation who is knowledgeable about these issues and whom you could speak to. They can also potentially provide public support for your case or cause and help draw the right kind of attention to the matter.

Generally, harassment claims are more personal, so a company or media outlet will not likely be able to institute legal procedures on a journalist's behalf.

Unions often also offer legal advice that extends beyond the employment context, so it is worth looking into connecting with their legal advice services as well.

In many countries, there are options for getting **free or state-financed legal support**. Find out if there are legal aid schemes, legal clinics, or citizen's advice bureaus in your country where there is a lawyer who can talk to you about your situation.

Finally, **NGOs** can be a good source for advice on where to find a good lawyer and sometimes they can even assist in paying legal fees. IPI has listed a number of organisations you can contact for advice.

- NGOs can also help in leveraging any legal case you take on for a bigger cause. Through **strategic litigation**, you can pursue a goal that goes beyond a success in the case itself alone. For example, it can help set a standard that ensure greater legal protection for others in your position in the future. That way, the lawsuit can lead to broader, systematic change.
- NGOs that are specialised in freedom of expression, press freedom, and women's rights, for example, can be important partners in this. This can also help alleviate the burden of taking on a case alone. They can be partners on the legal and litigation aspects of the case or help raise awareness of the issue in a broader context through for example advocacy and campaigning.

Not every case lends itself to strategic litigation and it is also not something that everyone will be interested in. But it can be an option to consider for making the negative experience of having had to face harassment into a lever for positive change.

The **summary** of this is: make sure to inform yourself well about the options and try to find the right partners to pursue the route that best works for you. There are no guarantees that the legal framework will be able to adequately address the issues you're facing, but there are options available that are worth exploring.

Author: Nani Jansen Reventlow, Director of Digital Freedom Fund.

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