

Labour Abuse: How Nigerian Journalists Struggle to Survive

A WIJAFRICA Report on Pay, Welfare and Working Conditions
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Overview

The preliminary findings confirm that poor welfare conditions remain widespread across Nigeria's media industry and continue to affect women journalists disproportionately.

Across interviews, a consistent pattern emerged of delayed salaries, non-payment of wages, poor remuneration, absence of salary reviews, non-remittance of pensions and the non-payment of gratuities and retirement benefits. These issues are not isolated to a few organisations but appear to be consistent across both private and state-owned media.

Many journalists described a profession in which workers are routinely expected to continue working despite being owed salaries for extended periods, often with little or no communication from management. In several organisations, staff reported being owed between four and twelve months' salary at different points, with some extreme cases exceeding one year.

For women journalists, these conditions carry additional consequences. Several respondents described experiences of humiliation, financial distress and burnout, often having to rely on personal appeals to friends, former colleagues, government officials and private sector contacts to meet basic obligations such as rent, school fees and hospital bills.

The average experience level of journalists interviewed was approximately 15 years, indicating that these findings reflect not only early-career professionals but also mid- and senior-level practitioners.

Across almost all respondents, the cost of accommodation emerged as the single most pressing financial challenge, followed closely by school fees for those with children. Many described a recurring cycle in which rent periods trigger periods of financial crisis, leading to reliance on external support mechanisms.

Nearly all journalists interviewed acknowledged that they have, at some point, resorted to personal solicitation to meet financial obligations. These include remittances from relatives abroad, freelance engagements, support from former colleagues now in the corporate sector and high-interest loans from digital lending platforms.

Source material for this report is based on interviews with current and former journalists, editors, camera operators and newsroom staff.

Scope of Research

This report tracked 170 journalists across 50 media establishments in 19 states over a four-month period (January 2026 – April 2026), using a combination of extensive phone interviews, physical meetings and private communications.

The organisations represented span print, television, radio and digital platforms, including Leadership, Punch, Daily Independent, TVC, MITV, Channels, Arise News, Premium Times, Nairametrics, THISDAY, Vanguard, Guardian, Daily Trust, Silverbird, Soundcity, BBC, New Telegraph, RSTV Port Harcourt, DITV Kaduna, ITV Benin, DBS Asaba, CoolWazobiaInfo, BeatClassicNaija FM, Brilla FM, BusinessDay, TechCabal, CORE TV, Galaxy TV, Kaftan TV and several others across the country.

Most respondents requested anonymity. Several journalists declined participation outright, while a small number who initially agreed later contacted the research team to withdraw their contributions. The primary reason cited was fear of being identified, fear of retaliation or being blacklisted across the industry.

This shows an environment in which journalists feel constrained from speaking openly about working conditions, even when those conditions are widely known.

Several calls to the current National President of the Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ), Comrade Alhassan Yahaya were not returned. The team asked a very senior journalist to reach out, but the president did not respond beyond preliminary greetings.

Delayed and Non-Payment of Salaries

Delayed salaries remain one of the most severe and persistent issues identified.

Respondents across multiple organisations reported that salary delays are not occasional disruptions but recurring patterns. In organisations such as THISDAY, MITV, Soundcity, AIT, Plus TV Africa and Silverbird, staff reported extended arrears ranging from several months to over one year. AIT and Silverbird have undergone some restructuring and salaries are now consistent, even though other welfare issues were still reported.

Among organisations identified during preliminary interviews:

- **THISDAY**, controlled by Chief Nduka Obaigbena, is reportedly owing staff up to seven months' salary.
- **MITV**, controlled by the Busari family - staff are reportedly owed more than 12 months' salary. They are said to be under new management
- **Soundcity**, controlled by Tajudeen Adepetu (and its sister companies) is reported to have delayed salaries throughout the year, with some staff owed up to nine months.

- **AIT** controlled by the Dokpesi family has historically owed salaries, although there are reports of management changes. AIT remains one of the only media organizations where staff have protested non-payment of salaries in the past, shutting down operations in 2015.
- **Plus TV**, with former **Rivers State Governor Rotimi Amaechi** as core investor, shut down operations in 2025 and is reportedly owing some former staff up to nine months in arrears. There is no communication from the company about when – of if ever - the salaries will be paid.
- **NN24** owed salaries for over one year before it shut down in 2012. Staffers are still owed wages running into millions of naira. Five years later in 2017, the founder of the station, **Anthony Dara** then went ahead and established **News Central**. Former staffers of NN24 never received wages that were owed to them and none have sought redress in court.
- **Vanguard** owed salaries for months in the past year, but has now cleared all arrears
- **Business Day** also owed salaries in recent months but has cleared all arrears.
- **CORE TV**, controlled by politician Olajide Olaniran (aka Jandor) has reportedly shut down operations but former staff declined to say if they were still being owed.

For many organisations where salaries are delayed, staff are owed a minimum of four to five months. In more severe cases, the figure rises to 12 months or more. In many organisations, delays affect all categories of staff and are rarely accompanied by transparent communication from management. Staff are often expected to continue working under these conditions without clarity on when outstanding payments will be made.

In Northern Nigeria, particularly in states such as Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi, journalists working with stations such as DITV Kaduna, Liberty TV and similar outlets described even more precarious arrangements, including situations where staff work for months or years without formal salary structures, relying instead on sponsorship, commissions or informal payments.

Low Wages, Salary Structures and Inequality

Beyond delayed salaries, respondents consistently described wages as extremely low and disconnected from current economic realities.

Entry-level salaries in state-owned media organisations across Ogun, Edo, Rivers, Plateau, Kaduna, Delta, Oyo, Osun, Imo, Gombe, Kwara and Cross River were reported to average between ₦70,000 and ₦80,000, with some as low as ₦63,000.

In print media, organisations such as Vanguard, Tribune, Daily Sun, New Telegraph, Leadership, Guardian, Thisday and Daily Independent were generally reported to pay approximately ₦130,000 per month, with little or no salary review in up to five years.

Average television pay (Lagos) was ₦150,000, while journalists in other states earn less. Recent pay raise has brought TVC to around ₦200,000, while Channels, Arise News Smooth FM and News Central are reportedly higher.

Salary secrecy is widespread, with no formal salary bands and wide disparities within the same roles. Journalists reported situations where individuals in the same role earn significantly different salaries. This is reportedly widespread in organisations like Business Day.

The Punch pays around N250,000 per month along with other allowances including transportation, while **Premium Times** and **The Cable** pay approximately N150,000 to N180,000 per month on average. **Pulse** and **Nairametrics** pay approximately N250,000 per month for the average reporter, while **TechCabal** reportedly pays up to N400,000 per month for the average reporter

By comparison, international broadcasters operating in Nigeria, including BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera and DW, reportedly pay Nigerian journalists between N1.5 million and N2.2 million per month depending on role and experience. International journalists average around \$55,000 to \$75,000 per month. Senior correspondents (international) earn closer to \$100,000 per year.

Most journalists interviewed said their organisations have not reviewed salaries in approximately five years, despite inflation, the COVID-19 pandemic, the aftermath of the EndSARS protests and recent economic reforms which have significantly increased living costs.

Pensions, Gratuities and Long-Term Security

Non-remittance of pension contributions emerged as a critical concern.

Across organisations, respondents reported that pension deductions are regularly made from salaries but are not remitted to Pension Fund Administrators. In some cases, staff reported that no remittances had been made for over a decade.

Many journalists stated that they do not know the status of their pension accounts, raising serious concerns about long-term financial security. Retirees are often owed gratuities for extended periods, and former staff frequently wait years for severance payments.

These practices represent clear violations of the Pension Reform Act 2014, yet enforcement appears weak within the sector.

One former editor at Vanguard reportedly retired more than five years ago and has still not received his gratuity.

Organisations Frequently Mentioned for Poor Welfare Practices

- THISDAY
- MITV
- Soundcity
- AIT
- Plus TV
- Silverbird
- All private media in Northern Nigeria, with the exception of Daily Trust and Leadership newspapers

Silverbird was repeatedly mentioned by current and former staff as another organisation with significant welfare concerns.

After years of salary delays, the company reportedly introduced a batch payment system in which one group of staff is paid at month-end while another group is paid weeks later. Several interviewees stated that, in 2025, salary delays averaged approximately 90 days.

Other Responders

General reporters at Silverbird reportedly earn between N120,000 and N150,000 per month. Respondents also stated that there has been no salary review since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several staff members alleged that pension contributions continue to be deducted from salaries but have not been remitted to pension administrators for more than a decade.

Daily Independent, which is linked with a former governor of Delta State, Chief James Ibori historically associated with salary delays, was also mentioned, although respondents noted that the organisation has undergone some restructuring.

Daily Sun and New Telegraph, both associated with Senator Orji Uzor Kalu, were reported to have improved salary consistency in the past year.

News Central, associated with Chief James Ibori was also described as relatively consistent in salary payment, even though it has struggled in the past.

Organisations Frequently Mentioned for Better Welfare Practices

The following organisations were repeatedly identified by interviewees as having relatively better welfare standards:

- Channels Television
- The Punch
- TVC
- Pulse (digital)
- Daily Trust
- TechCabal (digital)
- CoolWazobialInfo

The Punch was especially noted by several current and former employees as having maintained a strong record of salary consistency over more than 25 years.

However, more than seven current and former Punch staff members also complained of grueling work schedules and long working hours, with some employees reportedly remaining in the office until

10pm, often travelling very long distances to get home from the Punch offices in Magboro along the Lagos Ibadan Expressway.

Channels Television is widely regarded as offering above-industry average pay for reporters, with staff consistently describing its welfare provisions as satisfactory. It is also among the few organisations noted for investing in staff development through structured training and continuous professional improvement.

Daily Trust was also identified as one of the better employers in the sector, with consistent salary payments and improved welfare including HMOs.

TechCabal was identified as one of the highest-paying media organisations in Nigeria.

BusinessDay was consistently cited as maintaining relatively strong welfare standards, though respondents noted that pay levels can vary internally depending on individual negotiation with the owner. A similar pattern was observed at Smooth FM in Lagos, where salaries are reported to be consistent and generally regarded as fair by staff.

CoolWazobiaInfo was described as having strong health insurance and above-average welfare structures. However, salaries were reported to be relatively low, with some disparities across states attributed to cost of living. Some staff also complained about hostel quality in Abuja.

Brilla FM was described as consistent in salary payments, with management seen as committed to staff welfare, although employees expressed concerns about low pay. Same (low but consistent pay) was reported for ITV Benin, DBS Asaba.

Leadership Newspaper reportedly pays salaries as and when due.

Industry Conditions and Workforce Wellbeing

To cope with low or unpaid salaries, journalists rely on:

- Honorariums, “gifts” and brown envelopes from events
- Remittances from relatives abroad
- Freelance work
- Support from former colleagues in the corporate sector
- High-interest loan applications

These coping mechanisms are unsustainable and increase financial vulnerability.

Most journalists reported that they do not have access to life insurance, and healthcare support is limited or non-existent in many organisations.

Journalists described their working conditions as financially unsustainable. The cost of rent, school fees, food, transportation and healthcare consistently exceeds monthly income, forcing many into cycles of debt, dependency and financial insecurity.

Respondents consistently described low morale across the industry.

- Many journalists reported feelings of shame and loss of dignity in their work
- Several respondents admitted to experiencing depression
- Most journalists lack life insurance
- Many do not know the status of their pension accounts or balances

Specific organisational insights:

- Arise News reportedly recently increased salaries but withdrew health insurance and withdrew pensions. The station was also reported not to remit pensions to Pension Fund Administrators
- Soundcity (owing for more than 6 months) staff in Port Harcourt raised concerns about hostel accommodation conditions
- CoolwazobiaInfo staff in Abuja raised concerns about hostel accommodation conditions.
- Silverbird has reportedly introduced a revised employee handbook that reduces certain staff entitlements, including a provision requiring employees to complete 10 years of service before qualifying for severance benefits.

Mental Health, Morale and Loss of Dignity

The financial pressures associated with delayed salaries, low wages and lack of welfare support have had a profound impact on morale across the industry.

Many journalists described a sense of diminished dignity associated with their work. Several respondents admitted to experiencing depression, anxiety and burnout.

Atmosphere of Fear and Silence

A defining feature of the industry is the pervasive atmosphere of fear.

Many journalists reported that employers actively discourage discussions around salaries and welfare conditions. Some respondents withdrew their participation after initial engagement due to fear of retaliation or blacklisting.

This environment significantly undermines accountability and allows poor labour practices to persist.

Women Journalists

Women journalists face compounded challenges in a male-dominated and male-controlled industry.

- Respondents reported miscarriages linked to demanding work schedules, marriages breaking down due to long working hours, and experiences of sexual harassment by supervisors and media owners.
- Women also reported limited opportunities for promotion and career advancement.

- Some women reported being advised to delay childbirth in order to protect their careers. Some who followed this advice later experienced difficulty conceiving due to age, highlighting long-term personal consequences linked to workplace conditions.

Ethical and Professional Consequences

Respondents repeatedly linked poor welfare conditions with declining ethical standards across the industry.

Many journalists stated that poor wages and salary delays create pressure to accept inducements, sponsored stories and other forms of “brown envelope” journalism.

Several journalists also noted that many of the profession’s best talents are leaving journalism for corporate communications, public relations and government jobs.

For those who wish to remain in journalism, international organisations such as the BBC, CNN, DW and Al Jazeera are seen as preferred employers because of better pay, stronger welfare and clearer career structures.

The findings also suggest that the profession is losing experienced journalists at a time when Nigeria requires strong, independent and ethical reporting.

Regional Disparities: Northern Nigeria

Findings indicate significant regional disparities, particularly in Northern states of Nigeria. Government-owned media organisations are generally more consistent in salary payments than private media in the region, even though some are still reportedly paying less than the minimum wage of 70,000.

Even government media salaries are low and largely limited to basic pay without allowances

Private media structures in the region were described as highly precarious:

- Journalists, especially TV presenters and anchors, are often paid based on programme performance, sponsorship or commissions
- In some cases, staff work for months or even years without formal salaries
- Radio, television and print media across states such as Zamfara, Sokoto and Kebbi were reported to follow similar patterns

This has created conditions where:

- Journalists are financially dependent on politicians and external actors
- Professional independence is weakened
- Journalists are treated with low regard due to economic vulnerability

In Kano, despite a higher concentration of media organisations, conditions remain largely similar, with government-owned media still offering the most stable (though limited) income.

Public Sector Media Compensation

Respondents from federal and state-owned media organisations provided additional salary benchmarks:

- Entry-level journalists in federal radio (e.g. Radio Nigeria) earn approximately N63,000 per month, with recent minimum wage adjustments not yet fully implemented
- Mid-to-senior level staff (e.g. Level 14 Step 11 with nearly 20 years of service) earn approximately N265,000 per month
- Salary differences across federal media organisations such as VON, BON and NBC are minimal

Despite relatively greater stability compared to private media, respondents emphasised that public sector media salaries remain low relative to cost of living and professional demands.

Additional Industry Insights

Respondents and analysts also provided other insights:

- Industry consolidation while recommended, is difficult because many media organisations are founder-driven or “one-man businesses”
- Government funding of media raises concerns about independence and watchdog roles
- Legacy media organisations could reduce costs by sharing infrastructure such as circulation and distribution trucks for newspapers
- International donor funding remains a major support channel but is sometimes viewed with suspicion or perceived ideological bias

Preliminary Recommendations Based on this Report

During a meeting with media executives in March 2026, President Bola Tinubu pledged to provide fiscal relief to the media industry by reviewing import tariffs on newsprint, printing plates and broadcasting equipment, while also addressing the impact of large technology companies on advertising revenue.

However, journalists interviewed for this report argued that operational challenges alone do not explain the industry’s labour crisis, particularly in organisations where owners continue to maintain highly affluent and highly visible lifestyles while staff remain unpaid.

Several respondents also pointed to the irony that some industry leaders have occupied prominent leadership positions in sectoral bodies while simultaneously being accused of poor welfare practices. Any intervention by the presidency, they said, will likely not trickle down to the average journalist, essentially defeating the purpose.

Based on the findings so far, industry veterans and the writer of this report have proposed a number of interventions that could improve the welfare of journalists in Nigeria.

1. Unemployment Insurance for Journalists - Respondents suggested the creation of an unemployment insurance system for journalists who lose their jobs, particularly given the number of media closures and prolonged salary delays in the sector.
2. Monthly Welfare Support for Low-Income Journalists (government): Some respondents proposed a monthly welfare support programme for journalists earning N200,000 or less per month, to assist with food, transportation and other essential living expenses.
3. Emergency Fund for Journalists: There were repeated calls for a dedicated emergency fund to help journalists pay for healthcare, medical tests, hospital treatment and other urgent expenses.
4. Grants for Investigative Journalism: Respondents noted that investigative journalism is increasingly difficult because of poor pay and shrinking newsroom budgets. Several suggested the creation of grants to support public interest reporting and investigative work.
5. Grants for Training and Technology: Many journalists expressed the need for grants that would support professional development, training, digital skills and access to modern technology.
6. Equipment Loans and Grants: Respondents proposed grants and low-interest loans to help journalists acquire cameras, computers, recording devices and vehicles needed for reporting.
7. Media Entrepreneurship Support: Several interviewees suggested the creation of grants and financial support for owners of small media enterprises, especially digital publishers, to enable them hire additional staff and create sustainable jobs.
8. Verifiable Pension System: Respondents strongly recommended the creation of a more transparent and verifiable pension system for journalists, to ensure that deductions made from salaries are actually remitted and accessible at retirement.

Conclusion

The findings of this report present a consistent picture of an industry under strain. It is quite unconscionable that there are journalists in this country, who did not receive their wages during the Christmas season and the New Year. Three months later, during Ramadan and Sallah, they were still not paid what they were owed. This is a moral failure of the Nigeria Labour Congress and the Nigerian Union of Journalists, who have not come out to fight vehemently for the rights of their members. There are journalists among those interviewed for this report, who have up to 30 years' experience but are

unable to cater for a N500,000 naira emergency. Nigerian journalism has reached its moment of reckoning, what will be done about the profession and its custodians remains a question for all of us.

Yomi Owope, Coordinator, WIJAFRICA

programs@wijafrica.org, yomi@wijafrica.org