

SAFETY OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS ONLINE

A #SOFJO Resource Guide

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Authors:	Dr. Silvia Chocarro Sarah Clarke Paulina Gutiérrez Judy Taing
Editor:	Kristin Olson
Project officer:	Julia Haas
Peer-review:	Barbora Bukovska
Copy-editors:	Elisabeth Witchel Ton van den Brandt Laura Vidal Sebastian Denton
Designer and artist:	Peno Mishoyan

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Wallnerstrasse 6

A-1010 Vienna, Austria

Tel.: +43-1 514 36 68 00

E-mail: pm-fom@osce.org

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Foreword

Taking stock and
looking forward

Foreword

Taking stock and looking forward

In 2015, alarmed by a growing number of reports of women journalists and media workers being attacked online, the Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) initiated a discussion about tackling gender-based online harassment of journalists. These conversations spurred the launch of the Safety of Female Journalists Online project, or #SOFJO.¹

During the first five years of the #SOFJO project, the RFoM protected gender diversity within journalism in many ways. In their mandated early-warning function, the consecutive Representatives have given special attention to women journalists. They promoted women journalists' perspectives with the aim to support States to implement their international commitments. This Resource Guide takes the next step, helping States to transform their commitments into practice.

› **A dark place to be in**

In the course of the #SOFJO project, the Office of the RFoM has generated, together with various stakeholders, innovative and sustainable initiatives, including policy documents with concrete recommendations for all relevant actors, including governments, media outlets, and civil society organizations. The project became a recognized platform for raising awareness, developing collective strategies, and sharing tools and resources for targeted female journalists. Conferences, closed group meetings, and the social media outreach campaign #SOFJO helped to create a network of support from governments, media organizations, academia and civil society actors from across the OSCE participating States.

Various publications, including the research and recommendations presented in the 2016 publication *Countering Online Abuse of Female Journalists*;² the 2019 *Communiqué on Media Pluralism, Safety of Female Journalists and Safeguarding Marginalized Voices Online*;³ and the 2019 publication *Legal Responses to Online Harassment and Abuse of Journalists*⁴ co-produced by the International Press Institute (IPI), have furthered society's understanding of the many challenges and possible way forward.

The Office of the RFoM, in co-operation with IPI, produced a documentary in late 2018 entitled "A Dark Place".⁵ Women journalists who are the targets of harassment and online abuse can indeed find themselves in "a very dark place", as expressed in the film by recognized journalist Arzu Geybulla from Azerbaijan. The documentary shares experiences of female journalists who have been subjected to such overwhelming online harassment and abuse. In addition, lawyers, media managers, tech specialists and gender experts describe the negative implications for media diversity and the risk of self-censorship. The documentary has been, and still is, publicly screened across the OSCE region and beyond. The screenings have often been followed by powerful panel discussions in a bid to raise awareness and inspire change.



Now it is time to take the next step. The Office of the RFoM has developed this comprehensive #SOFJO Resource Guide to assist both State and non-State actors with guidance on improving the safety of female journalists online. This Guide aims to fill the gap between theory and the realization of online safety for women journalists.

The good practices presented in this Guide are all examples of ways in which international standards and commitments on safety of journalists can be realized. The #SOFJO Resource Guide outlines a systemic approach for actors that are central for creating an enabling environment for media freedom and safety of journalists.

Let the time ahead be marked by collective action so that women journalists will be able to work free from fear, harassment and violence. It is time to walk the talk.

The Office of the RFoM would like to sincerely thank all the contributors to this paper, especially Silvia Chocarro who authored the text together with Sarah Clarke, Paulina Gutiérrez and Judy Taing. Finally, I would like to thank the staff of the Office who contributed to the editing and publishing, in particular Kristin Olson, Julia Haas, Ton van den Brandt and Sebastian Denton.

29 October 2020

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Heissel', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jürgen Heissel,
*Director, Office of the OSCE
Representative on Freedom of the Media*

Endnotes

- 1 Safety of Female Journalists Online (#SOFJO) project of the Office of the OSCE RFoM, <https://www.osce.org/fom/sofjo>.
- 2 “New Challenges to Freedom of Expression: Countering Online Abuse of Female Journalists”, OSCE RFoM, 17 September 2015, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/1/193556.pdf>.
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- 4 OSCE RFoM and IPI, “Legal Responses to Online Harassment and Abuse of Journalists, Perspectives from Finland, France and Ireland”, 7 March 2019, <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/413549>.
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Summary

One common approach
and 40 proposed actions

Summary

One common approach and 40 proposed actions

The safety of women journalists online directly affects the quality of our democracies and the right of society to access a plurality of information. This #SOFJO Resource Guide responds to the gaps that exist in addressing the safety of women journalists online.

Following the work of the #SOFJO project by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, this Resource Guide aims to assist States and provide guidance to all relevant stakeholders, including non-State actors, across the OSCE region in addressing online harassment and abuse against women journalists.

After a short introduction of the problem and a mapping of international human rights standards that support the safety of women journalists online, 40 actions are proposed to be implemented with one common approach. Relevant examples and resources are added to these proposed actions.

› One common gender-responsive approach

All actions proposed in the #SOFJO Resource Guide should be implemented with a gender-responsive approach. This includes: departing from an understanding of the diverse conditions that influence the work and life of men and women of different groups in society; actively produce disaggregated data and information; ensure participatory and multi-stakeholder processes; properly resource, plan and evaluate the work that is needed; and make sure that measures aimed at protecting women journalists do not undermine their fundamental rights.



Executive branch of government

Implementing policies and practices for increased safety of female journalists

Proposed actions

1. Establish a national action plan on the safety of journalists that addresses specific conditions for female journalists;
2. Put in place protection measures that are gender-responsive;
3. Collect data on attacks against female journalists to inform policy and research, and to support awareness-raising campaigns to spur engagement among decision makers and the public;
4. Report on the safety of female journalists to the key international human rights mechanisms, and integrate the issue into foreign policy.

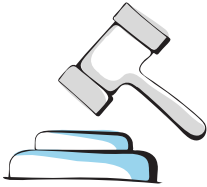


Legislative branch of government

Adopting or adapting frameworks for a safer environment offline and online

Proposed actions

1. Review and, when necessary, amend or adopt laws to promote a gender-responsive approach to the safety of journalists;
2. Make sure that legislation addressing online harassment and abuse against female journalists does not undermine the right to freedom of expression.

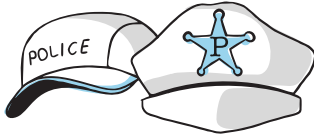


Judiciary

Ensuring access to justice
and ending impunity

Proposed actions

1. Raise awareness on gender issues throughout the judicial system, as this is essential for the protection of female journalists;
2. Increase expertise among judicial personnel on issues of freedom of expression, safety of journalists and harassment and abuse, offline and online;
3. Apply and promote best practices in access to justice, sentencing and remedies;
4. National human rights institutions should engage on the issue of safety of journalists.



Law enforcement agencies

Enhancing the methods for protection and effective investigations

Proposed actions

1. Enhance training of law enforcement authorities on the issue of online safety of journalists with a gender-responsive approach;
2. Review and improve gender considerations in risk assessments of threats and harassment;
3. Strengthen protocols, methods and procedures to investigate crimes against journalists and freedom of expression;
4. Increase dialogue and co-ordination on the safety of journalists between law enforcement authorities, media outlets and civil society.

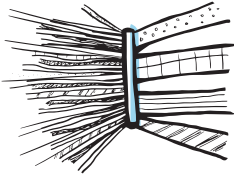


Intergovernmental organizations

From setting standards to assisting States

Proposed actions

1. Mainstream gender-responsive approaches in human rights standards and mechanisms on the safety of journalists;
2. Support States to address the implementation gap of international standards on the safety of journalists;
3. Help increase data and research that could inform the initiatives on safety of female journalists online;
4. Prioritize co-operation and co-ordination of actors to leverage impact.



Internet intermediaries

Respecting the rights of female journalists
and promoting online safety

Proposed actions

1. Respect international human rights standards on freedom of expression, privacy, participation and non-discrimination in policy and practice;
2. Make sure that policies on content moderation are clear, transparent and accessible for users, and that users are aware of how content is moderated, what constitutes online harassment and abuse, and how to report it;
3. Adopt user-centered and non-discrimination-based approaches in all operations;
4. Handle content removals and users' data requests with transparency and consistency;
5. Promote the role of women in journalism.



Media outlets

Protecting journalists starts at work

Proposed actions

1. Improve the workplace culture with comprehensive policies on both safety and gender;
2. Ensure support and training to journalists facing online harassment and abuse;
3. Develop gender-responsive community guidelines for interactive online platforms;
4. Monitor and document online abuse and harassment of female journalists, including freelancers.



Journalists' organizations and self-regulatory bodies

Organizing collective action and codes of conduct

Proposed actions

1. Increase collective action and advocacy to improve safety and other working conditions for female journalists;
2. Reinforce capacities through peer-to-peer networks, training and other practical support;
3. Document attacks and use information to raise awareness among key actors;
4. Promote the inclusion of safety and gender equality issues in the work of self-regulatory bodies.

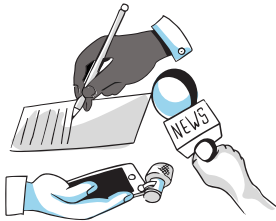


Civil society organizations and educational institutions

Mobilizing, researching and sharing good practices

Proposed actions

1. Increase data, knowledge and awareness on gender-based online harassment and abuse among key actors and society at large;
2. Join forces to advance the implementation of safety standards and other working conditions for female journalists at the national level;
3. Develop holistic protection training and educational materials;
4. Integrate journalists' safety and gender equality in journalism education and training institutions' activities.



Journalists and media workers

Prioritizing self-protection and peer support

Proposed actions

1. Monitor and assess the risk landscape for female journalists;
2. Practice a holistic approach towards safety and security, including physical, legal, psychosocial and digital security;
3. Document and report threats and attacks;
4. Support colleagues who are facing online abuse and harassment, and those who are at higher risk of experiencing such attacks;
5. Become informed on available forms of support, including legal mechanisms.

LEGISLATIVE



EXECUTIVE



JUDICIARY



MEDIA
OUTLETS



LAW ENFORCEMENT

#SOFJO



INTERNET
INTERMEDIARIES

JOURNALISTS
AND MEDIA
WORKERS



CIVIL SOCIETY AND
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

JOURNALISTS'
ORGANIZATIONS
AND SELF-REGULATORY
BODIES



INTERGOVERNMENTAL
ORGANIZATIONS

Introduction

Introduction

A threat to everyone
needs action from everyone

“Tonight, they will rape you.”

“Is there no brave fellow who could blow the fire out of this fiery bitch?”

“Does anyone know where she lives or which places she regularly visits?”

“I am thinking about fucking you as a warning or deterrent to others.”¹

These are just a few examples of social media posts women journalists² have received, which, unfortunately and alarmingly, are not exceptions. Sixty-three per cent of female journalists at some point have been threatened or harassed online just for doing their jobs.³ Women journalists are four times more likely to experience these types of attacks than their male counterparts, according to a survey by The Guardian.⁴

For most women journalists around the world, online harassment and abuse has become a major hazard to the profession, one that threatens their ability to do their jobs, thereby violating their right to freedom of expression, and hampering free and open access to information for all members of society. “I have thought about coming off social media,” says BBC political editor Laura Kuenssberg in the documentary “A Dark Place” by the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) in co-operation with the International Press Institute, “but then people who are there, who want information, which is the most important thing for me, then they lose, and then I lose.”

All journalists around the world face increasing threats and violence as a result of their work.⁵ Too often, the price of reporting the truth comes in

the form of threats, surveillance, attacks, arbitrary arrest and detention, and – in the most grievous cases – enforced disappearance or killings. Governments and other powerful actors continue to silence those that hold them accountable, in an attempt to escape scrutiny and stifle dissent.⁶

Women journalists face an additional layer of risk, specifically due to their gender. Nowhere is this more starkly evident than in gender-based online harassment and abuse. Manifestations of online harassment and abuse can range from direct or indirect threats of physical or sexual violence, offensive messages, and targeted harassment (often in the form of “pile-on”, i.e., with multiple perpetrators co-ordinated against an individual), to privacy violations (such as stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images and “doxing”, i.e., publishing private information, such as the target’s home address).⁷ Each of these might be defined differently in domestic legislation or in recommendations of regional and international human rights bodies. Other actors in the field, such as social media companies and academics, have also produced their own lexicon to conceptualize this phenomenon.⁸ While there is no universally agreed terminology, this Resource Guide has employed the term “online harassment and abuse” as a generic term to capture the type of conduct previously described.

Although both men and women journalists are targeted by online harassment and abuse, the form and frequency of attacks that women face are particularly disturbing,⁹ pushing many women journalists to curtail their work or consider leaving the profession. According to a global study, approximately 40 per cent of women journalists said they have avoided reporting certain stories as a result of online harassment.¹⁰ Violence against women journalists does not take place in a vacuum. It is intrinsically linked to how women are subjugated in patriarchal societies and to the associated factors that undermine gender equality, such as wage gaps, exclusion from decision-making processes, and the greater

burden of unpaid family care. Women journalists are often targeted when they are highly visible and outspoken in their work, especially when they are challenging long-standing gender norms and stereotypes.¹¹ Women journalists face attacks not only by those attempting to silence their coverage, but also from sources and colleagues, and even family members. In many cases, they are not safe even in spaces where they are meant to be protected, such as their own newsrooms.¹²

It is clear that the type of threats and attacks which journalists face and the impact that these threats and attacks have is often linked to, and varies according to, gender and other factors, such as race and ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age and social group.¹³ Aggravating factors include working as a freelancer,¹⁴ or covering topics that have been shown to be riskier, such as corruption,¹⁵ organized crime,¹⁶ environment issues,¹⁷ human rights and, in particular, women's rights, not to mention the risks of covering conflict situations.¹⁸ Understanding these differences, and how journalists belonging to diverse groups may experience certain threats differently compared to their counterparts, is essential to developing comprehensive, tailored measures to prevent, protect, and remedy attacks against journalists. Unfortunately, many pieces of legislation, public policies and other measures put in place by States lack this gender and intersectional dimension.

› **A gender-responsive, multi-stakeholder approach to safety of female journalists online**

The purpose of this Resource Guide is to directly respond to the gaps that exist in addressing the safety of women journalists online. Over the last decade, there has been promising progress among stakeholders in their understanding and integration of gender approaches in the

efforts to promote the safety of journalists. International human rights standards increasingly call for a gender-responsive approach to the safety of journalists, and there is a growing body of research on the issue of attacks against women journalists, including harassment and abuse that they are increasingly facing online. On a national level, it can be seen that media outlets and civil society groups are investing more energy into developing tools and programmes for journalists to address and prevent gender-based online harassment and abuse.

However, even stronger efforts are needed. Tackling online gender-based harassment and abuse, as well as the issue of violence against women journalists at large, must include public awareness campaigns to improve social norms and workplace equality, while also ensuring that women's voices are heard more in all media, especially on issues that have largely been assigned to men, such as politics. A multi-stakeholder approach that engages different branches of government, international and regional bodies, media actors, internet intermediaries and various civil society actors, is needed. It is important that women journalists, including those who have experienced online attacks, are involved in developing approaches and solutions to address online harassment and abuse against women journalists. Of course, any support provided to women journalists must come with their explicit consent.

This Resource Guide aims to identify a concrete way forward for different stakeholders in bolstering the safety of women journalists online by applying a holistic perspective. This Guide includes ten chapters, each dedicated to a different key actor. Each chapter lays out a series of proposed actions for measures to address gender-based online harassment and abuse, followed by examples of existing measures and a list of useful resources.

This Resource Guide is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of all the work on this issue, nor does it list all specific steps that should be taken. It aims to support the ability of stakeholders to identify their own gaps, and to supplement information that can support the creation or improvement of tools or initiatives to tackle online harassment and abuse against women journalists.

For State actors, this Resource Guide lays out steps and considerations that the executive, legislative, judiciary and law enforcement can take. These proposed actions include legislative reviews and reforms, the development of national action plans, and dialogue building. The Resource Guide also proposes measures to integrate a gender-responsive approach throughout State institutions, investigations, and journalist safety mechanisms, as well as putting capacity-building programmes in place for civil servants. Among the first five chapters covering State actors, one points to the role of intergovernmental bodies, by highlighting approaches to improve international human rights standards and their effective implementation on a national level.

This Resource Guide continues with another five chapters covering recommended actions for non-State actors: internet intermediaries; media outlets; journalists' organizations and actors with a key role in independent self-regulation; civil society organizations and educational institutions; and individual journalists and media workers. The recommended measures include: enhancing capacity through training in digital tools and legal knowledge; developing peer support networks and other psychosocial resources; strengthening risk assessments and protocols for reporting and responding to online harassment; waging awareness campaigns; and advocating for workplace equality. The

section for non-State actors also sets out ways for different stakeholders to improve gender-responsive documentation of online attacks. Fostering collaboration and co-ordination among stakeholders is an overarching recommendation.

This Resource Guide includes a section on international human rights standards that apply to the safety of women journalists. It is important that, in addressing gender-based online harassment and abuse, the fundamental human rights to freedom of expression and privacy are respected.

Unfortunately, there is nothing virtual about harassment and abuse against women journalists online. It is a real problem that needs real solutions.

Endnotes

1 Quotes from the documentary “A Dark Place”, produced by the OSCE RFoM, in co-operation with the IPI. For the trailer, see <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/410423>.

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Overview

International human rights standards that frame the safety of female journalists online

Overview

International human rights standards that frame the safety of female journalists online

Democracy depends on the ability of journalists to freely, equally and safely speak truth to power, to investigate abuses and corruption, to contribute to and strengthen public debate and dialogue, and to provide people with information. The environment for journalists to play this crucial role in society, however, is steadily degrading around the world, including in the region of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Direct and indirect forms of silencing are increasing, including physical, legal, psychological and online harassment, threats and violence.¹ This trend cannot be altered if the framework of international human rights standards is not translated into effective public policies. Since male and female journalists are targeted and impacted by violence differently, and since the way this needs to be tackled differs depending on gender and other forms of intersecting factors, a gender perspective is also needed.

This section briefly highlights the most relevant international standards on freedom of expression, equality and non-discrimination against women and on the safety of journalists that should substantiate policies and practices to address gender-based online harassment and abuse.²

› **The right to freedom of expression should not be another victim of online harassment and abuse**

Online harassment and abuse undermine the right to freedom of expression of the targeted journalist – who may be pushed to self-censor due to security concerns or psychological distress – as well as that of other journalists – who might be intimidated and concerned

about online reprisals because of their reporting. Since this negatively affects the right of the whole society to access a diversity of views and information, effective measures to counter online harassment and abuse are needed. At the same time, however, such measures must be undertaken with a full understanding of international human rights standards on freedom of expression and media freedom, to avoid further infringement on those rights.

International human rights standards guarantee the right to freedom of expression, such as Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,³ and Article 19 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#).⁴ Regional human rights treaties, such as the [European Convention on Human Rights](#),⁵ also articulate this right.

The scope of the right to freedom of expression is broad and concerns society as a whole. It requires States to guarantee for all people the freedom to seek, receive and impart information or ideas of any kind, regardless of frontiers, and through any media of a person's choice.

Importantly, the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UN HR Committee), a treaty body of independent experts set up to monitor the implementation of the ICCPR by its State parties, has recognized that the protection of freedom of expression in the ICCPR includes all forms of electronic and internet-based modes of expression.⁶ Any limitations on forms of communication or expression disseminated over the internet must be justified according to the same criteria as non-electronic or offline communications, as set out below.⁷

› **Legality, legitimacy, and necessity and proportionality: The three-part test for limiting freedom of expression**

Under international human rights standards, limitations on freedom of expression are only permissible if they pass what is known as the three-part test of legality, legitimacy, and necessity and proportionality outlined in Article 19.3 of the ICCPR.⁸

The first part of the test, legality, refers to the fact that **limitations on freedom of expression must be prescribed by law**. These laws or regulations must be made accessible to the public and formulated with enough precision and clarity to provide sufficient guidance to those charged with their execution in order to enable them to ascertain what sorts of expressions are properly restricted and what sorts are not, to prevent their abuse or misuse by authorities.

The second criteria that must be met by States entails that **limitations to freedom of expression must serve a legitimate purpose**, which, according to Article 19.3 of the ICCPR, includes the respect of the rights or reputations of others, or the protection of national security, public order, public health, or morals.

Finally, any **limitation on freedom of expression must be necessary and proportionate to the aim pursued in a democratic society**, in particular by establishing a direct and immediate connection between the expression and the threat.

In Article 20.2, the ICCPR prescribes that any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence must be prohibited by law. In its 2011 review of Article 19, the United Nations Human Rights Committee (UN HR

Committee) stated that limitations under Article 20 of the ICCPR must also comply with the three-part test set out in Article 19.3 of the ICCPR.⁹

Accordingly, all efforts to address online harassment and abuse against female journalists that entail direct or indirect restrictions on the right to freedom of expression must conform to the strict requirements of the three-part test.

› **The right to equality and non-discrimination**

Gender-based online harassment and abuse against journalists may violate other rights of individuals beyond freedom of expression. It threatens the ability to participate on equal terms in journalistic activities. It also deepens the existing discriminatory societal norms and gender stereotypes that challenge the ability of female journalists to pursue their journalistic activity. Without women being able to report freely and safely, media pluralism cannot prevail.

The right to equality and non-discrimination and the right to freedom of expression are mutually supporting and reinforcing rights. Only when co-ordinated and focused actions are taken to promote both these rights, can either of them be effectively realized.

International human rights law stipulates equality and non-discrimination for all. There are clear obligations for States to guarantee equality in the enjoyment of human rights and to offer equal protection of the law. The principle of non-discrimination prohibits any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference against a person based on a protected characteristic, recognized under international human rights law.¹⁰

Several international documents affirm, clarify and expand on how the right to equality and non-discrimination should be applied to women. The [Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) as a kind of international bill of rights for women, defines discrimination against women as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”¹¹

A specific reference to women journalists can be found in [CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence](#), which asserts that harmful practices and crimes against women human rights defenders, activists or journalists are also forms of gender-based violence against women affected by cultural, ideological and political factors.¹² The recommendation also stipulates that “State parties have to adopt and implement diverse measures to tackle gender-based violence against women”.¹³

In the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), adopted by the UN Member States in 1995, women and the media were recognized among its 12 critical areas of concern, in particular related to the need to increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication; also by addressing the value of a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media.¹⁴

In the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/18 on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women](#), participating States committed

themselves to prevent and combat violence against women, which also applies to women journalists. The Decision recognized that “women engaged in professional activities with public exposure and/or in the interest of society, are more likely to be exposed to specific forms of violence or abuse, threats, and harassment, in relation to their work.” These commitments agreed by all the States are, among others, ensuring access to justice, as well as effective investigation and prosecution of perpetrators while respecting their rights to privacy; contributing to preventing and combating all forms of violence facing women; and taking action to address abuse, threats and harassment, including through digital technologies.¹⁵

The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, and the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression joined together on International Women’s Day in 2017 to urge States and companies to address online gender-based abuse, whilst warning against censorship. The rapporteurs called for human rights-based responses to tackle the abuse-enabling environments often faced by women online.¹⁶

› **Offline human rights must be protected online**

Understanding how international human rights standards extend to the digital sphere is vital to addressing gender-based online harassment and abuse in a manner that promotes, rather than compromises, safety of journalists.

In 2013, the UN declared that all human rights are equally applicable online. [UN Human Rights Council \(UN HRC\) Resolution 32/13 on the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet](#)

stated that “the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression, which is applicable regardless of frontiers and through any media of one’s choice, in accordance with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”.¹⁷ It also called on States to enhance women’s access to the internet and to bridge the digital gender divide.¹⁸

Communications technologies have expanded the tools for everyone to express opinions. At the same time, these tools are vulnerable to surveillance and interception, which could jeopardize people’s human rights, in particular the right to private communications. This right is articulated in Article 17 of the ICCPR, which states that “no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with their privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on their honour and reputation”.¹⁹

Although human rights standards offer protections against surveillance, it still poses an actual risk, in particular for journalists who, because of their work, are more prone to be subject to unlawful interferences that could lead to silencing them. For this reason, encryption tools and anonymity are vital to enable the safe exercise of the right to freedom of expression in the digital age.²⁰ Restrictions on encryption and anonymity must be strictly limited according to the three-part test of 1) legality, 2) legitimacy, and 3) necessity and proportionality.²¹ The [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists](#) (annexed) has recognized this, calling on States to “refrain from arbitrary or unlawful interference with journalists’ use of encryption and anonymity technologies and refrain from employing unlawful or arbitrary surveillance techniques”.²²

› **A growing body of human rights standards promotes safety of journalists**

Open, inclusive and democratic societies cannot exist without informed people. When journalism is attacked, the right to information of every person is attacked. Under international human rights law, States have the obligation to protect those who practice journalism. The number of international documents that map how to do this has grown over the last decade. These documents recognise gender-based threats and the need for a gender-responsive approach to varying degrees.

International bodies have been building a definition in functional terms of who is a journalist in the digital era. The UN HR Committee [General Comment 34](#) from 2013 defines the function of journalism as a “function shared by a wide range of actors, including professional full-time reporters and analysts, as well as bloggers and others who engage in forms of self-publication in print, on the internet or elsewhere”.²³ For the Council of Europe, “journalist” refers to those “who perform journalistic activities or fulfil public watchdog functions”.²⁴

The UN has repeatedly recognized the importance of strengthening the safety of journalists in recent years. In 2012, the UN HRC passed its [first resolution on the safety of journalists](#), calling on States “to promote a safe and enabling environment for journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference”,²⁵ including by means of legislative measures, awareness-raising, monitoring and reporting, publicly condemning attacks, and dedicating necessary resources to investigate and prosecute such attacks. Before this resolution, UNESCO and the UN Security Council (UNSC) had passed two texts on the issue of the safety of journalists.²⁶

Since the 2012 resolution 32/13, the UN HRC, the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the UNSC, and the UNESCO General Conference have passed over ten [resolutions](#) on the safety of journalists; some of these resolutions have a particular focus on the safety of female journalists,²⁷ such as the 2019 [UNGA Resolution 74/157](#).²⁸ The UN HRC Resolution 45/17 (2020) specifically called on States to “take measures to prevent sexual harassment and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence” against women journalists, offline and online.²⁹ Moreover, various [implementation reports](#) of these resolutions have also been published.³⁰ Notably, the [2017 implementation report](#) by the UN Secretary-General focused on the safety of women journalists.³¹ In 2020, the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences published a report focused on combating violence against women journalists.³²

In 2012, the first ever multi-agency UN strategy was designed and adopted. The [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#) calls for a “gender-sensitive approach” to the safety of journalists and the fight against impunity, and has guided the UN’s work on this matter in co-ordination with other actors.³³

The inclusion of safety of journalists in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is another indication of its relevance to global human rights and development. SDG 16 aims to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.³⁴ [Indicator 16.10.1](#) assesses “the number of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists”.³⁵

In 2018, the OSCE participating States adopted their first Decision focused on the safety of journalists, the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists](#). This Decision, agreed

by consensus of all 57 OSCE participating States, calls on these participating States to prevent, protect and prosecute attacks against journalists. In addition, it expresses concern over “the distinct risks faced by women journalists in relation to their work, including through digital technologies”, and underlines “the importance to ensure their greatest possible safety and that the experiences and concerns of women journalists are effectively addressed”.³⁶ The Decision also calls on the States “to condemn publicly and unequivocally attacks on women journalists in relation to their work, such as sexual harassment, abuse, intimidation, threats and violence, including through digital technologies”.³⁷ While this is the first OSCE decision focused on journalists’ safety, there are many OSCE standards on freedom of expression, freedom of the media and access to information³⁸ and several guiding publications on the safety of journalists.³⁹

› **Businesses must respect international human rights standards**

While addressing the States in the first instance, the international human rights framework also applies to business enterprises, such as social media companies, which means that these companies are required to respect human rights. The [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) state that companies have the responsibility to “avoid causing or contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities and address such impacts as they occur” and prevent or mitigate adverse human rights impacts that are directly linked to their operations, products or services by their business relationships, even if they themselves have not contributed to those impacts directly.⁴⁰

In 2019, the International Labour Organization adopted the [Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment](#) in the world of work, recognizing the right of everyone to work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment, as this constitutes a threat to equal opportunities. It calls on States to oblige businesses to adhere to zero tolerance for violence and harassment.⁴¹

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Walk the talk

Walk the talk

What key actors can do

Addressing online harassment and abuse against women journalists requires a multi-layered approach with many actors involved. This section of the Resource Guide presents immediate steps for State and non-State actors to bolster the safety of women journalists online. The aim is to improve existing efforts as well as encourage key actors to introduce new initiatives. Taken together, these steps form an interrelated structure in which women journalists can continue their profession online in a safer manner.

The following ten chapters are divided into two blocks, one for States and one for non-State actors. This Resource Guide does not pretend to propose an exhaustive list of actions to be taken to address the large scope of online harassment and abuse against women journalists. Rather, it provides each key actor with a brief selection of the most relevant and achievable steps. Concrete examples, put in place by different actors in various countries, illustrate each proposed action. A selection of useful resources complements this list.

The safety of women journalists online cannot be addressed in isolation from the work on the safety of all journalists, nor can it be addressed without a broader pursuit of gender equality in society. Simply put, the safety of women in the media could be vastly improved by ensuring that women have equal rights and the same opportunities and security as men do. In line with this, some proposed actions entail the integration of a gender approach into existing initiatives promoting safety of journalists. Other actions are about augmenting or tailoring existing gender equality actions.

› A gender-responsive approach

Any initiative aiming to tackle online harassment and abuse against women journalists needs to be designed from a gender-responsive approach. While a gender-sensitive approach is about being aware of gender roles, norms and relations, a gender-responsive approach means taking into consideration and acting upon gender norms, roles, relations and how policies or measures affect men and women differently. It is about taking action towards gender equality.

The following ten modes of working should be applied:

1. **Gender neutral is gender blind.** Every decision and measure, be it a piece of legislation, a training programme or budget, or other such measure, has a different effect on different people, including depending on their gender.
2. **Gender is interconnected with other identities.** Gender, together with age, class, income, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, race and other factors, such as being part of an urban culture versus rural environment, constitute socially defined categories that are intertwined and generate overlapping and interdependent inequalities. This is called an intersectional approach, and is needed, as not everyone experiences inequality in the same way.
3. **Address inequalities in every step of the way.** Inequalities between women and men, including asymmetric access to power and rights, need to be taken into account throughout the whole process, from designing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating legislation, policies and any other actions.

4. **It is not only about what, but also about how.** A gender-responsive approach not only takes into account the degree to which gender and power relationships impact the context. It also entails an inclusive, participatory and respectful process that empowers and promotes gender equality.
5. **Information is key to building solutions.** Accurate and comprehensive data on attacks against journalists, disaggregated by gender and other intersectional factors, is needed to develop strong responses tailored to different political, economic, cultural and social contexts.
6. **Keep listening to many voices.** To ensure that women journalists are among the active decision makers related to work that potentially affects their lives, wide and transparent consultations are needed, including with governmental and non-governmental actors across all relevant specialties and fields of discipline.
7. **Build capacity for change.** Tailored training on gender-responsive approaches should be made available to all actors involved in the protection of journalists. The first focus should be on individuals most likely to be able to influence and who have the power to bring changes in a broad and sustainable manner.
8. **Set aside sufficient resources.** Committing to a gender-responsive approach should go beyond words, with sufficient human and financial resources assigned to the implementation of these actions.
9. **Be S.M.A.R.T.** Initiatives addressing online harassment and abuse against women journalists must contain goals that are Specific,

Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time-bound (S.M.A.R.T.). This would promote accountability towards gender equality and would contribute to systematizing the lessons learned and thus supporting the progress towards improved future actions.

10. Measures towards the protection of women must advance, not undermine, their fundamental rights. All measures that could restrict the right to freedom of expression must be prescribed by law, serve a legitimate purpose, and be necessary and proportionate in a democratic society. Discouraging or restricting professional activities of women is not a solution.



**Executive branch
of government**

Proposed actions

1. Establish a national action plan on the safety of journalists that addresses specific conditions for female journalists;
2. Put in place protection measures that are gender-responsive;
3. Collect data on attacks against female journalists to inform policy and research, and to support awareness-raising campaigns to spur engagement among decision makers and the public;
4. Report on the safety of female journalists to the key international human rights mechanisms, and integrate the issue into foreign policy.

1. Executive branch of government

Implementing policies and practices for increased safety of female journalists

The executive branch is responsible for the governance of the States, establishing policies and processes to execute and enforce laws effectively. This chapter proposes a selection of actions that the president or prime minister's office and ministries can take to protect, but also promote, the safety of women journalists online. While this section does not focus on local governments, whose forms and functions vary greatly, the proposed actions might be equally relevant for local authorities. The role of law enforcement agencies, although falling under the responsibility of the executive, is addressed separately in chapter four.

[OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18](#) calls on States to “fully implement all OSCE commitments and their international obligations related to freedom of expression and media freedom, including by respecting, promoting and protecting the freedom to seek, receive and impart information regardless of frontiers.”

- › **Establish a national action plan on the safety of journalists that addresses specific conditions for female journalists**

National commitment to the safety of women journalists should be demonstrated at the highest levels, both in words and in deeds. Members of the government must publicly and unequivocally condemn attacks on women journalists in relation to their work, and not just in

cases of physical violence, but also when it concerns sexual harassment, intimidation, threats and other abuse, including through digital technologies.¹ Public officials should lead by example and refrain from denigrating, intimidating or threatening the media, including using misogynistic language against women journalists.

Violence against women journalists and online harassment and abuse are intrinsically linked to broader social inequality and attitudes towards women. Policies to address the root causes of gender-based violence and gender stereotypes should accompany, and link to, an action plan aimed at improving the safety of women journalists. Empowerment of women throughout society must be promoted, not just actions specific to the media sector.

Of course, online harassment and abuse against women journalists is linked to the media environments they work in. Understanding the specific context in each country is fundamental to addressing the safety of journalists. Incorporating a national assessment of how women and men journalists are exposed to, and impacted by, various types of threats (physical, psychological, digital, legal and economic), is therefore an important first step in the development of a national action plan for safety of journalists.

A national action plan's ultimate goal should be to design the most effective measures for implementing international human rights standards on the safety of journalists, and to do so with gender-responsiveness in mind. This means designing actions to address the specific needs of women journalists while contributing to changing the gender and power dynamics that undermine gender equality. One concrete step is to perform a gender-responsive audit regarding the implementation of specific standards and commitments, such as the

[OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists](#), as part of a national action plan on the safety of journalists. If an active national action plan on the safety of journalists in the country already exists, it could be reviewed to mainstream a gender-responsive approach and include measures to address online harassment and abuse. This could include developing safety training programmes to identify and tackle online harassment and abuse, and to develop or strengthen support associations, networks and forums for women journalists, particularly those working to counter online abuse.²

Cross-pollination with other relevant work areas, such as for example, national action plans for gender equality, human rights, or other categories with overlapping themes, is highly recommended.

According to the [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#), it is fundamental to develop strategic partnerships with various international, regional and local actors.³ With this in mind, actions to address online harassment and abuse against women journalists would need to be developed and implemented with a high degree of representation by women journalists. In this way, practices would be well informed by those vulnerable to the problem and in turn empower them through their participation. This might include all branches of the State; independent human rights institutions; media regulatory and self-regulatory bodies; internet intermediary companies; public, private and community media outlets; journalists' associations and unions; civil society groups; journalism education institutions and academic researchers; media literacy experts and women's rights organizations.

Examples

Integrating national action plans: The Swedish national action plan [Defending Free Speech: Measures to Protect Journalists, Elected Representatives and Artists from Exposure to Threats and Hatred](#) recognizes the need to integrate a journalists' safety plan into the national gender strategy and the need to ensure a gender approach by key actors, such as the judiciary.⁴ A key aspect of this plan's focus is expanding, developing and funding existing institutions, such as the local victim support centers and helplines to support those subjected to threats brought about by participation in public discourse.

Conducting audits: In 2018, the University of Amsterdam carried out an [Audit on Freedom of Expression in the Netherlands](#),⁵ to provide a concrete picture of the implementation of the 2016 Council of Europe Recommendation on the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists and other Media Actors in the Netherlands.⁶ Even though this audit does not specifically include the issue of online violence against women journalists, it is a good example of how to conduct an effective assessment.

Including protection of journalists in policies: To increase impact, the protection of journalists could be included in national gender equality and human rights policies, or other connected policies. The [National Programme for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights in the Period 2013 – 2016](#) in Croatia, for example, included the recommendation to strengthen the prosecution of perpetrators of threats and violence against journalists.⁷

Resources

- [UNESCO's Journalists' Safety Indicators](#) (JSIs)⁸ provide a set of indicators to assess the state of the safety of journalists at the national level. It also includes a guidebook on how to apply them, although its application would need to be complemented with a gender-responsive assessment tool.⁹ JSIs have been applied in Afghanistan, Guatemala, Iraq, Kenya, Nepal and Pakistan.
- The UN Women [Handbook for National Action Plans on Violence against Women](#) could serve as a point of reference to integrate a gender approach within a plan of action for safety of journalists.¹⁰ Also, the UN Women [How to Manage Gender-Responsive Evaluation](#) could provide tips for assessing the safety of journalists with a gender-responsive approach.¹¹

› Put in place protection measures that are gender-responsive

Journalists who are threatened should have immediate access to concrete protection measures. Rapid response to threats against journalists could be effective in protecting a (potential) target and minimize possible escalation of violence. This type of mechanism could fall under the supervision of one governmental body, for example a law enforcement agency or a multi-stakeholder group with a mandate under a national protection mechanism. While these mechanisms are traditionally used in cases of physical attacks, they can also be mobilized for legal and psychosocial support, including in cases of online harassment and abuse.

Given the distinct and often sensitive nature of threats to women journalists, which can include sexualized violence, threats of violence and sexual attacks, including against family members, it is imperative that all measures, including those under rapid response mechanisms, are gender-responsive. A first step is to ensure that any analysis of attacks takes into account any gender aspect and that women are staffing safety resources, such as by having women law enforcement officials available to protect the person attacked, including to escort them as bodyguards, or to have women answering emergency hotlines. Risk and response assessment protocols need to take into account security measures or support, for example if relocation is needed, tailored to the specific needs of the individual women attacked.

It is important that any rapid response or protection mechanism includes preventive measures and proactive solutions, not only reactive components. This could include a system to monitor risks and threats against journalists online and offline, combined with gender analysis. Such preventive measures are key to identifying trends and the readiness to address threats more effectively. Preventive initiatives could also include training programmes for all actors involved, including on how to respond when journalists are targets of online harassment and abuse, and the development of easily accessible resources that inform journalists how to use the mechanisms and measures in place. These efforts should be accompanied by awareness-raising campaigns.

Protection measures are more accessible and effective when they are tailored to the case and context of each individual journalist. This means, for instance, that protective equipment needs be adapted to women's bodies and clothes, that financial support may need to include dependents, and that specific psychological support should be guaranteed for journalists who are being harassed or abused online. All actors involved in the protection of journalists should receive training on gender-responsive approaches.

Structuring protection mechanisms and measures, to include multi-stakeholder representation in management and oversight, brings varied expertise to the table, along with greater accountability. Women's rights and journalists' organizations should be among these stakeholder groups.

Efforts to improve the safety of journalists should always be accompanied by the prosecution of those committing violence against journalists and by addressing impunity for crimes against journalists. As a concrete measure to support this, the executive branch could appoint an independent national prosecutor specialized in crimes against expression and journalists. This special prosecutor could supervise and co-ordinate cases; provide support to the victims; and promote a culture of zero tolerance for impunity on crimes against freedom of expression and against journalists.¹² This person should be trained on gender-responsive approaches.

In some countries, there may already be well-functioning national protection or rapid response mechanisms. Given that gender-based attacks, including online harassment and abuse, have turned into a major threat relatively recently, it may still be necessary to review and reform existing mechanisms so as to ensure a gender-responsive approach is included and properly integrated. This process should be done in consultation with other stakeholders, including experts on gender perspectives in public policies and in safety assistance.

Examples

Developing national rapid response mechanisms: The [Ufficio Centrale Interforze per la Sicurezza Personale](#), a body within the Ministry of Interior of Italy, leads a rapid response mechanism providing bodyguards, armoured cars and other protection equipment to journalists threatened by organized crime.¹³

Creating multi-stakeholder groups: The Netherlands has created a multi-stakeholder [Steering Group on Aggression and Violence against Journalists](#), with the mandate to co-ordinate the response to attacks against journalists between the police, the prosecutor's office and the media sector and journalists.¹⁴

Encouraging commissions of investigation: The Serbian Ministry of Interior, together with the national security body and journalists' associations, runs the Commission for the investigation of wartime murders of journalists in the Former Yugoslavia, created in 2013. As a result, in 2019 someone was convicted for the murder of a Serbian journalist in 1999. Although its focus does not address online harassment and abuse against women journalists, it is a good example of bringing together multi-stakeholder expertise and oversight.¹⁵

Supporting regional rapid response mechanisms: In 2020, the European Union (EU) supported the creation of the [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) mechanism to protect journalists, managed by a group of civil society groups on a day-to-day basis.¹⁶ A rapid response mechanism already existed for human rights defenders, [ProtectDefenders.eu](#), which also includes journalists. A consortium of human rights NGOs manages this mechanism.¹⁷

Developing national protection mechanisms: Colombia was the first country worldwide to develop a national protection mechanism for journalists. It includes a dedicated women's protection committee, with representatives from women's rights organizations, the government, and international organizations, such as UN Women. They analyse each case they receive from a gender perspective, which has enabled customized responses.¹⁸ Twelve years after the founding of the protection programme in 2000, the government introduced a protocol in 2012 for addressing threats against women journalists: a good example of reassessing and reforming an existing mechanism to integrate a gender-responsive approach.

Installing special prosecutors: In 2006, Mexico installed the first special prosecutor for crimes against freedom of expression, with a focus on attacks against journalists.¹⁹

Resources

- [The UN Human Rights Council \(HRC\) report 24/2](#) has collected good practices of State and non-State actors on the safety of journalists.²⁰
- The Council of Europe (CoE) has published a series of recommendations and good practices on the safety of journalists, called [Taking Action to Protect Journalists and other Media Actors](#), which includes concrete examples of how the CoE's standards on the safety of journalists have been implemented in some countries.²¹
- A collection of mechanisms on the protection of journalists can be consulted in the International Media Support publications series

[Defending Journalism](#),²² one [publication](#) in the series focuses specifically on the safety of women journalists.²³

- [The Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) initiative published a collection of protections measures taken by EU Member States and candidate countries.²⁴
- Palermo University has analysed the effectiveness and institutional set-up for protection mechanisms in a report on the cases of Colombia, Mexico and Guatemala.²⁵

› **Collect data on attacks against female journalists to inform policy and research, and to support awareness-raising campaigns to spur engagement among decision makers and the public**

Strong responses to online harassment and abuse against women journalists can only be developed when policymakers, media professionals, civil society groups and the broader public have a comprehensive understanding of the scope of the problem and of its impact on the journalistic profession, free expression and the free flow of information. To build that understanding, quantitative and qualitative data collection, analysis and research are needed.²⁶

As a start, data disaggregated by gender, but also by other intersectional identities, needs to be gathered. Such data is needed to ensure that solutions take into account the complexity and diversity of the way violence affects women and how structural violence is exercised against certain groups in society.

Some key areas of research include the gathering of data that distinguishes between different forms of online abuse, the severity of online attacks, and the impact of this violence on women journalists' rights and their work. The identification of gender-specific obstacles and risks and insight into how these differ from those faced by their male counterparts would inform evidence-based policies and other possible responses.

Ideally, data collection would be done in collaboration with national statistics/statistical bodies, universities, national human rights institutions and civil society groups to ensure the most accurate and independent information, and ensuring the right to privacy.²⁷ Besides informing national actions, data collection would also be useful to inform international mechanisms. Indicator 16.10.1. of the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), for example, asks authorities to provide the number of attacks against journalists in their respective countries.²⁸

Data collection can also support strong public awareness campaigns, demonstrating that online harassment and abuse is not only an attack on women journalists, but also an attack on freedom of expression and freedom of the media, and a threat to the right of every person to access information in society as a whole.²⁹

Educational outreach is another important step to improve public understanding of the issue. Social media use and trends could be integrated into education curricula by education authorities, or included within media literacy programmes. Adult and non-formal education programmes that promote a media and digital literate society could be developed and implemented. This approach can contribute to a safer environment for all, including women journalists.

As part of a public awareness strategy, government officials should issue public statements, including when applicable social media posts, to express support for targeted journalists, and organize events to sensitize citizens about the role of journalism and the negative impact of attacks against women journalists on society. International commemoration days, such as World Press Freedom Day (3 May), International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (2 November), International Women's Day (8 March), and the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women (25 November), offer good opportunities for such actions.

Examples

Creating panels of legal experts: The United Kingdom has created an independent [High-Level Panel of Legal Experts](#), with the aim of carrying out research to inform the development of legislation and policies on the safety of journalists.³⁰ Their first report, published in February 2020, focuses on the [Use of Targeted Sanctions to Protect Journalists](#).³¹

Developing media literacy programmes: A report prepared by national experts for the European Audiovisual Observatory for the European Commission refers to [547 media literacy projects](#) implemented in EU Member States since 2010. Media literacy skills linked to critical thinking was addressed by 403 of those projects, while those related to media use capacities featured in 385 of the 547 projects.³²

Finland has a national policy targeting formal and informal education institutions, media and other actors relevant to promoting an understanding of the offline and online media and social media environment.³³

› **Report on the safety of female journalists to the key international human rights mechanisms, and integrate the issue into foreign policy**

Through their participation in intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), States can play a constructive role in contributing to the development of international standards on the safety of journalists. States should suggest including the issue of the safety of women journalists and a stronger gender-responsive approach in the many resolutions, recommendations and decisions passed by IGOs.

States can also actively contribute and engage with relevant gender equality-focused international treaty bodies, such as the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, or the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Amongst others, CSW monitors progress on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, which recognizes the importance of promoting women in the media industry and mainstreaming a gender perspective in media content.³⁴

An important accountability commitment that States have in relation to international standards is their obligation to report on their implementation. Well-established reporting secures the measurement of progress towards goals or obligations, but also serves as a means to document trends, including impunity levels, and good practices. States could further improve the quantity and quality of their inputs pertaining to violence against women journalists (in co-operation with non-governmental actors that collect data and produce research) when participating in the following mechanisms.

Examples of mechanisms

The UN [Universal Periodic Review](#) (UPR).³⁵ Under the UPR process, States have to report on their national human rights situation, after which the members of the UN HRC provide recommendations for improvement. This process provides an excellent opportunity to make safety of women journalists offline and online a priority for all States.

- States can also highlight the challenges faced by women journalists when contributing to the regular [reports](#) by the UN HRC and the UN Secretary-General on the implementation of UN HRC and UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolutions on the safety of journalists.³⁶
- The same goes for the [thematic reports, communications and urgent appeals](#) issued by the Special Procedures of the UN HRC, in particular for the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and other institutions whose mandates may cover violence against women journalists.³⁷
- In the [Voluntary National Reviews](#) on the implementation of the SDGs, and in particular for SDG 5 (gender equality and women's empowerment) and SDG 16 (promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies), States should include data on the safety of journalists disaggregated by gender.³⁸
- Responding to UNESCO requests for information on the judicial status of journalist killings, the [UNESCO Director-General's Report on the Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity](#) allows the UN organization, mandated with the protection of freedom of expression, to monitor trends impacting safety of journalists.³⁹ In addition, UNESCO collects a broader range of inputs for its [World Trends Report](#) on freedom

of expression and media development, which includes information on online harassment against women journalists.⁴⁰ In addition to providing data, States can help promote the findings of these reports.

- Member States of the CoE should respond to the alerts on the [Council of Europe Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and the Safety of Journalists](#). The Platform monitors particular incidents against journalists and seeks States' responses.⁴¹
- Multilateral initiatives, such as the [Open Government Partnership](#), [Freedom Online Coalition](#), [Community of Democracies](#) and the [Media Freedom Coalition](#), could provide good forums to promote policy discussions on addressing the safety of women journalists online.

In addition to these international mechanisms, diplomatic representations in other countries can be mobilized to promote public events, to issue public statements, and to support local or regional initiatives promoting the safety of women journalists. Facilitating visa and asylum requests from women journalists under threat is another vital way to respond.

Examples

Incorporating SOFJO in Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR): By September 2019, after 84 States had gone through a UPR, 43 States had incorporated the issue of the safety of journalists in their recommendations. Kyrgyzstan, Montenegro, the Russian Federation and Turkmenistan were among the OSCE participating States that received recommendations on safety of journalists. Among the participating States that were vocal on the issue, the Czech Republic was the most active, followed by Austria, Canada, France, Lithuania, and

Norway.⁴² Slovenia, for example, recommended to Mexico to integrate a gender perspective when addressing the safety of journalists.

Intergovernmental informal groups: Several States, in their capacity as members of, or participants in, intergovernmental initiatives, have created informal groups on the safety of journalists. Their aim is to work together for increased attention on the issue. Such informal groups for co-operation on the issue exist at the UN in Geneva and New York, UNESCO and the OSCE.⁴³ Next to co-ordinating their efforts around resolutions and other policy actions, these groups host events to draw attention to the issue. In 2019, for example, the UNESCO Group of Friends (GoF) on the safety of journalists organized a conference on online harassment against women journalists.⁴⁴ In the same year, the UN New York GoF co-hosted an event on the safety of journalists and the SDGs.

Delivering policy statements: In [2018](#) and [2019](#), the informal OSCE group of friends on the safety of journalists issued statements expressing its concern about violence against women journalists.⁴⁵

Resources

- The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has a [database](#) with human rights recommendations issued by the UN human rights protection system, which is valuable for the development of public policies.⁴⁶
- ARTICLE 19's report [Ending Impunity: Acting on UN Standards on the Safety of Journalists](#) summarizes the latest standards on

the safety of journalists, including recommendations to address violence against women journalists online and offline.⁴⁷ It includes a chapter on gender-responsive approaches to the safety of journalists.

- The coalition of States participating in the Open Government Partnership produced a global report on [Civic Space: Defending Activists and Journalists](#), which includes a series of good practices put in place by States on the safety of journalists.⁴⁸
- Through the initiative of [Media4Democracy](#), the EU has been supporting EU delegations worldwide to better understand the challenges to media freedom and reinforce freedom of expression. This includes the [Handbook for EU Delegations: Protecting the Safety of Journalists, Protecting Freedom of Expression](#) that provides technical guidance in taking action on the safety of journalists.⁴⁹
- The Community of Democracies published a [Toolkit on the Safety of Journalists for the Personnel of the Diplomatic Missions](#), which entails concrete actions to promote the safety of journalists, such as holding a regular dialogue with the authorities and journalists; providing emergency support when needed; monitoring trials of journalists or their attackers; and facilitating travel documents and visas.⁵⁰
- The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs of the European Parliament published the guide [Safety of Journalists and the Fighting of Corruption in the EU](#) to explore various regulatory and other measures to counter attacks against journalists in the European Union.⁵¹

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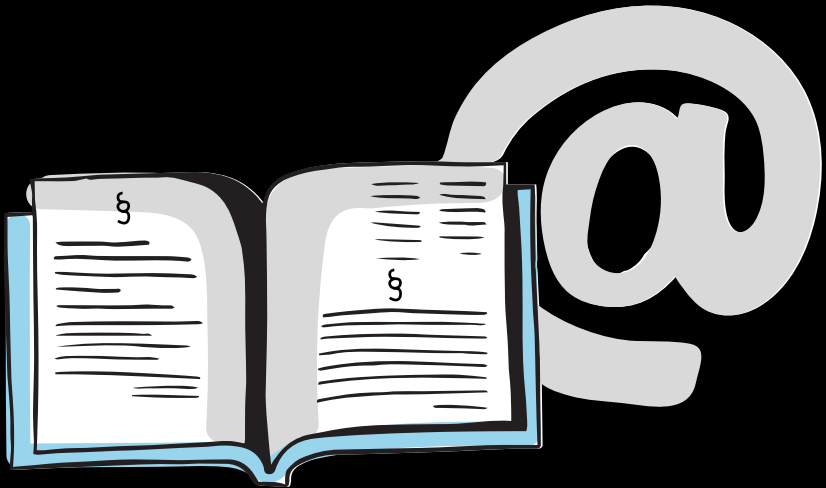
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**Legislative branch
of government**

Proposed actions

1. Review and, when necessary, amend or adopt laws to promote a gender-responsive approach to the safety of journalists;
2. Make sure that legislation addressing online harassment and abuse against female journalists does not undermine the right to freedom of expression.

2. Legislative branch of government

Adopting or adapting frameworks for a safer environment offline and online

The legislative branch is the deliberative assembly with the authority for making laws. This section focuses on how legislators can enact laws that enable a safe environment at the national level for women journalists online and offline, in line with international standards on freedom of expression and freedom of the media, including [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists](#).¹

[OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18](#) calls on States to “bring their laws, policies and practices, pertaining to media freedom, fully in compliance with their international obligations and commitments and to review and, where necessary, repeal or amend them so that they do not limit the ability of journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference.”

- › **Review and, when necessary, amend or adopt laws to promote a gender-responsive approach to the safety of journalists**

Having proper legislation for safeguarding women journalists starts with a legal framework that adequately recognizes and protects the right to equality and non-discrimination, in line with international human rights law, as well as the right to freedom of expression.² The way in which women journalists are being attacked, be it online or offline, is

fundamentally related to structural, deep-rooted discrimination. States have a positive obligation to address this.

Lawmakers should ensure that State authorities fulfil their obligations under international human rights law: to prevent attacks from happening; to protect those subjected to violence; and to prosecute the perpetrators and to provide remedies. Legislation creating national protection mechanisms for journalists should encompass a gender-responsive mechanism.

Many countries have laws in place that might already apply and penalize some types of online harassment and abuse. Where laws exist, but do not provide enough protection, creating new laws should be the last resort. Instead, amendments to existing laws should be considered. Moreover, laws should be reviewed to ensure their compliance with international human rights standards. In any case, it is also crucial to consider a varied range of remedies in civil and administrative law, not necessarily criminal law.

The process of reviewing, reforming, or making laws should involve extensive consultation with the media sector, the public and civil society organizations as part of the aim to ensure adequate protection of women's rights to life, freedom from inhuman and degrading treatment, equality, non-discrimination, freedom of expression and privacy. In this endeavour, it could be useful to acquire expert support from international and regional intergovernmental bodies, including the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), academia and the legal community.

Examples

Use existing laws: Several States have used existing legislation to prosecute online harassers of women journalists. The OSCE RFoM has, in collaboration with the International Press Institute (IPI), analysed and compared three such cases in the 2019 report [Legal Responses to Online Harassment and Abuse of Journalists - Perspectives from Finland, France and Ireland](#).³ As highlighted in the report, one of the perpetrators, however, was prosecuted under criminal defamation, in contradiction to international standards on freedom of expression, which recommend decriminalization of defamation. In [Canada, Finland, France, Germany and Spain](#) existing laws prohibit breaches of privacy, threats, malicious messages, stalking by means of communications, online harassment, unauthorized data disclosure and sharing, and other forms of harassment.⁴

Resources

- The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) Guide [Making Laws Work for Women and Men: A Practical Guide to Gender-Sensitive Legislation](#) provides useful tips on how to make laws that work both for men and women.⁵
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) developed a [Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality in Public Life](#) that includes a chapter on gender sensitive practices in parliaments.⁶

- The Inter-Parliamentary Union published a [Handbook on Freedom of Expression for Parliaments and their Members: Importance and Scope of Protection](#), which can be useful for legislators making law on the protection of journalists.⁷

› **Make sure that legislation addressing online harassment and abuse against female journalists does not undermine the right to freedom of expression**

The internet provides an unprecedented platform for the exercise of freedom of expression. Legislative developments related to online harassment and abuse against women journalists should recognize it.

Freedom of expression extends not only to ideas and information generally regarded as inoffensive, but also to those that might offend, shock, or disturb.⁸ Legislation should recognize that any measure that could restrict the right to freedom of expression must be prescribed by law, serve a legitimate purpose, and be necessary and proportionate in a democratic society,⁹ as per international human rights law. The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression warned that efforts to promote women journalists' safety online could unintentionally lead to "censorship or undue restrictions that could end up undermining the rights of the very women from whom governments may seek to provide redress."¹⁰ Vaguely formulated laws and regulations that prohibit nudity or obscenity, for example, could have a significant and chilling effect on critical discussions about sexuality, gender and reproductive health.¹¹

In this light, considering the risks of restricting legitimate expression, it is useful to point to the fact that among other international bodies, the UN Human Rights Committee has raised specific concerns about the abuse of criminal law to target journalists, researchers and human rights defenders sharing information of legitimate public interest.¹² In a democratic society, criminal law should be imposed only as a last resort and only in the most severe cases. States should, therefore, always try to resort to less restrictive civil or administrative measures instead.¹³

In some cases, States have introduced criminal legal provisions on “hate speech” to tackle gender-based online harassment and abuse against women, including women journalists. There is no uniform definition of “hate speech” under international human rights law; therefore, such laws can be misused and generate unlawful limitations to the right to freedom of expression, or abused to enable infringements on lawful expressions. All legislation should strictly define the terms that constitute prohibited content under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. It should also resist criminalizing such speech except in the gravest situations, such as advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence,¹⁴ and instead adopt the interpretations of human rights law contained in the Rabat Plan of Action.¹⁵

In some instances, defamation laws have been used to address cases of online harassment and abuse. These terms are sometimes conflated, but defamation is about causing substantive harm to someone’s reputation based on false statements of facts. In any case, it should be noted that the protection of reputation should be addressed exclusively through civil defamation law, in line with international human rights standards.¹⁶ Defamation should be decriminalized in all States.

A number of civil law provisions might be applicable as a response to online harassment and abuse against women journalists. Examples include statutes relating to breach of privacy or confidentiality or the right to protection of the security of a person. When seeking a specific remedy for the harm caused by specific forms of online harassment and abuse, journalists could also turn to these civil law measures.¹⁷

In the protection of women journalists, encryption and anonymity are of crucial importance, as they enable more possibilities for women journalists to exercise their right to freedom of expression without undue interference from State or non-State actors,¹⁸ including surveillance and direct harassment practices. Legislative developments that address online harassment and abuse against women journalists should not impose encryption and anonymity bans, or mandatory identification of users online.¹⁹ Women journalists have the right to online anonymity as part of their right to privacy.

Finally, legislation should maintain and follow the principles and standards on conditional liability of internet intermediaries. This means that they should not be liable for third party content when they have not been involved in modifying the content in question, and that States can only require them to remove content by order of a court.

Examples

Proposing tiered responses: The proposal of the Law Commission of Ireland articulates a variety of measures (a tiered response) that prioritizes educational programmes and civil legal measures before

resorting to criminal law.²⁰ This approach would help to ensure that any interference with the right to freedom of expression caused by online harassment laws would be proportionate to the harm caused by the act of harassment.

Modifying legislation: In 2018, France modified its [Penal Code](#), to enable the prosecution of harassment committed by a group of people or through the use of online communication services.²¹

Using existing laws: In 2018, [Ireland](#) used existing harassment laws to prosecute an individual in 2018 for online “reckless harassment” against a woman journalist. The charge was brought under the country’s Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 2010, which enables the prosecution of individuals for harassment that takes place “by any means”. The case demonstrates that such provisions can be applied in cases where online forms of communication were used.²²

Including provisions applicable to online forms of harassment: In Germany, provisions in the [Criminal Code](#) on stalking offences include unauthorized attempts to contact another person by means of telecommunications and improperly using another person’s data to induce third parties to contact a person.²³

Decriminalizing defamation: Since 2009, OSCE participating States have made progress in the decriminalization of defamation and/or criminal insult laws. As of 2017, the following OSCE participating States repealed general provisions on criminal defamation: Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Estonia, Georgia, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Norway, Romania, Tajikistan, the United Kingdom, and Ukraine.²⁴

Resources

The OSCE RFoM and IPI have published a report on [Legal Responses to Online Harassment and Abuse of Journalists: Perspectives from Finland, France and Ireland](#), which examines legal responses for online harassment and abuse against journalists in Finland, France and Ireland.²⁵

- The OSCE RFoM publishes legal analyses of relevant legislation with recommendations to authorities, for example the [Austrian Draft Law on Diligence and Responsibility Online](#),²⁶ the [Ukrainian Media Law](#),²⁷ the [draft Law on Media Services in Albania](#),²⁸ or the [German Draft Law on Better Law Enforcement in Social Networks](#).²⁹
- [Legislationline](#) is a database established by ODIHR for OSCE participating States to consult and bring legislation in line with international standards.³⁰
- The Law Library of the US Congress published a comparative analysis of legislation in the report [Law Protecting Journalists from Online Harassment](#).³¹
- The UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression provides useful recommendations in the [Report on the Use of Encryption and Anonymity in Digital Communications](#).³²

- The [Rabat Plan of Action on The Prohibition of Advocacy of National, Racial or Religious Hatred that Constitutes Incitement to Discrimination, Hostility or Violence](#), by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, provides clear recommendations on what constitutes “hate speech”.³³
- [‘Hate Speech’ Explained: A Toolkit](#) is a guide by ARTICLE 19 to identify “hate speech” and how to effectively counter it while protecting the right to freedom of expression and equality.³⁴

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- 34 ARTICLE 19, “‘Hate Speech’ Explained: A Toolkit”, 2015, <https://www.article19.org/data/files/medialibrary/38231/Hate-Speech-Explained---A-Toolkit-%282015-Edition%29.pdf>.



Judiciary

Proposed actions

1. Raise awareness on gender issues throughout the judicial system, as this is essential for the protection of female journalists;
2. Increase expertise among judicial personnel on issues of freedom of expression, safety of journalists and harassment and abuse, offline and online;
3. Apply and promote best practices in access to justice, sentencing and remedies;
4. National human rights institutions should engage on the issue of safety of journalists.

3. Judiciary

Ensuring access to justice and ending impunity

This chapter focuses on the work of courts and judges who interpret and apply the law, which is essential in the protection of human rights and the safety of journalists. In addition, this chapter also includes a section on independent human rights institutions that are mandated to protect and promote human rights.

One of the challenges in addressing online harassment and abuse against women journalists is that it often goes unreported and, therefore, guaranteeing their access to justice is crucial. Of particular concern is the high level of impunity for crimes against journalists – nearly 90 per cent of the known murders of journalists worldwide.¹ As it represents a systemic failure of the functions of government and the rule of law, on which the safety and rights of everyone depends, fighting impunity is an absolute imperative.²

OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 calls on States to “take effective measures to end impunity for crimes committed against journalists, by ensuring accountability as a key element in preventing future attacks, including by ensuring that law enforcement agencies carry out swift, effective and impartial investigations into acts of violence and threats against journalists, in order to bring all those responsible to justice, and ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies.”

› **Raise awareness on gender issues throughout the judicial system, as this is essential for the protection of female journalists**

Online safety for women journalists needs a judicial system that protects the rights of everyone and is attentive to how different experiences are lived by men, women and people of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, in line with international human rights standards.³ In pursuit of this ideal, States should make all efforts to evaluate and reform the justice system to advance gender equality. Potential steps towards this goal include balancing gender representation in personnel and building capacity to guarantee equal access to justice.

One of the challenges in addressing online harassment and abuse against women journalists that it is often not reported. There are many factors that contribute to this, such as fear of retaliation, professional repercussions, and stigmatization by peers. There may also be inadequate protections to safeguard the dignity of complainants, economic costs and a perception that nothing will be done; factors that might further discourage women journalists from pursuing a case.⁴ Proactive steps to facilitate access to justice, including legal aid services and information campaigns, can help women journalists overcome some of these hurdles. Promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice for all is a commitment in the Sustainable Development Goals.⁵

Steps to improve the rate of cases that are addressed on the safety of women journalists in the judicial system can also include organizing dialogues between the judiciary and women journalists, to share experiences and increase understanding of how online harassment and abuse affects journalists' personal and professional lives.

Examples

Training judicial professionals: Starting in 2013, the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina have, in collaboration with the Association of Women Judges, trained judicial professionals on gender approaches in the judicial procedures and practices.⁶

Supporting cases being brought to court: In 2018, the regional media regulatory authority of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany, launched a project offering legal support to news organizations and journalists to bring cases of online harassment and abuse to court.⁷

Resources

- Detailed recommendations on how to ensure a gender-responsive approach to the justice system have been developed by the OSCE in the toolkit [Justice and Gender](#).⁸
- The Council of Europe's programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) offers an online course, [Access to Justice for Women](#), which includes modules on improving women's access to justice and gender sensitive approaches to the practice of law.⁹
- UNESCO's report [Prevent and Punish: in Search of Solutions to Fight Violence Against Journalists](#) includes recommendations to address impunity of crimes against journalists, although there are no specifics on gender issues.¹⁰

› **Increase expertise among judicial personnel on issues of freedom of expression, safety of journalists and harassment and abuse, offline and online**

To be able to adapt, judicial personnel need to be aware of the different benefits and challenges that the rapidly changing media landscape poses to men and women journalists. Topics such as the fulfillment and protection of the right to freedom of expression online; the fundamental importance of gender-responsive approaches to upholding this right; as well as the proper reaction to online harassment and abuse while keeping in line with international human rights standards, should be included in legal educational curricula and training programmes.

Such training courses should cover, at a minimum, five themes that impact the safety of women journalists online:

1. an overview of international human rights standards on the prevention, protection and prosecution of crimes against the right to freedom of expression;
2. a clear insight into the lawful limitations to the right to freedom of expression and the so-called three-part test (page 42: legality; legitimacy; and necessity and proportionality);
3. the benefits of, and challenges to, the right to freedom of expression online and insight into the way the internet and social media operates;
4. an inclusive and non-discriminatory approach to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of expression; and
5. the role of journalism and journalists in democratic societies.¹¹

Organizing training in co-operation with peers from the judiciary across borders could be invaluable to all involved. A workshop among judges, or other individuals working in the justice sector, from OSCE participating States, for example, could allow for a productive exchange of experiences and lessons learned.

Examples

Organizing Massive Open Online Courses: Since 2014, more than 12,000 judges have attended Massive Open Online Courses organized by UNESCO to increase their knowledge on freedom of expression issues. Participants have warmly welcomed the courses, with feedback indicating that the training has helped them to better understand issues related to the safety of journalists.¹²

High-level international exchanges between experts: The Central Asia Judicial Dialogue by the OSCE RFoM has enabled regional and international co-operation between influential jurists and judges that rarely, or never, meet one another.¹³ They exchange legal opinions and judicial experiences on the most pressing issues, such as the decriminalization of defamation and combating “hate speech” while protecting freedom of expression.

Attending in-person training: Since 2016, more than 4,000 judges, prosecutors, lawyers and media professionals took part in the Council of Europe’s [JUFREX](#) project expanding their knowledge on freedom of expression and the safety of journalists in South-East Europe.¹⁴

Establishing special courts: Estonia established a specialized court for online harassment, with judges and law enforcement officials receiving special training on the issue.¹⁵

Resources

- UNESCO published a toolkit on [Legal Standards on Freedom of Expression in Africa](#), which includes a section on gendered perspectives on freedom of expression.¹⁶ UNESCO, in collaboration with the Center for International Media Assistance, also published a guide on [International Standards on Freedom of Expression: A Basic Guide for Legal Professionals in Latin America](#)¹⁷ as well as an educational toolbox for judges on freedom of expression, access to information and safety of journalists.¹⁸
- Protecting the Right to Freedom of Expression under the European Convention on Human Rights, a guide by the Council of Europe provides recommendations on the safety of journalists.¹⁹
- An online training on the safety of journalists for judges and legal practitioners sets the basics for protecting and prosecuting violence against journalists. It is available on the [Council of Europe's HELP online platform](#) in various languages.²⁰

› **Apply and promote best practices in access to justice, sentencing and remedies**

As the pursuit of independent legal action can be traumatic and time consuming for the person subjected to violence, a system should be in place to ensure processes are swift, and legal aid and remedies provided.²¹ Remedies should be proportionate to the gravity of the violations, and could include financial compensation, as well as a range of measures to rehabilitate the victims and facilitate their return to work if they so desire.²²

When considering cases of online harassment and abuse against women journalists, courts should factor into their sentencing and corresponding sanctions and remedies the impact that the conduct has had on the right to freedom of expression and freedom of the press.²³ When sentencing, judges should consider best practices of cases of attacks against journalists addressed by other courts, in line with international human rights law. There is an increasing body of jurisprudence that the judiciary can draw from. This can serve to ensure that State and non-State perpetrators are firmly aware that they cannot act with impunity without some measure of redress being granted by the courts. One such measure is an award of damages to a journalist who has suffered a violation.²⁴

Judicial bodies should promote, in co-operation with special prosecutors and independent commissions established by different stakeholders, the reinforcement of the fight against impunity. This could include collaboration with special commissions that monitor the effectiveness of investigations in co-operation with the responsible ministry, media organizations and civil society organizations.

Examples

Sentencing: In France, two individuals were handed six-month suspended prison sentences and fined 2,000 euros for making online death threats and rape threats. Their target, a French woman journalist, had been subjected to an eight-month online harassment campaign.²⁵ In Ireland, an individual was sentenced to four-and-a-half-years in prison (the last 18 months of which were suspended) for harassing a woman journalist under the Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act.²⁶

Establishing public inquiries: In November 2019, a public inquiry into the assassination of Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta was established, following substantial advocacy by the victim's family, a resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's Legal Affairs Committee, and pressure from other international organizations.²⁷

Awarding financial reparation: In Finland, a national court awarded a woman journalist with 94,000 euros in damages, along with compensation for medical fees, loss of earnings and security, after being subjected to online harassment, stalking and defamation by three individuals.²⁸

Ensuring civil remedies: In many countries, victims can bring civil claims for damages if online harassment or abuse breaches the constitutional right of a private person, for example under Irish Law.²⁹

Resources

- European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) case law can be consulted in the Council of Europe report [Freedom of Expression, the Media and Journalists: Case-law of the European Court of Human Rights](#).³⁰ There is also the Council of Europe HELP online training on [Reasoning of Criminal Judgments and Introduction to the ECHR](#).³¹
- The European Audiovisual Observatory [IRIS Merlin database](#) includes useful information on media legal issues, including protection of journalists.
- The Columbia University [Global Freedom of Expression Case Law](#) database provides access to hundreds of judgments on freedom of expression issues worldwide, including the safety of journalists.
- The University of Oxford's Faculty of Law published a [Report on Reparations and Remedies for Victims of Sexual and Gender Based Violence](#) looking at international, regional and national jurisprudence.³²

› **National human rights institutions should engage on the issue of safety of journalists**

Whether established as a commission, ombudsperson or other form, independent public national human rights institutions (NHRIs) are well suited to address the issue of safety of journalists, including the issue of online harassment and abuse against women journalists. NHRIs could give attention to the safety of female journalists through monitoring, educating and strategic communication, as well as through the examination of complaints, and preventing human rights violations and abuses against journalists.³³ For example, NHRIs are mandated to deal with individual complaints, and to mediate between complainants and public administration bodies not having fulfilled their obligation to protect human rights. In addition, NHRIs can make public statements, start awareness raising campaigns, as well as publish topical research.

NHRIs are well placed to monitor attacks against journalists, including online harassment and abuse. As independent public institutions, NHRIs are in a good position to develop data collection systems on the extent and impact of the safety of journalists that could inform public policies and international mechanisms, such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

NHRIs have in some cases quasi-judisdictional competencies, which puts them in the position to recommend and provide for remedies, or play a role in alternative dispute resolutions. Such non-legal remedies can be a welcome alternative on cases of gender-based online and offline harassment against women who do not want to engage in an open judicial procedure.

Like other institutions, NHRIs should ensure a gender-responsive approach in their work and designate the appropriate human and financial resources to implement such an approach effectively.

Examples

Producing human rights ombudsperson reports: The Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina produced a [Special Report on the Status and Cases of Threats against Journalists](#). It identifies the main challenges for journalists' safety, including online harassment and abuse, and the extent to which these challenges were properly handled by the State.³⁴

Publishing reports in collaboration with media: The Lithuanian Seimas Ombudsman's Office collaborates with the media, in particular the Association of Regional Radio Stations, to conduct joint programmes on human rights issues. In this joint initiative, radio journalists prepare programming with content input from the ombudsperson's office. This arrangement offers a forum to broadcast issues on freedom of expression and violence against journalists, including online harassment and abuse.³⁵

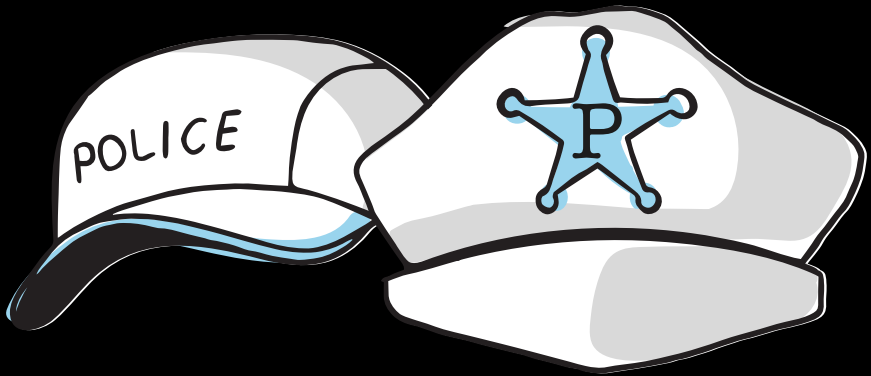
Resources

- The [Handbook for National Human Rights Institutions on Women's Rights and Gender Equality](#) by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights provides useful tips to mainstream gender in NHRIs.³⁶

Endnotes

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**Law enforcement
agencies**

Proposed actions

1. Enhance training of law enforcement authorities on the issue of online safety of journalists with a gender-responsive approach;
2. Review and improve gender considerations in risk assessments of threats and harassment;
3. Strengthen protocols, methods and procedures to investigate crimes against journalists and freedom of expression;
4. Increase dialogue and co-ordination on the safety of journalists between law enforcement authorities, media outlets and civil society.

4. Law enforcement agencies

Enhancing the methods for protection and effective investigations

This section deals with the State bodies that have to fulfil the obligation to protect journalists and effectively investigate crimes against them: the law enforcement agencies. Women journalists face distinct risks in relation to their work, which requires gender-responsive approaches to their safety. Investigation of crimes against journalists committed in the digital environment are still a developing field. Any new proposals to counter online practices should be carefully assessed, to ensure that the protection and exercise of human rights online, including the right to freedom of expression and privacy, is not undermined.

This section provides an overview of recommendations and existing standards on the effective investigation of crimes against journalists, including those laid out in [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18](#), to address the range of conduct of gender-based online harassment and abuse against women journalists. In addition, it proposes steps that law enforcement authorities should undertake at a minimum to implement these recommendations.

[OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18](#) calls on States to “encourage State bodies and law enforcement agencies to engage in awareness-raising and training activities related to the need to ensure safety of journalists, and to promote the involvement of civil society in such activities, where appropriate.”

› **Enhance training of law enforcement authorities on the issue of online safety of journalists with a gender-responsive approach**

As law enforcement officers may not always be mindful of international human rights standards and safety of journalists in their day-to-day work, training programmes could play a constructive role in helping them to understand better the rights of journalists, the range of threats they face and tools to respond.¹ Such training programmes should include several components and recommendations on how to create procedures that encourage women journalists to report online and offline attacks to the competent authorities. These training programmes should also include actions to abstain from practicing institutional behaviours that make individuals relive the trauma of the attack and thus add on to the negative experience (also known as re-victimization).² A general perspective on the use, misuse and benefits of technology, as well as practical modules providing tools and knowledge on legal and technical aspects, should convey the different manifestations of gender-based online harassment and abuse, as well as the specific circumstances under which threats and harassment online amount to criminal offenses that should be dealt with in the same way as offline crimes.³

Such training should be mandatory for all relevant law enforcement personnel, in particular police receiving the reports and investigators, and should include certain timeframes for completion. Equality and non-discrimination modules should incorporate measures to counter the obstacles that women face in accessing justice, such as structural and targeted discrimination in the criminal justice system.

Preventive measures are crucial, as are the procedures to identify the particular risks and threats that women journalists frequently face online as opposed to those experienced by their male counterparts.

Law enforcement authorities should prioritize threats to life or physical integrity, including rape threats⁴ and other criminal conduct online with the potential to manifest itself offline.

Law enforcement personnel should become well versed in the practical measures available to prevent and mitigate the negative impacts of gender-based online harassment and abuse. They should, for example, become aware of the possibilities that digital security tools provide to prevent unauthorized access to journalists' digital accounts. Authorities should also be aware of the unique aspects of journalists' activities, like the crucial need to protect sources and the impact that various types of harassment and abuse have in their personal and professional lives.

Training should make law enforcement mindful and aware of the historical and still prevailing tendency of blaming the women targeted by gender-based abuse and harassment related cases. The training should also highlight the burden and psychological impact of reporting and pursuing such complaints. Identifying the root causes of overlooking reports of online abuse and other acts reported by women journalists should provide inputs to create measures that protect women journalists from, and prevent, attacks against them.

Additionally, law enforcement officers should receive training and information on the application of measures to support women journalists when certain acts do not meet the criminal threshold.

Examples

Providing online training for the police: The Swedish Police Authority, in co-operation with Uppsala University, launched an [online training for police officers](#) to deal with hate crimes, addressing freedom of speech, freedom of the press and the fundamental rights and freedoms of journalists, opinion leaders and politicians.⁵

Publishing handbooks for the police: The [Canadian Department of Justice's Handbook for Police and Crown Prosecutors on Criminal Harassment](#) shows the different types of harassment that occur online and the different laws and procedures that can be followed to investigate such crimes.⁶

Resources

- The training manual on [Freedom of Expression and Public Order](#), published by UNESCO, aims to equip members of the security forces with the tools to maintain public order in compliance with human rights and freedom of expression, while also guaranteeing the safety of journalists.⁷ The manual has been used in workshops and training courses as part of the implementation of the UN Action Plan on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity in many countries, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.⁸
- To help law enforcement to better investigate online harassment and abuse of women journalists, ARTICLE 19 prepared the policy brief [Investigating online harassment and abuse of women journalists](#).⁹

› **Review and improve gender considerations in risk assessments of threats and harassment**

Discrimination and inequality that women face offline often replicates itself online. Law enforcement authorities should be aware of these circumstances, particularly in cases where journalists are vocal and expose conduct against societal norms and gender stereotypes that may put them at extra risk.

Law enforcement authorities should comprehensively review the procedures and measures they apply to evaluate the risk level posed by online and offline threats against journalists. This review should include the level of risk assigned to different types of threats that are not necessarily categorized as criminal conduct, both online and offline, including the connection between the two realms. Such a comprehensive review should generate practices with the view of developing a protocol – understood as the set of methods, procedures and standards that guide the authorities’ performance – on the investigation and responses to threats against, and risks faced by, journalists.¹⁰

All threat reports by law enforcement officers should include a detailed description of the assessment and the recommended measures, as well as all factual, contextual and gender considerations provided by the journalist and a gender specialist, if there was one, co-conducting the assessment or investigation.

Risk assessments should have a section to include and consider behavioural patterns and gendered aspects of the incident, such as stereotypes, discrimination, intolerance, sexualized threats and intimidation. This information should be used to determine follow-up actions and to

enhance the collection of data related to the different manifestations of online harassment and abuse against women journalists.

Law enforcement functions can contribute to a better understanding and development of policy responses to online harassment and abuse against women journalists. Authorities should commission or support data collection and analysis of data related to this issue.¹¹ This work could guide and strengthen preventive and investigative responses, in strict compliance with data protection obligations and privacy protection standards. Journalists who report an incident should be clearly informed about the use and processing of their information, as well as the remedies they can access in case of violations or abuses.

Examples

Establishing protocols for assessing threats and risks: With a view to developing a model protocol to assess the risks,¹² and improve collaboratively the responses that law enforcement authorities are providing to journalists facing particular risks related to their work, the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions has called on States to support the collection of good practices in the investigation, assessment and/or response to threats and risks of journalists. Such protocols must incorporate the digital and technological notions of the threats and risks faced by journalists.

› **Strengthen protocols, methods and procedures to investigate crimes against journalists and freedom of expression**

Strengthening investigations into attacks against journalists is paramount to tackling impunity, but when doing so, it is important to incorporate a gender approach that responds to the different manifestations, impacts and risks faced by women and men respectively.¹³

Addressing impunity of crimes against journalists requires diligent, impartial and effective investigations aimed at determining the truth, and pursuing, arresting, prosecuting, and eventually punishing all perpetrators of crimes against journalists.¹⁴

One of the measures that law enforcement authorities should take is to create specific units within the police and prosecutor's offices for investigating crimes against journalists, or put in place any similar and adequate action plans that enable the prioritization and specialization of investigations of crimes against journalists. These units or special actions should base their operations on methods, procedures or protocols developed through shared good practices.

Next, law enforcement agencies should receive sufficient resources to prioritize risk assessments and investigations of crimes against women journalists. In addition, they should be given the capacity to develop a specialized set of standards, procedures and protocols to ensure that the investigation of crimes against journalists includes, as a rule, the exhaustion of a line of enquiry related to the victim's journalistic activity. When law enforcement agencies decide not to follow and exhaust this line of enquiry, they should justify this decision in writing, and

have it approved by a higher level official. In cases involving women journalists, gender considerations need to be highlighted in the report.

When threats and harassment online amount to criminal offences that should be dealt with in the same way as offline crimes, law enforcement authorities should evaluate their existing protocols of investigation and preventive measures in order to identify best practices and lessons learned from all procedures applicable to prevent and investigate these crimes. Such an evaluation can benefit from the participation of organizations and experts working with abused individuals, as well as women journalists who have experienced obstacles in accessing the criminal justice system.

Examples

Providing high-level judicial guidance: The UK Crown Prosecution Service provided guidance for decisions in cases involving communications sent via social media by its 2018 publication [Social Media – Guidelines on prosecuting cases involving communications sent via social media](#), which includes clarification on which social media communications could be considered criminal offences.¹⁵

Appointing special responsibility: The police in Kosovo assigned its Department of Grave Crimes to investigate attacks and threats against journalists. In a related measure, Kosovo's Basic Court of Pristina appointed a co-ordinator for cases of journalists.¹⁶

Resources

- A number of civil society organizations, along with the Public Prosecutor's Office, adopted a special protocol to investigate crimes against freedom of expression in Mexico. It includes operational standards of investigation and evidence gathering, collaboration between different authorities, and measures to direct and liaise targeted individuals with relevant services.¹⁷
- ARTICLE 19's policy brief [Investigating Online Harassment and Abuse against Women Journalists](#) examines the scope of State obligations to address online harassment and abuse of women journalists, and to conduct an effective investigation into the online harassment and abuse.¹⁸

› **Increase dialogue and co-ordination on the safety of journalists between law enforcement authorities, media outlets and civil society**

To build public confidence in the rule of law and to tackle gendered discrimination effectively, law enforcement authorities should promote, facilitate and encourage co-ordination between the police, prosecutors, media organizations and civil society. It is essential that the journalists that have been targeted by online and/or offline attacks and crimes report the crime to the police.

Dialogues between these parties should focus on addressing the root causes of impunity for crimes against journalists and the role of technology in both exercising human rights and posing risks to journalists' rights. These

dialogues should take place with the shared understanding by all that it is crucial to have input from those attacked, and from groups supporting people who have been experiencing online harassment and abuse, when law enforcement agencies want to design, develop or apply procedures that tackle discriminatory practices and structural obstacles. Co-ordination among participants should develop new, or strengthen existing, methods and procedures to ensure accountability and redress.

Law enforcement authorities could also participate in international co-operation initiatives, such as the ones organized by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), for example those led by the Crime Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice. Such initiatives offer space to exchange expertise, experience and information about criminal justice practices and the prevention of crimes against journalists. Civil society and the media sector should also be included in these initiatives.

Examples

Collaborating for improved investigations: The Dutch police and prosecution service, together with the Dutch Society of Editors-in-Chief, agreed to improve the investigations of attacks against journalists, including by implementing measures such as systematic registration of cases, giving attacks against journalists high priority and making information for victims more transparent and accessible.¹⁹

Establishing common grounds for the interaction: The European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) has created the resource policecodex.eu web to improve co-operation between the police and media organizations.²⁰ The Codex consists of eight guidelines for the police on how to react, handle and work with journalists. The eight

guidelines address the most relevant conflicts in Europe between the two professional groups, according to the findings of ECPMF.

Facilitating joint training to improve dialogue: UNESCO has facilitated structured dialogues and workshops for law enforcement personnel and journalists in various countries, such as Ukraine, Nepal, Tunisia, Senegal, Tanzania, Somalia, Burkina Faso and Tunisia.²¹

Inviting more actors to dialogue: The UNODC Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice holds dialogues on Safety of Journalists that include representatives from governments and civil society.²²

Providing issue-based training with potential targets: The OSCE Transnational Threats Department has trained the police in Armenia to improve their dialogue with civil society during demonstrations, including special attention to women protesters.²³

Resources

- After a series of seminars between law enforcement officials and journalists in Ukraine, UNESCO published a report and a video to share their experience.²⁴

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**Intergovernmental
organizations**

Proposed actions

1. Mainstream gender-responsive approaches in human rights standards and mechanisms on the safety of journalists;
2. Support States to address the implementation gap of international standards on the safety of journalists;
3. Help increase data and research that could inform the initiatives on safety of female journalists online;
4. Prioritize co-operation and co-ordination of actors to leverage impact.

5. Intergovernmental organizations

From setting standards to assisting States

Whether global in nature, like the United Nations (UN), or with a regional focus, like the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) can play an important role in strengthening international human rights standards, including those that have an impact on the safety of women journalists. IGOs can assist their members, or participating States, in putting these standards in place at country level. This section provides a selection of proposed actions that IGOs could take to reinforce their work on the safety of women journalists online.

[OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18](#) calls on States to “co-operate fully with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, including on the issue of safety of journalists” and “encourage the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media’s continued advocacy and promotion of safety of journalists in all OSCE participating States, in line with his/her mandate.”

› **Mainstream gender-responsive approaches in human rights standards and mechanisms on the safety of journalists**

The number of international standards and commitments regarding the safety of journalists has increased in recent years, and women journalists have been a particular focus in many of these texts. UN resolutions and

UNESCO commitments, for example, have progressively highlighted the need to address the specific threats faced by women journalists offline and online. Regional organizations, such as the OSCE, have also integrated the issue of safety of women journalists into their texts on safety of journalists.

This increase in attention represents a positive shift in thinking about the safety of women journalists as being integral to the safety of journalists and free expression. It is still necessary, however, to work towards a comprehensive gender-responsive approach in all standards, an approach that not only promotes the protection of women journalists, but also empowers them. Of course, women's voices need to be part of this process.

There are many UN and regional human rights mechanisms, and other initiatives, which look at the issue of journalists' safety. Unfortunately, these do not all have a fully integrated gender-responsive approach, or have not responded to how online harassment and abuse affects the work and life of journalists as well as how this problem can be addressed. Co-ordination initiatives, such as the [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#) and the UN focal points on the safety of journalists, could be used to reinforce a gender approach.

In addition, there is room for existing human rights mechanisms within IGOs – that provide some form of rapid response to human rights violations – to increase their attention to the issue of the safety of women journalists online. IGO bodies could also consider the creation of new rapid response mechanisms, in recognition of the severity of the growing threats to women journalists.

Examples

Living up to what has been agreed by the UN General Assembly (UNGA): For example the 2019 [UNGA Resolution 74/157](#) set the standard to put in place “gender-sensitive” approaches in all preventive and protection measures, investigative procedures and prosecution of violence against journalists.¹ IGOs should apply the same standards.

Supporting independent IGO-functions for the safety of journalists: The mandate of the OSCE Representative of Freedom of the Media (RFoM) from 1997 states that: “he or she will assume an early-warning function. He or she will address serious problems caused by, *inter alia*, obstruction of media activities and unfavourable working conditions for journalists.”² The daily work of the Representative includes assessing cases and raising attention to them. The OSCE has implemented gender mainstreaming since 2004.³ The RFoM launched its project on the Safety of Female Journalists Online (#SOFJO) in 2015,⁴ and the 2018 [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists](#) recognizes the specific risks faced by women journalists and calls upon participating States to publicly condemn attacks against women offline and online.⁵

Resources

- The OSCE has published several [guides](#) on how to integrate gender approaches in their various types of initiatives and events that help the OSCE to ensure a gender approach to its work. The biannual [reports by the RFoM to the Permanent Council of the OSCE](#) present the cases and threats to media freedom that the Representative has raised during each reporting period.⁶

- Recommendations on how to mainstream a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the UN system are available in [UN Resolution 2019/2](#) of the Economic and Social Council, which provides recommendations.⁷
- ARTICLE 19's guide [Ending Impunity: Acting on UN standards on the Safety of Journalists](#) summarizes existing commitments and includes a section on unpacking gender-responsive approaches to journalists' safety international standards.⁸
- [IFEX network 5-minute Explainers](#) is a tool to help demystify international standards on the safety of journalists.⁹

› **Support States to address the implementation gap of international standards on the safety of journalists**

When it comes to international standards, the pressing issue is often how to make them a reality and preventing them from remaining empty words. By increasing direct support, assistance and expertise to States, IGOs could help implement and make concrete the international standards on gender-based online harassment and abuse against women journalists. One way could be to develop a legal analysis on existing legislation applicable in cases of threats and violence against journalists and to provide recommendations accordingly.

IGO could also support the collection of good practices regarding crucial issues for the safety of women journalists online, such as guidelines for investigating harassment and abuse cases, protection

mechanisms and measures that have an impact on reducing online harassment and abuse against women journalists. Co-operating with, and supporting, national and sub-national authorities in investigations is another productive way to assist States.

Another aspect of the support that IGOs can provide concerns the capacity-building of public offices working on issues related to journalists' safety, online harassment and abuse, and gender approaches. All IGOs' efforts to build up expertise among State actors, such as human rights guides or training manuals, must include sections on the right to freedom of expression, the safety of journalists online and offline, and strong gender approaches.

Election periods are often fraught with heightened violence and intimidation of journalists, including acts of online aggression.¹⁰ These attacks undermine citizens' access to information before and during voting time. IGOs can support the analysis of violence against journalists, including gender-based online harassment and abuse, in election observation missions. Other observation and preventive measures should be taken long before the electoral period, as attacks against journalists increase.

Examples

Publishing reports on good practices: The OSCE RFoM has published and contributed to several reports on the safety of women journalists online, including an analysis of good practices and recommendations in this field. Information is available on the dedicated [SOFJO webpage](#).¹¹

The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences has published a report on [Combating Violence against Women Journalists](#) that provides specific recommendations to the UN and its Member States on how to address violence against women journalists.¹²

Mainstreaming gender approaches into reports and analyses:

In the report on [Safety of Journalists Covering Protests](#), UNESCO performed an intersectional analysis, taking into account gender and diversity factors. The report provides good practices, such as police training and safety measures that journalists can take themselves, as well as recommendations on how to improve journalists' safety when covering protests.¹³

Publishing in-depth reports: The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) special rapporteur on freedom of expression published an extensive report on Women Journalists and Freedom of Expression that contains numerous recommendations on how to advance the safety of women journalists offline and online.¹⁴

Standard-setting guidebooks: The OSCE RFoM [Safety of Journalists Guidebook](#) provides general guidance to States on how to promote the safety of journalists.¹⁵ Future updates should include in-depth sections on the safety of women journalists.

Performing legal analysis: The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) regularly conducts [legal analyses](#) of different issues, including on violence against women, in the OSCE region as well as international and regional special rapporteurs and mandates on freedom of expression.

Inserting journalists' safety in governance initiatives: In 2012, ODIHR published its handbook on media monitoring for Election Observation Missions. Similar publications, or updates thereof, could include recommendations on how to disaggregate data by gender, next to looking at online harassment and abuse against journalists and its impact on free elections.¹⁶

Mainstreaming gender approaches into the SDGs: The 2016 publication by UN Women [Driving the Gender-Responsive Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is a good example of a broader initiative to strengthen gender implementation of international standards.¹⁷

Reviewing existing protection mechanisms: The Office of the UN Commissioner for Human Rights carried out an in-depth review of protection mechanisms in Mexico, and provided a list of more than 100 recommendations for their effective and gender-responsive implementation.¹⁸

Accompanying investigations of crimes against journalists: An unprecedented Special Follow-up Team for the investigation into the killing of three journalists on the border of Ecuador and Colombia was set up by the two States and the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, providing a good example of how IGOs can accompany investigations into crimes against journalists.¹⁹

› **Help increase data and research that could inform the initiatives on safety of female journalists online**

In many countries, different actors are, in various ways, collecting data on safety of journalists, but these do not always reflect gender specific differences. IGOs can play an important role for both data collection standardization and diversity in supporting an approach that includes stronger gender analysis in data collection and research. This would contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular to SDG 5 on gender equality and to SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

Global and regional research and studies, in particular those that include the collection of good practices, are valuable to advancing the promotion of safety of women journalists online and to provide more nuanced recommendations to States and other relevant actors. Such studies are preferably done in co-operation with academic institutions and civil society organizations, and reports thereof are best disseminated widely and on occasions where solutions to online harassment and abuse against women journalists can be discussed. This underpins awareness-raising activities, which in turn could be a good way to mobilize key players for the safety of women journalists at the national level. When limited in time and budget, IGOs should have decision makers as their primary target audience.

Examples

Raising awareness on the need for accurate and continued research: The OSCE RFoM created an initiative focused on the [Safety of Female Journalists Online \(SOFJO\)](#), which includes a full-length documentary “A Dark Place”.²⁰ The film has been shown at many events around the world and at universities. In 2019, the RFoM held the #SOFJO Conference [Increasing Opportunities for Freedom of Expression and Media Pluralism](#).²¹

Monitoring and spreading knowledge based on data and research: The [UNESCO Director General’s Report on The Safety of Journalists and the Danger of Impunity](#)²² and the [World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development Report](#) both monitor violence against journalists and provide data in their investigations on the killings and impunity. The World Trends Report also notes gender-based threats to women journalists.²³

Sharing findings and good practices, and suggesting feasible responses: In 2017, UNESCO’s International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) published a collection of good practices on the safety of journalists by different actors, a collection that can inform future initiatives in this field. The publication [An Attack on One is an Attack on All](#) includes examples of responses developed by NGOs and media practitioners to online and offline threats to women journalists.²⁴ IPDC also published an analytical report on the [IPDC’s Role in the Promotion of the Safety of Journalists: A Way Forward](#), which includes recommendations to reinforce the gender approach.²⁵

Informing stakeholders on the latest news: UNESCO publishes a bimonthly [Newsletter](#) on the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity that includes updates on international standards, national policies, research, civil society initiatives and other relevant information on the safety of journalists.²⁶

› **Prioritize co-operation and co-ordination of actors to leverage impact**

Field offices of IGOs often lack sufficient knowledge of the internal workings of the media sector as well as an understanding of necessary approaches for the safety of women journalists. For real and effective improvement to the safety of journalists, there is an urgent need for more expertise on gendered issues related to media and journalism and on international human rights standards.

IGOs' field missions and country teams should be better equipped and have specialized knowledge to support the effective implementation of international standards at the national level. IGO personnel could, for example, be provided with training on issues related to the safety of journalists and gender equality.

The issue of the safety of journalists has become a key focus of various UN bodies and regional organizations. Reinforcing co-ordination and exchange of information among them, both at the international level and among those operating at the country level, would increase their final impact.

IGOs should also create opportunities to co-operate with State-led international and regional initiatives, with the issue of the safety of journalists in their mandate.

Examples

Acting together with peers: Since 1999, the special mandate holders on freedom of expression and media freedom of the OSCE, the UN, the Organization of American States, and the African Commission for People's and Human Rights annually issue a joint declaration to provide recommendations on how to address specific challenges related to the right to freedom of expression.²⁷

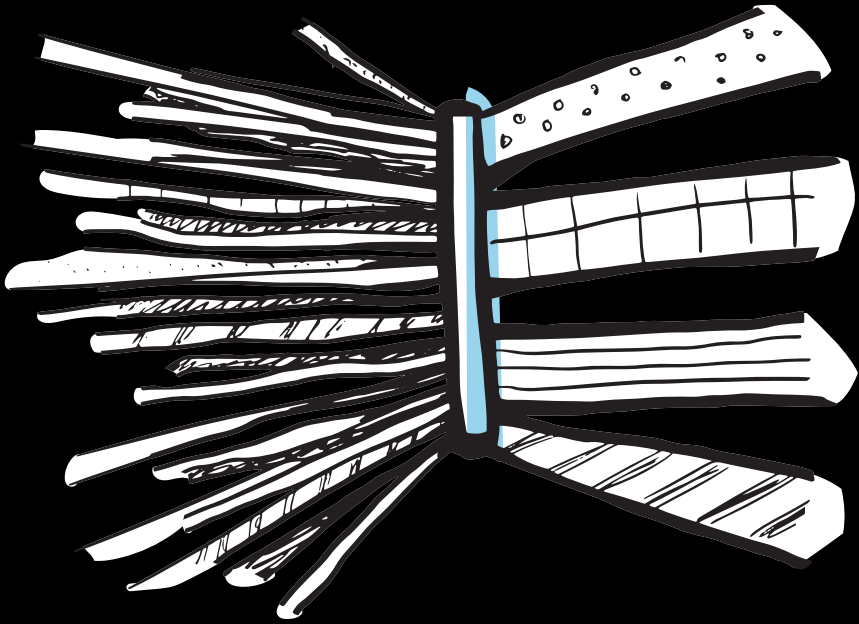
Building alliances between IGOs when there is a need: The OSCE RFoM and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights have issued joint statements, including on countering gender-based violence online.²⁸

Co-ordinating your work with other IGOs on a regular basis: UNESCO is leading a network of UN focal points on the safety of journalists that co-ordinates the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity among 14 UN agencies and bodies. UN Women, which can support a gender-responsive approach to this work, is among the participating agencies.²⁹

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**Internet
intermediaries**

Proposed actions

1. Respect international human rights standards on freedom of expression, privacy, participation and non-discrimination in policy and practice;
2. Make sure that policies on content moderation are clear, transparent and accessible for users, and that users are aware of how content is moderated, what constitutes online harassment and abuse, and how to report it;
3. Adopt user-centered and non-discrimination-based approaches in all operations;
4. Handle content removals and users' data requests with transparency and consistency;
5. Promote the role of women in journalism.

6. Internet intermediaries

Respecting the rights of female journalists and promoting online safety

All businesses have a responsibility to respect human rights.¹ For internet intermediaries – a category that includes numerous types of internet service providers, ranging from technical services and networking to social media platforms that facilitate online interactions – that means, among other things, avoiding infringements on women journalists’ ability to fully participate and exercise their right to freedom expression without discrimination and with respect for their privacy.

For the purposes of this guide, this section focuses on certain types of intermediaries on which journalists are most likely to experience online harassment and abuse, in particular platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Google and YouTube. It looks at standards and actions that internet intermediaries should uphold and adopt to contribute to universal human rights protection and enhancing women journalists’ participation online.

In the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18](#), the 57 OSCE participating States are “acknowledging that journalism and technology are evolving and that this contributes to the public debate, while it may also expand the range of risks that undermine the safety of journalists.” In addition, the participating States are “emphasizing also the particular risks with regard to the safety of journalists in the digital age, including the particular vulnerability of journalists to becoming targets of hacking or unlawful or arbitrary surveillance or interception of communications, undermining enjoyment of their right to freedom of expression and their right to be free from arbitrary and unlawful interference with privacy.”

› **Respect international human rights standards on freedom of expression, privacy, participation and non-discrimination in policy and practice**

Internet intermediaries, including social media platforms and their related services, should endorse the principle set out under international human rights law recognizing that human rights protected offline are also protected online. They should also put into practice actions that contribute to achieving the empowerment of women and the elimination of discrimination against them in, or as a result of, their services.²

At the very minimum, internet intermediaries' policies and terms of service need to be sufficiently clear and accessible, and be in line with international human rights standards as explained in the [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#).³ Policies and terms of service, as well as community guidelines and any internet intermediaries' standards that impact the rights to freedom of expression and privacy in particular, should reflect the principles of necessity and proportionality. Internet intermediaries should recognize that women journalists might prefer to express themselves online without revealing their identities; therefore, companies should not require real names or identification and should ensure that anonymity remains a genuine option for users.

On a practical level, internet intermediaries should conduct regular assessments, or audits, of the impact of their services, products, policies and operations on the various rights – freedom of expression, privacy, and non-discrimination – that are protected under international law and enable women journalists' participation online. These assessments should include an evaluation of the usefulness and effectiveness of the tools that companies have developed aimed at blocking, silencing,

removing or deprioritizing the different manifestations of online harassment and abuse, as well as their reporting and appeal mechanisms.

Impact assessments should also look at the effects created by algorithms being used to present, promote, or demote content, especially content that could imply gender-based harassment and abuse.

General obligations to monitor content and users' interactions go against international human rights law.⁴ They would threaten the privacy of users and promote restrictive measures as intermediaries err on the side of caution to avoid liability. Internet intermediaries should not adopt measures that may result in over-removal of content or in surveillance practices. Automated moderation tools – adopted on their own initiative or under obligations to take down certain content – can serve as a form of pre-publication censorship. The push for upload filters for “abusive” related content is ill-advised.⁵

Internet intermediaries should recognize that any moderation practices, as well as prescribed actions to remove content, have human rights implications that should be addressed to prevent unnecessary and disproportionate restrictions. The intermediaries should apply the three-part principle of legality, legitimacy, and necessity and proportionality (presented in the chapter: International human rights standards that frame the safety of female journalists online), and respect due process on all their content moderation related practices.

Resources

- The [UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) is a set of principles for States and businesses to increase the human rights standards and practices of business.⁶

- The OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media (RFoM) [Strategy Paper to Put a Spotlight on AI and Freedom of Expression](#) (#SAIFE) provides for a better understanding of how artificial intelligence (AI) affects freedom of expression, and which free speech safeguards are needed.⁷ The Paper and its preliminary recommendations, in particular, focus on the use of AI in content moderation and curation, including how to tackle “hate speech”.
- ARTICLE 19 published the policy brief [Online harassment and abuse against women journalists and major social media platforms](#), which provides recommendations to social media platforms on how to promote and protect women journalists’ safety online.⁸

› **Make sure policies on content moderation are clear, transparent and accessible for users, and that users are aware of how content is moderated, what constitutes online harassment and abuse, and how to report it**

Online harassment and abuse against women journalists will be better tackled when users have helpful information about what constitutes each type of harassment and abuse; when all users have full knowledge of how content is moderated (including the ranking, demotion and removal of content); and when all users have effective access to the remedies.

Internet intermediaries should ensure that the content and application of their terms of service, community guidelines and other special policies (e.g., advertising or commerce policies) are in line with international standards on freedom of expression and privacy. This means that the

terms of service, and alike, should be proportionate and adequate; clear; understandable; and easily available to all users.⁹ Users should be able to foresee whether their content is likely to be removed, ranked, demoted, or otherwise affected.¹⁰ Next, it must be clear when and how user data is likely to be collected, retained, or passed to third parties, including to law enforcement authorities.

Along with their terms of service and other materials that guide users, social media platforms should provide detailed examples, or case studies, of the way in which their community standards and policies are applied. Adding sections with examples of different manifestations of online harassment and abuse, including a thorough list of gender-based examples, would also help users' understanding of these platforms' policies. They should integrate data that illustrates trends in policy enforcement or application, and examples of actual cases, or extensive, detailed hypotheticals, that illustrate the nuances of interpretation and application of specific rules.¹¹

There is also a need for greater transparency in social media platforms' decision-making processes. It should be clear, for example, what tools they use to moderate and remove content, along with their function and impact, including the use of algorithms and artificial intelligence tools, trusted flagger-schemes or a combination of methods.

Another move that could inform policies and practices is for internet intermediaries to collect, analyse and report regularly and publicly on data related to online harassment and abuse and its effects.¹² This data and reporting should be processed under data protection rules, and be strictly built on information provided by users who have given their consent to use it for these specific purposes.

Examples

Information on application of policies: Twitter's [Transparency Report](#) provides statistical data about the actions the company takes towards user accounts under the application of some of their terms of service.¹³ It also publishes the description of each of their policies as well as the number of reports and actions taken in relation to each policy application. Twitter's Help Center provides a guide to [report violations of Twitter Rules](#) directly from a tweet or a profile.¹⁴

Accessible reporting mechanism: YouTube provides an accessible tool to report abuse under each of their [Community Guidelines](#).¹⁵ However, in some cases, the abused user will have to exhaust communication with the holder of the abusive account before being able to reach the company.

Transparency on content removal: Facebook publishes its [Community Standards Enforcement Report](#), in which the company provides numeric data on the reports they receive under each community guideline, including nudity, fake accounts and harassment.¹⁶ They provide the total amount of pieces of content they take action on, including appeals, and on the pieces of content they detect and remove with the use of automated tools. The report needs to be improved, however, to be functional for the purposes of accountability and transparency as, for example, it does not allow data comparisons. Twitter and Google also publish these types of transparency reports; it is important that all social media platforms improve their transparency mechanisms.

Removals per reporting mechanism: YouTube publishes its [Transparency Report on Community Guidelines Enforcement](#), in which they present the number of videos removed through their

different reporting schemes: automated flagging, users' reports, trusted flaggers, NGOs, and governments.¹⁷ This report also includes the number of videos removed per community guidelines.

Resources

- The [UN Special Rapporteur Report on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression to the Human Rights Council](#) provides recommendations on private sector responsibilities in content moderation.¹⁸
- The [Council of Europe \(CoE\) Recommendations on the protection of human rights with regard to social networking services](#) introduce principles on content moderation.¹⁹
- The CoE and the OSCE RFoM recommendations following the [Conference on Internet Freedom “The Role and Responsibilities of Internet Intermediaries”](#) address, *inter alia*, content moderation through transparent procedures based on the rule of law.²⁰
- The Joint Declarations by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, the OSCE RFoM, the Organization of American States Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information provide recommendations for the private sector and internet intermediaries on human rights-centered content moderation. In particular, the 2019 [Twentieth Anniversary Joint Declaration on Challenges to Freedom of Expression in the Next](#)

[Decade](#) introduces principles to prevent private content rules from interfering with individuals' rights to enjoy freedom of expression.²¹

- The [Santa Clara Principles on Transparency and Accountability in Content Moderation](#) is a set of principles meant to serve as a starting point, outlining minimum levels of transparency and accountability that internet platforms' content moderation should have.²²
- The [Manila Principles on Intermediary Liability](#) proposes this framework of baseline safeguards and best practices on intermediary liability.²³

› **Adopt user-centered and non-discrimination-based approaches in all operations**

There is a significant need for internet intermediaries to improve how they inform, and consult with, groups of users impacted by online harassment and abuse, and how content moderation tools and remedy options integrate these experiences and concerns.

Users – particularly those more likely to be targeted online – need to know what they can do to reduce the risks of participating on internet platforms. Internet intermediaries should therefore provide information to users about best practices for online safety and about technical solutions for reporting abusive content. They should also provide accessible, user-friendly and easy to find terms of service and reporting tools in local languages.²⁴

Internet intermediaries must move forward to distinguish between the varied levels and forms of abuse and harassment, and how removals are practiced and affect users with protected characteristics under international human rights law. Intermediaries should actively seek, and effectively take into account, issues of gender, in particular vulnerability or marginalization, and the concerns of communities facing distinct risks of censorship and discrimination.²⁵ Internet intermediaries should therefore develop solutions and remedies that are accessible to, and useful for, the users. This approach is also critical to prevent and mitigate the disproportionate impact of online harassment and abuse against targeted users, and for enabling human rights-centered evaluations of the impact of algorithmic and other AI-based decisions.

Internet intermediaries should design and implement their tools and policies through public and civil society consultations that are perceived as meaningful by the participants, and the internet intermediaries should publish the results of these consultations in practice.²⁶ For the purposes of women journalists' safety, intermediaries should adopt methodologies and procedures that take into consideration the context, experience and obstacles for women journalists using their tools and services. Consultations should be designed so that it is easy for journalists, media, civil society and academia to actively participate in them, a broad range of affected individuals should take part, especially from countries and communities particularly affected by the services. This participation should not impose unnecessary engagement requirements, such as non-disclosure agreements or excessive requests for information to register in their initiatives and programmes.

Resources

- The regulation of user-generated content is the focus of the [2018 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#), which contains useful recommendations for States and companies.²⁷
- The [Ethical Explorer Pack](#), developed by the Omidyar Network, addresses social media companies and service developers to help them start conversations and perform risk analysis on diversity, inclusion, and fairness and equity, among others. Companies that want to develop self-regulation norms and ethical processes need to identify what safety and gender equality mean for their work.²⁸ Even though this pack of arguments and suggestions does not elaborate upon specific human rights articles, it does point at some ways in which tech companies can incorporate discussions on how they can implement a human rights-based approach.

› **Handle content removals and users' data requests with transparency and consistency**

Any process or action that interferes with the right to freedom of expression and privacy of the users of internet intermediaries and other affected parties should be as open and transparent as possible.²⁹ Dominant social media platforms should consider applying the tests of necessity and proportionality to content related actions, even when such actions are undertaken with the goal of preventing or responding to online harassment and abuse against journalists.³⁰

Internet intermediaries should base their decisions related to content removal and users' data requests on due process principles, next to providing remedies for freedom of expression, privacy and non-discrimination violations.³¹ In practice, this means that internet intermediaries need to establish notification systems that include all the parties affected by their decisions, providing full explanations of the applied policies; the assessment that guided the decision; and details on how to activate complaint mechanisms to challenge the decisions.³²

Internet intermediaries should publish information about content removals and users' data requests. This includes, but is not limited to, statistical information on actions taken on content, appeals and outcomes, as well as any other information that informs the public about the consistency of their decisions from both a quantitative and qualitative perspective. This information should allow for public scrutiny of internet intermediaries' content moderation and use of automated systems, and their impact on the right to freedom of expression, privacy and non-discrimination.

Internet intermediaries' engagement and partnerships with governments should be as transparent as possible, so that the information is available and useful for assessing the interactions between governments and the intermediaries. The existing reports, about the number and identification of governments' requests to remove content or access users' information, do not provide the details needed to truly assess and scrutinize the engagement between these actors.

Transparency reports should include exhaustive data about the authority involved in the request; the legal basis, or lack thereof, for the request; and the actions taken by the company per request in each country, including those that enable domestic challenges of human rights violations or misuse of request mechanisms.

Internet intermediaries, in particular social media platforms, should commit themselves to independent oversight and consider joining multi-stakeholder regulatory bodies, such as social media councils, which would enable better public oversight of, and accountability for, their practices, including in the area of gender-based harassment and abuse.³³

Examples

Reporting on information requests: Twitter publishes information about their decisions regarding governments' and other "authorized reporters" requests, based on domestic legal grounds, including examples per country. Their transparency report on [Information Requests](#) includes the volume of legal requests they receive by government and non-government applicants per category and per country, including a specific profile per country.³⁴ However, the report does not provide basic information on the legal basis for the requests, nor does it provide the cases in which governments meet – or fail to fulfil - the legal requirements.

YouTube provides [FAQs on requests for users' information](#).³⁵ Google provides statistical data on governments' requests to remove content.³⁶

Every six months, Facebook releases a report on [Government Requests of User Data](#) providing the number of requests per country as well as a brief summary of a few specific cases.³⁷

In relation to users' data requests, Twitter, Google and Facebook include a section that covers general numeric data per country and the applications of their guidelines for law enforcement authorities' requests.³⁸

› **Promote the role of women in journalism**

Women journalists are disproportionately affected by online harassment and abuse on the services and platforms provided by internet intermediaries. The internet intermediaries should take on public and proactive initiatives to counter the different manifestations of online harassment and abuse, including through awareness-raising programmes, supporting women journalists' activities, and contributing to the creation and dissemination of counter narratives.

Internet intermediaries can actively promote and increase safer participation of women journalists on their services by, for example, supporting or implementing training for women journalists and other members of the media and civil society on how to apply the companies' policies of social media platforms, and how to use and improve their mechanisms for reporting and appealing.

Initiatives by the internet intermediaries that seek to promote journalistic services or enhance journalistic activities should be reviewed so these online services are gender-responsive and in line with human rights. This means, for example, that the responsible managers for services that are useful for acts of journalism should actively consult and address women journalists during the design and implementation phases, and provide options to enhance women's safety.

Examples

Making women journalists' experiences visible: Twitter's campaign [#HerStory](#) provides a good example of an internet intermediary producing public awareness materials on some of the issues that women journalists face.³⁹ Twitter launched the monthly video series on 3 May 2019 to mark [Word Press Freedom Day](#), as a means of spotlighting the work and personal stories of women journalists from around the world.⁴⁰

Training on policies and reporting: Twitter works with regional initiatives to train women journalists on the use of their tools, the enforcement of policies, and reporting. It also promotes and supports the creation of campaigns that bring women's interests and concerns into Twitter discussions.⁴¹

Providing resources for alerts on intimate images disseminated without consent: Facebook's initiative [Not Without My Consent](#) provides different resources to prevent, and respond to, the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images.⁴² Although not specifically designed for women journalists, it includes a pilot project implemented in partnership with civil society organizations, to help individuals stop or report the non-consensual dissemination of an intimate image.

Technical layer protection from co-ordinated attacks: Google's [Project Shield](#) provides protection for news organizations, journalists and human rights defenders from co-ordinated attacks against their websites aimed at blocking access to the media sites – so-called Distributed Denial-of-Service (DDoS) attacks. The protection consists of measures that filter out traffic categorized as “malicious” using Google's infrastructure and tools. When websites receive an attack, Project Shield tools block the “malicious” traffic to keep the website running.⁴³

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Media outlets

Proposed actions

1. Improve the workplace culture with comprehensive policies on both safety and gender;
2. Ensure support and training to journalists facing online harassment and abuse;
3. Develop gender-responsive community guidelines for interactive online platforms;
4. Monitor and document online abuse and harassment of female journalists, including freelancers.

7. Media outlets

Protecting journalists starts at work

Media outlets – more concretely, the owners, managers and editors of diverse forms of all types of media companies and organizations – have an obligation and opportunity to have a positive impact on the safety of journalists. They have a duty of care to ensure the safety and security of all individuals working for them, including freelancers, within the newsroom as well as in the field.

As employers, media owners, Editors-in-Chief and managers should recognize, and respond to, the fact that women journalists face an additional layer of risk by virtue of being women, on top of the risks that come with being journalists.¹ Additionally, media outlets have a responsibility to ensure that the workplace culture – traditionally a highly patriarchal one – stamps out potential threats from fellow colleagues.

Media owners, managers and editors should focus on preventative and protective measures for all staff, with special attention to the needs of women. Different forms of formal and informal support should be offered, which reinforce each other for a holistic approach to safety.

In the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18](#), the 57 OSCE participating States are “alarmed that targeted campaigns undermining the work of journalists are increasing, eroding public trust and confidence in the credibility of journalism, and recognizing that this can increase the risk of threats and violence against journalists.”

› **Improve the workplace culture with comprehensive policies on both safety and gender**

A culture of safety is essential. If journalists do not feel that their outlets strive to prevent, mitigate and respond to both external and internal abuse in every respect, then their job becomes more difficult.

Women journalists' lack of safety frequently starts within their workplace. Discriminatory cultural norms and stigmas, coupled with a lack of faith in their supervisors to act upon abuses, discourage reporting of gender-based violence. In this context, silence prevails.²

The first step for a media company to improve their culture is to acknowledge that gender-based violence is a problem, and that an attack on an individual journalist is an attack on the entire outlet. This includes operating with the recognition that women are targeted through online communications more often than their male counterparts and in more harmful ways.³ It also includes an acknowledgement that colleagues can target women journalists, and that these incidents might not be reported.

In order to support women journalists, media outlets should regularly conduct safety audits of their newsrooms and other working environments, such as the conditions of the geographical area being covered, and of the different types of field assignments. They should also conduct digital safety audits and assessments to better understand the different types of risks that individuals can experience while working for the outlet. Through this process, they can pinpoint operational strengths and weaknesses. Based upon the findings of the audits, and in co-operation with the journalists, outlets should implement holistic safety policies – those that address physical security, digital security and psychosocial support.

In tandem with fostering a positive newsroom culture, media companies should develop guidelines and protocols to prevent and counter attacks, including different forms of online harassment and abuse. These guidelines and protocols would need to have a clear person appointed to be in charge of their implementation, and they would need to be regularly reviewed and updated to remain relevant in a rapidly changing technological landscape.

It is important that such guidelines outline all the options that are available to journalists to report online harassment and abuse and on how to receive any assistance they need, such as legal advice or psychosocial support. At the same time, such guidelines should recognize that rigid internal procedures might prevent journalists from reporting gender-based attacks due to the personal and intimate nature of such attacks. Therefore, internal procedures should allow for a flexible range of actions. A journalist might prefer to speak, for example, with a close colleague to ask them to report the abuse, rather than having to raise the issue personally with supervisors. In another scenario, a journalist may wish to receive psychosocial support without taking the matter further internally or externally.

As gender-based harassment is also known to come from within the workplace, corporate structures for reporting online harassment and abuse must allow journalists to address both internal and external attacks. Mechanisms need to be easy to access, with the assurance of confidentiality and timely responses from the management.

Unequal societies, where it is the norm for men to have more opportunities and greater pay than women, underpin online gender-based attacks against women journalists. Moreover, in such societies, harassment and violence against women is often not recognized in its full scale and effect. In order to combat the root causes of such attacks, media outlets must adopt and implement gender equality policies with regard to wages, promotions,

work-life balance, and access to decision-making posts.⁴ Policies must also address sexual violence in the workplace and outline the appropriate course of action in response to internal transgressions. Gender policies should be designed with women journalists and representatives of associations and unions in mind, and all staff should be trained to know such policies well.

Editorial policies should also promote gender equality in media content. Recommendations on how to achieve this include ensuring that women's voices inform news coverage, avoiding gender bias in coverage, including of women public figures, and reporting on sexual violence in a way that does not stigmatize or aggravate trauma.

Examples

Discussing best practices: Media outlets throughout Europe participated in a study on gender carried out by the International Press Institute (IPI), in co-operation with the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), examining best practices for addressing online harassment and attacks on women journalists. IPI published the report [Newsroom Best Practices for Addressing Online Violence against Journalists](#) in 2019, which includes a set of recommendations.⁵

Implementing transparent guidelines and protocols: A guiding protocol on online harassment, *Measures for Newsrooms and Journalists to Address Online Harassment*, is available in multiple languages from IPI's online resource page. This protocol draws on best practices across Europe and provides specific recommendations. IPI works with several news outlets to implement these guidelines.⁶

The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) has created a practical step-by-step guide for media organizations and media employees to help prevent and constructively deal with sexual harassment at work, entitled [Sexual harassment in the media – A practical guide for employers & employee](#).⁷ It provides models developed by Human Resources experts of media companies, on what to report, how to act when reporting, and how to act after the report is submitted.

Austria's public broadcaster, Österreichischer Rundfunk, offers an example of a media outlet setting up protocols with gender equality targets. The public broadcaster set up a self-regulatory tool to promote gender equality and advance women's careers, to support a better balance between working and private life, and to reach 45 per cent representation of women across sectors in the organization, including technical areas.⁸

Russia's Novaya Gazeta editorial office adopted a protocol against psychological and sexual violence.⁹ It defines sexual harassment and psychological pressure, and envisions the establishment of a board that would deal with possible complaints. The board shall not include the editor, director of the publication or previous offenders.

The ACOS Alliance, in co-operation with the Dart Centre, developed *Leading Resilience: A Guide for Editors and News Managers* on how to work with freelancers exposed to trauma.¹⁰

Including bystanders in training sessions: Some research has suggested that many traditional sexual harassment training sessions are not effective. In its article [Sexual Harassment Training Doesn't](#)

[Work. But Some Things Do](#), The New York Times provides tips that organizations, including media outlets, can follow to create meaningful change in workplace cultures.¹¹ Among other approaches, the article highlights bystander training.

Resources

- [News Organizations Safety Self-Assessment](#) created by ACOS Alliance is a tool with recommendations from members for supporting news outlets to review and improve safety practices and protocols.¹²
- A blog by WAN-IFRA, [Plan for the expected and unexpected: What you need to think about when completing a risk assessment](#), provides key considerations for newsrooms, such as creating easy-to-follow templates for journalists to fill out prior to starting an assignment.¹³
- [UNESCO's Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media](#) provides a framework to gauge gender sensitivity in media operations and content, helping media to undertake a self-assessment for improving a gender-responsive approach.¹⁴
- The Office of the OSCE RFoM published a [factsheet](#) on the safety of female journalists online, which also includes resources and recommendations for media organizations.¹⁵

› **Ensure support and training to journalists facing online harassment and abuse**

Media owners, managers and editors must be prepared to act quickly with various forms of support for journalists who face online harassment and abuse. Targeted journalists may need physical security, alternative assignments, psychosocial and legal assistance, or a combination of all of the above.

Further, media owners, managers and editors need to be ready to aid and support journalists who choose to report cases to social media companies and/or law enforcement agencies. As part of this process, they should assess the risk involved in reporting attacks and always ensure there is full consent from the targeted journalist. Media outlets should facilitate or lead the development of peer support groups, or other types of support channels, that provide safe spaces for women journalists to share their experiences and concerns.

Institutional support notwithstanding, journalists, and particularly freelancers, often deal with the brunt of online harassment and abuse alone. Media outlets must therefore prioritize providing tools to all journalists to aid in the identification and handling of attacks. Media outlets also have a responsibility to foster and grow the protection skills of their journalists by providing training on holistic protection, including on internal policies and protocols. Such training should include trauma risk management, awareness of the manifestations of online gender-based violence, and digital security tools.

The introduction or promotion of mentorship programmes can build connections and dialogue among women journalists, and help guide them to useful resources.

Gender-based harassment and abuse are deeply rooted in social norms. Media outlets are in a position to affect positive change regarding these social norms. Training journalists and media professionals on how to address gender-bias and stereotypes in their reporting, and how to conduct sensitive reporting on gender-based violence, can therefore also promote diversity in media coverage.¹⁶

One way to further media diversity is to increasingly include women of all backgrounds in news and interviews, and acknowledge the active role of women in political, economic, social and cultural life. Even in countries that score better on gender equality, representation of women in media is low or can be stigmatizing.¹⁷

Training courses on the issues of gender-based violence and online harassment and abuse should be conducted on a regular basis, with follow-up courses to ensure that internal learning and skills enhancement is a long-term, meaningful process, and not a one-off, tick-the-box exercise.

Examples

Establishing a support fund: In Finland, leading media companies joined forces with unions to form a [support fund](#) to assist journalists who are victims of threats and persecution, including online harassment and incitement.¹⁸

Actively responding to online harassment and abuse: In Spain, the newspapers El País and La Vanguardia, and Catalunya Ràdio created [social media teams](#) to support journalists under attack. Some of their actions include responding to attacks on social media directly, withdrawing content from their platforms, documenting the attacks, and supporting the journalist affected in preparing for legal proceedings.¹⁹

Interviewing more women: In 2011, the management of Belgium's French-speaking broadcaster, RTBF, launched an initiative called [Cherchez la femme](#), urging its journalists to interview women rather than men whenever possible. This measure has increased the proportion of women featured in news broadcasting.²⁰

Daily monitoring of participation in media: The [Prognosis Shamebot](#) tool compares the percentage of men and women names in almost 30 daily online media outlets in Sweden and Finland.²¹ Although this specific tool has limitations – such as not providing information about the quality of the participation in media – outlets that have used it over time have found it valuable for fueling internal conversations, and discussions within the media sector, on men and women in the media.

Resources

- The Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe on gender equality in media recommends in [Rec\(2013\)1](#) that media outlets “adopt self-regulatory measures, internal code of conduct/ethics and internal supervision, and develop standards in media coverage that promote gender equality.” It also encourages third parties to “consistently defend gender equality by bringing their concerns to self-regulatory bodies.”²²
- [Portraying Politics: A Toolkit on Gender and Television](#) by the Media Diversity Institute includes eight modules for training journalists to better consider how they portray women in politics.²³
- [SaferJourno: Digital Security Resources for Media Trainers](#) is a free and open-source curriculum guide created by Internews for media trainers who teach digital safety and online security to students, professionals, and peers.²⁴ The downloadable publication provides lesson plans for six different modules: assessing risks; basic protection; mobile phone safety; keeping data safe; researching securely; and protecting e-mails.

› **Develop gender-responsive community guidelines for interactive online platforms**

Today, media outlets often maintain interactive online spaces on their websites and through social media accounts. Clear community guidelines for user engagement on the media outlet's online platforms can help to prevent online harassment and abuse, or mitigate the severity of attacks. While moderation of discussions on the media outlet's online platform can be an important tool to prevent or mitigate gender-based online abuse, it must not impinge on freedom of expression. Additionally, clarity on how journalists should interact on social media platforms can also help to shorten the period needed by the journalist and the media outlet to assess the risk and respond appropriately to attacks.

Media outlets can also work to prevent harassment and abuse by proactively investing in community engagement and by promoting constructive dialogue on their online platforms. One way to do this is by assigning dedicated community managers.

Examples

Engaging with the community: The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) established [House Rules](#) for commenting and uploading onto its platforms and has specifically requested its readers to refrain from abusive conduct.²⁵

Assigning a community dialogue manager: In 2018, Finnish public broadcaster Yle introduced [community management](#) on its platforms. Yle hired an audience dialogue manager to create a more positive online discussion culture.²⁶

Deutsche Welle (DW) has a community manager dedicated exclusively to moderating each German-language service platform on which DW is present, and its English-language service has community managers active around the clock.²⁷

Resources

- The Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom created an [online database](#) of social media guidelines across media outlets of European Union Member States.²⁸

› **Monitor and document online abuse and harassment of female journalists, including freelancers**

More data is needed to understand the full dimension and impact of online harassment and abuse, a relatively new threat to journalism. Media outlets can help their own staff and serve the broader community invested in the safety of journalists by documenting online harassment and abuse of their staff. Collecting disaggregated data about the different manifestations and dimensions of online harassment and abuse is critical for conducting risk assessments that acknowledge the nature of abuse and for understanding changes over time. This would better enable media outlets to track the status of each incident, and note and improve measures taken in response, including the preservation of evidence when attacks amount to criminal conduct.

With this information, media outlets can establish more effective communication channels with existing national protection mechanisms, national human rights institutions, policymakers and law enforcement authorities, and share some of this data. The aim is to contribute to the adoption of comprehensive policy responses, including specific situations in which an escalation in abuse against a specific journalist or by a specific perpetrator requires focused monitoring and responses.

This also requires full transparency and collaboration with all staff and freelancers, and the full consent of the journalist under attack. Even with consent, the media outlet must conduct a risk assessment on the use of identifying information if data is shared publicly or with third parties, whether with government agencies, law enforcement authorities, civil society groups, or on any public platform.

Examples

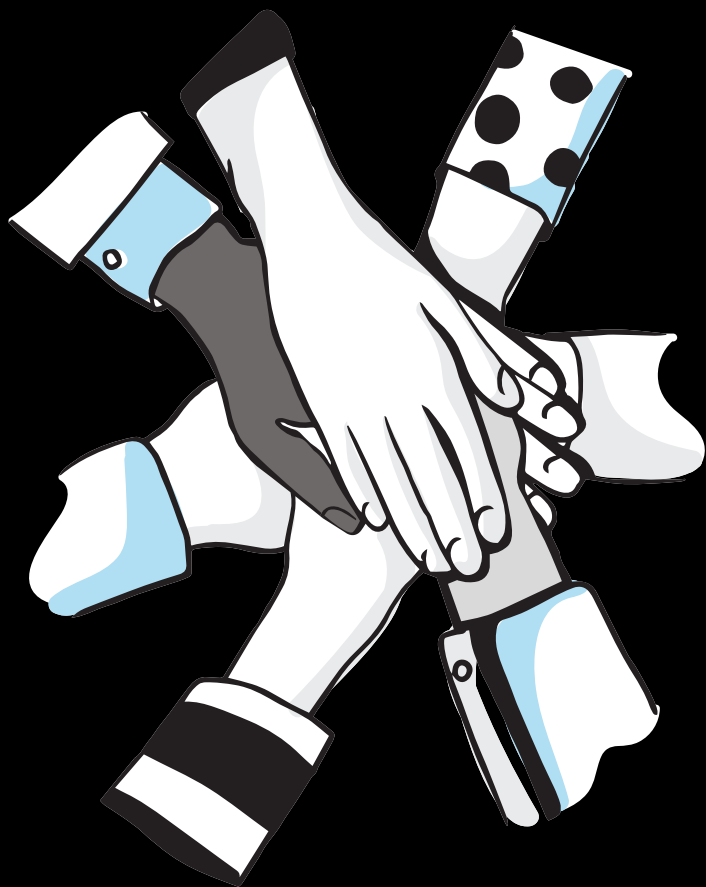
Creating a portal for monitoring violations: The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network created [BIRD](#), a resource portal that monitors violations of digital rights and freedoms in six countries in Central and South-East Europe, and published an investigative report on online attacks against women journalists.²⁹

Conducting research on online abuse: The Guardian commissioned research on 70 million comments posted on its site since 2006, to understand the nature of online abuse against its journalists. The outlet discovered that, of the ten most abused writers, eight were women. The findings are shared in the report [The dark side of Guardian comments](#).³⁰

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**Journalists'
organizations and
self-regulatory bodies**

Proposed actions

1. Increase collective action and advocacy to improve safety and other working conditions for female journalists;
2. Reinforce capacities through peer-to-peer networks, training and other practical support;
3. Document attacks and use information to raise awareness among key actors;
4. Promote the inclusion of safety and gender equality issues in the work of self-regulatory bodies.

8. Journalists' organizations and self-regulatory bodies

Organizing collective action and codes of conduct

Journalists' organizations, such as professional associations and unions, defend journalists' working rights and common interests. This includes improving the safety of their constituents and supporting them when facing specific threats. Non-State actors of the sector, such as media councils, editor guilds, educational institutions, and media ombudspersons that are appointed by one or many media outlets, can also play their part to promote journalists' safety.

This section outlines how these actors, except for educational actors that will be addressed later, can increase their impact on the promotion of safety of women journalists online.

In the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18](#), the 57 OSCE participating States are “noting with concern that the use of undue restrictive measures against journalists can affect their safety, and prevents them from providing information to the public, and thus negatively affects the exercise of the right to freedom of expression.”

› Increase collective action and advocacy to improve safety and other working conditions for female journalists

Journalists' associations and unions play a crucial role in having media outlets meet their obligations and responsibilities as employers to ensure

the safety of women journalists, whether they are staff or freelancers, in the practice of their journalistic activities.

In their efforts to improve working conditions in the media profession, journalists' associations and unions can prioritize the specific challenges faced by women journalists. Negotiating with media organizations to end the gender pay gap between men and women is fundamental, as this practice violates worker's rights and perpetuates discrimination against women. Also, advocating for gender equality and policies against sexual harassment in the media is essential, alongside safety protocols that include specific procedures for women journalists as well as having the necessary equipment and support.

Journalists' organizations should commit to gender equality and gender policies in their own structures too and pay special attention to issues of online harassment and abuse among their affiliates.

In addition to negotiations, professional associations and unions can monitor and analyse legislation to advocate for improvement, when relevant, at the national, regional and international levels. When online harassment and abuse amounts to criminal conduct, the organizations can provide legal support to journalists and affiliates.

Examples

Providing recommendations: The Union of Journalists in Finland created the flyer [Hate Campaigns – What We Should Do](#). It lists recommendations, such as documenting the abuse, arranging for counseling for employees if needed, or posting positive comments about a colleague online, to inform editors, managers and journalists

what steps to take when they themselves, an employee or a colleague are targeted with online harassment and abuse.¹

Promoting gender equality in the media industry: In June 2019, the International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted a new set of international labour standards, the [Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment](#).² The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) is leading the campaign [ILO Convention 190: It Can Change Lives](#), calling on States to ratify the convention.³

Updating union policies when needed: The National Union of Journalists in the United Kingdom and Ireland updated their policies to include a section on [Sexism and Bullying](#).⁴

Resources

- IFJ published a set of [Guidelines for Media and Unions to Combat Online Harassment of Women journalists](#), to help media managers, unions and colleagues in taking the proper action.⁵

› Reinforce capacities through peer-to-peer networks, training and other practical support

There are many ways journalists' associations and unions can strengthen journalists' capacities to combat online harassment and abuse and to manage the psychological toll.

Peer-to-peer support has shown to be key for women journalists to cope with online harassment and abuse. Colleagues who have endured similar experiences support each other, for example via peer-to-peer networks. However, it turns out that training and assistance is desirable, as the issues that arise can be both sensitive and complex. Together with media outlets (see also Chapter Seven), journalists' associations and unions could develop peer support networks and offer training and suggest rules for engagement, as well as other forms of psychosocial support. The expertise of these types of actors makes them valuable advocates for the issue of safety of journalists. They can provide meaningful inputs to public officials and parliamentarians for the development of legislation and policies addressing online harassment and abuse.

Journalists' associations and unions can also organize practical training for women journalists on best possible practices to prevent and address online harassment and abuse. Developing research, also in co-operation with journalism training and education institutions for journalists and media owners, is crucial to understand better the challenges that women journalists face. They can also facilitate women-led information sharing forums, focusing on tools to carry out self-risk assessments, how to secure social media profiles and tips on how to handle situations where they are targeted with online harassment and abuse.

Journalists' associations and unions often have women's groups or focal points for women journalists, which provide important spaces for women to speak out about their own experiences and safety needs. In addition, associations and unions could open a special section on their website, dedicated to the safety of women journalists online, providing easily accessible, relevant information, contacts and resources.⁶

Examples

Developing training tools: The International Association of Women in Radio and Television produced a safety manual for women, [What If...? Safety Handbook for Women Journalists](#). It has been used for protection training in several countries.⁷

Learning from good practices: In 2019, the Union of Journalists in Turkey and the European Federation of Journalists organized a workshop on best practices and concrete tools to improve gender equality and diversity in the media production process and on countering growing online harassment.⁸

Resources

- IFJ's [Handbook on Gender Equality Best Practices in European Unions](#) collected a series of good practices to improve gender equality in unions and media.⁹

› Document attacks and use information to raise awareness among key actors

Documenting attacks against journalists with a gender-responsive approach is fundamental to understand the complexity of the challenges that women journalists face and ways to address them.

Identifying the most efficient and safest way to document online violence against journalists is also instrumental in promoting safety of journalists, given that more and more attacks against the media are carried out online. Because they are in continued close contact with their members, professional networks, journalists' associations and unions are particularly well placed to monitor attacks and analyse trends. Co-ordination and collaboration among the groups that can track violence against journalists is important to avoid duplication, and reinforce one another.

The detailed information that journalists' associations and unions have on the situation of the safety of journalists can be used for launching and supporting awareness-raising campaigns, but can also be used to engage media organizations, policymakers and other key actors, always with full transparency and the consent of the journalist under attack. Collaboration among these groups of actors can increase the impact of safety initiatives.

Examples

Collecting information: The Union of Journalists in Finland prepared a survey on the extent to which journalists are targets of attacks; the survey has helped to understand better the problem and to take actions to address it.¹⁰

Building alliances for monitoring: In South-East Europe, six journalist associations and media trade unions joined forces with the initiative [Safe Journalists](#).¹¹ Launched in 2016, the project monitors the safety of journalists in the region from a legal and policy perspective. It also raises awareness about attacks and advocates for journalists' safety. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the alliance hosts, among others, a helpline and a network for women journalists.

Building cross-sectional alliances: Canada's largest private sector union, Unifor, raised awareness about sexual harassment and online abuse against women media workers in a 2018 [video](#) campaign, displaying that unions and professional associations, which represent a broader range of sectors than just the media sector, can join efforts to combat gender-based online aggression.¹²

Campaigning for increased reporting: In 2019, IFJ launched the [#YouAreNotAlone campaign](#) to raise awareness about gendered and sexualized online harassment and abuse against women journalists, and to encourage journalists to show solidarity to their colleagues under attack.¹³ IFJ and its partner group the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSAN) created the [ByteBack Campaign](#), which led to the 2017 publication [A Journalist's Guide to Combat Cyber Harassment in South Asia](#).¹⁴

Co-operating with the authorities when relevant: In North Macedonia, the Association of Journalists and the Ministry of the Interior signed a Memorandum to organize joint activities to raise awareness on the issue of impunity on crimes against journalists and to collaborate on cases of attacks.¹⁵

› **Promote the inclusion of safety and gender equality issues in the work of self-regulatory bodies**

The concept of a self-regulatory framework for media refers to a range of actors, institutions and organizations in a country that adhere to international standards for media and journalism, and which, in practice, contributes to a culture and an environment that furthers independent and quality media.

The type of actors that have a formal or informal role for media self-regulation can include prominent outlets, media and press councils, editor guilds, ombudspersons, unions, and training institutions, among others.¹⁶ Sometimes created through negotiations with the State, formal self-regulatory mechanisms should, in principle, be voluntary, operate transparently and be accessible to the public. Ombudspersons and complaint mechanisms established within bodies representing media outlets (such as media councils or media ethics boards) have in some cases been introduced after negotiations with the State to ease repressive State regulations.

Media professional standards and media ethics offer an effective venue for initiatives on safety and gender equality issues. A broad range of companies, institutions and organizations can mobilize media ethics to contribute to a culture and an environment that furthers independent media and upholds the quality of media.

Media ethics also inform the creation of formal self-regulatory mechanisms, such as media and press councils, which can be instrumental in easing State regulation. Sometimes created through negotiations with the State, formal self-regulatory mechanisms should in principle be voluntary, operate transparently and be accessible to the public.

Self-regulatory bodies can play an influential role for gender equality and safety in media since they get information on incidents from their stakeholders, they speak to peers, and media actors often accept these bodies. When there is a planned policy change, these actors can submit joint feedback based on high-level expertise. They can also raise attention to safety situations and suggest measures, in compliance with media freedom, to the executive and legislative bodies.

The role of self-regulatory media bodies extends, for example, to developing and promoting a code of ethics, which, under different denominations, can prove to be a fundamental point of reference, guiding journalists on their role, rights and obligations, and how they can best perform their job. This code of ethics should be gender-responsive and be developed in co-operation with women representation.

As discussed earlier, women's safety at work relies also on colleagues and managers. A strong media self-regulation framework presupposes not only the development of a code of ethics, but also the existence of an entity charged with overseeing its implementation and the forms for sanctioning those who fail to follow it.¹⁷ Media self-regulation bodies can ensure that best practices around gender-based online harassment and abuse are integrated into the collective conclusions on standards and recommended practices in use for journalists in the geographic area.

Outlets contribute to self-regulation by implementing collective norms and standards in-house, but also by communicating with the public, for example, by publishing when they have made a mistake, providing transparent information about their work and editorial positions, and offering an in-house ombudsperson. This function varies from media to media, but generally, an in-house ombudsperson acts as a mediator between the personnel of a media house, fostering a dialogue between the two parties.

The actors that contribute to the independent self-regulatory framework could give more attention to issues that influence women's safety. They could address, for example, how gender-based violence in general, and gender-based online harassment and abuse in particular, is monitored and mitigated.

Examples

Joint campaigning against impunity for gender discrimination:

A woman journalist in Russia was publicly shamed after filing a complaint on a deputy of the Federation Council (upper chamber of the Russian Parliament) for sexual harassment. Media associations and a union joined forces to end both the abuse and the bystander's behaviour. The collective actors questioned the legitimacy of the deputy's mandate, and sent a letter to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe calling for a boycott of all Russian deputies.¹⁸

Using cross-sector complaint mechanisms: Following incidents of online harassment against women journalists in Finland, complaints were filed with the country's Parliamentary Ombudsperson and the Council for Mass Media.¹⁹

Standard setting for the media industry by the media industry:

The Ethical Journalism Network is a solid reference for media ethics. This coalition of more than 70 groups of journalists, editors, press owners and media support groups from across the globe has published a report entitled [Saving the News](#), which addresses gender-based violence against journalists, including online harassment.²⁰

Setting moral standards for the media: Media owners and journalists' associations established the board of media ethics in Sweden in 1916, with the purpose of enabling more self-scrutiny within the trade.²¹ The board and its Media Ombudsperson select the media items that could be addressed by the board or by the ombudsperson, related to stories on discrimination, including cases when a woman accuses a

man of harassment. The verdicts by the board suggest well-argued moral borders for the media, and as such potentially limits the risk of arbitrary judgments on similar cases in the future.

Actively strengthening peer organizations: Networks for media councils and unions support the development of digital practices, and help new councils to establish media literacy activities, complaint mechanisms and normative documents on ethics and legislation.²² Councils that have actively supported women targeted by digital offenders have shared their experiences with other councils within the networks.

Training of self-regulatory actors: Belonging to different types of organizations with varied fields of responsibility, the actors within the self-regulatory framework often lack platforms to routinely meet and learn from each other. In an international training programme funded by Sweden, a central effect has been that actors learn about media policymaking in parallel with exchanging views on important threats against both men and women, and establishing communication routines to improve the safety of journalists.²³

Resources

- The Alliance of Independent Press Councils of Europe (AIPCE) published a [report about the role of self-regulatory bodies in the digital age](#).²⁴
- There are two guidebooks published by the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media on the role of self-regulation: [The Media Self-Regulation Guidebook](#) and [The Online Media Self-Regulation Guidebook](#).²⁵
- The Council of Europe identifies good practices in the analytical report on the 2013 resolution on gender equality, and discusses how self-regulatory bodies in member States have implemented the Council's recommendations on gender equality.²⁶

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**Civil society
organizations
and educational
institutions**

Proposed actions

1. Increase data, knowledge and awareness on gender-based online harassment and abuse among key actors and society at large;
2. Join forces to advance the implementation of safety standards and other working conditions for female journalists at the national level;
3. Develop holistic protection training and educational materials;
4. Integrate journalists' safety and gender equality in journalism education and training institutions' activities.

9. Civil society organizations and educational institutions

Mobilizing, researching and sharing good practices

This chapter looks at how activists, trainers, educators and academia can co-operate and strengthen their work to counter online harassment and abuse against women journalists.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) – in particular non-governmental actors working on freedom of expression, press freedom, media development and women's rights – support journalists in many different ways: from advocating against attacks and impunity, to conducting hands-on safety training. In recent years, CSOs have increasingly reported on, and in other ways responded to, the growing threat of online harassment and abuse against women journalists.

As universities and other educational institutions are responsible for educating and training future and current journalists and media managers, these organizations can contribute to increasing awareness and knowledge on journalists' safety and gender equality issues. Universities are also in a position to raise public discussions on policy issues and policy implementation. Moreover, their role in carrying out research can contribute to a better understanding of the challenges of online harassment and abuse against women journalists.

In the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18](#), the 57 OSCE participating States are “deeply concerned by all human rights violations and abuses committed in relation to the safety of journalists, including those involving killing, torture, enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest, arbitrary detention and arbitrary expulsion, intimidation, harassment and threats of all forms, such as physical, legal, political, technological or economic, intended to suppress their work.”

› **Increase data, knowledge and awareness on gender-based online harassment and abuse among key actors and society at large**

The first step in addressing an identified problem is getting a comprehensive picture of the issue at hand. Monitoring online harassment and abuse against women journalists in a systematic manner can be challenging. The number of cases and the ways and channels through which these issues are manifested are vast. At the same time, research shows that gender-based attacks are in many cases underreported due to social and professional stigmas as well as the potential for trauma associated with the attacks.¹ Many civil society groups that monitor and present data on attacks against journalists could work collaboratively with professional associations, unions, media outlets, academia and public bodies engaged in the documentation of online harassment and abuse cases. All of this should be done with a gender-responsive approach that tracks basic gender disaggregated information and other intersectional factors and specifics, such as reporting the events that preceded an attack.

Documenting with a gender-responsive approach does not only refer to “what” is monitored, but also to “how” cases are monitored. The research process should aim not only to collect data, but also be done with women journalists’ participation. It needs to be clear throughout the process, for example, that online harassment and abuse is part of a broader set of threats to journalism and not a private burden of a specific individual.

It requires substantial and co-ordinated efforts to increase the public’s knowledge of the issue of gender-based online harassment. While there has been a considerable increase in research on this topic, it is important to identify research gaps and produce additional reports covering different topics and a diverse representation of countries. One underexploited opportunity is collaboration between academic institutions and the many CSOs that perform research and monitoring. Here, too, the “how” is important. Any form of research should involve women journalists, their voices, views and perspectives, and should be produced and written in such a way that practitioners can use it to reinforce the safety of women journalists online.

Whether engaging in research directly or not, many CSOs play an important role in informing and mobilizing policymakers, the media community and society as a whole. This can lead to greater collective mobilization for tackling online harassment and abuse. Co-ordination amongst CSOs and other actors is fundamental to leverage impact and avoid duplication of efforts. Such co-operation can take various forms and can take place at different levels: the global, regional, national or sub-national level.

Examples

Data collection: The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) maintains an online global [database](#) of journalists killed, imprisoned and missing, which includes data disaggregated by gender.² In 2019, CPJ also published the survey [The Threats Follow Us Home](#), documenting online harassment and abuse against women journalists in Canada and the United States of America.³

Enabling safe and anonymous reporting: The Plataforma en Defensa de la Libertad de Información (PDLI) in Spain created the online platform [Observatorio contra el acoso online a mujeres periodistas](#) to document online harassment and abuse against women journalists and draw attention to this problem.⁴ Women journalists suffering online harassment can submit an anonymous report to the organization through an online form.

Undertaking research to better understand and address challenges: The global study [Attacks and Harassment: The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting](#) by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and TrollBusters shows that nearly two thirds of women journalists have at some point been threatened or harassed online and offline.⁵

The 2019 report [Targeting the Messenger: Journalists Face an Onslaught of Online Harassment](#) provides a picture of the situation in Europe based on a review of 162 reports of digital abuse submitted to the Index on Censorship's Mapping Media Freedom project.⁶ The European Center for Press and Media Freedom and the European Federation of Journalists also collaborated on the report.

The study [Don't Read the Comments: Enhancing Online Safety for Working in the Media](#), by Gen Vic and Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance, looks at online harassment of women journalists in Australia.⁷

The Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG) compiled a collection of policy papers in its report [Setting the Gender Agenda for Communication Policy](#). The publication includes a chapter on the safety of women journalists online.⁸

The Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom at the European University Institute produces the [Media Pluralism Monitor](#) in an effort to document the health of media ecosystems and threats to media freedom and journalists in the European Union Member States and some candidate countries.⁹

The European Journalism Observatory in collaboration with European universities undertook the study [Where the Women Journalists are in Europe's Media?](#)¹⁰

The Fojo Media Institute has also looked at the [Gender Aspects of Employment and Career in the Media Sector of Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine](#).¹¹

Presenting research and useful practices on a joint platform:

The project [Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries](#) is a collaboration between universities and journalist associations that jointly collect research and good practices on various issues related to gender equality in media in Europe.¹²

Analysing and raising awareness: In its report [Online harassment of journalists - Attack of the trolls](#), Reporters Without Borders has analysed cases of online attacks against journalists from its network around the world with an analysis of specific cases of women media workers.¹³

Resources

- [Integrating Gender into Human Rights Monitoring by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) offers guidance on how to monitor human rights violations with a gender perspective.¹⁴
- [Gendering Documentation: A Manual for and About Women Rights Defenders](#) by the International Coalition Defending Women Defending Rights provides good tips about how to mainstream gender in the work of documenting attacks against women human rights defenders.¹⁵

› **Join forces to advance the implementation of safety standards and other working conditions for female journalists at the national level**

When it comes to the safety of journalists, one of the most important aspects is the implementation at the national level of international human rights standards and other commitments made at the international level by States. Whereas one organization alone has a limited ability to hold governments accountable, co-ordinated efforts by many can have a substantial impact. CSOs, educational institutions for journalism and

other organizations that want to influence the media sector should look for opportunities to develop and implement co-ordinated strategies to ensure that States take action to meet their obligations regarding the safety of women journalists offline and online.

To make the safety of women journalists a priority in the international sphere, civil society can increase their level of engagement in international and regional intergovernmental organizations (see also Chapter Five). The UN and regional human rights mechanisms can be used more effectively by CSOs and other organizations if they co-ordinate their engagement on online harassment and abuse against women journalists more effectively. There is a good opportunity for collaboration, for instance, around submissions to the UN Human Rights Council special procedures, around the Universal Periodic Reviews, and when addressing the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Being able to effectively engage in the international sphere, as well as monitor and report on States' compliance with international commitments, requires some specialized knowledge. International and national CSOs with this expertise can conduct or promote training workshops on international standards and the commitments that apply to the issue of gender-based online harassment and abuse.

Examples

Creating gender and safety working groups: The [Global Forum for Media Development](#), a network of media development groups, and the [ACOS Alliance](#), a coalition of media outlets and press freedom groups promoting the safety of freelance journalists, both have gender working groups. The International CSOs Coalition is a network of 26

organizations that co-ordinate their work on the safety of journalists and join forces on journalists' safety initiatives.¹⁶

Joining forces and seeking financial support jointly: The [Media Freedom Rapid Response](#) for the Safety of Journalists in the European Union is a coalition of freedom of expression organizations.¹⁷ The coalition responds with practical, legal and advocacy support for journalists at risk. Online harassment against women journalists is one of its key themes.

Demystifying international standards: ARTICLE 19 published [Ending Impunity: Guide to acting on UN standards on the safety of journalists](#) to facilitate the understanding of international human rights standards on the safety of journalists.¹⁸ In addition, to improve the capacity of its members to engage with inter-governmental organizations, IFEX, a worldwide network of freedom of expression NGOs, published a series of [5-minute explainers](#) on the use of several international mechanisms to monitor the implementation of journalists' safety standards.¹⁹

Resources

- International Media Support's [Defending Journalism](#) series of publications highlights lessons learned from different countries where collaborative structures – coalitions, partnerships, and safety mechanisms – are working to promote safety of journalists. The series includes a [report](#) focused solely on women journalists.²⁰

› **Develop holistic protection training and educational materials**

Organizations that are close to journalists and skilled to identifying online trends are substantially furthering training on the safety of journalists. CSOs play an important role in the development of training and educational materials that can strengthen the protection of women journalists targeted online.

Because of the nature of online harassment and abuse, it is important that training ensures a holistic approach that includes various aspects, such as legal rights and psychosocial needs, in addition to digital security. Training women journalists on how to address gender-based online harassment and abuse should be an empowering process, enabling women to continue in their professions and express themselves.

For knowing one's rights, it is important to understand what these rights encompass and when they are violated. To increase assistance to women journalists in need of legal support, it could be useful for CSOs to reinforce their work and collaboration with bar associations and lawyers. By working with journalism education institutions and legal experts, freedom of expression groups can also enhance the capacity of current media professionals and next generation journalists to cope with and address gender-based online harassment and abuse.

Examples

Video tutorials: The International Press Institute (IPI) developed [video tutorials](#) for women journalists on how to address online harassment from a legal and psychosocial perspective.²¹

Manual for fieldwork: PEN America's [Online Harassment Field Manual](#) for writers and journalists provides a series of practical recommendations, also focused on women journalists.²²

Psychosocial support: The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma has resources for journalists experiencing, or at risk of suffering, trauma. In its blog, [Five Ways to Protect Yourself Against Cyberhate and Trolls](#), it highlights ways to protect against the psychosocial impact of online harassment and abuse.²³

Online safety training: Free Press Unlimited created the online platform [Totem](#) for digital safety courses.²⁴ It includes [Know Your Trolls](#), a course developed by the IWWMF, to help journalists identify the abuse they are receiving online and who may be behind it, as well as offer some key strategies to be better prepared to cope with online harassment and abuse.

The online [Gendersec Curricula](#), by Tactical Tech in Germany, is a resource that covers over 20 topics also valid for journalists, such as tackling “hate speech”; strategies of resistance; creative uses of social media; technological sovereignty; handling anxiety; releasing physical stress; and information mapping and identifying risks.²⁵

The [Orkhan Dzhemal Media Safety Academy](#), by the Justice for Journalists Foundation, offers online training courses on journalists' safety issues in Russian.²⁶

Several CSOs provide a diverse range of protection training courses for journalists, in some cases with a strong gender approach and addressing online harassment. The Global Investigative Journalism Network publishes a list on its [website](#).²⁷

Training manuals and support to trainers: The anti-harassment group Hollaback! provides training and published several training [manuals](#). It also co-ordinates the initiative [HeartMob](#) to promote peer-to-peer support.²⁸

TrollBusters produced the infographic [Are you Being Harassed Online?](#) to inform people about what to do when harassed and abused online.²⁹

› **Integrate journalists' safety and gender equality in journalism education and training institutions' activities**

Journalism education institutions and lifelong training institutions are crucial in educating journalists. Therefore, they can play an important role in ensuring students are trained on safety issues and, in particular, on online harassment and abuse. Lifelong training institutions can also ensure current professionals update their knowledge on the impact of new technologies, including online harassment and abuse.

Safety and gender topics can be the focus of specific workshops and seminars to provide a forum for public debate about the role of the media and foster good practices. To enrich students' access to this type of knowledge, journalism and training institutions can engage with CSOs, journalists and other key actors that bring up-to-date tools and practical

safety experience, in particular of women journalists.

Increasing knowledge is fundamental to understand the best ways to address online harassment and abuse against women journalists. In their research role, journalism education institutions can increase academic research in this field as well as organize academic conferences and events.

Collaboration and partnership between academia and practitioners is also crucial to enrich research, as highlighted at the 2017 follow-up meeting of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.³⁰

Examples

Integrating safety of journalists in the curriculum: UNESCO, the International Federation of Journalists, and the General Directorate of Higher Education in Lebanon published a [Model Course on the Safety of Journalists](#).³¹ UNESCO also published A Model Curricula for Journalism Education – a Compendium of a New Syllabi.³² The Journalism Faculty of the Baku State University in Azerbaijan created a curriculum on gender equality and media freedom.³³

Organizing specific training: The Knight Center for Journalism at the University of Texas in the United States of America organizes online training on issues related to the safety of journalists.³⁴

Organizing academic conferences on the safety of journalists: There are two global academic conferences dedicated to the safety of journalists. UNESCO organizes one annually in parallel to the

World Press Freedom Day Conference.³⁵ The Journalism and Media International Center at the Oslo Metropolitan University in Norway organizes the other one every November.³⁶ Abstracts can be consulted on their website.³⁷ Moreover, the International Association of Media and Communication Research's annual conference includes a panel on the safety of journalists under the working group on journalism research and education.³⁸

Advancing academic research on the safety of journalists: In recent years, there has been increasing academic research on issues related to the safety of journalists and concretely on online harassment and abuse. In 2017, for example, as a result of the first UNESCO Academic Conference on the Safety of Journalists, the book [The Assault on Journalism: Building knowledge to protect Freedom of Expression](#) was published to compile a selection of submitted papers.³⁹ UNESCO has published a [Research Agenda on the Safety of Journalists](#) to promote academic research in this field. The open access journal Media and Communication published a thematic issue entitled [Rethinking Safety of Journalists](#) featuring two articles on violence against women journalists in Norway and Nepal.⁴⁰

Increasing research co-operation: The Center for Freedom of the Media (CFOM) at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom promoted the creation of the [Journalist Safety Research Network](#) to advance collaboration and exchanges between academics working on the safety of journalists.⁴¹ The network has a closed Facebook page to connect its members.

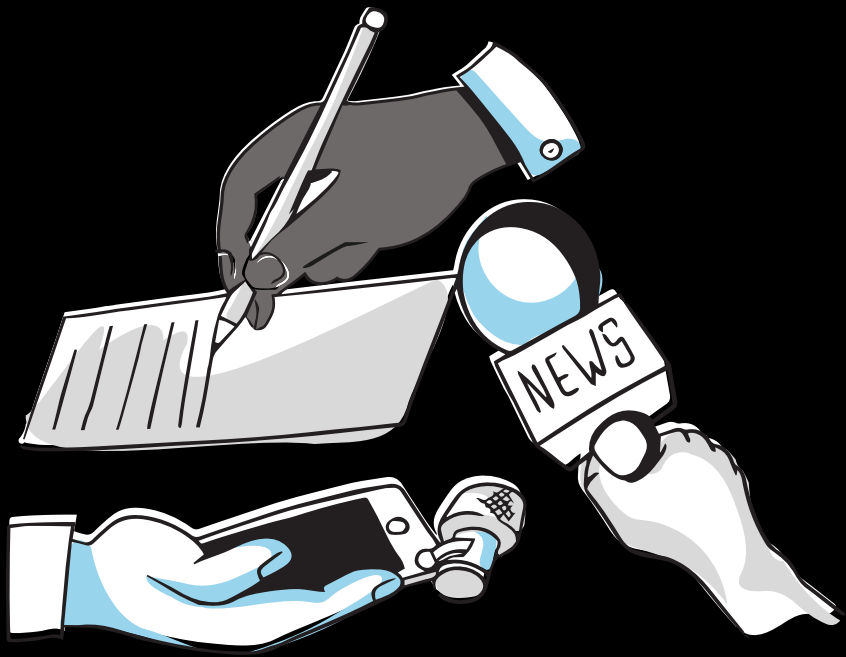
Creating spaces for the study of the safety of journalists: In 2018, the CFOM was awarded the first UNESCO Chair on Media Freedom, Journalism Safety and the Issue of Impunity.⁴² The UNESCO Chair

on Freedom of Expression at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and the UNESCO Chair of Communication of the University of Malaga in Spain have also engaged on the issue of journalists' safety.⁴³ The Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania in the United States of America created the Center for Media Risk to research and increase knowledge on journalists at risk.⁴⁴ The Global Freedom of Expression initiative at Columbia University has created a case law database, which includes cases on attacks against journalists.⁴⁵

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**Journalists and
media workers**

Proposed actions

1. Monitor and assess the risk landscape for female journalists;
2. Practice a holistic approach towards safety and security, including physical, legal, psychosocial and digital security;
3. Document and report threats and attacks;
4. Support colleagues who are facing online abuse and harassment, and those who are at higher risk of experiencing such attacks;
5. Become informed on available forms of support, including legal mechanisms.

10. Journalists and media workers

Prioritizing self-protection and peer support

The work of journalists comes with many risks. Women journalists, however, face an additional layer of risk just by virtue of being women. Online harassment and abuse is a clear example of an attack that targets women with greater severity than men.¹ Women journalists who have experienced online attacks are key in defining and implementing comprehensive solutions. This approach is reflected in the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists](#). In this decision, OSCE participating States recognize that the concept of safety does not only mean absence of physical harm, but also entails proper working conditions, and psychological, legal and digital safety.² While State and non-State actors have their own commitments regarding the safety of women journalists, as presented in the previous chapters, women journalists practice holistic self-protection to prevent, mitigate and respond to attacks. In addition, all journalists can lend their support to their colleagues in preventing, mitigating or responding to online abuse.

In the [OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18](#), the 57 OSCE participating States are “recognizing that the work of journalists can put them, and their family members, at risk of violence, as well as of intimidation and harassment, including through digital technologies, which can deter journalists from continuing their work or lead to self-censorship.” In addition, the participating States are “concerned by the distinct risks faced by women journalists in relation to their work, including through digital technologies, and underlining the importance to ensure their greatest possible safety and that the experiences and concerns of women journalists are effectively addressed.”

› **Monitor and assess the risk landscape for female journalists**

Risk assessments have become well-recognized as a good practice in the field of journalist security. To ensure holistic protection, media outlets must, together with individual women journalists, conduct regular risk assessments that include risks that materialize as a result of the profession, as well as risks associated with being a woman and other forms of their identities.

Prior to beginning an assignment, journalists should complete risk assessment templates provided by the media outlet to jointly determine what precautions and safeguards are needed to safely complete the assignment. Such risk assessments need to be tailored and updated per assignment.

More broadly, journalists can stay abreast of research on online harassment and abuse. Journalists who are less at risk of these types of attacks should develop ways to become allies with those who are at higher risk, for example by engaging in research and monitoring. This line of action supports the fostering of a work culture where attacks against women journalists, such as online harassment and abuse, are understood as attacks against journalism. This can enable women journalists to better gauge risks, identify threats, and report attacks, rather than normalizing abuse.

› **Practice a holistic approach towards safety and security, including physical, legal, psychosocial and digital security**

A holistic view of safety of journalists encompasses physical safety, digital security and psychosocial care as well as know-your-rights training

courses. For women journalists, this should especially include information and professional development on how to stay safe if subjected to gender-based online harassment and abuse.

Women journalists are encouraged to participate in security training courses, particularly on topics such as spotting manifestations of online harassment and abuse, using digital security tools, and navigating the internet safely. As a preparatory step, it is recommended that women journalists gain a strong grasp of security and reporting options available on the social media platforms they use.

Online harassment and abuse often has an escalatory nature, sometimes starting with micro-aggressions – more subtle slights and insults – and quickly intensifying into severe threats. Individual micro-aggressions, while seemingly non-threatening, can accumulate to create serious psychological ramifications for women journalists, or they can be harbingers of more harmful attacks. It is important for women journalists to prioritize psychosocial wellness by de-normalizing micro-aggressions, learning to identify trauma, and being empowered to practice self-care.

Other ways in which journalists can contribute to the holistic safety of women journalists is by staying informed of the media organization's online safety guidelines, which may change periodically, and pushing for policies and protocols to address online harassment and abuse if they do not yet exist. They can also work with women journalists to conduct risk assessments and set up security plans that address gender-based online harassment and abuse.

› **Document and report threats and attacks**

When experiencing attacks, women journalists should try and document the situation as soon as it occurs, if they are comfortable doing so, and if possible, share this information with the relevant support function within the media outlet. Colleagues can assist in doing both, if the woman journalist does not feel comfortable doing it individually. Incident reports can also be formally lodged with employers, social media platforms and law enforcement, depending on the nature of the aggression.

In some circumstances, women journalists may choose to engage in counter-speech in response to an attack, either broadly speaking out against the attack or addressing the attacker directly. Counter-speech can be a powerful way of stopping online harassment and abuse, but in some instances, it can lead to more attacks. Such a tactic should therefore be undertaken alongside a risk assessment. Consulting peer support networks, editors and/or security advisors can also help in determining whether counter-speech is the best course of action.

› **Support colleagues who are facing online abuse and harassment, and those who are at higher risk of experiencing such attacks**

As colleagues, individual journalists can be allies in countering gender-based online harassment and abuse. Journalists and media workers can help shape the overarching organizational culture (see also Chapter Seven) to be more supportive and empowering to those who may be experiencing attacks, or to those who are within a higher risk group by virtue of their identity or work.

Journalists can reach out in solidarity to women journalists experiencing attacks and provide immediate reassurance and support. They can help create peer support groups, document the online abuse and harassment against their colleagues, and report those attacks through different channels – provided the targeted journalist wants, and consents to, this help.

Community networks can provide immediate support to journalists experiencing gender-based online harassment and abuse. Women journalists can form peer support networks made up of trusted individuals, such as other colleagues, family and friends. The network can be a place to check-in and get support should attacks occur. Journalists are encouraged to share experiences and tips, work together to create security guides for fellow journalists, and to create alliances with their online audiences.

› **Become informed on available forms of support, including legal mechanisms**

The nature of online harassment and abuse is complex and multi-faceted. It infringes on several human rights areas, protected in different ways through national legislation, regional bodies, and international human rights standards. Women journalists can become agile in navigating the online terrain and its multi-layered risks by staying informed of their legal rights under national and international frameworks around gender equality, safety of journalists, freedom of expression, digital communications, and other relevant areas. In this way, women journalists can identify the different mechanisms to get support when confronted with online harassment and abuse.

In addition to the protection potentially offered by State and intergovernmental bodies, women journalists can benefit from familiarizing themselves with the terms and conditions and community guidelines of the online platforms they use, as well as the relevant policies of their employers for online engagement.

In some cases, women journalists may consider tapping into legal support organizations and networks.

Resources

- TrollBusters created an infographic, [Are you being harassed online?](#), which details the actions that women journalists can take depending on the nature of online attacks against them.³
- PEN America's [Online Harassment Field Manual](#) for writers and journalists provides a series of practical recommendations and tips, also focused on women.⁴
- [Video tutorials](#) produced by the International Press Institute instruct women journalists on how to address online harassment from a legal and psychosocial perspective.⁵
- [Hollaback!](#) provides training and has published several resources with practical tools for women to intervene when they are harassed.⁶ It also facilitates communities of support through its project [HeartMob](#).
- Free Press Unlimited created the online platform [Totem](#) with digital safety training materials.⁷ It includes the webinar [Know](#)

[Your Trolls](#), developed by the International Women's Media Foundation.

- Tactical tech created [XYZ](#), a space for sharing practical tools to navigate digital security for women.⁸ It also created [Me and My Shadow App Centre](#), a collection of open-source tools, apps and services for better privacy and managing digital traces.⁹
- A global volunteer network addressing gender-based violence, CHAYN, produced [CHAYNDIY](#), an online security guide for women.¹⁰
- Tips and tools for safer communications online can be found on the Electronic Frontier Foundation's [Surveillance Self-Defense website](#).¹¹
- [The Digital First Aid Kit](#) by the Digital Defenders Partnership provides advice on how to address the most common types of digital threats.¹²
- Some organizations provide emergency and legal support as well as fellowships to women journalists under attack, such as members of [IFEX](#) and groups participating in the [Journalists in Distress Network](#).¹³ Other organizations include [Digital Freedom Fund](#), [Access Now](#) and the [European Center for Press and Media Freedom](#).
- In the United Kingdom, the [Second Source](#) was created as a professional network for women journalists to tackle harassment in the media and to promote rights awareness.¹⁴
- [OnlineSOS](#) empowers people facing online harassment providing tools and sharing expertise and good practices.¹⁵

Endnotes

- 1 Mozilla Foundation, “Women journalists feel the brunt of online harassment”, April 2019, <https://internethealthreport.org/2019/women-journalists-feel-the-brunt-of-online-harassment/>.
- 2 OSCE, Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/18, “Safety of Journalists”, 7 December 2018, <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/406538?download=true>.
- 3 “What to Do? Where to Go? Infographic”, TrollBusters, <https://yoursosteam.wordpress.com/what-to-do-infographic/>.
- 4 “Online Harassment Field Manual”, PEN America, <https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/>.
- 5 “Tutorials”, On the Line Newsrooms, <https://newsrooms-ontheline.ipi.media/tutorials/>.
- 6 Hollaback!, <https://www.ihollaback.org/>.
- 7 Totem Project, <https://totem-project.org/>.
- 8 XYZ, <https://xyz.informationactivism.org/>.
- 9 “Alternative App Centre”, Me and My Shadow, <https://myshadow.org/resources>.
- 10 “Do it yourself online safety”, <https://chayn.co/safety/>.
- 11 “Tips, Tools and How-tos for Safer Online Communications”, Surveillance Self-Defense, <https://ssd EFF.org/>.
- 12 “Digital First Aid Kit”, Digital Defenders Partnership, <https://www.digitaldefenders.org/digitalfirstaid/>.
- 13 Committee to Protect Journalists, Journalists in Distress (JID) Network, <https://cpj.org/emergency-response/journalists-in-distress-network.php>.
- 14 The Second Source, <http://www.thesecondsource.co.uk>.
- 15 Online SOS, <https://onlinesos.org/>.

About the authors

Dr. Silvia Chocarro is a journalist and freedom of expression advocate. She is the Head of Protection at ARTICLE 19. She sits on the Council of IFEX and is a member of specialist bodies at the University of Sheffield and the Central European University. For the last 20 years, she has worked for news outlets, civil society groups and intergovernmental organizations, such as UNESCO where she worked on the development of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. She has authored several publications on gender and media. @silviachocarro

Sarah Clarke is the Head of the Europe and Central Asia team at ARTICLE 19. She is an expert at Columbia Free Expression and sits on the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom's Legal Affairs Committee. For six years, she led PEN International's policy and advocacy work, overseeing its engagement with the UN and regional human rights mechanisms. Sarah has consulted for the OHCHR, UNHCR, the OSCE, and Oxford and Harvard universities on issues relating to freedom of expression, asylum and migration. @sarah_m_clarke

Paulina Gutiérrez is an international human rights lawyer, freedom of expression and gender equality advocate. She leads the civic space and protection portfolios in the Law and Policy Programme at ARTICLE 19, including hate speech, gender, protest, and protection of journalists' issues. Prior to this, she led the digital rights strategy in the ARTICLE 19 Regional Office in Mexico. Her experience includes 12 years working on human rights policy research and human rights violations legal advisory in Latin America. @paulinagtzr

Judy Taing is Head of Gender & Sexuality at ARTICLE 19. She developed and implements its cross-cutting gender strategy, The Mx Method. She also sits on the Advisory Board on Online Harassment for the International Women's Media Foundation. Prior to joining ARTICLE 19, she worked in the Office of the Co-Investigating Judges at the United Nations Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials in Cambodia. @judytaing

Annex

The OSCE Ministerial Decision No. 3/18 on the Safety of Journalists¹

The Ministerial Council,

Reaffirming all relevant OSCE commitments on the right to freedom of expression, freedom of the media, and free flow of information, including the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, and the 1990 Copenhagen Document, where the participating States reaffirmed that the right to freedom of expression includes freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers,

Mindful that everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression, in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly Article 19, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), particularly Article 19, and that it constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society and one of the basic conditions for its progress and development,

Mindful also that any restrictions on the right to freedom of expression may only be such as are provided by law and are necessary on the grounds set out in paragraph 3 of Article 19 of the ICCPR,

Reaffirming that independent media are essential to a free and open society and accountable systems of government and are of particular importance in safeguarding human rights and fundamental freedoms, as stated in the 1991 Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the OSCE,

Acknowledging that journalism and technology are evolving and that this contributes to the public debate, while it may also expand the range of risks that undermine the safety of journalists,

Taking note of the importance of promoting and protecting the safety of journalists for the implementation of the relevant Sustainable Development Goal and Targets of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

Recognizing that the work of journalists can put them, and their family members, at risk of violence, as well as of intimidation and harassment, including through digital technologies, which can deter journalists from continuing their work or lead to self-censorship,

Noting with concern that the use of undue restrictive measures against journalists can affect their safety, and prevents them from providing information to the public, and thus negatively affects the exercise of the right to freedom of expression,

Reaffirming that the media in their territory should enjoy unrestricted access to foreign news and information services, that the public will enjoy similar freedom to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority regardless of frontiers, including through foreign publications and foreign broadcasts, and that any restriction in the exercise of this right will be prescribed by law and in accordance with international standards, as stated in the 1991 Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE,

Concerned that violations and abuses of the right to be free from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy may affect the safety of journalists,

Deeply concerned by all human rights violations and abuses committed in relation to the safety of journalists, including those involving killing, torture, enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest, arbitrary detention and arbitrary expulsion, intimidation, harassment and threats of all forms, such as physical, legal, political, technological or economic, intended to suppress their work,

Concerned by the distinct risks faced by women journalists in relation to their work, including through digital technologies, and underlining the importance to ensure their greatest possible safety and that the experiences and concerns of women journalists are effectively addressed,

Recognizing the crucial role of journalists in covering elections, in particular in informing the public about candidates, their platforms and ongoing debates, and expressing serious concern about threats and violent attacks that journalists can face in this regard,

Recognizing the importance of investigative journalism, and that the ability of media to investigate, and to publish the results of their investigations, including on the Internet, without fear of reprisal, can play an important role in our societies, including in holding public institutions and officials accountable,

Alarmed that targeted campaigns undermining the work of journalists are increasing, eroding public trust and confidence in the credibility of journalism, and recognizing that this can increase the risk of threats and violence against journalists,

Also alarmed at instances in which political leaders, public officials and/or authorities intimidate, threaten, condone or fail to condemn violence against journalists,

Expressing deep concern at the growing threat to the safety of journalists posed, *inter alia*, by terrorist groups and criminal organizations,

Emphasizing also the particular risks with regard to the safety of journalists in the digital age, including the particular vulnerability of journalists to becoming targets of hacking or unlawful or arbitrary surveillance or interception of communications, undermining enjoyment of their right to freedom of expression and their right to be free from arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy,

Reiterating that participating States condemn all attacks on and harassment of journalists and will endeavour to hold those directly responsible for such attacks and harassment accountable, as stated at the 1994 Budapest CSCE Summit, and also recognizing that accountability for crimes against journalists is a key element in preventing future attacks,

Stressing the significance of commemoration of 2 November as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (IDEI) proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly,

Noting with concern the climate of impunity that prevails when violent attacks committed against journalists remain unpunished, and recognizing the role of governments, legislators and the judiciary in enabling a safe working environment and ensuring safety of journalists by, *inter alia*, publicly condemning and bringing to justice all those responsible for crimes against journalists,

Recalling United Nations Security Council resolutions 1738 (2006) and 2222 (2015), which condemn all violations and abuses committed

against journalists, media professionals and associated personnel in situations of armed conflict, and which state that journalists, media professionals and associated personnel engaged in dangerous professional missions in areas of armed conflict shall be considered as civilians and shall be protected as such, provided that they take no action adversely affecting their status as civilians,

Calls on participating States to:

1. Fully implement all OSCE commitments and their international obligations related to freedom of expression and media freedom, including by respecting, promoting and protecting the freedom to seek, receive and impart information regardless of frontiers;
2. Bring their laws, policies and practices, pertaining to media freedom, fully in compliance with their international obligations and commitments and to review and, where necessary, repeal or amend them so that they do not limit the ability of journalists to perform their work independently and without undue interference;
3. Condemn publicly and unequivocally all attacks and violence against journalists such as killing, torture, enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest, arbitrary detention and arbitrary expulsion, intimidation, harassment, and threats of all forms, such as physical, legal, political, technological or economic, used to suppress their work and/or unduly force closure of their offices, including in conflict situations;
4. Also condemn publicly and unequivocally attacks on women journalists in relation to their work, such as sexual harassment, abuse, intimidation, threats and violence, including through digital technologies;

5. Urge the immediate and unconditional release of all journalists who have been arbitrarily arrested or detained, taken hostage or who have become victims of enforced disappearance;
6. Take effective measures to end impunity for crimes committed against journalists, by ensuring accountability as a key element in preventing future attacks, including by ensuring that law enforcement agencies carry out swift, effective and impartial investigations into acts of violence and threats against journalists, in order to bring all those responsible to justice, and ensure that victims have access to appropriate remedies;
7. Urge political leaders, public officials and/or authorities to refrain from intimidating, threatening or condoning – and to unequivocally condemn – violence against journalists, in order to reduce the risks or threats that journalists may face and avoid undermining trust in the credibility of journalists as well as respect for the importance of independent journalism;
8. Refrain from arbitrary or unlawful interference with journalists' use of encryption and anonymity technologies and refrain from employing unlawful or arbitrary surveillance techniques, noting that such acts infringe on the journalists' enjoyment of human rights, and could put them at potential risk of violence and threats to their safety;
9. Encourage State bodies and law enforcement agencies to engage in awareness-raising and training activities related to the need to ensure safety of journalists, and to promote the involvement of civil society in such activities, where appropriate;

10. Establish or strengthen, where possible, national data collection, analysis and reporting on attacks and violence against journalists;
11. Ensure that defamation laws do not carry excessive sanctions or penalties that could undermine the safety of journalists and/or effectively censor journalists and interfere with their mission of informing the public and, where necessary, to revise and repeal such laws, in compliance with participating States' obligations under international human rights law;
12. Implement more effectively the applicable legal framework for the protection of journalists and all relevant OSCE commitments;
13. Co-operate fully with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, including on the issue of safety of journalists;
14. Encourage the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media's continued advocacy and promotion of safety of journalists in all OSCE participating States, in line with his/her mandate.

Endnote

1 The Ministerial Council of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 7 December 2018, <https://www.osce.org/files/mcdecoo03%20safety%20of%20journalists%20en.pdf>



Online harassment and abuse against women journalists has become a major hazard to the profession. One that threatens women journalists' ability to do their jobs. It violates their right to freedom of expression as much as it hampers free and open access to information for all members of society.

This #SOFJO Resource Guide formulates an answer to that threat. It aims to assist States and non-State actors across the OSCE region in taking real actions to improve the safety of female journalists online. The practices presented are all examples of ways in which international standards and commitments can be realized.

This #SOFJO Resource Guide provides the key actors with a brief selection of the most relevant and achievable steps. Taken together, these steps form an interrelated structure in which women journalists can continue their profession online in a safer manner.

Unfortunately, there is nothing virtual about this form of harassment and abuse. It is a real problem that needs real solutions.

It is time to walk the talk.