

Following the request of the OHCHR to provide input for the report of the Secretary-General on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, please find the following Austrian input with a view to collect information on the specific challenges faced by female journalists:

First, Austria together with the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and the International News Safety Institute (INSI) in 2012 funded the **ground-breaking study "Violence and Harassment Against Women in the News Media: A Global Picture"** (*enclosure*), surveying more than 1000 female journalists from around the world about violence and harassment experienced in the context of their work. Respective findings were presented during side-events organised by Austria at the Human Rights Council in Geneva in March 2014 as well as in cooperation with UNESCO at the Commission on the Status of Women in April 2014 in New York. According to the study, risks for the safety of female journalists primarily stem from abuse of power or authority, attempts to damage reputation, name calling and acts committed online. Threats to the professional as well as physical safety of female journalists arise both in the office as well as in the field. As for the latter, notably during the uprisings of the so called Arab-Spring, reporting in mobs and crowds proved to be dangerous as female journalists have reported multiple incidents of sexual assault by groups of male protesters and violent acts by security officials under such circumstances. Similar events have been reported from other parts of the world too.

Second, in September 2015, an OSCE expert meeting "**New Challenges to Freedom of Expression: Countering Online Abuse of Female Journalists**" took place in Vienna, discussing the current situation and bringing together best practices, strategies and possible solutions. Especially in light of recent shifts in the media landscape and the increase in online aggression, common efforts to take adequate and prompt measures to prevent online abuse of female journalists are needed. Nature and intensity of online aggression depend heavily on the individual medium used to communicate and the target audience. While male journalists are likewise affected by online abuse, women are subjected to much more severe abuse in terms of amount and content – particularly as regards sexist and misogynistic remarks. This shows that women are oftentimes targeted for the sole reason of their sex, a feature to rarely occur in the case of male journalists. A common pattern to be observed in assaults on women journalists online is the attempt to reinforce gendered stereotypes, depicting men as sexually dominant and women as subservient sexual objects. Further exacerbation results from online anonymity adding a layer of protection to the perpetrators.

As a result, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media published the following recommendations on how participating States, media organizations and intermediaries can assist in ensuring that female journalists and media actors can work without fear and exercise their human right to freedom of expression.

Participating States should:

- Recognize that threats and other forms of online abuse of female journalists and media actors is a direct attack on freedom of expression and freedom of the media.

- Strengthen the capacity of law enforcement agencies to understand international standards on human rights so they can identify real threats to safety and protect individuals in danger, including providing tools and training on technical and legal issues.
- Refrain from introducing new criminal laws that could stifle freedom of expression, opting instead to apply existing laws that are in line with international human rights standards.
- Commission and support the collection and analysis of data related to online abuse and its effects, including creating a database of specific occurrences and follow-up from law enforcement.
- Establish a network of working groups with participating States, international organizations, media, civil society and Internet intermediaries to develop educational materials, awareness-raising campaigns and create effective structures for dialogue.

Media organizations should:

- Adopt industry-wide guidelines on identifying and monitoring online abuse.
- Ensure that journalists experiencing online abuse, both staff and freelancers, have access to a comprehensive system of support including psychosocial and legal assistance.
- Create a company culture of gender equality and non-tolerance to threats and harassment against staff.
- Put in place clear and transparent procedures related to content moderation, with the view of protecting the right to freedom of expression, and train relevant staff accordingly, while ensuring that male and female staff be equally involved.
- Work with other media organizations and associations to create support systems, including training and mentorship programmes, for female journalists and media actors.

Intermediaries and social media platforms should:

- Inform properly about terms of services, guidelines and best practices in ensuring a safe space for all users.
- Ensure that terms of service, community guidelines and information about their enforcement are proportionate and adequate, clear, understandable and easily available to all users.
- Provide information to users about best practices for online safety and about technical solutions on how to best report abusive content.
- Engage in capacity building with civil society organizations on issues like counter-speech as a response to abusive content.

- Collect data and statistics on online abuse to help facilitate more comprehensive research on online abuse of female journalists and media actors.

Third, the **International Press Institute Austria** has published an article on the [experiences of five female Austrian journalists](#) with online comments and postings that go beyond content-based criticism. Their common assessment is that especially the coverage of refugee issues and feminism are triggers for digital attacks.