

## UN Women submission

### State of play and gender implications

Journalism is an integral pillar of thriving democracies and it is in the interest of UN Member States to ensuring the journalists can function without fear of reprisal and violence and do their jobs in holding state and non-state actors accountable.

Recent movements over the last year and a half has shown us is that bringing a change in the media industry is urgently needed, whether it is in the context of increasing safety of journalists in all contexts, including ending sexual harassment at work, or ending other discriminations, which has captured headlines in the #Metoo era. But this can only come if there is an enabling environment in national laws (which are in line with international human rights standards rather than stifle freedom of expression) and in the media industry, which itself is changing rapidly today, with the explosion of online and social media.

In 2018, 94 journalists were killed including seven women, while thousands were attacked. Trends show a steady increase in the proportion of attacks and killings of journalists, in non-armed conflict settings, and those covering local stories (93% of all journalists killed in 2018).

**The gender implications** must be factored in for all policies, advocacy and response efforts. The proportion of women among fatalities have risen, and women journalists are facing increased gender-specific and different forms of attacks, such as sexual violence, sexual harassment, cyber bullying, stalking, intimidation and threats of violence. Often women journalists may feel compelled to shy away from tackling certain stories because of the push-back that they get online, and through cyber-bullying with sexual threats and harassment.

### Digital Safety

While many consider today to be the golden age of audience-engaged journalism, yet, the problem of online harassment is of great concern to individual journalists and newsrooms alike. This issue impacts both male and female journalists, but women are far more frequently subjected to sexual harassment and graphic threats of physical violence. A [2014 UK study](#) of Twitter abuse targeting celebrities found that "Journalism is the only category where women received more abuse than men, with female journalists receiving roughly three times as much abuse as their male counterparts."

Similarly, a [2015 OSCE study](#) found that: "Female journalists, bloggers and other media actors are disproportionately experiencing gender-related threats, harassment and intimidation on the Internet which has a direct impact on their safety and future online activities." This creates also a threat to the active participation of women in debates and discourses, fostered by news media, through online commenting platforms and their social media channels.

In today's media landscape, this situation further adversely impacts freelancer journalists and bloggers, many of them women. They often lack even the basic protection and compensation

policies provided by media houses to full-time staffers. They have no media house to back them up when attacked by state and non-state authorities and public leaders who discredit their work, in the push back environment we are witnessing.

Gender-responsive policies that foster prevention of sexual harassment, violence and safety of journalists, parental leave policies, flexible working arrangements, with a gender-lens is far from the norm. In the newsrooms and in the media industry, [men still occupy 73 per cent](#) of top media management positions, according to a global study spanning 522 news media organizations. And research spanning [more than 100 countries found that a staggering 46 per cent](#) of news stories, in print and on radio and television, uphold gender stereotypes, even as we move towards 25 years after the historic Beijing Conference, where [Women and Media](#) was one of the 12 critical areas of the [Beijing Platform for Action](#), popularly referred to as Section J.

### **UN Women actions**

Through several initiatives, UN Women works with the media industry and very closely with journalists to create an enabling environment for change, and to move the needle on gender equality within the media industry, as well as in their reporting.

UN Women's [Step it Up for Gender Equality Media Compact](#) is a concerted effort in support of Beijing Platform for Action's Section J. Recognizing the influential role media plays in driving women's empowerment and gender equality, the widely-recognized one of its kind [Step it Up for Gender Equality Media Compact](#), facilitated by UN Women functions as a pro-bono alliance of media organizations who are committed to playing an active role in advancing gender issues and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs). Since its launch at CSW 2016, the Compact with almost 75 partners currently, continues to grow. Partners include France24, SABC, Thomson Reuters, The Huffington Post, Marie-Claire, Glamour magazine, Devex, Refinery29, Jakarta Times, Dawn, Jordan Times, and many other international and national media outlets. In line with Beijing Platform for Action's Section J recommendations, the [news media outlets](#) are implementing the Step it Up Media Compact by promoting gender equality in the news room and putting a focus on covering gender equality issues. The Step it Up Media Compact today serves as a vibrant community working closely with UN Women. Many of the partners participate in the 16 Days of Activism by running special features on Ending Violence against Women, running editorials on the issue, replicating UN Women's stories with survivors, interactives, etc.

UN Women also trains journalists on gender issues through [country and regional efforts](#), works with [community radio broadcasters](#), as well as tracks global progress on Beijing Platform's [Section J](#) via support since 2009 to the leading international study which takes stock of the status of the media industry via the leading [Global Media Monitoring Project](#).

### **Recommendations**

For real change, substantive improvements in the safety of journalists, full participation of all stakeholders, including their employers. This is imperative in order to ensure concrete, measurable action. Along with Member States, professional organizations, and NGOs who are already involved, employers of journalists as in, decision-makers at media outlets and media organizations (such as BBC, Al Jazeera, SABC) should be consulted and become an integral part of the UN-led discussions. This can lead to media companies adopting industry-wide guidelines on identifying and monitoring safety of journalists' issues. They can become the champions of a preventive approach through their policies and HR processes, and better policies for the safety of journalists, including women journalists they employ, as well as free-lancers, online journalists, and bloggers.

The issue of safety of journalists must go beyond the occasional news headline which usually come into the spotlight when there is a killing of a journalist or kidnapping of another. While this spotlighting is critical, this issue has far-reaching impact on an everyday basis, on reporting of news and accountability of authorities, in both the global north and south. Raising the advocacy around this issue and a global call for ending of impunity for crimes against journalists, throughout the year is imperative, including at the local level as 93% of all journalists killed in 2018 were those covering local stories, and not on the battlefield. All parts of the UN System must come together to increase engagement on this issue, through advocacy, events, partnerships with media houses, journalists, and practitioners, and urge for preventive action and an end to impunity for crimes against journalists.