Contribution for Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women - Report on Violence Against Women Journalists

In her forthcoming report, the Special Rapporteur aims to build on the existing human rights standards and to offer a more holistic approach to addressing the specific challenges faced by women journalists, as well as their causes, and to provide recommendations to States and other stakeholders on how to tackle these issues. The report will also build on the Special Rapporteur's previous report to the Human Rights Council in 2018, on online violence against women (A/HRC/38/47). As such, the report seeks to lay the foundation for States to establish an appropriate human rights framework including through the development of policies or strategies to ensure the protection of women journalists.

In this regard, the Special Rapporteur on violence against women wishes to seek the views of States, National Human Rights Institutions, the media, journalists, civil society and academia on the following questions:

1. Please indicate whether there are cases of gender based violence and harassment against women journalists in your country. If so, please specify how these cases are documented, and describe the State response, or lack thereof, to such cases, including examples of good practice.
2. Please indicate whether your country has early-warning and rapid-response systems in place, such as hotlines, online platforms or 24-hour emergency contact points to ensure that journalists and other media actors have immediate access to protective measures when they are under threat.
3. Please specify whether there are any programs in place aimed at addressing factors that increase the likelihood of violence and harassment in the world of work for women journalists, including discrimination, the abuse of power relations, and gender, cultural and social norms that support violence and harassment.
4. Please specify whether online and ICT-facilitated violence against women is recognized as a crime, particularly cases of killings, threats of rape and harassment of women journalists.
5. Please indicate whether transparent complaint mechanisms for cases of offline and online and ICT-facilitated violence against women journalists have been adopted, and if so, whether policies and procedures for reporting and requesting the removal of harmful content are available and easily accessible.
6. Please indicate what challenges are faced by women journalists when reporting on cases of gender based violence, and specify whether there are any good practices in this regard.

UNESCO

UNESCO, as the UN agency with the mandate to protect freedom of expression and as the organization spearheading the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of

Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, has a central role to play in improving safety of women journalists. Gender equality is a global priority for UNESCO and we work to reflect this perspective in our policies, programmes and processes. The UN Plan of Action, which has been welcomed by the UN General Assembly, was developed in 2012 to coordinate the efforts of actors both within and outside of the UN system in promoting a safer environment for journalists worldwide. It recognizes the need to employ a gender-sensitive approach in this area. The outcome document of a 2017 multi-stakeholder consultation on reinforcing the implementation of the UN Plan of Action includes a number of recommendations to Member States, civil society and media actors to address specifically attacks against women journalists. Among others, it calls on Member States to "take action against discrimination and violence against women journalists, including sexual violence, online and offline, and ensure training and awareness-raising" on these issues.

In the last year, UNESCO has stepped up its efforts to address the gender dimensions of journalists' safety. This is in line with General Conference 39C/Resolution 39 which invited the UNESCO Director-General to "reinforce activities (...) aimed at addressing the specific threats to the safety of women journalists, both online and offline". Threats and harassment can lead to self-censorship which raises concern about the representation of women's voices and perspectives in the public sphere, including the media.

According to UNESCO's World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development women journalists encounter threats to their physical safety, such as assault, sexual assault, rape and even murder. Studies show that female journalists are targeted more frequently and more viciously by online abuse and harassment than their male colleagues. This abuse is often highly sexualized, based not on the content of their work, but on their physical traits or cultural background. In this way, gender-based violence can closely resemble – and intersect with – abuse and discrimination faced by journalists from ethnic or religious minorities or who identify as LGBTI. Their aim is often to silence women not just for their journalistic output, but for speaking out as women.

In one research sample by the IFJ in 2018, nearly two thirds of the women journalists surveyed said they had experienced some form of online abuse. IWMF and Trollbusters reported similar results in an international survey of nearly 600 women journalists, which revealed that online threats or harassment exceeded the number of reported physical threats or harassment. Both online and offline threats and attacks against women journalists are reported to have increased over the past five years. In both surveys, nearly 40% of the respondents who reported facing an online offence said they had avoided coverage of certain topics as a result.

In the face of these developments, there an urgent need to make concerted efforts towards developing solidarity between women journalists, management and male colleagues in the workplace. Judicial systems across the world are adapting to this reality at very different paces, most of them struggling to establish a clear line between what constitutes harassment or freedom of speech. Users are also demanding more accountability from social media platforms, where abuse against women journalists is rampant.

UNESCO's strategic approach to the safety of women journalists focuses on three main thematic axes:

1. Research & monitoring
2. Capacity building

3. Agenda-setting
4. Awareness-raising

1. **Research and monitoring**

UNESCO supports research on the issue of women journalists' safety to support evidenced-based policy decisions. UNESCO's World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development series contained a chapter dedicated to challenges faced by women journalists including the problem of online harassment.

In 2019, UNESCO launched a **global, one-year-long study on effective measures in countering online violence against women journalists** to be published in late 2020.

While there is a growing scholarly body on online harassment, this research has largely been focused on the Global North. Furthermore, existing studies have payed limited attention to intersecting aspects of discrimination (such as sexual orientation, race, religion, etc.) which can add extra pressure to the affected journalists and reinforce a lack of diversity in public discourses. Additionally, through consultations and discussions with different stakeholders, UNESCO has identified a need for policy-oriented work that brings forth concrete recommendations. UNESCO is in a unique position to develop such research and to promote the implementation of measures among governments, media organizations, journalists and other actors.

Following an open call for proposals, UNESCO contracted a research consortium led by a scholar with vast experience on this topic. Through a sample of 12-15 countries, the consortium is conducting in-depth research, based on interviews, focus groups, legal and policy analysis. Thereby, the consortium is accumulating knowledge on the scope and varieties of online harassment in understudied contexts and also exploring deficiencies in existing mechanisms. The study will also include a comprehensive survey as well as big data analysis around selected case studies. As a result, the recommendations to be brought forth will be uniquely tailored to address this problem efficiently and also help UNESCO to strengthen its effectiveness as a leading institution in fighting online gender-based violence and attacks against freedom of expression.

Additionally, UNESCO's Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media are applied by media organizations across the world to gauge gender sensitivity in media operations and content, and provide a means to measure progress. Several indicators assess the level of safety in the working environment in which female and male journalists operate.

UNESCO also monitors cases of killings of female journalists and fights impunity by requesting concerned Members States to report to UNESCO on an annual basis on the status of the judicial enquiries into each killing. UNESCO's gender-disaggregated data on journalists killing is available on UNESCO's Observatory of killings of journalists and is used for reporting on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 16.10.1 on the safety of journalists.

2. **Capacity building:**

As regards capacity building, UNESCO provides women journalists with training on safety-related issues and their rights, both online and offline, with a specific emphasis on digital safety. The purpose of these activities is to empower women journalists to better protect themselves against attacks and have an improved understanding of how to deal with situations of harassment at work and online. By sensitizing media managers to these issues, UNESCO also aims to improve the workplace culture and "de-normalize" behaviours that contribute to the harassment of women journalists. UNESCO is also working with media managers to provide inputs on the elaboration or strengthening of gender-sensitive safety policies within media organizations.

UNESCO has also supported the development of various safety handbooks dealing with the gender dimensions of safety, including:

- The latest edition of the [Safety Guide for Journalists: A handbook for reporters in high-risk environments](#), developed with Reporters without Borders, which focuses on gender-specific threats, both offline and online.
- A handbook by the International Association of Women in Radio's publication, [What if…? Safety Handbook for Women Journalists](#), which provides practical tips for women journalists on minimizing risks while covering sensitive and dangerous assignments.

Below a selection of recently implemented capacity building activities in this area:

- UNESCO launched in 2019 a project titled "Promoting the Safety of Women Journalists". The project has a global component as well as country components in 4 countries (**Senegal, Mali, India, Sri Lanka**). It involves the training of 120 media owners on safety protocols to protect women journalists; 120 women journalists on safety, including digital safety skills; 50 security and police personnel on freedom of expression and safety of journalists (gender aspects). It also aims at reaching 5000 key stakeholders through awareness raising activities.
- In **Uganda**, UNESCO supported a project which provided safety skills to 100 female journalists, including freelance journalists and bloggers. Round table discussions were held to engage different stakeholders such as media houses, civil society and security forces in strengthening safety of women journalists.
- Over 150 journalists and editors were trained in gender-responsive reporting, safety, and knowledge on media laws in **South Sudan**.
- In **Afghanistan**, safety training courses tailored for women journalists equipped 65 journalists with safety and first-aid skills.
- In **Morocco,** 14 national media outlets benefited from trainings on safety of women journalists and on covering gender issues in the media, within the framework of a project co-funded by the European Union. Following the success of these trainings, management of these outlets decided to fund additional training courses in provinces of the country.

- In **Pakistan**, discussions were initiated with the Cyber-crime governmental department regarding gathering evidence on harassment and digital threats which affect female journalists disproportionately.
- In **Sudan** in 2018-2019, UNESCO facilitated a capacity building project that trained 130 female journalists from different regions of the country on safety, following a similar capacity building project supported by UNESCO in 2016-2017 during which 140 female journalists were trained.
- In **Lebanon,** training sessions for young journalists on safety issues involved over 70% of female participants, and included a component highlighting the specific safety concerns of women journalists.
- UNESCO developed a series of training sessions in **Tunisia** to further the advocacy on a gender charter to be adopted by the Tunisian media, in collaboration with the Tunisian National Regulator and the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR).

3. <u>Agenda-setting</u>

UNESCO works to foster the policy dialogue with Member States and other stakeholders on the issue of safety of women journalists.

Concerted efforts between a range of actors are necessary to address these challenges effectively. It is with this aim in mind that UNESCO organized in June 2019, together with Member States from the Group for the Safety of Journalists at UNESCO, a conference titled "[Standing up against online harassment of women journalists – What works?](#)". The meeting brought together over 200 participants, including many representatives of Member State, and featured a range of prominent women journalists, experts from Twitter, *The Guardian* and *Libération*, as well as prosecutors and lawyers dealing with cases of online harassment.

Gender mainstreaming is also at the core of UNESCO's efforts when facilitating the creation of national multi-stakeholder mechanisms for the safety of journalists. In 2020, UNESCO is supporting the Global Alliance of Media and Gender (GAMAG) in mainstreaming gender in national mechanisms for the protection of journalists in **Mexico, Colombia and Iraq**. The project includes analysis of national legal frameworks, reporting on types of gender-based violence against women journalists, evaluation of national protection mechanisms regarding their gender-responsiveness and concrete proposals on how to adapt the existing protection mechanisms.

UNESCO is also integrating the gender dimensions of safety in its capacity building activities for judicial actors in Latin America and in Africa on freedom of expression and safety of journalists, whereby several thousands of members of the judiciary have been trained through Massive Open Online Courses.

4. <u>Awareness-raising</u>

Globally, UNESCO supports advocacy and builds coalitions with other organizations to keep the issue of women journalists' safety on top of the UN Plan of Action Agenda.

Currently, UNESCO is finalizing a collection of articles by women journalists around the world about their personal experiences with various forms of gender-based attacks or harassment while carrying out their work. They will be published as a UNESCO publication in 2020.

The annual UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize has helped to raise awareness about the dangers faced by several female journalists who were targeted for their work, including: Khadija Ismayilova (Azerbaijan), Reeyot Alemu (Ethiopia), Monica Gonzalez Mujica (Chile), Lydia Cacho Ribeiro (Mexico), Anna Politkovskaya (Russian Federation) and May Chidiac (Lebanon).