



# Equally Safe

Towards a feminist approach  
to the safety of journalists



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PROTECT

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# Abbreviations

<b>AWID</b>	Association for Women's Rights in Development
<b>CEDAW</b>	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
<b>CIMAC</b>	Comunicación e Información de la Mujer (Women's Communication and Information Service)
<b>GIJN</b>	Global Investigative Journalism Network
<b>HRC</b>	Human Rights Committee
<b>ICCPR</b>	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
<b>ICFJ</b>	International Center for Journalists
<b>IFJ</b>	International Federation of Journalists
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IPI</b>	International Press Institute
<b>IWMF</b>	International Women's Media Foundation
<b>LGBTQI+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and intersex
<b>LSE</b>	London School of Economics and Political Science
<b>OAS</b>	Organization of American States
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>OSCE</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>SR</b>	UN Special Rapporteur
<b>UNGA</b>	UN General Assembly

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# 1. Introduction

**What might a feminist approach to the protection of journalists look like? What concrete benefits might it bring? And could it provide solutions to the well-documented – and highly gendered – abuse that women journalists face every day?**

While journalists and communicators<sup>1</sup> worldwide experience threats, surveillance, attacks, arbitrary arrest, detention, enforced disappearances, and murder for carrying out their vital work, women<sup>2</sup> journalists deal with additional, gendered threats, violence, abuse, and harassment – in their workplaces, when out reporting, and online. They bear the brunt of not only the increasingly hostile environment affecting all journalists but also pervasive gender-based violence, gendered discrimination, and ‘gendered censorship’.<sup>3</sup> These risks multiply for women journalists, who experience multiple, overlapping discriminations on the basis of race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, gender identity/expression, and religious beliefs, among others.

Current policies and practices – even those deemed ‘gender-sensitive’ – are failing to protect women journalists from these risks. A bulletproof vest may be useful in some contexts, but it will not protect a woman from sexual harassment in her newsroom, abuse when she shares her stories online, or assault on public transport when she travels to an assignment. Due to this lack of effective protection measures, women journalists have in some cases taken the situation into their own hands, creating solutions to keep themselves and their colleagues safe. These solutions are grounded in diverse feminist approaches that place women’s everyday experiences, lived realities, and protection needs front and centre.

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 set out to make these sometimes invisible practices more visible, building on our [existing programmes](#) on the safety of women journalists worldwide. We undertook original research globally and specifically in six countries – three in Asia (Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) and three in Latin America (Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay), all of which ARTICLE 19 is publishing separately – guided by the questions:

## What might feminist approaches to the protection of journalists look like, and what benefits might they bring?

Our research findings form the basis of this report, which aims to:

- **EXPLORE** how feminist practices have been, are being, and can be applied to improve all women journalists' safety worldwide;
- **BRIDGE** international legal and policy frameworks on the safety of journalists with the practical approaches being adopted on the ground; and
- **CATALYSE** a conversation about how – together – we can move towards feminist approaches to the safety of journalists.

From national organisations to grassroots networks, this report documents women's monumental efforts to make structural changes, tackle entrenched patterns of gender-based discrimination and violence, and enhance the safety of women journalists. The initiatives showcased here are a testament to the creativity and resilience of those working on the feminist frontlines.



## 2. Feminist frameworks

In her 2021 report to the UN General Assembly's (UNGA) 76<sup>th</sup> session, the UN Special Rapporteur (SR) on freedom of expression, Irene Khan, adopts a 'feminist analytical framework',<sup>4</sup> which she describes as one that:

*is attentive to the lived realities and needs of women and gender non-conforming people, and in so doing addresses traditionally neglected forms of speech relevant to their lives, including freedom of gender, sexual, and cultural expression. It takes an intersectional approach, noting that women's experiences vary according to their race, ethnicity, caste, religion, sexual orientation, age, geographic location, social, economic, and legal status and many other factors.*

Looking at freedom of opinion and expression through a feminist lens, she underlines the power imbalances in society that feed sexism, gender-based discrimination, and misogyny, and constrain women's enjoyment of human rights, particularly their right to freedom of expression.<sup>5</sup>

This research also takes an intersectional feminist<sup>6</sup> approach to framing the research questions and process. A feminist approach to journalists' safety goes hand in hand with a feminist methodology. Feminist methodologies provide new analytical frames for issues, making visible women's varied and rich lived experiences and recognising the effects of structural and intersectional inequalities. Such an approach goes beyond calling for gender-disaggregated data – although that is an important first step to identify why structural problems exist – and ensures an analysis of the underlying structures of violence as well as the opportunities such feminist insights bring.

The following research questions guided our work on this project:

- What does a feminist approach to the safety of journalists and communicators comprise and mean in theory and practice?
- How can a feminist approach to the safety of journalists and communicators strengthen standard-setting mechanisms, policy development, and media and civil society strategies?
- What existing feminist approaches to the safety of journalists can we highlight and learn from?

This research was driven by the idea that there are multiple and various feminisms, and our aim was to highlight and learn from the feminist practices and principles we discovered. Because of the diversity within feminism itself, it is impossible – and undesirable – to define a singular feminist approach to the safety and protection of journalists. Instead, there is a plurality of feminist approaches, perspectives, experiences, initiatives, challenges, solutions, and strategies, grounded in diversity and inclusion, which this research showcases and seeks to learn from. Adopting a feminist lens, in this research we sought to capture not only the violations of rights that women journalists face but also the creativity and resilience of women journalists, who are designing and implementing their own protection mechanisms in formal and informal ways.

In carrying out this research and working towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists, we are mindful of these formal and informal practices that women journalists have developed on the ground. As Sara Ahmed, author of *Living a feminist life*, [explains](#): ‘A life-line can be the words sent out by a writer, gathered in the form of a book, words that you hang on to, that can pull you out of an existence, which can, perhaps later, on another day, pull you into a more liveable world.’ In the context of this research, we interpreted such ‘life-lines’ as consisting of not only solidarity groups and other protection mechanisms, online and offline, but also books, words, and poetry.

## How we conducted this research

This research report is based on qualitative research conducted by two global researchers and six national-level researchers in Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Nepal, Paraguay, and Sri Lanka.

At the global level, the researchers conducted a review of specialised literature and a review of legal jurisprudence on free speech cases relating to the protection of journalists. In addition, two virtual workshops were organised to provide a space for knowledge sharing and creation, bringing together those working in the fields of standard setting, journalism, feminist activism, freedom of expression, and the protection and safety of journalists. These took place on 13 and 14 October 2021. The first workshop brought together 26 participants to discuss and consider the main obstacles to the safety of woman journalists and communicators and how a feminist approach to the issue could strengthen standard-setting mechanisms and policy development. The second workshop involved 23 participants and focused on creativity, resilience, and feminisms, with a discussion on the strategies, practices, and knowledge that feminist journalists and those working on freedom of expression issues on the ground have developed. We also conducted 11 semi-structured interviews with ARTICLE 19 staff and other experts worldwide. We then carried out an interpretative analysis of the data based on the technique of grounded theory<sup>7</sup> to identify the key themes from the research.

Six country case studies were also conducted – three in Asia (Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) and three in Latin America (Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay) – which informed this research and are published separately. These case studies delve deeper into each country’s context and specific challenges, using qualitative methods

including interviews (five in Bangladesh, eight in Brazil, six in Chile, four in Nepal, 11 in Paraguay, and 20 in Sri Lanka), desk research, and surveys.

As with any research, this project has its limitations, which is why we have used the word 'towards' a feminist approach in this research.

*We committed not only to undertake research about feminist approaches to the safety of journalists, but to do so from a feminist perspective, and developed a set of feminist guidelines for everyone involved. The reality is that putting them in place was more challenging than expected. Taking a feminist approach requires more work, more time, and more funds; and needs to be taken into account in future research.*

– Silvia Chocarro Marcesse  
Head of Protection, ARTICLE 19





SHAMED

MOCKED

WISHED  
KISSED  
IT  
WENT

WENT  
TO  
SCHOOL

LESS  
RAP  
GOD  
GOD

ASSAULTED

NOT PRETTY TOXIC  
EAK USELESS



### 3. A risky business: Challenges faced by women journalists

Journalists around the world face significant challenges when carrying out their vital work, from threats and surveillance to attacks, arbitrary arrest, detention, enforced disappearances, and murder. The legacy and continued reality of dictatorships, militarised police forces, and the prison–industrial complex;<sup>8</sup> the growth of right-wing ideology and political authoritarianism; and the enforcement of problematic laws all have a profoundly negative impact on journalists. Since 2020, many governments have also used the COVID-19 pandemic to further restrict freedom of expression; during the first year of the pandemic, ARTICLE 19 found that two-thirds of all countries imposed restrictions on the media.

But while all journalists are at risk, some are more at risk than others. Women journalists face additional, gendered, often sexualised threats, discrimination, and misogyny – in their workplaces, when out reporting, and online – not only from the powerful forces that attempt to silence them but also sources, colleagues, and even their own family members. Women who work as journalists often violate social norms and stereotypes about women’s role in society, which attracts further discrimination and attacks.<sup>9</sup> And that’s if they manage to overcome the significant barriers – which are even higher for marginalised women facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (e.g. indigenous women, women in poverty, and lesbian, bisexual, and trans women) – that prevent them from becoming journalists in the first place.

#### **Violence against women**

Violence against women and girls is one of the most prevalent human rights violations in the world; an estimated one in three women experience sexual or physical violence in their lifetime.

Women journalists are even more likely to experience gender-based violence,<sup>10</sup> both online and off.<sup>11</sup> A 2017 study by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which surveyed 400 women journalists in 50 countries, found that half of respondents had been subjected to gender-based violence – from rape and sexual harassment to psychological abuse and online trolling. According to a global study



by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and TrollBusters in 2018, nearly two-thirds of women journalists had been threatened or harassed online and offline, while 26% had been physically attacked.

Violence against women journalists – as with all violence against women – does not occur in a vacuum; it is part and parcel of a systematic pattern of structural discrimination against women, which is grounded in negative gender stereotypes.<sup>12</sup> As the SR on violence against women, its causes and consequences (SR on violence against women), Reem Alsalem, told us:

*We know that women journalists are particularly exposed to online gender-based violence. Violence against journalists is often a reflection of a larger reality that is at play, namely that the whole democratic enterprise and governance in a particular country is at serious risk of being undermined. Women journalists, however, are particularly exposed to that kind of misogynistic violence, which can seriously jeopardise their ability to conduct their work safely and also impacts upon women's representation in the media more generally. Prominent media personnel and politicians are often complicit in these attacks. In fact, they too often lay the grounds for the barrage of hateful, vicious, dangerous, and life-threatening attacks that follow. What is more, the severity, and seriousness of this violence often gets downplayed by the same actors that tend to encourage it.*

The SR on violence against women has also reported numerous cases of women journalists being raped while doing their jobs and facing regular threats of rape and sexual violence – including from State officials (e.g. during arbitrary detention and police interrogation).<sup>13</sup> Reporters Without Borders also recently [drew attention](#) to women journalists being subjected to sexual violence in prison.

Worldwide, women journalists are also targeted and killed. According to [UNESCO](#), in 2012, women accounted for 4% of the 119 media workers killed; in 2021 this had increased to 10% of the 55 victims reported that year.<sup>14</sup> Recent high-profile cases include the assassination of [Daphne Caruana Galizia](#) in Malta (2017), the killings of [Mursal Wahidi](#), [Sadia Sadat](#), [Shahnaz Raofi](#), and [Mina Khair](#) in Afghanistan (2021), and the murder of [María de Lourdes Maldonado López](#) in Mexico (2022).

## Online abuse and harassment

A wealth of research and expert reports highlight the extent, and chilling effects, of online harassment and abuse against women journalists.<sup>15</sup> A 2021 [joint global study](#) by UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), for example, found that 73% of women journalists had faced online violence, 25% of which involved physical threats (including death and rape threats), while 20% reported that offline physical attacks were related to the online violence. Some women experienced PTSD-like symptoms from the online abuse, with 26% reporting mental health issues, while 11% had to miss work due to security concerns. Concerningly, as a result of online violence, 38% of women reported self-censoring or making themselves less visible, 4% quit their jobs, and 2% left journalism altogether.

According to the Karisma Foundation, online attacks against women media workers are often sexualised, make frequent references to personal and family relationships, and insult women's physical appearance and intellectual capability. Intimidation is rarely levelled at a woman's actual ideas or arguments; more commonly, it is perpetrated because she is a woman who thinks for herself and speaks out. *The Guardian* commissioned research into 70 million comments its users posted on its website between 2006 and 2016, and found that articles written by women attracted the most abusive and dismissive trolling; of the 10 journalists who received the most abuse, eight were women (the remaining two were black men).<sup>16</sup>

As ARTICLE 19 has repeatedly highlighted, online abuse and harassment is a freedom of expression issue that silences, threatens, and stigmatises women journalists. Journalists' associations are increasingly recognising the various manifestations of online harassment and their impacts as an occupational health and safety issue for women journalists, given the impact on their mental and physical health. All of the studies surveyed for this report emphasise the adverse physical and psychological impact of such abuse. IWMF and TrollBusters, for example, found that at least one-third of interviewees had experienced physical, mental, and emotional trauma following harassment. A study by International Media Support found that one-third of the 597 women journalists who responded had considered leaving the profession, while over one-third avoided reporting on stories that could put them at risk.<sup>17</sup> For freelancers, the situation is even more difficult – and they feel even more unsafe.

Stories that put women journalists at particular risk include those about feminist and gender issues, as the SR on violence against women has noted.<sup>18</sup> In the aforementioned *Guardian* study, articles about feminism or rape attracted the highest levels of comments that were blocked for violating *The Guardian's* community standards and participation guidelines.

There are also attempts to silence women who advocate for sexual and reproductive rights, protest against the policing of violence against women, or call for State accountability on violence against women. For example in, 2020, the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, Pedro Vaca Villarreal, expressed concern over reports that the Carabineros police department in Chile had filed a criminal lawsuit in relation to the feminist collective Las Tesis for 'threats, attacks on the authority and incitement to violence against the police' – all for performing a song about police failures to investigate gender-based violence. The police officers called for a criminal investigation into the protest organisers for the chant 'A rapist in your path', which the Special Rapporteur has described as 'an emblematic expressive way of condemning gender violence in different parts of the region'. His statement of concern concludes that expression of protest against gender violence by human rights defenders, artists, and women's groups, which have expanded because of online protest, have been of great value in raising awareness of the persistence of a problem that prevents women enjoying their right to a life free of violence. This is just one example of how communicators and those protesting for greater equality face repression and restrictions on their speech.

Given that contemporary journalism requires an online presence – and, indeed, a journalist’s social media presence is often a measurement for employment and promotion in media organisations – online harassment and abuse against women journalists is a huge problem. It affects their ability to do their job and progress in their careers, and undermines their ability to contribute to public debate.<sup>19</sup> It is also – as ARTICLE 19 [has argued](#) – a freedom of expression issue. Women’s right to freedom of expression requires them to be equally able to share their ideas and opinions – without censorship or fear of retaliation, which can drive them offline and out of public debate. Restriction of women journalists’ expression online often has a similar impact to offline attacks – and, indeed, is often accompanied by them – and must be taken seriously as a freedom of expression concern. As the SR on freedom of expression has stated, attacks on women journalists, and the ‘gendered censorship’ that results, constitute ‘a gendered attack on media freedom’.<sup>20</sup>

### **All women do not face the same risks**

Women who are from minority groups are at even greater risk. In 2019, an International Press Institute (IPI) study of 45 newsrooms found that journalists from these groups, or from communities at risk of marginalisation, ‘were not only more often targeted online but [that] the attacks experienced were particularly malicious and often highly sexualised’.<sup>21</sup> In 2021, [UNESCO](#) also found that ‘Black, Indigenous, Jewish, Arab and lesbian women journalists ... experienced both the highest rates and most severe impacts of online violence’.

This demonstrates the chilling impacts of the intersections between racism, religious bigotry, sectarianism, and homophobia (among other forms of discrimination). Importantly, these various oppressions are not discrete; they are overlapping and simultaneous, and it is the combination of them that increases the risks that women journalists experience. This has been [explained](#) in the context of the Inter-American system in relation to the experiences of indigenous women journalists:

*In the particular case of indigenous women journalists, the risk of experiencing violence as a result of their work may increase due to the combination of structural patterns affecting community media; intersectional discrimination against indigenous women; and the high public profile they may acquire in the defense of the rights of indigenous peoples and/or the rights of women in their territories. The combination of these factors often exposes indigenous women journalists to a greater risk of stigmatisation and persecution in certain contexts, whether by State, or non-state actors.*

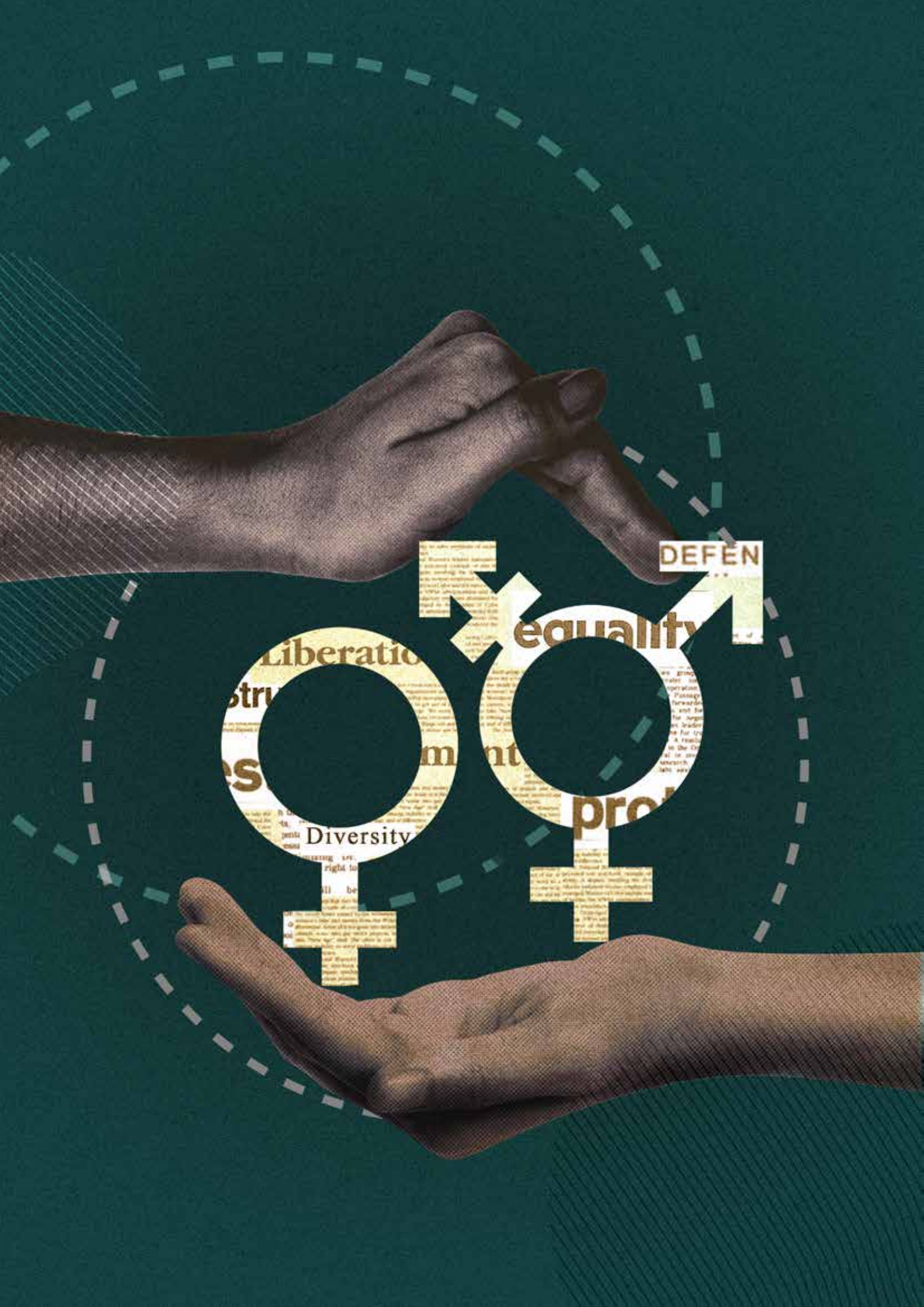
It is important also to highlight, however, that these intersecting identities are also the sources of struggle, power, and storytelling. Journalism from women journalists in these peripheries is an important source of information and knowledge:

*We cover basically issues related to black, underprivileged women. One of our goals at Nós, Mulheres da Periferia is to write articles, tell stories, analyse information, and create overviews for Brazil and the world. We want to debunk the myth that women from underprivileged communities should only talk about where they come from. We want to show everyone the women from these communities have an opinion about the world. Thus, we talk about the most diverse topics, from politics to zodiac signs. We're trying to bring people closer together in any way we can. We're trying to bring black, underprivileged women closer together in any way we can. We describe our style of journalism as memory-based journalism, as we came to understand the importance of having records of what these women went through. In Brazil, our memories were never recorded, historically speaking, neither through texts, or videos nor through podcasts. So we're telling our stories or we're talking about what is happening in Brazil and in the world from our point of view as members of these underprivileged communities.*

– Jessica Moreira  
Co-Director, Nós, Mulheres da Periferia (Brazil)

This is why – as expressed above and explored in the next chapter – our research takes an intersectional feminist approach, enabling us 'to understand the depths of the inequalities and the relationships among them in any given context'.







## 4. Why feminist approaches to the safety of journalists?

We are inspired by bell hooks and others who have invited us all to participate fully in the feminist movement and to realise how we all benefit from it. Feminism, as she says, is for everybody. She defined feminism as follows: ‘Simply put, feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.’<sup>22</sup> Feminism includes a broad spectrum of feminisms, but at its core it centres on equality and the need for transformative change.

The feminist approach envisioned in this report is inclusive, in that it includes all women. This project embraces the concept of ‘intersectionality’, which recognises that women’s lived experiences are shaped by interlocking structural factors that affect the discrimination and violence they may face.<sup>23</sup> Taking an intersectional feminist approach means adopting a lens that allows us to see how journalists and commentators are placed at risk due to their race, class, sexual orientation, migrant status, age, disability, and/or indigenous or other status. Intersectional feminism is about not only the outcome but also the process. If the result we want is transformative equality and journalistic freedom, then intersectional feminism also asks hard questions about how we get there. An intersectional feminist approach also allows us to think of recommendations for change that are not only grounded in the realities of women’s lives but also ‘attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity and struggle, as well as to the micropolitics of global economics and political systems and processes’.<sup>24</sup> This feminist lens thus takes us beyond women journalists’ individual experiences and draws out the systems that make women vulnerable to sexual harassment, violence, and/or discrimination.

We asked our participants how a feminist approach could address systematic inequality and discrimination against women journalists and strengthen safety standards in public policy, legislation, and practice. Their responses emphasised that a feminist approach is necessary to:

- rectify unequal power relations within institutions;
- recognise the embodied nature of violations of freedom of expression;
- improve working conditions for women journalists;
- ensure newsrooms are safe for women; and
- address the specific forms of violence that women journalists experience.

This chapter gives a flavour of what a feminist approach to the safety of journalists means to our participants. This data comes from the roundtables and the interviews we carried out in 2021.

## **'Gender-sensitive' or feminist?**

Numerous reports and UN resolutions call for gender-sensitive approaches and have made visible the need to understand the different struggles women face due to their gender in the field of newsgathering and reporting.<sup>25</sup> In 2017, the UNGA passed a resolution on the safety of journalists, which re-affirmed the need for a gender-sensitive approach and acknowledged that violence takes place online as well as offline. [Resolution 72/175](#) (2017) emphasised the need to take measures to effectively tackle 'gender-based discrimination, including intimidation, harassment and violence offline and online' and 'inequality and gender-based stereotypes', 'to enable women to enter and remain in journalism on equal terms with men while ensuring their greatest possible safety', and 'to ensure that the experiences and concerns of women journalists are effectively addressed and gender stereotypes in the media are adequately tackled'. In 2020, [Human Rights Council Resolution 45/18](#) recognised the importance of 'taking a gender-responsive approach when considering measures to address the safety of journalists, including in the online sphere'. Similarly, the 2012 [UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists](#) recognised the need for a 'gender-sensitive approach', and, following a five-year revision of the Plan, the 2017 [outcome document](#) referred to the need for 'gender mainstreaming' in initiatives to address violence against women journalists. The need to take action to prevent and protect against online violence towards women, including women journalists, has since been highlighted in a number of resolutions.<sup>26</sup>

But despite these calls, a gender-sensitive – or even gender-responsive – approach is yet to be implemented. While many reports call for such an approach, this report takes a feminist approach, which goes beyond calling for gender sensitivity and ensures an analysis of the underlying structures of violence, as well as the opportunities such feminist insights bring. A feminist approach in research includes shining a spotlight to seek out patriarchy<sup>27</sup> in our households, laws, and policies.

For some people we interviewed, a key difference between a gender-sensitive approach, which highlights the gendered differentials in treatment, and a feminist approach is that the latter seeks to address social injustice, inequalities, and violence against all women and girls. In other words, feminist approaches are transformative.

Many journalists and experts explained to us that a feminist approach to journalism meant challenging structural discrimination and historical injustices:

*From my point of view, in our experience with CIMAC, CIMAC was born a feminist organisation because the people running CIMAC are all feminists. We advocate for the feminist movement. This means that women's human rights are always at the core of everything we do. That is how it all starts. Being women-centred for the work we do for women has an impact on everything else. It means recognising the huge gender inequalities we've been experiencing,*

*which were built throughout history, and the system behind it. The media and the news outlets are a part of this system. Thus, women do not make the news, are not seen as a source of information, and do not have access to media outlets. To understand the historical gender inequality and discrimination on which this system was built is key to build a feminist approach. But you can't just become a feminist overnight. It's about your political beliefs. And allow me to say that oftentimes people discuss how to turn feminism into a tool without any actual commitment to feminism, to use it for other purposes.*

– Lucía Lagunes Huertas

Director of Comunicación e Información de la Mujer (CIMAC) (Women's Communication and Information Service), Mexico

Others told us that a feminist approach seeks to uncover how misogyny operates – inside and outside the newsroom – and to move beyond mere 'gender awareness' to proactively creating and implementing changes:

*A feminist approach to the safety of women journalists requires looking into and addressing the structural and historical obstacles women face [with regard] to access to justice. Entrenched gender stereotypes and social norms, along with discriminatory practices still operate across the justice system. An approach to women journalists' right to access to justice needs to look at these factors and beyond law and practice, in a way that assesses not only the lack of access to justice but the impact of how the justice system operates.*

– Paulina Gutiérrez

Legal Project Officer, ARTICLE 19

For this reason, a feminist approach creates potential:

*I think bringing the feminist approaches is crucial to this kind of work. First, feminism really calls you to step back and really question what is the data that I'm using to get to this conclusion, what are the protocols that I'm using to monitor these violations, and I think that this kind of thinking is really crucial to the monitoring of violations against women journalists. And it can really, deeply affect the kinds of advocacy and policy demands in relation to changes in the policies and the protective and preventive measures that are put in place to avoid violence against women journalists. It also brings to the table the recognition that any specific violation that a woman suffers in the exercise of journalism has to be assessed and analysed as part of a bigger, larger context of structural discrimination and inequality. You cannot analyse that in isolation, and this is something also that feminists could bring to the work on the safety of journalists.*

– Paula Martins

Policy Advocacy Lead, Association for Progressive Communications

For other participants, current 'gender-sensitive' standards on the protection of journalists are, in fact, feminist, but are not explicitly labelled as such because of negative attitudes towards the term 'feminism':

*Feminism is still a dirty word – from the newsroom floor through to the halls of the UN, I've witnessed attempts to delegitimise feminist perspectives*

– Julie Posetti

Deputy Vice President and Global Director of Research, ICFJ, Washington DC, USA

One of the reactions which the participants brought to light was a discomfort or caution about the term 'feminism' with respect to the safety of journalists:

*Something that I encounter a lot in the work that I do in terms of gender, sexuality, and intersectionality more broadly is that feminism is this big negative word; it is in fact this big taboo. There are three types of reaction that I see a lot in my work. One is this fear of erasure of men. There's this fear that if we are going to adopt a feminist approach to work, we're going to exclude other parts of the population, and that's men. A second reaction I often get is a tendency for surprise, a tendency for people to think: "No, we're equal, and there's no need for special rights, there's no need for unique rights for certain parts of the population." And a final one is a fear of community formation. I come from France, where this comes up a lot, as in other national contexts. It can be summarised as the fear that community building is going to erode the foundations of society and the national identity. I believe that these reactions reveal deeply ingrained systemic patriarchy and forms of privilege attached to it.*

– Simon Petitjean

Senior Project Officer, Gender and Sexuality, ARTICLE 19

## An intersectional approach

Participants also emphasised the need for an intersectional approach to the safety of women journalists; that is, an approach that recognises how women's lived experiences are shaped by interlocking structural factors:<sup>28</sup>

*We need to think about women in the light of intersectionality with the other types of violence committed against us. We live in a world of structural racism. Being a black female journalist takes a lot of resilience in order for us to keep on creating things and voicing our opinions, because we've rarely had the chance to do that in our history. But we're trying to foster this at Nós, Mulheres da Periferia.*

– Jessica Moreira

An intersectional approach also reflects the fact that, far from being a monolithic movement, feminism is a broad church; there are African feminisms, *feminismos territoriales*, and pan-Asian feminist solidarity movements, in addition to the Western feminist voices that tend to dominate. As UN Women's recent Feminist plan for sustainability and social justice notes, there is a 'plurality of voices within progressive feminist movements, including Global South, Black and Indigenous activists who have long rejected the portrayal of the experi-

ences of Global North, white, class-privileged women as universal'. Such an approach was vital to our research participants:

*And, finally, the issue of intersectionality. I actually think there is no one feminism, there are many feminisms, and this idea that there are different impacts on different individuals based on gender and sexual identity, this is something that is also crucial to frame the work that we do, the calls that we put on forward to protect this community.*

– Paula Martins

*When we speak about feminism, we need to give it a qualifier. People tend to be stuck in second-wave feminism, which is extremely white. It's extremely privileged and is extremely academic. So if we do not unpack the notion of feminism and bring it into the barrio, if you don't bring a bit of spice into the kitchen, then I don't think the question ['What is a feminist approach to the safety of journalists and why is it important?'] can even be asked. But if we are building a feminism where you and I and everybody else has a space where we can express ourselves in dignity and diversity and equality and respect, then yes.*

– Dr Luisa Ortiz Pérez  
Executive Director, Vita-Activa.org

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, our research is informed by an intersectional feminist approach, which identifies how different forms of inequality, discrimination, and oppression, including legacies like colonialism, operate simultaneously. It allows us to see how journalists and communicators are at risk due to their race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, migrant status, age, disability, and other factors – and, crucially, to think of solutions. And it takes us beyond women journalists' individual experiences to illuminate the systems that place them in a situation of vulnerability when they engage in journalistic activities.

## Sexism in the workplace

Many participants expressed concern at current levels of understanding of gender issues within newsrooms, and emphasised that men colleagues' attitudes, as well as the culture in newsrooms, need to change:

*I believe that there is a need for change of mindsets in newsrooms. There is still sort of patriarchy in the way gender issues are approached and the way violence is covered in the news, especially violence against women. There are loads of clichés, there are loads of stereotypes and this also conveys a wrong impression on how violence against women and the safety of women should be handled.*

– Pamela Morinière  
Head of Campaigns and Communication, Gender Officer, IFJ

Many participants also felt that a feminist approach to the protection of journalists should build upon and learn from the experiences of the feminist movement, and emphasised how the 'personal is political'. As Denise Dora, Director of ARTICLE 19 Brazil and South America, noted:



*Protection of women journalists is not only when they are in the set, when they are doing their job, but how the connections between their private and work lives would be combined in a more protective way. Also, we've seen that there are differences between the situation of young journalists that are working at the beginning of their career and are taking some risks, vis-à-vis journalists who are in more mainstream media outlets with lots of other kinds of protections, even from the companies. So what I believe we are trying to do is to understand this different approach ... but also learning from the previous experience of the feminist movement and in other fields.*

In other words, a feminist approach to the protection of women journalists would consider their safety not only on the job but also on their way to work, in their newsrooms, and how safety concerns can involve aspects of their private lives.

Claudia Padovani, an academic based in Italy, explained that, based on [her research](#), most traditional media organisations do not adopt gender mainstreaming and do not have gender equality or sexual harassment policies in place – but even when they do, these policies are not implemented (a concern shared by Anne Koch from the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN)). Padovani called for further research on monitoring and implementation “to make sure that what is declared as a feminist policy actually responds to that ambition”, as well as better education for future journalists and media professionals.

Sara Hossain, a leading barrister practising in the Supreme Court of Bangladesh, noted that workplaces should be inclusive and respectful of everyone, across lines of gender, community, religion, race, and disability. She also drew attention to the important role of citizen journalists, and the need to ensure that social change is not only a top-down process but also bottom-up. In this way, a feminist approach attends not only to working conditions for women journalists – inside and outside the newsroom – but also broader social hierarchies, and the need to create spaces of solidarity. Many participants also noted the importance of talking not only about women journalists but also communications workers more generally.

## **A feminist approach to press freedom**

Some participants thought that the adoption of a feminist approach should not be limited to the protection and safety of journalists, but should be expanded to freedom of expression more broadly. They noted how, for example, data on violations against journalists often excludes women's lack of press freedom.

*In many of our country contexts, journalists, including mainstream and well-established ones, face arrest and threats of prosecution, including for criminal defamation, sedition, and digital security offences. A feminist approach is one that is informed by politics and questioning abuse of power and authoritarianism, not only focused on the individual.*

– Sara Hossain

Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

Participants wanted to ensure that a feminist approach would look at the many ways in which women are kept from exercising their freedom of expression:

*We tend to see the safety issues like harassment and digital safety and assault as women's issues, because these are issues that women disproportionately face, but all journalists face those issues, and if we want to change how we view the safety of journalists, we should think about how we prioritise different safety issues. I think that traditionally people tend to see physical violence or the violence that journalists face when they're reporting on war as more important safety issues than digital safety or harassment. When we start to take a more holistic view of safety and prioritise digital, mental health, and harassment on an equal footing as all of these other traditional safety issues, we can change the culture around the safety of journalists. Ultimately, it will make everyone more safe, regardless of their gender or their status as an LGBTQI+ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, and intersex] journalist, or as a journalist who's from a marginalised community. I also want to make sure that when we have this conversation, we aren't victimising women, because there are safety issues that women disproportionately face, but there's a lot of reporting contexts in which being a woman can make you safer than being a man ... [It's] this complex, identity-based, holistic safety approach that I think we should be focusing on.*

– Maria Alejandra Silva Ortega  
Senior Program Coordinator, IWMF

Maria's final point in the above quote echoes the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which has explained that the 'categorization of women and girls as passive "vulnerable groups" in need of protection ... is a negative gender stereotype'.<sup>29</sup> CEDAW has made it clear that reducing women to their vulnerability fails to recognise the important contributions women make to designing and participating in initiatives that advance substantive gender equality and women's empowerment.

## **The risks to feminist journalists**

Finally, it is important to note that – as mentioned in the previous chapter – feminist journalists are frequently the subject of attacks, from online harassment to stalking and intrusion into their private lives. Our research found that feminist journalists or those who spoke out about feminist or women's rights issues often faced abuse or security challenges specifically because they worked on these issues.<sup>30</sup> This is unsurprising given that, as this chapter has shown, feminist politics often challenges the status quo and calls out power imbalances within society and the media sphere.

At the same time, participants reminded us of the vital contributions that feminist journalists make to free speech, democracy, and creating a more equal world – as did the feminist practices our research discovered, which we will now explore.



**SPEAK**

**Community**

**Accountability**

**Politics**

**Women**

**SOLIDARITY**

**Leadership**

**BE HEARD**

# 5. Feminist practices: Findings and lessons learned

The following sections explore the findings and lessons learned from the feminist practices our research uncovered. These findings are drawn from the experiences, knowledge, and expertise of the individuals who we interviewed, and from the two roundtables that took place in 2021. Some of the findings, particularly in relation to accountability, are also drawn from a combination of desk research and a legal analysis of international jurisprudence on the protection of journalists.

We have divided our findings into three subchapters:

- Women taking leadership over their own safety;
- Feminist solidarity practices; and
- Tackling impunity and seeking accountability.

These reflect the three main themes that emerged from our analysis of the interviews and roundtable transcripts.

## **Women taking leadership over their own safety**

One of the major themes and priorities that emerged from the roundtables and interviews was the importance of providing time and space for women journalists to contribute to, create, and implement their own safety mechanisms. As explained further below, the protection of journalists must start by ensuring that all women's lived realities and safety issues are taken into account. This means that the types of violence and threats women journalists face are recognised, monitored, and taken seriously, and ensuring that women journalists are participants and leaders in the development of safety and protection protocols.

## **Recognise the forms of violence that disproportionately affect women**

Many research participants were concerned that current safety measures fail to centre the experiences of women journalists and instead devalue or minimise the differentiated forms and impacts of violence they face. Many also drew attention to the hierarchies of violence that are monitored and measured, which



do not adequately capture the concerns of women journalists; for example, some monitoring mechanisms may take death threats into account but fail to understand the significance of gender-based abuse. ARTICLE 19 has initiated this effort by creating a [guideline](#) to document violence against women journalists. The very specific threats women journalists face, and the targeting of their intimate partners and children, was a particular concern:

*Women are silenced before they are murdered. Failing to understand how violence has different impacts on women journalists and men journalists, or even LGBTQI+ journalists, means that protection policies overlook the specific protections that women journalists need. Because their needs go beyond physical protection to prevent a murder. Women are subject to psychological violence and unequal treatment in the newsroom. This starts in the newsrooms, as you were saying at the beginning of our conversation. Sometimes, initiatives and policies only look at the last stages of violence to protect journalists from extreme situations like murders or kidnappings, something more severe, but they ignore all these other expressions of violence that happen first and whose impact is to silence women. I think we need to reflect about this first. Without looking at all the diversity and all the inequality affecting women communicators and journalists, as not all of them are journalists, we won't be able to respond to this violence efficiently. We may even save the lives of women journalists in the future, but they'll have been victims who have been silenced much earlier than that because of the sexist world we live in.*

– Bia Barbosa

Project Coordinator, Reporters Without Borders

Participants drew attention to the issue of online safety for women journalists and communicators again and again:

*We should also have safety protocols for online attacks against women journalists. Right now, they are basically facing these attacks on their own, without any kind of technical guidance, help from their employers, or support from organisations. These groups don't believe that this matters, and they even believe that it's impossible for online violence to transfer to the 'real world' or to the offline world. They don't even deploy security measures like two-factor authentication or protections against password changes, or anything related to digital security.*

– Flavia Borja

Paraguayan journalist

Participants explained that, as a first step, it is necessary to document and monitor this violence from a feminist perspective, placing women's experiences, needs, and rights at the centre and moving outwards – in contrast to documentation and monitoring models that do not take into account women's specific realities (such as the safety of their newsrooms) or do not make visible the invisible (such as women journalists not being assigned to certain topics so as to avoid situations that are only risky because they are women). Participants explained that these latter modes failed to adequately capture women journalists' experiences of protection issues.<sup>31</sup>



## Adopt an intersectional and holistic approach to protection

An intersectional feminist approach seeks to go beyond an ‘add women and stir’ approach.<sup>32</sup> The current approach to protection mechanisms is to add some elements of gender specificity into existing protection trainings or risk assessments. This approach is insufficient when dealing with the lived realities of differently situated women journalists.<sup>33</sup>

*As some of you know, we’ve been doing work on the safety of women journalists for 30 years and we have seen a real sea change in the past probably five or six years when we’ve really delved into providing security training around the world and really noticing how non-intersectional this training has been in its delivery. So for the past five years we’ve been working to actually train more female journalists to be able to deliver safety training and also working on providing intersectional digital security training.*

– Elisa Lees Muñoz  
Executive Director, IWMF

Some participants told us that some State-led protection trainings are currently provided by the military, which approaches the issue of protection from a militarised and patriarchal perspective. An intersectional feminist approach challenges us to think about how we might re-design such spaces and training exercises, particularly given the long history of feminist activism against militarised notions of security. The answer is not to ensure that women military personnel provide the training; this would constitute an ‘add women and stir’ approach, maintaining a deeply patriarchal militaristic system, and would not result in transformative change. Taking an intersectional feminist approach requires us to be more creative and to step beyond the status quo or cookie-cutter mechanisms that envision the ‘universal being of reference’ to be an able-bodied, heterosexual, cis man without caring responsibilities.

*All protection reports and guides with a feminist approach should include that every person and every institution offering protection services should be trained on the foundations of masculinity, the privileges that they shouldn’t be multiplying, and how not to be oppressive when offering protection to people.*

– Paula Saucedo  
Head of Protection, ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America

*The safety and security training for journalists covering war and conflict is essential, but for watchdog journalists in particular, we need more training in day-to-day protection in the cities, on routine beats, and during investigations. We need security tools that are easy to use. We need to know we’re being surveilled and targeted – physically, digitally, legally. Women in particular need help in handling the tsunami of online sexist attacks and harassment, a major threat to the safety and security of women journalists and what one called “low-intense, constant warfare”.*

– Anne Koch  
Program Director, GIJN

Participants raised again and again the importance of gaining trust by providing feminist safe spaces for women to be able to discuss their security issues together and to take leadership over their own safety. Providing childcare cover to attend a masculinised and militarised security training is not the solution.

### Case study: Nepal – the case of Rupa Sunar

In the last week of June 2021, 24-year-old journalist Rupa Sunar approached a landlady in Kathmandu to rent a room. According to Sunar, she was initially told the room was available, until she was asked about her caste. Sunar alleges that, when she disclosed that she was a Dalit woman, she was told the room was actually unavailable.

Sunar decided to go public about her experience in an online video, which went viral. She then started to receive hundreds of threats – including rape and death threats – and verbal abuse on social media. She explained:

“Being a person from a Dalit community in Nepal is tough, and when you are a woman and in a challenging profession, it’s severely challenging.”

She noted that women journalists in Nepal who are harassed sometimes go offline and are silenced as a strategy for dealing with online abuse.

Sunar, however, has chosen a different path. She reads all the comments and reports the abuse to the Cyber Crimes Bureau of the Nepal Police. She said that, while she has reached out for support from journalists’ associations and organisations working on journalists’ safety, their responses to her have not been encouraging, on the basis that the online abuse relates to a private matter. Instead, Sunar has found support from Dalit rights and human rights organisations.

The landlady’s refusal to rent a room to Sunar highlights how the discrimination women journalists face in their personal lives also affects their professional lives – and, therefore, their ability to perform their journalistic work safely.

### Allow women journalists to design their own safety mechanisms

Participants explained how safety protocols and protective measures often fail to consider women’s specific needs and concerns. They suggested that women journalists should be given leadership over how the safety mechanisms are crafted, and consent to the implementation of any such mechanisms and protocols, given the effects they have on their personal, professional, and psychological experiences.

*Women should not be negotiating for their space within their place of work. The time for responses designed by men, for men is over; it is time women took the lead in initiating action involving institutional systems with sound redressal mechanisms.*

– Dilrukshi Handunetti

Journalist and administrator of [South Asian Women in Media](#), Sri Lanka

For the participants, a feminist approach with an emphasis on social justice, equality, and fairness means that men in positions of power – within intergovernmental organisations or States, for example – should not ultimately

get to determine what is said, how it is said, and by whom it is said in the context of devising strategies, recommendations, and resolutions supposedly designed to protect women journalists.

*We need to get from a position where we have an awareness of gender and to get to one that actively empowers women to take a leadership role in how the safety of women journalists is to be implemented.*

– Julie Posetti

This means ensuring women's leadership in the design, review, and approval of standards and protection mechanisms – at international, regional, and local levels. Women should not be told how to protect themselves, but rather should co-create knowledge based on their own experiences of the violence and continuous barriers that stop them from carrying out their journalistic activities.

Many participants underlined the importance of collaborating with women journalists when designing any safety or protection mechanisms, as well as obtaining consent and avoiding practices that make them relive the experiences they struggle with as a result of being women journalists:

*For a feminist approach, I believe it's crucial to underscore the idea of consent, by women, regarding the safety measures implemented for them, meaning you can't force them to accept a safety protocol they'd have to comply with in order to be journalists. There'll be these safety tools, measures, and tactics, but women must consent to them. We must respect all women as individuals. Finally, when deploying safety measures, we need to be careful not to hurt these women again, not to subject them again to the violence they've been through. We don't want this help to add to the trauma of the things they've already experienced.*

– Bia Barbosa

Feminist organisations and movements have developed protection principles and approaches that we can learn and draw from. These principles include allowing women journalists to be active agents in designing their own safety mechanisms and challenging the broader structures that create a hostile environment for women who speak online and offline. ARTICLE 19 Mexico and Central America told us they achieved this by taking women journalists to the beach for rest and respite – not only from their jobs but also from the unpaid labour activities in their homes. The creation of this space allowed the women journalists to build trust to share experiences and tips with each other, and the group went on to become an informal network. As such, creating and tailoring a specific space enabled a network of trust to develop, which then allowed the women journalists to implement and design their own safety mechanisms.

These examples show the importance of considering feminist spaces, time, and care as part of the move towards transformative change. These changes have to occur both inside and outside of the newsroom. Working to ensure women's effective participation has to be one of the first steps towards this feminist approach.

## Share accessible resources on prevention and protection

*[We need] more resources for women journalists not only to improve their protection but also navigate the complex and risky political terrain they are in.*

– Shreen Saroor

Co-founder, Women's Action Network

Participants raised the issue of resources, referring to both monetary remuneration for work done and knowledge-sharing and protection resources.

First, there is the issue of unequal pay. A [recent study](#) in Nepal found that women journalists' primary concerns are recruitment, work assignments, promotion, the contract system, job insecurity, and sexual harassment in the workplace. The study also found that women journalists in Nepal were often paid less than men on the basis that 'they were single' and did not need to support a family. The Centre for Investigative Journalism has found that women journalists lack access to safety equipment, transport for news reporting, separate toilets, and childcare facilities.<sup>34</sup>

A recommendation that feminist journalists made again and again was on the importance of sharing feminist methodologies and resources, as well as more general information on issues from digital security (such as how to store passwords and ensure two-factor authentication for social media) to labour rights and maternity rights.

A number of tools have been developed to help journalists, including the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) [Safety of female journalists online resource guide](#), Women in News's [tools for managing sexual harassment](#) (including a toolkit and an independent training tool), and the IPI's [tools to manage online harassment](#). The OHCHR, together with UN Women and in partnership with UNESCO, created a [10-month webinar series](#) to enhance the protection of women journalists and women's rights and to build capacity in the context of shrinking democratic space in Asia. This initiative created online spaces enabling the exchange of experiences and the enhancement of self-protection assessments, including in the area of cybersecurity, and it [gathered together](#) 41 journalists and media workers from 15 countries in Asia. It has also led to the establishment of a community of practice and deepened partnerships, including with 11 INGOs, regional intergovernmental organisations, academia, and national human rights and gender institutions and commissions working in the region with and for women journalists.

Alongside websites, reports, and capacity trainings, specific organisations – such as TrollBusters, Vita-Activa.org, and the Digital Rights Foundation – have been set up to provide support to journalists and communicators. In 2014, the award-winning columnist and author Dr Michelle Ferrier founded TrollBusters, which provides first-response assistance to women facing online abuse and other 'troll behaviour'. Dr Ferrier has explained that the organisation seeks "to move the journalist from being the story, to being able to tell stories". The organisation helps journalists with free lessons on digital hygiene and how to protect oneself, conducts training on digital security, and publishes a monthly magazine online, [Toxic Avenger](#). It tailors its approach specifically to [freelancers](#) and independent journalists – categories in which women often find themselves (as discussed earlier).

[Vita-Activa.org](#) similarly provides support and strategic solutions for all women and LGBTQI+ journalists; gender, land, and labour rights activists; and freedom of expression defenders. The organisation provides a number of resources online, which centre self-care in resistance (*autocuidados en resistencia*) and 'cyber security against digital violence'. Such organisations respond to the urgent problem of online abuse, harassment, and misogyny that women journalists face for carrying out their work. For example, Vita-Activa.org has 12 trained responders who work around the clock responding to messages they receive via Signal or Telegram. They start by simply asking the question: "How are you?"

Many participants drew attention to the need for responses and support for women journalists following physical threats and online abuse to be trauma informed, and for emergency helplines to ensure women journalists have someone to talk to when going through gendered online attacks.

*As feminists and cyber feminists, we believe that the digital body needs to be taken care of, before any digital security or any police or any form of legal solution, or involving the police should be included. There is a real importance for bipoc [black, indigenous, and people of colour], as well as genderqueer, as well as Global South folks to recognise the existence of a digital citizenship, digital rights, and digital tools that could help us engage with the patriarchy. Cyber feminism also recognises the necessity of intersectionality, as well as ... different forms of empathy and a different form of consciousness. In the recognition that the digital body is a body that feels, is a body that is abused, there's a sub-body that is in constant transformation and liberation. And also because we're such fans of Donna Haraway!*

– Dr Luisa Ortiz Pérez

These organisations (and [others](#)) are carrying out vital work responding to the real-life problems and dangers that women journalists face daily.





**Sisters**  
common voice

**WOMEN'S  
LIBERATION**

**CARE**

**ADVANCE**

**solidarity**



## Feminist solidarity practices

The second major theme and finding relates to how feminist journalists and communicators from around the world have been working on protection and safety issues through the building of networks. In this section, we gather some examples of both long-standing and more recent networks that seek to develop women journalists' rights within media companies and to influence communications more generally on topics such as gender-based violence and gender stereotyping.

### Case study: Brazil

With a population of over 213 million people, Brazil is the largest Latin American country – and one of the most dangerous for journalists and communicators. An ARTICLE 19 study with 46 women communicators in 2018 found that 65% suffered psychological violence at work and home, 52% had been victims of sexual harassment or sexual assault (which the data showed was a recurrent violation), and six had experienced death threats. Associação Brasileira de Jornalismo Investigativo (Abraji) (Brazilian Association of Investigative Journalists) reported that female journalists suffer the majority of online attacks, which grew by 140% in 2020 compared to the previous year.

Despite these significant challenges, feminist media and organisations in Brazil continue to produce content and create independent journalism. Some media websites include AzMina, Portal Catarinas, and Geledes Institute. There are also specific LGBTQI+ websites and organisations led by journalists and communicators, such as Põe na Roda, Louie Ponto on YouTube, and Lola Escreva.

Women journalists and communicators are also creating their own networks. In 2020, the collective *Jornalistas contra o Assédio* (Journalists Against Harassment) coordinated a Twitter action against attacks and harassment against women journalists in the professional environment, using the hashtag #MulheresJornalistasEmLuta (#WomenJournalistsInFight), which attracted more than 10,000 tweets in two hours. The collective also created a public petition calling for Twitter to be made responsible for online 'hate speech' against journalists and promoting measures to reduce it.

In 2012, representatives of the Associação Mundial de Rádios Comunitárias – Brazil (Amarc) created the *Rede de Mulheres da Amarc* (Amarc Women's Network), a network that aims to tackle harassment and gender discrimination against communicators on community radio stations, to improve their working conditions, and to strengthen the voices of women within the community. In 2018, Rede de Mulheres da Amarc and ARTICLE 19 launched a partnership campaign that showed women's lived realities and ongoing discrimination in the field. As part of the campaign, more than 40 community radio broadcasters attended workshops on technical skills, such as radio editing and producing. The main goal of the project was to develop protection strategies and strengthen freedom of expression. In a documentary called *Mulheres de Expressão* (Women of Expression), community radio broadcasters discussed their roles, violence against them, and representation in the media system.

## Networks as feminist solidarity building

The national-level research carried out in Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Nepal, Paraguay, and Sri Lanka identified the importance of support networks for journalists. These range from pop-up online solidarity initiatives on social media to counteract abuse to more established and formalised networks. Participants spoke of the importance of peer-support spaces in online spaces and social media platforms. One participant also spoke about the importance of trade unions, and journalist unions more generally, and questioned how feminism could be brought into those unions so that feminist journalists do not have to seek out their own networks.

Our research found that networks are important not only as a form of support and solidarity but also as a resource for women journalists to share protection and safety tips. This is important, since women journalists' security and safety concerns may include those within the workplace, which cannot be raised with their media organisation or employer. In other circumstances, women journalists work in precarious economic situations, meaning that they fear raising safety concerns in case they lose their jobs. As Nita Pandit of Sancharika Samuha, a forum of women journalists that trains women in the industry and aims to mainstream women's issues, explained in the context of Nepal:

*Sometimes, even journalists do not want to discuss such attacks with us, let alone report them, fearing that they could be victimised further for speaking out. Most of the time our efforts to get the victims to make formal complaints lead to nowhere as we don't have a dedicated mechanism to address this issue and the victims tend to give up.*

We heard of informal networks set up not only among women journalists themselves but also between women journalists and feminist groups to share support and survival techniques. AWID is currently creating a feminist journalist network by providing grants to 15 feminist journalists from the Global South. Lola Silva, who is coordinating the project at AWID, explained to us that, by providing funding, the project allows journalists to unleash their creativity and work together to create feminist journalism, and provides a space where they can discuss their work and challenges. It not only fosters solidarity and knowledge sharing but also creates feminist models in the newsgathering sector, changing the traditional media landscape. As such, it illustrates just what feminist journalists can do with funding and space, and in solidarity.

In response to demand following a discussion at their Hamburg conference in 2017 about the struggles women journalists faced, GIJN created another international network. Gabriela Manuli, Deputy Director of GIJN, explained that they created this [women's group](#) as an informal safe space where women can share their experiences, strategise, and provide advice and support to each other, including advice on careers, security, and protection. Manuli emphasised the importance of creating space "to nurture networks and nurture a sense of community; to get to know each other and take care of ourselves and each other".

There are now examples of feminist networks or networks of women journalists in many countries around the world. In Chile, the [Red de Periodistas y Comunicadoras](#)

[Feministas](#) network (Network of Feminist Journalists and Communicators) was founded in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, and is open to all who identify as women. Its main goals are to deal with topics such as violence against women communicators, sexual harassment, and gender stereotyping in media and communication, and to create its own media outlet. The network already has accounts on [Instagram](#) and on [Twitter](#).

Chile also has a second network, the *Observatorio de Género y Medios* (Gender and Media Observatory), an organisation with links to popular movements and feminist practice. Young feminists in southern Chile created the network around the same time that protests broke out in the city of Valdivia against sexual harassment. The network focuses on combating sexism in the media and the protection of women communicators, and carries out specific activities to support women, including training for women's small businesses. It has also sought to change the way in which violence against women is reported in the media:

*A few years ago, media outlets made headlines calling the murders of women crimes motivated by love, not femicide. Today that would not be possible. Quickly, Twitter and other media outlets would react.*

– Gabriela Lagos

Journalist and member of the Observatorio de Género y Medios

These networks demonstrate different feminist collectivist approaches to safety, with grassroots spaces and initiatives emerging to deal with the problem.

Paulina Gutiérrez, a legal officer at ARTICLE 19, told us about [Internet es Nuestra](#) (The Internet is Ours), a Mexico-based network set up to tackle online violence against women. The group, which began as an informal network, was established to bring free speech groups and women's rights groups together to debate and agree on common positions on online abuse and harassment. While these issues could sometimes be polarising between these communities, the network created a space for common understandings and advocacy approaches.

In Paraguay, the [Red de Mujeres Periodistas y Comunicadores del Paraguay](#) (Network of Women Journalists and Communicators Paraguay) promotes respectful media coverage in relation to women, and campaigns against sexual harassment in the media.

In Bangladesh, the [Bangladesh Nari Sangbadik Kendra](#) (A Centre for Women Journalists) was formed in 2001 and has been networking, campaigning, training, and organising women's journalists ever since. Our national-level research found that it has formulated a number of demands:



### Case study: The demands of the Bangladesh Nari Sangbadik Kendra

1. All media organisations must recruit at least 30% women in all departments.
2. Special training programmes should be arranged for women journalists. Women journalists should be given equal opportunity and, if needed, given priority in all trainings at home and abroad.
3. Women journalists must be given equal opportunity in promotion. There should not be any discrimination.
4. A special committee must be formed in all media organisations to investigate and take action against any complaint of discrimination against women.
5. Women journalists must get maternity leave according to the national law. It has to be ensured that promotions and assignments are not affected by this leave.
6. Every organisation must have women's toilets, restrooms, and breast-feeding corners.
7. Every media organisation must have day-care centres for children.
8. Every organisation must provide safe transportation for women going to and coming back from the office.
9. No discrimination should exist while recruiting women or giving them assignments, selecting their news beats, or sending them for trainings.
10. Women journalists cannot be sacked without due process.
11. To stop sexual harassment in every media organisation, and establish a sexual harassment prevention committee.
12. All organisations must have a gender policy and a code of conduct.

### Support those speaking out on feminist issues

Some participants pointed to difficulties trying to get more senior colleagues to understand the importance of a gender perspective, creating frustration and problems with being heard. One participant told us she was constantly questioned about why she was bringing up the importance of gender in relation to the safety of journalists. Participants explained how women were battling multiple levels of oppression which affected how women journalists could raise their voices when men control the media outlets – as editors, producers, and CEOs – that dominate the field.

Another problem participants identified was when those drafting, implementing, and approving legal and policy standards and internal governance at international, regional, and national levels were all powerful men, with a lack of consultation with women journalists or lack of acknowledgement of women as co-producers of knowledge or standards. Without more senior-level women in positions of power within organisations, participants feared that the violence that disproportionately affects women, and from which they need protection and support, would not be adequately recognised. One participant noted that this was due to the different ways in which speech is valued; especially when women journalists expressed their situations in emotional terms, their lived experiences of violence were seen as less legitimate

than men's. There was a lack of understanding, and women's voices and knowledge were neither valued nor incorporated into protection standards. Some participants felt that there was little space for feminist input – or even input from women.

Research participants described being hacked and receiving threatening racialised and gendered abuse online for their journalism, or for tweeting or commenting in support of other women journalists who were being attacked online. In addition to the more formal aforementioned networks, participants drew attention to how informal and online strategies are used to counter the online harassment and abuse women journalists face. As the Paraguayan journalist Flavia Borja explained to us:

*When fellow women journalists and communicators, on different occasions – especially when well-known women journalists who identify as feminists, either openly or otherwise – were the victims of massive, coordinated attacks on social media, for instance on Twitter, which is their favourite platform to attack women journalists, we decided to respond by starting a conversation to highlight the positives of these women journalists, pointing out their work, their experience, their skills, and their personalities. This strategy was used many times, and even though it does not stop the attacks against our colleagues, especially on Twitter, it's been useful, as the targeted journalists told us that these initiatives were helpful as emotional support during these times when these groups, which are usually connected to conservative political parties, are attacking. So it works as a kind of emotional support.*

Alongside this individual emotional support, online campaigns have been used to draw attention to issues such as sexual harassment in the workplace and women journalists' safety.

### Case study: Paraguay

In 2017, the Paraguayan Journalists Union launched a campaign entitled *No me acosés, respetame* (Do Not Harass Me, Respect Me) to develop awareness of sexual harassment against women journalists and create a safer environment. According to the journalist Flavia Borja, who was Secretary of Human Rights and Gender of the Sindicato de los Periodistas del Paraguay (Union of Journalists of Paraguay) at that time, women journalists are the targets of sexual harassment and inappropriate behaviour from colleagues, bosses, and sources.

The two-year campaign called for training, social mobilisation, support for those reporting abuse, better working conditions, and more plurality in media coverage. During this period, campaign participants developed and participated in major feminist movements in Paraguay. Through social media, the campaign offered information on labour rights, women's rights, and gender-based perspectives, and used the hashtag #hórama to invite women journalists to tell their stories of daily experiences of abuse, stigmatisation, harassment, and other types of violence, both within their newsrooms and from their sources.

The campaign also mobilised journalists and communicators to participate in the International Women's Day March on 8 March 2019 in Asunción, Concepción, Encarnación, Ciudad del Este, and Coronel Oviedo, when they also called a symbolic 10-minute strike in newsrooms. This action, #LasPeriodistas-Paramos (#WeWomenJournalistsStopped), drew attention to gender inequality in the media industry.

In Nepal, our research found that journalists are creating and forming peer-support groups to call out sexism online and reach out to survivors of violence and abuse. Three women journalists decided to create a peer group after they faced severe harassment on Twitter, which evolved into threatening phone calls and stalking.

“Reporting from a remote district is very challenging; my family members are in constant fear that I could be abducted, if not killed,” said Menuka Dhugana, a journalist from Karnali Province. Not ready to give up journalism yet, she and other women journalists in the region have devised their own ways of coping: “We encourage and support each other, we make all in the group feel that they are not alone.” The group encourages women journalists who face abuse or threats to report the cases, and even accompanies those who require their support to file charges.

## **Fund feminist approaches to the safety of journalists**

*We need to make sure that the funding organisations, the philanthropic organisations that are funding this work, are recognising and supporting those people who are providing direct support to journalists. And making sure that we can continue to test, deploy, and reinvent the tools that we are designing and the supports that we are designing because it is a moving target. There is no one solution to solving the before, during, and after an attack. There are multiple ways in which we need to go at this issue. We need to make sure that individual organisations are recognised in the global context and that they are getting the support they need to continue to do this work.*

– Dr Michelle Ferrier  
Founder, TrollBusters

Another major challenge participants identified was funding for feminist media and feminist support services. The civil society participants we spoke to explained that some funders see feminist best practices – such as providing funds to pay for childcare so that women journalists, who disproportionately have caring responsibilities, can attend protection trainings – as “an expensive luxury” (though other funders understand the importance of funding such services). Having a feminist perspective means understanding that providing for childcare, or ensuring women can leave their houses to attend trainings, is not reductive; rather, it meets the lived realities of many women across the world, who remain primarily responsible for childcare. Furthermore, a feminist perspective means that this funding should be extended to fathers and all caregivers. If women’s childcare needs or unpaid labour activities are not taken into account, their participation in safety trainings or spaces where protection measures are being discussed and actioned is seriously hampered.

## Feminists doing it for themselves

In some cases, feminist journalists have made the decision to leave the 'malestream' media, which men continue to dominate, and to establish their own websites, blogs, and other mediums in order to be able to report and work in a feminist way, and with other feminists. Media outlets and websites such as Volcanicas and Igualadas in Colombia and Az Minas Revista in Brazil, are examples of this approach.

For example, one of our research participants, Jessica Moreira, told us about the intersectional feminist media outlet she is a part of, Nós, Mulheres da Periferia. Writing and living in the peripheral neighbourhoods of São Paulo – the poorest areas in the city – the issues they address touch on the daily life of the periphery, what it means to be a peripheral woman, and the agendas specific to these regions, and they also debate various themes for the residents of the periphery. On their website, the group introduces themselves:

*We are women that created a website to write texts and register stories that were not found anywhere. In a country where women are on the sidelines of leadership in the media industry, 'Nós Mulheres da Periferia' is a journalistic company founded and self-managed by peripheral and black women.*

What started as a collective in 2012 became a media outlet in 2014. As Jessica explained: "Nowadays we identify ourselves with subjects such as gender, race and territory, and nobody denies to be a feminist."







## Tackling impunity and seeking accountability

### Enact protocols to combat sexual harassment in the workplace

Many participants and experts from around the world have drawn attention to the harassment and violence that women journalists face within the newsroom. For example, the Feminist Network of Journalists in Chile has highlighted that a major problem is a lack of protocols within media or journalistic companies to deal with and prevent cases of sexual harassment. Many journalists do not report harassment or mistreatment by their colleagues for fear of the consequences – including job loss.

*At this point what we have is the testimonies of colleagues who effectively showed us that they have experienced violence that they have not reported because of the impacts on their work or the risk of simply being fired. Without a doubt this reality is given. We also hope that the survey we are preparing will allow us to have systematized information on this.*

– Nataly Díaz

General Coordinator, Red de Periodistas y Comunicadoras Feministas de Chile (Network of Feminist Journalists and Communicators of Chile)

Fabiola Guttierrez, Communication Coordinator of the Red de Periodistas y Comunicadoras Feministas de Chile, has described a 'legal vacuum' in the protection of journalists in Chile. In other countries and cases, participants drew attention to the lack of protections in law and/or lack of protocols and policies within media organisations. Women were battling to have sexual harassment recognised as an issue, while at the same time fearing losing their job over reporting their colleagues for such harassment. Often, changes have come about due to the sustained advocacy of women fighting for better policies and protection mechanisms, including those within the workplace, such as sexual harassment policies. Women journalists have created informal groups online or within media houses to fight against discrimination in the workplace and to share safety tips and concerns. In some cases, these battles are against egregious violations of women's human rights, such as rape, or voyeurs filming women in the toilets. When media houses fail to have sexual harassment policies or adequate complaints mechanisms for discrimination, women have to spend inordinate amounts of their time trying to obtain justice – simply to carry out their work in an environment that respects their rights.

One participant explained that the safety risks to women journalists reporting on protests or in certain situations are well known, and that employers should ensure detailed security risk assessments are carried out so that women journalists are safe and secure. Gurchaten Sandhu, an LGBTQI+ economic and labour rights and inclusion expert at the International Labour Organization (ILO), suggested that employers ask themselves a few simple questions:

- How am I, as an employer, protecting you from the risks you face?
- Is the working environment safe?
- Is your journey to work safe for you?

Questions such as these can help ensure the risks women face are captured, taken seriously, and acted on, so that women journalists can do their work and their rights as workers are also respected. Seeing the issue as a workers' rights issue, as well as a feminist or gender issue, offers another lens through which to ensure journalists have safe working conditions. Gurchaten Sandhu also drew attention to ILO Convention 190 (2019) on violence and harassment in the workplace, which makes clear that such acts can be human rights violations. The Convention states that victims of gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work should have effective access to gender-responsive, safe, and effective complaint- and dispute-resolution mechanisms, as well as support, services, and remedies.

### **Enact guidelines and protocols to recognise women's other safety issues**

Participants also highlighted other safety concerns that women journalists face, such as reporting at night or transport issues. Women journalists sometimes find it difficult to raise these concerns in case they are removed from reporting on an issue. Other structural barriers, included contexts where women journalists make up a small proportion of the general population of journalists, mean that their safety or security needs are not prioritised – or even considered.

### **Accountability for women journalists' online safety**

*Women are entitled to living free from violence, so these companies should be held accountable, because they don't take responsibility when women are abused, so they need to be held accountable.*

– Lucía Lagunes Huertas

All of the reports reviewed for this research to date document the extent of this problem, its impact on women journalists, and the failure of social media platforms to respond to it. Our research participants suggested that tech companies are failing to tackle gendered and sexualised abuse on social media, and said it is difficult to report online abuse and harassment. Some participants felt that platforms should work to implement features that aim to mitigate online harassment and abuse, and to empower users to quickly record evidence of abusive content. PEN America has produced a [guideline](#) about what social media companies can do to empower users and to stop abuse.

ARTICLE 19's 2020 report [Online harassment and abuse against women journalists and major social media platforms](#) assesses the responses of three major social media companies – Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (Google) – to the various forms of online harassment and abuse women journalists face. Focusing on the companies' policies and practices, the report calls for social media companies to undertake a human rights and gender-discrimination impact assessment that identifies, prevents, and mitigates any negative impact of their operations on the rights to freedom of expression, privacy, participation, and non-discrimination of women and women journalists. The report also highlights that social media companies should partner with women journalists and civil society groups to develop practical, research-focused, community-led strategies and solutions to gender-based harassment and abuse.

Our research participants generally felt that journalist security training, which attempts to empower journalists with strategies to manage their own security and reduce the risk of online and offline harm, has, to date, failed to address online harassment and abuse and its impacts. Participants also noted the need for better tech tools to address online violence and its impacts – a gap and need that some groups are trying to fill. For example, GIJN recently launched a new online security tool (the [Journalism Security Assessment Tool](#)), which was adapted – with the help of experts from the [Ford Foundation's Cybersecurity Assessment Tool \(CAT\)](#) – for use by watchdog journalism groups. The tool offers an [online diagnosis](#) of an organisation's physical and cybersecurity strength and resilience, as well as recommendations on how to strengthen security and information on where to access the necessary resources. Although it does not adopt a feminist approach, Anne Koch of GIJN suggests that such tools could be further adapted to do so.

Following the impact of a [UNESCO–ICFJ global survey](#) of over 700 women journalists on online violence, ICFJ [announced](#) it had received funding from the UK government 'to work on an early warning system to help detect, predict, and ultimately prevent violence against women journalists' and to 'develop open-source digital tools to detect, monitor, and alert key responders to high-risk cases'. It is clear from this research that better tools and strategies are desperately needed to protect women journalists from online violence – and our participants called for such tools to incorporate feminist approaches.

### **International standards as a tool to tackle impunity**

Existing human rights frameworks and protections apply to women journalists, including the protection of freedom of speech, the right to life and physical security, the right to equality, and the right to be free from gender-based violence, which is now a recognised rule of customary international law.<sup>35</sup> These associated and overlapping international standards and the associated jurisprudence apply to women journalists who face the risk and reality of gender-based violence.

CEDAW explicitly highlights violence against women journalists<sup>36</sup> and acknowledges that gender-based violence can take place online, as it 'manifests in a continuum of multiple, interrelated and recurring forms, in a range of settings, from private to public, including technology-mediated settings, and in the contemporary globalized world it transcends national boundaries'.<sup>37</sup> The right to be free from gender-based violence also imposes on the State a duty to prevent and protect against violence and to investigate, prosecute, and punish those responsible.<sup>38</sup>

In June 2017, the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) adopted a resolution that expressed concern 'for the particular risks faced by women who practice journalism', such as discrimination, harassment, and sexual violence, including online.<sup>39</sup> Report after report from the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression within the OAS has documented the issue of impunity for violence against women and freedom of expression, recognising the need for gender-specific responses and the problem of silence around violence against media workers.<sup>40</sup>



The decision of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights in *Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and Interrights v Egypt* is a stark illustration of how female journalists are targeted, discriminated against on the basis of their gender, and face threats of sexual violence for being present at and reporting on events. The victims in this case were all journalists who were reporting and taking photographs at a demonstration when they were assaulted and molested.<sup>41</sup> In this case, private individuals separately attacked four women journalists, either on the orders of a police officer or as police watched on and did nothing, including sexual assault and verbal assaults, using words such as "slut" and "whore". The African Commission found that these acts against the women journalists constituted gender-based violence because of their nature (by their nature, acts directed only at women) and that the Egyptian authorities had violated the journalists' rights by engaging in and failing to protect them from this violence and failing to prosecute those responsible.<sup>42</sup> The Commission requested compensation for the journalists, and also urged the State to ratify the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

### **Lydia Cacho v Mexico**

In 2018, the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), mandated to receive individual complaints under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), issued a landmark decision recognising multiple human rights violations by Mexico after the arbitrary detention and torture of female journalist Lydia Cacho in 2005.<sup>43</sup> Cacho is a journalist, human rights defender, and founder of the Centro Integral de Atención a la Mujer (Integrated Support Centre for Women), an organisation devoted to providing protection and support for victims of sexual violence. Cacho had lived through years of harassment, threats, and exile, and all for one reason: reporting on the abuse of political power, paedophile rings, and sex trafficking.

ARTICLE 19 Mexico supported Cacho by taking her case to the HRC. Cacho brought a claim under, inter alia, Article 19 of the ICCPR on the basis that her right to freedom of expression had been violated in circumstances where she was deprived of her liberty on charges of criminal defamation.<sup>44</sup> She also argued that she was a victim of gender-based violence.

The HRC found that Cacho had been arbitrarily detained, and subjected to torture and gender-based violence in violation of Article 3 of the Covenant that requires State parties to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights, and Article 7 on the Prohibition of Torture, or Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The HRC also found that her right to freedom of expression had been violated as a result of the criminal defamation proceedings, her detention, and the treatment she suffered. It also found that Cacho was subjected to treatment that had a discriminatory purpose based on her sex, and that there was a pattern of sexual violence against women detained in Mexico – and prevailing impunity for such violations.

The HRC ordered the State of Mexico to make full reparation and to provide Cacho with an effective remedy, including conducting a full investigation into the complaints, punishing those found guilty of the violations, and providing her with compensation. The HRC also emphasised the State's obligation to prevent similar violations from occurring in the future, and to 'ensure that all journalists and human rights defenders are able to exercise their right to freedom of expression in their activities, including by decriminalizing the offences of defamation and calumny in all the federated states'.

Upholding the rights of women journalists is key to a feminist approach to the safety of journalists, and recent decisions by international bodies and courts have confirmed that States will be held liable when women journalists are threatened, attacked, or face sexual violence. Such decisions are significant because they show how broader human rights, women's rights, freedom of expression, and the safety of journalists interact with one another. Here we highlight two cases: one decision made by the UN HRC and the other by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights.

The Cacho case is an important decision because the HRC recognises the special risks that women journalists face in the context of systematic torture and sexual violence in Mexico. In other words, it contextualises the incidents and violations that Lydia Cacho suffered within the broader context of structural discrimination against women generally, and women's rights. It forms part of a growing jurisprudence upholding the rights of women journalists, reinforcing State obligations to create enabling environments for women journalists to be able to do their work.

These cases demonstrate that States have obligations to uphold women's human rights, including their rights to be free from gender-based violence, as such violence causes or contributes to the silencing of women journalists.

### **Jineth Bedoya v Colombia<sup>45</sup>**

In 2021, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights handed down a landmark decision on the protection of women journalists. The Court held the Colombian government responsible for violations of fundamental human rights in circumstances where award-winning journalist Jineth Bedoya was kidnapped and sexually assaulted while reporting on crimes and human rights violations in Bogota.

The Court found violations of the right to personal integrity, personal liberty, honour and dignity, and freedom of expression, and set out in detail the context of sexual violence against women in armed conflict and the particular situation of journalists, including women journalists, during the time frame of the facts of the case.

The Court made a number of recommendations specific to Colombia, but that represent good practice more generally, including to finance prevention, protection, and assistance programmes for women journalists who have suffered from gender-based violence, and to create training programmes to ensure public officials can identify manifestations of gender-based violence that affect women journalists and place them in danger.

When we asked Jineth Bedoya about her case, she said:

*The implementation of this decision is significant as it calls for gender mainstreaming and a gender perspective to advance and support rights, in relation to content, and also complaints and the monitoring of cases of gender-based violence against women journalists. While feminism has become relevant to collectives of women communicators, at a global level, what has to be taken into account is that we have to continue working and interpreting human rights with a gender perspective more than a feminist perspective, because in many parts of the world it is still difficult to understand how feminism is being approached in the 21st century and what feminist aims are.*

## Case study: Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's journalism and media landscape operates in three languages: Sinhala, Tamil, and English. According to the [Government Information Department](#), in 2021, a total of 772 women journalists were registered under the annual media-accreditation programme, representing 23.6% of the total number of journalists registered. The actual number is likely higher, however, due to [restrictions](#) (imposed since 2020) on accrediting journalists who report for web-based outlets; websites must register with the Ministry of Mass Media and Information to be eligible to apply for accreditation.

In addition to the concerns that an accreditation regime entails for the recognition of journalism, safety concerns affecting all women journalists mainly occur within the workplace and during field-work. The lack of formality in the industry, coupled with the reluctance of industry leaders to formalise the sector from within, have contributed to the creation of unsafe working conditions for women journalists, a senior journalist (who wished to remain anonymous) said. She added that the patriarchal and resistant culture, which prevents the formalisation of journalism as an industry, is evident in the practice of assigning women to positions of authority within editorials – but without key decision-making powers.

“Journalism is not listed as a trade and is not recognised as a profession in Sri Lanka. Women have long borne the brunt of this semi-formal, unregulated industry, as structural barriers automatically impact the less empowered segments more severely,” explained the journalist.

Participants in our national-level research raised physical safety concerns, including sexual harassment, assault, lack of safe transportation options, stress and trauma-related psychological disorders, vulnerabilities arising from social and cultural stigmatisation of sexual and gender identities, and on-line harassment.

“These vulnerabilities impacted freelancers much more than a full-time staffer,” said TV anchor Malsri Amarasinghe.

Women journalists from minority communities faced security concerns due to dual circumstances that put them at risk of discrimination and marginalisation, both as women and due to their religious and other identities. Thulasi Muttulingam, a journalist and blogger from northern Sri Lanka, said her safety concerns had shifted over the years – from simply trying to stay alive during the

conflict period to insecurities arising from cultural norms steeped in misogyny, male chauvinism, and patriarchal politics. Muslim women journalists shared similar sentiments on multiple discrimination and resultant vulnerabilities, pointing out that threats such as online harassment and abuse against Muslim women reporters visibly increased during the pandemic as a result of misinformation targeting Muslims, who comprise 9.3% of the population.

Unsafe work conditions have contributed to the shockingly low representation of all women from the provinces in media reporting. Mustaffa Mohamed Azad, Director of the NGO Sri Lanka Development Journalists' Forum Program, said women make up only 1–2% of journalists and media workers in the provinces.

The Sri Lanka Press Institute is trying to ensure media organisations implement guidelines on the safety of women journalists. These guidelines seeks to address the safety concerns of all women journalists in the workplace, and take a holistic approach to safety:

### **PHYSICAL SAFETY**

- Mandatory risk assessment before being allocated high-risk assignments
- Special focus on all women journalists' safety in transportation and logistics policies relating to travel during assignments and late hours of work

### **DIGITAL SAFETY**

- Encryption of all digital devices used to store data
- Establishment of a monitoring system to tackle online threats faced by journalists

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY**

- Implementing a care mechanism to ensure psychological support to journalists who have undergone trauma and harassment
- Having focus groups for women journalists to discuss and understand their daily safety concerns at work.







# 6. Recommendations

This report includes a large number of findings and recommendations from the various individuals and organisations that have participated in this research. We invite you to read it carefully and in detail, as it provides practical guidance on how to approach the safety of journalists from a feminist and intersectional perspective.

In this chapter, ARTICLE 19 summarises five key messages from across this investigation and uses them as a framework to suggest a set of five general recommendations and some examples for implementation under the safety of journalists and women's rights framework. We consider these to be key to continuing the debate about how feminist approaches can contribute to the safety of journalists.

We start by recognising two fundamental ideas that repeatedly arose in the contributions of our research partners:

1. There is no such thing as one feminist approach to the safety of journalists; rather, feminist approaches and practices are lived in a great diversity of formal and informal measures, at local and community levels as well as nationally and worldwide.
2. Feminism is neither a strict method nor a tool; it is a way to see and be in the world aimed at fulfilling women's rights for all women and lived by all women.

**General recommendation 1:** All women's voices, experiences, needs, and human rights should be at the centre of the variety of actions State and non-State actors undertake on the safety of journalists.

For example:

- States should ensure that women journalists contribute and participate in the development and implementation of national legislation and public policy involving the safety of journalists. Any public policy response to the safety of journalists should incorporate States' obligations to guarantee women's

rights to equality and non-discrimination. This approach includes ensuring the participation of women journalists in the design and effectiveness assessments of protection mechanisms, risk assessments, security protocols, and ad hoc initiatives or programmes on the safety of journalists.

- All responses on the safety of journalists should take into consideration that women are not a homogeneous group and, as such, gender-responsive approaches should expand to consider specific aspects that affect their safety as a result of exercising their freedom of expression, including, race, ethnic origin, nationality, age, socioeconomic circumstances, religion or belief, sexual orientation, and urban/rural environment.
- States should create and promote an enabling environment that facilitates women journalists' views in policy decision-making processes concerning the safety of journalists. Positive measures to create this enabling environment should enhance the diversity of independent feminist voices and enable women-led media to flourish.
- Media outlets and other media-related institutions, such as journalists' associations, should lead and facilitate the creation of spaces where women journalists' protection needs are considered, and enable the full development of their journalistic role in society.

**General recommendation 2:** All measures concerning the safety of journalists should be developed under the assumption that women's right to freedom of expression is key to ending structural discrimination, historical inequality, and unequal power relations, which exacerbate the risks women face in relation to their journalistic activities.

For example:

- States should take all appropriate measures to ensure that women can fully exercise their right to freedom of expression without discrimination and violence. This includes adopting and adjusting existing policy and programmes on the safety of journalists to proactively include positive and special measures aimed at tackling structural and deep-rooted factors that affect women differently, including on the basis of gender-based discrimination.
- Media outlets, journalist-led initiatives, companies, and other non-State actors should put women's safety, integrity, and ability to seek and disseminate information at the centre of their actions and protocols aimed at protecting at-risk women journalists. They should promote and support lifelines and protection mechanisms led by women journalists, which can range from solidarity groups and participation in networks to spaces for writing and experience sharing.
- State and non-State responses to the safety of journalists need to include processes that identify and address the structural causes of women journalists' inequality and modify the traditional power relations between women and institutions, power holders, and decision makers.

**General recommendation 3:** All stakeholders involved in the safety of journalists should reassess the lens through which the safety of journalists is analysed and therefore used to propose solutions to the different risks faced by women journalists.

For example:

- States should assess their policies and programmes on gender equality and non-discrimination and ensure they respond to and include the different obstacles and risks women face for exercising their right to freedom of expression. This includes making sure their monitoring, evidence-gathering, data-collection, and solution-designing practices clearly reflect and respond to the various and intersecting factors that impact women journalists differently. These assessments should be done in consultation with women journalists, media outlets, and experts on freedom of expression and gender equality.
- All policies, mechanisms, protocols, and informal initiatives on the protection of journalists should be developed, implemented, budgeted, and evaluated using an intersectional approach. They should respond to the different characteristics and converging risks women journalists face.
- All individuals involved in policy development and the design and implementation of protection measures for the safety of journalists should be trained in women's human rights, in particular their right to freedom of expression, gender equality, and non-discrimination. Risk and needs assessments should be undertaken that consider the societal, political, socioeconomic, and cultural systems that discriminate against women, in particular when they exacerbate the risks women face as a result of exercising their right to freedom of expression.

**General recommendation 4:** Strategies and policies on the safety of women journalists must consider the challenges and violence women face in their private and public spheres.

For example:

- States should immediately ratify and fully implement the ILO Convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the world of work (ILO C190). In line with C190, States should conduct a participatory and transparent assessment that determines whether there is a need to develop policies to prevent gender-based harassment and violence in the media sector. Any potential implementation of C190 should ensure extensive consultation and coordination with civil society, journalists, and the private sector to guarantee a sustained and participatory change.
- Measures, policies, and projects aimed at monitoring and documenting attacks against women journalists should include sexual harassment and other forms of harassment that occur both in the workplace and in the course of their journalistic work.
- Media outlets and journalistic initiatives should put in place gender-responsive policies, including on sexual harassment and equal pay.

- Protection and safety assessments of women journalists should include the risks and struggles in women's private and public lives. Based on these considerations, protection measures should seek to enhance their ability to carry out their journalistic activities.

**General recommendation 5:** Impunity for crimes against journalists should be addressed through strategies that consider the different manifestations of violence against women resulting from exercising their right to freedom of expression, along with the barriers women face in accessing justice.

For example:

- States should identify and address the root causes of underreporting of crimes resulting from women's exercise of freedom of expression. They should tackle the general practices that diminish the seriousness of the attacks women journalists face and ensure they are not blamed for these attacks. Instead, authorities should develop measures that incentivise women journalists to report criminal behaviours committed against them in relation to their journalistic activities.
- When the activities women journalists report do not amount to criminal behaviour but do require preventive or monitoring attention, authorities should ensure women journalists are directed to other State authorities that can provide adequate safety support.
- Investigations of crimes committed against women journalists that result from the exercise of their right to freedom of expression should include a gender and intersectional analysis to determine whether there are any aggravating circumstances based on gender or other discriminatory factors. Women's privacy and data protection should be protected throughout the investigation.
- Courts and judges should ensure that, when deciding about criminal cases against women journalists, they incorporate in their assessment the context of violence against women and against journalists, along with the protection of and potential violations of the right to freedom of expression, the right to live a life free from gender-based violence, the right to life, and the right to equality. The decisions of the judiciary concerning crimes against women journalists in relation to the exercise of their right to freedom of expression should clearly determine when they faced discrimination and violence on the basis of gender in relation to the exercise of their journalistic activities. In these cases, the judicial system should provide comprehensive redress, including reparation measures that aim to be transformative of the existing patterns of structural and intersecting forms of discrimination in the context of violence against women journalists.

ARTICLE 19 has provided numerous recommendations on the safety of women journalists, including how to implement international human right standards on the intersection of the right to freedom of expression and the protection of women's rights. You can find these recommendations in the following reports:

- [\*Freedom of expression and women's equality: Ensuring comprehensive rights protection\*](#) (2020)
- [\*Girl, did you get home safely? Care and safety of women in protests in Latin America\*](#) (2021)
- [\*Investigating online harassment and abuse of women journalists\*](#) (2020)
- [\*Online harassment and abuse against women journalists and major social media platforms\*](#) (2020)
- [\*Online harassment and abuse against women journalists in the Iranian diaspora\*](#) (2021)
- [\*OSCE SOFJO resource guide on the safety of female journalists online\*](#) (2020)



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This bibliography is organised for ease of reference for the reader. It includes not only traditional headings, such as legal cases and policy reports, but also some references to ‘feminist lifelines’ and websites that provide information on digital security and self-care from a feminist perspective.

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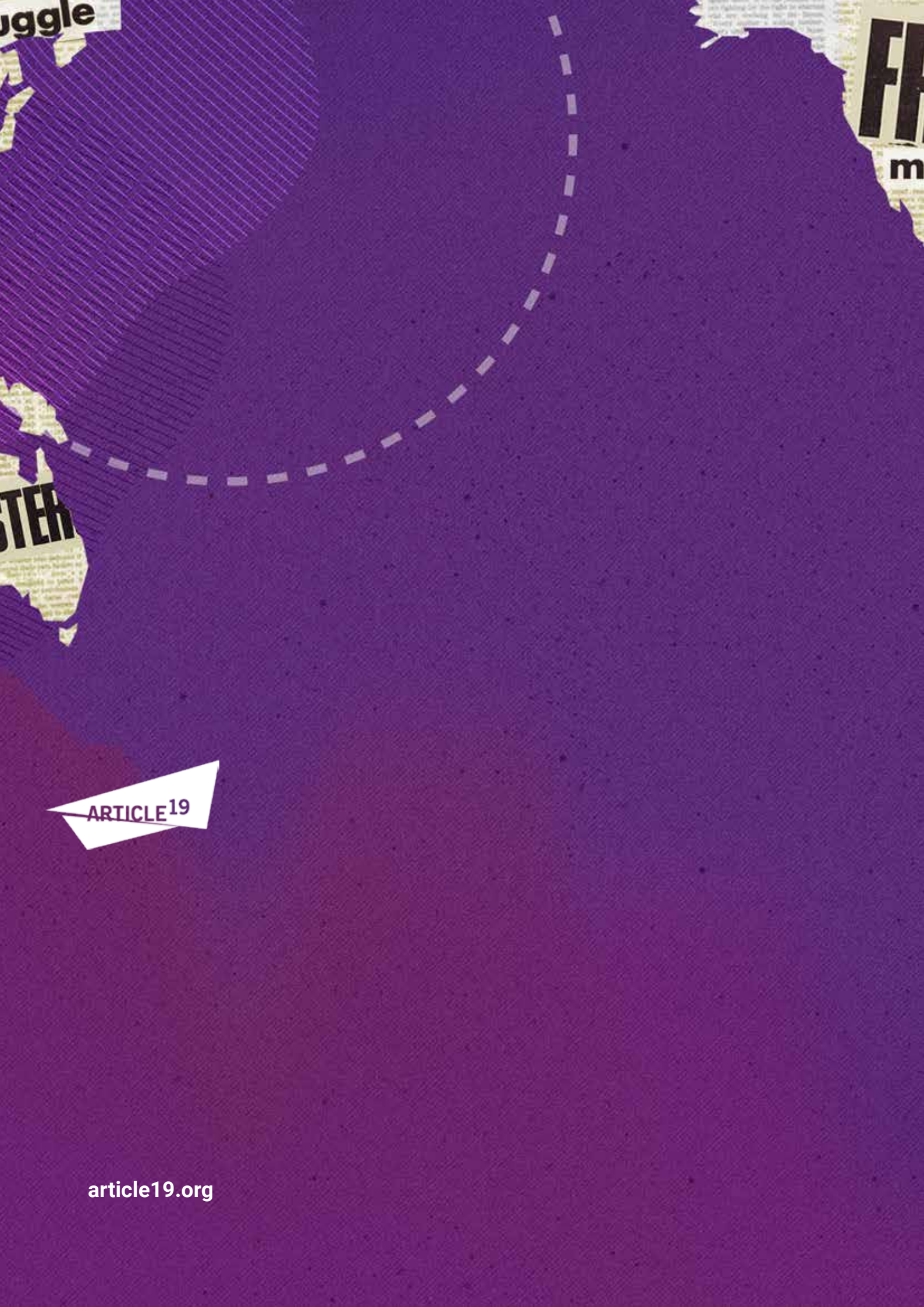
- 1 ARTICLE 19 uses a functional definition of journalists and communicators, as per the UN Human Rights Committee General Comment 34: ‘Journalism is a function shared by a wide range of actors, including professional full-time reporters and analysts, as well as bloggers and others who engage in forms of self-publication in print, on the internet or elsewhere’.
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- 27 In [Understanding patriarchy](#), bell hooks defines patriarchy as ‘a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.’ Alda Facio has [defined and theorised patriarchy](#) as ‘a form of mental, social, spiritual, economic and political organization/structuring of society produced by the gradual institutionalization of sex-based political relations created, maintained and reinforced by different institutions linked closely together to achieve consensus on the lesser value of women and their roles. These institutions interconnect not only with each other to strengthen the structures of domination of men over women, but also with other systems of exclusion, oppression and/or domination based on real or perceived differences between humans, creating States that respond

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