



Lessons learned

Equally Safe: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists



ARTICLE 19 is an international think–do organisation that propels the freedom of expression movement locally and globally to ensure all people realise the power of their voices.

Together with our partners, we develop cutting-edge research and legal and policy analysis to drive change worldwide, lead work on the frontlines of expression through our nine regional hubs across the globe, and propel change by sparking innovation in the global freedom of expression movement.

We do this by working on five key themes: promoting media independence, increasing access to information, protecting journalists, expanding civic space, and placing human rights at the heart of developing digital spaces.

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Part of ARTICLE 19's project: [Equally Safe: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists](#)

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Introduction

Upholding the right to freedom of expression requires that women, especially those facing intersecting and overlapping forms of oppression, are equally able to share their ideas and opinions without censorship or fear of retaliation, which can drive them out of public debate. Yet while all journalists experience threats, violence, abuse, and harassment for carrying out their vital work, **women journalists face additional gendered risks** – from workplace sexual harassment to online rape threats. Furthermore, women journalists are not a monolithic group; the risks and abuse they face differ depending on their race, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, and other characteristics. Multiply marginalised women typically face greater risks and harsher abuse.

An intersectional feminist approach – one that recognises these intersecting forms of oppression – is needed to enhance the safety of all women journalists.

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 launched [Equally Safe: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists](#) to explore what such an approach might look like and what benefits it might bring. We published our findings in the form of new global research, case studies from 6 countries, practical guidelines, and advocacy tools.

In 2024, we launched a second phase of Equally Safe to implement and strengthen this innovative feminist approach by pinpointing solutions to the problems identified in Phase 1.

This report is part of that second phase. It synthesises lessons learned from the second phase of Equally Safe by reflecting on the activities undertaken during that period. It integrates feminist theoretical frameworks developed during Phase 1 with qualitative implementation data from capacity-building and dialogue events, local case studies, emergency support, and global advocacy efforts to consolidate key learnings and recommendations for the safety of women journalists within a feminist and intersectional framework.

The findings from both phases of Equally Safe propose a necessary evolution in approaches to protection, grounded in the rationale that women journalists face unique risks. Phase 1 set out to explore the question: what might feminist approaches to the protection of journalists look like, and what benefits might they bring? A key finding was that not all women journalists face the same risks, and the various forms of oppression faced by journalists are intersecting rather than discrete. This means there is no static feminist approach to safety; it must reflect the diversity of the women journalists it is designed to protect.

Phase 2 implemented and strengthened the feminist approach by considering and responding to the distinct challenges that women journalists face in the project's target countries: **Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Nepal, and Paraguay**. For example, the project provided emergency funding in response to workplace discrimination of women journalists in Bangladesh and to state-perpetrated violence against journalists in Brazil. Other activities under the project included:

- Advocacy meetings
- Dialogues with local stakeholders and women journalists
- Events for women journalists to share experiences, strategies, and solidarity
- Physical, legal, and digital safety workshops
- Engagements in the UN Universal Periodic Review process
- International advocacy at the UN Human Rights Council, the Conferencia Latinoamericana de Periodismo de Investigación, and the Inter-American Court on Human Rights

Carrying out these activities with an intersectional feminist approach highlighted the structural factors that enable violence against women journalists and led to a key finding of the second phase of Equally Safe: these structures must be accounted for in protection approaches. While women journalists experience risk differently due to the intersecting forms of discrimination, implementing a feminist approach also requires looking at the ecosystems that generate the conditions of violence, discrimination, and marginalisation of women journalists in all their diversity.

Throughout our advocacy during Phase 2, ARTICLE 19 emphasised that states are obligated under international human rights standards to protect journalists in all their diversity, and proposed an approach that recognised the rights to freedom of expression and to non-discrimination and equality as mutually reinforcing.

Crucial to implementing this intersectional and gender-centred approach to legal and policy advocacy, emergency response, community dialogues, and trainings is centring the lived experiences of women journalists in all their diversity. This paradigm shift demands a genuine redistribution of power and confronts the structures that enable both violence and impunity, working towards a media ecosystem where women journalists have real agency and dignity when it comes to the mechanisms designed to protect their safety.

This report draws on insights from both phases of Equally Safe, providing reflections and recommendations that are grounded in the project's activities and learnings, and contributing towards the continued development of an intersectional feminist approach to the safety of journalists.

From principles to practice: A living framework for feminist safety

Through moving from Phase 1 of Equally Safe to implementing activities aimed at promoting an intersectional and gender-centred approach to the safety of women journalists in all their diversity, we sought to ground the project's activities in the lived experiences of the journalists we worked with throughout the project. This demonstrated that the conditions for the safety of women journalists are not a static product but a political, collective, and iterative process that requires questioning and challenging entrenched power asymmetries.

Based on the project's learnings, the key elements to be considered in an intersectional feminist approach include:

- Power redistribution and collective agency
- Holistic wellbeing as crucial to dignity
- Intersectional and institutional adaptation
- Justice as a preventative and restorative pillar
- Tackling the weaponisation of online spaces

Power redistribution and collective agency

A central finding of the project is that true safety requires a redistribution of power. This includes supporting women journalists to actively co-develop and co-govern the systems intended to protect them, transitioning from top-down protocols to safety and redress mechanisms to those led or directly informed by affected communities of women journalists.

From individual risk to collective defence

- An intersectional feminist approach to the safety of journalists recognises that safety is a collective responsibility, not just an individual one. This ecosystemic approach can dilute individual vulnerability by making a threat against one journalist a catalyst for a collective response. For instance, in many peripheries and *favelas* in **Brazil**, Black and Indigenous women journalists

have moved away from isolated risk management. By adopting collective response networks, the entire community responds to a threat, ensuring that a journalist is backed by a visible, organised social fabric.

In **Bangladesh**, as described in ARTICLE 19's report *Harnessing momentum for change: Improving the safety of women journalists in Bangladesh and Nepal*, the need for moving from conceptions of individual risk to collective responsibility for safety was revealed through women journalists sharing their experiences of being victim-blamed in response to attacks they faced in their workplaces, while doing fieldwork, and online. When women journalists are perceived as being responsible for their own safety, then victim-blaming naturally follows. Women are also perceived as responsible when they suffer attacks.

Collective approaches to safety don't just diffuse or dilute risk; they also refocus the responsibility of the attack on the perpetrator rather than the target.

This model of collective defence includes, but is not limited to:

- **Emotional support:** Providing secure spaces for debriefing and psychosocial support after attacks, discrimination, and harassment breaks the isolation often felt by survivors. Women journalists involved in the dialogues and sharing events held throughout Phase 2 gave consistent feedback that these spaces provided intentional, safe, and welcoming venues for them to share experiences about the various challenges they faced while doing their jobs, bolstering resolution to not be silenced.
- **Tactical defence trainings and networks:** Implementing training that is deeply rooted in the lived experiences of women journalists that goes beyond basics promotes a culture of safety and offers women journalists another opportunity to find and strengthen community through sharing knowledge with each other. In all project workshops, ARTICLE 19 prioritised regional diversity, reflecting Phase 1 findings that women journalists in areas outside major economic and political centres of power often face additional or different types of risks. For example:

- In **Bangladesh** and **Nepal**, safety trainings provided up-to-date digital security training that women journalists can both implement and share within their networks, alongside 'know your rights' training that worked with participants to develop personal protection plans. Perhaps the most positive feedback from the safety training in Bangladesh was increased confidence.
- In **Brazil**, legal empowerment workshops were grounded in specific areas of work – such as climate justice, gender, arts-based communication, and protest – where women journalist face overlapping risks when reporting and working. Participants [noted](#) that the spaces, 'built with affection', allowed them to 'strengthen their practices'.
- **Workplace safety and equity:** Especially in Bangladesh and Nepal, women journalists involved in the project reported gender- and class-based disparities in pay and opportunity alongside workplace harassment and bullying. Newsrooms and journalists' associations and unions can provide important sources of collective safety if they are structured to support – not silence – women journalists, acting as spaces for advocacy rather than reinforcing the status quo.

Reclaiming professional spaces and narratives

Collective agency is also used to dismantle the barriers that force women out of the public sphere. By addressing gender-based violence as a systemic safety issue and not as a private grievance, these networks reclaim the right to occupy professional spaces. This can be achieved through:

- **Establishing feminist media:** One of the most powerful ways to reclaim space is to create independent infrastructures (for example, Alharaca in **El Salvador**, AzMina in **Brazil**, or Faktograf in **Croatia**, where Equally Safe methodologies were applied in collaboration with another project focused on media freedom). In response to traditional media's failure to guarantee safety and equity, women journalists – especially those facing intersecting forms of oppression – have established media outlets as professional refuges grounded in logics of care. In these spaces, physical, digital, and psychological safety are the structural priority, not secondary considerations.

- **Independent work in Bangladesh:** In Bangladesh, some women journalists choose to protect themselves from gendered workplace harassment and abuse by conducting freelance work instead. While freelancing presents its own challenges, women journalists who have chosen this path cite the agency it gives them to dictate their own work. When employed by media outlets, many women journalists involved in the project described experiences of being shoehorned into reporting on issues related to fashion, beauty, children, or the family, despite being interested in other areas like politics or economics, which were instead assigned to their male counterparts. Amid persistent workplace harassment and the lack of reliable reporting mechanisms, freelancing can help alleviate some of these concerns. ARTICLE 19 supported freelance women journalists in Bangladesh by offering specific training, such as 'know your rights', and using emergency support grants to support their work.
- **Discursive protection:** Across target countries in the project, a key strategy was the collective rejection of victim-blaming. By dismantling narratives that link a journalist's safety to her clothing or topic of coverage, these networks eliminate the social justification for aggression. This includes, for example, women accompanying each other and standing behind each other when they report sexual harassment or assault cases, as described in one of the project's other reports, *Harnessing momentum for change: Improving the safety of women journalists in Bangladesh and Nepal*.

These practices demonstrate that protection that truly meets the needs of women journalists is born from the ground up. These grassroots networks are a necessary response to the state's systemic failure to fulfil its fundamental human rights obligations to safeguard women journalists. By fostering peer-to-peer education and ensuring that women journalists facing intersecting forms of discrimination have the agency and support to design their own professional spaces, these networks do not excuse the state's inaction – they expose it. In creating their own protection mechanisms, these journalists are filling a void left by state neglect while simultaneously holding the state accountable for the conditions that make these self-managed measures necessary for maintaining a safe, pluralistic, and democratic journalistic environment.

Holistic wellbeing as a foundation for dignity

An intersectional feminist approach to safety recognises that psychological harm is not a side effect of violence but a core component of it. At ARTICLE 19's 2025 Equally Safe [side event](#) at World Press Freedom Day, we asked how women journalists should be included in the decision-making processes that form the protection mechanisms designed to safeguard them. During discussions, the women journalists we invited from **Brazil** and **Bangladesh** highlighted that self-silencing as a result of psychological exhaustion or abuse has the same effect as physical threats and is another effective tool to remove women journalists from the public sphere. Any efforts to address this self-censorship must address the psychological harm at the root of this issue and integrate a trauma-informed approach that recognises that women journalists have been self-advocating and gone unheard for many years.

At World Press Freedom Day, ARTICLE 19 also implemented a discussion moderation style that prioritised emotional support and validation over steering the direction of the conversation. We considered this to be especially important given that women journalists experiencing intersecting forms of oppression are often excluded from sharing their experiences in high-level spaces. If women journalists are to be more than token participants and to genuinely shape solutions, they must be supported to steer the conversation.

During the interactive portion of the Equally Safe side event, Charlene Nagae, a lawyer working with Brazilian journalist [Schirlei Alvez](#) – who was sentenced to prison in a criminal strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP) case for her coverage of a rape case – highlighted a difficult truth: once targeted, women journalists are too often reduced to retelling the story of the abuse and violence they suffered, rather than being supported to continue their work and given a platform to spotlight their journalistic achievements. Celebration and validation by one's community are also key components of psychological wellbeing.

However, **emotional support is insufficient without the material resources to back it up**. This project identified a critical gap in current safety frameworks: the reliance on ad hoc individual-level support that treats protection as a privilege, rather than a right.

Institutionalising holistic wellbeing requires a fundamental shift in media funding that recognises the uncompensated mental and emotional labour behind safety efforts. Consequently, there is an urgent need for targeted investments, not only for emergency aid but also for institutionalised protocols. This includes:

- The recognition of safety mechanisms and protocols that mitigate threats and attacks, especially those most felt by women journalists facing overlapping forms of oppression, as basic and non-negotiable professional operating expenses. Physical, digital, and psychological safety are costly – both financially and in terms of time and effort – but funding models or funding from institutions must cover them.
- Financial mechanisms to cover legal fees, immediate mental health support, and longer-term care for other health concerns resulting from chronic stress.
- A move towards intersectional feminist-based safety plans that incorporate risk assessments for families and households, acknowledging that threats rarely stop at the individual.

Intersectional and institutional adaptation

Notions of 'safety' must be as diverse as the journalists they aim to protect. In **Bangladesh**, this meant centring the concerns of women freelancers and those in rural areas to ensure that safety trainings conducted under the project were not limited to urban, privileged professionals. It also requires examining the hidden costs of reporting from marginalised positions or regions that are more removed from the country's political and financial centres of power.

To ensure safety measures are sustainable, they should be woven into the fabric of intermediate institutions such as unions and newsrooms which, in **Bangladesh** and **Nepal**, often set professional norms and standards.

- In **Bangladesh**, dialogue and sharing events held throughout the project saw women journalists from various backgrounds call on newsrooms to enact enforceable policies and trainings on gender, non-discrimination, and anti-harassment. By bringing journalists together with media owners and unions, the project sought to reframe sexual harassment not as a personal grievance but as a critical and structural issue of professional safety.

While ARTICLE 19 was honoured to work with women journalists in Bangladesh to bring these concerns to international fora and national stakeholders, immediate safety needs were met through the project by providing the technology required for sustainable freelance work outside newsrooms, where workplace and sexual harassment are typically perpetrated with impunity. Prior to ARTICLE 19's support, all of the journalists were reporting from their mobile phones. In this situation, providing long-term safety meant supplying women journalists with the tools to work independently and on their own terms.

- In **Nepal**, similar unsafe and gendered workplace conditions for women journalists – especially those from lower caste backgrounds – were highlighted at the May 2025 sharing event. In response, ARTICLE 19, together with Media Action Nepal, utilised an intersectional feminist approach in a joint [Universal Periodic Review submission](#) to analyse workplace discrimination and call for the full enforcement of already-existing workplace equality and non-discrimination mechanisms.

Most of the learnings of this project have focused on sustainable safety solutions that use an intersectional feminist lens to address the root causes of marginalisation and violence. But while we work towards longer-term conditions of safety, the project made clear that crisis response must also be built in, because **those experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination are the most at risk – or are even directly targeted – during periods of instability or state-led violence.**

While an intersectional feminist approach to the safety of journalists must look at the structures that enable violence, it also must be able to respond with agility to attacks.

- In **Brazil**, this involved using emergency resources to provide journalists and social communicators with the tools they need to protect themselves from attacks. This was especially important in the context of [state-led attacks](#) – most notably, the racist [police massacre](#) of [122 people](#) in Rio de Janeiro's *favelas* in October 2025.
- Emergency resources were used to support Black women social communicators in the aftermath of the 2025 massacre to ensure they could safely report on the violence in their communities.

- In March 2025, emergency support allowed Radio Resistência – a communication outlet that focuses its coverage on information related to Black community in Rio de Janeiro, including Black women – to purchase and install security cameras after a series of break-ins at its headquarters.

Whether responding to police violence in Brazil or the political collapse in Bangladesh, the project permitted flexibility between long-term advocacy to immediate life protection. Both are important parts of intersectional feminist safety.

Justice as a preventative and restorative pillar

A key imperative of the project is to continue demanding justice in response to attacks on women journalists facing intersecting and overlapping forms of oppression, including those related to their membership in low income, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+), Black, or Indigenous communities. **Justice must not only be a reactive measure following an attack, but also a preventative force that ensures a safe environment through accountability and institutional protection.**

When attacks do not reach a criminal threshold, other tools are needed. When responding to attacks, an intersectional feminist approach calls for **more agile legal mechanisms**, through which non-criminal measures – including civil law, data protection regulations, and administrative sanctions (like cease-and-desist orders) – can be used to ensure rapid intervention in cases of abuse and attacks against women journalists, especially those facing intersecting forms of oppression, before the aggression reaches criminal level.

The project highlights that protection mechanisms are only as strong as the institutions that uphold them. For justice to be preventative, the state and private companies must uphold their obligations under international human rights law:

- **Intersectional gender protocols:** State authorities must quickly, independently, and effectively investigate technology-facilitated gender-based violence against women, LGBTQI+, Black, and Indigenous journalists, incorporating an intersectional gender approach into their investigative protocols. This also requires better protocols for handling digital evidence to prevent data leaks and unauthorised interceptions that could further endanger survivors, as well as training the judiciary and law enforcement in the specifics of technology-facilitated gender-based violence.

- **Defence against SLAPPs:** If the judicial system is used as a tool for harassment, it ceases to be a place of justice and becomes an instrument of censorship. Therefore, there is an urgent need to mandate training for judges, prosecutors, and lawyers to recognise abuses of legal process that target defendants in protected categories.
- **Private and state obligations:** States have a positive obligation to protect individuals, including women journalists, from violations of their rights to freedom of expression and non-discrimination by private entities. Social media platforms in particular must recognise and address the abuse against women journalists, especially those facing intersecting forms of oppression. This abuse is facilitated by the platform's business models and algorithms that prioritise profit from inflammatory, threatening, and abusive content over the safety of the women journalists, social communicators, and human rights defenders.

States must also unconditionally and strictly adhere to international human rights and humanitarian law to ensure the safety of women journalists operating in extreme conditions of danger:

- **Conflict zones:** States have an obligation to adhere strictly to international humanitarian law and to recognise journalists as civilians who must never be targeted in conflict. During armed conflict, digital attacks against journalists and other civilians – including physical targeting of [communications infrastructures](#) – must also be evaluated under international humanitarian law.
- **Transnational repression:** States have a proactive obligation to protect exiled journalists and their families, ensuring that aggressions committed by aggressor governments across borders are investigated and prosecuted. Investigations and remedies following instances of transnational repression must be holistic and address the link between individual journalists' safety and the broader right to freedom of expression.

Ending impunity for attacks against women journalists is a key aspect of strengthening institutional protection. When investigations are rapid, independent, and effective, they send a clear signal that the consequences of attacking a woman journalist are too severe to ignore. By integrating preventative practices with robust accountability, we move towards a system that not only punishes the crime but also actively fosters a culture in which journalism and women journalists in all their diversity are safe and respected.

The concept of an intersectional feminist approach to the safety of journalists highlighted that freedom of expression and the right to equality and non-discrimination are mutually reinforcing. The state's obligation to protect free speech is incomplete if it fails to address the structural barriers that silence marginalised voices. Freedom of expression-related advocacy, protection efforts, and policy must incorporate a non-discrimination viewpoint when sexism, racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia, and other forms of discrimination impede journalists' ability to investigate, find and interview sources, and publish and disseminate their work.

Tackling the weaponisation of online spaces

Women journalists confirmed throughout the project that political actors systematically weaponise online digital platforms to mobilise online masses against women journalists, typically when they publish information challenging power holders. We know from [Phase 1](#) of Equally Safe that this online abuse is usually gendered and often sexually violent, and that these attacks inhibit women journalists using online platforms to connect with sources, develop relationships with their audiences, and contribute to public debate.

Naming attacks incited by public authorities or other powerful figures as coordinated strategies rather than random acts of trolling can form part of an intersectional feminist approach to safety of women journalists and platform accountability. At ARTICLE 19's [side event](#) during the 59th session of the UN Human Rights Council, an independent Mexican woman journalist and representative of the Paraguayan digital rights non-profit organisation TEDIC highlighted another key component: intersectional feminist safety for women journalists requires that online violence is taken seriously, rather than dismissed simply because it takes place online and is often not prosecutable. They asserted that online harms must be considered as part of the continuum of violence, which also includes offline attacks and long-term psychological harm, and cannot be addressed by separating them from the broader systems that enable offline violence.

Although more research is needed to highlight the specifics of an intersectional feminist approach to online safety – including content moderation, platform accountability, internet infrastructure, and regulation of digital platforms and services – this project has provided a starting point.

To begin to tackle the weaponisation of online spaces against women journalists, power holders – including states, regulatory and governance bodies, advocacy groups, and private companies – must recognise the convergence of political and economic incentive models that benefit from online violence against women journalists, particularly those facing intersecting forms of oppression.

- The amplifying effect of online platforms provides a strong **political incentive** for powerful actors to incite their followers to attack women journalists. Existing stereotypes and biases allow these actors to quickly undermine the credibility of women journalists who challenge power. Because online anonymity makes it difficult to prosecute such threats of violence, perpetrators of online attacks often face few consequences, while women journalists and their communities experience lasting psychological harm.
- Online platforms have strong **economic incentives** to maintain the status quo – even though their business models often provide the very rails upon which online gender-based violence runs – because they [profit](#) from the high engagement generated by divisive, hateful, or otherwise inflammatory content. Algorithms that prioritise high engagement increase the reach of coordinated attacks, particularly against women journalists who face intersecting forms of discrimination.

When these political and economic models converge, technology-facilitated gender-based violence becomes a systemic feature of the digital landscape.

It is also crucial to recognise that the burden of documenting technology-facilitated gender-based violence should not rest solely on targets and survivors. While grassroots monitoring effectively exposes how instigators operate and fills the information gap left by platforms and states, it is not a solution in itself.

Conclusion

In an era of global backlash against the gains of women's and LGBTQI+ rights, alongside a broader shrinkage of civic space, it is critical to reaffirm the importance of an intersectional feminist approach to the safety of women journalists – one that is grounded in the human right to equality and non-discrimination and also the right to freedom of expression. This framework challenges traditional definitions that protect journalists from violence – which can remove their agency – and instead works with affected communities to transform the conditions that enable violence to occur.

Phase 1 of this project highlighted how intersecting identities expose women journalists to different types of risks on the basis of discrimination against those identities. Phase 2 highlighted how the attacks themselves intersect and accumulate, signalling their existence within a framework that systematically silences women journalists and excludes them from public spaces. Real gender-centred and intersectional accountability requires that protection efforts go beyond responding to visible attacks, recognising that these attacks are the culmination of varied types of intersecting and structural violence faced by women journalists.

This requires the redistribution of decision-making power, centring the wellbeing and dignity of women journalists in all their diversity, and bringing an end to impunity. When the often-invisible work of protecting women journalists – particularly those experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination – is transformed into recognised and funded collective care, we can begin to strip the sociocultural, political, and economic structures that enable violence. Efforts must be centred on strengthening movements for systemic change, ensuring these initiatives remain grounded in the lived experiences of the journalists who created them rather than co-opting the safe spaces they have built.

This transformation demands that states fulfil their obligations under international human rights law – not only upholding non-discrimination, equality, and freedom of expression, but ensuring these rights are mutually reinforcing. By adopting this political framework, institutions can move beyond mere co-optation to commit to genuine structural reform.

The only path to a sustainable future for the press is one that builds a system that responds to those reporting from the margins, ensuring the watchdog of democracy remains secure, pluralistic, and free.



ARTICLE 19