



## CONCEPT NOTE

### **SAFETY OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS ONLINE: THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARY ACTION**

*Joint Web Dialogue event by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA) and the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (OSCE/RFoM)*

Online // Wednesday, 20 April 2022, 15.00-17.00 CEST

#### **BACKGROUND**

Online harassment, discrimination and violence have become a serious issue that journalists and media actors face on a daily basis. In this regard, female journalists are particularly exposed to, and disproportionately confronted by multifaceted forms of online violence. This is confirmed by numerous reports and studies.<sup>1</sup> For instance, a global survey conducted in 2020 by UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ)<sup>2</sup> revealed that 73 percent out of 625 women journalists surveyed reported to have experienced online violence – with only 11 percent of them claiming to have reported such cases to the police. Gender-based violence against journalists online is a global phenomenon impacting their every-day work and well-being.

Such violence is not only destructive and, in some cases, fatal for journalists – it has also a tremendously negative impact on the freedom of expression, the pluralism of opinions and the information landscape overall, as it leads to self-censorship and entails a chilling effect, which adds up to a global decline of press freedom.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, it negatively influences aspirations of women to pursue a career in journalism, therefore, further shrinking plurality and the role of journalists in maintaining checks and balances, fundamental for the democratic functioning of societies. Challenges caused by new and protracted conflicts, health emergencies, natural disasters, and other emergency situations are ramping up cases of online violence against female journalists who are reporting on these issues.

Safety of all journalists is a prerequisite not only for media freedom, but for justice, democracy, as well as for the fulfillment and enjoyment of human rights more broadly. Attacks against journalists pose a direct threat to democracy, which is why all forms of violence and in particular increased risks of threats for women journalists need to be reflected in and adequately addressed by the national legislative and policy frameworks. By adopting new and updating existing laws, as well as by ensuring their effective and meaningful implementation,

<sup>1</sup> [OSCE, UNESCO and ICFJ reports.](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>.

<sup>3</sup> 83 percent of the world's population experienced a decline in press freedom in their country over the past five years as reported by Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem).

policymakers can help prevent and address online harassment, as well as to end impunity of perpetrators.

Over the course of last year, several good practices and legal responses in addressing the online harassment and abuse of journalists have been identified across the OSCE participating States (pS) that could be possibly extrapolated to the entire OSCE region<sup>4</sup>. OSCE pS have made clear commitments in that regard, being clearly outlined in relevant OSCE Ministerial Council Decisions, as well as across the OSCE PA Declarations and Resolutions over the years. In particular, the 2018 OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on Safety of Journalists<sup>5</sup> recognizes the distinct risks faced by women journalists as well as the need to add a gender perspective to all policy endeavors towards ensuring the safety of journalists. Moreover, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RfOM) has promoted the need to ensure the safety of female journalists online through its SOFJO project since 2015 and has recently produced a comprehensive Resource Guide<sup>6</sup> with proposed actions and recommendations for key actors, including for legislative bodies and members of parliament. This tool is complemented by good practice examples and additional resources.

Building upon their parallel work on the topic of safety of journalists<sup>7</sup>, the RfOM and the OSCE PA, under the guidance of its General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions and of its Special Representative on Gender Issues, will host a Joint Web Dialogue on the *“Safety of Female Journalists Online: the role of Parliamentary action”*. This will be the first joint event in a common initiative on promoting the safety of female journalists online. The event will build on a questionnaire on the safety of female journalists online shared with members of the Assembly during the meeting of its third General Committee during the 2022 Winter Meeting. Its purpose is to enable parliamentarians to elaborate on main concepts pertaining to the safety of female journalists online and to take stock of the existing challenges towards the digital safety of women journalists and possible solutions thereto.

Moreover, the event aims to touch upon particular issues related to the safety of female journalists in times of crises and conflicts. During conflicts, patriarchal structures are often strengthened, which also affects journalists working on and often reporting from conflict areas. Overall, female journalists are more exposed to safety threats, often being excluded from their own security assessment and limiting their access to conflict zones.

Finally, parliamentarians are invited to exchange their experience and their insights on the role of national parliaments in ensuring the implementation of OSCE commitments in the field of media freedom. Hence, the event will serve not only as an opportunity to discuss the emerging forms of violence against female journalists, but it will also focus on discussing effective prevention, protection and prosecution mechanisms aiming at reinforcing mobilizing action in that regard.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/413552>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/406538>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media/468861>

<sup>7</sup> In 2019, OSCE RfOM jointly with International Press Institute issued a guide on Legal Responses to Online Harassment and Abuse of Journalists: Perspectives from Finland, France and Ireland. In 2021, OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issue Fry issued a report on “Violence Against Women Journalists and Politicians: A Growing Crisis” and held a parliamentary dialogue in November 2021.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE EVENT

The event will aim to:

1. Provide an opportunity to elaborate on main legal and policy concepts, initiatives and good practices pertaining to the safety of female journalists online, including those related to the safety of journalists in times of crises and conflicts, building on a questionnaire on the safety of female journalists online that was shared with Members of the Assembly prior to the event;
2. Provide a platform for parliamentarians to share particular concerns and challenges faced in ensuring safe online spaces to female journalists in their countries and, together with experts, elaborate on how national parliaments can work to effectively address such challenges;
3. Raise awareness among parliamentarians of OSCE pS on existing OSCE tools in this field, including on the RFoM's Resource Guide on SOFJO.

## TARGET AUDIENCE

- Members of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and relevant staff
- Representatives of OSCE executive structures
- Experts in the field of media freedom and safety of journalists

## REGISTRATION

Please register via the **OSCE PA Registration Portal** - you may access it via the OSCE PA website or this [LINK](#) - by **Monday, 18 April 2022, at 17:00 CEST.**

The agenda of the event as well as the online access details will be shared in due course.

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

The event will be held online, via Zoom conferencing platform. Members are invited to indicate the language in which they would prefer to follow the event (English/Russian) by email.

English/Russian interpretation will be provided upon sufficient number of requests.

## CONTACT

Should you have any questions regarding the registration and participation, please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Ilias Trochidis at [ilias.trochidis@oscepa.dk](mailto:ilias.trochidis@oscepa.dk) or at +43 676 320 03 95