

Safety of Women Journalists: Challenges and Solutions

A thematic consultation to mark the 10th Anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity



Summary

The year 2022 marks the 10th anniversary since the endorsement of the United Nations Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity (UNPA) by the Chief Executive Board of the United Nations and its launch at the 2nd UN Inter-Agency Meeting on Safety of Journalists in Vienna on 22-23 November 2012. While the main conference to commemorate this milestone will be held in Vienna, Austria, in November 2022, thematic consultations will constitute a core part of the run up to the main event. Consultations will generate key issues for deliberation and inform priorities around which the main conference will structure recommendations and action areas in strengthening the UNPA.

The two thematic consultations to be held prior to the Vienna Conference will focus on the topics of internet transparency and safety of women journalists whose significance to the safety of journalists has evolved in the last 10 years.

The Association for Progressive Communications - APC will co-organize with UNESCO the consultation on safety of women journalists, which will build on existing efforts to encourage a gender-sensitive and gender-responsive approach to safety and guide the future of the UNPA in this direction.

Context, rationale and similar initiatives

The UNPA provides a normative framework for mobilizing multi-stakeholder efforts to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers. However, it provides little guidance on how stakeholders should better account for the gender dimension in analyzing and more accurately responding to safety concerns. This knowledge gap is neither by omission nor commission. Rather, it has emerged as a result of the exponential growth and influence of digital technologies over the last 10 years, during which a gendered trend of online violence has emerged, affecting particularly women journalists. Lack of informed policy and institutional responses to this trend generates a blind spot in actions necessary to

promote and protect freedom of expression and freedom of the press as well as prosecution of abuses thereof.

The importance of addressing threats to the safety of women journalists has been reaffirmed in recent years in [several United Nations resolutions and decisions](#), including by the UN Security Council ([Resolution 2222](#), adopted in 2015) and the UN General Assembly in numerous resolutions since 2013. The UN Human Rights Council too, in 2021, has again condemned attacks against women journalists engaging in public debate, calling for gender-sensitive responses that take into account the particular forms of online discrimination ([Resolution 47/16](#)).

Several initiatives in recent years have highlighted the necessity of a gender-sensitive and gender-responsive approach to the safety of journalists. Such projects address attacks that women journalists face almost exclusively, including sexist hate speech, stigmatization, trolling, and physical assault including rape. Studies like [The Chilling](#), an interdisciplinary study on trends in online violence against women journalists conducted by UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), demonstrate that female journalists are targeted online significantly more than their male colleagues, and that the threats they face are highly sexualized, focused on their physical features, ethnicity, or cultural background, rather than on the content of their work. As a result of these threats, women journalists tend to be silenced, to the detriment of what should be a diverse media landscape. Furthermore, the study reveals that institutional responses by judicial, law enforcement, and news organizations are insufficient to stem the tide of online violence directed towards women journalists.

While UNESCO, NGOs, partners, and several Member States have been working on this prominent issue in recent years, the thematic consultation would be a first of its kind and will generate the necessary knowledge and strategies for strengthening the implementation of the UNPA in regard to the gender dimensions of safety of journalists, particularly those brought to the fore by digital transformation.

Consultation structure

1. Preliminary input questionnaire

To best set the grounds for the consultation, a questionnaire would allow for a first gathering of progress made on the topics of safety of women journalists, as well as the identification of areas yet to be addressed. Conducting a preliminary questionnaire would also allow for the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders.

In order to gather concise information, the questionnaire should be broken down into relevant topics including:

- [Online violence](#), in correspondence with the findings presented in [The Chilling](#) (stakeholders can help ensure the implementation of recommendations covered in the study)

- Harassment in the newsroom, building on resources like the [Gender-sensitive safety policies for newsrooms guidelines](#) created together with Thomson Reuters Foundation
- Mental health and psychological wellbeing, as addressed in the [How to Report Safely](#) online course organised with the Knight Center and the International Women’s Media Foundation

The brief questionnaire will be prepared by APC and disseminated to a pre-agreed list of respondents suggested by APC. The questionnaire will be based around the 3 pillars of the UNPA – prevention, protection, prosecution and reflect the above topics.

Results of the questionnaire, condensed into a limited series (ten points) of concrete priorities that can be used to elaborate the UNPA and related to the above-mentioned categories, will inform and guide the next step of the process – a hybrid consultation workshop.

2. Format of the convening

Participants will gather for a hybrid consultation organized by APC on 3 October in Bangkok. Building on the emerging findings of the report compiled from the preliminary questionnaire, the consultation will last approximately a day.

3. Participants

A total of 25 participants will be invited to the consultation. Tentatively, 10 participants will take part in person in Bangkok and 15 will join online.

Participants should include a variety of relevant stakeholders and be balanced in terms of geographical and gender representation. These may include:

- Academia (3 participants)
- Government policymakers with representing a range of approaches. For example, one known for its gender equality and inclusion initiatives, one from a region with gender issues (3 participants)
- International organisations (3 participants)
- NGOs (6 participants)
- Media or journalists, including newsrooms and community journalists (6 participants)
- Internet companies engaging on the safety of women journalists, such as Twitter and Jigsaw (2 participants)
- TBD (2 participants)

A small connectivity fund is proposed in the attached budget to facilitate access to broadband internet to those with unreliable connection or, alternatively, to be used as contingency fund if needed.

4. Implementation strategy

Other partners will be welcome to participate in the organization of the consultation. APC is engaging in conversations with the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression to discuss her interest in co-hosting the event. Another possible partner could be the network Freedom of Expression Exchange – IFEX. Locally, NGO EngageMedia will serve as the local counterpart. UNESCO will provide overall strategic guidance to the consultation.

5. Approximate timeline of key activities

Early August 2022: Launch questionnaire and finalization of the list of invitees.

August/September 2022: Creation of a report based on the findings of the questionnaire, to be shared with consultation participants and finalization of the event's agenda.

Early October 2022: Consultation on safety of women journalists and drafting of relative report (3-5 pages of key points).

October 2022 (first week): Updating of the report based on consultation discussions.

Expected outcome

The consultations will result in a series of recommendations and action points for the development of a more targeted approach – one aimed at raising awareness and gender-sensitive and responsive capacity building - to tackling the issue of safety of journalists.

These outcomes will feed into the process towards strengthening the implementation of the UNPA, particularly through its three pillars of prevention, protection and prosecution. In addition, the outcomes will give visibility to other necessary elements related to safety of women journalists that are missing from its current form. This will allow for consideration of other identity-related elements in the future of the UNPA in order to better fulfil its principle of “a gender-sensitive approach”.

Budget

The relevant budget for the activities described above follows attached.