Engendering National Mechanisms for the Safety of Journalists: Mexico, Iraq and Afghanistan

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About this project

There is a sharp increase in violence against women journalists offline and online. In some countries, national mechanisms for the protection of journalists have become an institutional response, but have failed to ensure safety for and protect women. One reason is the lack of a gender perspective in the measures adopted by these mechanisms.

With the purpose of analyzing existing institutional mechanisms to address specific conditions and needs faced by women journalists, the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG[1]) developed the project "Engendering National Mechanisms for the Safety of Journalists". Three countries with high levels of violence against women journalists were selected for this project: Mexico, Iraq and Afghanistan. The CEDAW Committee called on the Mexican government for concrete measures to fully implement the federal mechanism in a gender-sensitive manner (Ninth Periodic Report, 2018). Iraq was included as one of the pilot countries for the UN Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. Afghanistan has been historically a country where being a woman journalist comes with significant risks – with more emphasis since August 2021.

The objective of the project is to promote the safety of women journalists and contribute to the UN Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, and to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality, and the Beijing Platform for Action Section J "Women and the Media".

The primary target group were women journalists in the three implementation countries. The secondary target groups were national machineries and news media industries committed to ensuring that mechanisms to protect journalists are responsive to the needs and interests of women journalists.

Planned project outputs included:

1. A gender sensitiveness assessment of the national monitoring, reporting, protection, prevention and prosecution mechanisms on the safety of journalists (including those supported by UNESCO);
2. Country recommendations to mainstream gender in the mechanisms for the safety of journalists;
3. An analysis of gender-based violence, threats against women journalists and of the responses that have been developed to tackle these threats in the three countries, with particular attention to the issue of digital safety (an area where such threats are particularly visible).

In order to achieve the project outputs, applying qualitative and quantitative methodologies, activities included:

- Research on the existing legislation for the protection of women journalists in the three countries;
- Gender-focused evaluation of the national mechanisms in the three countries on three dimensions: a) legal framework b) risk analysis and c) measures adopted.
- Analysis of types of gender-based violence against women journalists in the three countries – including digital violence;

The project was approved by the 63rd meeting of the International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) Bureau in June 2019 and in close cooperation with the IPDC Secretariat, headed by UNESCO. It is in line with the IPDC priority area “Promoting safety of journalists”.

The project coordinator was Aimée Vega Montiel. Three research teams were constituted, one per country. Leaders were Ruchi Kumar (Afghanistan), Basma Elmahdy (Iraq) and Aimée Vega Montiel (México). Researchers included Lucía Lagunes and Daniela Esquivel.

Instead of beginning in 2020, this study was completed between 2021 and 2022, due to the COVID-19 pandemic that affected our original research plan, which included fieldwork and in-person interviews - these were possible only partially. However, the research teams were able to complete the study by having access to information sources and data online. Each report – one per country - includes an assessment of national mechanisms, country recommendations and an analysis of gender based violence against women journalists.

The study in Afghanistan

The study in Afghanistan was hampered by the Taliban occupation in August 2021. Ruchi Kumar, the research leader, was able to complete the report out of the country, after the occupation. She became a key actor for GAMAG to facilitate support for women journalists during that time.

Besides expressing their solidarity with women journalists in Afghanistan, GAMAG members sought to extend support to them at that especially difficult juncture. GAMAG urgently called on governments across the world, the United Nations system – in particular the Security Council -– and the international community to facilitate and expedite the evacuation of women journalists from Afghanistan in order to save as many lives as possible.

Female journalists are still targeted by insurgents not just for exercising their human right to communicate, but also for being women pioneers in an otherwise patriarchal society. Female journalists in Afghanistan are currently at greater risk because they are women and, additionally, as a consequence of their independent journalism, exposing the ground realities in Afghanistan, including human rights violations. They are at risk of murder, abduction, sexual violence and having their children taken away from them.

GAMAG identified the following as urgent priorities for action:

- Facilitate visas for female journalists and their families, particularly elderly dependants and minor children.
- Ensure asylum and freedom from discrimination in host countries.
- Enable the subsistence of evacuees until alternative livelihood options emerge.
- Provide security and support to female journalists who choose to remain in Afghanistan.

The Alliance became involved in advocating for their achievement - it also arranged a fundraising campaign.

GAMAG is grateful to UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC-UNESCO). Its support was key for embarking on this project.

Engendering National Mechanisms for the Safety of Journalists. Mexico

Mexico

INTRODUCTION

Mexico is among the five most dangerous countries to practice journalism. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) notes that Mexico ranks in the sixth in the world, in its impunity index, for unsolved crimes against journalists.

There has been a sharp increase in violence against women journalists in Mexico, both offline and online. Risk conditions have increased during the pandemic. Women journalists in Mexico have faced different types of violence such as physical, psychological, sexual, economic and femicides, in their workplaces or homes.

The Mexican government has so far done little to address the problem. In fact, in October 2021 the Congress approved the presidential initiative of eliminating the trust fund that had allowed the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists to implement protection measures that have helped protect more than 1,700 people who were under threat. The lack of human and financial resources has dramatically limited the Mechanism's capacity to do its job properly.

In addition to that, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the Mexican ex-president publicly expressed hostility toward journalists during his daily morning press briefings, which exacerbated the risk conditions for those women journalists who challenged his policies, including those in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the persisting impunity.

GENDER-SENSITIVENESS ASSESSMENT OF THE MONITORING, REPORTING, PROTECTION, PREVENTION AND PROSECUTION MECHANISMS ON SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

Comprehensive research of the Mechanism was undertaken, its structure and the path followed to improve protection measures for women journalists. Researchers were able to access to existing statistical data on women journalists victims of violence who have requested protection from the Mechanism.

The Mechanism was created in November 2012, following the mandate of the *Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists*[2]. According to the first article of the Law, it is a legal mechanism of public order, social interest and general observance throughout the country. Its purpose is to establish cooperation between the Federation and the 32 states to implement and operate the measures of prevention and urgent protection measures that guarantee the life, integrity, freedom and security of people who are in a situation of risk as a consequence of the defence or promotion of human rights, and the exercise of freedom of expression and journalism.

Its structure includes the Governing Board (Junta de Gobierno) whose members are: the Ministry of Interior (SEGOB), the Attorney General's Office (FGR), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SRE), the Ministry of Public Security (SSP), the Mexican Congress, the National Confederation of Governors (CONAGO), the Human Rights National Commission (CNDH), OHCHR and four members of the Citizen Council – two human rights defenders and two journalists.

A National Executive Coordination synchronizes the responsibilities of the Mechanism, which are carried out by three sections, as follows:

- **Unit of Case Reception and Rapid Reaction.** This unit receives requests from journalists and human rights defenders for protection from the Mechanism.
- **Risk Evaluation Unit.** This unit is charged with evaluating the risk situation of the targets of attack and defining the appropriate protection measures.
- **Prevention, Follow Up, and Analysis Unit.** This unit's role is to analyze regional and local contexts and patterns of attacks, in order to propose actions or public policy changes that could help prevent violence against journalists and defenders.

Since its creation, one of the main challenges faced by the Mechanism has been reaching all journalists and defenders who are at risk due to their work, to safeguard their lives and integrity.

Main challenges of the Mechanism, are:

Human resources. The number of staff has been pointed out as one of the main challenges faced by the Mechanism. Approximately 35 people work in the institution and are in charge of doing the tasks of the three units – receiving cases, conducting risk analysis, defining protection measures, following-up implementation, re-evaluating cases, addressing prevention, etc.

Budget. The operation of the Mechanism's protection measures was financed by a trust fund (Fondo para la Protección de Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas). During the period the trust fund worked, there were obstacles to access these funds, however it worked. In 2020 however, Mexico's President sent to the Congress an initiative to eliminate the trust fund that had allowed the Protection Mechanism for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists to implement protection measures.

Operation. Lack of human and financial resources makes its operation difficult, then principles such as gender equality are not seen as a priority within the Mechanism. Tools – such as the interview with women journalists seeking protection and protection measures do not have a women's human rights approach. Furthermore, most of the staff members and individual analysts in particular cannot rely on the Mechanism to be gender sensitive, which leads to evaluations that are far from understanding how their gender condition increases women vulnerability to attacks in risk situations.

Gender dimension within the Mechanism

The Mexican Constitution establishes in its Article 1 that the human rights approach must prevail in all actions of the State to promote, respect, protect and guarantee human rights in accordance with the principles of universality, interdependence, indivisibility and progressiveness and without discrimination of any kind. This calls also on the incorporation into the national legal framework of the international conventions that Mexico has signed to promote women's human rights, such as the Convention against all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Inter-American Convention to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women, also known as the Belem do Pará Convention, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Likewise, the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence establishes the types and modalities of violence against women and instruments for analysis and approach that government agencies must follow. In addition, both the Law of Equality between Women and Men and the Law on Non-Discrimination complete the legal framework for women's human rights in the country.

Together, all these instruments constitute the legal framework that must be followed by the Protection Mechanism in Mexico, according to its mandates. However, since its creation, there has been a lack of a gender focus to improve specific measures for the protection of women journalists. Although Article 8 of the Law calls for the adoption of a gender approach as a principle of the Mechanism, this is far from being accomplished. Even though in Mexico violence against women is alarming because of the serious conditions of inequality, the approach of the Protection Mechanism lacks a gender equality perspective to fulfil its mandate and to generate preventive measures for both journalists and defenders.

One of the objectives of the Protection Mechanism, is to give security to attacked journalists to avoid future violence and even homicides. Its reactive nature, the lack of coordination between the federal, state and municipal authorities, the absence of an adequate risk analysis, the lack of protection measures according to the profile of the journalists and the delay in the implementation of measures are serious obstacles for the correct fulfilment of its mandate.

Despite having a broad legal framework in favor of women's human rights, both the risk analysis and the protection plan for journalists and defenders fail in ensuring it. It has been shown that the Mechanism does not analyse cases with a gender focus, that is, it does not consider the inequality and discrimination in which women journalists live. On the contrary, the review process is dominated by sexist prejudices.

For the officials in charge of defining protection measures, an attack has the same effect on women as on men journalists. They place only sexual violence as exclusive to women, overestimating physical and psychological violence. No elements exist to assess the risks and impacts of online violence, which has probably become the most frequent form of violence experienced by women journalists in recent times.

The lack of a gender approach moved a woman journalist to fail a complaint against the Mechanism. Due to her investigations on human rights violations by the army, she became a target of death threats. She requested the Mechanism's protection in 2017, however the risk analysis and the protection plan failed to ensure effective safety conditions for her. She took her case to Court to ask for the Mechanism's explanation

of its methodology and demonstration of how it incorporates the gender approach. Four years later, the trial continues due to the inability of the Mechanism to satisfy her request.

The serious impacts of violence against women journalists in their own lives and in society, have led Mexican women journalists to seek support in international bodies in order for a gender approach to be effectively adopted by the Mechanism.

In the same year the Mechanism was created, the CEDAW Committee of Experts issued the Recommendation 25 to the Mexican State to incorporate the gender perspective in this newly created institution. The mandate includes:

- Guarantee the life, freedom and integrity of women journalists and human rights defenders, and ensure that they are not subjected to any type of violence;
- Ensure a gender approach in the Mechanism's mandate;
- Take concrete, adequate and effective measures to prevent and investigate attacks and other forms of abuse against women journalists and human rights defenders and to prosecute and punish the aggressors and adopt effective measures to combat impunity.

This recommendation was concreted in a risk analysis matrix called "Woman's perspective". The name itself shows how far from complying with the CEDAW recommendation we are.

Six years later, on the occasion of the 9th Periodic Report of the Mexican government before the CEDAW Committee, this insisted on the urgent need for Mexican authorities to prevent, investigate and prosecute attacks against women journalists, to punish aggressors and to take effective measures to eradicate impunity.

According to the Report of Women Journalists and Freedom of Expression of the Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American System (CIDH, 2018), discriminatory practices against women journalists have a double effect: first, against their human rights (as women) and second against their freedom of expression.

Following the report, although more and more women have been practising journalism in recent years, social norms and gender stereotypes still “represent an enormous challenge for the ability of women to start and carry out a career in the field of journalism in equality conditions" (CIDH, 2018: 18).

The report also points out that "substantive equality may require differentiated approaches according to the specific needs and risks of women journalists in each context" (CIDH, 2018: 43), especially in the justice system. Violence against journalists must be adequately addressed.

According to the lawyer Alda Facio, to eradicate the impunity that prevails in violence and murders of women journalists, it is necessary to go beyond the concept of the absence of punishment and incorporate the responsibility and obligations of the State regarding the human right of women to a life free of violence. This duty, explains Facio, includes three obligations: respect, protection and compliance.

- **Respect** involves the State's obligation to recognize in its legislation the right of every woman to live free from violence and disseminate all the laws and policies that refer to this right.

- **Protection** means that the State enforces the right of women to live free from violence and to prevent powerful actors and organizations from violating women's human rights.

- **Complying** means the State to adopt, implement, monitor and evaluate plans and action programmes, depending on the right involved.

Unfortunately, the principles stated by Alda Facio have not been assumed by Mexican authorities. Impunity in cases of violence against women journalists is practically 98% - it must be observed the Prosecutor's Office is part of the Governing Board of the Mechanism.

According to statistical data from the Special Prosecutor's Office for Dealing with Crimes against Freedom of Expression (FEADLE), from 2010, the year of its creation up to 2019, 48 files were in process and 54 "direct female victims were part of these numbers". This shows the level of impunity in the country in cases of violence against women journalists[3].

In the table below is the list of crimes against women journalists identified by the FEADLE.

Types of crimes committed against women	Files		Women
	No.	%	
Threats	20	41.7%	20
Deprivation of liberty	6	12.5%	9
Extortion by an authority	5	10.4%	5
Theft	2	4.2%	2
Body injuries	2	4.2%	2
Homicide	3	6.3%	3
Damages to third-party property	2	4.2%	2
Search warrant	2	4.2%	2
Homicide attempt	1	2.1%	1
Torture	1	2.1%	1
Attack to general means of communication	1	2.1%	4
Violation to Federal Law of Author's Rights	1	2.1%	1
Wiretapping	1	2.1%	1
Intimidation	1	2.1%	1
	48		54

According to the Mechanism's data accessed by this research team, from 2012 until December 2020, 1,730 journalists and human rights defenders were incorporated under its protection. Of these, 657 (38%) of the people incorporated into the Mechanism are journalists, of which 185 are women (39%).

According to Communication and Information for Women (CIMAC), a Mexican NGO focused on documenting attacks against women journalists, there were 920 aggressions, including 19 femicides between 2012 to 2020.

The difference between the numbers registered by the Mechanism and those by CIMAC, can be explained by the absence of information among women journalists in the country about the existence of the Mechanism and the path they need to follow to request protection. This is the reason why women journalists, particularly those from the states and municipalities within the country, are unable to access the Mechanism. Likewise, other reasons to consider are the isolation in which many women journalists work, the

fact that journalists' civil organizations are led by men and violence against women has been normalized, including hostility to journalism as a profession.

Of the 185 cases of women journalists that were incorporated into the Mechanism up until December 2020, 37% have been concluded while 116 remain opened. In comparison 33% of cases of male journalists have been resolved.

The inequalities faced by women journalists in accessing the Mechanism are evident in the absence of women journalists under the protection of this institution in seven states of the country. As shown in the table below, not a single woman journalist has entered protection in those states despite the pattern of attacks against women journalists (see CIMAC's mapping[4]).

State	Mechanism	CIMAC
Yucatán	0	3
Querétaro	0	5
Nuevo León	0	10
Durango	0	5
Colima	0	7
Jalisco	0	16
Zacatecas	0	5

The lack of gender mainstreaming within the Mechanism is also reflected in its statistical reports, since the basic indicators on sources and types of violence, as well as the aggressors, are not disaggregated by sex.

Broadly, there are three categories of potential aggressors recognized by the Mechanism: public, private and unidentified. Of the 600 possible aggressors of journalists identified by the Mechanism, there are: 43% institutional representatives; 33% private individuals and 28% unidentified.

Considering the information on the aggressors of women journalists and grouping them into the same categories recognized by the Mechanism, we observe that 44% are institutional representatives, 36% are private individuals and, 18% are unidentified.

The aggressors of women journalists considered in the category of institutional representatives, include those of the three branches of government – executive, legislative and judicial, at the three levels – federal, state and municipal. Regarding private individuals, they include candidates and supporters of political parties, unions and societal leaders, business persons, private security, male journalists and media owners. Criminal groups represent 0.9% of aggressors.

Regarding the type of attacks against journalists, there are also three global categories that the Mechanism considers: kidnapping / deprivation of liberty; physical aggressions and threats, the latter being the one with the highest incidence according to the institution's records.

Regarding women journalists, taking into account CIMAC's data, whose classification is based on the types and modalities identified in the General Law of Access for Women to a Life Free of Violence, we observe that the types of violence that women journalists come up against are: 96% psychological, 47% physical and 16% familial, followed by sexual and economic with 7 and 3 percent respectively.

Concerning the modalities of violence (according to the General Law), institutional violence is at first place with 42%, followed by online violence with 32%, violence within the community in third place; both femicide and work violence at 2% each.

In comparison to violence against men journalists, the analysis of violence against women journalists and their aggressors reveals that social, human rights and political research are the main sources of aggression against women journalists, while for male journalists, the news coverage of criminal groups and yellow press are the main sources of violence.

As for the cases that were closed, given their importance for women journalists and considering the reasons recognized by the Mechanism, it is crucial to undertake a gender analysis in order to understand the outcome.

In 2013, a year after the Mechanism was created, representatives of the Advisory Council reported that the institution had received 98 cases, of which six concerned women journalists. It was warned about one case valued as "urgent" that involved both a man and a woman journalist, who were victims of death threats. The risk analysis that

was applied to both cases concluded that the male journalist needed higher security measures than his female colleague, without a clear argument. Also, the risk analysis process did not include mechanisms to identify gender-based violence against the female journalist.

The absence of a gender approach by the Mechanism, as well as by the government institutions represented in its Board, has generated enormous distrust of those women journalists that have requested protection. According to the survey carried out in 2014 by CIMAC among women journalists who were beneficiaries of the Mechanism at the time, 29% considered the Mechanism to be "moderately efficient", 24% rated it "bad" and 47% as "very bad".

At that time, the Mechanism had two years of existence and had 82 women journalists under its protection – 35% of the total of 232 journalists protected by this institution.

According to the Statistical Report of the Mechanism corresponding to April 2021, women journalists represent 26% of the total of 467 journalists protected by it[5]. This means that, even though violence against them continues to grow and the number of journalists protected by the institution doubled in five years, not only did the protection of female journalists not grow, but in the same period the number decreased nine points.

What are the reasons for this decrease? What difficulties do they face in accessing this institution? These are some of the questions raised that have not been answered by the Mechanism. However, according to women journalists and NGOs focused on supporting survivors, there are various explanations. Among them, the lack of networks among women journalists and the normalization of attacks against journalists, under the logic that this is part of the culture of being a journalist in Mexico. Also, the normalization of violence against women in the country. Another reason is the lack of campaigns by the institution aimed at journalists to publicize the Mechanism, its scope and activities.

In this period, 36% of cases of female journalists were concluded compared to 31% of those corresponding to male journalists. In accordance with the Regulation of the Protection Law for Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, Chapter VI, on the termination of measures, it is stipulated that these may be terminated in the cases listed below:

- As requested by the beneficiary or petitioner or determined by the governing board. The request will have to be in writing and in case the risk persists, the petitioner must state that she/he is aware of this situation, but that it is her/his will to terminate the measures.

- The governing board may terminate the measures when it is found, by updating the risk assessment study, that the level of risk has decreased to such a degree that they are no longer necessary for the protection of life, integrity, freedom and security of the beneficiary or petitioner. To make this decision, the governing board will require that the beneficiary or petitioner be present at the session, and a vote of two thirds of the present members of the Governing Board.
- If there is not enough evidence or there is doubt that the risk persists, the governing board must decide in favor of the provisional continuity of the measures, while the Risk Assessment Unit provides new elements.

However, the lack of information on the reasons why the cases have been concluded, prevents us from assessing whether there are different patterns between women and men journalists' cases.

The statistical information developed by the Mechanism's Prevention, Monitoring and Analysis section, although it is disaggregated by sex, completely lacks an analysis from the gender perspective in crucial dimensions such as patterns of attacks against journalists, which includes the type of aggressors, types of violence, and the precautionary measures that other authorities have issued. This information would be very useful, especially to design preventive measures that inhibit the repetition of attacks against female journalists in the future.

In the same way, the effectiveness of the preventive, protection and urgent measures that have been granted for them could be evaluated and a catalogue of measures could be identified and created according to the needs of women journalists, who are usually the main responsible for the care of children and parents - especially in the context of forced displacement. So, when a journalist is forced into displacement, it is usually done with her family, and the Mechanism does not have a comprehensive care protocol to cover all the needs of the families, such as schools for children, medical care, adequate shelters and insurance[6].

Similar lack of analysis occurs both in the Case Reception and the Rapid Reaction sections, where the unequal conditions faced by women journalists are not usually considered.

The critical situation faced by women journalist petitioners to the Mechanism, is deepened by the lack of support from media companies towards them and the impacts of stigmatization campaigns, loss of prestige, threats towards their children, etcetera. These generate self-censorship in these professionals forcing them to reduce the frequency and depth of their journalistic investigations, even thinking about abandoning the profession.

In 2019, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), at the request of the Mexican Ministry of the Interior, responsible for the Mechanism, prepared a report on the Mechanism. In argued that:

> "The international responsibility of the State to protect the defenders of the aggressions they may suffer derives from the fundamental duty of every State to protect all human rights, as enshrined in article 2 of the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights. This duty of protection is not limited to States refraining from violating the human rights of defenders and journalists, but also includes the duty to respect, prevent and protect them against risky situations, as well as to investigate, judge and punish those who are responsible for the attacks suffered by human rights defenders and journalists" (OHCHR, 2019: 6).

The report prepared by the OHCHR points out the importance of the Mechanism, recognized "by several of the 62 beneficiaries interviewed, who highlighted that the protection provided by the Mechanism is the reason why they are still alive" (OHCHR, 2019: 7). One of these positive actions is the possibility for petitioners to link with different authorities to solve problems of different kinds that are the cause of the risk they face. "The initial mistrust in the Mechanism has been counteracted through increased awareness among officials and the consolidation of various processes" (OHCHR, 2019: 8).

The report quotes the Resolution 68/181 of the United Nations General Assembly on obstacles to the protection of women defenders, which can also be applied to journalists: "One of the main challenges in integrating the gender perspective in protection measures for human rights defenders lies in the personal convictions and psychosocial factors of each individual. Discrimination on the grounds of gender has a deep social root in Mexico and on occasions it may be people with discriminatory convictions who participate [as officials] in the implementation of measures, putting their quality at risk" (OHCHR, 2019: 57). This could explain the resistance of officials of the Mechanism to include women's human rights among the topics that are listed in the training programs to staff of the institution.

Based on interviews with 26 women beneficiaries, the OHCHR is aware that due to the lack of a gender approach, the vulnerability of some has increased. That is the case for women journalists in displacement situation. Specific conditions like this one, demonstrate the need to ensure that the Mechanism's officials have the appropriate profiles to support victims of different types of discrimination.

As a result of both national pressure and international recommendations to incorporate the gender perspective, the Mechanism designed a risk analysis methodology that "seeks to respond to this need, by considering the vulnerabilities [faced by women journalists] in both

the public and private spheres".

This new methodology has been applied since 2020 and focuses on dimensions such as their home situations - violence faced by women journalists at home, their marital status, whether they are heads of family, etcetera.

Likewise, a section on discrimination and exclusion was added, specifying the gender status and how it affects women's professional development. However, as the analysis on how being a woman determines the violence faced depends on the targets themselves; in some cases, the results of the risk analysis fail to incorporate this as a crucial dimension of the problem described by the victims.

Finally, in 2020 with the sponsorship of the Spotlight initiative, a consultancy was supported with the aim of "strengthening the incorporation of the gender perspective both in risk analysis and in the protection measures granted to defenders and their families." The results of this consultancy are yet to be published.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN MEXICO. NATIONAL DIAGNOSTIC

This report is based in the survey, **"Violence against women journalists in Mexico"**.

The survey was organized with 40 questions that were developed with the aim of identifying different types of violence that women journalist face and how their working conditions have become increasingly precarious because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

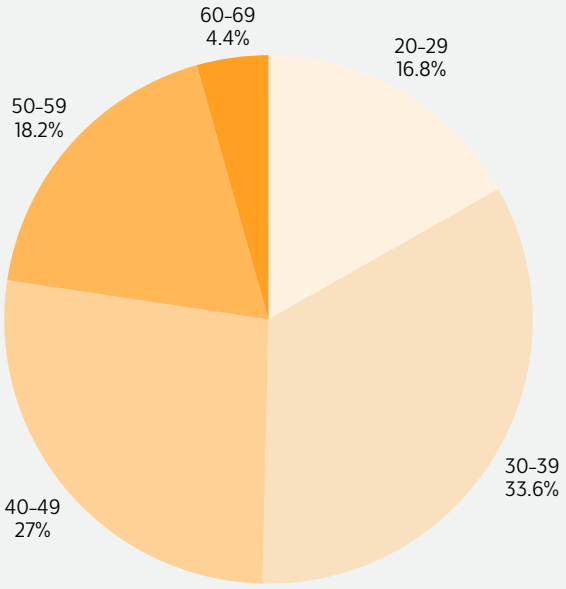
The survey was divided into three parts. The first one gathers general data, the second focuses on types and modalities of violence that affect women while doing journalism and the identification of their aggressors; it also attempts to identify some forms of protections women have implemented in their daily lives. Finally, the third part seeks to prove how women journalists lived during the COVID-19 pandemic and how this affected their work.

Methodological note:

- 137 respondents answered the questionnaire from February 28 up to June 26, 2021.
- Of these, 35 left the second part (identification of types and modalities of violence against women) blank – a 25.5% abandonment. Although there is no further information about these women, the abandonment data in the violence section indicates that the respondents may not have wished to expose information about the violence they have suffered in their professional spaces.
- 4 more respondents abandoned the third section (COVID-19), corresponding to 2.1% abandonment rate.
- The percentage of total abandonment corresponds to 28.4% (39) and the total fully answered surveys is 71.5% (98).

PERSONAL DATA

The widest age range identified was between 30 to 39 years old (46), followed by 40 to 49 (37), 50 to 59 years old (25) and 20 to 29 (23). Six women were between 60 to 69 years old.



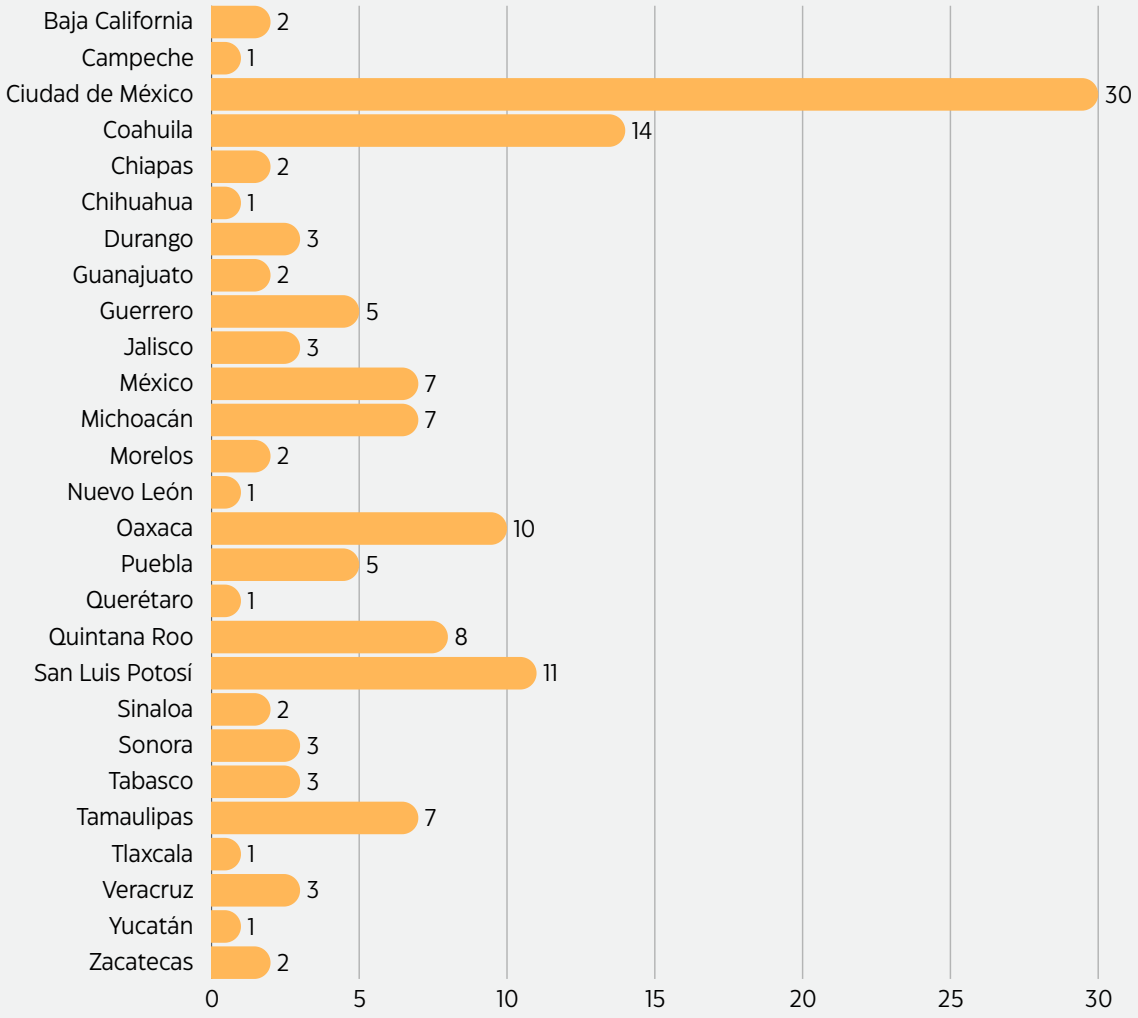
The registered nationalities are mainly Mexican (135), one woman from Venezuelan and another one from Spain.

The recorded ethnicities with the widest range are: none (65), mestizo (19) and Mexican (20); followed up by Mayan (3), Zapotecan (3), Nahua (2), Huastec (2), Mixtecan (2), followed by Chontal, and Oaxaqueña.

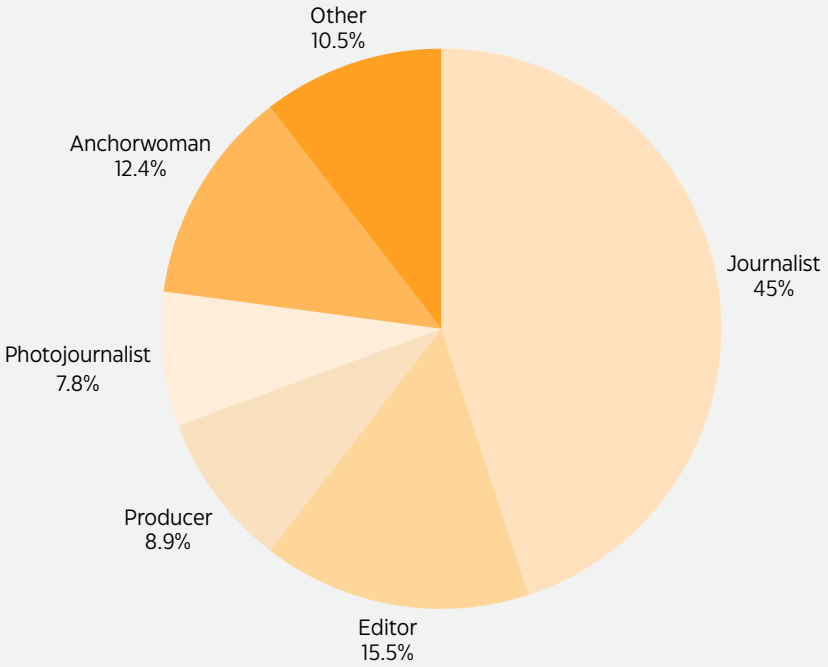
The LGBTQI question recorded five women that identified as part of the community, and the rest (132) don't belong to it. Regarding disabilities, three women mentioned that they have some type of disability and 134 of them do not.

Of all the surveys, 26 (18.9%) of women confirmed to be displaced and 111 (81%) did not. Seven (5.10%) women mentioned having been deprived of liberty and 130 (94.8%) did not.

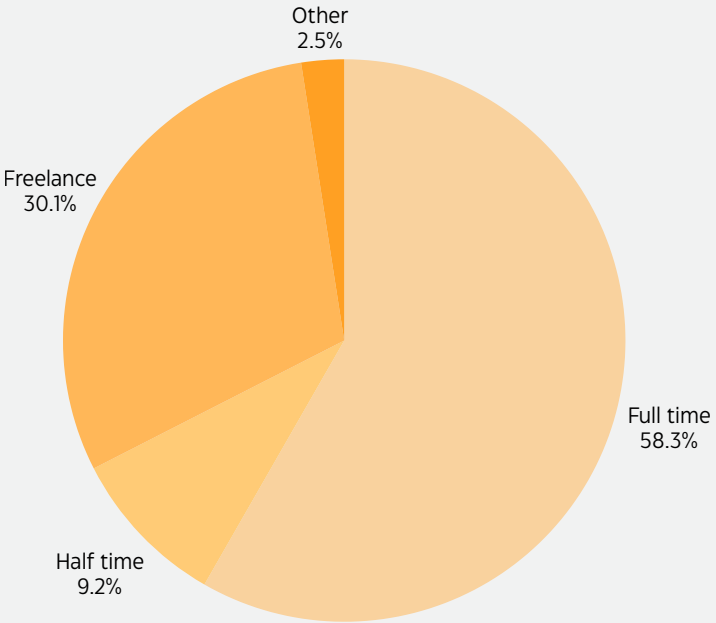
Among the states they are based, are: CDMX (30), Coahuila (14), SLP (11), Oaxaca (10), Quintana Roo (8), México (7), Michoacán (7), Tamaulipas (7), Guerrero (5), Puebla (5), Durango (3), Jalisco (3), Sonora (3), Tabasco (3), Veracruz (3), Baja California (2), Chiapas (2), Guanajuato (2), Morelos (2), Sinaloa (2), Zacatecas (2), Campeche (1), Chihuahua (1), Nuevo León (1), Querétaro (1), Tlaxcala (1) and Yucatán (1).



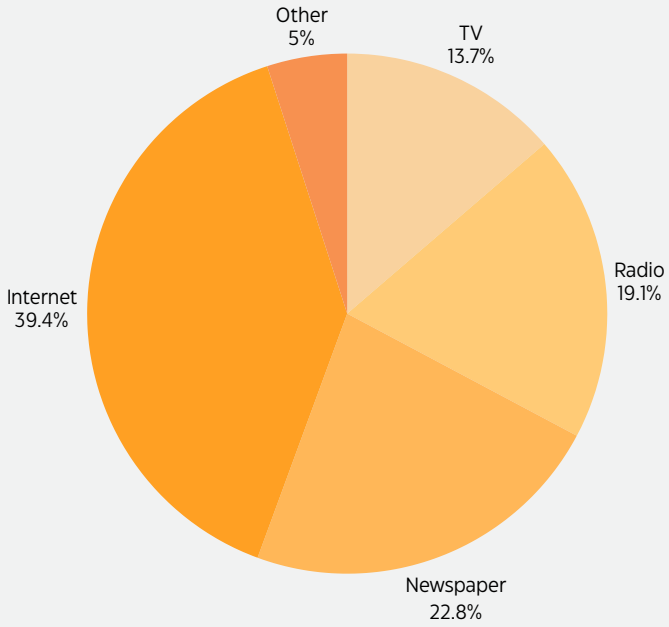
The occupational categories are: journalist (116), editor (40), anchorwoman (32), producer (23), photojournalist (20) and other (27). The "other" category included blogger, web designer, scholar, advocate, reporter, digital reporter, assistant principal, copyeditor, kindergarten supervisor, broadcaster, social communication, scientist, photographer, television production assistant, data analyst and copywriter.



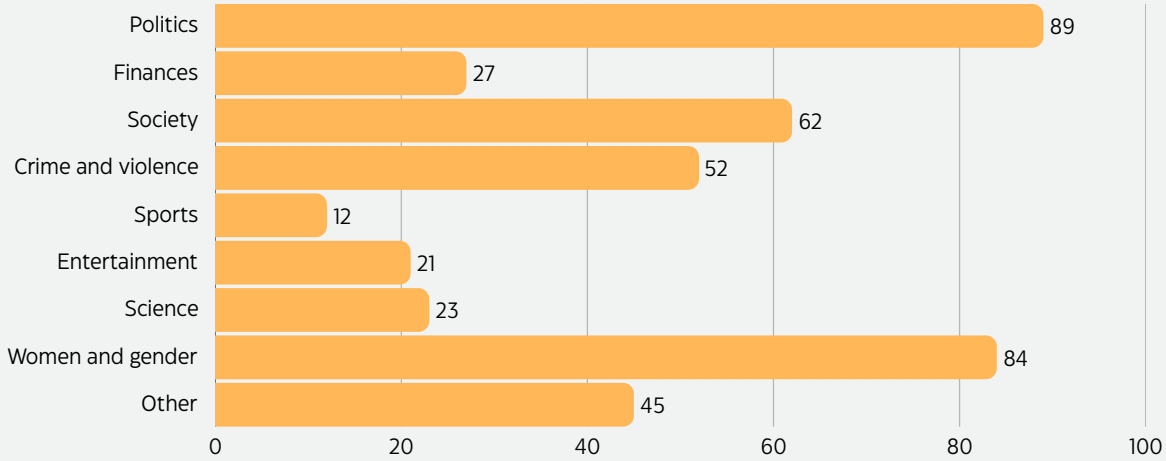
Among the types of employment that were registered are: full-time (95), part-time (15), freelancer (49) and other (4, per hour, full time with no contract, collaborator and an own business related to handmade jewelry)[7].



Among the types of media in which women work are: internet (95), newspaper (55), TV (33), radio (46), and others (12) - among which are mentioned: academia, alternative TV, labor union, filming company, communication management, seminar, social communication, newsroom manager and podcast[8].



The main news sources they cover are: politics (89), women and gender (84), society (62), crime and violence (52), finance (27), science (23), entertainment (21), sports (12) and other (45).

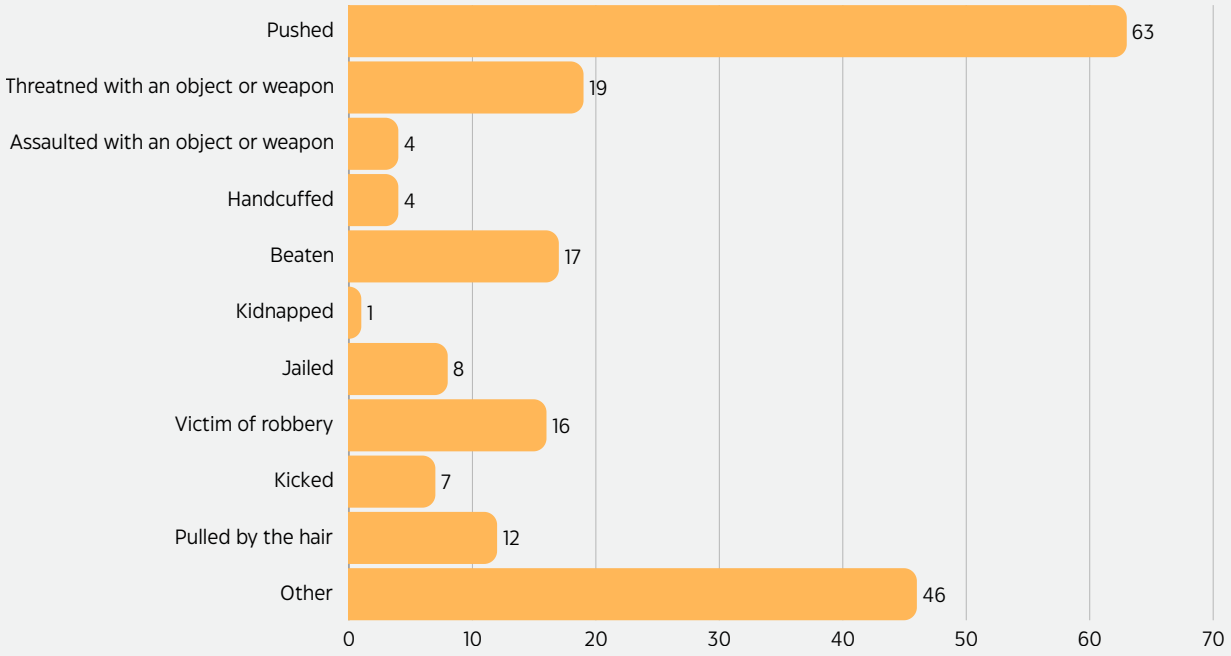


TYPES OF VIOLENCE

The second part of the survey[9] asked women to identify different violent actions that they have faced while carrying out their professional activities within the journalism field. These items were divided according to the categories proposed in the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence. (*Ley General de Acceso a las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*). The results are as follows:

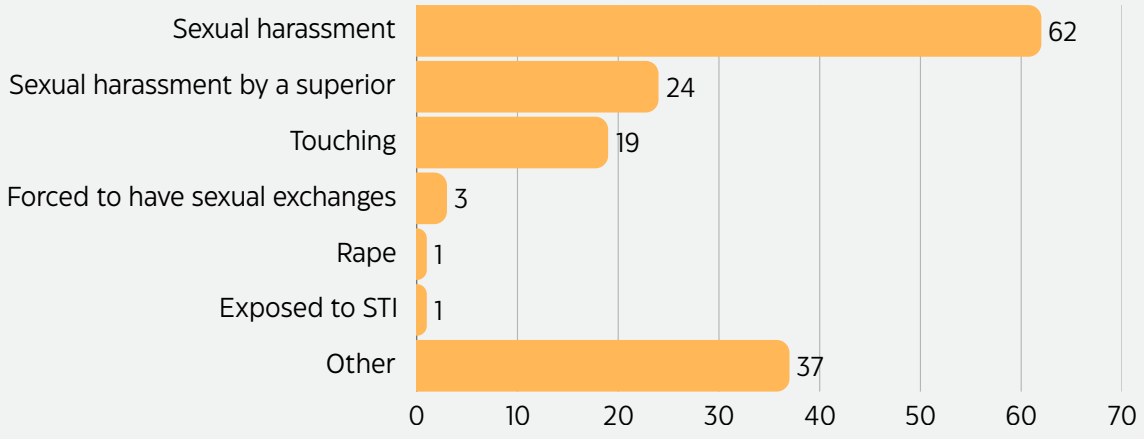
Physical violence

Among the actions of physical violence, the following were identified: being pushed (63), threatened with an object or weapon (19), beaten (17), victim of robbery (16), pulled by the hair (12), jailed (8), kicked (7), assaulted with an object or weapon (4), handcuffed (4), kidnapped (1) and other (46). 17 women indicated not having suffered any of these actions. (11). The rest of women identified, among others, some types of violence that are mainly psychological, such as threats, insults and discrimination at work. Other types of physical violence included being forcefully expelled from certain places and digital violence, such as intimidation and harassment through information and communication technologies.



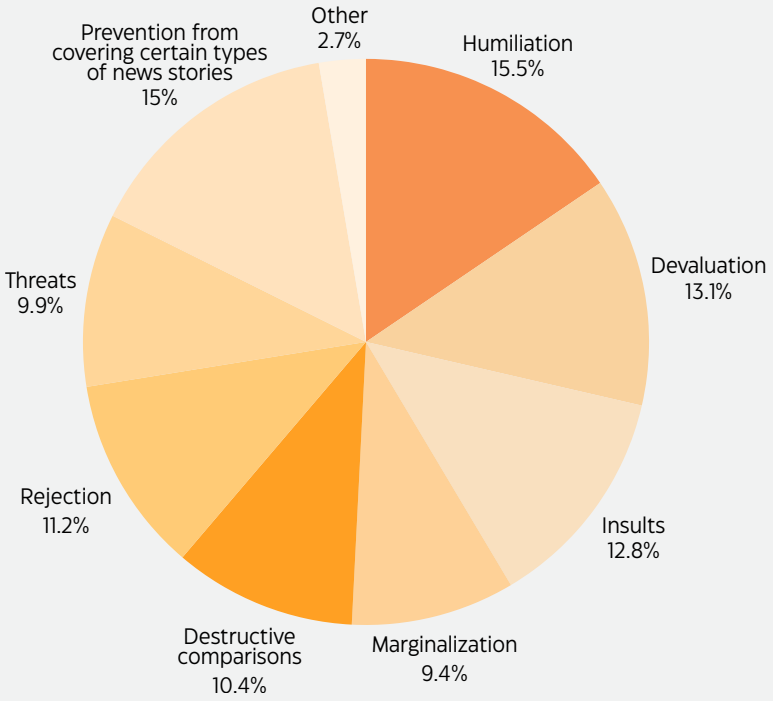
Sexual violence

Among the sexual violence actions, the following were identified: sexual harassment (62), sexual harassment by a boss[10], (24), touching (19), forced to have sexual relations (3), exposed to STI (1), rape (1) and others (37)[11]. 23 women indicated they had not experienced this type of aggression.



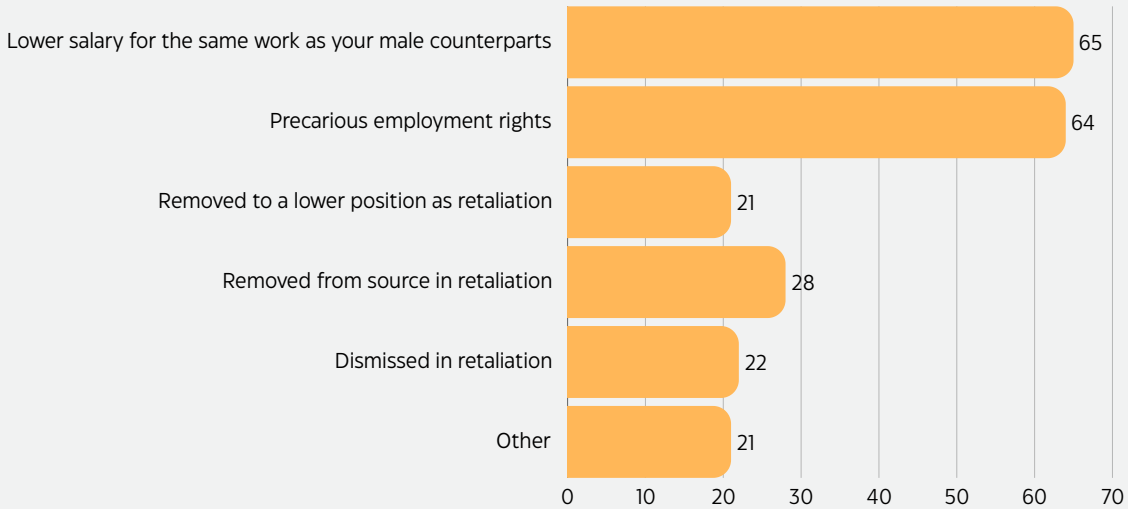
Psychological violence

Among the psychological aggressions, women identified: humiliation (58), prevention from covering certain types of news stories and accessing to certain people (56), devaluation (49), insults (48), rejection (42), destructive comparisons (39), threats (37), marginalization (35) and others (10), of which five women indicated they didn't suffer any type of psychological violence.



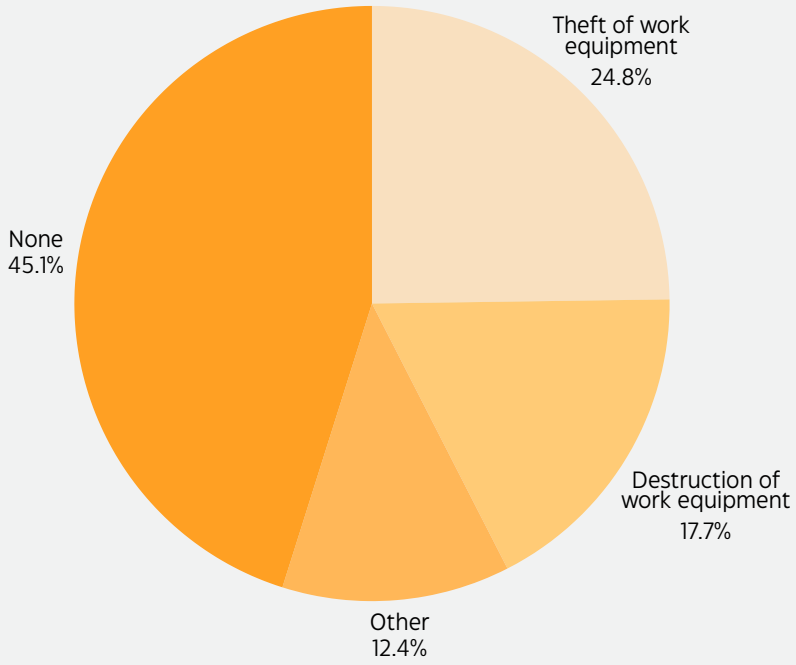
Economic violence

Among the aggressions identified, are: lower salary for the same work done by men colleagues (65), precarious employment (social security, bonus, profit sharing, holidays, etc) (64), removal from source in retaliation (28), demotion as retaliation (21), dismissal as retaliation (22) and other (21)[12]. Eight women indicated they had not suffered this type of violence.



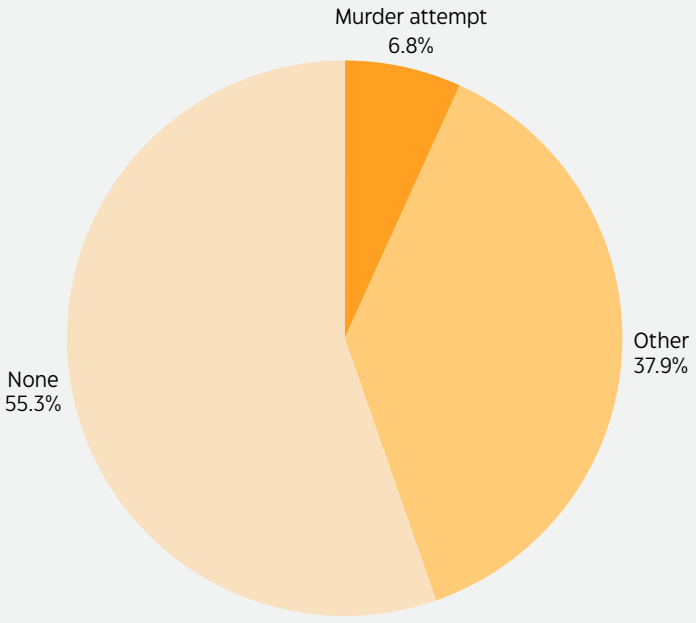
Patrimonial violence (violation of a woman's property rights)

Some of the aggressions that the women interviewed, were: theft of work equipment (28), destruction of work equipment (20) and other (14)[13]. 51 indicated they had not suffered any of these actions.

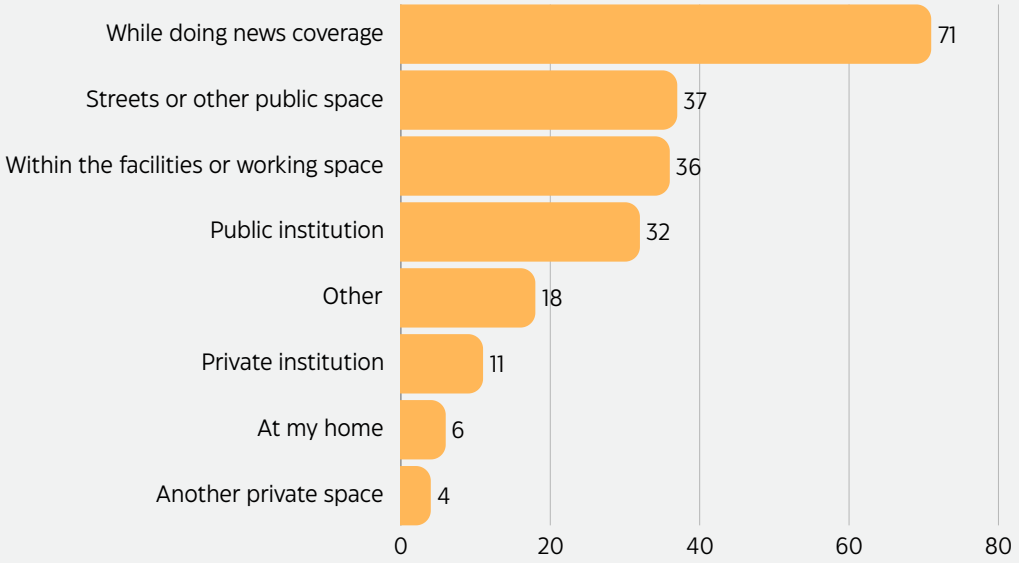


Femicide violence

In the case of attempted femicide, seven women confirmed they had suffered a murder attempt, 57 mentioned not having had any, and 39 identified other types of attacks, which were mainly death threats and other forms of intimidation.

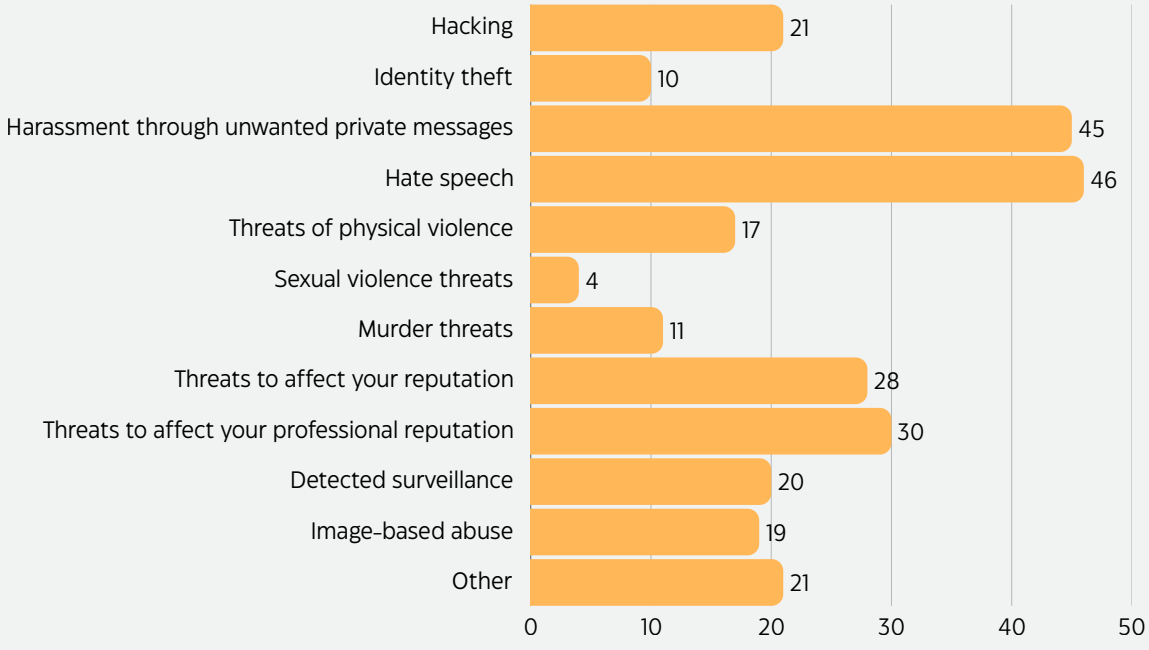


Among the spaces where violence was perpetrated, women journalists confirmed having been attacked while covering news (71), in the street or other public space (37), within the spaces they work (36), in a public institution (32), in a private institution (11), at their homes (6), in another private space (4), and in another public space (18). Among these, women mentioned SMS threats, telephone threats and road rage.

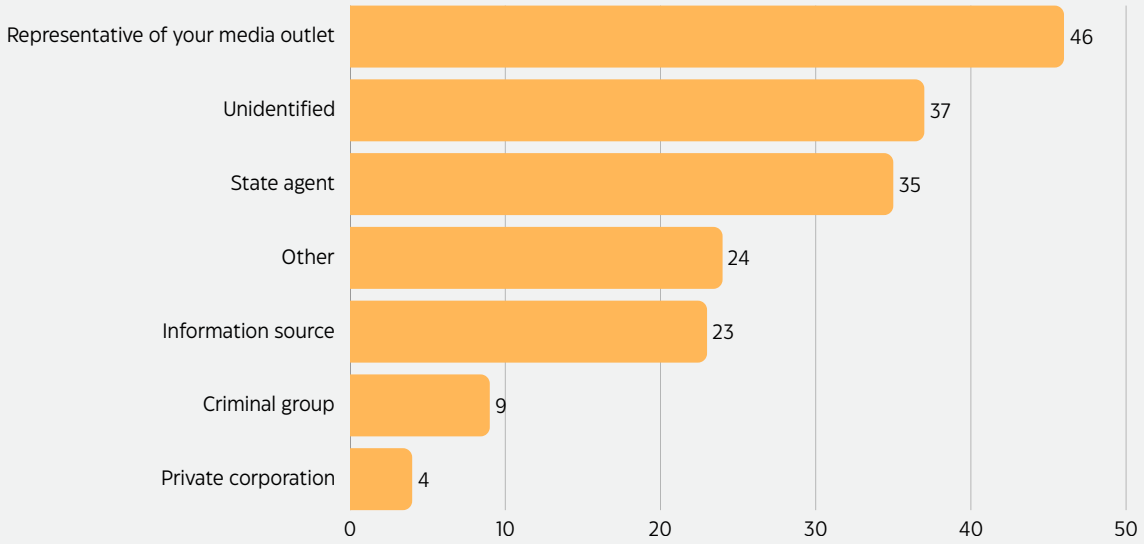


Online violence

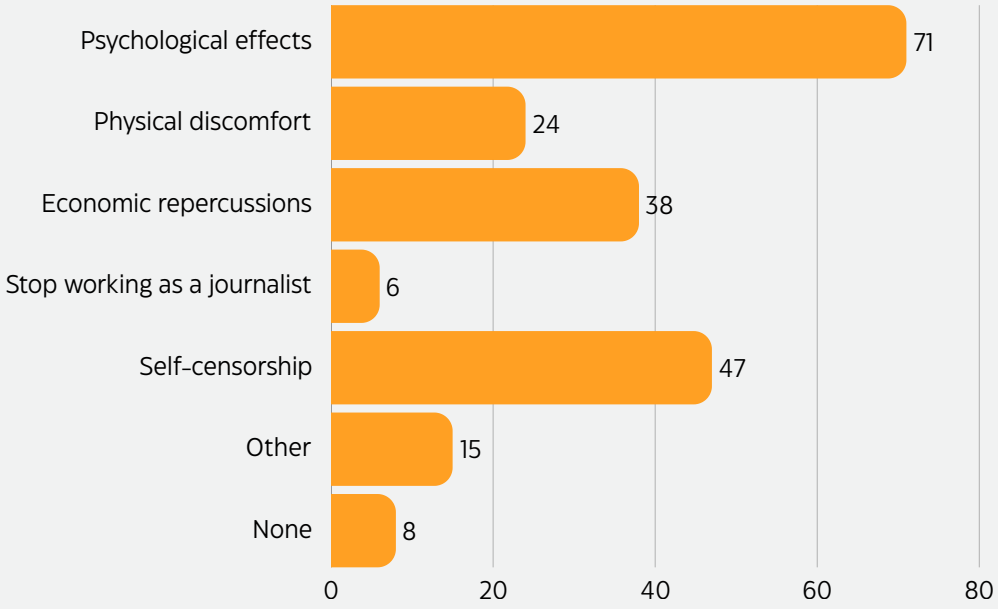
Women journalists interviewed mentioned having been target of the following types of online violence: hate speech (46), harassment through unwanted private messages (45), threats to professional reputation (30), threats to personal reputation (28), hacking (21), surveillance (20),), image-based abuse / abuse of personal information (19), threats of physical violence (17), death threats (11), identity theft (10), rape/sexual threats (4) and other (21). 18 had not experienced any type of online violence.



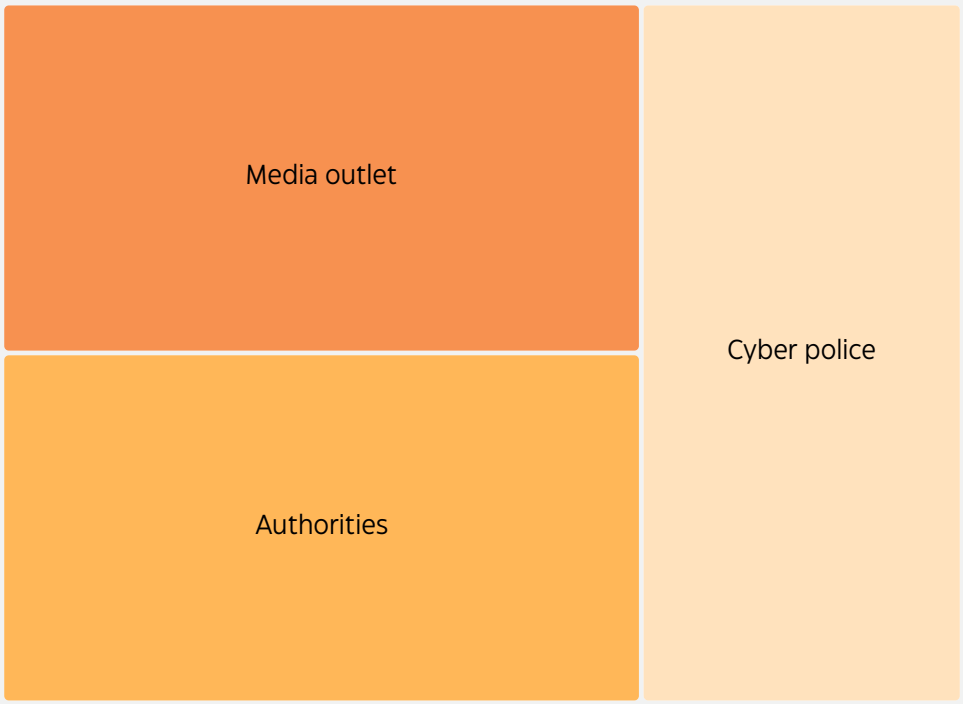
The main identified aggressors were: representative of their media outlet (colleague, boss, director, owner, other) (46), unidentified (37), state agent (legislator, police, army, navy, federal, state or municipal, other) (35), information source (23), criminal groups (9), private corporation (4) and other (24). , Eight women indicated that had not suffered this type of attack.



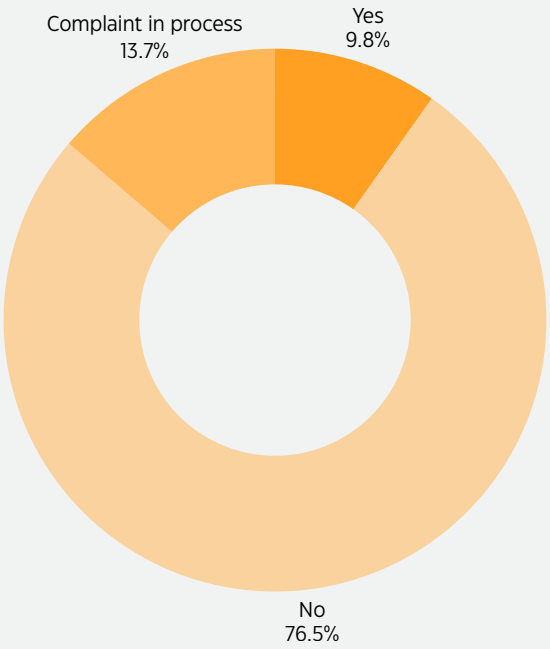
For the surveyed women, the impact of the violence they experienced had psychological effects (fear, anxiety, insomnia, feelings of persecution, alcoholism, etc.) (71), self-censorship (47), economic repercussions (38), physical discomfort (muscle cramps, changes in menstruation, dermatitis, etc.) (24), having stopped working in journalism (6), other (15) and none (8).



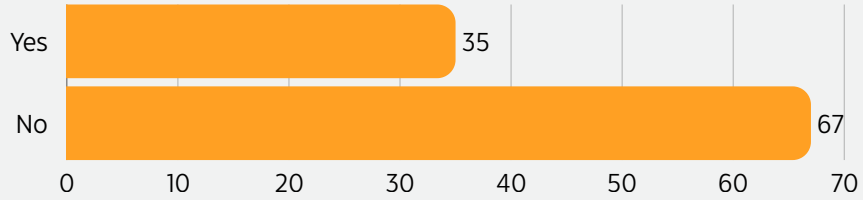
Of the 102 women who reached this part of the survey, 43 reported the violence they faced and 59 of them did not. Of that total, 27 women reported to the authorities, 24 to their media and seven to the cyber police.



Of the 51 women who reported having faced violence, five responded that their complaints had been satisfactorily resolved, 39 confirmed that they had not, and seven mentioned that their complaints are still in process.



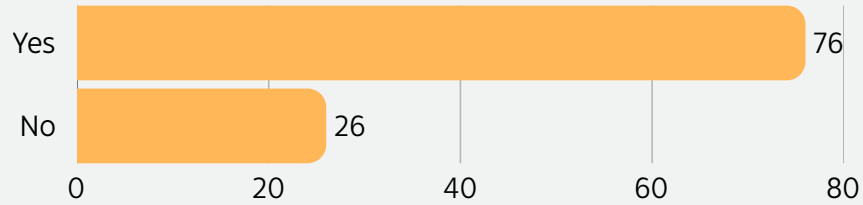
According to the responses of women journalists, for 67 of them, their employers did not provide any kind of measures to guarantee safety conditions while doing their jobs, while 35 of them mentioned that their media houses provided them with security measures.



The main measures are:

- Keep communication between senior managers, immediate bosses and colleagues; WhatsApp groups to keep available the information they handle and what could happen to them. If something were to happen, they could be aware and able to react immediately.
- Training courses.
- Not exposing themselves to situations that could threaten their lives.
- Delete all the information that could be useful to find their whereabouts.
- Digital counselling, psychological support, and purchase of equipment.
- Keep company with other collegues and seek to training by themselves for self-safety.
- Accompaniment.
- Social security.
- Personal judgement.
- Legal support.
- Not exposing themselves and getting legal advice.
- Working in pairs or more.
- Vehicle. Mobile devices
- Appropriate personal and professional care information.
- Entered under the protection Mechanism.
- Courses and access to NGOs with the capacity to offer guidance and advice.
- Have backup information.

When asked if they have implemented their own security measures, 76 women confirmed they have implemented and 26 have not.



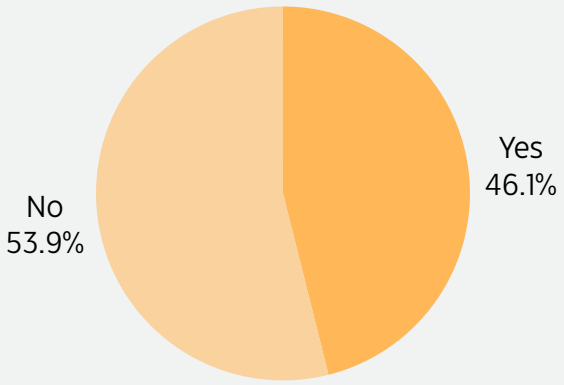
Of those that have done so, Self-censorship is one of the most mentioned. Below are other measures they have implemented:

- Stop talking to male colleagues, if needed. Point out bullying behaviors.
- Keep in touch with friends and first-aid kits, carry a pepper spray
- Training protocol to get home.
- Always advise what they do, where and with whom they are.
- Travel monitoring.
- Buy their own face mask, and gel and not travel in collective transport.
- Avoid talking about sensitive subjects.
- Alert friends and family when doing news coverage.
- Change of routine.
- Keep in touch with other colleagues, changing telephone number.
- Have a support network.
- Keep alert.
- Double verification, long passwords, getting two computers to handle sensitive information, getting on one secure computer, changing routines.
- Maintain distance and check coverage area before attending. Avoid risky areas. Inform colleagues about their whereabouts in case of high-risk news coverage.
- Avoid accepting people they don't know on social networks. Avoid providing private addresses.
- Avoid doing solo coverage and in some cases constantly report their locations.
- Change passwords, activate two-step verification, and use computer passwords.
- Change schedules and avoid risky situations.
- Avoid places where life could be at risk and, in some situations, avoid identifying as a journalist.
- Follow security protocols.
- Control information sources. Keep two phone lines. Protect personal information.
- Purchase insurance.
- Avoid using a mobile phone in public places and keep social networks private.
- Carry pepper spray.
- Inform family members about their whereabouts and keep company while doing media coverage.
- Avoid night assignments. or high-risk area assignments.
- Keep sanitary protection kits (masks, face masks, antibacterial gel) and carry pepper spray.

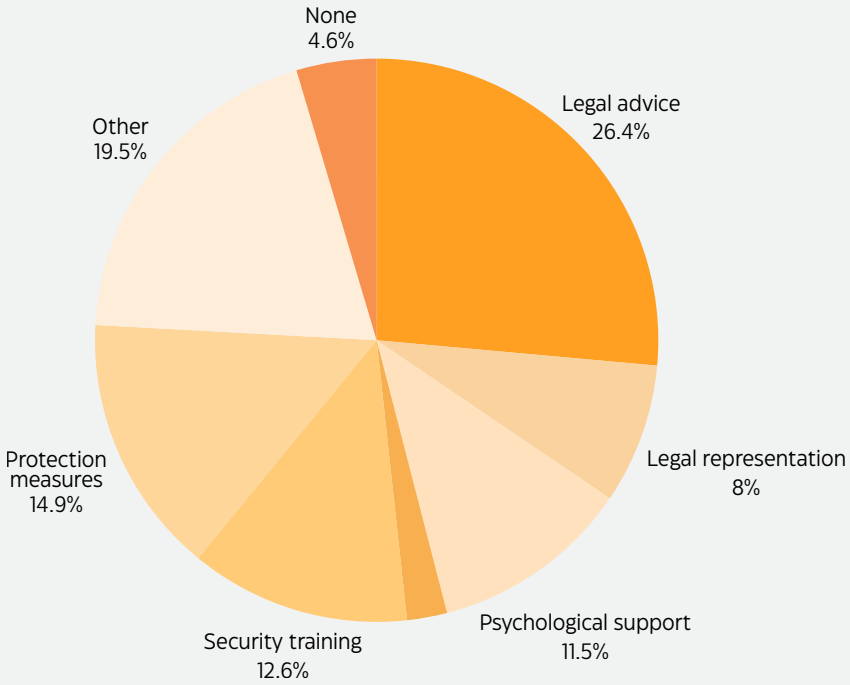
- Move of home, installing security cameras, and adding locks on doors and windows.
- Requesting to enter under the protection Mechanism.
- Implementing a family protocol where everyone reports departures and arrivals. Do not go out at night.
- Avoid covering certain topics that compromise safety.
- Carry pepper spray and a razor.
- Resign from work.
- Observe surroundings and share location with their family.
- Do not walk alone and keep alert.
- Share location with colleagues.
- Inform a contact about personal and professional movements. Have emergency contacts. Use two mobile phones.

- Avoid working alone and going to high risk locations. Avoid organized crime issues, or research of issues that may put them at risk.
- Abandon potentially dangerous investigations.
- Protect sources of information and be careful with speech.
- Use security software, keep computer camera covered, notify others in case of being alone with a man and keep a backup of all documents.
- COVID-19 test, keep a security plan. Organize group follow-ups during coverages, and maintain constant location updates.
- Protect personal data.
- Change work routes, not show daughters' faces on social networks, and refrain from sharing private life details on social media.

According to the survey, while facing violence, 55 women mentioned that their media has not supported them and 47 confirmed receiving support from them.



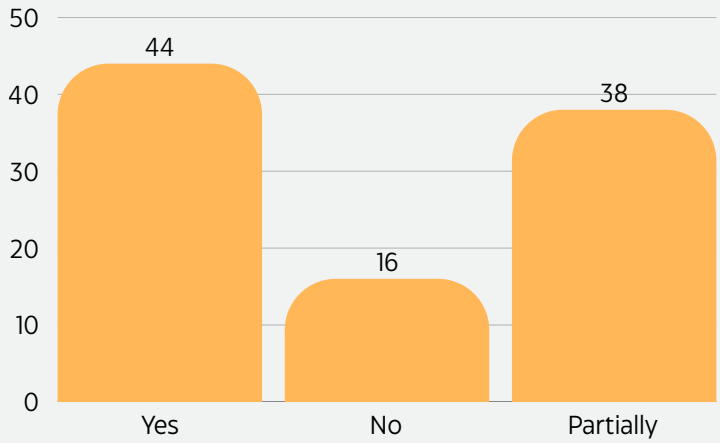
Those who answered **yes** indicated that the support has been: legal advice (23), others[14] (17), protection measures (13), security training (11), psychological support (10), legal representation (7), none (4), or supported a relocation (2).



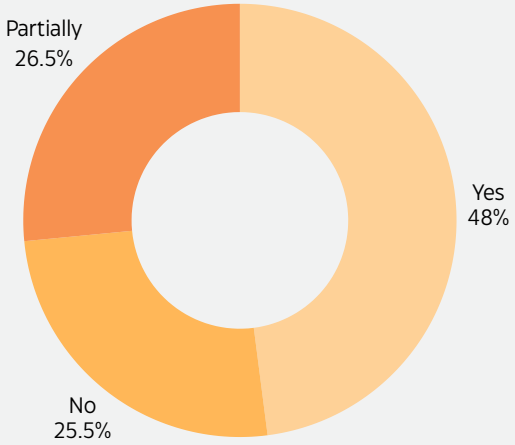
COVID-19

In this section of the survey, women journalists were asked how the COVID-19[15] pandemic affected their activities, as well as the means of protection they had while fulfilling their professional duties.

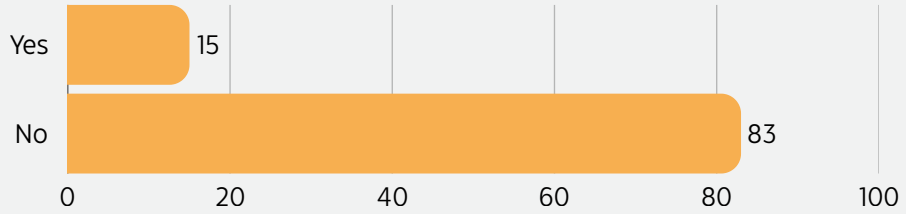
44 women responded that, during the pandemic, they continued their activities normally, 16 of them did not and 38 did them partially.



For 47 women, their media outlets, provided them with health security measures to prevent infections because of their professional work. 25 of them had not received this type of measures and 26 received them partially.

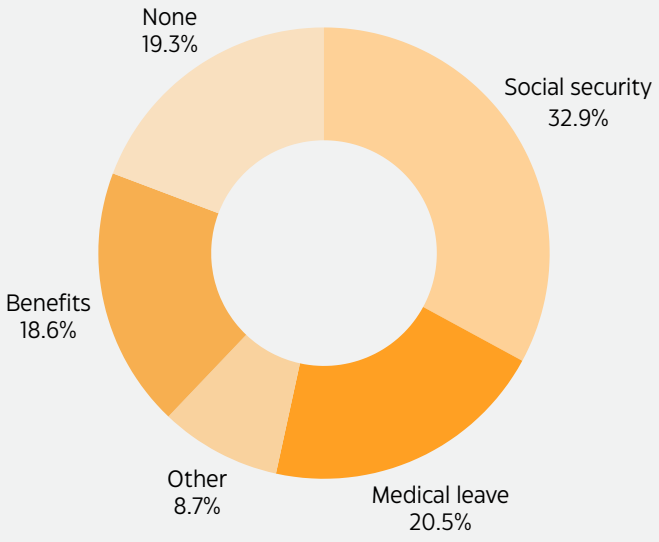


When asked if they were got COVID-19 while doing their work, 15 answered affirmatively and 83 said they didn't get infected.

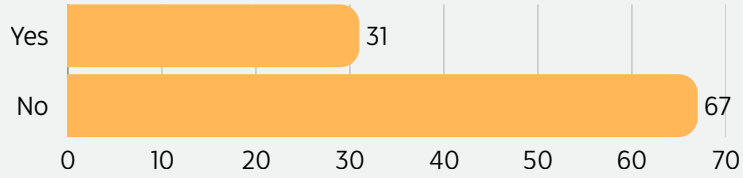


Of the women who responded that they were infected by COVID-19, three responded that their media outlet provided them with resources such as social security and medical leave; while 19 confirmed that they did not these benefits.

Some of the benefits that their media outlets covered were: social security (53), medical leave (33), benefits (30), other (14) and none (31).



Of those women journalists that responded that because of the pandemic, 31 lost their jobs or their work contracts became precarious, while 67 claimed that they kept their jobs.



In response to the final question, concerning the responsibilities that the government, the media, and human rights organizations should assume to ensure women journalists can live free from violence, respondents agreed on the urgent need to guarantee their safety and security.

Finally, throughout the analysis of this survey, the different contexts of vulnerability faced by journalist women were made visible, particularly those that worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-existing issues such as precarious working conditions, lack of support from media organizations, and the absence of State intervention, highlighted the specific risks women journalists face due to their gender condition —a reality that is not being adequately addressed in the different levels of implementation of the Mechanism.

The survey revealed the need for State intervention that goes beyond isolated and individual responses. The answers shared by women journalists, reflect the power dynamics and structural inequalities that perpetuate types and modalities of violence against women. Notably, there has been a significant increase in online violence, which is an extension of the violence many women already experience in their workplaces. This situation has driven women journalists to adopt self-defence measures, from personal safety protocols and creating external support networks, to self-censorship. These strategies underscore the deficiencies in institutional and media-level responses.

This gap highlights the need to incorporate a gendered perspective into protection and support strategies to ensure a safe working environment and freedom of expression for women. Furthermore, these measures must prioritize women's human right to communicate.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MAINSTREAM GENDER IN THE NATIONAL MECHANISM IN MEXICO

- The possibility of incorporating the gender perspective in the Mechanism is not reduced to a checklist, but to placing the right of women to live free of violence at the center of the analysis, recognizing the historical structural conditions faced by women

journalists that make them vulnerable to attacks not only from external agents – such as government officials or criminal groups, but from their colleagues and bosses, which limit their professional development.

- Articulating the entire national and international legal framework for women's human rights in a logic of protection.
- Guaranteeing the recruitment of officials sensitive to the gender approach – mainly those working in the three Mechanism's Units mentioned above, that should be systematically trained.
- Guaranteeing that all the statistical information produced by the Mechanism is disaggregated by sex.
- Strengthening the Mechanism with the necessary personnel to face the challenges posed by the number of petitioners.
- Building a monitoring system that includes the gender approach to evaluate the suitability of measures for women journalists.
- Strengthening the financial autonomy of the Mechanism, which includes recovering the Trust that was eliminated in 2020 by Mexico's President.
- Guaranteeing that institutions that make up the Governing Board, appoint as representatives, officials with the necessary knowledge about protection, risk analysis and gender perspective.
- Guaranteeing the coordination between federal, state and municipal authorities.

References:

OHCHR (2019). Diagnóstico sobre el funcionamiento del Mecanismo. Oficina en México del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos. Ciudad de México. URL: https://hchr.org.mx/wp/wp-content/themes/hchr/images/doc_pub/190725-Diagnostico-Mecanismo-FINAL.pdf

Notes:

[1] GAMAG is an international non-governmental organization with members from journalism, academia, and civil society in different parts of the world.

[2] Cámara de Diputados (2012), Law for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists. http://www.oas.org/juridico/PDFs/mesicic5_mex_ane_12.pdf

[3]https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/508676/V_ctimas_Mujeres_FEADLE_-_oct_2019.pdf

[4] CIMAC (2021). Geographies of Violence Against Women Journalists: https://cartografia-cimac.uwazi.io/es/page/0f8cy12v5v3f

[5] Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists, Statistical Report, April 2021 Available at: https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/644669/2021_04_Informe_estadistico.pdf

[6] Another consequence of the lack of a women's human rights approach, are the shelters granted to displaced journalists, especially for young journalists. These are not safe places as they are usually sexually harassed by the guards of the buildings.

[7] In the results, 17 women identified that they share activities full-time and freelance, five part-time and freelance, and three more full-time and part-time.

[8] One woman mentioned being fired and one more did not complete the answer.

[9] From this question, 35 women abandoned the survey.

[10] Mexican law identifies two types of sexual harassment: *acoso* and *hostigamiento*, the first one is done by any man that doesn't have a relationship with the victim, while the second aims to point out that the aggressor has a power relationship with the victim, like a boss, a police officer or a teacher.

[11] Among the other aggressions that the women identified were: shootings, insinuations, harassment by officials, aggressions derived from the fact that the information was opposed to business interests and emotional violence.

[12] Some women noted that they suffered threats of dismissal for not dedicating enough time to work, made publications without salary, worked 12-hour shifts, suffered from changes in hours and breaks without prior notice, shift changes, including not being accepted at other media for not consenting sexual requests.

[13] Of the women who selected "others" they mentioned: the removal of their cell phones at different times, being blocked of transmissions and the use of their equipment without their permission.

[14] Among the answers for "other", the women journalists mentioned that they have received training, legal guidance, support and advice from their media.

[15] Four more women abandoned the survey before the start of the third part.

Engendering National Mechanisms for the Safety of Journalists. Iraq

Iraq

INTRODUCTION

Since 2016 the number of journalist killings in Iraq declined, with nine journalists killed between 2017 and 2019. But in the first four months of 2020 alone, six media professionals were killed in the country. Many of these dangers overshadow the work of journalists in Iraq, such as attacks from ISIS or armed groups backed by political parties. Moreover, Iraqi media watchdog organizations showed a pattern of violations of human rights by security forces.

Between late 2016 and early 2017 the Iraqi journalism community was shaken by another attack on one of its members, when Afrah Shawqi, an Iraqi woman journalist and a mother of two young boys, was kidnapped at her home in southern Baghdad by between eight and 15 gunmen late on 26 December. Shawqi, who has been writing for several Arabic and international publications, including the London-based *Al Sharq Al Awsat*, had at that time published articles critical of armed groups in Iraq. The release of Shawqi demonstrated the significant role of the state in providing safety for journalists in Iraq when the former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi issued a communiqué condemning her abduction and ordering the security forces to do the utmost to protect her, find her and capture the group or groups responsible. She was returned home in a week, though her kidnappers remain at large and free.

However, the government intervention in this case, instead of making a statement to guarantee the safety of journalists in Iraq, it came as a solo action. As Human Rights Watch documented, in a 42-page report, the growing number of prosecutions of journalists under defamation and incitement laws in the country in June 2020. Accordingly, Reporters Without Borders places Iraq at 163 in its press freedom rankings, near Syria (173), and Yemen (169) — out of 180 countries. Even more discouraging is that Iraq has fallen down the rankings each year: in 2013, it was in 150th place.

Regarding female journalists working in Iraq, they are a double target. In addition to being targeted as journalists, they are also harassed as women. Although the statistics collected from opinion surveys and media reports confirm that up to 65% of female journalists are subjected to harassment, they often refrain from reporting such abuses due to the nature of social conditions, customs and traditions prevailing in Iraqi society. Only a single case of harassment has been registered officially.

In 2012, a study on violence against women was conducted by the Iraqi Women Journalists Forum. The study concluded that more than half of the women who participated in the survey were victims of harassment and that they chose to remain silent for fear of compromising their jobs and reputations.

In the Kurdistan Region, the Nerij Organization for Investigative Journalism conducted a survey on sexual harassment against female journalists in 2017. The results of the survey show that 140 out of 240 journalists working in television, radio, and electronic media, have experienced such situations that are considered sexual harassment. The survey also showed that two thirds of these women experienced verbal harassment, while one third faced physical harassment.

In that context, Iraq alongside Nepal, Pakistan, and South Sudan was chosen as a pilot country for the implementation of the UN plan of action for the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity in 2013. The UN Plan of Action was adopted in April 2012 and confirmed by the UN General Assembly in November 2013 while UNESCO developed and oversaw it. However, the Iraqi government has not responded to any of the information requests in a total of 145 murder cases. Towards the end of 2016, UNESCO was able to meet with members of the legislative and executive branches to discuss a mechanism for reporting murders and responding to these requests.

GENDER-SENSITIVENESS ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS

This report covers a comprehensive study of what mechanism not only provides protection to journalists in Iraq from risks, threats, and repercussions, but also takes into consideration the gender aspects of risks and protection mechanisms for women journalists facing double danger as they are vulnerable to additional gender-specific dangers when practicing journalism in Iraq.

At the beginning, the report demonstrates the process of establishing the national mechanisms between 2016 and 2019 in Iraq. Following that, this report aims to investigate to what extent and in what manner the newly born national mechanisms have provided protection measures for Iraqi women journalists across the country.

By the end of 2016 the Iraqi National Committee for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity was formed at the order of the Iraqi Prime Minister. Its work is supported by the UNESCO office and other foreign embassies in Iraq. Since 2012 the UNESCO Office for Iraq in Baghdad has been spearheading the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, in close cooperation with the Iraqi authorities and media representatives, as well as national and international specialized NGOs.

In 2015 a comprehensive analysis of the safety situation of Iraqi journalists using the UNESCO Journalists' Safety Indicators (JSI) was conducted by UNESCO and its local partner, the Iraqi Journalists' Rights Defense Association (IJRDA). It concluded that there was not a national strategy for the protection of journalists, but instead of existing but 'temporary reactions' to some cases. According to the report, published in 2019, the lack of necessary measures to follow up with the concerned authorities has eventually resulted in the high rate of impunity in Iraq.

Hence, the National Committee was established to fulfil the following three functions:

- Preparing information and data on all threats and murder cases of journalists
- Conducting annual reports on those cases[1]
- Following-up on any aggression that occurs in real time - once a journalist reports his case- through members of the committee, who are representative of governmental bodies, such as the ministry of interior.

On the World Press Freedom Day, the 3rd of May 2017, the national committee was officially born. In that year it sent the first official report to the Iraqi government in ten years, which addressed 146 murder cases. Despite that remarkable achievement, the committee faced two fundamental issues regarding the absence of the national mechanism itself at that point, in the middle of 2017. The representatives of governmental and parliamentary bodies competed over the presidency of the committee. Moreover, there was a conflict of powers among them. For instance, judicial officials refused to respond to the Ministry of Interior's enquiries about murder cases because the judiciary is ranked higher than the ministry of interior.

In early 2018 the UNESCO office in Iraq supervised preparation of the national Mechanism that was drafted by the international expert Toby Mendel. After the National Committee had approved the draft, the national mechanism was created by a ministerial decision ratified by the Minister of Justice in October 2018. Having had a new government in the country, members of the national council, who were representatives of the former government, were replaced with new members. Therefore, the national Mechanism was officially announced once more on the World Press Freedom Day, the 3rd of May 2019.

Its structure includes the National Council whose members are the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the Iraqi Parliament, the Communication Media Commission (CMC), the Human Rights National Commission (IHCHR), and the Journalists Syndicate (IJS) – two representatives of the civil society. The membership of civil society organizations has quite a short lifespan that lasts for a few months before being replaced with a new representative of a civil society organization.

The Mechanism's operation is constituted by the three following teams:

- A team of 14 field officers. In June 2019, it was established under the supervision of the National Committee's board members. The objective of this team is to perform groundwork on journalists' cases by collecting relevant information from the concerned authorities (e.g., the Ministry of Interior, the Judiciary) among other sources, which will later be presented to the members of the National Committee.

- The Special Investigative Unit for the Protection of Journalists (SIU) is the core of the national mechanisms as it has been established –at a later stage– to be an investigative and protection body. The head of this unit is the Ministry of Interior's representative in the National Committee. Its initial objective was to distinguish journalists' cases from hundreds of other daily cases reported to police stations across Iraq, in a way that speeds up how Iraqi authorities investigate attacks on journalists. It was formed with the support of UNESCO through ''Breaking the Silence: enhancing public accountability on freedom of expression and the safety of journalists in Iraq'', a project funded by the Dutch government. The Unit consists of 58 police officers; 3 ones are assigned to one police station in each governorate. Daily, they submit a report on any case reported by a journalist in a police station. If a journalist reports an attack or threat to a police station, his/her file will be given priority and sent directly into the central investigation unit in Baghdad, in a way that speeds up the investigation and protection measures on the level of police stations.

- Concerning the judicial procedures, a few courts of appeal judges are assigned to expedite investigation procedures in journalists' cases. To fetch information on cases of journalists as quickly as possible without going through hundreds of cases in the courts, the assigned judge will mark the file with a special code implying that the case belongs to a journalist[2].

Another protection and reporting procedure forming the National Mechanism for Protecting Journalists and Combating Impunity in Iraq is the hotline 5555 for journalists. It was established by UNESCO Iraq with the Ministry of Interior as the UNESCO Iraq Office has been building the capacity of the Special Investigative Unit for journalists' cases. This procedure fills a gap identified by the 2015 baseline study, which was the lack of emergency numbers journalists could have in case of exposure to danger or threats. The objective of this hotline is to receive requests for protection from journalists who are exposed to direct danger, so the authorities can send the nearest security patrol to his/her location. For other types of threats, the call center will refer the journalist to the concerned authority.

In addition to this hotline, journalists and media outlets can report their complaints to the government in case of any incidents by contacting the two-hour radio program "Media and Security", another initiative supported by UNESCO-Iraq. Both the hotline and radio programme are part of the Breaking Silence project.

As a result of the above-mentioned procedures, the process of reporting journalists' cases and follow-up breaks into three levels across the national mechanisms:

1. Reported cases directly by journalists and published ones in the news.
2. National Committee's board members. When they receive a case of a journalist, they assign the concerned authority to follow-up (e.g., in the case of murder, they request the initial investigations from the Special Investigative Unit of the Ministry of Interior).
3. The National Committee's periodical follow-up on open cases with the Special Investigative Unit by requesting updates on a daily or monthly basis.

The primary challenge faced by the Mechanism is ensuring access for all journalists, particularly women at risk due to their profession, in order to protect their lives and well-being. According to the UNESCO office in Iraq's survey[3], which included 2,600 journalists, the majority were reluctant to report threats and dangers to police. 98% of female journalists firmly refused to report online or offline threats while 70% of their male counterparts confirmed that they would not report any threats in police stations.

For both, women and men, the reason behind such a decision is the widespread government corruption and political parties' control over the security establishment in Iraq; hence, they will put themselves at greater risk by going to a police station. From a gender perspective, women journalists are even at greater risk when reporting threats to police because of the social stigma, as they may be subject to harassment by police officers. On a moral basis, women journalists have no access to the police services when facing threats or dangers -even if it is a serious danger- they will keep silent as they fear for bringing dishonor upon their families.

Taking into consideration the highly charged political climate of Iraq, the main challenges of the Mechanism, are:

Vocational Stability and Political Influence. The Mechanisms and the National Committee have been created by a line of ministerial orders. Consequently, whenever a new government is formed, the members of the National Committee may be replaced or the committee itself may be dissolved. This instability has been pointed out as one of the main challenges faced by the Mechanism.

To achieve vocational stability, the prime minister must issue a decree, so the committee has the power -according to the Iraqi constitution– to appoint its members away from the authority of the ministers and the influence of the political parties. With such vocational stability, the Mechanisms will be able to hold the government accountable for threats and impunity.

In May 2020, UNESCO and Iraqi journalists sent a request to the Iraqi government and to the Prime Minister's Office to sign a draft of the executive order on the protection mechanism for the safety of journalists in Iraq, specifying who would be responsible for the safety of journalists, and to determine the duty of each member of the Committee. At the time of writing this report, the prime minister has not responded to that request.

Operation. The operation of the Mechanism is influenced by Iraq's political mood swings and restricted because of the absence of the executive order that emphasizes its powers. The lack of stability and independence from political parties fuels conflict of powers among government bodies, which hinders the operation of the Mechanism's investigation measures. For instance, the Special Investigative Unit clashes with the Iraqi National Security Agency when investigating a crime of journalist murder as the National Security Agency will not share videotapes or other evidence with the Special Investigative Unit because it is ranked higher than the Special Investigative Unit.

Budget. The operation of the Mechanism's protection, monitoring and investigation measures is financed by a grant from the Dutch government. Despite the financial and technical support from the Dutch government for setting up the National Mechanism in Iraq, it withdrew its financial support for a new digital platform which aims to overcome the obstacle of reporting threats to police stations. The UNESCO office in Iraq submitted the proposal twice in 2019 and 2020.

Legislations. The National Council performs its duties without legislative support from the legislature. According to the UNESCO office in Iraq, the Supreme Judicial Council still works according to the provisions of the amended 1969 Penal Code, which is "a law of oppressive power", in a way that ignores the provisions of the 2011 Journalists Protection Law.

Monitoring Mechanisms

On a monitoring level, the National Committee has recently created a paper-based database of attacks on journalists, media houses, media workers and other related jobs in the media industry in Iraq. The database takes the UNESCO Journalists' Safety Indicators (JSI) into consideration such as gender when monitoring numbers of attacks and other violations committed against journalists, media practitioners and media houses. With a gender focus, the database considers the inequality and discrimination that Iraqi women journalists experience such as physical appearance-based discrimination and sexual harassment by male colleagues, managers, and sources.

However, there are two challenges facing the monitoring mechanisms, one hand, the paper-based database has no digital version because of the current dispute between the Communication Media Commission (CMC) and the Ministry of Justice over determining the headquarters of the National Committee, which has not been decided yet. On the other hand, the monitoring mechanisms are so torn between different bodies that there is no unified database. Rather, there are three databases divided as follows:

- The Ministry of Justice, which is responsible for issuing the international reports on behalf of the government.
- The Journalists Syndicate, which refuses to share its data with others.
- The Communication Media Commission (CMC).

Reporting Mechanisms

Results of the 2012 survey of the Iraqi Female Journalists Forum, which included 250 women, revealed various reasons behind the reluctance of female journalists to report the

risks they were exposed to the police, perhaps the most prominent of which was that the police community is dominated by males, in addition to the social stigma that prevents women from going to police stations. Accordingly, 43% of the participants who faced sexual harassment did not file a lawsuit because they feared being accused of defamation.

To overcome this gender-based barrier, UNESCO Iraq with the Ministry of Interior established the hotline 4444 for women journalists and media workers, where female police officers oversee receiving their phone calls. Once the caller proves their professional identity -through the ID number or the name of their media organization-, the call center officer will direct her to the concerned officer. In 2020, out of 400 reports, 169 women journalists called the hotline 4444.

Another reporting procedure is the two-hour radio program "Media and Security", where the second hour is dedicated to women journalists who can file a complaint to the government.

However, the fear of reporting to police is still immense as it jeopardizes the reputation of women journalists in Iraqi society. The reason behind women avoiding filing complaints intersects with the fact that the security and police forces are controlled by powerful political and religious figures and their supported militias. This was the harsh reality that Sanar[4], 25, had to face alone when she received death threats for publishing stories about the activities of political militias. As a result, she was unable to report the threats to the police and instead decided to stop covering political topics altogether.

Women avoid filing complaints because security and police forces are controlled by powerful political and religious figures and their supported militias

Therefore, UNESCO Iraq has developed a project proposal aiming to establish a digital platform (*Balagh Suhafiun*) for reporting violations against journalists and media workers, including receiving and addressing complaints from women journalists. While UNESCO Iraq will supervise the platform, its operation will be managed by the Journalists Syndicate, the Communication Media Commission (CMC), the Iraq Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Interior. With this structure, the platform will not be controlled by a certain political party or security power.

The objective of the platform is to monitor all kinds of data on violations against journalists across the country as it overcomes the fear of filling complaints among male and female journalists. For that purpose, the journalist's complaint will be given a special code and then directed into the court. According to UNESCO Iraq, this digital platform would have shown

promise in breaking the silence surrounding the existence of sexual harassment in Iraqi society in general and in the media industry. However, the Dutch government rejected the project proposal because it is 'a software infrastructure' that could be financed by the Iraqi government. Rather, it prefers to finance capacity-building activities.

To enhance the gender perspective of the reporting mechanisms, the Minister of Interior assigned 12 female police officers to the Special Investigative Unit in February 2020, in response to UNESCO-Iraq's proposal. The objective is to overcome the gender barrier that prevents women journalists from filing complaints to male police officers. In this regard, the police officer had attended gender sensitivity training to foster a better environment for women who wish to approach the justice system.

Furthermore, there is no gender balance in recruiting board members of the National Committee on Safety of Journalists and Issue of Impunity as the majority are male representatives. Only three out of 14 members are women. Earlier, there were only two women board members of the National Committee. The civil society and women's rights organization are represented by only two members, one of them is the head of the Iraqi Women Journalists Forum (IWJF).



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN IRAQ. NATIONAL DIAGNOSTIC

This report is based on the results of the survey titled "Gender-based Violence against Women Journalists in Iraq". The survey was organized into 34 questions developed with the aim of identifying different types of violence that women journalists experience and revealing the changing working conditions because of the COVID-19 pandemic[5].

The survey was divided into three parts, the first one gathers general data, the second focuses on types and modalities of violence that affect women while doing their journalistic activities and the identification of their aggressors. It also attempts to identify some forms of protections women have implemented in their daily lives.

Finally, the third part seeks to probe how women journalists lived during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected their work.

The results of this survey follow below.

Methodological note:

1. 24 polls were registered from July 23rd until August 14th of 2021.
2. Of those polls, the completion rate is 63%.
3. Among 34 questions that comprised the poll, the most skipped one was in relation to the protection provided to journalists by their institution during Covid-19. 15 out of 24 respondents abandoned the following question: *Does your media organization provide you with health care services, such as health insurance or social insurance?*

PERSONAL DATA

The widest age range that was identified was women between 20 to 29 years old (11), followed up by women between 30 and 39 (8), next are women of 40 to 49 years old (3), and two women with ages between 50 and 59.

Among the mentioned governorates are Baghdad (14) where the majority are based in the Capital of Iraq, then Sulaymaniyah, Basra, Wasit, Karbala, Anbar, Najaf, Salahuddin, Erbil and Maysan[6].

With respect to the significant role of the religious affiliation to a certain group in the politics of media in Iraq, of all the surveys, 21 of the women confirmed to be Muslim when only one woman affiliated herself to the Muslim Sunni group. Another one woman preferred not to reveal her religious affiliation.

The recorded ethnicity with the widest range is Arab (9), followed up by Iraqi (3), none (3), and Kurdish (2). It is noticed that some respondents recorded their religious affiliation instead of ethnicity as follows: Islam (1), Islam Shia (2), Islam Sunni (2).

The occupations in which this group of women mainly develop their work are journalist (21), editor (8), photojournalist (3), producer (2), radio hostess (2), TV hostess (1), and other (1), among those specified are: managing editor and radio hostess.

Among the types of employment that were registered are: freelancer (10), part-time (6), full-time (5), and other (2, collaborator with newspaper, affiliated with organizations). Their answers demonstrated the instability in the media market in Iraq.

Among the types of media in which women work are online journalism (14), press (7), TV (4), radio (4), and others (12), among which are mentioned: on a freelance basis with a

variety of media outlets, news agencies, communication management and international media.

The main information topics they cover are society (16), politics (14), security (10), finance (7), entertainment (3), sport (2), science (1), and other (1) among which are mentioned: culture, environment, women rights, refugees' issues and freedom of religion.

The recorded years of experience with the widest range were (0-3 years) (8), (5-10 years) (6) and (10-15 years) (5), followed by (3-5 years) (3), and one register for (more than 15 years of experience).

TYPES OF VIOLENCE

The second part of the survey asked women to identify different violent actions that they have faced while carrying out their professional activities within the journalism field. We have divided these items according to the categories proposed in Mexico's General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence[7] (Ley General de Acceso a las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia). The results are the following:

Physical violence

Among the actions of physical violence, the following were identified: threatened with an object or weapon (3), locked up (3), and three women journalists identified some types of violence that are partly psychological ad femicide attempts[8]. Ten women indicated not having suffered any of these actions[9].

Sexual violence

Among the sexual violence actions, the following were identified: verbal harassment (12), sexual harassment (3) and touching (2). Four women indicated they did not suffer any aggression of this type.

Psychological violence

In comparison to the previous types of violence, the women have experienced all the types of psychological violence listed on the survey at their workplaces. Among the psychological aggressions, women identified: devaluation (8), marginalization (7), destructive comparisons (6), rejection (5), threats (5), insults (4) and humiliation (2). Three women indicated they didn't not suffer any type of psychological violence.

Economic violence

Similar to the results of psychological violence, the women have faced all types of economic violence at the workplace. Among the aggressions are precarious employment

rights (social security, bonus, profit sharing, holidays, etc.) (12), received of a lower salary for the same work as your male counterparts (5), removed to a lower position as retaliation (3), and of the women selected "other" (1) they mentioned: worked without pay. Four women journalists indicated they did not suffer this type of violence.

Patrimonial violence (violation of a woman's property rights)

Some of the aggressions that the women registered were destruction of work equipment (3), and theft of work equipment (2). The majority, 14 women, indicated they did not suffer any of these actions.

Femicide violence

In the case of attempted of femicide violence, five women journalists confirmed they had suffered a murder attempt while 13 mentioned not having had any.

Space

Among the spaces where violence was perpetrated, women journalists confirmed having been attacked in the street or other public space (8). In addition to that, the attempt took place within the facilities or spaces they work, in a public institution, in a private institution, and at their homes.

Online violence

The women journalists surveyed mentioned having been victims of the following types of online violence: hacking (6), hate speech (5), harassment through unwanted private messages (4), threats to affect your professional standing (4), image-based abuse / abuse of your personal information (4), threats to affect your reputation (3), murder threats (2), detected surveillance (2), identity theft (2), sexual violence threats (1), threats of physical violence (1), and none (6).

The main identified aggressors are unidentified (9), representative of their media outlet (colleague, boss, director, owner) (6), militias (4), state agent (legislator, police, army, navy, federal, state, or municipal) (2), and others (1), a woman member of parliament who is affiliated with a political party has a militia and a leader of an Al-Qaeda organization[10].

For the surveyed women journalists, the impact of the violence they have experienced has had psychological effects (fear, anxiety, insomnia, feelings of persecution, alcoholism, etc.) (12), they have stopped working as a journalist (7), economic repercussions (5), self-censorship (3), physical discomfort (contractures, changes in menstruation, dermatitis, etc.) (2), and none (1).

Of the 15 journalists who reached this part of the survey, five women reported the violence they experienced while eight of them did not. Two women journalists consider reporting the violence but have not decided yet. Of that total, two women made a report to the authorities, two women to their media and three to the cyber police, and of the two women who selected "other" (1) they reported the violence to an international humanitarian organization and a friend who is a digital security expert[11].

Of the 12 women journalists who reached this part of the survey, four responded that their complaints had been satisfactorily resolved while eight confirmed that they had not.

According to the responses of women journalists, for nine of them, their media for which they work, did not provide any kind of measures to guarantee safety conditions while doing their jobs, while three of them, mentioned that their media provides them with security measures. Four women do not know whether their media organization provides such measures or not.

In the case of those who answered "yes"[12], the main measures are:

- The workplace is relatively secure because it is near governmental buildings.
- Freedom of expression

On a similar note, those who work on a freelance basis, find it hard to secure themselves, relying on their personal resources.

When asked if they have implemented their own security measures, 18 women journalists confirmed they have implemented security measures while two of them have not done it.

Of those that have done so, here are some of the measures they have implemented.

- Digital security when reporting in the field.
- Do not reveal professional identity as a journalist.
- Keep private phone numbers separated from work phone numbers.
- Do not share own photos with anyone or give details of your private life on social networks.
- Focus only on writing and editing.
- I work in private.
- Get in touch with security forces if harassed.
- Carry self-defense tools.
- Be more careful when dealing with colleagues.

- Try not to be proactive by applying social norms.
- Do not hold meetings with sources in unreachable places.
- Report frequently whereabouts.
- Ask an acquaintance for help with transportation if the destination is far away.
- Use a spare and hidden phone.
- Ask staff for help when needed.
- Follow safety measures when covering demonstrations.
- Wear protective clothes and carry an emergency bag.
- Let the organization know about locations when covering a story.
- Report any negative situation to police.
- Use digital security software

According to the survey, while facing violence, seven women mentioned that their media has not supported them and 10 confirmed receiving support from them.

Those who answered yes indicated that the support has been psychological support (7), protection measures (6), security training (4), legal advice (3) and supported a relocation (1).

COVID-19

Throughout this third section, women journalists were asked how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their work activities, as well as the means of protection they have had while fulfilling their professional duties. 15 women responded that, during the pandemic, their work routine has been affected negatively.

Of those whose work has not continued normally, here are some of the changes they encountered.

- “I have been jobless for six months because my media organization has suffered from a shortage of financial resources”.
- “As a freelancer my work has decreased by 90%”.
- “Covid-19 affected my work completely as my organization was shut down”.
- “I stay at home without a job”.

For eight women journalists, their media outlets have provided them with health security measures to prevent infections because of their professional work. Five women have not received this type of measure when two women journalists do not know if such measures exist or not in their media organization.

When asked if they had been infected with COVID-19 while doing their work, four answered affirmatively and 11 denied having been infected.

Of the women who responded that they had been infected with COVID-19, only one-woman journalist responded that her media outlet has provided her with resources such as social security and medical incapacity, while eight confirmed not having received these benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MAINSTREAM GENDER IN THE NATIONAL MECHANISM IN IRAQ

A gender-sensitive approach to the National Mechanisms for the Safety of Journalists in Iraq requires understanding and consideration of the different experiences, views and needs of women and men. In addition to that, coordination is much needed between government, legal bodies, media houses and civil society organizations. In line with that, here are some recommendations to mainstream gender in the mechanisms in Iraq:

- To implement gender policies and anti-harassment measures in newsrooms.
- To promote gender sensitivity in safety mechanisms.
- To provide law enforcement personnel and the judiciary with gender sensitivity training.
- To hold gender-sensitive monitoring including disaggregated data by sex, type of attacks, and lack of data on perpetrators of sexual attacks including those that are instigated by colleagues, professional superiors, and sources.
- To conduct ongoing research to identify and respond to the specific needs of women journalists regarding the violence they face.
- To empower women journalists with training and workshops on dealing with gender-based violence and safety issues.

Notes:

[1] The National Committee issued the first Iraqi report on Safety of Journalists in 2017 and the second one in 2018.

[2] This step mimicked the Dutch experience in following up cases involving journalists and expediting investigative and judicial procedures. It was implemented after a group of the Special Investigative Unit's' police officers had met with Persveilig, a joint platform between the Dutch Journalists Union and the Dutch police to collect information on journalists' cases. The Iraqi delegation to the Netherlands in November 2019 was part of the Breaking Silence Project.

[3] The survey was conducted by the UNESCO office in Iraq to assess the first phase of the Breaking Silence project.

[4] She was interviewed by the researcher on the 5th of August 2021.

[5] It is worth noting that the survey is published only in Arabic given the limited resources available for the researcher; otherwise, the results of the survey would have been more inclusive if it had been translated into Kurdish.

[6] Each one with one register.

[7] The methodology of this project is based on the typology of types and modalities outlined in *Mexico's General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence*.

[8] Such as verbal threats from an official source (a female parliamentarian) seeking to prevent the publication of her statements to the press, as this opposed her political interests; two assassination attempts involving a car, and digital violence expressed through threats of a sexual nature and physical harm via social media platforms.

[9] Five women skip this question and the next five ones.

[10] One respondent faced two threats from different aggressors.

[11] Under 'others', one recorded 'I did not experience violence,' another said 'I have not decided yet,' when one woman mentioned 'there is no violence'.

[12] Out of the 10 respondents who answered that question, the majority repeated their answer to the previous question saying, 'there is no such measure' or 'I do not know'.

Engendering National Mechanisms for the Safety of Journalists. Afghanistan

Afghanistan

INTRODUCTION

After the United States withdrew its forces from Afghanistan, following the conflict with the Taliban insurgency, the country experienced a spike in violence across the country. While an emboldened Taliban has launched many attacks to seize territorial control of districts in Afghanistan, there has also been a significant increase in the number of targeted attacks across the country, including on journalists, particularly women journalists. Of the five journalists killed in Afghanistan in 2021, four were women[1].

Such targeted violence towards women journalists only exacerbates existing challenges they face trying to navigate a largely male dominant industry in a patriarchal society like Afghanistan. As a result, over 300 Afghan women have been forced out of an already small community of Afghan female journalists in the past year.

In this research, female journalists, media activists and lawyers were interviewed to understand the depth of the problem that Afghan women journalist face. Additionally, a survey was conducted with 130 journalists from across 25 provinces in three languages providing a detailed and diverse perspective on the challenges women face while trying to complain about the threats and risks they face.

Below is a short overview of these findings:

GENDER-SENSITIVENESS ASSESSMENT OF THE NATIONAL MONITORING, REPORTING, PROTECTION, PREVENTION AND PROSECUTION MECHANISMS ON SAFETY OF JOURNALISTS

We undertook a comprehensive study of the mechanisms available in Afghanistan to protect journalists, particularly women journalists, from risks, threats and repercussions. While the media law in Afghanistan[2] is formulated in much detail, the search for working mechanisms yielded very little in terms of formal systems or platforms facilitated by the Afghan government or judiciary.

From interviews with media activists, it was possible to learn that the Ministry of Culture and Information, which is responsible for monitoring media regulations and content, does not have any authorized body or policy to address journalist grievances. However, two committees set up by the government exist that look at some of the cases of violence against journalists referred to them.

One is a joint committee of ministries and civil society organization called the *Hal-e-Munazat-e-Qari*[3] (translates "Commission for Resolution on Labour Disputes" to in Dari) that was set up in 2019. They include Ministry of Culture and Information, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Civil Society Organization, and National Journalists Union. According to a local news source[4], this committee is an official platform to resolve issues between journalists and media organizations.

Another is referred to as *Kamita Mushtarak Rasanaha wa Hokumat*[5] (translates to "Joint Committee on Media Safety" in Dari). A local news sources[6] said that the ministry was a joint effort between media federations and government ministries to work on cases of violence against journalists. The report said that the committee was considering 172 cases for the year.

These committees meet once a month to address cases and concerns of issues related to media freedoms. Lawyers and activists who are part of these committees were interviewed, revealing that some cases involving women journalists are also discussed during this meeting. Cognisance is taken on the most serious of them and other legal authorities are involved if the committee is unable to reach a resolution on a case.

However, there is no set protocol on receiving or addressing matters. Every case is dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Journalists can only approach civil society organizations that are part of the committee, and they present the cases to the meetings. This prolonged method of application, along with the lack of frequency of their meetings, and

a limited scope of issues, can be a deterrent for many journalists from approaching the committee. Lawyers say that it is particularly harder for women journalists who are often discouraged from registering complaints.

Meanwhile, this study found and conducted interviews with non-profit organizations, media activists, and lawyers, operating in this vacuum, and have independent policies on providing support to journalists, particularly women in media. In these interviews, it was possible to identify private, non-profit organization who have created their own mechanism and have successfully implemented them at a national level serving journalists where the government bodies have failed to.

However, the consequences of a lack of a national mechanism to address issues faced by women journalists remain evident in the Afghan media landscape.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MAINSTREAM GENDER IN THE MECHANISMS IN AFGHANISTAN

- One of the strongest recommendations proposed in this report comes from organizations working in the field of providing safety for journalists advocating for the formalization of their policies. The government needs to build on the existing committees to establish a platform to address media grievances, assigning one section to cases from women.
- A platform for addressing safety issues needs to be inclusive in its access in terms of region, language and ethnic composition. It should also provide women journalists the option of registering a discreet complaint.
- It was also noted that many media organizations do not have an internal system to address issues of safety for women media workers in their employment, even though the Afghan government's labor laws recommend media houses to adopt anti-harassment and safety policies. We recommend that the government enforce the requirement of the mentioned policies in media businesses.
- There already exist many private, non-profit organizations working for media safety in Afghanistan who have created policies on frequently occurring issues women journalists faces. They have also successfully implemented these at a national scale. The government and international bodies are urged to replicate the models and policies created by these organization and implement them across the country.
- Additionally, it is important to establish a national system to enforce existing laws and create mechanisms that facilitate access to legal protections and remedies for women in media.
- Since Afghanistan lacks an active national mechanism to support women journalists, the criminal justice system is one of the few available avenues for seeking remedies. However, limited training and restrictive socio-cultural norms make it difficult for women journalists to approach law enforcement officers. Gender sensitivity training for

these officials could increase their understanding of the challenges women face and foster a more supportive environment for women seeking justice.

REPORT ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN THE COUNTRY

Gender-based violence is rampant in media in Afghanistan, and it is no more evident than in the recent data shared by the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee in March 2021. The deeply concerning report revealed that over 300 women journalists quit the media industry in the second half of 2020 due to growing violence, harassment and COVID-19 related issues. Many female journalists interviewed for this report, shared similar circumstances and reasons for leaving journalism. About 12% of the women said they were forced to leave journalism due to the threats they faced.

While conducting the survey it was also found that some provinces in Afghanistan have not one single female journalist working there. For instance, while looking for media in Zabul province in the south, one civil society member shared that: “We had a female journalist in Zabul, who got married recently and moved to another province. Now there are no female journalists here.”

This is deeply problematic because it essentially means that women’s stories and voices from these provinces are not reaching mainstream media in the country and the women are excluded from national debate on crucial issues.



In the first phase of our survey, 29% of the women journalists said they had experienced psychological violence, 21% reported economic violence, 10% were victims of sexual violence and 8% experienced physical violence, while 16% said they faced violence related to ethnic discrimination. A total of 14 women mentioned they faced attempts on their lives.

While 44% of the aggressors were unidentified, 13% were linked to insurgent groups, and 11% were employers or colleagues of the women journalists. Meanwhile, 10% reported that their aggressors were corporations and another 10% identified government or security officials, while nine per cent attributed threats and harassment to local criminal groups and warlords.

44% of the aggressors were unidentified

DRAFT INDICATORS FOR EVALUATING THE GENDER-SENSITIVITY OF THE MECHANISMS

- Develop a journalist safety policy in consultation with broadcast media and publication businesses, civil society organizations, and media lawyers.
- Build a platform to receive and address complaints from women journalists.
- Expedite the resolution of harassment cases involving women in media.
- Design a curriculum for gender-sensitivity training for law enforcement and first responders handling threats cases against women journalists.
- Create safe spaces for women to access legal remedies.
- Establish a national fund to provide safety resources to women journalists in need.
- Implement policies to enforce anti-harassment practices in media workplaces.
- Develop policies to promote ethical and gendered-sensitive business practices within the media sector.
- Develop policies that encourage equal opportunity hiring for women in media businesses.
- Create a quota system to ensure equal representation of women in media and across provinces.
- Maintain a registry of safety resources for women journalists.
- Publish an annual report that enables the documentation of cases and incidents involving threats and targeted attacks on women in media, to monitor trends in their safety.

Notes:

[1] IFEX. (n.d.). News anchor Mina Khairi killed in Kabul blast. Available at: https://ifex.org/news-anchor-mina-khairi-killed-in-kabul-blast/
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[3] 8am. (n.d.). Commission for the resolution of labor disputes. Available at: https://8am.af/commission-for-the-resolution-of-labor-disputes/
[4] 8am. (n.d.). Commission for the resolution of labor disputes. Available at: https://8am.af/commission-for-the-resolution-of-labor-disputes/
[5] Ministry of Information and Culture (MOIC). (n.d.). Node 1077. Available at: https://www.moic.gov.af/index.php/en/node/1077
[6] Shafaqna. (n.d.). FA 225380. Available at: https://af.shafaqna.com/FA/225380

Overall Conclusions

Based on the research findings, the general recommendations to mainstream gender in National Mechanisms for the Protection of Journalists are as follows:

1. Ensure that gender equality is upheld as a fundamental and critical principle in all actions designed to implement the UNPA within the national mechanisms for the protection of journalists (see: https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/thematic-areas/human-rights-and-gender/).
2. Incorporating gender equality in the mechanisms not reduced to a checklist, but to placing the right of women journalists to a life free of violence at the center of the risk analysis, recognizing the structural violence faced by women journalists that makes them vulnerable to attacks not only from external agents – such as government officials or criminal groups – but from their colleagues and bosses, which limits their professional development.
3. Articulate the entire international legal framework for women's human rights in a public policy of protection of women journalists.
4. Guarantee the recruitment of officials with expertise in women's human rights, who could be systematically trained.
5. Guarantee that all the statistical information produced by the mechanisms is disaggregated by sex.
6. Strengthen the mechanisms with the necessary human and financial resources to face the challenges posed by the number of petitioners.
7. Build a monitoring system that adopts the gender approach to evaluate the suitability of the protection measures for women journalists.
8. Ensure the Citizen Councils within the mechanisms include representatives with knowledge about protection, risk analysis and gender perspective.

