**Organisation: International Press Institute**

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**Questionnaire for the report of the Secretary-General on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity**

1. *Please identify the gender-specific obstacles and human rights violations, or risks thereof, faced by women journalist working in your country or abroad. Please elaborate on how these obstacles and violation manifest themselves in practice and how they differ from the obstacles and human rights violations faced by their male counterparts*

Among the various obstacles female journalists encounter daily, the International Press Institute (IPI) has paid special attention to the online abuse they are targeted with for their reporting. Above all, Internet and social media represent a great opportunity for free expression and activism. However, these platforms have also become a key component of the rise of a new method of repressing the free flow of information online: Online harassment directed at journalists, which is especially vicious when addressed against female journalists.

In some cases, this harassment may be perpetrated by individual actors taking advantage of the anonymity and immediacy offered by online communication channels to express personal animosity. But it has become increasingly clear that, in many political environments, online harassment is also the result of concerted, organised campaigns. In these cases, Internet militias influenced by or with ties to powerful state and non-state actors form intricate networks of bots and human-operated accounts on various social media platforms to intimidate and/or smear specific reporters and media houses. These campaigns seek to silence and neutralise critical voices.

IPI has studied in-depth online harassment against journalist, with a special focus on the gender component, in three countries: Austria, Turkey and Hungary. Leaving aside idiosyncrasies in each of these countries, they all show common patterns related to the impact of online abuse on female journalists. Whereas comments targeting male journalists tended to criticise their work and question their independence, comments against female journalists were more likely to refer to appearance, or contain sexual-related insults or threats of physical violence.

This type of intimidation has a deep psychological impact on women journalists. In recalling their experiences, the journalists cited increasing feelings of anxiety, burnout, sadness and hopelessness. Despair and anger were reported as common and instinctive reactions when the intimidation campaigns on social media reach their peak. The trolls’ activity is described as unrelenting and unforgiving. According to Turkish psychiatrist Dr. Alper Hasanoğlu, the journalists’ symptoms are very similar to those experienced by teenage victims of cyberbullying, and include sleep deprivation, depression, anger and bitterness.

This picture corresponds to the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media presented in February 2016 in “Countering Online Abuse of Female Journalists”, a compendium of articles from experts in the field. In one of the articles, researchers at the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma describe the psychological toll of online abuse on female journalists in particular:

 “[...] Our preliminary analyses suggest that intimidation and sexual harassment are stronger predictors of trauma‑related distress and occupational impairment (e.g., felt exhausted at work, missed deadlines, felt disconnected from colleagues or supervisors) than is assignment‑related stress.”

Undoubtedly, online death threats and other types of digital abuse have also a professional toll on the female reporters. The journalists we interviewed believe the main objective of the orchestrated social media campaigns is to single them out. Our research shows that the online abuse frequently consists in labelling journalists in a way that remains stuck in the collective imagination and revived each time the journalist publishes new work.

This act of singling out impacts the journalist’s ability to do her job. One of the journalists IPI interviewed said that the biggest consequence was that certain government sources no longer responded to her interview requests, since the smear campaign launched against her on Twitter falsely accused her of spying for a foreign country.

Foreign journalists are also directly affected. One of the main hurdles foreign correspondents in different countries must overcome is obtaining government press credentials in the form of a press card required to access official events such as press conferences. In Turkey, a common concern shared by foreign journalists whom the delegation interviewed was that the process of securing credentials had become much more arduous in recent years.

“Most people’s accreditation was delayed this year, mostly because the process has become more intense and elaborate,” one foreign correspondent told IPI. “Whereas normally I would get it within a week or two weeks, this year it took one or two months.”

There are other consequences of being singled out that journalists may have to endure silently. One journalist interviewed by IPI was working as a freelancer for a foreign news outlet when a self-described fact-checking site – which many experts view as a thinly veiled pro-government outlet – targeted the journalist in a smear article.

Notably, the article was written in English, as were the subsequent messages disseminated through this site’s social media channels. The journalist described this act as “an attempt to diminish my credibility in front of my employers”. The journalist added: “It made me think twice before posting something on Twitter, since I don’t want to be considered ‘problematic’ by employers and put my job at risk.”

Evidences from first-hand interviews journalists suggests that online harassment by AKP trolls does lead to a certain degree of self-censorship. However, this self-censorship is primarily reported to be limited to the journalist’s activity on social media. One reporter described it as “soft self-censorship”.

IPI’s three-month-study on harassment patterns in Hungary offered a significant amount of qualitative data that appears to confirm a gender component in the local commenting sphere. On average, female journalists receive more negative comments, bullying and threats than their male counterparts. In addition, a higher percentage of the threats against female journalists are of a sexual nature.

Hungary Index.hu photo editor, Tímea Karip, recounted different, but equally disturbing experiences. According to Karip, the amount of harassment aimed at women is “probably” similar as that aimed at men. The difference, she said, is that online bullying aimed at women is frequently of a sexual nature. She recalled a time when she would receive hardcore porn images via email along with comments describing her forced participation in sexual intercourse. Karip said that the risk of being sexually harassed online partly explained why some female journalists intentionally left their by-lines off particularly sensitive articles and disguised their Facebook identities. “Politics and being a woman are both risk factors” for harassment, she commented.

Women journalists’ first reaction when being attacked online is often to try to reason with the troll accounts – to the extent that these are operated by humans rather than bots – and explain that the latter are presented distorted information. Distress sets it when these attempts to engage and reason are shown not only to be useless but also to further fuel the trolls’ anger.

This has led many female journalists to used social media networks strictly in a professional capacity and refrained from posting their own thoughts. Others went further, choosing not to share anything related to sensitive topics, varying by country, such as religion, politics or anti-terrorism efforts. Some decided to stop posting altogether, while others said they had become so desensitised after having been repeatedly targeted by waves of hate that they opted to take no action at all.

This culture of silence is especially harmful among women journalists. In addition to being targeted for their reporting, they often find themselves threatened in their capacity as women, including threats of sexual violence. Some women journalists said they were targeted with doxing – revealing personal data – and addresses of their children’s schools were posted online.

1. *Please indicate whether you monitor and collect information and disaggregated data (e.g. by sex, gender identity, ethnicity, age, online/offline, focus areas of work) specifically on the gender-specific obstacles and human rights violations, or risks thereof, faced by women journalists.*

Coverage of this phenomenon, however, has largely been restricted to anecdotal evidence. International watchdogs such as the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and academic researchers around the world have highlighted the need for systematic monitoring and analysis to better understand the scope of online abuse targeting journalists.

With these calls in mind, the International Press Institute launched an online database aimed at recording harassment, abuse, threats, hacking and other web-based methods of intimidating independent media into silence: <https://onthelinedb.ipi.media/>

Intended as a resource for journalists, researchers and media freedom advocates, the database currently contains 1065 verified instances of online abuse against journalists collected in two pilot countries, Turkey and Austria. In January 2016, IPI began systematically monitoring social media platforms in Turkey to record instances of attacks on journalists.

The data collected under the Ontheline programme is classified according to three broad categories: violent threats, abusive behaviour and technical interference. In a second step, each attack is analysed using nearly 20 variables, ranging from the gender of the victim (male, female), type of victim (journalist, news website, media corporation) to the background issue that appears to have prompted the attack (religion, nationalism, politics, education, etc).

The database forms part of IPI’s Ontheline programme, initiated in 2015 in order to combat growing online attacks on the media. During the programme’s initial phase, IPI researchers conducted more than 50 in-depth interviews with female journalists targeted by online mobs as well as with experts in cyber security, social network analysis, psychology and other fields.

Women experience online abuse differently – and to a different degree. The same goes for female journalists. As part of the Ontheline programme, IPI conducted a series of in-depth interviews with female journalists in Austria. Two conclusions formed a common thread through all the conversations: first, the abuse is extraordinarily invasive, particularly when it reaches journalists unfiltered via social media; and second, the quantity and nature of the abuse depends strongly on the issue being covered. All of the journalists interviewed stated that they could tell in advance whether an article would be particularly controversial and give rise to a large number of comments and postings.

Two issues in particular are said to trigger intense responses from readers: refugees and feminism. Reporting on discrimination against women, or even simply stating that phenomena such as forced migration impacts women differently, provokes strong emotions. The journalists interviewed said the intensity of these emotional responses had grown during the refugee crisis and the 2016 Austrian presidential election campaign.

This statement is backed-up with the data collected on IPI’s Ontheline database. IPI’s research focused on the Facebook page of the far-right political party FPÖ chairman Heinz-Christian Strache. This page plays a central role, as it is used to share important posts from other FPÖ pages, increasing their reach. As of the end of October 2016, Strache’s verified page had more than 430,000 fans, more than five times as many as the official FPÖ fanpage, with more than 78,000 fans.

Attempting to draw a line between legitimate criticism and abuse, the study closely examined 10 Facebook posts from “HC Strache”, as he is commonly known, that singled out journalists for criticism. The study did not examine abuse directed at social media activity not directly related to the journalists’ work.

In total, the case study identified 92comments on the 10 posts on Strache’s Facebook page during the period in question that contained insults or threats to journalists. As noted, this figure could be higher, particularly as it is unclear whether any comments were deleted.

A clear gender component was strikingly evident. While the majority of the 10 posts on Strache’s page singled out male journalists, the posts targeting female journalists drew a much greater number of negative comments: 75 of the 92 examined, including six comments deemed threats and 69 comments deemed abuse. Whereas comments targeting male journalists tended to criticise their work and question their independence, comments against female journalists were more likely to refer to appearance (“I don’t even look at the woman any more, I’m so nauseated”), or contain sexual-related insults (“I don’t like the bitch, she’s just disrespectful”) or threats of physical violence.

In one case, the FPÖ cut together old footage from ORF programs such as “Im Zentrum” or “Runder Tisch” to produce a misleading video alleging to show journalist Ingrid Thurnher making unfavourable facial expressions in reaction to comments by FPÖ politicians, and shared it under the title “A look says more than a thousand words”. The video evoked a strong response from commenters on Strache’s Facebook page, exposing Thurnher to intensely negative reactions.

In Turkey, verbal abuse in Turkey frequently takes on a sexual component, especially when a women journalist is the target. As noted, some 300 messages went beyond levying humiliating insults and threats of rape to make an explicitly sexual-based attack. The most common sexual-related insults involve language such as “street girl” or “loose woman”. When women journalists publish an article or comment online in support of certain politicians, they are labelled that politician’s “mistress” or an “odalisque”, i.e., a female slave or concubine in a harem. The aim of such a label is not only to humiliate the journalist, but to use sex to undermine her reputation, attack her credibility and silence her reporting through intimidation.

A similar tactic involves suggesting that the journalist has “gone under” the man she publicly supported, implying a sexual relationship. This tactic is often invoked when a journalist comments favourably about someone government supporters consider an “enemy” of Turkey.

IPI has also led a pioneering report on online intimidation against journalists in Hungary. As described in Question 1, the research has highlighted worrying trends against female journalists. The research can be explore in further details in the following link: <https://ipi.media/online-harassment-of-journalists-in-hungary/>

1. *What programmes and initiatives have your organization adopted to address the issue of the safety of women journalists, including underlying causes of the obstacles and human rights violations, and harmful gender stereotypes, experienced by women journalists? How do these measures differ from those adopted to address the issue of the safety of journalists more generally, or the safety of male journalists? Please elaborate on the impact of any measures adopted*.

As described previously, IPI launched a specific programme to combat online harassment against journalists with an especial focus on the online abuse addressed at female journalists. The project includes the following measures and achievements:

* Launched IPI’s **Ontheline Database**, which tracks verified instances of online harassment of journalists (<http://ipi.media/programmes/ontheline/>). The database represents one of the first attempts to systematically analyse a phenomenon that is becoming ubiquitous across the globe.
* Launched a **secure reporting platform** where journalists can report digital attacks against them or their colleagues (<http://ipi.media/programmes/ontheline/report-securely/>).
* Highlighted a **gender component** to online harassment that crosses borders: in all countries IPI researched, women journalists faced ‘double’ harassment due to both their profession and their gender.
* Developed a detailed matrix consisting of over **20 criteria to thoroughly analyse** instances of online harassment.
* Through the collection of qualitative and quantitative data in three countries (Turkey, Austria and Hungary), revealed **how online harassment and digital attacks against journalists, and especially against female journalists, operate in different socio-political realities**.
* Through research, articles, interviews and videos, unearthed the impact that online harassment can have on the free flow of news. On one hand, this impact manifests in the form of a **chilling effect** in terms of both the topics that female journalists choose to address publicly and journalists’ overall engagement with social media. On the other, online harassment leads to both negative **emotional consequences** (trauma-like symptoms) and **professional consequences** (generating a widespread lack of trust in and negative perception of journalists as a group).
* Used the same communication tools to **raise global and national-level awareness** about a phenomenon that increasingly poses a systematic threat to the free flow of information and to the safety on female journalists.
* Launched the **Voices against Online Harassment** (<http://ipi.media/programmes/ontheline/special-feature-voices-against-online-harassment/>) platform, featuring videos of female journalists and other experts discussing the impact of online harassment on their work as well as solutions developed to combat this phenomenon.
* Revealed that, in certain contexts, online harassment against journalists is either **orchestrated or tacitly encouraged by prominent state and non-state actors**. IPI’s research showed how the ruling AKP party in Turkey developed its digital strategy to target critical media in recent years and how the Austrian far-right triggered abuse and threats against journalists, including female journalists, on the social media pages of its members.
* Identified **key trends and characteristics** of the way in which online harassment occurs and affects its targets. This information has allowed for the development of strategies to support victims and counteract the chilling effect caused by such harassment.
1. *Are the measures – if any – referred to in response to Question 3 above part of a “gender-sensitive approach)”? If so, what does this approach consist of?*

One of the main obstacles in addressing online harassment against journalists is to find the correct balance between safeguarding the human right to free expression and protecting those who engage in journalism from being subjected to a torrent of abuse and threats online. Therefore, any approach to developing best practices and guidelines to counter digital attacks against journalists, and female journalists in particular, needs to have a multidisciplinary perspective. IPI together with experts and representatives of other organisations have developed the following set of recommendations to counter online abuse against journalists, with a special focus on the gender component.

**Intermediaries and social media platforms**

* Empower users to freely control the feed of posts and comments they view, including giving them possibility of utilising a more flexible process for using bulk lists to block or mute content included in their feeds. This measure would serve two purposes: it would be consistent with the principles of freedom of expression, insofar as it allows users to opt out of receiving content but does not silence the person who generated that content, while also minimising the psychological impact of being targeted.
* Facilitate a process to make these platforms safer, not least by incorporating tools that make the reporting process more user-friendly.
* Adapt transparent policies to minimize the impact of cyber-harassment and systematically revise those policies to adapt to ever-changing context.
* Increase transparency into to the decision-making process with respect to account blocking, as the consequences can extend beyond the platform. For example, in recent years, many websites and services online have moved toward a system whereby users log in using social media accounts. The suspension of a social media account for spurious or unknown reasons could lead to a loss of access to other online services.

**Governments**

* Ensure that laws and norms regulating online communications meet existing international standards on human rights and that the interest of free speech is given due weight when balanced against the need to protect privacy and security online. This is particularly necessary in regions where media ownership is concentrated or where access to the Internet is controlled by a limited number of actors.
* Take all necessary steps to ensure that law enforcement officers and the judiciary are properly trained and funded to address cyber-harassment and its impact on journalists, bloggers and citizen reporters.

**Media Houses**

* Support community managers to moderate comments and to engage with users to educate on best commenting practices. Moderating all comments across a media house’s full spectrum of articles and blogs can be difficult and can consume a large amount of resources, but when comments are not moderated efficiently, abusive commenters tend to engage in similar behaviour on social media platforms. Adopting “think-twice policies”, where readers are reminded of the rules of commenting before posting, and reducing the number of articles on which users can post a comment, in addition to limiting the period of time in which they can do so, might be effective strategies.
* Put in place mechanisms to address low-level harassment, such of verbal abuse addressed not only at journalists’ specific reporting but at their personal characteristics, such as gender or race, as this type of harassment may also affect journalists’ ability to carry on their job.
* Provide counselling and legal support to journalists targeted by online harassment in order to minimized potential psychosocial consequences.

**Civil society and media freedom advocates**

* Work with communities to cultivate a network of users that would organically respond to hate speech on social media with counter-speech, as a means to provide psychosocial support to victims of cyber-harassment.
* Raise awareness among journalists, bloggers and citizen reporters on the importance of digital security, both in terms of tools and practices. Observers have identified a lack of awareness among these communities of the risks associated with unprotected electronic communications.
* Support a scientific approach to the study of online harassment utilizing a systematic collection of data to measure its impact and explore the causes behind the phenomenon.
* Journalists, bloggers and citizen reporters
* Be aware of the risks inherent in the online environment, such as digital attacks targeting journalists and citizen reporters that seek to gain access to electronic communications and personal data in order to compromise journalists’ work.
* Take advantages of opportunities to obtain proper training on how to address attacks and mitigate their potential harm.

**UN and international organisations**

* Strengthen U.N. inter-agency collaboration and UNESCO’s leading role in implementing the U.N. Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.
* Observe and promote World Press Freedom Day (May 3) and the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists (Nov. 2) in more countries.
* Cover the safety of journalists by reporting on the existence of – and progress on – government commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals.
* Promote journalists’ safety online and offline via meetings related to the World Summit on the Information Society and via upcoming meetings of the Internet Governance Forum.

Nonetheless, remains within IPI short-term goals to develop more detailed guidelines to counter online harassment against journalists, specifically the online abuse against female journalists due to harmful and vicious nature of the threats addressed to them or their relatives.

1. *In the country/countries in which your organization works, are there any specific laws and/or policies or initiatives (e.g. training, awareness-raising) to address harmful gender stereotypes, intersecting forms of discrimination and other human rights violations experienced by women journalists in the course of carrying out their work (e.g. in the workplace, in the field, online)? What is the impact of these laws, policies or initiative?*

Hungary, Austria and Turkey have initiatives and policies with regard to the violence against women in general, but none of them have specifically developed initiatives to counteract online abuse against female journalists in particular.

With regard to the issue of violence against women, Austria has an extensive list of policies and initiatives, including a specific ministry dedicated to the Health and Care of women. Please, for more information see the following link: <http://www.bmgf.gv.at/home/EN/Women_Equality/>

The Federal Ministry of Health and Women’s Affairs contains a Division for Women's Affairs and Equality which is divided into six departments working in the following areas:

* The coordination and realisation of gender mainstreaming – an initiative of the Federal Government at a federal level
* The organisation of projects and events which are of specific relevance to women Equal treatment in the private sector and for federal employees, as well as providing support for the Equal Treatment Commissions and Senates Protection from and prevention of violence
* The creation of studies and publications which are of specific relevance to women Contacts with women’s initiatives and the award of subsidies to women's projects Ensuring that the interests of women’s policy are taken into consideration in the legislative process
* The representation of the fundamental interests of female migrants Issues related to socio-economic equality Women’s affairs in an international context and in the EU
* The women’s service point of the Federal Minister
1. *In the country/countries in which your organisation works, are there any specific laws, and/or policies or initiative (e.g. training, awareness-raising) to address violations of international humanitarian law committed against women journalists?*

Better promotion and protection of women’s rights is a priority of the Austrian government. Austria advocates this issue at all levels: at the United Nations, the European Union, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, as well as in its relations with third countries and in the context of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC). Austria’s thematic priorities are enhancing the participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution and in peace processes; fighting violence against women, as well as economic and political empowerment of women.

Since 2007 Austria has a National Action Plan on Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) in peace missions, in the context of multilateral and bilateral contacts, as well as in the framework of development cooperation and humanitarian aid. The Action Plan, which was revised in January 2012, aims at the promotion of the inclusion of women in peace processes, the strengthening of preventive measures against violence against women, the increased participation of women in peace missions, as well as increasing the number of women in senior positions in the UN or the EU. A Working Group chaired by the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs reviews the implementation of the Action Plan on an annual basis.

1. *What mechanisms and/or networks do you have in place to share information and increase the protection of women journalists, particularly in situation of conflict or political instability?*

IPI has developed a secure platform for journalists to contact us in case they are under digital attacks or being the target of a threatening campaign on social media: <https://ipi.media/programmes/ontheline/report-securely/>

The platform offers a digital emergency response (which it will be coordinated together with Digital Defenders Partnership and their network of IT security experts). The secure portal also provides legal help in case they need legal consultation: Which authorities should they contact? Is it safe to do so? What are their rights in case a government decides to take down their website or an article from their website. Together with the Media Legal Defense Initiative we will coordinate what’s the best action in case by case basis.

The platform is run using GlobaLeaks, a software initially designed for whistleblowers which IPI has adapted to be a user-friendly mechanism for journalists. In this vein, any female journalist can report an online threat in three different ways:

* **Protecting the content of what she is reporting**: Journalists use this option to report a digital attack against if they don’t need to remain anonymous. The fact that they are reporting something might become known, but no one will be able to see the content.
* **Protecting the identity of the female journalists as well as the content they share via the secure portal**: This option is often used in the cases she needs to remain anonymous. Both the information she submits and the fact that she did so will be kept confidential.
* **Sending us a message via web form**: Journalists use this option when they don’t require confidentiality or if they want to talk about how IPI can help.