

INFORMAL REPORT

Countering Online Violence against Women:

OSCE Guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists

7 June 2023, 15:00 – 16:30 CEST, (online via zoom)

Recording of the event is available [here](#).

Background

The “*Countering Online Violence against Women*” joint OSCE PA – RFoM event brought together OSCE PA members, experts, and representatives of OSCE executive structures to discuss innovative approaches to monitoring online violence against female journalists. Participants and speakers exchanged good practices, lessons learned, and innovations on how national parliaments can take concrete actions to enhance the monitoring of online violence against female journalists. The event also aimed to raise awareness among parliamentarians of OSCE participating States of OSCE tools and resources, including RFoM’s new guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists

Speakers

Ms. Teresa Ribeiro, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM)

Dr. Hedy Fry, OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues, Member of the House of Commons of Canada

Mr. Johan Büser, Rapporteur of the OSCE PA Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions, Member of the Swedish Riksdag of Sheffield

Dr. Diana Maynard, Senior Research Fellow, Department of Computer Science at the University

RFoM’s new Guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists

- 73% of female journalists say that they experience online violence, 20% of those cases turn into physical violence, and women in politics are 27 times more likely to face online abuse than men.
- This prevalence of online violence against women journalists creates issues with democratic participation at all levels, as “plurality can only exist when all stakeholders – regardless of their gender – are safe to do their work, and ultimately have a voice.”
- The OSCE RFoM is in the process of publishing guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists.

- These guidelines include 14 indicators of online violence escalation which will help with early warning, rapid response, monitoring, and reporting of online violence against female journalists.
- The guidelines sort the indicators into different categories, such as the perpetrators of the abuse, the kind of abuse, the implications of the abuse, the duration of abuse, what is said, and the network of the abuse.
- Some of the most important indicators of the guidelines include tracking whether the abuse consists of death or rape threats, if a foreign state or actor is involved, how the abuse is connected, and whether the abuse targets the journalist's family.
- The guidelines also emphasize the importance of reporting abuse, including the perpetrator and any contact information associated with them.

Key Points of Discussion

- Freedom of the press is at the core of democracy. To ensure that democracy remains strong, women need to feel comfortable to continue participating in journalism.
- Gender-based violence is among the most prevalent and tolerated human rights violations worldwide. Female journalists are being specifically targeted, which leads to self-censorship, and ultimately retreating from the public sphere.
- Female journalists bring a different perspective to the public sphere, so they must remain a part of journalism.
- Unfortunately, female journalists face intersectional abuse that often targets their gender, families, and journalism. This type of abuse is often highly sexualized.
- While states have an obligation to protect freedom of expression, online violence is not adequately regulated in many countries worldwide. This abuse poses a direct threat to democracy, and there are actions that parliaments can take to combat the pressing issue.
- One of the main challenges remains regulation of the internet and how to identify the perpetrators of online abuse in light of the prevalent anonymity online.
- In many instances, the perpetrators of abuse brag about their actions and are often linked with others who commit similar actions.
- The only way to truly regulate the internet is by taking a global approach - individuals living within repressive authoritarian regimes dislike regulating it, as they see it as an accessible outlet for expression and news.
- The regulation of the internet is not a black-and-white issue. Instead, it is incredibly complex and hard to put in legal terms.
- Properly addressing the issue of online violence against female journalists is essential, and the way to tackle it is by talking and listening to experts in the field.
- The OSCE PA has many tools at its disposal to address online violence against women. For example, it can propose resolutions on this topic, which should then be applied to the national legislative and policy framework.
- Dr. Hedy Fry (CAN), the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues, detailed the good practices in the Canadian Parliament as an example for participants on how parliaments can address violence against female journalists. The Canadian Parliament has a Justice Committee and Human Rights Committee, which proposes legislative solutions to the issues of online violence. These committees have suggested improving data collection on the topic and increasing the reporting of online hate crimes against female politicians and journalists. Dr. Fry also explained Canadian policy for harassment

prevention, which helps parliamentarians learn to understand harassment, including cyberbullying, threats, and harassment. Finally, in Canada, they use a gender-based analysis to examine every issue from a gendered perspective. These good practices may not have led to decreased violence, but they provide tools to report and take action against the abuse.

Key Recommendations and Takeaways

- For the preservation of democratic norms, it is crucial that female journalists feel safe in the public space and are not threatened by online violence.
- It is essential that parliaments take action to implement best practices and guidelines to combat the issues, as it is a global issue. This can be achieved through implementing new and adjusting existing legislative and policy frameworks, so that they help better protect female journalists, particularly in the online sphere.
- Online violence and internet regulation are incredibly complicated issues that will take collaboration at the highest levels to solve. Having this in mind, it is key to maintain a whole-of-society approach and involve all relevant actors, including parliaments, governments, journalists, civil society and experts in the field.
- OSCE, including OSCE PA and RFoM should be seen as tools that provide technical expertise and bring together parliamentarians and experts from all over the OSCE region to discuss, exchange and identify best practices and lessons learned in dealing with the cases of online violence, which can then be tailor-made and applied to different countries.

Contact Information

If you would like to hear more about OSCE Guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists, please contact Paloma Madrigal, Associate Project Officer at the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, at paloma.madrigal@osce.org.