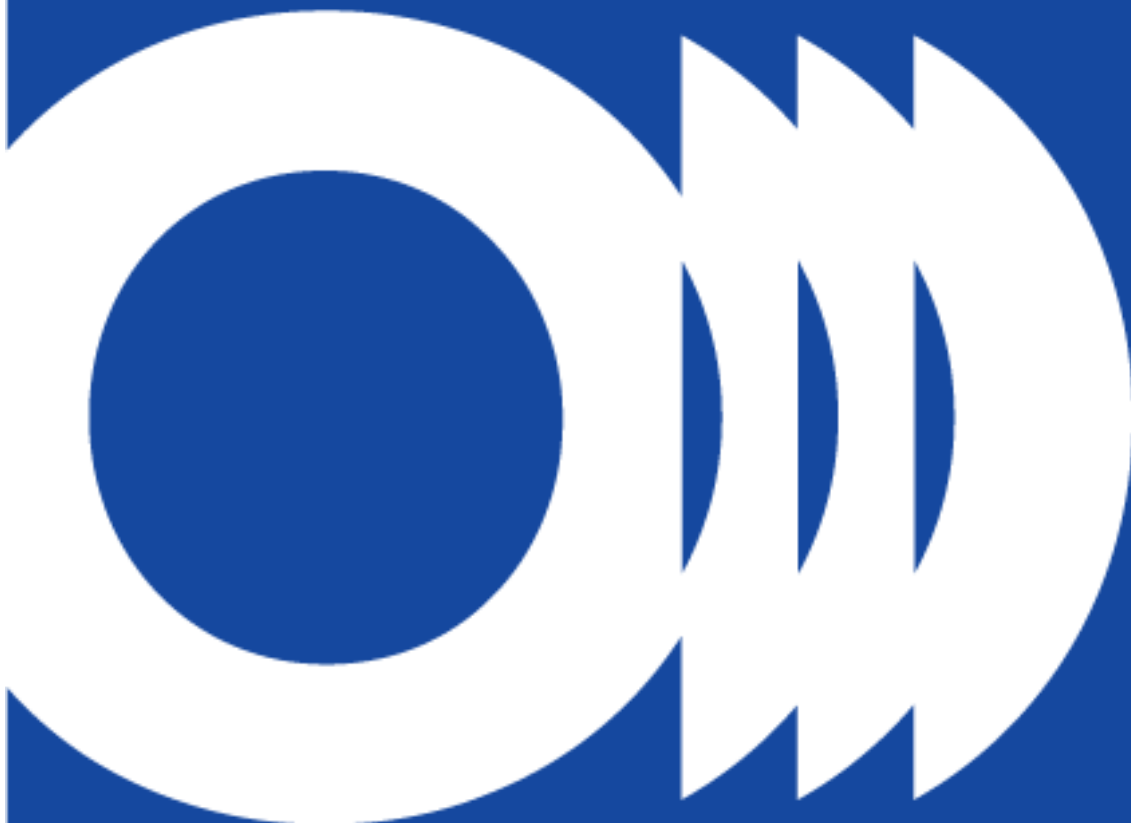


EBU

OPERATING EUROVISION AND EURORADIO

EBU Contribution to the European Commission's Consultation on Gender-Based Violence Against Women – Focus on Online Violence

10 MAY 2021



EBU Contribution to the Commission's Consultation on Gender-Based Violence Against Women – Focus on Online Violence 10 May 2021

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) is the world's leading alliance of public service media (PSM). We have 115 member organizations in 56 countries. Our Members operate nearly 2,000 television, radio and online channels and services, and offer a wealth of content across other platforms. One of the EBU missions is to enhance the freedom and pluralism of the media, the free flow of information and ideas and the free formation of opinions.

Over recent years, in the course of their professional activities, women journalists and media professionals have been facing gendered-based online violence aimed at discrediting and humiliating them to ultimately silence them. Many of them have encountered online attacks based on their origin, minority affiliation, disabilities, religion, etc. Patterns from different surveys suggest online attacks against women journalists and media professionals are more common than online attacks against their male counterparts, are exponentially growing and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [2020 UN Report on gender-based violence faced by women journalists in their daily work](#) listed various forms of online violence ranging from online abuse (often misogynistic and with sexualized content), stalking, harassment, intimidation to threats. Women journalists and media professionals are confronted to online smearing campaigns, sometimes organised, or at least encouraged, by politicians and political parties. Attempts to silence them resort to emerging forms of online harassment against women ranging from "trolling" (posting of messages, uploading of images or videos and creating hashtags for the purpose of annoying, provoking or inciting violence), "doxing" (online publication of private information with the intention of exposing women to offline harassment and/or other purposes) to non-consensual distribution of intimate content, including manipulated content facilitated by the accelerated development of AI-powered deepfake.

The [2020 UNESCO's Global Survey on Online Violence against Women Journalists](#) highlighted the scope and the nature of this online violence: 73% of respondents were confronted with online violence. They included threats of physical violence (25%) and sexual assault (18%) as well as threats of violence against those close to them, including their families (13%). Among women journalists and media professionals who experienced online violence, 20% said they faced attacks and abuses offline, which were related to the violence encountered online.

In addition to the psychological and professional harm, online violence against women journalists and media professionals can lead to self-censorship. Some women journalists and media professionals decide to use pseudonyms, others chose to suspend, deactivate or delete permanently their online accounts. Others even make the decision to leave their profession¹. Online violence targeting women journalists and media professionals deprive them from their fundamental rights, including the right to live free from violence, the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy. Due to online violence and its consequences, women's representation in the online information space and pluralism of the media are seriously damaged.

¹ Dubravka Šimonović, UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, Report on gender-based violence faced by women journalists in their daily work, 6 May 2020, page 9 see: <https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/44/52> .

The EBU and its Members have discussed counterstrategies², exchanged practices³ to cope with online violence targeting women journalists and media professionals against the backdrop of gender equality discussions. The EBU distributed via the EBU News Exchange '[A Dark Place](#)', a OSCE documentary highlighting the experiences of female journalists targeted by online harassment. The EBU Academy also proposes [training modules to strengthen journalists' digital safety and security](#), which incorporates tactics to prevent online harassment and doxing.

However, coordinated responses are needed to deal with this severe and urgent issue.

Digital platforms need to take more responsibility for removing from their platforms illegal online content targeting women journalists and media professionals, and more generally targeting all journalists and all media professionals. Any policy interventions in relation to illegal content must take due account of the impact on fundamental rights. Such measures should therefore be designed in a careful, targeted manner, paying utmost attention to the proportionality principle.

Online platforms should implement user-friendly tools to flag and/or report illegal activities and content. The flagging and/or reporting systems should be accompanied by appropriate explanations in a timely and effective manner on the follow-up given to flagged/reported content and on transparent, easy-to-use and effective procedures for the handling and resolution of complaints. Automated tools can be used to detect illegal content and prevent their reappearance provided that there are relevant safeguards. The use of automated or algorithmic tools should be accompanied by appropriate human oversight.

These duties should be accompanied by measures that ensure their effective enforcement, including regulators competence to sanction non-compliance, in particular by imposing deterrent fines. Online platforms' cooperation with competent authorities should include the submission of regular reports on the application of content policies, on measures adopted to fight illegal content and on safeguards applied to protect fundamental rights.

To obtain reliable information on the extent of online violence against journalists and media professionals, digital platforms also need to take part in data-collection mechanisms and provide gender-disaggregated data.

National regulatory authorities for the media play a vital role to ensure media pluralism and safeguard freedom of expression and information. They should be adequately involved in any future EU proposal addressing online violence targeting women journalists and media professionals.

States' legal framework aimed at ensuring the safety of journalists to allow them to exercise their profession in a safe environment, free from physical or verbal threats and harassment should be reviewed in light of the International and European Human Rights framework in order to ensure laws and rights designed to protect women journalists offline are applied online.

² Back in 2016, Emmy Rasper, host at Swedish Radio, presented the ways to manage threats and hate directed at journalists at the [2016 EBU News Assembly](#)

³ EBU Eurovision Sport, [Reimagining Sport. Pathways to Gender- Balanced Media Coverage](#), February 2021, page 47 and EBU, [All Things Being Equal. Gender Equality Guidelines from Public Service Media](#), December 2019, from page 38

In line with the [OSCE recommendations set out in the 2018 Decision on the Safety of Journalists](#), State bodies and law enforcement agencies should be provided with training programmes covering procedures encouraging women journalists and media professionals to report online attacks to the competent authorities⁴.

⁴ OSCE Representative of the Freedom of the Media, [Safety of Female Journalists Online](#), 2020, page 112. In line with the [OSCE recommendations set out in the 2018 Decision on the Safety of Journalists](#),