



**OUTCOMES OF
THE REGIONAL
AND THEMATIC
CONSULTATIONS**

to mark the 10th anniversary of the UN
Plan of Action on the Safety of
Journalists and the Issue of Impunity

10 YEARS

UN PLAN OF ACTION ON THE
**SAFETY OF
JOURNALISTS**
AND THE ISSUE OF IMPUNITY

This report produced by UNESCO is based on wide consultations with stakeholders over five continents and three thematic areas in 2022 to serve as a background document for the High-level conference, Safety of Journalists – Protecting media to protect democracy, in Vienna on 4 November. The conference is organized by the Austrian Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs in cooperation with UNESCO and the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, who coordinate the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

 Federal Ministry
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1 BACKGROUND

The [UN Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity](#), developed through a multistakeholder process spearheaded by UNESCO, is a systemic UN-wide plan to create a free and safe environment for journalists and media workers online and offline and both in conflict and non-conflict situations. With a view to strengthening peace, democracy and development worldwide, it contributes directly to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Plan calls for a coalition-based approach, and it provides an overarching blueprint and framework for cooperation amongst relevant stakeholders, including UN bodies, national authorities, civil society organizations, media actors, academia and national, regional and international organizations.

The Plan is fruit of a process that began in 2010 upon request of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). It was then endorsed by the Chief Executive Board of the United Nations, and launched in Vienna at the 2nd UN Inter-Agency Meeting on the Safety of Journalists in November 2012. The Plan is anchored on the three pillars of prevention, protection, and prosecution of the crimes against journalists and promotes a safer environment for journalists and media workers through six key approaches: awareness raising, standard setting and policy making, monitoring and reporting, capacity building, academic research, and coalition building.

Over the course of the past decade, the Plan has contributed to the launch of a multitude of networks, bringing together a wide array of relevant stakeholders to foster a safer environment for journalists and media workers. Among these are a network of United Nations' Focal Points for Safety of Journalists, co-chaired by UNESCO and the Office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and six 'Groups of Friends' of Safety of Journalists - informal structures bringing together representatives of like-minded and committed countries, whose permanent missions at the UN Secretariat in New York, UNESCO in Paris, OHCHR in Geneva, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna, the Council of Europe (CoE) in Strasbourg and the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, are constantly advocating for better multilateral policies for a safer environment for journalists and media workers. Under the framework of the Plan, an informal "Task Force" on the safety of journalists was established, bringing together relevant representatives and senior civil servants from regional, non-treaty-based and thematic IGOs outside of the UN, working to advance the safety of journalists. In 2019, The Media Freedom Coalition was launched at the first Global Conference for Media Freedom in London, and serves as a cross-regional network of more than 50 countries committed to advocating for media freedom and the safety of journalists.

Likewise, and in order to strengthen coordination and cooperation amongst specialized CSOs and with other stakeholders within the framework of the Plan, the International Coalition of Civil Society Organizations for the Safety of Journalists was formed and brings together 19 specialized CSOs in the field of freedom of expression and safety of journalists.

Succeeding in coordination has been instrumental to the achievements such as those collected in this report. However, with [press freedom continuing its downward trend across the globe](#), the rapidly changing landscape for the safety of journalists required that the 10th anniversary of the Plan be an opportunity to take stock of its key achievements during this first decade of implementation, as well as to identify solutions to challenges that have arisen along the way. In this respect, UNESCO coordinated a multi-stakeholder consultative process involving regional and thematic consultations to collect partners' experiences in promoting safety of journalists over the last decade as a basis for informing the course of action in the next 10 years and beyond. This document has also been informed by over 800 activities mentioned in the 51 issues of the Newsletter on Safety of [Journalists](#) as well as by practices that emerged from subregions where specific consultations did not take place.

The consultative process included five regional and sub-regional consultations (for Africa, South Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Arab States and Europe), two thematic consultations (on the safety of women journalists, on risk management and transparency of digital platforms), and a crosscutting academic consultation brought together governments representatives, civil society organizations, academia, journalists, news organizations, IGOs and tech companies. These consultations were financially supported by UNESCO's IPDC, and the Multi-Donor Programme on Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists (MDP).

This report is a summary of the results of the consultations, with concrete recommendations and proposed solutions to inform the future implementation of the Plan.

¹The full reports by the consultations will be available at: <https://www.unesco.org/en/communication-information/safety-journalists/un-plan-action>. The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the consultations' contributors, rapporteurs and editors and do not necessarily represent the views of UNESCO. The designations employed and the presentation of material on this report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning its frontiers or boundaries.

2 ACHIEVEMENTS AND BEST PRACTICES ON THE SIX AXES OF THE UNPA

With the proviso that the Plan is a fit-for purpose document, the regional and thematic consultations focused on successes, achievements and good practices, but also mistakes, as a basis for future improvements in the implementation of the Plan. This section is a non-exhaustive list of such cases cited in the consultations, structured on the Plan's six axes.

Selected identified achievements arisen were:

- Safety of journalists, through **SDG indicator 16.10.1**, unequivocally connected with the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#);
- The approval of a significant number of [declarations, resolutions and other normative texts at global and regional level](#);
- The [UN Secretary General's Call to Action for Human Rights](#), which clearly highlights the need to protect journalists;
- The first special session on the topic organized by the presidents of the three relevant bodies in the UN System – the UN General Assembly, the UNESCO General Conference and the Human Rights Council – resulting in a [joint declaration](#) at the World Press Freedom Conference 2022;
- A growing number of recommendations accepted by member states related to safety of journalists, as witnessed through the [Universal Periodical Review](#);
- Individual or joint reports by the Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression, both UN and regional, that have contributed hugely to further understand the political, policy and programmatic challenges that need to be addressed to increase the safety of journalists, including [the most recent report of the UN Special Rapporteur](#);
- Global and regional platforms in Europe and Africa that were developed to monitor the safety of journalists;
- Over fifty multistakeholder national mechanisms established with function ranging from prevention to protection and prosecution.

- [Capacity building by training of more than 24,000 judicial operators](#) from 150 countries and of more than 11,500 security forces from 160 countries on safety of journalists issues, supported by UNESCO;
- The creation of the [Global Media Defence Fund](#) which since 2020 supported over 80 projects around the globe involving nearly 3,000 journalists, 600 lawyers and 120 CSOs, and directly supporting over 1,000 cases of legal assistance provided to journalists in distress, over 70 instances of strategic litigation undertaken to contribute to standard-setting precedents in Freedom of Expression and Safety of Journalists, and over 150 investigations on crimes against journalists – among many other activities.
- While impunity for killings against journalists is still alarmingly high (86%), it is a fact that the last ten years have witnessed a decline of 9 percentage points, from 95% in 2012 to 86% in 2022. Likewise, while one murder of a journalist is still too much, it is a fact that there has been on average a steady decrease in the killings of journalists in the last 10 years, according to UNESCO's DG reports. While in 2012, 124 journalists were killed, the number of journalists killed in 2021 reduced to 51. Although 70 journalists have already been killed in the first three quarters of 2022, projections based on this figure are unlikely to surpass the 100 mark by the end of the year.

2.1. Awareness raising

- Quantitative and qualitative parameters demonstrate that safety of journalists and the issue of impunity have considerably been raised in international agendas as well as in the awareness of the wider public all over the world. Since the proclamation of World Press Freedom Day (WPF) by the UN General Assembly in 1993 and the subsequent proclamation by the Assembly of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists (IDEI) in 2013 - both on the recommendation of UNESCO General Conference - thousands of events across the world have been held every 3 May (WPF) and 2 November (IDEI) as pivotal events to raise awareness about the importance of press freedom and the need to protect journalists and fight impunity. Several global campaigns were organized involving thousands of media partners with a reach in the order of millions.
- This feature is well captured in all regional consultation reports which point to multistakeholder participation in these events, and the impact in raising awareness about press freedom and safety of journalists. The transition of ownership on the topic of press freedom from the core journalistic circles to a broader and diverse set of actors has been cited as one of the major achievements of the UN Plan over the last 10 years and overall since the 1991 Windhoek Declaration. The connection between norms, standards and local actions has been a feature of the Plan as a framework for guiding work on safety of journalists.
- Awareness of the gendered impact of attacks against journalists has increased and a body of research supports the claim raised at the consultation on safety of women journalists that this issue now urgently needs to see impactful counter-action.

2.2. Monitoring and reporting

- The inclusion in the 2030 Agenda of a specific indicator on safety of journalists (SDG 16.10.1) is just one of the results of the upscaled international commitment to monitoring, along with UNESCO's launch of the [Observatory on Killed Journalists](#) and of the number of recommendations in this domain within the Universal Periodical Review process.
- The Europe consultation noted the launching of the "[Platform for the Protection of Journalism and the Safety of Journalism](#)" by the Council of Europe, as one of the best practices on improving monitoring and reporting. This platform has been compiling, processing and sharing information on serious concerns about media freedom and the safety of journalists in Council of Europe member states since 2015.
- In Africa, the [Digital Platform for Safety of Journalists in Africa](#) was launched in 2021, demonstrating a good practice in the multistakeholder approach to monitoring and cross-continent collaborations.
- The Africa consultation also suggested developing a gender focus on monitoring and documentation of safety of journalists, in order to address the problem of gendered attacks and violence particularly targeted to women journalists. The need to standardize the documentation and reporting of media violations to include disaggregated information regarding threats, attacks, and the underlying issues driving such attacks was also highlighted.
- Several consultations referred to national monitoring mechanisms.

2.3. Standard setting and policymaking

- During several consultations, it was noted that over 20 UN resolutions on safety of journalists have been approved by the UN General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the UNESCO General Conference, with a progressively increased level of [detail](#).
- This progress was coupled with relevant and unprecedented decisions by regional intergovernmental bodies including within the African Union, the Council of Europe, the OAS and the OSCE.
- Decisions and resolutions by multilateral bodies were accompanied by growing jurisprudence by International Human Rights Courts emphasizing the obligation of States to protect, investigate and prosecute the crimes against journalists.
- In Latin America, a Model Law on the Safety of Journalists has been proposed for the continent during the World Press Freedom Day 2022 to serve as a guide for countries seeking to adopt regulations and protocols to protect the lives of journalists. The model law has been presented to the congresses of Chile, Mexico and Paraguay.
- The High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom, convened as an independent group of lawyers and judges in July 2019 at the request of the governments of the United Kingdom and Canada, drafted – with the assistance of the International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) Secretariat – and launched four enforcement Reports, providing advice to States in the form of model legal frameworks: "[Providing Safe Refuge to Journalists at Risk](#)", "[Consular Support to Journalists at Risk](#)"; the "[Use of Targeted Sanctions to Protect Journalists](#)"; and "[Advice on Promoting More Effective Investigations into Abuses against Journalists](#)".

- On the latter topic, the International Association of Prosecutors (IAP), has developed, with the support of UNESCO, a set of [guidelines for Prosecutors on Cases of Crimes against Journalists](#).
- The academic consultations also revealed the need for better legal frameworks to more effectively protect journalists.
- During the tech consultation, it was noted that partnerships among journalists, media companies, tech companies, international and national public policy makers are vital to protecting journalists, citing, for example, the collaboration between tech companies and local actors in Afghanistan and Ukraine which enabled acting quickly to gather information and call for effective changes at policy and company level to protect journalists. While it has been noted that OHCHR and other stakeholders are advocating for a moratorium on the use of surveillance technologies.
- The consultation process was also informed by the recent report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression Irene Khan on “Reinforcing media freedom and the safety of journalists in the digital age”, issued on June 2022. On legislative issues, the Reports recommends that:
 - i) States should repeal criminal defamation and seditious libel laws and laws criminalizing the criticism of State institutions and officials. Criminalization of speech (other than in the most egregious cases of incitement to violence and hatred) is disproportionate, gags journalism and damages democratic discourse and public participation;
 - ii) States should discourage frivolous or vexatious legal action (strategic lawsuits against public participation) against journalists and news outlets by adopting laws and policies that allow early dismissal of such cases, limit the damages claimed in civil defamation suits against journalists and media outlets, permit the defence of “public interest” and “no malice” for journalists, provide legal support to victims of strategic lawsuits against public participation, end “forum shopping” and sanction the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation.

2.4. Capacity-building

- Thousands of relevant capacity-building initiatives were organized by hundreds of organizations. Approaches ranged from generic to specific, including topics such as equipping journalists to tackle PTSD or gender-specific threats, addressing digital security, or protecting sources.
- The Africa consultations noted the significant mobilization of judges in supporting freedom of expression and safety of journalists, mostly through UNESCO’s Judges initiative that has seen more than 24,000 judicial actors trained in over 150 countries.
- The academic consultations noted how the Plan has inspired the enlisting of additional constituencies in the issue of safety citing UNESCO’s engagement of regional human rights courts in Europe, Latin America and Africa; the capacity building of lawyers and their networks supported by the Global Media Defence Fund; as well as the training programmes for Security forces on the issue of safety of journalists, reaching police forces in more than 160 countries.

- Several consultations, including the Arab states and academic ones, stressed the importance of workplace safety and working conditions, in particular a need for psychological safety training to deal with the mental health needs of journalists, especially those that have experienced trauma due to abuse or covering violent incidents..

2.5. Academic research

- As noted in the third academic consultation on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Plan, most academic literature on the safety of journalists has been published since the establishment of the Plan as a framework for tackling the issue. What appears to have increased the number of publications is a growing interest in social media and the way in which it facilitates attacks of threats and harassment against journalists and in particular attention has focused on gender-specific attacks. Research has also evolved over time, now serving multiple purposes such as informing the implementation of the Plan and collecting and analyzing existing policies.
- In 2006, during the Academic Conference held as part of World Press Freedom Day 2016 in Helsinki, the Journalism Safety Research Network was launched as a platform for deepening research on safety of journalists in the implementation of the Plan.
- The Africa consultation noted the need to conduct in-depth and regular research on the nature and levels of threats to press freedom and freedom of expression to generate empirical evidence for engagement with the various regional and continental bodies, as well as other stakeholders.

2.6. Coalition building

- On top of international coalition building as outlined in section 1, regional, national and local coalitions have also been created.
- At national level, Iraq, Italy, Montenegro, Nepal, Palestine, Pakistan, Paraguay, to mention just a few examples, reported inter alia efforts towards establishing multistakeholder mechanisms.

3 KEY CONSULTATION HIGHLIGHTS, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Arab States

The regional consultation was held in an online format on 15 September 2022, preceded by a survey launched in June, collecting regional experiences with the implementation of the Plan and targeting relevant stakeholders in the region. The results of this survey were analyzed and compiled into a report validated by regional stakeholders, including the Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism, Arab World and the Middle East, Gulf Center for Human Rights, International Federation of Journalists, Mauritania Women Journalists Network, and the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists (SNJT). Participants represented a cross section of civil society organizations, media, academia, governmental organizations, judicial powers, independent national bodies, as well as UN agencies, programmes and funds.

The last decade started with the hopes and reforming energies following the “Arab Spring” but the region remained the most perilous one for war reporters in conflicts such in Iraq, Syria and Yemen. Meanwhile, regional initiatives such as the Declaration on Media Freedom in the Arab World Spearheaded by IFJ was signed by some heads of states and contributed to advancing the advocacy. At the national level, the region has developed innovative and effective mechanisms, such as a hotline and the Digital Women Journalists Platform in Iraq as well as the Safety of Journalists Monitoring Unit undertaken by the Union of Tunisian Journalists in Tunisia.

Most respondents to the online survey considered the prosecution of crimes against journalists as the least successful area of intervention under the Plan. The main challenge in this area is the lack of proper trials conducted in a timely manner. Participants also highlighted the lack of legal training for journalists which would enhance their knowledge regarding their rights under national and international laws.

The recommendations that emerged from the consultation include:

- Implementing journalist training adapted to each country’s unique context, on several topics such as physical safety, psychological well-being, digital safety and legal competency.

- Establishing a safe and secure mechanism for journalists, especially women, to report on harassment and attacks.
- Reviewing national laws in line with international standards and to add more provisions which protect journalists, as well as the creation of a platform to publish academic research on safety of journalists.
- Promoting rule of law and creating a specialized court or an independent international investigative body to investigate cases pertaining to journalists.
- Sharing legal cases with an international network of legal professionals and with international level judicial powers.
- Increased and open monitoring reports of cases of violence against journalists.
- Increased protection of journalists subject to arbitrary detention.

3.2. Africa

The Africa consultations saw a multi-pronged process that involved organizing three online sub-regional consultations for Eastern African, Southern Africa and West and Central Africa, with a final consultation to consolidate overall recommendations. This process involved several partners and stakeholders including African Editors Forum Africa Freedom of Expression Network (AFEX); Collaboration on ICT Policy for Eastern and Southern Africa, Congress of African Journalists, Eastern Africa Editor's Society, Federation for African Journalists (FAJ) Media Foundation of West Africa Media Institute for Southern Africa (MISA) Media Rights Agenda, International Media Support (IMS) and OHCHR, among others. The consultations collected some of the main successes, challenges, and good practices in the implementation of the Plan in the African context. These include the establishment of national mechanisms and working groups for the protection of journalists in Kenya, Somalia, Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan, the appointment of a Special Prosecutor for the Investigation and Prosecution of Abuses against Journalists in Somalia, and the appointment of government focal persons for the safety of journalists in Uganda, Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania. The Digital Platform for Safety of Journalists in Africa was launched in 2021, with support by UNESCO and technical expertise by the Council of Europe, overseen by a multistakeholder steering committee chaired by the Federation of African Journalists (FAJ) and the African Editors Forum (TAEF). The Platform is also supported by the African Union's Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) within the framework of its Governance assessments.

The recommendations that emerged from the consultation include:

- Reinforcement and support for national and regional coordination mechanisms that bring together various stakeholders for the safety of journalists, notably government institutions by appointing a government focal point to liaise with national and regional coordination processes on safety of journalists.
- Establishing a Media Lawyers Network, working with key partners such as the Pan African Lawyers Association for the defense of journalists at risk.
- Establishing *Safety of Journalists Surgery* seminars to fast-track prosecution of crimes and government responses on safety of journalists in collaboration with national and regional courts.

- A harmonized monitoring and reporting mechanism for safety of journalists in Africa, that creates synergies with African Union Member States obligations as well all mandates of Special rapporteur on Freedom of expression and access to Information.

The academic consultations revealed among the topics studied that in Africa, journalism safety during elections is a prominent issue, along with gender-specific safety issues online, lack of safety training in higher education journalism curricula.

3.3. Latin America and the Caribbean

The regional consultation for Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Punta del Este, Uruguay on the occasion of the World Press Freedom Day Global Conference on 3 May 2022. The legacy of the Plan was cited as having led to an unprecedented mobilization around the issue of safety of journalists. Regional stakeholders regard the Plan as an important high level ‘commitment document’ that launched the issue as a critical part of the agenda in Latin America. However, the last 10 years have seen a deterioration of the regional context and safety standards for media workers, with many other violations on top of killings having been documented. The main challenges facing the Plan are the distance between the high-level approach and the reality of violence on the ground, as well as the lack of strategic leadership and coordination to better foster its implementation. A central aspect of the problem is that a significant number of perpetrators are members of organized crime, therefore not influenced by the “calls” of international organizations.

These overriding challenges impact on the effectiveness of duty-bearers responses. Several States have established official mechanisms, measures or protection programs to support journalists, however, persistently high rates of killings show the fragility of these responses. Some other regional challenges include: abusive legal procedures against journalists; increasing use of stigmatizing discourse against journalists and activists by officials; the introduction of legislation negatively impacting the safety of journalists; targeted surveillance has expanded through the use of manual tactics (ciberpatrullaje), as well as with the deployment of more advanced technology, and increasing number of Internet shutdowns.

The recommendations that emerged from the consultation include:

- Establishing National Task Forces in countries of concern which work in cooperation with national protection mechanisms for more effective national implementation of the Plan.
- A stronger focus from States on a wider range of violence and threats considered ‘minor’, because they are a strong indicator of future targeting.
- Comprehensive policies to address the increasing stigmatization of journalists by officials.
- State monitoring of cases of violence against journalists in order to provide data to regional and international freedom of expression bodies like UNESCO.
- State development and adoption of integrated and gender responsive prevention, protection, monitoring and response mechanisms for the online and offline safety of women journalists, with special attention given to intersectionality.
- Continuous training for investigative authorities and judges on international freedom of expression standards concerning the safety of journalists, widening the scope to include the prosecution of masterminds.

3.4. Europe

On 30 September 2022, European stakeholders came together in an event co-organized by UNESCO, the Council of Europe and hosted by the Permanent Representation of the Slovak Republic to the European Union.

During a mapping of key successes resulting from the implementation of the Plan over the past years, participants described the UN Plan of Action as a “catalyst for positive change”. Among key successes, participants named successful monitoring efforts of attacks against journalist such as the platform by the Council of Europe and the UNESCO observatory of killed journalists. Participants also remarked successes at the normative intergovernmental level, including the European Commission Recommendation (2021), the OSCE Ministerial Council Decision Nr.3 (2018), the Council of Europe Recommendation Nr. 4 (2016), as well as UN General Assembly and Human Rights Council Resolutions. In terms of concrete political applications of the Plan, participants pointed out the establishment of national safety mechanisms in several countries (such as Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK) as well as recent commitments to emergency visa for journalists from countries in conflict (for example by Czechia, Ireland and Lithuania).

While acknowledging key advancements in the area of safety of journalists, participants also identified trends of regression in the safety of journalists in Europe and declared that journalists have been under attack in their role as “watchdogs of democracy”. Key challenges as observed were “a lack of political will to translate commitments into actions” and political anti-media rhetoric which also contributes to a societal lack of trust in independent, professional journalism. Additionally, abusive use of the law to harass and silence journalists, such as SLAPPs (strategic lawsuits against public participation) were emphasized. Lastly, participants stressed concern about attacks online and offline attacks targeted at journalists linked to their identity or their specific employment status/ work situation (this included, but is not limited to women, queer and non-binary journalists, investigative reporters, freelancers and displaced journalists).

The recommendations that emerged from the consultation include:

- That journalists and the media community should be consulted and included in political decision-making on the safety of journalists.
- The creation of national mechanisms, which, if implemented effectively, constitute a good practice. These should be comprehensive, based on multi-stakeholder participation and effectively coordinate between the different actors. National mechanisms should be well-resourced and given measurable objectives; progress towards these objectives should be tracked.
- Maintenance and upscaling, where necessary, of alert and early-warning systems and monitoring mechanisms.
- The creation of actions to address the safety of journalists and impunity that are responsive to identity-based hatred and attacks against journalists, such as gender-based violence online and offline.
- Training and capacity-building of legal actors (including judges, prosecutors as well as lawyers) such as the UNESCO Programme are a good practice.

- Efforts in Media Information Literacy (MIL) to better equip citizens with tools to counter disinformation.
- State commitment to safety of journalists need to be translated into practice, with increased focus on follow-up and measurement of concrete implementation.
- State review and repeal of overly restrictive laws threatening media freedom.

3.5. South Asia

The hybrid South Asian consultation took place in Kathmandu between 31 May and 1 June 2022. The consultation involved policy makers, national human rights institutions, senior media professionals and experts from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Good practices have emerged in the region, like a reporting mechanism created jointly with provincial police departments and in collaboration with the Pakistani National Commission for Human Rights in 2019. Regional cooperation has expanded via the International Media Support led workshop series for National Human Rights Institutes (NHRIs), which aimed to provide support to establish independent protection mechanisms. Regional dialogue on ending impunity was promoted during the 2017 IDEI activities in Colombo, Sri Lanka, with the participation of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission of Human Rights (AICHR) and the OHCHR. However, the challenges facing journalists persist, including intolerance to openness, the inability to build effective coalitions of civil society, the gradual deterioration in quality journalism education, and the emerging issue of online threats of violence impacting the safety of women journalists. Newer threats include controls on content introduced under the guise of tackling alleged disinformation, hate speech, and 'fake news'.

The recommendations that emerged from the consultation include:

- Establishing/strengthening national and regional coalitions of media and human rights institutions to carry out joint monitoring and research, as well as regional and international advocacy.
- Strengthening capacity and professionalism of media associations and human rights organizations to build safe spaces to support journalists, particularly women, who have been threatened, harassed, and attacked for expressing themselves.
- Organizing capacity building opportunities for women journalists and those working from the regions to equip them with the knowledge and skills required for safety, managing stress and trauma, and good journalism, including investigative and conflict journalism.
- Promoting digital safety of journalists and the need for a four-point approach to digital safety – knowledge (mandatory trainings, audits), preparedness (adopting new systems, offshore archives), resilience (continuous change in practices) and repetition (refresher training, and digital safety drills).
- In response to traditional intolerance to openness, the strengthening of targeted collaborative advocacy for the review of media laws, including those intended for 'regulating' digital/social media, to build public support for repealing restrictive provisions in existing laws and the criminalization of both journalism violations and defamation.

3.6. Safety of journalists in the digital age: enhancing risk management and transparency of platforms

The consultation on safety of journalists in the digital age focused on developing on risk assessment frameworks and enhancing transparency of online platforms. The consultation took place in a hybrid format on 13 September 2022, virtually and in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Online disinformation, hate speech, surveillance, and other forms of harassment against journalists, particularly women journalists, was identified as new challenges whose characteristics and dimensions were not as apparent at the time UN Plan of Action was first developed and approved. The consultation was therefore organized as part of the ongoing initiatives to address the increasing online harms that journalists face, and to discuss the strategic roles of tech companies in addressing these challenges. It attracted a broad network of stakeholders, key among whom were five major tech companies: Ericsson, Google, Meta, Microsoft and Twitter. Other stakeholders included International Media Support (IMS), the Danish Tech Ambassador, Danish National Commission for UNESCO, the Global Network Initiative (GNI), Brainbox (project lead on the GNI's Action Coalition on Meaningful Transparency), major press freedom ICSSOs including Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and Free Press Unlimited (FPU), as well as independents like Bradon Silverman, co-founder of CrowdTangle.

The active participation of the major tech companies was vital for this consultation. Representatives of companies shared information about their existing policies and good practices for protecting journalists, such as Twitter's 'Unmentioning' tool (in which a person tagged in a conversation can remove him/herself) and 'symptoms-first' approach to self-reporting by users; Meta's identification of countries where and categories of journalists that may be at risk in order to prioritize resources; Google's research to understand the problem, including a partnership between Jigsaw and the Economist Intelligence Unit on measuring the prevalence of online violence against women, as well as other initiatives like the use of trusted flagger channels.

Several participants noted the problem was often less the lack of policies in place, but rather, the proper implementation of what already exists. It was also noted that partnerships are key for scaling initiatives. For example, digital companies may leverage third-party reporting tools as a complement to their own tools. Partnerships are also central to scaling a tool to make it universal, requiring language capabilities. Cross-company information sharing of identified threatening accounts also prevents abuse and helps end impunity.

Other challenges cited, particularly by tech companies, were the ever-dynamic definition of who is a journalist for purposes of protection, the complexity of determining bona-fide third parties for information sharing, isolating disinformation from legitimate speech, and the limited awareness of the public, including journalists, on cyber-security basics. Major outcomes of the consultation included consensus on the worrying extent of online gendered abuse, the scale of disinformation online, the need for risk assessment frameworks and data sharing mechanisms on safety of journalists, and initiatives that would be taken forward by UNESCO and partners in addressing the broader online harms to journalists.

The recommendations that emerged from the consultation include:

- Reinforcing rapid response measures and reporting channels, with attention to the specific threats faced by women journalists.
- Deepening on the ground partnerships with tech companies to scale up initiatives grounded in local context, language and culture.
- Strengthening human and automated moderation systems to protect journalists.
- Enhancing meaningful transparency as a basis for accountability and evidence-based policies; this could be through aggregated statistics and reports (including on mitigate measures and execution of them), public data, audits, and greater data sharing between tech companies and legitimate third-parties like academics, researchers, and journalists.
- Developing forward-looking voluntary risk assessment frameworks as means of identifying who is most at risk and for developing mitigation measures for such risks.

3.7. Safety of women journalists

The consultation on safety of women journalists took place on 3 October 2022 and was co-organized with the Association for Progressive Communications in Bangkok, Thailand. The hybrid consultation saw the involvement of stakeholders from civil society, IGOs, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, and media representatives. By discussing three key areas of safety, namely online gender-based violence, violence during coverages, and harassment and discrimination in the workplace, participants produced a comprehensive list of recommendations.

At the outset, participants called for a renewed commitment to the Plan and one that clearly and expressly refers to the differentiated impact of violence on women and non-binary journalists. The understanding of the differentiated impact on women and gender diverse people has been significantly deepened over the past ten years and this knowledge should be taken advantage of when designing policies, norms and activities. Research, including by UNESCO, has shown the pervasive nature and harmful impact on freedom of expression of online or offline gender-based violence, gendered disinformation and sexual violence.

The recommendations that emerged from the consultation include:

- Referring to gender-based violence in journalism instead of violence against women journalists, as a step to ensure that diversity and intersectionality are better taken into consideration in calls for action.
- Incentivizing actions aimed at strengthening capacity for implementation of measures that could promote the safety of women journalists, these could include:
 - Trainings offered to women journalists on holistic security;
 - More transparency and communication / dissemination by tech companies in relation to the tools they have developed to improve women's ability to protect themselves on their respective internet platforms;
 - Training to law enforcement and justice officers on how to investigate and process complaints relating to online gender-based violence.

- Incentivizing research and technical assistance to build:
 - an authoritative definition of online gender-based violence;
 - better protocols, procedures and tools for documenting online gender-based violence;
 - research to better understand the impacts of online gender based violence against journalists.
- Promote more transparency by platforms in relation to specific disaggregated data sets that could allow researchers and activists to better understand online gender-based violence.
- UN bodies should monitor and publish reports on implementation measures adopted in relation to online gender-based violence under the framework of the UN Plan.
- UN and States should promote and support the creation of gender responsive newsroom policies, including through the promotion of ratification of the 190 ILO Convention.

3.8. Academic consultations

The 10 year anniversary consultation process included a series of three interconnected academic consultations. The first took place on 30 May as a preconference to the International Communication Association (ICA) annual conference, held at the UNESCO headquarters, and focused on discussing understandings and conceptualizations of journalists' safety, and relatedly how understandings of the concept might need to evolve to understand the impact of new forms of threats such as digital attacks and the compromised safety of women journalists. Following on from this the session explored how academia can best support the implementation of the UN Action Plan, related policy agendas on protection, prevention and prosecution as well as effectively bridging between theory and practice.

The phase was on 9 June at the 2022 International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) Conference and was organized in collaboration between the Journalism Safety Research Network/the UNESCO Chair on Media Freedom, Journalism Safety and the Issue of Impunity hosted by the Centre for Freedom of the Media (CFOM), University of Sheffield and UNESCO. Discussions focused on exploring how academia can be mobilized to foster the continued implementation of the Plan through effective knowledge exchange and impactful collaboration between academic and non-academic actors to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The third consultation, held online on 28 September, finetuned the recommendations developed over the course of the previous two phases. The recommendations that emerged from the consultation include:

- Continuity in research on contemporary challenges including digital safety, gender-specific safety issues, workplace safety (physical and psychological), improving monitoring, a wider understanding of impunity, the weaponization of the law, and UNPA implementation strategies

- That academic research be recognized as essential for understanding the aforementioned issues in their breadth, depth and significance by all stakeholders to the UN Action Plan and that therefore be a significant investment in both financial and human resources as well as time to support the development of greater academic capacity
- This, in turn, would turn to a recommended interconnective approach between stakeholders.
- In particular, the GAC recommends that a Journalism Safety and Impunity Education Curriculum will be drawn up by all stakeholders involved that includes tailored and individualized education and training for journalism students, trainees, practitioners with a view to developing their ability for self-protection and capacity for resilience as far as possible and reasonable.
- Lastly, that the UNPA and its implementation strategy be extended to include specific provision for journalists in exile who face unique challenges that are currently not being addressed.

4 MOVING FORWARD WITH THE UN PLAN IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS AND BEYOND

The first ten years of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity have seen significant improvements in promoting a safer and enabling environment for journalists and media workers, despite shrinking press freedom, the reduced public trust in professional journalism, and disruption of media business models.

Through its three key pillars of prevention, protection, and prosecution, the Plan has succeeded in multiplying the collective capacities of different actors to prevent attacks, protect journalists in danger and to prosecute those responsible for crimes against them.

But the past ten years have also seen setbacks, worrying developments and the emergence of new threats and challenges to freedom of expression and the safety of journalists, which were not anticipated when the Plan was first conceived.

Amongst these are digital challenges such as digital surveillance, online violence and cyber-crimes, particularly affecting women journalists, the increasing prevalence of (gendered) mis- and disinformation, hate speech and the exponential growth of digital technologies, which has given rise to concerns about the use and misuse of digital platforms and the role of internet companies in mediating freedom of expression and the safety of journalists. The need to address disinformation to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms was recently further underscored by the report of the United Nation's Secretary General on these issues.

These challenges further include the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), which are often aimed at journalists to prevent them from reporting on matters of public interest or the increasing need to provide emergency assistance, including legal protections, to journalists in both conflict and non-conflict settings.

Strengthening the implementation of the Plan in the next decade therefore requires addressing these emerging challenges. This multi-stakeholder consultative process has developed the above-mentioned concrete recommendations and options for actions to tackling these issues at regional and thematic level.

Consolidating the mentioned achievements in terms of networking and coalition creation, the recent report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression Irene Khan on *Reinforcing media freedom and the safety of journalists in the digital age*, issued on June 2022, “noting that this year marks the tenth anniversary of the Plan” calls UNESCO and OHCHR to strengthen multistakeholderism to further advance the Plan.

In addition, crosscutting multistakeholder option for actions include:

- The media, by contributing to more transparency and accountability, is key to the strengthening of peaceful and democratic societies, as well as to furthering good governance and sustainable development as outlined in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.10, and to achieve Journalism as a Public Good as per the Windhoek+30 Declaration enforced with unanimity by the UNESCO General Conference in 2021;
- An effective approach to safety of journalists requires the sharing of good practices on the prevention, protection and prosecution of crimes against journalists;
- Gendered violence against journalists needs to be addressed urgently and needs holistic, coordinated, multi-stakeholders action in order to be combatted effectively;
- Similarly, digital threats and cyber-crimes against journalists, particularly those committed against female journalists, require a coordinated approach;
- States, being key duty bearers, have an obligation to provide, protect, and ensure a safe and secure environment for media and journalists, notably through the adoption and implementation of national protection mechanisms;
- The protection and safety of journalists should be essential components of National Human Rights and Development Plans, particularly within the context of achieving SDGs;
- The protection and safety of journalists requires the full mobilization of State structures and organs, in particular the Judiciary, prosecution, law enforcement, and other mandated State components;
- Among others, States should consider adopting laws, or review and revise existing ones, relating to freedom of expression online and offline to ensure they are aligned with international standards.
- States should in particular adopt legislations and other measures addressing online violence against women journalists; discouraging frivolous or vexatious legal actions against journalists; and ensuring adequate human rights safeguards on the use of digital surveillance.

5 ANNEX A:

Selected Options for duty-bearers' pledges

1. Member States may wish to pledge to the following:

- a) Adopting legislation or reviewing existing laws for the protection of journalists and media workers to ensure that they are in line with international human rights standards;
- b) Creating effective, human rights based, and multistakeholder relevant national mechanisms, including:
 - i) the adoption of national action plans;
 - ii) the setting up of independent commissions for the safety of journalists;
 - iii) the designation of specialized prosecutors, dedicated investigative units, specialized courts for crimes against journalists;
 - iv) the adoption of specific protocols and methods of investigation and prosecution for crimes against journalists;
 - v) the establishment of information-gathering mechanisms, such as databases, to permit the gathering of verified information about threats and attacks against journalists;
 - vi) the establishment of an early warning and rapid response mechanism to give journalists, when threatened, immediate access to the authorities and protective measures; and
 - vii) the training of journalists, journalists associations, as well as prosecutors, the judiciary and the security forces regarding the safety of journalists.
- c) Voluntary reporting on SDG 16.10.1 indicator related to attack against journalists to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development;
- d) Replying to UNESCO request for information on judicial follow up to States in which killings of journalists took place, as per mandate established by the UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication;
- e) Reporting more systematically to the Universal Periodic Review and UN Treaty Bodies on media freedom and safety of journalists;
- f) Operationalizing the recommendations related to safety of journalists by international human rights mechanisms including the Universal Periodical Review process, the special procedures of the Human Rights Council and Treaty Bodies;
- g) Responding positively to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN independent rights experts' appeal to States to adopt domestic safeguards to protect individuals from unlawful surveillance, in line with international human rights law; as well as adhering to their call for a moratorium on surveillance technology until "effective" national or international controls are put in place to lessen its harmful impact;

- h) Responding positively to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN independent rights experts' call to States to adopt laws and policies that allow early dismissal of strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), limit the damages claimed in civil defamation suits against journalists and media outlets, permit the defence of "public interest" and "no malice" to journalists, and provide legal support to victims of SLAPPs;
- i) Operationalizing the recommendations contained in the four Enforcement Reports independently developed by the High Level Panel of Legal Experts on Media Freedom;
- j) Supporting the work of the UN Network of Focal Points on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity and providing sustained funding for activities that work towards the implementation of the Plan.

FACTS AND FIGURES ON THE IMPACT OF THE UN PLAN OF ACTION IN THE LAST 10 YEARS

BUILDING COALITIONS

- A network of UN Focal Points for the Safety of Journalists within UN agencies, funds and programmes
- An informal task force connecting the UN with regional and thematic intergovernmental organizations
- 6 Groups of Friends related to Safety of Journalists, comprised of Member States represented in New York (UN Secretariat), Paris (UNESCO), Geneva (OHCHR), Vienna (OSCE), Strasbourg (Council of Europe) and Washington (Organization of American States)
- A Media Freedom Coalition of more than 50 countries
- An International Coalition of Civil Society Organizations of Safety of Journalists
- A Journalism Safety Research Network, coordinated from UNESCO Chair at the Sheffield University
- A Legal Forum

APPLYING THE 3 P-S – PREVENTION, PROTECTION AND PROSECUTION:

PREVENTION

- 1300 advocacy events organized on safety of journalists since 2012
- 6 Global Campaigns on the occasion of the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalist
- Over 800 multistakeholder activities reported in 51 bimonthly newsletters on the Implementation of the UN Plan of Action
- An SDG indicator (16.10.1) in Agenda 2030 on safety of journalists

PROTECTION

- At least 50 National Protection Mechanisms for the safety of journalists established since 2012
- Two regional digital platforms in Europe and Africa to monitor attacks against journalists and over half a dozen of national ones
- Creation of the UNESCO Observatory on Killed Journalists

PROSECUTION

- More than 24,000 judicial operators from 150 countries and more than 11,500 security forces from 160 countries trained on safety of journalists and freedom of expression
- Over 500 lawyers trained in 30 countries and 1,000 cases of legal assistance provided to journalists in distress over 2020 and 2021, funded by the support of the Global Media Defense Fund
- 4 « Enforcement Reports » for States to enforce international human rights norms to defend media freedom

A GROWING RANGE OF INTERNATIONAL NORMS

NORMATIVE PROCEDURES

- 26 UN resolutions on safety of journalists adopted since 2012 by UN General Assembly, UNESCO General Conference and the Human Rights Council
- About 4% of the recommendations during the 3rd cycle of the UPR were related to freedom of expression issues in general, which highlights the importance of the issue on the international human rights agenda
- Increased number of reports by the Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression (of the UN and regional bodies) focusing on the safety of journalists
- 7 formal agreements with international human rights courts and associations of prosecutors
- Impunity rate drop of 9 percentage points

- Impunity rate down by 9 percentage points from 95% to 86% in ten years
- 7 formal agreements with international human rights courts and associations of prosecutors

The year 2022 marks the 10th Anniversary of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity

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