



## Contribution of [La Alianza Regional por la Libre Expresión e Información](#) to the OHCHR on “The safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity”

**Please provide any data or recent reports that you would like to share on the safety of journalists in general, especially regarding:**

- The killings of journalists and accountability measures or lack of accountability for those killings;
- The detention of journalists worldwide;
- The adoption of defamation laws and new laws affecting on-line expression;
- Legal harassment of journalists, including Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Prosecutions (SLAPP);
- The unlawful use of targeted surveillance technologies against journalists.

In a recent contribution of the Regional Alliance for the Freedom of Expression and Information, entitled "[Freedom of expression online. Challenges, opportunities and trends in Latin America](#)", we were able to identify a series of problems arising from the use of mass surveillance practices of citizen expressions online by governments or private regulation of content on online platforms. These types of practices, which are still not duly regulated in practically any Latin American country, can have serious impacts on freedom of expression and, therefore, on the quality of public debate. With regard to journalists, cases have been identified in different countries of the region in which the private moderation of content led to restrictions on social network accounts. Likewise, we could observe that the States increased their practices of massive online surveillance at the same time that the digital tools to carry out these activities became more sophisticated. Both the generation of proprietary technology and the acquisition of complex software designed in the private sector have allowed practices such as "cyber patrolling" to become commonplace in the region. Added to this are mechanisms for direct surveillance of journalists or other opinion leaders, in a scenario in which there is growing pressure or criminalization (through civil and criminal prosecution) of expressions expressed in social networks or other digital media.

**Please provide any data or recent reports that you would like to share on the safety of women journalists, on-line and off-line?**

During the last year, the Regional Alliance for Freedom of Expression and Information, in collaboration with UN Women, conducted research on online gender-based violence against women with a public voice, with a special focus on journalists and communicators in Latin America. The results of the work were materialized in a recent report called "[The impact on freedom of expression of online gender-based violence against women with a public voice](#)", which we presented in the context of the [Second Forum #TitularesSinRiesgo, in the](#)

[Communication for Equality Cycle "Women journalists: risks and challenges in the context of the region"](#), organized by UN Women on November 30, 2022.

**What are, according to your organisation, the main trends that affect the safety of women journalists, off-line and on-line?**

As we were able to note in the framework of the aforementioned study, online gender-based violence is one of the main problems affecting women journalists and communicators. Among the most outstanding findings we were able to identify are the following:

- Online violence transcends virtuality; it has concrete and visible consequences for the people who suffer it; and often, it literally continues outside of digital platforms. It is a mistake and a minimization of the problem to speak of online violence as something alien, separate, distanced from structural gender-based violence. The impact is such that we have identified cases of journalists who have had to leave their country due to the seriousness of the threats, and others who have had to reorganize their lives when they find their children's schedules and location published on networks.
- The attacks have a direct impact on the exercise of freedom of expression of those who suffer them, who often choose to withdraw from certain platforms and/or spaces, at the same time that on multiple occasions they receive reprimands from the media in which they work (they are fired instead of being protected and accompanied). And they are also disciplinarians and achieve a high indirect impact on other women, who, seeing the violence received by journalists, choose not to be a source in their investigations, articles or interviews. In this way they subtract voices in the public debate and, consequently, undermine the quality of democracies.

This kind of violence to which women journalists and communicators are subjected manifests itself in different ways. In particular, we have identified:

- Permanent harassment and trolling by some accounts.
- Massive Harassment, with Insults and Fake News.
- The Publishing of Personal Information (Doxing).
- Concrete Threats Through Direct Messages, WhatsApp and E-mail, and Hacking.
- Violence is replicated offline, for example, through threats and groping during one of their journalistic coverage; or when strangers take photos of the person in public places and upload them to social networks inviting "to say hello".

The most extreme cases occurred in political contexts of increasing public space closure in which all journalists were —or are— in danger and suffer threats and aggressions. The interviewees highlight gender biases in these acts of violence: increased viciousness and more disqualifications than their male colleagues, and, fundamentally, threats of rape directed at them and their children.

**In what ways and to what extent does online harassment impact the lives of women journalists?**

All of the women interviewed in the Americas region (15 in total) for the aforementioned report stated that online violence had real and concrete impacts on their participation in the public conversation:

- 80% of them limited their participation on social media: declining to opine or make statements about certain issues.
- 40% manifested having self-censored by avoiding writing or talking about an issue of their competence in the media outlet or environment in which they work
- One third changed jobs
- One quarter were fired from their jobs or didn't have their contracts renewed. Half fear losing it.
- 80% feared or fear for their physical integrity and even for their life.

We also identified that online gender-based violence has limiting effects on the freedom of expression of all those affected:

- The main effect it generates is self-censorship
- The second effect, which isn't minor, is the disciplining sought by public lynching, even if it's called virtual.

On the other hand, it is worth saying that the consequences aren't exclusively individual, they spill out and generate more withdrawals: colleagues and activists that avoid visibility, and other women who don't want to be interviewed or participate in public debates so as not to be harassed. For each woman who is silenced or attempted to keep quiet, there are many that retire or don't even reach the public debate.

### **What has your organisation done to address these trends?**

The relevance of online gender-based violence among women with a public voice led us to intensify our efforts to broaden the scope and dissemination of our study, mainly through awareness-raising, networking and advocacy in two different directions: with regional and international organizations and agencies; and with governments, organizations and local media.

At the regional and international level, we consolidated a strategic alliance with UN Women, which materialized in two concrete actions.

- Firstly, in the participation in the [Second Forum #TitularesSinRiesgo, in the Communication for Equality Cycle "Women journalists: risks and challenges in the context of the region"](#), which took place on November 30, 2022.
- Secondly, the content of the study served to add concrete contributions to the global campaign organized by UN Women, called ["16 Days of Activism"](#), carried out between November 25 - the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women - and December 10 - Human Rights Day 2022. Within the framework of the campaign, the Regional Alliance collaborated with the creation of different [pieces](#)

[with key messages related to the report](#), which are freely available for dissemination through networks and media.

With regard to sensitization, advocacy and relations at the local level, at the time of writing this contribution, we were able to develop the following actions:

- The local promotion of the study and the communication pieces developed within the framework of the ["16 Days of Activism"](#) campaign, particularly through the communication networks and platforms of the organizations that are part of our network.
- In order to generate greater visibility inside Cuba, we developed [specific audiovisual material](#) based on the content of the report, which was disseminated by the independent media [elToque](#).
- We are working together with UN Women Argentina to make a presentation in March.