

# JOURNALISM IN THE #METOO ERA



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## Courage has a name: Sophia Huang Xueqin

The shockwave caused by a journalistic investigation that will go down in the history of the press led to the emergence of #MeToo on social media and the subsequent amplification of the hashtag.

On 5 October 2017, Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, journalists for the American daily, the *New York Times*, published the first investigation into the Weinstein affair, a film producer accused of sexual violence by dozens of actresses. Five days later, a second journalistic investigation, conducted by Ronan Farrow for the weekly, *The New Yorker*, drove the point home. These revelations triggered an unprecedented worldwide movement giving us freedom to speak, but also freedom to listen to reports of gender-based violence, all propelled by the hashtag #MeToo.

#EuTambién was the response from Brazilian women, while it became #EnaZeda in Tunisia; #Cuéntalo in Spain; #EndRapeCulture in South Africa; #ندق\_الناجيات in Egypt, #UnVioladorEnTuCamino in Chile. These hashtags are symbolic of the triumph of a grassroots movement originally dreamt up by Afro-American activist Tarana Burke back in 2006 and which had already been surging all over Latin and Central America since 2015 with the pioneering slogan #NiUnaMenos, “Not one [woman] less,” following the murder of 14-year-old Chiara Páez by her boyfriend in 2015 in Argentina.

This media momentum in 2017, swept along by the driving force of social media, contributed to the growth and visibility of investigative journalism on gender-based violence, and has sometimes since made the headlines in fledgling specialist media or in the mainstream press. These investigations have also been bolstered by structural changes in the media ecosystem: the adoption of ethical charters, the creation of gender editor posts — journalists who ensure that women and minorities are treated more fairly in the media — and the growth of new cooperation networks between journalists.

There's no denying it: this worldwide movement to liberate women's voices has significantly impacted the media landscape. Out of the 113 journalists polled in an exclusive RSF survey in nearly as many countries, more than 80% noted a significant increase in the number of stories about women's rights, gender issues, and gender-based violence since 2017.

However, this media feminist spring is not without danger. For more than 25% of respondents to RSF's survey, working on these issues is dangerous. Moreover, almost 60% of respondents know of at least one case of a

journalist working on these issues who has been a victim of cyber-harassment.

Threatened and cyber-harassed, journalists can be forced into self-censorship and even exile. Others are subjected to improper legal proceedings aimed at silencing them. Reprisals against reporters for their work on women's rights even go as far as imprisonment, for example in China, where Sophia Huang Xueqin, instigator of #WoYeShi, the local #MeToo, was arrested in 2021. In Russia, the grip of an increasingly authoritarian government is having an impact on media coverage, and some journalists report having had to reconsider their approach to gender-based violence. Afghan journalists who cover these issues have to go underground or into exile. In Iran, journalists who carry out investigations in the wake of the “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi” (“Woman, Life, Freedom”) movement are severely repressed.

Following on from [Women's Rights: Forbidden Subject](#) and [Sexism's toll on journalism](#), this new report from RSF reveals, on the basis of an exclusive investigation, that, yes, investigations into women's rights and gender-based violence are being taken more seriously and are more visible, even at an international level. However, RSF is alarmed by the violent repression of journalists who are covering these issues. RSF is making 16 recommendations to governments, digital platforms, judicial and police authorities and newsrooms to support journalism on women's rights and gender-based violence.

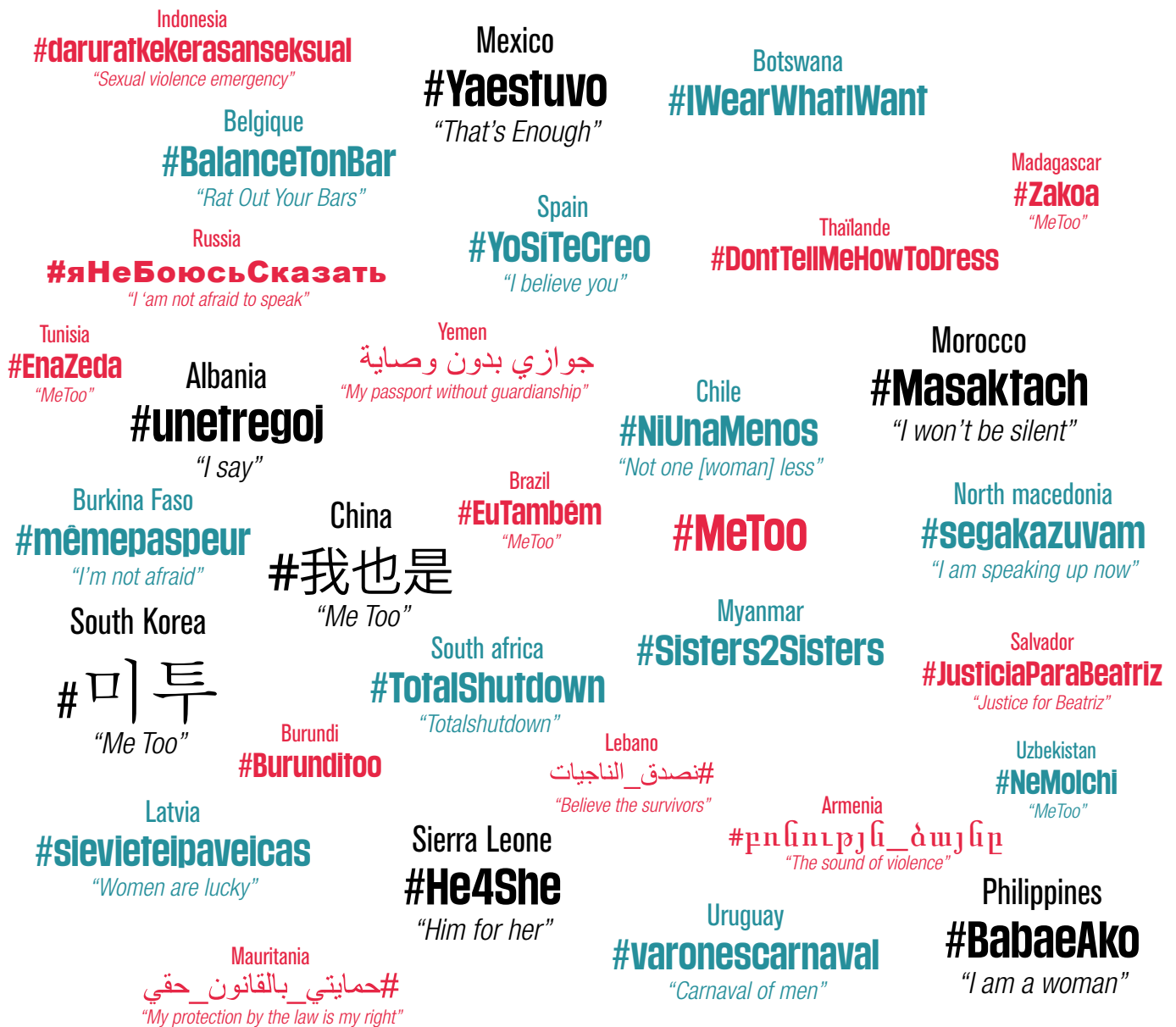
Commentators can debate at will whether the #MeToo era is over or whether this freedom of speech will continue, but there is a before and an after #MeToo in journalism. Journalism has forever been changed: the attention being paid to the status of women journalists and to the issues of gender-based violence are testament to that. Let's congratulate the courage of journalists who have taken risks to report on these issues. Some are paying a high price.

As I write this, on a mission in Taipei, I dedicate this report to Sophia Huang Xueqin, who launched the #MeToo movement in China and who was sentenced to five years in prison on 14 June.

**Thibaut Bruttin,**  
*Director general of Reporters without borders (RSF)*

# FROM #METOO TO #DONTTELLMEHOWTODRESS: OVER 40 HASHTAGS ARE MAKING THE HEADLINES

In nearly two-thirds of the 112 countries represented in the RSF study, a movement promoting discourse on women's rights, gender issues and gender-based violence has emerged under the slogan #MeToo or under a related term (according to 72 of the 113 correspondents surveyed, i.e. 64%). We have various hashtags to thank for the fact that media coverage has grown on these subjects, such as in Russia, with #яНеБоюсьСказать ("I am not afraid to speak"), or in Morocco, with #Masaktach ("I won't be silent"). Slogans sometimes express more specific demands, as in Yemen, with جوازي بدون وصاية ("My passport without guardianship," a movement for Yemeni women to be able to travel without a man's permission) or Thailand with #DontTellMeHowToDress.



# I METHODOLOGY NOTE I

In order to better quantify certain anticipated trends, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) mobilised its network of correspondents around the world for this report: **113 journalists from 112 countries\*** answered a questionnaire in **five languages** (French, English, Spanish, Arabic and Portuguese) containing **35 questions regarding media coverage of gender issues and gender-based violence, developments within newsrooms, and violence suffered by journalists specialising in these subjects.**

\* RSF has two correspondents in India to cover the whole country.

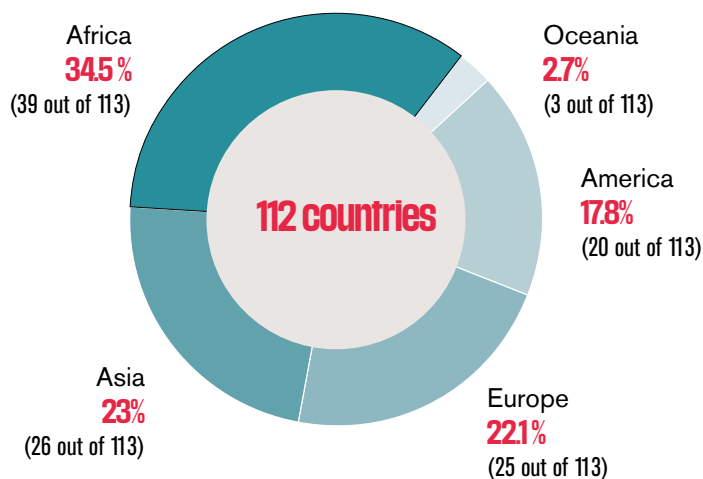
## RSF SURVEY RESULTS

**35 questions**

**in five languages**

French, English, Spanish, Arabic, Portuguese

**113 correspondents interviewed in 112 countries  
across all continents**



**113 responses**

**considered valid**

# 1 | A MEDIA FEMINIST SPRING

## A/ INVESTIGATIONS TAKING CENTRE STAGE

The #MeToo movement and its equivalents in various countries, sometimes under other names, have opened the floodgates. While specialised media existed before this, media devoted to gender issues have seen a real expansion since 2017, giving visibility to investigations related to women's rights and gender issues around the world. The traditional press, for its part, is catching up, with the development of dedicated columns. New journalist networks have been involved in this boom.

### RSF SURVEY RESULTS

**48%** of respondents believe that the impact of #MeToo in the media has been significant

According to the data collected by RSF, almost half of those surveyed believe that the impact of #MeToo has been significant in their country (48%). While the movement to liberate speech on these subjects is not necessarily using this hashtag, **more than 80% noted an increase in the number of topics relating to women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence since 2017.** Some news coverage in particular has accompanied this liberation of speech, such as the *New York Times* investigation into the Weinstein affair, which provoked the #MeToo movement in the United States. In South Korea, the local #MeToo was triggered by media coverage of prosecutor Seo Ji-hyeon speaking out. She revealed on television in 2018 that she had been assaulted by a superior. In Brazil, *TV Globo*, the country's largest television channel, revealed in an investigation that caused a stir that same year, that several hundred women had been sexually assaulted by a famous psychic, Joao de Deus.

## | A NEW GENERATION OF SPECIALIST MEDIA

2017 was a pivotal year for many journalists around the world for investigations related to women's rights. In the wake of the #MeToo wave and in specific local contexts, many media outlets sprang up with the stated aim of highlighting women's rights and gender issues around the world. These media outlets are called *Copadas* in Chile, *Ruda* in Guatemala and *Jeem* in Lebanon and the rest of the Arab world.

With 20,000 issues sold every print run in the French-speaking world, the success of the French quarterly magazine *La Déferlante* bears witness to a craze for feminist journalism. Founded in 2021, partly thanks to a crowdfunding campaign, it has nine employees and several dozen contributors. "#MeToo contributed to our desire to create a media outlet on feminist and gender issues," recalls Marie Barbier, co-editor-in-chief and one of the four co-founders. "We started thinking about a media outlet devoted to feminist struggles in 2019, two years after #MeToo, at a time when these issues were a boiling point of culture, activism, academia and media. Three years after the launch of the magazine, this boiling pot has not cooled, on the contrary, and this constant flow of news allows us to measure the impact of this ongoing revolution," continues Marie Barbier. #MeToo is not just about the freedom to talk about these subjects, it is also about the freedom to

listen with increased interest to issues that were previously ignored. The *La Déferlante* issues discuss domestic violence, transphobia, sexuality and new family models. Many powerful investigations have appeared, for example the investigation into the human trafficking networks between mainland France and French Guiana, which transport drugs in the stomachs of mules, very often women. "All areas of society are affected by this outpouring of witness statements, which challenges the existing order," concludes the journalist. "Moreover, it's fascinating to document from a journalistic point of view."



*Bilan Media* is another of the recent examples of this new generation of media specializing in coverage of gender-based violence that has emerged in the wake of #MeToo. Encouraged by a major legislative change promoting freedom of speech in Somalia, six journalists launched *Bilan* in 2022, the country's first independent women's online media, whose name means "light" in Somali. "We weren't influenced by #metoo – it's not a big thing inside Somalia," explains *Bilan Media* editor-in-chief Hinda Abdi Mohamoud, "but what we do is in line with the aims of the movement, to speak up for women, to bring abuses to light and to provide a safe space where women can work as professionals without harassment. The result is that we put stories on TV and radio that were ignored or avoided before." For example, *Bilan Media* is investigating the opioid crisis among young women, sexual crimes committed in orphanages during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the living conditions of people with HIV. "If there was no *Bilan Media*, this kind of journalism would not exist in Somalia," says Fathi Mohamed Ahmed, one of the journalists working for the news website, which is based in the capital Mogadishu at the offices of *Dalsan Media Group*, one of the country's largest media groups. *Bilan Media's* reports are broadcast on *Dalsan's* television channel and radio station. This young media group also works with foreign press institutions such as the *BBC* and *The Guardian* in the UK, and the Spanish daily *El País*.



## | FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF PIONEERING MEDIA

### RSF SURVEY RESULTS

**Almost half of the respondents believe that there are fewer than five media outlets specialising in women's rights in their country, gender issues and/or gender-based violence.**

“We are pioneers of the feminist press,” says Manon Legrand, one of the writers at *Axelle*, a Belgian bimonthly magazine founded in 1998. For her, #MeToo has given visibility and legitimacy to initiatives like theirs. For over 20 years, the magazine’s journalists have been investigating women’s detention conditions, the decrease in time spent in maternity wards after childbirth, and certain commercial abuses in the fight against breast cancer.

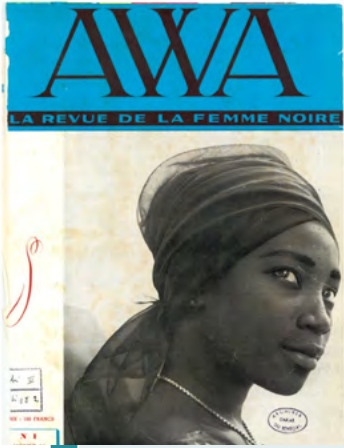


This reflection also involves the choice of words. Femicide can no longer be described in the media as a “crime of passion.” This was still the case when the online magazine *AzMina* was created in Brazil. “Feminism was a dirty word, and black, indigenous, trans and lesbian women were invisible in the mainstream media,” write the editors of this magazine launched in 2015 in São Paulo. It covers current affairs through the lens of gender, offering, for example, stories on reproductive rights, domestic violence or transphobia and investigations into cases of mercury contamination of indigenous women.

There are also several pioneering examples in the Middle East that have paved the way for this kind of journalism in the #MeToo era, such as *Sharika Wa Laken* – which means “partner but not yet equal.” “We are the largest feminist digital platform in the region,” says Hayat Mirshad, who founded the platform in 2012. Originally, *Sharika Wa Laken* was a radio program. Then, with the rise of the Internet, this Lebanese platform became a news website in 2015, covering issues such as the mental burden on women during Ramadan, sexual harassment on public transport and the enslavement of domestic servants caught up in the “Kafala” sponsorship system – which gives control over migrant women. #MeToo did not influence the editorial line, as *Sharika Wa Laken* was already working on this topic, “however, we noticed that, since 2017, more and more women and girls were ready to share their stories, particularly on digital platforms to fight against impunity,” Hayat Mirshad continues.

Palestine gives us another example with *Nawa* – “the core” in Arabic – a feminist news website founded in 2012 by the women journalists’ NGO Falastiniyat. *Nawa* – run by five salaried staff, six regular contributors and a network of more than 60 freelancers in Gaza and the West Bank – aims to convey the reality of Palestinian women’s daily lives, in a media landscape where their voices are sorely lacking. *Nawa*’s feminist approach is also reflected in its language. Where the male gender is the default rule, *Nawa* makes the feminine gender heard: “When we talk about women, we put the sentence in the feminine, that’s the least we can do,” explains journalist Barra Qadi. “In a war, women are among the civilians who are most affected. It’s important to have a media outlet dedicated to them, to their voices and their perspectives,” adds West Bank-based editor-in-chief Wafa Abdel Rahman. Since 7 October 2023 and the start of the war in Gaza, reporters have been working almost 24/7 under constant bombing.





## From “Awa” to “Info’Elles”: Senegalese media gives a voice to women’s rights

Created in 1964 in a newly independent Senegal, Awa magazine, also called “la revue de la femme noire” [the black women’s magazine], was created by a network of women, including the first Senegalese journalist, Annette Mbaye d’Erneville. Every month until 1973, it documented women’s place in public life. In her own way, Zoubida Fall is doing this with her podcast “*Conversations féminines*” [Feminist conversations], launched in 2022, on the “place of women in Senegal and Africa,” and the news website *Info’Elles*. Launched in 2021 by Alice Djiba - a journalist specializing in gender and the media and General Secretary of the Senegalese Women in the Media Association - the site offers video reports with the aim of fighting for women’s rights. “The #MeToo movement has strengthened the feminist movement in general,” says Alice Djiba. “In 2017, I got involved

with women’s rights organisations. Then over the recent years, Senegalese women have become more vocal in denouncing the violence they suffer in their relationships or in the workplace. I can’t say how much of this is due to #MeToo. However, since then, the media have given more coverage to these stories, even if the way in which they are reported still needs to be reviewed. I would say that #MeToo has also strengthened the work of feminist and women’s rights organisations, which are using the media to advocate for legislative reforms and better protection for victims.”

### THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA FOLLOWING THE TREND

In the wake of #MeToo, mainstream newsrooms are being encouraged to reflect on how they cover women’s rights and gender-based violence. To better report on the societal changes underway, many newspapers are teaming up with specialist media outlets such as those mentioned above, or have created sections devoted to women’s rights and gender issues, where previously the trend was more towards creating “women’s” supplements.

### RSF SURVEY RESULTS

#### Women’s voices in the media are:

- Not really present: **21%** (24 out of 113)
- Not very present: **8%** (9 out of 113)
- Present: **28%** (32 out of 113)
- Somewhat present: **34%** (38 out of 113)
- Very present: **9%** (10 out of 113)

#### Do the mainstream media have specialist columns or programmes on women’s rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence?

- No, not at all: **20%** (23 out of 113)
- Yes, but rarely: **60%** (68 out of 113)
- Yes, most of the mainstream press: **17%** (19 out of 113)
- Yes, all the mainstream press: **3%** (3 out of 113)

#### Do the largest national dailies have a section dedicated to women’s rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence?

- No, neither: **65%** (73 out of 113)
- Yes, one of the two: **14%** (16 out of 113)
- Yes, both: **13%** (15 out of 113)
- Can’t answer: **8%** (9 out of 113)

In Brazil, the country's leading daily, *Folha de S. Paulo*, launched the "Todas" ("All women") tab on its website in October 2022, devoted to investigations and articles on women's rights and gender in the broadest sense. Five journalists manage these topics. "We also produce articles for all sections of the newspaper, from welfare to politics," explains Victoria Damasceno, the journalist in charge of the column. "Of course, we also cover issues such as trans-identity and masculinity."

A similar development is taking place in Kenya, with the *Daily Nation*, East Africa's leading newspaper, launching a gender column in 2019. "A question I constantly get is why we feature women more. I have also, on several occasions, been reminded that gender is not just about women, but men too. I couldn't agree more." wrote the journalist in charge of this column, Dorcas Muga-Odumbe, in an article published in January 2023, while explaining the approach and the work in progress: "Historically, women's perspectives have been lacking in news; and their voices and impact in societies marginalised. Their representation in news presents a mixed picture of them as subjects, largely underrepresented and portrayed in stereotypical and simplistic ways." In the same vein, in 2018, the *New York Times* launched a section with an Instagram account @nytgender, followed, to date, by 315,000 internet users. It brings together all the media's content related to gender issues. "Why gender? Why now?" the daily posted at the time to explain the creation of this space, replying: "Gender has long been relegated to the background as a news topic. Until now. We're bringing gender to the forefront and looking to produce journalism that accurately reflects our world today."

This concern is particularly evident in France when looking at the evolution of media coverage of conjugal femicide. Until a few years ago, journalists frequently referred to these crimes as "crimes of passion." Inspired by numerous activist initiatives, several newspapers have set up investigative units dedicated to femicides since 2017, following the example of *Le Monde*, which commissioned a dozen journalists in March 2019 to compile a detailed analysis of marital femicides perpetrated in 2018. Similar initiatives have been launched by the regional press, notably *Ouest France*. The editors of France's leading regional daily realized that the treatment of the subject of marital femicide in its pages tended to highlight details about the suspects, rather than the victims. "We started from the journalistic assumption that readers wanted to know more about the man who killed his wife than the woman who was murdered. We wanted to get away from the constraints of a traditional news item and tell these stories in all their glory," explains Jennifer Chainay. For the whole of 2022, she was assigned to cover domestic femicide. Every month, an article appeared listing these crimes and telling the stories of the deceased. While Jennifer Chainay continues to cover this subject, her position is no longer exclusively dedicated to it. The rest of the editorial team now also cover it. Jennifer Chainay is delighted: "Within the editorial team, we are continuing to publish an article every month to record the victims of femicide, following on from the survey carried out in 2022."

## RSF SURVEY RESULTS

**How do you think the media's treatment of women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence has changed since 2017?** For example, in the tone used to describe women, physical descriptions, visual representations, use of inclusive writing, feminization of headlines, etc.?

Favourably: **69%** (78 out of 113)

Unfavourably: **8%** (9 out of 113)

No change: **23%** (26 out of 113)

## B/ NEWSROOM DEVELOPMENTS

In addition to reviewing their coverage of gender issues, more and more media outlets have been transforming themselves from within since #MeToo: positions for “gender editors,” ethical charters and self-help networks, particularly for investigative journalists, are being created. The aim? To improve coverage of women’s rights, which until now have often been confined to the miscellaneous or women’s columns.

### I GENDER EDITOR: A NEW PROFESSION, NEW PRACTICES

The same month that the *New York Times* published its first investigation into the Weinstein affair, which triggered the #MeToo shockwave, the American daily announced the creation of a “gender editor” position, i.e., an editorial manager responsible for ensuring the proper representation of women and gender minorities in its pages. These two news items breaking simultaneously is symbolic of the evolution of journalistic practices. Jessica Bennett, the first journalist to be appointed to this position within the media, explains her mission as follows: “I see gender as a lens through which we view global storytelling. So that certainly means writing about feminism and women’s roles in politics and culture and economics, but it also means covering masculinity and sexuality and gender fluidity and race and class and looking at science and health and parenting and sport all through this lens.” She adds, “It also means thinking about things like tone, visual display, representation in that visual display, who is writing articles, who is being photographed in those articles, sources we quote, and so on and so forth.” Jessica Bennett stepped down as gender editor in 2020 to take on the role of reporter, with a particular focus on gender issues. She has not been replaced, but coverage of gender issues has gained a perennial place in the paper’s columns, notably with the “New York Times gender” section.

According to information gathered by RSF, in the wake of the *New York Times*’s decision, dozens of other international newspapers have also appointed gender editors, marking a structural change in media coverage and representation of women’s and minority rights. The role of these journalists is multi-sectoral across the entire newsroom team, from analysing the proportion of women experts among the journalists’ sources, to the way in which female bodies and those of minorities are portrayed in the choice of illustrations. It’s also a question of encouraging investigations into themes that were not previously in the news, such as gender-based violence.

### RSF SURVEY RESULTS

**27%**

**More than a quarter of RSF correspondents (27%) are aware of at least one gender editor position being created in their country.**

In Spain, the daily *El País* and the online newspaper *El Diario* opened this type of position in 2018. The following year, in 2019, the *Daily Nation*, East Africa’s largest independent newspaper, based in Nairobi, Kenya, appointed Dorcas Muga-Odumbe to a similar position. In 2022, Megha Mohan was appointed by the *BBC* in London. She is also responsible for writing feature stories on women’s rights, sexual minorities, gender, ethnicity and religion. Prior to this, in March 2018 she published an investigation into how the #MeToo movement had affected female asylum seekers in the UK, who themselves face specific difficulties and risks when they decide to lodge a complaint about gender-based violence. In France, the online daily *Mediapart* appointed Lenaïg Bredoux to the position of gender editor in 2020 – before electing her editorial co-director in October 2023.

*Agence France-Presse (AFP)*, which carried out an initial internal survey in 2017 on the representation of women in its content, as well as within its editorial staff, has since brought about a number of changes in its practices: they update the journalist manual with female versions of titles and functions; they diversify



Jessica Lopez, Agence France-Presse journalist  
©AFP

sources so as not to always interview only male experts; remind people of instructions to avoid stereotyping, or inadequately describing women's physique or outfits. At the end of 2021, the agency also launched in-house training courses on the representation of women as regards the agency's content, and is distributing practical sheets to encourage the presence of female experts in all content. "Journalists have all been impacted by #MeToo. In particular, it has brought to the fore subjects that previously had no place in the mainstream media, such as questions of parenthood, gender-based violence or political debates around abortion," analyses AFP journalist Jessica Lopez. To accompany this transition, the journalist was appointed in 2022 to the position of deputy central editor, in charge of diversity and gender issues. "Simply creating this position has raised awareness, which shows that these subjects are important," she believes.

AFP has also teamed up with sociologist Gilles Bastin, from Sciences Po Grenoble, to work on a tool for counting gendered representations in written content. "It's vital to be able to quantify," admits Jessica Lopez. "We have a particular responsibility as a press agency, because we're at the top of the chain, and inform the rest of the media." She concludes: "These practices are new, and we need to be constantly questioning and training ourselves on these subjects

to make sure we don't miss any important facets of the question. We should highlight that these subjects, linked to the #MeToo era, are not 'lady' subjects, but rather topics that must be treated in a factual and journalistic way, like everything else in the news."

A similar phenomenon can be observed in Latin American editorial offices, such as Argentina's leading daily *Clarín*. Mariana Iglesias has been appointed gender editor in June 2019 (see text box). In Brazil, journalist Flavia Lima was appointed to this position in 2019 at the daily *Folha de S. Paulo*. She worked on developing the *Voz Delas* ("Their Voice") app in partnership with Google, a tool that quantifies the representation of women interviewed in the newspaper and suggests expert profiles. "Covering topics such as workplace inequities, careers, aging, health, and well-being from a gender perspective is crucial for a newspaper aiming to act in the public's interest and serve its audience," assures Flavia Lima before adding, "All of our efforts in gender area have yielded results, with women now representing 50% of new subscriptions to the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper."



**Mariana Iglesias**

Journaliste

### ***“Perspectives on gender in the media must be multi-sectorial”***

**Mariana Iglesias was the first journalist in Argentina to be appointed to the position of gender editor, in 2019, at the Argentine daily *Clarín*. Five years on, she reflects on the impact of her work.**

#### **In what context was the position of gender editor created at your newspaper?**

*I asked for this position to be created in 2018. That year, in Argentina, the possibility of legal, safe and free abortion was discussed for the first time in Congress. The movement in favour of this reform was supported by feminist activists and hundreds of thousands of young people marching in the streets. At the same time, a famous actress, Thelma Fardin, had also testified about the abuse she had suffered as a teenager by an actor 30 years her senior. This was Argentina’s #MeToo, when thousands of women dared to speak out and denounce cases of harassment and rape.*

**The keyword #MiraComoNosPonemos (“Look at what you are doing to us”) was then springing up on social media at the same time as the great #NiUnaMenos (“Not one [woman] less”) marches.**

*Exactly. In fact, I managed to get the position created and be appointed gender editor on 3 June 2019, the day of the fourth #NiUnaMenos march against femicide.*

#### **Did the creation of this position spark a debate within your editorial team?**

*It was supported by the majority of my colleagues, but there was still some resistance. I could sense the fear that my role was to censor or “forbid” certain subjects or forms of writing. Today, I can say that most of my colleagues understand perfectly well that the gender perspective must be taken into account in all disciplines and all sections of the newspaper. Keeping gender issues on the media agenda will always be one of our goals.*

## | ETHICAL CHARTERS AND CODES

In recent years, many media and professional organisations around the world have reworked their charters and codes of ethical conduct, to better promote and support journalists working on gender-based violence.

### RSF SURVEY RESULTS

**42%**

of respondents note that professional and media organisations have drawn up ethical charters, codes of conduct or best practice guides on media coverage of women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence.

In its 2028 strategic forecasts published in July 2023, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO), the main regulator of the UK newspaper and magazine industry, includes a charter for the coverage of sex and gender issues. Another example would be one of Japan's biggest dailies, *Asahi Shimbun*, which issued a gender equality declaration in April 2020, consisting of doubling the proportion of female executives in the company and reshaping the newspaper's content to include more women. At the same time, the company launched a "Think gender" online section which highlights articles on this theme. In the same year, the "Universa" section of Brazil's *Universo online (UOL)* news outlet, dedicated to covering violence against women, launched a best practice guide for reporting cases of violence against women. In 2023, Axelle Magazine published the manual *Pour un journalisme féministe* [For feminist journalism], which the team defines as a way of "putting the world back to rights." The manual calls for greater inclusivity and diversity in the media landscape.

International organisations have also made a contribution, such as Unesco and the United Nations (UN) Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women – UN Women – which have published several charters and best-practice guides along these lines, such as the 2023 manual on multi-sectoral national action plans to prevent violence against women and girls. In particular, it recommends "establishing partnerships with networks and associations of feminist journalists [...] in order to broaden the public message on the elimination of violence against women."

### RSF SURVEY RESULTS

For nearly **57%** of RSF's international correspondents, i.e., **64** people from **112** countries, the proportion of women experts quoted in the media has increased since 2017.

## Directories of experts for greater diversity in journalistic coverage

One-fifth, i.e. 24%, of the experts quoted in news stories are women, according to a 2020 study by the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP). To bridge this gap, many online directories suggest women experts to media professionals. Such is the case with the InterviewHer database, which lists profiles of women experts on international security issues, such as analysts, former political prisoners, human rights activists and more. This project was launched in 2019 by the Nobel Women's Initiative, an Ottawa, Canada-based organisation founded in 2006 by six Nobel Peace Prize laureates, including Filipino-American journalist Maria Ressa.

Another example is the French-language Les Expertes [The experts] project, launched in 2015. This website is renowned in French-language newsrooms, and 14 media and press companies contribute to its funding, including the private group *TF1* and the public group *Radio France*. At European level, The Brussel binders directory has been in existence since 2017.



© Screenshot from the Reflect Reality website

The American platform Reflect reality, founded in 2020 and which aims to pass on various tools to increase the involvement of women in the media, lists some fifty directories categorised by skill and area e.g.: “Diversify chemistry,” “Woman in machine leading,” “Women in Tech Africa” or “SourceHer!.” In South Africa, the NGO Quote this Woman, founded in 2019 and headed by Kathy Magrobi, in addition to organising training courses, has built up a database journalists can draw from to correct this prevalent imbalance. Journalists quote men and male experts around four times more often than women in the media. In March 2024, two Australian entrepreneurs Phoebe Saintilan and Hannah Divine launched the Missing perspective digital platform: an app that aims to connect women journalists and writers with international newsrooms, in order to promote stories and reporting by women from all regions of the world.

## C/ THE RISE OF JOURNALISM NETWORKS FOR GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Since #MeToo, not only have newsrooms started to mobilise, but journalists have also joined forces to develop large-scale investigative projects on gender-based violence, propose solutions for better coverage of women’s rights and provide each other with mutual support in order to work in better conditions. According to 56% of RSF respondents, since 2017 there have been more networks to connect journalists on these issues.

### I CROSS-BORDER RESEARCH NETWORKS

Journalists are stepping up to develop large-scale investigative projects on gender-based violence. Journalists from the Youpress collective, based in various regions of France and Sweden, published the groundbreaking *Femmes à abattre* (“Women to be slaughtered”) survey in 2023, which lists nearly 300 women activists who were murdered in 58 countries between 2010 and 2022, including journalists (see text box). In Africa, the Cenozo network of investigative journalists, set up in 2015 in Burkina Faso, regularly takes up gender issues, such as topics

relating to a woman's place in elections or to economic issues linked to feminine hygiene products. A first international network of journalists working specifically on femicide is being created, from Mexico to Canada via Europe. "We specifically need training and for journalists to exchange views when working on this type of content, including in terms of protection," says Brigitte Leoni, a documentary filmmaker who is developing the network from Italy, and who also wishes to influence public policy. Around twenty participants have already taken part in exchanges, notably with UN Women spokespersons in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to Brigitte Leoni, journalism enables us to "understand the causes and then consider what actions to take."

## **| FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS INVESTIGATIONS**

Internationally, a number of funding schemes provide specific grants to reporters covering gender-based violence. Some of these existed long before #MeToo, such as the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF). This Washington-based organisation has been distributing grants to women and non-binary journalists since the 1990s. One of its programs supports projects relating to reproductive rights, and has funded a dozen investigations into the consequences of repealing Roe vs. Wade in 2022, which until then guaranteed the constitutional right to abortion. Among the grant-winners are Eleanor Klibanoff, a journalist with the *Texas Tribune* news website, who investigated conditions regarding access to sex education in Texas, and Monica Obradovic, a journalist with the weekly *Riverfront Times* in Missouri, who investigated alternative networks for obtaining abortion pills in Missouri.

As the fight for women's rights is one of the major issues on the international political agenda, financial support is provided to initiatives by networks of journalists addressing these topics. The UN thus supports the activities of the International Network of Journalists with a Gender Perspective (RIPVG) as well as Network of Women Gender Editors activities in Argentina – a space for exchange and support between gender editors, which *Clarín's* Mariana Iglesias co-founded in November 2021. "The UN decided to support us when we began to realise that there was a global and local movement against gender, criticising and ridiculing our role, opposing the principle of equality, progress and social justice," summarises Mariana Iglesias, before emphasizing, "The UN's support is very important to us in these times of [conservative] backlash."

### **RSF SURVEY RESULTS**

#### **MORE NETWORKS AND TRAINING**

Nearly **50%** of RSF's international correspondents believe that there are now more **associations of women journalists or feminist journalists** compared to 2017.

**73%** believe there has been more **training for journalists** on women's rights, gender issues, and/or gender-based violence since 2017.





**Sophie Boutboul**  
Journaliste



**Rouguyata Sall**  
Journaliste

## Femmes à abattre

*“Our survey is breaking the silence on political femicide.”*

**Femmes à abattre** (“Women to be slaughtered”) is an emblematic survey of what journalism can produce in the #MeToo era, and records the murder of nearly 300 activist women, perpetrated in 58 countries between 2010 and 2022, including journalists fighting for women and LGBTQI+ rights, and for environmental preservation. This ambitious project is spearheaded by the Youpress collective of independent journalists. Meet two of its members, Sophie Boutboul and Rouguyata Sall, who also regularly contribute to RSF.

### How did Femmes à abattre come about?

**Sophie Boutboul:** In 2016, we had already launched a collaborative investigation with Youpress into rape as a weapon of war called Zero Impunity. The subject of political assassinations of women, because they are in the public sphere, came up during this investigation. No large-scale journalistic investigation had been devoted to this phenomenon.

### What do the data you’ve compiled reveal?

**Rouguyata Sall:** We have examined almost 500 cases, using various open databases. Our investigation began in 2010, the year the UN first issued an alarming report regarding the situation of women human rights defenders around the world. Despite the lack of judicial and journalistic interest in shedding light on these cases, we have identified 82 political feminicides that are considered to be proven, and 287 other cases where a number of clues lead us to assume they were indeed political feminicides.

**SB:** These data highlight specific features, such as “overkilling”: ferocious attacks on women’s bodies.

**You have counted 11 murders of women journalists, killed for their commitment to women’s rights in particular.**

**RS:** One example is the murder of Pakistani journalist Shaheena Shaheen in September 2020 by her husband, who disapproved of her being a public figure due to her work as

a journalist. This is classed as both a domestic and political femicide. The investigation is still ongoing. Her murder is a reminder that there are places in the world where simply being a woman and a journalist is a form of activism.

### What impact has #MeToo had on your work?

**SB:** Gendered violence has been highlighted more in the press since 2017. Access to open sources is also less complicated as topics of discussion emerge on social media. However, researchers and associations specialising in gender-based violence were working on this subject long before #MeToo, and the UN has been talking about the continuum of violence targeting women activists since 2010, so the subject of political femicide has been around for decades. It just wasn’t talked about as much.

### How did you finance this investigative work?

**RS:** Our main partner was Mediapart. We were also supported by the magazine La Déferlante, as well as two Belgian media, Axelle Magazine and the investigative website Apache. We won a grant from the Pascal Decroos fund, which supports investigative projects in the Belgian and Dutch media. However, this didn’t cover the four years of investigation.

**SB:** We applied for a number of other grants, but were turned down on the grounds that our work was militant and not journalistic. However, our work as journalists helps to break the silence surrounding these crimes, and we are helping, in our own way, to protect those who are threatened today.

## ■ MUTUAL AID GROUPS AT A NATIONAL LEVEL

Journalists are not only joining investigative networks, but they are also creating local networks to drive editorial issues, train and support each other. Thanks to #MeToo spreading the word, these networks are being created particularly in the face of scandals involving harassment or sexist and sexual assaults within newsrooms.

“We need to get together to discuss our working conditions and reflect on the content we produce,” explains radio documentarian Julie Bianchin, a member of the Journalista collective, founded in 2021 in French-speaking Switzerland. Some fifty women and non-binary journalists from a dozen newsrooms are affiliated to it. “Journalista was launched in the wake of the Darius Rochebin affair,” adds network member Alice Randegger, a journalist with the daily *La Tribune de Genève*. This affair was revealed by an investigation published in October 2020 in the daily *Le Temps*, which exposed accusations of sexual harassment against one of the star presenters of *Radio Télévision Suisse* (RTS). The *Société Suisse de radiodiffusion et télévision* (SSR), to which RTS belongs, led an internal investigation, and found no criminal wrongdoing on the part of the former presenter, without denying the elements revealed by *Le Temps*’ investigation. “It can be difficult to encourage investigations into sexist and sexual violence when we see how difficult it is to tackle these subjects in our newsrooms,” lament the members of Journalista.

The same is true of journalists from the Japanese Women in Media network, created in 2021. “Reports on social or political issues facing women and children are rarely given front-page treatment, and are not taken seriously,” notes this collective of around a hundred members. These dynamics play out in Japan’s media, where women account for just 20% of the staff at major broadcasters and newspapers. Almost none of them are in the managerial ranks of Japanese media. As this has “a profound impact on how stories are covered, and most crucially, whose voices are heard,” the association organises training courses for women working in the media.

In Ukraine, the Women in Media network was created following a sexist remark made by former President Petro Poroshenko to a journalist. In February 2018, the head of state said “my darling” to a journalist at a press conference. “When the President said this phrase, it was directed not only to this journalist, but also to me and all women who work in media,” recalls Liza Kuzmenko, who was working for the independent *Hromadske Radio* at the time. On 8 March 2018, she launched the #ятобінедоренька/ (“I’m not your darling”) campaign on social media, “to support the journalist and draw attention to the politicians.” A few months later, along with Victoria Yermolaeva, also a journalist at *Hromadske Radio*, she created Women in Media. “It all began with a small Facebook group, which now unites 1,500 women journalists, editors, producers, and other female, non-binary, and transgender media professionals from all regions of Ukraine,” shares Liza Kuzmenko. “We empower each other and fight against sexism in newsrooms and in content. Our goals are gender-sensitive journalism and more women in media in decision-making positions.”

To confront the sexism, harassment and assaults that women journalists may have suffered in newsrooms, many professional women united in 2020 during Egypt’s #MeToo movement تصدق الناجيات (“We believe the survivors”). On social media and through the online blog دفتر حكايات (“History books”), they have collected and made public hundreds of unpublished, anonymous testimonies from journalists. In the same vein, in 2020, other professionals created the association entitled صحفيات مصريات (“Egyptian Women Journalists”) to call for reforms on the protection of women journalists in the media. They then suffered violent online intimidation campaigns. In Pakistan, The Women Journalists Association of Pakistan (WJAP) has been working since 2021 against the marginalisation of women journalists, and in 2024 published the report Unequal Newsrooms - A gender audit of Pakistani Media Organisations.



Solidarity for Rasha Azab, 2022 (journalist and writer, tried for her outspoken support for victims of sexual sexual violence) © Facebook Page Book of Tales - Testimonies of Sexual Violence in Egypt



Liza Kuzmenko presents the guidelines on media coverage of equality between women and men, prevention of violence, sexism and gender stereotypes, 2023. ©Women in media

## UKRAINE: WOMEN IN MEDIA, THE NETWORK THAT TRAINS JOURNALISTS TO COVER GENDER ISSUES IN TIMES OF WAR

In 2022, against the backdrop of the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian Women in Media network collaborated with La Strada, one of the country's leading women's rights organisations, to offer journalists an online training course entitled "Strengthening the capacity of independent media and journalists to cover gender-based violence in wartime." The aim was to raise awareness for reporters on domestic violence, sexual violence, and the risks of trafficking and exploitation of women in wartime and give them the correct tools. "The Ukrainian media focus mainly on the course of events, while the stories of women and girls, refugees and their families, as well as disabled women or those caring for their children, go unreported," insists journalist Liza Kuzmenko, one of the project's initiators. Among the recommendations shared were:

- > **Protect the anonymity and dignity** of interviewees;
- > **Use the right terminology** to avoid minimising or "romanticising" the violence committed;
- > **Do not tolerate violence:** the interviewee is not responsible for the acts suffered;
- > **Ask questions without re-traumatising** the interviewee by asking for too many details;
- > **Accept not having a testimonial** if the interviewee has difficulty speaking;
- > **Have emergency psychological, medical and legal contact details** to redirect interviewees.

Financial support was provided by Women in Media to some 50 regional reporters to encourage them to cover these stories.



**Bettie Johnson Mbayo**

*Investigative journalist*

**INTERVIEW**

## **“We need more investigations into women’s rights”**

**Investigative journalist Bettie Johnson Mbayo has won the Press Union of Liberia’s journalism award for her work on women’s rights.**

### **What impact do you think #MeToo has had in Liberia?**

*The #Metoo movement has had a significant impact on journalists, particularly in Liberia, where male ownership dominates the media landscape. Similarly, there have been multiple reports of gender-based violence involving male bosses bullying or intimidating females in newsrooms, whether broadcast or print. The #Metoo movement in Liberia, particularly in the media space, has not been stifled by the pay gap, and managerial and editorial roles which provide a safe space for female journalists to compete with their male counterparts.*

### **When and why did you start investigating women’s rights in Liberia?**

*I have had a shared of being violated in Liberia, I have seen family members, friends, and co-workers having similar experiences. Growing up with a single mother places me in a position to beat the odds to ensure that I rise to the top. In 2017 when I investigated the story of a lawmaker who reportedly raped and impregnated a 13-year-old minor who was in his house, I felt there was a need to go further instead of surface reporting. I published several investigations for the [FrontPage media](#). This story brought me to prominence, even though I had investigated several other cases involving the rights of women. I investigate these stories because I feel that our country is politically entrenched and forgets that there are waves of violence against women and girls and therefore there is a need to hold perpetrators and accomplices accountable.*

### **Were you prevented from carrying out your investigation into women’s rights?**

*When I reported this story about the lawmaker, I had to relocate from my home because my family was targeted.*

*Again, I reported how a referral hospital locked down women who had given birth due to them not being able to foot their bills, the Chief Medical Officer, a then instructor of my husband threatened him that he would not graduate as a doctor.*

*This we had to do an on-surface separation, whereas people pleaded on my spouse’s behalf to the CMO. There have been times when perpetrators have openly attacked me on stories that I have done. Have I backed down, no, because if I do, it means there will be more issues of violence against women. I feel that women are counting on me and my professional colleagues to keep raising the bar for female journalists.*

### **Have you worked with or benefited from the support of a network of journalists?**

*Since 2020, my colleague and I opened The Stage Media- a fact-checking and investigative network, we feel that there is a need for consistent support to ensure that there are more reports and investigations on women’s rights.*

# 2 | THE PERPETUATION OF ACTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS

## RSF SURVEY RESULTS

### THE MULTIPLE FORMS OF VIOLENCE SUFFERED BY SPECIALIST JOURNALISTS

More than a quarter of respondents (27%) believe that, in their country, it is dangerous for journalists to work on women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence. This violence takes many forms.

Nearly 60% of all those surveyed by RSF (67 out of 113) know of at least one case of a journalist, specialised or not, who has been the victim of specific gender-based violence because of their work. For example, a rape threat, a sexual insult, a pornographic deepfake, etc.

Over 60% of those surveyed know of at least one case of a journalist working on women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence who has been a victim of cyberstalking in connection with their work. This is a reality observed in at least 69 of the 112 countries represented in this study.

Nearly a quarter of respondents (27 out of 113, or 24%) know of at least one case of a journalist working on women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence who has received death threats because of their work. This is the case in the following countries: Russia, Sudan, Burma, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Albania, Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, South Korea, Canada, Slovenia, Mongolia, Somalia, India, Lebanon, Peru, Paraguay, Mexico, France, Türkiye, Sweden, Indonesia, Uganda, Brazil, New Zealand.

One respondent in five (21 out of 113) knows of at least one case of a journalist working on women's rights, gender issues and/or sexual and gender-based violence who has been the victim of a physical assault as a result of their work.

13% of respondents know of at least one case where a journalist working on women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence has been the victim of an attack related to their work.

More than 20% (24 out of 113) know of at least one case of a journalist working on women's rights, gender issues and/or sexual and gender-based violence who has been the subject of legal proceedings for defamation or slander in connection with their work.

7% know of at least one case of a journalist working on women's rights, gender issues and/or sexual and gender-based violence who has been imprisoned.

12% of respondents know of at least one case of a journalist working on women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence who has had to leave the profession for fear of reprisals in connection with their work.

19% of respondents are aware of at least one case of a journalist working on women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence being forced to work underground or use a pseudonym.

Impunity persists: 93% of respondents to RSF's survey are not aware of any perpetrators being convicted of an attack against a journalist working on women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence.

# 1/ JOURNALISTS OVEREXPOSED TO CYBER-HARRASSMENT

Even though women's rights investigations have gained greater prominence, and even though networks have been set up to develop them, there is still an element of risk when investigating women's rights.

## VIRTUAL VIOLENCE WITH REAL CONSEQUENCES

A survey conducted by the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) and cited in the Coalition against online violence report reveals that, worldwide, almost three out of four women journalists have experienced online violence. In addition, 20% of women surveyed reported offline attacks that followed online violence. Women are 27 times more likely to be targeted by cyber-harassment than men, adds the NGO European Women's Lobby.

Ever since the editor-in-chief of Chilean newspaper *El Ciudadano*, **Josefa Barraza Díaz**, in February 2023 revealed the existence of "La Manada," a group of officers under investigation for sexual assaults at festive parties, she has been "constantly harassed on social media." The same punishment was given to Turkish journalist **Hale Gönültaş**, who is receiving death threats because she is covering the plight of the Yazidi minority, persecuted by Daesh (the Islamic State), with men killed and many women captured and forced into being sex slaves by the Islamists. In May 2022, she published a lengthy investigation into the place of women in groups close to the Islamic State. Reprisals against her intensified on the Internet and on her phone when she was awarded the Erbil Tusalp prize by the Foundation for Social, Cultural and Artistic Research (TAKSAV).

If Nigerian journalist **Kiki Mordi** can claim to have changed Nigerian law, she is now paying for it with her safety. The *Sex for grades* investigation into sexual harassment in higher education in Nigeria and Ghana, published in 2019 in the *BBC's* "Africa Eye" program, has spurred legislative change in Nigeria to punish this type of harassment. "I spent several months gathering evidence to expose this system of corruption," recalls Kiki Mordi, who was the main character in the documentary, appearing on camera as a reporter. *Sex for grades* was nominated for an Emmy award in the USA in 2020. In the meantime, Kiki Mordi's life has become a living hell. "My personal data was leaked online, my phone number, my email address, my place of residence and information about my relatives," she enumerates. Conspiracy theories were also spread on the Internet to discredit her work. To be on the safe side, Kiki Mordi moved three times without informing her own close family and friends of her new addresses. "Even my post was sent to another address as a precaution," recounts the journalist, who is followed by almost 130,000 Internet users on X (formerly Twitter). For Rosa Maria Rodriguez Quintanilla, Executive Director of the International Network of Journalists with a Gender Perspective (RIPVG), this is obvious: "The most frequent forms of violence against feminist





Bilan Media © UNDP/2023/Fadhaye

journalists are threats and digital attacks, which can often pass from virtual to real life, affecting their safety, freedom of expression, mental health and even the health of their families.” Today, Kiki Mordi laments an unavoidable fact: “No woman who speaks out publicly in Nigeria is safe.”

Unfortunately, the same applies elsewhere in the world. In France, journalists working on gender inequalities and identified as feminists are also regularly targeted by cyberstalkers; *Blast* journalist **Salomé Saqué**, who defines cyber-harassment as “denigrating, discrediting, organised en masse,” is regularly targeted. Cyber-harassment has a big impact on my work as a journalist,” she says. I take this risk into account as I go about my work. There are certain subjects I refuse to cover at certain times because I don’t have the strength.” Salomé Saqué has also been targeted by a specific form of online intimidation and attack: pornographic deepfakes, i.e. photos of her that were manipulated to make her appear naked. “In concrete terms, cyberstalking causes anxiety. You can say that you’re ignoring it, that you’re not paying attention, but you’ve still seen and read about it. These deepfakes are contributing to a climate where we feel we have to be wary of everything we say, do and post,” she continues.

The phenomenon of pornographic deepfakes is not really new, but recent developments in generative artificial intelligence tools have made it considerably easier to produce them, thanks to the availability of powerful and easy-to-use tools, which amplify this kind of violence. Therefore, Salomé Saqué has taken steps to protect herself: “My social media accounts, which are regularly victims of hacking attempts, are particularly secure. I regularly set my accounts to private to limit cyber-harassment attacks when they occur. And when there are attacks, when things are getting too much, I ask certain people who are close to me to look into the networks for me.”

## | IMPUNITY FOR CYBER-HARASSMENT

When Turkish journalist **Hale Gönültaş** filed a complaint in May 2022, Ankara's public prosecutor's office decided that there was insufficient evidence to open a criminal case. On 18 December 2023, the court rejected her appeal, resulting in the case being dismissed.

"Most cases of online violence against women journalists go unreported, and when they are, they are not investigated as quickly and effectively as they should be, in order to punish those responsible for the crime," laments Rosa Maria Rodriguez Quintanilla. Rosa Maria also appeals to the responsibility of digital platforms. "Many attacks are made possible due to the anonymity enjoyed by users," she recalls, before summing up as follows: "Anonymity is welcome, especially in areas filled with silence, where conditions do not allow for freedom of speech, but this anonymity must cease when the social media user violates the rights of journalists." Back in 2021, in RSF's previous report *Sexism's toll on journalism*, Michelle Ferrier, a professor at the University of Florida School of Journalism and founder of TrollBusters, an American digital platform for fighting and supporting women journalists facing cyber harassment, was already warning, "We are facing increasing technological challenges, and we need to work with the digital platforms involved to combat this phenomenon." Three years on, the situation is as worrying as ever, according to this expert: "For freelancers, there is no newsroom protection. For many employed journalists, there's only the illusion of newsroom protection." TrollBusters offers online workshops to help journalists faced with the dangers of cyber-harassment, to better control their digital footprint, secure their online data, etc. "So we've got to armor ourselves – all of us – to protect against privacy breaches, data breaches and physical threats to our person, home, work and livelihood."

### RSF SURVEY RESULTS

**44%**

of those surveyed know of at least one case where a journalist working on women's rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence has censored himself or herself for fear of reprisals.



## Coverage of reproductive rights: forbidden subject

**In Argentina, Brazil and Guatemala in particular, journalists covering reproductive rights issues are the target of violent campaigns of cyber-harassment and intimidation, sometimes coming directly from the political authorities.**

When Brazilian journalists **Paula Guimarães, Bruna Lara** and **Tatiana Dias** revealed in the *As Catarinas* and *The Intercept Brasil* media outlets in 2022 that an 11-year-old rape victim was being forced by a Santa Catarina State prosecutor to pursue a pregnancy, they came under massive attack on social media. They were also the subject of a parliamentary commission of inquiry in the state of Santa Catarina, which pressured reporters to divulge their sources.

Getting to grips with this type of subject all too often becomes a trial of strength for journalists. Already in 2019, the Brazilian online investigative journal *AzMina* was targeted by a series of threats, sexual insults and incitement to lynching on social media. The cause? The publication of an article on the World Health Organisation's recommendations on abortion. These reprisals, led by anti-abortion groups and conservative right-wing personalities, were relayed by federal deputies affiliated to former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro's Social-Liberal Party, and by Damares Alves, an evangelical pastor, then Minister of Human Rights and Citizenship. On her X account, she accused *AzMina* of "glorifying crime" and announced that she had filed a complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office.

It's the same problem in Argentina, where **Mariana Iglesias** covered the 2020 abortion law for *Clarín*. "I received numerous threats from people and groups opposed to this right; from messages on social media, emails sent to the newspaper's editor asking him to fire me, to calls telling me to stop writing and 'watch my back' or 'there would be consequences,'" recalls the journalist who filed the complaint. "I never stopped writing, but I left X [Twitter]. I prefer to protect myself."

In Guatemala, **Jovanna Mariám Garcon**, a former journalist with the online feminist magazine *Ruda*, also denounces the harassment she suffered after covering the International Safe Abortion Day in 2020. "I received anonymous messages on my social media, including rape threats," she recounts. Via a fake account, an unknown person sent her insults, threatening to beat and rape her. A few weeks later, while the reporter was covering a demonstration, she was attacked by an unknown person armed with an iron bar, who called her an "undercover feminist." To protect herself, the reporter decided to move away from the field and move to a community manager position.



Screenshot from the Ruda news website

## | THE RISK OF SELF-CENSORSHIP

Journalist **Kiki Mordi** has finally put most of her media activities on hold to turn to the film industry. “I’ll always be a journalist at heart though,” says the reporter in exile in London, where she fled to escape the threats. “I had a nervous breakdown when I arrived, as well as post-traumatic stress disorder,” she says. Journalist **Jovanna Mariám Garcon** had to change jobs to recover from violent online attacks and a physical assault during a report on abortion rights in Guatemala (see text box). Now a community manager for the online media outlet *No-Ficción*, she says she hopes to “return to the field because that’s what [she] love[s] most about journalism.” The Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMIK), which studied the impact of cyber harassment and pressure on journalists in 2016, states that “online pressure is mostly aimed at provoking self-censorship and discouraging women journalists from covering stories where they risk being abused.”

**Cecilia Maundu**, the journalist behind the *Digital Dada* podcast, has also observed that, fearing online violence, “the majority of journalists are starting to censor themselves. This is a huge problem not only for the victims, but for society as a whole: when journalists censor themselves, the fundamental right to freedom of information is compromised.” She records programmes in the studio and organises recordings in various locations to inform others on the subject and discuss the cyber-harassment of women journalists. More recently, the podcast team invited **Zubeidah Kananu**, a journalist with the *KTN News* channel and the first woman elected to head the *Kenya Editors Guild*, to talk about the cyber-harassment she has suffered.

## B/ THE RISK OF LEGAL PROCEEDINGS AGAINST JOURNALISTS

**Authorities do not hesitate to prosecute or imprison journalists who report on gender-based violence in too many countries.**

## | THE WRONGFUL DETENTION OF CHINESE JOURNALIST SOPHIA HUANG XUEQIN



*Sophia Huang Xueqin*

Among the wrongful detentions, the detention of instigator of #WoYeShi, the Chinese #MeToo, **Sophia Huang Xueqin**, is emblematic. To this day, the reporter is still behind bars, in particular due to her fighting for women’s rights. This freelance journalist had been investigating the working conditions of Chinese women in the media and universities since October 2017, in order to reveal systemic violence against them. The 30-year-old was arrested for “inciting subversion of state power” on 19 September 2021. Her detention conditions are alarming and her health is deteriorating. Those close to her have reported sleep deprivation, malnutrition and significant weight loss. “By mistreating her in this way, with probable torture, this veteran journalist who is respected for her involvement in the #MeToo movement, the Chinese authorities are clearly showing their desire to make an example of Sophia Huang Xueqin in order to intimidate the few remaining dissident voices in the country,” says Cédric Alviani, director of RSF’s Asia-Pacific office based in Taipei. More than 20% of the world’s journalists are imprisoned by the Chinese regime. Sophia Huang Xueqin is one of 17 women among the 121 media professionals currently detained in China (including Hong Kong), making it the largest prison for journalists in the world.

## DEFAMATION PROCEEDINGS AS A MEANS OF INTIMIDATION

The growing number of legal proceedings for “defamation” being abused to obstruct investigations into gender-based violence is particularly alarming in Brazil. Journalist **Schirlei Alves**, who regularly covers gender issues, is paying the price. In November 2023, she was sentenced to a year’s imprisonment and ordered to pay 400,000 reals (around €80,000) in damages for “defamation.” The offence? Publishing a report on the trial of a businessman in 2020 – who was acquitted – following a complaint of rape filed by an influencer. The article by Schirlei Alves, published in *The Intercept Brasil*, highlighted the humiliation suffered by the complainant during the proceedings, which implicated her more than her alleged attacker. The journalist used the term “estupro culposo,” which means “guilty rape.” This expression went viral on social media when the article was published.

So much so that it led to the adoption of law 14.245, which provides for penalties for acts that undermine the dignity of victims of sexual violence and witnesses during trials. The journalist’s lawyers have appealed the decision. In the meantime, the journalist continues to suffer huge harassment campaigns on social media. The same is true in Comoros, where four journalists who tried to raise the issue of alleged “sexual violence” against female journalists in 2023 were the target of a complaint for “defamation and insult” brought by an executive of the *Office de radio et télévision des Comores* (ORTC). The journalists received a 9-month suspended prison sentence and a €300 fine. However, no independent investigation into the accusations of sexual violence in the workplace has been opened against an employee of the public broadcaster.

## JUSTICE MOVING TOWARDS GREATER RECOGNITION OF THE WORK OF JOURNALISTS

The information was classed as being in the public interest. A libel action brought by a choreographer against two journalists from the Canadian media outlet *La Presse* has been dismissed. The court ruled that the article published in 2017 by journalists **Katia Gagnon** and **Stéphanie Vallet** complied with the ethical rules governing the right to information. For *La Presse*, this is a landmark verdict: according to one of its journalists, William Thériault, “an important decision that validates the #MeToo approach to journalistic investigations. It is the first time in Canada that a judge has ruled on the outcome of a trial involving a journalistic investigation related to this movement.”

In France, one of the most emblematic cases is linked to Denis Baupin, then an ecologist MP and Vice-President of the National Assembly, who was accused of sexual harassment and assault by an investigation published by the *France Inter* and *Mediapart* media outlets. The case, which was contested by Baupin, was dismissed on the grounds that the statute of limitations had expired, even though the accusations had been “corroborated” and certain facts were “likely to be classified as criminal offences,” according to the courts. The MP, who has retired from public life, has filed a complaint against the journalists for slanderous denunciation. In April 2019, during this trial for defamation, other female politicians spoke out, revealing new accusations of harassment, making this trial a platform for testifying against Denis Baupin. The media outlets were acquitted. The judges found the former politician guilty of malicious prosecution and ordered him to pay damages – approximately €7,500 – to all the defendants, including the journalists.

## C/ FEMINICIDE OF JOURNALISTS

Of the 486 journalists killed in the line of duty worldwide since 2017, 40 victims were women. At least ten of them were killed after devoting part of their work to women's rights and gender violence, according to the information available to date.

**Nagihan Akarsel**, co-editor of the magazine *Jineologî*, was gunned down on her doorstep in Iraqi Kurdistan on 4 October 2022. No one has claimed responsibility for the crime. A well-known feminist, the journalist helped found the Kurdish Women's Library, Archive and Research Centre, which opened in 2023 in her hometown of Souleymanieh in the north of the country.

In Mexico, the most dangerous country for journalists, five of the 56 journalists killed in the line of duty since 2017 have been women. Among them, **Miroslava Breach**, correspondent for *La Jornada* and *Norte de Juarez* in the northern state of Chihuahua, was shot dead in her car on 23 March 2017, aged 54. She covered topics related to organised crime and the many feminicides committed in the Ciudad Juarez region.



A march following the murder of journalist Miroslava Breach. Mexico City, 21 March 2017. © ALFREDO ESTRELLA / AFP

In India, **Gauri Lankesh**, editor-in-chief of the secular and feminist weekly *Gauri Lankesh Patrike*, also regularly denounced the restrictions placed on women by the caste system. She was killed on 5 September 2017 in Bangalore, in the south of India.

Other women journalists, whose battles for women's rights and against gender violence continue to be hailed, were killed during this period, in circumstances that remain unclear to this day. This was specifically the case of **Lyra McKee**, a journalist specialising in the Northern Ireland conflict and a figure renowned for her commitment to LGBTQI+ rights. She was killed on 18 April 2019 in Londonderry, Northern Ireland, during the clashes. Swedish freelance reporter **Kim Wall**, who was sexually assaulted and killed in August 2017, was also committed to gender issues. In reaction to this murder, committed by the businessman she interviewed, and in the context of #MeToo, the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma has put online a series of recommendations to strengthen the safety of women reporters.



*A portrait of Gauri Lankesh is held up at a vigil held in her honour on 6 September 2017 in Mumbai*  
© DR / Punit Pranajpe / AFP



*Kim Wall © DR*

## At least two homicides of journalists covering gender-based violence

**Aleksandr Lachkarava** died six days after being seriously injured in July 2021 while covering far-right homophobic demonstrations for the opposition *Pirveli TV* channel. He was attacked, along with 52 other journalists, during counter-demonstrations to the Pride march in Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia.

**Luis Gabriel Pereira** was murdered in cold blood in May 2023 by two hired killers on a motorbike in Ciénaga de Oro, in the north-west of Colombia. A few days earlier, he had posted information about a case of femicide and the murder of an indigenous leader on his Facebook page *Notiorense*.

# 3 | INVESTIGATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE UNDER THE STEAMROLLER OF AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES

## A/ RUSSIA'S BACKWARDS TREND

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, virtually all of the independent media have been closed down and journalists have been forced into exile. Independent media websites are blocked and their staff risk imprisonment and are often declared “foreign agents” or “undesirable organisations” by the authorities. All other media are subject to Kremlin censorship. In this context, the authorities are further promoting a return to conservative values. Journalists on the ground who try to report on gender-based violence are undeniably paying the price.

### | A RUSSIAN #METOO MAINLY IN MOSCOW

However, in 2017, #MeToo resonated in Russia according to Anna (first name changed), a Moscow-based freelance journalist who requires anonymity for security reasons. “The #MeToo movement prompted many newsrooms to reconsider, at least partially, their approach to dealing with gender-based violence.” She believes that even today, “although still rare, the number of articles on sexual violence has increased. There are also more investigations into marital rape and prostitution as an exploitation tool.” She is confident that society has changed since then: “We see society retreating from patriarchy and ‘traditional’ values, particularly religious values – Orthodox or Islamic, depending on the region.”

However, such developments in the media are not reflected in public policy – quite the contrary. The year 2017 also marked a major legislative setback: Russian MPs decriminalised most domestic violence and acts of violence that did not result in hospitalisation. Head of State Vladimir Putin supports this reform. He says it prevents the “destruction of the family.”

### | FROM INTIMIDATION TO SELF-CENSORSHIP

In November 2023, in addition to this legislative setback in the area of domestic violence, the Supreme Court banned the “international LGBT movement” – which does not exist as an organisation - on the grounds of “extremism,” making it possible to impose prison sentences on any defender or sympathiser, neither of which are legally defined. In this context, journalists who, like Anna, cover gender issues are becoming more severely targeted by the authorities and masculine groups. “It has become even more dangerous to write about gender-based violence, especially about the LGBTQ+ community. The risk of criminal prosecution is becoming more frequently exponential.” Anna has paid the price: unknown persons have used articles about Russia’s demographic situation as a pretext to file a complaint against her for “LGBT propaganda.” To protect themselves from legal reprisals, “many media outlets have withdrawn their content on this subject, even though they used to talk about it very openly,” the freelance journalist laments.

To protect themselves from further attacks, journalists like Anna pay for a virtual private network (VPN), secure messaging, and also try to filter as much personal content as possible that can be accessed online. “I also avoid confidential conversations via mobile phones. It has long been known that all Russian mobile

phone operators provide information about their subscribers on request,” explains Anna. When she goes home, she also has to be increasingly vigilant “due to [her] work and the amount of aggression on the city streets, which has increased over the last two years,” she says.

## EXILE AS THE ONLY OPTION

Other Russian journalists have been forced into exile. **Izabella Evloeva** is one of more than 1,500 journalists who have had to flee Russia. Izabella is a journalist for a television channel in Ingushetia and in 2018 she founded her own media outlet, *Fortanga.org*, named after the river bordering the neighbouring Chechnya, against a backdrop of very high tension between these two predominantly Muslim republics in the Russian Caucasus. *Fortanga* deals with human rights, with a particular focus on women’s rights. “We come up against resistance from conservative readers, some of whom think that violence should not be discussed openly and that it is normal to beat a woman ‘for educational purposes,’” says the journalist. In her opinion, “#MeToo has had no impact in the Republic of Ingushetia. I would even say it went unnoticed.”

While covering a human rights demonstration in February 2019, several journalists were arrested. Izabella Evloeva, who was in Prague at the time reports: “A *Fortanga* contributor, **Rachid Maisigov**, was framed by FSB [Russian security service] agents, who had hidden drugs on him. They tortured him to force him to ‘confess’ and testify against me. He was sentenced to three years in prison. It became clear at that point that I was also in danger of being sent to prison for a long time.” Her charges notably include “public dissemination of false information regarding the deployment of the Russian army.” She faces up to 15 years in prison. The intimidation she suffers also includes threats against her family. Her parents’ home is regularly searched by the authorities and her eldest daughter is repeatedly questioned.

To avoid prison, Izabella Evloeva sought refuge in a European country that granted her political asylum, which was a complicated process both administratively and personally. Most Russian journalists in exile prefer to avoid applying for asylum, in the hope of returning to Russia one day.

### RSF SURVEY RESULTS

**16%**

of respondents (18 out of 113) are aware of at least one case of a journalist working on women’s rights, gender issues and/or gender-based violence being forced into exile for fear of reprisals in connection with their work.

## B/WOMAN, LIFE, FREEDOM: THE PERSECUTION OF JOURNALISTS IN IRAN

On 16 September 2022, Mahsa Amini, a student of Kurdish origin who had been arrested three days earlier by the morality police for “wearing inappropriate clothing,” died in hospital after being subjected to violence by the police. The fact that a young woman lost her life due to the way she was dressed sparked a vast popular protest movement in September 2022. The journalists who covered this uprising, known as “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi” (“Woman, Life, Freedom”), are still paying the price.



Cover of the newspaper Libération  
26 September 2022

### WOMEN IRANIAN JOURNALISTS' STRUGGLE

According to RSF figures, nearly 100 journalists who covered the Iranian uprising that began in September 2022 have been detained in the space of two years. Fourteen are still in prison for covering the uprising. The main charge seems unchanged: “propaganda against the state,” often with aggravating circumstances such as “forbidden assembly,” “conspiracy and collusion to commit a crime against national security” or “collaboration with the hostile government of the United States.”

The scale of the “Woman, Life and Freedom” popular uprising has gone hand in hand with a severe increase in the Iranian regime’s violence against journalists. Many of them — especially women — have gone into exile. In 2023, RSF provided 23 grants to Iranian journalists in exile. “Most of them were Iranian women,”

**Ghazal Golshiri**

Journalist

INTERVIEW

## “Woman, Life, Freedom’ also marks a turning point for journalism”

**Ghazal Golshiri is a Franco-Iranian journalist who worked as a correspondent for *Le Monde* in Tehran before returning to Paris in 2019 to join the French daily’s international department.**

**What do Niloofar Hamedei and Elaheh Mohammadi, along with all the other journalists repressed for covering the death of Mahsa Amini and gender-based violence in Iran in general represent?**

*Niloofar and Elaheh are big names in Iranian journalism. These two journalists are strong, committed and recognised for the work they do fighting women’s rights violations.*

**You yourself write about gender-based violence in Iran. What does the popular uprising “Woman, Life, Freedom” represent?**

*The “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement marked an unprecedented turning point. It contributed to a more general awareness of discrimination between men and women, and society started questioning all the rules that, until then, had seemed very established: Why do women have to wear a*

*hijab? Why do women have to cover everything except their hands and face? Why are they treated badly when not covered properly? More generally, hijabs, or more precisely the obligation to wear them, have now become symbolic of all the injustices and discrimination in Iran, imposed on both women and men.*

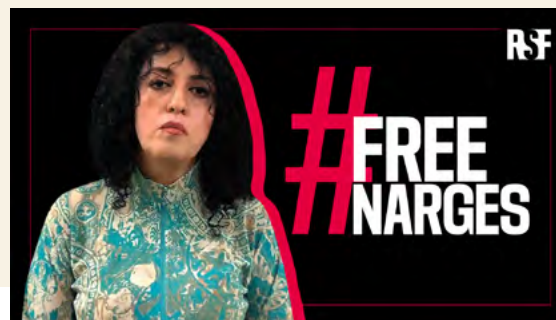
**What impact has this movement had on journalism?**

*Journalists’ private lives are investigated and the information is then used to threaten them. These methods create an atmosphere of terror that affects how the profession is carried out. Editors may refrain from covering certain subjects related to gender-based violence and the Mahsa Amini affair, in order to avoid being harassed or punished. Everything is political in Iran.*



## Narges Mohammadi, imprisoned journalist and Nobel Peace Prize winner: one of the most important voices in the fight for women’s rights

Narges Mohammadi has been arrested 13 times in her life, has been sentenced to prison terms totalling more than 35 years, with her last detention in November 2021. To date, she has spent more than ten years in prison. As a journalist and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2023, she continues to speak out from inside prison, denouncing sexual violence and other rights violations for women prisoners. As retaliation for what she writes, the journalist has been subjected to solitary confinement, sexual harassment and other abusive treatment in detention. She has not been allowed to contact her family by telephone since November 2023. Despite this oppression, Narges Mohammadi continues to fight for her freedom and for the freedom of everyone within the walls of Evin prison. Last March, she launched an appeal to “criminalise gender apartheid,” denouncing the “systematic and institutionalised segregation” of women in Iran. In a special issue of the French magazine *Society*, written with RSF and published in September 2024, she chose to ask questions on this theme to seven other women from around the world.

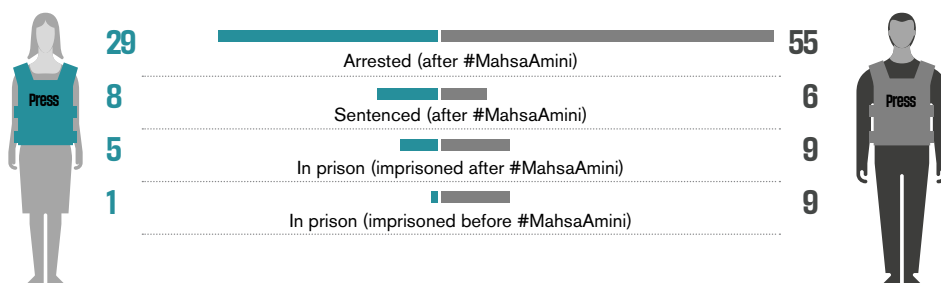


Narges Mohammadi © DR

notes Victoria Lavenue, head of RSF’s Assistance Desk. This is the case for **Nazila Maroufian**, who has found refuge in France. In Iran, this journalist, who, like Mahsa Amini, is from Saqqez, was arrested for the first time in October 2022 after interviewing her father for the online news site *Mostaghel Online*. In the summer of 2023, Nazila Maroufian was arrested for a fourth time. She later testified that she had been sexually assaulted by the security forces, which the Iranian authorities are denying outright to this day. Based on the testimonies received by RSF’s assistance team, Victoria Lavenue notes that women journalists can be victims of sexual violence on two fronts: both in their own country, by representatives of the authorities, and by various actors they may encounter during their exile. To help these journalists deal with the trauma, RSF offers psychological counselling, sometimes in partnership with Eutelmed, a company that offers video consultations in 40 languages.

### Judicial repression by the Iranian regime

Arrests, detentions and convictions since the death of Mahsa Amini and the popular uprising of September 2022.



# IRAN: THE WORLD'S FOURTH-LARGEST PRISON FOR WOMEN JOURNALISTS

Five journalists arrested since September 2022 are still in prison, according to RSF figures.



## Vida Rabbani

**Role:** freelance

**Details:** freelance journalist Vida Rabbani was arrested at her home and sentenced to 7 years and 3 months in prison for “gathering and colluding against the security of the country” and for “propaganda against the regime.”

**Type of detention:** sentenced on 31/12/2022



## Saeedeh Shafiei

**Role:** freelance

**Details:** she was sentenced to 3 years, 6 months and 1 day imprisonment for “assembly and conspiracy,” and to 7 months and 16 days imprisonment for “propaganda,” but will only serve the longer sentence of 3 years, 6 months and 1 day. She is also banned from travelling for 2 years and from joining any group or organisation.

**Type of detention:** sentenced on 30/07/2023

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## Saba Azarpeik

**Role:** freelance, former correspondent for the *Etemad Daily* newspaper

**Details:** she was sentenced to 3 years in prison, including 2 years for “spreading lies,” “defamation,” “damage to reputation” and “spreading threats.” She is also banned from using social media for 2 years, and is required to pay a fine and publicly apologise to the complainants.

**Type of detention:** sentenced in May 2024



## Parisa Salehi

**Role:** business journalist for *Donyaye Eghtesad*

**Details:** sentenced in February 2024 to 1 year's imprisonment, reduced on appeal to 5 months and a 2-year travel and online ban.

**Type of detention:** sentenced in February 2024

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## Nasrin Hasani

**Role:** editor-in-chief of the weekly *Seyahat Shargh*

**Details:** on 5 November 2023, she was sentenced to 7 months in prison for “spreading false information on social media and fined one million Iranian tomans (around €20) for appearing in public without her hijab. On 23 January, the Court of Appeal of Khorassan, a region in the north-east of the country, upheld an earlier 1-year prison sentence for “propaganda against the Islamic Republic.”

**Type of detention:** sentenced on 5 November 2023 and 23 January 2024

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## C/ THE DISAPPEARANCE OF WOMEN FROM JOURNALISM IN AFGHANISTAN

Investigating gender issues has been virtually impossible since the Taliban took power in August 2021. The subject has been erased, as have women journalists from the media landscape. More than four out of five women journalists (84%) have lost their jobs and more than two-thirds of the country's 12,000 journalists have left the profession.

### I TOWARDS THE END OF INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM

Until she and her family left Afghanistan in 2017 to escape a risky situation, journalist **Zahra Nader** was a reporter for the *New York Times* in Kabul. She focused on gender issues, and made pioneering investigations into discrimination against divorced women and the virginity testing scandal. According to this reporter, in 2024, "women's voices are banned from the media, even if it's just women who want to call a radio station to ask the presenter a question." This type of directive comes from the Taliban regime's new institutions, including the Ministry of Information and Culture, but also the intelligence service (Istihbarat), the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, and the Government Media and Information Centre (GMIC). The few women who have remained in their posts, especially in Kabul, "sometimes work for free and face sexual harassment," adds Zahra Nader.

Those women who work outside the city are sometimes forbidden to travel without being accompanied by a man, i.e. a "chaperone." "You can't live under the Taliban and work independently without risking torture and death." *Radio Begum* is one of the few media outlets still operating. Launched on 8 March 2021, International Women's Rights Day, this educational radio station is aimed at young girls who have no access to school. This media outlet founded and run by women journalists, is coping, not without difficulty, with the climate of repression: "We are never seen with men, we don't talk about politics. We follow all the restrictions. We have no choice," says the editor-in-chief in the documentary *Radio Begum: la voix des résistantes* [Radio Begum: the Voice of Resistance], made by French journalist Solène Chalvon-Fioriti for the Franco-German channel *Arte* and broadcast in April 2024. This media outlet, she explains in the film's introduction, was made by women for women and broadcasts school programmes every day that support the network of underground schools in the country, of which there are around 15,000, all created in secret, housed in family rooms, cellars and caves.

### I AT LEAST FIVE WOMEN JOURNALISTS KILLED FOR THEIR WORK ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

**Malalai Maiwand**, a leading journalist and representative of the Center for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists (CPAWJ), which supports many media professionals working in remote areas, was killed on 10 December 2020 along with her driver, Taher Khan, by two gunmen claiming to be from the Islamic State group. The Centre's director, Farida Nekzad, described her former colleague, aged 30, as "a role model for many Afghan journalists." She was a journalist, and was committed to fighting for the rights of other women. This made her a prime target for the active radical groups in the country. Three months later, in Jalalabad, in the east of the country, three young employees of *Enekaas TV*, **Sadida Sadat**, **Shahnaz Roufi** and **Mursal Waheedi**, were also shot dead by Islamist terrorists. Their television station had been targeted by attacks on several occasions. A few years earlier, on 30 April 2018, the journalist **Darani Maharam**, host and producer of a programme regarding the status of women broadcast on *Radio Azadi*, was the victim of a lethal attack perpetrated against several journalists, and which was claimed by the Islamic State.



Zahra Nader, editor-in-chief of Zan Times, at the 23rd Canadian Conference of Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE). Toronto, 15 February 2023. © CJFE

## | BEING A WOMAN UNDER THE TALIBAN: INVESTIGATIONS FROM EXILE

When Kabul fell in August 2021, Zahra Nader founded *Zan Times* – “Zan” means “woman” in Dari. “When I saw the Taliban return to power, I said to myself [...] that it was our duty to state loud and clear that we are still here to deliver our truth, to reveal what it really means to be a woman under the Taliban,” she shares. “Our aim is to speak to the women who are prevented from leaving their homes,” adds the editor-in-chief. *Zan Times* works with a number of freelance journalists in Afghanistan who have been forced to work underground. These women collaborators “don’t know each other, which makes it difficult to create a sense of community. They write using a pseudonym and I look forward to the day when we can recognise their identity and their courage in broad daylight.” After several investigations into the extent of domestic violence and the wave of suicides by women, some of which were published by the British daily *The Guardian*, *Zan Times* has made a tally of the murders of women involved in the public sphere. “We’re fighting on two fronts: finding funding and ensuring the safety of our colleagues in Afghanistan,” sighs Zahra Nader, before emphasising her point: “Our only hope lies in the exiled media outlets.”



**Mursal Sayas**, a journalist living in exile in France, agrees: “Every day I interview women in Afghanistan to ask them about their daily lives. Sayas works from Paris for *Radio Afghanistan International*, the exiled London-based media. In 2024, she also published a book in French, entitled *Qui entendra nos cris?* (“Who will hear our cries?”), bringing together the testimonies of Afghan women. Mursal Sayas was a member of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission until she fled the country in the summer of 2021. Since then, she has been writing remotely about the living conditions of her compatriots, talking about the difficulties gaining access to healthcare, the experiences of gender and sexual minorities, and also about the future of those women fighting to defend their rights. She reports: “The Taliban arrest women and make them disappear. We don’t know where they’re going. The international community has stopped paying attention to the situation of women in Afghanistan.” From Canada, Zahra Nader also warns: “If you don’t have women journalists in Afghanistan, you don’t have information about what is happening to women in Afghanistan.” She states: “Just because you don’t read about what’s happening to women in Afghanistan any more doesn’t mean that everything is fine. Quite the opposite, in fact. The Taliban are trying to erase women.”

# 4 | RSF REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS RECOMMENDATIONS

Supporting journalism specialising in women's rights, aggression based on gender and gender-based violence is one of RSF's priorities in its advocacy work and assistance to reporters and institutions. The organisation takes gender issues into account in its training courses, organises specific sessions for women journalists internationally and also provides appropriate safety equipment.

Because the repression of specialist journalists and women journalists remains a major challenge that requires investment from all players, RSF has put forward 16 recommendations aimed at governments, police and judicial authorities, platforms and newsrooms.

## For States:

- > **Guarantee**, in the name of press freedom and the right to information, the protection of journalists working on subjects related to women's rights, as well as the media professionals who assist them;
- > **Introduce** the criminalisation of certain forms of cyber-harassment into criminal law, with aggravating circumstances for the perpetrators and those responsible for these offences when they target women journalists and gender minorities<sup>1</sup>;
- > **Ensure** the protection of journalists working on gender-based violence, particularly in the context of asylum application procedures and obtaining residence permits;
- > **Encourage** the media, including through public funding, to equip themselves with tools for counting and measuring the place of women and gender minorities, and to implement a charter of commitment to gender equality within their structures, as well as training tools to raise their teams' awareness of parity and equality.

## For the police and legal authorities:

- > **Create** national committees for the safety of these specialised journalists, which would include legal, police and journalists' associations representatives, to maintain a regular dialogue;
- > **Appoint** liaison officers within the police force to collect testimonies from victims of physical or online attacks;
- > **Document**, with the help of the newsrooms concerned, attacks on journalists working on subjects related to women's rights and gender violence, in order to measure the scale of these attacks.

<sup>1</sup> For the Member States of the European Union, this involves transposing EU Directive (2024/1385) of 14 May 2024 on combating violence against women and domestic violence, in particular Article 11, which calls on them to incorporate into their criminal law the fact that cyber-harassment of female journalists may constitute an aggravating circumstance.

## For digital platforms:

- > **Raise awareness** among the general public by distributing, free of charge, communication campaigns on violence against journalists specialising in gender-based violence;
- > **Make** reports from journalists who are victims of cyber-harassment top priority, and support civil society organisations acting on their behalf, as soon as a report is received;
- > **Respond** without delay to injunctions from legal authorities investigating cases of violence against journalists;
- > **Combat** anonymous threats and coordinated and repeated harassment campaigns by “troll factories,” by implementing all the measures for removing content and suspending accounts prescribed by the applicable law, and by dedicating appropriate resources to human moderation.

## For the newsrooms:

- > **Encourage** the creation of gender editor roles;
- > **Encourage** journalists to participate in transmedia and international investigative networks;
- > **Train** journalists on the issue of cyber-harassment so that they can adopt the right reflexes and behaviour when faced with this type of situation (See our report: [Online harassment of journalists: the trolls attack, available here](#) (pages 34-35));
- > **Protect** journalists specialising in these issues, including sources, and set up internal emergency arrangements to support them, as well as physical and psychological safety training;
- > **Develop** financial aid schemes to better support investigative work on gender-based violence, for example in the form of dedicated grants.





REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS (RSF) works for journalistic freedom, independence and pluralism all over the world. Headquartered in Paris, with 13 bureaus and sections around the world and correspondents in 130 countries, it has consultative status with the United Nations and UNESCO.