



# ON MUTE.

the impact of digital violence  
against journalists

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# 1 INTRODUCTION



Journalists play a fundamental role; their work is very valuable in terms of keeping historical records, developing and expanding knowledge, and providing a channel of expression for society that contributes to ensuring all voices are heard and to generating changes and transformations throughout history.<sup>1</sup> In recent decades, women have gained space in the media, which has afforded women journalists, especially those focusing on gender and human rights issues, the opportunity to play a crucial role in highlighting the realities and challenges facing women and gender-diverse individuals in the acknowledgement of their rights.

Media coverage of these issues shapes public opinion and influences governments to implement changes in legislation and public policies to ensure the exercise of rights under conditions of equality and non-discrimination.

Thus, it was women journalists covering gender issues who started #NiUnaMenos in Argentina, a movement that led to a broader agenda in terms of women's and other gender identities' rights. Similarly, it was predominantly women journalists who investigated and reported on actress Thelma Fardin's public denunciation of sexual abuse, which marked a turning point in the fight against gender violence in Argentina. Their coverage was pivotal in encouraging minors and women who are victims of sexual violence to break their silence. They were also the ones who gave a voice to thousands of women who risked their health and lives as a consequence of undergoing clandestine abortions, something that contributed to highlighting the need to move towards the decriminalization and legalization of abortion.

At the forefront of each of these milestones, digital platforms were an invaluable channel for amplifying the voices of women journalists, enabling them to

reach audiences across the country and abroad. In recent years, however, social media—originally conceived as tools for the democratization of information—have become channels that facilitate the spread of hate speech, harassment, and gender-based violence against women journalists. This shift has had negative impacts on their health, professional practice, and freedom of expression.

The violence and abuse that women journalists face on social media manifest in various ways, all of which are rooted in a broader context of structural discrimination against women and gender-diverse individuals. It is understood that violence against women, whether offline or online through the use of technology, stems from the same underlying causes. In this sense, the multiple forms of gender violence “are not confined to a physical or digital framework, but are part of an ‘online-offline continuum’ without clear delimitations. That's why we talk about a continuum of violence.

Thus, while women journalists face the same risks as their male counterparts when investigating and reporting on human rights violations, they also face specific risks stemming from their gender. These risks arise simply because they are women and often intersect with other identity factors, such as ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression, among others.

The situation is even more challenging for women journalists who publicly address topics such as sexual and reproductive rights, gender-based violence, and the rights of LGBTI+ individuals. These journalists often face violent backlash from certain sectors openly hostile to voices advocating for these agendas, within a context shaped by far-right global leaders whose rhetoric is laden with xenophobic, sexist, and homophobic messages. This rhetoric is rooted in the notion that advances in

1. Fundación Gabo, Why is journalism important?, 2016.



the rights of women and gender-diverse individuals have created “privileges” for these groups.

This phenomenon is neither new nor exclusive to Argentina. In various parts of the world, political leaders—from the United States to India, Brazil to Hungary, Turkey to the Philippines—have fostered narratives of demonization and division to gain popular support. These strategies often rely, among other tactics, on blaming entire groups, such as women, migrants, LGBTI+ individuals, and other vulnerable populations, for economic, social, or criminal issues.

Inequality is on the rise in many parts of the world, and politicians exploit this situation with oversimplified rhetoric that identifies scapegoats to blame, fueling a sense of discontent among the population. This rollback of rights for women and gender-diverse individuals is exacerbated by increasing violence against women journalists from government authorities, who legitimize and enable abusive and misogynistic discourse, further amplifying the violence they face.

The violence and abuse that many women journalists face on social media often lead them to self-censor, limit their interactions, or, in some cases, abandon social media entirely, even though these platforms are essential for disseminating their work. Ultimately, this results in insufficient plurality of voices in the public debate and undermines both the individual and collective dimensions of freedom of expression. In the case of women journalists and editors specializing

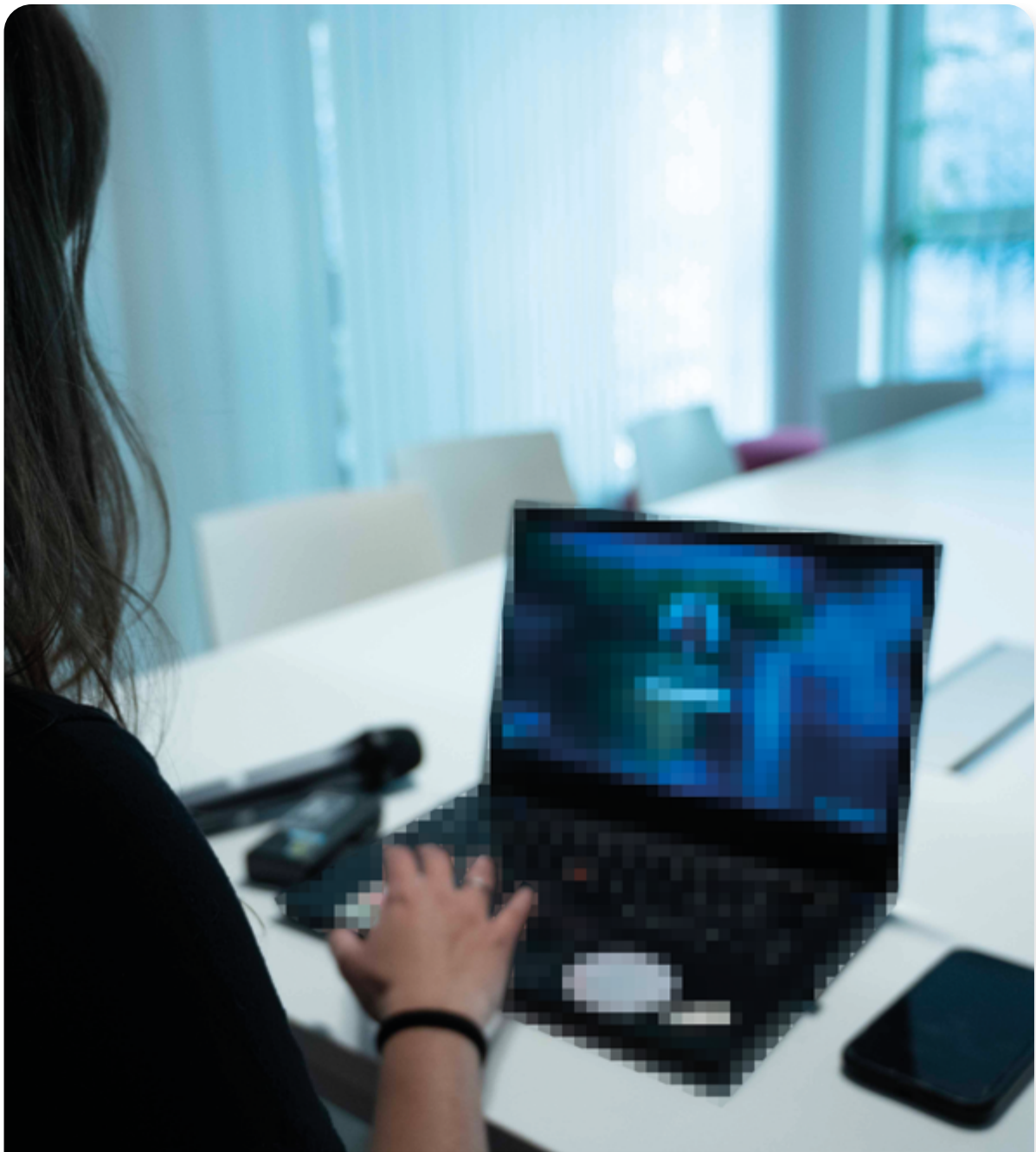
in gender issues, violence on digital platforms, along with its interplay with various contemporary phenomena related to the topics they cover, threatens to silence this agenda in the media.

Given the magnitude of this phenomenon, various international human rights organizations have condemned specific attacks against women journalists in the course of their work, including gender-based discrimination and violence, intimidation, and harassment, whether online or through other means. “In addition, they have called on States to address the threats faced by women journalists because of their gender<sup>2</sup>, particularly concerning the negative impact on freedom of expression.

This phenomenon is exacerbated by the recurring **lack of institutional support from media companies**, within the broader context of an industry-wide crisis marked by staff and salary cuts, increased labor precariousness, and the need for multiple jobs. In this context, the responsibility for mitigating attacks on social networks often falls on women journalists themselves and their individual protection measures, particularly as responses from media outlets to complaints are often untimely and inadequate.

At the same time, the lack of concrete measures taken by the vast majority of **digital platforms** to prevent and mitigate the harm caused by online violent speech severely impacts women journalists' human rights.

2. In 2016, the Human Rights Council unanimously adopted Resolution 33/2 on the safety of journalists. See A/HRC/44/52, May 6, 2020, paragraph 70. This is complemented by the joint statement of the Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Expression and Violence Against Women from March 8, 2017.



Moreover, the inaction of **States** contributes to perpetuating a hostile environment that not only jeopardizes the safety of women journalists but also threatens freedom of expression and the quality of the public debate.

Failure by States, media outlets and digital platforms to take measures allows for a cycle of exclusion and silencing to be perpetuated, affecting women journalists and also impoverishing public discourse as a whole.

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATIONS - GLOBAL CHAPTER

Amnesty International has investigated and documented the phenomenon of online violence exercised through social networks in various countries, analyzing its impact on freedom of expression. In March 2018, the organization published *Toxic Twitter: Violence and Abuse Against Women Online Violence and abuse against women online*<sup>3</sup>, a report that exposed the violence and abuse faced by women on Twitter in the United States and the United Kingdom. Among its conclusions, the report highlighted that the platform did not take responsibility for protecting women's rights, as it did not properly investigate the reports of violence and abuse nor did it respond to them in a transparent fashion.

In September 2020, Amnesty International published the first Twitter Scorecard<sup>4</sup>, aimed at tracking Twitter's global progress in addressing abusive language. The scorecard contained ten indicators covering **transparency, reporting mechanisms, the review process for abuse reports, as well as privacy and security features**. These indicators were developed based on the recommendations that Amnesty International had previously made regarding the best way for Twitter to address abusive and problematic content. Subsequently, in 2021, the *Second Scorecard*<sup>5</sup> was published to continue monitoring the platform's progress and challenges, while also addressing gender-based violence in digital environments.

Recently, Amnesty International released the report *Being ourselves is too dangerous*<sup>6</sup>, which highlights how women and LGBTI+ activists in Thailand are facing an escalation of online hate speech and other forms of digital violence for gender reasons. This report tells the stories of women and LGBTI+ human rights advocates in Thailand who tried to leverage digital technology to boost their online activism, while offline civic space was shrinking as a result of the measures taken in the context of the 2014 military coup. The document highlights that, as a result of this situation, they were subjected to forms of gender-based violence facilitated by technology, such as selective digital surveillance and online harassment.

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL INVESTIGATIONS IN ARGENTINA

In the local chapter, in 2018, we published the report titled *The limited public debate. Trolling and attacks against the free expression of journalists and human rights advocates on Twitter Argentina*<sup>7</sup>, which reported on cyberattacks targeting 11 individuals—nine prominent journalists working in media outlets in the City of Buenos Aires and two human rights activists—representing diverse cultural, ideological, and social backgrounds.

We conducted a study to analyze the conditions shaping the public debate on the Abortion Law as it played out on social networks. The report was titled *“Green Hearts, Online Violence Against Women during the Debate on the Legalization*

3. Available at: [https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/05/TOXICTWITTER-report\\_SP.pdf](https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/05/TOXICTWITTER-report_SP.pdf)

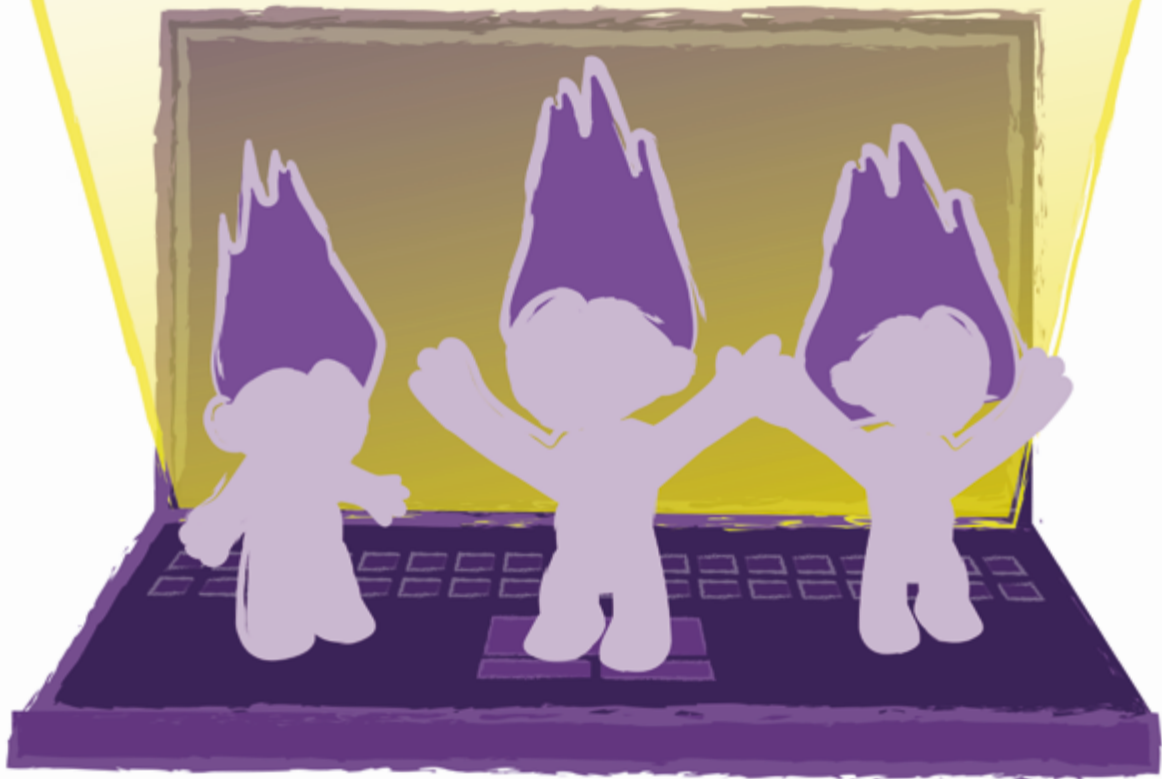
4. Available at: [https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2020/09/twitter\\_scorecard\\_spanish-1.pdf](https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2020/09/twitter_scorecard_spanish-1.pdf)

5. Available at: [https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2021/12/FINAL-twitter\\_scorecard\\_spanish\\_2021.pdf](https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2021/12/FINAL-twitter_scorecard_spanish_2021.pdf)

6. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/7955/2024/en/>

7. Available at: <https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/03/online-pre1.pdf>





of *Abortion in Argentina*<sup>8</sup> and was published in 2019. In connection with this report, a nationwide survey was conducted with 1,200 women aged 18 to 55, revealing that one in three had experienced violence on social media. Out of those, 26% suffered direct and/or indirect threats of psychological or sexual violence; 59% reported being the target of sexual and misogynistic messages; and 34% received messages with violent language or abusive comments in general.

These studies have made key contributions to shaping the public agenda and informing the design of public policies aimed at preventing, addressing, and sanctioning gender-based violence facilitated by

information and communication technologies (ICTs).

As part of its ongoing efforts to document and denounce violence and abuse against women in digital environments, Amnesty International presents this report, which analyzes the impacts of online violence against women journalists and gender-diverse individuals between 2018 and 2024. This federal study aims to evaluate and analyze the scope and experiences of violence against women journalists in digital environments, focusing on the nature and consequences of the abuse and online violence they face daily due to their gender and their prominent public roles in advancing the gender agenda in Argentina.

8. Available at: <https://amnistia.org.ar/corazonesperdes/informe-corazonesperdes>



## 2. METHODOLOGY

Amnesty International recently conducted a study examining the experiences of women and gender-diverse journalists in Argentina over the past six years. The study aimed to identify and document the various forms of digital violence these journalists have faced, as well as its impact on their health and freedom of expression. In addition, the study examined how these attacks have affected journalists' news production routines and investigated the institutional responses provided by media outlets, business chambers, journalist organizations, and social media platforms. It also addressed the responsibility of States in preventing, sanctioning, and eradicating gender-based violence against women and gender-diverse individuals.

A total of **36 interviews** were conducted, gathering testimonies from individuals with various roles in the information production circuit. These interviews included gender-diverse and women journalists who shared their experiences regarding online violence, as well as male and female media outlet CEOs, executives, editors, and representatives from journalist associations such as the Forum for Argentine Journalism (FOPEA), the National Academy of Journalism, the Buenos Aires Press Union (SiPreBA), and

representatives from the Meta Corporation (Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp).<sup>9</sup>

To ensure a heterogeneous sample, a broad perspective was adopted, including individuals from various sections such as Politics, Gender, Culture, and Society, among others. A broad range was also sought regarding the types of media outlets, editorial lines, and the sizes of the journalistic companies for which they work, as well as coverage of every jurisdiction in the country. Except for the dialogues with representatives of organizations, the testimonies were anonymized to protect the identities of the interviewees.

In addition, a survey<sup>10</sup> was conducted, which received 403 responses, about women journalists experiencing violence and abuse on digital platforms in Argentina.<sup>11</sup> Responses were provided by journalists aged 18 to 70, from across the country and representing various fields of journalism.<sup>12</sup>

The conclusions of this report are based exclusively on the self-defined universe of women journalists who were surveyed and interviewed. The data collection instrument was subject to the inherent limitations of the tool itself and the sampling technique employed.

9. Representatives from other platforms were contacted, but it was not possible to coordinate interviews with them.
10. The survey was anonymous in nature and was organized around three main sections: demographic and social/labor data; experiences of digital violence; and experiences of physical violence.
11. The survey was distributed using the "snowball" sampling technique, i.e., incorporating participants through a chain referral system. To this end, female media workers and women in journalism organizations, chambers, educational institutions, and unions were contacted. Likewise, press releases were disseminated to media outlets across the country and shared on social media through institutional and non-institutional accounts.
12. Of the total survey respondents, 97.8% identified as women; 1.5% as non-binary individuals; and 0.7% as transgender women. The survey also revealed that 56.8% of respondents live in the Buenos Aires Metropolitan Area (AMBA, by its Spanish acronym), which hosts the largest proportion of Argentina's population as well as the highest concentration of media outlets in the country. In the rest of the provinces, the number of responses was variable. On the other hand, 63.5% of the respondents were between 30 and 49 years of age. Regarding the sector in which they work, 56.4% reported working in private commercial outlets, while 30% said they work in public media outlets. Additionally, 12.3% are involved in cooperative media, and 25% work in non-profit media. Most of the respondents work in more than one media outlet, combining different employment modes and roles. Of the women journalists surveyed, 56.6% work in digital portals and 34.7% work in the radio. The largest percentage of respondents hold roles as editors or correspondents (54.4%). Regarding types of employment, 57.6% of respondents work full-time for one or more media outlets, 33.5% are freelancers, and just under 20% are developing their own projects.



**amnistiaar** 🇧🇪 🤔 What is the impact of online violence against women journalists on their news production routine?

Women journalists have reported that the abuse they face on digital platforms often leads to self-censorship, limiting their publications, and, in some cases, abandoning social media altogether.

[#periodismoenargentina](#) [journalism in argentina]  
[#mujeresydisidencias](#) [women and other gender identities]

The data collected from both the survey and the interviews enrich this report, providing context and insight into the magnitude of gender-based violence and abuse faced by gender-diverse and women journalists in digital environments in

Argentina between 2018 and 2024. The interviews and data were also key to understanding how women journalists describe these situations as an integral part of their work.



**3. ONLINE VIOLENCE  
AGAINST JOURNALISTS: A  
THREAT TO FREEDOM OF  
EXPRESSION**

Since its emergence, the internet has offered new opportunities to expand freedom of expression<sup>13</sup>, allowing anyone to share their ideas and opinions with global audiences, regardless of where they are located. In addition, it has facilitated access to information, promoting transparency and the possibility of holding government authorities accountable. Therefore, in terms of freedom of expression, digital platforms have played a key role in enabling exchange of ideas, access to information, and public debate.

However, multiple challenges currently threaten the ability of the internet and digital platforms to remain free, democratic, open, and inclusive spaces.<sup>14</sup> In particular, the vast potential for content dissemination and the anonymity offered by social networks and digital platforms are being exploited as tools to stigmatize and silence journalists, human rights advocates, and individuals with a public voice.<sup>15</sup> According

**According to the findings of this report, 63.5% of the women journalists surveyed reported having been victims of some form of digital violence in the last six years.**

to the findings of this report, 63.5% of the women journalists surveyed reported experiencing some form of digital violence in the last six years. The results align with global research that highlights this phenomenon, reporting an increase in online gender-based violence against women journalists.<sup>16</sup>

Women with public voices face constant attacks, stemming from both their gender and their exercise of freedom of expression in the public sphere.<sup>17</sup> The nature of the aggression and violence they endure often results in self-censorship. Thus, many women journalists choose to limit their participation and interactions, refrain from expressing their opinions on certain topics, and, in some cases, deactivate or permanently delete their online accounts. This occurs despite social media being a central platform for disseminating their work, and, in some cases, they even abandon the profession altogether because they cannot practice it safely.<sup>18</sup>

13. IACHR, Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Digital Inclusion and Internet Content Governance, June 2024, paragraph 3. Available at: [https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/informes/Inclusion\\_digital\\_esp.pdf](https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/informes/Inclusion_digital_esp.pdf)

14. Idem. Paragraph 2.

15. Idem. Paragraph 33.

16. Amnesty International, Toxic Twitter: Violence and abuse against women online, 2018; UNESCO, Online violence against women journalists: a global snapshot of its incidence and impacts, 2020; UN Women, Online gender-based violence against women with a public voice. Impact on freedom of expression, 2022; Chequeado, Violencia online contra periodistas: qué pasó en las elecciones presidenciales de Argentina en 2023 y qué se puede hacer, 2024; as well as reports from international organizations: OAS - MESECVI [Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention], Cyber-violence and cyber-bullying against women and girls in the framework of the Belém Do Pará Convention, 2022; IACHR. Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression. Women Journalists and Freedom of Expression. Discrimination and gender-based violence faced by women journalists in the exercise of their profession. 2018.

17. IACHR, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Women Journalists and Freedom of Expression, October 2018. OAS/SER.LV/II. Paragraph 3. Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/docs/informes/MujeresPeriodistas.pdf> - Special Rapporteurship for Freedom of Expression. Digital Inclusion and Internet Content. 2024; UN - Human Rights Council, Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective, 2018.

18. Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective, June 2018, A/HRC/38/47. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g18/184/61/pdf/g1818461.pdf>

Moreover, this type of violence has social repercussions because it excludes women journalists from the public debate. This, in turn, silences their crucial voices in promoting and advocating for gender equality agendas, particularly for those specializing in these issues. In addition, society's right to seek and receive information produced by women journalists on these agendas is undermined.

Freedom of expression, explicitly recognized in various universal and regional human rights treaties, is a fundamental pillar of any democratic system.<sup>19</sup> However, not all expression should be considered valid, particularly when it infringes upon the rights of others—such as equality, non-discrimination, and the right to express opinions and participate in public debate on an equal footing.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, the right to freedom of expression is not absolute. When expression is discriminatory or constitutes violence-inciting hate speech<sup>21</sup> that threatens or causes serious harm to the health or life of the person targeted, it may warrant subsequent accountability to protect the rights to dignity and non-discrimination of the affected social group.<sup>22</sup>

However, given the fundamental importance of freedom of expression in our democratic systems, any restrictions imposed to prevent its abusive exercise must be explicitly established by law and deemed necessary to ensure respect for the rights or reputation of others.<sup>23</sup> This does not imply that expressions can be restricted merely for being offensive, disturbing, or critical of journalistic work. Indeed, in the case of journalism, questioning

19. The right to freedom of expression is enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966). It is also guaranteed in international and regional human rights treaties such as the American Convention on Human Rights (1969), which states that this right includes "the freedom to seek, receive, and disseminate information and ideas of all kinds" (Article 13). The abovementioned treaties have been made part of the constitution, according to what is established in art. 75, subsection 22. Likewise, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has established in its jurisprudence that attacks, threats, or intimidation against journalists constitute a serious violation of this right.

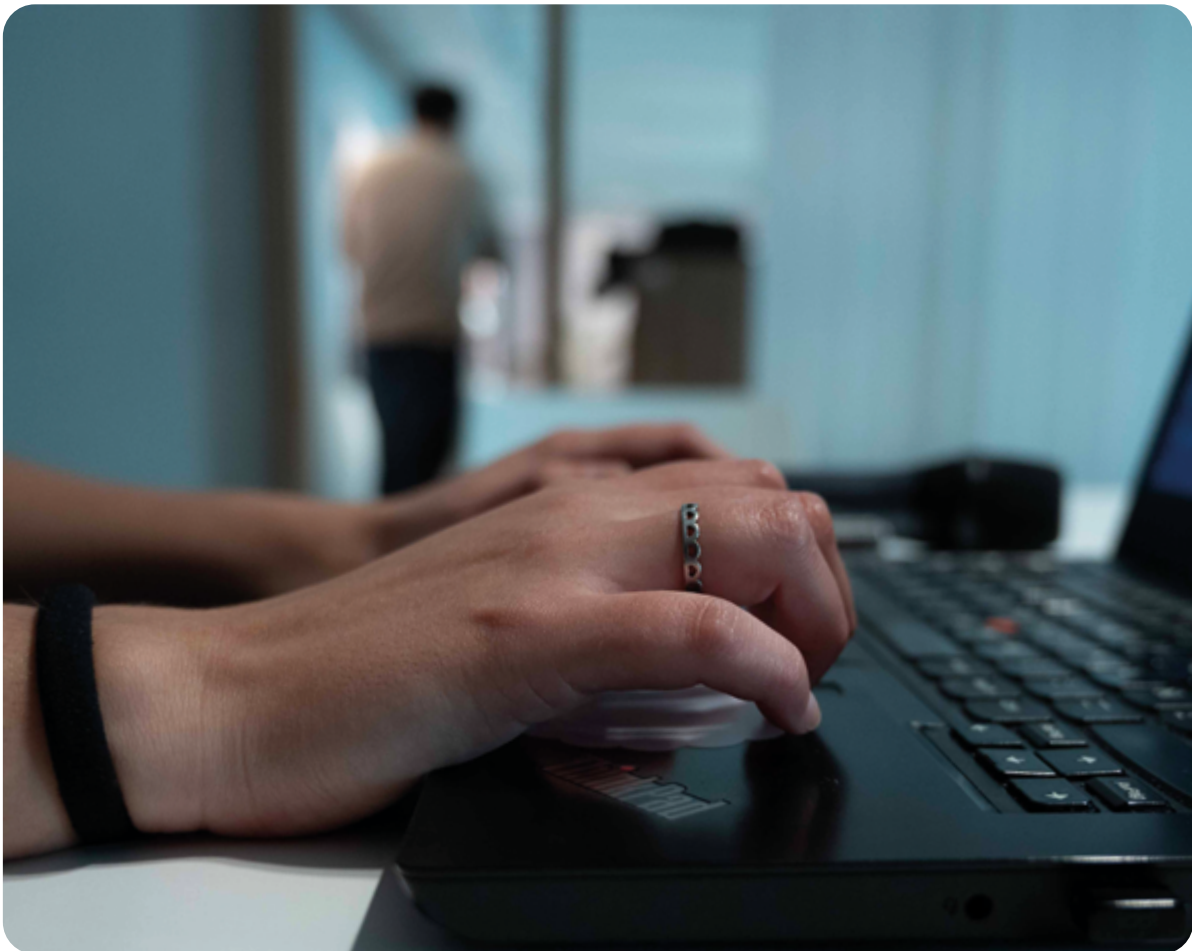
20. International human rights law permits limitations on freedom of expression when necessary to prevent the marginalization of certain voices in public debate and to ensure the right to express oneself on equal terms, particularly for historically discriminated groups. See, American Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

21. Article 13.5 of the American Convention establishes that States must enact legislation to sanction the advocacy of hatred that constitutes "incitement to violence or any other similar illegal action." The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has determined that a high threshold must be met to impose sanctions for hate speech constituting "incitement to violence or any other similar illegal action," as defined and prohibited under Article 13.5 of the American Convention. In this regard, the Rapporteur stated: [...] These sanctions must be grounded in current, clear, objective, and compelling evidence that the individual was not merely expressing an opinion—no matter how harsh, unfair, or disturbing it may be—but had a clear intention to promote illegal violence or any similar action against LGBTI individuals. Additionally, there must be evidence of their capacity to achieve this objective and that it poses a real risk of harm to members of these groups. From Justice and the University of the Andes, *The Right to Freedom of Expression. Advanced course for judges and legal operators in the Americas. Curricular guide and study materials*, p. 76, ISBN digital version: 978-958-5441-06-4, Center for Studies in Law, Justice and Society, Dejusticia, Bogota 2017.

22. IACHR, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Annual Report 2014, Chapter IV (Hate speech and incitement to violence against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex people in the Americas). OAS/Ser.LV/II. Doc. 48/15, December 31, 2015, paragraph 18.

23. According to Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and Article 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights (1969).





and analyzing the work of male and female journalists contributes to improving the quality of information and strengthening the quality of democracy.

However, when criticism turns into personal attacks, threats, or harassment, it crosses the line and should no longer be considered speech protected by freedom of expression. It is the duty of the State to adopt measures to protect those who are victims of discrimination and violence, as well as to ensure that the individuals' right to freedom of expression is not compromised as a result of hate speech or violent expressions. At the same time, it is the State's duty to demonstrate

that they deploy every tool at their disposal to address all types of violent or abusive speech, in accordance with the commitments made regarding human rights.<sup>24</sup>

The right to freedom of expression must be equally enjoyed by everyone and includes women's right to express themselves and live free from violence and abuse, both online and offline. Preventing abuse and violence in these new spaces and ensuring that all groups and sectors of society can express themselves without fear helps overcome the culture of silence and discrimination, while enhancing the quality of democracy.

24. UN, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, October 2019, A/74/486; and the principle of enhanced due diligence in accordance with the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women "Convention of Belém do Pará".

# 4. WHAT IS GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS?



Gender-based violence in digital spaces includes any act targeting women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity, and/or gender expression. These acts are committed, enabled, intensified, or amplified—partially or fully—through the use of information and communication technologies, with the intent to cause physical, psychological, economic, sexual, or moral harm to them or their families in both public and private spheres.<sup>25</sup>

Due to the dynamic nature of the digital world, online violence is constantly evolving, comprising a wide range of violent behaviors, facilitated or amplified by means of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that gender-based violence against women includes, among other aspects, acts that inflict physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, as well as threats to commit those acts.<sup>26</sup> This could be facilitated or amplified by digital or online means. In particular, the Belém do Pará Convention defines violence against women as “*any action or conduct, based on gender, that causes death, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to a woman, whether in the public or private sphere.*” The CEDAW Committee affirms that women’s right to a life free from gender-based

violence is indivisible and interdependent with other human rights, such as those related to freedom of expression, participation, assembly, and association.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, various United Nations bodies have classified online gender-based violence as a manifestation of systemic discrimination based on gender that demands effective responses in line with human rights.<sup>28</sup>

Against conventional wisdom, digital gender violence is **not expressed in isolated or atypical events, but in everyday and ongoing occurrences that must be interpreted within a social context in which women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals are constant targets of attacks and discrimination. Thus, there is an online/offline continuum of violence that emerges as a consequence of structural discrimination.**<sup>29</sup> In this sense, UN Women establishes that violence against women occurs in an online-offline scenario that displays no precise limits. Therefore, it is considered a **continuum of violence.**<sup>30</sup>

Another characteristic of this form of violence is the **speed** with which the violent act spreads and the damage it can cause to the mental health of those who experience it. The very nature of the internet allows content published on social media to become “**viral**” and be shared almost instantly.

25. Amnesty International, Being ourselves is too dangerous: digital violence and the silencing of women and LGBTI activists in Thailand, 2024, p. 10. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/7955/2024/en/>

26. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, July 26, 2017, doc. UN CEDAW/C/GC/35. paragraph 14, Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n17/231/57/pdf/n1723157.pdf>

27. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, paragraph 14. Previously cited.

28. Resolution 68/181 of the UN General Assembly highlights that violence and abuse against women on social media can be a form of systematic gender-based discrimination against women. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n13/450/34/pdf/n1345034.pdf>

29. Women’s Legal and Human Rights Bureau, & Association for Progressive Communications (APC). (2015) End violence Women’s rights and safety online, From impunity to justice: Domestic legal remedies for cases of technology-related violence against women. Association for Progressive Communications & Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

30. UN Women, Online gender-based violence against women with a public voice. Its impact on freedom of expression, 2022. Page 14. Available at: [https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Resumen\\_ViolenciaEnLinea-25Nov-V2.pdf](https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/Resumen_ViolenciaEnLinea-25Nov-V2.pdf)

This is compounded by the impossibility of completely erasing the **digital footprint**, which can have very serious consequences for those who suffer this type of violence. Therefore, the nature of technology-facilitated attacks can, in some contexts, cause qualitatively different harm compared to the same discourse occurring in offline spaces.<sup>31</sup> **Indeed, digital gender-based violence can impact mental health, economic stability, professional development, freedom of expression, and even family dynamics, depending on the forms in which the violence is perpetrated.**<sup>32</sup>

Although not all offensive content is defined as violent or abusive, recent experiences of online hostility and violence, especially against women and gender-diverse individuals, show that it is often difficult to draw the line. Doing so requires understanding of the particular characteristics of abuse, the context, and the circumstances in which it takes place, how the facts are interlinked, the medium used, and the outreach of the perpetrator.<sup>33</sup> Even when some attacks may seem trivial when viewed in isolation, when they occur on a larger scale, over a long period, and as a coordinated “pile-on”<sup>34</sup>—the combination of

various forms of violence and abuse exercised together as part of a coordinated attack against a person—they may indicate a progression towards serious harm, and may carry severe consequences for the person under attack. Also, that violence can expand to family members, colleagues, and even to sources of information, when the victims of the attacks are journalists or communicators.<sup>35</sup>

## 4.1 THE MULTIPLE FACES OF ONLINE VIOLENCE

The ways in which online violence manifests are dynamic and fast-changing, which makes it difficult to establish a complete list of ICT-facilitated attacks and behaviors. In addition, the different forms of abuse are often combined. Generally, online violence includes, but is not limited to:

- › **Threats of physical or sexual violence:** they involve sending or posting messages that communicate the intention to inflict physical harm or sexual violence against a person or their family and friends.<sup>36</sup>

31. Amnesty International, Being ourselves is too dangerous: digital violence and the silencing of women and LGBTI activists in Thailand, 2024, Page 30. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa39/7955/2024/en/>

32. OAS, Online gender-based violence against women and girls: Guide of basic concepts, digital security tools and response strategies, In OAS, 2021. Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/sms/cicte/docs/Guia-conceptos-basicos-La-violencia-de-genero-en-linea-contra-las-mujeres-y-ninas.pdf>

33. In this sense, the analysis should be made in light of the UN RABAT principles, which establish a high threshold to define whether restrictions on freedom of expression should be evaluated when it comes to hate speech. Similarly, it also recommends an analysis that consists of six parameters, which take into account: (1) the social and political context, (2) the speaker's category, (3) the intention to incite audiences against a specific group, (4) the content and form of the speech, (5) the extent of its dissemination, and (6) the likelihood of causing harm, even imminently.

34. The term “pile-on” is used to refer to the combination of various forms of violence and abuse that are exercised together as part of a coordinated attack against a person. Amnesty International, Twitter score table: Tracking Twitter's progress in addressing online violence and abuse against women in Argentina, 2021, p. 5.

35. Posetti, J., Maynard, D., & Shabbir, N. Guidelines for monitoring violence against female journalists. 2023.

36. UN Women, OAS -MESECVI, Cyber-violence and cyberbullying against women and girls within the framework of the Belém Do Pará Convention, 2022, p. 44. Available at: [https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Informe-Ciberviolencia-MESECVI\\_1Abr.pdf](https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Informe-Ciberviolencia-MESECVI_1Abr.pdf)



# DEFINITION OF ABUSIVE AND PROBLEMATIC CONTENT <sup>37</sup>

## PROBLEMATIC:

Messages with hurtful or hostile content, especially when repeatedly aimed at the same person on multiple occasions, even if individually they do not constitute abusive messages.

Problematic tweets, for example, can reinforce negative or harmful stereotypes against a group of people. However, this kind of expressions, such as offensive, disturbing, or adverse ones are considered protected by the right to freedom of expression, so they would not necessarily be subject to legal consequences.

## ABUSIVE

Messages that promote violence against someone because of their ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religion, age, and disability, among others.

Some examples include physical or sexual threats, the manifestation of desires for physical harm or death, references to violent acts, defamation, racist and sexist messages, or other degrading content targeting an individual.

<sup>37</sup>. Amnesty International, Twitter score table: Tracking Twitter's progress in addressing online violence and abuse against women in Argentina, 2021, p. 6. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/amr13/4721/2021/es/>

- › **Sexist and misogynistic abuse:** sending insulting or abusive images or comments targeted at women, with the intention of intimidating or degrading them on the basis of their gender. Sexist or misogynistic abuse often includes references to negative and harmful stereotypes against women and obscene language.<sup>38</sup>
- › **Targeted harassment:** it occurs when one or more people agree to repeatedly attack another person over a certain period of time, with the aim of humiliating them or causing distress.<sup>39</sup> This form of violence is generally exercised through Bots (accounts created to automatically and repetitively generate messages that are quickly and massively disseminated), or Trolling (the act of sending insulting, disqualifying, or defamatory messages and hate speech, generally, on a massive scale).<sup>40</sup>
- › **Multiple discrimination:** it takes place when online abuse focuses on some aspect of a person's identity beyond their gender (nationality, religion, political ideology, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation, among others).<sup>41</sup>
- › **Hate speech:** this encompasses any type of expression that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language to refer to a person or group, based on religion, ethnicity, nationality, ancestry, gender, or other identity features.<sup>42</sup>
- › **Doxing:** it consists of publishing personal documents or information that reveal a person's identity on the internet without their consent. It may be personal information about an individual such as their address, phone numbers, email address, or the names of their children, among other data. Doxing represents a violation of a person's privacy with the aim of alarming or causing them to get distressed or panicked.<sup>43</sup>
- › **Sharing sexual and private images without consent:** this is the online dissemination of sexual or private images without the person's consent, regardless of whether the images were obtained with or without their consent, to embarrass, stigmatize, or harm the victim.<sup>44</sup>
- › **Online impersonation and identity theft:** it involves the use of a person's image or data to create a false identity to threaten, intimidate, or damage them and their reputation.<sup>45</sup>

38. Amnesty International, #TOXICTWITTER, Violence and abuse against women online, 2018. Page 28. Available at: [https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/05/TOXICTWITTER-report\\_SP.pdf](https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/05/TOXICTWITTER-report_SP.pdf)

39. Idem. Page 33

40. UN Women, Online gender-based violence against women with a public voice: Impact on freedom of expression, 2022. Page 15. Available at: [https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Informe-Ciberviolencia-MESECVI\\_1Abr.pdf](https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Informe-Ciberviolencia-MESECVI_1Abr.pdf)

41. Amnesty International, #TOXICTWITTER, Violence and abuse against women online, 2018. Page 29. Available at: [https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/05/TOXICTWITTER-report\\_SP.pdf](https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/05/TOXICTWITTER-report_SP.pdf)

42. United Nations Strategy and Action Plan on Hate Speech, June 2019. Available at: <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/un-strategy-and-plan-of-action-on-hate-speech>. This definition was drafted by the United Nations; however, there is no universal definition of hate speech according to international human rights laws. The concept remains widely debated, especially in relation to freedom of opinion and expression, non-discrimination, and equality.

43. Amnesty International, #TOXICTWITTER, Violence and abuse against women online, 2018. Page 31.

44. UN Women, OAS- MESECVI, Cyber violence and cyber harassment against women and girls within the framework of the Belém Do Pará Convention, 2022. Page 39. Available at: [https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Informe-Ciberviolencia-MESECVI\\_1Abr.pdf](https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Informe-Ciberviolencia-MESECVI_1Abr.pdf)

45. Idem. Page 42



**DiputadosAr** ✓

@DiputadosAr

In Argentina, Law No. 27736, known as [#leyolimpia \[Olympia Law\]](#), was enacted in October 2023.

10/10/2023, 10:38 AM



It incorporates [#violenciadigital](#) [digital violence] into the forms of gender-based violence recognized in Law No. 26485 for comprehensive protection to prevent, punish, and eradicate violence against women in the environments where they establish interpersonal relationships.



This law also establishes the need to implement [#políticaspúblicas](#) [public policies] that address this issue, incorporating basic rights and guarantees, as well as judicial and administrative procedures for online gender-based violence cases.



› **Online monitoring, control, and surveillance:** it consists of the continuous tracking of a person's online and offline activities, their movements, and geolocation through the use

of technologies. It may include the installation of spyware on electronic devices without consent or the installation and use of cameras or recorders that enable tracking.<sup>46</sup>

46. Idem. Page 43



**5. EXPERIENCES OF  
ONLINE GENDER-BASED  
VIOLENCE AGAINST  
JOURNALISTS:  
RESEARCH FINDINGS**



Violence and abuse against women and gender-diverse individuals on social media has become a daily occurrence. The survey conducted by Amnesty International reveals that six out of ten women journalists have been victims of some form of online violence in the past six years.

Some of the most common types of violence recorded include:

- › **Isolated attacks or insults (98.3%),**
- › **Harassment or trolling (85.6%),**
- › **Sexual harassment or threats of sexual violence (45.9%),**
- › **Threats of physical violence (44%).**

One of the female interviewees covering national politics shared an incident in which a public official retweeted one of her posts with a provocative comment. This triggered dozens of the official's followers to flood social media with abusive and violent messages directed at the journalist.

**“What struck me, and continues to strike me about that situation, is how the deliberate action of a person with public responsibilities can impose a censorship mechanism on you; in fact, it works as a way of disciplining people.”**

Among the most common cases, the women interviewed mentioned messages with sexual content, insults in response to a tweet, doxing, and a systematic attack:

**“I started receiving many rape threats, masturbation videos. They called me ‘fat, abortionist, lesbian, and Kirchnerist’,”** points out a journalist who

covered the legalization of the Abortion Law, among other issues on the gender agenda.

A feminist journalist mentioned an attack she suffered after publishing an investigation:

**“It was brutal: there was doxing, threats, calls to my family, and they even sent a delivery guy to my house. It was a situation of generalized harassment that went beyond social media.”**

The results presented in the report are consistent with the documentation of this phenomenon at a global level. A study conducted by UNESCO in 2020, which covered 125 countries, including Argentina, indicated that seven out of ten women journalists were victims of online violence, which is expressed mainly as threats of physical and sexual attacks, mostly through X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram.<sup>47</sup> The Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women highlighted that online violence facilitated by ICTs has become increasingly frequent: it is estimated that one in ten women has experienced some form of violence in digital environments since the age of 15.<sup>48</sup>

Some of the women journalists exposed to this form of violence recognized it as an everyday or regular occurrence in their lives.

**“I don't know what it's like to write without being exposed to violence”,** said a woman journalist.

In this context, many of the journalists interviewed mentioned that what disturbs them the most is the often subtle violence aimed at damaging

47. UNESCO, Online violence against women journalists: A global snapshot of incidence and impacts, 2020. Available at: [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136\\_eng](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136_eng)

48. Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective, June 2018, A/HRC/38/47. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g18/184/61/pdf/g1818461.pdf>

their reputation and spreading fake news about their work. Indeed, criticism to their professional performance, which could be legitimate, comes in the form of accusations and insults that turn the critique violent.

**“What bothers me the most is that I am persistently accused of publishing certain things and not publishing others because I have a certain political ideology. I think it's something everyday and repetitive that gradually erodes the perception of my work because it allows people to think, ‘Hmm, there's a hidden agenda behind publishing this or not publishing that.’ That bothers me a lot, because my name is the only thing I have,”** said a woman journalist specialized in Politics.

Regarding those who perpetrate the violence, according to data collected by Amnesty International, 90% of the women surveyed who were victims of online violence reported having been attacked from anonymous accounts, which usually have few followers and are created specifically to carry out the attack. In addition, 27% indicated that they were victims of attacks from “social media personalities,” that is, very active users with great influence in these spaces. One of the interviewees identified two types of perpetrators of violence:

**“One thing is the violence that comes from people you know, who have a face and a name. You know who they are. But then there are the anonymous ones, who appear one day, out of nowhere, and come in droves but when you check you see that they have five or six followers.”**

It is also important to highlight that there are attacks that come from their own journalist colleagues, a phenomenon that affects 22% of the women surveyed. This type of violence is particularly devastating for them, given the professional and personal bond they often have with these perpetrators.

**“When a colleague attacks me [publicly], it destroys me. It hurts a lot. But I keep going, I'm already used to it,”** shares a woman journalist specialized in Politics.

**“If the attack comes from a colleague or someone I respect, it affects me deeply. I have different ways of handling it, but the impact is inevitable,”** says another interviewee.

### **The impact of online violence when the attacks come from government authorities**

A significant percentage of the women journalists surveyed (23%) reported having been victims of attacks on social media or digital platforms by figures from the political sphere. When violence and abuses are enabled and/or promoted by government authorities, their impact and consequences can be greater, due to the asymmetry of power and the possibility of exacerbating the risks of disrupting freedom of expression.

In recent times, a concerning rise in attacks against journalists and political opponents by public officials has been observed, primarily through the intensive use of practices such as targeted harassment, doxing, and fake news. These actions aim to discredit, silence, and exclude individuals from public discourse. In Argentina, according to several women journalists interviewed, Javier Milei's presidency inaugurated a phase of great hostility against journalism, with women journalists being the main target of these attacks.

**“This level of aggression by officials did not exist before,”** said an interviewee.

In fact, a radio journalist noted an increase in the levels of violence starting in November of last year, when she shared, **“I received my first**



**green Falcon”<sup>49</sup> on Instagram, accompanied by a comment that said: ‘You’re going to enjoy going out for a ride.’**

In a previous report, Amnesty International documented that, in these first few months of President Milei’s administration, around 30 journalists suffered harassment on social media and media outlets, with X being the main tool of the attacks.<sup>50</sup>

The demonization and misogynistic rhetoric directed at women journalists by those in positions of power often incites a wave of online violence. Reactions to these attacks vary, and even women journalists with significant public recognition and years of professional experience have had to develop strategies to cope with the situation. One

of them expressed that she prefers to respond to the attacks:

**“Whenever the President gets angry with me, I respond. And there is nothing I like better than responding to the President and having him reply to me.”**

However, this is not how most of the interviewees react. Many point out that there are **intimidating and silencing effects derived from the power imbalance** when the attacks come from the President:

**“There is a phenomenal wave of attacks on social media against anyone who questions the President. Moreover, it comes from the Casa Rosada, which is a true eccentricity. It is absolutely intimidating.”**

<sup>49</sup>. In Argentina, green Ford Falcon cars are historically associated with the clandestine operations, kidnappings, and enforced disappearances carried out during the military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983.

<sup>50</sup>. Amnesty International, The first 100 days of Milei’s Administration, 2024. Available at: [https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2024/03/An%C3%A1lisis-100-dias-Milei.pdf?utm\\_source=analisys&utm\\_medium=analisys&utm\\_campaign=analisys&utm\\_id=100dias](https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2024/03/An%C3%A1lisis-100-dias-Milei.pdf?utm_source=analisys&utm_medium=analisys&utm_campaign=analisys&utm_id=100dias)

**These news coverage topics are identified as triggers of online attacks: abortion, femicides and gender-based violence, human rights, politics, and Comprehensive Sexual Education.**

Some women journalists observed similarities between the actions of Milei's government and certain practices carried out during the Kirchner administrations, especially regarding the constant targeting of opposing media outlets and journalists.

**“The Kirchner administrations frequently attempted to completely degrade journalism as a profession. “It's not exactly a continuation, but I would say that I currently observe a similar approach to undermining our profession, diminishing it, and degrading it.” And both need [referring to Milei's and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's administrations] for journalism to be synonymous with press release, deprived of opinion and of the possibility of asking what should not be asked. In other words, if you're a journalist, you gotta be a journalist who's with the crew. If you're not, I won't give you an interview and, as soon as I can, I'll publicly expose you. That happened during the Kirchner years and that is happening now,”** claims a woman journalist.

However, this practice is not only observed in connection with Milei's and Fernández's administrations. As documented by Amnesty International, during the presidency of Mauricio

Macri, the use of cyber troops, trolls, and bots was frequent, mostly linked to government officials or official spokespersons, in order to disqualify, attack, or intimidate journalists and human rights advocates in Argentina.<sup>51</sup> The persistence of these practices, despite changes in administrations, underscores the need to strengthen the protection of women journalists' rights and ensure an environment in which freedom of expression can be fully exercised without fear of reprisals.

## **5.1 TRIGGERS OF ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST JOURNALISTS**

There are various recurring triggers of attacks on social media and digital platforms against women and gender-diverse journalists. In general, these attacks are related to the topics they address, the political and media context, their political or ideological perspectives, and the fact that they are public figures. In addition, being women or LGBTI+ individuals compounds the multiple discrimination they are subjected to and intensifies the violence they face compared to their male colleagues who are also targets of different attacks. **For 67.2% of the respondents, women and gender-diverse individuals who practice journalism receive attacks more frequently than their male colleagues,** which is consistent with both the findings of the interviews and the global data on this matter.

According to the United Nations, “women who cover topics such as politics, law, economics, sports, women's rights gender issues, and feminism are at special risk of being victims of online violence. While male journalists are also

51. Amnesty International, The limited public debate, trolling and attacks on the free expression of journalists and human rights advocates on Twitter, 2018. Available at: [https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/03/online-pre1.pdf?utm\\_source=Prensa&utm\\_campaign=ff5af8232c-EMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_03\\_16&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_a60e315cac-ff5af8232c-](https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/03/online-pre1.pdf?utm_source=Prensa&utm_campaign=ff5af8232c-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_03_16&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_a60e315cac-ff5af8232c-)

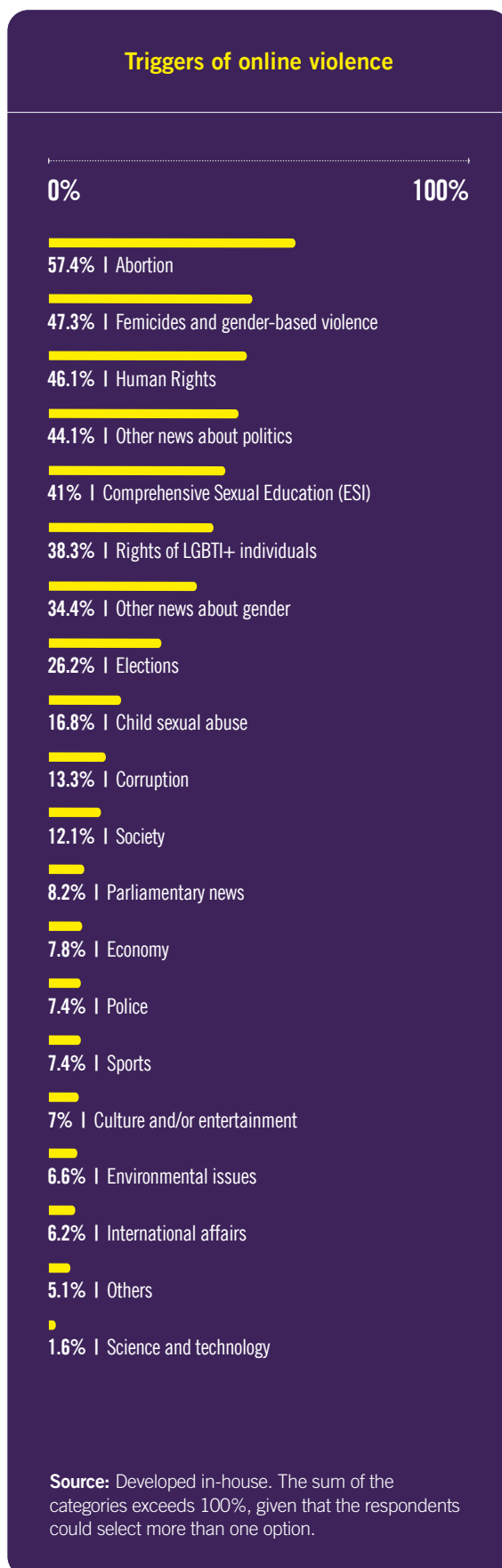
subject to online abuse, the attacks against women journalists tend to be more severe.”<sup>52</sup> This reveals the disproportionate exposure of women journalists to digital violence, especially when dealing with certain topics. According to the survey conducted by Amnesty International, nearly 60% of the women journalists surveyed who were victims of violence identified the coverage of abortion rights issues as the main trigger for online attacks. At the same time, the main topics identified as triggers of attacks include talking about femicides and gender-based violence (47.3%), human rights (46.1%), politics (44.1%), and Comprehensive Sexual Education (41%).

Similarly, UNESCO has detected the same trend: almost half of the women journalists surveyed indicated that the coverage of gender issues is the main trigger for online attacks. It follows that for **women journalists and gender-diverse individuals who address issues relative to gender, human rights, and sexual and reproductive rights, the levels of aggression and violence intensify, which shows the role of misogyny in online violence.**<sup>53</sup>

“Many times, the attacks were not directly against me, but linked to the issue I was advocating for. It's always: ‘They have to learn to close their legs’, when it comes to abortion. Those attacks are more connected to the topics discussed than to the person addressing them,” said a woman journalist from the North East region.

52. UN, The safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, Report of the Secretary-General, August 2017, A/72/290, paragraph 10. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n17/245/47/pdf/n1724547.pdf> and Contributions from El Salvador, Greece, UNESCO, Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain, Karisma Foundation, and PEN International. See also UNESCO “Global Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development” (2014), p. 102.

53. UNESCO, Online violence against women journalists: A global snapshot of incidence and impacts. 2020, Page 8. Available at: [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136\\_eng](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136_eng)



### Aspects that are targeted by digital attacks



**Source:** Developed in-house. This variable was adapted from the proposal by Ferrier (2018). The sum of the categories exceeds 100%, given that the respondents could select more than one option.

“I receive a lot of insults when I cover human rights cases. They label me as a ‘defender of criminals.’ There were some cases where they called for marches against me. Complete madness.” said a reporter on judicial and police issues from the North West region.

“During the abortion debate in 2018, they sent me emails copied to the newspaper’s director, calling me ‘commie,’ ‘murderer,’ ‘feminazi,’ and ‘abortionist,’” recalled another woman journalist from Buenos Aires province.

In addition, women journalists identified other aspects that act as frequent triggers of attacks, such as being a woman, gender identity, aspects related to their appearance, and their political or ideological position. For 64.1% of the women surveyed who were victims of violence, gender is identified as the predominant factor in the attacks. The same proportion indicates that political ideology also acts as a trigger.

At the same time, online attacks and abuses targeting women journalists acquire specific characteristics related to gender: they tend to be misogynistic messages, with sexualized content, and seek to reduce women to their roles as mothers, daughters, and caregivers, reproducing gender-based stereotypes and prejudices. This marks a clear difference with the attacks that male journalists receive. In the case of women and gender-diverse individuals, online attacks are characterized by reinforcing socially entrenched gender stereotypes. This is especially apparent in the case of violence, threats, and harassment as a consequence of gender equality speech or women’s and gender-diverse individuals’ rights advocacy.<sup>54</sup>

54. Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective, June 2018. A/HRC/38/47. Paragraph. 30. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g18/184/61/pdf/g1818461.pdf>



**“It’s something that happens every day. Attacks are divided into two main groups: those that are about my physical appearance and those that target my sexual activity. They are directed at the person, they aim to weaken you regardless of what you say. The goal is to grind you down so that whatever you say carries less impact,”** pointed out a female political journalist who works in radio and television.

Similarly, when asked about the types of attacks they received, the women journalists interviewed frequently described them as including explicit sexual content and sexual threats.

**“I received many rape threats, many pictures of genitals, videos of masturbation,”** said a woman journalist from Buenos Aires province.

Women journalists also delved into the type of attacks they have received versus what happens to their male colleagues:

**“My male colleagues don’t experience this. They might get called ‘government-ad-beggars’ or ‘pocket journalists’ but although degrading and aggressive, these terms have to do with our work environment. I haven’t heard anyone tell a male colleague, for example, ‘you look ugly,’ ‘you look handsome,’ ‘you’ve gained weight,’ ‘you’ve lost weight,’ or ‘you are a kept man’,”** explained a woman journalist.

In this regard, an male executive from a media outlet talks about the gender bias in the attacks against women journalists:

**“I receive a lot of attacks and insults on social media, but no one tells me ‘I’m going to rape you when you get home’ (...) It’s hard for me to think that a woman processes aggression the same way a man does.”**

While various organizations have reported widespread harassment against male journalists, there is evidence of specific traits in the attacks against women journalists. Among the latest reports on the subject, Chequeado conducted an analysis of posts and concluded that “women suffer more attacks per number of followers and number of published posts compared to their male colleagues, given that women tend to have fewer followers and post less.” The report also highlights the difference in the type of attacks towards female and male journalists: “males are also insulted by derogatorily referring to women, often their mothers or life partners.” Taking into account total numbers, one third of the attacks have misogynistic content, followed by insults related to political views, and physical appearance.”<sup>55</sup>

## 5.2 THE IMPACT OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

### The silencing effect: self-censorship to avoid being attacked

One of the most severe consequences of gender-based violence against women journalists in digital environments is its **silencing effect**. While many choose not to stop publishing information

55. Chequeado, *Violencia online contra periodistas: qué pasó en las elecciones presidenciales de Argentina en 2023 y qué se puede hacer*, 2024. Available at: <https://chequeado.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/informe-Violencia-a-Periodistas.pdf>

## Impact of online attacks on work routines



**Source:** Developed in-house. This variable was adapted from the proposal by Posetti et al. (2022). The sum of the categories exceeds 100%, given that the respondents could select more than one option.

despite suffering constant harassment and intimidation, the vast majority opt for reducing their footprint on digital platforms, limiting their posts, or, in extreme cases, closing their social media accounts or even completely abandoning their work. In fact, the mere threat of violence and abuse against women on social media has a paralyzing effect, causing them to keep silent and self-censor to prevent being attacked. This type of violence also has a deterring effect: it instills fear in those who witness the consequences of publicly advocating for women and gender-diverse individuals' rights, causing them to refrain from speaking out.

Self-censorship due to fear of reprisals limits the diversity of opinions and perspectives, thus weakening the fundamental role of journalism in a democratic society. At the same time, the fact that women and gender-diverse individuals are marginalized from participation in the public space means that their voices are not heard in topics that can have a direct impact on improving the lives of half the population. Therefore, various organizations and specialists in the field warn about the need to guarantee safe conditions for them to participate in the public debate on an equal footing with men.

A joint statement made by United Nations experts on freedom of expression and violence against women highlighted that the different forms of online abuse experienced by women and girls can lead to limiting their participation and, at times, to entirely withdrawing from digital platforms.<sup>56</sup> The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression stated that this type of violence leads to self-censorship and is a direct

<sup>56</sup> UN, Joint statement by experts on violence against women and freedom of expression. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2017/03/un-experts-urge-states-and-companies-address-online-gender-based-abuse-warn?LangID=E&NewsID=21317>





**amnistiaar** 🇦🇷 🤔 Five out of ten women journalists surveyed who were victims of violence said that they self-censor on social media to avoid being victims of attacks.

At the same time, 44.7% said that they modified their way of interacting on digital platforms and avoid interaction with the audience; 34.5% stopped participating in a social network entirely, and 7.10% closed their accounts.

[#violenciadigital](#) [online violence] [#autocensura](#) [self-censor] [#ataquesdigitales](#) [attacks in digital environments]

attack on the visibility and full participation of women in the public life.<sup>57</sup>

The research conducted by Amnesty International revealed not only the self-censorship caused by these forms of violence but also changes in the frequency and manner in which women journalists use online platforms after experiencing abuse or harassment. Indeed, none of the interviewed or surveyed women

journalist has failed to notice that the digital violence received has had **impacts on various aspects of their daily life**. Thus, five out of ten women respondents stated that they self-censor on social media to avoid being victims of attacks. At the same time, 44.7% said that they modified their way of interacting on digital platforms and avoid interaction with the audience; 34.5% stopped participating in a social network entirely, and 7.10% closed their accounts.

<sup>57</sup> Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective, June 2018, A/HRC/38/47, Para. 29. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g18/184/61/pdf/g1818461.pdf>



A woman journalist covering national politics recounted how an incident, in which she received numerous hate messages in response to one of her comments, changed her relationship with social media.

**“Clearly, there are things I refrain from saying on Twitter; I was disciplined. The disciplining operation worked on me.”**

A young woman journalist from Patagonia explained how the attacks on social media led her to question her own work and to meticulous reviewing what she publishes before doing so:

**“Being called a ‘murderess’ doesn’t feel right. There are days when it makes you laugh, and other days, it’s a downer. And it is true that it limits your participation in social networks, because you think: ‘Why am I going to write this?’ ‘What am I going to share this for?’”**

For some of them, the violence they receive has a paralyzing effect. Faced with the fear of suffering new attacks, they prefer to eliminate postings with their views or avoid sharing altogether.

**“The attacks paralyze me. The few times I received an attack I ended up erasing posts, blocking users, and withdrawing more and more.”**

Regarding interaction on the platforms, many of the women that were interviewed chose to manage their accounts based on keyword filters and ways to stop seeing responses to their posts. They also highlighted that, after some attacks, they were completely on the defensive against legitimate criticism to their work:

**“Anything that is minimally critical puts me on the defensive. Not only that. I am afraid of what might happen if I respond. Even if I do so, and that starts a conversation, I’m afraid that later it will be used for doxing. That’s why I think 150 times about each tweet before posting it.”**

Others put a lock on their accounts: **“A friend of mine has a metaphor for it: having an unlocked account is like leaving the door to your apartment open. Anyone can enter, take your things, intrude on you, paint the walls, take a picture, make a drawing or whatever. And then they are going to spread that as if it were true.”**

Many of the women journalists surveyed who were victims of violence (63%) stated that, in the face of the violence and attacks they experienced, they blocked online users; a relatively low number decided to respond to the attack publicly (23.2%),



or privately (10.2%). While the ability to block users helps women journalists filter out the abuse they suffer, the constant attacks ultimately limit their interactions with other accounts and their participation in the public debate.

### Changing work routines

According to the survey conducted by Amnesty International, **more than 80% of the women journalists who experienced online violence reported that their professional practice was affected by the acts of aggression and/or digital threats.** In the face of such attacks, these women journalists adopted various protective measures, which significantly altered their work routine. According to the collected data, almost two out of ten avoid or give it some serious consideration before covering certain stories. Others fear the

impact that gender-based violence could have on access to information sources.

A young woman journalist, who covers General Information topics, recounted how the digital attacks she received made her fear a negative impact on her work routine:

**“My main fear after the attack was that certain people or sources would become unwilling to talk to me for fear of being associated and attacked in turn. It didn't happen to me, but I know of female colleagues that experienced it. It can have a strong impact on your work life.”**

In the most extreme cases, **some women journalists were forced to resign from their jobs,** lest they would not be able to continue working in a safe environment, both for themselves and for their interviewees.



“I chose to quit my job because I was cornered up against the wall. Could I have chosen something else? Probably. I don't know if it would have turned out better for me or not, but I wasn't free to decide what to do. And that had an impact on my personal and professional life. I earn less money than before, I no longer collect bonuses and paid vacations, I have to find gigs month by month, apply for scholarships and always be on the lookout for work,” said another woman journalist who was forced to resign due to the constant attacks she received.

A woman journalist covering General News explained that she changed her approach to work after receiving threats via direct messages, and a response from a public official to one of her tweets, which triggered dozens of violent online attacks:

“If you ask me whether I remembered that situation the next day when I had to work on the news, of course I did. And did it condition me? It did. Why? Because all of a sudden, I understand what they say about doxing, and I don't want this jerk commenting on ‘how nice your daughter looks leaving school,’ or meddling with my family, with things I don't even know my relatives are doing. Or to see my work ruined in a coordinated action. All of that is constantly running through my mind.”

### Actions addressing digital attacks on colleagues

An effect that was revealed by the investigation conducted by Amnesty International was the attitude that women journalists adopted to address digital attacks on colleagues. According to the survey results, 34.4% reported having contacted the victim privately, while 39% reported the attacker. On the other hand, different women journalists said that they do not intervene when they observe an attack on a colleague for fear

### Levels of concern generated by the risk of being a victim of attacks or threats in the coming years



of getting involved. The attitude they choose to take in the face of these situations, then, tends to generate dissatisfaction on the part of the women we interviewed:

“I get really angry with myself. I get very upset when I decide not to intervene. I believe a very successful self-censorship device has been launched against us. In fact, I am practicing self-censorship like never before. I never did it this way.”

A woman journalist who suffered repeated attacks on social media reflected on how she felt about the attitude of her colleagues towards the attack against her:

**“You become a sort of poisonous stain: no one wants to get stuck with someone who is being attacked.”**

All the interviewees paused to think about how to confront violence in digital environments. One of them said:

**“In the last couple of years, and especially since 2023, violence was unleashed. Reacting individually is not an answer.”**

## WOMEN JOURNALISTS' HEALTH

Out of the women journalists who reported having suffered online violence, almost three out of ten felt physically unsafe in situations of violence or abuse on social media, and two out of ten sought medical or psychological support due to such experiences. Almost all the women journalists interviewed by the Amnesty International referred to the negative effects of the online violence and abuse they experienced on digital platforms on their physical and mental health.

The investigation showed high levels of concern and fear in the face of the possibility of suffering online or offline attacks: **almost 70% of women journalists said they were worried about the possibility of being victims of online threats or attacks, while 64.5% stated that the fear also extends to the possibility of suffering verbal attacks or threats in person.** In fact, many women journalists mentioned that online violence triggered in them a latent threat effect: fear of someone recognizing them on the street and attacking them. This evidences the clear connection between online and offline violence, and the non-existent borders between both worlds, something that was also mentioned by many of the interviewees.

**“My inner fear is: ‘they are going to come for me and my family.’ The threat of doxing is there,”** comments a woman journalist with more than 20 years of experience.

**“I am not afraid at work, but I do get scared when I am eating with friends. What if someone comes to confront me then?,”** says a woman journalist from Buenos Aires province.

**“The main issue is fear. Because what doesn't let you live is fear; if it happened, it happened, that's it, but fear is what keeps you from living,”** says a woman journalist from the Northwest region.

A woman journalist pointed out that one of the changes she noticed was on the street, where two young men chased her for two blocks, as they shouted various kinds of insults at her:

**“Online violence has taken to the streets. I was insulted and called ‘a whore’. I froze, I didn't know what to say. I didn't want a mess, either.”**

## The impacts on mental health

The impacts on mental health and self-esteem were frequently identified by women journalists in the interviews. In particular, **two out of ten mentioned having sought medical or psychological help** after an attack on social media or digital platforms.

**“They broke my mental health,”** said a woman journalist from Buenos Aires province.

Another woman journalist from the Andean region recalled:

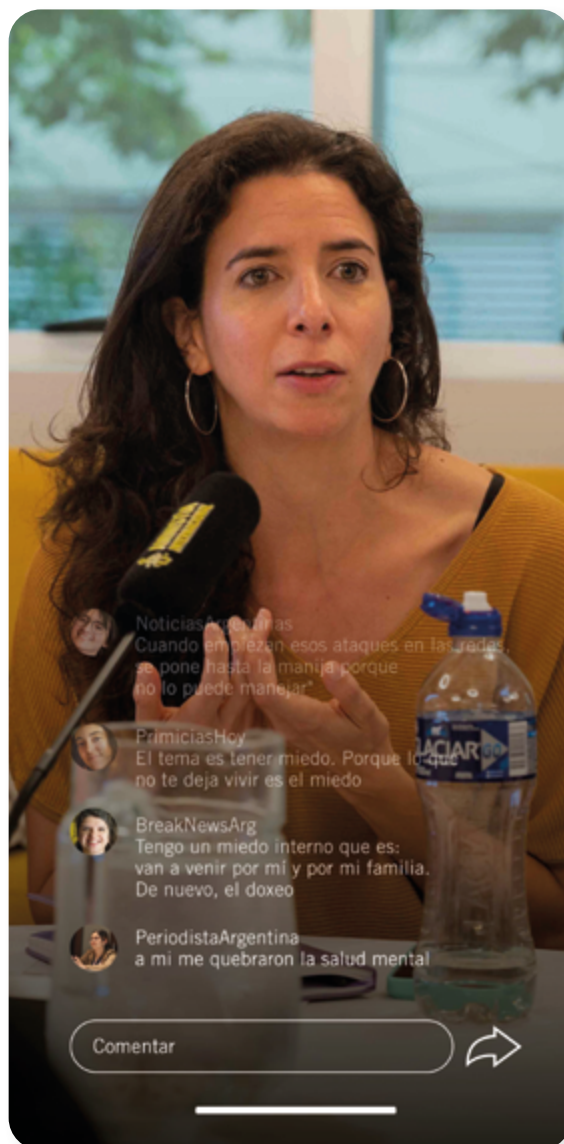
**“I had a different way of dealing with those situations that may have helped me to overcome them, but now I understand that the person**

who was my boss at the time and who ended up taking psychiatric leave didn't have the same coping mechanisms as I did and ended up heavily medicated.”

“I have another friend who is heavily medicated. When those attacks [harassment on social media] start, she gets in a dreadful state because she can't deal with it,” said another woman journalist from Buenos Aires province.

It is worth mentioning several of the women journalists were moved to tears during the interviews when recounting a particular instance of violence, even after several years. This shows the lasting and profound impact that gender-based violence in digital environments has had on them, underscoring the urgent need to address and mitigate these attacks in order to protect the well-being of women journalists.

“I will continue to cover these topics, but I think that sometimes so much exposure to personal, collective, and social violence wreaks havoc in your head. So you end up always expecting the worst,” said a woman journalist from Patagonia, recounting the situation of psychological vulnerability she was exposed to as a result of covering gender issues.





# 6. HUMAN RIGHTS RESPONSIBILITIES



## 6.1. RESPONSIBILITIES OF DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Digital platforms have become very significant players for social interaction, access to information, and the practice of journalism, so their actions (or inaction) have an increasing influence on the exercise of human rights.<sup>58</sup> In their role as businesses, digital platforms assume specific responsibilities regarding human rights. Therefore, they must take concrete measures to avoid causing or contributing to the abuse that occurs on the platforms and to mitigate the adverse effects of such abuse.<sup>59</sup>

The research conducted by Amnesty International highlighted that violence in digital environments is facilitated, or mostly perpetrated, through social networks, and has identified certain platforms where abuse and violence are more frequent than in others. Thus, X (formerly Twitter) was pointed out by women journalists as the social network that enables the highest number of attacks (56.6%), followed by Instagram (54.3%), comments on news portals (36.3%), Facebook (32.8%), and WhatsApp (27%).

**“Today social media networks are enemies of women. This fact couldn't be more apparent: they enable violence against us and never share our content,”** claims a woman journalist specialized in gender issues.

Even though the women surveyed did not mention YouTube as a prominent platform for the circulation of digital violence, some interviewees pointed it out as a network where aggressive

**X (formerly Twitter) is the one that generates the most attacks: 56.6%. Instagram follows with 54.3%.**

messages have increased. A woman journalist who works in the radio said:

**“We have detected that the YouTube chat box for the radio station has become very aggressive lately. It seems as if it were a parallel universe that has nothing to do with what is going on in the show or with the messages we receive from listeners through other channels.”**

Many of the women journalists interviewed acknowledged having significantly limited their participation, especially in X, due to the levels of aggression and hostility they observed and suffered in the last few years. In contrast, the circulation of violent discourse on Instagram is a more recent phenomenon: **“I used to like Instagram because it was more like Disneyland. You felt bad on Twitter, you went to Instagram, but now you don't,”** says a woman journalist specializing in politics.

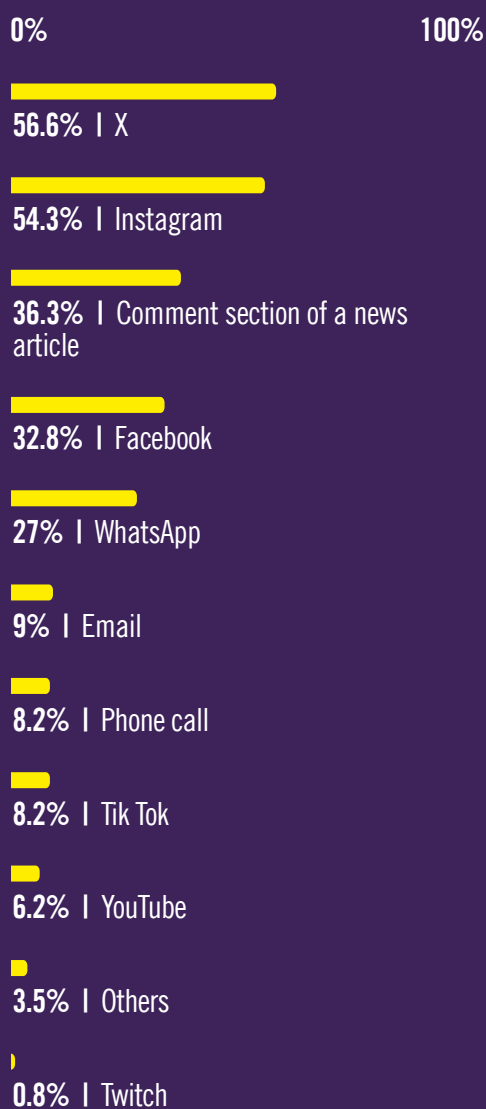
Today, constant attacks and abuse operate on all platforms and, many times, simultaneously:

**“It's so obvious because they happen simultaneously. It's as if they agree and say**

58. UN Women - OAS - MESECVI, Cyber-violence and cyberbullying against women and girls within the framework of the Belém do Pará Convention, 2022, p. 124. Available at: [https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Informe-Ciberviolencia-MESECVI\\_1Abr.pdf](https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Informe-Ciberviolencia-MESECVI_1Abr.pdf)

59. UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, HR/PUB/11/04, 2011. Available at [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR\\_SP.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_SP.pdf)

### Online attack channels



**Source:** Developed in-house. The sum of the categories related to the platforms exceeds the 53.5% of people who reported the attacks given that respondents could select more than one option.

**‘well, let’s go after her.’ And then you see that they are on Twitter, on Instagram, everywhere.”**

In response to the violence and abuse in digital environments that women and gender-diverse individuals experience, platforms have implemented various policies: for example, on X you can limit the visibility of a violent post, restrict its reach or exclude it from search results and trends. In addition, it prevents adjacent ads and allows users to tag a post to inform viewers that it includes misleading or violent content. In more serious cases, violent content may be removed, as long as it is determined that a rule on X has been violated.<sup>60</sup>

In turn, Instagram allows users to report a post or comment that violates community rules; in those cases, the platform may remove the violent content. Also, when it comes to offensive content that does not violate community rules, it enables the “unfollow” or “block” option against the person who made the post or comment.<sup>61</sup> It is also possible to delete comments, although a prior report is necessary for that.

Despite these measures, the response of the platforms to digital violence and abuse reports and complaints are not always effective. Almost half of the women journalists surveyed who were victims of violence chose not to report the incidents on the platforms. Additionally, 33.6% reported incidents to X and 29.7% to Instagram, but the responses

<sup>60.</sup> X Help Center. <https://help.x.com/es/rules-and-policies/enforcement-options>

<sup>61.</sup> Instagram. Community rules and guidelines. <https://help.instagram.com/477434105621119/>. Among the reasons for reporting a post, the following are mentioned: 1. I simply don't like it, 2. It is spam, 3. Nudity or sexual activity, 4. Language or symbols that incite hatred, 5. Violence or dangerous organizations, 6. False information, 7. Bullying or harassment, 8. Scam or fraud, 9. Intellectual property rights infringements, 10. Suicide and self-harm, 11. Sale of illegal or regulated goods, 12. Eating disorders, 13. Drugs, 14. Another reason.

received were often inadequate. Four out of ten journalists said that they received no response to their complaints or that their reports were dismissed for not being considered violations of the platform's rules.

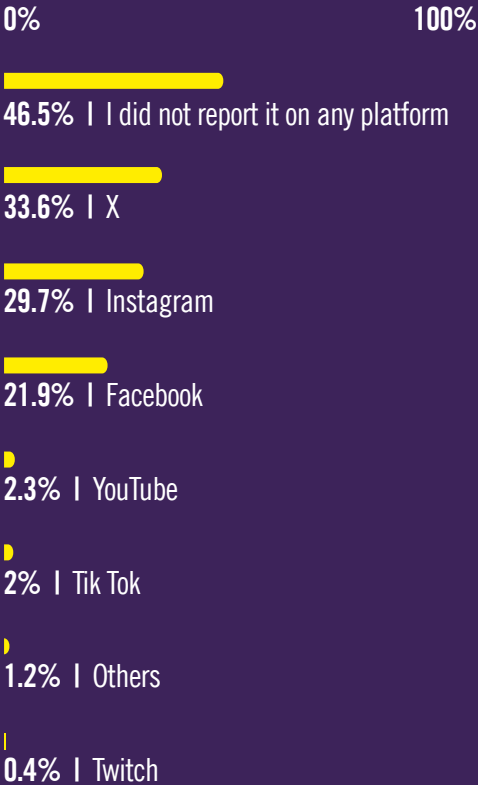
**"I followed the steps to report an instance of violence, but I was told that the post did not violate community rules. I was offered to block the person or not see their comments anymore,"** commented a woman journalist.

**"I reported following the social network guidelines. I did not feel satisfied with the platform's response because, according to their criteria, it was very complicated to determine whether the attack I received was really aggressive against me. I always felt that the whole thing was minimized,"** said a woman journalist.

**"Many times there was no response or the response was that [the attacks] did not violate the rules, despite being explicitly violent comments,"** said another woman journalist.

Although digital platforms have some tools to address violence and abuse against women and gender-diverse individuals, these are insufficient to tackle the scale and complexity of the issue. In the case of X, the continuous proliferation of violence and gender-based abuse occurs without adequate accountability or transparency, as evidenced in our report "Toxic Twitter." This social network does not provide sufficient information on how algorithms are used to address violent posts and lacks transparency about its internal content review processes, how complaints are handled, the number and location of human moderators, the training provided to staff responsible for processing reports, and the timelines for their reviews. In addition, the measures implemented by the platforms often shift the responsibility for mitigating the effects of aggression and threats onto users, relying on online self-care measures. These

### Report of online attacks by platform



**Source:** Developed in-house. The sum of the categories exceeds 100%, given that the respondents could select more than one option.



**Maria Cristina Capelo** 

Safety Policy Manager at Meta in Latin America

“Journalists, women, and LGBTIQ+ communities are among the most harassed groups on social media, particularly in Latin America. There is a range of actions that can be taken, from reporting to using protection tools, such as blocking someone, activating hidden word filters or sensitive word filters, or moderating all comments at once on platforms like Instagram or Facebook. On the other hand, the platforms feature automated detection technology, which allows them to identify hate speech before it is uploaded to the web. In addition, we work with “trusted partners”, civil society organizations with which we directly collaborate to make these mechanisms more sophisticated.”

strategies mainly include increasing security and privacy levels in the settings of profiles or blocking/ muting the profiles of the attackers when, in reality, it should be the companies that take a proactive and effective role in protecting their users. Another problem that arises is the automation of responses to complaints or reports, which fail to meet the victims' needs.

A woman journalist retells her experience in this regard: **“I reported a case using the tools provided by each network. In general, the response used to be positive and relatively quick, until Twitter was sold to Elon Musk. Now they do not respond.”**

In contrast, the experience on YouTube seems to be more favorable for the interviewed users. A testimony highlighted: **“I reported the comments and the users who made them through reports to the platforms. On some occasions, like with**

**YouTube, I received positive responses, as they removed the comments and proceeded to take action against the accounts that made them.”**

Although in 2020 and 2021 Twitter was open to introducing some modifications suggested by Amnesty International to combat gender-based online violence<sup>62</sup>, since the sale and the rebranding of the company in 2022, the situation has worsened. In fact, unlike Meta, which agreed to grant us an interview for the preparation of this report, social network X did not even respond to our meeting requests, something that highlights their unwillingness to responsibly address this issue.

According to Capelo, detection and filter activation policies are widely implemented for all users but were designed with a gender perspective, recognizing that women and members of the LGBTIQ+ community are disproportionately targeted

<sup>62</sup>. Idem, pp. 12 to 17.

what responsibilities |

what responsibilities do the platforms have

what responsibilities do digital platforms have

by attacks: “Some attacks are very extreme; others, unfortunately, are just an everyday thing.” In the latter, the responsibility to mitigate the effects of aggression and threats falls on individual users.

Digital platforms have specific responsibilities regarding human rights and are obligated to respect them, regardless of where they are located, in accordance with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. They are also duty bound to prevent or mitigate adverse impacts, not only when caused by their own actions or omissions but also when they have contributed to causing them or are directly related to their operations, products, or the services provided by their business partners or affiliates. Regarding gender-based violence in digital environments, platforms are required to continuously and proactively assess how their policies and practices affect the human rights of women and gender-diverse groups. In addition, they must provide effective solutions for specific cases of abuse, ensuring a reporting procedure that enables users to easily report situations involving violence and abuse.

**Content moderation** gradually became one of the central topics of **internet governance**. Large social media platforms are increasingly turning to automated systems to manage abusive behavior. This can result in the removal of expressions protected by the right to freedom of expression or in the failure to

remove content not covered by freedom of expression according to international standards. This occurs because automated systems are unable to recognize nuances and contextual elements in which such expressions are embedded.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, effective **moderation** requires a sufficient number of human moderators who are fluent in the language of the reported content, properly trained to identify violent or abusive behavior based on gender and gender identity, and equipped to understand the context in which the reported content was created. This ensures an accurate evaluation of its abusive nature.

**Transparency** is another key component of digital platforms' responsibilities regarding human rights. According to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the responsibility to respect human rights requires having policies and processes in place to ensure that businesses both know and demonstrate that they are, in practice, respecting human rights<sup>64</sup>. Therefore, platforms must implement mechanisms that provide sufficient transparency about their internal review processes, how they handle complaints, the timelines established for reviewing reports, the type and extent of human rights training provided to their staff, and other relevant aspects.<sup>65</sup>

Amnesty International emphasizes the need for companies that own digital platforms to take an active role and responsibility in protecting human

63. IACHR, Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Digital Inclusion and Internet Content Governance, 2024, para. 47. Available at: [https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/informes/Inclusion\\_digital\\_esp.pdf](https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/informes/Inclusion_digital_esp.pdf)

64. UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, HR/PUB/11/04, 2011. Available at [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR\\_SP.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/GuidingPrinciplesBusinessHR_SP.pdf)

65. Amnesty International, #ToxicTwitter violence and abuse against women online, 2018, Available at: [https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/05/TOXICTWITTER-report\\_SP.pdf](https://amnistia.org.ar/wp-content/uploads/delightful-downloads/2018/05/TOXICTWITTER-report_SP.pdf)

rights, especially those related to women and gender-diverse individuals, while also protecting and ensuring freedom of expression.

## 6.2. CHALLENGES AND OBLIGATIONS OF THE MEDIA IN PROTECTING WOMEN JOURNALISTS AGAINST VIOLENCE IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS

Media outlets play a crucial role in public debate and therefore bear the social responsibility of amplifying all voices in society and promoting gender equality.

They are also obligated to protect women journalists, ensuring they can perform their work under fair conditions and without fear of violence or reprisals for their reporting. So much so that various human rights organizations, including the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), have repeatedly emphasized that media outlets play a fundamental role in protecting women journalists and other media workers, not only those directly employed by the outlet but also freelancers.<sup>66</sup>

The gender-based violence women journalists face in digital environments while carrying out their profession limits their ability to perform and impacts their right to freedom of expression. Consequently, media outlets have a duty to adopt and implement all necessary measures to ensure the safety of women journalists from gender-based risks encountered while exercising their profession.<sup>67</sup> This includes adopting proactive measures to create and maintain a safe and enabling environment where women journalists can carry out their work under conditions

of equality and without discrimination; integrating a gender perspective into policies and measures aimed at ensuring their safety; establishing clear policies and protocols for preventing and responding to cases of violence; providing access to psychological and legal support; and promoting awareness and training for staff on gender issues and human rights.

Data collected by Amnesty International reveals that most women journalists choose not to report the online attacks they have experienced to their employers. This is primarily because they generally do not feel supported by media outlets or institutions, nor do they believe that this approach will enhance their safety. This is further exacerbated by the fact that, in some cases, there is no solid contractual relationship linking them to media outlets. This occurs within a context of labor precariousness, marked by multiple jobs and informal employment. **Indeed, only two out of every ten journalists (21.5%) reported incidents of violence or abuse to the media outlet they work for.**

There is a strong perception among women journalists that media outlets lack sufficient tools to address and support them in situations of violence.

**“There is no protocol whatsoever. If you leave, it's better for them,”** affirms a woman journalist when asked about the role of media outlets in providing support addressing these occurrences.

There is concern about the normalization of the aggression that women journalists face on digital platforms. Media outlets often frame this issue as an inherent reaction to the professional work journalists carry out. In that sense, complaints

66. IACHR, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Women Journalists and Freedom of Expression, October 2018, OAS/SER.LV/II. Paragraph 133. Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/docs/informes/MujeresPeriodistas.pdf>

67. Idem. Paragraph 135

and corporate support tend to be sporadic and inconsistent. Meanwhile, violence is normalized as a day-to-day, commonplace phenomenon.

This perspective has been thoughtfully considered by executives and editors from various media outlets interviewed by Amnesty International.

One of them emphasizes that provoking responses is part of journalistic work, and gives as an example situations in which it was he who received attacks on social media:

**“This is what we do, to generate reactions: it is part of our job.”**

Another executive mentions the case of a writer whose work was influenced by the potential repercussions of her articles on social media:

**“I was worried about someone not being able to work freely, about them not being able to overcome it and find a way to deal with the situation. Unfortunately, we are always subjected to the judgment of social networks. We know how it is: it can be very, very harsh, depending on who is writing”.**

Women journalists often choose not to report for various reasons and may even downplay the violence, believing it is not serious enough. In fact, among the journalists who chose not to report to their employer, seven out of ten stated that they refrained from doing so because they considered the violence they experienced to be “part of the job.”

At the same time, **29% chose not to report because they feared that nothing would be done, and 48.2% were afraid of the consequences that reporting the case could entail.** Such concerns include being labeled as problematic (16.4%), losing their jobs (13%), facing retaliation (11.6%), or their complaint not being kept confidential (7.2%).

### Reasons not to report or denounce cases of online violence

0% 100%

70% | I considered that it was not important enough./ It's part of the job.

29% | I feared that nothing would be done

19.8% | I didn't know where to turn

16.4% | I feared they would label me as problematic

13% | I was afraid of losing my job or job opportunities

11.6% | I was afraid of reprisals

7.2% | I feared that my complaint or report would not remain confidential

4.8% | I feared they wouldn't believe me

**Source:** Developed in-house. This variable was adapted from the proposal by Ferrier (2018). The sum of the categories exceeds 100%, given that the respondents could select more than one option.



In addition, other factors influencing the decision not to report the attacks include precarious working conditions, weak contractual ties to the media outlet, multiple jobs, and a lack of support from the media organization.

**“There are women gender editors who have stopped doing their job because it was not properly compensated. There is also censorship and restrictions on gender content. But nowadays you can't quit or get too angry because you have nowhere else to go to find work,”** said a woman journalist.

This highlights the existence of a deeply hostile working environment for women journalists, where aggression and threats are frequently normalized. The fear of personal and professional repercussions discourages reporting these incidents, a reluctance further intensified by precarious labor conditions. This situation underscores the urgent need for media outlets to implement effective policies to protect women journalists and promote a safe working environment.

### **The rollback of the gender agenda in the media**

Between 2018 and 2020, the Argentine political and media agenda highlighted key demands related to women's rights, the rights of gender-diverse individuals, access to sexual and reproductive health rights, and the fight against gender-based violence. These issues gained particular momentum through campaigns like #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, and the debates surrounding the passage of the Abortion Bill in 2018.

The relevance of gender content in media corporations was such that the main national media outlets began to make changes to their organizational structures and hired females specialized columnists, and in early 2019, the figure of “gender editor” was created in some media outlets. This contributed to raising awareness in newsrooms about the importance of addressing different topics from a gender perspective. Subsequently, to address the challenges faced by women journalists serving as gender editors, the Network of Gender Editors was established in 2021

68. The Network of Gender Editors was initially made up by: Marina Abiuso (TN/ Artear), Carmen Amador (El Tribuno de Jujuy), Ingrid Beck (Letra P); Mariana Iglesias (Clarín); Laura Loncopán Berti (Diario Río Negro); Julia López (Media system of the Universidad Nacional de Cuyo); Silvina Molina (Télam); Gabriela Pellegrini (Chaco TV and Radio Provincia); Clarise Sánchez Soloaga (República de Corrientes), and Gabriela Weller (Multimedia Radio and Television of the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba). UNFPA Argentina, with the support of UNFPA, creates the first network of gender editors, November 24, 2021. <https://goo.su/jkiQFE>



with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The Network brings together women journalists whose role is key to promoting news coverage that does not perpetuate gender-based violence and respects the rights of women and gender-diverse individuals.<sup>68</sup>

However, the political, social, and media landscape shifted again since then. We are currently navigating a global context marked by a significant backlash from sectors opposing the recognition of women's and LGBTI+ human rights. Across the globe, sexual and reproductive rights, along with progress in gender equality, are under threat from restrictive laws and policies, as well as public rhetoric aimed at promoting regressive gender narratives in the media.

Amnesty International documented how the backlash against women's rights and gender equality has intensified in various parts of the world, threatening many of the advances achieved over the past 20 years.<sup>69</sup> This trend became particularly evident in Argentina, where sectors advancing narratives that demonize women's rights and those of gender-diverse individuals—framing them as distractions from real issues like rising poverty or economic and social crises—have gained prominence and influenced how the media covers these topics. According to a female journalist covering cultural issues, anti-feminist content has successfully dominated public discourse—on the streets, in traditional media outlets, and across social networks. This has allowed the groups promoting these narratives to:

**“Make talking about gender issues, women's rights, and the rights of diverse gender identities seem like a meme nowadays. They got what they wanted.”**

**“They managed to make talking about gender issues and rights for women and other gender identities sound like a meme today. They got what they wanted.”**

Women journalists reported that this context has impacted newsrooms, leading many media outlets to deprioritize gender issues in their news agenda and leaving specialized women journalists and editors without the necessary support to cover these topics effectively.

**“At first, I felt fully supported, but over time that changed, as if they were no longer interested in gender perspectives. This approach often seems to be disregarded when it comes to handling news pieces. I also feel that the interest in maintaining the gender agenda has waned; everything I write now comes from personal interest, and at times, I've even been questioned about my content,”** says a woman journalist serving as a gender editor.

The interviewees with executive or editorial responsibilities agree that there is less content on gender nowadays, although they do not necessarily connect this trend to the increase in online violence that this issue could generate:

**“For a few years the gender issue was a top priority, which in some ways was quite natural. It's the first thing that happens after years of a topic being neglected. It's like the wave of democratic spring. And maybe this rollback is partly due to a sense of fatigue among the**

<sup>69</sup> Amnesty International, The situation of human rights in the world, 2024. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol10/7200/2024/en/#:~:text=10%2F7200%2F2024-,The%20situation%20of%20human%20rights%20in%20the%20world%3A%20April,its%20implications%20for%20the%20future>

**Of the 13 gender editors who once held prominent positions in the media, fewer than half remain in those roles today.**

**audience. Also, at some point gender content starts to trickle into other content. That is to say, the gender perspective can be more widely dispersed throughout journalistic content.”**

While some pointed out that audiences have lost interest in gender-related topics, others challenged this notion: **“From our inception, we were strongly committed to the gender agenda, and our audience values that and follows it. For us it's non-negotiable, and we do not follow trends,”** an executive from a national media outlet pointed out.

Despite this, of the 13 gender editors who held prominent positions in national and regional media between 2019 and 2023<sup>70</sup>, fewer than half remain today.<sup>71</sup> This highlights the rollback of the gender agenda in the media.

For some, the problem lies in the fact that, despite the advance that the incorporation of gender editors entailed, media outlets failed to implement policies that ensured equitable representation of women in decision-making positions. At the same time, they did

not take the necessary measures for the creation and maintenance of a safe and conducive environment, so that women journalists could carry out their work under conditions of equality and without discrimination. They also failed to integrate the gender perspective into their policies, and to deconstruct deeply rooted stereotypes. In fact, women continue to be overrepresented in the coverage of topics that are traditionally associated with “the feminine world”, while they are underrepresented in areas such as politics, government, economics, and in mainstream news sections.<sup>72</sup>

**“Gender issues became the new cooking section: they kept giving us spaces to talk about women, but the sections were still run by men.”**

The growing hostility toward the gender agenda has fostered an adverse environment for women journalists specializing in this field. They have not only witnessed a rollback of gender-related content in the media but have also become targets of virulent social media attacks designed to silence them and undermine their work. According to the women journalists interviewed, the attacks are associated with the rise of anti-feminist movements that have gained ground in recent years in the public and media scene.

**“Slogans such as ‘gender ideology’ or ‘don't mess with my children’ have erupted onto the public scene with shocking ferocity. However, they have existed for a long time without being legitimized,”** said a journalist specializing in gender issues, noting that, in recent times, the boundaries of what can be said in the media have shifted.

70. Laura Rosenberg. Towards communication with a human rights perspective: the configuration of the role of gender editors in media outlets in Argentina (2019 – 2023), National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET), Argentina: Intersections in Communication, Universidad Nacional del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, Argentina, vol. 2, Issue no. 17, 2023. Available at: <http://portal.amelica.org/amei/journal/216/2164409009/>

71. At the time when this report was published, only 5 gender editors remained in their roles.

72. IACHR, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Women Journalists and Freedom of Expression, October 2018. OAS/SER.L/V/II. Paragraph 19. Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/docs/informes/MujeresPeriodistas.pdf>

### 6.3. THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN SUPPORTING WOMEN JOURNALISTS WHO ARE VICTIMS OF ONLINE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

According to the women journalists surveyed, those who decide to report gender-based violence in digital environments turn to unions (6.6%), non-governmental organizations linked to human rights advocacy (5.9%), or non-union professional organizations (3.9%).

For those who turn to them, institutions play an important role in supporting victims and articulating collective responses to gender-based violence in digital environments.

Micaela Polak, head of the Women's and Gender Secretariat at the Buenos Aires Press Union (SiPreBA), explained that online violence against women journalists has risen significantly in recent years. She noted that adopting a collective approach has provided better tools and support for those affected.

**“It's reassuring to know that you have the support of an organization and access to a team of lawyers. It also makes a difference when you're aware that you're part of an organized group capable of providing a collective response. They may be threatening one of us, but in reality, we are many, and they won't be able to take on the organization.”**

The intervention of these institutions in cases of extreme violence was very relevant for some women journalists who did not feel supported by the media outlet in which they worked. In this respect, a woman journalist says:

**“Yes, in general, I had more support from journalistic organizations [SiPreBA, ADEPA, FOPEA, and the National Academy of Journalism] than from the companies I worked for. It's not always the case. It depends on the relationship they have with the Government. But if you feel supported by the institutions, then you think: ‘well, since I am supported, I can move forward’.”**

In turn, the Forum for Argentine Journalism (FOPEA) has developed tools to help journalists facing violence and assist them throughout the reporting process. Since 2008, FOPEA has been conducting a Federal Monitoring of Freedom of Expression to document and share information about attacks on journalists.<sup>73</sup> To achieve this, it has journalists stationed in various provinces who serve as “monitoring agents” and receive reports from colleagues who have been targeted. In addition, it has a website dedicated to these cases.

Paula Moreno Román, President of FOPEA, explained: **“Once the case is reported, it is assigned to a monitoring agent who drafts a report. The report is submitted to a monitoring committee, the case is evaluated, the mode of intervention is determined, and we move forward. We get in contact with the victim, and we always try to talk to the attacker; sometimes we can, but sometimes we cannot. Then, we tell the victim what we can do or what the alternative courses of action are. Many times they tell us: ‘I think it's important for you to have a record of the case, but I don't want to be exposed.’ This happens many times.”**

For Moreno, the first step to articulate a defense for women journalists against attacks is to make the case visible: **“Reporting the case and making the complaint visible are the main tools. And then, analyzing it, but not as an isolated case.”**

<sup>73</sup> The pattern of cases monitored includes ten categories: attacks on life, attacks on physical integrity, attacks on property, stigmatizing speech, censorship, internal censorship in media, abusive use of government advertising, restrictions on access to public information, other abuses of state power, and civil or criminal legal actions.

When asked about how she analyzes this phenomenon, Moreno Román identified a greater incidence of attacks against women journalists, particularly starting in 2024 through “stigmatizing discourse.” Along the same lines, Joaquín Morales Solá, the President of the National Academy of Journalism, also considered that there has been an increase in this phenomenon recently, although mostly linked to political views as a trigger for the attacks:

**“In my view, the fanaticism on social networks, both during Cristina Fernández’s era and Javier Milei’s, is more evident from an ideological perspective and the ‘friend-enemy’ logic, rather than from a gender-based standpoint.” It is also true that today in Argentine journalism, and especially in political journalism, women play a significant role (...) The presence of women in journalism today is very strong and that can give the impression that sometimes there are more attacks on social media directed at women.”**

However, he noted that the current president publicly attacked three women journalists within a span of no more than ten days, prompting the National Academy of Journalism to issue a public statement.<sup>74</sup>

Observations suggest that institutional responses to instances of violence have played a crucial role in mitigating the impact of ICT-facilitated gender-based violence on the work of women journalists.

The support of media outlets and communication institutions is crucial, along with the backing of professional associations, civil society, and human rights organizations.<sup>75</sup> Equally essential are clear public policies and regulations to protect and advocate for victims of online violence, as well as measures to ensure access to justice in cases of gender-based violence.

## 6.4. STATES' RESPONSIBILITY IN ADDRESSING ONLINE VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

States are the main guarantors of human rights and have the responsibility to respect, protect, and ensure the fulfillment of these rights for everyone. This responsibility is not limited to violence perpetrated solely by state agents or officials. It also includes the obligation to prevent, investigate, and punish human rights violations committed by third parties, including private companies.

The obligations of States to protect human rights in gender-based violence experienced by women journalists in digital environments are complemented and reinforced by duties derived from the Belém do Pará Convention, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and other regulations that guarantee a life free of violence for women and girls.<sup>76</sup>

These regulations require the establishment of a due diligence framework to prevent, protect, investigate, punish, and provide redress for

74. The National Journalism Agency rejects the persistent social media campaign against María O'Donnell. <https://academiaperiodismo.org.ar/la-anp-rechaza-la-insistente-campana-de-persecucion-en-redes-sociales-a-maria-odonnell/>

75. UNICEF; UNFPA, UNDP; UN Women; Network of Gender Editors, Violence and digital harassment. Action tools for journalists, 2024, Page 7. Available at: [https://argentina.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/violencia\\_y\\_acoso\\_digital-v4\\_0.pdf](https://argentina.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/violencia_y_acoso_digital-v4_0.pdf)

76. IACHR, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression. Women journalists and freedom of expression. October 2018. Paragraph 75. Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/docs/informes/MujeresPeriodistas.pdf>. Indeed, States have the obligation to respect and guarantee the free and full exercise of women's right to live a life free from violence and discrimination, both online and offline, in accordance with Articles 1.1 and 2 of the American Convention on Human Rights, Articles 7 and 8 of the Belém do Pará Convention, Article 2(e) of the CEDAW, and Article 4.3 of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.

victims of gender-based violence, whether the perpetrators are state agents, non-state actors, or private companies.<sup>77</sup> Consequently, a lack of due diligence by the State in these cases could constitute discrimination and a violation of the right to equality.<sup>78</sup>

The duty of due diligence on the part of States includes the obligation to:

- › Adopt measures to **inform society and raise awareness** about violence against women, gender-diverse individuals, and girls in digital environments.<sup>79</sup>
- › **Combat negative and harmful gender stereotypes** that contribute to violence and abuse against women online.<sup>80</sup>
- › **Furnish an adequate legal framework, to ensure effective protection**, and develop prevention and protection policies that allow for effective action in response to complaints.<sup>81</sup>
- › **Implement efficient mechanisms to ensure access to justice**, which includes providing and disseminating reporting channels, developing protocols to investigate gender-based violence

in digital environments, and identifying the perpetrators of the acts. To this end, it is crucial to provide technological resources and improve the training of judicial officials, along with specialized public services to support women and gender-diverse individuals who have experienced online violence and abuse.

- › Establish **remedial measures** that include the immediate removal of harmful content, as well as redressing mechanisms and guarantees of non-repetition, combining symbolic, material, individual, and collective measures, tailored to the circumstances and the specific claims of the victim.<sup>82</sup>

Likewise, States must harmonize their laws protecting the right to live free from violence, the right to equality and non-discrimination, and the autonomy of women and gender-diverse individuals with the regulations safeguarding freedom of expression. Consequently, it is the responsibility of States and governments to have laws and public policies that protect women and gender-diverse individuals from gender-based violence on digital platforms, while respecting standards established to guarantee freedom of expression<sup>83</sup>, since undue or abusive

77. UN Women, OAS - MESECVI, Cyber-violence and cyberbullying against women and girls in the framework of the Belém Do Pará Convention, 2022, p. 114. Available at: [https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Informe-Ciberviolencia-MESECVI\\_1Abr.pdf](https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Informe-Ciberviolencia-MESECVI_1Abr.pdf)

78. Idem.

79. UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on online violence against women and girls from a human rights perspective. June 2018. A/HRC/38/47. Paragraph 66. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g18/184/61/pdf/g1818461.pdf>

80. Idem. Paragraph 63

81. IACHR, Case González and others ("Campo Algodonero" [Cotton Field]) Vs. Mexico, Sentence date: November 16, 2009, paragraph 258.

82. Idem. Paragraph 70.

83. See International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, articles 2 (right to an effective remedy for violation of rights), 19.1 (right to freedom of opinion), 19.2 (right to freedom of expression), 19.3 (restrictions on freedom of expression), 20.2 (prohibition of hate speech that incites discrimination, hostility, or violence), 26 (right to non-discrimination), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, article 4 (eradicate all incitement and acts of racial discrimination) and the Rabat Action Plan.



restrictions on the content that circulates can end up undermining the rights of the women that governments and society stakeholders seek to protect.<sup>84</sup>

International human rights law allows for the regulation of freedom of expression to ensure that everyone can express themselves on equal terms, especially historically discriminated groups. This

84. UN, Joint statement by experts on violence against women and freedom of expression, Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2017/03/un-experts-urge-states-and-companies-address-online-gender-based-abuse-warn?LangID=E&NewsID=21317>

can be instrumented, for example, by adopting regulations to prevent the concentration of voices and ensure that there is no discrimination in access to communications.

To determine the levels of state interference in circulating speech, the inter-American system –the Rapporteur, the IACHR, and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights– has developed a classification of speech based on the degree of protection required for freedom of expression. It identifies three levels: at the extremes, unprotected speech<sup>85</sup> and specially protected speech, and in between, protected speech.<sup>86</sup>

Hate speech that directly incites violence is not protected under freedom of expression. However, discriminatory statements made in the context of discussions on matters of public interest require special protection and, conversely, restrict the scope of state intervention.<sup>87</sup>

All efforts to limit or prevent abuse and violence in digital environments that entail restrictions

on the right to freedom of expression must be exceptional, established in advance by law, and meet the criteria of necessity and proportionality in line with international law.<sup>88</sup>

The fight against gender-based violence in digital environments is a collective effort that requires governments to adopt measures and the active involvement of civil society, media outlets, journalist associations, unions, businesses, and digital platforms.<sup>89</sup> Only through a joint and sustained effort can a safe digital environment be created for all, enabling women and gender-diverse individuals, in general, and those practicing journalism, in particular, to exercise their right to freedom of expression without fear of violence or discrimination.

In this sense, the implementation of a due diligence framework by the States is essential to ensure that all stakeholders fulfill their responsibilities and contribute to the creation of safe online spaces.

85. Abramovich, Victor, *The democratic limits of hate speech: constitutional principles, regulatory models, and public policies* / Victor Abramovich [et al.]; general coordination by Victor Abramovich; Maria Capurro Robles; Maria Jose Guembe. – 1st ed. – City of Buenos Aires, 2021, p. 38 Within the inter-American system, speech that must be legally prohibited due to its content is considered unprotected discourse and is not covered by the guarantee system under Article 13 of the American Convention. As a result, States have broad powers to intervene in such speech. They can establish subsequent responsibilities, and in certain cases, they can impose mechanisms (...) to restrict the circulation of information...

86. IACHR-OAS, Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, *the Inter-American Legal Framework regarding the Right to Freedom of Expression*, December 2009. Available at: <https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/docs/publicaciones/MARCO%20JURIDICO%20INTERAMERICANO%20DEL%20DERECHO%20A%20LA%20LIBERTAD%20DE%20EXPRESION%20ESP%20FINAL%20portada.doc.pdf>

87. Abramovich, Victor, *The democratic limits of hate speech: constitutional principles, regulatory models, and public policies* / Victor Abramovich [et al.]; general coordination by Victor Abramovich; Maria Capurro Robles; Maria Jose Guembe. – 1st ed. – City of Buenos Aires, 2021, p. 57.

88. UN, *Promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression*, October 2019, A/74/486. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n19/308/16/pdf/n1930816.pdf>

89. UN, *Joint statement by experts on violence against women and freedom of expression*. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2017/03/un-experts-urge-states-and-companies-address-online-gender-based-abuse-warn?LangID=E&NewsID=21317>

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a black microphone. The hand is positioned in the center-right of the frame. The background is dark, with a white, textured sweater visible on the left and top. The bottom of the image features a white, torn paper effect. The text '7. CHALLENGES IN ACCESS TO JUSTICE' is overlaid on the bottom half of the image.

**7. CHALLENGES IN  
ACCESS TO JUSTICE**



States are obliged to implement effective legal procedures to protect women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals who are victims of gender-based violence, including violence in digital environments. This implies not only ensuring protective measures and timely access to justice but also ensuring that these procedures are accessible to all affected individuals.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) emphasized that an adequate judicial response is essential for victims to access effective remedies that prevent perpetrators' impunity and ensure redressing for the damage caused.<sup>90</sup>

However, access to justice in cases of gender-based violence in digital environments faces serious challenges that require urgent attention. The numerous barriers and the inadequate responses from States discourage women from reporting the online violence they experience. A concerning example is that only 7% of the surveyed victims

reported the attacks suffered to the authorities, which highlights the perception that the States do not make the necessary efforts to effectively address digital violence and provide timely and effective solutions to the victims.

Amnesty International has followed strategic litigation cases related to gender-based violence facilitated by the use of ICTs, especially those affecting journalists covering gender issues. Through its intervention in these cases, Amnesty International identified several critical obstacles, stemming from the lack of tools for justice officials to investigate and prosecute gender-based violence in digital environments. In fact, until the organization became involved in the legal strategy, the cases had been archived because, initially, judicial officials treated the abusive and violent messages as isolated incidents, rather than considering the context and the combination of various forms of violence as part of a coordinated attack against women journalists.



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Only 7% of the surveyed victims reported the attacks suffered to the judiciary, which evidences the perception that the State does not make the necessary efforts to effectively address digital violence and provide timely and effective solutions to the victims.

10-15-2024, 10:38 AM

90. IACHR, Access to justice for women victims of violence in the Americas, January 2007, paragraphs 6 and 23. Available at: <https://www.cidh.oas.org/pdf%20files/Informe%20Acceso%20a%20Justicia%20Espanol%20020507.pdf>



## CASE MARINA ABIUSO:

Woman journalist specialized in gender issues, activist, and human rights advocate. She was part of the group organizing the first #NiUnaMenos demonstration in 2015 and served as gender editor for Todo Noticias (TN), a cable TV network.

During 2022 and 2023, she was the victim of a harassment campaign aimed at publicly discrediting her, intimidating her, and silencing her for being a leading spokesperson for gender equality agendas in Argentina. Much of this harassment was carried out through social media, particularly on X, where she received constant rape and death threats. The fear generated by these actions affected her daily life and, even, her professional career, to the point that she was forced to change her work routines at first, and later resign from her position in a TV network.

The attacks on social media were carried out by accounts belonging to "influencers" or anonymous users, whose role was to replicate the abusive content. One of the authors of the smear campaign was Manuel Jorge Gorostiaga, known as "Emmanuel Danann." His posts included insults and false accusations that fueled a wave of online violence against the journalist. In response, various entities, such as the National Academy of Journalism<sup>91</sup> and ADEPA<sup>92</sup> publicly expressed their rejection of the shaming, false accusations, and the harassment suffered by Marina Abiuso.

91. National Academy of Journalism, The National Academy of Journalism rejects harassment on social media, February 2023. <https://academiaperiodismo.org.ar/la-academia-nacional-de-periodismo-rechaza-los-escraches-en-redes/>

92. ADEPA condemns the online harassment against journalist Marina Abiuso, February 2023. <https://adepa.org.ar/adepa-repudia-hostigamiento-linea-periodista-marina-abiuso/>

The threats also put her physical safety -and that of her family- at risk, which led to her being assigned a panic button and police surveillance at her family's home. However, despite reports of more than 20 serious incidents, the prosecution initially decided to archive the complaint citing the difficulty of obtaining evidence from companies like Google, Twitter, and META, which are not headquartered in Argentina. They argued that the delay in receiving responses to requests for information about the accounts involved would surpass the statute of limitations for the offenses under investigation. This decision was appealed by the journalist, arguing that the difficulty in obtaining information from these companies does not justify abandoning the investigation by the prosecution. At the same time, it was pointed out that the reported facts were not isolated incidents, but rather a sustained behavior that had a lasting impact on the journalist's mental health, constituting a clear case of psychological abuse.

In this regard, the Chamber Prosecutor ruled that the investigation should continue due to the criminal significance and contraventional nature of the reported incidents. Finally, Pablo Casas, the judge in the First Instance Court in the Criminal and Minor Offenses Jurisdiction No. 10 of the City of Buenos Aires, ruled that the reported facts took place in a context of psychological and symbolic gender-based violence in a digital environment. Danann was prosecuted and was given a suspended sentence with the obligation to perform community service and attend a training workshop against gender-based violence. Furthermore, he was ordered to refrain from mentioning Marina by any means, and delete existing posts that referred to her, setting a precedent in the fight against harassment and gender-based violence on social media.

Also other four individuals identified as aggressors in this case are performing community service.

The case of Marina Abiuso is a testament to how gender-based violence in digital environments is used as a tool to silence women journalists who cover the women's and gender-diverse individual rights agenda.

# CASE LUCIANA PEKER.

She is a journalist and human rights advocate, with more than 20 years of experience in gender journalism.



Luciana Peker played a central role in the investigation of Thelma Fardin's public denunciation of a case of sexual violence against Juan Darthés, and contributed to the filing of the legal complaint in Nicaragua.

As a result, coordinated harassment and intimidation campaigns on digital platforms aimed at silencing her, as well as the demands of the feminist movement. This makes sense considering that the public complaint filed by the actress marked a turning point in the fight against gender violence. The night Thelma Fardin made her complaint public, calls to the hotline opened to receive reports of child sexual abuse increased by 1,200%<sup>93</sup>; additionally, calls to the 144 line grew by 123%.<sup>94</sup>

The systematic harassment and threats made through digital platforms triggered by this event were not isolated incidents. On the contrary, they were part of an organized plan that was deployed simultaneously against the actress and the journalist specialized in

93. Ministry of Justice, Calls to the child sexual abuse hotline increased by 1240%, December 2018. <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/noticias/aumentaron-un-1240-las-llamadas-la-linea-contra-el-abuso-sexual-infantil>

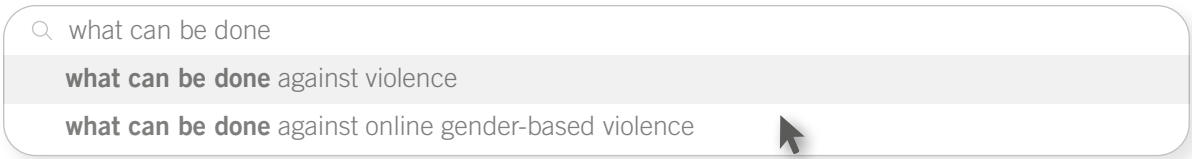
94. Ministry of Women, Gender and Diversity. If we tally the calls received by day of the week, we notice that the largest peak was recorded on Wednesday 12/12 (123%), a date after the press conference organized by the Argentine Actresses Collective. <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/sites/default/files/linea144aumentollamadas.pdf>

gender issues, every time judicial steps or decisions were about to be taken in the case.

The messages received by Luciana and by Thelma indicate that it was a person or group of people who had access to precise information about the case that was being prosecuted under judicial secrecy (confidentiality) in Brazil. These facts were aggravated by identity theft maneuvers through which more than 10 telephone lines were fraudulently registered in Thelma Fardin's name. Intimidation messages were sent to Luciana Peker from one of these lines. In addition, the telephone companies reported that they had no record of calls made from these lines, they were only being used for messaging purposes.

In July 2023, Judge Maria Laura Martinez Vega, in charge of the First Instance Court in the Criminal and Minor Offenses Jurisdiction No. 9, stated that, based on the evidence produced in the context of the case, it was possible to hypothesize that the harassment against Luciana Peker was not a series of isolated incidents, but rather a joint action, with a common objective, orchestrated by the same person and/or group of people. However, the intervening Prosecutor's Office has not yet been able to produce the necessary evidence to identify and punish those responsible for organized harassment, which highlights the limitations of justice officials when it comes to investigating gender-based violence cases in digital environments.

Currently, the lawsuit for threats against the person who intimidated the journalist via an anonymous Instagram account—regarding her coverage of femicides—is ongoing.



The cases presented reveal the difficulties and barriers that victims of gender-based violence in digital environments face when seeking justice, especially when obtaining the evidence depends on the digital platforms. Also, there is a noteworthy lack of tools and training for judicial officials to understand the nature, scope, and impact of online gender-based violence, which limits the effectiveness of judicial remedies. In this sense, it is necessary to:

- › **Strengthen training on gender-based violence** and enhance the understanding of these occurrences in digital environments, as part of the online/ offline continuum of gender-based violence.
- › **Eradicate gender biases and stereotypes** that persist in the investigation and assessment of evidence, which ultimately hinder access to justice.
- › **Analyze the attacks in the context in which they occur.** Some may seem trivial when viewed in isolation. However, if they occur on a large scale, over an extended period of time, as part of a coordinated attack against a person, combining various forms of gender-based

violence facilitated by ICTs, they can have severe consequences for the victim. That is why it is necessary for justice officials to understand the special characteristics of this form of violence, analyze the context and circumstances in which they take place, the medium, the attacker's reach, the possibility of anonymity, the speed at which the content can go viral, and the impossibility of erasing the digital footprint. Otherwise, the understanding of its severity and impact is weakened.

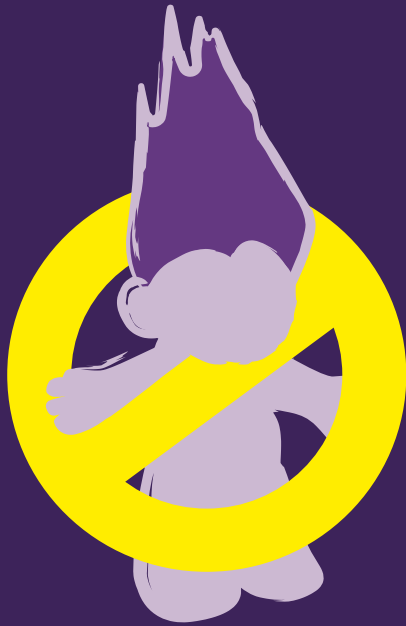
- › **Build technical capabilities for judicial officials** to be able to identify, collect, preserve, and process digital evidence.
- › **Provide the Judiciary with technological resources and appropriate systems** for the production and preservation of evidence in the context of judicial investigations related to online gender-based violence.
- › **Listen to the voice of the victim:** In many cases, the expectations and needs of those experiencing violence are not properly considered, hindering the adoption of remedies that effectively address the harm caused.



**amnistiaar** 🌟🙄 What tools does the justice system have to understand the nature, extent, and impact of online gender violence?

💬 What can the Judiciary do? Where can you go if you have been a victim of online violence?

[#accesoalajusticia](#) [access to justice] [#violenciadegeneroonline](#) [online gender-based violence]



## TIPS ON WHAT TO DO IN THE EVENT OF AN ATTACK ON DIGITAL PLATFORMS:

Digital platforms have mechanisms designed to report attacks and strengthen the security and safety of users. These tools allow users to limit the visibility of posts or violent comments, restrict their reach, block the aggressor's account, or even remove content in serious cases, when it violates community rules.

However, these measures are not effective if the goal is to identify the aggressor and to adopt legal measures to curb and sanction violence on digital platforms. Therefore, follow these recommendations:

### 1 DO NOT DELETE MESSAGES OR BLOCK ACCOUNTS

From the perpetrator, so as to avoid hindering identification and to preserve the evidence.<sup>95</sup> It is recommended to silence the attacker, but not to report the account on the platform until the digital evidence has been collected and preserved, because closing the account may lead to the loss of the necessary evidence needed for the investigation.

### 2 COLLECT EVIDENCE OF THE ATTACK

First, document the date when the event occurred, the username of the account, the platform where it happened, and the interaction sequence through screenshots of the messages. It is important **to identify users properly**. Depending on the platform, it will be by means of the URL (on Facebook), URL/username (on Instagram or X).

If the interaction was via chat, the conversation history can be exported and/or downloaded in a digital format (X<sup>96</sup>, Instagram<sup>97</sup>, Facebook<sup>98</sup> and WhatsApp<sup>99</sup> have instructions on how to do it). When the interaction is via email, it is important to download the original email.

95. Ministry of Justice, Council to file complaints, updated information as of June 2024. Available at: <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/justicia/convosenlaweb/denuncia/consejos>

96. X, How to download your X file. Available at: <https://help.x.com/es/managing-your-account/how-to-download-your-x-archive>

97. <https://www.facebook.com/help/instagram/181231772500920>

98. <https://www.facebook.com/help/messenger-app/713635396288741>

99. WhatsApp, How to export your chat history. Available at: [https://faq.whatsapp.com/1180414079177245?cms\\_platform=android](https://faq.whatsapp.com/1180414079177245?cms_platform=android)



### 3 PRESERVE THE EVIDENCE PROPERLY

You need to go to a prosecutor's office.

A screenshot will not be enough to advance the process. What is needed is an expert examination through the extraction of the information. The device where such information is located (phone or computer) may be requested; therefore, it is important to keep the evidence on the device.

### 4 WHERE TO REPORT

The complaint can be filed at a prosecutor's office or at a police station. Among the agencies specialized in these cases, we can name the following:

- Fiscal Unit Specialized on Cybercrime (UFECI),<sup>100</sup>
- Fiscal Unit Specialized on Violence against Women (UFEM),<sup>101</sup>
- Public Prosecutor's Office of the City of Buenos Aires. Fiscal Unit Specialized on Computer Crimes and Offenses (UFEDyCI)<sup>102</sup> and Prosecutor's Offices in the criminal justice system specialized in gender issues,<sup>103</sup>
- Office for Domestic Violence (ODV) of the National Supreme Court of Justice.<sup>104</sup>

A complaint for online gender-based violence can also be filed with the Ombudsman of the City of Buenos Aires.<sup>105</sup>

### 5 LEGAL ACTION:

In the context of the legal prosecution, the victim has the right to be a plaintiff in the case. Large media corporations have legal teams; it is important that they get involved in supporting these complaints to prevent the cases from being shelved and to support women journalists in the exercise of their profession.

In the case of media outlets with a smaller structure, community or self-managed outlets, they can turn to specialized organizations that offer legal support and monitoring to ensure that the case advances as it should.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>100.</sup> <https://www.mpf.gob.ar/ufeci/>

<sup>101.</sup> <https://www.mpf.gob.ar/ufem/>

<sup>102.</sup> <https://mpfciudad.gob.ar/institucional/fiscalias>

<sup>103.</sup> <https://mpfciudad.gob.ar/institucional/fiscalias>

<sup>104.</sup> <https://www.ovd.gov.ar/ovd/>

<sup>105.</sup> <https://defensoria.org.ar/derechos/democracia-y-digitalidad/derechos-digitales-y-proteccion-de-datos-personales/que-puedo-reclamar/> [Digital rights/ protection of personal data/ where can I file a complaint?]

<sup>106.</sup> UNICEF; UNFPA, UNDP; UN Women; Network of Gender Editors, Harassment and Digital Violence, Tools for Action for Journalists, March 2024. Available at: <https://argentina.unfpa.org/es/publications/violencia-y-acoso-digital-herramientas-de-acci%C3%B3n-para-periodistas>

ACTUAL MAIL



8.

FINAL  
THOUGHTS

Female journalists and communicators play a crucial role in addressing everyday realities, while gender-focused journalists contribute to integrating key women's and gender-diverse rights demands into the public and media agenda.

Digital platforms have been an invaluable channel to amplify the voices of journalists and human rights advocates. Movements like #MeToo, #NiUnaMenos, and La Marea Verde -in the context of the fight for legal abortion-, among many others, took advantage of the potential of social media to amplify their voices and reach audiences in every corner of the region and the world.

However, their vast capacity for content dissemination is currently being used to misinform, spread fake news, stigmatize, and silence journalists, public figures, and human rights advocates, often shielded by the anonymity offered by social networks. In recent years, these spaces have become breeding grounds for hate speech, harassment, and gender-based violence, as digital platforms and States fail to adopt the necessary measures to prevent, address, and penalize this issue.

This form of gender-based violence against women journalists is framed within a context in which demonization narratives have gained ground in the public and media sphere, seeking to blame women and gender diverse groups for economic, social, or criminality problems. This phenomenon has penetrated deep in society and has generated an adverse environment that hinders public discussion about women's and gender-diverse individuals' rights, exposing women journalists who cover these agendas to higher levels of violence.

Most of the women journalists interviewed and surveyed for this report have been victims of various forms of online aggression over the past six years, particularly when publicly addressing issues such as abortion, gender-based violence, human rights, and politics. As a result, they

have experienced extremely negative impacts on various aspects of their lives and their freedom of expression. This has led to changes in their habits, self-censorship, or even to abandoning digital platforms. Some had to resign from their jobs in the media as a result of the constant attacks suffered in digital environments.

The investigation conducted by Amnesty International highlights the serious situation facing women journalists, who are under attack on two fronts: the violence directed at them seeks to discipline and silence them, simply for being women with a public voice in the media. In the case of women journalists specializing in gender, it targets them for daring to make the existing social structures of gender-based domination and discrimination visible.

This regressive context, combined with the various crises affecting the journalism industry, constitutes the backdrop against which many media outlets are pushing gender-related topics away from their editorial agenda, and the reason why women journalists and editors with a gender focus lack the institutional support needed to carry out their work.

In addition, there is a spike in attacks against women journalists by government authorities. This has greater impacts due to the power asymmetry, which leads to intimidating and silencing effects. This phenomenon has occurred during administrations headed by different political parties, but women journalists identify a marked increase since the inauguration of President Javier Milei.

The survey conducted by Amnesty International confirms that gender-based violence against women journalists on digital platforms is not an isolated or episodic occurrence, but a daily reality in their lives. Understanding gender-based violence in digital environments as part of an ongoing process of discrimination and abuse—both online and offline—against women and

gender-diverse groups enhances the framework for access to justice.

In order to be able to confront the various forms of gender-based violence experienced on social media, the women journalists interviewed and surveyed for this report have adopted different **online self-protection strategies**. These strategies mainly include increasing the levels of security and privacy in the configuration of their profiles on social media. Women journalists have also chosen to moderate their interventions, spacing out their participation, and refraining from responding or debating in the face of the attacks suffered. In the most extreme cases, some stopped participating in certain social networks entirely or even eliminated their profiles and accounts.

All the women journalists interviewed by Amnesty International emphasized that digital violence significantly impacts various aspects of their daily lives. A considerable number also highlighted the negative effects on their physical and mental health, as well as the need to make changes to their work routine and how they manage social media—now essential tools for practicing journalism. Others highlighted that they self-censor for fear of experiencing violence, which reduces the diversity of voices in the public space, thus weakening the fundamental role of journalism in our democratic societies.

For women journalists, especially those who promote gender agendas, this marginalization on digital platforms results in their voices not being heard when it comes to the coverage of agendas that have a significant impact on improving the lives of women and girls.

Ensuring the full enforcement of human rights is a primary responsibility of the **State**, which includes the duty to ensure that women and gender-diverse groups have a life free from violence, as well as to protect and promote the exercise of freedom of

**In order to confront the various forms of gender violence experienced on social media, women journalists have adopted different online self-protection strategies.**

expression under conditions of equality and non-discrimination. States have specific obligations related to the prevention, eradication, and sanctioning of gender-based violence, as well as ensuring access to justice.

In turn, digital platforms and media outlets also have obligations and responsibilities regarding human rights and the violence inflicted on women and gender-diverse individuals in digital environments.

**The companies behind social media platforms**, such as X, Meta, Youtube, Tik Tok, must continuously and proactively assess how their policies and practices affect the rights to freedom of expression and opinion of their users, as well as the rights to equality and non-discrimination of women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals and other groups in vulnerable situations. At the same time, they must take measures to mitigate or prevent any possible negative impact on the exercise of rights. It is also crucial for them to be transparent about their policies and practices to identify and address human rights abuse.

Regarding **the media**, news outlets play a fundamental role in supporting women journalists who are victims of gender-based violence. Their support is crucial to allow women journalists to carry out their work without fear of reprisals. However, the investigation conducted by Amnesty



International highlights that media outlets do not always provide the necessary support to women journalists. This takes place within a context of deep precariousness in the job market. Many women journalists refrain from reporting because of their weak contractual ties with their media companies, because they are forced to hold multiple jobs, or due to the lack of support from the media outlet they work for. In this situation, the role of other institutions such as unions or non-union organizations becomes more relevant when it comes to supporting women journalists who are victims of violence .

In conclusion, the prevention and protection of women journalists' right to freedom of expression under conditions of equality and non-discrimination, as well as their right to live free from violence, require States to fulfill their obligations

to prevent, sanction, and eradicate gender-based violence. Additionally, joint and sustained efforts from companies that own digital platforms and media outlets are essential. At the same time, the effective participation of institutions that represent women journalists, as well as media companies, unions, human rights organizations, and the civil society, must be ensured. Only in this way can a safe digital environment be created for everyone, so that women and gender-diverse groups, in general, and those who practice journalism, in particular, can exercise their right to freedom of expression without fear of suffering violence or discrimination.

Amnesty International considers this phenomenon a priority issue, prompting the following recommendations for action by States, digital platform companies, and media outlets.



# 9. RECOMMENDATIONS

## AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES STATES AND GOVERNMENTS TO:

### Ensure that digital platforms respect the human rights of girls, women, and gender-diverse individuals, as well as freedom of speech.

- › Adopt and implement an **appropriate legal protection framework** to address online violence and abuse against women journalists, in accordance with international human rights law and related regulations and standards.
- › Adopt domestic law provisions to ensure that digital platforms apply the criteria of lawfulness, reasonableness, and proportionality in their content moderation practices.<sup>107</sup>
- › **Ensure the participation of civil society and institutions** such as unions, associations, and forums gathering women journalists, as well as media corporations and human rights organizations, in the design of laws and public policies aimed at addressing, preventing, and sanctioning gender-based violence in digital environments.
- › Promote channels for dialogue between States and digital platforms to expedite intervention processes in cases of gender-based violence facilitated by ICTs and ensure effective solutions.
- › Ensure the production of data and access to information in accessible formats for the design of effective public policies to prevent and combat gender-based violence in digital environments.

- › Promote accountability for the companies that own digital platforms, ensuring they adopt measures to create a safe environment where girls, women, gender-diverse individuals, and other vulnerable groups can express themselves freely, under conditions of equality and non-discrimination.

### Develop awareness campaigns and promote digital education to create safe and inclusive digital environments.

- › Develop and carry out awareness campaigns about the nature and impact of violence against girls, women, and gender-diverse individuals in digital environments, as well as initiatives that promote equality and non-discrimination, and combat gender stereotypes.
- › Ensure that **digital literacy** is integrated into school programs throughout the entire educational cycle. Curricula must include knowledge and skills to safely handle a wide range of digital tools and resources, including those related to content, creation, collaboration, engagement, socialization, and civic participation. Curricula should also include critical understanding; guidance on **how to find reliable sources of information, and how to identify misinformation and other forms of biased or false content, as well as available forms of support and redress.** They must promote children's awareness of digital gender-based violence, as well as strategies aimed at protecting their personal data and online security.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>107</sup>. IACHR, Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Digital Inclusion and Internet Content Governance, 2024, para. 324. Available at: [https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/informes/Inclusion\\_digital\\_esp.pdf](https://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/informes/Inclusion_digital_esp.pdf)

<sup>108</sup>. Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment, March 2021, CRC/C/GC/25, paragraph 104. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g21/053/46/pdf/g2105346.pdf>

- › Promote media literacy **in the digital world** (which contributes to accessing, using, and creating content through digital platforms) and **literacy in data usage** (to strengthen knowledge in data analysis and interpretation), as well as **digital citizenship**.<sup>109</sup>

### Ensure access to justice in cases of gender-based violence facilitated by the use of ICTs.

- › Strengthen capabilities at the organizations that advise and support victims of gender-based violence facilitated by ICTs. To achieve this, it is necessary to ensure the required human, technical, and economic resources, as well as to provide ongoing training, so that these organizations can perform their roles effectively, and offer appropriate ways to address this form of violence.
- › Ensure **free legal counsel and mental health support** in view of the negative effects of gender-based violence and online abuse.
- › Provide economic resources and **appropriate technological systems to ensure the administration of justice, including the production and preservation of digital evidence** in judicial investigations related to online gender-based violence.
- › Build **technical capabilities** available to judicial officials for the **identification, collection, preservation, and processing of digital evidence**.

- › Develop **action protocols and guidelines for the investigation** of gender-based violence cases that are facilitated or aggravated by the use of technologies, thus allowing for effective action in addressing reports of gender-based violence in digital environments.
- › Ensure measures to repair the harm caused, taking into account the needs of the victims and trying to guarantee non-repetition.

### AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES DIGITAL PLATFORMS TO:

- › Improve the reporting procedures that allow users to easily denounce cases of violence and abuse they experience on digital platforms.
- › Invest in human content moderators, who are properly trained with a gender perspective, to provide responses in specific cases according to the different social, cultural, and other contexts.
- › Provide information about algorithms developed for automated solutions in content moderation and report or complaint resolution. Platforms are advised to publish information on how they resolve complaints.
- › Create public campaigns to combat gender-based violence on digital platforms.
- › Publicly share detailed and meaningful information about the nature and levels of violence and abuse occurring on their platforms,

<sup>109</sup>. UNESCO has defined digital citizenship as the ability to find, access, use, and create information effectively; to interact with other users and with content in an active, critical, sensitive, and ethical manner; and to navigate the online and ICTs environment safely and responsibly, while being aware of one's own rights. Available in: UN, Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Impact of the digitalization of education on the right to education, April 2022, A/HRC/50/32, para.38. Available at: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g22/322/40/pdf/g2232240.pdf>



both against women and gender-diverse individuals, as well as other vulnerable groups.

- › Ensure transparency regarding internal content review processes, stipulated timelines for analyzing complaints, and the type and level of training on human rights and gender issues received by the staff assigned to content moderation.
- › Ensure that content moderation decisions comply with international human rights law, guarantee freedom of expression, are transparent, and are subject to an effective appeal mechanism.

### **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL URGES MEDIA OUTLETS TO:**

- › Implement internal **policies to ensure gender inclusion and equality in the media**, guaranteeing that women and gender-diverse individuals can effectively exercise their freedom of expression without discrimination.
- › Adopt measures to **guarantee the safety of women journalists** against gender-based risks.

This includes the adoption of all necessary measures for the creation and maintenance of a safe and conducive environment in which they can carry out their work under conditions of equality and without discrimination, as well as the need to integrate gender perspective into policies and measures aimed at ensuring the safety of journalists.

- › Establish **clear policies and protocols for the prevention and response to cases of gender-based violence against women journalists and communicators**, and grant them access to **psychological and legal support** when requested.
- › Promote **awareness and training of staff on gender and human rights issues**.
- › Raise awareness in society about the prevalence of gender stereotypes and their impact on the rights of women and gender-diverse individuals to live a life free from violence and discrimination.
- › Ensure that decisions made regarding the moderation of violent and abusive content on their websites comply with international human rights laws concerning freedom of expression.

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