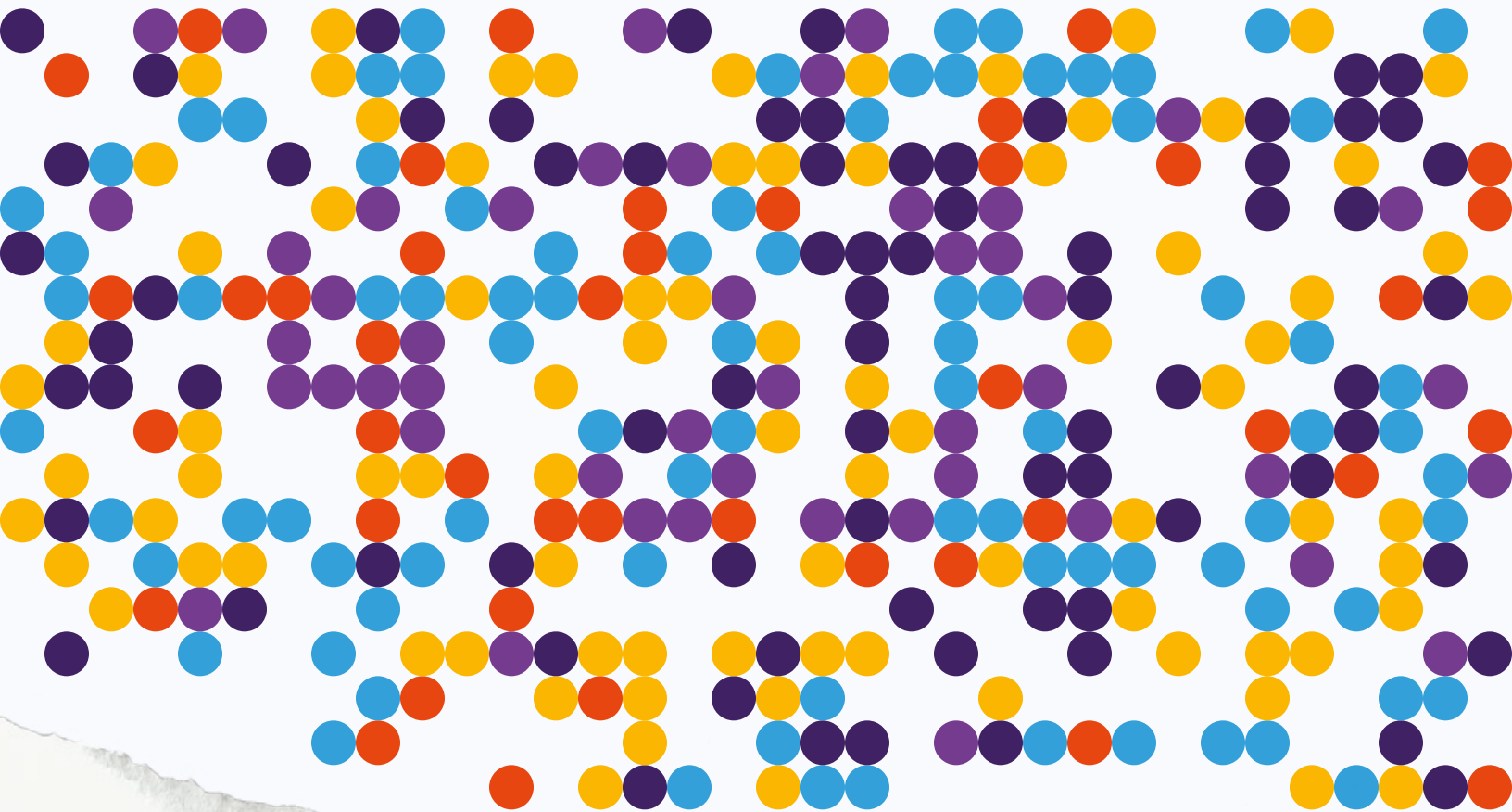


Support proposal for
women journalists in Mexico,
Guatemala and Honduras:

CÍRCULO





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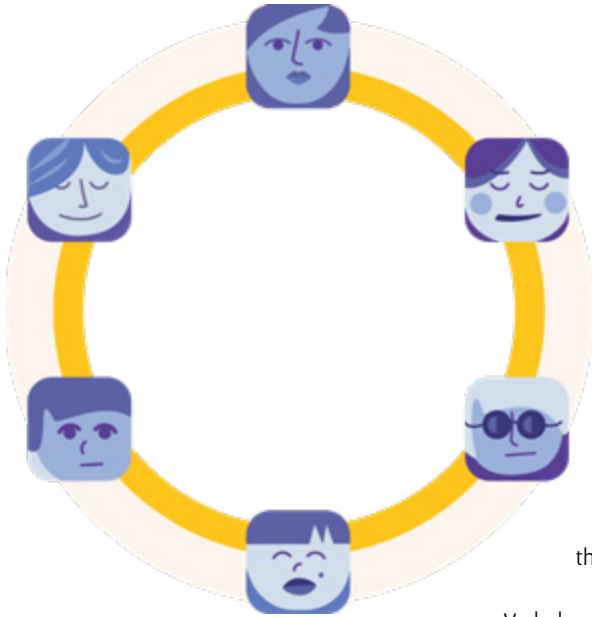


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Introduction



During 2020, 692 attacks on the press were documented in Mexico¹, including the murder of six journalists². In Guatemala³, 149 attacks were reported during the same period, including the murder of three people. In Honduras⁴, at least 117 attacks against freedom of expression were registered, alongside the murder of four journalists.

Facing a generalized siege against the press in these three countries, it is important to acknowledge that every journalist faces high risks wherever there is press coverage, mainly on sensitive subjects, such as corruption, politics, organized crime, and human rights violations.⁵ Women journalists, however, face specific obstacles and violence that are distinct from those faced by male journalists⁶ –a consequence of gender-based inequality pervading all spheres of our societies.⁷ The combination of several features such as skin color, race or age, for instance, may increase the risk of encountering obstacles or difficulties in the full exercise of freedom of expression.

Verbal and psychological abuse, economic exploitation, physical violence, and online harassment are the most common expressions of gender-based violence against women journalists.⁸ The

- 1 ARTICLE 19, "Distorsión: El discurso contra la realidad" (Distortion: Discourse Against Reality), Mexico, March 2021, page 145, https://articulo19.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Book-1_ARTICLE-19_2021_V03.pdf
- 2 Reference of every person watching, describing, documenting and analyzing the events, and documenting and analyzing statements, policies and any proposal that may affect the society, with the purpose of systematizing this information and collect facts and analysis to inform the society sectors or the society as a whole. Center for International Media Assistance, et. al., "Estándares internacionales de libertad de expresión: Guía básica para operadores de justicia en América Latina" (Freedom of Expression International Standards: Basic guide for justice operators in Latin America), August 2017, page 13, <https://www.corteidh.or.cr/tablas/r37048.pdf>
- 3 Human Rights Watch, "Guatemala: Ataques a la libertad de prensa" (Guatemala: Attacks against Press Freedom), United States, February 18, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/es/news/2021/02/18/guatemala-ataques-la-libertad-de-prensa>
- 4 Comité por la Libre Expresión (C-Libre), "Más de tres mil alertas fueron reportadas durante 2020 en América Latina" (More than 3,000 Alerts Were Reported in Latin America During 2020), August 16, 2021, <http://www.clibrehonduras.com/cl/index.php/noticias/1382-mas-de-tres-mil-alertas-fueron-reportadas-durante-2020-en-america-latina>
- 5 Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Human Rights Inter American Commission, "Mujeres Periodistas y Libertad de Expresión: Discriminación y violencia basada en el género contra las mujeres periodistas por el ejercicio de su profesión" (Women Journalists and Freedom of Expression: Gender Based Discrimination and Violence Against Women Journalists at their profession), OEA/SER.L/V/II, October 31, 2018, paragraph 12, page 17, <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/expresion/docs/informes/MujeresPeriodistas.pdf>
- 6 arding the social construction of gender- sex, not denying the existence of other non-binary gender identities and expressions.
- 7 Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Human Rights Inter American Commission, op. cit., paragraph 12, page 17.
- 8 Ibid, paragraph 33, page 26.

most commonly used violence strategies against women journalists in Mexico⁹, Honduras¹⁰ and Guatemala¹¹, are smear campaigns, intimidation, discrimination, threats of sexual violence, material deprivation, arbitrary detentions, surveillance, content removal, censorship, information deadlocks, stalking, spread of personal and private information online, legal harassment, and sexual harassment.

The violence faced by women journalists is based upon everyday masculine and misogynous stereotypes and prejudices.¹² By being a woman, working in such a public and crucial role, the work of women journalists is discredited, and women journalists' bodies become the main vehicle for aggressions, with threats against their bodily integrity, or the invalidation of a woman journalist's work by appeal to her appearance or gendered expectations toward her work.¹³

Every attack against a journalist disturbs their life or their physical integrity, as much as their right to provide information, and society's right to be informed. Therefore, it becomes a direct attack against the right to know and to scrutiny, which are the cornerstones of public transparency and government accountability, both indispensable in a democracy.¹⁴

Intimidation – to be silenced or to self-censor – has a double origin on women journalists: for being journalists and for being women. The latter is not a minor thing. The importance of women's participation in the press is related to the right of equality and nondiscrimination.¹⁵ Women are part of the society too, and women journalists' perspectives and experiences are not reflected equally in press coverage or research journalism.¹⁶ Women journalists' voices are silenced as a consequence of the violence they suffer, which is a tragic loss for a real democracy.

Hostile scenarios will be recurrent for women journalists until the structural changes necessary to diminish violence against the press and violence against women are implemented. However, as a way of self-defense and resistance to the *status quo*, technologies and digital spaces have helped women to make visible, denounce and confront the attacks they receive.¹⁷

In recognition of the above, aiming to generate an integral security strategy in the short term¹⁸ for women journalists that enables them to continue with their work, The Guardian Project and ARTICLE 19 introduce *Círculo*, a tech application that aims to foster social co-responsibility towards women journalists

9 Área de Redes de Periodistas y Libertad de Expresión, "Balance Semestral 2021, Infografía interactiva sobre violencia contra mujeres periodistas" (Semi-annual Balance 2021, Interactive infographic on Violence Against Women Journalists), Comunicación e Información de la Mujer (CIMAC), Mexico, August 30, 2021, <https://cimac.org.mx/2021/08/30/balance-semesteral-2021/>

10 SIGNIS ALC, "Agresiones contra periodistas provoca desplazamiento forzado" (Aggressions Against Journalists Cause Forced Displacement), Honduras, February 18, 2020, <https://signisalc.org/agresiones-contra-periodistas-provoca-desplazamiento-forzado/>

11 Blanck, Evelyn, et. al., "Guatemala: Estado contra la prensa y la libre expresión" (Guatemala: The State Against the Press and Freedom of Expression), ARTICLE 19, Guatemala, April 19, 2021, pages 27–31, <https://articulo19.org/informeguatemala/>

12 Chicas Poderosas, "Mujeres periodistas bajo dos fuegos" (Women Journalists in the Cross-Fire), Luchadoras, January 27, 2020, <https://luchadoras.mx/mujeres-periodistas-bajo-dos-fuegos/>

13 Ibidem.

14 Center for International Media Assistance, op. cit., page 12.

15 ARTICLE 19, "The Camden Principles on Freedom of Expression and Equality", April, 2009, <https://www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/standards/the-camden-principles-on-freedom-of-expression-and-equality.pdf>

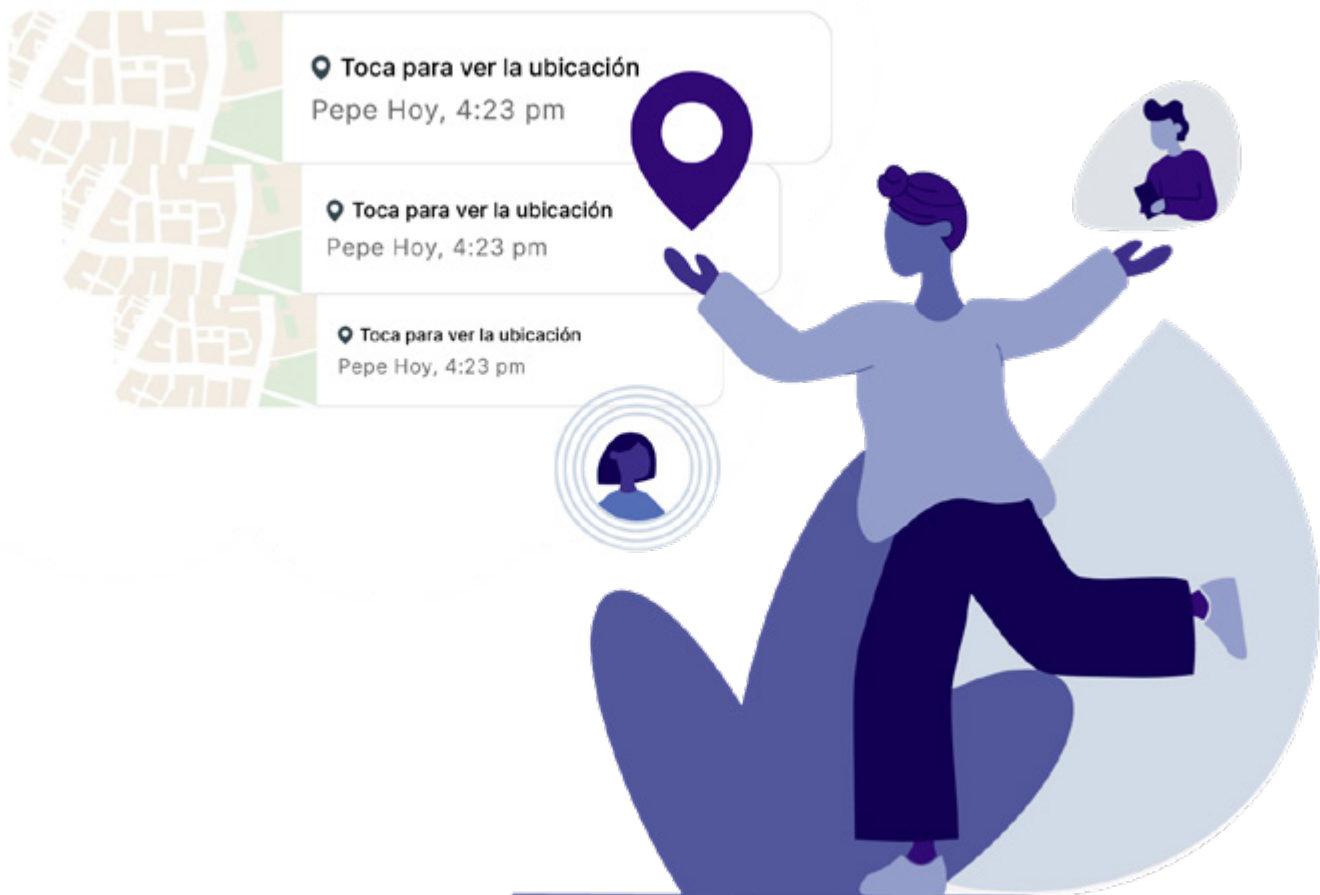
16 Anarte, Enrique, "La difícil batalla del periodismo feminista en América Latina" (The Tough Battle of Feminist Journalism in Latin America), DW, May 03, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/es/la-dif%C3%ADcil-batalla-del-periodismo-feminista-en-am%C3%A9rica-latina/a-48581045>

17 See Ciberseguras, "Contra la violencia" (Against Violence), <https://ciberseguras.org/dxg/>

18 Regarding the protocols and tools on physical and digital security, normativity, right to information, among others, which allow women journalists to reduce the risks related to their job.

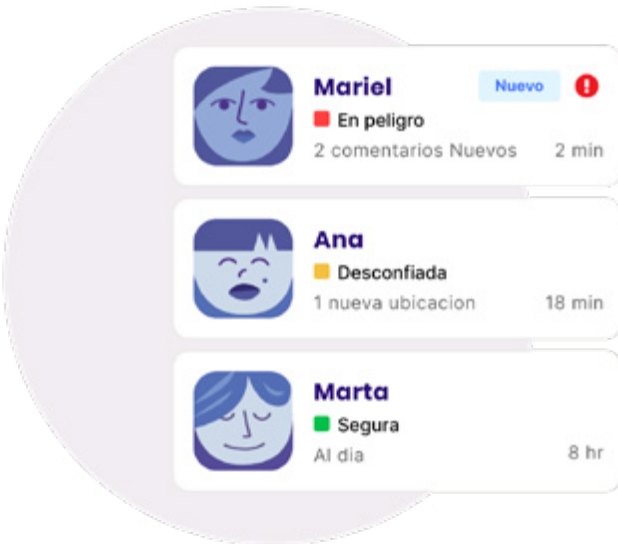
when they face danger. *Círculo* is a communication channel for them to share – in a secure way – their locations and security alerts with friends, family and colleagues, which can, if necessary, implement a security protocol.

This document provides a review of the violence against women journalists in Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras, and introduces *Círculo* and its characteristics, addressing the features of journalism and gender in these territories. The information provided here also includes important ideas on different workshops hosted by The Guardian Project and ARTICLE 19 in all three countries between 2017 and 2021. The purpose of these conversations is to acknowledge women journalists' experiences, fears, and particular needs, and to build *Círculo* around them.¹⁹



¹⁹ We acknowledge that even when the categories 'woman' and 'journalist' may generate a common reference; these categories alone do not describe the whole violence and social implications of women journalists' identities and features. These characteristics are only a reference point to identify the general risk and violence conditions that may be applicable for most people with said gender identity belonging to the profession.

Journalism in Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras



The World Press Freedom Ranking annually evaluates the freedom of the press in 180 countries and territories.²⁰ In 2021 they ranked Honduras 151st, Mexico 143rd, and Guatemala 116th²¹. These rankings show that these three countries lack pluralism in mass media, have little independence from political and economic powers, lack or have little support from a legal framework that would protect journalists, and have insufficient prevention, protection and security guarantees for journalists. Among other factors, these rankings demonstrate that these three countries are insecure for press freedom.²²

Besides this, all three countries have censorship mechanisms against journalists and mass media. For instance, (1) laws that repress the press and access to public information; (2) direct and structural violence towards the profession; (3) social media-based campaigns of discreditation; (4) surveillance and espionage; (5) criminalization and legal persecution; (6) bill proposals to control internet content; and (7) impunity in crimes against freedom of expression – that is, a lack of due diligence in the investigation, prosecution and sanctioning of those committing the attacks.²³

The following is an overall picture of the landscape of violence against the press in each country:

Mexico

- Murders against journalists have an impunity rate of about 99%.²⁴
- 692 attacks upon press representatives were documented in 2020, including the murders of six journalists.²⁵ More recently, during the first half of 2021, 362 attacks on the press were reported, equating to 1 every 12 hours.²⁶

20 Reporters Without Borders, "Clasificación Mundial de la Libertad de Prensa 2021" (Press Freedom World Classification 2021), 2021, <https://rsf.org/es/ranking/2021>

21 Ibidem.

22 Ibidem.

23 ARTICLE 19, "Bajo sentencia: la censura en Cuba, Guatemala y Honduras" (Under Sentence: Censorship in Cuba, Guatemala and Honduras), August 31, 2020, https://articulo19.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/A19_2020_ReporteCA_book_v2-2.pdf

24 Forbes Staff, "Día de la libertad de prensa: México entre la impunidad y la violencia" (Press Freedom Day: Mexico Between Impunity and Violence), Forbes Mexico, May 03, 2021, <https://www.forbes.com.mx/dia-de-la-libertad-de-prensa-mexico-entre-la-impunidad-y-la-violencia/>

25 ARTICLE 19, "Distorsión [...]" (Distortion [...]), op. cit., page 145.

26 ARTICLE 19, "Primer semestre de 2021: la violencia contra la prensa prevalece, al igual que la inacción del Estado" (First Half of 2021: Violence Against the Press Prevails as well as a Lack of Actions by the State), August 24, 2021, <https://articulo19.org/informe-semestral-2021/>

- Most attacks come from public servants, with intimidation as the most common threat, as well as harassment, information deadlocks, physical attack, and the illegitimate use of public authority.²⁷
- A high percentage of attacks on journalists come from organized crime or authorities who collude with *de-facto* power groups, especially in regions where armed groups prevail outside the law.²⁸
- Regular abuse of public resources and abuse of authority by a state agency was documented throughout 2020, often in terms of designing and executing discreditation campaigns or harming a journalist's reputation, especially via social media²⁹.
- Widespread stigmatization of the press, especially by the federal public service, alongside the lack of preventative state-based actions, increase a journalist's risk of being the target of aggressions, threats, and even murder.³⁰
- A sustained growth of internet attacks throughout the first half of 2021, with 1 in 3 attacks perpetrated online. These take the form of discreditation campaigns, intimidation, cyber-attacks (such as DoS, or denial of service) and unauthorized attempts to access women journalists' accounts.³¹

Guatemala

- Although a record is not kept of the overall rate of impunity for the murder of journalists, between January 1, 2015 and July 30, 2020, 646 reports of crimes against the press were reported, and a sentence was reached in only 6.19% of them: 29 of them condemnatory and 11 without charges.³²
- About 149 aggressions were reported against the press during 2020, including the murder of three journalists.³³
- Threat and coercion were the most reported crimes between 2011 and June 2020. Theft and destruction of the journalists' working equipment, mainly tape recorders, cameras and cell phones, were widely reported.³⁴
- State agents in the last three administrations have³⁵: (1) criminalized and prosecuted community radio broadcasters; (2) used automated tools to discredit and attack journalists in digital networks; (3) directly confronted the press; (4) denied information; (5) selectively attacked independent journalists that carry out investigative journalism; and (6) had a discretionary and

27 Ibidem.

28 ARTICLE 19, "Distorsión [...]" (Distortion [...]), op. cit., page 155.

29 ARTICLE 19, "La "guerra está en Twitter": Evidencia confirma tácticas de la Dirección de Notimex para atacar periodistas" ("War is at Twitter": Evidence Confirms Notimex Direction Tactics to Attack Journalists), Mexico, June 18, 2020, <https://articulo19.org/la-guerra-esta-en-twitter-evidencia-confirma-tacticas-de-la-direccion-de-notimex-para-atacar-periodistas/>

30 ARTICLE 19, "Distorsión [...]" (Distortion [...]), op. cit., page 31.

31 ARTICLE 19, "Primer semestre de 2021 [...]" (First Half of 2021 [...]), op. cit.

32 Blanck, Evelyn, et. al., op. cit., page 42.

33 Human Rights Watch, op. cit.

34 Blanck, Evelyn, et. al., op. cit., page 63.

35 Corresponding to the governments of Otto Pérez Molina, Jimmy Morales and Alejandro Giammattei.

arbitrary management of government advertising guidelines in favor of information control³⁶ through official communications.

- Attacks by public officials have increased, mainly by the federal executive, where information given by the press, and even the press itself, are disqualified.³⁷

Honduras

- Murders against journalists have an impunity rate of approximately 90%.³⁸
- 90 assassinations of journalists were registered from January 2000 to August 2021.³⁹ Only six of these crimes ended with the detention of material authors; their intellectual authors remain unprosecuted.⁴⁰
- At least 117 attacks upon the freedom of expression were registered in 2020, alongside the murder of four information workers.⁴¹
- Journalists' murders are linked to repressive actions by church and entrepreneurial groups, public officials, and representatives of the military, as a means of silencing conversation on matters they do not want disclosed.⁴²
- Threats to close and sabotage community broadcasters are constant and systematic, since they have become the key means through which the resistance against extractivist projects are articulated and disseminated.⁴³
- There is a pattern of attacks in the murder of journalists: perpetrators promote the message that those that disclose information in Honduras will be murdered.⁴⁴
- Corruption and impunity deals among public servers, business groups and criminals result in threats, intimidation, physical aggressions and murder of journalists.⁴⁵
- Public servants and governors dismiss the seriousness of attacks against journalists, and practice re-victimization.⁴⁶

36 Blanck, Evelyn, et. al., op. cit., page 36.

37 ARTICLE 19, "Informe especial C.O.V.I.D: Libertad de expresión e información durante pandemia de COVID-19 en México y Centroamérica" (C.O.V.I.D. Special Report: Freedom of Expression and COVID-19 Information during the Pandemic in Mexico and Central America), Mexico, July 09, 2020, page 72, https://articulo19.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Book-A19_InformeCovid_2020-V03.pdf

38 ARTICLE 19, "Bajo sentencia [...]" (Under Sentence [...]), op. cit., page 110.

39 Comité por la Libre Expresión (C-LIBRE), "Huellas de Crímenes a la Prensa Hondureña" (Honduran Press Crime Traces), July 16, 2021, <http://www.librehonduras.com/cl/index.php/asesinatos>

40 Ibidem.

41 Comité por la Libre Expresión (C-LIBRE), "Más de tres [...]" (More than 3,000 [...]), op. cit.

42 Comité por la Libre Expresión (C-LIBRE), "Huellas [...]" (Honduran Press [...]), op. cit.

43 ARTICLE 19, "Bajo sentencia [...]" (Under Sentence [...]), op. cit., page 112.

44 Ibid, page 121.

45 Ibid, page 128.

46 Ibid, page 130.

Gender-based violence towards women journalists



Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala show an extremely adverse context for journalists to perform their democratic work. The characteristics of the violence exercised against the profession, as well as their impact, however, are not the same for everybody. The violence women journalists face is expressed more specifically as a consequence of the gender disparity existing in our societies.⁴⁷

Besides the risks faced by every journalist in the region, women are exposed to additional risks when defying male stereotypes, often resulting in the rejection of women journalists' participation as communicators in public life.⁴⁸

Alongside the gendered targeting of women journalists, women journalists also face quotidian forms of harassment, including sexual violence by crowds while they cover public acts,⁴⁹ apart from other acts of violence they receive because of their sexual orientation, socio-economic class, skin color or educative level, among others.

ARTICLE 19 documented 120 aggressions against women journalists in Mexico over the first half of 2021, 28.69% of which had a gender-based component or sexual connotation.⁵⁰ In Guatemala, without recent data, 90% of women journalists surveyed by Centro Civitas in 2016 had experienced sexual harassment while performing their journalistic work.⁵¹ No information or data is available to identify the differentiated intentions and implications experienced by women journalists in Honduras.⁵² In an interview with ARTICLE 19 in 2020, however, a Honduran woman journalist said that companies and organized crime threatened women journalists' work, as did colleagues who silence women through inequality, misogynous comments, and sexual violence.⁵³

In general, the most common online and offline aggressions and gender-based violence towards women journalists include verbal and psychological abuse, economic exploitation, physical violence, and ha-

47 Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Human Rights Inter American Commission, op. cit., paragraph 12, page 17.

48 Human Rights Inter American Commission, "Segundo informe sobre la situación de las defensoras y los defensores de derechos humanos en las Américas" (Second Report on the Human Rights Defenders' Situation in America), OEA/Ser.L/V/II, 2011, page 119, <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/defensores/docs/pdf/defensores2011.pdf>

49 Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Human Rights Inter American Commission, op. cit., paragraph 38, page 27.

50 ARTICLE 19, "Primer semestre de 2021 [...]" (First Half of 2021 [...]), op. cit.

51 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "Fundamental challenges faced by women journalists and community communicators in Guatemala", https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/concept_note_guatemala_impunityday_journalists.pdf

52 ARTICLE 19, "Bajo sentencia [...]" (Under Sentence [...]), op. cit., page 130.

53 Ibidem.

rassment.⁵⁴ Women journalists, in particular, are exposed to online attacks by their male colleagues, and recent years have seen a significant increase in insults, harassment and stalking through and with technology.⁵⁵ The most common acts of harassment are repetitive and ongoing personal e-mails, messages in social networks, emails and calls to the women journalists' workplace, and calls to their own homes.⁵⁶

Experiencing this type of violence may cause self-censorship,⁵⁷ loss of motivation, the closing of social network accounts, resignation or unwillingness to renew job agreements, rejection of some press coverages, and, for these reasons, eventual dismissal.⁵⁸ Every aggression against a women journalist is a direct attack against womens' visibility and womens' full participation in public life.⁵⁹ The lack of diversity in publishers' offices has serious consequences for democracies, mainly in terms of the content offered to the public by women.⁶⁰ That the voices of women journalists are silenced by violence is a massive loss for our societies.

Finally, it is important to state that while measuring violence within the category "women", it is also true that violence changes as this category interacts with other identities, such as age, territory, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation, to mention some. Reporters Without Borders quote a journalist who states that, "Being a woman, journalist and part of a minority represents a major risk."⁶¹ No data is available to appreciate the real incidence of violence and discrimination across women of different statuses and identities.⁶² What we do know is that there are people and communities who experience concurrent and overlapped oppression.⁶³ This means that fighting violence towards women journalists implies not only the abolition of gender-based injustice, but the eradication of all forms of oppression and discrimination.⁶⁴

54 Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Human Rights Inter American Commission, op. cit., paragraph 33, page 26.

55 Ibid, paragraph 45, page 30.

56 Reporters Without Borders, "El periodismo frente al sexismo" (Journalism Facing Sexism), page 9, <https://www.rsf-es.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/RSF-INFORME-PERIODISMO-FRENTE-AL-SEXISMO-8-3-2021.pdf>

57 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), "The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists", April, 2021, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377223>

58 Ibid, page 23.

59 Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Human Rights Inter American Commission, op. cit., paragraph 45, page 30.

60 Reporters Without Borders, "El periodismo [...]" (Journalism [...]), op. cit., page 26.

61 Ibid, page 20.

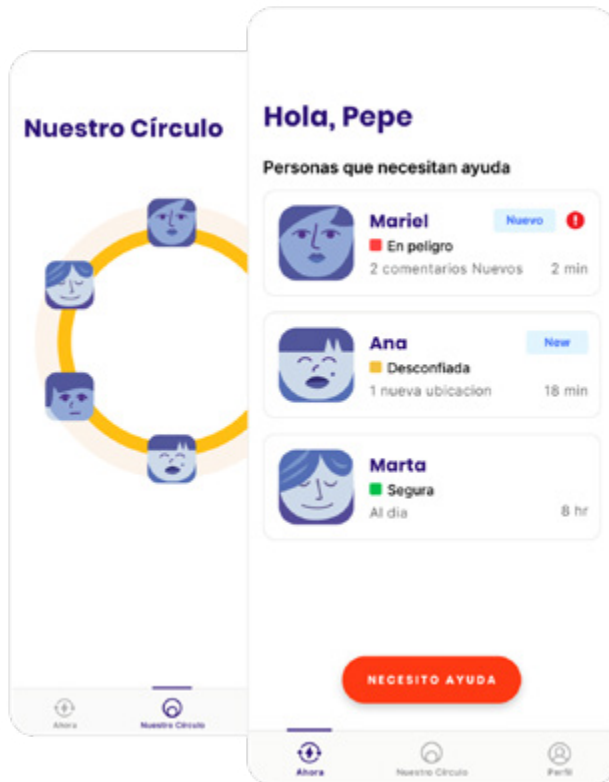
62 Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Human Rights Inter American Commission, op. cit., paragraph 61, page 37.

63 UN Women, "Intersectional feminism: what it means and why it matters right now", July 01, 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/explainer-intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters>

64 Ibidem.



CÍRCULO: Social co-responsibility and tech proposal



“(Women journalist) have no normal life; we can not use digital means as other people do.”

– Women journalist at a security workshop held by ARTICLE 19, 2019.

By documenting attacks upon journalists, ARTICLE 19 identifies that the access and use of information and communication technologies (ICT) has modified scenarios and types of violence towards the journalistic profession, but particularly towards women.⁶⁵ The information and communication overflow permitted by these technologies has amplified attacks on women journalists, rendering them difficult to track and prosecute if they become crimes.⁶⁶ The evolution of ICT, in addition, makes attacks more complex, damaging, and undetectable – the latter in forensic terms – as in the case of private communication intervention using the *spyware* Pegasus.⁶⁷

ICT enables, however, a defense against violence against women journalists, both on and offline.⁶⁸ They make possible claims and counterweights towards the aggressors and institutions that victimize women journalists, alongside offering short and long-term solutions for the attacks they suffer, and a means of finding alliances that support women journalists’ work.⁶⁹ Moreover, it is also through technology – such as encryption and other digital security infrastructure and protocols – that the personal data of the

65 ARTICLE 19, “Machismo y censura: mujeres periodistas enfrentan violencia diferenciada en redes sociales” (Machismo and Censorship: Women Journalists Face Differentiated Violence in Social Networks), June 11, 2021, <https://articulo19.org/machismo-y-censura-mujeres-periodistas-enfrentan-violencia-diferenciada-en-redes-sociales/>

66 ARTICLE 19, “Primer semestre de 2021 [...]” (First Half of 2021 [...]), op. cit.

67 ARTICLE 19, “Estado mexicano debe cumplir con el compromiso sobre controles democráticos para la intervención de comunicaciones y esclarecer el uso de #Pegasus” (The Mexican State Must Fulfill the Democratic Control Commitment for Communication Intervention and Clear the #Pegasus Case), July 21, 2021, <https://articulo19.org/estado-mexicano-debe-cumplir-con-el-compromiso-sobre-controles-democraticos-para-la-intervencion-de-comunicaciones-y-esclarecer-el-uso-de-pegasus/>

68 Barragán, Almudena, ““Voy a violar a tu hija”: las columnistas en México dicen basta a la violencia machista que reciben en redes”, (“I Will Rape Your Daughter”: Journalists in Mexico Say Stop to Macho Violence They Receive in Networks) El País, June 9, 2021, <https://elpais.com/mexico/2021-06-10/voy-a-violar-a-tu-hija-las-columnistas-en-mexico-dicen-basta-a-la-violencia-machista-que-reciben-en-redes.html>

69 Animal Político Editorial, “#MeTooPeriodistasMexicanos: Mujeres denuncian acoso y abuso sexual en medios de comunicación” (#MeTooMexicanJournalists: Women claim sexual harassment and abuse in media), Animal Político, March 24, 2019, <https://www.animalpolitico.com/2019/03/metoo-periodistas-mexicanos-mujeres-denuncian-acoso-medios/>

women journalists, that of their sources, and the information they collect, are shielded from those who would attempt to use this information in attacks against them.⁷⁰

ARTICLE 19 and The Guardian Project believe that in this complex, ambivalent context, *Círculo* can be part of an integral security strategy for women journalists, which includes the technology itself, as well as social responsibility, and the creation of protocols. *Círculo* is a technological tool that may be downloaded onto cell phones for free. It is an application that offers a secure communication channel for people to send messages, alerts, and location information, offering a means for women journalists to support one another when facing or defying harassment and other forms of violence in their work.

This application was built by collecting the experience, needs and worries of women working in the press, in social initiatives, and in human rights defense projects. What interested ARTICLE 19 and The Guardian Project was having the sensitivity of the context of women journalists' work and associated dangers, as well as the gender factors that affect said context. The participation of women journalists was fundamental in building this application.

Since 2017, ARTICLE 19 and The Guardian Project have led several workshops and discussion groups that focused on mapping (1) support networks – personal and professional – for women journalists in case they experience any kind of violence; (2) circumstances and reactions to violence faced by women journalists in Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala – both on and offline; (3) technological tools available in the digital market for women to feel more safe. In addition, (4) several test processes were developed – based on the user – to improve the application; (5) feedback was sought throughout its development about its use and efficiency; and (6) models of potential scenarios where women may use *Círculo* were created, alongside the inputs and materials that would aid comprehension and implementation of the app. The result is *Círculo*.

The application was built in order to prioritize the right to privacy of women journalists and their contacts. *Círculo* is not cellphone intrusive, requires no inconsistent or abusive permissions. *Círculo* safeguards the communication and contents shared among its users through encryption and security mechanisms in its information transmission, reception, and storage technology. Moreover, privacy policies and data handling are accessible and public so that users can understand fully its operation terms.⁷¹ Finally, it is an open source, free software tool, which allows people and technology developing communities to audit it, adapt it, and use it.

Lastly, a technological tool – albeit one designed for women journalists and being secure – provides no protection just by being downloaded to a cellphone. *Círculo* is not a panic button to alert authorities in risky situations since, in this region, authorities will not respond in a timely manner, and they might even be colluded with criminals.

“In Mexico we trust no (public) security force”

– Women journalist at a security workshop held by ARTICLE 19, 2019.

Círculo aims to become a secure communication channel between women journalists and their contacts so that – when facing risky situations – the support network implements the appropriate security pro-

70 For more information see resources by ARTICLE 19 on security and digital rights available at <https://seguridadintegral.articulo19.org/categorias-prevencion/seguridad-y-derechos-digitales/>

71 SocialTIC, “Mapeo y análisis de apps de monitoreo y seguridad para mujeres” (Security and Monitoring Apps Analysis and Mapping for Women), November 2019, <https://socialtic.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Mapeo-y-ana%CC%81lisis-de-herramientas-de-seguridad-para-mujeres-2.pdf>

protocols. Women journalists depend on their “circle” of trust to activate prevention, monitoring, and response strategies. This application is calling upon citizens’ social responsibility, to proactively take care of those informing us in the press. The latter implies asking and knowing about dangerous situations, and ensuring that specific roles and responsibilities are adopted in cases of emergency.

Círculo therefore, is an invitation for women journalists to dialogue with the people that may support them in their journalistic work and its dangers. This will allow the violence to be put on the table and be known by its full magnitude. Thus, perhaps, a conversation about the individual security of each woman can boost a conversation of the importance of women journalists’ work.

Key challenge for the application implementation

Círculo works only on a cellphone with internet access, and without the connection, information may not be shared. This represents the most relevant challenge in the use of the application, as many people in Mexico, Honduras and Guatemala have limited data cellphones. Press coverage is often also carried out in zones without internet connection, mainly in the case of women journalists’ community work. It is important, therefore, to design security alternatives and protocols that can be activated in offline situations.

Final comments

The recurrence of direct attacks upon women journalists reflects the structural and institutional violence that is deeply rooted in Mexican, Honduran and Guatemalan societies. This systematic violence requires fighting impunity and creating the conditions for women journalists to have freedom of expression.⁷² Moreover, it involves strengthening and applying educational, legal, political, and public measures to foster and protect women's leadership in the civic space.⁷³ Additionally, it requires guaranteeing state programs and policies to prevent, protect, and provide justice and compensation for gender-based crimes against women journalists.⁷⁴

Taking into account the fact that hostile scenarios will continue to be constant in women journalists' work, and that long term solutions will take time to be implemented, *Círculo* aims to contribute to women journalists' security by fostering technological capacity and social co-responsibility.

Designed with and for women journalists, *Círculo* has the optimum features to be considered an efficient and secure technological tool. However, its implementation will only be successful to the extent that, in the event of direct violence against a female journalist, there is a route of actions and accompaniment by part of her support network.

This proposal seeks that violent experiences are shared and discussed collectively, as a means of generating companionship among women journalists and others around them. There are no technological tools that will overcome structural violence in our societies, but *Círculo* can be part of an integrated security protocol.

Círculo looks forward to becoming the baseline application for women journalists, activists and human right defenders in Latin America and the Caribbean, who wish to use technology to overcome the risks they encounter.

72 Posetti, Julie, et. al., "Violencia en línea contra las mujeres periodistas: Instantánea mundial de la incidencia y las repercusiones" (Online Violence Against Women Journalists: Global Picture on Incidence and Repercussions), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020, page 15, <https://www.icfj.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/Online%20Violence%20Against%20Women%20Journalists%20Global%20Snapshot%20Spanish.pdf>

73 Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression at the Human Rights Inter American Commission, op. cit., pages 75-80.

74 Ibidem.

Support proposal for
women journalists in Mexico,
Guatemala and Honduras:
CÍRCULO

