



Latin American
insights
on protecting
women and
LGBTQIAPN+
social
communicators



LATIN AMERICAN INSIGHTS ON PROTECTING WOMEN AND LGBTQIAPN+ SOCIAL COMMUNICATORS

PRODUCED BY

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* For the purpose of clearly identifying the organization's different offices throughout the publication, we refer to ARTICLE 19 when discussing the organization's international office, ARTIGO 19 when referring to the Brazil and South America office, and ARTÍCULO 19 when referring to the Mexico and Central America office.

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Protecting women journalists and communicators requires a cross-cutting approach that considers the dimensions of gender, race, and other forms of intersectionality that influence the risks of violence faced by different groups. Women, Black people, Indigenous people, and LGBTQIAPN+ individuals, community communicators, those from favelas, peripheries, forests, and rural areas, among others, face specific patterns of attack, often directed not only at their work but also at their identities. Recognizing these layers is essential for formulating policies that effectively address the structural inequalities that determine who is most exposed, who is most easily silenced, and who does or does not have protection mechanisms.

For this reason, in this research, ARTIGO 19 Brazil and South America focused on strategies for protecting journalists, with a primary focus on women and LGBTQIAPN+ journalists and communicators. The main objectives of the work linked to this agenda are: (i) to observe how public policies are being built and whether they incorporate, at some level, a concern for the intersectional perspective of the violence they intend to address; and (ii) to deepen and disseminate knowledge related to feminist and intersectional protection strategies, from a regional perspective.

This report is the result of a series of initiatives led by ARTIGO 19 Brazil and South America, in partnership with other regional offices and the international office of ARTICLE 19, aimed at mapping, understanding, strengthening, and disseminating intersectional strategies for the protection of journalists and communicators, paying attention to the complexities of violations of freedom of expression – which are intersected by gender, sexuality, race, territory, and age. It was with this same intention that the research papers *Women of Expression: Freedom of Expression and Confronting Gender-Based*

Violence in Communication (2023)¹ and the case studies on feminist approaches to the protection of journalists and communicators in Brazil,² Chile,³ and Paraguay⁴ (2022) were published.

Although protecting journalists and communicators is a central obligation of the State, due to its role as guarantor of democracy and human rights, reality shows us that, in many cases, this role is exercised by civil society organizations that deal with political pressures, scarce resources, and high demand. This study seeks to understand these challenges and perspectives from a regional standpoint, looking at the countries of South America, with a special focus on Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay. Various experiences, especially good practices and lessons learned, will be presented from other countries on the continent. This analysis comprises the first part of the report.

The report also seeks to portray the challenges that protection policies must address, exploring some of the new regional trends impacting several of the countries mentioned. We will present analyses and perspectives on building protection for women journalists and communicators considering the attacks perpetrated through the abuse of the judicial system and those operated through information and communication technologies. Finally, we will address the pressures that democratic instability and the rise of conservatism exert on the construction and implementation of public protection policies, recognizing the impact that political changes have on guaranteeing freedom of expression and of the press, and the dismantling of public policies for the defense of human rights.

- 1 ARTIGO 19. *Mulheres de Expressão: A liberdade de expressão e o enfrentamento às violências de gênero na comunicação*. 2023. Available at: https://artigo19.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/24/files/2023/12/Digital_A19_Mulheres-de-expressao_2023.pdf
- 2 ARTICLE 19. *Equally Safe: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists. Case study – Brazil*. 2022. Available at: <https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Brazil-FemSoj-2022.pdf>
- 3 ARTICLE 19. *Equally Safe: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists. Case study – Chile*. 2022. Available at: <https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Chile-FemSoj-2022-min.pdf>
- 4 ARTICLE 19. *Equally Safe: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists. Case study – Paraguay*. 2022. Available at: <https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Paraguay-FemSoj-2022.pdf>

To build this analysis, we developed a process of strengthening alliances and collaborations with various organizations in Latin America that have been developing complementary and essential work to address the new challenges identified. This collaboration was made possible through two meetings for discussion and collective construction: a virtual event dedicated to discussing mechanisms for monitoring and documenting violence, and an in-person meeting in which we addressed the construction of protection mechanisms in light of the challenges initially identified.⁵ The main findings from these conversations are the primary source of the investigation, which was complemented by individual interviews⁶ and a review of the literature and other reports and initiatives that address the topic.

Finally, several recommendations are outlined for the various stakeholders involved in addressing the problem. Our aim is to foster the construction of a collective agenda for improvements and the development of protection mechanisms that can adequately meet the challenges, while simultaneously strengthening the fundamental work that allied organizations have been carrying out and giving greater visibility to women and LGBTQIAPN+ individuals who dedicate themselves to communicating and informing the public, recognizing how essential it is to include diverse voices in the public debate.

5 The first meeting was held online on April 30, 2025, with the participation of representatives from 7 civil society organizations, connecting 3 different countries in Latin America (Brazil, Paraguay, and Mexico), as well as international organizations that operate regionally. The second meeting was held in person at the Artigo 19 office in Brazil, on July 21 and 22, 2025, with 14 representatives from different organizations working in 5 different countries in the region: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Paraguay. ARTIGO 19. *Proteção de jornalistas e comunicadoras mulheres e LGBTQIAPN+*. July 2025. Available at: <https://artigo19.org/2025/07/22/protacao-de-jornalistas-e-comunicadoras-mulheres-e-lgbtqiapn/>

6 The individual interviews, complementary to the group meetings, were carried out with 7 different organizations working in countries such as Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Paraguay: Observatorio del Derecho a la Comunicación, Red de Protección de Mujeres Periodistas, Colegio de Periodistas de Chile, Sindicato de Periodistas del Paraguay (SPP), Tedic, IDEA, Artigo 19, and Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP).

Protection of women journalists and communicators in Latin America

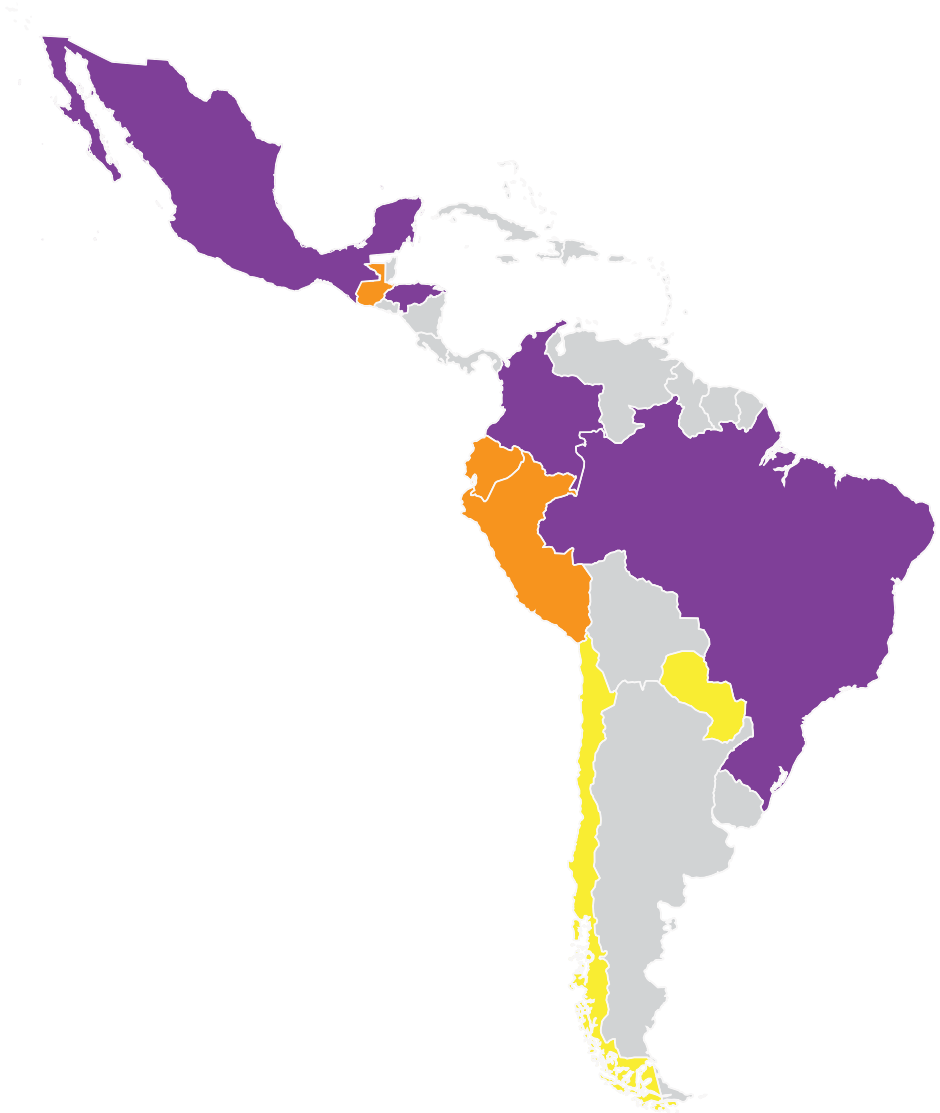


The protection offered by States

The high levels of violence⁷ against journalists in Latin American countries are already evidence that the policies for protecting communicators implemented by nation-states are not sufficient for their local contexts.

While certain countries have institutionalized policies, but with ineffective practical application, in our region, on the contrary, state experiences with mechanisms for protecting journalists are, in some cases, marked by the institutional fragility of the policies themselves. Across the region, we can list four countries that have public policies that are, in some way, institutionalized and can be identified as programs for the protection of journalists and communicators: Mexico, Colombia, Honduras, and Brazil. In addition, some initiatives are also identified in Paraguay, with the Roundtable for the Safety of Journalists, although it does not meet the requirements to be considered a national protection mechanism. In other cases, there are public policies under development, such as in Ecuador, Guatemala, and Peru. Finally, there are legislative proposals for the creation of legal parameters for the protection of press workers currently under consideration, notably in Paraguay and Chile, which do not have a protection program in these terms. Therefore, we can divide and classify the countries into three main groups:

7 A 2022 report by the Committee to Protect Journalists shows that Latin America was the deadliest region for journalists (see: <https://cpj.org/2023/01/latin-america-was-the-deadliest-region-for-journalists-in-2022/>). According to Reporters Without Borders, one in four journalists killed in 2025 worked in Latin America (see more at: <https://oglobo.globo.com/mundo/noticia/2025/12/09/um-em-cada-quatro-jornalistas-mortos-em-2025-trabalhava-na-america-latina-afirma-ong-reporteres-sem-fronteiras.ghtml>).



Countries with mechanisms in place:
Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Honduras

Countries with mechanisms in implementation:
Guatemala, Ecuador, and Peru

Countries where protection bills are being processed:
Chile and Paraguay

Furthermore, journalists and communicators are not a homogeneous group with similar needs. Beyond the different geographical, social, economic, and political contexts identified in different countries and within their own territories, there are also different types of intersectionality that traverse these realities, overlapping layers of violence, especially gender and race issues, which need to be considered in the design of protection policies. In general, what is observed in the region is a scarcity of policies, protocols, or specific mentions of gender issues. Moreover, these mentions, when identified, tend to be superficial and do not reflect the practice of policies.

Next, we will analyze the different levels of protection that countries have developed, bringing specific consideration to the issue of gender-based violence.

First group of countries: those in which a policy is in place

The countries that comprise this first level of protection are those that have had a public policy for the protection of journalists and communicators for some time, with some degree of institutionalization. Even so, there are criticisms regarding the lack of legal frameworks that ensure the mechanism as a state policy, making it less vulnerable to the conjunctural political changes that frequently impact its budgetary reserves, the composition of technical teams, and the effective execution and prioritization of the policy.

Most countries in this group created their mechanism around 2010, so we can consider that there is already greater maturity in its functioning and even analyze more critically not only its operation, but its impact (or not) on the local situation of press freedom and violence against journalists.

Of this group, Brazil is the first country where a national mechanism for the protection of human rights defenders was created. The Program for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Communicators, and Environmentalists (Programa de Proteção aos Defensores de Direitos Humanos, Comunicadores e Ambientalistas, PPDDH) was created in 2004, with the objective of

guaranteeing the safety and physical integrity of people threatened because of their work defending human rights. Linked to the federal government and operated in partnership with civil society organizations, the program works through agreements with state-level programs within the country. Its structure seeks to coordinate different public bodies to offer protection and monitoring measures, although its territorial coverage is still limited, since only a portion of Brazilian states maintain active centers.

Communicators and journalists were formally included in the scope of the PPDDH only in 2018, following a regulatory expansion that had long been a demand of civil society organizations dedicated to the protection of journalists and the defense of press freedom. Despite this progress, the inclusion has been largely symbolic, since the program lacks its own methodology to address the specific risks related to freedom of expression and journalistic activity. Furthermore, for a long time, the protection offered prioritized communicators who work directly in the defense of human rights, leaving out a large part of the category, such as journalists who cover politics and who are the main targets of attacks and threats.⁸

The main criticisms of the PPDDH point to the lack of a consolidated legal basis, chronic underfunding, staff shortages, and excessive dependence on civil society organizations for its implementation, which weakens state accountability. The absence of specific protocols for journalists and the lack of a preventive approach are also cited as limitations. This set of factors subjects the Program to constant instability, and it can be greatly impacted by political changes in the federal government. An example is what occurred during Jair Bolsonaro's administration (2019-2022), when the program suffered from a lack of political will and federal

8 A 2022 report by Reporters Without Borders highlighted that only communicators working “to disseminate information aimed at promoting and defending human rights and who, as a result of their work towards this goal, are experiencing situations of threat or violence aimed at constraining or inhibiting their work towards this end” would be included in the Program. See more at: <https://rsf.org/pt-br/sobre-o-programa-de-prote%C3%A7%C3%A3o-aos-defensores-de-direitos-humanos-comunicadores-e-ambientalistas>

coordination, resulting in low effectiveness and reduced beneficiary confidence in the mechanism.⁹

Since its creation, the PPDDH has had a Deliberative Council (Condel) as the body responsible for deliberating on the inclusion of cases and making strategic decisions regarding policy. However, from 2019 onwards, Condel ceased to include civil society participation, becoming composed exclusively of representatives of the federal government. This change represented a setback in the participatory governance of the program, reducing transparency and social control over its actions. Only in 2025 was Condel reconstituted, ensuring the participation of civil society.

In recent years, a process of regionalization of the policy has been observed, with nine states of Brazil implementing their own programs coordinated with the federal government for the reception and monitoring of cases. In states that do not have an agreement, protection is provided directly by the federal program, or through a regionalized federal team. Even so, public awareness of the existence and functioning of the policy is low, which limits access by potential beneficiaries. Added to this is a difficulty in recognizing and identifying journalists themselves as human rights defenders and as subjects entitled to protection.

In 2022, the Brazilian State was condemned by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) in the Gabriel Sales Pimenta case, which reinforced the need to review and strengthen the program. The Union was also condemned in a Public Civil Action judged by the domestic justice system itself, in a lawsuit that involved the participation of several civil society organizations. As a result of these decisions, the Sales Pimenta Technical Working Group (Grupo de Trabalho Técnico, GTT) was created,¹⁰ which

9 Terra de Direitos e Justiça Global. *Começo do fim? O pior momento do Programa de Proteção aos Defensores de Direitos Humanos, Comunicadores e Ambientalistas*. 2021. Available at: <https://terradedireitos.org.br/uploads/arquivos/Relatorio---Comeco-do-Fim.pdf>

10 The Collegiate Body was created in June 2023, by decree, to develop proposals for the National Policy and Plan for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders: <https://www.gov.br/mdh/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/2024/abril/conheca-mais-sobre-o-grupo-de-trabalho-tecnico-sales-pimenta>

worked for about a year and drafted a National Protection Plan as well as a bill aimed at institutionalizing the public policy.¹¹

The National Plan for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders was established by Decree No. 12,710, of November 5, 2025, which provided guidelines for the public policy. Subsequently, Joint Ordinance No. 6, of December 11, 2025, was published in the Official Gazette of the Union, establishing the Action Plan of the National Plan for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders (PlanoDDH), valid until 2035, and creating the Interministerial Committee for Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation responsible for monitoring the execution of the planned actions.

Finally, it is worth noting that, although the PPDDH is a federal program, its implementation is carried out by partner civil society organizations, which creates operational challenges. This form of management limits the scope of the policy and imposes restrictions on institutional coordination with other state bodies, hindering the effectiveness and integration of protection actions at the national level.

Another response from the federal government regarding the situation of press freedom and violence against journalists came in the first months of Lula's third administration, with the creation of the Observatory of Violence against Journalists and Social Communicators. This measure was a response to the systematic attacks suffered by media professionals while covering the attempted coup d'état of January 8, 2023, in the Three Powers Square in Brasília. Despite being an important step, the Observatory faces significant difficulties in its consolidation, considering the need for adequate structure and resources for its purpose. Only in 2025 were the ordinances published that describe the internal regulations and composition of the Observatory,¹² which faces difficulties in dialogue and coordination with other existing protection mechanisms to enable comprehensive and more efficient protection for the cases it receives.

11 At the time of publication, the draft bill developed by the GTT Sales Pimenta had not yet been submitted to the Brazilian National Congress.

12 Available at <https://www.gov.br/mj/pt-br/canais-de-denuncias/observatorio-da-violencia-contra-jornalistas-e-comunicadores/atos-normativos>

In Colombia, the National Protection Unit (Unidad Nacional de Protección, UNP) was created in 2011¹³ as part of the state policy to guarantee the life, liberty, and integrity of people at risk due to their professional, political, or social activities. Established by decree and linked to the Ministry of the Interior, the UNP consolidated various pre-existing protection programs, becoming the most structured and best-funded mechanism in the region. Its central objective is to offer protection measures to human rights defenders, social leaders, public authorities, victims of armed conflict, and communicators. Currently, the unit has a centralized administrative structure and a Risk Assessment and Measures Recommendation Committee (Comité de Evaluación del Riesgo y Recomendación de Medidas, CERREM), responsible for defining the protection actions for each beneficiary.

Communicators and journalists were formally incorporated into the UNP as a priority beneficiary group, in recognition of the fundamental role of freedom of expression in Colombian democracy and the high number of attacks suffered by this group. This inclusion allowed journalists in threatened situations to request state protection, including measures such as escorts, armored vehicles, and logistical support. In 2021, approximately 175 journalists were under the unit's protection.¹⁴ Despite this, civil society organizations point out that the protection granted prioritizes material and reactive measures, such as physical security, without addressing structural aspects of the risk, such as stigmatization, judicial harassment, and the psychosocial impact of threats.

The main criticisms of the UNP refer to the bureaucratic and centralized nature of the mechanism, the delays in risk analysis processes—which sometimes exceed the legal deadline—and the lack of effective participation of beneficiaries in defining their protection plans, points common to other mechanisms in operation in

13 Unidad Nacional de Protección (UNP). Website available at: <https://www.unp.gov.co/>

14 Reporters Without Borders. Sob Risco: Como superar as falhas dos programas de proteção a jornalistas na América Latina (Brasil, Colômbia, Honduras e México). Paris, France, February 2022. Available at: https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/relatorio_pt_final.pdf

the region. Furthermore, the model has been criticized for the outsourcing of security teams, frequently composed of employees of private companies or former intelligence agents, which generates distrust among protected journalists. Although it is possibly the most robust mechanism in the region, the UNP is seen by Colombian civil society organizations dedicated to the protection of journalists as reactive and lacking in comprehensiveness, focusing on immediate physical security solutions to the detriment of preventive policies and the strengthening of press freedom.

On the other hand, the mechanism that seems to have the most consolidated legal basis is the Mexican initiative. The Federal Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists¹⁵ was created in Mexico in 2012 through a specific law that established the basis for its operation. Linked to the Ministry of the Interior (Secretaría de Gobernación, SEGOB), the mechanism emerged as a response to the increase in attacks and assassinations of defenders and journalists. Its structure is coordinated by a Governing Board, composed of federal authorities and representatives of civil society with voting rights, which gives it a participatory and collegiate character. Since its creation, the mechanism has aimed to guarantee the safety and integrity of people at risk due to their public work, offering measures ranging from police support to emergency relocation.

Communicators and journalists have been considered a priority beneficiary group since the mechanism's inception, in recognition of their vulnerability to threats, attacks, and assassinations. This inclusion represented a significant advance compared to other countries in the region, allowing threatened media professionals to submit formal protection requests and receive measures tailored to their level of risk. In 2021, the mechanism assisted approximately 1,500 people, nearly 500 of whom were journalists. Measures ranged from armed escorts and security equipment to legal and psychological support. However, the effectiveness of these actions has been hampered by excessive demands and a lack of

15 Mecanismo de Protección para Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas. Website available at: <https://www.gob.mx/defensorasyperiodistas>

coordination with state and municipal authorities, who are not legally obligated to comply with the mechanism's decisions—often being the very entities responsible for the attacks.

The main criticisms of the Federal Mechanism relate to institutional overload, underfunding given the volume of cases, and the absence of a preventive and gender-sensitive approach. The implementation of measures is often slow and bureaucratic, and the mechanism is seen as a reactive and emergency structure, more focused on containing immediate risks than on addressing the structural causes of violence. Furthermore, the recurring use of forced displacement as a protective measure has generated serious personal and professional impacts, resulting in the interruption of journalistic careers and community disarticulation. Despite its robust institutional design and the participation of civil society, the mechanism faces failures in federal coordination, high levels of impunity, and a lack of effectiveness in preventing new attacks, while Mexico remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for the practice of journalism.

Based on information presented at hearings of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) committee and by civil society organizations, a parallel report¹⁶ was prepared highlighting serious deficiencies in the implementation of the mechanism. The rejection rate for protection applications reaches 55%, a result of multiple factors, including lack of access to information about the program, as well as risk assessments that do not consider a human rights and gender perspective. Although the mechanism is configured as a protection instrument, it does not incorporate prevention policies and does not recognize beneficiaries as active subjects in defining the measures that concern them.

In recent years, a gradual dismantling of the mechanism has been seen, with the withdrawal of protective measures and a

16 Espacio OSC. *Violencia y discriminación contra mujeres defensoras de derechos humanos y periodistas en México*. 2025. Available at: <https://espacio.osc.mx/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/EOSC-Informe-mujeres-defensoras-y-periodistas-CEDAW-2025.pdf>

reduction in available resources. This trend reflects a prioritization of budgetary maintenance at the expense of the effectiveness of actions and the safety of beneficiaries. The administrative focus on preserving resources, in addition to the lack of lasting solutions for the reintegration and support of displaced persons, highlights the structural fragility of the policy. Thus, the Federal Mechanism, although one of the oldest and most normatively robust in the region, faces a crisis of legitimacy and operational capacity, compromising its role as an effective instrument for guaranteeing a safe environment for the practice of journalism in Mexico.

The last of the mechanisms that make up this bloc is the National Protection System (Sistema Nacional de Protección, SNP)¹⁷ of Honduras, created in 2015 through a specific law¹⁸ that established a comprehensive legal framework for the protection of human rights defenders, journalists, social communicators, and justice operators. Coordinated by the Secretariat of Human Rights, the SNP has a National Protection Council that includes representatives of civil society, which, in theory, constitutes a robust and participatory institutional design. However, its implementation has faced serious structural limitations, especially related to chronic underfunding, lack of coordination between state institutions, and inconsistency in the application of protection measures.

Although communicators have been formally included since the system's creation, the protection measures offered are insufficient and, in many cases, are not effectively implemented. According to a study by Reporters Without Borders,¹⁹ in 2021, the mechanism's operational budget was only US\$430,000, making it impossible to fulfill the approved measures. Furthermore, beneficiary confidence is low—more than 60% say they do not feel safe

17 Sistema Nacional de Protección (SNP). Website available at: <https://sedh.gob.hn/sistema-proteccion/>

18 Decree No. 34-2015. Available at: <https://www.acnur.org/fileadmin/Documentos/BDL/2016/10426.pdf>

19 Reporters Without Borders Sob Risco: Como superar as falhas dos programas de proteção a jornalistas na América Latina (Brasil, Colômbia, Honduras e México). 2021. Available at: https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/relatorio_pt_final.pdf

under the SNP's protection—and journalists' organizations have left the National Council in protest against the lack of transparency, slow responses, and absence of concrete results, which compromises the system's credibility and effectiveness.

Protection of women journalists and LGBTQIAPN+ journalists in countries with protection policies in place

Although this section details the situation of mechanisms in those countries where there is apparent institutionalization and a trajectory for the implementation of public policy, there is a common shortcoming in all these realities: the inclusion and differentiated protection that women journalists and LGBTQIAPN+ journalists receive due to gender-based violence and discrimination they suffer, in addition to violations of their freedom of expression and of the press. What is observed is that the lack of sensitivity of the mechanisms to gender issues can even generate contexts of revictimization or episodes of gender-based violence perpetrated by the public policy itself.

In the Mexican case, there seem to be efforts to build a cross-cutting vision on gender, including provisions in the law that establishes the mechanism and also in the discourse of public officials on the subject. A group called “La Equipa” was created, which was supposed to address gender issues, but it has not been effective. The main difficulty lies in the fact that gender violence is a structural problem in society and should include measures that can address it as such, such as ongoing courses and training, sanctions for cases of violations, and the implementation of announced plans and protocols.

Another significant concern is the fact that some security measures are carried out by contracted private companies, in a context where cases of sexual harassment committed by employees linked to the mechanism have been reported, reinforcing the inefficiency of initiatives to include a gender perspective in policy. The concern about gender-based violence perpetrated by agents of the protection program is also common in the Colombian context, indicating that this is a recurring problem in countries that

are advancing and consolidating their policies. This scenario shows that it is necessary to reinforce the recommendation that training and awareness-raising initiatives on the subject be included continuously with all those who collaborate with the mechanism, as should be the case within the newsrooms of journalistic organizations.

In Colombia, Unidad Nacional de Protección has had a specific protocol for women since 2012, developed based on the ratification of international treaties and the recognition of the need to incorporate a gender perspective into security policies. The protocol allows beneficiaries to opt for a specialized committee that prioritizes the care of women human rights defenders and communicators, providing for protection measures extended to family members, as well as a gradual withdrawal mechanism for protection measures, which seeks to maintain preventive actions after the risk reduction. This group, which operates within the program, investigates the history of aggression suffered by the individual, helping to understand the importance of the case. Training and capacity-building with a gender focus are also planned for professionals involved in the execution of the measures. However, in practice, the protocol's operation diverges from formal norms: reports from beneficiaries indicate cases of abuse and even sexual harassment committed by police officers responsible for escorting them, revealing serious flaws in its implementation. Furthermore, the policy is criticized for forcing women to choose between being treated exclusively as women or as journalists, without full recognition of their intersectional identities and the specific risks they face.

In the case of Honduras, Reporters Without Borders²⁰ reported the existence of a document addressing gender issues within the country's mechanism. The Manual for the Application of Gender and Intersectional Approaches is the result of work by professionals specialized in and interested in the topic. However, this

20 Reporters Without Borders. *Sob Risco: Como superar as falhas dos programas de proteção a jornalistas na América Latina (Brasil, Colômbia, Honduras e México)*. 2021. Available at: https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/relatorio_pt_final.pdf

protocol is not implemented in any way, although it could serve as a good practice for policy design.

In Brazil, the Program for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, Communicators, and Environmentalists (Programa de Proteção aos Defensores de Direitos Humanos, Comunicadores e Ambientalistas, PPDDH) lacks specific guidelines or protocols addressing gender issues, limiting the policy's ability to respond to the various risks faced by women defenders and communicators. The Sales Pimenta Technical Working Group, responsible for drafting the National Protection Policy and a bill for the mechanism, included some references to a gender perspective, but without defining clear procedures or operational guidelines for its practical application. Furthermore, during the group's work, there was an initial move to remove the explicit mention of "communicators" from the list of beneficiaries of the public policy, as it could be considered that they also belong to the category of "human rights defenders." Given the complaints from organizations in the field of journalism defense and protection in Brazil regarding the potential weakening of institutional recognition of the vulnerability of these professionals, it was possible to partially reverse this omission.

Second group of countries: where recent mechanisms lack implementation

The three countries that are part of this group—Ecuador, Guatemala, and Peru—have recent, yet fragile and still consolidating, protection mechanisms created in response to the growing violence against journalists and human rights defenders. In Ecuador, the Mechanism for the Prevention and Protection of Journalistic Work, regulated by decree in 2023, emerged after the public commotion over the case of three journalists who were kidnapped and murdered in 2018. Although it was a formal step forward, the mechanism still lacks its own budget, technical structure, or consolidated protocols, which compromises its effectiveness in a context of public security crisis and attacks on the press.

In Guatemala, after years of state inaction and the dismantling of previous institutions, the country is experiencing a moment of reconstruction of its protection policy with a new government that had committed to implementing a comprehensive public policy for human rights defenders and communicators. The proposal, led by the Presidential Commission for Peace and Human Rights (Comisión Presidencial por la Paz y los Derechos Humanos, COPADEH), is still being developed and depends on consensus between civil society and the Executive branch. Despite recent mobilization, the mechanism lacks a solid legal basis and a guaranteed budget, which puts its sustainability at risk in the face of political instability.

In Peru, the Intersectoral Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, created in 2021, represents an institutional effort by the Ministry of Justice, but remains limited by a lack of resources, poor coordination between public bodies, and a lack of awareness among communicators. Protection measures face delays and implementation difficulties, while the criminalization of journalists and social leaders continues to rise. In common, the three countries share the challenge of transforming political or normative advances into effective policies, facing budgetary constraints, institutional fragility, and a lack of intersectoral coordination, which prevents the consolidation of protection mechanisms truly capable of addressing the hostile contexts of exercising freedom of expression.

Protection of women journalists and LGBTQIAPN+ journalists in countries where protection mechanisms are in place

The gender perspective is still quite restricted and limited in the mechanisms of these countries. In Ecuador, it is timidly mentioned in the decree that establishes the mechanism; in Peru, there is only a mention of gender-based violence as one of the types of aggression protected by the mechanism, and in Guatemala, attacks on women human rights defenders are mentioned, but there is no intersectional perspective considered in the construction of the public policy. This reinforces that these mechanisms are still very

incipient, even in their institutional design, in the face of the challenges of protecting journalists and communicators and the need to improve the debate on comprehensive protection with special attention to forms of gender-based violence and other forms of intersectionality.

Third group of countries: where protectionist bills are being processed

Finally, we identified a third group of countries in which legislative proposals are underway to advance the development of a regulatory framework to guarantee freedom of expression and of the press, as well as to establish a public policy for the protection of journalists, communicators, and media. Although they do not currently have a protection mechanism, they are examples of the possibilities for influencing and consolidating a new regional parameter for the design of these public policies.

In the case of Paraguay, although there is no protection mechanism as previously mentioned, the Roundtable for the Safety of Journalists was created in 2017.²¹ Formulated from a letter of intent between UNESCO and the Paraguayan state for the protection of journalists, it is currently the main instrument for protecting journalists and human rights defenders in the country.²²

The Roundtable brings together representatives of the three branches of government, the Public Prosecutor's Office, and civil society organizations, with the aim of coordinating preventive actions, adopting security measures, and strengthening the institutional response to cases of violence against journalists. Although it does not directly implement protection measures, the Roundtable functions as a body for dialogue and coordination, and has contributed to establishing more agile communication channels between threatened journalists and competent authorities, including

21 Mesa para la Seguridad de Periodistas. Official website available at: <https://seguridadperiodistas.org.py/>

22 Available at: <https://www.unesco.org/es/articles/paraguay-firmo-compromiso-pionero-sobre-seguridad-de-periodistas>

through informal rapid alert mechanisms, such as groups in instant messaging platforms.

One of the main results of the Roundtable was the development of a Police Action Protocol focused on the safety of journalists in risky situations. Despite its relevance, considered a gain for Paraguayan civil society, several criticisms and vulnerabilities are highlighted. The Roundtable plays a relevant role as a space for the exchange of information and coordination between public institutions and journalistic organizations, seeking more agile responses to risky situations faced by communication professionals. However, the initiative lacks its own regulations governing its operation, which limits its capacity to act and depends heavily on the individual dedication of the representatives who are part of the space. Civil society organizations acknowledge that the creation of the Roundtable has contributed to improving the flow of information and promoting dialogue between the different actors involved, but state that it lacks a legal structure, financial resources, and clear operational protocols, which prevents a consistent institutional response to cases of violence.

Representatives of civil society and journalists' associations denounce the lack of effective measures in emergency situations. In one case from 2025, two threats against journalists were registered, but the Roundtable did not take immediate action, forcing colleagues and organizations to directly contact the competent public bodies to guarantee emergency protection measures. This lack of responsiveness reveals that the mechanism, in practice, is not binding and does not impose concrete obligations on state institutions.

Thus, its functioning essentially depends on the political goodwill and individual commitment of the representatives of the institutions involved, which makes its performance irregular and unpredictable. The absence of a normative basis and its own funding weakens the mechanism and prevents it from evolving into a permanent and effective public policy. Despite its importance as a space for dialogue, the Roundtable still operates under precarious and voluntarist conditions, without the necessary support to guarantee the full and immediate protection

of threatened journalists in the country. The Roundtable does not adopt criteria, protocols, or guidelines regarding gender intersectionality in its handling of cases and actions. Civil society organizations that are part of the Roundtable report that it is now acknowledged, based on the monitoring conducted by the Roundtable, that cases of online violence affect women journalists more, however, this does not translate into actions or practical measures incorporated into the Roundtable's daily operations.

It is important to mention that the Paraguayan state has already been condemned twice by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in cases related to freedom of expression and the protection of journalists. The most recent case concerns the assassination of journalist Santiago Leguizamón,²³ which occurred in 1991 in the city of Pedro Juan Caballero, on the border with Brazil. The Court determined structural reparation measures. Among these measures, the sentence obliges Paraguay to approve a national law for the protection of journalists and human rights defenders, in addition to ensuring budgetary resources for the Roundtable for the Safety of Journalists, until a permanent state mechanism is implemented.

This ruling served as a key driver for the progress of legislative initiatives to protect journalists. A draft Law on the Protection of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders was presented to the Senate in April 2023, on the anniversary of Leguizamón's death. The proposal seeks to institutionalize a protection mechanism, guaranteeing its own budget, permanent technical structure, and legal obligations for state institutions. The draft also incorporates a gender perspective and a territorial focus, recognizing the specific vulnerabilities faced by women communicators and professionals working in border regions, marked by a strong presence of organized crime. If approved, the new legal framework will represent an important step in the transition

23 Caso Leguizamón Zaván Y Otros Vs. Paraguay. *Sentencia de 15 de Noviembre de 2022 (Fondo, Reparaciones y Costas)*. Available at https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_475_esp.pdf

from an informal and voluntary model to a formal, structured, and sustainable public policy.

In 2025, again coinciding with National Journalist Day and the anniversary of Santiago Leguizamón's death, the proposal's progress was revived. The Senate, which is currently analyzing the bill, postponed the vote on October 15, 2025. Civil society organizations such as the Paraguayan Journalists' Union (Sindicato de Periodistas del Paraguay, SPP) lamented the postponement, arguing that there are no technical observations regarding the proposal, only a lack of political will on the part of the senators to protect this constitutional right to freedom of expression.

Another country facing a similar context is Chile. Over the last decade, the country has experienced a political and social climate marked by profound transformations—a right-wing government with little regard for human rights, countered by the rise of a feminist wave, massive social protests (known as the 2019 social uprising, *estallido social*), during which more than 300 media professionals were attacked and two attempts at constitutional reform were initiated.

A few years later, the government of President Gabriel Boric, elected on a progressive platform, signaled its intention to build an agenda focused on the democratization of communication and the defense of freedom of expression and of the press. However, despite the initial intentions, no concrete public policies were implemented in this area. During his term, the government promoted several diagnoses and studies, including the report *Más Comunicación, Más Amplitud, Más Democracia* (More Communication, More Amplitude, More Democracy)²⁴, prepared by universities and civil society organizations, and another on disinformation and freedom of expression. Even so, these efforts

24 PANCANI, Dino; ORTEGA, Juan Enrique; MUÑOZ, Carolina; CASTILLO, Ana María; RODRÍGUEZ, Carolina; MUÑOZ, Cristian; ANDRADA, Pablo; EYTEL, Barbara; del VALLE, Carlos. *Más amplitud, más voces, más democracia: aportes para las comunicaciones del Chile que viene*. Santiago: University of Chile and other institutions, January 2023. Available at: <https://oped.educacion.uc.cl/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Informe-Mas-Amplitud-Mas-Voces-Mas-Democracia.pdf> . Accessed on October 16, 2025.

did not translate into structural actions, reflecting the lack of political will to transform diagnoses into effective policies.

Chile has had a Press Law since 2001 that guarantees freedom of opinion and information, but it is considered insufficient to prevent attacks and combat impunity, and it contains a restrictive definition of journalists. Since 2022, parliament has been debating the adoption of a model law for the protection of journalists and media professionals, a proposal inspired by international standards. The initiative gained new momentum when a member of parliament, a woman who is also a journalist, formally presented the draft protection law, which incorporates a specific article on the gender perspective, focusing on digital violence and the protection of the families of media professionals. The text establishes definitions of the types of attacks, the obligations of the State, and the institutional protection mechanisms, representing a significant normative advance for the country.

However, the bill faced resistance in Congress, which has a conservative majority, leading to the removal of provisions that provided for sanctions against aggressors. This decision was considered necessary to ensure that the text could advance through the legislative process. Thus, although the proposal represents an important step in recognizing the state's duty to protect journalists and communicators, it still lacks punitive force and clear implementation mechanisms. The Chilean case therefore highlights a mismatch between progressive discourse and institutional practice, where freedom of expression is recognized as a democratic value, but the effective protection of the professionals who exercise it remains insufficient.

Protection of women journalists and LGBTQIAPN+ journalists in countries where protection bills are being considered

Regarding the gender perspective, Paraguay and Chile face similar challenges: how to include a perspective of protection for women journalists in their new legislative proposals while facing

a parliament hostile to these issues,²⁵ and when existing laws are often used against the practice of journalism.

In Paraguay, there is no specific protocol addressing gender issues within the Roundtable for the Safety of Journalists, even though, due to monitoring and cases received, the Roundtable is aware of some aspects of the differentiated violence suffered by women journalists – such as the fact that they are much more frequently targeted by attacks in the digital sphere. However, the Ministry of Women does not participate in the Roundtable, which highlights a lack of intersectoral coordination and the absence of a gender-sensitive approach in strategies for the safety and prevention of violence against women journalists in the country.

From a normative standpoint, although the country has legislation addressing violence against women, these laws have, in some cases, been misused as instruments of censorship, especially by women in political positions who resort to the law to impede journalistic investigations or public criticism. The Comprehensive Protection Law for Women (*Ley de Protección Integral a las Mujeres*, Law 5767) is not only useless for women journalists but, on the contrary, has been used against the work of journalists. Beyond the fear of reporting the violence they suffer, the law does not function for protection or prevention, but only to apply sanctions to aggressors, which has been done in a distorted way.

This distortion has been reinforced by judicial decisions that interpret the law restrictively, resulting in limitations on the work of the press and the creation of a dangerous precedent for freedom of expression. The scenario is marked by divergent positions: on one side, conservative sectors that defend the repeal of the law and, on the other, groups that seek to reinterpret it in light of human rights, ensuring that its use does not violate freedom

²⁵ It is worth mentioning that the same problem is faced by other countries that already have more structured protection mechanisms. In some cases, such as in Brazil, this incompatibility between the intention to create and strengthen protection mechanisms for journalists and communicators and the majority political position in the legislative sphere has been an obstacle to the strengthening and institutionalization of protection mechanisms and additional documents that bring more robustness and effectiveness to existing measures.

of the press. A similar scenario is observed in Mexico, where the legislation dealing with gender-based political violence has been misused and is now one of the strategies by which political figures, such as female parliamentarians, use this legislation to censor information of public interest about themselves, in a clear strategy of judicial harassment against journalists.

In Chile, the first constituent process²⁶ represented a historic opportunity to incorporate the right to communication as a democratic principle, linked to themes such as media literacy, gender equality, and a feminist approach to the media. This debate emerged in a complex political context, marked by difficulties in accessing information, a strong concentration of media power, and resistance from conservative sectors during the right-wing government. Even so, journalists' organizations, feminist collectives, and social movements played a decisive role in proposing structural reforms that guaranteed greater plurality and diversity in the media. Among the main proposals were the inclusion of media literacy in school curricula and the recognition of the right to communication in the new Constitution, ensuring equitable access to information and fair representation of women and historically marginalized groups. Although the process faced strong resistance, especially from male representatives and conservative sectors, it was fundamental in opening the dialogue on the role of communication and gender equality in consolidating Chilean democracy.

The draft Model Law on Safety and Protection for Journalists and Press Workers currently under consideration in the country includes specific provisions regarding the rights of women journalists and their special protection. This law should be in

26 In September 2022, Chile held a plebiscite on a new Constitution supported by the administration of President Gabriel Boric. The proposal granted a wide range of social rights, as well as an emphasis on environmental protection and indigenous "plurinationality." The plebiscite resulted in the rejection of the proposal, with a majority of 62% of the votes. With the defeat, the 1980 Constitution, a legacy of the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship, remained in force. A new Constitution was presented in 2023, this time led by the far-right and with a series of setbacks in terms of social rights, and it was again rejected in the popular vote.

accordance with other legislation already approved that is related to the topic. The Bill Against Digital Violence, presented to the Chilean Parliament in 2020 and recently approved by the Senate, represents a significant advance in incorporating a gender perspective in addressing violence perpetrated in virtual environments. The proposal seeks to recognize and classify digital gender-based violence, broadening the understanding of aggressions that occur online — such as harassment, threats, and non-consensual exposure of images — and their disproportionate impact on women communicators. Unlike other initiatives focused solely on punishment, the bill prioritizes prevention, education, and public awareness measures, aligning itself with international standards of human rights and gender equality. Furthermore, the text provides for the creation of a technical advisory committee, responsible for incorporating the voices of experts in monitoring and implementing the policy.

On the other hand, civil society organizations also highlighted concerns about the progress and possible approval of the so-called Gag Law 2.0 (*Ley Mordaza 2.0*). This initiative aims to combat the leaking of information from inquiries and investigations. Although it does not appear to be the central focus of the proposal, the text included a provision that also criminalizes anyone who discloses leaked information, generating a high risk of criminalizing journalistic activity. If, on the one hand, there is resistance to the approval of initiatives that strengthen the protection of journalists, on the other hand, regulations have been approved and implemented that directly or indirectly threaten the free exercise of journalism.

The protection developed and offered by civil society

The various countries of Latin America present different levels of institutionalization and maturity of their national mechanisms for the protection of journalists and communicators. Some are already better established by laws or regulations and have been implemented for a longer time, but suffer from being overburdened,

lacking the necessary budget and/or staff. Others are still on the path to institutionalizing and implementing policies. Although there are differences, there is a common point among these different scenarios of institutionalization of protection: the inadequacy of public policies in the face of the enormous challenges the region faces in guaranteeing a safe environment for the practice of journalism. This makes the role of civil society organizations central not only to ensuring the functioning of public policies, but also to complement state measures.

Furthermore, in most of the analyzed countries, the main aggressors against the press are public officials and authorities. This undermines the trust that communicators and journalists have in a protection mechanism managed by the State itself and often results in the underreporting of these cases within the mechanisms, wherever they exist. And, when they are properly reported, the unpreparedness of the teams responsible for assisting victims in cases where the aggressors are agents of the State itself exacerbates the feeling of distrust and the perceived inefficiency of public protection policies. The lack of specific training and adequate protocols to deal with these situations undermines the victims' trust in public institutions and hinders the adoption of effective protection and reparation measures.

Another consequence is that journalists and communicators do not relate to local public policies. In countries like Brazil, the invisibility of the inclusion of communicators in the Protection Program results in an underrepresentation of this group in politics – they were only included in 2018, but the program lacks specific protocols and the policy is not adequately adapted to accommodate this public. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling in the case of *Santiago Leguizamón vs. Paraguay* highlighted that journalists are human rights defenders and should receive protection because of this role. However, communicators often do not recognize themselves as part of the human rights defenders and therefore fail to access these policies – a reality shared in several countries in the region. Policies are not always designed in this sense, and legislative initiatives that

advance more adequate protection parameters encounter resistance within political sectors of parliament that understand them as “privileges” of the category.

This deficiency persists even in the most consolidated mechanisms. In Mexico and Colombia, the alternative of contracting companies to implement the policy has led to structural problems of lack of training and ongoing capacity-building for agents, who themselves become aggressors against the protected subjects. In the case of Brazil, the implementation of the policy through partnerships with states and civil society organizations leaves bottlenecks in those localities where there are no agreements and hinders the management of the program from the federal team. Furthermore, it lacks mechanisms or normative devices that guarantee the execution of security measures, not even from the state services themselves, such as the impossibility of normative provisions to ensure specialized escort for defenders who need this protection.

Meanwhile, impunity remains one of the main obstacles to the effectiveness of protection mechanisms. There is no guarantee that cases of violence against journalists and communicators will be properly investigated or resolved, which reinforces a climate of distrust and vulnerability among the victims.

In Paraguay, the situation regarding violence against journalists is extremely serious and marked by systematic impunity. Since records began, 21 journalists have been murdered, and in none of the cases has it been possible to identify the entire chain of perpetrators, including masterminds and intermediaries. Most of these crimes occurred in border regions, especially in areas near Brazil and Argentina, where there is a strong presence of organized crime, drug trafficking, and corruption. These factors create zones of silence, in which journalistic activity is severely limited by fear and the absence of security guarantees. The lack of effective investigation and punishment of those responsible not only perpetuates the cycle of violence but also compromises the right to information and freedom of expression in the country.

The absence of effective accountability, in turn, not only perpetuates violence but also undermines trust in democratic

institutions, highlighting the need for independent and transparent mechanisms to investigate violations and guarantee the full protection of media professionals. Initiatives to create protocols for action and investigation for the police and the Public Prosecutor's Office have been progressing, largely driven by civil society organizations in Colombia, Paraguay, and Brazil.

Given this context of invisibility and attempts to minimize the violence suffered by journalists and communicators, a valuable contribution that various civil society organizations have made is the systematic documentation and recording of cases. Monitoring and documentation are essential tools for making normalized violence visible, identifying structural barriers that affect freedom of expression, and developing protection strategies appropriate to the specific realities of the victims.

The organizations ARTÍCULO 19 Mexico y Centroamérica²⁷ and Tedic, from Paraguay,²⁸ have developed valuable guides on how to document cases of violence for this purpose. The documents were presented as “living material,” constantly updated according to the needs and experiences observed in the field. This approach emphasizes the autonomy of victims, who are treated as rights-holders and agents of their own lives, and underscores the need to raise awareness among staff in order to create safe and respectful spaces for support.

This becomes even more important when dealing with gender-based violence and providing support to women journalists and LGBTQIAPN+ individuals. According to ARTÍCULO 19, the documentation process includes several stages: defining monitoring objectives, assessing resources and support networks, actively searching for cases, planning investigations, and conducting interviews based on ethical principles and non-revictimization. The methodology prioritizes understanding the context and environment in which the aggressions occur, seeking to identify whether they are isolated attacks or reflections of broader

27 Available at: <https://seguridadintegral.articulo19.org/>

28 Available at: <https://www.tedic.org/seguridad-digital-para-coberturas-de-alto-riesgo-en-paraguay/>

structures of discrimination and inequality. Documentation is a form of protection and resistance, which can be summarized by the maxim: “what is not documented does not exist.” Therefore, the detailed recording of aggressions, the verification of information, and the monitoring of cases are fundamental steps to generate data that support effective public policies and advocacy actions. When dealing with groups that, due to the nature of the rights violations they experience and the lower public legitimacy of their accounts, are generally listed as “underreported” in regional violence statistics, these strategies become even more relevant and necessary for making visible the aggressions and general and specific patterns of violence.

Making violence visible also helps to strengthen the protection of journalists who live and work in more vulnerable and hostile contexts. What was previously a self-organized effort by journalists now has the support of civil society organizations that are attentive to different contexts.

On the other hand, the challenge of dealing with diversity and providing financial, psychological, professional, and legal support persists. When dealing with diversities – of gender, race, sexuality, territory, and sociopolitical context – best practices point to the need to listen to and include victims in the construction of initiatives that will ultimately serve to protect them.

The guide developed by Tedic highlights patterns in recurring cases of impunity, self-censorship, and persecution, reinforcing the need for integrated protection strategies that include digital security, legal support, and solidarity networks. The proposed methodology emphasizes that the aggressions do not end with the event itself, as they produce lasting emotional and professional impacts. Thus, documenting and making the violence visible becomes a political act of resistance and defense of freedom of expression, as well as an essential step in breaking the cycle of silence and impunity that especially affects women journalists in the region.

More recently, Chile has also begun documenting violence against journalists and producing reports that highlight the

situation and serve as a basis for advocacy strategies. Especially in the context of the massive social protests, known as the *estallido social* (social uprising) journalists became targets of state repression, but diagnoses, statistics, and records of this violence were lacking. It was in this context that the organization Observatorio del Derecho a la Comunicación (ODC) was created, focusing particularly on community communicators who did not receive support from mainstream media. Through ODC reports, it has been possible to highlight an increase in gender-related alerts in digital environments, and that women are the main victims of stigmatizing discourse.

The work of documenting, making visible, and monitoring cases becomes even more powerful when carried out regionally or globally, as is done by international organizations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders, and ARTIGO 19, or even regional networks like Voces Del Sur, which brings together 17 organizations from different Latin American countries to produce unified reports on the state of press freedom.

In this sense, it is important to strengthen the dialogue between LGBTQIAPN+ organizations and entities that protect freedom of expression, given the observation that there is still little direct interaction with LGBTQIAPN+ people who are victims of attacks, especially when it comes to the transgender population, which is a daily target of multiple forms of violence, including in the areas of communication and journalism.

This disconnect makes it difficult to develop responses that adequately address their specific needs and to combat underreporting. Furthermore, journalism, as an activity carried out in the public sphere, remains strongly marked by unequal gender structures, with a predominance of white, cisgender, and heterosexual men in newsrooms and decision-making bodies.

Violence against journalists presents distinct characteristics according to gender, including in the digital environment. Women journalists suffer attacks with connotations of gender, morality, or appearance, while men are more frequently targeted

with threats to their professional credibility. This differentiation is also reflected in institutional perceptions of protection measures. In Mexico, organizations highlighted that forced displacement is often applied as a security measure. This measure tends to be seen as a heroic act when carried out by men, but interpreted as a failure to fulfill social roles—such as that of mother or caregiver—when it involves women.

Civil society organizations, such as ARTÍCULO 19, have been contributing to the Mechanism for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists by incorporating a gender perspective into recommendations and protocols. This includes the development of alerts targeted at specific public agents, with requirements adapted to the severity and nature of the attacks. The documentation and monitoring system has also been improved, currently encompassing 18 categories of aggression, with subcategories identifying whether there were characteristics of gender-based violence, as well as the recording of data on gender identity, race, and belonging to indigenous communities of the victims.

These advances represent important steps toward improving institutional responses and promoting more equitable and contextualized protection, recognizing that violence against journalists in Mexico is intersected by markers of gender, race, and identity.

In other countries, different strategies have been designed to foster discussion about intersectional agendas within the mechanisms. In Colombia, the Fundación para la Libertad de Prensa (FLIP), an organization that works to protect journalists and influences the functioning of the local protection mechanism, filed a lawsuit in the Constitutional Court to differentiate what it means to be a woman journalist, as well as the differentiated impact of threats against their children and families. After being studied, this information is transmitted to the Protection Unit, in addition to enabling advocacy with the Public Prosecutor's Office regarding the gender perspective.

Coordinated action within networks is an essential element in strategies to support women communicators and human rights defenders. Various organizations work together in an

articulated manner, each contributing their expertise to multiply their capabilities.

The Paraguayan experience demonstrates the potential of organizational coordination, especially in combating digital violence. Recognizing that women are the main victims of digital attacks, the Tedic organization works to support women who suffer from hacking, identity theft, and hate attacks on social media, intervening directly with the platforms. Furthermore, they have developed a combined approach with other organizations, where some focus on initial containment, providing initial support and identifying urgent needs, before integrating into a referral network capable of handling more complex cases. In this model, the collaboration between entities such as the Feminist Legal Clinic, PsicoFem²⁹, psychological support teams, and the Ministry of Women seeks to ensure more coordinated responses and avoid the revictimization of those served. The proposal aims to strengthen inter-institutional cooperation, promoting clear service flows, joint presentations, and referrals that assure the victim that effective action and continuous follow-up have been taken.

In Mexico, the Civil Society Space for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Journalists (Espacio de Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil para la Protección de Personas Defensoras de Derechos Humanos y Periodistas, known as Espacio OSC), was created, where various organizations working with the federal protection mechanism meet to discuss policy shortcomings. They hold regional meetings in the states of the republic to jointly develop diagnoses, check results, and formulate recommendations that can form the basis for advocacy strategies with the State.

In Brazil, the Coalition in Defense of Journalism (Coalizão em Defesa do Jornalismo, CDJor), publicly launched in May 2024, brings together 11 civil society organizations, including ARTIGO 19 Brazil and South America, and aims to strengthen and coordinate their actions to guarantee a safe environment for the practice of journalism in the country. The coalition's work had already been articulated in 2022, in the electoral and post-electoral

29 Available at: <https://psicofem.org/#inicio>

context, to monitor and record cases of violence jointly, as well as to facilitate the coordination of advocacy actions. Furthermore, CDJor is a valuable space for exchanging information on cases of threatened journalists, victims of judicial harassment, and other attacks, to enhance the support and assistance that member organizations offer to victims. For the 2024 elections, the Coalition conducted continuous and joint monitoring of attacks against the press, with a special focus on digital violence and the gender and race disparities of the victims.

The Vladimir Herzog Institute, together with ARTIGO 19 leads the coordination of the National Network for the Protection of Journalists and Communicators, with the participation of civil society organizations, communicators and journalists, communication collectives, social movements, unions, and other entities. The Network has become a benchmark in confronting violations of freedom of expression and of the press, through broad national coordination, training of communicators, and monitoring of cases. One of the network's areas of focus is with popular communicators from favelas³⁰, quilombos³¹, and other communities.

In Chile, several initiatives have also been observed to strengthen the articulation and joint action of civil society organizations in the more recent context. From 2015 onwards, the country experienced a growing mobilization process around gender equality and the democratization of communication, driven mainly by civil society organizations and feminist journalist collectives. In this context, the National Gender Commission of the Chilean Journalists' Association (Comisión Nacional de Género

30 Favelas (a Brazilian Portuguese term often translated as slums) are informal urban settlements that frequently lack adequate public services, water, and electricity. They emerged from historical processes linked to colonization and urban inequality, which pushed low-income communities to occupy peripheral or undervalued spaces. According to the 2022 national census, 16.4 million people reported living in favelas.

31 Quilombos are Afro-Brazilian communities founded by quilombolas — people who escaped slavery and their descendants — and are legally recognized for their collective territorial and cultural identity. They exist in both urban and rural areas.

del Colegio de Periodistas de Chile) was created to defend freedom of expression and of the press, promote women's participation in the field of communication, and strengthen the bond between professionals and students. In 2018, the commission launched the Non-Sexist Media (Medios No Sexistas) campaign, which denounced the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and in journalistic awards, as well as exposing cases of harassment and gender-based violence suffered by journalists and interns in newsrooms. Shortly afterward, the country would experience a feminist wave that would question the power structures in universities and the media.

The *estallido social* of 2019 (social uprising) once again marked a turning point in this process. Amidst repression and social crisis, the Network of Feminist Journalists and Communicators (Red de Periodistas y Comunicadoras Feministas) was born, with the mission of diagnosing the working conditions of women journalists, evaluating the media environment and public space, and promoting non-sexist journalism, guided by intersectionality and gender justice. During the protests, more than 400 violent attacks and arbitrary detentions of communication professionals were recorded, in addition to cases of sexual and political violence against women, committed by state agents. These violations highlighted the fragility of press freedom guarantees and the need for specific protection policies for women communicators and human rights defenders.

In the post-2019 period, new challenges arose, such as information blockades, the lack of plurality in the media, and the concentration of communicational power, especially under conservative governments. These contexts stimulated the emergence of constitutional reform proposals that sought to incorporate the right to communication, media literacy, and a gender and feminist approach in the media. With the arrival of the Boric government and the boost to the discussion on freedom of expression, Chile hosted the annual UNESCO event on May 3, 2024, the International Press Freedom Day. The occasion made it possible to internationally highlight the local reality, and on the same occasion, the creation of the Coalition for the Strengthening of

Freedom of Expression (Coalición por el Fortalecimiento de la Libertad de Expresión, Cofle) was launched, bringing together various Chilean civil society organizations that have been working to present fundamental proposals³² to strengthen freedom of expression, protect media workers, promote informational pluralism, and combat discrimination in the Chilean media.

The overall context of civil society in the region indicates that, on the one hand, various resilience strategies have been developed to monitor cases and pressure public bodies responsible for ensuring the safety of journalists. However, it is also true that organizations face a very restrictive context in terms of funding, in addition to the impact of transformations in multilateralism that limit the scope of international advocacy. Therefore, not only must states maintain a protection structure with the necessary budget, but funders, whether from international cooperation, philanthropy, or other sectors, must guarantee support so that civil society organizations can continue to exist and carry out essential projects in their countries to fill gaps and promote public policies.

32 Available at: <https://eluniversal.cl/2024/03/05/fortaleciendo-la-libertad-de-expresion-en-chile-recomendaciones-de-la-cofle-a-la-onu-para-protger-a-periodistas-y-promover-el-pluralismo-informativo/>

Challenges to protecting those who communicate in the south american context



Protecting journalists and communicators is especially challenging because new forms of silencing are constantly emerging and evolving, aiming to prevent messages of public interest from reaching communities, cities, or countries. Furthermore, violence is not experienced in the same way by all journalists and communicators, as this is not a homogeneous group. Popular communicators, independent professionals, and freelancers, as well as women and LGBTQIAPN+ individuals, are among the most vulnerable groups, both in terms of violence and the difficulty of accessing public policies. This is because these groups bear different layers of violence and a stigmatization that accompanies even the act of reporting the violence they suffer, ultimately normalizing attacks and contributing to the underreporting of cases. In Latin American countries, with strong legacies of authoritarianism, underreporting and self-censorship are further fueled by distrust of the State and public authorities who should be supportive and protective agents.

Impunity remains one of the central factors fueling the continued violence against journalists, communicators, and human rights defenders. While accountability policies are necessary, there is a consensus that purely punitive measures do not contribute to protection and do not address the structural dynamics that allow these violations to recur. The absence of robust protocols for investigating crimes against journalists fosters the normalization of violence, weakens the institutional capacity to prevent new attacks, and reinforces cycles of underreporting and self-censorship, as victims lack confidence that their complaints will be taken seriously and are more exposed to threats.

The perception of impunity is aggravated by the fact that, in many cases, the perpetrators are public officials, further reducing the expectation of resolution. Furthermore, the structural difficulties of society itself are exacerbated by the lack of courses, training, and capacity-building in human rights, and more specifically

in freedom of expression and of the press, so that the responsible bodies end up not developing the necessary skills to investigate and respond to this type of violence. Without accountability mechanisms, effective sanctions, and stable institutional practices, impunity becomes the norm, weakening the right to freedom of expression and undermining trust in public institutions.

At the same time, the building and maintenance of protection policies face historical limitations, including institutional instability, resource scarcity, and a lack of approaches that consider social and territorial inequalities in strategy development. To strengthen protection, it is crucial to reinforce the role of journalism and communication as essential components of democratic life, confronting the perception of a hostile media, especially prevalent in the digital environment. The impacts of this violence are far-reaching: they undermine job opportunities, weaken career trajectories, and deepen existing insecurities—especially for communicators working without ties to established organizations capable of providing support.

Given this scenario, it is necessary to develop policies that transcend the punitive logic that increasing penalties for crimes means greater security, recognizing that punishment alone, especially in countries marked by impunity, does not guarantee protection. Effective measures must involve prevention, human rights education, community strengthening, inclusion of historically marginalized groups, and recognition of the multiple dimensions that constitute the risk for those engaged in journalistic activity. Only with this broader approach will it be possible to confront the dynamics of silencing and ensure that all relevant voices in the public debate can carry out their work safely and freely.

Judicial harassment

Judicial harassment is a recurring theme in the public debate about violations of press freedom, becoming increasingly common and sophisticated, demanding the attention of public authorities, but also of civil society and journalistic companies and organizations. The term, which became popular in Latin America, is better known around the world by Strategic Lawsuit Against Public

Participation and its acronym, SLAPP. The definition of this phenomenon is still under debate, precisely because of the intrinsic difficulties in the search for universally comprehensive concepts, since the way the phenomenon presents itself and impacts the exercise of the right to freedom of expression depends on the particularities of each country, region, judicial system, and economic, political, and social pressures, in addition to the individual characteristics of the person being prosecuted.

UNESCO, in a 2022 report,³³ described SLAPPs as “legal claims that are typically initiated by a powerful actor (a state body/official, high-profile individual or firm) to intimidate and silence weaker parties who criticize or disseminate public interest messages unfavorable to them.” The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in a 2024 document, defined SLAPPs as “lawsuits or threats of legal action which use abusive litigation tactics with the aim or effect of suppressing public participation and critical reporting on public interest matters”.³⁴

In the region, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights has already ruled on cases that have been characterized as SLAPPs. In particular, in the case of *Palacio Urrutia vs. Ecuador*, in a ruling dated November 24, 2021, the Court highlighted its concern about the use of legal action by public officials to silence criticism, thus constituting threats to freedom of expression,³⁵ especially criminal actions for offenses against honor. It even cited the Human Rights Council in its statement on “the strategic use of the justice system, by commercial entities and individuals, against public participation, with the aim of pressuring journalists and preventing them from producing critical and/or investigative reporting”.³⁶

33 The full report can be found at: https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000383832_locale=en

34 The full report can be accessed at this link: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/briefer-the-impact-slapps-hr-how-resond.pdf>

35 *Caso Palacio Urrutia y otros Vs. Ecuador. Fondo, Reparaciones y Costas. Sentence of November 24th. 2021, paragraph 95.* Available at: https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_446_esp.pdf.

36 The UN Human Rights Council resolution can be found at: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/45/L.42>

Judicial harassment has been observed throughout the region. Reports from Mexico,³⁷ Colombia,³⁸ and Brazil³⁹ point to some regional trends such as the use of criminal law to justify the non-sharing of information of public interest, the power imbalance caused by politicians, high-ranking public officials or businesspeople, and serial lawsuits. Beyond the criminal sphere, which is a concern in several Latin American countries that still criminalize slander, defamation, and libel, the use of other laws that are distorted with the aim of silencing the work of journalists and communicators has also been highlighted. Reports from Mexico and Paraguay, countries with specific laws to combat gender-based political violence, showed that despite being an important mechanism to protect women against various forms of violence, this mechanism is being abused by female politicians to accuse male and female journalists when they don't appreciate a report, even when it involves fair and accurate investigations on topics of public interest.

Lawsuits for harassment can lead to various claims, from imprisonment to multimillion-dollar compensations, including censorship and removal of content. Cases are not always successful: they may result in settlements, be withdrawn by the plaintiff, or extend for years until they become moot. However, due to the abusive nature of such actions, a conviction is not necessary for the victim's rights to be violated: the very existence of the lawsuit is already a form of anticipated punishment. This is because these cases carry an economic, financial, professional, personal, and emotional burden that results in individual and collective self-censorship. The aim of judicial harassment is, in fact, to wear down the victim, with the expenditure of time and financial resources to pay lawyers and support the construction of a defense. Furthermore, it carries a significant burden of intimidation due to its capacity to

37 The report *Las leyes como mecanismo de censura: aumento del acoso judicial contra periodistas en México* is available at: <https://articulo19.org/las-leyes-como-mecanismo-de-censura-aumento-del-acoso-judicial-contra-periodistas-en-mexico/>

38 *Leyes del Silencio* report can be accessed at <https://articulo19.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/INFORME-LEYES-DEL-SILENCIO.pdf>

39 The Abraji Judicial Harassment Monitor is available at <https://assediojudicial.abraji.org.br/relatorios/>

cause considerable damage to the personal lives and careers of professionals involved. Finally, this impact is suffered not only by the woman journalist or communicator who receives the lawsuit, but also by their colleagues, who are afraid to investigate and publish on the same subject, and by the general public, who are deprived of information of public interest due to self-censorship.

Challenges in protecting journalists and communicators from judicial harassment

- New abusive strategies emerging all the time
- Protecting freedom of expression in conjunction with other rights
- Guarantee the independence of three branches of government
- Develop mechanisms for prevention, not just reaction

Despite this growing landscape of abusive litigation, new strategies of legal harassment, and the misuse of the justice system, none of the protection mechanisms analyzed showed any initiative capable of adequately addressing judicial harassment. In countries that have some protection mechanism, it tends to be more reactive than preventive. In this context of abusive lawsuits, this approach is limited, considering that the violation is already realized simply by the processing of the case. On the other hand, the tools for accessing the right to defense for journalists and communicators are overburdened in various countries of the region. Public defenders' offices or other public bodies providing access to justice do not usually have specific lines of defense for journalists and communicators, or even be involved in combating judicial harassment. Thus, community communicators and

economically vulnerable journalists, who are the most vulnerable groups in these cases, often depend on initiatives developed by civil society organizations that need more support and funding to meet the high demand.

Other structural challenges limit the effectiveness of actions to protect against and address judicial harassment. Among these issues, the tension related to the independence of the branches of government stands out. While fundamental to democratic order, it's crucial to recognize that the Judiciary has been instrumental in violating freedom of expression and therefore must open itself to the creation of protective measures and inter-institutional protocols. Added to this is the recurring difficulty in ensuring continuous training and capacity-building opportunities for judges and other agents of the justice system, which compromises the assimilation of updated approaches to human rights and the renewal of abusive litigation strategies. Furthermore, it is observed that, although the judiciary is also a victim of judicial harassment, suffering from large amounts of unfounded lawsuits that contribute to the system's overload, agents of the justice system often act to replicate and perpetuate these violations. This occurs either because judges are the authors of lawsuits for judicial harassment, or through restrictive interpretations, intentional delays, or disproportionate decisions that disregard the protection of freedom of expression.

Violations committed through information and communication technologies

Violations committed through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have significantly increased in recent years, particularly affecting women communicators, human rights defenders, and women journalists. There has been a marked increase in digital attacks, including disinformation, hate speech, identity theft, hacking, and coordinated campaigns to discredit

the professional work of these women.⁴⁰ Many victims, however, do not immediately recognize that they are being targeted by this type of violence, which hinders their ability to seek help and activate protection mechanisms. Considering that women and the LGBTQIAPN+ population are the main victims of online attacks, there is a normalization of this violence, as if social networks were an environment with greater tolerance for high levels of hostility. In fact, this is at the root of this violence, which combines attempts to censor journalistic work with sexism and LGBTQIA+phobia, with the aim of distancing and excluding these people from public debate.

One of the main challenges identified is the lack of adequate tools for investigating, prosecuting, and holding perpetrators accountable. Frequently, attacks are perpetrated by right-wing political groups, business collectives, or even parliamentarians reacting to journalistic comments or coverage, questioning the credibility of female professionals simply because they are women. In many cases, it is not possible to directly identify who is behind hacks or fake profiles, although some situations can be connected to complaints previously made by civil society organizations. Furthermore, there is a strong tendency towards self-censorship, motivated both by a lack of knowledge about how to react and by the high risk of retaliation, especially when the aggressors possess significant political power – and are often linked to the very authorities responsible for investigating.

Another recurring obstacle is the low priority given by police forces and the justice system to reports of digital violence. In practice, virtual threats and attacks are often not considered serious, and investigations are limited by the absence of adequate protocols, lack of technical knowledge, and the low level of seriousness attributed to the issue. When, in fact, digital attacks often precede more serious physical violence and should serve as a warning of

⁴⁰ The organization SocialTic has developed a typology of digital attacks that includes attacks that occur through technical vulnerabilities or that are carried out through human conduct, whether direct or indirect. Access the typology at this link: <https://protege.la/ataques/>

future threats and aggressions. When it comes to areas that are distant from large urban centers, these obstacles are even greater due to low digital literacy, restricted internet access, and a lack of information about digital rights.

Despite these difficulties, some civil society initiatives have sought to expand prevention and strengthen local capacities through initiatives such as training sessions for male and female communicators at universities, participation in coalitions, and awareness campaigns about digital rights and how to protect oneself from attacks. However, civil society cannot act alone, and some initiatives have reinforced the importance and necessity of creating rapid communication channels with the companies responsible for digital platforms, allowing for the identification and urgent action when a violation affects a human rights defender. Currently, an imbalance persists in the treatment given by these companies to content related to human rights, which is sometimes censored under algorithmic justifications.

Finally, although there is an intention for protection mechanisms to address this type of violence, many of them remain focused only on what is tangible in the physical space, without fully incorporating the digital dimension as a continuation and integral part of the risk dynamics. This results in insufficient responses, both in terms of security and psychological support for victims, reinforcing the urgency of more comprehensive and integrated policies to address violations committed in the digital environment. And it impacts women and LGBTQIAPN+ people even more severely, as they are the main targets and often find themselves unprotected.

Collective protection

Collective protection has been recognized as an essential element in responding to the various forms of violence that affect the rights to freedom of expression and of the press. When it comes to women, the LGBTQIAPN+ community, and other historically silenced groups, this term takes on new dimensions, also encompassing methods of community, shared, self-organized, and/or traditional protection, reflecting aspects of violence and belonging that permeate these identities. However, both States and civil

society organizations face significant difficulties in guaranteeing adequate protection measures in this area, and additionally there is no clear consensus on what constitutes collective protection, which limits the formulation of structured and shared strategies in the region. The main unanswered question is whether the concept refers to protecting media outlets and other communication organizations or whether it should be a way of addressing protection by including different actors.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the protection mechanisms developed by States are insufficient, and in some cases are even non-existent. Meanwhile, the attacks are diverse and pose a significant challenge to address, leading various organizations to work together, each contributing its specific capabilities. The experience of countries like Paraguay, Mexico, and Brazil shows that action typically begins with initial containment, seeking to offer immediate support to those affected. From there, organizations mobilize to build networks capable of directing cases to more specialized initiatives, given the complexity of the situations faced. These coalitions may even include organizations that don't solely work with freedom of expression and the protection of journalists, establishing partnerships with feminist legal aid clinics, psychological support services, specialized collectives, and, in some cases, public institutions.

Even so, there are significant challenges in coordinating the entities involved. Many organizations express a desire to coordinate in a more organized way, in order to avoid revictimization when a case passes through different institutions. Their intention is that referrals are made responsibly and respectfully, preventing victims from feeling that nothing has been done or that they have been unnecessarily exposed. These weaknesses highlight the need to strengthen collective protection mechanisms and consolidate common practices that allow for more integrated, efficient, and sensitive responses to the needs of at-risk groups.

On the other hand, there is a recognition that these acts of violence are not suffered individually and in isolation. Reports show that the attacks are systematic, and their effects are felt not only by the reporter who is on the front line of the violence. The costs of

security and defense measures in legal proceedings, in addition to self-censorship and limitations imposed on journalistic work, are a threat to the existence and sustainability of journalistic organizations, whether they are companies, non-profit organizations, or communication collectives. Within the collective dimension of protection, the issue of mental health also appears as a cross-cutting element that directly impacts the capacity of journalistic organizations to operate.

The protection mechanisms, as we have seen, are essentially reactive and heavily based on the individualization of threats, not considering the context of threats within the media outlet or even the territory in which the person is located. However, ignoring these contexts only contributes to the inefficiency of protection measures, since many practices must be built upon the experiences of organizations and the contexts of victims.

It is also important to make the distinction between collective protection and popular protection, since the latter reflects concern with strategies for confronting violations that affect communicators, collectives, and groups located in territories of greater vulnerability. Collective protection is usually associated with the development of protocols, institutional articulations, and organized actions focused on prevention and coordinated response. Popular protection, on the other hand, emerges from listening processes and knowledge built from the relationship between individuals and their territories, allowing the identification of strengths, their own strategies, and initiatives already developed by the communities themselves. In this sense, it is a set of locally produced practices that consolidate as forms of protection developed “from within”, and not from external models.

Prevention measures need to be built recognizing that the role played by collectives directly influences the violations they suffer. Considering that attacks against freedom of expression are attacks against the messenger to prevent the message from reaching its recipient, it is fundamental to understand the territorial, political, and community dimensions of this violence. In territories of resistance, the fight against violence directed at journalists is also a fight against broader and more structural violence that these

groups face. In a veritable crossfire, male and female communicators are targeted by stigmatizing discourses that attempt to discredit their work. Building a safer environment for journalistic work requires, first and foremost, reaffirming that journalists are not part of the problem, but central actors in the public interest and in guaranteeing access to other rights.

It also requires verifying and redressing collective violations, considering their financial, emotional, and community impacts. For these violations to be recognized by the State, it is necessary to develop strategies that demonstrate that the threats directed at specific groups are directly related to the public value of their work and that their restriction causes harm to collective rights.

Democratic instabilities and conservatism

The rise of the far right – a phenomenon observed, albeit in different forms, throughout the region – has had a profound impact on the maintenance of democratic institutions. In the case of freedom of expression, one of the pillars of democracy, the political landscape has directly impacted the safety of journalists and the capacity of civil society to collectively organize and confront the dismantling of public policies. This movement is accompanied by the expansion of anti-gender policies, the appropriation by the State of instruments of institutional violence, and the increasing use of technologies aimed at surveillance, intimidation, and the fragmentation of social struggles. Difficulties in strengthening protection policies are intensifying, while threats against communicators are increasing, especially those working in critical contexts, vulnerable territories, or dedicated to issues considered sensitive by political power.

Democratic instabilities and the rise of conservative positions have created an environment of strong restrictions for the construction and implementation of public protection policies. One of the main challenges is the lack of political priority. In several countries in the region, the far-right parliamentary majority has no interest in advancing projects aimed at protecting human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society organizations. The

approval of specific laws faces significant resistance, such as the mobilization for a Model Law for the Protection of Journalists and Press Workers,⁴¹ which has been discussed primarily in Chile and Paraguay.

The recent political context has been marked by significant tensions, including episodes of institutional upheaval, internal disputes, and confrontations with international actors. The election of Donald Trump to a second term as President of the United States impacted not only the field of freedom of expression and of the press, but the entire ecosystem of the third sector and humanitarian aid organizations that received funding from the U.S. Department of State and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), until the freezing and subsequent cuts and closure of the agency. This context financially impacted several organizations in Latin America that often guarantee protection when states fail to do so. Furthermore, many have experienced direct attacks from local governments and sectors of society attempting to discredit their work, becoming victims of disinformation and stigmatization campaigns that make them even more vulnerable.

In this context, legislation seeking to stifle civil society organizations with bureaucracies that attempt to prevent the receipt of international funds is proliferating in Latin America. Initiatives known as “foreign agents laws” have spread throughout the region, with legislation already in effect in Venezuela and Nicaragua, another approved more recently in 2025 in El Salvador, and similar proposals under consideration in Paraguay and Peru. In Paraguay, pressure against organizations intensified with the creation of a bicameral commission tasked with investigating organizations funded by international cooperation, analyzing whether their members were affiliated with political parties and attempting to link the resources received to partisan activities. This offensive resulted in persecution of media outlets, journalists, and organizations, with repeated requests for information and demands for accountability

41 The lessons learned and adjustments to the text of the Model Law are presented in the report available at this link: <https://cl.boell.org/es/2025/09/01/ley-modelo-de-proteccion-periodistas>

already provided previously. Even when fulfilling their transparency obligations, organizations continue to face pressure, particularly for not presenting data from third parties to which they legally do not have access. This process has triggered ongoing legal actions. Even in cases where such a law has not been approved, the institutional environment remains marked by stigmatizing discourse. Former and current presidents and political leaders from different countries in the region maintain or have maintained a hostile rhetoric against the press, encouraging attacks on media outlets and reporters, placing these professionals in the crosshairs of a climate of intimidation.

Budgetary and legal instability, which generally affects the countries studied in this research, prevents the consolidation of protection policies, further weakening existing programs. The absence of clear rules, internal conflicts within governments, and the instrumental use of institutions to pressure organizations and media outlets create an environment of permanent uncertainty. The combination of political conservatism, institutional persecution, and legislative blockages compromises the State's ability to develop, finance, and implement robust protection measures, deepening the risks for journalists, communicators, and human rights defenders.

Conclusions and recommendations



State protection faces historical bottlenecks that have worsened in this scenario. Structural challenges persist in dealing with violence perpetrated by the state itself, which goes beyond police violence and includes the criminalization of journalists, judicial harassment, and the instrumentalization of public bodies for persecution. At the same time, there is the difficulty of incorporating an intersectional perspective into protection policies, considering populations that suffer additional layers of prejudice and violence, such as indigenous peoples, women, and gender dissidents, due to the institutional dismantling also in identity-based issues. Even when protection programs exist, they often fail to adopt the terminology and logic of collective protection, ignoring the territorial and community dynamics that shape the risks faced by these groups.

The history of authoritarianism in the region accentuates distrust of the state, which hinders journalists' participation in institutional programs. For many, joining a state protection policy can represent a risk to their very existence, especially when the state is associated with surveillance and repression or even with the perpetration of the violence they face. This resistance highlights the need to build mechanisms that are transparent, perceived as reliable, and capable of addressing the real needs of communities and ensuring security without reproducing censorship practices.

Furthermore, the challenge arises of operating in contexts considered more progressive, where the State transfers a large part of the protection responsibilities to civil society without ensuring the resources, structures, and guarantees necessary to sustain this work. In this model, civil society organizations assume state functions in an improvised manner, while the State abdicates its obligations. This further weakens the institutional response and places a burden on collectives that they cannot bear alone. The

State must be convinced that, as a guarantor of human rights, it must also be a guarantor of freedom of expression. Thus, the formulation of public policies cannot become a mere count of those affected, but must include this count in the budget to ensure its effectiveness not only in repairing the violence suffered, but also in preventing it before it occurs.

Given this scenario, it becomes crucial to rethink protection strategies, recognizing that the violations suffered by communicators are directly linked to the broader political context and the struggle for control of the public narrative, which often relies on the stigmatization of journalists and communicators. Strengthening intersectional, territorial, and collective approaches is essential to building more effective responses capable of confronting both direct violence and the structural forms of repression that are strengthened by the rise of the far right.

Recommendations

Based on the analyses, listening sessions, and collective discussions that led to the creation of this report, the following is recommended:

To the States:

- Strengthen the legal and institutional frameworks for protecting the work of journalists and communicators, including a gender perspective, and ensure the effective participation of civil society in the construction and design of these initiatives.
- Ensure adequate and sustainable funding for mechanisms to protect journalists and media professionals, with transparent budgets that are proportionate to the risk and the measures required.
- Develop specific protocols for investigating crimes against journalists, incorporating a gender and intersectional perspective, and including a concern for the protection and safety of the victim.

- Adopt a comprehensive protection model that includes preventive measures, psychosocial support, legal assistance, and structural strategies, aimed at preventing and mitigating risks, including victims and civil society organizations.
- Combat impunity by strengthening specialized prosecutors' offices and ensuring swift and effective investigations, as well as monitoring cases through to the judicial phase.
- Ensure a political commitment from public authorities to openly condemn attacks on the press and value the role of journalism in democracy.

To States, international cooperation, and philanthropy:

- Guarantee funding and support for the sustainability of civil society organizations that assist journalists who are victims of violence, including in cases of judicial harassment, recognizing the high demand and lengthy duration of the processes.

To social media platforms:

- Create effective and sensitive reporting mechanisms to protect journalists and human rights defenders, especially women and LGBTQIAPN+ people, including a panic button, followed by prompt and informed assistance based on human rights protection parameters.
- Create channels of communication with civil society and include a human rights perspective in algorithmic training and mechanisms for controlling harmful behavior on social networks.
- Act transparently with regard to privacy policies and terms of use, including from the perspective of specially protected discourses, such as those of journalists and popular communicators who play a public interest role in informing society.

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