

A woman wearing a bright orange headwrap and a pink shirt is looking through a black metal gate. The gate has a decorative pattern of circles and lines. The background is slightly blurred, showing a stone wall and some greenery. The overall scene suggests a restricted access point, possibly a border or a secure area.

TOOLKIT FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION ON

WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS



Cover photo: members of OFRANEH / Honduran civil society waiting in front of the Supreme Court of Justice, where the protest was held marking the first anniversary of the assassination of Berta Cáceres, while family and lawyers delivered a new petition on the case to government officials inside. Credit: Ivi Oliveira, Front Line Defenders

Front Line Defenders expresses its sincerest gratitude to the women human rights defenders, organizations, and movements whose insight and expertise drove the creation of this Toolkit, from the feminist collective who generously carved out time and space in their global convening to allow dozens of WHRDs to contribute, to the at-risk defenders who provided personal testimonies.

This Toolkit aims to aid the European Union in supporting the struggles of WHRDs who dare to claim rights from the very identities that society insists are sites of victimhood: indigenous women, lesbian women, bisexual women, transgender women, women trade unionists, mothers, sisters, caretakers, sex workers. Their ongoing struggles, the creativity of their resistance, and the power of their human rights work are the foundation of this project.

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Introduction and Purpose

As outlined in the UN Resolution on Women Human Rights Defenders¹ (WHRDs), adopted in 2013¹, while all precepts included in the UN Human Rights Defenders Declaration are applicable, WHRDs experience violence in differentiated ways because of the work they do, and who they are, as women. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders reports that “women defenders often face additional and different risks and obstacles that are gendered, intersectional and shaped by entrenched gender stereotypes and deeply held ideas and norms about who women are and how women should be.” There are many economic, social, cultural and geographical factors that affect how WHRDs experience a violation, including class, religion, age, language, sexual orientation, location, race and ethnicity. The Resolution calls for specific gendered protection measures and for WHRDs to be consulted in their design and implementation.

Feminist movements are, however, wary of framing the vulnerabilities faced by women as the most pervasive narrative on WHRDs – insisting that they are not viewed as a sub-category and/or ‘more needy and vulnerable HRDs’. Feminist and defender organisations, introducing the concept of integrated or holistic security have gone beyond the classic,

visible, ‘external’ risks faced by HRDs and recognised a range of other issues that affect WHRDs. Struggles over income; health, stress and burnout; the impacts of discrimination, sexism, inequality; and the overshare of caring for families that falls upon women, can all be barriers to the work of activists and should be addressed by those who want to help advance their work. WHRDs consequently call on the EU, its Embassies, Delegations and staff to recognise these unique risk factors and to develop both an understanding of, and additional strategies towards, the specific situations and threats faced by WHRDs in the application of the EU Guidelines on HRDs.

This toolkit benefited from the input of many international and national WHRD organisations and defenders and aims to provide staff in EU Headquarters, EU Member States’ capitals, EU Delegations and Embassies with an operational set of tools to be used in diplomatic work, in contacts with WHRDs, and with local and international civil society organisations. The intent and expected outcome is that the use of this toolkit will strengthen the implementation of the EU Guidelines on HRDs, and better enable the EU to effectively respond to WHRDs who have requested international action and protection.



1. Risks & challenges faced by women human rights defenders

Around the world, WHRDs identified common experiences reflecting global trends of repression and gender-specific violence perpetrated by both state and non-state actors: private companies, state and local authorities, military and police forces, private security services, and, at times, women's own family members, communities and social movements. Violence against WHRDs in public and private spheres is interlinked, and always rooted in social, economic and political power relations.

Cultural and societal factors

UN Resolution A/RES/68/18 (2013) recognizes that historical and structural inequalities in power relations and discrimination against women, as well as various forms of extremism, have direct implications for the status and treatment of women. The rights of some women human rights defenders are violated or abused, and their work stigmatised owing to discriminatory practices.

“Women being seen in public hurts the religious sentiments of some people in this country. Women’s liberation, women’s freedom, is very much at stake if killings, attacks, harassment are justified in the name of hurting religious sentiment.”
- Sultana Kamal, WHRD

“Heteronormativity – the privileging of heterosexuality and the rigid definition of gender identities, sexualities, and gender relations – reinforces clear distinctions between men and women. It renders gender non-conforming persons invisible, and reproduces expectations about how women and men should express themselves.”² The work of WHRDs, including leading and organising their communities, can be



seen as challenging traditional societal notions of family and gender roles, which can generate hostility from the general population, their communities, religious leaders, their families and the authorities. WHRDs are more likely to be slandered, discredited and exposed to humiliation, exclusion and public repudiation when doing the same work as their male counterparts.

Patriarchy, religious fundamentalism and the revival of ‘traditional values’ also limit WHRDs’ access to decision makers. Those with a real or perceived ‘feminist agenda’ are increasingly excluded from some consultation mechanisms. Anti-feminist language is normalised in the UN³ and trickles into national agendas.

“The first issue that women defenders face is being rendered invisible or their contributions marginalized, sometimes subtly, their views to be ignored, treated with scepticism and belittled, including in human rights movements. Women are often relegated to support roles, while men occupy formal positions, and can find it more challenging to gain access to information and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Women defenders have expressed deep concern about the reluctance of organisations and social movements to address gender-based discrimination, violence, and the marginalization of women in their own structures and practices.”⁴ “In many cultures, the requirement for women to defer to men in public can be an obstacle to their publicly questioning action by men in violation of human rights.”⁵

“In the beginning, in the revolution days and through 2011, everyone seemed happy for me to do the work, to lead. In 2012, [male colleagues] starting saying things like ‘we’re going to villages tomorrow, to meet more teachers, we’ll be sitting in cafés, it’s not appropriate for a woman.’ It was clear they didn’t want me – an uncovered woman from Cairo who smokes – representing the union to men in areas that they think of as more conservative. When we were small and urban, it was fine for me to do all the work. But when it became a massive national movement, suddenly I’m not a suitable leader. They offered me a tokenistic role as head of the ‘Women’s Committee.’ That’s not for me.”
- Hala, WHRD & teacher

Around the world, WHRDs identified common experiences reflecting global trends of repression and gender-specific violence perpetrated by both state and non-state actors: private companies, state and local authorities, military and police forces, private security services, and, at times, women’s own family members, communities and social movements. Violence against WHRDs in public and private spheres is interlinked, and always rooted in social, economic and political power relations.

Traditional gender roles mean WHRDs experience a disproportionate share of taking care of the home, elderly parents, children, the sick, in addition to their human rights work. In this context, WHRDs either have less time to dedicate

to work than they would want, or are at higher risk of overwork brought about by a 24/7 schedule.

Intersectional frameworks to understand risks and barriers that move beyond a male/female binary are essential if we are to respond effectively to risks to WHRDs, especially those based in the community. Trans WHRDs, in particular, are effectively prevented from engaging in any advocacy for LGBTI+ rights in some countries. “Transgender women experience violence on many levels as a result of social exclusion and discrimination; and transgender HRDs in Latin America are at extreme risk of being subjected to human rights violations, a risk that is exponentially increased in the context of sex work.”⁶

Ines, a sex worker rights defender, transwoman, and WHRD in Yogyakarta founded an unregistered organisation in 2013 to advocate for services that individual sex workers are usually denied such as housing and health care. She helped the community pool their wages to meet ‘stable salary’ requirements held by many landlords, and advocated against discriminatory treatment in hospitals. Ines reported frequently having to ‘choose’ between her security as an activist and her ability to earn enough money to eat. She took less clients at night due to time spent documenting violence, doing security check-ins with other women, and advocating for sex workers being harassed by the police.



The UN Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity has highlighted⁷ the many social, economic, cultural, legal and political factors that breed violence and discrimination against transwomen, and by extension trans WHRDs. These include hate-motivated, targeted killings, homophobic and transphobic hatred and attacks, sexual violence, mutilations, torture and ill-treatment, as well as arbitrary arrests, detention, abductions, harassment and bullying. Laws based on public decency, public health and security, such as 'crimes against the order of nature' or 'debauchery', or those criminalizing sex work or 'vagrancy', which are used to target and prosecute both transgender and cisgender sex worker rights defenders in many countries.

Based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LBTI+) WHRDs also face discrimination in employment, health care, education, housing, social protection and legal gender recognition, and restrictions on freedoms of expression, association and assembly. LBTI+ women's very existence is an affront to heteronormative power structures which privilege cisgendered, straight, male-led family units, and the visibility of these women as activists often increases the likelihood of experiencing violence or discrimination based on their now public sexual identities.

Finally, women leaders, coordinators and activists may also not be acquainted with human rights systems and may likewise not identify themselves as WHRDs. WHRDs at highest risk are grassroots and frontline women activists defending human rights in their own communities, without broader support networks or visibility. They are not part of a larger civil society movement or network, and face greater risk because of their vulnerable – and likely marginalised position

In Zimbabwe with the expansion of mining and oil extraction, military and police forces have moved in to back up the companies. They use violence and sexual violence to intimidate local women and girls and repress resistance. In some cases, soldiers or police gang-rape women as a form of punishment - for artisanal mining, for 'trespassing' on diamond fields that were once their ancestral lands, etc.⁸

(e.g., LBTI+ women, minority women, internally displaced women, indigenous women, refugee women). Dangerous situations are often aggravated due to a lack of direct contact with organisations which have the ability and resources to help them.

Gendered violations

In addition to the violations suffered by men, women defenders may experience other, gender-specific ones, ranging from verbal abuse based on their sex, to sexual abuse and rape. The latter is particularly prevalent in situations of armed conflict, in which there is almost always impunity for perpetrators. Moreover, in certain contexts, if a woman is raped or sexually abused, she may be perceived by her community as having brought shame on both her family and wider community. Sexual violence, threats of sexual violence, discrimination against women in decision-making spaces and sexist defamation campaigns are used to silence women's voices, their movements and communities, by both state actors and non-state actors. But violence against WHRDs goes beyond, to other more insidious forms of psychological and physical threats to their work and wellbeing.

Armed conflict impacts WHRDs due to higher levels of violence and gender-based violence, the breakdown of law enforcement mechanisms and the



inability or unwillingness of the State to address violations committed by State and non-State agents. But “the misrecognition of women activists purely as victims of conflict, as well as the lack of value attached to the work that they do, are both guided by deeply gendered perceptions of the role and capabilities of women in this context.”⁹ The breakdown in societal relations during conflict can also reduce community support for both the professional and private work of WHRDs, and restrict their freedom of movement. Women are most affected by displacement, disruption to their communities and to livelihood and life-sustaining activities such as subsistence farming, collective water management, etc. Often, during times of armed conflict, traditional gendered roles are revived or strengthened, while peace processes or negotiations exclude or marginalize opportunities for women’s participation.

WHRDs are often targeted because of the policy or movement goals for which they are struggling, such as stronger legislation in support of LGBTI rights or to counter gender-based violence or. Those working to stop violence against women are not just working on accountability for state actors such as police and security forces, but also for violence perpetrated within the family. In cultures in which the family unit is a traditionally private and male dominated space, in which violence is normalised, the work of WHRDs carries grave risks for their personal security.

Threats to WHRDs that utilize digital technologies, such as online harassment/violence, stalking, censorship, and hacking take on specific gendered aspects when they aim at discrediting, humiliating, and inciting gender-based violence and abuse, and manifest

Since Colombian WHRD Claudia Julieta Duque began investigating the murder of fellow journalist Jaime Garzón in 2001, she has suffered countless persecutions, ranging from kidnapping, multiple threats, illegal surveillance of her telephones and emails, access to her bank accounts and espionage of her and of her closest family members and childhood friends, as well as direct death and rape threats against her daughter in 2004, events that forced her to three exiles. The harassment was so severe that Colombian courts convicted three high-ranking officers of the DAS, including an Intelligence director, for torturing Claudia and her daughter.

“Weekly, someone messages that they will harm me or my family. Especially I worry about my son. Some of the women receive threats saying ‘We know where your son goes to school, how he walks home.’ See, when we, women, are threatened, it affects our family lives. When I started receiving death threats, the people I told said to me, ‘But you are a responsible mother of two children! Don’t write these things.’”

- Supriti Dhar, WHRD

systemic gender discrimination. Abusive, threatening and often sexualized violence perpetrated against WHRDs via social media can have a chilling effect on their work, as well as on their emotional and physical safety. This can lead to WHRDs self-censoring, reducing their presence online and in public spaces, or not engaging in the work altogether.

Family members of WHRDs, particularly children, also are targeted

for threats and violence, to discourage WHRDs from pursuing their work. As primary caretakers, “women human rights defenders ... often find it very hard to continue their human rights work knowing that arrest and detention would prevent them from fulfilling that role in the family.”¹⁰

One tactic repressive governments are using is to criminalise HRDs as ‘terrorists’ or abettors. The blanket categorisation by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) of civil society organisations as particularly at risk of being used by terrorists for money laundering, has also led to increased financial surveillance and profiling of civil society, increasingly complicated financial processes, and even loss of financial access for some civil society organisations.¹¹ Because WHRDs disproportionately, compared to their male counterparts, depend on access to funding by sister organisations abroad, crucial for sensitive and independent work, the fight against terrorism creates additional obstacles for WHRDs.

Criminalisation also increases the financial vulnerability of women activists and can lead to social condemnation. When men of a community are killed or imprisoned for their activism, women shoulder all of the family responsibilities while also pursuing justice and helping to re-organize their communities.¹² At the same time, crimes committed against WHRDs are under-reported.

Combined impacts

“Globalization and neoliberal policies have, moreover, led to economic disempowerment and power inequalities that affect the rights of women. Women

defenders have been at the forefront of protesting such changes and claiming their rights, often with far fewer resources than those whose actions they resist.”

“Women defending their lands, communities, and the environment face critical risks and gender-specific challenges: when confronting extractive industries, for example, they are not only challenging corporate power, but also a deeply rooted patriarchy.”¹⁴

Women experience disproportionate harm from large scale extractive operations as the pollution of water, land appropriation and disruption of communities impacts them and their families. Additionally, the import of an almost entirely male labour force into a community, accompanied by a service provision economy, including increased prevalence of alcohol, drugs, and gambling can disproportionately harm local women and WHRDs. Environmental damage increases the workload for WHRDs in their role as primary caretakers and imposes upon them far-reaching economic and social impacts.

The combination of different forms of discrimination and gender violence not only puts the lives and health of women activists at risk, but also weakens families, organisations, and the social fabric of their communities. Women are generally the first-responders to social breakdown, crises (health, economic, environmental), and community conflict; they also make up the majorities of most social movements, although often not playing visible leadership roles.¹⁵



Central America and Mexico

Between 2015 and 2016 there were a total of 2,197 attacks against women human rights defenders in El Salvador (102), Guatemala (231), Honduras (810), Mexico (862) and Nicaragua (192).

Which WHRDs are being attacked?

WHRDs of land, territory and natural resources have suffered the most with 609 attacks, followed by those who defend the right to information and freedom of expression (425) and defenders of the right to truth, justice and reparations (255). WHRDs working in local (63%) and rural (41%) spheres were most attacked.

How are they being attacked?

Between 2015 and 2016, 21 murders of women human rights defenders and 44 attempted murders were documented. In quantitative terms, intimidation and psychological harassment were experienced by 30% of those assaulted; slander, defamation and smear campaigns by 12%; and threats, warnings and ultimatums by 11%). 76% of the attacks were repeated, so that there is a systematic pattern of an interrelated series of attacks. A gender component was identified in 37% of the attacks (against a defender simply for being a woman).¹⁶

Who is attacking WHRDs?

The State is the main aggressor, given that 54% of the assailants identified are police, military personnel, public officials or authorities at different levels of government. 28% of the attacks (607) were attributed to unknown persons. As a result, in only 38% of all attacks do WHRDs seek resolution in court. In 13% of the cases, WHRDs are attacked in private spaces: their own communities, organisations or families. In 10% of the cases, business or security agents were involved, usually: levels of aggression are closely correlated to the expansion of extractive industries. As many as 5% of the aggressors come from religious and/or fundamentalist groups, medical personnel, and members of political parties who oppose defenders of sexual and reproductive rights and sexual diversity.

- Source: *IM-Defensoras*¹⁷



2. Features of a Differentiated Approach to Safety & Protection

According to OHCHR, “Women defenders are more at risk of certain forms of violence and other violations, prejudice, exclusion, and repudiation than their male counterparts. It is therefore important to recognise the specific challenges this group of defenders faces, in order to strengthen protection mechanisms and other, both local and international level responses to their specific concerns. Often WHRDs are left without effective protection mechanisms.”¹⁸ All these factors affect how, whether and if WHRDs reflect and strategise on their security, and take the time and energy necessary to implement measures that allow them to remain resilient and work at their full potential. For many WHRDs though, the issues they work on are not easily disaggregated from the protection issues they suffer, so we should be mindful that security concerns may not be articulated in a clear framework and may require knowledge of cultural and political contexts.

“When [male activists] say things to women like ‘you have to stop striking now, they won’t punish you like they punish us,’ they’re only thinking of arrest. They completely disregard what we face.[We have] way less access to lawyers, can be disowned by our families for being too vocal or visible, and in Egypt you’re always at risk of sexual assault. They don’t see any of that.”
- WHRD

Because they belong to networks, collectives and movements, attacks against WHRDs are meant to serve as warnings to others. Indeed, WHRD movements have been critical of approaches to protection and security that focus only on the individual, insisting on the need for collective support. Individual protection is generally limited

and only provides resources for a few people, rather than extending to all those within a community who are at risk. It can also single out WHRDs and expose them to more criticism.

Women human rights defenders consistently describe a concept of security that incorporates a range of inter-related priorities, many that are not typically considered as security concerns in a ‘traditional’ sense. These include the ability to:

- conduct their work freely, without restrictions;
- work in safe spaces, in their own spaces, without the constant, grinding need to justify the work, or themselves;
- have the freedom to speak, travel and to work without obstacles;
- work without having to explain their activities;
- break down artificial boundaries between the ‘public’ and the ‘private’ sides of security;
- access justice and receive recognition; and
- rest, recover and renew.”¹⁹

A differentiated approach must also take an intersectional lens, as factors including gender, race, ethnicity, class, marital status and sexual orientation shape power relations and increase WHRDs’ vulnerability to violence.



Current coping strategies include visibility and alliances: “Sometimes, women human rights defenders will go underground and remain low profile until a threat has passed. Other times, they will hide their work. Women’s rights groups may not register as formal organisations, or they may publish their work anonymously. Other times, they may choose to respond to a threat very publicly, or challenge an opponent through national or international court systems, increase their public profile to attract attention to – and support for – their cause. Many women’s rights groups form strategic relationships with allies in the media, government, the police force; or alliances with other human rights groups in their country, in the region and internationally. When they have been threatened, they have triggered these support networks for protection.”²⁰

The construction of protection and self-care networks among WHRDs is an important strategy for protection with a gender perspective. Women activists establish collective spaces that provide safety and recognize their needs. The trust and connection enables joint responses to attacks and, because these responses are developed and led by the WHRDs themselves, they are able to draw on their first-hand knowledge and experience to provide effective accompaniment.²¹

3. What Can the EU do to Support the Safety & Protection of WHRDs from a Gendered & Intersectional Approach?

States are bound by national, regional and international human rights standards to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of WHRDs, and establish conditions for them to carry out their work. States are also responsible for fostering change in discriminatory societal attitudes, such as prejudices and cultural constructs that undermine women’s work and positions, stereotypes about appropriate conduct, and harmful customs that perpetuate violence against women.

For the EU to comprehensively support HRDs, it must take into account all factors that hinder the work of WHRDs and allow them to fully contribute to defending all rights, help address any obstacles they face, and hold State and non-state actors accountable to their obligations.

Specific measures are extremely context specific and the EU must be open and committed to consistent dialogue with WHRDs to ascertain what, if any, measures would be most useful. Every measure outlined in the Toolkit should be discussed with the concerned WHRD or their representatives, in order to develop the most appropriate strategies and actions. The Toolkit summarises different actions WHRDs have identified as the most needed and effective in assisting them carry out and continue their work under difficult circumstances.



Measures

In addition to measures contained in the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, the EU should make all efforts to:

Challenging social-cultural norms

>> Publicly acknowledge the significant role played by WHRDs in the consolidation and advancement of plural and inclusive societies; recognize specific contributions made and successes achieved by WHRDs; and call for societal support for their work. The EU should also press for other influential actors to do the same: authorities, politicians, media outlets, public and religious figures, etc.

>> Provide alternative frameworks that counter patriarchal/traditional views about the legitimacy of their work, especially in rural, marginal or remote communities where WHRDs have less access to resources and visibility. Strengthen the recognition, backing and respect for women's leadership and actively promote women's participation in decision-making inside organisations and movements, particularly for those whose realities are less visible, such as indigenous, rural and migrant women, LBTI+ women, and defenders of sexual and reproductive rights.

>> In building women's leadership and participation, be mindful of the disproportionate burden already carried by WHRDs: recognition does not mean having to carry the burden of more work, more responsibility and even greater reporting. Promote greater responsibility by men in family and community care, and in making room for women in leadership and within movements.

>> Call out any statements or actions that question or delegitimise the work of women defenders, or that fosters the stigmatization, defamation, discrimination and sexism against a WHRD.

Countering the restricted space

>> Increase awareness of the gendered dimension of the shrinking space and the occupation of that space by non-governmental organisations set up or sponsored by governments in order to further their political interests, as well as by organisations promoting so-called 'traditional values' that aim to reverse feminist policies; ensure effective responses in policies, dialogue and programming.

>> Provide increased levels of funding for WHRDs including women's rights projects, feminist activities, and LBTI+ programming in particular, also to compensate for reduced funding from national and international sources.

Intersectionality

>> Help strengthen understanding of the concrete barriers faced by WHRDs in their work, taking into account intersectionality (how challenges faced by WHRDs are compounded by other factors such as racial/ethnic identity, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion, etc.).

>> Ensure consultations with indigenous WHRDs, LBTI+ women, women from rural groups, women leaders from labour rights organisations, and other under-represented WHRDs.

Visibility for protection

- >> Specifically recognize the contribution of WHRDs working in contexts of armed conflict, post-war communities and highly militarized spaces; and the specific risks associated with holding the military and their own communities accountable for violence committed against women and civilians. Acknowledge that WHRDs who belong to and represent victims groups and communities are especially at risk of being criminalized, targetted and dismissed by state and non-state groups.
- >> Encourage the active participation of WHRDs in public forums; those away from centres of power should be given the same platform as their male counterparts to engage in advocacy and raise awareness of their work and profiles. This can also help defend WHRDs against attacks and increase protection.
- >> In building women's leadership and participation, be mindful of the disproportionate burden already carried by WHRDs: recognition does not mean having to carry the burden of more work, more responsibility and even greater reporting. Promote greater responsibility by men in family and community care, and in making room for women in leadership and within movements.
- >> EU public statements of support for WHRDs who are attacked send a powerful message. Consult with WHRDs on preferred language before issuing statements. Awards and other forms of appropriate and context-specific recognition can contribute towards legitimising WHRDs' work and contribution, but can also come with additional expectations or risk. Strategies around publicising awards and recognition should be done in consultation with the WHRDs.

Business and Human Rights

- >> Avoid providing assistance to companies that are violating women's rights, either directly or through projects that undermine community, land and environmental rights as these affect women disproportionately more.
- >> Recognise the power imbalance between WHRDs and the communities they represent on one hand, and companies on the other, before proposing dialogues and make sure WHRDs give prior approval and consent to such dialogues including the structure and modality of them.
- >> Encourage and, where appropriate, require all business enterprises funded by EU (e.g. through investment and development banks, or in projects) to carry out human rights due diligence, including by conducting meaningful and inclusive consultations with WHRDs, ensuring, if necessary, that male leadership is circumvented and that WHRD and women voices are heard.

Working with WHRDs

>> Ensure frequent outreach to consult WHRDs based in remote regions; meeting with WHRDs in their own location gives them visibility, draws attention to their work and the issues they address. Make extra efforts to meet with WHRDs as representatives of movements even when these are headed by men. Offer next steps following these fact-finding missions, practical support, follow up, and feedback; engage with local authorities, leaders, public figures, business and non-state actors to relay the concerns expressed by WHRDs.

>> Specifically involve WHRDs in consultations with human rights defenders. Offer safe spaces for WHRDs to ensure they can share their experiences, even if multiple spaces must be arranged.

>> Help transgender activists with obtaining documentation, for example when needing to travel to attend international events; find solutions with WHRDs in countries where they cannot travel without male guardians or approval from family members; facilitate accompanied travel if WHRDs need to bring family members either due to care duties, or security reasons; check and assist if they have special needs due to disability; if they need translation or special assistance if they are from minorities/indigenous groups. In general, proactively contact WHRDs to ask what obstacles they face and offer support, and be as flexible as possible with this assistance, including if very small measures are needed.

>> Visas – facilitate application processes and procedures to account for lesser mobility for WHRDs in many contexts. Issue multiple entry visas to facilitate emergency exit for WHRDs, particularly where armed conflict is prevalent.

>> Help create and strengthen monitoring mechanisms so that civil society can critically evaluate their government's progress in the adoption and application of national, regional and international commitments related to women, discrimination and gender violence.

Management and reporting

>> Provide embassy and mission staff with the extra time and effort that are necessary for such actions: the EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy prioritises increased diplomatic attention to WHRDs, especially in remote areas, indigenous communities, more marginalised groups, LGBTI+ defenders, etc. These actions are more time-intensive than capital-based work with well-connected HRDs.

>> Provide officials and diplomats with intersectional, gender-sensitive training.

>> EU missions should endeavour to report on how many feminist WHRDs they have met, what kinds of rights they work on, if they were met in the capital or regions, how many are supported, and on impacts, in order to refine and improve strategies, and be accountable.

Urgent funding, practical measures

- >> Ensure response times to urgent requests by WHRDs are minimised – an attack against a WHRD can be compounded by attacks against her family.
- >> Recognize that the traditional framework of protection and violence applicable to HRDs may differ in the case of WHRDs, especially in contexts where the threats are not purely physical and in cases where the State systematically instigates violence by community members or by family members in an attempt to stop a WHRD's work.
- >> Refrain from insisting that WHRDs report harassment or violence to the police or state mechanisms, as patriarchal structures and attitudes present within the authorities can expose them to additional violence or leave them ignored, in particular if the WHRD comes from a marginalised or minority group.
- >> Review temporary relocation programs and visa procedures so that they are easily accessible to WHRDs in times of risk and urgency. Ensure speedy procedures, support for WHRDs to travel with their families, and facilitate multiple entry visas. Support temporary relocation programs that WHRDs have in their own countries or regions and link better with programs in Europe, etc. Provide accompaniment to/from the airport before/after international travel, when the risk of reprisal is particularly high, etc.
- >> Ensure that public/private programmes supported by the EU for the security and protection of human rights defenders, including emergency grants programmes, supply a full range of assistance measures for WHRDs' physical, professional, digital and psychosocial security.
- >> As WHRDs might need protection measures for family members too, coordinate with other entities providing emergency assistance so that the cost can be fully covered if there are funding limits.
- >> Provide or help with renting spaces, even occasionally, inside EU missions or directly in locations where WHRDs live/work, as women can be culturally, financially and politically prevented from meeting in public spaces (particularly transgender activists due to transphobia).

Working with authorities

- >> Encourage the work of independent mechanisms such as the National Human Rights Commission or Women's Commission, where they exist, to specifically support the work of WHRDs.
- >> Advocate for government programmes for the security and protection of human rights defenders to integrate a gender perspective and address the specific risks and security needs of women defenders, in close coordination with WHRDs; call for these mechanisms to be well resourced, flexible, rapid and extending to those who are also harassed because of the WHRD's work (family, colleagues, etc.); press for these programmes to supply a full range of assistance measures for physical, professional, digital and psychosocial security.
- >> Urge governments to utilize the research and documentation done by WHRDs and their networks that analyses gender specific components of the violence they face, and use it while developing laws and protection policies.
- >> Help repeal and stop overly broad and vague legislation that penalizes women's sexual health and reproductive rights, which places WHRDs at risk of criminalisation either due to lack of clarity surrounding punishable offences, or through directly aiming at limiting, inhibiting or criminalising human rights work carried out by WHRDs.

Fight against impunity

>> Render visible violations against women defenders perpetrated by State and non-State actors; acknowledge and publicly address the criminal and social phenomenon and magnitude of violence against WHRDs.

>> Press third country authorities to establish official registries with a gender perspective on attacks against HRDs, and to publicly acknowledge any responsibility regarding attacks against defenders perpetrated by State agents.

>> Press for violations against WHRDs and those working on women's rights or gender issues committed by State and non-State actors to be promptly and impartially investigated, and that those responsible, including those who contract, authorize, plan or organize the attacks, are brought to justice. Address violations at the most appropriate level (i.e. national, regional or local government level) to ensure that advocacy efforts are effective and relevant.

>> Support WHRDs who are victims of criminalisation (support for legal advice, counter defamation campaigns, presence in court hearings, diplomatic assistance for shelter programs, etc.). Call on States to apply all other measures that have been recommended in regard to HRDs, such as: refraining from criminalising their work and adopting laws and measures that make civil society activities and professional human rights work more difficult; respecting and promoting rights of association and expression; systematically investigating violations against HRDs. Identify regressive laws and state measures that have a specific burden on WHRDs, especially in the context of threats to their safety from arrest, detention, interrogation without due process or representation etc., and raise these issues with the authorities.

>> Call on States to exercise due diligence in preventing the harassment and attacks against WHRDs, and creating favourable environments in which they can work. States should be called on and encouraged to refrain from harassing WHRDs who interact with international institutions and civil society, as well as their families and colleagues. Encourage the work of independent mechanisms such as National Human Rights Commissions or Women's Commissions where they exist to specifically support the work of WHRDs.

>> Promote projects, laws and actions that improve and develop the documentation of violations against WHRDs so as to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon and promote dialogue on it and on possible solutions (provide extra protection measures for those who do this work as it particularly exposes them vis-a-vis the authorities).



Programming/aid

>> Provide financial support as general, unrestricted, long-term funding – that supports both programmatic and security activities/needs – for WHRDs, their organisations and their social movements.

>> Place special emphasis on resourcing WHRDs to attend to individual and collective care needs in order to guarantee the sustainability of their activism. In calls for proposals, grant applications and budget requests for project funding, encourage and allow for specific inputs, measures, costs for addressing holistic security needs that do not diminish project funding.

>> Help strengthen informal and formal networks to support women defenders and those working on women's rights or gender issues. In the event of an attack, they can be instrumental in ensuring WHRDs' immediate safety when needed. This can include having available flexible funding schemes that also allow for funding to unregistered groups, or including such networks in projects.

>> Help support the development and dissemination of tools and materials for the protection of WHRDs adapted to local realities. Examine with WHRDs what kind of collective protection needs and measures could be implemented.

>> Fund and support efforts by WHRDs to raise their profile, their visibility, public awareness of their work, their societal role, etc. Promote campaigns to address prejudices against the work and activities of WHRDs.

>> Help fund strategies bringing awareness to, and addressing violence affecting, WHRDs in family and community spaces, as well as inside organisations and movements.

>> Provide digital protection training for women, specifically tailored to the types of harassment that they encounter online; support the recruitment and training of women trainers.

>> Provide support for capacity building of women-led organisations – particularly those of more rural and marginalised communities, such as LGBTI+ movements – so that they can compete for funding schemes more effectively, particularly in the fields of financial management and documentation.

>> Create effective recourse mechanisms within EU programmes for WHRDs to safely denounce violations and ensure prompt and effective action and redress.

Examples of aid programme components that are gender sensitive towards WHRDs

- consulting WHRDs on calls for proposal to ensure the language and content corresponds to their needs and realities;
- moderating excessive impact or calendar demands that result in overwork/additional stress
- ensuring that staff, travel, facilities allowances are commensurate to the work expected
- ensuring salaries and paid vacations are sufficient
- allowing for sufficient expenditure on non-salary essential income: pension fund, medical insurance/visits, contributions to child-minding expenditure, psychosocial measures (psychologists, team facilitators/mediators)
- allow for spending for team-building and retreats, networking/strategy sharing with other WHRDs/organisations
- security measures (accompaniment expenses, safe travelling, infrastructure, legal assistance, rehabilitation needs, temporary relocation expenses (including family), specific and specialised counselling for WHRDs having experienced violence, sexual violence and gendered attacks
- solidarity funds (help with family support during arrest/disappearance/loss of employment..), compensation for assistance by community/family/colleagues in case of risk/need..
- prevention (risk and security assessments, security/wellness training, self-defence training, physical and legal assessments)
- in building additional activities around visibility, including for regular meetings with diplomats, events
- separate contingency funds (or an internal rapid-response fund) to react to unexpected security and/or health crises
- accept risk analysis prepared by organisations and persons trusted by WHRDs
- incorporate community protection measures as part of the protection measures
- prevent situations of discrimination, harassment and sexual violence by officials assigned to define or apply protection measures (especially when assigning security guards) and punish any undue action.

Endnotes

- 1 https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/68/181
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Kvinna Till Kvinna reports that “It has also become increasingly difficult to raise and discuss women’s sexual and reproductive rights in the UN, or indeed to talk about gender equality. The term gender has become strongly connected to the promotion of homosexuality and destruction of traditional family values.” and “UN resolutions passed in the HRC in Geneva contain dangerous clashes between women’s individual human rights on the one hand, and traditional and family values on the other.”
- 4 United Nations General Assembly, HRC, Fortieth session, *Situation of women human rights defenders - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders*, 2019.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Red Lac Trans, *The Night is Another Country: Impunity and Violence against Transgender Women Human Rights Defenders in Latin America*, 2012
- 7 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G18/132/12/PDF/G1813212.pdf?OpenElement>
- 8 JASS, *Women defending land, life and equality*
- 9 https://defendingwomen-defendingrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/WHRD_IC_Global-Report_2012.pdf
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- 11 Kvinna till Kvinna, *Suffocating The Movement – Shrinking Space For Women’s Rights*, 2018
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- 16 “Bodies, Territories and Movements in Resistance in Mesoamerica” *2015-2016 REPORT ON ATTACKS AGAINST WHRD* – Mesoamerican Initiative for Women Human Rights Defenders
- 17 Mesoamerican Registry of Attacks against Women Human Rights Defenders
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