

REDEFINING WHISTLEBLOWING: GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR INCLUSIVE PROTECTION

Marie Terracol, Whistleblower Protection Lead



Anti-Corruption Helpdesk Answer

The integration of gender and intersectionality in whistleblowing environments

Authors: Taymi Milán Paradela and Marie Terracol,
tihelpdesk@transparency.org

Reviewers: Caitlin Maclean, Annie Healion and Marie Chêne
October 2025

Whistleblower protection is vital for transparency, yet power dynamics and social inequalities often weaken it, particularly for those already facing structural discrimination, such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals and people from communities that are ethnically minoritised or structurally marginalised. In many contexts, the barriers are not accidental but embedded in institutional design, where inaction and neglect function as deliberate forms of obstruction. Key barriers, such as the lack of access to adequate protection and support services, increase the risks associated with whistleblowing. A truly enabling environment for whistleblowers requires the integration of considered gender, social inclusion and intersectionality-sensitive approaches by all the main stakeholders in the design and implementation of all the key elements, including legal frameworks, organisations' internal whistleblowing systems, regulators and other authorities' external whistleblowing systems, protection and support frameworks, data collection and awareness raising. Enhancing the capacity of competent authorities, collaboration between major stakeholders, leveraging local resources, developing strategies for advocacy and social awareness can reduce negative impacts on whistleblowers, ensure access to necessary services and promote a more inclusive and just environment. These approaches aim to challenge structural inequalities within organisations, ensure greater protection for whistleblowers and foster a more accessible and equitable space for reporting corruption.

NEW BACKGROUND PAPER BY TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL

Title: Integrating Gender and Intersectionality into Whistleblower Systems

Authors: Taymi Milán Paradela & Marie Terracol

Publisher: Transparency International

Date: October 2025

<https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/helpdesk/the-integration-of-gender-and-intersectionality-in-whistleblower-systems>



PRESENTATION OVERVIEW

- Why whistleblowing matters
- The role of gender and intersectionality
- Barriers and risks for diverse whistleblowers
- Case studies of women whistleblowers
- Key reforms and best practices for inclusive environments
- The role of civil society
- Conclusions



I CONTRIBUTED TO SOMETHING
IMPORTANT THAT HELPED TO
CHANGE THINGS.

Antoine Deltour, Lux Leaks whistleblower
#whistleEU



Photo: Bloomberg



“BEHIND EACH AND EVERY MAJOR
SCANDAL, FROM LUX LEAKS, TO THE
PANAMA PAPERS AND CAMBRIDGE
ANALYTICA, CHANGE IN OUR TIME IS
BEING **DRIVEN BY WHISTLEBLOWERS.**”

Transparency International Europe



THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF WHISTLEBLOWERS

- Whistleblowers expose corruption and abuse of power
- Saves billions in public funds
- Builds accountability and trust
- Still, retaliation and silencing remain widespread



transparency.org



@anticorruption

DEFINITIONS



INTERNATIONAL PRINCIPLES
FOR WHISTLEBLOWER
LEGISLATION
BEST PRACTICES FOR LAWS TO PROTECT
WHISTLEBLOWERS AND SUPPORT
WHISTLEBLOWING IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST



Whistleblower: A person reporting or disclosing information about suspected wrongdoing to individuals or entities believed to be able to effect action.

Wrongdoing: unlawful or abusive conduct, or which can cause harm

*encountered in the context of their **work-related activities***



THE CORE QUESTIONS

- How do gender and intersectional issues shape whistleblowing?
- What are the challenges, best practices and recommendations to create inclusive whistleblowing environments that empower everyone to speak up safely?



KEY CONCEPTS

- **Gender-sensitive:** acknowledges differences
- **Gender-responsive:** adapts to needs
- **Gender-transformative:** challenges power structures



WHY GENDER MATTERS

- Whistleblowing is not neutral
- Systems privilege an “ideal whistleblower” (male, senior, powerful)
- Marginalised individuals face additional barriers
- Neutral laws reinforce inequality

Reference: Acker (2006); Schneider & Ingram (1997); Whitehead (2013).



CASE STUDIES: WOMEN WHISTLEBLOWERS

Examples:

- *Marsha Coleman-Adebayo* – US EPA, retaliation and demotion
- *Kathryn Bolkovac* – UN Bosnia, exposed human trafficking
- *Babita Deokaran* – South Africa, murdered after Covid-19 corruption disclosure
- *Ifeoma Ozoma* – Pinterest, racism and pay inequity



PATTERNS AND CONSEQUENCES

- Retaliation and silencing
- Credibility undermined
- Lack of protection mechanisms
- “Second struggle” after disclosure

Reference: Kenny & Fotaki (2021); Kenny (2024)



MOTIVATIONS FOR WHISTLEBLOWING

- Ethical commitment and public interest values
- Severity of wrongdoing and perceived harm
- Contextual and institutional trust
- Cultural norms influencing decisions

Reference: Peterson et al. (2010); Roxas & Stoneback (2004); Klofstad et al. 2022



BARRIERS TO REPORTING

- Organisational culture and hierarchy
- Limited trust
- Fear of retaliation

Reference: Kaspersen (2023); Kundro & Rothbard (2023); Cortina et al. (2002); Kenny (2023).



RETALIATION AND RISK

- Systemic, not exceptional
- Women disproportionately affected
 - Broader forms of abuse
 - Economic and emotional toll
 - Family and caregiving burdens

Reference: Kenny, Fotaki & Scriver (2019); Kubbe & Merkle (2025); Alford (2003).



INTERSECTIONALITY

- Overlapping discrimination
- Power defines credibility
- Cultural stereotypes silence women
- Intersectional lens reveals hidden barriers

Reference: Chene (2021); Crenshaw (1991); Kenny & Batishcheva (2025); Rehg et al. (2008).



CORRUPTION AND DISCRIMINATION

- Corruption exploits existing inequalities
- Gendered forms like “sexual corruption”
- Indigenous and rural communities face land dispossession
- Women report less, face more harm

Reference: Feigenblatt (2020); Barnes & Bergin (2025); Chêne (2021).



LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL GAPS

- Many laws cover only employees or public officials
- Few address gender-based misconduct (e.g., sexual corruption)
- Litigation success rates remain low globally

Reference: Feinstein & Devine (2021); Williams & Vandekerckhove (2023).



TOWARDS INCLUSIVE WHISTLEBLOWING

Key Principles for whistleblowing laws and systems:

- Broad scope
- Accessible, multi-channel reporting
- Protection from retaliation
- Inclusive data collection
- Effective oversight and enforcement



WHAT TYPES OF WRONGDOING CAN BE REPORTED

- Many laws focus narrowly on financial or administrative misconduct
- Structural violence and gender-based wrongdoing often excluded
- Expanding scope to include discrimination, harassment & sexual corruption
- **Emerging good practice:**
 - UNODC (2025) – 19 countries include gender-sensitive categories
 - Transparency International – recommends explicit inclusion lists

Sources: Terracol (2018, 2022, 2024); France (2022b); UNODC (2025).



WHO CAN BE RECOGNISED AS A WHISTLEBLOWER

- Many laws protect only formal employees or public officials
- Excludes informal, migrant & contract workers
- Inclusive laws extend personal scope to all individuals
 - EU Directive 2019/1937
 - South Africa's Protected Disclosures Act
 - France & Malaysia whistleblower protection laws

Sources: Terracol (2018); Sedacca (2024); OECD (2016).



PROTECTION AGAINST RETALIATION

Need for support services:

- Legal assistance
- Financial aid
- Help with family care
- Help with professional reintegration
- Psychological counselling
- Peer support networks

Reference: Kenny (20214); Milan & Kenny (2024); Terracol (2024)



MULTIPLE REPORTING AVENUES

- Reporting to authorities without restriction
- Public disclosures
 - EU Directive, US WPA, Canadian PSDPA
- Obligation for organisations to establish whistleblowing system
 - EU Directive, US WPA, Canadian PSDPA, US SOX



ANONYMOUS & ACCESSIBLE CHANNELS

- Offer multiple channels: online, phone, postal, in-person
- Ensure accessibility for people with disabilities or caregivers
- Diverse, trained case managers
- Women often prefer anonymity

Reference: Council of Europe (2014); Terracol (2018, 2022, 2024); OECD (2016).



INFORMATION AND AWARENESS

- Persistent gender gaps in knowledge of reporting mechanisms
- Need for inclusive, multilingual, gender-neutral communication
- Outreach via CSOs, unions, community networks
 - EU Directive 2019/1937 requires detailed public information

Reference: European Commission (2025); Chêne (2021); Terracol (2023).



DATA COLLECTION AND EVIDENCE

- Collect gender-disaggregated and intersectional data
- Publish outcomes to build trust
- Analyse patterns of retaliation
- Use evidence for reform
- Practice of CSOs

Reference: Milan & Kenny (2024); Nowers & Terracol (2025)



OVERSIGHT AND ENFORCEMENT

- Whistleblowing authorities
 - Information and advice to whistleblowers
 - Support – financial, legal, psychological
 - Addressing complaints of retaliation
 - Guidance to employers and competent authorities
 - Monitoring compliance
 - Data collection and evaluation
 - Awareness raising

Reference: Transaprency International (2013); Loyens & Vandekerckhove (2018a,b).



CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE

- Advocacy and direct support (legal, psychological, financial)
 - TI ALACs, Protect, Xnet, Oživení, etc.
- Capacity building for organisations and authorities
- Partnerships with women's and human rights organisations

Reference: Milán & Kenny (2024).



STORYTELLING AND SOCIAL AWARENESS

- Personal narratives inspire change
- Campaigns: Women of Honour (Ireland), #HoldTheLine (Philippines)
- Changing perceptions from “traitors” to “integrity champions”

Women of Honour report: Statutory inquiry into military abuse likely to be recommended by review

Report will detail bullying, harassment and sexual abuse of female and male Defence Forces members over many years



Hold The Line Coalition welcomes acquittal of Maria Ressa and Rappler, calls for dropping of remaining cases

September 12, 2023 5:38 AM EDT

September 12, 2023, Manila—The Hold the Line Coalition (HTL) welcomes Tuesday’s Regional Trial Court verdict acquitting Nobel laureate Maria Ressa and her news outlet Rappler on the final criminal tax charge leveled against them by the regime of former President Rodrigo Duterte. The judgment comes after a legal battle lasting nearly five years. If they...



transparency.org



@anticorruption

MOMENTUM FOR REFORM

- Collaborative governance among policymakers, employers, CSOs, communities,
- Integrate gender and intersectionality in every stage
- Move from technical compliance → cultural transformation



CONCLUSIONS

- Whistleblowing is deeply social, not only legal
- Gender and intersectionality define access, risk, and legitimacy
- Inclusive systems strengthen justice and accountability
- Transformation demands collaboration and cultural change



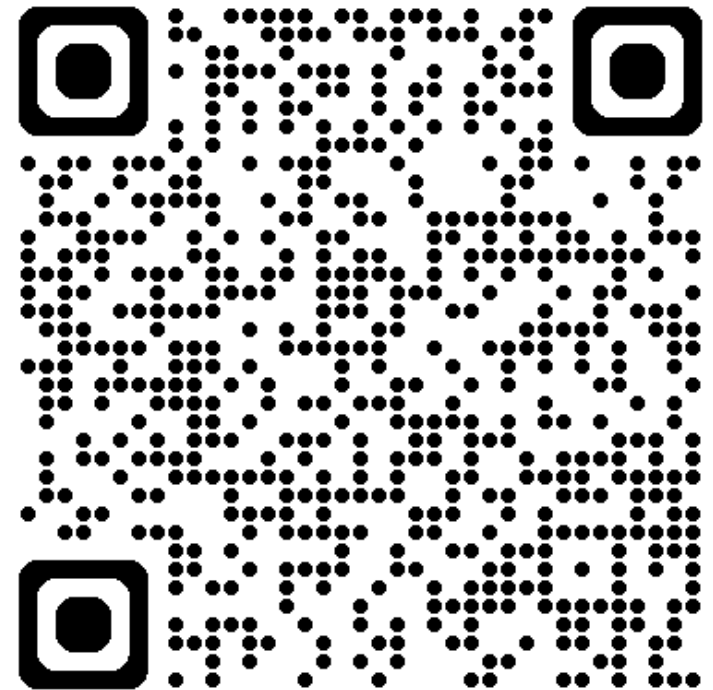


EU SURVEY – JUSTICE, RIGHTS AND VALUES 2021-2027

Anonymous survey (required by EU donor)

- Reference of the project: 101143007
- Type of activity: Mutual learning and exchange of good practices
- Event title: Gender and Intersectionality in Whistleblowing Workshop
- Date: 05.11.2025
- Format: in person
- Last section on personal data (gender, type of organisation)

https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/CERV_2021-2027#page2



Co-funded by
the European Union



transparency.org



@anticorruption



THANK YOU!

Any questions?

transparency.org

