

MEDIA ETHICS AND THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN THE MEDIA

Guidelines and code of conduct

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INTRODUCTION

This is an updated document, based on a series of training courses and workshops, on the portrayal of children in the media in Kosovo. The sessions have been carried out for Save the Children and the University of Pristina, Journalism Department, by the journalist and media consultant, David Hayward.

This latest edition has been written with the support of Save the Children and the Journalism Department, of the University of Prishtina, "Hasan Prishtina."

The code of conduct is based on discussions with journalists, representatives from the Kosovo Independent Media Commission, monitoring organizations, NGO media professionals, journalism students and university professors, both private and public.

The aim of the code of conduct is to create an accessible guide (online and booklet) on the responsible involvement of children in the media. It draws on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Kosovo Independent Media Commission code of conduct and the BBC editorial guidelines.

RESPONSIBLE REPORTING OF CHILDREN IN THE MEDIA

It is the duty of the media and journalists in Kosovo to carry out responsible reporting of children and vulnerable young people

when they are involved in news stories. This means responsibility of the media in the implementation of Code of Ethics and media monitoring on a daily basis.

PORTRAYAL OF CHILDREN IN THE MEDIA

Article 1 of the UNCRC states: A child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

The depiction of children in the media can often be misleading. Children are too often shown in negative stereotypes as;

- Victims
- Starving children
- Troublemakers
- Irresponsible teenagers
- Little mischiefs

Children should be portrayed in a way that does not impede their rights; they should be seen as individuals.

REPORTING ON CHILDREN FROM ETHNIC MINORITY GROUPS AND COMMUNITIES

Children should not be portrayed in a negative light because of their race, religion or community. They should not face discrimination in the media or be treated differently due to their ethnic background. Care should

be taken to ensure the minority groups such as the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are not victimized. When reporting on ethnic minority groups, children who can be easily identified, should not be used to depict the community as a whole.

The image of disheveled children and young people can lead to a reinforcement of harmful preconceptions. In contrast children from ethnic minority backgrounds should be championed for what they can do. For instance in achieving high standards in school, education or in the sporting and artistic fields.

As with all children, they need to be treated as individuals and people in their own right.

REPORTING ON CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Children with disabilities should be treated with respect and not have their human rights abused. Special consideration needs to be given to the use of language and the way children and young people with disabilities are portrayed in the media.

All children have the same human rights, for example, children are should not be described as mentally ill. The correct terms is; they have learning difficulties or mental health issues. Children who use wheelchairs are not wheelchair bound they are wheelchair users. When reporting, the most important thing to consider is “Am I treating this child with the dignity he/she deserves?”

REPORTING ON CHILDREN IN POVERTY

Children should not be portrayed as victims of poverty. They need to be protected from future discrimination and harm. The media should not use them, to illustrate poor and disadvantaged stereotypes. For example, it is all too easy, to use starving children as the most powerful image to depict famine. However, this dehumanizes them. If reporters do use these images, there needs to be context. Where appropriate, they should be treated as an individual, not an object to gain emotional impact.

A good example on this is the BBC documentary, Ebola Frontline, on the treatment of children with Ebola in West Africa. The children in the film are handled with sensitivity and dignity. They are a central part of the story and their position is put into a global context.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FikEo54vj-o>

On the other hand, there are many cases where children’s rights are not respected and they are portrayed negatively. Such are the examples, given below:

CHILDREN IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

Children should not be exploited during political election campaigns. They should be treated with respect and allowed to maintain their right of privacy. There is a long tradition of politicians using children to improve their image during election campaigns. Photo calls of politicians holding babies are often appealing. However, cases that use children to attract publicity and win more votes (by pulling children out of school, using them for publicity stunts, etc) or used as a negative tool to attack opponents. These actions should be censured.

The example of Jennifer's Ear, during the 1992 general election in the UK, is a very good illustration of how the rights of the child can be seriously damaged by political in-fighting.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_Jennifer%27s_Ear

Overall, it is the journalists' role also to protect children during election campaigns by adhering to the codes of conduct, by respecting child rights as per the convention, and calling upon the misuses and pointing out irregularities.

PROTECTION OF THE CHILD AND THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY

Children have a right to protection and privacy. When involving children in stories,

journalists and the media must have their permission and consent of their parents or guardians. Parents and guardians need to be fully and fairly informed about the potential risk and consequences to children before agreeing to give permission. This is known as informed consent.

For more information click on the link to see various forms of consent and guidance:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/page/guidance-consent-how#Use of Standard Contributor Consent Form>

Children should not be submitted to exposure of a negative nature in the media. This includes the exposure to media and videos that already exist on social media. It is the duty of all news agencies/organisations to ensure the rights of privacy to the child, in order to not harm children as a result of their exposure on media.

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM HARMFUL CONTENT

Children should not be exposed to harmful on-screen content. They must be protected from images that could have a lasting and detrimental impact on them. This includes images of violence and of a sexual nature, explicit pornography and extreme language. Action must be taken to warn children and adults of harmful content and for it to be shown at appropriate times.

News and current affairs programmes should warn viewers about news reports

containing violent or disturbing images, which could have a negative impact on children and young people's wellbeing. Special care should be taken when reporting on violent crimes, war zones, disaster areas, death, rape, murder and disease. The global coverage of the Ebola crisis, has shown some very disturbing and powerful images. It is important these pictures are used with care and due warning is given.

Warnings should be given ahead of news reports and current affairs programmes in which flash photography appears. Flash photography can lead to serious problems for people with certain medical conditions. The warning should be worded as follows:

"The following programme contains flash photography and flashing images."

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM HARMFUL CONTENT ON DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Due care needs to be given to protect children and young people from harmful content on digital and social media. Platforms should have measures in place, to report and take down offensive material, which could have a negative impact on the lives of children and young people. Parents should be educated by the media to take responsibility for their children and their accounts in social media. Parents and guardians of children need to understand the impact their actions can have on the lives of their children.

Article 17 of the UNCRC (Access to information; mass media)

Children have the right to get information that is important to their health and well-being. Governments should encourage mass media – radio, television, newspapers and Internet content sources – to provide information that children can understand and to not promote materials that could harm children. Mass media should particularly be encouraged to supply information in languages that minority and indigenous children can understand. Children should also have access to children's books.

SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN

Children must not be exposed to sexualisation. The dress code of presenters when working with children needs to be appropriate and should not expose children to over-sexualised clothing. Children should be protected from viewing explicit material, whether it is in music videos, television programs or movies.

Children should not be portrayed as sexual objects. Special care needs to be taken to their dress code and imitation of sexual behavior in the media.

Children should not be used as décor. Their presence at a program has to be meaningful. They should be contributors to the content.

GIVING CHILDREN A VOICE

Children have the right for their voice to be heard. Their right to participate in the media is central to the UNCRC.

In news stories, where appropriate and within the law, they should be allowed to express their own views and opinions.

“Time and again, experience shows that children – even very young children – given the time and opportunity, demonstrate not only that they have views, experiences and perspectives to express, but that their expression can contribute positively to decisions that affect the realisation of their rights and wellbeing.” “Every Child’s Right to be Heard,” UNICEF - a resource guide on the UN committee on the rights of the child general comment no.12

Article 13 of the UNCRC (Freedom of expression):

Children have the right to get and share information, as long as the information is not damaging to them or others. In exercising the right to freedom of expression, children have the responsibility to also respect the rights, freedoms and reputations of others. The freedom of expression includes the right to share information in any way they choose, including by talking, drawing or writing.

ACCESS TO THE MEDIA, INCLUDING DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Children must be allowed access to the media, including digital and social media. The relationship between the child and media is an entry point to the world of children and their rights to education, freedom of expression, identity, health, dignity and protection. There is an important function of the mass

media to ensure the child has access to information and material aimed at promoting their social, spiritual and moral well-being. Importance should also be given to internet media exposure. News portals should show diligence and responsibility to moderate comments of the audience in order to maintain high standards.

EDUCATING SOCIETY ABOUT THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

The media has an important role to play in protecting and promoting the rights of the child. There is a duty to educate and inform wider society on the issues affecting children. Parents and the general public need to be informed about the impact of their actions on children. This is particularly important in the area of social and digital media. Parents and guardians should understand the effect pictures and images of children can have on their future development and rights to privacy.

The Kosovo Independent Media Commission and the Press Release Body offer support, guidance and can address complaints about media coverage of children.

The general public should be informed about the measures that need to be taken in order to protect children from unsuitable content on digital and social media. They should ensure that children only have access to age appropriate websites and social media networks/ platforms and TV.

TV stations should also ensure that a material that is deemed inappropriate for transmission before watershed is not transmitted next day before watershed.

“The 9pm watershed signals the beginning of the transition to more adult material, but the change should not be abrupt. Programme makers and schedulers should also take into account the nature of the channel and viewer expectations. The strongest material should appear later in the schedule.”

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/page/guidelines-harm-watershed>

INTERVIEWING CHILDREN

Special care needs to be taken when interviewing children in the media. They should not be interviewed in affect or door-stepped. They should be informed and fully prepared, before taking part in an interview and told exactly how that interview and their appearance will be used. Permission to interview children should always be sought from their parents or guardians.

The journalist should do their best to put children at ease ahead of any interview or filming. Spend time talking to them in advance, explain what you are doing and why. All of this will ensure a far better interview.

Always appreciate that at any time, children do have the right not to answer questions or be interviewed, even if their parents have given written consent.

There are many examples of when the rights of the child are seriously damaged, by journalists and the media as a whole chasing them to get an interview. In October 2013 huge scrutiny was placed on a young blonde girl, named Maria, who was living with a Roma family in Greece. This story illustrates the pressure and preconceptions that can do so much harm to the child at the centre of it. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/oct/22/angel-kidnapped-by-gypsies-libel-replayed>

STORYTELLING

An essential element of all of the above points is the need to tell stories in a powerful, engaging and compelling way. For the media and journalists to effectively apply the guide and code of conduct, excellent storytelling must be a central part of every report.

There are several very good examples of both good and bad storytelling in the BBC College of Journalism sections

Reporting on Children

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20140428142034522>

and Getting the most from the children in your reports

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20140522115128283>

FURTHER INFORMATION AND READING

This code of conduct is designed to introduce the media, journalists and anyone involved in the portrayal of children, with a guide to responsible reporting. There is a great deal of further reading and information below. The United Nations Convention on the rights of the child and the Kosovo Independent Media Commission guidelines, offer excellent detail about how to deal with children in the media.

There is first class advice on verification and protection of social and digital media in the verification handbook and detailed help in reporting on children on the BBC College of Journalism website. All of the material listed will help journalists and the media cover stories about children and child issues in a far more effective and attractive manner.

APPENDIX

United Nations Convention of the rights of the child

http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/Know_Your_Rights_poster_4.pdf

Kosovo Independent Media Commission guidelines

<http://kpm-ks.org/?faqe=271&gjuha=3>

BBC Editorial Guidelines

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/page/guidelines-children-introduction/>

Verification Handbook

<http://verificationhandbook.com/>

BBC College of Journalism

Reporting on Children

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20140428142034522>

Getting the most from children in your reports

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20140522115128283>

Reporting Cases of Abuse

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/article/art20140610145725989>

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