

BASIC PROFESSIONAL RULES

“FOR AN ETHICAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF CHILDREN”

Children in Albania constitute about 40 percent of population and they represent one of the largest social groups in the country. According to the UNO Convention of the Rights of the Children (ratified by Albania in February 1992), every child enjoys the right to access appropriate information as well as the freedom of speech, freedom of expression and the right to be considered as an individual with inalienable rights.

In all societies massmedia plays an important role in informing the public and in creating and respecting a positive image of human beings, including children. Having in mind this role, massmedia's duty is not only to truthfully and impartially cover issues affecting children, but also to consider and respect the children's rights by adopting ethical rules that focus on the child.

For this purpose, Albanian Media Institute, with the support of UNICEF, started in November 2006 the process of preparing and consulting some basic professional rules specific to the ethical media coverage of children.

1. BASIC PRINCIPLES

For the purpose of these rules all persons under 18 are considered children.

Children's highest interests! Journalists should bear in mind that when reporting on issues concerning children and their rights the interests of the children are above any other interest. Children often find themselves in difficult situations and reporting on them or exposing their identity to the public, or unfair and inaccurate reporting can endanger or negatively affect the child's future. If news publication or broadcasting seems dangerous, news should not be published or its formulation should be modified (e.g. it should not focus on a specific child, but rather treated as a general problem of the situation of the rights of children in the country).

Children have absolute right to privacy. Interferences with this right, be it from media or other institutions are permitted only in those cases when they serve protection of children or children's best interest in the current situation. Such interferences cannot be justified by the public's right to know. Consent of the child and his/her tutor should be obtained for any such interference.

Fighting of prejudices. Media also has an important role in fighting prejudice and stereotypes in the society. Reporting on events involving children should not in any case convey a message that discriminates against children and their families belonging to different ethnical, linguistic, cultural, or social groups. In addition, media coverage should not lead to the establishment of stereotypes on children. Particular attention

should be paid to avoid the establishment of stereotypes for children that belong to minorities (reporting on these events as if these children are victims of the community they belong to)

Professional, complete, and accurate reporting of events. While protecting the identity and interest of the child, the events involving children should be reported in the real context where they take place, paying attention to the full analysis of the causes and to the verification of each element. The journalist should have at least two different sources of informations that guarantee the information. However, checking the information in different sources should not in any way endanger the child involved.

Media serving the children. Media and its products should serve the children's welfare and development into responsible actors of a democratic society. When publishing or broadcasting every material the respective media should consider whether the maerial can and should be accesed by children and what consequenses this would bear for the development of children.

There should be support for the publication and broadcastingby media of materials that convey positive examples to children, while reporting on criminal offences should be reported in the service of he public interest and not meet the demand for sensationalism.

Albanian media should consider the possibility of producing programmes and publishing sections for children in the languages of ethnic and cultural minorities living in the country. TVSH (public broadcaster) should broadcast every day a program for children in the languages of these minorities.

Child participation is another important principle. Media should provide the necessary space for children to freely express their opinions, without deforming it.

Media must reflect the thoughts and opinions of children regarding developments that affect their own growth, welfare, and development. Through the media children should become part of the public debate in issues such as education, healthcare, environment, urban developments, etc.

At the same time media should give priority to programmes or sections for children, prepared by children or in cooperation with them. Albanian media should work on improving quantity and quality of programmes for children.

2. CHILDREN'S IDENTIFICATION

- a) Any reporting, publication, broadcasting, or images that leads to the direct or indirect identification of children's image and sound, address or describing the

- children that are victims, witnesses, involved in investigation, charged, or convicted for a criminal offence should be avoided.
- b) Any reporting, publication, broadcasting, or images that leads to the direct or indirect identification of children's image and sound, address or describing the children that could have been or have been involved in a grave family matter should be avoided.
 - c) In both cases mentioned above technologies that enable the disguise of identity of image or sound of the children should be used.
 - d) Attention should also paid to the reporting, publishing, broadcasting or shooting of third parties (adults) when this can lead to the direct or indirect identification of children according to the two above-mentioned cases.
 - e) Children's photos and images should be obtained in honest ways and whenever it is possible consent of the child, parents or legal tutor should be obtained after explaining the purpose.
 - f) Publication of photos and broadcasting of images demeaning to children should be avoided; instead, publication and broadcasting of positive images for children should be promoted.
 - g) Publication of photos and broadcasting of images of children with sexual nuances or showing children in inappropriate positions should be avoided.
 - h) Shooting pictures of children should take place in public spaces or in the presence of the child's legal representative or of a person he/she has left in charge.
 - i) Long sessions of photographing children should be avoided and measures should be taken so that the environment be appropriate for children (children should be guaranteed food and water for every such long session)
 - j) Media should have strong rules for archiving and distributing photos and movies of children, limiting and preventing the possibilities of abuse with these materials.

3. INTERVIEWING

- a) Interviewing of children should take place in the presence of or at least with the knowledge of the child's legal representative or that of a person appointed by him/her;

- b) The purpose of the interview and its potential use should be revealed to the child and to his/her legal representative. The right of both the child and his/her legal representative to refuse the interview should be respected.
- c) If the legal representative refuses interviewing of children, interview can take place only if the child insists on being interviewed and the journalist has specific reasons to think that the interviewing serves the interest of the child.
- d) In no case shall the journalist pressure, promise or give gifts to the child or his/her legal representative in order to have the interview.
- e) If during the interview of the child on an event or fact the reporter notices that the child gets emotional or is psychologically charged, the interview should be interrupted until the situation improves. If the situation does not change or reemerges the same, the journalist gives up the interview.
- f) In both above-mentioned cases (c and e) the reporter can ask for the assistance of a psychologist or social worker specialized in children's interviewing.
- g) The interview should take place in an appropriate environment for the child to feel free from pressure. Long interviewing or shooting sessions that stress or affect negatively children should be avoided; the same is true for the repetition of interviewing and shooting of the same child without any strong reasons.
- h) The place and duration of interview as well as the questions asked to the children should be appropriate for the age and level of maturity of the child. In order to enable this not only is journalism training for reporters working with children needed; it is also necessary that these journalists invest in evaluating and understanding children beforehand.
- i) Questions should be clear and direct and should not guide the children (Do not use guiding questions or questions that lead the child to the fact or phenomenon that you are interested in).
- j) Prejudiced questions or comments should be avoided; the same is true for questions or comments endangering the child or reminding him/her of traumatic events.
- k) Children should not be forced to behave according to the guidelines given by the journalist or the media; they should be urged to be themselves.
- l) If, during the interviewing the journalist becomes aware of a criminal offence against the child or endangering the child, the journalist should immediately notify the respective authorities.

- m) If, during the interview, the journalist becomes aware of facts that when made public will endanger the child's life, health or welfare, the interview or this specific part should not be published or broadcast.