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GUIDELINES

FOR MEDIA REPORTING ON

CHILD LABOUR

IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

INTRODUCTION

These guidelines on media reporting on child labour were prepared under the framework of the Country Level Engagement and Assistance to Reduce Child Labour [CLEAR] Project. They are derived from the research study and recommendations of this project and fully respect international and national regulations in this area, as well as related documents of professional media associations and civil society organizations dealing with the rights and protection of children.

The aim of these guidelines for media professionals is to offer general instructions that will help them in reporting on child labour in a professional manner that respects child rights. At the same time, these guidelines respect freedom of expression, as well as the right and duty of the media to report on issues of public interest.

In addition, these guidelines attempt to contribute to an increase in the professionalism of media reporting on child labour and to be part of the exchange of opinions among media professionals who are striving to raise the level of media coverage, and thus to impact the improvement of the situation of children in Serbia, and worldwide.

The study of this project, which provides an analysis of research of media reports in the period from 1 October 2015 to 30 September 2016, as well as the conclusions of other studies, shows that the media is insufficiently familiar with the concept of child labour, as well as with the regulations and spectrum of institutions dealing with the issue of child labour. The study also found that in reporting on child labour issues breaches of the right to dignity and psychological integrity of the child occur, and furthermore that the journalistic style is often inaccurate and full of stereotypes and prejudices. Prestige enjoyed by the media in the marketplace as well as economic interests are often placed above the interests of the child. Even in this area, the media, in an effort towards gaining greater circulation/ratings, do not resist sensationalism leading to the conclusion that child rights often need to be protected from the media itself.

At the same time, the media do not take sufficient advantage of their important role in society. For example, by reporting on the issue of child labour in an appropriate manner the media can contribute to systemic prevention and improvement of child protection.

Taking into consideration the sensitivity and the special situation of children, and the principles contained in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, international and national regulations, as well as in the studies and recommendations of organizations dedicated to the protection of child rights, including the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), media professionals should keep in mind the following guidelines:

- ◆ understanding the concept of a child and child labour, international and national conventions and regulations;
- ◆ provide credible sources of information and relevant interlocutors, and include children in coverage with due care, taking into account their protection;
- ◆ avoid a superficial and sensationalist approach to the reporting and processing of texts (headlines, subtitles, text boxes) and photos;
- ◆ always bear in mind the consequences that publicity can have on children and/or their families and take into account the protection of children accordingly (de-identification of photos and video clips; use of initials, including pseudonyms);
- ◆ take into account the potential risks regarding the safety and security of children, including the lack of respect for basic human rights (food, clothing, housing, security) as well as all forms of exploitation;
- ◆ put the interests of the child above all other interests, including the so-called public interest; and
- ◆ take a proactive role in combating child abuse, raise public awareness, and develop cooperation with all types of institutions and organizations dealing with the protection of child rights.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPTS AS A CONDITION FOR RECOGNITION AND PROFESSIONAL REPORTING

Journalists, especially those who report to a greater extent on child rights and their situation in society, as well as on issues concerning social care for children, must have the necessary knowledge related to this field. Primarily they need to know what the terms child and child labour mean, and the difference between the terms “child work” and “child labour”, bearing in mind that not every type of work constitutes illegal child labour.

WHO?

A **child** is a person under 18 years of age. Specific restrictions found in the legal texts apply to the work of a child aged 15 to 18.

WHAT?

Child labour points to work that is mentally, physically, socially and morally dangerous and harmful to the child, or work that by its nature and the circumstances in which it is carried out (regardless of whether it is paid or unpaid, whether it happens on the market or outside it,

whether it is in the form of a regular or occasional job), harms the well-being of the child, abuses and exploits children and prevents or hinders their education, development and future life. The worst forms of child labour (according to the ILO Worst forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 [No. 182]) are:

- a. all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery (the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including recruitment of children for use in armed conflict);
- b. prostitution and pornography;
- c. participation in the production, trafficking and sale of drugs;
- d. work which harms the health, safety or morals of children.

The largest number of media reports about child labour in Serbia concern begging and prostitution but this does not preclude other forms of violations of children's rights. This indicates ignorance of the topic and lack of recognition

of the problem. For example, when the sale of drugs by minors is reported, it is deemed juvenile delinquency. However, child labour performed because of social/economic problems within the family, even when it adversely affects a child's education and his/her overall psychophysical state [hard work in rural areas, street sale of their own handicrafts], often stands out as heroism, as though their rights are not being violated – and this is considered sensationalistic reporting on child labour. Highlighting one problem is not an excuse for not recognizing or emphasizing another one. A child who sells drugs must be recognized as a victim, and the journalist covering the story must contribute to the identification of those who have driven him/her to become a juvenile delinquent through abuse, as well as hold accountable all those who have a duty to protect children from such forms of abuse.

In addition, ignorance and the failure to recognize the problem of child labour lead to a completely misguided approach in which, though with the best of intentions, child victims

are declared “heroes” [e.g., “street hero” – story about a boy who creates drawings that are then sold on the street in order to feed himself and an unemployed mother; the story of a boy who has lost his parents and supports himself by doing the heaviest farm work, etc.].

Journalists should therefore become more familiar with the concept of child labour, which will enable them to understand that children who are engaged in heavy farm chores, selling on the street or providing services such as washing car windows, etc., are engaged in child labour, so-called because such work is detrimental to their health, safety or morals, and often hinders or completely suspends their schooling.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as international and national legal and other documents focus on the protection of human and child rights. The expertise they bring together with sanctions they stipulate in the case of non-compliance is essential.

KEY LEGISLATION ON CHILD PROTECTION

A. INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION

- ◆ Conventions of the International Labour Organization
- ◆ Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime
- ◆ Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse
- ◆ EU rules on the protection of young workers
- ◆ European Social Charter
- ◆ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- ◆ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- ◆ International documents on trafficking in human beings
- ◆ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

B. NATIONAL LEGISLATION

- ◆ Constitution of the Republic of Serbia
- ◆ Anti-Discrimination Law
- ◆ Criminal Code
- ◆ Family Law
- ◆ Labour Law
- ◆ Law on Social Protection
- ◆ Law on the Education System
- ◆ Law on Primary Education
- ◆ Law on Secondary Education
- ◆ Law on Health Protection
- ◆ Law on Safety and Health at Work
- ◆ Law on Prevention of Harassment at Work
- ◆ Law on Employment and Unemployment Insurance
- ◆ Law on Agriculture and Rural Development
- ◆ Law on Youth
- ◆ Law on Sports

Knowledge of legislation and other acts aimed at the protection of child rights, including protection from child labour, allows journalists to report in a professional manner. On the one hand, this contributes to improving the situation, and on the other, avoids possible ignorance when reporting in a negative manner (such as articles

containing discriminatory connotations, e.g., a journalist insisting that the people involved are Roma, instead of questioning the authorities about the reasons why, if that is the case, they are most often Roma). It is necessary to place the individual event in a specific context, likewise for the coverage of a general issue.

INFORMATION SOURCES ON CHILD LABOUR

The acquisition of different types of relevant material, statistics and research will allow a clearer understanding of the status, image, types and prevalence of the phenomenon of child protection, as well as of actions promised and undertaken aimed at resolving the problems, etc. Together with relevant interlocutors this will provide a more detailed insight into the topic, as a prerequisite for professional reporting that will in turn contribute to sensitizing the public and elicit a faster systemic solution to the issue.

In order for reporting to be comprehensive and accurate, when information is acquired it is necessary to consult and/or include institutions or individuals who represent a credible source of information related to the topic. From the regulation it is clear that significantly more institutions are engaged in child protection issues, to a greater or lesser extent, than at first appears. Indeed, studies have shown that the media are not sufficiently familiar with these questions, because in most of the releases concerning child labour only two sources of information were used: the police and a centre for social work.

In fact, a number of institutions work on this issue and thus represent potential sources of information: international and domestic institutions; a range of ministries, health and social protection organizations, institutes and

faculties; the ILO and its local office; trade unions; and civil society organizations.

The inclusion of the non-governmental sector is extremely important, but one should always bear in mind the possibility of “abuse of abuse,” and thus carefully check the authenticity and credibility of the individual and/or organization that claims to represent the interests of children.

Journalists should never forget that the child is a person and a subject, not an object, which means that his/her voice should be heard. The right to express views and to participate represents one of the key rights of the child. The sources of information should therefore also include the children, because their word is at least as important as other sources. It is, of course, obligatory to require the necessary consents and carry out independent verification of the data in such a way that will never compromise the position of the child who is providing the information.

It is also necessary to consider whether the inclusion of the child in the story could in any way harm him/her. If there is a shadow of a doubt in this regard, the story of the child should not be released. In such cases it is better to take account of the information provided by the child and place the story in a general context.

GUIDELINES ON CONVERSATION WITH CHILDREN

Prior to any conversation with children, **it is necessary to obtain the consent of parents and guardians.** This means that the reason and purpose of the interview has to be explained both to the child and the guardian: i.e., for which purpose it will be used, in what context, and where and when the interview or parts of it will be published. Whenever possible, journalists should obtain consent in written form.

Even when a journalist obtains the consent of parents and/or guardians to publish the story of the child, as well as his/her photograph/video, **it is necessary to consider whether it would be more appropriate to conceal the child's identity.**

Certain situations can cause subsequent negative effects on the child, and possible retaliation (which can be both psychological and physical) or stigmatization by the milieu. Stories that at first glance may evoke emotion, and even a positive reaction from society that might help a particular child and even other potentially vulnerable children, can trigger another more sinister aspect – reactions of ridicule, false pity, the belittling of the child by other children and members of his/her community, and sometimes the child's exclusion from the company of his/her peers.

It is important to use language that is understandable to the child and leaves no doubts. This will contribute to a better understanding and more accurate transfer of the child's views, and it will allow the child to feel natural and relaxed. When a journalist talks with a child, it should be physically at the child's level. The interviewer should pay attention to the area in which the conversation is held. Media professionals (journalist, photographer, cameraperson, director) should consider whether and in what way (video, audio) the background affects the story and whether it implies something that could in any way harm the child (this could include the child's home, community, and environment).

The story of a child should not be taken out of context. Do not let the desire for producing attractive stories and eliciting a powerful emotional response from the audience mislead

you in anyway. For example, insisting on questions that could cause the child pain and tears and reactivate his/her suffering brought about by traumatic events is absolutely inappropriate. The child's right to dignity and privacy must be respected. Avoid questions, attitudes or comments that could show insensitivity towards the cultural and religious values of the child, as well as those that could expose the child to danger or humiliation.

Talking with children is not easy. It is not only necessary for the child to be prepared, but the journalist as well. The child is sensitive, susceptible to the influence of adults and the environment, and often not aware of the possible consequences of what he/she says. A journalist should be aware of this before the interview, in order to be prepared to react appropriately in a situation where the child may begin to cry, disclose an illness, or mention his/her name or the name of parents or other persons whose identity should not be revealed.

A journalist should monitor the expression of his/her own emotions. In an interview with children, to a greater extent than in conversation with adults, one should bear in mind that communication is not only verbal: sometimes nonverbal communication is more eloquent, including gestures, facial expressions and so on. If a journalist is shocked or clearly expresses other types of emotions by what the child says during the interview, this should be hidden from that child, because it can cause discomfort or lead to changes in further statements by the child who might lean in the direction that they believe is expected of them (giving "expected/desirable answers").

In addition, it is always advisable to **verify the accuracy of what the child says** by talking to other children and/or a parent/guardian/teacher, etc.

It is essential to conceal the identity of the child during reporting if it goes against their best interests to be identified. Concealing the name and face of the child is often not sufficient, as the voice can also be a powerful identifier.

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Just like direct child protection work carried out on the ground, media professionals should pay special attention to the protection of children in the preparation of the final reports/media releases.

With knowledge of the topic, credible interlocutors and special attention given to the context of the upcoming story, it is necessary that journalists avoid stereotypes and prejudices, and consider carefully their choice of words.

It is crucial that reporting on children and child labour avoids sensationalism, not only in reporting, but also in text processing and placement of video and photo material. Data on the prevalence of the phenomenon of child labour are sufficiently serious that they do not need to be supplemented by shocking headlines, which can affect the child in a negative way. In addition, such headlines do not raise serious questions, address the issue of responsibility or initiate a solution to the problem. Unfortunately, sometimes economic interests and the drive for greater circulation/ratings take precedence even when it comes to the interests of children. The most recent survey, conducted in 2016, shows some revealing results.

Interviews with journalists conducted during the research, show that in many cases journalistic texts themselves do not contain sensationalism, stereotypes or prejudice, nor do they reveal the identity of the child concerned, but rather that these issues are portrayed in headlines or photographs that accompany the text. However, in most cases where the topic of child labour appeared on the front page, this was because the text itself was sensationalistic.

This suggests that the question and its legal solutions – including these guidelines – must be brought to the attention of editors in the media; moreover, regulatory and self-regulatory bodies must also take a much more active stance in addressing negative phenomena, and even in imposing sanctions. Professionalism of journalists is reflected in the struggle for their own work and integrity, but should the reporting be sensationalistic and accepted by the editors, there is no justification.

Once the media reports are finalized – just as in the situation of conducting an interview with children – it is necessary to take into account the potential risks to the safety and security of children, including the possibility of potential retaliation, deprivation of their basic human rights [food, clothing, housing, security] and all forms of exploitation.

In reporting on child labour, media professionals must avoid images of sexual exposure of children as well as displaying their sexuality. These challenges are the greatest when writing articles about pornography, prostitution and trafficking in children for the purpose of providing sexual services [sex trafficking].

Publishing photos of children requires the consent of the parent/guardian [preferably written], and the child's identity must be hidden if it is not obtained. Media representatives should always bear in mind the consequences that publicity can have on children and/or their families. Therefore, even when the consent for publishing photos/video is granted, it is important to carefully assess whether it is necessary to conceal the identity of the child. Use of black bars over the eyes is often insufficient, so the de-identification of photos/video footage is better achieved in a more reliable manner [blurring around the face, etc.]. With regard to audio-visual reports, it is also necessary to de-identify the voice of the child, and sometimes that of parents/guardians, as such airing can lead to the identity of the child being revealed.

In situations where the identity of the child is hidden by using initials instead of the full name and surname, it is necessary to realize that disclosure of other names or other data may undermine the de-identification achieved by using only initials. Specifically, what happens is that the reporters state the initials of the child, but at the same time may release the full name of parents, relatives, or neighbours, or give an address or other information. This may occur indirectly or perhaps target only a small group of people, but nevertheless reveals the identity of the child that was meant to be concealed.

PROACTIVE APPROACH AND COOPERATION

The importance and role of the media in today's world of ever-expanding science and information technology is more significant than ever: the media pervade all spheres of society and are no longer limited to specialized media houses but include almost every individual. The passive role of the audience is obsolete – everyone can create and broadcast information. This has both good and bad connotations. It contributes to the freedom and democratization of society, but also reduces the space for control, which leads to misuse of media space, understood in its broadest sense. This results in an increase in the responsibility of media professionals and media

houses, whose influence is still much stronger than the influence of an individual.

With its character and power, the media impacts the creation of public opinion, and can thus influence the drivers of opinion and decision-makers. In addition, the role of the media has long since surpassed its former functions to inform, educate and entertain, and it has tripled its field of operation. Professor of journalism Stephan Russ-Mohl and journalist/author Ana Jugoslava Zagorac-Keršer¹ identify the following as the most important functions of journalism today:

- 1. INFORMATION** – Providing quality information and increasing general awareness of citizens, which will contribute to better decision-making on the most important issues of the community.
- 2. ARTICULATION** – The shaping and placement of problems in a real, visible and tangible framework that can be perceived by the public.
- 3. ESTABLISHING AGENDA** – Establishing priorities in the treatment of social issues and presenting the problem to the public, as well as to those who are responsible for solving them.
- 4. CRITICISM AND CONTROL** – Transparency, which does not allow anything to be hidden from the public, and which enables control of the holders of public power.
- 5. ENTERTAINMENT**
- 6. EDUCATION**
- 7. SOCIALIZATION AND LEADERSHIP**
- 8. INTEGRATION** – Connecting people, cultures, religions, and ideas, and allowing for community involvement.

Bearing all this in mind, it is clear that in protecting the rights of children, and also in terms of addressing child labour, the role of the media is essential. Therefore, the media should not only be conveyors of messages, but also initiators of many important issues, including the question of combating child labour.

First and foremost, in treating the topic of child labour, journalists should demonstrate maximum professionalism: this entails a strong

understanding of the topic they are discussing, an extensive list of potential sources of information and relevant interlocutors, independence from any influence on their work, and compliance with legal and professional standards and ethics.

If these preconditions are met, the possibility of proactive action in terms of reporting on child labour and thus contributing to its eradication is significant.

¹ Russ Mohl, S. and Jugoslava Zagorac-Keršer, A. 2005. *Novinarstvo*, Clio, Belgrade.

KEY GUIDELINES FOR A PROACTIVE APPROACH

- ◆ Do your best to find news that pertains to child labour.
- ◆ Investigate hidden forms of child labour and make them public.
- ◆ Pay attention to the situation of children whose work is abused.
- ◆ Remind government representatives and members of Parliament about what needs to be done, and about any unfulfilled promises they have made. For example, the current Strategy for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence identifies a set of problems concerning the protection of child rights, including child labour, so you can ask what has been done, what will be completed and when. Point out that Serbia is a country that has ratified and respects international conventions and has a number of laws concerning the protection of the rights and situation of children, yet we still do not have the new National Strategy for Preventing and Protecting Children from Violence defined by the Action Plan for Chapter 23 in the process of European Union accession.
- ◆ Participate in educational events and programmes dedicated to combating child labour.
- ◆ Organize journalistic forums and pay attention to other meetings on the topics of protecting the rights of the child and child labour.
- ◆ Point out the inconsistency of the Code of Journalists and the Law on Public Information with respect to placing the interest of the child above all other interests.
- ◆ Request that the competent regulatory and self-regulatory media bodies include an expert in the field of child rights.
- ◆ Point out any violation of the Code of Journalists in your own or other media.
- ◆ Develop cooperation with trade unions and civil society organizations dealing with the protection of child rights.
- ◆ Initiate socially responsible actions on the theme of combating child labour that include children and prominent public figures.
- ◆ Promote best practices in combating child labour.

Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Branch (FUNDAMENTALS)

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