



National Council of  
Ukraine on Television  
and Radio Broadcasting



Organization for Security and  
Co-operation in Europe

# HANDBOOK OF RECOMMENDATIONS

**on Media Literacy and Application of  
Professional Standards in the Media  
Sector**

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# INTRODUCTION

In times of war the media is not just an information resource, but can be both an actor in military developments in all their manifestations and a source of social resilience and national unity.

Journalists play a decisive role in ensuring one of the most important human rights, i.e. to have a reliable and full access to verified, accurate, and high-quality information. During wartime this journalistic mission is a particular challenge, as such work is carried out in extremely difficult circumstances, often costing journalists their freedom and their lives. However, the state of affairs remains intact, where not only the trust of audiences, but also the national security, safety of the information space, and resilience of our state, which is heroically fighting an unprecedented battle for the future of democracy around the world today, depend on the extent to which the media adhere to standards of reliability, impartiality, and ethics. Today every single publication and every single story is either a step to support the consolidation of society or a risk of becoming a tool of disinformation provocations in the hands of the aggressor.

Being aware of this responsibility, the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting initiated a survey in the Ukrainian media sector.

We sought to understand how journalists and media professionals assess their own level of media literacy, what principles they are guided by in their work, and what challenges they face in practice. The data obtained allowed us to identify the strengths of modern journalism and outline areas for development and targeted support, particularly in regions with lower levels of digital and ethical awareness.

This handbook compiles key findings and practical recommendations based on the results obtained. Our goal is to provide a space for reflection, discussion, and improvement of professional practices.

Here you will find guidelines on:

- application of basic journalism standards in your daily work;
- level of critical awareness of manipulation, fake news, and information influence;
- assessment of media ethics in editorial processes;
- training and professional support needs.

The National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting is expressing its sincere gratitude to all the experts who have contributed to the preparation of this collection and participated in the survey.

We invite you to familiarize yourself with the materials, compare the findings with your own experience, and, most importantly, use these recommendations as a basis for the internal growth and professional discussions within your teams.

Yours faithfully,

**Olha HERASYMIUK**, Head of the National Council

Nowadays media literacy is not only a trending topic but also a vital skill in the context of hybrid threats that affect Ukrainian society on a daily basis. Especially in times of the full-scale war and continuous information attacks, critical thinking skills and ability to navigate the information environment become the backbone for preserving democratic values, national security, and social resilience.

Media literacy is a field of interest not only for journalists, educators, or communication experts. It is a direct need for every citizen, regardless of age, profession, or place of residence. Only a cognizant society can resist disinformation, distinguish quality content from manipulation, and make conscious choices about information.

In our media project, we focus on creating a sustainable, transparent, and responsible information ecosystem in Ukraine. Working with government agencies, civil society organizations, and media representatives, we implement a number of initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacity of Ukrainian media, developing ethical journalism, and supporting regional media which are often at the forefront of the fight against fake news and propaganda.

Our educational and methodological resources, trainings, thematic handbooks, and research are tools designed not only to inform but also to motivate action. We want journalists, educators, civil society activists, and all stakeholders to have effective support in their daily work and in their fight for truth. After all, this is how, step by step, trust in the media is built, media literacy is improved, and, consequently, democracy is strengthened.

The Media Project of the OSCE Support Program for Ukraine is about joining efforts to create a strong, resilient, and secure information space. And each of our partners, each journalist, each concerned citizen plays an important role in this process.

I sincerely hope that this guide will not only be a practical tool in your daily work, but also a source of inspiration for further development of the media environment in Ukraine. Together we can make the Ukrainian media space more free, responsible, and resilient to any challenges.

Yours faithfully,

**Olga PROKOPENKO**, Head of the Media Project, OSCE Support Programme for Ukraine

## **ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN JOURNALISM**

### **Why is it necessary to talk about adherence to ethical standards in journalism?**

In today's global environment characterized by an excessive number of information flows, rapid development of digital technologies, and an increase in the number of uncontrolled sources of information, the issue of adherence to ethical principles in journalism is of paramount importance. Ethical standards serve not only as a component of a journalist's professional culture but also as the foundation for creating reliable, responsible, and socially significant information. It is these principles — truthfulness, accuracy, independence, and respect for human dignity — that counterbalance fake news, manipulation, hate speech, and disinformation campaigns which have increasingly become a part of hybrid threats.

The ethical responsibility of journalists is particularly relevant in times of martial law. During wartime information becomes not only a tool for informing the public, but also a factor in its security, moral stamina, and unity. In such circumstances it is crucial to ensure the balance between the public's right to know the truth and the need to avoid publishing information that could be detrimental to the state's defense capability or cause harm to victims. Adherence to ethical principles under such conditions is not only a requirement of professional duty, but also a manifestation of civic maturity, social responsibility, and deep understanding of the role of journalism in shaping a democratic and resilient society.

### **Survey data of media professionals on ethical principles<sup>1</sup>**

The results of a survey conducted among representatives of the media community by the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting showed that the overall level of awareness of professional ethical standards is relatively low, as only 65% of correct answers were given in this section. Together with knowledge about fact-checking, these are the lowest results across the media community surveyed. Significant gaps have also been identified in understanding the specifics of ethical behaviour during martial law, in particular regarding restrictions on dissemination of sensitive information, interaction with military structures, usage of materials from social networks, and protection of personal data.

It has been found that these gaps in knowledge are uneven and depend on position, age, region of activity, and type of media. The lowest levels of awareness have been demonstrated by respondents under the age of 25, specialists in the fields of production, technical support, and SMM, directors, screenwriters, producers, as well as those who are not part of formal editorial structures (stand-alone specialists). It is these categories of professions in the media sector that require a tailored targeted approach when developing their curricula. Region-wise, Zakarpattia, Ternopil, Odesa, and Vinnytsia regions are in

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<sup>1</sup> National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, Analytical report based on the results of a survey of media professionals, 2025.

greatest need of targeted support. Particular attention should be paid to raising awareness of prohibition and restrictions on publication of certain types of information under martial law, particularly in Donetsk and Odesa regions.

This indicates the need to implement a multi-faceted, targeted, and intersectoral approach to developing a culture of ethical responsibility in the media sphere. Given the challenges that journalism faces during wartime — emotional polarisation, lack of access to verified information, the workload on field teams, growing influence of platforms, the key task is to strengthen the capacity of all media actors to act in accordance with ethical principles.

## **Ethical principles and their implementation**

Ethical principles in journalism is a set of professional standards, values, and rules of conduct that regulate activities of journalists and media organizations. They are designed to ensure responsible, impartial, and socially useful communication and to prevent harm, disinformation, and manipulation. Journalistic ethics rests on such basic principles as truthfulness, accuracy, objectivity, independence, honesty, respect for privacy and human dignity, as well as accountability to society.

Ethical principles are usually divided into several thematic groups. The first group consists of the principles of reliability and accuracy which require careful verification of facts, avoidance of distortions, and correction of errors. The second group consists of the principles of independence and impartiality which require freedom from the influence of the state, business, parties, or personal preferences. The third group consists of the principles of humanity and responsibility which refer to the protection of vulnerable groups, intolerance of hate speech, respect for privacy, and ethical coverage of conflicts, tragedies, and disasters. In addition, there are principles of transparency (disclosure of funding sources, distinguishing between advertising and editorial content) and principles of professional solidarity (mutual respect among journalists, respect for copyright, avoidance of plagiarism).

Historically, first codes of ethics originated in countries with a developed tradition of free press, primarily in the US, Great Britain, Germany, and France. For example, in the US the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) adopted its “Canon of Journalism” as early as 1923. One of the most influential documents — the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) — was first adopted back in 1926, while the current version of the code was developed in 1973 and has since been updated several times to take into account digital challenges (the last major update was in 2014).

In Europe the Munich Charter of Journalists’ Rights (1971) and the Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists of the International Federation of Journalists, which was first adopted in 1954 and updated in 1986, played an essential role. These documents enshrined key ethical guidelines recognized in international practice.

In Ukraine, journalistic ethics was actively being formed in the post-Soviet period. The most widely accepted set of ethical standards and principles of journalism in Ukraine is the Ethics Code of Ukrainian Journalists. The latest version of this document originally drafted in 2004 was adopted by journalists and journalism organizations in 2013.

The code was developed on the basis of international standards and adapted to the Ukrainian context. Its observance is supported by the Commission on Journalistic Ethics that acts as a self-regulatory body. However, as new challenges emerge, such as war, digitalization, and information terrorism, there is an ongoing discussion within the professional community about updating and specifying ethical standards, particularly in terms of interaction with the military, presentation of visual content, and usage of social networks as a source.

Thus, ethical principles of journalism are not a static list of norms, but a living system that responds to social, technological, and political changes. Their dynamic nature is an indication of the development of democracy, maturity of the professional community, and aspiration to ensure maximum benefit from journalism in complex and often crisis-ridden periods.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS for raising awareness and adherence to ethical principles in journalism**

### **For journalists, media professionals, and media organizations**

#### **Formalizing internal editorial ethics policies**

It is recommended, where possible, to develop or update codes of conduct setting out clear guidelines on how to behave in crisis situations, interact with volunteers, and interview traumatized individuals. Where appropriate, one can use ethical codes of foreign editorial offices, in particular, the one of the BBC, and use the Ethics Code of Ukrainian Journalists as a general framework, as well as seek assistance from experts or self-governing organizations, such as the Commission on Journalistic Ethics. In particular, special particular attention should be paid to the following nuances of ethical journalism during wartime:

#### **Priority of reliability**

Journalists must ensure maximum accuracy even under limited conditions. It is recommended to introduce internal fact-checking standards, involve experts, and, whenever possible, cooperate with independent fact-checking initiatives.

#### **Balance between promptness and responsibility**

In situations where promptness may compromise quality or safety, accuracy should be given priority. It is necessary to develop editorial guidelines for working with sensitive information, including anonymous sources, leaks, and war-related situations.

#### **No harm**

Preliminary risk assessments should be conducted before publishing content that could reveal person's whereabouts or personal data or harm national defense capability. It is advisable to consult with security experts and avoid any going into too much detail. If publication of information could harm the public interest or national security, journalists and editors should take into account the expediency and timing of publication. It is recommended to temporarily refrain from publication of the material, while ensuring that it is archived for future use.

## **Avoiding excessive emotionality and presenting information in a psychologically-balanced manner**

Journalists and editors should avoid shocking or frightening details, particularly in war-related materials. Excessive pumping up of emotions may destabilize public mood and traumatize audiences. It is recommended to take into account the audience's psycho-emotional state, especially during periods of escalation. Images of victims, funerals, or injuries should be presented with restraint — no close-ups and with the use of obscuring or blurring effects.

## **Regularly updating knowledge on ethical standards**

It is recommended to introduce systematic learning activities for journalists and editorial teams (training sessions, internal discussions) on peculiarities of ethics under martial law (in particular, with regard to the formalized codes mentioned above). Learning modules should include topics such as covering combat operations, safe handling of sources, protecting vulnerable groups, working with images of deceased persons and their relatives, and communicating with the military.

It is helpful to hold regular internal editorial meetings, as well as meetings between editorial offices to discuss specific cases, analyze them, and make decisions (in particular, whether to publish or not publish certain information, ethical approaches to materials concerning the military, the wounded, civilian victims, images of the aftermath of shelling, etc.).

Particular attention should be paid to updating the understanding of the standard of promptness, as there may be restrictions imposed on certain topics, or verification of information and data may take longer in situations of deliberate disinformation attacks and mongering of panic and despair.

It is also useful to have discussions within the editorial office from time to time about the social function of the media and the mission of journalists, especially in situations where citizens' lives and health depend on accuracy and correctness of information. Particular attention should be paid to this issue by media professionals in the Central and Southern regions where the lowest results were recorded according to the survey.

## **Targeted learning support for certain professional categories**

Producers, screenwriters, cameramen, technicians, and SMM specialists should participate in specialized trainings tailored to their specific contribution to content creation. It is recommended to integrate practical cases, in particular, on post-processing of photos/videos from the front line. Targeting specialists or SMM specialists should be well versed in ethical standards and aware of the impact of the media on society and citizens during wartime, as well as specifically consider this impact when working (for example, when creating clickbait headlines that can have a negative impact on the mental health of your audience). Occasionally, editorial meetings should be held (possibly with the involvement of an external expert) to analyze specific cases of videos, photos, headlines, vocabulary, etc.

## **Interaction of editorial offices with media owners and management**

Editorial offices should initiate an internal dialogue with owners, producers, and managers to agree on a vision of editorial independence. Owners should be aware that the main asset of the media is the audience's trust which is formed through consistent adherence to ethical standards and professional responsibility. It is this trust that forms the foundation of a media outlet's reputation and can be converted into support, influence, or profit. Therefore, it should be a shared priority for all participants in the media process to refrain from interfering in editorial policies and to support ethical consistency.

## **Dialogue with the audience**

Editorial offices should systematically develop audience feedback mechanisms: through comments, social networks, online surveys, hotlines, or public discussions. Such mechanisms allow to promptly identify errors, correct content, and increase trust in the media. It is also recommended to encourage audience participation in shaping topics and gathering local information as it boosts community engagement and improves the quality of media products.

## **For bloggers**

### **Engaging in an ethical discourse**

Bloggers, especially those under the age of 25, demonstrate insufficient knowledge of basic restrictions during martial law (location of military personnel, reporting from disaster sites, publication of emotional content with no context provided, etc.), as well as of key principles of ethical journalism and journalistic standards. It is recommended to engage bloggers in general journalistic ethical discourse by creating (engaging, supporting) open formats for participation in professional discussions: discussion clubs, open ethical guides, collaborations with journalists, and workshops to discuss specific cases and application of principles. It is necessary to at least articulate that bloggers as information fora with audiences are responsible to their audience for the content they create and distribute, as it has a direct impact on people and, accordingly, requires the imposition of a certain ethical framework.

### **Multimedia educational products**

The best and most accessible materials for bloggers' audiences are those they are familiar with: stories, reels, short videos with practical tips (such as "5 mistakes to avoid during wartime"). Content can be distributed and targeted via TikTok, Instagram, YouTube Shorts, or at relevant events (workshops, forums, etc.). It is also desirable to involve bloggers and influencers themselves as "speakers" and "providers" of ethical discourse in the production and distribution of such products.

## **Ethical registers of bloggers**

Monitoring organizations are encouraged to initiate ethical registers of bloggers: open platforms similar to “whitelists” to spotlight those authors who consistently adhere to the principles of ethical communication and avoid disinformation.

These registers should be based on a clear methodology and transparent evaluation criteria, covering the level of responsibility, transparency of funding sources, response to mistakes, ethical approach to sensitive topics, etc. The criteria should be developed and agreed upon in consultation with the media community, human rights organizations, and independent experts.

Such ethical registries will contribute to:

- increasing transparency of the information environment;
- strengthening trust in bloggers as a source of information;
- developing new standards of responsible behaviour in light of the growing role of digital content in public life.

This tool may also be used by civil society organizations, educational institutions, advertisers, and platforms to support responsible information influence.

## **For future media professionals**

### **Integrating ethics into curricula**

Media ethics modules should be a mandatory part of bachelor’s programs in journalism, PR, and digital communications. The emphasis must be on real-life cases: what exactly is prohibited under Ukrainian law, how to avoid hate speech, how to cover war ethically.

### **Mentoring and internship programs**

It is recommended to create mentoring initiatives under auspices of national and regional media with the participation of experienced editors and journalists. During their internships students should learn about ethical procedures and how to critically assess complex situations.

### **Simulation exercises**

It is worth introducing modules into curricula (university curricula – for students or training ones — for journalists and media professionals) where participants will act in simulated situations: processing information about shelling, interviewing refugees, working with eyewitness accounts. Such exercises are especially useful in regions with below-average knowledge levels.

## **For media civil society organizations**

### **Regular audit of gaps and needs**

It is recommended that the map of media needs be regularly updated by region, profession, and age, both by content producers and consumers. This will allow for the timely adaptation of curricula and support programs. Particular attention should be paid to the monitoring of new challenges: hybrid manipulation, deepfakes, digital fatigue, excessive centralization of media assets, etc.

### **Information campaigns**

A series of campaigns should be launched to explain why journalism is important, especially in times of war, why journalistic principles and ethical standards exist, and what constitutes a violation of ethical standards in wartime. The target audience for these campaigns shall be both citizens who consume content (to show why quality information is important, who produces it and under which standards in today's world) and journalists and media professionals (to increase the responsibility of journalists, especially during wartime). The campaigns should be localized and cover the Central, Southern, and Eastern regions of the country.

## Useful literature:

1. C.G. Christians, M. Fackler, K. B. Richardson et al. Media ethics: cases and moral reasoning. — Lviv: UCU Press, 2014. — 592 p.
2. I. Kulias, O. Makarenko. Effective TV News Production: Standards of Information Broadcasting; Professional Ethics of Journalists and Information Specialists. A Practical Guide for Journalists. — Kyiv, Internews–Ukraine NGO, 2006. — 120 p.
3. BBC editorial guidelines for authors of news and information programs.
4. I. Kulias. Standards and ethics of journalism in conditions of undeclared war. — MediaSapiens.
5. T. Pechonchyk. Why it is important to tell the truth during war.
6. Ethics Code of Ukrainian Journalists.
7. Munich Declaration of the Duties and Rights of Journalists (Munich Charter).
8. Ethical principles for media coverage of terrorist organizations and their leaders: expert discussion.
9. Peter Y. Sussman. Resolving Ethical Conflicts in Wartime – Society of Professional Journalists.
10. Jones, Alex S. Losing the News. Oxford University Press, 2009.
11. Safety Guide for Journalists: a Handbook for Reporters in High-Risk Environment (UNESCO).
12. UN Module on Media Integrity and Ethics.

## HOW TO RESPONSIBLY DEAL WITH THE TOPIC OF CHILDREN IN THE MEDIA

### Why is it important to talk about children in the media?

In today's world not only language is changing, but also the way we perceive children as individuals. Even in everyday situations, such as announcements on airplanes, we increasingly hear: "Ladies, gentlemen, and dear children". This is not just a linguistic detail, but a manifestation of respect for a child as an individual with their own rights, needs, and dignity.

This shift in perception shall also be reflected in journalism. A child is not a background for an emotional story, not a convenient dramatic figure in the frame, but a person who should be protected, even from excessive media attention.

No-harm journalism requires an awareness of the child's subjectivity, especially when it comes to violence, war, offences, or other traumatic experiences.

### Survey data of media professionals on the topic of children in the media

According to the results of a survey<sup>2</sup> on media literacy and application of professional standards conducted among media professionals by the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the overall level of awareness regarding the coverage of the topic of children is high: the average rate of correct answers is 86.3%.

However, the question that caused the most difficulty for journalists was: "Is it permissible to involve a child who has been sexually abused in the production of content for the media?" Only 58.5% of respondents gave the correct answer: yes, but only under certain conditions, i.e. with respect for rights and interests of the child. It indicates the need for in-depth learning for journalists on the specifics of working with children who have experienced trauma.

### Legislation and ethical standards of journalism

Under Ukrainian legislation, a child is defined as a person under the age of 18 (until reaching the age of majority). At the same time, a child under the age of 14 is considered a minor, and a child between the ages of 14 and 18 is considered an underage child.

The Law of Ukraine "On Media" pays special attention to the protection of children in public space. Article 42 of this Law provides for:

- Prohibition of publishing photos of children who have suffered physical or sexual abuse without the written consent of at least one parent or legal representative;

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<sup>2</sup> National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, Analytical report based on the results of a survey of media professionals, 2025.

- Prohibition of disclosing any information that could lead to the identification of a child in offense-related proceedings;
- Prohibition of identifying a child's identity if the publication concerns suicide.

Exceptions are possible only when it is otherwise impossible to ensure the best interests of the child. And even in this situation, the disclosure of data should be minimal and justified.

Thus, Article 42 of the Law effectively establishes:

- Prohibition of sensationalism in coverage of traumatic experiences of children;
- Mandatory consent (with due consideration of interests of a child, not just formally);
- Priority of protection rather than "right to information" for journalists.

In addition, the Ethics Code of Ukrainian Journalists (Article 18) requires journalists to be especially careful when covering issues related to children. Disclosing names or indicating characteristics by which a child can be identified is unacceptable if it is related to abuse or illegal activities.

In 2016, representatives of the media industry, together with the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, developed and signed a Joint Act of Agreement "On the Protection of a Child, who Has Suffered Sexual Violence, when Involved in Media Production"<sup>3</sup>.

The document became a voluntary but ethically binding agreement on the principles of working with children who have experienced sexual violence, with an emphasis on protecting their rights, safety, and preventing secondary traumatization. The signatories were the leadership of 1+1 Media, Media Group Ukraine, StarLightMedia, NSTU, and the Independent Association of TV and Radio Broadcasters.

The main provisions of this act are the following:

- Involving a child in the media is only possible for the purpose of protecting their interests, for example, if public intervention is needed or to help the family.
- A written assent from the child (depending on their age), a consent from parents or legal representatives is required.
- A written opinion from a psychologist confirming that there is no risk of secondary traumatization is compulsory.
- It is prohibited to identify a child, including their face, name, settlement name (except for cities with a population of over one million), and other characteristics.
- In the case of a missing child, it is prohibited to disclose sexual details of the incident.
- The media must act cautiously with due regard for the psychological state of the child and with the support of specialists.

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3 Joint Agreement No. 1 "Protection of a Child Who Has Experienced Sexual Abuse When Involved in Media Production"

The Recommendations on a Gender-Sensitive Approach in the Media for Child Audiences published by the media regulator in March 2025 specify that children are a particularly vulnerable group and are not always able to protect their rights or express their own position independently. Their physical, emotional, and psychological development largely depends on the environment in which they live, as well as on the decisions made by adults. That is why it is important to take children's needs into account and ensure they receive adequate protection and support<sup>4</sup>.

If content contains material that may be harmful to a child audience, it is essential to **clearly define the editorial purpose**, take into account provisions of Ukrainian law and ethical standards, as well as justify the expediency of such content in a specific context.

In particular, complex sensitive materials include profanity, scenes of violence, sexual scenes, sexual violence, bullying, humiliation, suffering, and degradation of human dignity.

To better understand how this works in practice, let's look at **examples of policies and approaches of Ukrainian media to working with sensitive content**:

#### **Example 1. Editorial Charter of JSC NSTU (Public Broadcasting [*Ukr. Suspilne*])<sup>5</sup>**

The editorial charter of the public broadcaster emphasizes that the media has a significant impact on society, particularly on children, so Suspilne prioritizes interests of a child and exercises caution when covering child-related topics.

«**Since reports of sexual violence crimes, particularly against children, require special attention, this topic is extremely sensitive and may pose a danger to the child**», — the Charter states.

According to the Charter, in programs of NSTU JSC it is prohibited to publish photos of children who have suffered physical or sexual abuse without the written consent of at least one parent or legal representative.

#### **Example 2. Editorial policy of Rayon.in.ua<sup>6</sup>**

It specifies that journalists must be especially careful when covering issues related to children. The publication of information about a child's private life requires reasonable grounds and the consent of their parents or guardians.

It emphasizes that it is unacceptable to disclose children's names (or the characteristics by which they can be identified) if they were involved in illegal activities or became participants in events related to violence.

The policy on reports of missing children is regulated separately: once a child is found, the relevant publications shall be deleted. If necessary, a news item can be created with the

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<sup>4</sup> How to inform but not traumatize? The National Council presented recommendations for the media

<sup>5</sup> Editorial Statute of the Joint Stock Company "National Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine"

<sup>6</sup> Editorial policy of the National Hyperlocal Media Network Rayon.in.ua

wording “A child was found” without specifying the first and last name, in order to avoid a 404 error and at the same time not violate the right to privacy.

### **Example 3. NV Editorial Code<sup>7</sup>**

The document states that the editorial office exercises particular caution when publishing materials about events involving underage children. NV adheres to the principle of not disclosing the names of children who have been or could potentially have been involved in illegal activities or who became participants in events related to violence. In addition, the editorial team emphasizes that in covering children’s issues, there is no compromise on the reliability, accuracy, or completeness of information for the sake of promptness.

### **Example 4. BBC Editorial Guidelines<sup>8</sup>**

**“It is not always easy to strike a balance between the competing interests of children who participate in our productions and the views and ambitions of their parents or our audience. However, we must always be vigilant in safeguarding the welfare of children and young people,”** the BBC emphasizes.

This includes the right of children to express themselves and participate, while recognizing that they often lack the experience to assess prospective long-term consequences, such as the risk of bullying. Potential consequences of participation should be explained to a child and their family. The BBC does not offer payment for consent to participate, allowing only reimbursement of reasonable expenses.

Protecting the physical and emotional well-being and dignity of individuals under the age of 18, especially those under the age of 15, is mandatory during the production process and broadcast, even when parental or guardian consent has been obtained.

## **International standards and European practices**

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 12 and 34) guarantees the right of the child to be heard and protected from sexual abuse. The Council of Europe’s Lanzarote Convention prohibits any exploitation of children, and participation in the media is recognized as potentially risky if there are no strict protective measures in place.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that sexual violence is a serious crime, not a topic for sensationalism. The purpose of content related to such cases should not consist in emotionally influencing the audience, but in educating, shaping a conscious society, and promoting changes in policies and protection systems.

Particular attention is paid to this aspect in the Murad Code: ethical principles developed under the guidance of Nadia Murad, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate who survived sexual slavery during the Yazidi genocide and later became a human rights activist and founder of the Murad Code project. This Code aims to responsibly document the stories of survivors of sexual violence.

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<sup>7</sup> NV Editorial Code

<sup>8</sup> BBC Editorial guidelines



*Scan the QR code to read the Ukrainian translation of the Murad Code.*

Principle 7.6 of the Code deals with interviewing child survivors of sexual violence. Given the heightened risks of unsafe and ineffective interviews with children, a child survivor will only be interviewed if the team has demonstrated competency, skills and experience working with children (attuned to their age, development, gender, and special needs). If such competencies are not available, the team must either acquire them or engage specialists to ensure the child's safe and controlled participation.

Section 7.5 of the Code emphasizes the importance of recognizing one's own limitations. Those involved in working with such stories must honestly acknowledge the limitations of their experience, knowledge, and mandate. They are obliged not to go beyond their competence and, in complex situations, to consult and work with other specialists, such as psychologists, trauma, security and child experts.

Recommendations<sup>9</sup> of the Council of Europe on children's participation in the public space (including the media):

- the child's participation must be voluntary, informed, and safe;
- support must be provided: psychological, legal, and through the presence of representatives;
- the risk of re-traumatization must be avoided — through anonymization, prior testing of the format, and limiting the topics.

### **Great Britain (IPSO)**

According to the Editors' Code of Practice approved by the Independent Press Standards Organization (IPSO), journalists must exercise particular caution when working with children. Specifically, it is prohibited to interview or photograph a child under the age of 16 in relation to traumatic events without the consent of a parent or legal representative. In addition, the

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<sup>9</sup> Listen – Act – Change – Handbook of the Council of Europe on Children's Participation (2020)

media must conduct a preliminary assessment of the risks to the child's well-being that may arise due to publication and avoid disclosing unnecessary details that could identify or harm the child in the future.

### France (ARCOM)

French audiovisual content regulator ARCOM requires that in cases where a child is a witness or victim of violence, their participation in TV or video material must be fully anonymized. This means not only concealing the name, but also obscuring or blurring the face, changing the voice, and avoiding references to the specific location of the incident or details that could identify the child.

### Germany

European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) recommends in its reports that an expert assessment of the potential harm to a child must be carried out before publishing content involving them. The media outlets operating in Germany are required to clearly label content that may be sensitive or potentially harmful to underage viewers, both in terms of content and format.

## RECOMMENDATIONS for responsible coverage of children in the media

### For journalists:

**Remember: a child is a subject, not an object of the story.** Treat children with respect for their dignity, rights, and vulnerability. Do not be guided solely by interests of the audience, but first and foremost by the best interests of the child.

**Obtain informed consent: not just formal, but substantive.** Prior to recording or photographing, determine whether the child understands where their story will end up, how it will be disseminated, and whether there are risks of bullying, re-traumatization, etc. Be sure to explain this to parents.

**Avoid any identification in traumatic stories.** If it concerns violence, crime, suicide, or loss, do not publish the name, photo, settlement name, or details that could identify the child. Even if the parents have given their consent.

**Consult in difficult situations.** Do not make decisions blindly. If in doubt, consult your editor, the Commission on Journalistic Ethics, the media regulator, psychologists, or human rights defenders.

**Involve specialists when working with child survivors of abuse.** If you do not have experience, it is better to delegate the work or involve a specialist. This will serve to protect both the child and yourself.

**Adhere to the standard of "journalism that does no harm".** Every journalistic decision must take into account the potential harm: to the subject, their environment, or overall safety. This is especially important when working with children.

## **For media organizations:**

**Introduce an internal policy on covering stories about children.** It should cover situations where a child is involved as the subject of a story, as a witness or victim of violence, as a participant in mass events, etc.

**Appoint a person in charge or establish an ethics group.** These individuals should advise journalists in cases where there are ethical risks or legal nuances in dealing with children. However, this is not just about lawyers, but also about understanding the ethics and standards of the profession.

**Conduct regular training.** Train your team on ethics, children's rights, working with victims, informed consent, and anonymization.

**Create informed consent templates and a system for storing them.** Provide separate templates for children under 14, underage children, and their parents. Ensure transparent document archiving.

**Partner with lawyers, psychologists, and human rights defenders.** It will allow you to respond swiftly to complex cases, avoid legal errors, and prevent secondary traumatization.

**For example, La Strada — Ukraine** is a public human rights organization.

- It specializes in protecting children from violence, exploitation, bullying, and human trafficking.
- It has a national hotline for children and young people: 0 800 500 225.

## **Ukrainian Child Rights Network (UCRN)**

- A coalition of Ukrainian civil society organizations working in the field of children's rights.
- It works on reforms, advocacy, policy analysis, and support for children during the war.

**Moderate comments on sensitive publications.** Ensure that insults, hate speech, and victim blaming are removed from stories about children, especially in cases of violence or dire life situations.

**Audit archived materials.** Check for content involving children that would violate current ethical or legal requirements. Delete or edit as necessary.

**Develop recommendations for short video formats.** Content for TikTok, Reels, and Shorts must meet the same standards and sometimes requires an even higher level of control due to its potential viral impact.

## **Useful literature:**

1. Law of Ukraine No. 2710-IX “On Media” dated 13 December 2022, [Electronic resource].
2. Ethics Code of Ukrainian Journalists [Electronic resource].
3. Joint Act of Agreement No. 1 On the Protection of a Child, who Has Suffered Sexual Violence, when Involved in Media Production.
4. Recommendations for a Gender-Sensitive Approach in the Media for Child Audiences [Electronic resource].
5. Murad Code. Murad Code in Ukrainian [Electronic resource].
6. UNICEF. Ethical reporting on children: A guide for journalists [Electronic resource]. – 2017.
7. World Health Organization. Reporting on violence against women and girls: A handbook for journalists [Electronic resource]. – Geneva: WHO, 2022. – 64 p. – (WHO/UCN/WHF/22.2).
8. International Journalists’ Network. Guidelines for ethical reporting on children in conflict [Electronic resource] // IJNet. – 2023. – 22 February.

## **PREVENTING HATE SPEECH IN THE MEDIA**

### **Why is it important to talk about preventing hate speech in the media?**

In modern information environment hate speech has become one of the key threats not only to certain social groups, but also to the stability of democratic society as a whole. The media space, especially in times of war, social polarization, and high emotional tension, often becomes a platform for spreading hostile statements, stigmatization, generalizing labels, or hidden discrimination. In this context, journalists, editors, bloggers, and all participants in the information chain bear a particular responsibility. They not only inform but also shape public's perception of "others", which is why they must adhere to high standards of ethical speech.

Discourse on hate speech in the media is especially relevant given the growing prevalence of normalized, latent forms of discrimination that often go unnoticed in everyday communication. Reporting on topics related to internally displaced persons, the Roma community, LGBTQ+, women, people with disabilities, or residents of temporarily occupied territories requires particular sensitivity, as these groups most often become the targets of stereotyping. Preventing hate speech is not just about using correct words, it is about preserving dignity, building an inclusive society, and practicing journalism that does no harm.

This topic requires special attention in the Ukrainian context where people are in a state of deep psychological fatigue, heightened emotionality, and prolonged traumatic experience caused by the full-scale war. In such conditions, even unconsciously used wording may cause a wave of public unrest, disappointment, or aggression. The information field can easily turn into a space for projecting pain, despair, or the hunt for "culprits" within the country. This creates the risk of deepening internal fault lines: between regions, between displaced persons and local communities, between veterans and civilians, between those who stay and those who left.

Avoiding hate speech is not only a moral choice, but also a tool for preventing internal destabilisation. The media play a special role here: they can either contribute to the incitement of mistrust and discord, or, conversely, help to establish public dialogue, foster empathy, and a shared sense of dignity. That is why systematic work to raise awareness, develop ethical sensitivity, and promote professional reflection in the media environment should be considered as part of national information security.

### **Survey data of media professionals on prevention of hate speech<sup>10</sup>**

The findings of the dedicated section of the survey conducted among representatives of the media community by the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio

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<sup>10</sup> National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, Analytical report based on the results of a survey of media professionals, 2025.

Broadcasting show that, although the general level of basic understanding of the term “hate speech” is sufficient, a significant part of the media community experiences difficulties in recognizing its manifestations in practical situations. This is especially true for indirect, hidden, or “normalized” forms of discrimination. Topics related to the Roma community, women, LGBTQ+, IDPs, as well as conflict vocabulary in the coverage of war-related news, remain sensitive.

These trends are evident in all target categories, but the largest gaps are observed:

- among older age groups (56+),
- in the Cherkasy and Mykolaiv regions.

## **Principles for preventing hate speech in the media and their implementation**

Hate speech is a form of communication that contains derogatory, humiliating, or aggressive statements about individuals or groups of people based on their race, ethnic origin, nationality, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, or other characteristics. Such speech aims at or results in inciting discrimination, enmity, hostile attitudes, isolation, or even violence against certain social groups. It can be direct (e.g., open calls for violence) or indirect, hidden in jokes, hints, stereotypes, or “normalized” statements.

To illustrate hate speech, it is helpful to provide a few typical examples that occur in Ukrainian media. For example, in a news story on a robbery, the wording “some Roma persons who committed the crime were arrested” is used without specifying that ethnic origin is irrelevant to the essence of the news. Or in a story about an attack on a woman, the journalist adds: “the suspect was mentally ill and of non-traditional orientation”, thereby creating dangerous associations. In social networks, one can often see headlines such as “displaced persons get everything, while locals get nothing” or memes with ironic images of the military allegedly “comfortably giving up their places to refugees”. Such examples demonstrate how negative stereotypes are formed and how they fuel prejudice and deepen social tensions.

Hate speech can be both direct — open calls for enmity, humiliation, or exclusion, and indirect, when negative associations are formed through visual accompaniment, tone, selection of facts, or even a photo caption. For example, a news story about a crime includes an image of a black man, even though he is not involved in the incident. Or in a video report on the distribution of humanitarian aid the journalist unjustifiably emphasizes that there are “many people from the southern regions” among its recipients. Such “innocent” phrases reinforce in the minds of viewers the link between a particular group and a negative phenomenon, which constitutes one of the most common forms of hate speech — stigmatization through association.

In the international context the fight against hate speech is based on the principle of finding a balance between the freedom of expression and the protection of human rights. Here, a key document is the Recommendation No. R(97)20 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe that defines hate speech as covering all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred. It calls on member states to introduce educational, legal, and professional measures to prevent

and counter such practices. Similar provisions are contained in the EU Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online signed by Google, Facebook, X (Twitter), and other platforms.

In journalism the principles of avoiding hate speech are a part of professional ethical standards. In particular, the Declaration of the International Federation of Journalists (1986) explicitly obliges journalists not to spread discriminatory statements and not to mix facts with judgments. Many media outlets around the world have introduced internal policies to check content for discriminatory risks, and editorial offices develop ethical guidelines with examples of unacceptable language, risky topics, and recommendations for working with vulnerable groups. Mechanisms for transparent responses to complaints about hate speech are also being implemented, ranging from public apologies to the deletion or redaction of materials.

In Ukraine the key ethical document is the Ethics Code of Ukrainian Journalists which prohibits hate speech in its clause 15. However, despite the formal existence of these norms, their application remains uneven. According to studies, Ukrainian journalists demonstrate a sufficient basic understanding of the term, but often fail to recognize its indirect or disguised forms. This is especially true for topics related to IDPs, the Roma, LGBTQ+, as well as for the rhetoric in war-related materials, where patriotically justified animosity towards certain categories of fellow citizens may arise.

In the Ukrainian context, it is crucial to take into account the psychological fatigue of society, military trauma, and increased sensitivity to offensive messages. During a full-scale war there is an increased risk of “legalized hatred”: when public emotion turns into stigmatization of internal opponents, displaced persons, or those who experience the war differently. Avoiding hate speech in this context is not only a matter of professional ethics, but also a strategic tool for preserving civic unity and information security.

Thus, countering hate speech requires a comprehensive approach: ethical standards in editorial offices, self-regulation mechanisms, internal team trainings, involvement of human rights experts, and a dialogue with vulnerable groups. The introduction of such practices should not be an exception but a mandatory element of responsible media activity, both in Ukraine and in the international professional space.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS for raising awareness and preventing hate speech in the media**

### **For journalists, media professionals, and media organizations**

**Practice of peer review of content.** To strengthen professional self-reflection and develop critical thinking about ethics in editorial work, it is advisable to introduce the practice of regular peer reviews of content, in particular, of examples of the use of stereotypes, hate speech, unconscious discrimination, or unintentional dissemination of biased language.

#### **The following measures should be considered:**

- To organize anonymous case reviews (within an editorial office or at inter-editorial sessions) in order to analyze specific materials that have caused public resonance or contained potentially problematic content.

- To involve not only journalists in the reviews, but also ethics experts, human rights defenders, psychologists, and representatives of vulnerable groups to ensure a multifaceted and constructive perspective on the situation.
- To summarize conclusions of such discussions in the form of internal recommendations that can later be turned into practical guidelines to avoid similar mistakes in the future.
- To create an open platform or knowledge base of typical ethical dilemmas to be used as training materials for new editorial staff, freelancers, and bloggers.

## **Visual content audit**

At the outlet level it is recommended to implement a systematic practice of visual auditing of materials — photos, videos, infographics, and covers for social media posts. Such an audit should include checking images for bias, stereotypes, and hidden discrimination, particularly when depicting vulnerable or marginalized groups.

### **Particular attention should be paid to:**

- Images of Roma people, internally displaced persons, crime suspects, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and other vulnerable groups;
- Usage of archival or nominal “supporting visuals” (misleading B-rolls) that may form false associations or reinforce negative cliches;
- contextualization of the visual series: each image should be relevant to the topic and accompanied by an explanation in the caption if it is potentially sensitive or ambiguous.

It is advisable to create internal editorial protocols for visual etiquette to establish standards for the ethical visual design of news and stories. It is also worth conducting periodic trainings for designers, SMM specialists, videographers, and photojournalists on preventing discriminatory or biased images. This will help to improve the quality of visual content and preserve respect for the dignity of the subjects of media materials.

## **Introduction of internal protocols for responding to hate speech**

In order to increase editorial responsibility for content and foster a sustainable feedback culture for their audiences, media organizations should develop and implement internal protocols for responding to instances of hate speech in publications or statements made by media professionals.

### **Key elements of such protocols may include:**

- A mechanism for documenting complaints from readers, viewers, or human rights organizations regarding the detection of hate speech or discriminatory statements. This can be a separate form on the website, an email address, a chatbot, or another accessible communication channel.
- A procedure for reviewing complaints within the editorial office, with mandatory consideration of the case at an internal meeting or a dedicated ethics briefing session. The review shall be conducted in a constructive and impartial manner.

- A decision on whether to respond publicly or privately: correcting the content, posting an editorial clarification, apology, or explanation of the editorial position.
- Registration of the case with subsequent analysis of such cases in dynamics to identify typical problem areas in style, wording, or editorial standards.
- Regular internal reviews of such cases for the purpose of training, correcting practices, and strengthening self-regulation.

## Internal editorial trainings and modules

Given the need to adapt practices to the wartime challenges, it is recommended to introduce mandatory modules on hate speech within the professional development system for journalists, including cases covering the topics of IDPs, minorities, and war-related stigmatization.

Particular attention should be paid to local publications in the Central and Southern regions.

## For bloggers

**Red lines guide.** It is recommended to create a handy online red lines guide: a living list of topics and wordings with high ethical risk (in particular, regarding war, nationality, gender, religion, disability, etc.). The tool should be adapted to the needs of journalists, bloggers, and SMM specialists, contain examples of acceptable/unacceptable content, brief explanations, and be updated in line with current challenges. Its format shall be visual, interactive, and accessible via a website, mobile app, or bot. Such a resource will enable swift navigation in sensitive issues, especially for young content creators who often lack professional training. It will become a tool for preventing hate speech and discrimination, as well as promoting a culture of responsible public discourse in the digital environment.

**Gamification of soundness as an ethical check-up for content.** It is worth considering the idea to develop an interactive tool in the form of a game or quest that will enable bloggers, SMM specialists, and journalists to quickly check the ethics of content before publishing it. Such an “ethical check-up” can be designed as an extension for social networks or a mobile application that, in the form of a game with simple questions and hints, will help users assess whether their posts contain hate speech, prejudice, harmful generalizations, or sensitive content without the appropriate context.

A gamified approach (e.g., a character’s journey aimed at avoiding hate speech or unethical clichés) will help engage young audiences and make the verification process not a boring chore but a habitual and even interesting practice. Successful completion of such mini tests could be accompanied by virtual badges or rankings that would encourage users to regularly check their content. The tool could also be adapted to different topics (war, religion, nationality, LGBTQ+, disability) and updated in line with the media situation.

## **For future media professionals**

### **Projects**

It is recommended to introduce innovative approaches to teaching ethics in media education, in particular, through inter-university competitions for student projects on the topic “Hate speech: how to overcome normalization?”. This format stimulates independent thinking, analysis of real cases, and forms a practical, creative, and investigative approach to the problem to be addressed. Working in teams within courses, classes, and universities will enhance the discussion of complex moral dilemmas and teach reasoned choices of approaches to covering sensitive topics. It is also recommended to encourage students to choose topics related to hate speech in the media for their course work or thesis, especially in the context of war, refugees, LGBTQ+, the Roma community, and other vulnerable groups.

### **Analysis of hate speech in a war context**

It is advisable to include modules on the specifics of hate speech in wartime in curricula. In particular, attention should be paid not only to traditional manifestations of discrimination (ethnic, gender, religious aspects), but also to more complex cases related to “patriotically justified” animosity towards internal political opponents, internally displaced persons, residents of occupied territories, or those who are stigmatized because of their position. By analysing these examples, future media professionals can better understand their moral responsibility in a complex social context. It is also worth introducing debates on specific materials, where one side defends the use of certain words and images, while the other argues why it’s inappropriate and how alternatives could be found.

### **Training in stigma-free storytelling**

It is advisable to conduct practical training on creating materials about vulnerable social groups (IDPs, veterans, people with disabilities, national minorities, LGBTQ+) with an emphasis on avoiding clichés. This involves developing storytelling skills while avoiding images of “victims”, “exoticism”, or “weakness”. Such classes should include an element of self-reflection: future journalists must be able to analyze their own attitudes, language, and narratives.

## **For media civil society organizations**

### **Systematic monitoring of content for hate speech and stereotyping: an inclusiveness audit**

Media civil society organizations, in partnership with relevant think tanks, are recommended to implement systematic monitoring of media content for hate speech, stereotyping, and biased narratives. The purpose of such monitoring is to identify typical mistakes, recurring patterns of discriminatory content, and groups that are most often portrayed in an incorrect manner.

### **Key components:**

- Developing a methodology that makes it possible to identify both overt forms of hate speech (derogatory language, direct insults) and covert forms (in headlines, images, and references).
- Focus on vulnerable groups: IDPs, ethnic minorities, religious communities, LGBTQ+, women, people with disabilities, victims of crime, etc.;
- Periodic public reporting on findings with summarized examples of violations and recommendations for improvement;
- Use of findings to develop curricula, training courses, and methodological materials for journalists, editors, designers, SMM specialists, and media students.

Such monitoring would contribute not only to reducing discrimination in the media, but also to forming a consistent understanding of the responsibility for the impact of content on public perceptions, trust, and solidarity in times of crisis.

**A system of “content accompaniment” for sensitive materials.** It is advisable for media CSOs, in partnership with editorial offices and relevant experts in ethics and human rights, to develop and introduce a system of content accompaniment for publications containing potentially sensitive or risky information.

The main idea is to create standard ethical templates (short notes, interpretations, contextual explanations, or caveats) for accompaniment information that would help:

- to explain why a particular characteristic of a person (e.g., nationality, religion, or gender) shall only be mentioned in cases where it is relevant to the substance of the material;
- to warn about emotionally traumatic or potentially triggering content (e.g., scenes of violence, war, death, discrimination);
- to provide clarification about the legal status of the person mentioned (e.g., that the person is a suspect, not a convicted one);
- to indicate the conditional nature of the image (e.g., if the used photo is not related to a specific event or person — a misleading B-roll).

These accompaniments may be introduced in the form of short inserts into the text or special marks in subheadings, photo captions, and editorial comments. In visual content it should be indicated graphically.

### **It is also recommended:**

- to develop a reference guide of typical situations in which ethical accompaniment should be used, with examples of practical application;
- to conduct training for journalists, editors, and SMM teams on the rules for formulating such accompaniments;

- to integrate these templates into internal editorial guidelines on ethics and style.

The introduction of such a system will minimize risks of stigmatization, increase transparency of outlet's positions, and generally strengthen the ethical culture in the media, especially under martial law and in times of high emotional tension in the society.

### **Learning activities based on identified ethical challenges**

It is expedient for media CSOs, in cooperation with journalism schools, universities, editorial offices, and media ethics experts, to systematically conduct training events based on specific challenges identified in the process of media monitoring, analysis of typical mistakes, and public reactions.

Such learning activities shall address:

- Ethical aspects of working with sensitive content, particularly on topics of war, violence, refugees, victims, national minorities, and LGBTQ+ persons;
- Use of content accompaniment systems: when and how to apply caveats, explanations, and interpretations;
- Detection and prevention of hate speech and stereotyping with examples from real-life content;
- Visual ethics: avoiding discriminatory or emotionally traumatic images;
- How to respond to pressure from owners or sponsors, mechanisms for self-defense and internal solidarity within editorial teams;
- How to establish interaction with audience, including feedback tools, responding to criticism, and correcting mistakes.

Such trainings should be adapted for different categories of media professionals: journalists, editors, video producers, designers, SMM specialists, and technical staff. Special attention should be paid to regional media, as well as to young professionals and students.

Learning activities should be run regularly, based on real-life case studies, and updated in line with new challenges in the information space.

## **Useful literature:**

1. Combating Hate Speech. Council of Europe.
2. Council of Europe – toolkits for media regulators and editors on hate speech.
3. The Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online.
4. Commission welcomes the integration of the revised Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online into the Digital.
5. Hate-Speech: A Five-Point Test for Journalists.
6. Ethics Code of Ukrainian Journalists.
7. D.R. Dutsyk. Hate Speech in Ukrainian Media Discourse / D.R. Dutsyk. // Contemporary Social Problems in the Context of Management Sociology: Collection of Scientific Works of Donetsk State University of Management. Series: Sociology / [ed. by O.S. Povazhny et al.]. – Donetsk: [DSUM Press], 2012. – Vol. XIII, issue 217. – p. 112–118.
8. T. Isakova. Hate speech as a problem in the Ukrainian information space // Strategic Communications.
9. IMC Recommendation No. 10. On How to Prevent Hate Speech against Protected Groups and Stereotypes in the Media.
10. Recommendation No. 9 of the International Media Council. On How to Write about Religion, Denominations and/or Religious Organizations without Bias, Stereotypes and Incitement to Hatred.
11. Aidan White. Ethical Challenges for Journalists in Dealing with Hate Speech.

## HOW TO RESPONSIBLY DEAL WITH THE TOPIC OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE MEDIA

### Why is it important to talk about gender equality in the media?

In the media gender equality is not just about having an equal number of women and men in the frame, but about a deeper approach to content, language, images, contexts, and portrayal of different social roles. It means that every publication, regardless of its topic, should avoid reproducing stereotypes and should not allow discrimination.

Gender equality in journalism is also about the power of trust: when the media respect diversity and ensure equal representation, the audience sees itself and feels involved. This is especially important in times of war, when society needs unity and sensitivity towards vulnerable groups.

Achieving gender equality is a prerequisite for achieving social justice. This is in the interests not only of women, but of society as a whole.

### Survey data of media professionals on gender equality<sup>11</sup>

According to the results of a survey on media literacy and application of professional standards regarding gender equality conducted among media professionals by the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the average rate of correct answers is 68.3%.

This indicates an above-average level of awareness, but it is still insufficient for the full implementation of a gender-sensitive approach in daily editorial practice.

**Gender sensitivity** – the ability to recognize existing gender-based differences, the occurrence of sex-based discrimination in society, manifestations of inequality, and to take these aspects into account in one's strategies and actions. In the context of journalism this means a responsible attitude to the wording, images, topics, and tone of information presentation with respect for the dignity of all social groups regardless of sex or gender identity. In other words, gender sensitivity is the recognition that equality on paper does not mean equality in reality and taking this into account in reporting.

### An example of a gender-sensitive journalist

In March 2019, STB TV channel aired a story about the introduction of equal admission rights for girls and boys to a military lyceum. The story presented the opinions of girls, as well as a quote from one of the boys: "Girls cannot be in the military, men must defend the Homeland,

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<sup>11</sup> National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, Analytical report based on the results of a survey of media professionals, 2025.

and girls must stay at home and wait for them". The TV channel journalist responded to it with the following comment: "People who fight for gender equality would argue with you". Thus, not only did he present a contrasting point of view, but he also set a socially important framework for discussion and did not leave the discriminatory view unchallenged.

## **An example of a gender-sensitive media**

**Hromadske Radio** is an independent news and talk radio station in Ukraine. In its Charter the organization clearly states that one of its main goals is to "promote gender equality". This means that at the institutional level the media recognizes the importance of a gender-sensitive approach and undertakes to adhere to it in its editorial policy, selection of experts, language practices, and thematic focus.

### **Most of the challenges for journalists arose from tasks where they were asked:**

- To recognize less "subtle" manifestations of discrimination, for example, in headlines about "blondes" or "a beautiful female manager";
- To interpret images of men in ways that are atypical for traditional masculinity.

### **This indicates a need for systematic education on:**

- hidden forms of discrimination;
- stereotypical framing;
- an inclusive approach to different groups, including non-binary individuals and representatives of the LGBTIQ+ community.

**Stereotypical framing** is a way of presenting information in the media when the storyline, headline, photo, or context is presented through a standardized pattern that reinforces gender, ethnic, age, or other stereotypes. That is, when a story is told not objectively, but in a way that amplifies a stereotype already familiar to society, even if it demeans or distorts reality.

## **Legislation and ethical standards of journalism**

The new Ukrainian Law "On Media" (Article 6) prohibits discrimination in the media on the basis of sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. The media must refrain from publishing materials that may degrade human dignity or reproduce images that entrench discriminatory practices.

Discrimination on the basis of sex (e.g., sexism) is classified as a significant violation under the new legislation. In particular, online media are subject to a fine of 5 to 10 minimum wages per day for each violation, and linear television and radio broadcasting is subject to a similar amount or 10% of the license fee, or 5 to 40 minimum wages per day.

The Ethics Code of Ukrainian Journalists (Article 15) urges journalists to avoid prejudice against people based on sex or other characteristics such as language, race, religion, national, regional, or social origin, or political preferences. Relevant characteristics of a person (group of people) should only be mentioned when this information is an essential part of the material. It is required to refrain from allusions or comments regarding a person's illness and to avoid the use of offensive language and profanity.

**Recommendations on media coverage of gender equality, prevention of violence, sexism, and gender stereotypes** approved by Order **No. 333** of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine **dated 16 June 2023** contain practical guidelines for journalists and editorial offices. In particular, they:

- call for refraining from derogatory, stereotypical, and sexist language in media materials;
- define the characteristics of sex-based hate speech;
- advise avoiding generalizations that reinforce ideas about “typical” behaviours of women and men;
- recommend ensuring a balanced representation of women and men, particularly in expert circles;
- encourage the media to implement internal gender equality policies and conduct training for staff.

The State Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men for the Period until 2030 requires that media coverage be gender-sensitive.

The 2005 Law of Ukraine “On Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men” stipulates that under legislation the media shall contribute to the prevention of sex-based discrimination and sex-based violence and of dissemination of materials that reproduce or reinforce discriminatory perceptions of social roles and responsibilities of women and men, welcome or provoke sex-based discrimination and sex-based violence, including sexual violence.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS for responsible coverage of gender equality**

### **For journalists:**

#### **1. Ensure balanced representation of women and men**

- Try to include opinions of female and male experts equally in your materials.
- Avoid portraying women only as secondary characters or victims of crime.

#### **2. Avoid language that reproduces gender stereotypes**

- Do not reduce women to their appearance, age, emotions, or family role, and men to their masculinity or role of a “breadwinner” or “helpless dad”.

- Use feminine forms to refer to women's professions, positions, and roles: female lawyer, editor, expert, manager, etc. [translator's note: in Ukrainian, special feminine forms may be used to refer to women's professions] This is not only a linguistic norm, but also a sign of respect for the individual.

### 3. **Analyze the presentation of material with regard to gender stereotypes and sexism**

- Is the topic presented through a sexist lens (for example, "sensational female politician" or "unexpected female candidate")?
- Does the visual content reinforce gender clichés?

#### **Example:**

Media publications on the Day of Male and Female Defenders of Ukraine (14 October) often use images of exclusively male military personnel: on posters, in social media, and in television stories. These may be group photos from the front lines or symbolic images of soldiers making female military personnel, who also participate in combat operations, invisible. Images and photos amplify the stereotype that defense is a "man's job" and that women can only be in the rear — as volunteers, mothers, or wives.

### 4. **Pay attention to intersectional discrimination (intersectionality)**

- Women who also belong to other marginalized groups (LGBTIQ+, IDPs, ethnic communities, people with disabilities, etc.) are particularly vulnerable.

### 5. **Continuously update your knowledge and improve your qualifications**

- Gender sensitivity is not a one-time skill, but a continuous process of self-reflection, learning, and adapting to changes in society.
- Take training courses, classes, and webinars on ethics, non-discriminatory language, covering sensitive topics, countering hate speech, and intersectionality.
- Do not hesitate to seek advice from experts, human rights defenders, psychologists, or media organizations, especially in complex or sensitive cases.

#### **For media organizations:**

##### 1. **Develop and implement a gender equality policy**

It should cover both content and internal practices (equality in access to positions, working conditions, etc.).

#### **Example:**

The Commission on Journalistic Ethics, as a self-regulatory body for journalists and editorial offices in Ukraine, together with the Women in Media NGO and with the support of the OSCE, has developed a model **Policy on Gender Equality in the Media Content**. This policy can be fully adopted by any type of media, regardless of the method of information dissemination, or integrated into existing documents.

The policy has already been integrated by media outlets such as Ukrainska Pravda, LB, Espresso, Kyiv24 TV, Channel 5, Hromadske Radio, and others.

## **2. Ensure gender monitoring of content**

Conduct regular analysis of how many women and men are represented in the materials, in what roles, and who provides comments.

### **Example:**

In February 2022, Ukraine's Public Broadcaster joined the BBC's international 50:50 initiative that involves monthly monitoring of gender balance in content. The goal is to achieve equal representation of women and men in media products, integrate diversity principles into all editorial processes, and raise employees' awareness of gender imbalance. The essence of the 50:50 approach is to measure, analyze, and change: count monthly who is represented in the news, who are the experts, who are the subjects of stories, and gradually even out this balance.

## **3. Raise awareness among your team**

Conduct training on gender sensitivity, non-discriminatory approaches, language inclusivity, and combating sexism. If you are experiencing financial difficulties, involve professional civil society organizations.

### **Example:**

In 2024 Women in Media NGO, with informational support from the National Council on Television and Radio Broadcasting, conducted a series of training sessions for journalists, including:

- "Breaking the Cycle: How to Cover Domestic Violence Without Stereotypes",
- "Gender-Sensitive Journalism: From Reporting to Editorial Principles",
- "Gender Sensitivity in the Print Media from De-occupied and Frontline Territories".

## **4. Maintain a safe environment for all employees**

- Implement policies against discrimination and sexual harassment.
- Introduce complaint response mechanisms.

## **5. Ensure equal access to resources and leadership positions**

- Monitor the ratio of women to men in managerial, editorial, and technical positions.
- Analyze whether women have equal access to decision-making, strategic management, budget, and influence.

### **Example:**

**European Gender Balance on Corporate Boards Directive**

In November of 2022 the EU adopted Directive 2022/2381 which establishes a mandatory quota for women in management bodies of large companies.

By 30 June 2026 companies covered by the Directive must: ensure that at least 40% of nonexecutive director positions (supervisory boards) are women; or at least 33% of all director positions (executive and non-executive) are women; companies to which these requirements do not apply directly must set their own targets for improving gender balance among executive director positions and achieve them by 2026.

This is an example of a legislative initiative that stimulates structural change and can serve as a reference point for Ukrainian media organizations in terms of self-regulation and target indicators in management.

### **Useful literature:**

1. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). How to Bring Your Editorial Office and Content Closer to Gender Sensitivity. Handbook [Electronic resource]. – 2020.
2. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Gender Equality Policy in the Media Content. [Electronic resource]. – 2024.
3. Interagency Coordination Subcommittee on Communications. Collection of Gender Recommendations for the Media [Electronic resource]. – 2024.
4. National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting. Gender Profile of Ukrainian Media [Electronic resource].
5. O. Pohorelov (ed.). Practical Guide to Journalistic Ethics. 3rd edition, expanded [Electronic resource]. – K.: Commission on Journalistic Ethics, 2024. – 96 p.
6. A. Kulykov, L. Kuzmenko, M. Dvorovyi, D. Dutsyk, L. Kushch. Handbook on Journalistic Ethics [Electronic resource]. – K.: Commission on Journalistic Ethics, 2023. – 129 p.
7. Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine. Recommendations on media coverage of gender equality, prevention of violence, sexism, and gender stereotypes [Electronic resource]. – 2023.

## HOW TO RESPONSIBLY DEAL WITH THE TOPIC OF ACCESSIBILITY (BARRIERLESSNESS) IN THE MEDIA

### Why is it important to talk about accessibility in the media?

Accessibility is not just about physical space. It is about equal opportunities for all people to exercise their rights, move freely, obtain information, learn, work, and participate in public life. As a source of influence on perceptions and norms, the media plays a key role in shaping a culture of accessibility.

Today in Ukraine there is increasing talk about the importance of accessibility: architectural, digital, informational, and linguistic. However, along with that, people with disabilities, the elderly, internally displaced persons, parents with children, representatives of national minorities, and people with low digital literacy are still often left out of the media spotlight or are represented in stereotypical ways.

Accessibility in journalism is not just an ethical norm, but a sign of respect for one's audience and, at the same time, a way to expand it.

When journalists consider needs of different audiences, in their choice of language, formats, subjects, and topics, it means that the media become truly inclusive and, therefore, effective.

### What is accessibility in journalism?

It is attention to the following aspects:

#### — Convenient access to content

It is important to provide subtitles for videos, materials in plain language, sign language dubbing, or voiceovers. This opens up information to a wider audience.

#### — Accurate portrayal of subjects

People with disabilities should not be portrayed solely as objects of pity or as exceptional success stories. It is important to show them as full participants in public life: they are individuals with their own dignity, autonomy of decision, and respect for their private space.

#### — Language sensitivity

Words matter. It is worth using modern terminology: for example, "person with disability" instead of outdated and stigmatizing terms.

#### — Topic inclusivity

Accessibility, participation in elections, employment, education — these issues should be a part of the normal agenda rather than being covered as exceptional stories.

Some Ukrainian media outlets, such as Hromadske and Teksty.org.ua, use clear language and visualizations to explain complex topics, thus increasing overall accessibility of their content. However, systematic adaptation of content into Easy-to-Read format for people with cognitive impairments remains a rare practice in Ukrainian media. Unfortunately, they do not yet have separate sections where materials are systematically adapted to an easy-to-read format, as understood in the context of accessibility (for example, according to the recommendations of Inclusion Europe).

The Fight for Right CSO, in partnership with journalists and activists, creates materials adapted to easy-to-read standards, in particular for election campaigns, on explanations of the rights of people with disabilities and pandemic restrictions. This is an example of how information can be made truly accessible: not only in form, but also in content.

### **Example. The Accessible Cinema Project by Fight for Right**

Accessible Cinema is an initiative of Fight for Right CSO founded by Yuliia Sachuk, an expert on disability issues who was included in the BBC 100 Women 2022 list. As part of the project video content — films, series, cartoons — is adapted into sign language, supplemented with subtitles and three-dimensional sound. Background music and voice effects convey the emotional context, making viewing accessible to viewers with visual, hearing, or cognitive impairments. This format is also suitable for a wider audience that appreciates clear, thoughtful, and inclusive presentation of information.

This format provides a comfortable viewing environment that addresses needs of the widest possible range of users. It is a real-life example of application of the principles of **easy-to-read language in multimedia** and inclusive design.

### **Survey data of media professionals on accessibility<sup>12</sup>**

According to results of the survey conducted among media professionals by the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, the average rate of correct answers in section “On accessibility in the media” is 75.8%. It demonstrates a basic understanding of the principles of inclusion in the media among those surveyed. This is a good result that shows that most journalists are familiar with the topic, but findings also show areas where further improvement is needed, particularly in the field of terminology.

The first question, which was related to general approaches to the implementation of accessibility and inclusion in the media, received 88.8% correct answers. This indicates that journalists have a high level of understanding of basic principles of an inclusive approach and are ready to integrate these principles into their daily practice. This result can be considered as a positive sign that the topic of accessibility is already familiar to most respondents.

The second question was more difficult: it required selecting several correct answers regarding production of content about people with disabilities. Here the rate of correct answers dropped to 70.5%. Although this is still above average, the response rate reveals a need for a deeper understanding of practical aspects, such as knowledge of international

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<sup>12</sup> National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, Analytical report based on the results of a survey of media professionals, 2025.

standards, namely, the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Council of Europe's recommendations, or guidelines from Ukrainian human rights organizations. The situation points to the need not only for theoretical knowledge but also for practical experience in applying inclusive standards in work.

The lowest result was observed in response to the question about correct terminology: only 63.5% of respondents gave the correct answer. This is a serious challenge, as language is one of the key tools in journalism. The failure to use ethical, modern, and non-discriminatory vocabulary may lead to the unintentional stigmatization of subjects of materials or distortion of meaning. It is also worth noting that terminological errors are often found not only in the text, but also in headlines, lead-ins, and photo captions.

Overall, the findings indicate a high level of basic understanding of the concepts of accessibility and of the ethical approach to the topic of disability. At the same time, the accuracy of terminology, attention to nuances in headlines, and the ability to analyze complex situations that require knowledge of international recommendations and practical examples are still key areas for improvement.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS for responsible coverage of the topic of accessibility**

### **For journalists and media organizations:**

1. **Engage voices of people with experience of accessibility issues:** give a floor to those who face barriers, not just experts or officials. Adhere to the principle of "Nothing about us without us".
2. **Speak with respect, without pity or heroization:** focus on rights, opportunities, and systemic solutions, rather than "heroic deeds" or "horror stories".
3. **Avoid stigmatizing language:** use a "person with a disability", "needs assistance", "did not have access" wording instead of "bedridden", "incapacitated", "suffering".
4. **Keep your knowledge up to date:** language changes, and new terms, clarifications, and ethical standards emerge. It is important to learn, consult, and follow latest information sources.
5. **Collaborate with specialized organizations:** seek advice from CSOs that deal with topics of inclusion, the rights of people with disabilities, language accessibility, etc.
6. **Ensure content accessibility:** add subtitles, alternative text to images, duplicate materials in easy-to-read or audio formats.
7. **Address not only physical accessibility:** pay attention to digital, informational, linguistic, and cultural barriers and explain how they can be removed.

## **Useful literature:**

1. Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine. Methodological recommendations for ensuring accessibility in the media [Electronic resource]. – 2024.
2. The Barrier-Free Handbook [Electronic resource]. – 2021.
3. Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine. Barrier-free Brand Book: Communication Guide, Visual Standards [Electronic resource].
4. L. Urzel Francil., Yu. Sachuk. Accessibility of Audiovisual Media Services in Ukraine: Compliance of the Law “On Media” with the Provisions of EU Directive 2018/1808 [Electronic resource] / Fight For Right CSO. – 2025.
5. UNESCO. Practical Manual on Disability Equality in the Media [Electronic resource]. – 2024.

## DESINFORMATION

**Disinformation** is false information that is disseminated with the aim of misleading the audience and, consequently, causing it harm.

Disinformation can be published in any form: verbal, audio, or visual. Quite often disinformation messages mix true and false information. For example, a photograph or a moving image may be genuine, but the accompanying words may not refer to what is depicted. The opposite can also be true: a truthful verbal message may be accompanied by fake images and/or sounds. Similarly, true and false information may be mixed in messages produced without mixing different means of conveying ideas. For example, a government or organization may disseminate a truthful message accompanied by a commentary that imposes a false interpretation of a fact, process, or phenomenon. Or truthful information disseminated by someone is presented by another organization in an unaltered form, but in the context of other arguments and messages that create a false impression of the meaning or consequences of the truthful information.

**When there is a lack of evidence to prove a statement that is important to those who disseminate the message, disinformation is used, explicitly or implicitly justifying such actions by saying that the goal of disseminating the statement justifies the means necessary for its dissemination.**

Therefore, **disinformation is regularly used in propaganda, since the goal of propaganda is to support and spread political and other views that influence the life of society.** Although propagandists will deny the harmfulness of propaganda on the grounds that it is purportedly aimed at strengthening “correct” ideas and rules that are supposedly helpful to society, **propaganda is fundamentally based on belief rather than knowledge, i.e., it prevents the audience from acquiring the skills to work independently with information.** Thus, **propaganda weakens the audience’s resistance to lies and its ability to find reasonable solutions in the information space.**

**Disinformation may come from various sources**, including the mass media (traditional editorial offices, channels and individuals’ accounts in social networks, literature and art) and authorities, corporations, civil society organizations, or those pretending to be civil society organizations.

### Survey data of media professionals on disinformation<sup>13</sup>

In Ukraine, which is a constant target of Russian disinformation, the response rate for section “On disinformation” in the survey conducted by the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting reached 72.5%. This indicates a high overall level of awareness among people working in the media and provides a suitable ground for gaining

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<sup>13</sup> National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, Analytical report based on the results of a survey of media professionals, 2025.

and improving skills to recognize disinformation and, at the same time, avoid using disinformation in their own activities. To strengthen this foundation, attention should be paid to awareness of the methods used to create and spread disinformation.

## **Characteristics and methods of creating and spreading disinformation**

Among the most common methods of creating disinformation are **headlines that do not correspond to the content of messages**. The goal is to draw more attention to the publication (in this text, the term “publication” means disclosure by any means), reach a wider audience for a particular message, and thus increase its impact on the public. Repeated and consistent use of this technique may undermine the audience’s trust in the mass media in general.

**Selectivity: disinformation is conveyed to the audience, with only those facts selected that are beneficial to those spreading the disinformation.** For example, when only those statistics or quotes that are beneficial to the disseminators are presented. This also applies to the cutting off (concealment) of illustrative material, including audio.

**Misleading context: when true content is presented in a false context**, which, of course, makes it difficult to determine the causality and the meaning of the information presented. In addition, a false context allows true content to be used to support views that would otherwise be refuted by this content.

**Fake sources: this type of disinformation aims to exploit the audience’s (often justified) trust in certain media outlets, organizations, or individuals.** It is not so much about quoting specific facts and opinions as it is about creating the impression that the message comes from a completely trustworthy source. The expectation is that information from such a source will not be checked (at least not thoroughly).

**Altered content: when true content is altered to mislead. For example, in photos and videos, it is enough to replace one element (the flag of one country is replaced with the flag of another country) so that the image takes on a completely opposite meaning.**

**Fabricated content:** such content is completely false, invented with the aim of misleading and causing harm. Since everything in such messages is fabricated, this falsity can be exposed mainly by comparing it with the general information background which confirms the extent to which the published ideas are widespread. In this case, it is necessary to try to find out when and from which sources the questionable messages began to appear, which platforms and organizations picked them up and started spreading them particularly vigorously.

**An important sign of any type of disinformation is that it is deliberately created and disseminated for a specific purpose.** If false information is disseminated without a specific purpose (through carelessness), it is not considered disinformation, although its consequences can be just as harmful. However, when such false information is noticed, but instead of correcting it, people start to spread it deliberately, it takes on the characteristics of disinformation and its harmfulness increases due to the systematic nature of its dissemination.

**Disinformation campaigns aim to provoke an audience into certain actions or, conversely, discourage it from certain actions; to convince the audience that specific statements are true or false; to glorify or discredit certain individuals or particular communities;** that is, it is about manipulating public opinion that arises from manipulating the opinions of many people — of each person's opinion individually, but also of entire communities, when disinformation is directed at people with certain similar characteristics. These can be religious communities, territorial communities, communities united by similar life practices, professional communities, age communities, etc.

**To increase the effectiveness of disinformation, fake profiles are often used in social media accounts** (which is itself a form of disinformation), **as well as bots, to create the illusion of greater support for the ideas they spread for the purpose of disinformation.** The goal is to persuade those who are exposed to disinformation to join the (fictional) majority, the impression of which is created with the help of fake accounts and bots. After all, **people begin to question their own beliefs and knowledge when they are given the impression that “everyone else thinks differently”.**

Notably, **the purpose of disinformation is not always to convince someone of a particular point.** Those who organize disinformation campaigns **may be satisfied with confusing the target audience, creating the impression that “everyone is lying”.** The goal of such disinformation campaigns is to generate public apathy, passivity, etc. If propagandists have reason to believe that it is impossible to fully convince the target audience of the validity or acceptability of their views, they may well limit themselves to ensuring that the audience refrains from actively countering disinformation and other their actions.

Frequent or regular (constant) exposure of communities and individuals to disinformation erodes trust in the state and society, causes a desire to isolate oneself from the rest of society, withdraw into one's own community, or seek out like-minded people in a hostile environment. This search and its eventual success may lead the target audience of disinformation to the enemy camp, proving once again the similarity between disinformation and propaganda.

**Disinformation is often characterized by the emotional tone of materials it contains. It is particularly effective when those who create it introduce components designed to arouse feelings of fear, resentment, envy, anger, etc. in the audience.** To assess the degree of disinformation risk, we must pay attention to the presence of such emotional components and ask ourselves and others: for what purpose were these components introduced? What kind of (illconsidered, sudden) response do those who have loaded certain material with emotions expect from me?

In short, **when dealing with emotions woven into disinformation messages, we must not respond impulsively, but rather seek and apply techniques to avoid succumbing to irritation and despair that those who spread disinformation are trying to provoke in us.** This is a fundamental rule for those who counter disinformation if they want their countermeasures to be effective. More details on this can be found in section “On countering propaganda and disinformation”, as well as in section “On fact-checking”.

## RECOMMENDATIONS for improving understanding of disinformation

### For journalists and media organizations

1. **Check with primary sources**, especially official bodies, to reduce the risk of receiving unverified information from the outset.
2. **Use the latest means of communication with information sources**, such as creating groups on popular messaging apps consisting of people from press services, public relations services, experts, journalists, and civil society activists. This will facilitate regular information exchange, faster dissemination of verified information, and easier access for the media to reputable people whose expertise and experience are valuable to the audience.
3. **Implement editorial algorithms (policies) for working with information** that provide for verification of its authenticity and for anticipating disinformation campaigns by publishing data that are likely to become targets of distortion.
4. **Publish various types of content** that give your audience an idea of the nature and scope of disinformation they may encounter, helping them develop skills to recognize and resist disinformation.

### Useful resources:

1. P. Kulish. "What is disinformation and how does it affect us?" Kharkiv-2023.
2. O. Myroniuk. "Disinformation: how to recognize it and how to fight it". Chernivtsi-2023.
3. "Spravdi". Website of the Centre for Strategic Communications.
4. "How journalists can verify information to avoid publishing fake news". Kharkiv-2024.

## COUNTERACTING PROPAGANDA AND DISINFORMATION

**The best way to counteract propaganda and disinformation is to prevent them from happening or to weaken their effectiveness in advance**, rather than expose them in response since, as a rule, exposure covers only a small part of the audience subject to propaganda or disinformation. Propaganda campaigns provide information selectively in order to encourage some generalization, appeal to emotions, so that an emotional rather than sensible attitude is evoked. Because of that propaganda is borderline with disinformation as it does not provide the audience with important information that is not favourable for those who are spreading propaganda.

Propaganda campaigns conducted in Ukraine during the period of resistance to the Russian invasion are examples of how numerous people are misled regarding possible course of events because most focus is given to promised outcomes (emotions) that the majority of people find desirable, rather than informing about most probable developments based on review and generalization of information (circumstances). Some examples include propaganda of the counteroffensive of 2023, as well as propaganda of effectiveness of economic sanctions against Russia and statements about quick inevitable decline of Russian military capacities. Disappointment from the failure of the propagated things to materialize causes a psychological trauma in society, which completely undermines temporary gains from the propaganda effect like an increase in the level of resistance, unity, etc.

Propaganda and disinformation at the public level are typical for totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. It is no coincidence that during the Soviet era, propaganda departments were the leading departments in editorial offices in our country. The nature of a democratic society and level of the Ukrainian democratic society's development provide opportunities for spreading ideas in other ways. The question is to what extent we have professional skills to apply these methods effectively.

The issue of countering hostile propaganda and disinformation is equally topical. Given the power of resources directed by Russia at subversive information activities against Ukraine, it is necessary to seek asymmetric responses, and there are ways to ensure such asymmetric responses in Ukraine.

**Effective ways and means of countering propaganda and disinformation include information hygiene, maintaining of and increase in the level of media literacy, creation of quality content** which develops respective information consumption habits in the audience based on professional and ethical (which mostly coincide) standards. An educated, media-literate audience has no desire to replace quality information with propaganda and disinformation.

## Survey data of media professionals on countering propaganda and disinformation<sup>14</sup>

Pursuant to results of the survey among representatives of the media community in the sphere of media literacy and application of professional standards conducted by the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, 77.8% of responses to questions of section “Countering Propaganda and Disinformation” were correct. However, those who spread disinformation and propaganda take consistent persistent efforts to erode and contaminate a healthy information space, and in democratic societies there may be (rather prolonged) relapses into authoritarian models of development preceded by or causing negative changes in the media space. Of course, it is also applicable to Ukraine taking into consideration exceptionally difficult circumstances caused by the Russian aggression.

It is important to remember that the general information space of society is created not only by the mass media, but also by external communication from public authorities, statutory and informal communities, non-governmental organizations, and corporations. Editorial boards, professional journalist associations, and anyone working in journalism **should start interacting with various organizations and communities and promote establishment of means and methods in their activity that do not contradict the interests of creating and protecting a healthy information space.**

Consistent, evidence-based, regular, multifaceted **professional reporting** with references to sources **about events, processes, and phenomena in society helps build a loyal audience that develops varying degrees of resistance and immunity to disinformation or even rejection of disinformation and propaganda messages.**

It is important to realize that **silencing of problems “on our side” creates favourable conditions for the enemy’s propaganda because then those who are spreading propaganda and disinformation get the chance to be the first to act.** Until there is a response, the audience interested in discussing the issue is limited in its choice: either consume disinformation or consume no information on the subject at all. A real alternative to propaganda and disinformation appears only after responses to them emerge, but meanwhile the audience has time to get inaccurate information and develop a need to consume it.

At the same time, **it is possible to reduce the impact of propaganda and disinformation even before they begin to spread.** Ongoing analytical work, which allows identifying vulnerable spheres to be attacked by those who produce and spread propaganda and disinformation, is needed for that.

Familiarization of the audience with expected intentions regarding spread of disinformation and propaganda can lower their effectiveness even when they are launched: it helps prepare those who are sympathetic to you to resist propaganda and disinformation; and

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<sup>14</sup> National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, Analytical report based on the results of a survey of media professionals, 2025.

make those who are not sympathetic to you think about your power – after all, you were able to predict how events would unfold.

**Argument “If we had not said anything, no one would have found out” does not work nowadays.** This argument only serves as a poor excuse for inaction and defeatist attitude.

If propaganda and disinformation directed against you appear in the media space before the start of your information campaign, do not rush to respond. To begin with, you can publish a statement announcing that the response to the accusation will be given after a certain period of time (and specify such time) and then use that period of time to prepare your response.

First of all, while preparing the response, it is necessary to assess the extent of potential harm that the disseminated disinformation might cause. Accordingly, it is necessary to calculate resources which you are ready to use to debunk propaganda and prove the fact of disinformation.

Responses to disinformation should be given in simple language (including illustrative materials). Even if disinformation is spread in a difficult for perception manner, **do not mimic the techniques used by the opposing party**. The clearer and more concise you are, the more likely it is that your information will be accepted in full (which, however, does not mean that it will be perceived completely in the same way).

**Focus on the most significant elements without wasting efforts on debunking or refuting secondary information.** Rebuttal of main propaganda and disinformation statements gives rise to doubts in the audience about accuracy of secondary, supportive statements.

**While responding to propaganda and exposing disinformation, name their sources.** Do not think that in such a way you are advertising those who are spreading propaganda and disinformation. On the contrary, by **not mentioning such sources you are encouraging the audience to search for such sources on their own**, and in the process the audience can come across similar messages in other sources, which will promote emergence of the sense of prevalence and, therefore, possible (in the audience’s opinion) accuracy of messages being refuted. However, **do not include links to websites containing false information** as this might lead to an increase in traffic on those pages. **A screenshot should suffice.**

Do not neglect the opportunity to express your rebuttal on various platforms. If you are counteracting disinformation spread in social media, do not limit yourself to social media only. Similarly, use your presence in social media to respond to propaganda and disinformation even if they are spread not through social media.

**Use clear determinations. Call a lie a lie** – it is much clearer for many people than a description of a phenomenon or action.

Avoid using artificial intelligence: **measures on counteracting propaganda and disinformation developed with the help of AI will be cliched and aimed not at achieving maximum effectiveness, but rather at being liked by those who request development of counteraction plans.**

And do not panic in connection with the AI development and its possible future use in disinformation and propaganda: there are too many human factors that impact people's readiness to perceive disinformation and propaganda as a quality product. Even though the use of AI can significantly increase the number of falsifications, **nothing essentially new has been identified so far in the spread of disinformation created by artificial intelligence**. Forty years ago, professionally retouched photos were just as misleading for the audience as today's videos in which President Zelenskyi or Greta Thunberg appear to be moving and speaking with the help of AI. Of course, it is necessary to keep track of artificial intelligence development in order to predict where it might be used to spread disinformation. **The key to success in addressing the influence of AI in this sphere consists in improvement of our own skills.**

Do not forget that solutions which worked in the past might not be effective in new situations. **Do not get discouraged when you have to revise plans based on previous successes: as you are gaining additional experience by making changes.**

Consider and **develop countermeasures to propaganda and disinformation as a comprehensive measure. Identify and suggest educational, political, and legislative measures in addition to journalistic ones** in order to achieve a multifaceted impact, even if it appears only in the long term.

Please note that propaganda and disinformation often arise in response to unconscious or hidden need of the audience. Without satisfying their need for certain genres, styles, means, the audience willingly perceives suggested forms, initially without thinking about their content and then getting used to the suggested content and craving it. **Diversify your own product**, remembering that **the time already spent on consuming results of your efforts cannot be spent on consumption of propaganda and disinformation.**

Replacing and displacing propaganda and disinformation are more effective than explanations of why they are harmful, but **replacement should be accompanied with the dissemination of media literacy and proof of harm inflicted upon a healthy development of society and mental health of people.**

**Fact-checking system plays an important role in countering propaganda and disinformation**, as discussed in a separate section of these recommendations.

**Seemingly simple measures include labelling of accuracy of the content** produced by professional media and social media channels. Indeed, a green flag or red card marking a name of the outlet or channel, as well as an author in lists prepared by respective organizations monitoring the journalistic space can warn or encourage the audience about a particular product. However, such **lists must come from reputable organizations that have to first gain trust of the audience.**

**Preservation of and assistance with development of local journalism are necessary for counteracting propaganda and disinformation.** When inventing "news", developing short messages, those who spread propaganda and disinformation can provide examples of events and phenomena which are allegedly happening in different parts of the country, including the remote ones. **In order to convincingly and reasonably refute and expose**

**false information concerning specific territories, people who are as close as possible to the place of real or imagined events are needed.** Correspondent networks are usually unable to cover such a large territory that local journalism as a whole can keep in the focus of attention.

There is ample evidence that **media literacy trainings help overcome propaganda and disinformation.** Even though special organizations and institutions are mostly responsible for that, **participation of those who work in practical journalism can be of significant help. Elements of media literacy knowledge and skills can easily be included in journalistic publications,** which makes consumption of such content appealing.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS on counteracting propaganda and disinformation:**

### **For journalists and media organizations**

1. **Be proactive:** effective ways and means for countering propaganda and disinformation include information hygiene, maintaining and improving the level of media literacy, creating quality content – the audience trained to appreciate quality journalism is less vulnerable to propaganda and disinformation.
2. **Interact with different organizations and communities,** promote establishment of the practice of creation and protection of healthy information space in their activities, rejection of propaganda and disinformation.
3. **Do not keep silent about problems “on our side”:** this creates convenient conditions for hostile actions because then those who are spreading propaganda and disinformation are the first to seize information space. Argument “If we had not said about that, no one would have found out about that” does not work these days.
4. **Use simple determinations:** name a lie a lie and truth – truth. Accordingly, use truth and nothing but truth in counteracting propaganda and disinformation.
5. **Avoid using artificial intelligence:** measures developed with the help of AI to counteract propaganda and disinformation will be cliched and aimed not at achieving the highest level of effectiveness, but rather at making sure that those who request their development like them. In turn, improve own professional skills.
6. **Develop counteraction to propaganda and disinformation comprehensively.** Always be in touch with civil society organizations and public authorities and suggest educational, political, and legislative measures in counteracting propaganda and disinformation in addition to journalistic work.
7. **Develop and maintain the fact-checking system in the outlet,** enhance personal factchecking skills as an effective way to counteract propaganda and disinformation. Determine sources of propaganda origin: this gives grounds to reach conclusions about the goal of spreading propaganda.

8. **In central and powerful regional outlets, always maintain contact with colleagues from local outlets**, and vice versa – local journalism is often more effective and swifter in rebutting and exposing propaganda and disinformation.

9. Remember that own propaganda targeting internal audience may eventually cause a deep psychological trauma in society which completely undermines possible temporary gains from its spread. Therefore, **avoid using propaganda as a way to influence the audience**.

### **Useful literature:**

1. A. Hrushetskyi. "Perception of Threats of Russian Propaganda Spread in Social Media by Ukrainians and Their Attitude Towards Ban of "Telegram". Kyiv-2024.
2. "Study of the Impact of Russian State Propaganda on Russians' Worldview and Actions of Russian Servicemembers Directly Involved into the Armed Aggression of Russia against Ukraine". Internews Ukraine, Kyiv-2024.
3. A. Kokotiukha. "Is There Ukrainian Propaganda?". Kyiv-2024.
4. N. Kramar. "Ukraine and Propaganda, or How to Win the Information War". Kyiv-2025.
5. D. Markova. "Propaganda and Disinformation: What Impacts Ukrainian Information Space the Most". Kyiv-2024.
6. H. Pocheptsov. "Propaganda and Post-propaganda as a Tool to Give Rise to "Correct" Behavior". Kyiv-2024.
7. V.O. Torichnyi. "Study of Propaganda as a Tool for Information Support of State Security". Kyiv-2019.

## FACT CHECKING

Since the beginning of the century fact-checking in journalism has gone beyond internal activities of editorial staff and independent work of journalists whose goal was to avoid and promptly correct possible mistakes, thereby not misleading the audience. Nowadays we are talking about an **entirely new genre of journalism which is referred to with the help of a borrowed term in Ukrainian – “fact-checking”**. Obviously, the use of this term reveals a tendency towards self-denial imposed on Ukrainian journalism which in fact does not reflect the wealth of experience and skills available in our information space and, thus, belittles the experience and achievements of Ukrainian journalism.

Experience gained in the sphere of fact-checking shows that **this genre can effectively counteract misperceptions, prevent them from arising in the audience, as well as undermine and ultimately destroy specific inaccurate statements**. This is especially true for those audiences that do not consciously associate themselves with specific views on issues being discussed and are therefore willing to consider arguments that refute false evidence used by those who are spreading propaganda and disinformation.

At the same time, it is necessary to realize that **thoroughly conducted and skilfully presented factchecking does not always lead to a change in perceptions or behaviour on its own**. The audience does not always have sufficient media literacy to reach conclusions about systemic and targeted nature of disinformation campaigns aimed at creating and maintaining false perceptions.

### Survey data of media professionals on fact-checking<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, the survey by the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting conducted among representatives of the media community in the sphere of media literacy and application of professional standards, in particular, in the section about “fact-checking”, shows the lowest percentages of correct answers, namely, 63.5%. It leads to a conclusion that there is a need to significantly expand knowledge and skills necessary for effective fact-checking, as forming perceptions in society that correspond to the actual situation and, accordingly, public safety in the broad sense depend on that.

**Fact-checking must exist and operate in combination with other methods of information space improvement. Consistent raising of the audience’s media literacy level creates conditions under which the audience perceives results of fact-checking with higher effectiveness.**

**A full range of expressive means typical for other genres of journalism is needed to ensure that results of fact-checking have an effective impact on the audience.** Even illustrative results will be almost wasted if they are presented to the audience in a way that is

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<sup>15</sup> National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, Analytical report based on the results of a survey of media professionals, 2025.

not interesting in terms of both content and form. An additional fact that should encourage presentation of fact-checking results in an attractive and easy for comprehension manner is that these results may and should be used by different public authorities and civil society organizations to counteract disinformation and propaganda. **We expand the sphere in which such journalistic materials influence social processes and phenomena by ensuring that presentation of fact-checking results is appealing.**

Journalistic skills in presenting fact-checking results are all the more important because creation of false reports is usually faster and cheaper than their check and exposure. Furthermore, fact-checking is by nature a reactive activity, which is why **those who spread lies almost always have an advantage in terms of the start of their campaigns.** In view of this, **fact-checkers must anticipate possible disinformation campaigns and forecast what fabrications will be presented as facts by those who are trying to mislead the audience.**

It is important for fact-checkers to know which type of facts is distorted most often and most effectively. After all, **fiction or distorted facts are often disguised by placing them among accurate data.**

A systemic and focused approach to fact-checking can ensure higher effectiveness of this activity. Exposure of facts distortion should be accompanied by publication of accurate information. It is not enough to prove that facts have been maliciously or unintentionally distorted, **publication of factchecking results should be accompanied with true facts which can fill gaps in the audience's knowledge and ideas.** These true facts have to be presented in the manner that is the most convenient for perception. Then the audience will probably remember them, which, in turn, will prevent distorted and fabricated information from entering the audience's memory and consciousness.

**Regular campaigns on dissemination of accurate information create a favourable environment for independent fact-checking by the audience.** Realizing that journalism serves interests of society, we have to pass on our fact-checking skills to the audience. Independent fact-checking by the audience is unlikely to match the quality of work done by professional journalists, but it will create favourable conditions for dissemination of fact-checking results, as the audience will feel a personal connection with the genre and fact-checking process.

Of course, it is **necessary to study the audience's level of interest in certain topics** in order to achieve noticeable success in the work with the audience. When conducting such studies or using their findings, fact-checkers also gain a sense of connection with the audience, which contributes to more conscientious and creative performance of tasks.

Fact-checking is the process of verifying factual accuracy of reports and statements. This **verification can take place before and after publication of information.**

Before publication of information, as a rule, there is **internal fact-checking** in order to prevent publication of inaccurate content. Most often such verification is carried out by the management of the editorial staff. Large outlets have special departments or employees whose job is to check all or some of the materials to be published. Besides,

while preparing publications, fact-checking is the responsibility of all journalists and is an integral part of preparation of quality materials.

**External fact-checking** is usually performed by organizations or persons independent from publishers (sometimes duplicated in-house for the purpose of double-checking and verifying diligence of external checks). Sometimes external fact-checking is ordered by the management of the outlet in order to have a stronger position in controversial situations or before the start of some information campaign. However, more often external fact-checking is organized by specialized journalistic professional or civil society organizations, including with a view to improving information space, identifying and debunking disinformation and propaganda, as well as with a view to preventing further spread and accumulation of publication of false information. However, the commercial aspect of fact-checking cannot be ignored because successful work in this genre can attract advertising, investments, etc.

**Publication of fact-checking results can influence the audience's perception of public processes and phenomena.** Moreover, in some cases **fact-checking and its findings may discourage political forces, corporations, public authorities, etc. from further spread of inaccurate information.** At the same time, one should bear in mind that the effect of publishing fact-checking results does not last forever, which is why from time to time the audience should be reminded of these results. It is also necessary to monitor actions of those who spread disinformation as they might renew their attempts to republish false reports under the guise of new facts or circumstances.

Fact-checking conducted mostly by professional journalism organizations is not limited to tracking reports in the sphere of journalism and public relations of the political sector, corporations, and third sector organizations. **Currently particular attention should be paid to checking messages published in social media.**

The ease of social media use in combination with the low level of legal regulation and self-discipline of those who publish information there makes social media attractive and fruitful for dissemination of information that publishers do not bother to verify or even deliberately fabricate to achieve commercial or political success. In this regard it should be noted that **publications in professional media are often turned into publications in social media.** During re-publication with a view to taking advantage of the authority of the source to attract the audience, any professionally prepared material may be distorted in order to introduce ideas into public consciousness that were not actually present in the inaccurately quoted publication.

Fact-checking may give the impression of counter-propaganda aimed at destruction (albeit necessary). However, **while destroying lies, fact-checking performs a restorative function, returning to circulation in the information space of true facts and justified ideas** regarding the subject, process, or phenomenon that have been distorted by those who spread disinformation.

In order to increase the expertise of fact-checking, it is necessary to involve specialists from the sphere facts from which are subject to verification. **One should refer to experts involved into the process of fact-checking in order to increase credibility of fact-checking results.**

**Thoroughness of fact-checking must be its integral part**, and a single source is not sufficient to reach a final conclusion. Even the most authoritative statistical digest or historical manual may contain a misprint or a statement introduced there as a result of multi-step disinformation operations.

**Publication of fact-checking results should be aimed at reaching the widest possible audience**, and platforms and forms that some are too quick to label as outdated, including radio and print media, should not be neglected.

**Methods used in the process of fact-checking should not be kept secret.** In addition to such story being of additional interest for the audience, thereby ensuring better reach-out to the audience, **the description of methods also has an educational effect and can encourage the audience to acquire own fact-checking skills.**

And, of course, fact-checking must happen in the context of events and phenomena which these facts concern. Significance of a particular fact can vary depending on the time and place, economic, geographical, and historical circumstances. If the fact is that the sun rises in the east, then the practical significance of this for a person in winter and summer is completely different. If the Office of the Prosecutor General can be headed in Ukraine by a person aged above 35, then it has different significance for those who are already 35 and those are not yet 35. Similarly, it has different significance for those who support one of these persons.

Hence, **while checking facts, we put them into the context of public significance and not merely publish the conclusion whether statements are true or not.**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS on fact-checking**

### **For journalists and media organizations**

1. Check facts in combination with other methods for improvement of the media space.
2. Ensure effectiveness of influence of fact-checking on the audience using an entire range of expressive means of other genres of journalism.
3. Work proactively – disseminate accurate facts and teach media literacy so that the educated audience can identify lies on their own and/or easier perceive findings of our fact-checking efforts.
4. Accompany publication of fact-checking results with true facts which can fill gaps in knowledge and ideas of the audience.
5. Remember that while preparing own publications fact-checking is the obligation of all journalists, an element of quality materials.
6. Pay particular attention to the check of statements published in social media.
7. Involve experts on respective matters into the process of fact-checking and inform about that in order to enhance the authoritative reputation of publications.
8. Talk about means and methods of fact-checking in publications, thereby sharing useful skills with the audience.

**Useful literature:**

1. H. Holovchenko. "How Do You Know That?": Which Fact-Checking Tools Professional Journalists Should Know". Kyiv-2020.
2. Gvara Media. "Fact-Checking Policy". Kharkiv-2025.
3. Yu. Danylenko. "Fact-check vs. Fakenews: Does Fact-Checking in Facebook Help with Counteracting Disinformation Spread?". Kyiv-2020.
4. Ye. Fedchenko. "Every Reader Should Be a Fact-Checker – Yevhen Fedchenko". Kyiv-2018.

## **DIGITAL LITERACY FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS**

### **Why is it important to talk about digital literacy for media professionals?**

In the era of information overload, digital manipulations, and widespread use of artificial intelligence digital literacy has become one of key competences for modern journalists. It includes not only basic technical knowledge but also ability to critically evaluate information sources, recognize disinformation, protect digital security, and understand ethical boundaries of using digital technologies in the creation and dissemination of content. In the context of the war and hybrid information threats digital literacy is moving from the category of “desirable skills” to the domain of professional necessity, without which it is impossible to guarantee high-quality and safe journalism.

The lack of journalists’ and editors’ digital literacy can have serious consequences: the spread of fake news, use of falsified visual content, disclosure of sensitive data, interferences with the work of the media by malicious actors or algorithmic systems. In this context digital literacy is not only a protection tool, but also a basis for building trust in the media as a responsible provider of information. Competent use of digital sources and platforms is what allows journalists not only to inform but also counteract information chaos which intensifies in times of social upheaval and armed conflict.

In view of this, it is essential to systematically integrate digital literacy into professional journalism standards, educational programs for media professionals, and internal editorial practices. It is about mastering technical tools (visual OSINT tools, verification platforms, digital security protocols) and shaping a culture of digital ethics which combines technological awareness with social responsibility. In the context of hybrid warfare and growing role of AI in communication, digital literacy is key to ensuring that journalism remains resilient, truthful, and capable of serving public interests.

### **Survey data of media professionals on digital literacy<sup>16</sup>**

Overall, findings of the survey conducted by the National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting presented in thematic chapter “Digital Literacy” show an above average level of awareness of the media community (71.5% of correct answers), but with significant differences based on age, professional, and regional criteria. Respondents aged up to 25 did the best with visual examples (recognition of AI-generated images), while representatives of older age groups demonstrated worse results, especially with recognition of notions “bot”, “trolling”. At the same time, the latter age group knows theoretical principles well and can better than anyone point out shortcomings of the use of AI while creating content.

Southern and central regions need special attention in terms of development of programs aimed at increasing the level of media literacy of the media sphere representatives.

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<sup>16</sup> National Council of Ukraine on Television and Radio Broadcasting, Analytical report based on the results of a survey of media professionals, 2025.

In the context of the war and rapid digitalization it is important to be knowledgeable about technologies and be able to critically analyze sources of information, distinguish facts from interpretation, recognize hybrid threats, and ensure security of digital channels. Moreover, particular emphasis should be placed on the development of AI technologies and their impact on the information industry.

## Introduction of digital literacy for media professionals

**Digital literacy of media professionals** means the totality of knowledge, skills, and attitudes which allow creating, disseminating, analyzing, and verifying information in the digital environment in a safe, responsible, and effective manner. It covers both technical awareness about the use of digital tools and capacity to understand algorithms, functioning of social platforms, digital security principles, ethical challenges posed by artificial intelligence, and hybrid disinformation. Digital literacy is closely related to the notion of **digital hygiene**, i.e. daily adherence to the rules of safe use of digital services, and **digital security**, i.e. protection of devices, data, and personal information from technical and sociotechnical threats.

In the global context, digital literacy in the media sphere is introduced through systemic educational initiatives, codes of conduct, verification protocols, and intersectoral programs. In Europe, the important role in formation of digital competencies is played by the European Commission which adopted the **Digital Competence Framework (DigComp)** in 2018 that became the basis for development of professional educational programs, in particular, for journalists. Such organizations as BBC Academy (UK), DW Akademie (Germany), Fondation Hirondelle (Switzerland) have developed their own modules on digital security, OSINT, fact-checking, digital ethics and protection from cyberthreats intended for journalists of traditional media and independent bloggers.

In the USA, numerous universities, including Columbia Journalism School, have integrated digital literacy into basic training courses for journalists, while developing academic and practical programs. Besides, a significant role is played by non-governmental organizations, for example, IREX, Internews, First Draft, which implement global initiatives on enhancement of digital resilience of journalists and audiences to fakes, deepfake-content, manipulations, and harmful impacts on the internet. Educational initiatives are accompanied with implementation of ethical policies regarding AI, transparency of digital content, and responsible use of technologies by the editorial staff.

In Ukraine, the process of digital literacy introduction in the media sphere intensified especially after 2014 and it gained strategic significance after the start of the full-scale invasion. One of important initiatives was the development of national Diia.Digital Education platform which covers basic digital skills. However, the most valuable thing for media professionals is activity of civil society organizations, in particular, Internews-Ukraine, Institute of Mass Information, Media Detector, Digital Security Laboratory, etc. which implement specialized trainings on digital security, OSINT, work with AI, protection of sources, verification of content, and digital ethics.

In higher education, digital literacy is for now integrated in a fragmented manner. Some journalism departments update their curricula, including separate modules on digital security or information verification. At the same time, according to recommendations of analytical centres it is necessary to have systemic integration of digital literacy as a cross-cutting component into all stages of training for future media professionals. It envisions combination of technical skills (work with platforms, verification tools), critical thinking (recognition of manipulations, hybrid influences), ethical reflections (responsible use of AI, privacy protection), and legal awareness (digital rights, access to data, copyright).

Hence, digital literacy is a prerequisite for professional activities of journalists during the digital era, effective tool for counteracting disinformation, guaranteeing safety of editorial staff, and maintaining trust in the media as a democratic institute. Its systemic implementation requires coordinated efforts by the state, educational institutions, civil society, and media themselves both in Ukraine and at the international level.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS on enhancement of media professionals' digital literacy**

### **For journalists, media professionals, and media organizations**

**Voluntary labelling of AI content.** It is appropriate to encourage professional journalists and media outlets (as well as bloggers) to implement the practice of voluntarily labelling materials that use the content created or modified with the help of artificial intelligence. The use of respective tags, hashtags, or disclaimers (for example, #created\_AI, #AI\_content, #generated\_by\_algorithm) will increase transparency, allow audiences to assess information sources more critically, and reduce risks of disinformation. It is especially relevant in cases when AI is used to generate illustrations, process voice, or reproduce video. Introduction of such practices can also become a marker of integrity and professional responsibility of the media which will over time strengthen the audience's trust in traditional information sources competing with uncontrolled sources.

**Targeted educational programs and in-house training on digital ethics, AI, and disinformation.** A series of targeted educational courses for the media should be introduced both in person and online, focusing on such topics as digital ethics, counteracting disinformation, understanding AI mechanisms, and hybrid information influences. It is advisable to include into these courses modules on creation and recognition of deepfake-content, information verification using open sources (OSINT), principles of functioning of social platforms algorithms, and impact of targeted advertising on consumers' information behaviour.

It is recommended to accompany such training with regular in-house training sessions, during which teams' attention should be focused on consideration of real cases: fake images, manipulative headlines, videos of unknown origin, incorrect or missing source attribution. In addition, it is worth focusing on topics of digital privacy, personal data protection, limits of what is permissible in frontline publications, and ethical handling of sensitive information.

Educational modules should be adapted to different levels of training – basic for beginners, advanced for experienced journalists and editors. It will be particularly valuable to involve experts on factchecking, digital security, and media law for integration of an interdisciplinary approach.

**Development of digital content verification protocols.** It is recommended that editorial staff implement standardized internal protocols for verification of digital content before publication. Such protocols can cover a step-by-step procedure for verification of visual and textual materials, including chronological analysis of videos and images, assessment of source credibility, metadata verification, and cross-referencing with official and verified platforms. It is worth integrating the use of basic OSINT-tools, such as Google Reverse Image Search, InVID, Forensically, WhoIsLookup, TinEye etc.

It is important that such guidelines are clear and easy to use on a daily basis and accessible for both novice and experienced journalists. They can be presented in the form of an internal reference guide or checklist for quick verification adapted to the type of the material. These protocols should be updated to reflect new challenges, in particular, spread of AI-content and novel forms of manipulation. After development of respective digital content verification protocols, it is desirable to organize training sessions on their implementation for the editorial staff, as well as introducing regular internal discussions with analysis of case studies which will allow updating and adapting these procedures to new challenges of the digital environment.

**Regional adaptation of educational initiatives.** It is recommended to ensure wider coverage of educational programs described above, in particular, in those regions where the lowest level of digital literacy has been recorded pursuant to the survey results, namely, southern Ukraine (including frontline regions). It is recommended to conduct trainings in partnership with local media organizations, outlets, and professional associations. It is also advisable to introduce regional scholarships or educational vouchers for journalists.

## **For bloggers**

**Educational video content and support of young digital ambassadors.** It is appropriate to combine creation of quality educational video content in the format of short dynamic videos (TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts) with development of initiatives in the sphere of digital literacy for the youth. Format “1 minute – 1 rule” allows effectively explaining media hygiene rules: how to recognize a bot, how not to spread fakes, how to identify deepfake or manipulative presentation of news. Such content must be visually attractive and informative, created in cooperation with media experts, but adapted to the language and format of social media.

At the same time, it is recommended to support young bloggers and content creators aged up to 25 as digital ambassadors. It can happen through microgrant programs or mentorship formats which promote launch of new blogs, pages, or podcasts dedicated to digital awareness, fact-checking, and ethical conduct in the online context. The youth as “peer-to-peer” communicators have significant trust among their peers, which makes them especially effective in counteracting disinformation among adolescents and students. Combination of these two approaches will promote dissemination of knowledge and forming of a new generation of responsible digital leaders.

## For future media professionals

**Integration of digital literacy into all stages of education.** It is recommended that digital literacy is a cross-cutting component of curricula in journalism, PR, and media communications from the first year of studies onwards, including both theoretical and practical components. There should be envisioned mandatory modules dedicated to algorithms of social media functioning, content verification, digital security, impact of manipulation and propaganda on public opinion, as well as work with AI tools. It should be done consistently and increase in complexity at each level of studies. It is also important to integrate this topic into courses concerning ethics, law, and social responsibility of the media in order to ensure interdisciplinary approach to shaping digital integrity of future media professionals.

**Simulation exercises and gaming techniques.** Introducing simulations and game modelling of real-life crisis case studies into university education will help students to develop skills of rapid response, critical analysis of sources, and risk assessment, as well as deepen understanding of the information ecosystem. These could include scenarios such as “spread of fake news during elections”, “deepfake-videos causing panic”, “information attacks on local media”, or “data leaks from investigative journalists”. It is also important to encourage development of own simulations to reinforce knowledge through creative application. Such an approach makes the learning process interactive and closer to real challenges of the professional activity.

**Mentorship focusing on digital integrity.** It is recommended to develop mentorship programs in universities, outlets, and through media organizations where young journalists, students, and interns can receive support from experienced media professionals. Such programs should focus not only on practical journalistic skills, but also on deep understanding of ethical challenges of the digital age – from responsible use of AI to preservation of sources’ privacy. Discussion of specific cases is important. In particular, how to:

- respond to a phishing attack on the outlet’s email;
- verify video that allegedly shows crimes committed during the occupation, but does not contain clear metadata;
- work with sources on temporarily occupied territories without the risk of their exposure through digital traces;
- protect journalists’ social media accounts from hacking and interferences;
- recognize AI-generated images, especially in highly emotional charged materials.

Analysis of such situations will help future media professionals to better navigate the digital environment and make responsible decisions in the context of information warfare and constant information threats.

## For media civil society organizations

**Study of digital needs of professional communities and audiences.** Media organizations in cooperation with think tanks should systematically conduct comprehensive studies of digital needs of various target groups: regional journalists, independent bloggers, media students, and media activists. Such studies should cover the basic level of digital literacy, identify practical difficulties in the use of digital tools, level of cybersecurity skills, understanding of the principles of algorithms, AI content, as well as prevalence of vulnerable practices that may pose risks to personal data or content consumers.

A separate vector of such studies should be the analysis of digital behaviour of media consumers, in particular, their sources of information, trust in content, ability to recognize fakes, emotional responses to information hoaxes, etc. This will help identify areas of greatest risks to digital and information security, for example, vulnerable groups which often become victims of manipulations or typical situations in which disinformation is spread.

It is important to use quantitative (questionnaires, sociological surveys), qualitative (focus group discussions, interview, content analysis of behaviour in the social media), and biometric (eyetracking, facial coding, clickstream-analysis / scroll depth) methods to study consumers' behaviour. Obtained results should become the basis for adaptation of educational products, development of training programs, information campaigns, and prevention tools.

The goal of such studies consists in improving accuracy and effectiveness of digital education, as well as enhancing resilience of the society to hybrid threats in the information space.

**Development and implementation of educational courses and practical materials for journalists.** Media organizations and expert community should take the leading role in development and implementation of educational programs aimed at enhancing digital literacy of journalists, students, bloggers in accordance with the recommendations given above. It envisions development of structured online courses and practical materials: digital content verification protocols, internal editorial guidelines, training modules on digital ethics, case studies concerning manipulative content, etc.

To ensure topicality, reliability, and practical application of knowledge, such programs should be developed jointly with the expert community, including analysts, media lawyers, OSINT specialists, fact checkers, and digital researchers. The format may envision both short video lessons with selfassessment and full-fledged interactive platforms with built-in tests, case studies, and possibility to obtain a certificate.

It is important to ensure accessibility and regular update of such resources, as well as their adaptation to regional needs of journalists, especially those from southern and frontline areas.

**Useful literature:**

1. Digital Journalism – course at Diia.Education platform.
2. Digital Competence Framework (DigComp).
3. Online course “Digital Security for Journalists and Other Media Professionals”.
4. Independent Media Council’s Recommendation No. 20: Digital Security for Journalists (and Not Only) in the War Setting.
5. Course “Strengthen Your Digital Journalism”.
6. Sirlin, N., Epstein, Z., Arechar, A. A., & Rand, D. G. (2021). Digital literacy and susceptibility to disinformation. Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Disinformation Review, 2(6).