GUIDELINES AND SELF-REGULATORY STANDARDS ON THE SENSITIVE AND ETHICAL REPORTING OF GENDER, GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND LGBTQI ISSUES

UN WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION

The media have a significant impact on how social and cultural norms relating to gender and sexual orientation form and evolve. The media's treatment of women and LGBTQI people and their reinforcement of stereotypes are linked to violence against these groups in everyday life.

The media are not simply mirrors of the world; they are active shapers of perceptions and ideas. This means they have a heavy responsibility when it comes to the fair, accurate, non-stereotypical and balanced portrayal of women, gender and sexual orientation.

In the media in many countries around the world, women are underrepresented; they are a minority in politics; and the news, even if about women, is often conveyed with a male voice. Men are far more likely to be portrayed in a way that values their opinions, experiences and professions. In Georgia, while experts indicate that the share of women enrolled in journalism schools and working within all types of media is relatively high, they are still underrepresented at the managerial level.[1]

Thus, these guidelines aim to reduce the stereotyping and misrepresentation of women and members of the LGBTQI community, as well as to reduce reporting that may legitimize prejudice and violence against them. Research shows that from a young age, children are influenced by the stereotypes that the media present to them[2]

Women are often portrayed as caregivers, models, objects of desire or victims. Women are also more likely to be linked to physical attributes or superficial characteristics, such as their appearance, clothing, age and relationship status, while men tend to be referred to in relation to their ideas, experiences and professions. Violence against women is often reported from the perspective of the local community, including perpetrators' neighbours, friends or family members. Such content (interviews, statements, etc.) often contains stereotypical, prejudiced and judgmental language that is sometimes misogynistic or homophobic.

Similarly, anti-LGBTQI violence and aggression is often either downplayed or sensationalized by the media, while members of the LGBTQI community are often assigned certain limited characteristics that do not reflect the reality of their lives. They are often not consulted on issues affecting them.

Violence against women is sometimes even glamorized and monetized. The hyper-sexualization of images and the use of social media for the objectification of women constitute a new context within which women, and especially young women, construct and express their identities. Images of sexualized women are poor examples for girls and younger women and create a false picture of women's roles in society.

Similarly, skewed and inaccurate representation of LGBTQI people in the media contributes to an unsafe environment for LGBTQI youth in which to grow up and hinders societal acceptance.

There is an enormous potential for the Georgian media to show more balanced, inclusive and diverse portrayals of gender and sexual orientation. Reporting on violence against women in a responsible manner will encourage a greater rejection of violence against women and girls, while more attentive reporting on LGBTQI issues will encourage understanding and thus contribute to a reduction in prejudice, hate speech and violence. To similar effect, by promoting fair, gender-sensitive reporting, the media can help counter violence against women in politics—one of the most serious barriers to women's leadership and full participation in public life—thereby helping to create a more just and equal society.

There is also a business case for sensitive and fair reporting: women and girls are consumers of media too.

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1   https://georgia.unwomen.org/ka/digital-library/publications/2020/05/the-country-gender-equality-profile
2   https://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/publikationer/beyond-stereotypes

Media companies in Norway and the United Kingdom, as well as global media agencies, have stated that making their reporting more attractive to women has been good for business.

The guidelines below are intended to support members of the media in providing fairer and more sensitive reporting. They are based on the 'Report of the 1st Conference of the Council of Europe Network of National Focal Points on Gender Equality,[3] in addition to research and recommendations by international media development organizations.

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3   https://rm.coe.int/1680590587

RECOMMENDATIONS TO MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

1. General guidelines

a. Combat the proliferation of stereotyping through careful reporting and appropriate programming in general and everyday practice in the daily business of media organizations.

○ Provide guidance and, when possible, training for all reporters on fair and sensitive reporting on gender and sexual orientation (e.g. organizing workshops on understanding and combating inherent bias).

○ Encourage reporters to challenge, rather than reinforce, stereotypes (e.g. by creating a safe space in which questioning gender stereotypes, and offering counter-examples, is accepted and encouraged).

○ Provide editors with guidelines for story selection and reporting.

▷ Try to balance the presence of women and men (e.g. ask an equal number of both men and women for their opinion).

▷ Ensure coverage of issues that are of particular importance to women and LGBTQI people.

▷ Consider whether there are additional gender angles being left out of major news stories.

▷ Keep reversibility in mind: when conducting interviews, consider whether the questions you are asking could be posed to either a man or a woman. When describing someone, consider whether you would describe a person of a different gender in the same way (e.g. not focusing on women's physical appearance or clothing, even in a neutral way).

▷ Recognize that there are not two sides to every story (e.g. in instances of reporting femicide or anti-LGBTQI violence, there is no justification or defence for such crimes)..

○ Provide guidelines around image and video selection, avoiding sensationalism and sexualization (e.g. use images that show men and women across all spheres of life, both public and private).

○ Provide guidelines around the disclosure of private information.

▷ Always obtain informed consent and maintain the anonymity of survivors.

▷ Ensure that you have an understanding of the interviewee's context to make sure that your actions are not inadvertently putting them at risk (e.g. not disclosing information that could be used to identify them).

○ Provide additional training and resources to reporters who may interview survivors of violence or trauma.

○ Acknowledge that there are many types of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence as well as threats, coercion and online hatred and abuse.

▷ Acknowledge that gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed towards anyone based on their gender or on their perceived gender.

b. Establish a unified code of conduct for journalists and the media that journalists' unions, together with media organizations, can strengthen..

► **General guidelines:**

▷ Advocate for and encourage the adoption of guidelines similar to these within news organizations.

▷ Implement self-regulatory mechanisms or appoint a senior individual to field complaints. Where this is not possible, media organizations should appoint one or more persons to liaise with the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics or another independent industry body to handle complaints and discuss the development of relevant elements of the code of conduct and practice.

▷ Collaborate with the Charter to access training and guidelines.

► **LGBTQI-specific guidelines:**

▷ Revisit codes of conduct and other relevant policies to ensure that they address anti-harassment, inclusion and non-discrimination issues within the organization.

▷ Make sure editorial staff are aware of the appropriate terminology and definitions related to LGBTQI people and gender recognition.

▷ Collaborate with LGBTQI community groups to provide training for reporters and obtain assistance in creating guidelines for coverage.

▷ Encourage more dialogue and interaction with members of the LGBTQI community and groups during day-to-day reporting.

2. Media content

a. Ensure that a balanced group of media workers provides coverage of diverse topics, witnesses, experts and panelists, thereby producing better gender representation and promoting greater understanding of women's perspectives.

► **General guidelines:**

▷ Ensure that story selection reflects the diverse roles of women and LGBTQI people in society and the issues that are of interest to women and the LGBTQI community.

▷ Ensure a gender balance among interviewees, experts and panelists.

▷ Address the wider context beyond individual incidents, and include statistics on gender-based violence and anti-LGBTQI violence in reporting.

▷ Discuss motive responsibly (e.g. avoid constructing a narrative about how a particular choice or event 'led to' any violence that occurred) and without sensationalism (e.g. do not include graphic or personal details if not necessary to the story).

▷ Ensure that statistics reported in the media are accurate and within context (e.g. acknowledge that many incidents of violence against women are not reported to the police).

▷ Provide accurate information about identifying violence against women, gender-based violence, and violence towards LGBTQI people.

► **LGBTQI-specific guidelines:**

▷ Include LGBTQI advocates as interviewees, experts and panelists in coverage of the issues impacting the community.

▷ Seek to ensure a balance among LGBTQI experts interviewed for coverage of other topics.

○ Consult with LGBTQI groups and organizations as needed to understand the context and ensure that LGBTQI issues are being reported on fairly and accurately.

b. Proactively address the effects of stereotyping by educating and raising awareness in society by covering issues such as gendered violence against women and anti-LGBTQI violence.

► **General guidelines:**

▷ Ensure that these issues are covered broadly, rather than focusing on individual incidents without context, and that they are framed as human rights issues.

▷ Implement media literacy campaigns in partnership with other outlets and international media development organizations.

▷ Provide readers with practical information (e.g. addresses of shelters, legal aid and protection associations) and resources (e.g. URLs and book references) where they can find help or further explore the subjects of gender-based and anti-LGBTQI violence.

▶ LGBTQI-specific guidelines:

▷ Provide consistent, unsensational coverage of issues affecting the community that is free of stereotypes.

▷ Depict incidents of violence against the LGBTQI community as serious crimes (not as 'less important' or less newsworthy).

▷ Do not depict violence as an isolated incident or one-off episode.

▷ Understand that sometimes, violence is not just directed towards an LGBTQI individual but towards their family and relatives, so reporting should highlight the motive of the crime and not stress the minority status of the victim.

▷ Do not sensationalize the fact that a survivor of violence is an LGBTQI person.

▷ Avoid unnecessary focus on whether someone is gay or transgender. Often, it might not be very relevant to the story but merely adds a sensational element.

▷ Avoid anything that discloses a forced coming out and violates the protection of private, personal data concerning an LGBTQI person. This could affect the safety of the person who is 'outed'.

▷ Avoid focusing on operations, surgeries or any other procedures that a transgender person may have had. Those questions are only asked out of prurient curiosity. They distract the viewer from seeing the whole person, as well as from the larger issues that affect the person, like discrimination, poverty and violence..

C. Use appropriate terminology in describing and reporting on violations of the law and human rights, such as child abuse, rape, sexual harassment and other forms of violence..

▶ General guidelines:

▷ Establish clear guidelines on language usage.

● Avoid writing sensational headlines.

● As a general best practice, describe people subjected to violence and abuse as 'survivors' rather than 'victims', unless they have been killed.

● When describing acts of violence, make the perpetrator the subject of the sentence, and assign the verb to them (e.g. "He raped her", rather than "She was raped").

● Avoid words like 'tragedy' as this makes it seem as if the violence was an unavoidable or uncontrollable incident instead of a conscious action by the perpetrator.

● Exercise caution when interviewing perpetrators of violence and discussing the motive behind their alleged crimes, as this can inadvertently imply justification or provide inspiration for others to carry out similar acts.

● Do not use language that frames the perpetrator in a sympathetic way (e.g. in a headline, do not refer to a perpetrator as a 'father of four'). Avoid focusing on the perpetrator's remorse or apology, and avoid describing his behaviour as 'out of character' or similar. Equally, avoid insinuating that something the survivor did prompted the incident.

● Recognize that there are not two sides to every story (e.g. in instances of reporting femicide or anti-LGBTQI violence, there is no justification or defence for such crimes).

- Refer to the reference guide 'Reporting on Violence against Women and Girls: A Handbook for Journalists' by UNESCO.[4]

▶ **LGBTQI-specific guidelines:**

▷ Use language and terminology that avoids stereotyping and will support tolerance. See the GLAAD Media Reference Guide[5] and the NUJ Guidelines on LGBT Reporting.[6]

▷ Do not use or report misogynist or homophobic language.

▷ Provide clear guidelines on language usage.

- Before reporting, consider whether labels such as 'gay', 'lesbian', or 'bisexual' are necessary and relevant to the story. If not, do not include them.

- Avoid terms such as 'gay relationship' or 'lesbian couple'; simply use 'relationship' or 'couple' instead.

- Be aware of correct/preferred terminology (e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, transgender, etc.), and understand that certain language is offensive (e.g. the term 'homosexual' has clinical connotations and is frequently used by anti-LGBTQI extremists, so it should be avoided).

- Sexual orientations, like 'gay' or 'transgender', are adjectives, not nouns.

- Avoid language that implies that being LGBTQI is a free choice (e.g. instead of saying 'sexual preference', use 'sexual orientation').

- Avoid disclosing someone's sexual orientation without their consent.

- Always use appropriate pronouns (i.e. do not mis-gender a transgender person).

- Do not use a transgender person's birth name, but rather use their chosen name.

- Never advocate for conversion therapy or inaccurately imply that sexual orientation or gender identity is a form of mental illness.

- Do not sensationalize the fact that a survivor of violence is an LGBTQI person.

- Work to raise awareness and literacy about LGBTQI issues and the harassment and discrimination that the community faces.

4 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371524
5 https://www.glaad.org/reference
6 https://www.scribd.com/document/400343295/nuj-guidelines-on-lgbt-reporting-published-sept-2014-pdf

3. Policy and decision-making mechanisms

a. Strengthen self-regulatory mechanisms and codes of conduct to condemn and combat sexist or homophobic imagery, language and practices by setting clear standards and consequences for the industry, and provide progress monitoring. .

▶ **General guidelines::**

▷ Ensure that the Charter's role is communicated clearly and that people understand how to contact the Charter to file a complaint.

▷ Ensure a gender balance within the self-regulatory mechanism.

▷ Ensure that the people reviewing complaints are well-trained and experienced in gender-sensitive reporting.

▷ If already obliged to report information to the communications commission on complaints received, go a step further by publishing this information on the news organization's website. If not already obliged to report this information, do so voluntarily. Provide as much detail as possible without compromising the anonymity or safety of those filing complaints.

▷ Clearly report any actions taken in response to a complaint (e.g. additional training, disciplinary action), as well as actions taken to reduce the number of complaints.

▶ **GBTQI-specific guidelines:**

▷ Ensure that the self-regulatory body has clear guidelines for dealing with issues impacting the LGBTQI community.

▷ Consult LGBTQI community groups on the guidelines to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

b. Ensure that internal codes of ethics and conduct, including procedures for complaint, are widely known to the public and easy to access.

▶ **General guidelines:**

▷ Publish codes of ethics and conduct publicly on the news organization's website.

○ Ensure that members of the public and stakeholders can easily contact the self-regulatory mechanism (e.g. by putting a complaint form [7] on the news organization's website and prominently displaying the link to the form).

c. Publicly recognize and give credit to organizations for excellence and leadership in promoting balanced representation.

▶ **General guidelines:**

▷ Make examples of best practices available for journalists who need guidance on how to report responsibly.

4. Employment and working practice

a. Support the return to work of women professionals after parental leave, and encourage work practices that correspond to people's natural life cycles, such as when caring for young children.

▶ **General guidelines:**

▷ Encourage the review of parental leave policies, and, if financially feasible, explore opportunities to provide paid parental leave.

▶ **LGBTQI-specific guidelines:**

▷ Review parental leave policies to ensure that they do not unintentionally discriminate against LGBTQI employees (e.g. consider offering adoption leave and removing gender-specific language from guidelines—for example, to refer to 'primary caregivers' rather than 'mothers').

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7   https://www.qartia.ge/en/submit-an-application

b. Provide training with adequate remuneration and social benefits, and provide other forms of support through mentoring systems. Childcare support can significantly alleviate the burden placed on individuals and help them overcome structural hurdles and progress in their careers.

▶ **General guidelines:**

▷ Consider the implementation of mentorship programmes, or partner with organizations that provide such programmes.

c. Provide resources and programmes for the strengthening of women's media literacy in designing, accessing and managing information and content in media technologies..

▶ **General guidelines:**

▷ Consider programmes specifically geared towards engaging women readers/viewers, particularly in rural areas where access may be more limited.

d. Encourage studies of the managerial and decision-making aspects of media organizations to become an integral part of higher education curricula and journalism training programmes.

▶ **General guidelines:**

▷ Encourage journalists to provide lectures and share their experiences with aspiring journalists.

▷ Provide internships, and ensure a gender balance among interns.

e. Protect journalists from job precariousness and instability, and create safe working environments for women and LGBTQI people.

▶ **General guidelines:**

▷ Implement a complaints mechanism for sexual harassment and discrimination based on gender and/or sexual orientation.

▷ Ensure that the mechanism for reporting harassment to the Ombudsman's Office (Public Defender's Office) is clear and readily available.

▷ Ensure that adherence to the code of conduct is included in all employment contracts.

▷ Ensure that anti-harassment and non-discrimination training is regularly implemented.

▷ Ensure that newsrooms have clear policies for digital security, and provide training for reporters on how to keep themselves safe.

▶ **LGBTQI-specific guidelines:**

▷ Ensure that newsrooms employ members of the LGBTQI community as journalists, commentators and interviewees and that they have a wide space for participation, including the opportunity to lead on the coverage of issues affecting their community.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Bisexual

A term (adj.) used to describe a person who has the capacity to form enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attractions to those of the same gender or to those of another gender. Also referred to as 'bi'.

Conversion therapy

Some anti-LGBTQI activists argue that sexual orientation is a choice and/or a changeable condition. They believe that 'homosexuality' is a form of mental illness or an emotional disorder that can be 'cured' through psychological or religious intervention. 'Conversion therapy' refers to these 'treatments' and/or programmes.

Gay

The term (adj.) preferred over 'homosexual' used to describe men and women attracted to the same sex. In specific references to women, 'lesbian' is the more common term.

Gender

The socially constructed characteristics of femininity and masculinity. It is different than 'sex', which refers to biological traits. Gender identity refers to a person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender and does not always match the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gender-based violence

Violence or harmful acts directed against a person because of their gender or their perceived gender. Gender-based violence can be experienced by women and men.

Heterosexual

A term (adj.) used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to people of the opposite sex. Also referred to as 'straight'.

Homophobia

The fear of people attracted to the same sex, often expressed through intolerance, bias or prejudice. Homophobic language can be used purposefully as a form of verbal abuse, or it can be used unconsciously and without explicitly hurtful intent.

Intersex

An umbrella term describing people born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy and/or chromosome pattern that cannot be classified as typically male or female.

Lesbian

See gay.

LGBTQI

Acronym used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people.

Misogyny

Dislike of, contempt for or ingrained prejudice against women.

Queer

A term (adj.) used by some people to describe people whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual.

Transgender

An umbrella term (adj.) for people whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth.

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