

CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA

A GUIDEBOOK ON ETHICAL REPORTING



unicef 
for every child



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Useful resources:

[UNICEF Guidelines for Journalists Reporting on Children](#)

[Child Rights and Why they Matter - E-course](#)

[Journalism for Social Change - E-course](#)

[Being a journalist: the state of the profession](#) (analysis by AEJ)

[Fake News and Disinformation Target Democratic Freedoms](#) (analysis by AEJ)

[“News... Close-by”](#) (analysis by AEJ)

[The Great Comeback of Political Pressure](#) - 2017 Annual Study of the Freedom of Speech in Bulgaria by AEJ

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“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” asked Alice.
“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.
Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll

CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA

A GUIDEBOOK ON ETHICAL REPORTING

In front of you is the first guidebook on ethical reporting on children in the media and corporate/commercial communication, developed by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Association of European Journalists – Bulgaria. Like any guidebook, it offers guidance and support for those times when we need help to stay on the right track. And that track, the one we as responsible media professionals have chosen, is where the best interests of the child are always placed first.

This guidebook is designed for all journalists, whether working in television, radio, online or print media. A separate chapter is focused on photo and video coverage of children, and the last part is aimed at public relations and advertising professionals.

This edition would not have been possible without the active involvement and dedicated work of a number of practicing journalists and public relations specialists who helped us get our bearings. Inside, you will also find valuable recommendations from a psychologist and a lawyer, references to the legal framework in Bulgaria and illustrative examples of good and bad practices, as well as the highest international standards on the ethical coverage of children in the media. A key element of the guidebook are the follow-up questions, which can guide us in the right direction when children feature in our stories. Some of the questions focus on written rules—for example, making sure we have complied with all the laws—but others target the “unwritten” rules, the territory of ethics and morality. Questions of the latter type are not always straightforward and may require us to try putting ourselves in the place of the child, imagining how they feel or how our actions might affect their feelings. As the popular phrase goes, we must “walk in their shoes”.

The advantage here is that we, too, were once children, and we can rely on our own personal and emotional experiences. In other words, we don’t have to imagine ourselves in completely alien shoes, but we should rather try to remember how we felt or how we would have felt when we wore a much smaller shoe size. A comparison could be made between answering the follow-up questions and Cinderella trying on the glass slipper: we ask a question and we look among all the possible answers for the one that fits best. How can we be certain we have picked the best one? According to a popular theory, in order to reach the level of expert knowledge in a given field, a person needs to dedicate 10,000 hours to it. And as each of us ‘practised’ being a child for 18 years, that amounts to nearly 160,000 hours of experience in the field. If we were to just summon that experience and combine it with the professional knowledge and skills we have gained as journalists and PR specialists, that would surely lead to great results. This guidebook is designed to assist us every time we are in search of the best answer. Its mission is not to limit children’s presence in the media, but rather to make their voices heard on important issues while respecting their rights. The guidebook was created jointly by a group of professionals united by UNICEF and AEJ’s mission, as well as firmly committed to the idea that ethical reporting on children in the media is a “mission possible”. Using this as a solid foundation, the two organisations will provide training sessions for journalists, photojournalists, videographers, public relations specialists and students in order to give them the chance to draw on each other’s experiences and find companions on the right path forward. This is the beginning of a truly exciting journey for all of us!

CHAPTER 1

CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA



FROM THE AUTHORS

This chapter is about all children. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, ratified by Bulgaria in 1991) and Bulgarian legislation, a child is every human being below the age of eighteen. What should we take into consideration when covering child-related topics and promoting and protecting children's rights in Bulgaria through the media? Are we providing enough visibility not only to children's problems but also to their opinions and ideas as equal members of society?

DO YOU KNOW THAT...



There were 1,192,746 children in Bulgaria in 2018, which is around 17% of the country's population. Four out of every ten children in Bulgaria are living in material deprivation. By comparison, the EU average is one in ten. There are also many more factors for vulnerability among children that media professionals should take into consideration (e.g., ethnicity, religion, disabilities, social background, gender identification and social norms).

Sources: National Statistical Institute, TransMonEE Database

VOCABULARY

Words are the strongest weapon held by the fourth estate, the media. Words (and images) can help, but they can simultaneously inflict irreparable damage to those affected if improperly used. This applies with full force when child-related topics are being covered. The following brief wordlist is intended to facilitate media professionals' selection of adequate vocabulary when referring to children:



Let's use: children, youngsters, teenagers, boys and girls, youth, young people, adolescents, minors, underage, pupils, high-school students.



Don't use: kids, nippers, pubescents, juveniles, minikins, teens. These words might sound patronising or offensive. When speaking of themselves, children do not self-identify in such terms.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

The Persons and Family Act categorises people under the age of 18 into two groups: minors (who have not reached the age of 14) and the underage (who have reached the age of 14 but have not reached the age of majority, 18). Minors can carry out legal acts only through their legal representatives (parents or legal guardians/trustees) and underage persons have certain legal rights and can assume obligations, albeit within a limited scope. Therefore, the use of the terms "minor" and "underage" in media publications is appropriate, especially if we endeavour to be as precise as possible when presenting information concerning children.

NB: Every child is a full-fledged bearer of the whole range of inalienable rights set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (for more information, see the Useful Resources section below).

The Child Protection Act, last updated in 2017, grants every child the right to freely express their opinions about all matters of interest and to seek assistance from the authorities and people entrusted with the child's protection. This means that, in principle, children may feature in media publications by expressing their opinions on matters that concern them. Featuring children in broadcasts, however, should never put their physical, mental, moral and/or social development in jeopardy. That responsibility belongs to their parents, legal guardians, trustees or other caretakers, including directors of small family-type group homes and centres for children without parental care (Article 8, Paragraph 10 of the CPA). In any case, if a child features in a media publication, no information or data about the child may be made public without the consent of the child's parents or legal representatives (Article 11A of the CPA).

Please note that the consent of children themselves should be requested by media professionals. Since every child is entitled to their rights, their opinions about whether or not and how to be featured in any media publication should also be taken into consideration.

LAWYER'S ADVICE

You must obtain the consent of the person responsible for a child in order to feature him/her in a media publication. (Permission must be obtained for all interviews, videotaping and photographs. Ensure that the child and his/her parent/guardian know they are talking to a reporter. Explain the purpose of the interview and its intended use. Permission must be obtained in circumstances that ensure the child and guardian are not being forced in any way and understand that they are part of a story which might be disseminated locally or globally. This is usually only ensured if permission is obtained in the child's language and the decision is made in consultation with an adult the child trusts.)



Under exceptional circumstances, the rules for obtaining permission can be overridden if the child's participation in the media coverage aims to protect his/her rights and interests from violation by the very same adult or institution responsible for his/her care (in such cases, those adults or institutions are unlikely to give the child permission to speak in the first place). However, the child's identity must not be disclosed in such cases. Based on their findings about child rights violations, journalists must alert the competent authority, e.g., the local Social Assistance Directorate or the State Agency for Child Protection.

NB: For more information on how and where to report a case of violence or a child at risk, read [here](#) (in Bulgarian)

LEGAL ASSISTANCE:

Could I be prosecuted in court for unethical coverage of a child?

LAWYER'S COMMENTS

The ethical aspect of coverage is not sanctioned by the courts but by the Council of Electronic Media (this includes radio and television but does not include newspapers or online media).

An example of this is the recent administrative decision to establish one major television channel's violation of the Radio and Television Act when it covered a case of peer-to-peer violence among adolescents. In particular, the TV channel was found to have violated the following Council of Electronic Media criterion: "When covering events related to child abuse, child maltreatment or family problems, the providers of media services must respect the privacy of children who have been victims of violence or family problems." The decision referred to a segment in the channel's morning programme which covered acts of humiliation carried out by two 16-year-old girls against a female classmate. The topic was developed as an opinion piece, discussing aggression and violence among children in school, but the programme also showed video footage of the girls' actions and this content was uploaded to the internet, as well. The victim's face (covered by a privacy mask) and later her body were shown: she was beaten, pulled by the hair and forced to strip naked while being interrogated and verbally abused. Certain segments of the video clip (which was downloaded from Facebook) had been muted, but the entire dialogue between the girls was subtitled. In spite of the blurred video, the girl could be seen undressing and being beaten by one of the other girls; their conversation could also be heard and read (and the child could be heard crying). A decision was issued for a violation under the Radio and Television Act.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

The following questions are useful to have in mind when preparing a topic or a piece of reportage about children.



Are we making the world of children and their achievements visible to a sufficient extent, rather than only their problems?

- 1 Have we obtained consent from the adult responsible for the child (parent or legal guardian)?
- 2 Have we informed the child in a suitable and understandable way how he/she is to be featured in our material?
- 3 Are we convinced that revealing the child's identity will not harm him/her, regardless of consent obtained from the adult caring for him/her? Responsible media professionals should consider that adults may not be aware of what is in the child's best interest.
- 4 Are we sure that our material and the child's presence therein will not create a feeling of shame or discomfort? Could it possible for such feelings to appear years later when the child is an adult?
- 5 Are we certain that our material will not be a cause for mockery among the child's peers or for negative treatment on the part of adults?
- 6 Are we positive that the material does not offend the dignity of the child?
- 7 Are we sure that the words we use to refer to the child do not sound patronising or dismissive? Can we ask the child what he/she thinks of the words we use to refer to him/her?
- 8 Are we convinced that we do not exploit the child in order to make the material more impactful?
- 9 Depending on the age of the child, have we considered whether we should address them in a formal or informal manner?

TOPICS APPROPRIATE TO SEEK CHILDREN'S POINTS OF VIEW ABOUT

- | | |
|----|------------------------|
| 1 | URBAN LIFE |
| 2 | HEALTH CARE |
| 3 | EDUCATION |
| 4 | FRIENDSHIP, SOLIDARITY |
| 5 | POLICIES/POLITICS |
| 6 | FAMILY RELATIONS |
| 7 | ENVIRONMENT |
| 8 | FOOD |
| 9 | SPORTS |
| 10 | CULTURE |



USEFUL RESOURCES:

[Children and the Media](#)

[Putting Children in the Right - Resources for Journalists](#)

[UNICEF reporting guidelines](#)

[UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

[„The State of the World’s Children 2017: Children in a Digital World“ - UNICEF flagship report about the opportunities and risks that online space creates for children](#)

CHILDREN RAISED IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OR ALTERNATIVE CARE



FROM THE AUTHORS

This chapter is about children who, for one reason or another, are being raised in public institutions or in so-called alternative care: in the care of relatives (extended families), foster parents or various forms of residential services. There are numerous questions and topics that touch upon the lives and rights of children who are in formal care. Our choice of topics and approach towards them in journalistic materials can lead to real change for the benefit of the children we are covering. The best practice is to always conduct thorough research into why and how children have come to be raised outside their biological families; the risk of reaffirming social stereotypes, any blame or stigma assigned to them should be avoided. Positive coverage of the opportunities for children in institutions to reintegrate within society can contribute towards counteracting ignorance and prejudice. Giving such children the opportunity to be present in the media and express their opinions and views is also a positive step in that direction.

We should keep in mind that while it is not always possible for a child to live with his/her biological parents, it is always in the best interest of every child to live in a caring and supportive family environment (including forms of alternative care which should resemble such a family environment to the maximum)—this is an inalienable right under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

DO YOU KNOW THAT...



The number of children being raised in specialised institutions in Bulgaria has dropped dramatically in recent years in comparison to the year 2000 (when that number was 12,609), thanks to the deinstitutionalisation process and introduction of alternative forms of care. All large institutions for children with special needs have already closed. Towards the end of 2018, there were 633 children in total living in specialised institutions (homes for children bereft of parental care and medical-social children's care homes), while another 4,852 children were being cared for by close friends or relatives and 2,205 children were living in foster care. The ambitions of the state are to have all public institutions closed down and to provide children with alternative care which should be closer in type to a family environment.

According to a UNICEF study from 2017, at least 2.7 million children live in residential care worldwide, but the rate in Central and Eastern Europe is the highest in the world: 666 children per 100,000 are living in residential care, a figure over 5 times the global average of 120 children per 100,000. Research has shown that some of the key risk factors which result in children being placed in residential care include family breakdown, health issues, poor or unequal provision of social services, disability and poverty.

Source: Agency for Social Assistance, UNICEF Bulgaria Annual Report 2016, "Estimating the Number of Children in Formal Alternative Care: Challenges and Results" (UNICEF, 2017). (UNICEF, 2017).

VOCABULARY



Let's use: children in public institutions, children in formal care, children housed in medical and social care homes, children being raised or living in public institutions, children being raised in residential-type or alternative care facilities, children living in family-type centres, children living in a family environment.



Be careful with (words and expressions not to use): children deprived of parental care, orphans, abandoned children, relinquished by their parents, nobody's children, children raised by the state. Such definitions might intensify their sadness and instil feelings of inferiority, stigma and exclusion.



PSYCHOLOGIST'S ADVICE

When covering children in institutions, you can present them as children who have managed to cope with their lives without parents. After all, they have gotten through the initial abandonment, separation from their parents, hardships, illnesses and other trauma... This means they have the resilience to survive and thrive. This is how we should portray them. And then people will not pity them or feel guilty. It is very likely that they will even want to help them more.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

According to the Child Protection Act, a child whose parents are unable, in fact or by law, to take care of him/her—or whose family environment poses a risk to the child's physical, psychological, moral, intellectual and social development—can be placed outside of his/her family. Cases when a child's parents have allowed or done nothing to stop his/her participation in a media broadcast that poses a danger for his/her development are also considered as grounds for the child's placement into care outside of the family (Articles 25 and 26 of the CPA).

Relocating a child away from the family and into institutional or residential care can be done in different ways, as described in detail in the Social Assistance Act and the rules for implementation thereof:

- ① Placement in a residential-type social service facility. Such facilities are family-type small group homes for children and young people with or without disabilities, crisis centres and transition homes.
- ② Placement in a specialised institution. This is an exception and is done only in cases where all opportunities for the child to remain in a family environment have been exhausted (Article 35 of the CPA). Such specialised institutions are homes for children without parental care and children's homes for medical and social care.

In cases of media coverage of children who have been placed outside of their families, permission must be requested from the director of the family-type small group home or specialised institution.

LAWYER'S ADVICE

In cases where a child has been placed outside of the family, the exercise of parental rights and obligations is granted to the director of the institution or residential-type social service where the child is housed. This does not mean that the parents have been stripped of their rights: such a measure can only be decided by a court and through special proceedings subject to the procedure stipulated in Article 132 of the Family Code. But even if a parent has not been stripped of his/her rights, permission to take photographs or video footage must be obtained from the director of the institution or residential-type social service because he/she is directly responsible for and represents the child.



Being in formal care, these children are under state protection and the directors of these institutions will require permission from the local Child Protection Department of the Agency for Social Assistance—journalists may have to request and obtain such on their own.

Access to children in institutional care is not easy or fast, and there is generally good reason for that (prevention of further stigmatisation or secondary victimisation by the media). At the same time, those children should be visible to society and not hidden away, which means that media professionals should indeed pursue contact with them but should cover their stories ethically and responsibly, with respect and understanding.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Are we sure that our material does not create conditions for the stigmatisation and isolation of these children from society?
- What is the purpose of mentioning the child's growing up in an institution? Could that information be omitted without compromising the purpose and meaning of the story?

- Are we convinced that the presence of a child in our material will not cause negative treatment on the part of the people who take care of him/her?
- Have we adequately weighed the risk that such institutions might be using ostensible considerations for child protection to cover up irregularities? At the same time, children's protected status and vulnerability within institutions have to always be taken into account.
- Are we positive that the way we have presented the child does not contain any element of condescension or belittling his/her worth as a human being?
- Does our material allow for negative suggestions to be made by third parties with respect to children being raised or placed in public care facilities?
- Are we sure that we have not misled the child by arousing unrealistic expectations about solving his/her problems? Have we been careful about making promises?
- Are we certain that we will not potentially cause the child to feel "incomplete" or intensify such feelings?
- Have we managed to see and show the child's individuality beyond the "victim" stereotype of a child in an institution?
- Does our material help towards better understanding of the institutional care system?

WHEN MEDIA COVERAGE DOES HARM



Case: Rape of an underage child from a home for children in Sofia

In 2016, three children ran away from a home for children in Sofia with the intention of visiting a female friend for the weekend. Their photographs were disseminated by the Ministry of Interior as “missing children” and many media outlets shared them to help with the search. Subsequently, it became clear that one of the three children, a minor girl, had been kidnapped and raped by a recidivist—as communicated by the Prosecution Office. While most of the media hid the faces and names of the children, some outlets published detailed information about the incident, together with a photograph of the three children, their names and details of the crime. Their dignity and reputations were violated, and some exceptionally painful aspects of their personal lives were exposed. Such an approach by the media poses the threat of permanent psychological and emotional damage, as well as the victim’s stigmatisation among relatives and acquaintances. Obviously, neither the principle of protecting the child’s best interests underlying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child nor the standards of the Ethical Code of the Bulgarian Media were respected.

POSITIVE EXAMPLE

Children from institutions have the right to be shown in positive media stories. The fact that a child lives in an institution should not lead to the restriction of his/her right to free expression and participation. Here’s an example from a campaign by UNICEF Bulgaria in partnership with Bulgarian National Television, “My Voice Matters”: an adolescent boy living in institutional care was featured in an interview, showing that he had been elected by his classmates to be school council president, representing them in discussions of school policies and defending their best interests. The focus was not that he was “different”; rather, he was shown as having great potential and not being treated as inferior just because he lives in an institution. This case is also noteworthy for the fact that it was very difficult to obtain permission to show the boy’s face and name. When the director of the institution would not allow the boy to be identified, lawyers argued that he was violating the boy’s right to express his opinion freely and that the story was a positive, rather than a negative one. On the contrary, it was not the boy’s protection status but his potential—without being restrained by the fact that he lives in residential care—that gave him the right to share his experience with a general audience.



CHILDREN WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES



FROM THE AUTHORS

In order to positively influence public attitudes, we encourage journalists to use the term “children with different abilities” instead of children with disabilities. Children living with disabilities are, first and foremost, children—and we should always see the child before the disability. According to the Child Protection Act, children with disabilities and children with debilitating diseases are children at risk. As a society, we need to create suitable conditions for them to fully participate in every sphere of public life; their media exposure requires special attention. However, that should not be a deterrent to journalists from drawing the public’s attention towards issues related to children with disabilities. On the contrary, it is quite important to illuminate the situation of children with disabilities and their possibly limited access to equal opportunities due to the lack of legal guarantees against discrimination and prejudice. Giving children a voice to express their opinions and describe their personal experiences would be the best remedy against prejudice and harmful attitudes towards those who are viewed as “different”.

DO YOU KNOW THAT...



Disabilities are not diseases, although diseases are sometimes what causes them. Still, there are children with disabilities in Bulgaria who are living apart from their families in state institutions for residential care. At the end of 2017, according to data from the Agency for Social Assistance, there were more than 729 children living in small family-type group homes. The Ministry of Health reports that another 405 children are living in old-style homes for medical and social care.



SEE MORE IN CHAPTER 2:
[CHILDREN RAISED](#)
[IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS](#)
[OR ALTERNATIVE CARE](#)

The number of children with special educational needs registered in the database for pre-school and school education for the 2018–2019 school year was 3,480 in kindergartens and 18,116 in schools, i.e., 21,596 in total. Of these children, 2,828 were in centres for special educational support, formerly known as auxiliary schools; however, these children are still being registered in public kindergartens and statistically included along with the rest (in spite of the well-known fact that the majority of them do not attend public kindergartens or schools). But beyond those who are officially registered, the real number of children with disabilities in Bulgaria is likely much higher and is as yet unknown. In the 2016–2017 school year, out of approximately 30,000 registered children with disabilities, 17,347 were integrated in schools and kindergartens, meaning that there were at least 14,000 children with disabilities who were excluded from early learning and access to quality education. In addition to disabilities, the umbrella of children with special needs also covers children with chronic diseases, children with autistic spectrum disorders, children with behavioural and emotional problems (shorter attention span, hyperactivity), children with speech impairments, children with learning difficulties, etc. According to a national survey conducted in 2015 by the State Agency for Child Protection, 65% of respondents revealed that they did not want children with intellectual disabilities to be part of their own child's class, and 20% did not want their children to study alongside children with physical disabilities.

Sources: Ministry of Education and Science, annual UNICEF reports

VOCABULARY



Let's use: children with physical and intellectual disabilities, children with special needs and medical terms, if they sound accessible enough, for instance, “children with Down syndrome”, children with autism spectrum disorders, etc.



Don't use: invalids, invalid children, crippled children, defective children, mentally retarded, autists.



PSYCHOLOGIST'S ADVICE

What is the most considerate way of approaching the topic of a child's disability?

In conversation with the child him/herself, we should not be the ones to introduce the topic of disability. We should talk to the child about anything else but the disability. This topic should be introduced by the child only if he/she so wishes. There is no adequate reason for us to introduce the topic of disability first—that's because we should be able to see the child first, and then the disability (if the latter is at all relevant).

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

According to the Integration of People with Disabilities Act, a disability is any loss or disturbance in the anatomical structure, physiology or mentality of an individual. The Law on Preschool and School Education stipulates that “special educational needs” are: educational needs that can occur when a child has sensory difficulties, physical disabilities, multiple disabilities, intellectual impairments, speech impairments, learning difficulties, autistic spectrum disorders or emotional/behavioural disorders.

The law pays attention to the educational aspects concerning children with disabilities, and the responsibility for these is assigned to the Ministry of Education and Science. Except for the educational needs of children with disabilities, the legislation does not stipulate any other specific rules beyond the general requirements for integrating people with disabilities.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasises that a child with an intellectual or physical disability should enjoy a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community. The state is obliged to provide the child with assistance to ensure that he/she has effective access to and receives education, training, healthcare, rehabilitation services, preparation for employment and recreation opportunities in a manner conducive to the child’s fullest possible social integration and individual development. Children with intellectual or physical disabilities have rights to special care which is appropriate to their condition and the circumstances of their parents or others caring for them.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Have we made sure that, when covering a child with specific needs, his/her personality, skills, interests, feelings, etc. do not remain in the background of our material?
- Are we positive that we are not pressing the child to speak about the disability if he/she is unwilling to do so?
- Are we sure that overly cautious coverage of the child’s specific situation will not lead to the opposite result and increase stigmatisation?
- Covering children with disabilities often arouses emotions. Are we sure that we are not going to embarrass the child by showing negative emotions (e.g., pity)?
- Are we sure we are not offending the child’s dignity by asking him/her questions too delicate in nature (thus, underestimating him/her) or questions which he/she cannot answer or understand (thus, overestimating him/her)?
- What is the purpose of mentioning the child’s disability? Can it be avoided without compromising the idea behind the material?

A MODEL STORYLINE

A group of children has won a mathematics competition and one of them has a hearing impairment. If our material is centred on presenting the children themselves, it is probably not at all appropriate to touch upon the topic of the impairment of one of them, as this might shift the story’s focus. If, however, we develop our material towards the topic of whether children with disabilities ought to study alongside their peers or be isolated in specialised groups, the example of a child with a disability achieving success as part of a mathematics team is illustrative and appropriate.



GOOD PRACTICE

„TOGETHER FROM KINDERGARTEN”

Within their joint campaign “Together from Kindergarten”, UNICEF and bTV are broadcasting a series about the real-life stories of children with special needs and the benefits of their integration starting from the earliest years, since kindergarten is where the foundations of tolerance and inclusiveness are laid. The campaign is an example of journalism with a cause, one where the media openly takes a stance to promote children’s rights. The aim is to achieve lasting change in societal attitudes so that children with various disabilities can take their place in society and develop alongside their peers.



MARIA’S STORY

The educational achievements of a 17-year-old girl with childhood cerebral palsy from Vratsa are presented in a positive, respectful and empowering way. Nova Television’s reportage is an example of ethical coverage of young people with different abilities, as well as ethical documentation of people with physical challenges in a tactful and dignified way



BAD PRACTICE

„Invalid children“ is a term still in use in the Bulgarian media. Despite experts’ advice, some inappropriate and inadequate words and phrases are still widespread. A simple internet search reveals that children with disabilities have been stigmatised even in mainstream media.

CHILDREN OF MINORITY OR FOREIGN ORIGIN



FROM THE AUTHORS

This chapter is about media coverage of any child belonging to an ethnic, religious or language minority in Bulgaria. Ethnic minorities are often the object of prejudice, discrimination and stigmatisation. It is the duty of media representatives to examine and expose the root causes and consequences of this, especially with regard to the youngest and most vulnerable members of such groups. We should also seek to give children who have been the object of discrimination the opportunity to tell society how such prejudices held against them make them feel. The discrimination against and segregation of children from minority backgrounds affect many key life areas – access to education, health care, adequate justice and protection – and bear long-lasting consequences on their future development and inclusion within society. The media has a key responsibility to promote respect for diversity and a culture of non-violation of children's rights-this endeavour has the potential for long-term and positive effects on society as a whole, along with the promotion of values such as peace, justice, equality and prosperity.

DO YOU KNOW THAT...



Bulgaria has a diverse ethnic makeup, with the largest ethnic group besides Bulgarians being Turks, followed by the Roma people, Russians, Armenians and others. As a result of the refugee crisis that escalated after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War and other conflicts in the Middle East in recent years, there are also asylum seekers, refugees and migrants residing temporarily, settling permanently or seeking protection in the country. There are recognised Bulgarian minorities living in Hungary, Romania, Ukraine and Albania. Do they also find their place in media coverage and with what angle?

Source: National Statistical Institute

VOCABULARY



Let's use: children of Roma/Armenian/Turkish/Jewish, etc. origin, child refugee, child migrant, child seeking protection, child from an immigrant family, children on the move, unaccompanied and/or separated children.



Be careful with: the racial, ethnic or religious background of children. This is justified in the media where it is closely connected to the topic of the material. Even in such cases, it's preferable to avoid words that might be offensive to the children and/or reaffirm minority stereotypes, such as little Gypsies, Gypsy kids, aliens, etc.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Bulgarian legislation does not contain specific provisions for any special protection of children from minority or foreign backgrounds. They are subject to the general protections against discrimination in the Protection Against Discrimination Act, as well as measures laid out in the Child Protection Act. In fulfilment of its obligation to integrate these children, the Ministry of Education and Science has adopted the Strategy for the Educational Integration of Children and Schoolchildren from Ethnic Minority Groups (2015-2020). In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, signatory countries (Bulgaria ratified the document in 1991) are to encourage the media to respect the linguistic needs of children belonging to minority groups or indigenous populations. When considering issues affecting refugee or migrant children, we are advised to be familiar with the UN Refugee Convention (the Geneva Convention) as well as the Act on Asylum and Refugees and the Foreigners in the Republic of Bulgaria Act. For example, the Foreigners Act prohibits unaccompanied children from being placed in closed-type centres, while international standards recommend prevention of that practice even for children who arrive with their families, as this is tantamount to imprisonment. Since December 2017, Bulgaria has forbidden the detainment of unaccompanied minors and children separated from their families arriving in the country. Bulgaria is an external border of the European Union: flowing across it is one of the main passages for migrant children fleeing violence, destruction and extreme poverty. In 2016, there were 19,418 people seeking asylum within the country, of whom 6,572 were children—2,772 of them unaccompanied. In 2017, due to a shift in European politics regarding migration, the granting of international protections and a treaty between the EU and Turkey, the number of asylum seekers significantly decreased: respectively, unaccompanied minors and children separated from their families numbered only 440. This remained a steady trend in 2018. There were 2,536 asylum seekers in Bulgaria, 30% of whom were children, including some 500 unaccompanied minors.

Legislative provisions on unaccompanied and separated children are already in place which explicitly prohibit their detention and give them access to legal aid and an interpreter, representation by child protection agencies and referrals to protection measures. The illegal detention of unaccompanied minors or children separated from their families is now only possible when the child has been incorrectly registered by the authorities as an adult or mistakenly grouped with persons with whom they were travelling but who are not family members. In such cases, the legal precedent over the last two years has been for repealed detention based on legal grounds and in keeping with the child's best interests.

There has been serious progress made in Bulgaria regarding legislation and institutional practices surrounding unaccompanied minors and children separated from their families, but not every problem has been addressed as part of a national or overarching plan.

LAWYER'S ADVICE

Under the Bulgarian Constitution and its respective laws, no specific data collection on ethnicity, religion or any other indicator of minority status is envisaged for the citizens of Bulgaria. The collection of such data within censuses, for example, is passive: it is done according to the will and consideration of the person being freely given the option to self-identify (or not) under specific indicators like ethnicity or religion. Effectively, the right to self-identification is the leading principle, one that is guaranteed and protected under the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (Article 54, Paragraph 1).

Every person has the right to expression regarding national and universal human values, as well as to develop their culture in accordance with their self-identified ethnic group, under the law. Therefore, the collection of such sensitive data is limited to the state's obligation to guarantee the rights of its citizens to self-identify, in addition to ensuring their protection from discrimination or forceful assimilation. In the Ethical Code of the Bulgarian Media, the following principle is envisioned (2.5.2): "We shall not disclose the racial, ethnic or religious background or the sexual orientation, mental or physical status of any person if those facts are not of absolutely significance of the story." Thus, media coverage that explicitly discloses the characteristics mentioned above could be considered as expressing hostile speech that, in turn, could lead to discrimination and the incitement of hatred.

The bottom line is that journalists who cite the ethnicity of a child or group of children in their reporting (when this has nothing to do with the topic of the story) are not only unethical but are in breach of the law and the pursuit of facts. Moreover, it is impossible to be completely sure of a person's actual ethnicity (unless he or she specifically self-identifies as such in front of the journalist).



FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS



Is it necessary to mention the ethnic origin of the child, in light of the topic? Does this information pose the threat of discrimination against or the stigmatisation of entire groups?

- Would the child's ethnic origin be mentioned if the material was about a child belonging to the majority ethnic group in the same situation?
- Are we convinced that the language and content of the material will not stereotype the child and his/her family on the basis of their ethnic origin?
- Are we sure that we are not prejudiced because of the child's ethnic origin or religion before we familiarise ourselves with the facts of the case? Does this influence our material?
- Have we thoroughly checked sources of information, especially if they come from extremely prejudiced groups, such as nationalistic or racist ones?
- Do we look for balance when covering opinions, including children's points of view?
- Are we aware of whether the child's linguistic competence or knowledge are sufficient for him/her to be interviewed and whether this would embarrass or present him/her in a bad light? Have we taken into consideration the manner in which we address the child when speaking to him/her?
- Do we display due respect, patience and attention to the child?
- Have we explained intelligibly and in detail the social and cultural context typical of the respective group? For instance: it is normal for refugees to have a different eating culture, attire, social behaviour, etc.
- Do we always keep in mind that a child is a child and—regardless of ethnicity, religion, social status, origin, etc.—every child is entitled to the same rights?



Refugee and migrant children, particularly those unaccompanied by a parent or relative, are one of the most vulnerable groups of people worldwide; that's why we as journalists have to approach their media coverage with special care. When interviewing such children, we must keep in mind the extreme difficulties they have likely faced and that our questions may dredge up the trauma and memory of that experience. Even in cases where we have easy access to filming refugee children, the consent of parents or governing institutions is required, as is a clear explanation as to where and when the material will be aired or published. It is of the utmost importance that children are also informed and give their consent to being filmed or interviewed. There is a strong likelihood that these children and their families have been persecuted in the countries they are fleeing, and such publicity could create serious problems for them and their relatives back home. This is why maintaining the anonymity of children and hiding their faces is highly recommended.



GOOD PRACTICE

“NOBODY’S CHILDREN”, NOVA TELEVISION

Nova TV’s “Nobody’s Children” tells the stories of unaccompanied children in Bulgaria by paying attention to their reasons for leaving their countries on their own, their problems, hopes and dreams. In addition, the programme touches upon the shortcomings of the system regarding the protection of unaccompanied children in Bulgaria. It sheds light on various aspects of the problem by including many children’s voices as well as those of representatives of institutions and organisations. Due to the former legal vacuum that did not allow for an adult to be determined as a responsible person (guardian) for an unaccompanied child, it was especially difficult for journalists to make sure that they had the necessary permissions to interview or photograph representatives of that group. A good solution to that problem was found in Nova TV’s coverage, in which an 18-year-old man was chosen as the main character. The age of majority enabled that young man to assess for himself whether or not to participate in the programme and, being still close to childhood in age (as an adolescent), he was an adequate and competent interlocutor on the topic.



MISSION “EVERY CHILD”

The “Mission: Every Child” series on Bulgarian National Television in partnership with UNICEF, is focused on the lives of children living in extreme poverty and the problems faced by their families. Such children are not of minority or foreign origin by default but, in reality, the isolation of such groups often makes it the case. Those materials are a good example because they do not emphasise ethnic backgrounds but rather the social problems being faced by participants.



FROM THE GHETTO TO NASA

13-year-old Simona from Sofia’s Fakulteta neighbourhood is leaving for one of the world’s largest space camps. Bulgaria on Air’s television coverage tells the story of the Roma girl, focusing on her personal qualities and strengths rather than her ethnic background. She was consulted about the material, which demonstrates tact and a positive change in attitudes through highlighting role models.



Children belonging to potentially marginalised communities and living with disabilities are particularly risky cases to report on. We need to consult the “Children with Disabilities” chapter of this manual.

Working solutions implemented with the assistance of organizations like UNICEF are presented in the series. These reportages are good examples touching upon the topic of “Children and PR”, developed in Chapter 8 of this manual.



BAD PRACTICE

In 2012, three 17-year-old school students of Roma origin were involved in a scandal after posting controversial pictures of themselves doing inappropriate actions with the images of three of Bulgaria’s most honoured national heroes. The incident led to a number of hate-speech publications, even in mainstream national media.

The Association of European Journalists – Bulgaria (AEJ) called for the Sofia Regional Prosecutor’s Office to investigate the racism and hate speech being used in national media outlets. Unfortunately, the Prosecutor’s office refused to undertake any measures in this case. There were no consequences for the author who used the ethnicity of the individuals involved as a basis for stirring up hate and confrontation among Bulgarian citizens from various ethnic groups. The scandal had a very negative impact on the three teenagers themselves. They were expelled from school and failed to finish their educations.



USEFUL RESOURCES:

[“Representation of Roma, refugees, and expats in Bulgarian online media during the 2017 election campaign”](#) (analysis by AEJ)

[“Roma people in the media: Going beyond the stereotypes](#) (analysis by AEJ)

CHILD SURVIVORS OR WITNESSES OF ABUSE



FROM THE AUTHORS

In this chapter, we arrive at one of the most sensitive and painful topics for society – child abuse—and its place in the media. Cases of child abuse usually draw great public and media interest, and they require quick journalistic reaction. But before approaching such material, we have to be sure that the child in question will receive adequate protection as well as carefully analyse the potential repercussions on his or her life, safety and mental health. An important aspect of this question, one rarely if ever discussed in professional circles, is the support given to reporters who are traumatised as a result of their work in preparing this kind of reportage. Does the conversation ever even come up with our editors, not only regarding the “heroes” covered in such material but also ourselves, the storytellers of tragic events?

We should bear in mind that violence against children occurs in every community, cultural group and country. It takes on many forms: physical, psychological or sexual abuse, economic deprivation, neglect, forced marriage, labour exploitation, bullying or harassment, including “sexploitation” (online sexual extortion), etc. It can happen at home, in schools, on the street, in childcare facilities or online. Abuse has damaging effects on the physical and emotional development of children, in some cases even leading to death. A global study by UNICEF reveals that every 5 minutes, a child dies as a result of violence somewhere in the world.

There is a constant influx of new reports confirming the long-term effects of abuse on children’s emotional development, general state of health and ability to reach their full potential in life. Children who have been exposed to or experienced violence have a much higher risk for developing depression, alcohol or drug misuse, unlawful behaviour, low self-esteem and/or chronic illness later on in life. Children raised by parents who enforce abusive parenting methods or use violence in reaction to problems or difficulties are highly more likely to adopt similar parenting strategies with their own children.

According to data from the Agency for Social Assistance, departments for child protection across the entire country received 1,106 reports of child abuse in 2018 (there were 3,741 such reports in 2015). Merely 387 cases of child abuse were investigated. In that same period of time, reports from the Bulgarian Prosecutor’s Office disclosed that there were 4,320 child victims of crime, among them: 512 child victims of crimes related to sexual abuse, 57 child victims of human trafficking (49 of those had fallen victim to sexual exploitation) and another 664 child victims of crimes related to forced marriage and unlawful cohabitation with persons under 16 years of age. This grim picture for the children suffering various forms of violence is further supported by data from the Ministry of Education and Science for the 2017–2018 school year, according to which there were 3,316 reported cases of aggression in schools in the whole country.

The latest research shows high levels of tolerance and acceptance of violence in Bulgarian society and a low level of understanding certain forms of abuse, such as online sexual exploitation and child abuse. A whopping 68% of Bulgarian parents accept the use of “disciplinary abuse” (e.g., spanking/hitting) as a means of child-rearing, the National Centre for the Study of Public Opinion indicates in a 2012 study on corporal punishment. In 2018, the National Network for Children commissioned a nationwide survey on the topic “Attitudes towards the right to protection against corporal punishment in Bulgaria”. Its results demonstrate that, while the use of corporal punishment is decreasing, it remains widespread. About two-thirds of parents surveyed had previously enforced corporal punishment and other trauma-inducing methods, such as physical isolation, non-interference in danger of injury, causing discomfort through uncomfortable standing positions and “hot saucing”. Around one in four parents use such tactics systematically. No significant programmes are in place to support parents in applying non-violent methods.

Sources: Agency for Social Assistance, Bulgarian Prosecutor’s Office, UNICEF reports, National Statistics Institute, National Centre for the Study of Public Opinion.

VOCABULARY



Let’s use: child survivor of abuse or bullying; child forced into child labour; child in an exploitative situation; child who has experienced violence; child who has witnessed violence.

NB: The term “victim”—why does it deserve special attention?



PSYCHOLOGIST'S ADVICE

„The verb we decide to use when introducing the phrase ‘victim of abuse’ is important. There’s a difference between ‘the child is a victim of abuse’ (which is more of a label or qualification) and ‘the child became a victim of abuse’ (which explains what has happened without qualification). Because the child is a ‘victim’ only in reference to the specific circumstance or act. Above all, he or she is a human being with dignity and value, and, in a way, maintaining that dignity and value means avoiding his or her entire self being reduced to one event, situation, action or deed.“.

LAWYER'S COMMENTS

In cases where children have been the target of a crime, it follows that we should use the term “victimised” (the term “victim”, however, does not appear in the Bulgarian Penal Code), e.g., “victimised” is used when it comes to legal proceedings in a criminal court or in cases where the person victimising a child has been convicted. The name and visual identity of a child who has been victimised through violence or a criminal act should be concealed. The Child Protection Act, in force since 2000 in Bulgaria, explicitly prohibits corporal punishment. Art. 11(2) states: “Every child has the right to protection against all methods of upbringing that undermine his or her dignity, violence of a physical, psychological or other nature and all forms of influence which go against his or her interests”. In the same manner, the Family Code of 2009 forbids parents from using force or other disciplinary methods which are demeaning to a child’s dignity. This stipulation is echoed in legislation applying to schools and other institutions working with children.



When a child has been the object of abuse or exploitation, we can refer to him or her as a “victim” in the following situations:

- The reason for this child’s placement outside of the family is due to child abuse;
- This is a “child at risk”, i.e., the victim of maltreatment, violence, exploitation or any other inhumane or humiliating treatment or punishment, whether this takes place in the home or not.

Therefore, in general cases where a child is subjected to some form of violence, no matter if it occurs within the family or not, the term “victim” may be used. However, this should never be used for abstract reference—e.g., a “victim” of the system or circumstances—but always in relation to the specific instance negatively affecting the child.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

The Child Protection Act specifically provides for the protection of children against violence and crimes, as regulated in Article 11. Besides this, the law stipulates that children must be given a hearing in administrative or legal proceedings which affect their rights and interests (including as victims of crime), if they have reached the age of 10 and as long as this would not harm their interests. Children can and should be given a hearing before the age of 10 at the sole discretion of the court.

The international and European legal framework safeguards the confidentiality of children's identities when they are either victims or witnesses in legal proceedings, and this includes the introduction of special measures of restraint with respect to media. The aim is to avoid doing harm as a result of undue publicity or labelling. In order to be as precise as possible when covering cases of children who have suffered or witnessed violence, lawyers recommend that we thoroughly familiarise ourselves with: the Child Protection Act (Articles 15 and 11); the Criminal Procedure Code (Article 140); Directive 2012/29/EC from 25 October 2012 by European Parliament and the Council establishing minimum standards for the rights, support and protection of victims of crime; the Convention for the Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings; and the United Nations Guidelines on Justice in Matters Involving Child Victims and Witnesses of Crime. Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) establishes that all children have the right to protection from violence, abuse and neglect on the part of their parents or guardians. Other important documents include: General Comment No. 8 to the CRC about the right of the child to protection against corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading forms of punishment and General Comment No. 13 on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Why are we covering a case of abuse? Could we provoke a positive change in social attitudes—or the reverse, “sensationalism”? For example: if a child has survived physical violence in the family, in telling his or her story are we invoking our audience to react and report similar instances? Domestic violence is often observed by teachers, neighbours and friends, but goes on unreported to governing institutions.
- Are we certain that our questions will not cause the child to re-live specific moments of a traumatic situation? Are we using all possible means to gather information about the events without involving the child? An example of good practice is the “blue room” method for interviewing witnesses or victims in a child-friendly way—and avoiding secondary victimisation. The police, a child psychologist and the prosecution will gather together at one time (behind a two-way mirror to remain unseen by the child) and listen to his or her story as told by the child **ONLY** once, so as to avoid repeating the trauma and having to retell the experience over and over again to various institutions. Through the use of this method, “blue room” specialists can also provide appropriate information to journalists. Still, if it is absolutely necessary for the child to re-live the experience, are we doing so in a sufficiently child-friendly and caring way? Have we sought the help of specialists? Have we taken the child's preference not to answer questions into consideration? Can we be sure that our narrative of the events will not have a negative future effect on the child?



PSYCHOLOGIST'S ADVICE

In this chapter, we have turned our attention to the advice provided by Vesela Banova, child psychotherapist, as her work involves children experiencing states of shock, stress and psychological trauma.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER

If the child is indeed only going to share with journalists, they must first make the effort to understand what support the child needs at that point in time. Once the child has been cared for, without being pressured by us, then he or she can share the information. We must firstly ensure that the child is fully aware of his/her identity and sense of time and place. After that, we can ask if there is something bothering the child or making the child feel afraid. We should not expect the child to provide very precise answers. Especially with survivors of sexualisation and/or sexual abuse, it can be very hard to find the words. It's a difficult situation for children. They may start and stop with interrupted speech. They may hesitate, trying to find the right words. They may sometimes use words they do not understand. There could be moments of embarrassment and shame. Most of the time, in my own practice, children who speak easily with uninterrupted speech have been coached by manipulative adults or they are expressing delusional fantasies (which could include expressions of family psychoses). Of course, each child needs to be evaluated according to his or her age and stage of development—there are differences in the way an 8-year-old and a 15-year-old express themselves, for example.

WHEN MEDIA COVERAGE DOES HARM:



Case 1: Murder in Borisova Gradina

The coverage of the 2015 murder of a 16-year-old boy in the central Sofia park Borisova Gradina sparked reactions from both professional organisations and the Commission on Journalistic Ethics. In the hours after the murder, the electronic editions of leading media and other websites published photos in which the body, face and wounds of the murdered boy were visible. His identity was also revealed.



Other children, acquaintances of the murdered boy, were involved in numerous reports immediately after the crime was announced. In addition to being a gross violation of the Ethical Code of the Bulgarian Media, such a journalistic approach exemplifies the humiliating treatment of a deceased child's memory, which can in turn intensify the pain of next of kin and relatives. Sensationalist coverage of such tragic events should not be allowed to cause trauma to victims' friends and peers who empathise with the tragedy.

Case 2: Rape in Strelcha

In early 2016, it became clear that a 16-year-old girl had been sexually abused by the then-former mayor of the town of Strelcha. As soon as the incident gained publicity, the girl's identity and details about her family, school and personal life were announced. The media published "juicy" details surrounding the incident. Those details had been revealed in court hearings, although these proceedings were conducted behind closed doors—an option regulated by the Criminal Procedural Code for such cases. Unfortunately, numerous media outlets focused not on the violation of the girl's right to privacy, which should have been protected by the investigating authorities, but on the leaked details concerning the criminal act. Quite swiftly thereafter, the girl and her family were forced to relocate to another town where she now attends another school because of the trauma and shame she experienced. "Strelcha" remains an emblematic case of the explicit violation of children's rights on the part of both institutions and the media.



MODEL EXAMPLE: THE LEGENDARY "SPOTLIGHT"



"Spotlight" (2015), a film dedicated to the power of investigative journalism, was a surprise winner at the 2016 Academy Awards. The film's story is remarkable for the fact that it was completely based on true events. It portrays the investigative team of The Boston Globe, which in 2002 revealed numerous sexual assaults against children having been carried out by local Catholic priests in addition to their systemic concealment by the Church. The five-member "Spotlight" team spent months on their investigation, going back decades in order to cast light on one of the biggest scandals in the history of the Catholic Church. The effects of the investigation were like an avalanche: thousands of victims of sexual violence by priests all over the world spoke out to tell their stories and the Vatican created a special tribunal charged with the task of investigating sexual assaults against children, although its efficiency would later come under criticism. The "Spotlight" team won the most prestigious award in journalism, the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. They will be remembered as the ones who "told the truth no one wanted to tell", in the words of The Guardian in a feature about the film and the story behind it.

BBC DOCUMENTARY: “WHEN KIDS ABUSE KIDS”

The UK Panorama TV programme investigates a hidden world of child sexual abuse, one in which children sexually assault other children. It's often referred to as 'peer-on-peer' abuse and can happen in classrooms and even in the playgrounds of primary schools. In this part-animated film, children who have been interviewed anonymously to protect their identities talk candidly about the abuse they have experienced and describe how they felt let down when they tried to report it. The programme is a very illustrative example of ethical reporting, from both a technical and moral perspective. “When Kids Abuse Kids” also talks with parents who say they've struggled to get help from schools, social services and the police. By using freedom of information requests, the programme has revealed an increase in sexual offences carried out by under-18s on other children and a dramatic rise in sexual assaults committed by children, even on school premises.



“FUTURE FREE OF VIOLENCE FOR EVERY CHILD” A CAMPAIGN BY bTV AND UNICEF.

The story of little Niki (the name of the child has been changed) demonstrates how a child can be filmed with sensitivity (without revealing their identity) and how the topic of violence against children can be approached ethically.

This material shows how a so-called “blue room” is used in practice and what the benefits of this approach are.



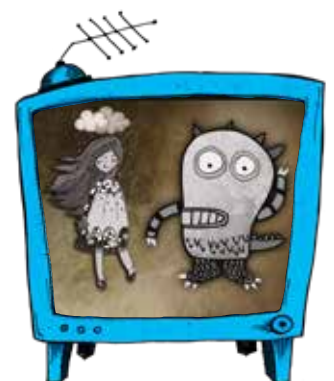
„STORIES OF FEAR—CHILDREN WITHOUT CHILDHOOD AND FAMILIES WITHOUT LOVE“

This episode on „Nova Hot Topic“ is an example of an ethical editorial piece about children in the media, both in terms of interview tactics and creative techniques employed in filming the video footage in a child-friendly way that does not infringe on their rights, but rather demonstrates the programme's dedication to respecting them: through filming re-enactments, keeping the children's identities confidential and filming symbolic details, all the while building a complete visual aesthetic around the topic, one that is quite sensitive and potentially trauma-inducing.



„WHO SHOULD PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF CHILD SURVIVORS OF ABUSE?“ – BULGARIAN NATIONAL TELEVISION, „AROUND THE WORLD AND AT HOME“

This piece, even through its title, demonstrates dedication to the protection of children's rights and to finding solutions to the problem. The material upholds the traditions of ethical reporting, both stylistically and thematically as well as visually speaking—demonstrating reportage done in an eye-catching and innovative way (e.g., with animation) on a very sensitive topic which, if not dealt with in a professional manner, could put the children in question at even greater risk.





USEFUL RESOURCES:

[„A Familiar Face: Violence in the Lives of Children and Adolescents” – UNICEF global flagship report, 2017](#)

[Who Perpetrates Violence Against Children? Five Findings from a Global Review](#)

[„What is Violence Against Children and How We Can Help” – brochure for experts \(in Bulgarian\)](#)

[„What is Violence and Where to Look for Help” – brochure for children \(in Bulgarian\)](#)

[Scandalous Speech Dominates Media Coverage of the Istanbul Convention in Bulgarian Media](#) (analysis by Association of European Journalists)

[Articles from the website “My Rights” provide remarkably valuable information about how to assist children in need of support. The advice there is relevant to journalists as well as any other person who has become a witness of violence or to any child at risk](#)

CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW



FROM THE AUTHORS

In cases involving a minor, media professionals must guarantee that justice is served in the best interests of the child. Children in conflict with the law are children at risk, too, and we must be especially careful when reporting about their situations. Violence and illegal acts among children are often linked with violence on the part of adults and the treatment these young people have been subjected to growing up. Young offenders have the right to a second chance. They are in need of support, not stigma. To that end, we should ask ourselves follow-up questions such as: Are we sure that we are not suggesting through our material that they deserve fewer rights than other children? Have we adequately considered the risks facing children in conflict with the law, or whether the environment in which they live provides opportunities for their resocialisation?

Around 5,000 children in Bulgaria become criminal offenders each year, according to the National Statistics Institute. At present, there are roughly 200 children housed in various closed-type facilities, essentially being imprisoned.

DO YOU KNOW THAT...



In Bulgaria, two types of correctional facilities for children exist: there are four correctional boarding schools and one socio-pedagogical boarding school. There is also an all-boys juvenile prison, referred to as a “correctional home”, which is part of the Vratsa men’s prison. In 2018, around 105 children were housed in these institutions, governed by the Ministry of Education and Science (both SPI and VUI). Most of the children in the boarding schools arrive there from other public institutions.

That same year, 46 children “aged out” of juvenile correctional facilities under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice. “Detention” measures were carried out regarding another 64 minors.

Data concerning children in conflict with the law and childhood criminality published by various institutions not only fail to corroborate but contradict one another. The number of minors against whom local commissions have taken punitive measures to combat antisocial displays and crimes committed by minors, the number of juveniles identified as the perpetrators of crimes by Interior Ministry reports and the number of minors against whom criminal proceedings have been initiated vary by as many as tens of thousands (Annual Report by the Bulgarian Prosecutor’s Office, yearly reports by the Interior Ministry, National Statistics Institute).

The juvenile justice system in Bulgaria has been the subject of systemic criticism by international institutions along with Bulgarian organisations involved in the fight for human rights as a result of numerous reports of child abuse and mistreatment, poor material conditions and substandard educational and health services in the correctional facilities, as well as the isolation of these children from the outside world.

Sources: Ministry of Education and Science; National Network for Children; Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

VOCABULARY

Our choice of words will determine whether a child in conflict with the law will be either labelled and reduced to a “worthless” social status or recognised as a living human being going through a rough period: as an individual who has the potential to rebuild relationships with both victims and the community, to make changes in life. Journalists are tasked with the responsibility to educate their audience and shift negative stereotypes which violate children’s rights.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

Children under the age of 14 do not bear criminal responsibility in Bulgaria. Despite this, they are subject to correctional measures and are even housed in social-pedagogical boarding schools.

Children over the age of 14 do bear criminal responsibility, provided that they are aware of the meaning of their actions and that they are capable of guiding their own actions. When held criminally liable, children are not treated as adults and their degree of liability also depends not only on the illegal act committed but also whether they are between the ages of 14 and 16 or 16 and 18.

Court hearings in cases against juveniles are conducted behind closed doors, unless the court finds it in the best community interest to examine the case publicly. In proceedings involving minors, their parents or guardians must be summoned. Children have the right to freely express their own opinion, which should be taken into account. Children also have the right to give no explanations. Neither are they obligated to narrate or share anything about their situation. The adults involved in the process, including journalists reporting on the case, have to respect this right and act in children’s best interests without pressuring them.

A particularly important fact is that children under 14 and those over 14 currently fall under legal provisions from nearly 60 years ago (Act for Combatting Anti-Social Behaviour of Minors and the Underage) and which are in contradiction with international law. This is a gross violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In 2016, a draft law prepared by an inter-agency working group (called the Draft Law on the Diversion of Criminal Proceedings and Enforcement of Correctional Measures for Minors) was published for public comment by the Ministry of Justice. It envisions changes to criminal procedures, provides the conditions for a restorative approach to juvenile justice and lays out the specialisation requirements for all professionals working with children.

[Here](#) you can find a practical comparison compiled by UNICEF that shows what the current legislation provides and what would be changed.

The Guidelines from the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on justice in the interests of the child insist that the privacy and personal information of children who are or have been involved in judicial or non-judicial proceedings and other procedures be protected. However, although the leading principle of non-disclosure to the public remains, there are possible instances when the child may benefit from the case's publicity as an exception to the rule, for example in abduction cases.

Public coverage could also prove useful to the issue at hand, stimulating public debate or raising awareness, but only through mindful and ethical coverage which guarantees the privacy of the child's identity.

How should we protect the identity of a child in conflict with the law for the needs of our media material?

Among the possible ways to protect a child's identity in the media are, for instance, granting anonymity or a pseudonym, using protective screens or disguising voices, deleting names and other elements that can lead to the identification of a child from all documents, prohibiting any form of recording (photo, audio, video), etc.

CHECKUP QUESTIONS



The identity of a child who has been charged or convicted of a crime should be protected. It can be disclosed only under exceptional circumstances. Before revealing the identity of a child investigated, accused or convicted as a perpetrator of a crime or an antisocial act, or a child witness to such an act, have we answered for ourselves the question whether the best interest of the child necessitates such disclosure?

- When seeking to protect the child's identity, are we sure we have taken all necessary measures such as not revealing the identity of other family members, the place where the child lives or goes to school?
- Do we have the understanding that the child in conflict with the law is first and foremost a victim and not a criminal – a victim of the environment, of the way he/she is treated by the institutions of the state, by their parents and peers?
- Have we made sure that the presumption of innocence of the child accused or suspected of an offence has been respected?
- Have we made sure that all rights of the child related to the investigation against him/her, his/her right to defence and specific care have been respected?
- Have we made sure that children placed in specialised institutions (boarding schools, incarceration facilities, pre-trial detention premises) are not subject to humiliating treatment and torture and have full access to education, qualification and health-care?
- Have we thoroughly checked the facts before we speak of children who have committed violence, are we sure that we know exactly what happened?
- Have we made an effort to collect information under the case with the assistance of specialists, while avoiding direct questions about what happened aimed at the child in conflict with the law?
- Are we sure that the questions we are asking are not misleading and do not imply the answer?
- Have we done everything possible in order to learn and present the context in which the events unfolded, the child's experience of what happened and the consequences for himself/herself?
- Do we manage to be objective by overcoming potential feelings of anger, indignation, disgust at the act committed by the child?
- Are we sure that the way we cover children in conflict with the law will not turn them into heroes and will not encourage their peers to imitate their behaviour? For example: letting runaway children or children who consume alcohol describe how good that is.
- Are we sure that we do not tolerate the attempts of children in conflict with the law to heroise themselves by glorifying what they have done? For example: a child sentenced for robbery telling how strong, fast and sly he/she is.



PSYCHOLOGIST'S ADVICE

Whatever a child has committed it can be presented in two ways:

- As an assessment that denounces the crime or the antisocial act and its perpetrator. There are no questions and doubts, only the facts as an end-of-story are presented.
- As a problem to be resolved. As an event for which we need time to make sense of. We could provide the age of the child perpetrator, the context, we can ask questions... We could ask ourselves questions.

WHICH APPROACH WOULD YOU CHOOSE?



GOOD PRACTICE ABROAD



PRISON KIDS

In 2015, the US television channel Fusion broadcast the documentary “Prison Kids” about children serving time in US prisons. The media published a series of articles on the topic focusing on children in solitary confinement. Fusion started a petition and organised an overall campaign calling on President Obama to ban solitary confinement for children. The campaign included creating a special website and using multiple platforms, including virtual reality to enable users to see a child’s solitary confinement cell and a replica of such a cell being built in front of the New York Mayor’s Office, as well as gaining the involvement of politicians and opinion leaders. Four months later, Obama announced a ban on the solitary confinement of children. Fusion won the Shorty Social Good Award for “Television” and was a finalist in the “Integrated Campaign” category. This example is very illustrative of the fact that media outlets have the responsibility not only to report ethically on children’s issues but to also proactively advocate for the realisation of children’s rights.

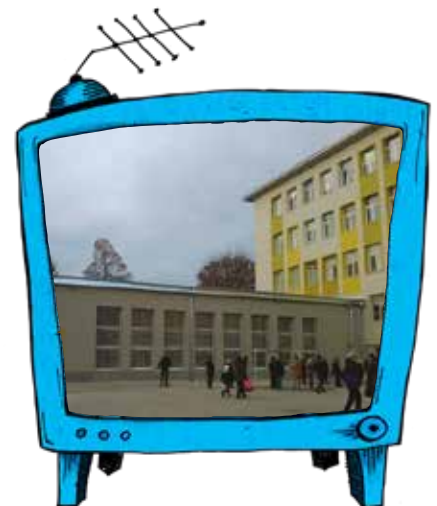
GOOD PRACTICE IN BULGARIA

„Sentenced Childhood? Justice for Every Child” is a media campaign by Nova TV and UNICEF Bulgaria that combines awareness-raising, advocacy for juvenile justice reform, social mobilisation and ethical reporting. The videographer working on the stories was awarded in 2017 by the “Valya Krushkina” journalistic committee for his ethical video coverage of a child in conflict with the law—a welcome sign that the industry itself is starting to recognise and embrace this model.

The story is about an 11-year-old boy, called Zlatko for the purposes of the programme. A passionate football fan from a poor family, he was sent to a corrective boarding school just for stealing a magazine, despite the fact that he does not meet the minimum age to bear criminal responsibility.

In the summer of 2019, Bulgarian society came face-to-face with an as-yet unknown challenge—the investigation of a child suspected of planning a terrorist act. The news took its place in the journalistic information stream as a case of both outrageously poor examples of covering it as well as demonstrating good practices. Most noteworthy among the latter was the unified effort of journalists from different media outlets in Plovdiv, joined in their understanding of ethical coverage and non-disclosure of the child’s identity which was based on the current guidebook. (See the Bulgarian National Television coverage)

An investigation by the online media source OFFNews reveals politicians offering their influence in exchange for their children’s admission into elite schools. What impresses is not only the depth of the investigation but the editorial position in support of children’s rights and the argument given for concealing both the children’s and their parents’ identities: “We are aware that the quality of our investigation is likely to suffer, but we cannot allow for a child to suffer because of a relative’s ambitions or other reasons. As to the lawfulness of specific cases and other emerging suspicions, we will leave it up to the relevant authorities to decide, confident that we have provided enough data for them to initiate their own verifications” (edited)



BAD PRACTICE

In 2017, a 16-year-old boy driving his father’s car hit five people in an accident near the village of Trigrad (Southern Bulgaria). Some of the victims had severe injuries and needed to be hospitalised. The teenager disappeared immediately after the accident. In the following days, a number of media pieces started appearing which described him as a “little hooligan” and used information from his Facebook profile. There were media speculations that the boy had been hidden by his family to escape justice. Two weeks after the accident, the family found the body of the boy, who had committed suicide.

TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS AND VIDEO FOOTAGE OF CHILDREN



FROM THE AUTHORS

This chapter is about all children who are the subject of professional photography or filming. The protection of their rights, interests and personal dignity must be at the core of each media team's work. We should always do our best to assess any possible future consequences for the child, both as the object of others' observation and as a subject viewing the public coverage of himself/herself.

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

The Child Protection Act stipulates that parents, trustees, legal guardians or other persons caring for a child are obliged to prevent children from being featured in broadcasts which are not in their best interests or which put their physical, mental, moral and/or social development at risk (Article 8, Paragraph 10). The law stipulates that failure to comply on the part of parents or any other adults caring for a child will result in a fine amounting to between 1,000 and 2,000 BGN or up to 5,000 BGN for repeat offenders.

When covering such sensitive topics as violence against children or violent or criminal acts committed by children, it is important to bear in mind that the consent of a parent or legal guardian does not necessarily grant media clearance to feature a child. Put simply, a lack of understanding on the part of the adult (which could be the reason for their consent) cannot be used as permission for the case to be covered in the media in a manner which enables the child's identification or causes him/her re-experience negative emotions, thus intensifying the emotional and mental trauma. The opinion and consent of the child should also be pursued.

The fact that information which could be potentially harmful to the interests of a child has already been disseminated on the internet does not provide grounds for the media to use or additionally publicise such information.

Exceptions shall be made when covering wars, disasters or other extraordinary news. In such cases, the editor-in-chief needs to be consulted in judging the story's worth.

Please bear in mind that the internet makes it possible for adults and children, even when filmed in remote locations of the world, to be seen and identified by those around them—no matter if the material is broadcast in a different country or on another continent. This necessitates the exercise of caution when making decisions about revealing a subject's identity, regardless of the child's location in the world.



SEE CHAPTER 4:
“CHILDREN FROM MINORITY
AND FOREIGN ORIGIN”

NB: When covering positive stories—of children's participation in competitions, their talents, achievements, etc.—we still need both the consent of their parents/caregivers and the opinion of the children themselves, but we do not need to hide these children's identities (their faces, names, etc.) because they are not vulnerable or under legal protection. On the contrary, we are supporting their right to express their opinions freely and allowing their voices to be heard on matters that concern them directly or indirectly. In a way, we are empowering them. This delicate balance between empowerment and protection should always be considered, though never used to justify the violation of ethical reporting standards—when, for example, the preservation of a child's anonymity is a must. The bottom line is that we don't have to hide the face and identity of every child we photograph/film, provided they are not at risk and such media exposure is actually in their best interests.

Excerpt from the Code of Conduct of Bulgarian Media

“We shall not publish information or photographs about the private lives of children unless such information or photographs are a matter of considerable public interest. However, this must be applied by taking into consideration Article 10 of the Child Protection Act, and no publication or coverage harming a child’s physical, mental, moral and/or social development shall be allowed.”

LAWYER’S ADVICE

Is permission necessary to photograph/film a group of children playing on a playground?



It depends on the manner of filming.

● If a group of children comprises the background of some other journalistic shot (e.g., their faces are not visible or have been shot close-up but out of focus), then no permission is needed. In such cases, the children are not participating directly or in any personal capacity but are part of a frame within the content.



● If a specific group of children can be clearly identified and the content topic deals precisely and specifically with them, then there is “participation” in the material and permission must be obtained from the adults responsible for the children. This is even more valid when children are speaking in front of the camera or reacting to it.



FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Do we have the consent of the adults/institutions responsible for this child in order to disseminate his/her image?
- Apart from the consent of adults, have we considered whether disseminating this image may endanger the child’s physical, mental, moral and/or social development?
- Have we made sure when notifying and obtaining consent from the adults responsible that they are aware of all possible future consequences for the child, so that they can make an informed choice? Adults do not always assess such possible risks due to inexperience, inability to do so or their judgment having been obscured by emotional factors such as anger, despair and depression or the desire for media exposure and “fame”.
- Despite the fact that audiences tend to generally take a strong interest in information about violence against or on the part of children, are we aware that this does not always make such information a matter of “considerable public interest”? In other words, are we certain we can differentiate between what is in the “public interest” and what is “interesting for the public”?

When uploading photographs on websites/internet platforms, the consent of a parent or guardian must be obtained. When using photos of children taken from professional image banks, journalists are protected because evidence of obtained consent has been provided in order for the image to be uploaded there. Still, it is absolutely crucial to use such images in a context that resembles the original intention of the story (i.e., avoid relying on image banks as a source of misleading visuals).

Have we taken into account the present or future potential impact of publicising material taken from the internet which has been uploaded by the child himself/herself, his/her acquaintances or friends or by his/her parents?

Are we careful to avoid unintentionally covering children who are present in scenes where improper acts are being committed (e.g., group acts of hooliganism, groups of people consuming alcohol or drugs, etc.)? In such cases, parental consent or that of the child might be waived on the following condition: close-up shots in photography or video footage of groups of children committing such acts should not be close enough to enable facial identification.



Are we careful enough when selecting images of children engaging in negative acts not to end up promoting or advertising such conduct?

Have we reviewed the video footage in advance to make sure that no children have been filmed, even in the background, in a compromising manner?

Is the manner of our depiction of disadvantaged children one that does not offend their dignity and will not intensify 'shocking' elements of the story?



When protecting the identity of a child at risk, can we be positive that our shot will not accidentally expose any other details enabling the child's identification, e.g., address, school name, easily recognised landmark near the child's home, etc.?



- Do we realise that using another child's photograph in order to cover up the identity of the child subject of a piece of reporting places the second child at risk and into an inappropriate context?
- For videographers and photographers: when working with a reporter covering child-related issues, are we being mindful of any statements or vocabulary used in their reportage that might be unethical and/or result in mental, social or moral harm to the children involved? Do we try to influence reporters towards more ethical coverage?



PSYCHOLOGIST'S COMMENTS

Exposure to publicity may be examined in two aspects. One is "going on stage" or "exposing oneself to the gaze of everybody". Different children react differently—from excitement and joy to acute embarrassment and blockage. We can never know whose expectations are being met by a child whom we expose to the public eye. We can, however, ask him/her questions that concern only him/her, his/her position, his/her participation. Thus, we can be sure that we have used the situation to his/her benefit.

The other aspect of publicity is that the child, as the object of publicity, "enters the mouths" of a great number of people. They will start talking about the child. Viewers will borrow words and feed their imaginations with the way the child has been interviewed and presented. Among them are the child's classmates, schoolmates, parents, teammates in sports, the neighbours, etc. The way other people talk about a child/adolescent will have a personal impact on him/her and his/her life.



UNICEF RECOMMENDS

Always represent children in a dignified, respectful manner. Children are never hopeless, nor are they passive victims. Always obtain informed consent from the child's parent or guardian. Protect the identities of children who are victims of sexual exploitation and those charged with or convicted of a crime. Protect the identities of any children if their identification could put them at risk of reprisals. Imagery that fully protects the subject's identity can be as powerful and convincing as any other approach to documenting harsh realities.

Imagery that fully protects the subject's identity can be as powerful and convincing as any other approach to documenting harsh realities. This can be done, for example, by asking a child to turn away from the camera or cover their face, by leaving their face out of the shot, etc.



USEFUL RESOURCES

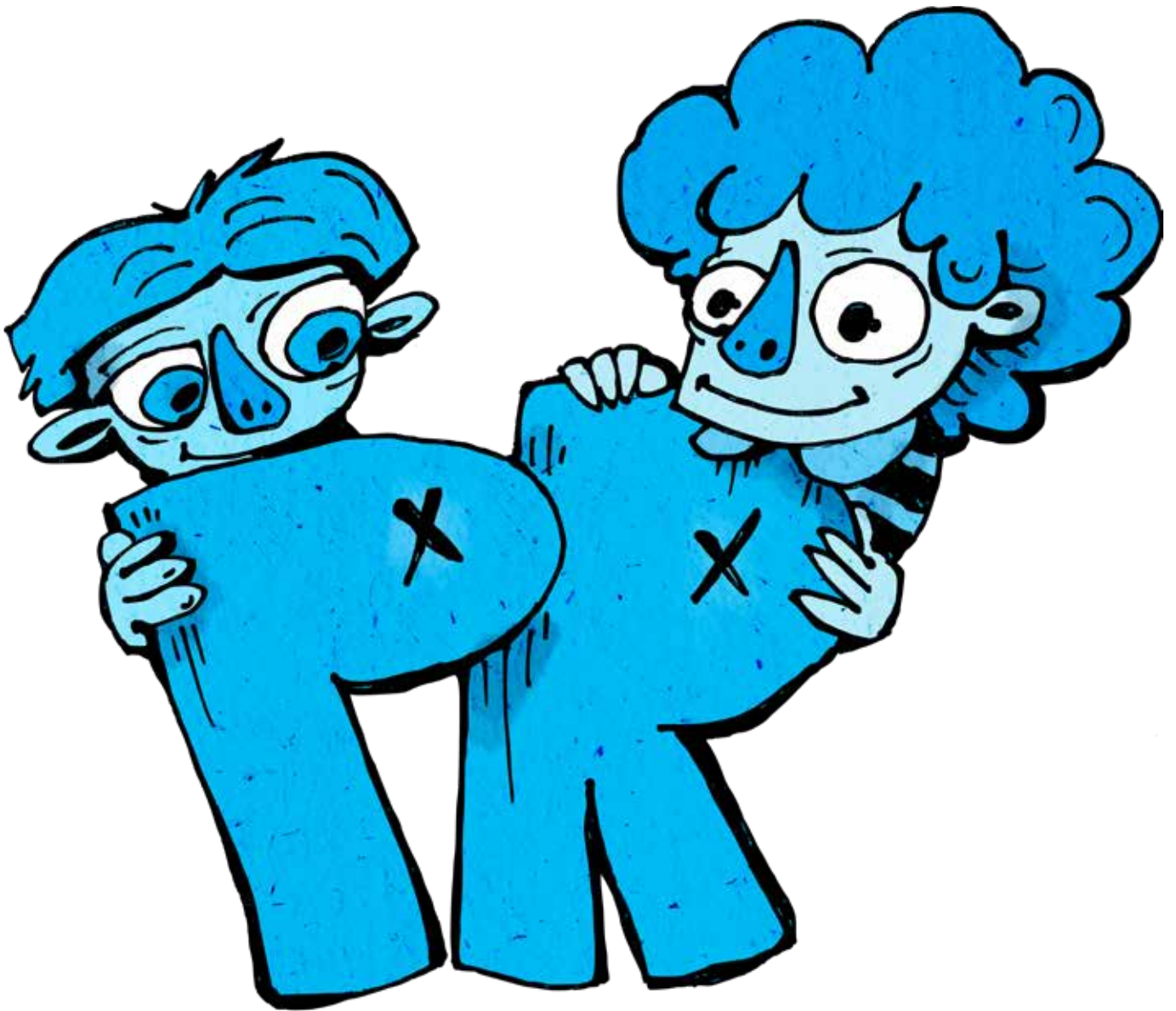
[Using Photography to Advocate for Children: UNICEF images from 1990-2013](#)

[Protecting Children's Life in Corporate Partner Image Use](#)

[Photography and Social Change](#)

[„Long live TV - Or Which Media Bulgarians Trust the Most“](#) - analysis by Eurobarometer (article in Bulgarian)

CHILDREN AND PUBLIC RELATIONS (PR)



SCOPE

This chapter is aimed at public relations specialists and anyone else creating strategic communication materials featuring children, both corporate (commercial) and image-related (reputational) in scope. At the same time, it should be noted that this chapter does not examine corporate communications targeting children as an audience.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

“Business interacts with children on a daily basis. Business impacts the wide range of children’s rights—well beyond child labour. But it also has enormous power to improve the rights of children and protect them from harm through the way in which it treats employees, operates its facilities, develops and markets its products, provides its services, and exerts its influence on economic and social development. But business can do more, especially for the most marginalised children. Despite the growth and increasing sophistication of corporate responsibility, corporate sustainability and the business and human rights agenda, children as stakeholders and their rights are still only rarely being addressed explicitly within the private sector.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) goes beyond philanthropy. Child-focused CSR contributes to sustainable development, including the health and the welfare of children. It also takes into account the expectations of children and their families as stakeholders. In order for the Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved, businesses must be fit for children. CSR within UNICEF refers to efforts towards positively changing business behaviours and practices as they affect children, positioning business within a web of relationships and obligations, intergovernmental standards and agreements, governmental regulation and policy, supply chains, multi-stakeholder business platforms and other key business influencers.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children’s rights outlines that **all businesses must meet their responsibilities regarding children’s rights and States must ensure they do so.**”

Source: “Corporate Social Responsibility - Advancing Children’s Rights in Business” (UNICEF)

STATUTORY FRAMEWORK

The Radio and Television Act in Bulgaria prohibits the showing of a sponsor’s logo in children’s and religious programmes (article 82, paragraph 6) as well as product placement in children’s programmes.

In pursuance of the law, the Electronic Media Council has also adopted [criteria](#) (article in Bulgarian) to assess content that is either adverse to or poses a risk of harming children’s physical, mental, moral and/or social development.

Excerpts from the National Ethical Rules on Advertising and Commercial Communication in the Republic of Bulgaria:

COMMERCIAL COMMUNICATION should not abuse a sense of pity for sick people, babies, children, adults or disadvantaged people.

7.1. Special care must be taken in commercial communications aimed at or featuring children and adolescents. Such communications should not undermine socially acceptable good behaviour, universal human values or a positive lifestyle and attitude.

17.6. Children and adolescents should neither be depicted in dangerous situations nor in situations where they are engaged in activities that are harmful to themselves or other people, nor should they be encouraged to engage in potentially dangerous activities or conduct. In particular, but not limited to, the following:

17.6.1. The criterion of children's safety must be applied to all commercial communication portraying children.

17.6.2. Children may be shown in dangerous situations only if the purpose of the message is to promote safety rules or safe conduct and when a lesson is to be learned by the audience.

17.6.3. Medicines, disinfectants, cleaning substances, acids/detergents and products that are dangerous to the public health should not be shown in advertisements accessible to children without parental supervision and children should not be depicted using such products.

17.6.5. Children should not be shown without adult supervision on the road or in traffic unless they are demonstrated to be sufficiently mature as responsible for their own safety and displaying responsible behaviour.

17.6.6. Children should not be shown playing in the street, in industrial sites, including high voltage areas, areas with dangerous explosives, chemicals, etc., only in areas and locations clearly intended for children's games or other safe areas.

17.6.7. Where children are depicted as participants in road traffic (as pedestrians), the communication must clearly show children acting in accordance with traffic safety rules and principles.

17.7. Commercial communications should not suggest that the possession or use of the product being promoted will bring children and adolescents any physical, psychological or social advantages over their peers or that not possessing the product would have an opposite effect.

17.13. In cases of commercial communications regarding products available to be purchased or used by children (e.g., advertising communications on the internet offering a purchase by phone option), advertisers must take special measures so that children would have to obtain the consent of their parents or caregivers before confirming the purchase or use of the product.

NON-COMMERCIAL COMMUNICATION

Non-commercial communication includes the involvement of children for promoting causes, internal communication activities and projects, as well as informing the public about the condition of child patients and/or children who have been injured in accidents.

- 1.** It is explicitly prohibited, on any channels or media, to disseminate photographs depicting the condition of children who have been injured in accidents.
- 2.** It is explicitly prohibited to associate children with risky (dangerous) professions and/or place them in high-risk situations, even if the aim is to achieve a positive effect (strengthening the bonds between employees and the company, encouraging early career development, etc.).

3. Visualising materials for internal communications with children must follow the guidelines on commercial communication.
4. Any depiction of scenes featuring violence against children-re-enacted by child actors for the needs of a campaign aimed at raising general public awareness or that of separate groups about a specific problem-must undergo thorough and detailed scene planning and shooting and post-production planning, including the planning of “pre-premiere screenings” (testing) to be accompanied by a discussion and analysis of possible interpretations and damage that the video content may inflict on the audience or the children who participate in it.

NB: This guidebook contains a non-exhaustive list of examples and guidelines.

FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

- Have we ensured that we are not disseminating more information about the child than we are supposed to?
- Have we made sure not to disclose the child’s identity in cases where this is undesirable: children who are victims of crimes, children in conflict with the law and all other cases where we do not have the explicit consent of the adult or adults responsible for the child?
- Are we violating the presumption of innocence or any other rights of the child?
- Have we considered how the child would feel upon seeing the communication material featuring him/her?
- Have we tried to imagine the possible interpretations of the message we are sending to the media and how those might affect the child? Have we done everything in our power to be properly understood and avoid erroneous or malicious interpretations?
- When communicating fundraising campaigns, have we explored the causes of the problem? What can be done to find a systemic solution?
- Are we positive that we are not reducing the dignity of the children we involve in communicating charitable causes?
- Every campaign aims to be effective, but have we reflected on all relevant ethical principles? Have we avoided causing harm to the children featured and to our target audience when we attempt to touch their feelings?
- Have we made sure that our emphasis of a child’s disability for the purposes this specific campaign will not negatively impact that child’s self-esteem in the future?
- Have we adequately provided for the safety of the children featured in our materials, including by not showing them in potentially dangerous or age-inappropriate situations?
- Do we have the understanding that every exposure to publicity, even on positive occasions, bears potential risk for children? Sudden “fame” could have a negative impact on children’s lives.

- ⚡ If we are unsure of whether a communications plan featuring child characters meets all of the aforesaid recommendations on child-friendly depictions of children, is there anyone we can ask for advice?
- ⚡ Have we asked for permission and have we explained the project in detail to the family of the child we want to photograph/film?

GOOD AND BAD EXAMPLES

✓ GOOD PRACTICES

UNICEF runs campaigns in Bulgaria aiming to promote children's rights via corporate partners' channels and business practices. Examples

Examples:

Post Bank awarded "Best Donor Programme" for its strategic partnership with UNICEF Bulgaria (recognition by the President of Bulgaria) (in Bulgarian)

(recognition by the President of Bulgaria)

Toy designed by a child from Bulgaria supports the rights of every child all over the world to play and develop (in Bulgarian)

(partnership between UNICEF and IKEA)

In 2011, 2012 and 2013, supported by Happy Bar & Grill, three consecutive seasons of the show "That's life" were broadcast on bTV.

The documentary series is part of UNICEF's "Every Child Wants a Family" campaign and foster care development project in nine regions across the country aimed at changing public attitudes towards foster care and early childhood development. It tells the stories of several families from different social and economic backgrounds who are at the same time united on one topic-positive parenting.

✗ BAD PRACTICES

1. Public relations specialists at the Ministry of Interior and Prosecutor's Office have disclosed the identities of child victims of crime. Such public relations specialists must brief other employees who might release information to the media about the statutory requirements as well as the moral questions involved

2. Using children in election and political campaigns is never a good practice from a child's point of view. Although politicians might think it is a good idea, the results can be mixed for them, too: some of the most notorious political figures have made use of children and, instead of attracting voters, it could alienated them.
3. Corporate social responsibility campaigns at residential institutions for children can be problematic. Charity on Christmas? Bringing cheer to children in public institutions-giving them presents, taking pictures with them and uploading the pictures on social networks-might seem like a good idea, and the intentions might be entirely positive, but it is worth a second thought. Don't we instil unrealistic expectations of intimacy, care and belonging in children if we visit them just once a year? How might these children feel after we leave? Won't they expect us to show up again? Aren't we violating their rights by publishing their pictures on social networks? Do we have the necessary consent? What do the children think? And what may they think years later when they come across those photos online?
4. Advertisements of unhealthy foods featuring children.
5. Advertisements of gambling where participants look like children (adolescents on the cusp of maturity) and where part of the target group is children include examples such as the commercial "We are merely smelling the chocolate", which was recently taken off the air due to violations of the law and ethical standards.

Official Position of the National Network for Children Against Advertisement
(in Bulgarian)

Decision of the National Council for Self-Regulation (in Bulgarian)



GOOD PRACTICE

DO YOU KNOW THAT...



The National Council of Self-Regulation offers "Copy Advice for Advertising Proposals" as a service. This might help advertisers, advertising agencies or media to elevate their ethical engagement and portrayal of children, all the while avoiding complaints from consumers and competitors or potentially costly and reputation-damaging sanctions on the part of the Ethical Commission of the National Council of Self-Regulation and other parties.

"Copy Advice" may be sought at any phase of the creative process-idea, design or ready-copy-but the sooner the better, as any potential problems would be rooted out before any misdirected time and resources are spent.

Looking for advice at an early stage of ad campaign preparation will provide advertisers and agencies with greater certainty that their commercial communications meet the highest ethical standards in the industry. At the same time, “Copy Advice” provides better assurance that advertising campaigns will not be suspended due to ethical rules violation, thus avoiding damage to the company’s public reputation. In a broader context, this advice ensures the protection of advertising itself as a type of activity.



USEFUL RESOURCES:

[National Council for Self-Regulation: “How to File a Complaint Against Unethical Advertisements”](#)

[“Protecting Children’s Life in Corporate Partner Image Use”](#)

[“UNICEF and Corporate Social Responsibility”](#)

(includes information on children’s rights and business, children’s rights and business principles, tools and a child labour portal)

[“How to Cover News Related to Commercial Brands: The Right to Information and Hidden Commercial Messages”](#) - analysis by the Association of European Journalists (in Bulgarian)

