



# GUIDELINES FOR INCLUSIVE MEDIA REPORTING ON COVID-19

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United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

# Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly every individual and all aspects of life, but its effect varied among different groups in society. Media are always a powerful actor during times of crisis, and the way they cover the crisis can impact people's perceptions and reaction to it. Besides reporting on different aspects and consequences of the crisis, media expose, but can also entrench, the inequalities and discrimination against already marginalized groups.

Suppose the media omits minority groups' voices and experiences in their coverage of a crisis. In that case, and following the idea that media plays the role of a watchdog holding power to account, the media becomes an enabler of a system that suppresses the marginalized groups [1] that are then likely to be left out of institutional responses to the crisis - the government directs its work to those the media shines a light on [2].

The LGBTQI community has been particularly affected and discriminated against during the pandemic. For example, in March this year, Ukrainian media outlets disseminated a news report based on Patriarch Filaret's interview with Ukrainian Channel 4 [3]. The Patriarch noted that the pandemic originated and spread "through same-sex marriages" and called people to take communion in religious buildings during the quarantine. Hate speech targeting the LGBTQI community and the calls for disregard of quarantine requirements were condemned by the Commission on Journalism Ethics.

Another group that has been a frequent target of stigmatization and scapegoating is the Roma community. This community has been alleged to spread the virus or fail to comply with security measures, regularly appearing in the news relating to these issues and being a target of negative statements from media and politicians that contribute to creating a stereotypical image of Roma and fuel negative prejudices and antigypsyism [4].

Research shows that women's voices are drowned out by men's in the coronavirus-related news [5]. Women are rarely consulted as authoritative experts, and they overwhelmingly appear as victims of the virus in media stories rather than as empowered individuals.

Disinformation, stereotyping, and stigmatization are extremely bad for outbreak control. The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has emphasized that "This is the time for science, not rumors. This is the time for solidarity, not stigma." [6]

UN Secretary-General António Guterres has urged that all actors, including the UN system, redouble efforts to address violence, discrimination, and exclusion of people including minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) people, people with disabilities and others [7].

In such an environment, journalists and media professionals hold a critical role in building awareness about issues affecting different groups in society, counteracting myths, wrong perceptions, and disinformation, and providing objective and balanced reporting.

In these Guidelines, the reference to “diversity” implies a diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, age, ability, and more. Many of these are intersectional, and the list is not exhaustive. In terms of “diversity,” the codes of ethics and guidelines used in media self-regulatory bodies across Europe mainly refer to non-discrimination, respect of dignity and human rights of every individual in the society (e.g., in the Guidelines for Journalists of the Council for Mass Media in Finland [8], the German Press Code [9], the Code for Print and Online Media used by the Press Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina [10]). Some codes also emphasize the need to cultivate a culture of public speech (e.g., codes of the Serbian Press Council [11] and the Council of Media Ethics in North Macedonia [12]).

The recommendations in these Guidelines are in compliance with already existing professional standards and practices in journalism in diversity inclusiveness, both in normal times and in emergency contexts. They also contain recommendations as an addition to the broad provisions and standards related to the respect of diversity and inclusiveness in media reporting.

The Guidelines were developed as a result of consultations and sharing of practices with press councils in Western and South East Europe, analysis of documents (guidelines, recommendations, codes) of professional organizations in the field of media and journalism, as well as interviews with media experts, academics and representatives of CSOs working on protection of human rights of vulnerable groups.

They are primarily intended for journalists, students, educators, activists, and media management. They can also support various actors working in humanitarian contexts to address the needs of vulnerable and marginalized individuals and groups.

# 1. What do we mean by inclusive reporting on Covid-19?

Diversity inclusiveness means inviting traditionally underrepresented people to the table. It goes beyond questions of race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation to include perspectives of, for example, urban and rural residents, religious believers and atheists, political conservatives and liberals, and so on [13]. Inclusive journalism also means raising the visibility of marginalized groups in topics unrelated to their identities. Someone's age, sex, ethnic background, religion, legal status, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation should only be mentioned when these are directly relevant to the story. Irrelevant references may create stigma and discrimination. Accordingly, the Covid-19 pandemic should not be associated with any location, country, region, nationality, or ethnicity [14].

*“Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.”*

*Article 3 of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*

During the pandemic, diversity is how stories are reported and sourced, and it helps to ensure that all communities are repre-

ented and served by health authorities [15]. Media can foster credibility by providing a diversity of news subjects and sources. When the readers are not reflected in the media, they stop seeing it as a credible source of information. [16] “If your content doesn't reflect the community well, journalists should consider whether they are reflecting life and news in the community accurately. As well as looking at overall percentages, they should consider whether coverage of a particular group is skewed by topic.” [17]

*Avoid stigmatizing individuals or populations. Avoid labelling, stereotypes and discriminatory treatment, particularly towards those who contract the disease and their loved ones. Such treatment can harm them and lead people to conceal their illness to avoid discrimination, preventing them from seeking care and practicing healthy behaviour. Build trust and show empathy towards those with the disease so that people can protect their safety and that of others.*

*World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe,  
“COVID 19 – An informative guide – advice for journalists”*

Maynard Institute for Journalism Education in Oakland, California, teaches journalists to look more deeply into society through a framework called “fault lines” to understand what separates people and which differences can fracture their relationships and social structures [18]. Therefore, the media must reflect carefully on the story angles and the represented voices, eliminating potential harm to marginalized groups.

Ideally, journalists should use neutral language without elements of sensationalism, report diligently, and produce accurate, fact-based, independent, unbiased, impartial, and, above all, information showing humanity and consideration of vulnerable groups [19]. People should be portrayed as human beings, not as representatives of minority groups. The media must also avoid disclosing details of individuals to prevent stigma and its harmful impacts [20] and be careful when reporting about hate speech to prevent social stigma and stereotyping.

Including diverse voices also means fighting misinformation. The media should use multiple sources to provide more accurate insight [21] - experts will diverge in their knowledge and identify shortcomings in each other's reasoning [22].

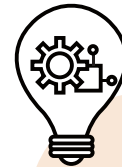
## 2. Media portrayal of race and ethnicity

Narratives stressing geography rather than medical terminology in referring to COVID-19 are stigmatizing and can encourage racism and xenophobia. They can exacerbate fear and worsen the perception of minority groups or "foreigners" already targeted by discrimination or exclusion based on racism, xenophobia, and similar forms of intolerance.

In the media coverage of the pandemic, audiences may be exposed to one-sided portrayals of racial/ethnic groups or not see them at all. Denying coverage to minority groups, even unintentionally, should be seen as a divergence from journalistic

ethics [23]. Stereotyped reporting about ethnicities and races can lead to perceptions that things and people "truly are" how they are presented.

Misinformation in media can fortify racial stereotypes, thus promoting fear. Fearmongering around illnesses is nothing new to the world of journalism, from the coverage of the H1N1 influenza pandemic in 2009 (known as "swine flu") to the Ebola virus epidemic in 2014 [24]. In drawing attention to the Ebola outbreak and its links with specific African countries, media fostered various forms of stigmatization [25]. Reporting about issues involving race and different ethnicities requires careful consideration.



### WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

- **Use precise language and have an open discussion** with individuals of diverse backgrounds about how to frame coverage or what language is most appropriate, accurate, and fair.
- **Avoid broad generalizations and labels;** race and ethnicity are only a part of a person's identity. Identifying people by race and reporting on race-related actions often go beyond simple style questions, challenging journalists to think broadly about racial issues before making decisions on specific situations and stories [26].



- **Do not use phrases such as “Wuhan virus,” „Chinese virus,” or “foreign virus.”** These phrases politicize the pandemic and stir xenophobia.
- **Review sources, consider the fault lines and think about what the story is about, whose voices are mainstreamed or left out** [27]. Vulnerable groups and people at risk should be included in the discussion concerning the pandemic [28].
- **Be cautious when covering quotes from public figures that can generate stereotypes and xenophobic views.** Unless the context is explicitly explained, the media risk acting as a conduit for the political messaging associated with the quote. Also, such quotes should never be allowed to stand alone in a headline.
- **Be cautious about the imagery and provide context.** Before using a photo of an Asian person wearing a face mask, for example, a journalist should reflect on how such an image is relevant to the story. Are Asian people subjects of the story? Is the story about the efficacy of face masks in preventing the spread of the virus? [29] The Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA) urges journalists to ensure accurate and fair portrayals of Asians and Asian Americans and avoid fueling xenophobia and racism that have already emerged since the coronavirus outbreak.

### 3. Media portrayal of poverty

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected people's lives across the world and posed particular challenges to low-income families. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating. Tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people, estimated at nearly 690 million, could increase by up to 132 million by the end of the year [30]. As the outbreak advances, we will increasingly hear the voices of vulnerable people as it transforms from a middle-class epidemic into a poorer epidemic [31]. Media often fails to capture the reality of poverty - it lacks coverage, or it is presented stereotypically and inaccurately, potentially resulting in negative beliefs about the poor and a lack of support for welfare programs.

A lack of contact between journalists and people living in poverty exacerbates the tendency to portray poverty in the wrong way. “The contributions of people in deep poverty are not easily made and, when they are, they often go unnoticed. Those contributions cannot emerge and be acknowledged without a specific commitment to bring them to light.” [32]

Addressing these issues through the media, especially when reporting about the pandemic, is critical to tackling the range of risk factors that affect the wellbeing of poor people.



## WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

- **Ensure** that the poor are visible in media coverage.
- **Be mindful** of the way they are presented.
- **Analyze** to what extent can media coverage of these issues influence the general opinion.
- **Include opinions, information, and statistics** from organizations (national and international) and institutions on the situation and future steps to help the poor.
- **Analyze strategies and initiatives** of institutions or the civil sector for assisting the poor in combating poverty.

## 4. Media portrayal of disability

Disabled people are often under-represented in the media, or topics related to them are framed in a stereotyped way. There is also a tendency to generalize, i.e., present the disabled as homogeneous, sharing the same or similar needs. Applying such a general approach deepens the stereotypes of persons with a disability. Too often, journalists see disability solely as a medical story.

Many articles still make presumptions about how disabled people identify and how their disability impacts their lives. Like with reporting on any marginalized community, reporters and editors may need guidance for how to write on the disability community in a way that reflects s knowledge on the group [33]. On the other hand, media have been criticized for their lack of accessible formats when disseminating important information and updates about COVID-19. But even though people with disabilities are rarely portrayed in traditional media, their representation on social networks increases day by day.

Social groups support people with disabilities and their parents through announcements and exchanging experiences, ideas, and advice. They are usually led by parents of people with disabilities and enthusiasts who want to help. These groups have seriously started to fill the gap in informing about the problems of people with disabilities, which the traditional media cannot, for both objective and subjective reasons [34].



## WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

- **Examine perceptions created for disability.** Media products need to be free from sensationalism, dramatization, or compassion. It is better to focus on the achievements, opinions, or expertise and not disability, whenever possible.
- **Serve as a platform for awareness-raising** and education of these groups by developing accessible education audio-visual materials.



- **Raise awareness.** The media should present the challenges people with disabilities face during the pandemic and issues surrounding disability, including exclusion and stigmatization.
- **Improve sourcing.** The media should seek out people with disabilities as sources. CSOs represent almost every type of disability, and they can offer information that can help raise public awareness and break down prejudices. Journalists should allow people with disabilities to speak on their behalf and involve people with disabilities in interviews on topics unrelated to their disability.
- **Portray people with disabilities as active members of society and not as passive or dependent.** Feature examples of people with disabilities as providers of expertise, services, assistance, and financial support contributors to their families and communities [35].
- **Use images that are inclusive** and do not stigmatize disability.
- **Check terminology use.** One of the biggest problems in the media reporting on people with disabilities is the terminology they use to identify the disabled or describe their characteristics or rights. Socially accepted and updated language should be used when referring to people with disabilities.
- **Identify actions to protect people with disabilities in high-risk situations** by closely collaborating with them and their representative organizations.
- **Be aware of diversity** among people with disabilities, especially having in mind women, children with disabilities, and marginalized groups, such as members of ethnic groups with disabilities.

## QUESTIONS THAT JOURNALISTS CAN ASK THEMSELVES:

- *Does the story provide a clear, honest and true way of presenting the individual?*
- *Is the person with disability presented as helpless or as an independent?*
- *Are those individuals represented in roles that are socially justified?*
- *Are we sure that stories or images that we use do not support any negative stereotypes?*
- *Does the story omit any important elements from the life of these individuals?*
- *Will the story or photograph contribute to their harassment or discrimination?*

School of Journalism and Public Relations (2011)  
Diversity Reporting Handbook

## 5. Media portrayal of women

The absence of women's perspectives in COVID-19- related news coverage leads to their limited influence over the framing of the crisis in the news. A recent report, "The Missing Perspectives of Women in Covid-19 News" [36], put together by the International Women's Media Foundation, shows that too few women experts have been quoted on the pandemic in the media. The report found that even when a woman's voice is heard in the news on Covid-19,



it is drowned out by men's voices. Also, when women are given a platform in stories about the pandemic, they appear more often as victims of the disease and not as authoritative experts or as empowered individuals [37]. More than half of women journalists have experienced increased gender inequalities due to COVID-19, according to a new survey conducted by the International Federation of Journalists among more than 500 women journalists in 52 countries [38].

For women who live in patriarchal societies in rural areas, their right to access and own land is mainly amplified by the media when violations occur, like denial or theft of land by male village leaders, local chiefs, or family members who hold power in those areas. However, due to the Covid-19 financial implications and lockdown restrictions, the media has been unable to travel to rural areas to highlight these infringements [39].

Another hidden consequence of the pandemic is sexual and gender-based violence. As communities worldwide are forced to stay at home, women and girls are at a heightened risk of domestic violence, intimate partner violence, child abuse, and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence [40].

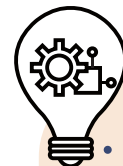
Given that the COVID-19 crisis affects men and women differently, measures to resolve it must take gender into account. For women and girls, vulnerabilities in their homes, the front lines of health care, and the labor market must be addressed [41].

Gender sensitivity has to be prioritized in the media reporting to

eradicate entrenched biases that can have long-lasting and devastating effects on how society responds to crises and achieve gender equality. Media has the power to amplify women's voices, portray their active roles in the crisis, support their participation in public debate, challenge gender stereotypes, and hold decision-makers accountable for women's rights [42].

“Media and unions must do much more to tackle gender inequalities and take into account the conciliation of work and private life in these turbulent times. They must hear the calls from women who have been deeply affected by stress during COVID-19 and respond to it. It is time to set up proper teleworking policies, ensure support is provided to women as family careers and provide decent work and equal pay.”

IFJ Gender Council Chair Maria Angeles Samperio, 2020



## WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

- **Create women experts' databases.** Journalists can consider the diversity of expertise and reach out to women experts to include their views and perspectives when covering stories related to COVID-19.
- **Include balanced voices of women and men** in the general reporting and each story separately. Women's voices need to be heard on topics related to Covid-19, but also on other relevant topics during times of crisis.



- **Amplify the views of women** who are political, healthcare, and business leaders when reporting on COVID-19 to offset women's absence in the national crisis committees responsible for driving policy-making decisions [43]. Ensure that women are portrayed as empowered rather than victims or playing second fiddle.
- **Produce analyses and reports** that reflect the impact of the pandemic on women.
- **Regularly monitor newsroom practices** in producing content related to women and their portrayal, changing the potential patterns in the reporting. Journalists need to be cautious of stereotypes that can be created due to imbalanced, sensational, and one-sided reporting.
- **Use gender-neutral language** in the reporting.
- **Consult CSOs** to broaden the perspectives on the different impacts of COVID-19 on women to ensure a fair and accurate portrayal of the crisis. Partner with disability organizations to reach women and girls with disabilities and ensure their needs and interests are reflected in the media reporting.
- **Ensure easy access to information** related to COVID-19. Information should be accessible through trusted communications channels in different languages, age-appropriate formats, and media appropriate for people with visual/auditory impairments [44].
- **Balance facts with stories** highlighting the real emotional impacts through personal accounts to draw women in and humanize the immeasurable loss caused by the virus [45].

## JOURNALISTS CAN EXPLORE THE FOLLOWING ANGLES:

- Local perspective of the story and the impact on specific municipalities and rural areas.
- Is the person with a disability presented as helpless or as independent?
- Health implications that women face during the pandemic (mental, physical, or related to their reproductive and sexual health).
- Power-related challenges that women face in relation to COVID-19.
- Socio-economic pressures that women face during the crisis.

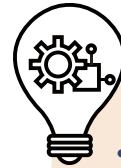
## 6. Media portrayal of migrants and refugees

The current pandemic brought many challenges for migrants, refugees, and societies that host them. Most migrants are extremely vulnerable both to the health and socio-economic effects of Covid-19. They are constantly moving, working in the service economy, and have limited access to public services. Women migrants are particularly affected [46].

Covid-19 has also generated stigma and discrimination towards migrants. In some contexts, they are thought to bring the virus into

Stigma can lead to social isolation and prevent migrants from seeking assistance, compromising both individual safety and public health efforts to control the pandemic [47]. The UN has warned the pandemic is having severe and disproportionate effects on migrants, with undocumented migrants in an even more extreme situation of vulnerability. Migrants have very limited access to information in their language about their rights and entitlements, including what services exist and how to obtain them, potentially leading to misinformation and confusion during the pandemic, which may hamper Covid-19 prevention efforts.

The media can have an important role in publicizing the human-rights concerns of refugees and migrants. Disinformation, misinformation, and hate speech generated and spread by media can seriously affect the image, security, and safety of migrants and refugees, especially in times of crisis.



- **Develop media products** that accommodate the linguistic and cultural needs of migrants.
- **Check for the representation of migrant voices in news stories.** To accurately portray migrants and refugees in stories, personal communication, and visiting the locations where they live are fundamental. Besides, journalists can consult people in their environment, support organizations (local and international), etc.
- **Analyze if stereotyped images and inflammatory content about migrants and refugees are used in other media or social networks** and help recognize it and deconstruct reporting patterns. Perceptions, rumors, and feedback should be monitored and responded to, notably to address negative behaviors and stigma [48].
- **Journalists should make a comprehensive analysis of their newsrooms reporting about migrants and refugees** to re-evaluate their future approach. In case reporting included omissions, negative coverage, or a tendency to ignore problems relating to migrants and refugees, journalists will have to invest more energy in their work. In the analysis, journalists should check for the reporting that negatively portrayed the groups in question, used only one side as a source of information, and whether the refugees were given the opportunity to express their thoughts personally [49].



## WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

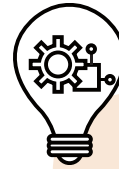
- **Partner with professional organizations** that monitor asylum and immigration issues to understand the broader context of these phenomena. NGO activists are good sources of information.
- **Highlight challenges faced by migrants and refugees**, e.g., if it is safe for them to seek medical care across the country. Reports in the media should address health insurance issues, but also other challenges, such as unemployment, financial issues, and access to information.

## 7. Media portrayal of elderly

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly affected the lives of the elderly, but also how they are represented in media. Since the virus's outbreak, experts have repeatedly stated that the virus is particularly dangerous for the elderly. Along with being portrayed as the highest risk group, the elderly are also represented as passive and weak, potentially strengthening the idea that they impose an undue burden on society and, more specifically, the health system, and that addressing their needs might endanger the younger population [50].

Segregation based on age, notably in sharing information, statistics, and latest updates about the virus cases, feeds a stereotype that older people are helpless and unable to contribute to society. When we view members of a group as all the same, we are more likely to apply stereotypes to them [51]. At times, high mortality rates among the elderly are even considered an 'inevitable' and 'normal' outcome of this pandemic.

Following such portrayals, youth can start to see themselves as immune to the virus and engage in risky behaviors with consequences that add hurdles to the health care system [52]. Research about the framing of Covid-19 in the media shows that it is a condition primarily lethal to older people. Referring to older adults using pronouns "they" and "them" contributes to the "us vs. them" narrative and portrays the elderly as 'others.' [53]



### WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

- **Consult the elderly** and ask their opinions, views, and expectations. They are seldom given a voice or considered in decision-making. Contacting them leads to a better understanding of their realities and issues, thoughts about what is missing in the reporting.
- **Individualize the stories.** Delve into specifics. The more we know, the less we're likely to perceive them stereotypically. What unique challenges does an older person face? How does she cope day-to-day? [54]
- **Spread the facts.** Media need to share accurate information to ensure responses to COVID-19 benefits everyone. Disinformation and stereotyped information about the elderly might contribute to misunderstandings that can exacerbate ageist attitudes. Advocating for their needs is especially important.
- **Analyze implicit biases in the media about the elderly.** A visual of an older person using a cane triggers an association with "dependency." It is often hard to identify implicit biases as they coexist with explicit thoughts that seem to contradict them. For example, implicitly, someone may feel "being old is terrible" while explicitly that person may think: "We need to do more, as a society, to value older people." Yet this kind of conflict may go unrecognized [55].
- **Use the right language** as it can be a powerful tool in reflecting and shaping public views. Refer to a 'gran' or 'granddad' only if the person's role as a grandparent is central to the piece. Use 'pensioner' only when referring to pensions [56].
- **Consider not revealing the age** in all news reports, especially relating to the deceased from Covid-19.



- **Represent the elderly from different perspectives and within diverse topics** - related to the pandemic and other public interest issues. Another angle may be provided by organizations and associations involved in assisting the elderly. However, the media should be realistic about the challenges the elderly face in their daily lives. They should highlight the poor treatment of the elderly in hospitals and community care settings. There are genuine health issues that also come with aging, but it is vital to avoid a picture of victimhood. Older people are also likely to be carers – for spouses, partners, or parents – as they are to be cared for [57].

(e.g., 5G installations leading to breaking of masts or scapegoating an ethnic or religious group leading to the rise of anti-Semitic content), requiring a comprehensive reaction of societies, including competent authorities, media, journalists, fact-checkers, CSO, and online platforms, by debunking, demotion, possible removal, or action against accounts [59].

Reporting on religions requires careful wording and extensive knowledge of traditions and journalists should communicate with due respect, adhering to standards of impartial reporting.

## 8. Media portrayal of religion

Religious misinformation during the pandemic comes from various sources. There were examples of religious leaders trying to spread misinformation about remedies or divine immunities to believers or using their authority to encourage people to visit churches on religious holidays, attend communions, or drink from one spoon in churches. Religious misinformation can be used by opponents of Islam to undermine it and its adherents, prompting Islamophobia [58]. On the other hand, content creators used the atmosphere of uncertainty to attract new subscribers and followers.

Also, conspiracy theories may endanger human health, harm societies' cohesion, and lead to public violence and social unrests



### WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

- **Reporting about negative behaviours should only include a person's religion if it is relevant to the story** or essential information. Otherwise, it should be avoided if it supports stigmatization and stereotypes.
- **Be neutral and objective** in reporting on religious matters. Media must avoid religious stereotyping and association of any religion or belief to human rights violations or terrorism.
- **Do not equate the activities, attitudes, or actions of individuals of a specific religion with the entire religious group** and do not emphasize characteristics related to particular religions unless they are directly related to the event and topic.
- **Discuss** with the interlocutors with diverse religious affiliations as sources of information on unrelated topics and issues.
- **Analyze** stories before they are published to check if they will perpetuate xenophobia, racism, or stereotypes.



- **Journalists should not refer to religions or religious institutions in a biased or pejorative context.**
- **Let the sources speak openly about their beliefs,** particularly relevant when religion and faith are central to the story [60]. If religious references are essential or facilitate a better understanding of the story, they should be made accurately, fairly, impartially, and respectfully. If a woman says, "I thank God for saving my mother from Covid-19," it should be quoted.
- **Be aware and react to disinformation and hate speech.** Responsible media avoids discriminatory or denigrating references to religious beliefs and spiritual values. Journalists should be particularly mindful of the spread of opinions based on religious dogma and are not rooted in reality. Hate speech stemming from or directed at religious groups and individuals should be called out and addressed adequately in the media reporting. The media should also be responsible for reviewing and removing user comments on media websites or social networks that contain hate speech and potentially harmful content.

## 9. Media portrayal of LGBTQI community

The pandemic has impacted the LGBTQI community, adding to the existing challenges. LGBTQI community regularly faces barriers to access to healthcare services, especially in places where their identities are criminalized or targeted. During the pandemic, homosexuality has been lumped together with globalization as a

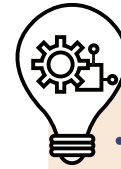
source of pollution if not contagion - an idea that supports the fallacy of gay "recruitment." [61] This can cause people to avoid seeking critical health services for fear of arrest or violence, increasing vulnerabilities to Covid-19 on top of existing health concerns [62]. Moreover, LGBTQI persons are disproportionately represented in the ranks of people in poverty, experiencing homelessness, or without healthcare, potentially making them particularly affected by the pandemic [63]. Stigma and discrimination against the LGBTQI community will play against them, making it impossible to fully document and understand how the pandemic is impacting them. Hate speech explicitly or implicitly inciting violence against LGBTQI people has been increasing, including inflammatory statements by political or religious leaders blaming them for the pandemic - the latter even citing "divine punishment" as the reason, with those unable to seek refuge in the privacy of their homes bearing the brunt of harassment [64].

The UN called states to urgently consider the impact of the pandemic on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender diverse individuals when designing, implementing, and evaluating safety measures that could disproportionately affect the LGBT communities [65]. Inclusive reporting plays a crucial role in raising awareness and ensuring that the public health crisis does not exacerbate the existing misconceptions, prejudices, inequalities, and structural barriers or lead to increased violence and discrimination against individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Through their reporting, journalists should combat discrimination against this community by using reliable sources of information, staying clear from stereotypes, prejudices, and wrong pictures.



## WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

- **Make direct communication** to identify issues and challenges the LGBTQI community faces, and thus correctly present them to the public and combat the stereotypes. Contacts with relevant CSOs can help get a better insight about their position in the society, Covid-19 induced problems, and potential reporting patterns.
- **Report the facts and substantiate every claim with the source of information.** Journalists must look for facts and present misconceptions and "myths" (such as that the number of infected is higher among the LGBTQI population than heterosexuals). The rhetoric of stereotypes and prejudices against this group often stems from someone's statement that shows intolerance towards sexual minorities. Journalists should be particularly cautious and not use such statements solely to ensure "balance" in the story.
- **Use appropriate and neutral terminology.** Before any reporting involving LGBTQI people, journalists should ask themselves whether mentioning their sexual orientation or gender identity is relevant to the story. These should only be mentioned when they are relevant to the topic.
- **Raise awareness about how the LGBTQI community is portrayed in the media** - this is not always known to the public, and even members of the LGBTQI community may be surprised. In addition to raising awareness, journalists should promote improvements in these issues. The media can raise awareness about their role, not only that of the CSOs and institutions, in media monitoring.



- **Infuse voices of the LGBTQI community into stories that cover various topics** unrelated to their sexual orientation (e.g., related to the pandemic's consequences to education, economy, etc.)

## THE WAY IN WHICH MEDIA REPORTING OF LGBTQI COMMUNITY CAN BE ANALYZED:

- What issues are covered and "labels" created (e.g., LGBTQI people represented as empowered individuals or as victims)?
- Analyze the frequency of their representation.
- Analyze the messages resulting from the story.
- Is there any important information missing?
- Analyze the way the audience interprets these messages.
- Analyze if there is any in-depth research on the topic.



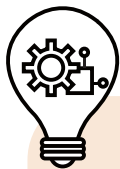
## 10. Media portrayal of children and youth

For children and young people, the Covid-19 crisis poses considerable risks, notably in education and mental health. Discrimination targeting people from different origins has increased. Research suggests that youth's concern about racial stigma and widespread disinformation associated with the pandemic is likely to persist in the long-term. Some youth-led initiatives tackle these problems by disseminating information and

by disseminating information and supporting the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, including minorities, indigenous communities, and migrants [66].

Since the outbreak of the virus worldwide, images of young people partying or meeting in groups have been widely circulated. Many people accuse younger generations of being selfish and irresponsible [67]. Youth are more exposed to the perils of misinformation and the consequent fear and lack of trust. Their primary source of information is social media, which, according to a recent study, accounts for 88% of the misinformation related to the pandemic [68].

Media can play a vital role in providing emergency response information and news about how people are coping. Still, it can also cause real harm to children and vulnerable populations if its focus magnifies painful, disturbing details, people's loss, and suffering, or the possibility of future or ongoing threats.



## WHAT CAN JOURNALISTS DO?

- **Do not stigmatize children.** Avoid categorizations or descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals - including additional physical or psychological harm, lifelong abuse, discrimination, or rejection by their local communities [69].



- **Check sources of information and verify facts** through multiple sources to prevent exaggerated and inaccurate information. Contact youth networks and organizations in acquiring relevant data.
- **Carefully consider the pandemic's impact on the psychological well-being of children and youth** and potential reactions they might have as a result of traumatic experiences. Still, journalists mustn't overdramatize the effects of the pandemic on children and youth since this could result in identifying with the story angles.
- **Protect the children's best interests and advocate for promotion and protection of their rights in reporting** by respecting the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- **In reporting on child-related topics, journalists should consult** the closest relatives and involved people who can best assess the effects of any reporting on children.
- **Require parental consent for interviews with children.**
- **Promote age diversity in public consultations** and state institutions to reflect the needs and concerns of different age cohorts in decision-making [70].
- **Produce youth-friendly content that is inclusive and representative of young people in their diversity.**
- **Represent youth through positive story angles, in proactive roles, or taking action to tackle Covid-19,** such as volunteering to support the elderly and other vulnerable groups, participating in awareness-raising campaigns, tackling disinformation, myths and stigma, promoting social cohesion, countering hate speech, etc.



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