

COMMITTEE OF MEDIA ETHICS, CYPRUS

JOURNALISTS' CODE OF CONDUCT

GENERAL PROVISIONS

1. This Code of Conduct applies to all Media (print, digital, online, radio organizations, broadcasters, as well as the State Broadcaster, corporate, public-affiliated media, etc.) hereinafter referred to as Media, and to Journalists.
2. Media and journalists uphold their professional ethics, their credibility and independence by strengthening self-regulatory mechanisms, and at the same time safeguarding the citizen's right to information.
3. Media and their Journalists undertake the commitment to cooperate with the Journalists' Code of Conduct Committee, hereinafter referred to as CME, in the conduct of its work. Failure to cooperate constitutes a violation of this Code.
4. The CME defends the freedom of the press and the right to freedom of expression of media, journalists and/or their officers; at the same time, it defends the rights of third parties who have been harmed by acts and/or actions of media, journalists and/or their officers.
5. The CME defends the editorial independence of Journalists working for Media.
6. The CME undertakes the task of monitoring the Code's implementation and compliance with its provisions.
7. With the assistance of the third parties, the CME undertakes the task of promoting the Code's principles and rules, with the aim of it becoming property of all professionals and being known to the public.
8. THE CME has the authority, ex officio or following a complaint, to examine and handle all issues arising from and/or related to the provisions of this Code; to examine allegations of violation of provisions of this Code as well as to examine whether publications, broadcast transmissions, digital posts, or any act or omission by any natural or legal person or authority, constitute a violation or threat to the freedom of expression of Media and Journalists.

If investigation of a complaint is decided, the Committee ensures that all parties involved have the opportunity to present their positions and views. If the

Committee finds a breach or a threat as described above, it publicly releases its findings, unless it decides a different course of action.

9. Journalists and/or media Officers are obliged to observe/comply with the provisions of the current Code and avoid publications, broadcast transmissions, digital posts or use of language that may constitute a breach of the current Code.
10. Respect for the truth and for citizen's right to objective, comprehensive and reliable information is an obligation for all Media and all Journalists.
11. Journalists should demonstrate the highest possible standards of work ethic, honesty, integrity and dignity.
12. Respect for the freedom of expression and Journalists' right to unimpeded access to information sources, as well as transparency, are necessary conditions for the citizen to be accurately informed.
13. Journalists have the duty to defend their independence and not to allow any intervention to their work. Consequently, intervention in the work of Media Officers, intimidation or attempted intimidation through statements or in any other means, is unacceptable.
14. Journalists respect information collection and dissemination methods that they have accepted at their will, such as "off the record", anonymity or "embargo", provided that such commitments are clear.
15. Journalists are bound by professional secrecy as regards their sources of information that they have received in confidence.
16. Media and Journalists do not make blatant personal attacks, nor do they use abusive or offensive language that harm individuals' reputation and good name.
17. Journalists and/or Media Officers have the right to express views about their peers' work, with full respect to their reputation and good name, avoiding personal attacks and degrading comments.
18. Plagiarism, slander and falsification of data and events are held to be grave professional misconduct.

19. Carrying out their function, Journalists:

- a. respect and promote democratic principles and the other universal values;
- b. respect and promote human rights and basic freedoms for all;
- c. demonstrate the necessary sensitivity to issues related to national security;
- d. are particularly cautious and discreet in their approach to issues such as violence, crime, rape & sexual assault, human suffering and death, as well as information or audio-visual material that may cause panic, horror or outrage, particularly to minors;
- e. always act in good faith and comply to the letter as well as the spirit of the current Code.

SPECIAL PROVISIONS

1. ACCURACY

- 1.1. Media are under obligation to take all reasonable measures so that the facts they present are accurate.
- 1.2. Respect for audiences' right to truth is the Journalist's first and foremost duty. Fulfilling this duty the Journalist should at all times defend the freedom of expression, the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press.
- 1.3. In case of inaccurate, misleading, fabricated or truth-distorting news, information or comments, media ensure that there is immediate correction, clarification and/or apology.
- 1.4. Media and Journalists are under obligation to provide reliable information to the citizens and not to manipulate news agenda.
- 1.5. The urgent or emergency nature of information dissemination is never above fact-checking and/or sources' verification.
- 1.6. Media and journalists' obligation to accuracy does not impact their right to criticism or satire, nor their right to offer analysis, interpretation or comment on facts.

2. MIS/DISINFORMATION/FAKE NEWS

Trust in the media and journalists is supreme value of Journalism.

Mis/Disinformation, fake news that may be spread through media or social media are detrimental and dangerous phenomena for democracy and freedom of press.

Therefore, any involvement of media or journalists in spreading fake news or mis/disinformation is unacceptable.

3. THE RIGHT TO REPLY

- 3.1. Media offer those directly affected the opportunity to substantially reply to publications, broadcast transmissions, online posts within a time framework that will not render the reply devoid of purpose.
- 3.2. Media are under obligation to publish the reply of those directly affected. They have the right to limit the word-count of the reply ensuring however that the substance of their reply remains intact. They also have the right to deny the publication of replies which may carry legal repercussions.

4. SOURCING OF INFORMATION

- 4.1. As a rule Media Officers should not attempt to obtain information or audio-visual material, or to record a telephone conversation by false pretence or deception. This may only be allowed in exceptional cases and solely in the purposes of public interest, as provided for in the current Code.
- 4.2. Journalists should not get access to documents and evidence in false pretence or deception. This may only be allowed in exceptional cases and solely in the purposes of public interest, as provided for in the current Code.
- 4.3. Journalists do not acquire neither attempt to acquire information or audio-visual material through intimidation, blackmailing or by paying (money or in kind of material or sentimental value) third parties.
- 4.4. Media and journalists do not pay or bribe witnesses in criminal or other cases, or individuals involved in criminal activities, including members of their families, with a view to obtaining information or audiovisual material.

5. PRIVACY

- 5.1. The reputation and privacy of any individual are respected.
- 5.2. Intrusion and investigation into the private life of individuals, including acquisition of audio-visual material without their consent, is prohibited as a rule. By way of exception, it may be authorised in the case of individuals involved in incidents or stories that constitute news of interest to the general public.
- 5.3. The acquisition of information and/or audio-visual material using wiretapping or other interception mechanisms, is normally prohibited. By way of exception, this may be justified solely in the public interest as set out in the current Code.

6. HEALTHCARE

- 6.1. Investigation or capturing and publicising audio-visual material from hospitals or such facilities are conducted discreetly and, where necessary, following the relevant authorisation, and always with full respect for privacy.
- 6.2. By way of exception the right to privacy may be limited, when the journalist investigation is about individuals in hospitals or such facilities.
- 6.3. Any information about the health of individuals is sensitive and it is only publicised by way of exception and only to the extent necessary.
- 6.4. Any reference to aspects of physical, emotional or mental health, condition or disability should be accurate, with full respect to dignity and avoid stereotypes.

7. GRIEF – MOURNING - SHOCK

- 7.1. Any story around mourning, grief or shock or a story that may potentially cause human suffering, should be handled with the utmost discretion and empathy and without any action that may worsen human suffering.
- 7.2. Media and journalists should avoid publicising images of people grieving, mourning or having a mental shock. In cases that publicising of this sort is

justified by the circumstances, then it should be done in a particularly careful and sensitive way.

- 7.3. Any accounts or statements by individuals who are grieving, mourning or having a mental shock, should be treated with care and the necessary sensitivity.

8. SUICIDE

As a rule reporting suicides or suicide attempts should be avoided.

In exceptional cases that publicising suicides or suicide attempt is justified, Media and Journalists should demonstrate sensitivity and particular care. Details about the method or the place should be avoided and there should not be any speculation around motives, regardless of the sources of information.

9. MINORS

- 9.1. Journalists interview minors or report quotes or pictures of minors, only after careful consideration of whether by so doing they will not harm the safety and wellbeing of the minor. For interviews such as these, the minor's consent should be secured and it is recommended that a responsible adult related to the minor has been informed accordingly, unless it is in the public interest as provided for in the current Code.
- 9.2. The minor should have the opportunity to express him/herself, however Journalists are responsible to carefully evaluate the minor's age and his/her ability to consent.
- 9.3. By exception of special cases of public interest, as provided for in the current code, Journalists should not reveal the identity of a minor without his/her content and that of a legally responsible adult.
- 9.4. Media and journalists are under obligation to observe the provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the relevant legislation as well as the provisions of the existing personal data protection legislation.
- 9.5. Participation of minors in events of general or specific interest for journalistic purposes, should be decided on an ad hoc basis.

10. PERSONAL DATA HANDLING

Journalists collect, process and use personal data in media exclusively for reporting purposes and in the framework of current legislation.

Sensitive personal data may require stricter handling.

11. JOURNALIST CONFIDENTIALITY

Journalists should uphold the confidentiality of their sources. They are under no obligation to reveal the sources of information, which, however, does not undermine their obligation to uphold all the provisions of the current Code.

12. DISCRIMINATION

- 12.1. Media should avoid any direct or otherwise reference or act against an individual or group of individuals which suggests pejorative discrimination or bias on the basis of race, skin colour, language, religion, political or other views, national, community or social origin, financial status, background, sex, sex identification, sex orientation, pregnancy, physical, cognitive, sensory, mental illness or disability, or physical appearance.

In general, no material that harms or may harm or may instigate hate against an individual or a group of individuals should be published.

- 12.2. Levelling or degrading expressions or descriptions, ridicule, castigation and shaming of individuals or group of individuals is unacceptable.

13. GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Media should avoid any direct or indirect references and vocabulary which constitute gender-based, gender identity or sexual orientation discrimination. Any references reproducing stereotypes and anachronistic perceptions of sex, or targeting, insulting and reducing people on the basis of sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, are to be condemned.

14. HATE SPEECH

Media and Journalists ensure that no content that may advocate, incite, promote or justify hatred, violence and discrimination against an individual or group, is published.

Hate speech may take the form of denying, degrading or forbearing crimes as well as glorifying perpetrators of such crimes.

Given that hate speech may be included in journalists' domain in the form of statements, Media and Journalists are expected to assume the responsibility of the whole of the content of their reports in print, broadcast and online.

15. RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULTS

15.1. Media should not directly or indirectly reveal the identity of rape & sexual assault or sexual harassment victims.

15.2. Releasing information about rape and sexual assaults should be minimal without details or dramatization of the incident. Even greater caution is necessary when the crime involves minors.

15.3. Any reference to statements that are unilaterally in support of the defendant or that may contribute to romanticisation of the crime should be avoided.

16. PRESUMPTION OF INNOCENCE

Journalists fully respect the principle that an individual who is suspected of or facing charges, shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law; hence, they avoid reporting anything that may lead of any conclusions about its guilt or innocence, or that may shame or humiliate him/her.

17. ACTIVE AND PASSIVE BRIBING

Media and journalists do not accept gifts, or privilege or bribe when it comes to performing their professional duties; nor do they put their independence at risk, by engaging in such practices.

18. FINANCIAL GAINS

Media and Journalists do not use or disseminate any kind of financial information they may have access to for their own or their employer's benefit, before this information is public knowledge.

19. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

- 19.1. Media and Journalists respect and implement the current legislation and conventions regarding the protection of intellectual property.
- 19.2. In case of publication, transmission or uploading of non-original material, even if edited in whole or in part, the relevant rights and/or authorisation by the media and the owner of intellectual property rights should be guaranteed.
- 19.3. In the case of reproducing material from another source, where permitted, Media and Journalists are under obligation to take all the necessary measures so that this is done with full respect for the original source and it is properly attributed to it.

20. PUBLIC INTEREST

Exemption from the rules provided in the current Code are possible in the following cases of public interest:

- 1) Protecting of National Security
- 2) Protecting of public security and public health
- 3) Protection of human rights and freedoms
- 4) Helping detect or reveal a criminal act
- 5) Preventing audiences' manipulation as a result of statements or action by natural and legal persons, government, political or State agencies.

FINAL PROVISION

The current Code is reviewed or amended only following of agreement or unanimity of the parties that adopted it.

Any revision or amendment is expected to be attached to this document and will be integral part of the Code.

Nicosia, April 1997

* With the agreement of all stakeholders Bodies, the Journalists Code of Conduct was supplemented and amended mainly to become clearer, easier to understand and use, in June 2008; it entered into force on 1 July 2008.

** In June 2015, the number of Committee Members was increased to 15 for operational purposes and in order to accommodate a representative of the online media.

The original articles that were replaced are as follows:

"The Committee, its President included, is comprised of 13 members. They are all individuals of high moral standards and recognised standing. The President of the Committee should preferably have legal background.

"The President and three Committee members are appointed jointly by the Union of Journalists, the Publishers' Association and the Online Media Owners. The rest of nine members are appointed as follows: three by the Union of Journalists, three by the Publishers' Association and three by the Online Media Owners."

*** In June 2017, the Code was amended increasing the number of members from 15 to 17 in order to provide for the adequate representation of the Cyprus Online Publishers Organisation, to supplement and clarify the rules of procedure and to set the duties of each CME member.

**** In September 2022, the Journalists Code of Conduct was radically amended in order to update the CME scope of operation and, mainly, to update the provisions of the Code in order to be in line with developments in Journalism as well as in society, and with the need to protect the freedom of the press and the quality of journalistic content. With the unanimous agreement of stakeholder Bodies the amended Code entered into force...

Nicosia, September 2022

The Committee members:

Elli Kodjamani, President

Katerina Nicolaou, Vice President

Yorgos Georgiadis, Secretary

Charis Nikolaidis, Treasurer

Varvara Argyrou
Frosso Violari
Christos Lottidis
Nicholas Markantonis
Xenia Xenofondos
Michalis Papaevagorou
Sotiris Paroutis
Dimitris Parperis
Tonia Stavrinou
Stavroula Stergidou / Elena Makri
Dimitris Trimithiotis
Miranda Christou
Christos Christofidis