

16 April 2018

## REPORTING ON TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS

**Trafficking in human beings (THB) is a complex issue. At the heart of trafficking is the exploitation of one human being against their will by another, yet a large number of legal and social issues are linked with this process. As a result, trafficking can simultaneously be considered an organised crime challenge, a human rights violation, an issue linked with migration, labour market dynamics, gender or economic development. Each of these perspectives applies a different “narrative” to explain what human trafficking is and why it occurs. These different narratives sometimes present challenges for media professionals and journalists reporting on THB, and can lead to inaccurate or damaging representations of trafficking in the media.**

Journalists and editors in today’s media landscape are working in an increasingly competitive industry with shrinking resources and time for in-depth investigative reporting. In such circumstances, media reporting on trafficking may try to simplify the reality of a situation, reducing a trafficking case to a story of good guys vs. bad guys, or criminals vs. victims. The consequence of falling into these traps when reporting on trafficking reinforces popular misconceptions and prejudices, such as that people are predominantly trafficked to be forced into prostitution and that it is mainly women who are at risk. It also perpetuates a fixation on victimhood, removing the possibility of agency or recovery from those individuals suffering exploitation.

ICMPD’s Director General, Mr. Michael Spindelegger has previously spoken about the potential of media reporting on human trafficking to act as both a magnifying glass of the issue as well as a distorting lens of the facts. Spindelegger said “policy makers, experts, and organisations such as ICMPD have a role to play in supporting media strengthen the quality of reporting on these topics. Effective media reporting is a key tool to strengthen balanced, fact-based debate on public policy and to raise awareness of complex issues such as trafficking in human beings.”

ICMPD recently published Media and Trafficking in Human Beings Guidelines in order to support journalists and media strengthen reporting on human trafficking. The guidelines are intended to provide a brief and accessible resource for journalists to consult, to assist them in understanding trafficking in human beings and to help them develop nuanced, informed stories when reporting on trafficking cases. ICMPD developed the Guidelines in the framework

of the EU-funded Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings and Organised Crime – Phase 2 project in partnership with the Ethical Journalism Network (EJN).

The author, Aidan White, Founder and President of the EJN, has over 30 years of experience as a journalist working on numerous publications including The Guardian and the Financial Times, as well as 24 years as General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists. In his words, “trafficking in human beings is a tricky story for journalists to work with, it’s important that journalists understand the best way to approach it, how to get good information, and provide a means for victims of human trafficking to tell their story without jeopardising their wellbeing. While this is easy to say, how we do it in practice is much tougher. The guidelines are intended to provide journalists and media professionals with some much-needed guidance on applying these principles to their work.” The Media Guidelines are available in 8 languages: [English](#), [Albanian](#), [Arabic](#), [Azeri](#), [Bosnian](#), [Romanian](#), [Russian](#), and [Turkish](#).

The publication of the guidelines is the latest of ICMPD's actions to engage with the role of the media in migration issues. In 2017, a 17-country study was published asking "How does the media on both sides of the Mediterranean report on migration?" followed by a competition that rewarded 35 journalists for journalistic excellence in the Euro-Mediterranean region, namely the "Migration Media Award". The call for submission of applications for the 2018 Migration Media Award is open until 15 May.

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