

THE STANDARDS OF SPEAKING AND WRITING ABOUT MIGRANTS IN THE MEDIA

The proposed standards consist of six the most important advices and postulates, formed by the representatives of migrant communities (people with experience in the media industry) towards the media in Poland. We highly recommend becoming acquainted with them, and using them in own media coverage.

The standards focus on the six main postulates:

1. **Migrants' voice in the media**
2. **The origin, when its relevant**
3. **Knowledge, various perspectives, broad context**
4. **No stereotypes, bias, sensationalism**
5. **The neutrality of language**
6. **Integration aim**

1. Migrants' voice in the media

In all cases concerning migration and migrants, their voice should be taken under consideration.

When describing different groups a good rule of thumb is to ask how people describe themselves: there have to be good reasons for calling them something different^[1] – this is one of the general advices of BBC concerning presentation of social diversity in the media. However, it is very important one for the change of the media coverage concerning migrants in Poland. The results of analysis of annual press monitoring (July 2013-May 2014), conducted by the Foundation for Social Diversity in relation to media coverage concerning migrants in Poland after the year 1989, points out that migrants in 86% of the articles DO NOT occur as persons providing their accounts to situations of their concern^[2]. These data only confirms the sense of insufficient representation of migrants' voice in Polish media. This is all the more significant because this voice is not given by the mainstream media to migrants in situation when the media coverage applies to them.

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Why is this important?

- The presence of migrants' voice in the media coverage provides additional perspectives and because of that enhances the reliability and objectivity of the message.
- Informing about modern world means informing about its diversity, and one of the challenges is to collect different accounts relevant for the material – the perspective of the official represents only one point of view.
- It allows certain groups to co-create own image in the society (think about emotions evoked by some of the information published in the external media about Poland and Poles).
- It enhances the equal participation in the public space of the groups insufficiently represented.
- Persons without migration experiences, acting as experts in such materials not always understand the specification of the culture of certain places and groups they are speaking about.

2. The origin, when its relevant

The characteristics connected with origin (ethnicity, nationality, colour of skin) and religion should be mentioned only if they are relevant for the message.

We do not state that characteristics like ethnicity, nationality, colour of skin or religion are irrelevant but, it is worth to think about what is their relevance for the specific subject, topic or material. Is the message an information because of the event, or because of the characteristics of the people involved in this event? Is it necessary to emphasis the differences in case of minorities – highlighting the origin other than Polish, skin colour other than white, creed other than Roman-Catholic... ? The characteristics of majority seem to be transparent – (. . .) *ask yourself each time: would you say black or white in a similar situation?*^[3]

Why is this important?

- When stressing the characteristics connected with origin in particular context, you influence the image of the group you are speaking or writing about – the group represented by this person. Remember that people are individuals with their individual characteristics.
- Exposure of differentiating factors like the colour of skin indicates that this factor is relevant, and so it may contribute to the sustain of the differentiating attitudes in relation to peoples' origin or religion.

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3. Knowledge, various perspectives, broad context

The message concerning migrants should be supported by knowledge, various perspectives, and should be put in a broad context of described phenomenon.

In case of themes and subjects which are unfamiliar to the majority of society, like migration, the media holds greater responsibility for the message and its reliability. Selection and verification of the information and its sources has a significant meaning for the message to be clearly understood.

If you are speaking or writing about people outside Poland, or European Union, remember that this may have influence the way these people and these groups associated with described places are perceived^[4].

When you write about particular groups of migrants, mind the terminology you use:

- when you speak or write about people migrating to Poland, you write about immigrants not emigrants; however, when you speak or write about people migrating from Poland, you write about emigrants;
- when you speak or write about refugees, remember that you inform about very specific type of migration – forced, motivated by a threat of persecution in the country of origin on the basis of colour of skin, religion, nationality, political beliefs or affiliation to specific social group.
- If you are reporting on facts about particular event or phenomenon (e.g. quantitative data), try to:

* present its scale, e.g. how did the number of migrants for Ukraine change – is this income already a “flood?” What is the value of the social help provided to refugees, and how big is the group included in this help?

* point out the causes (e.g. situation in the countries from which people migrate to Europe through Mediterranean Sea and its causes, e.g. relations between the countries of Global North and South).

Messages concerning migration and migrants often touch the issue of the differences between groups, particularly cultural ones. This entails the great responsibility for the message. It is necessary to mind the risk of stereotypization, creating closed attitudes and antagonizing a group. It is worth to remember that we are always representing “our” group, the one that describes the “other” group. Respect the people and groups you speak or write about, even if you do not share their beliefs, values, decisions, actions and practices.

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4. No stereotypes, bias, sensationalism

Messages concerning migrants should be free of stereotypes, simplifications, bias and “sensationalism.”

When speaking and writing about migrants, the media present groups unfamiliar to many receivers – the survey conducted by Foundation Africa Another Way shows that Poles have small experience with Africans: *Only 15% of Poles meets Africans in their place of residence, and 7% have direct contact*, while for the biggest cities – with number of citizens exceeding 500 hundreds – this percentage rates are 29% and 13%^[5]; at the same time 64% of respondents states small or very small knowledge of Africa, and this knowledge is often received from television programs concerning nature or travels^[6].

Such state fosters and sustains stereotypes concerning particular groups. The greater is the influence of the media coverage on the attitudes towards particular groups, the more important is the educational role of the media.

It is worth to consider:

- how much does particular material give new dimension to the media discourse concerning migrants e.g. a certain migrant group; and how much does it sustain common beliefs concerning this group? Are those beliefs justified?
- in what role the material sets migrants (e.g. victims, criminals, customers in the office)? Does the message limit to only one role? Are there any other journalistic materials that would put migrants in other roles?

When you speak and write about people from particular migrant groups, you co-create the social image of these groups.

Describing migrants in messages of sensational nature (e.g. headlines) even more exhibits the contrast between the group of majority and does not create positive social atmosphere. Negative emotions make the comprehension harder to achieve. This is crucial especially when it concerns groups of people endangered with stereotypization and discrimination.

The information function of the media should not be realized through stereotypization, bias and sensationalism of the messages.

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5. The neutrality of language

One should avoid “semantically charged words,” mostly negative which provide a sense of danger. In the language of the message one should maintain the symmetry of the used phrases and expressions.

The language you use – your basic tool – is relevant. You co-create the image of the world, including the way migrants are perceived. Some words and expressions may affect the quality of your information. Other, apparently neutral and common in Polish language – in contemporary reality should be revisited. The suggested changes are defined as follows:

- when you are writing about colour of skin, use symmetric forms. There are no “white deputies,” so there are no “black deputies.” We are white, black, red, yellow. Remember, that word “Murzyn” (Negro) is considered by the people called that way, insulting and offensive^[7].
- using word “obcokrajowiec,” (foreigner) you emphasize strangeness/otherness of the people from outside Poland. The similar issue concerns “cudzoziemskość” (foreignness), but we do understand that ultimate elimination of this word from the media coverage is impossible due to many legal acts and institutions (Act on Foreigners, Office for Foreigners). The term “migrant” implies specific type of experience – migration (regardless its type or direction) and is more neutral. If the origin of a person is relevant, consider providing more detailed description, regarding e.g. citizenship or ethnicity.
- person is not “illegal,” so there are no “illegal immigrants.” A person may act illegally e.g. by crossing the border with violation of legal acts – in other words illegally.
- when using in texts, especially in the headlines, metaphors of uncontrolled income and natural disasters like: *avalanche*, *flood of immigrants/refugees* you are not informing, you are creating a sense of danger – is this really your aim?

Helpful advices:

- *Jak mówić i pisać o Afryce?* (How to Write and Speak About Africa – Polish version) <http://afryka.org/batory/poradnik.pdf>
- *Jak dziennikarka metodą prób, błędów i poszukiwań uczy się pisać o różnorodności* (About Journalist Who – Through Trial and Error – Learns How to Write About Diversity – Polish version) http://ffrs.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/FRS_SeriaM_201503_Klimowicz.pdf, page. 12.

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6. Integration aim

The responsible media should contribute to social integration and harmonic coexistence of various groups in more and more diverse society.

In practice, the media not only inform, they influence attitudes – this is why it so important to understand the potential of media in co creation of harmonic multicultural society.

^[1] *Producer's Guidelines. The BBC's Values and Standards.* Chapter. 9, page 89

^[2] *Media wobec migrantów i migrantek w Polsce. Wyniki rocznego monitoringu prasy w latach 2013 i 2014.* Page 14. Świerszcz Jan. The Foundation for Social Diversity. Warsaw 2014 (Polish version)

^[3] *Producer's Guidelines. The BBC's Values and Standards.* Chapter. 9, page 90

^[4] *Badanie opinii publicznej na rzecz integracji obywateli państw afrykańskich w Polsce.* Editor Prof. Średziński Paweł, Foundation Africa Another Way, Warsaw 2010

^[5] *Ibidem*, page 15

^[6] *Ibidem*, page 11

^[7] *Jak mówić i pisać o Afryce?* Diouf Mamadou, Średziński Paweł, Foundation Africa Another Way. Warsaw 2011.

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