How to write our/their story

A practical guide to responsible reporting and creating media content about the Roma community



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Contents

Introduction

I. For media professionals:
A. How to report responsibly on the Roma community
B. How not to report on the Roma community

II. For members of the Roma community:
A. Creating your own media content
B. Engaging and working with the media

The masculine grammatical forms used in this guide are intended to be gender-neutral and refer to all persons, regardless of gender.

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INTRODUCTION



The guide *How to Write Our/Their Story* was developed as part of the media project *Nothing About Us Without Us*, which aims to strengthen media literacy and promote more responsible reporting on the Roma community. It is intended for Roma women and men, as well as non-Roma individuals and organisations that support them, with the aim of empowering them to create and share their own stories and contributing to a more accurate, ethical and balanced portrayal of the Roma community in the media.

The principle of *Nothing About Us Without Us* reminds us that policies, public debates and media content concerning Roma should be shaped with their active participation. The involvement of community members is not only a matter of inclusion, but also a prerequisite for credible and responsible reporting. Journalism is not only about conveying information; it also plays an important role in strengthening democracy, protecting human rights and fostering mutual understanding.

I. FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

A. How to report responsibly on the Roma community

1. The community as a source, not just a subject

When reporting on issues concerning Roma, include their voices. The experiences, opinions and perspectives of community members are essential for comprehensive and credible reporting.

2. Talk to a diverse range of people

Do not always turn to the same sources. Talk to young people, women, entrepreneurs, students, artists or parents. This helps show that the Roma community is not homogeneous.

3. Present interviewees as individuals, not as the voice of the entire community

An interviewee may speak about their own experience or area of work, but does not necessarily represent the views of the entire community. This should be clearly stated in the report or article.

4. Highlight positive examples

Reporting only on problems should not be the only or most common portrayal of the Roma community. Stories about successful students, athletes, entrepreneurs, cultural initiatives and similar examples are equally valuable.

5. Verify facts and context

Do not rely on assumptions or established narratives. Verify all information using credible sources and, where necessary, explain the broader historical or social context.

6. Respect the dignity of interviewees

Keep in mind that poverty, lower levels of education or barriers to employment are not the result of individual choice, but are often consequences of long-term social exclusion. Every interviewee therefore deserves to be approached with respect and with full regard for their dignity.



B. How not to report on the Roma community



1. Avoid generalisations

As the Roma community is diverse, avoid expressions such as “Roma think”, “Roma do” or “Roma want”. There is no single experience that represents all members of the community.

2. Do not use sensationalist headlines

Avoid exaggerated or provocative headlines designed to attract attention.

3. Do not portray Roma solely through the lens of problems

If the only topics covered are poverty, crime, social assistance or conflict, audiences may develop a distorted image of the community.

4. Do not use stereotypical images

Avoid repeatedly using the same images of run-down settlements, children on the streets or makeshift homes when they are not directly relevant to the story. Likewise, at a time of increasing use of artificial intelligence, avoid AI-generated photographs and visuals, particularly those depicting people.

5. Avoid questions based on stereotypes

Instead, ask open-ended questions that allow for well-reasoned responses, such as: “Could you share your personal experience related to the topic we are discussing?” or “Are there examples of good practice that show how the challenges faced by the Roma community can be overcome?”

6. Do not emphasise ethnicity if it is not relevant to the story

Ethnicity should only be mentioned when it is directly relevant to the story. Otherwise, it may unnecessarily reinforce stereotypes and prejudice.

7. Do not romanticise Roma culture

Portraying Roma culture positively is not a problem. The problem arises when the entire community is reduced solely to folklore, music or “exoticism”.

II. FOR MEMBERS OF THE ROMA COMMUNITY



A. Creating your own media content

1. Write authentically

Do not be afraid to write from your own perspective, as personal experiences and feelings bring the story closer to readers and help them better understand its context.

2. Change the narrative

Your story can offer a different perspective, challenge prejudice and show the reality you experience, rather than the one others often assume.

3. "Nothing About Us Without Us"

By using your own voice, you help represent the Roma community from within, through the perspective of those who live in it and shape its culture and customs.

4. Take responsibility for your story

Be aware that with every article you write, you help break down monolithic perceptions and enable the public to better understand the diversity of the Roma community.

5. Learn, grow and stay informed

By developing new knowledge and skills, you will be better able to identify reliable sources of information, use media platforms responsibly and present your stories more effectively to a wider audience.

B. Engaging and working with the media

1. Speak for yourself

Share your own experiences, opinions and views. If a journalist asks what "Roma think" or "how Roma live", feel free to explain that you can or prefer to speak only about your own experience.

2. You have the right to ask for clarification or choose not to answer a question

If a question is unclear, ask the journalist to repeat or rephrase it. You do not have to answer questions that intrude on your privacy, are unrelated to the topic, or are offensive or based on stereotypes.

3. Rely on facts whenever possible and take time to prepare your answers

Whenever possible, support your statements with examples or verified and relevant information. This makes your statements more credible. If the interview is scheduled in advance, feel free to ask the journalist for the questions beforehand so that you can prepare your answers.

4. Speak calmly and confidently

Confidence does not mean speaking louder, but speaking calmly and clearly. Your answers can be brief and straightforward, and include only what you know, even if this means answering only part of a question and leaving the rest unanswered.

5. Show respect for yourself and your community

Do not diminish the value of your experience, knowledge or perspective in any way. Your life experiences and connection to the community can contribute to a fuller understanding of the issues you are discussing.

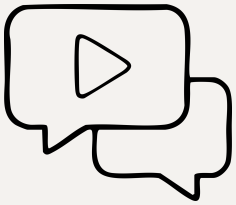
6. Use affirmative language

Alongside problems and challenges, where relevant, highlight achievements, initiatives, cultural activities, educational accomplishments, examples of solidarity and cooperation, and other positive developments within the community.

7. If you make a mistake, correct yourself

If you have said something incorrectly or notice that your statement has been misrepresented, ask for a correction or clarification.

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