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ASSESSING MEDIA **from Diversity and Social** **Inclusion Perspective**

Monitoring Report No 3

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Author:

Natalia Porubin, Media Expert

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Contents

Introduction and Methodological Issues	4
Monitoring Objective	5
Monitoring Methodology	6
Media outlets monitored	7
I. Quantitative Assessment	8
a) Portals Monitored: General Trends	8
b) Thematic Trends in Portals Monitored	12
c) Newspapers Monitored: General Trends	15
d) Thematic Trends in Newspapers Monitored	18
e) TV and Radio Stations Monitored: General Trends	19
j) Thematic Trends on TV and Radio Stations Monitored	20
II. Qualitative Assessment	23
1) Treatment of Protagonists	23
2) Terminology Used by Journalists	30
3) Headlines	32
4) Photographs	33
III. General conclusions	35
IV. Recommendations	37

Introduction and Methodological Issues

The media has a key role to play in promoting the diversity and social inclusion of groups vulnerable to discrimination. Journalists have the opportunity to highlight the issues and challenges faced by these groups, as well as to present success stories of integration of vulnerable people.

To promote inclusion, journalists should avoid using discriminatory terminology altogether. A word or phrase used inappropriately in journalistic material can be picked up by thousands of people and become a cliché or stereotype. The Journalist's Code of Ethics contains clear provisions to prevent discrimination. Article 4.14 of the revised document states: "The human dignity of every person shall be respected. National, ethnic and social origin, race, color, nationality, citizenship, language, religion, age, gender, gender identity, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, health status, opinion, political affiliation or any other protected criterion may not be presented in an inappropriate or derogatory manner." Ethics also require newsrooms to monitor and manage consumer comments on journalistic material to prevent the spread of hate speech.

Monitoring Objective

This monitoring was conducted between November and December 2024 and aims to analyze quantitatively and qualitatively how the media cover diversity and promote social inclusion. The monitoring team followed journalistic material that directly or indirectly addressed representatives of groups vulnerable to discrimination. The groups were selected on the basis of the criteria set out in the Law on Equality: race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, sex, age, disability, HIV/AIDS status, sexual orientation, and language spoken.

In particular, the monitoring focused on how the media covered the following groups:

- People with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities;
- People with physical disabilities;
- LGBT people;
- People living with HIV/AIDS;
- Roma people;
- People who do not speak Romanian;
- Ethnic minorities;
- Religious minorities;
- People who have been incarcerated (ex-prisoners);
- Refugees.

Monitoring Methodology

The quantitative analysis included the number of materials on topics related to vulnerable groups, the position of these materials in newscasts, on the pages of newspapers, the journalistic genres used, the number of photographs included and their quality.

The qualitative analysis assessed the compliance of materials with the provisions of the Journalist's Code of Ethics and the Audiovisual Services Code (for radio and television), taking into account criteria such as: objectivity and accuracy of data, presumption of innocence, tolerance and non-discrimination, protection of people in vulnerable situations.

The monitoring team also tracked consumer comments in the press, where available on websites, to identify elements of discrimination or hate speech, such as the use of derogatory language, stereotyping, hate speech or intolerance.

Media outlets monitored

The first monitoring report on this topic was produced in 2022, when 10 media outlets were monitored. The second report was produced in 2023 and included 15 outlets. This monitoring, the third in number, was conducted from November to December 2024, when the monitoring team followed 20 media outlets – newspapers, online portals, TV and radio stations.

List of media monitored between November and December 2024:

- Agora.md
- Newsmaker.md
- Realitatea.md
- Unimedia.info
- Diez.md
- Nokta.md
- Tuk.md
- Ziuadeazi.md
- GRT
- Radio Moldova
- Jurnal TV
- TV 8
- Moldova 1
- Pro TV
- Radio Chişinău
- SP, Bălţi
- Expresul
- Observatorul de Nord
- Unghiul
- Ziarul de Gardă

Selection criteria for print, radio, television and online media: Romanian and Russian-language media (national and regional) that broadcast news and other information content on a daily basis.

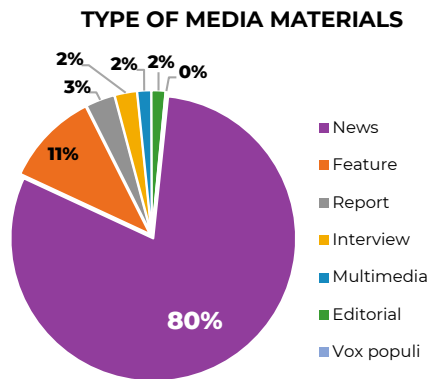
I. Quantitative Assessment

In November–December 2024, the 20 outlets monitored published a total of **1075** diversity and inclusion stories, compared to **808** stories in 2023 (when 15 outlets were monitored) and **442** stories in the first phase of monitoring – in 2022, when 10 outlets were included.

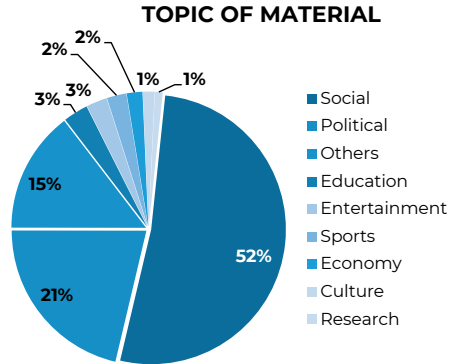
As in previous monitoring periods, most of the material was in the form of news or features, while other journalistic genres, such as investigations, editorials, etc., were much less represented. Most of the material published during the monitoring period focused on women, refugees and the elderly. The issues of LGBT people, ex-prisoners, Roma and people living with HIV/AIDS were covered much less frequently. Some newsrooms went as long as two months without reporting on these groups.

a) Portals Monitored: General Trends

In November–December 2024, the eight portals monitored – Agora.md, Diez.md, Newsmaker.md, Unimedia.info, Nokta.md, Realitatea.md, Tuk.md and Ziuadeazi.md – published a total of **638** materials on the topics included in the monitoring. Most of them – 512 (about 80%) – were news items. Another 68 were articles, 21 – reports, 16 – interviews, 10 – multimedia, 10 – editorials and 1 – vox populi.



One in two monitoring topics falls under the social heading, and one in five under the political heading.

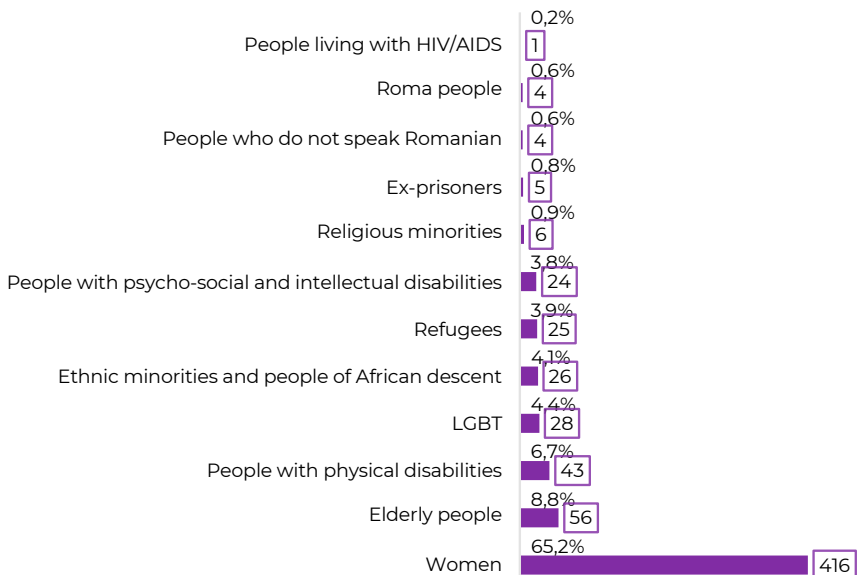


Of the total number of materials, 391 are original stories produced by the newsrooms monitored and 247 are taken from other media sources.

In terms of the vulnerable group targeted by the material, the majority of cases concern women. 65% of the published material addressed this group. In second place, by a wide margin, are materials on topics related to older people – 56 (or 8.8%), followed by those on people with physical disabilities – 43 (or 6.7%).

During the entire reporting period, the eight portals monitored cumulatively published only one material about people living with HIV/AIDS, four materials about Roma people and five materials about ex-prisoners.

VULNERABLE GROUP TARGETED IN MATERIAL

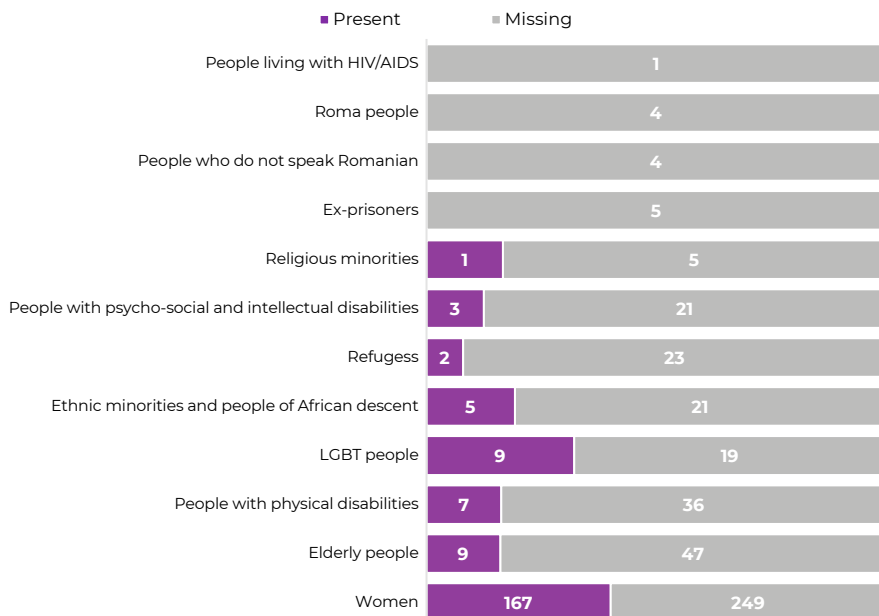


In most cases, vulnerable groups were presented in a neutral context – 312 materials. In 176 materials, the groups monitored were presented in a negative context, and in another 150 cases – in a positive context.

Women were portrayed in a negative context in 141 out of 416 cases, elderly people in 12 out of 56 cases, refugees in 4 out of 25 cases, etc.

Vulnerable group targeted in the material	Negatively	Neutrally	Positively	Grand Total
People living with /AIDS		1		1
Roma people		2	2	4
People who do not speak Romanian	1	2	1	4
Ex-prisoners	4	1		5
Religious minorities		4	2	6
People with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities	4	16	4	24
Refugees	4	13	8	25
Ethnic minorities and people of African descent	4	11	11	26
LGBT People	4	16	8	28
People with physical disabilities	2	24	17	43
Elderly people	12	27	17	56
Women	141	195	80	416
Grand Total	176	312	150	638

Some newsrooms did not take into account the views of the vulnerable groups they were writing about, contrary to the Journalist’s Code of Ethics (Article 4.16), which states: “When writing about vulnerable groups and individual representatives of these groups, the journalist shall ensure that they are fully represented and that their position is clear and presented to the public in an explicit and undistorted manner.”

VULNERABLE GROUP OPINION

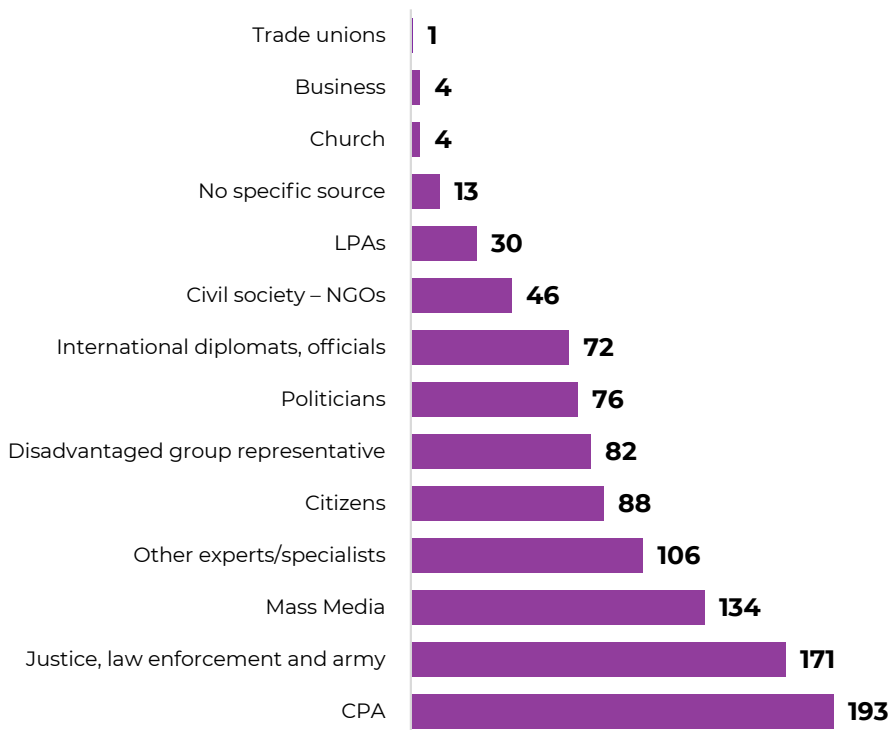
Despite this provision, in most cases journalists chose to cover the issues of minority groups without seeking the opinion of their representatives. For example, the opinion of women was included in only 167 of the 416 articles on this group. In the case of the elderly, the opinion of the group's representatives was present in only 9 cases, while it was absent in 47 other materials dealing with the subject.

In the case of LGBT people, the opinion of the group's representatives was sought in only 9 cases.

In most cases (193), the sources of journalistic materials are representatives of central public authorities (ministries, departments, etc.). Representatives of the judiciary, law enforcement bodies and the military were consulted in 171 cases, mass media in 134 cases, citizens in 88 cases and representatives of disadvantaged groups in 82 cases. At the opposite pole are trade unions,

whose opinion was included in the journalistic material on the topic monitored in only one case; business representatives, who were consulted in 4 cases; and the church, which was also mentioned in 4 cases.

FREQUENCY OF SOURCES



b) Thematic Trends in Portals Monitored

Agora.md published 197 diversity and inclusion stories in the monitoring period, compared to 22 stories in the previous analysis period (2023) and 50 stories in the 2022 monitoring period. Most of the material is in the form of news stories in the *Social* section. The newsrooms frequently covered women’s issues, including a young woman’s experience in Iran; the impact of medical research on women’s health; several pieces on violence in

childbirth; the case of an athlete who was the victim of body shaming; the inhumane punishments for Iranian women who do not wear the Islamic veil; preventing and combating gender-based violence; the case of a woman blackmailed into publishing intimate photos; international news on sexual abuse of women in Sudan; the conviction of a man in France who drugged and forced his wife to have sex. Agora.md thus showed a constant interest in issues related to women's rights and the fight against gender-based violence, contributing to the visibility of these issues in the public space.

Newsmaker.md published 147 stories, compared to 158 stories in the previous period (2023) and 57 in 2022. Most of them (111) were news items in the *Social* section. Journalists of this portal covered such topics as measures to re-educate domestic abusers; depression and its influence on women's mental health; the story of a woman from Moldova who works in the Romanian Parliament; a problem story about unlit streets in Chişinău – a phenomenon that may contribute to the increase of abuse and aggression against women; the conviction of a Frenchman who abused his wife for 20 years; the case of a woman killed by her brother who allegedly had mental problems; the case of a woman involved in a sex scandal. The portal also reported on the conviction of a man who sexually abused his underage daughter, another case of human trafficking, the story of a disabled athlete, etc.

Realitatea.md was monitored for the first time. Between November and December 2024, the newsroom published 147 articles, 131 of which were news stories. Journalists of this portal reported on the blackmail with intimate pictures of a Moldovan interpreter; several cases of violence; a murder that took place in a New York subway, where a man set a sleeping woman on fire; the case of several German gymnasts who accused their coaches of abuse; the prosecution of a man accused of forcing several girls into prostitution; the case of a woman who accused her husband of raping her while she was suffering from epileptic seizures; state allowances for children with disabilities; the verbal abuse of disabled voters at a polling station in Edineţ by a disabled voter observer; events organized on the

occasion of the Day of People with Disabilities; merit scholarships for Roma pupils and students, etc.

Unimedia.info published 12 materials on the topic of this monitoring, compared to 93 in the 2023 monitoring. The portal reported on topics such as the voting by the oldest Moldovan voter; the elderly Moldovan couple who voted at a polling station in the UK; the sanctioning of the public TV station in the Gagauz ATU for discriminating against the LGBTQ+ community. Unimedia also reported on the decision to allow the integration of Ukrainian refugee children in Moldovan kindergartens throughout the year.

Diez.md published 13 news items focused on disadvantaged groups, compared to 19 in 2023. Journalists reported on an anonymous survey of women and young women with disabilities who are victims of violence; the use of fake images to harass women and girls; and commitments made by more than 250 members of the capital's Pupil Councils to promote inclusion; organization of a charity fair by the Department of Law of Moldova State University to support people with disabilities; provision of assistive devices to education facilities for children with hearing and visual impairments; launch of an online platform for parents of children with disabilities; merit scholarships for Roma pupils and students.

Tuk.md published 31 materials compared to 11 in the 2023 monitoring. The portal highlighted the statistics on gender-based violence in 2023, according to which more than 30 women lost their lives due to this phenomenon; support for families with children with disabilities through a one-time allowance; a simplified procedure for refugee children from Ukraine to enroll in Moldovan schools and kindergartens; the opening of Romanian-language classes at a high school in Tvardița; the exemption of graduates of Russian-language schools from the Romanian baccalaureate exam by taking a special exam; the launch of a new website in Moldova dedicated to families with children with disabilities, etc.

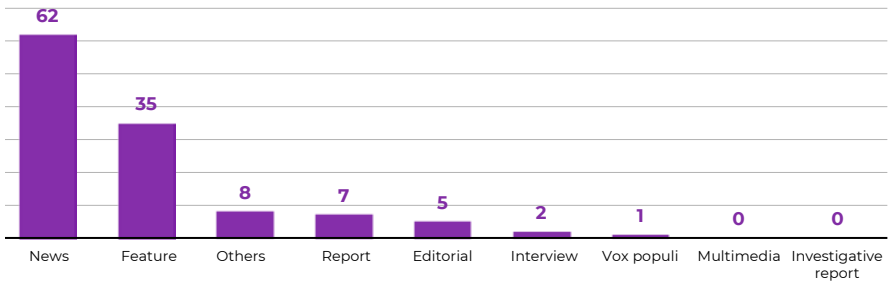
Nokta.md was in the first stage of monitoring, its newsroom having published a total of 43 materials, 39 of which were news items. Journalists from this portal covered a variety of topics – information about the trust phone line for survivors of gender-based violence; the case of a prison inmate who blackmailed a woman with intimate pictures; the alarming increase in mortality due to gender-based violence, as well as the condemnation of our country by the European Court of Human Rights in the case of discrimination against a disabled woman. At the same time, the issues of allowances for families caring for children with disabilities and the sanctions imposed on Bishop Marchel for discrimination against LGBT people were also discussed.

Ziuadeazi.md published 48 materials, including 41 news items. The newsroom wrote about an IT program for Moldovan girls and women; the death of an elderly person who allegedly died in a well; the case of a woman killed by her own son; the case of a woman who physically assaulted her one-year-old child; the launch of the “16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence” campaign; the launch of the study “Inclusion of Children with Special Educational Needs in the Education System (2024)”; the one-off payments of 3300 lei to all families with children with disabilities; merit scholarships for Roma pupils and students; the story of the oldest Moldovan voter; one-off payments for pensioners, etc.

c) Newspapers Monitored: General Trends

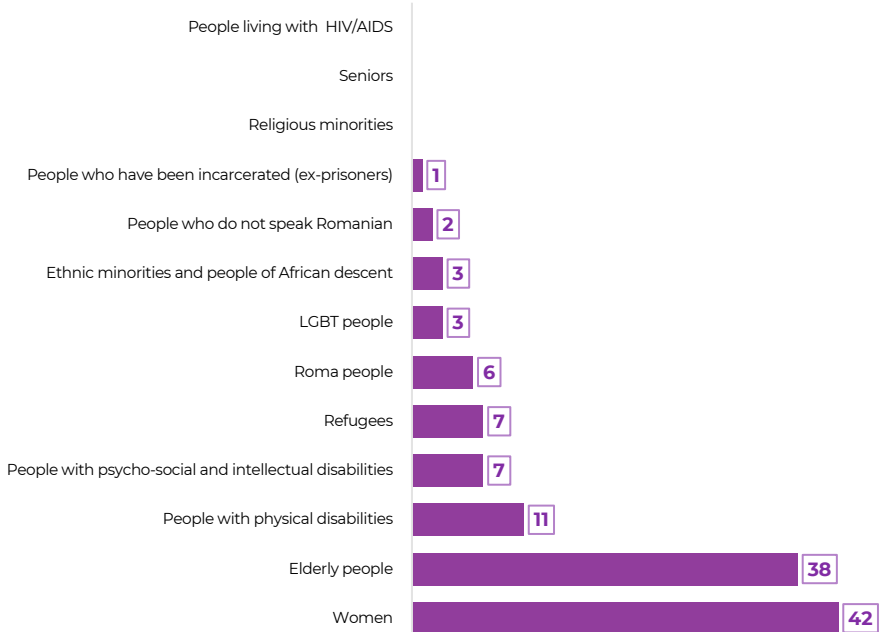
The five newspapers monitored – *Ziarul de Gardă, SP, Expresul, Observatorul de Nord* and *Unghiul* – published a total of 120 materials, of which 62 were news items, 35 – features, along with other types of content. The majority of the news items on the topics monitored were placed on the inside pages of the newspapers, except in only four cases where they were placed on the front page. Of the total number of materials published, 75 were in the social section, 14 in the political section, 8 – education, etc.

NUMBER OF MEDIA MATERIALS



In 74% of cases, newsrooms published original material on diversity and inclusion, with a further 26% of material taken from other media sources. Most of the material (42) was about women, 38 about older people, 11 about people with physical disabilities, 7 about people with psychosocial disabilities, 7 about refugees and 6 about Roma.

VULNERABLE GROUP TARGETED IN MATERIAL

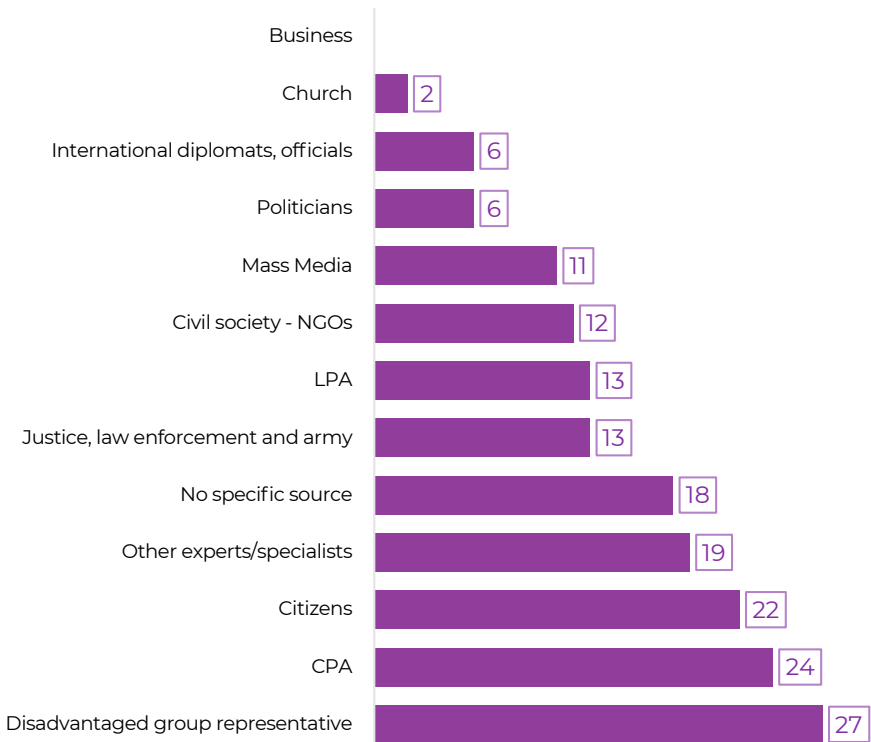


At the same time, no material was published about people living with HIV/AIDS or religious minorities. The groups monitored were presented in a positive context in 48 cases, in a neutral context in 51 cases, and in a negative context in 21 materials.

In 75 out of 120 materials analyzed, the opinion of the minority group is missing. The newspapers used a total of 146 photographs to illustrate the material on the topics monitored, of which only 95 were accompanied by captions.

In the case of newspapers, the most common source of journalistic material were members of disadvantaged groups (27 sources), followed by representatives of central public authorities (24 sources), citizens (22 sources) and experts (19 sources). At the same time, the monitoring team identified 18 materials that did not have a specific source.

FREQUENCY OF SOURCES



d) Thematic Trends in Newspapers Monitored

SP Bălți published 39 materials in the monitoring period, compared to 28 in the previous period (2023). Of the total number of texts, 20 were written by the editorial team, the others were taken over. Most of the materials dealt with issues related to the elderly (16), women (11) and refugees (4). All material was published in a neutral or positive context. The newsroom chose to report on several women who started businesses; fake news affecting the safety of girls and women; the use of gender quotas in elections; Ukrainian Culture Days; the opening of Ukrainian language classes in several schools in the north of the country; sign language courses for some employees of state institutions, etc.

Expresul published 10 articles, 8 of which were news items and 2 features, most of which were in the *Social* section. The newspaper chose to write about the safety of elderly women; a social laundry for vulnerable people; pension increases; the problems of families raising children with severe disabilities; online harassment of women, etc.

Observatorul de Nord published a total of 40 pieces of journalistic material (compared to 36 in 2023), three of which were placed on the front page of the newspaper. Almost half of them were published in the *Social* section. Journalists from this publication reported on a support action for children with disabilities; allowances for families with children with disabilities; a Roma pupil receiving a merit scholarship; the problem of Roma children not attending school; social payments for people with disabilities; a case of trafficking of refugees from Ukraine; several jokes targeting Roma or women.

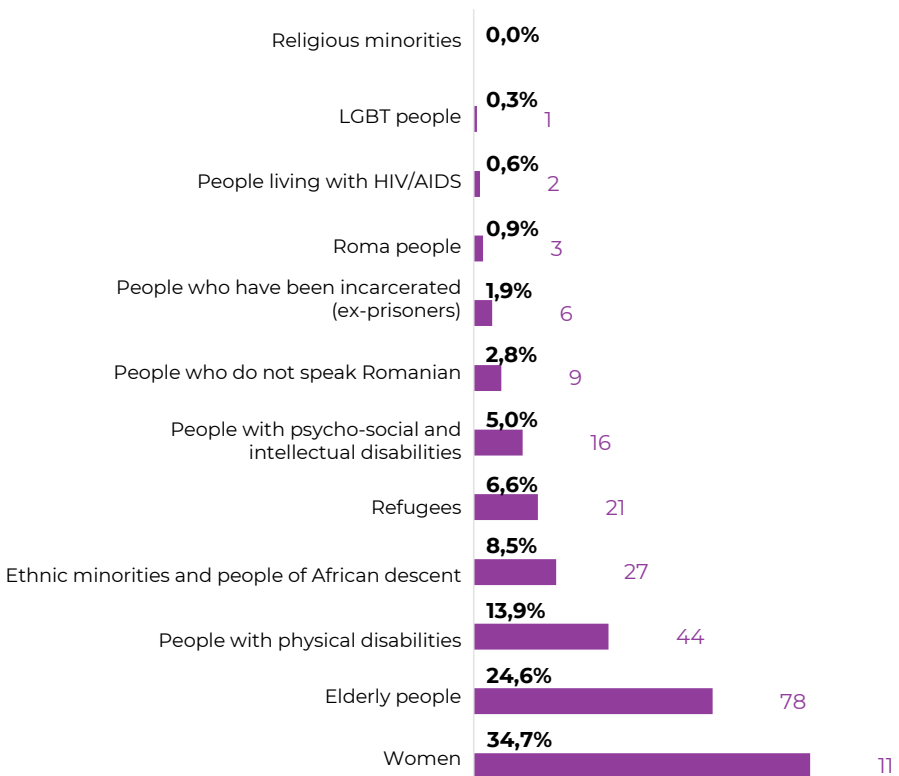
Unghiul published 6 materials that are the subject of this monitoring. Journalists from this publication chose to report on the “16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence” campaign; a center in Ungheni specialized in the protection of victims of gender-based violence; a meeting of specialists responsible for inclusive education; the launch of the Platform for Active Ageing; digital inclusion of the elderly in the Republic of Moldova.

Ziarul de Gardă published 25 articles on inclusion and diversity. Among the topics covered were the case of harassment of editor-in-chief Alina Radu; the opening of a social canteen in Cazangic where people from disadvantaged groups are fed; rehabilitation programs for domestic abusers; protection of minorities in the European Union; the story of a person with cerebral palsy; age crisis among the elderly; indexation of pensions, etc.

e) TV and Radio Stations Monitored: General Trends

The seven TV and radio stations monitored – GRT, Radio Moldova, Jurnal TV, Moldova 1, PRO TV, Radio Chişinău, TV 8 – broadcast a total of 317 items

VULNERABLE GROUP TARGETED IN MATERIAL



between November and December 2024, of which the majority (197) were reports and 111 news items. More than 70% of all materials fall under the *Social* heading. Most materials (110) were about women, 78 about older people, 44 about people with disabilities, 27 about ethnic minorities, 21 about refugees, etc. Only one material was about LGBT people, two about people living with HIV/AIDS and three about Roma people.

j) Thematic Trends on TV and Radio Stations Monitored

The GRT TV station broadcast 20 news items and features related to the topic of this report (compared to 24 in 2023). Most of the time, the respective materials opened the newscasts, being the first or the second position therein. The station reported on: ethnic minorities, problems of the elderly, women's issues, etc.

Jurnal TV broadcast 60 stories related to this report (compared to 39 in the previous monitoring period – 2023). Journalists from this TV station reported on the issue of gender-based violence; the story of a brain cancer survivor; the story of a woman who lived with a violent husband for ten years; the creation of the Family Justice Center, a structure aimed at preventing and combating gender-based violence; the story of a woman who raised five children alone after divorcing her abusive husband; the possibilities of rehabilitation and correction for domestic abusers; the festival dedicated to Ukrainian culture; the benefits of including children with disabilities in schools; the issue of social assistance for people with disabilities; a woman who sold her apartment and opened a center for people with disabilities; the integration of a young man in a wheelchair into society; the work of a center for children with disabilities, etc.

Moldova 1 aired 53 news items and features on diversity and inclusion, compared to 116 in 2023 and 52 in 2022. About 60% of the material aired by the public broadcaster fell into the social category. Most of them were

aimed at women, ethnic minorities, the elderly or refugees. The public broadcaster aired very limited news stories and features about people living with HIV/AIDS, religious minorities, people in prison, and LGBT people. The channel reported on a 70-year-old man suspected of murder; a fire at a center for the elderly in Germany; the initiative of refugee women from Ukraine to repair some classrooms at a high school in the capital, where most Ukrainian refugee children study; refugees who enrolled in Romanian language courses; the assistance provided by the UK to Ukrainian refugees settled in Moldova; the festival of Ukrainian culture in the north of the country; a festival of Gagauz culture; the first gala of ethnic minorities “United through Diversity”; Hanukkah or the festival of light celebrated by the Jews; a visually impaired young woman working at the printing house of the Information and Rehabilitation Center of the Association of the Blind of the Republic of Moldova; the lack of specialized teachers for children with special educational needs, etc.

PRO TV aired 78 news items and features covered by this monitoring (compared to 123 in 2023) and 38 in 2022. The majority fall into the *Social* category. Reporters from this TV station chose to report on a sports veteran who had won several medals at international competitions; several news stories about sportswomen from Moldova and abroad who have won medals; the story of a 23-year-old woman who ended up working as a patrol officer; the case of a woman who physically abused her child; an international news story about the meeting of the tallest and the shortest woman in the world; the festival of Ukrainian culture in Glodeni; a news story about the importance of early detection of a person’s HIV status in connection with the story of an HIV-infected ex-convict; the story of a young girl who needs two prostheses; the launch of an online platform dedicated to parents of children with disabilities; about the increasing number of children with disabilities integrated into the education system, etc.

Radio Chişinău produced 11 news and feature stories on the topics monitored. Journalists from this radio station chose to report on the language

barrier for the integration of ethnic minorities; higher heating allowances for people with disabilities; problems faced by people with disabilities, including lack of accessibility to buildings and lack of personal assistants; mental health and behavioral problems among prisoners; a campaign to reintegrate ex-prisoners; agreement between the Moldovan and Italian governments on the recognition of periods of contribution to the Social Fund; indexation of pensions, etc.

Radio Moldova broadcast 34 news items and features on the topics monitored, compared to 28 in 2023 and 29 in 2022. The station reported on the festival of handicrafts and music organized by the Association of the Blind of the Republic of Moldova, which brings together people with disabilities; the problems of the elderly in the village of Șeptelici, Soroca district, who have no access to social services; increasing pensions; a program for the elderly to develop digital skills and social inclusion; the first online platform for Ukrainian refugees; a professional integration program for refugee women from Ukraine.

TV 8 published 61 news stories and features on inclusion and diversity, compared to 48 in the previous monitoring period (2023). The station reported on the case of a trafficked woman; prevention of cervical cancer; a woman who was the victim of a fire caused by an unlit cigarette; the IJC issued a statement condemning intimidation of journalists. It presented the cases of Alina Radu and Mariana Rață; a woman who was filmed beating her child; a woman who was blackmailed with intimate pictures by a prison inmate; a message about the gifts that some children with disabilities received from Santa Claus; a report from a specialized school for children with disabilities; about pensioners waiting for compensation to buy wood; about a 72-year-old man who allegedly tried to kill a local man suspected of being his wife's lover; a news story about Moldovan citizens who have worked in Italy and can claim years of work as part of their pension; Bishop Markel sanctioned for making a statement that the LGBT community should be rejected.

II. Qualitative Assessment

This chapter of the monitoring looked at how journalists complied with the general principles of journalistic ethics: terminology used, treatment of victims, tolerance and non-discrimination, etc.

1) Treatment of Protagonists

This phase of the monitoring looked at how journalists approach the people they write about, especially those in vulnerable groups. It looked at whether media reports respected ethical principles and protected the identities of people living with HIV/AIDS, ex-prisoners, victims of trafficking and violence, etc.

The monitoring team examined whether journalists avoided disclosing information that could lead to the identification of such individuals, given the additional risks they may face. Lack of confidentiality can lead to discrimination by the community or situations that would further jeopardize their safety. The monitoring thus emphasized respect for the right to privacy and the responsibility of the media to report on sensitive issues in an ethical and balanced manner, provided that human dignity is respected.

In this monitoring period, several cases of exploitation of the sensational side were detected. For example, the news item “Melania Trump rumored to have visited plastic surgeon before husband’s victory” (published by Realitatea.md on November 10, 2024) focuses excessively on Melania Trump’s physical appearance. Discussions of her possible cosmetic procedures before her husband’s election reflect an exclusive preoccupation with her physique and detract from her personal accomplishments or social involvement. This type of approach is considered sexist because it promotes the idea that a woman must meet certain aesthetic standards, ignoring her value as a personality.

Another news story that focuses on the physical appearance of the protagonists is “Two influencers drowned after refusing to wear life jackets to avoid ruining their tans.” (Realitatea.md). „Aline Tamara Moreira de Amorim și Beatriz Tavares da Silva Faria s-au înecat, în timpul unei excursii cu iahtul. Influencerițele au refuzat să poarte veste de salvare pentru a nu-și „strica selfie-urile și bronzul”. (Aline Tamara Moreira de Amorim and Beatriz Tavares da Silva Faria drowned during a yacht trip. The influencers refused to wear life jackets so as not to ‘ruin their selfies and tans’.) The two victims were known as online ‘influencers’.

The news report suggests that the deaths of the two women are related to their desire to maintain a certain standard of beauty (e.g., a perfect tan) rather than focusing on personal safety, risks, or dangerous behavior. The news may thus reinforce stereotypes of women as overly concerned with their physical image and less concerned with their personal safety.

Headline “În fruntea MAI vine o femeie. Efros demisionează” (A Woman Comes To Lead Ministry of Interior. Efros Resigns) (Unimedia.info, 18 November) emphasizes gender rather than competence, experience, or the person’s name. The wording may suggest that the appointment of a woman to lead the Ministry of the Interior is surprising or unusual, and that such positions are reserved for men.

There is also a dose of sensationalism in the headline „Первая реакция Додона на победу Санду: «Она превратилась в президента диаспоры», Она превратилась в „хромую утку“, президента диаспоры» — сказал Додон. (“Dodon’s first reaction to Sandu’s victory: “She has become the president of the diaspora”, She has become a ‘lame duck’, the president of the diaspora” – Dodon said.) The headline attracts attention by directly quoting Igor Dodon, who uses pejorative expressions such as “президент диаспоры” (president of the diaspora) and “хромая утка” (lame duck). These phrases are provocative, but accurate quotes. The headline should be balanced and not reinforce hate rhetoric against political opponents.

Publishing only critical statements risks favoring a particular political agenda.

There are also ethical issues with this news story „Caz cutremurător în Italia. Un bărbat de 46 de ani, a fost arestat, după ce și-a ucis cu cruzime mama de 73 de ani. Acesta i-a smuls inima din piept” (*Shocking case in Italy. A 46-year-old man has been arrested after brutally murdering his 73-year-old mother. He ripped her heart out of her chest.*) (Realitatea.md, 22 November 2024). The material is full of shocking details that have no place in journalistic material prepared according to deontological rules: ‘ripped her heart out of her chest’, ‘the murderer justified his horrible deed by saying that his mother was a ‘vampire’ who ‘tried to force him to eat human flesh’ etc.

Morbid details can also be found in the news story “В Кишиневе иностранец жестоко убил свою сестру, а ее тело нашли только через месяц” (*In Chisinau, a foreigner brutally murdered his sister, whose body was found only a month later.*) (Newsmaker, 19 December 2024) – „По неустановленным причинам обвиняемый нанес сестре девять ножевых ранений. Правоохранители узнали об этом только 3 октября, когда в доме нашли тело женщины в стадии разложения”. (*For unspecified reasons, the defendant stabbed his sister nine times. Law enforcement officials learned of the crime only on October 3, when the woman’s body was found in the house in a state of decomposition.*)

According to Article 4.7 of the Journalist’s Code of Ethics – “Journalists shall not provide the public with morbid details of crimes, accidents and natural disasters or details of suicide techniques. The same rules apply to visual material (photos, videos).” The rules apply to both written text and visual material – photos, videos, but also to news broadcast on the radio.

The sensational side is also exploited in „După viol, bătaie și profanarea mormintelor a omorât un consătean, dar și de această dată scapă de închiisoare din cauza problemelor psihice” (*After raping, beating and desecrating*

graves, he murdered a fellow countryman, but this time he escapes jail because of mental problems.) (November 18, 2024, *Observatorul de Nord*). The article reports on a person with severe mental health problems who committed violent crimes, including murder, but was declared legally incompetent because of his condition and sent to a mental facility instead of prison. In terms of journalistic ethics, reporting should strike a balance between the severity of the crime and the risk of stigmatizing people with intellectual disabilities. Exploiting the sensational side contributes to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes, which can be harmful to all people in this group.

The sensational aspect is also exploited in the news story published on *Realitatea.md* (December 20, 2024) - „Un bărbat din municipiul Suceava, România, este cercetat penal pentru violență în familie. Individul și-a bătut soția pentru că nu i-a plăcut cum a împodobit bradul de Crăciun”. (*“Man from Suceava, Romania, under investigation for domestic violence. The man beat his wife because he did not like the way she decorated the Christmas tree.”*)

The phrase “because he didn’t like the way she decorated the Christmas tree” may suggest that the reason for the aggression is trivial. Journalists should emphasize that domestic violence, under any pretext, is unacceptable behavior. A more balanced formulation would have been ‘for minor reasons’, ‘because of a conflict’, or a more general explanation of the incident without emphasizing the cause. Such approaches risk making a mockery of the phenomenon of violence, which must be taken very seriously, whatever the cause.

The same way of presenting a case of violence is used in another news story - „Un individ și-a agresat fizic soția, pentru că nu i-a plăcut ceapa pe care o cumpărase femeia” (*“Man physically attacks his wife because he didn’t like the onions she bought.”*)

The details in the news story, including the seemingly insignificant motive (the woman bought onions), risk trivializing a serious social problem.

The sensational side is also used in another news story - „O tânără și-a băgat soțul în spital de Crăciun, după ce bărbatul s-a plâns de mâncare. Cazul a fost înregistrat în orașul Dăbuleni din județul Dolj, România” (*Young woman puts her husband in hospital for Christmas after he complains about food. The case was recorded in the town of Dăbuleni, Dolj county, Romania.*)

Good journalistic practice dictates that headlines should accurately reflect the content and avoid exaggeration. Another problem is that the article treats a serious incident (violence) in a way that risks minimizing the seriousness of the situation.

In the way information is presented, some of the material on the subject monitored contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes. For example, the story „Pe tinerii generației Z îi deranjează la femeile în vârstă că „suportă atât de multe prostii de la soți. Ce altceva?”” (*Gen Zers’ are bothered by older women who “put up with so much crap from their husbands. What else?”*) The material seems to present the views of young people in a generalizing and critical way towards older women, without providing a balanced perspective. The lack of opinions from experts or representatives of the target group encourages a number of prejudices and does not present a serious analysis of the differences between the generations.

Another news story - „Obraznicul mănâncă praznicul” (*“The brat eats the feast”*) in *Observatorul de Nord* is rife with discriminatory language against the Roma community. “The minibus of route number 3 brakes at one of the stops on Soroca’s Hill, where three elderly Roma women are waiting for it like three wine polo necks. // With two superhuman efforts, the passenger in the first seat steams the other two gypsies into the minibus.”

The fact that women are called “round as three wine polo necks” is a description that can be interpreted as degrading or offensive, which is unacceptable in terms of journalistic ethics.

The use of the term ‘gypsy’ is a form of stereotyping an entire ethnic group. In a responsible journalistic context, it is advisable to avoid pejorative terms, as they can fuel prejudice and contribute to the stigmatization of a minority.

Gender stereotypes are also promoted in the news on Moldova 1, which announces that “Vasile Badea are 77 de ani. A rămas văduv și acum nu are cine să-l ajute să-și spele hainele”. „Vestea că în sat s-a deschis o spălătorie publică a fost primită cu bucurie de localnici, mai ales de gospodine”. (*Vasile Badea is 77. He is a widower and has no one to help him wash his clothes.* “*The news of the opening of a public laundry in the village was welcomed by the locals, especially the housewives.*) (minute 14.20).

In particular, the news reinforces traditional expectations about the roles of men and women in the home and in society. The phrase “now he has no one to help him wash his clothes” suggests that men, especially older men, are unable to take care of themselves and are dependent on women’s help.

Another statement in this news item – “The news that a public laundry has been opened in the village was welcomed by the locals, especially the housewives” - suggests that women are the ones responsible for domestic activities and, by implication, for taking care of the home and family needs.

The report Au solicitat ajutor la contor acasă (*They asked for compensation for electric power at home*) on Jurnal TV (14 November 2024) erroneously includes the medical diagnosis of a woman and her son who receive government assistance to pay their bills during the cold season. The information about the family’s difficulties is complemented by the statement that for them “every day is a struggle to survive.” Even though the family is facing difficulties, the wording can influence how they are perceived by society, which can lead to stigmatization and social exclusion.

We note that “the journalist does not disclose personal data – diagnosis, address, telephone number and other information required by the

legislation on the protection of personal data. Such data may be published only if it is in the public interest and, where appropriate, with the consent of the data subject.” (Code of Ethics, Article 4.6).

Some newsrooms promoted gender stereotypes, including through the jokes they published. “A blonde hits a car. // The driver gets out of the car and asks her: - Did you at least take your driving test?// - Of course! And unlike you, several times! “A blonde was fishing on the bank of a stream. // The security guard shows up: - Ma’am, you can’t fish here without a license. // - Oh, how stupid of me! I’ve been trying to do it with polenta.” (*Observatorul de Nord*).

The report on Jurnal TV „A trăit zece ani lângă un soț agresor” (*She lived with an abusive husband for ten years*), published on November 15, 2024, reveals the identity of a survivor of gender-based violence – her first and last name, unblurred images of the woman, and the home where she and her four children settled after leaving her abuser.

In the story, the protagonist reveals her identity and recounts the details of her dramatic experience. It should be noted that revealing identity and personal details can lead to revictimization or stigmatization, so it is essential that the journalist ensures that the publication of such information does not cause further distress to the person concerned.

Journalists must also be extremely responsible with information gathered about people in vulnerable situations and anticipate possible negative effects on them. The collateral victims of this approach are the protagonist’s four children. Although their faces are blurred, they can be easily identified and risk discrimination at school or in the community. Moreover, the report focuses exclusively on the negative experiences of the victims, without providing a broader perspective on the phenomenon of gender-based violence or the solutions available to women in such situations.

The identity of the survivor of gender-based violence is not protected in the

report published by Jurnal TV on November 29 either. - „Crește singură 5 copii. Este istoria unei femei victime a violenței” (*“Raising five children alone. It’s the story of a woman who is a victim of violence.”*) While the intention of the story is to bring real issues to the forefront and raise awareness of the problem of gender-based violence, the identity of the person who has suffered is not protected, which makes them vulnerable.

To recall that Article 4.19 of the Journalist’s Code of Ethics states, “Journalists shall treat with particular accuracy information gathered about crimes, natural disasters, accidents and other similar cases in which someone suffers harm of any kind, always ensuring that the publication of such information does not cause further suffering to those harmed or innocent by what has happened.”

The monitoring team also identified cases where journalists inappropriately mentioned the ethnicity of people involved in incidents with negative connotations. The portal Ziuadeazi.md (December 12, 2024) inappropriately mentioned ethnicity in a news story about two men arrested for fraud. “During the investigation it was established that the crimes took place in October–December this year. The suspects, aged 20 and 27, from Bălți and Chișinău (one of them is from Turkey, currently settled in Moldova). <https://ziuadeazi.md/stiri/video-i-doi-barbati-retinuti-pentru-escrocherie-financiara-peste-4-000-000-de-lei-prejudiciati-in-cazul-investitiilor-false/>

According to Article 4.27 of the Code of Ethics - “Journalists shall mention a person’s ethnicity, political opinions, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and other sensitive information only when it is editorially relevant.”

2) Terminology Used by Journalists

The monitoring team also looked at the terminology used by journalists to ensure that it complied with ethical standards and human rights principles.

This principle is violated in the news story „Compensații cu scandal: Venituri lunare după vânzarea imobilelor și invalizi nevulnerabili. Reacția lui Buzu” (“*Outrageous compensation: monthly income after the sale of real estate and non-vulnerable invalids. Buzu’s reaction.*”) (Realitatea, December 11).

The term “non-vulnerable invalids” is ethically problematic. The use of the term ‘invalid’ is seen as discriminatory and stigmatizing, and its association with ‘non-vulnerable’ creates a contradiction that can be perceived as disrespectful to these people. Journalists must use appropriate and inclusive language, avoiding terms that can discriminate or marginalize. The same violation – incorrect terminology – is contained in the news story „Семьи детей с тяжёлой инвалидностью в Молдове получают по 3300 леев (*Families with children with severe invalidity in Moldova will receive 3300 lei each*), (Nokta, November 25, 2024).

The term ‘invalidity’ and the phrase “children with severe invalidity” are stigmatizing. More inclusive phrases such as “children with severe disabilities” instead of “severe invalidity” are recommended.

„Семьи с детьми-инвалидами в Молдове получают единовременную выплату. Когда и сколько” (“*Families with invalid children in Moldova will receive a one-off payment. When and how much*”) (TUK.md, November 25, 2024). Again, more inclusive wording and in line with good journalistic practice, such as “children with disabilities” is recommended.

The news story on Nokta.md „ЕСПЧ осудил Молдову за дискриминацию женщины с инвалидностью” (“*ECHR condemns Moldova for discriminating against a woman with invalidity*”) also used the discriminatory term of ‘invalidity’.

Another issue is how journalists portray people with disabilities. Good journalistic practice recommends that we do not offend the dignity of people with disabilities by portraying them as powerless, dependent on others, or forced

to live in isolation in specialized institutions. Journalists should avoid using myths and stereotypes about people with intellectual, physical or multiple disabilities, such as “they cannot live independently,” “they are pitiable,” “they are helpless,” “they cannot learn or go to school,” etc.

An example of a deviation from this principle can be found in the report “School of Empathy,” broadcast by TV8. The material presents the initiative of an education facility in Chişinău to organize a celebration for children in a special institution for the visually impaired, stating that the organizers “have set themselves the goal of coloring at least one day of their lives.” This wording implicitly suggests that the rest of these children’s lives are colorless, perpetuating an unfair stereotype.

It is essential that journalists adopt an inclusive perspective that emphasizes the rights, abilities and achievements of persons with disabilities, rather than their perceived vulnerability.

3) Headlines

As mentioned above, the monitoring team noted several cases where journalists used sensational headlines to draw readers’ attention to the material published.

The headline „В Кишиневе иностранец жестоко убил свою сестру, а ее тело нашли только через месяц” (“*In Chişinău, a foreigner brutally murdered his sister, whose body was found only a month later.*”) (Newsmaker, December 19, 2024) raises several questions about journalistic ethics. Mentioning a ‘foreigner’ can contribute to reinforcing negative stereotypes about people who are not from Moldova.

This case is also about the stigmatization of people with intellectual disabilities. The mention that the perpetrator of the crime was recognized as

“невменяемый” (psychiatrically innocent) suggests that the individual may have had mental problems or an intellectual disability that led him to commit the crime. The headline may thus reinforce the stereotype that people with intellectual disabilities are more likely to commit acts of violence, which is a dangerous stereotype.

The article entitled „Melania Trump «se vinde»! Lista de prețuri pentru o cină cu viitoarea prima doamnă a SUA” (“*Melania Trump “for sale!” Price List for Dinner with the Future First Lady of the USA*”), published by Realitatea.md on December 6. It describes a fundraising event where donors could attend an exclusive dinner with Melania Trump in exchange for significant financial contributions. Although the article provides details about the event and the packages available to donors, its headline could be considered biased and sensational, as discussed above.

4) Photographs

In most of the sensitive cases, symbolic photographs were used. Unfortunately, many photographs did not have a caption explaining their relationship to the text.

In many cases, the media tended to use dramatic images that emphasize suffering. For example, in stories about poverty, images of elderly people were chosen to emphasize material deprivation and feelings of sadness.

Reports on domestic violence used generic images, such as silhouettes of crying women or aggressive shadows on the wall, without presenting the complex reality of these situations.

People with disabilities were often photographed in a passive context, suggesting dependency, without highlighting issues of inclusion or their contribution to society.

One problematic aspect was the use of photographs without specifying whether they were real or illustrative. According to the Journalist's Code of Ethics, symbolic photographs should be properly labeled, but in practice this was often not done, which can lead to confusion or reinforce stereotypes.

In some cases, the identity of vulnerable people was not adequately protected. Photographs showing the faces of victims of violence, children from disadvantaged backgrounds or people with disabilities were published without taking into account the possible consequences for those people.

To illustrate diversity, the media should use images that reflect different ages, ethnicities, disabilities and social backgrounds. People photographed should be treated with respect and images should be taken with their consent, especially in sensitive situations. According to the Journalist's Code of Ethics - (Art. 4.8) Journalists shall respect the privacy of individuals and ask permission to photograph/film them, except in relevant cases when they are in a public place (e.g. poverty, refugees, violence); (Art. 4.11) Archival or symbolic photographs used to illustrate journalistic material shall be appropriately credited. The journalist shall ensure that the images used are consistent with the message of the journalistic material.

In most of the sensitive cases, symbolic photos were used. Unfortunately, many photos did not have a caption explaining their relationship to the text.

III. General conclusions

- The monitoring results show increased media interest in certain groups – women – and extremely low media coverage of other groups – people living with HIV/AIDS, ex-prisoners, etc.
- The monitoring revealed several problems with the way vulnerable people and sensitive events are portrayed. The quality of press material is often compromised by sensationalism, stereotyping and a lack of protection of the identity of those affected.
- Some articles do not protect the identity of people who have experienced situations with negative connotations, including survivors of domestic violence or people with mental health problems. Revealing their identity may expose them to additional risk, stigma and suffering. Journalists should be more cautious and avoid publishing details that could put them at risk.
- Some stories emphasize shocking and dramatic details over journalistic balance. Sensational headlines, shocking details, and emphasis on emotion over facts are used instead of balanced reporting that seeks to accurately inform.
- Some newsrooms chose to portray women in terms of their physical appearance, ignoring their professional or social achievements. In addition, some materials promote gender stereotypes, associating certain responsibilities exclusively with women while depicting men as helpless in the home. Such stereotypes influence social perceptions and perpetuate gender inequalities.
- Some journalists use offensive or generalizing language when referring to certain ethnic groups, such as the Roma community. These approaches only fuel prejudice and further marginalize this community. The press has the responsibility to treat all groups with respect and to contribute to a more inclusive society.
- There have been instances where articles took up political

statements without providing context or the right of reply. This can reinforce aggressive rhetoric and divisions in society.

- In some reports, domestic violence is minimized, suggesting that the assaults were caused by minor or trivial reasons. This type of narrative creates a misperception of this serious social problem that needs to be addressed responsibly, both in the media and in society.
- Some newsrooms do not use the correct terminology when referring to people from disadvantaged groups, using outdated or offensive terms such as “invalid” instead of “disabled person” or “gypsy” instead of “Roma.”

IV. Recommendations

To improve the quality of journalism and respect the rights of vulnerable people, newsrooms can adopt some key principles:

- Protect the identity of victims and respect their confidentiality;
- Avoid sensationalism and emphasize balanced facts;
- Eliminate gender and ethnic stereotypes when presenting stories;
- Contextualize political statements and provide the right of reply;
- Responsible discourse on domestic violence without minimizing the seriousness of the problem;
- More frequently include the views of representatives of disadvantaged groups in decisions that affect them and their daily lives;
- Use correct terminology in relation to disadvantaged groups;
- Content managers in each newsroom should be aware of and take into account the provisions of the Moldovan Journalist's Code of Ethics and the recommendations of the "Style Guide with Ethical Norms for Journalists," when writing news or moderating comments from press consumers.