



Funded by  
the European Union



Reporting  
Diversity  
Network

**LICEULICE**

photography: Marija Janković

LICEULICE

# GUIDELINES FOR ETHICAL REPORTING ON HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY



This publication was created with the financial support of the European Union within the Reporting Diversity Network program. Its content is the sole responsibility of LICEULICE and does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union or the Reporting Diversity Network (RDN).

**Publisher:**

Liceulice

**Represented by:**

Milosav Marinović

**Developed by:**

Dunja Karanović

**Layout and Design:**

Tamara Kalčić

**Proofreading:**

Sandra Đurić Milinov

**Photographs:**

Marija Janković

Gavrilo Andrić

Predrag Trokicić

**Illustrations:**

Tamara Kalčić

Andreja Lepir

**Contributors:**

Katarina Bogdanović (ADRA)

Milica Jocić (ADRA)

Gorica Nikolin (A11)

Ema Stepanović (A11)

Iva Petrović (Liceulice)

Belgrade, 2026



ON  
ND  
S

**HOW WE REPORT ON  
HOMELESSNESS AND  
POVERTY MATTERS**

**HOW WE  
HOMEL  
POVERTY**

Homelessness, poverty, and social exclusion are structural problems that require systemic solutions and social responsibility. In media reports on these topics, especially in photographs and other visual materials, we usually encounter a distorted image – people living on the streets represented through stories of personal *tragedy*, *poor* decisions, or *unfortunate* circumstances. Homelessness and poverty are not individual problems, but complex social phenomena caused by a multitude of economic, institutional, and social factors.

The way the media reports on homelessness and poverty shapes how our society understands these phenomena and how it relates to them. Irresponsible reporting strengthens stereotypes and prejudice, dehumanizing people living in poverty or in homelessness situations, as well as shifting responsibility from systems onto individuals.

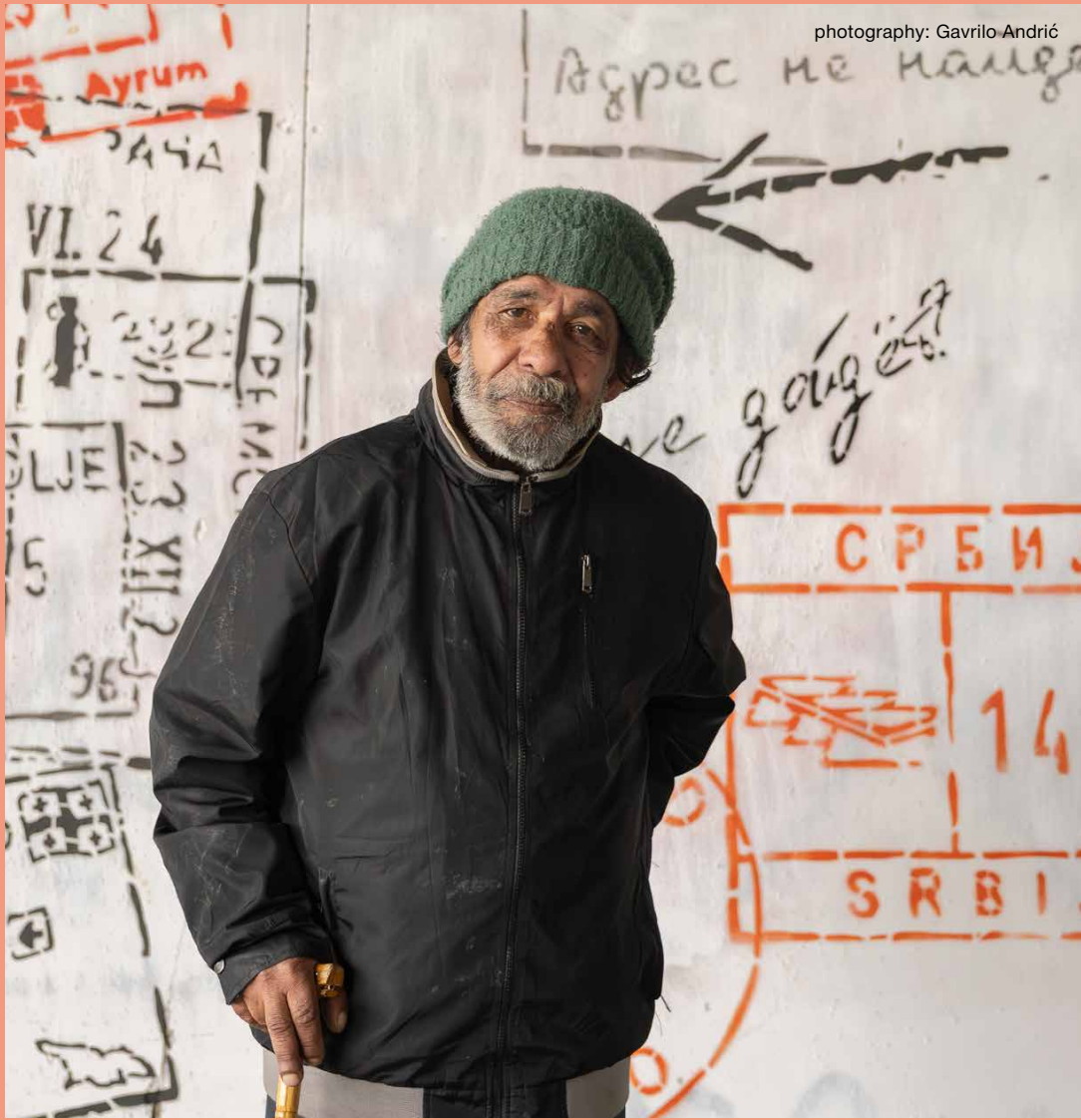
Stereotypical and/or sensationalist reporting, apart from being inaccurate, reduces empathy and solidarity among our readers and viewers by making it harder to understand the causes of structural problems that concern all citizens. In contrast, responsible and ethical reporting informs the public, reduces stigma, and encourages the development of fairer policies – policies that serve to protect all citizens, not just those living in extreme poverty and on the margins of society.

These *Guidelines for Ethical Reporting on Homelessness and Poverty* summarize the experience that *Liceulice* has been building since 2010 in reporting on poverty, systemic discrimination, and housing and economic inequality faced by our most vulnerable fellow citizens, as well as in providing direct support for economic empowerment. The principles we present here are based on our editorial work, direct work with beneficiaries, as well as cooperation with partner organizations from the Network for Combating Homelessness (Mreža za borbu protiv beskućništva)<sup>1</sup>. These organizations provide services such as free legal aid, psychological support, healthcare, warm meals, and representation with social welfare institutions – all the basic services that guarantee a dignified life, that should be ensured by the state.

These guidelines are intended for all editorial offices, media outlets, journalists, reporters, editorial teams, photojournalists, and others who aim to report accurately, impartially, and comprehensively on issues of homelessness and poverty in line with the public interest and ethical principles of their profession.

---

1 Members of the Network for Combating Homelessness (Mreža za borbu protiv beskućništva) include: A11 Initiative for Social and Economic Rights, ADRA, KlikAktiv, Solidarity Kitchen (Kuhinja solidarnosti) Novi Sad, Liceulice, CK13 Youth Center, PIN – Psychosocial Innovation Network, Caritas Serbia, as well as the organizations Patrija, Info Park, Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO) and Grupa Budi 1.



**NESS  
TY ARE  
SOCIAL  
A**

**HOMELINESS  
AND POVERTY ARE  
COMPLEX SOCIAL  
PHENOMENA**

**HOM  
AND  
COM  
PHE**

Homelessness does not exclusively imply living on the street or *sleeping rough*. It also includes people who reside in temporary, insecure, or inadequate housing conditions, as well as those who depend on others for accommodation. Poverty and homelessness are the result of systemic, interconnected factors, including inadequate housing policies, insecure and precarious forms of work, ineffective and inaccessible social welfare systems, experiences of violence and discrimination, institutional exclusion and invisibility, as well as health conditions that make access to the labor market more difficult.

Under Serbian legislation, the concept of homelessness is not clearly defined, which makes it difficult to estimate the number of people experiencing homelessness and prevents an adequate and comprehensive state response. The terms primary and secondary homelessness are used in the context of population censuses. **Primary homelessness** refers to visible homelessness (living without shelter, living rough), while **secondary homelessness** includes temporary accommodation, staying in shelters, drop-in centers, or abandoned spaces.

The European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion (ETHOS) developed by the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA) identifies four main categories of living situations that constitute homelessness and housing exclusion: **rooflessness** (living rough, staying in overnight shelters), **houselessness** (living in homeless hostels, temporary shelters, women's shelters, penal institutions, etc.) **insecure housing** (living with friends or family, living under threat of eviction, illegal occupation of land), and **inadequate housing** (living on overcrowded spaces, mobile homes, non-conventional and temporary housing, dwellings unfit for habitation).

It is important to understand that **people experiencing homelessness are not a homogeneous group**, and their experiences can be very different. What connects those experiences is a lack of institutional support. Groups at particular risk include: people without personal documents, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, Roma and other national minorities, members of the LGBT+ community, people with mental health issues, persons with disabilities, victims of gender-based and domestic violence, war veterans, people with addiction issues, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, children and youth leaving the social protection system, people leaving correctional institutions, and others.

When it comes to poverty, data from the National Statistical Office of Serbia<sup>2</sup> shows that in 2025, the at-risk-of-poverty rate was 19.6% (25.8% for senior citizens over 65), while the risk of poverty or social exclusion was 23.2%. This means that by reporting on poverty, we are reporting on the reality faced by one fifth to one quarter of the population of Serbia.

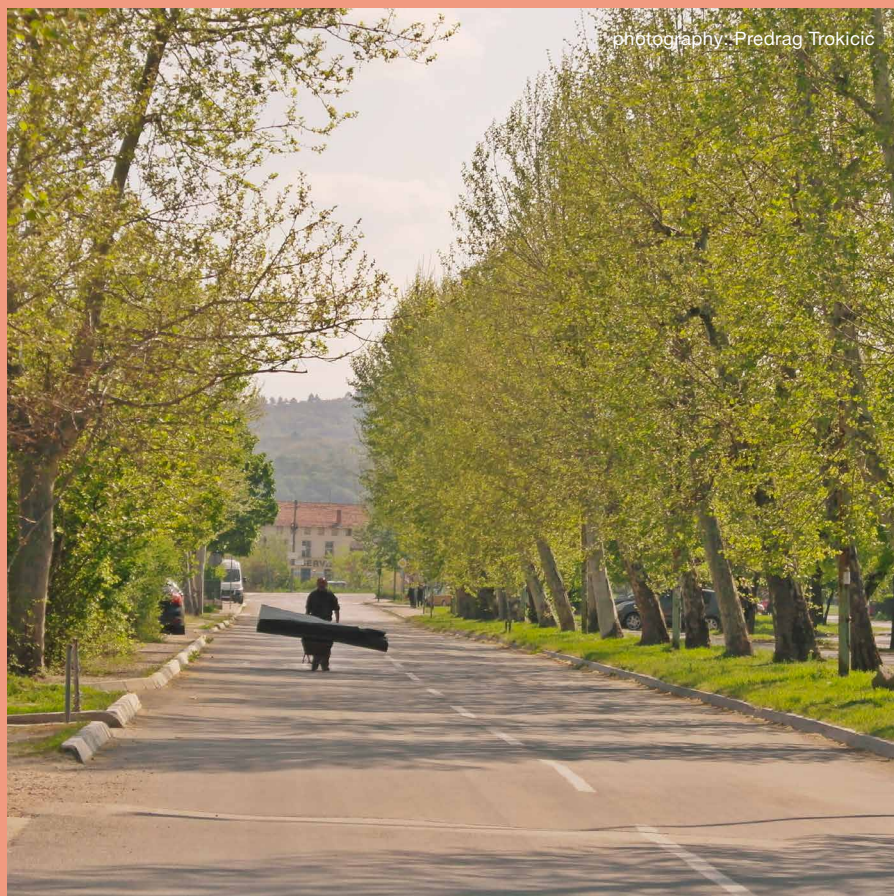
---

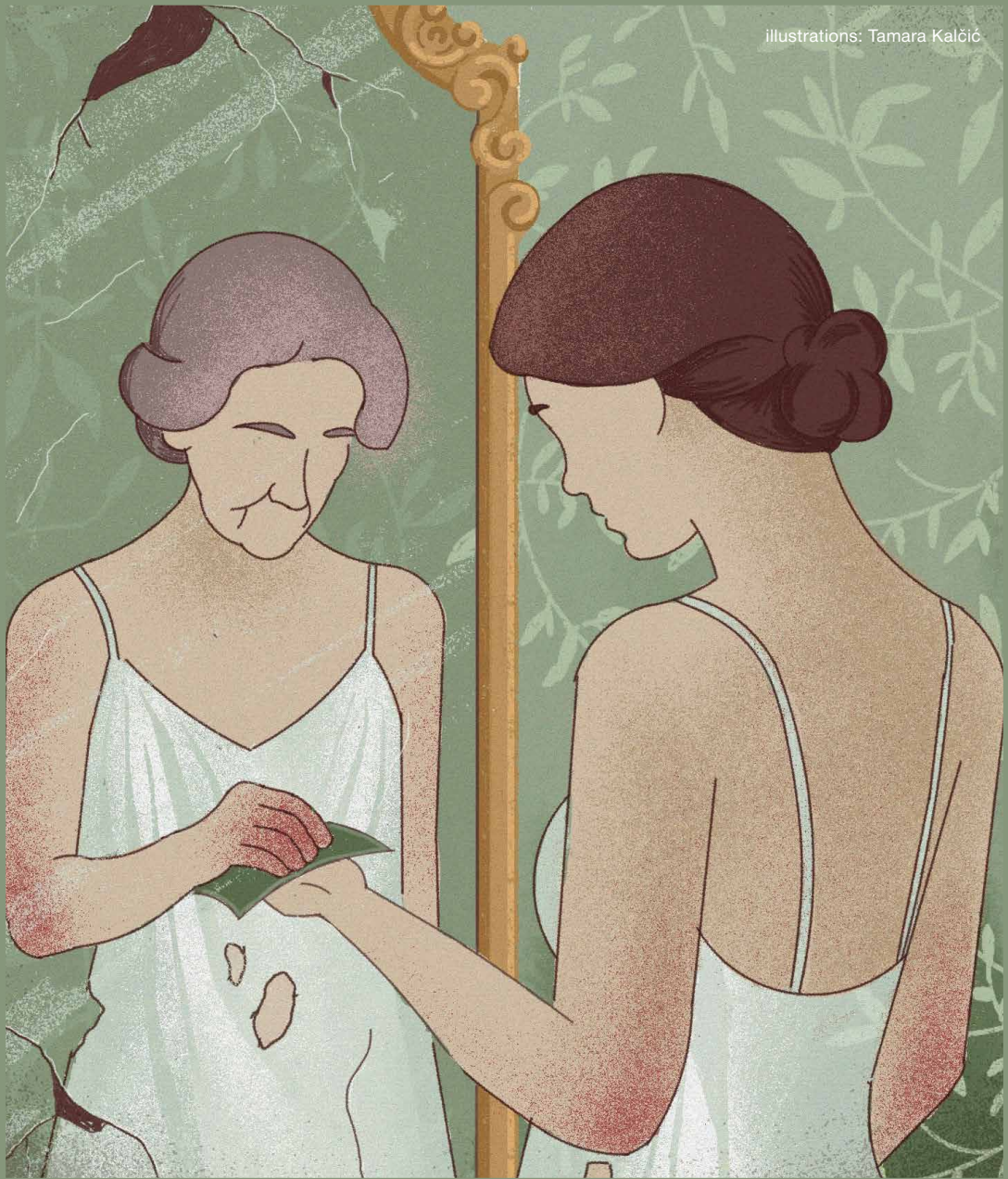
1 See [www.stat.gov.rs](http://www.stat.gov.rs)

When reporting on homelessness, poverty, and social exclusion, it is crucial that we do not present these phenomena through the lens of personal decisions, mistakes, exceptional life circumstances, or individual failures, but as the result of broader social and systemic shortcomings.

The right to housing and a dignified life is guaranteed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, the European Social Charter, as well as numerous international conventions ratified by Serbia (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, etc.).

With this in mind, it is the duty of the media to report on homelessness and poverty as violations of fundamental human rights and to point out cracks in the social welfare system that put the entire population at risk.





**KES**

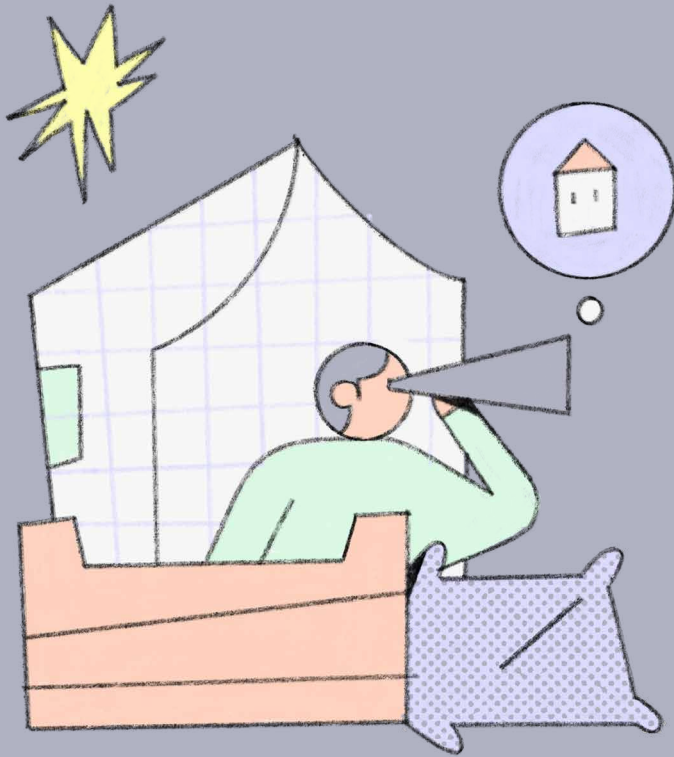
**COMMON MISTAKES  
IN REPORTING**

**COM  
IN R**

## Some of the most commonly made mistakes in media reporting on homelessness and poverty include:

- sensationalist portrayals and exploitation of suffering (*misery tourism, poverty porn*), *clickbait* headlines and stereotypical phrases like “hell on the streets”;
- romanticization of difficult living conditions (“living a modest but happy life”);
- shifting responsibility onto the individual and focusing on personal stories (“drank his way to homelessness”, “died in misery”);
- linking poverty and homelessness with crime and spreading panic (phrases like “infestation” and “plague”, presenting people living rough as scammers, etc.);
- use of dehumanizing visual material (photographing/ filming without consent, depicting people in risky, undignified, or intimate situations);
- revealing personal data and sharing details without consent;
- superficial reporting without addressing structural issues, legal frameworks, and institutional responsibility;
- stereotyping and reducing poverty and homelessness to a homogeneous experience.





**IPLES**

**BASIC PRINCIPLES  
OF ETHICAL  
REPORTING**

**BASIC  
OF ETH  
REPOR**

The media play a significant role in shaping public discourse on homelessness and poverty. Through responsible reporting, we can contribute to reducing stigma and prejudice, improving understanding of social causes, encouraging solidarity and social responsibility among audiences and the wider community, and improving public policies.

Ethical reporting is based on the following principles:

## **Dignity and respect**

People should be presented as whole individuals, not reduced solely to their current life situation. Interviewees should not be portrayed as helpless or “tragic” figures requiring pity, nor should their situation be romanticized.

## **Do no harm**

Reporting must not endanger the safety, privacy, or mental health of the interviewee. Personal information (health data, legal records, history of substance use, place of residence, sexual orientation, citizenship status, etc.) that could put them at risk should not be disclosed. Interviews must be conducted with prior agreement, and only in appropriate circumstances – not when the person is under stress, feeling scared, exhausted, anxious, or coerced.

## **Privacy and informed consent**

Interviewees must be informed about the purpose, context, and possible consequences of the interview. They should be given the opportunity to approve the text or see the audio/video material before publication.

## **Accuracy and context**

Information must be verified and placed within broader social and economic frameworks, using data and expert sources, and referencing relevant legal frameworks. It is important to have more than one source in a story and include the opinions of civil society organizations, social workers, and activists who have hands-on experience with supporting people in homelessness situations.

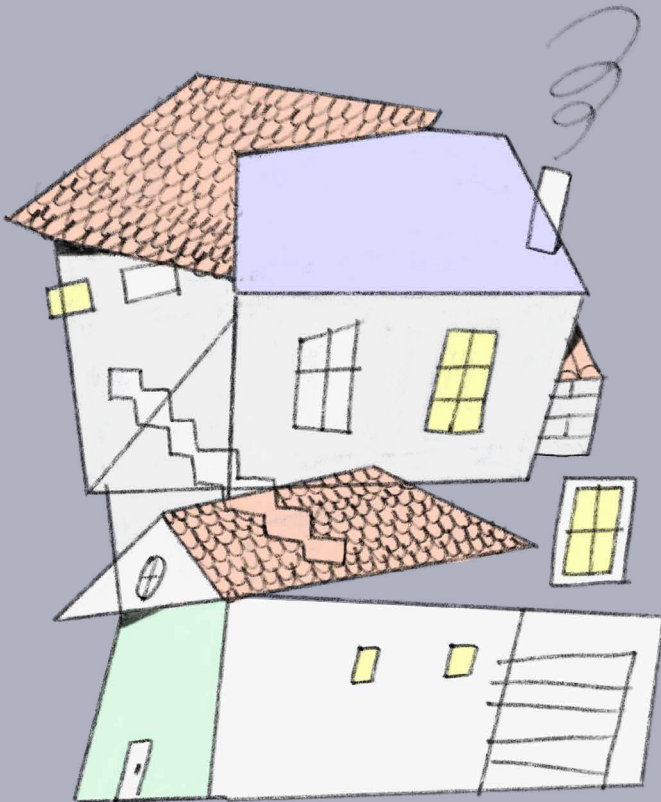
## **Avoiding stigmatization**

People who have experienced extreme poverty, homelessness, and housing exclusion are rarely present in the media, which is why it is important to avoid language that reinforces stereotypes, discriminates, or spreads panic. Person-first language is preferred because it focuses on the person rather

than their circumstances. It is also necessary to avoid phrases that promote discrimination based on a person's gender, ethnicity, race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, age, or ability.

## **Highlighting systemic causes**

Reporting should focus on structural factors rather than individual blame. Individual experiences can be potent examples, but a comprehensive report highlights problems that affect our entire society as well as showcasing potential systemic solutions.





**ELINES FOR  
RTING**

**GUIDELINES FOR  
REPORTING**

**GU  
RE**

## **Language and terminology**

Use clear, neutral, precise, non-stigmatizing language. Language that focuses on the person rather than the situation they're in is recommended ('people living rough' instead of 'homeless people', 'vagrants', 'bums', etc.). An interviewee has the right to refer to themselves as they please and this right should be respected, but quotes should not reinforce stereotypes.

## **Topic selection**

Homelessness and poverty are complex issues that encompass a wide range of experiences rarely shown in the media. Stories of homelessness and poverty usually come up during times of extreme heat, extreme cold, on special occasions such as holidays and the World Homeless Day (October 10), or when a shelter closes down.

It is necessary to report year-round and include diverse perspectives and less visible forms of homelessness, especially when it comes to the experiences of women, non-binary people, youth, people with disabilities, and different marginalized groups.

## **Selection of interviewees**

In reporting, it is crucial to include individuals with lived experiences of homelessness and poverty, as well as experts from relevant fields and organizations that provide support and work with marginalized groups.

When choosing interviewees, civil society organizations and experts working with people in situations of homelessness and extreme poverty represent a vital support system. In addition to providing broader context and sharing experiences, they can act as intermediaries in communication and help the interviewee feel more comfortable, understand the purpose of the interview, and know their rights regarding informed consent and authorization.

Social workers, activists, and mental health professionals are also best positioned to assess which interviewee is able to speak with the media without compromising their own safety, privacy, or mental health. As journalists and editors, we must give them ample time to provide statements, authorize content, and/or connect us with people with lived experience. Deadlines in the media are often tight, but we cannot expect someone to answer questions or prepare an interviewee for a conversation in less than 24 hours. Ethical reporting requires planning and adequate preparation.

## **Conducting an interview**

Before the interview itself, it is necessary to explain the purpose of the conversation, obtain informed consent, and familiarize the interviewee with the potential consequences of publication. This often implies getting to know them (with or without an intermediary) before we begin recording their story.

During the interview, it is vital to respect the interviewee's right to refuse to answer questions that make them uncomfortable and to withdraw their consent if they choose to do so.

We should approach the conversation with respect and empathy, avoiding pressure. There are various reasons why someone might want to share their story. We must ensure that the person we are speaking with does not feel obligated to disclose personal information as a favor to us, to get something in return, or because they feel we are doing them a favor. On the other hand, we have to understand that people living in extreme poverty or without secure housing are giving up time they could otherwise spend visiting a soup kitchen or searching for shelter. Therefore, it is entirely reasonable to show our appreciation by sharing a coffee or a meal together.

If the person we are interviewing wishes to be accompanied by someone they trust – an intermediary, a friend, or social worker, we have to make that possible. People in situations of homelessness often have histories of trauma, exploitation, or violence; they do not owe us their trust simply because we are journalists and have good intentions.

After the interview is completed, it is good to remain in contact with the interviewee(s), provide them with a copy of the media outlet where the interview was published or show them the feature on a device, and to be mindful of the context in which their story is presented.

The interview must not be taken out of context, exaggerated or accompanied by sensationalist headlines and stereotypical visuals, and the report should never reveal personal data that could jeopardize the safety and dignity of the interviewee.

## **Visual Content**

In the era of digital media and social networks, visual representations are an indispensable part of media reporting and are often what draws the audience's attention. In the context of reporting on homelessness and poverty, illustrations, photographs, and video recordings must also comply with the principles of dignity, respect, and protect the safety of the people we are speaking with and about.

Photographs, video recordings, and illustrations should help the audience see people who have experienced poverty and homelessness as whole individuals, allowing them to identify with their problems and recognize the systemic factors that contribute to extreme poverty, housing inequality, and exclusion.

Stereotypical depictions that reduce homelessness to extreme imagery (e.g. a person sleeping on a bench or rummaging through trash cans) should be avoided, as well as images of suffering, misery, or filth.

It is unacceptable to photograph or film secretly or without consent, or to capture people in risky and intimate situations that violate their dignity. Photographs or recordings that could be used as evidence against the person being reported on should not be published (i.e. footage of children begging or working on the street, individuals using illegal substances – especially if their identity can be determined from the footage), nor should visual content that could be used as a way to locate, condemn, or harm a person.

The best visuals provide a broader context and show the diversity of life experiences such as social interactions, mutual support, and hobbies. Illustrations and photographs that represent systemic problems in a metaphorical or allegorical way are also encouraged: institutional “labyrinths,” “tangled” procedures, locked doors, unequal starting positions, and so on.





**ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

**ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

The goal of ethical reporting is to raise awareness about the fact that the right to fair housing and dignity are issues that concern our entire society, and that just housing policies, social welfare, and institutional support should be available to everyone.

Homelessness and poverty are not personal tragedies but symptoms of a faulty system that puts everyone at risk.

When the media reports on structural causes of homelessness and poverty, the effects of social policies, available support systems, examples of good practice, personal experiences, and success stories, we can contribute to better understanding and greater solidarity.



## **Network for Combatting Homelessness (Mreža za borbu protiv beskućništva)**

[mreza.beskucnistvo@gmail.com](mailto:mreza.beskucnistvo@gmail.com)

---

## **A11 – Initiative for Social and Economic Rights**

[www.a11initiative.org](http://www.a11initiative.org)  
[office@a11initiative.org](mailto:office@a11initiative.org)

+381 11 3225 172

+381 11 3232 030

+381 60 1772 454

Reports <http://www.a11initiative.org/publikacije/izvestaji/>

---

## **ADRA Serbia**

[www.adra.org.rs](http://www.adra.org.rs)  
[office@adra.org.rs](mailto:office@adra.org.rs)

+381 11 4087 802

+381 60 8080 561 (beskućništvo, donacije)

+381 11 3442 625 (faks)

Publications - <http://adra.org.rs/publikacije-adra/>

---

## **KlikAktiv - Center for Development of Social Policies**

[www.klikaktiv.org](http://www.klikaktiv.org)  
[info@klikaktiv.org](mailto:info@klikaktiv.org)

+381 64 6599 177

## **Liceulice**

[www.liceulice.org](http://www.liceulice.org)  
[vendors@liceulice.org](mailto:vendors@liceulice.org)  
[redakcija@liceulice.org](mailto:redakcija@liceulice.org)  
[info@liceulice.org](mailto:info@liceulice.org)

+381 11 2686 567

---

## **CK13 Youth Center / Solidarity Kitchen Novi Sad**

[www.ck13.space](http://www.ck13.space)  
[office@ck13.space](mailto:office@ck13.space)  
[pr@ck13.space](mailto:pr@ck13.space)  
[kuhinjasolidarnostins@gmail.com](mailto:kuhinjasolidarnostins@gmail.com)

+381 21 4737 601

---

## **PIN – Psychosocial Innovation Network**

[www.pin.org.rs](http://www.pin.org.rs)  
[office@pin.org.rs](mailto:office@pin.org.rs)

+381 62 8880 927

---

## **Caritas Serbia**

[www.caritas.rs](http://www.caritas.rs)  
[zastita@caritas.rs](mailto:zastita@caritas.rs)  
[secretariat@caritas.rs](mailto:secretariat@caritas.rs)

+381 11 4099 561

---

## **Solidarity Kitchen (Belgrade)**

[www.solidarnakuhinja.org](http://www.solidarnakuhinja.org)  
[solidarna.kuhinja@gmail.com](mailto:solidarna.kuhinja@gmail.com)

+381 63 1455 930

## **Info park**

[gordan@infopark.online](mailto:gordan@infopark.online)

+381604050248

---

## **Patrija Association Novi Sad**

[www.patrija.com](http://www.patrija.com)

[ngopatria@gmail.com](mailto:ngopatria@gmail.com)

+38163549365

---

## **Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO) Novi Sad**

[office@ehons.org](mailto:office@ehons.org)

+381 21 466 588

---

## **Grupa BUDI 1 / Novi Sad**

[groupb1.org](http://groupb1.org)

[office@groupb1.org](mailto:office@groupb1.org)

+381600561759

---

## **Astra - Anti Trafficking Action**

[www.astra.rs](http://www.astra.rs)

[astra@astra.rs](mailto:astra@astra.rs)

+ 381 11 785 0001

---

## **Izlazak**

[info@izlazak.org](mailto:info@izlazak.org)

+381 61 255 27 37