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Code of Professional Standards for Journalistic and Media Coverage of Migration and Asylum



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“The views and opinions presented in this manual are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of Switzerland.

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Code of Professional Standards for Journalistic and Media Coverage of Migration and Asylum

Introduction

Migration and asylum are complex and sensitive issues, encompassing interconnected legal, human rights, humanitarian, social, economic and security dimensions. Their drivers range from conflict and persecution to economic circumstances, environmental factors and climate change.

These issues also intersect with international protection, access to services, integration and relations with host communities. Their coverage therefore requires an accurate understanding of the relevant contexts and differing legal statuses, verification of information and sources, and the use of clear terminology and neutral language. It also requires avoiding generalisations, stigmatisation, stereotypes and hate speech, while safeguarding people's dignity, privacy and safety, particularly those at heightened risk.

This Code provides a framework of professional guidance for journalists, media professionals and media organisations at every stage of coverage, from planning and information gathering to interviewing, content production, publication and monitoring its impact. It also addresses informed consent, correction of errors and the updating of information where necessary.

The Code draws on Egyptian legislation, professional rules and standards, international human rights instruments, international refugee law, and relevant international professional guidance.

Scope of Application

This Code serves as a framework of professional guidance for journalistic and media coverage related to migration and asylum across all types and platforms. It covers print and digital journalism, radio, television, audiovisual content, social media platforms and other forms of media publication.

Media organisations, journalists and media professionals may draw on the Code throughout their work, subject to applicable legislation and binding professional rules. The code does not replace the legal or professional obligations arising from those instruments.

I. Key Concepts and Terminology

This section defines key concepts and terms relating to migration and asylum, explains their legal and professional significance, and distinguishes between related terms whose conflation may lead to inaccurate descriptions of individuals, their legal status or their rights.

Depending on the term concerned, these definitions draw on relevant instruments and rules of international human rights law and international refugee law, as well as applicable national legislation.

Asylum-seeker: A person who seeks international protection and has applied for refugee status or another form of international protection, but whose application has not yet been finally determined. Not every asylum-seeker qualifies as a refugee; they must meet the relevant legal criteria.

Refugee: A person who is outside their country of nationality due to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, and due to such fear is unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country. Refugee status does not depend on formal recognition: a person is a refugee as soon as they meet the criteria set out in national law and the relevant international law. A person who has applied for international protection and whose claim has not yet been finally determined is considered an asylum-seeker until their status is determined in accordance with the applicable procedures.

Internally displaced person: "A person or group of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their home or place of habitual residence as a result of, or to avoid the effects of, armed conflict, violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters, without crossing an internationally recognised State border.

Migrant: A broad term used to describe a person who moves away from their place of habitual residence, temporarily or permanently, for economic, social, family, security, environmental or other reasons, regardless of their legal status or whether the movement is voluntary or forced. There is no universally agreed, comprehensive definition of "migrant" under international law.

Irregular migration: The movement of persons outside the laws, regulations or international agreements governing entry into or exit from a country of origin, transit or destination. Depending on the circumstances, it includes entry, stay or departure without fulfilling the relevant legal or administrative requirements.

Unaccompanied and separated children: Children under the age of eighteen. Unaccompanied children are those who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who is responsible for doing so by law or custom. Separated children are those who have been separated from both parents or from their legal or customary primary caregiver, but may be accompanied by other relatives. Separation may occur in different circumstances, including conflict, violence, persecution, emergencies and crises.

Refoulement: The direct or indirect return of a person to a State or territory where they may face persecution, torture or other forms of serious or irreparable harm. Such return is prohibited under the principle of non-refoulement, a fundamental principle of refugee law and international human rights law. The prohibition extends beyond direct return to include indirect return, such as transfer to a third country that may subsequently return the person to a place where they face such risks.

Trafficking in persons: The recruitment, transportation, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to obtain the consent of a person having control over another person, for exploitation. Exploitation includes exploitation in prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude, or the removal of organs. In the case of children, the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation constitutes trafficking even if it does not involve any of the means set out above.

Voluntary return: A person's return to their country of origin, a country of transit or a third country on the basis of a free and informed decision, either independently or with assistance from a competent entity. Provided that sufficient information is available and there is no coercion or pressure that makes the return forced in effect.

Forced migration: A term used to describe movement or displacement involving force, coercion or compulsion, in its causes or circumstances, from people's places of habitual residence because of external factors beyond their control. These may include armed conflict, war, political or ethnic persecution, natural and environmental disasters, serious disturbances of public order, or a State's unwillingness to protect the rights of its citizens.

Stateless person: A person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law. Statelessness does not necessarily mean that a person lacks identity documents, nor does it automatically mean that they are a refugee. A stateless person may be within or outside their country and may also be a refugee if they meet the relevant criteria. Depending on the legal context and the person's circumstances, statelessness may create obstacles to the enjoyment of certain rights and access to services, including education, health care, employment and freedom of movement.

Persons at heightened risk: Persons whose personal, legal, social, health or security circumstances, or the contexts in which they find themselves, may expose them to a greater risk of harm, violence, exploitation or violations of their rights, whether during migration or displacement, upon arrival in a destination country or in their place of residence. Depending on the context, they may include children, women, older persons, persons with disabilities, survivors of torture, victims of trafficking, members of groups that may face discrimination or persecution, and others whose circumstances call for specific protection measures or professional precautions.

Smuggling of migrants: The procurement of a person's illegal entry into a State of which that person is neither a national nor a permanent resident, to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit. Migrant smuggling differs from trafficking in persons in that its primary purpose is to facilitate illegal entry into a State in exchange for a benefit; exploitation is not a

necessary element. A smuggled person may nevertheless subsequently experience exploitation or other violations.

Deportation: A measure taken by the competent authorities to require a foreign national to leave the territory of a State and to transfer them to another State, which may be their country of nationality or another country where they are permitted to enter, in accordance with applicable law and procedures. Deportation must be subject to the prescribed legal and procedural safeguards. Depending on the person's circumstances and legal status, these include notification of the deportation decision and its reasons, and access to appeal or review before a competent authority, with due regard to the principle of non-refoulement and obligations to protect persons against torture, persecution or other forms of serious harm.

Informed consent: A free and voluntary decision by an individual, whether a victim, witness or participant, to agree to the collection of their information, an interview or the use of evidence they provide, without coercion, pressure or undue inducement, after receiving and understanding full information about the process. Additional safeguards are required when engaging with children, persons with disabilities or trauma survivors. Where consent from a parent or legal guardian is required, it must not conflict with the child's best interests, and the child's own assent must also be sought in a manner appropriate to their age and maturity.

II. Preparing Coverage and Gathering Information

Article 1 — Legal Framework

Journalists and media professionals shall familiarize themselves with the Egyptian Constitution and legislation relevant to asylum, migration and human rights, including laws governing the entry, residence and departure of foreign nationals, and laws addressing trafficking in persons and migrant smuggling. They shall also familiarize themselves with relevant international and regional treaties and instruments ratified by Egypt and the obligations arising from them.

Article 2 — Professional Planning

Press and media coverage rests on deliberate professional planning that comes before any content is produced. The plan clearly defines the subject of the coverage, its editorial purpose, the angle of treatment and the key questions, as well as the appropriate sources, the methods for gathering information, and the means of verifying its accuracy and credibility. The planning also takes into account the legal, human rights, humanitarian, social and cultural dimensions of the subject, so that the facts are placed in their proper context. It avoids fragmented, stereotypical or sensationalist treatment, and refrains from exploiting human suffering or violating the dignity of the people covered for the sake of sensation or audience appeal.

Article 3 — Assessing the Effects of Publication and Avoiding Harm

Editorial decisions shall be based on an assessment of the potential effects of publication, balancing the public's right to information with individuals' rights to privacy, dignity and safety, particularly where persons or groups are in vulnerable situations. This assessment shall take account of risks of harm, stigmatization, discrimination and the disclosure of sensitive information.

The effects of publication shall be monitored, as much as possible, and measures taken to mitigate unforeseen harm. Such measures may include correcting or clarifying information, amending content, restricting access to it or withdrawing it, where feasible, professionally justified and proportionate to the harm concerned.

Article 4 — Verification of Digital Content

Images, videos, audio recordings, documents and other digital content circulating on social media and digital platforms shall be verified before being published, republished or relied upon in journalistic or media coverage.

Verification shall establish the content's source, authenticity, date of production or circulation, location of recording or production, and context. It shall also establish whether the content has been selectively excerpted, manipulated or repurposed outside its original context.

Article 5 — Protection of Sources

Journalists and media professionals should protect the confidentiality of sources and secure their data. They shall not disclose a source's identity or any information that may reveal it directly or indirectly, or expose the source or their family to danger, except with the source's informed consent or in circumstances permitted by law.

Article 6 — Professional Safety

Press and media coverage takes personal, professional and digital safety into account by assessing risks during planning and adopting measures to protect journalists, their sources and team members.

These measures shall include securing data, accounts, communications and systems, and updating devices and software, as appropriate to the assignment and its context, to minimise the risk that can be avoided.

III. Producing and Publishing Content

Article 7 — Accuracy in Human Rights and Legal Terminology

Journalistic and media coverage shall use accurate human rights and legal terminology relating to migration and asylum. As appropriate to each case, it shall distinguish between refugees, asylum-

seekers, migrants, internally displaced persons, victims of migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons, and other relevant categories.

Coverage shall avoid terms or descriptions that stigmatize, discriminate, convey prejudgment or conflate distinct legal statuses and humanitarian circumstances.

Article 8 — Providing the Full Context

Journalistic and media reporting shall place events and information within their relevant legal, political, economic, social, cultural and humanitarian contexts, enabling audiences to understand the causes, developments and implications of the issues concerned.

Information, statements and data shall not be taken out of context in ways that distort their meaning or mislead the public.

Article 9 — Distinguishing News from Opinion

Journalistic and media reporting shall distinguish documented facts and information from opinion, commentary or interpretation. The nature of the content shall be clearly identified, and opinions, assessments, interpretations and conclusions shall not be presented as facts or verified information.

Article 10 — Data and Statistics

Journalistic and media reporting shall rely on credible data and statistics, identifying their sources, dates and methods of collection and production where this information is available.

Data and statistics shall be placed in their relevant context and shall not be selectively presented, used out of context or displayed in ways that may lead to misleading or inaccurate conclusions.

Article 11 — Visual Content and Disturbing Images

The use of visual content in journalistic and media reporting shall respect dignity and privacy, protect people's identities and safety, and avoid exposing them or their families to danger or exploiting their suffering.

Visual material shall be presented in its proper context, without selective editing or manipulation that alters its meaning or reinforces stigmatization and stereotypes concerning migrants and refugees.

Disturbing or graphic images shall be published only where there is a clear professional necessity, with due respect for victims' dignity and privacy and the dignity of deceased persons, while avoiding additional harm or distress to their families.

Article 12 — Headlines, Introductions and Thumbnails

Headlines, introductions and thumbnails shall be accurate, balanced and faithful to the substance of the content.

Information shall not be selectively presented, taken out of context or used to sensationalize, provoke fear, exaggerate or mislead, or to attract attention and increase views or engagement at the expense of truth or people's dignity and rights.

Article 13 — Publication on Digital Platforms

The same professional standards apply to websites, social media platforms and audiovisual and short-form content.

The nature of a platform, the speed of publication or limitations on content length shall not justify abandoning standards of accuracy, verification, privacy protection or respect for human dignity.

Article 14 — Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of artificial intelligence applications and tools to gather, analyse or translate information, or to produce journalistic and media content, should not remove professional responsibility for the accuracy of published or broadcast material. That responsibility remains with the journalist or media organization.

Artificial intelligence outputs shall not be relied upon as the sole source of information. They shall undergo independent verification and human review before publication or broadcast, particularly with respect to names, figures, facts, images and other material generated by such tools.

IV. Engaging with Individuals and Sources

Article 15 — Avoiding Promises or Guarantees

Professional relationships with individuals featured in coverage shall not involve promises or guarantees beyond the professional role of the journalist or media organization.

Journalists and media professionals shall not imply that they represent another entity or claim that they can provide assistance or services, or influence a person's legal status or living conditions. Participation in media coverage shall not be made a condition for receiving any assistance, service or benefit.

Article 16 — Interviews, Informed Consent and Privacy Protection

Interviews, recordings and photography shall be conducted with free and informed consent, after explaining the identity of the media organization, the purpose of the coverage, how the material will be used and published, and the potential risks of participation. A safe environment shall be provided that takes account of people's needs, particularly those at heightened risk.

Individuals' right to refuse participation without pressure, coercion or exploitation shall be respected, as shall their right to withdraw consent or request that material not be used, as well as professionally and legally feasible.

The privacy of individuals and their families, their personal data, places of residence, property and documents shall be protected. Information that reveals their identities or locations, or exposes them or their families to danger, shall not be published except where there is a clear professional necessity, with appropriate measures taken to minimize harm.

Article 17 — Trauma-Sensitive Reporting

Reporting on individuals who have experienced violence or trauma shall take account of their circumstances and privacy, respect their capacity to participate, and uphold their right not to answer questions or to discontinue participation.

Individuals shall not be pressured to recall or disclose painful details that are not required by professional necessity, nor shall interviews be conducted in ways that may cause further harm. Human suffering shall not be used to generate an emotional response or attract attention at the expense of dignity and psychological safety.

V. Balance and Avoidance of Stigmatization and Stereotyping

Article 18 — Avoiding Generalizations and Stereotypical Associations between Migration and Crime

Journalistic and media reporting shall avoid stereotypical or unjustified associations between migration or asylum and crime, terrorism or security threats.

A person's migrant or refugee status, nationality or legal status shall not be presented as an indication that they have committed or are responsible for a crime. Such information shall be included only where it is verified and directly and objectively relevant to the incident being covered.

An individual incident shall not be generalized to the group to which the person belongs, and coverage shall not be framed in ways that reinforce stereotypes, stigmatization or hostility towards migrants and refugees.

Article 19 — Presumption of Innocence and Protection of Victims and Witnesses

Coverage of criminal incidents and proceedings shall respect the presumption of innocence. No person shall be presented as having committed, being responsible for, or having been convicted of an offence before a final court judgment has been issued.

Coverage shall clearly distinguish between suspicion, accusation and conviction, and accurately attribute allegations and accounts of events to their judicial or official sources, without adopting them or presenting them as established facts.

The protection, privacy and safety of victims and witnesses shall be respected, particularly children and persons at heightened risk.

Article 20 — Avoiding Reductive Portrayals of Refugees and Migrants

Journalistic and media coverage shall avoid stereotypical portrayals of refugees and migrants solely as a problem, a burden or victims, or as a homogeneous group.

It shall reflect the diversity of their circumstances, experiences, needs, abilities and contributions, and the different contexts in which they live. Coverage shall present a balanced and multidimensional account of their human and social realities, recognizing their dignity and agency as individuals with rights, needs and distinct experiences.

Article 21 — Diversity of Sources and Perspectives and Verification of Information

Journalistic and media coverage shall draw on diverse sources and perspectives, including those of the parties concerned, to provide a comprehensive and balanced account of migration and asylum issues.

Coverage shall not reduce these issues to a single narrative or focus exclusively on incidents and crises. It shall also address their legal, humanitarian, social, economic, educational, and cultural dimensions, as well as success stories and contributions to society.

Journalists and media professionals shall consult original sources wherever possible, verify information by cross-checking it against independent and credible sources, and clearly attribute it. They shall distinguish facts from allegations and opinions, and shall not present unconfirmed or unverifiable information as fact.

Article 22 — Balanced Reporting on Economic and Social Impacts

Reporting on the economic and social impacts of asylum and migration shall be based on credible information, data and evidence, with due attention to their context and the limits of the conclusions that may be drawn from them.

Individual cases shall not be used as the basis for conclusions or generalizations concerning refugees, migrants or host communities.

Article 23 — Avoiding False Narratives of Competition and Highlighting Contributions

Journalistic and media coverage shall avoid portraying refugees and migrants as a burden or as competitors with citizens, or assuming an inevitable conflict with the interests of host communities.

Reporting on impacts or competition shall be grounded in credible, context-specific data and evidence. Where relevant to the subject, it should also highlight refugees' and migrants' economic, social and cultural contributions, providing a balanced and multidimensional account.

Article 24 — Placing Migration in Its Broader Context

Media coverage of migration issues should be placed in its broader context, including- depending on the nature of the subject- its causes, drivers and legal, economic, social and humanitarian dimensions-. This helps readers understand the phenomenon as a whole, rather than through fragmented or one-sided account. Coverage should not reduce migration to disputes between States, or treat them from a security perspective detached from their different contexts and cuases. They should also distinguish between different cases and contexts, and avoid applying a single explanation to all patterns and drivers of migration.

VI. Coverage of Persons at Heightened Risk

Article 25 — Avoiding Stereotypical and Reductive Portrayals

Journalistic and media coverage shall avoid portraying refugees and migrants solely as victims, weak or helpless, or assuming that their circumstances and needs are alike.

It shall recognise differences in their experiences and circumstances, enable them to express their views and choices, and highlight their rights, abilities and contributions. Their portrayal shall not be confined to their legal status or the risks and needs they face.

Article 26 — Violence, Exploitation and Avoidance of Victim-Blaming

Coverage of violence, exploitation, trafficking in persons and sexual assault shall prioritise victims' privacy, safety and dignity, and avoid exposing them to further harm, stigmatisation or exploitation.

Victims shall not be held responsible, explicitly or implicitly, for what happened to them because of their behavior, clothing, decisions, circumstances, or legal or social status.

Events shall be presented in context, without reproducing stereotypes or rationalizations that justify violence or make it appear acceptable.

Article 27 — Protection without Paternalism

Journalistic and media coverage should protect people from risks without imposing paternalistic control or restricting their right to express themselves, participate in decisions concerning coverage and make their own choices where they are able to do so.

Their dignity and autonomy shall be respected, with protection measures appropriate to their age, abilities, circumstances and the nature of the risks, without exclusion or marginalization.

Article 28 — Protecting Children and Respecting Their Best Interests

Coverage of refugee and migrant children shall prioritize their safety, dignity and best interests. Information that may reveal their identities, directly or indirectly, shall not be published where doing so would expose them to danger or infringe their privacy.

Interviews and photography shall take account of the child's age, understanding and willingness to participate, without pressure or eliciting painful experiences for emotional effect.

The impact of publication on their future should also be taken into account, particularly because digital content remains available and can be recirculated out of context.

Article 29 — Refugee and Migrant Women

Journalistic and media coverage shall respect the dignity, privacy and autonomy of refugee and migrant women, and shall avoid portraying them solely through suffering, weakness or helplessness.

It shall take account of gender-related risks without assuming that all women experience them or blaming women for violence, exploitation or discrimination committed against them.

Coverage shall respect women's right to choose what they share, enable them to express their views, experiences and choices, and highlight the diversity of their roles, abilities and contributions as rights-holders.

Article 30 — Persons with Disabilities and Their Right to Participate

Journalistic and media coverage shall respect the dignity, autonomy and rights of refugees and migrants with disabilities. It shall avoid portraying them as incapable or as objects of pity, or reducing their identity to their disability. Disability shall be made a focus of coverage only where it is directly relevant to the subject and there is a clear professional justification.

Disability shall not be treated as a reason to presume that a person is unable to make decisions, express their views or participate. Coverage shall take account of people's needs and preferred means of communication, and provide arrangements, wherever possible, that facilitate their independent participation.

It shall use respectful, non-discriminatory language and respect individuals' right to decide what they disclose about their disabilities and experiences.

VII. Hate Speech and Disinformation

Article 31 — Avoiding the Dissemination of Hate Speech and Incitement

Journalistic and media coverage shall not incite hatred, discrimination or violence against refugees, migrants or others on grounds of nationality, origin, religion, race, color or any other ground prohibited by law.

It shall avoid promoting or legitimizing inflammatory or discriminatory discourse. Such discourse shall be presented only where there is a clear professional necessity for critical examination or documentation, and within a context that limits its inciting or discriminatory effects.

Article 32 — Dehumanizing Language and Metaphors

Journalistic and media reporting shall avoid descriptions or metaphors that diminish the humanity of refugees or migrants, or portray them as a danger, a collective threat or an invading force. This includes comparisons to natural disasters, floods, swarms, invasions or incursions.

Article 33 — Disinformation and Verification of Information

Journalistic and media reporting shall avoid promoting misleading, unsubstantiated or selectively excerpted information, whether originating from official or unofficial sources or circulating on social media.

Journalists shall exercise due professional diligence in verifying information and claims, particularly those that are controversial or whose publication may cause harm. Unverified information shall not be presented as fact, and information found to be inaccurate shall be corrected clearly and as promptly as possible.

VIII. Accountability and Corrections

Article 34 — Right of Reply and Response

Press and media coverage should give people and organizations a fair chance to respond to allegations or accusations that affect their rights or interests. The space given to the response should match the nature and importance of the allegation and the context of publication.

Journalists should make a professional effort to obtain the response before publishing. If this is not possible, they should publish the response as soon as they receive it.

Article 35 — Correction of Errors

Media organizations shall correct material errors identified in published content as promptly as possible and clearly and transparently, enabling the public to access the correction and limiting the continued circulation of inaccurate or erroneous information.

Article 36 — Professional Accountability and Complaints

Journalistic and media organizations shall provide a clear and accessible mechanism for receiving complaints about published content, particularly complaints concerning inaccuracy, failure to respect the right of reply, infringements of privacy or dignity, or unjustified harm.

Complaints shall be considered professionally, impartially and in a timely manner. Appropriate corrective or editorial action shall be taken where a breach is established, and the complainant shall be informed of the outcome wherever possible, strengthening professional accountability and public trust.