

WHAT YOU CALL US
IS HOW YOU SEE US
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Code

on the Presentation of
Persons with Disabilities
in the Media



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Publisher

Swedish umbrella organization within the disability movement

SHIA

Solidarity

Human Rights

Inclusion

Accessibility

MYRIGHT

EMPOWERS PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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1. Introduction

This Code is a joint product of over forty nongovernmental organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina whose mission is to provide support and advocacy for persons with disabilities. It was produced over several months under the SHIA¹ 2011-2012 Program by 5 coalitions of disabled persons organisations (DPOs) (Coalition “Informal group of DPOs“ of Dobož Region, Coordination Board of DPOs of Sarajevo Canton, Coalition “KOLOSI - BN” Bijeljina, Coalition of DPOs of Tuzla Canton, Coalition of DPOs of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton “Zajedno smo jaci”) and 4 further affiliated organizations. The working group have arrived at a clear definition of the Code's aims and fundamental elements and the resulting draft Code has been circulated for vetting by organizations dealing with persons with disabilities to ensure its relevance and credibility.

The Code proposes a terminology based, for the first time in Bosnia and Herzegovina, on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We believe it to be significant step forward towards standardizing language. There is a particular emphasis on usage in the media, as they provide some of the most important links between persons with disabilities, organizations working with them and the general public.

¹SHIA is an umbrella organization within the Swedish disability movement, working in the name of 29 member organizations. Its work aims, through projects, to increase the capacity of sister organizations as advocates for the rights, equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

2. Why the Code is needed

Inappropriate expressions are often used in everyday speech to refer to persons with disabilities, generally with insulting connotations. Such ugly phrases have unfortunately become endemic in the media, as indicated in a regional study from 2006 on disability in print media: a study into the presentation of disability and persons with disabilities in print media². Among positive developments in the field we would single out the publication under the Professional and Ethical Standards in Reporting on Marginalized Groups project implemented by the Helsinki Citizens Assembly from Banja Luka, the CURE Foundation, and the Republika Srpska Young Journalists Association of a handbook for reporting on marginalized groups³. The Linguists Association for Language and Culture has also contributed a publication on dealing with discriminatory

language in educational, media, and legal discourses⁴. Work in this area is still just beginning and greater cooperation is needed between the media and the nongovernmental sector (the associations of persons with disabilities) over the use of appropriate terminology in reporting on persons with disabilities. We recognize the media as a key potential factor in reducing discriminatory language through the application of “neutral” terminology in describing different kinds of disability and representing the population with disabilities. Our aim, through the Code being presented here, is to bring together a number of practical guidelines to be considered in interviewing or reporting on persons with disabilities, including a more acceptable concrete terminology. We hope the Code will prove a useful tool that will assist standardization in media reporting and reduce unfairness and stereotyping.

² *Invalidnost u štampi: istraživanje o tome kako su invalidnost i osobe sa invaliditetom prikazani u štampanim medijima u Bosni i Hercegovini, Crnoj Gori i Srbiji u 2006. Godini, Radni dokument.* A draft document and related materials were published in the Disability Monitor Initiative series. Although not official Handicap International publications, they were issued by the Regional Handicap International office for South-East Europe as part of a regional initiative to promote knowledge of disability in transition. They provide a preliminary analysis which stakeholders are encouraged to read with a view to promoting an exchange of opinions and debate: mc.mail@mc.rs

³ *Priru nik za izvještavanje o marginalizovanim grupama: www.hcabl.org*

⁴ *Na in za prevladavanje diskriminacije u jeziku u obrazovanju, medijima i pravnim dokumentima: www.lingvisti.ba*

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3. The Code's goals

Given the prevalence of inappropriate media presentation of persons with disabilities, which neglects their personalities, while emphasizing their disabilities to the exclusion of their abilities and stressing their success (as being in spite of their disabilities), we expect the Code to promote:

- A change in how reporting on persons with disabilities is approached (better communication with persons with disabilities, a reduction in conventional prejudice regarding their “achievements,” and a shift to presenting them as participants in ordinary, everyday life, taking into account their human dimension, etc.); and
- Partnerships with the media to change social attitudes towards persons with disabilities.



What the Code is not is a revolt by persons with disabilities against inappropriate representation in the media. It is an expression of willingness and readiness on their part, in line with the principle “nothing about us without us,” to work with the media to change and improve community attitudes and achieve better social inclusion.



4. “Disability” as a concept

After adoption of the Common Disability Policy in 2008 and the entity strategies for applying it, ratification in 2009 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities signalled that Bosnia and Herzegovina had embraced a new approach to disability and other issues affecting persons with disabilities.

In the Preamble to the Convention, disability is recognized as an evolving process that “results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”

Article 1 states that “persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory **impairments** which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society **on an equal basis with others**”⁵.

The Convention thus does not strictly define the terms “**disability**” or “person with disability,” but elements in the Preamble and in Article 1 do provide guidelines for clarification.

Certain of these elements deserve highlighting. Firstly, disability is recognized as an evolving process strongly connected to attitudes and environmental barriers that hinder participation in society.

The term “disability” is therefore not a strictly defined one and will differ from society to society, depending on the prevailing environment and attitudes.

Secondly, disability is not considered a medical condition. It is seen as resulting from the impact of the interaction between negative attitudes and an inappropriate environment on the status of the individual. What is required is to change attitudes and environmental barriers to allow persons with disabilities to participate as active members of society in full enjoyment of their rights, rather than providing medical treatment to “fix” their “problems.”

⁵Article 1 of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Bosnia and Herzegovina has both signed and ratified the Convention.

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5. Guidelines for a fair media approach to persons with disabilities

Our goal is to help the media develop a fairer approach to persons with disabilities. We offer below a number of suggestions in this regard, particularly in relation to the process of communication itself. In our view, the experience working with persons with disabilities represented by the organizations standing behind this Code provides sufficient reason for representatives of the media to take their suggestions seriously and apply them in approaching or communicating with persons with disabilities.



5.1 Approaching persons with disabilities

We recommend all editors and journalists ask themselves 4 questions regarding the representation of persons with disabilities in electronic and print media:

- Is the portrayal of the person with disabilities protective?
- Is the person with disabilities presented as a victim?
- Does the portrayal demonise the person with disabilities?

Or, in short,

- Is the person with disabilities treated in the same way as any other person?

Example: In the media, persons with disabilities are generally talked about indirectly and in relation to issues of social assistance, the disability allowance or inclusive education. Things are rarely considered from their perspective and issues of direct interest to them go unmentioned. The media focus on stories which present persons with disabilities from the perspective of the population without disabilities. For example, reports or articles on general life issues of relevance to the population as a whole never present them from the perspective of a person or child with disabilities. Children's shows will often feature a different child each episode talking about his or her lifestyle, friends and interests. They never choose a child with disabilities. This attitude in the media gives the impression that there are no children with disabilities in this country or that they do not deserve equal treatment with other children.

In general, we offer the following recommendations:

- Do not be too precious or politically correct - focusing too much on the language you are using in describing people with disabilities will stop you doing anything else. Any and all images help promote visibility – even so-called negative ones.
- Consider including persons with disabilities in scenarios that would usually involve persons without disabilities.
- Be aware of different types of disability, rather than focusing on just one e.g. only blind persons or only deaf persons.
- Think about presenting persons with disabilities in everyday situations, rather than just situations related to disability.
- Avoid the other extreme - consistently showing persons with disabilities as high achievers ("super-invalid").
- Show persons with disabilities as equal. Let them speak for themselves, highlight good statements and let them express their empowerment.



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5.2 Communicating with persons with disabilities

We offer the following practical advice regarding communication with persons with disabilities:

- Be patient and listen carefully.
- Use a normal tone.
- Do not speak or finish sentences for the person you are speaking with.
- Never ask "What happened to you?": Restrain your curiosity.

- Only address them by personal name or informally, if you address others with the same level of intimacy.
- Address them directly (never in the third person), even if accompanied by an interpreter or companion.
- Never make assumptions about what anybody can or cannot do.
- Labels say nothing about the person. They only reinforce the stereotype that people with disabilities are "sick" and dependent on doctors.
- If you must refer to the person's status, use formulations like "a person who has epilepsy or diabetes, a person with Down syndrome."
- Don't become uncomfortable using regular expressions potentially correlated to a given individual's disability, e.g. "See you later".
- Avoid language that suggests persons with disabilities are always weak or dependent or that could present them as objects of pity, e.g. as "suffering from", "tied to...", "dependent on...", "ward..." or "victim...".



5.3 Interviews:

We offer the following examples and suggestions for interviews with persons with disabilities:

- Take into account the location's accessibility for the individual you're interviewing.
- In interviewing deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals, always address them directly, regardless of the presence of an interpreter.
- Make sure the interpreter is seated opposite and not next to the deaf person and focus the camera on the deaf person, not the interpreter.
- In interviewing blind or visually impaired individuals, make arrangements beforehand on how to use body language as a signal.
- On the radio, a hand on the shoulder can be an effective way to signal the need to wrap up an answer.
- If your interlocutor is hearing impaired, find out in advance what kind of communication suits him or her best (sign language, lip-reading, normal conversation with hearing aids, etc.).
- In interviewing individuals with intellectual disabilities, be patient and prepared to wait for answers, do not end their sentences for them, and do not attempt to explain what they really wanted to say.

There is no virtue to giving an easy ride, if the discussion requires tough questions. It is condescending and unsatisfactory for everyone. This rule applies to the interview as a whole.

Many disabilities are "invisible" and you have probably already included people with disabilities in street interviews without knowing it. If you want to look actively for people with disabilities to participate in street interviews, try contacting local organizations of persons with disabilities.

Why not send a message by stopping passers-by who are persons with disabilities - something producers and directors rarely do?



Glossary/Terminology

We have drawn up a brief glossary of commonly used terms in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian and offer more acceptable alternatives as a practical aid in standardising terminology used in relation to persons with disabilities, particularly in the media. It reflects the usage of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. This glossary is at best a first step and does not pretend to be comprehensive. The emphasis is on usefulness and practicality. Future versions will certainly be amended to include a wider range of terms, as the process of linguistic standardization in the field, of which publication of this Code represents just a first step, progresses.

NE - NOT	NEGO - BUT
Invalid; Hendikepiran - <i>Invalids or the disabled, person with special needs, the handicapped or disabled persons.</i>	Osoba s invaliditetom - <i>Persons with disabilities.</i>
Gluh; Nagluh; Gluhonijem - <i>The deaf or hard of hearing or deaf-mutes.</i>	Gluha osoba; Nagluha osoba; Osoba ošte enog sluha - <i>Deaf person, hard of hearing person, or person with hearing impairment.</i>
Slijep; Ošte enog vida - <i>The blind or visually impaired.</i>	Osoba/Lice ošte enog vida; Slijepa osoba/lice; Slabovidna osoba/lice - <i>Blind person or visually impaired person.</i>
Cerebralac - <i>Spastic</i>	Osoba/Lice s cerebralnom paralizom - <i>Person with cerebral palsy;</i>
Paraplegi ar - <i>A paraplegic</i>	Osoba/Lice s paraplegijom - <i>Person with paraplegia;</i>
	Osoba/Lice s dje ijom paralizom - <i>Person with poliomyelitis;</i>
	Osoba/Lice s posljedicama miši nih oboljenja - <i>Person with the consequences of muscle disease;</i>
	Osoba/Lice s teškim hroni nim oboljenjima - <i>Person with severe chronic illnesses;</i>
	Osoba/Lice s tjelesnim/fizi kim invaliditetom - <i>Person with physical disabilities.</i>
Autist - <i>An autist or the autistic</i>	Osoba/Lice s autizmom; Osoba/Lice u autisti nom spektru; Dijete u autisti nom spektru - <i>Person with autism; person or children in the autistic spectrum.</i>

Words like deaf and blind should not be used as nouns, but only as epithets qualifying the noun "person".

NE - NOT	NEGO - BUT
Amputirac - <i>Amputee</i>	Osoba/Lice s tjelesnim invaliditetom; Osoba/Lice kojima je amputiran dio tijela; Osoba/Lice bez noge; Osoba/Lice bez ruke - <i>Person with physical disabilities, person with an amputated body part, person without a leg or arm, etc.</i>
Osoba oboljela od Downovog sindroma - <i>Person suffering from Downs Syndrome</i>	Osoba/Lice s Down sindromom; Dijete s Down sindromom - <i>Person or child with Downs Syndrome</i>
Mentalno retardiran - <i>Mentally retarded</i>	Osoba/Lice s intelektualnim teško ama/poteško ama - <i>Person with intellectual difficulties</i>
Dijete ometeno u razvoju - <i>Developmentally challenged children</i>	Dijete s teško ama/poteško ama u razvoju - <i>Children with learning difficulties</i>
Normalna škola - <i>Normal schools</i>	Redovna škola - <i>Mainstream schools</i>
Poreme aji glasovno-jezi ko govorne komunikacije - <i>Speech disorders</i>	Osoba/Lice s poteško ama u glasu i govoru - <i>Persons with voice and speech impairments</i>
Osoba s poreme ajem pažnje/hiperaktivnosti - <i>Persons with attention disorders or hyperactivity</i>	Osoba/Lice sa smanjenom pažnjom/hiperaktivnoš u - <i>Persons with impaired attention / hyperactivity</i>
Osoba s poreme ajem iz autisti nog spektra - <i>Persons with autistic spectrum disorders</i>	Osoba/Lice autisti nog spektra - <i>Persons with autism spectrum</i>
Osoba s motori kim poreme ajem - <i>Persons with motor disorders</i>	Osoba/Lice sa smanjenom motori kom sposobnoš u - <i>Persons with reduced motor ability</i>
Osoba s poreme ajem u ponašanju i emocionalnim poreme ajima - <i>Persons with behavioural problems and emotional disorders</i>	Osoba/Lice s asocijalnim ponašanjem i emocionalnim ispadima - <i>Persons with behavioural and emotional disabilities</i>
Specijalna škola - <i>Special schools</i>	Škola za specijalni odgoj i obrazovanje - <i>Schools for special education</i>

Where it is necessary to focus on the type of disability, use:

-Persons with physical disabilities,

-Persons with reduced motor ability,

... for more examples see table.

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Appendix II

Coalitions and organizations that support the Code on the Presentation of Persons with Disabilities

Coalition of DPOs of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton “Zajedno smo ja i”

Udruga gluhih i nagluhих „Sluh“ HNŽ Mostar

Udruženje roditelja i prijatelja osoba sa posebnim potrebama „Sunce“ Mostar

Humanitarna udruga „Cvijet“ apljina

Udruga roditelja i prijatelja djece sa posebnim potrebama „Susret“ itluk

Udruga građana roditelja djece sa posebnim potrebama "Djeca nade" Prozor - Rama

Udruženje roditelja djece i omladine sa posebnim potrebama "I" Konjic

Udruženje mladih „Ružnjak – Los Rosales“ Mostar

Coalition “Informal group of DPOs“ of Doboj Region

Udruženje paraplegičara, oboljelih od dječije paralize i ostalih tjelesnih invalida regije Doboj – nosilac projektnih aktivnosti

Udruženje distrofičara Doboj

Edukativno-resursni centar za osobe sa invaliditetom

Udruženje slijepih i slabovidnih Doboj

Odbojkaški klub invalida „OKI“ Doboj

Udruženje amputiraca Doboj

Savez za sport i rekreaciju invalidnih lica Doboj

Udruženje civilnih žrtava rata Doboj

Savez invalida rada Doboj

Udruženje paraplegičara i oboljelih od dječije paralize Doboj Jug

Udruženje distrofičara Tesli

Udruženje djece sa posebnim potrebama Doboj

Coordination Board of DPOs of Sarajevo Canton

Udruženje slijepih Kantona Sarajevo

Udruženje oboljelih od multipleskleroze Kantona Sarajevo

Udruženje invalida rada Kantona Sarajevo

Udruženje distrofičara Kantona Sarajevo

Udruženja paraplegičara i oboljelih od dječije paralize Kantona Sarajevo

Udruženje oboljelih od cerebralne dječije paralize Kantona Sarajevo



Udruženje gluhih Kantona Sarajevo
 Udruženje oboljelih od poliomyelitisa, povrede mozga
 i kičmene moždine Kantona Sarajevo
 Udruženje za podršku osobama sa intelektualnim
 teškoćama na području Kantona Sarajevo „Oaza“
 Unija civilnih žrtava rata Kantona Sarajevo

Coalition of DPOs of Tuzla Canton

Udruženje distrofičara Tuzlanskog Kantona
 Udruženje građana za pomoć u duševnoj nevolji Fenix
 Udruženje građana oštećenog vida Tuzla
 Udruženje građana Informativni centar za osobe sa
 invaliditetom „Lotos” Tuzla
 Udruženje žena sa invaliditetom H.O. Lotosice
 Majke hendikepirane djece Tuzlanskog Kantona

Coalition “KOLOSI –BN “Bijeljina

Regionalno udruženje amputiraca Bijeljina
 OKI - „Semberija“ Bijeljina

Međupopštinsko udruženje civilnih žrtava rata
 „CIZR“ Bijeljina
 Humanitarno udruženje žena “ARTA” Bijeljina
 Udruženje za pomoć mentalno zaostalim licima
 “NADA” Bijeljina

Streljački klub RVI "ORAO" Bijeljina
 KKK - "Bijeljina" Bijeljina

Udruženje slijepih i slabovidih regije Bijeljina
 Udruženje paraplegičara oboljelih od djetinje paralize
 i ostala invalidna lica Bijeljina
 Udruženje gluhih i nagluhih regije Bijeljina
 Udruženje žena oboljelih od karcinoma dojke
 "GEA" Bijeljina

Associations that support the Code, but are not members of a coalition

Sumero
 Život sa Down sindromom
 UG "BiosPlus" Derventa
 Savez gluhih i nagluhih BiH (SGN BiH)



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MyRight (SHIA)* is an umbrella organisation within the disability movement which works at the request of 30 member organisations.

The disability movement has a long tradition of work based on respect for human rights.

The goal of our joint work is to strengthen local partner organisations' capacity for effective advocacy of their members' rights. MyRight's role is to provide administrative support for member organisations. We also provide quality assurance of their projects.

Our vision is of a society where everyone's equality and rights are respected. This is why we provide support for bringing people together into strong organisations that can advocate for respect for the human rights of persons with disabilities.

Programme for 2011-2013 in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The main goal of the SHIA (MyRight) programme in Bosnia-Herzegovina is to increase local disabled persons' organisations' capacity with regard to their knowledge and mechanisms for advocating for their members' rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

This Code is result of joint work of DPOs gathered in five Coalitions that have been implementing SHIA 2011-2013 program.

Coalition "KOLOSI - BN" Bijeljina, Coalition of DPOs of Herzegovina-Neretva Canton "Zajedno smo ja i", Coalition "Informal group of DPOs" of Doboj Region, Coordination Board of DPOs of Sarajevo Canton, Coalition of DPOs of Tuzla Canton, and 4 further affiliated organizations: Sumero, Life with Down Syndrome, The BiosPlus Association from Derventa, The Society of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Persons of B&H (SGN BiH)

* In 2012 **SHIA** was renamed **MyRight** - empowers people with disability

