



## Tool 9.16 The role of the media in preventing trafficking

### Overview

*This tool examines the role and responsibility of the media in preventing trafficking both by virtue of the information investigative journalists may come across in their work and through a cautious approach to accepting advertisements.*

In addition to the key role in awareness raising that the media must play to prevent trafficking (see Tool 9.8 to Tool 9.11), there are several other special functions that they can perform. The media are indispensable in educating people about the many manifestations of trafficking in persons. Furthermore, they have a responsibility to ensure that, by taking a careful and informed approach to acceptance of advertisements, their outlets do not inadvertently assist traffickers to exploit people.

### Awareness-raising role of the media

The media have a large role to play in mobilizing public support and involvement to help prevent and combat trafficking. Owing to their reach and their ability to mould public opinion, they are a powerful tool of social change. Investigative journalism on trafficking needs to be promoted. By writing an article or broadcasting an item focusing on trafficking in persons, the media not only educate the public but also shine light on an issue typically shrouded in darkness. Responsible scrutiny by international media can be the difference between a trafficker being released or imprisoned.

However, in some parts of the world, journalists and media outlets are not adequately aware of the trafficking phenomenon or do not have sufficient understanding of the dimensions of the problem. As a result, some media coverage confuses the issue with others, such as migrant smuggling. Media publicity should take into consideration the rights-based approach and ensure that there is no violation of the rights of victims and survivors.



*When printing or broadcasting news on trafficking, local anti-trafficking helpline numbers and other sources of assistance for potential victims and members of the community should also be provided.*

### Media Dos and Don'ts

Protection of victims is at the heart of all anti-trafficking measures. Journalists, photographers and media outlets must protect potential and actual victims (and third persons) by altering the image, personal story and identity.

DO	DON'T
Tell the truth	Don't treat survivors as objects
Be accurate, objective and fair	Don't take photos of victims
Use masking techniques to avoid revealing the identities of victims and their families	Don't ask questions that violate the dignity of survivors (How many times were you raped? How many clients did you service each day?)
Delve into the reasons behind trafficking	Don't distort or blur facts to sensationalize stories
Visit source areas to understand the complexities of the root causes	Don't use tabloid-like or sensational headlines
Be investigative. In tracking down perpetrators, cooperate with law enforcement authorities	Don't try to take victims to their place of exploitation or make them mentally relive their experience
Highlight the challenges that survivors face	
Cover the story in court; focus on the law, its lacunae, its enforcement, delays, etc.	
Choose your words carefully	



Source: *Not her real name . . . Reporting Trafficking in Persons—A Media Handbook*, UNDP project on the prevention of trafficking, HIV/AIDS in Women and Children, New Delhi, 2006. More information is available at:

[www.ungift.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=232&Itemid=556](http://www.ungift.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=232&Itemid=556)

## Recommended resource

### ***Trafficking in Women; Manual for Journalists***

*(Anti-Sex Trafficking Action, Serbia)*

*Trafficking in Women; Manual for Journalists* is a publication of the Belgrade-based non-governmental organization Anti-Sex Trafficking Action. The manual primarily focuses on trafficking in persons from, through and to Serbia, and the response to the crime by the governmental and non-governmental organization community of Serbia. In addition to Serbia-specific information, the manual provides general information about trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation, and information and advice for journalists seeking to report

on this issue. Particularly relevant for the purposes of this Tool are those sections of the manual that discuss the issues and challenges involved in interviewing a victim of trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Such information is useful to journalists, regardless of where they are writing about trafficking.



To obtain *Trafficking in Women; Manual for Journalists*, available in English and Serbian, contact Anti-Sex Trafficking Action at [astrasos@sezampro.yu](mailto:astrasos@sezampro.yu)

## Responsible advertising

Advertisements in local, regional or national newspapers concerning adult services can sometimes be fronts for operations which exploit trafficked victims.

To ensure that media outlets are not a conduit for the exploitation of people, media outlets should:

- Provide trafficking hotlines alongside adult classified listings
- Cooperate with police in investigations where they are able
- Accept payments for classified advertisements only by cheque or credit card so that advertisers can be traced in the event that investigations are mounted

The awareness-raising role of the media is related to the role that the public can play in reporting trafficking. Those persons who are interested in obtaining adult services, must be aware that they may encounter victims of trafficking. They must also be aware of where to report any such suspicions. More information about this issue is available in Tool 9.12.

## Promising practice

### ***The Newspaper Society (United Kingdom)***

The Newspaper Society represents 1,300 newspapers, 1,100 websites, 750 magazines, 36 radio stations and two television stations in the United Kingdom. On 1 November 2007, The Newspaper Society issued a statement concerning cooperation with the Minister for Women and Equality of the United Kingdom in combating trafficking in persons. The statement is primarily concerned with advertisements which can fuel demand for trafficked women. The meeting which led to this joint action against trafficking was attended by the Minister for Women and Equality, a Home Office Minister, the Minister for Culture, Creative Industries and Tourism, the Solicitor General and representatives of The Newspaper Society, the Advertising Standards Authority, the Committee of Advertising Practice and the Advertising Association.

The Minister for Women and Equality stated that small advertisements, such as “new girls every day” and “international ladies 24/7”, placed at the back of local papers were believed by police to possibly fuel demand for trafficked women and girls. The Home Office Minister said that the Government was committed to strengthening its guidance to local papers on

what advertisements to accept, and to exploring a range of other cooperative initiatives. The Director of The Newspaper Society made a pledge to examine the guidance the Society issued to publishers to ensure that that guidance reflected concerns about trafficking, and to raise those concerns with regional and local newspaper publishers.

The Newspaper Society also provides legal advice and guidance to members in the form of “Ad points to watch”, an A to Z of advertising law and advertisement control advice services. Such information includes cautions concerning advertisements which may be disguising sexual services.

An example of a promising measure is one taken by Archant Regional, the newspaper publishing arm of Archant, which publishes four daily titles, around 30 weekly paid-for and around 45 weekly free newspapers totalling a combined weekly circulation of around three million copies. In Suffolk, after five prostitutes were murdered in 2007, Archant Regional decided, in conjunction with the police, to only accept payments by cheque or bank card for adult classified advertisements in order to facilitate investigations.



For more information about these initiatives, visit the website of The Newspaper Society: [www.newspapersoc.org.uk](http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk). This issue was also reported in *The Economist* of 1 November 2007 (“Indecent proposals”, p. 43).

For related promising practice, see also Tool 9.12.

## Recommended resources



Various media codes of conduct are available. For some examples, visit the website of the Society of Professional Journalists at: [www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp](http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp)