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Media, Gender and the Reporting of Emergencies

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A booklet for journalists and professionals dealing with flood reporting

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Introduction and Background to this Booklet

Introduction

Reporting on natural disasters and emergency situations is one of the most challenging tasks in journalism due to the fact that the media is dealing with the information of the gravest public concern and in situations of risk to human life. The determination of the media to provide as much information as possible can sometimes lead to the spread of panic, sensationalisation and the delivery of political or other messages. For this reason media coverage of natural disasters carries great risk.

Although natural disasters affect the entire population, certain categories of people are especially vulnerable: such as children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and pregnant women. At the same time, natural disasters have a different impact on women and men especially if we take into consideration social norms or possible predetermined gender roles (e.g. where women are not able to respond to risks) – a difference more pronounced in the situation of crisis. In a social model of gender inequality, often visible in crisis situations, the result is a higher exposure of risk to women. They are even more vulnerable if the predetermined social norm is for them to be passive.

In May 2014, Serbia was hit by a catastrophic flood in which, according to the official report, 51 people lost their lives, including 23 victims of drowning. Due to the flood, about 32,000 people were evacuated from their homes, of whom 25,000 were from the town of Obrenovac alone. Most of the evacuees were accommodated by relatives but over 5,000 people had to be temporarily placed into shelters set up by the Government and the Red Cross of Serbia.¹

1 <http://www.obnova.gov.rs/uploads/useruploads/Documents/lzvestaj-o-prcenii-potreba-za-oporavak-i-obnovu-posledicapoplava.pdf>

Having analysed the media coverage of the floods, we have sought to shed light on new aspects of media reporting and to draw attention to the topics that should be the focus of media attention. At the same time, through examples seen in other countries that have been dealing with the issue of gender-sensitive reporting for several years, we offer recommendations and advice that could be useful in the reporting of future natural disasters and emergency situations. To that end, we have also drawn attention to the problems faced by journalists and the media when reporting of an emergency situation. Through concrete examples of good practice, this booklet offers suggestions for the improvement of communication between relevant authorities and the media, which may result in a higher quality of information disseminated to citizens.

Background

Emergency and crisis situations, by their very nature, attract the attention of both the media and the general public. According to scientific predictions, natural disasters are likely to occur more frequently in the future and our common interest is to protect ourselves from them as effectively as possible with the engagement of all available resources. In recent years the Republic of Serbia has been faced with the consequences of several natural disasters, the severest of which was the flood of May 2014, about which much has been spoken and written. After this disaster, new institutions were established (e.g. Public Investment Management Office), new documents were drafted (e.g. National Disaster Risk Management Programme), new risk assessment methodologies were developed and various projects were implemented with the aim of strengthening the capacity to respond to emergency situations - primarily at the local level. The issue of gender-specific differences in emergency situations has been addressed primarily by international organisations (e.g. the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the United Nations Development Programme - UNDP). Gender mainstreaming has been recognised as an integral element of the concept of building disaster-resistant communities. This was the basis for conducting a study (see part 1 of this booklet) and the formulation of a set of recommendations for emergency management.

The media is in a position of significant influence during emergency situations and a need is perceived to increase the visibility and active participation of women in emergency response and their image in the media as well as the introduction of a gender perspective. Bearing in mind the necessity of transforming gender stereotypes in order to strengthen gender equality, numerous activities were organised, including the development of media codes and guidelines, with the intention of reducing the discriminatory and gender stereotypical portrayal of men and women.

This Guide reviews the media coverage during emergency situations from the gender perspective and provides guidelines to journalists on how to report while respecting human rights and dignity - in accordance with the standards of the profession. This booklet includes recommendations on how the media can contribute to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities, and thus to the creation of a better response in emergency situations.

The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality has recognised the importance of gender equality and the elimination of systemic discrimination as a prerequisite for social development and resilience² strengthening through enhancing the resources and capacities of all individuals - in particular members of vulnerable social groups.

This booklet first presents as a case study an overview and analysis of the actual reporting during the May 2014 flood in Serbia from the gender perspective. This part contains examples of gender stereotypical portrayal of men and women, but also the lack of visibility of female contribution to the humanitarian response.

The modern system of emergency management is essentially determined by a new security paradigm. This is important to the understanding of the gender perspective in emergency management and the main characteristics are described in part 2 of this guide.

This is followed by a study of the media and its role and ethics concerning the reporting of emergency situations – covering the gender aspects of emergencies. This part includes recommendations for media action in accordance with the global as well as national approaches to strengthening the resilience of people and communities for a timely and effective accommodation and recovery from the effects of disasters.

This booklet highlights that the media are active actors in enhancing community resilience to emergencies. We hope it will contribute to the development of new media practices, including the breaking of gender stereotypes, stereotypes that go beyond the usual portrayal of women who accidentally find themselves

2 In this context resilience is “the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate to and recover from the effects of the hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions.” (UNISDR, 2012)

in traditionally male roles. We also hope that the recommendations presented contribute to the creation of media content that will improve awareness and empower citizens to be active and helpful actors in reducing disaster risks and responding to emergencies.

Part 1 Case Study:
Media Reporting of the
May 2014 Flood in Serbia

Media Reporting of the May 2014 Flood in Serbia

Gender-sensitive reporting does not apply to only one natural disaster, but the media should draw public attention to the greater vulnerability of certain groups in every emergency. As regards the 2014 flood in Serbia, the media did not start from the assumption that natural disasters affected women and men differently and that the degree and type of vulnerability may be different depending on sex.

After the May 2014 flood, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, *the Gender Analysis of the Impact of the 2014 Floods in Serbia* was published³. That publication was based on research conducted in four municipalities in Serbia that were affected by the May floods (Svilajnac, Paraćin, Obrenovac and Niš). The aim of that research was to identify and document gender differences in order to inform the public and develop recommendations for the improvement of gender sensitivity in emergency management. That research showed that the most vulnerable groups in disasters are the elderly, persons with disabilities, single mothers and women who live alone in the household. Illiterate people (most of whom are women and Roma) are also among the vulnerable.

During that flood the media did not draw public attention to how the different categories of population adapted to the situation of emergency, whether there were differences and whether those differences were taken into account in the response of society to the situation.

3 <http://www.osce.org/sr/serbia/135026?download=true>-Višnja Bačanović, *Gender Analysis of the Impact of the 2014 Floods in Serbia*

The study showed that

“during imminent danger, men were at an advantage because they owned boats, possessed basic knowledge of defence and rescue procedures (especially older men), and were more physically fit than women, consequently to which, single women or women with children were at greater risk than those with male household members. Families with no adult male members were much more dependent on both organised assistance and informal support from neighbours, relatives and friends. Men were more engaged in flood-protection activities, they had more information, while women, in greater numbers were alone with children at the time of flooding.”⁴

Men as the rescuers; women as the victims

During the May 2014 flood, in the main, journalists interviewed male rescuers, while subjects of the stories about victims were usually women. This is also a consequence of the prevailing social norms – rarely are women portrayed as anything other than frightened and defenceless victims. Photographs published in daily newspapers during the flood and presented by news agencies and television stations showed men who are helping children, women and elderly people. Men are shown in an active role; they are in boats and save lives and property.



Photo: AFP



Photo: Tanjug



Photo: Večernje novosti

On the other hand, women were portrayed predominantly as victims and help-
less persons. Most recordings and photographs show women near destroyed
homes or devastated property, and sitting surrounded by children.

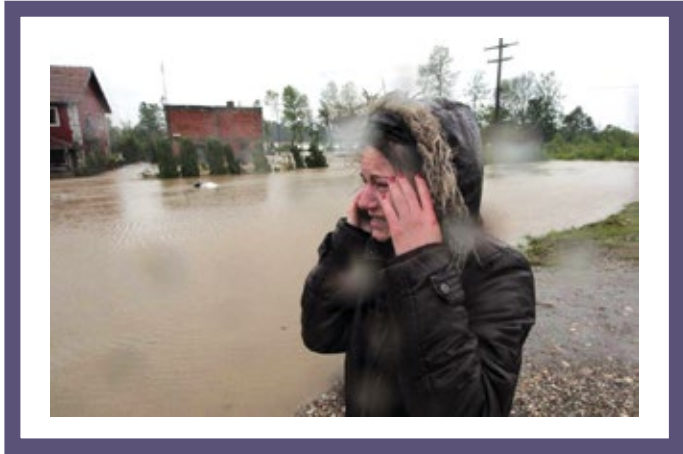


Photo: Tanjug



Photo: Tanjug

Women rescuers – a rare image

Although rarely shown in media reports, there were women in the front line of flood defence. Probably the most visible woman in the media was Časlavka Stokić from Obrenovac, who remained in her town throughout the flood to rescue babies and their mothers. Almost all the media reported about this heroine and soon named her Mother Courage.



24 hours



Blic



RTS

Časlavka Stokić talked about how she rescued babies and their mothers from water up to her neck despite risk to her own life.

Another problem, even more complex with respect to women, refers to the living conditions in shelters. Few media outlets reported specifically on this issue during the floods.

In this and similar ways the media can contribute to breaking down of stereotypes. However, media professionals should have a stronger commitment to ethical principles when reporting on women and to respect gender equality even when there is no disaster, or more precisely, before and after disasters. Časlavka

Stokić was quickly “forgotten” by the media. After the flood, there were no follow-up stories about this woman; she did not appear as a guest in special shows or newspaper articles. Her commitment and rescuing of others showed that this was not strictly a “male” task, but that was not all - her occupation as a bus driver in the Belgrade city public transport company was also considered “male”.

A good example of breaking the aforementioned stereotypes is the footage shown in the RTS⁵ emergency programme about female divers who, upon their own initiative and self organisation, rescued people and animals in the flooded Obrenovac.

Although they had not previously met, communicating through social media and using their own boats and equipment, they paddled, dived and swam continuously for fourteen hours rescuing those whose lives were in danger.

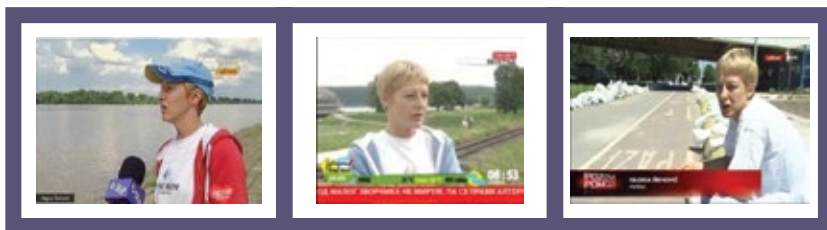


Source: www.rts.rs

This is one of very few reports in which women were portrayed in an active role, allowing the viewer to conclude that they were just as capable, courageous, resilient and determined as men. However, after this report they never re-appeared on the front page of any daily newspapers or on television.

5 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/drustvo/1602030/i-devojke-u-akciji-spasavanja.html>

The media also paid attention to Olgica Šehović and her team from the diving club Poseidon, who also rescued and assisted in the evacuation of residents from Obrenovac for several days.

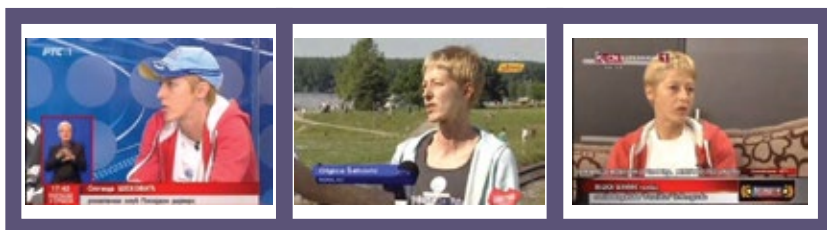


Source: B92

Source: RTS

Source: TV Prva

She gave statements to the media, describing the course of rescue, obstacles they encountered, and how they rescued a three-month old baby. Her club colleagues in their statements called her “a woman with two hearts” and pointed out that as regards all her diving and rescuing skills she was equal to the male members. Olgica had also completed a course for rescuers. Together with her colleagues, she appeared not only in a special emergency programme, but also in the shows that were not only of informative character. During the floods, she was in the centre of attention of the print media also.



Emergency Programme

RTS Boulevard TV B9

Morning Programme KCN1

Similar examples would be more numerous if the media were not, even in the situations like this, the mere reflection of the reality of Serbian society. Promoting the examples of courageous women, the media influence the awareness of the whole society and portray women as equal in responding to emergencies.

As part of their role, journalists should also work on investigative stories about the fate of people after natural disasters.

What the media did not report

The media did not focus on the topics of reproductive health of women, access to assistance or food availability. Also, there were no reports on the quality and equipment of shelters or on the safety of women in reception centres.

There were no reports dealing specifically with whether pregnant women had the necessary medical care, that is – whether they received all appropriate medical services and attention by medical staff - regardless of whether they were placed in temporary accommodation or remained in the affected area. There were no reports discussing aid for vulnerable population included everything necessary to satisfy hygiene needs. These issues, as well as the issue of the availability of food and water, are especially important for women who live in rural areas. They are often more vulnerable during disasters, but also hardest to reach in order to provide help.

The media reports on temporary accommodation during the 2014 flood mainly conveyed the experiences of people who were rescued and evacuated. There is no critical review of the equipment and quality of shelters, nor is that question raised at all. The media did not investigate how the conditions in temporary shelters affected those who are placed there 24 hours a day, especially in respect of hygiene, availability of food and water, as well as professional medical and psychological assistance.

A special reporting aspect is the safety of women in the reception centres and during the occurrence of natural disaster. There was no accurate data on whether there were any cases of trafficking in human beings, rape or other forms of crime during and after the 2014 flood. The previous experiences of other European countries have shown that in such situations the number of these crimes is on the rise. During the 2014 flood in Serbia, the police stated that the crime rate was decreasing, without specifying which criminal offences were included in this information. The media did not follow up or investigate this topic.

Part 2 Gender in the Modern World: Moral and Legal Responsibilities

Gender and the new security paradigm

The term “security” has become one of the most important and the most common terms in public discourse, in almost all spheres of social life, including politics, economy, ecology, health, information technology, etc. and at all levels, from local, national and regional to international and global. The term has a wide range of meanings, and it is susceptible to relatively frequent redefinition. It is certain that security is of vital importance to every individual, but it becomes the focus of our attention only when we have learned that it has been compromised in some way. The feeling of threat exists particularly in emergency situations, which will be discussed in this publication. One aim is to highlight the importance of providing citizens with adequate, accurate and timely information in emergencies.

With the end of the Cold War, new approaches to security have been developed, shifting the focus from military and security challenges to human security. The concept of security has been expanded, causing the need to systematise the issues of security. Here we will discuss one of many approaches: the concept of human security.

This approach, which appeared in the early nineties, centres on the individual – the human being as the subject of security - whose protection is the central issue, closely related to the development of society. The concept of human security is considered primarily in line with changed global circumstances such as poverty, unemployment, political crises, transnational organised crime, the violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms, infectious diseases, uncontrolled migration, and the consequences of climate change, such as global warming and its impact on agriculture, forestry, water management and ecosystems, rising sea level, changes in the amount of rainfall and so on. Major droughts or floods, which will be thoroughly discussed in the second part of this publication, can have devastating consequences, especially for the life and health of people, but also for the economy and society as a whole. We are currently experiencing a

growing number of natural disasters, with floods as the most common incident, and their increase can be expected in the future specifically due to changes in rainfall patterns.

Security risks related to climate change are separately analysed and studied as part of the concept of environmental or ecological security, and represent a challenge for the further expansion of the concept of national security.

The new security paradigm includes, in addition to the state which retains its central role, numerous other actors who participate in security policy in different ways, particularly in threat elimination, rehabilitation or mitigation of the effects of security risks, requiring good interconnection and coordination. There is a wide range of participants in these processes, including citizens, civil society organisations, humanitarian organisations, religious communities, radio amateurs, the media, etc.

Nowadays, when there are many channels of communication. The media have a special role to play, but they also have a great responsibility that they should be aware of. The provision of responsible, accurate and timely information to all citizens is often a key element in good crises management, especially during emergencies. This will be further discussed below.

The role of the media in emergency situations is complex and should include the promotion of gender equality, primarily in the transformation of gender stereotypes, but also in educating the public about the importance of equality. Allied to this is the matter of how different genders are affected in emergencies. Although natural disasters affect all segments of society, they can have different social impact on men and women as well as on vulnerable groups,⁶ because of the differences in the degree of their exposure and social exclusion, which considerably affects their ability to avoid and mitigate risks. Gender roles, social norms and inequality between men and women influence exposure to risk, the perception of risks and the ability to respond to risk and rescue, as well as various psychological and physical consequences and the potential for recovery and reconstruction after natural disasters.⁷

6 The authors recognise that all vulnerable groups should be considered and treated with equal measure. However, this booklet will focus upon the gender aspect only.

7 Višnja Bačanović, Gender Analysis of the Impact of the 2014 Floods in Serbia, OSCE Mission to Serbia, Belgrade, 2014, p. 7.

The review of media reporting of the May 2014 flood in Serbia as detailed in Part 1 of this booklet revealed that stereotypical representations of women and men continue to exist, while the analyses of the preparedness and awareness of the population, in particular of the information channels, indicate that the information received through the media is particularly important to women. In addition to timely information, the types of information that the population needs during emergencies is also significant.

The Gender Analysis of the Impact of the 2014 Floods in Serbia⁸ stresses that there are no significant differences in the emotional state of women and men during and after the period of imminent danger. However, women emphasised that they would have benefited from psychological support after evacuation, while men stated that they did not need this type of support. The women's need for psychological support was determined by their care of children and the children's emotional state. The evacuation process demonstrated that due to the lack of resources, biological differences and levels of skills, women are in greater need of formal and professional support and that professional and organised support related to evacuation and rescue is especially important for women.

It has also become apparent that women are most active in humanitarian activities after natural disasters and can be a very valuable source of information and understanding of the needs of the population exposed to natural disasters. It is also important for the media to recognise women as participants in the activities undertaken in emergency situations, as well as the target audience. Hence, we should not forget that women can be involved as partners in the management of emergency situations and the reduction of their consequences as members of the Sector for Emergency Management, civil society organisations, the Red Cross, medical staff and volunteers.

The Red Cross of Serbia has been helping people affected by various crises for many years and has achieved its goals thanks to a network of professional partners and volunteers who are regularly trained and educated and whose underlying motto is the well-being of individuals, families and communities. In November and December 2016, 200 volunteers and employees of the Red Cross of Serbia were trained on the topic of psychosocial support in disasters, provided to the vulnerable groups that are at higher risk in emergency situations. The specific

8 Višnja Bačanović, *Gender Analysis of the Impact of the 2014 Floods in Serbia*, OSCE Mission to Serbia, Belgrade, 2014, pp. 29-32.

topics covered by the training programme were sexual and gender-based violence, difference between sex and gender, the concepts of equity, equality, etc.

In addition to these training sessions, the Red Cross published (December 2016) a handbook dealing with psychosocial support in emergency and crisis situations, with the aim of helping its professional partners and volunteers in the provision of the best possible support, the preservation and improvement in the health of vulnerable population.

Useful tools to aid response in emergencies are the Standard Operating Procedures for the Protection of Refugee and Migrant Children (developed jointly by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Social Welfare Centre of Belgrade City, the Centre for Human Trafficking Victims Protection and a number of civil society organisations)⁹ and the Standard Operating Procedures of the Republic of Serbia for the Prevention and Protection of Refugees and Migrants from Gender-based Violence, being drafted at the time of writing this publication (December 2016). Besides, the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action are also significant.¹⁰

9 SOP for the Protection of Refugee and Migrant Children: Development and Research Centre IDEAS, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs, UNHCR and UNICEF, Belgrade, March 2016

10 Minimum Standards for Child in Humanitarian Action: Child Protection Working Group-CPWG. Publisher: Development and Research Centre IDEAS, Belgrade 2016

The international and national framework for emergency management

Gender equality is not only the equal participation of women, but also the elimination of consequences of inequality, which can be particularly visible in emergency situations, as well as the provision of opportunities for full participation of women and their empowerment in all fields.

The international framework, guidelines, recommendations and global activities (mainly initiated and conducted by international organisations, primarily the United Nations), recognise gender, gender equality and the inclusion of women as important aspects of emergency response. The starting point for this is the enhancement of community resilience which requires the involvement of all community members, especially those most vulnerable.

The international framework is the basis for the development of national framework (policies, laws, measures and programmes) related to emergency situations, thus gender and gender equality are integrated into national policies and programmes. Furthermore, the policies and laws in the area of anti-discrimination, human rights and achieving gender equality impose an obligation on institutions, organisations, the media and individuals to act towards empowering women and ensuring (gender) equality.

*The Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015)*¹¹ defines directions for global action aimed at reducing the risk of emergencies, particularly emphasising gender aspects. Risk reduction is described as inseparable from sustainable development and vulnerability reduction, while gender equality is recognised as one of the key preconditions for achieving these goals.

Although a lot has been achieved in strengthening resilience, there are still some global challenges that need to be addressed appropriately. At the Third United Nations World Conference held in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction was adopted; this defines the priorities for action to be taken by countries to reduce disaster risks¹².

The most important international document in the field of peace and security policy is the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSC) 1325 - Women, Peace and Security, which is legally binding on all United Nations member states. This resolution, which was adopted on 31 October 2000, highlights the consequences of armed conflict to women and girls and the importance of the role of women in peace-building and post-conflict rehabilitation of society. The Draft Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 - Women, Peace and Security in the Republic of Serbia (2016- 2020) is currently in preparation¹³, and will include a number of activities to be performed during the defined period in order to achieve the overall objective, which is to improve the security of women in society in the field of prevention, participation, protection and recovery, with a greater involvement of local communities.

Special attention is focused on in-depth research and strategic planning in the field of emergency management, but also on the participation of various stakeholders, including different groups, women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, the poor, migrants, members of traditional communities, etc. There are four global priorities: the understanding of emergency risk; the strengthening of risk reduction institutions; the investment into risk reduction with the aim of enhancing resilience; and, the strengthening of preparedness for emergency response.

Similarly, in respect of the emergency management at the national level, the emphasis is also placed on the involvement of citizens, different groups and vulnerable categories of the population, strengthening resilience at the local level, conducting risk assessment, developing measures and programmes to strengthen resilience and response to identified risks.

The Republic of Serbia has ratified a number of international documents and concluded a number of agreements on cooperation and assistance in cases of emergencies with neighbouring countries, but also with some other countries,

12 http://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf

13 Belgrade, July 2016

as well as the Agreement with the European Union on the participation of the Republic of Serbia in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.¹⁴

The international framework and commitments, as well as the national context, the recent experience with natural disasters and the current institutional set-up have all been incorporated into the national legal and strategic framework.

In addition to the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia¹⁵ - which provides the basis for the declaration of a state of emergency and the guarantee of gender equality - the two most relevant aspects to this booklet, the most significant documents for emergency management in the Republic of Serbia¹⁶ are the Law on Emergency Situations¹⁷ and the National Disaster Risk Management Programme (2015) with the Action Plan for its implementation (2016-2020). These documents define the institutions responsible for emergency prevention and response, the key responsibilities of local self-governments and other stakeholders in the system of emergency management. They also envisage the creation of policies and programmes and protection and rescue plans on the basis of threat and risk assessment at the local level.

From the gender perspective, it is of utmost importance to ensure that risk assessments take into account the vulnerability of people and different social groups, not just the vulnerability of "territory", and that individuals, local organisations and institutions are involved in risk assessments, response planning, but also in the process of institutionalisation of community emergency response. Also, it is particularly important to include women in the general-purpose civil defence units.

The National Strategy for Gender Equality in the Republic of Serbia (2016-2020) and the corresponding Action Plan (2016-2018) envisage the gender mainstreaming of all policies at all levels, which is applicable also to emergency related plans and programmes. Based on the relevant data, the following groups of women have been recognised as particularly vulnerable in Serbia: Roma wom-

14 Official Gazette of RS – International Treaties, no. 11/15

15 Official Gazette of RS, no. 98/06, Article 15

16 The Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management has been drafted, but has not been adopted yet. The Draft Law is available on the website of the Public Investment Management Office: <http://www.obnova.gov.rs/cirilica/zakoni-i-uredbe>

17 Official Gazette of RS, nos. 111/2009-3, 92/2011-6, 93/2012-30

en, rural women, single mothers, out-of-school young and teenage mothers, women aged 65 and over living in single-person households and women with disabilities. The Strategy also envisages the strengthening of cooperation between public authorities and the civil society, especially women's organisations. The first gender equality goal, adopted by the Government within the framework of this Strategy, includes the media coverage that increases the visibility of gender equality and non-traditional gender roles, and provides support for gender non-stereotyped representation of women and men.

The applicable Law on Gender Equality, as well as the actual draft of the new law¹⁸, in Article 20 provides for the legal responsibilities of the media to report without discrimination, using gender-sensitive language, and envisages that everyone, regardless of sex, has the right to information and data¹⁹.

18 <http://www.paragraf.rs/dnevne-vesti/160715/160715-vest8.html>

19 The field of gender equality is regulated also by other laws, such as the Law on Labour, the Law on Family, election laws, etc.

Gender perspective in reporting – the role of women

Gender aspects of natural disasters became a more discussed topic after the major flood in Pakistan in 2010, when a Rapid Gender Needs Assessment was conducted²⁰. Research has shown that a large number of victims in natural disasters are female. All major international organisations have now recognised this problem.

An important document adopted at the global level is the Beijing Agenda for Global Action on Gender-Sensitive Disaster Risk Reduction²¹. The document was adopted in order to facilitate the process of mainstreaming a gender perspective in disaster risk management, prevention and remediation. This document highlights the following issues:

- Health risk for women and men
- Risk and violence
- Human trafficking
- Participation of women in decision-making in respect of the prevention of risk, defence strategy, but also rehabilitation and reconstruction.

In addition to the guidelines for political commitment and the revision of country policies and action plans for natural disasters with a view to introducing a

20 <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Media/Publications/UNIFEM/PakistanFloods2010RapidGenderNeedsAssessmenten.pdf>

21 <http://capwip.org/Beijing%20Agenda%20for%20Global%20Action%20on%20Gender%20Sensitive%20DRR22.04.09.pdf>

gender perspective, the Beijing Agenda mentions the media and stresses the need for the following activities: raising awareness of the public and the media about gender-based vulnerability and needs for disaster risk reduction; supporting analysis of the benefits of gender-sensitive policies and programmes with respect to disaster risk reduction, climate change and poverty reduction.

After the May 2014 flood in Serbia, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN WOMEN) prepared a study²² with the guidelines for gender equality in post-disaster needs assessment and recommendations for the achievement of gender equality. This study specifies the key gender aspects of flood consequences, as follows:

- Employment and economic position of women
- Housing conditions and property
- Scope of female unpaid work
(this refers to housekeeping and care of children)
- Availability of educational, health care and social services
- Evacuation and placement in collective centres.

Each of these aspects may be addressed separately in media reports during natural disasters. However, the local media that reported on the floods did not particularly stress any of these aspects. Serbia has not developed a system for monitoring the consequences of floods from the gender perspective and it cannot be determined whether natural disasters affect men and women differently. We can only presume that the situation in Serbia is not essentially different from the situation demonstrated by the statistics at the global level. The media do not deal with particularly vulnerable groups, nor do they draw public attention to the gender perspective. They usually choose male interviewees. There is no reciprocity or equal representation of women and men in reports, footage, special programmes, texts or emergency programmes. Interviews are conducted mainly with male experts although there are a large number of women who are equally qualified in this field. This is a result of insufficient training and lack of sensibility of media professionals and the editorial policy for these topics.

22 UN Women, 2014, Gender Equality in Post-Disaster Needs Assessment: Floods Recovery and Reconstruction in Serbia

Men are the decisions-makers

The media does not often get to choose whom it interviews from official institutions. There appears to be a small number of women in public authorities at all levels, especially in the natural disaster protection system, i.e. there is a disproportionately small number of women in managerial positions. The media reports clearly reflect the situation in society.

Reports on natural disasters rarely present a woman as the government representative or decision-maker in the field. In the Radio-Television of Serbia programme News 2²³ broadcast on 14 May 2014, the interviewee was Slavica Ranković, Vice-President of Koceljeva Municipality. Her title was presented with the male gender.²⁴ Through the use of gender-sensitive language the media can contribute to furthering the principle of equality and increase the visibility of the underrepresented. Using all the terms in the female grammatical gender would show the public that in Serbia there are women who, thanks to their professional competence and achievements, occupy high positions in political and social life. In this way the media can significantly influence a change in public awareness and the breaking down of the stereotype that only men decide the important issues in the country.

However, the positive thing in this case is that women have public appearances in the role of government representatives and decision-makers. It also breaks down the stereotype that lifesaving, risk management and decision making in emergency situations are “male things.” The media are also able to contribute, through their daily reports, in the creation of a climate for increased participation of women in decision making at the local, regional and national level, and in the process of developing plans and strategies that would include special focus on gender-sensitive needs and the way to respond to them. This can also increase the capacity for the introduction of gender perspective in documents relating to emergency situations, but also for the participation of women in the process of adopting plans in the field of disaster risk reduction.

23 <http://www.rts.rs/page/tv/ci/story/17/rts-1/1598341/.html>

24 In Serbian language nouns and other grammatical words have grammatical gender.

Part 3 The Media and Gender Sensitivity
in the Reporting of Natural Disasters
and Emergency Situations

Sources of information prior to the flood

Every time that a natural disaster occurs in Serbia, the media see it primarily as news and it becomes the most covered topic. Thus, the media gives public importance to the natural disaster and “holds” public attention through non-stop reporting. That attention is often short-lasting and ceases as soon as the danger passes, while the disaster becomes less and less important as the main news, rarely do media outlets report on the processes of reconstruction and recovery until the end.

In its report²⁵ on the activities during the 2014 flood in Serbia, the Republic Hydrometeorological Service (hereinafter: RHMZ) stated that the first warning was issued on 9 May, and three days before the torrents, on 12 May, the highest level warning - the so-called red alert warning was issued. According to the Rulebook on the manner of producing, issuing and communicating meteorological and hydrological emergency information and warnings, RHMZ is obliged to alert, warn and inform the public, competent authorities and responsible individuals via SMS, e-mail, operational bulletin and direct contact, and to inform first of all the Sector for Emergency Management of the Serbian MoI and the Water Directorate, which is part of the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection.

The official report on the May 2014 floods, submitted to the Government of the Republic of Serbia, stated that the Sector for Emergency Management, “based on the early warning of heavy rainfall in the territory of the Republic of Serbia issued by the Republic Hydrometeorological Service, in the dispatch number 161-745/14 of 12 May 2014, through the operational centres, communicated a preliminary warning on the expected amounts of rainfall to all the commanders of emergency management headquarters. The information

25 http://www.hidmet.gov.rs/podaci/dokumenti_ciril/RHMZ_Sava_Centar_referat.pdf

was forwarded for the purpose of introducing preparedness in the headquarters and enhancing readiness of all stakeholders involved in the implementation of operational and preventive flood control measures within the unified protection and rescue system".²⁶

In the days before the flood, RHMZ warned that the rain has been falling for days, that the soil is oversaturated with water and that the record amounts of rainfall are to be expected. The media have neither the power nor the competence to warn of the danger before the public authorities decide on that, but they could educate citizens about the protection and action during natural disasters. However, after the 2014 flood it has become evident that meteorological announcements with precipitation warnings still occupy a significant place in the print and electronic media.

26 http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/lat/pdf/akta_procedura/2014/2220-14Lat.pdf (p.11).

Media reporting prior to the flood

Apart from being able to contribute significantly in the process of early warning of citizens concerning potential natural disasters, the media also constitutes one of the key links in the chain of education. Just like the competent authorities and institutions, the media has an important role and social responsibility in informing and preparing citizens for how to act before, during and after a disaster.

Information publically transmitted by the media before and at the onset of flooding:

- Severe weather warning;
- Record rainfall expected;
- Emergency services are on full alert;
- Some municipalities have declared a state of emergency.

Information absent from the media before and at the onset of the flood:

- How citizens should behave in an emergency situation;
- How citizens should respond and protect themselves;
- The plan of evacuation.

The instructions that the affected population received through the media boiled down to waiting for rescue teams and not refusing to evacuate. The me-

dia mainly passed on the messages of responsible public institutions/bodies, which is their legal obligation in emergency situations.

Many of the world's media outlets broadcast special instructions in their programmes during emergencies and some of them have interactive tutorials on their websites. The US commercial television CBS in its short interactive web presentation²⁷ gives clear instructions to citizens on how to act during any natural disaster. Through a very simple and short text that everyone can understand, and through audio instructions, this presentation provides a vulnerable population with advice on how to help themselves and one another, save property, and how to act to prevent a greater disaster. Since the majority of the population in Serbia does not know how to act in emergency situations, it would be useful to have similar instructions prepared by the local media outlets for all citizens of Serbia, particularly bearing in mind that they already exist on the website of the Serbian Ministry of Interior (Mol), Sector for Emergency Management²⁸.

The Family Guide for Emergency Preparedness and Response, published by the Mol, Sector for Emergency Management in cooperation with the OSCE Mission to Serbia, is not just of interest to journalists, but to all citizens. The Guide was published in early 2013, and is available on the website of the Serbian Mol²⁹. Although it has been recommended to local self-governments to print additional copies of the Guide and distribute them to citizens, only a few cities in Serbia responded to the appeals of the competent authorities³⁰. Thoroughly defining the role of the media and the way of informing the public in the new law that would regulate this field could be of great importance in terms of protection system efficiency.

27 http://www.cbsnews.com/htdocs/natural_disasters/flood_drought/html/framesource.html

28 <http://prezentacije.mup.gov.rs/sektorzastituispasavanje/saveti.html>

29 http://prezentacije.mup.gov.rs/svs/html/vanredne%20situacije_cirilica_final.pdf

30 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/drustvo/1264076/prirucnik-zavanredne-situacije.html>

Media reporting during the flood

At the onset of the May flood, national news generally consisted of reports on what, when and how something happened, while the priority in the selection of interviewees was given to the state and local officials who visited the affected places.

Due to the so-called “CNN effect” – where media outlets report on a disaster 24 hours a day and the audience focuses on their coverage with greater attention – many statements do not contain practical advice for the public. In all countries during emergencies politicians as a rule try to be at the disaster site with the aim of expressing empathy and solidarity with the population. This is often a professional test for editors who have to decide how many minutes or paragraphs will be dedicated to the information of relevance for the general population, and also to the reporters in the field who can get more useful and practical information from the people found on the site.

One of the main obstacles to the media was prohibited access to flooded areas, imposed by the relevant authorities in accordance with their powers. Movement were controlled by the authorities, which is understandable in an emergency situation because of security. However, the limitation was imposed also by the very nature of that natural disaster. At the onset of the floods there were neither reports nor photographs or recordings from most sites where the water level was above safe limits.

We have already mentioned that the media began reporting on the floods properly only when the effects of natural calamities became visible. All the reports contained mainly the information expected to be found in the news in emergency situations, such as answers to the following questions:

- Which parts of the country are flooded?

- Who is still in danger?
- Is it really safe to live in that environment, drink water, breathe the air, grow plants and animals, etc.?
- What is the opinion of other actors - professionals, experts (in addition to the authorities)?
- Is it safe to travel? Are any roads, schools, shops, businesses, pharmacies or hospitals closed?
- How do municipal institutions work (what about electricity, are phones functioning, have shelters been provided, where to find water, food, etc.)?

The journalists working in the field introduced a “human dimension” to their reports by recording authentic stories of the people from the affected areas and presenting these stories and experiences to the audience.

The media outlets repeated the statements of residents of the affected areas: namely, the storm occurred while they were asleep thus they did not hear the warning sirens, the house was under water in an unbelievable half an hour, they did not know what they should do, they did not manage to save their property in time, etc.

The untold stories

There is a visible lack of investigative journalism in the media coverage during emergencies, and there was no response to questions that citizens have the right to know, such as:

- Could it have been prevented?
- Did the warning system function properly?
- Was the protection system efficient enough?
- Were the riverbeds maintained?
- Did local communities have rescue plans?
- Were any funds allocated in the budgets for that purpose and what were those funds used for?
- Whether and who exactly violated the applicable regulations, or who was responsible?
- Did the relevant authorities perform their duties conscientiously?
- Was there any corruption?
- Etc.

Rarely were media stories followed up after the end of emergency or that a journalist or editor was interested in developing them further. Investigating the causes and deficiencies of the system would contribute to reducing the risks and mitigate the consequences, while continuous reporting and giving significance to these topics would result in informing citizens about potential hazards and best ways of protection in case of repeated natural disasters which are becoming, unfortunately, ever more common.

Media ethics in emergency situations

The Journalism Code of Ethics governs the issue of media conduct in emergencies. Unfortunately, many media professionals in Serbia are not familiar with their own code of ethics, and reporting on the 2014 flood demonstrated that some media outlets were ready to consciously violate it for the sake of circulation and profit. Hence, can we rely on the personal ethics of media professionals in emergency situations or can the issue of consistent application of ethical standards be resolved only through the systematic involvement of the media in the media coverage of the state's response to natural disasters?

In reporting on the 2014 flood, there were cases where some of the media outlets irresponsibly spread rumours and misinformation, which was most obvious in several reports on the number of casualties. The Government of the Republic of Serbia issued the official report on the number of flood victims on 29 May. Prior to that, several official press conferences stated that the number of victims was high, but that the official data would be announced later. Media speculation about the number of victims began due to the inherent tendency of the sensationalisation of reporting, primarily by print and online media, but also because of the lack of official information and the violation of the journalism code of ethics. This created additional panic in the country, which culminated especially on social media and in certain daily newspapers. According to the official statement of the Serbian Ministry of Interior, three people were detained and remanded in custody for spreading panic on social media. "The current number of victims in Obrenovac exceeds 127" was one of the headlines. A very short text below that headline says that the source of information was a police officer who was at the time in Obrenovac and wanted to remain anonymous. Other media outlets that speculated the number of casualties had similar "sources".

Such a sensationalist approach to the reporting of major disasters would not be possible if media outlets respected the code of ethics of their own profes-

sion, but also if the media were better involved in responding to emergencies. Unfortunately, usually a certain number of media outlets take a sensationalist approach, especially with respect to headline news.

In addition to causing panic, misinformation and, finally, showing no respect to victims, this approach undermines the reputation of journalism as a profession and weakens the credibility of the media that publishes such reports. Also, this kind of reporting causes additional problems to the authorities, and society as a whole, during the response to emergency situations.

As regards the profession of journalism, a significant consequence is relativisation of the essence of information in this way, i.e. "speaking in a vicious circle." In fact, it opens the space for the manipulation of information, known as media spinning. Then the important information, the essence of the problem or the issue of guilt and responsibility remain in the shadow of sensationalist headlines or statements.

The underlying motives are different, but the financial factor is dominant. For years in Serbia, especially in the print media, a certain number of editors have supported the standpoint that because of the poor economic situation and for the sake of circulation it is justified to resort to such tricks. The 2014 flood has shown that no limit exists and that some media have no scruples about putting circulation above reliable information and full truth and, finally, above the code of ethics and applicable laws.

Every journalist should inform the public about things not being done properly as soon as relevant evidence is available. If journalists conceal information or present misleading, sensationalist and incomplete information, they grossly violate the code of ethics but also undermine the essence of their profession - its credibility. Credibility is not something purely theoretical - as it is usually perceived in Serbia. The audience notices a lot more than what a journalist or editor usually think because the audience does not fall into a routine, which happens to professionals over time. Credibility is the core of the professional life of every journalist, editor and the whole media outlet. Ethical conduct is particularly important in case of reporting during emergency events, because it is primarily about lives, not only of citizens but also of journalists, as well as their families and children. Therefore, the responsibility of the media is increased, because in the case of compromised safety, health and similar situations journalists are compelled to rethink about their basic principles, values, obligations towards themselves and towards others. In such situations, the motive must be ethical

conduct and standards of the profession, rather than marketing, multi-reason censorship or, even worse, self-censorship. This is clearly stated in the Code of Ethics of Serbian Journalists.³¹

The provisions of the Code of Ethics that should be particularly taken into consideration in emergencies are these:

It is the right of the media to have different editorial concepts, but journalists and editors have a duty to make a clear distinction between the facts that they are reporting and any comments, assumptions and speculation.

The economic and political interests of a publisher shall not influence the editorial policy in a manner that would result in inaccurate, biased, incomplete and untimely information presented to the public.

Incompatible with the journalist profession is working in PR and marketing agencies, lobbying agencies, government bodies and institutions, as well as political parties.

The journalist is accountable primarily to his or her readers, listeners and viewers. This accountability should not be subordinate to the interests of others, particularly the interests of publishers, government and other state authorities. The journalist shall oppose all those who violate human rights or who advocate any kind of discrimination, hate speech or incitement to violence.

Journalists shall not blindly trust a source of information. They should take into account that the information sources often follow their own interests or the interests of social groups that they belong to and adjust their statements to those interests.

Journalists must be aware of the danger of discrimination that can be spread by the media and shall do everything to avoid discrimination based, among other things, on race, gender, age, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origins.

Inventing anonymous sources is a serious violation of the standards of professional conduct for journalists.

31 <http://www.nuns.rs/codex/ethical-code.html>

Journalists and editors should particularly avoid speculation and reporting opinions which have not been adequately verified, when reporting on disasters and tragedies involving victims, or where the material and other interests of citizens have been severely affected.

When reporting on events that involve personal grief and shock, journalists are obliged to adapt their questions in a way which reflects the spirit of compassion and discretion.

The issue of uncompromising ethics has been simply explained by Douglas A. Anderson, Professor of the Faculty of Communications of the State University of Pennsylvania. He says that ethics is 'self-adoption of law' and 'self-implementation of law', and although it is very close to law and morality, its nature is different. Law is something implemented by society, while ethics is a journalist's personal thing, implemented by a person and not by society as a whole. It is much easier with law, because it specifies what is illegal; ethics goes beyond it, because many acts are legal, but are not ethical.³²

It is almost impossible to raise all ethical issues or have all the answers, because new stories often bring new ethical dilemmas, but the compliance with and application of the professional code of ethics can, primarily, help any journalist in reporting during natural disasters. If they wonder whether they are acting ethically, it is sufficient to answer the list of questions to make good ethical decisions.

32 Anderson, D.A, Itule, D.D. (2001), *News Writing and Reporting for Today's Media*, Belgrade: Media Center

List of questions to make good ethical decisions:³³

1. What do I know? What do I need to know?
2. What is my journalistic purpose?
3. What are my ethical concerns?
4. What organisational policies and professional guidelines should I consider?
5. How can I include other people, with different perspectives and diverse ideas, in the decision-making process?
6. Who are the stakeholders -- those affected by my decision? What are their motivations? Which are legitimate?
7. What if the roles were reversed? How would I feel if I were in the shoes of one of the stakeholders?
8. What are the possible consequences of my actions? Short term? Long term?
9. What are my alternatives to maximize my truth-telling responsibility and minimize harm?
10. Can I clearly and fully justify my thinking and my decision? To my colleagues? To the stakeholders? To the public?

Misreporting

The number of victims was not the only subject of media speculation during the 2014 flood. There were various other unverified pieces of information, such as those about dams being damaged, which was later refuted.

Another example of the spurious speculation in the media and the publishing of unverified information was the news that the JVP Waters of Vojvodina kept in a warehouse in Novi Sad the most modern mobile equipment that it did not want to use for the defence of Srem. This company very quickly denied the information and explained that the equipment could only be used at the quay in Novi Sad, since putting it into operation required the installation of stands for mobile use in concrete, which had been done in Novi Sad during the reconstruction of the quay.

In order to prevent such information and speculation, the Crisis Committee for the Defence of Srem set up a temporary press centre in its premises and journalists were able to see on the spot how the defence was organised and implemented and obtain reliable information at any moment. This is certainly a good model for preventing misinformation, sensational reporting and provoking panic, which should serve to the competent authorities in planning responses to natural disasters.

Recommendations for the interviewing of disaster victims

A particularly sensitive issue in emergency situations is how to approach the victims in an interview. The Code of Ethics requires journalists to pay special attention in these situations; the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma has made a list³⁴ of tips for interviewing victims, which contains the following recommendations:

1. Always treat victims with dignity and respect - the way you want to be treated in a similar situation. Know when to back off.
2. Clearly identify yourself – your name and media outlet you represent. Don't be surprised if you receive a harsh reaction at first, especially from parents of child victims. However, do not respond by reacting harshly.
3. It is always recommendable to address the victim with the words: "I'm sorry for your loss"; but never say "I understand" or "I know how you feel."
4. Don't overwhelm with the hardest questions first. Begin with general questions, and then then listen to the answer. The worst mistake a reporter can do in such situations is to talk too much.

34 <http://dartcenter.org/content/tragedies-journalists-6?section=2>

Media as partners in emergencies

During the 2014 flood, it would have proven wise to work more on establishing a quicker and more efficient system for the early warning of citizens, and on achieving a better cooperation between public authorities and the media, to ensure data accuracy and a faster flow of information.

During disasters, the media should be a reliable source of information and a communication channel. The media should be used for providing information in emergency situations, but also for helping the public prepare for any future natural disasters and thus contribute to improving the response of society as a whole.

Communication between public authorities and the media in case of emergency is regulated by the Law on Emergency Situations³⁵. The Law states the following: "Radio broadcasting and television stations with national, regional and local frequencies shall, at the request of the operations centre 112, immediately stop broadcasting in order to convey the appropriate information of interest for protection and rescue."

Additionally, the Law on Electronic Media³⁶ stipulates that "the media service provider, with respect to its programme content, in accordance with its programme concept shall", inter alia, "transmit communications of public authorities of an urgent nature relating to the endangerment of life, health, safety, or property".

35 http://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_vanrednim_situacijama.html

36 http://www.paragraf.rs/propisi/zakon_o_elektronskim_medijima.html

It is also important that, pursuant to the Decree on the composition and operational method of emergency management headquarters³⁷, media representatives are among the members of national, provincial, district, city and municipal emergency management headquarters. Therefore, the laws regulate the issues of causing panic and criminal liability of the media, but also define their position during natural disasters or emergencies. The point is that the media must be part of emergency management team. They must be included in these teams even before a natural disaster occurs and must be part of the emergency response plan. The reports will certainly be more accurate if journalists are acquainted with the organisation and way of responding to emergencies, and particularly if they know personally the team members. Therefore, it is necessary to involve the media in a systematic manner, thus improving their contribution. Hence, the system of protection actually needs well-informed journalists and editors, who are trained to identify priority information, recognise needs and contribute to reducing the proportions of disaster, but also to prevent rumours, misinformation and discrimination against particular groups or hate speech, whose publication in emergencies may have multiple consequences.

37 http://www.vanredne-situacije.net/dokumenti/Uredba_o_sastavu_i_nacinu_rada_stabova_za_vs.pdf

Recommendations

Conclusion and recommendations

The overview of media reporting and the experience acquired from the flood that hit Serbia in 2014 show that the importance and role of the media is undisputed. By developing different and more comprehensive media reporting in which women are portrayed as active participants in the process of prevention, protection, rescue and reconstruction, the preparedness of communities to respond to natural disasters would be enhanced. In this context, we present the following recommendations to journalists:

- It is necessary to use media reporting to improve understanding of the importance and significance of gender roles, thus influencing the breaking of gender stereotypes and prejudices; the sensationalist approach of the media should be significantly reduced, or better still removed completely during emergency situations. Women in emergency situations should not be presented solely as victims or mothers, but also as active participants in the response to a natural disaster. This means that media attention should be directed also towards humanitarian activities, non-institutional ones, in which women make a significant contribution.
- The media should inform the public more comprehensively about the proper response in case of emergencies, providing content that is equally appropriate to women and men.
- Media reporting should be focused on informing and empowering women to respond to an emergency, as well as on gender-based vulnerabilities, and institutional measures in responding to them - both in the response preparation phase and during the humanitarian response to the emergency.

- In addition to “human destinies”, the media should focus on the actions of institutions and organisations that provide assistance to the population affected by natural disasters. The media should draw public attention to the specific needs and challenges faced by different groups of population and services that are available to them. This would also contribute to reducing discrimination against certain groups of vulnerable population.
- In order to raise public awareness about the importance of non-discrimination and the exercise of human rights, and also about the improvement of media standards, it is necessary that journalists use gender-sensitive and anti-discrimination terminology. The handbook for journalists *The Fight for Equality*, prepared by the Commissioner for Protection of Equality in 2016, provides the relevant guidelines.
- It would be useful if the Sector for Emergency Management could create, with the support of the media, a video-animation of the Family Guide for Emergency Preparedness and Response, and distribute it to the media outlets throughout Serbia, and also create versions adjusted to people with visual and hearing impairments.

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