

Working Session 1

Fundamental freedoms

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Mainstream media to cover issues of concern to Roma and to include Romani programs to provide constructive and balanced coverage. This would ensure that Roma are seen as being an integral part of society and would help to develop intercultural understanding

The mainstream media may fail to represent Romani concerns adequately. Editors often treat Roma as a cultural curiosity. The other dimension of this problem in the commercial media is that some outlets have made financial gains out of xenophobic coverage.

In the print media especially, some publishers have found that they sell more copies with sensationalist coverage, giving them a vested interest in maintaining it.

Media professionals from the majority tend to dominate the mainstream, and thus choose the groups and issues covered and shape the images used to portray them. In this sense, the majority community retains the 'privileged voice' in the mainstream media.

Need for Romani media to be more proactive in their relations with the mainstream media.

Role of training and technical assistance to develop the public relations capacity of Romani organizations is key to build better communication with mainstream societies and mainstream media.

Good communication with the media could help to counter the problems of prejudice.

Negative and stereotyped portrayal of Roma in the mainstream media is ongoing discussion among Romani media makers, representatives of Romani movement... and that journalists' own prejudices obstruct (interfere) with their professionalism in covering issues in Roma communities.

There is yet another issue: the coverage of notorious issues within the other minority communities and by the minority media.

Another concern is with the under-representation of Roma at all levels of the media system. In many countries, Roma are not adequately represented in the programming or regulatory councils overseeing the public broadcast sector.

Programmes about Roma rarely are produced by people from the majority community without input from Roma that is why so often fail to represent the Roma community's concerns and perspectives. Roma are overlooked as audiences for programmes, and their needs ignored.

There are reports, frequently there is only a very brief time slot allocated to Romani language broadcasts, which can be moved around unpredictably in the schedule or is broadcast at inconvenient times. The usual justification is the assumption that these programmes would not be of interest to the majority of their audience.

Role of media professionals

Employment of professionals from minority communities in the mainstream media is a key aspect of minorities' access. In most countries, however, members of minority groups are under-represented in media employment. A bias against appointing members of minority communities to key editorial positions, could generate conflict. These harms are sometimes part of a systemic pattern of discrimination throughout the media system.

The absence of minority media professionals results in programming that does not include minority views and prevents them helping to shape public understanding of the range of societal issues.

Another difficulty experienced by minority media professionals is how they represent their identity as a member of a minority community and the degree to which their perspectives as minorities are silenced. Minority media professionals can also be criticized by their own community when their individual views are seen as not reflecting 'genuine' minority perspectives. Yet, many believed that minority media professionals can serve as role models for their community and present positive images of the community for the majority and other minorities.

Need for professional training on the history and situation of minorities (Roma).

Media professionals, like most members of a society, may have a distorted understanding of these issues. Their reports or programmes then reproduce and reinforce that bias. That's why there is still need for bias-awareness training in journalism schools and in continuing professional education programmes.