

CHARTER OF ROME

CODE OF CONDUCT REGARDING ASYLUM SEEKERS, REFUGEES, VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING AND MIGRANTS¹

The National Council of the Journalists' Association (Consiglio Nazionale dell'Ordine dei Giornalisti, CNOG) and the Italian National Press Federation (Federazione Nazionale della Stampa Italiana, FNSI), sharing the concern voiced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as regards media coverage of asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants; recalling the principles regarding journalists' professional ethics laid out in the Journalist's Charter of Duties (Carta dei Doveri del Giornalista) – especially as regards the fundamental duty to respect each and every person and his/her dignity and to not discriminate against anyone on account of their race, religion, gender, physical and mental conditions and political opinions – and the principles enshrined in national and international law on the subject; reaffirming the special safeguards to be taken when dealing with minors as established by the United Nations Convention on children's rights and by the principles laid out in the Charter of Treviso (Carta di Treviso) and in its additional Manual; on the basis of the fundamental principle stressing the importance of adhering to the truth as regards all events which are the subject of media coverage (art. 2 of the Law establishing the Journalists' Association), invite Italian journalists to:

exercise the highest care in dealing with information regarding asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants living in Italy and elsewhere and, in particular, to:

- a. Adopt an appropriate terminology which reflects national and international law so as to provide readers and viewers with the greatest adherence to the truth as regards all events which are the subject of media coverage, avoiding the use of inappropriate terms;
- b. Avoid spreading inaccurate, simplified or distorted information as regards asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants. CNOG and FNSI call all their colleagues' – and those responsible for editorial content in particular – attention to the negative effects of superficial or unprofessional behaviour on those who are the object of news coverage, on readers/viewers and, as a consequence, on media professionals' credibility. Superficial behaviour may include associating different news items in an inappropriate manner and may engender unwarranted apprehension among the public.
- c. Safeguard those asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants who choose to speak with the media by adopting solutions as regards their identity and image so as to ensure that they are not identifiable. Asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants who are identifiable – as well as the latter's relatives - may face reprisals on the part of the authorities in their country of origin, of non-state entities or of criminal organisations. Moreover, individuals who belong to a different socio-cultural context, where the press plays a limited role, may not be aware of global media dynamics and may thus not be able to foresee all the consequences of their decision to appear in the media.
- d. Whenever possible, consult experts and organisations with a specific expertise on the subject so as to provide the public with information which is clear, comprehensive and also analyses the underlying roots of phenomena.

¹ The Code of Conduct is a Protocol to the Journalist's Charter of Duties (*Carta dei Doveri del Giornalista*)

COMMITMENTS TO BE UNDERTAKEN BY CNOG, FNSI AND UNHCR

i. The National Council of the Journalists' Association (CNOG) and the Italian National Press Federation (FNSI), in collaboration with the Journalists' Association's Regional Councils, the Regional Press Associations and all the other organisations which have promoted this Charter, pledge to insert issues relating to asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants among the topics covered in training courses for journalists, ranging from those organised by journalism schools to seminars held for prospective reporters. CNOG and FNSI also pledge to hold regular study seminars on the way asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants are represented in the press by print, radio and TV media outlets.

ii. CNOG and FNSI, in collaboration with UNHCR, support the establishment of an independent Monitoring Centre which - working with universities, research institutes and stakeholders - will monitor developments in media coverage of asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking, migrants and members of minority groups so as to:

- a) provide qualitative and quantitative analyses of asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants' image in the Italian media to Italian and European research institutes and universities as well as to relevant European Union and Council of Europe agencies dealing with discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance;
- b) provide material on media coverage of these issues and on trends underway in this field to the Journalists' Association's Regional Councils, to editors and reporters and to media and communications specialists so as to stimulate debate and discussion.

iii. The National Council of the Journalists' Association and the Italian National Press Federation will work towards the establishment of awards specifically dedicated to media coverage of asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants, drawing on similar initiatives at the European and international level which have proven to have positive effects.

The Charter has been drafted drawing on input from a Consultative Committee whose members include representatives of the Interior Ministry, the Social Solidarity Ministry, UNAR (Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali - National Office Against Racial Discrimination)/Presidency of the Council of Ministers - Department for Equal Opportunities, 'La Sapienza' University and Roma III University, Italian and foreign journalists.

ANNEX: GLOSSARY

- An asylum seeker is a person who is outside the country of his/her nationality and submits an application to be granted refugee status, or other forms of international protection, in a different country on the basis of the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees. He/she is an asylum seeker and has the right to reside in the host country as a legal alien until a final decision has been reached by the competent authorities. Asylum seekers are thus not irregular migrants, though they may enter the host country without identity papers or in an irregular manner, e.g. through so-called 'mixed migration flows', which are made up of both irregular migrants and potential refugees.
- A refugee is a person who has been granted refugee status on the basis of the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees, which Italy is a member to along with 143 other countries. Article 1 of the Convention defines a refugee as a person having a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, [who] is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'. A person is granted refugee status if he/she can demonstrate that he/she is the victim of an individual persecution.
- A beneficiary of humanitarian protection is a person who cannot be strictly defined as a 'refugee' under the 1951 Convention because he/she is not persecuted as an individual, but who is nevertheless in need of protection as, were he/she to be repatriated to his/her home country, he/she would be in grave danger due to armed conflict, generalised violence and/or widespread violations of human rights. European directives define this form of protection as 'subsidiary' protection. Most of the people who are recognised as being in need of protection in Italy are granted a residence permit for humanitarian reasons rather than refugee status.
- A victim of trafficking is a person who - unlike irregular migrants, who decide to entrust their fate to people smugglers - has not given his/her consent to be transferred to another country or, if he/she has given his/her consent, the latter has been rendered void by the coercive and/or deceitful actions of the traffickers or by the abuse which he/she has been the victim of or has been threatened with. Traffickers aim to achieve control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. 'Exploitation' includes the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.
- A migrant/immigrant is a person who chooses of his/her own accord to leave his/her home country in search of work and of better economic conditions elsewhere. Unlike refugees, migrants may return home without prejudice to their safety.
- An irregular migrant, often defined as a 'clandestine' migrant in Italy, is a person who: a) has entered a country avoiding detection at the border; b) has entered the country in a regular manner, e.g. on a tourist visa, and has not left after his/her entry visa has expired (thus becoming a so-called 'overstayer'); or c) has not left the territory of the destination country subsequent to receipt of an expulsion order.