

A large, stylized graphic in the background shows a hand holding a child. The hand is white with a grey shadow, and the child is a simple white silhouette. The background is a light grey gradient.

Guidelines on **Child Trafficking** & **Media Coverage**

Prepared by
**the Regional Child Trafficking Response Programme,
Southeast Europe**

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Background

In March 2001, Save the Children's Central and Eastern Europe regional group identified child trafficking as one of its two regional priorities. The following year, Save the Children began a Regional Child Trafficking Programme, implementing pilot child trafficking interventions in Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia. Save the Children in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Romania have also conducted research on child trafficking independently or as part of other regional initiatives.

Save the Children plans to continue working on child trafficking issues in the region through ongoing research, field-based interventions and advocacy at national and regional levels. As it steps up its advocacy efforts, media attention will increase. Staff will need to present consistent information to the general public on child trafficking issues, all the while taking into consideration the protection needs of children who will be directly or indirectly affected by this media coverage. The following guidelines are intended to provide guidance for staff involved in anti-trafficking work on how to respond to requests by the media.

Save the Children adopts a rights based approach to advocacy and programming. This means that policy, advocacy and programme responses in relation to trafficking must focus on the human rights of children who have been trafficked or who are at risk of being trafficked. Any responses should thus be tested against the key principles of children's rights as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child:

- The survival and development of the child must not be compromised and all means should be taken to protect the child.
- The best interests of the child must be taken into account as a primary consideration in all decisions and measures affecting them.
- Non-discrimination must be practiced.
- Children must participate to the maximum in decisions affecting them.



Introduction



The media has the potential to bring the issue of child trafficking into the public debate and to play a positive role in raising awareness about the issue, sensitising high-risk groups to the dangers of it, generating new information through investigative journalism, lowering public tolerance for criminality, exploitation of children, gender discrimination and human rights violations, and challenging a moral complacency which may tacitly accept using children for purposes of exploitation and profit.

On the other hand, trafficking is a complicated issue that is at times misrepresented in the media. It is often conflated with smuggling and/or prostitution, and victims of trafficking may be portrayed as criminals or as choosing and thus deserving of their fate. The media may sensationalise issues by, for example, focusing on titillating stories of “sex slavery,” or may unwittingly promote negative stereotypes, for example, suggesting that some groups of people are more inclined to “sell their children” and are somehow less humane. As such, the media also have the potential to play a negative role for children by generating misinformation, promoting negative attitudes towards victims and worst of all, causing direct harm to children.

Save the Children has a responsibility to promote accurate information about child trafficking, and to present the issue in a way that promotes and protects the human rights of high-risk and trafficked children. Save the Children staff can play a role in encouraging responsible, sensitive and critical media coverage of the issue by communicating a clear and concise position on child trafficking and by building good links with the media. It is important that child trafficking be presented as a serious infringement of the human rights of the trafficked child, not only as a criminal or migration issue.

The chance to influence a journalistic piece is before and during its production - by briefing the journalist - but Save the Children’s views

can never be forced. Rather, staff need to explain and ask the media to commit to basic child protection conditions, making it clear that this is in the best interest of the child and Save the Children's duty to promote.

These guidelines consist of two parts. The first part outlines how to assess child protection concerns when responding to media requests for information, particularly regarding requests to interview children who have been trafficked. The second part presents some points for staff to consider when preparing to speak to the media.

These guidelines apply to all Save the Children staff, implementing partners, journalists, and visitors to Save the Children's Regional Child Trafficking Response Programme, Southeast Europe.



Granting Media Access to Trafficked Children



Trafficked children and their families may be at serious risk of harm from traffickers. Public attention to their story, their identity, and/or their location may dramatically increase this risk. Exposure may also have a devastating effect on a trafficked child's process of recovery, destroying relationships with family members, colleagues and friends who may not have known about his or her trafficking history. Save the Children staff and partners have an obligation to assess the risks of granting the media direct access to children who have been trafficked, and to set conditions if that access is granted. Such assessments should be conducted on a case-by-case basis.

Some children may wish to tell their story to the public. Trafficked children should be given the opportunity to express their views and opinions in safety. However, consideration must be given to balancing the child's right to freedom of expression against the child's right to protection.

The following questions should be asked by staff and implementing partners to assist in this assessment:

Assessing Access

When is it appropriate to grant media direct access to trafficked and/or high-risk children? When is it not? What considerations should be taken into account?

Is this in the best interest of the child?

The **best interest** of the child should be the overriding principle guiding consideration of whether or not to grant media access to

children. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and Save the Children's *Child Protection Policy*¹ should inform this assessment.

When assessing the best interest of a child, do so in consultation with the child and his/her guardian, considering the short and long-term impact of the interview and media exposure on the child's physical, psychological and social well-being and integrity.

Physical Well-Being:

- Will the child's safety be at risk, directly or indirectly?
- Will the safety of the child's family be at risk, directly or indirectly?

Psychological well-being:

- Will the child be further victimised?
- Will the child re-live the trauma of his/her experience?
- Is there a counselor or other appropriate support on hand to comfort the child if necessary?

Integrity of the child:

Will the child suffer stigma or loss of self-esteem as a result of his or her public association with trafficking?

Who is doing the reporting?

Consideration of the **nature of the media source** (tabloid, hard-hitting news coverage, etc.) as well as of the identity of the journalist should be taken into account. Find out about the media source before agreeing to conduct an interview in order to get a sense of their approach to the issue, anticipate their questions, and prepare to answer them effectively. Refuse repeat visits by journalists who take a sensationalist approach.

- Is the journalist/media from a credible source?
- Can they be trusted to respect conditions agreed upon to protect children?



¹ International Save the Children Alliance, *Child Protection Policy*, March 2003

- Have you checked with others about their previous experiences with this journalist/media source?
- Will the media coverage benefit the child? Will it contribute to or hinder the programme objectives?



Does the child want to be interviewed?

Children must be consulted about whether or not they wish to speak to the media. Staff must help to ensure that this is an informed decision by the child, and that all possible implications for both the child and his/her family are fully understood.

- Have you consulted with the child about whether or not they wish to speak to the media?
- Have you informed the child about how and for what purpose the information they share will be used by the media?
- Have you considered and explained all the possible implications of the media coverage for both the child and his/her family?
- Have you considered the developmental stage and age of the child in ensuring that he/she understands the implications of his/her decision?
- Have you consulted with the child's guardian about granting the media access to the child?

Setting Conditions for Interviews with Trafficked Children

If access is granted, should it be conditional? If so, under what conditions, and how will they be enforced (i.e. written statement of confidentiality)?

- Set clear standards for media practice if access to the child is granted (see below). Discuss and agree upon these conditions with the journalist in advance of the interview. Underline the seriousness of failure to follow the agreed conditions.
- Place strong emphasis on child protection concerns, including confidentiality and ensuring the integrity of the child: during the interview, in the final news item/story as

well as in the context of how the story is used (i.e. its distribution).

- Make sure to agree upon these as preconditions to the interview.

Child Protection Guidelines for Journalists

Discuss and agree upon the following conditions with the journalist prior to the interview. Explain that you are asking the media to commit to basic child protection standards as these are in the best interest of the child, and as such, are your duty as a representative of a child rights organisation to promote.

Confidentiality

- **Under no circumstances**, must the journalist **reveal the identity of a trafficked child**. In all cases, real names, family names and places of residence, or other information that could lead to the child being identified, must be kept out of any published, audio or visual material. It is crucial that trafficked children cannot be identified in photographs, films or videos.
- **Confidentiality** should be respected whether or not a child gives permission to be interviewed, photographed or otherwise identified. Children involved in trafficking may not be aware of the dangers to themselves and may give permission without knowledge of the possible consequences to themselves or their families.
- The need for protection and confidentiality applies to the victims, their families and to staff working directly with the children. It is equally important therefore that Save the Children staff and partners are guaranteed confidentiality if they are at risk of harm.



Integrity of the Child

- Maintain ethical standards during the interview and do not pressure the child in a way that will harm or distress him/her.

- Make sure to ask age-appropriate questions (i.e. do not ask for details about sexual abuse).
- Be prepared to stop the interview if the child expresses distress. This should be determined in consultation with the child and the staff counselor or supervisor in attendance.
 - Do not publicise material that will cause direct or indirect harm to the child.
 - Portray the child accurately and sensitively, respect their integrity and do not misrepresent them.
 - Avoid the use of stereotypes and sensational presentation; avoid the use of sexualised images of the child.



Rights of the Child Being Interviewed

The child being interviewed has a right:

- To know who is conducting the interview, what it is for, and how it will be used.
- To refuse to answer any questions or to give only information they feel is important.
- To stop the interview whenever they want, for whatever reason.
- To confidentiality.
- To see what information is being recorded, to delete or change any information they have given, including going back to earlier questions and adding or changing an answer.
- To have other people present when answering questions.

Preparing for the interview

Save the Children staff have a responsibility to ensure that these guidelines are discussed with, agreed to and respected by the journalist prior to the interview. Offer the journalist the possibility of reviewing the story prior to its publication/release to ensure that child protection issues are not compromised.

- Have you discussed these guidelines with the journalist in full and ensured his/her commitment to respect them as a precondition to the interview?

- Have you fully informed the child about the nature of the interview, as well as of its future implications for the child and his/her family? Have you allowed enough time for this? Preparing a child for media exposure takes time, and this process must not be rushed.
- Have you clearly explained the rights of the child being interviewed to the child and the journalist prior to the interview?
- Have you ensured that the interview is supervised (by a Save the Children staff person, partner, or by someone who is familiar to the child and who the child trusts)?
- Have you ensured that the support of a counselor or other qualified professional is on hand for the child if they need it during or after the interview?



Talking to the Media about Child Trafficking



It is important to take the opportunity of meeting with the media to frame child trafficking as a human rights concern. Sharing clear, brief advocacy messages with the media may help to counter sensationalised stories of trafficked children.

- **Be clear** in your communication with the media: identify the problem and present the facts, outline the broader context under which trafficking occurs, identify what can be done to prevent it, point to what is needed and what must be done about it, and include information about legal or other types of response.
- Provide **information on the rights of the child** and make reference to international and national legal instruments.
- **Provide concrete examples** from your programme.
- **Be sensitive in your use of language** and try to use terminology in a way that maintains a focus on child rights. For example the term “child prostitute” or “sex slave” can be replaced with the term “sexually exploited child” to draw attention to the exploitative nature of child trafficking.
- Prepare **case studies** to share with the media in order to illustrate the protection concerns of high-risk and trafficked children as well as to highlight their strength and resilience.
- In some cases, children who have been trafficked decide to “go public” and present their cause to the general public. The media can be referred to these “spokes children” as they can be very strong advocates. However, take into consideration the potential for tokenism and exploitation of these children before making the referral.

- Check for Save the Children material on child trafficking including strategy documents and the latest updates on the debates and advocacy issues.



Responsibility



Who is responsible for following, implementing and disseminating these guidelines? How can Save the Children ensure that implementing partners follow these guidelines, particularly with regards to protection issues?

- Share and discuss these guidelines with all Save the Children staff and implementing partners working on child trafficking, including project partners, programme managers and press/information officers.
- Conduct workshops with journalists on child rights and child trafficking to raise awareness about issues of concern.
- Conduct media monitoring and field visits to follow up.
- Write letters-to-the-editor in response to misleading or sensationalised news coverage.
- Develop media kits/talking points to guide field staff, and organise media training for staff.

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