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contacte@periodistes.cat  
periodistes.cat

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# Code of ethics

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Declaration of Principles of  
Professional Journalists in Catalonia





## **Code of ethics**

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Professional Journalists in Catalonia

**The Code of Ethics sets out the rules that newspapers and other media have agreed to follow regulated by CIC, an independent body created in 1997 by the Catalan Society of Professional Journalists (Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya).**

**The Code was written in 1992 and the latest version was updated on 9 November 2016. It sets the framework for the professional standards that members of the press, in printed and online version, have undertaken to maintain as the system of voluntary self-regulation. The Code balances both the rights of the individual and the public's right to know, and it is the responsibility of editors, publishers and journalists to apply it in their publications.**

## 02.CRITERIA

The journalists should:

### 1. Report with accuracy and precision

The professional journalists are committed to the pursuit of the truth and, consequently, they have the obligation to report the reality of the events with the highest fidelity possible. The media always have to maintain a clear distinction between fact and opinion, disclose only information that's been verified with due diligence and avoid spreading conjectures and rumours as if they were facts.

### 2. Avoid harm due to information without sufficient basis

The journalists should not use abusive expressions nor disclose facts that are imprecise or without sufficient basis and that may injure the dignity of people and cause harm or discredit to public or private entities.

The journalists must contact previously with those who could be affected, providing them the opportunity to reply.

### 3. Rectify incorrect information

The journalists have the obligation to amend both the information and the resulting interpretations that have been proven false or wrong, and that should be done promptly and with an appropriate treatment and extent. At the same time, the media must meet the right of reply when this is requested on reasonable terms.

### 4. Use legitimate and worthy methods to obtain information

The use of hidden cameras and any other surreptitious or misleading procedure to obtain information, pictures and testimonies is unacceptable. The interception and revelation without consent of private material obtained from mobile telephones, electronic messaging and other communication devices is also unacceptable.

An exemption could be granted in case of incidents or events of unequivocal public interest, when there is no other option left to comply appropriately with the right to information.

Paying sources for information goes against the good journalistic practice and it is inadmissible when it endangers the principle of truthfulness or when it is likely to interfere with the action of Justice.

Plagiarism is unacceptable. It is necessary to apply the proper professional practices when using others' work.

### **5. Cite the sources and preserve the professional secrecy**

To assure the credibility of the information, the sources must be quoted. However, journalists have the moral obligation to protect them by invoking professional secrecy when necessary. Confidentiality is useful to protect people in a situation of vulnerability or risk, but in no case the anonymity can be used for unjustified attacks against individuals and organizations.

Good journalistic practice requires also an appropriately treatment of the information received under embargo, as well as to respect the off the record agreement.

### **6. Reconcile the individual rights with the public right to know**

The journalist must defend the right to information in front of any restriction to the transparency required by the public interest, especially when the sources are government institutions and agencies. However, one must concede the individual and legal persons the right not to provide any information or to answer questions. Intimidating and persistent harassment is a reprehensible practice.

## 7. Avoid conflict of interests

The journalists should never accept payments or rewards by third parties that intend to promote, orient or get published certain information and opinions. The acceptance of promotional or commemorative gifts can never exceed the strict criteria of courtesy, according to the scale established by the journalistic organizations. It is not admissible to practise journalism simultaneously with other paid activities that endanger the principles of truthfulness and independence.

It is necessary to refuse formulas of promotion or advertising under the deliberate appearance of journalistic information.

As a general rule, the information professionals should avoid any situation of conflict of interests, whether political, commercial, economic, financial or familiar, that calls into question the credibility and impartiality of his role.

## 8. Not use privileged information for one's own good

The journalists should not use in their own benefit the information received confidentially in the exercise of their function, regardless of whether it is published or not, nor pass it on to third parties for similar reasons. They also should avoid pronouncing on companies and products in which they have some financial interest, either directly or through family members or people they know well. The same rules should apply regarding the betting and gaming industry.

## 9. Respect the right to privacy

People should be treated with respect and dignity, particularly the most vulnerable ones. Unnecessary interference and speculations about their feelings and circumstances should be avoided. Harming unjustifiably the dignity of individuals through words or pictures, even beyond their death, disobey the journalistic ethics.

The cases of suicide will be disclosed only when they have personal relevance or a real public interest, bearing in mind always the risk of a mimetic effect.

## **10. Safeguard the presumption of innocence**

Any person accused of or charged for a crime has the right to the presumption of innocence in the information and opinions related to the investigations, lawsuits or criminal proceedings. The respect and protection of this right is valid from the beginning of the police interventions until guilt has been proved in a process celebrated with the necessary guarantees. The journalists should prevent prejudices and should not submit suspects to parallel trials.

## **11. Protect the rights of minors**

Spreading the identity of minors should be avoided when they appear as victims (except in the case of murder and cases of kidnappings or disappearances), witnesses or suspects. This consideration is particularly relevant in matters of special social significance, such as sex abuse, suicides, problems related to adoptions or children of incarcerated parents. Besides, the journalists should avoid identifying against their will innocent relatives or other close people of accused or convicted persons in criminal proceedings.

As a general rule, children should not be interviewed nor photographed or filmed without the explicit consent of their parents, legal guardians, teachers or educators. It is also not fair to allege the public relevance of relatives or close people to justify the interference in the children's private life or the exploitation of their image.

## **12. Respect the dignity of the persons, as well as their physical and moral integrity**

No one can be discriminated because of gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, belief, ethnic origin, nationality and social extraction. Likewise, the journalists should avoid using degrading expressions that may incite hatred and the use of violence. The journalists need to be especially sensitive to diversity and act with a sense of justice and respect for the people and the groups affected.

## 03. APPENDIXES

### **Appendix A:** Advice on image manipulation

In photojournalism the pictures must be credited with author, date, place and relevant elements that identify the image, unless this could put in danger the safety of the sources. Manipulations that involve altering the visual information captured originally by the camera's lens and recorded on the storage medium are not allowed; that is to say: add, delete, move or modify any element of the original image.

In the field of photo-illustration the alteration of images is legitimate, without any other limit than the responsibility of the author, and with the obligation to inform, aptly, the reader of the type of alteration practiced.



## **Appendix B:** **Advice about Internet**

The principles of journalistic ethics are common for all media and formats without any distinction. However, the characteristics of the Internet have led to an extensive casuistry that raises new ethical considerations for the professional practice.

### **01. Publisher's responsibility**

The ethical regulations must rule especially the web pages that are the electronic version of existing publications in other formats, or those who, born on the web, have a header and a content that could be perceived as informative publications.

- » These rules should also concern people who publish on-line information as individuals and can be considered journalism professionals as they receive most part of their income from this activity.
- » This appendix of good practices of information on the Internet affects also journalists who have personal blogs or participate in a professional way in social networks.

### **02. Transparency and accuracy**

- » The informative product must be recognisable as such, regardless of its formal nature. The distinction between information and opinion is also required, as well as the differentiation between advertising and information.
- » The information must be credited and the links should contain the correct references, with the purpose of guiding the recipients and keeping the data contextualized.
- » As in other media, the immediacy is no excuse to omit deontological principles as resorting to reliable sources and verifying the information.
- » The information that is been spread through social networks should not contain hearsay nor value judgements that could be offensive.

### 03. Active participation and supervision

Active audience participation enriches the plurality of media content on the Internet and is one of the most innovative defining keys of the new informative universe. However, the characteristics of the network generate new ethical traps on the relationship between the media and the public.

- » Feedback from users to the news disclosed on informative websites should be moderated by responsible publishers. These should count with mechanisms and appropriate tools to prevent the dissemination of offensive messages which could violate the dignity of the people and social groups or stimulate discrimination, violence and hatred.
- » The contributions on the Internet should not be anonymous. The diffuser should require a prior registration for users who wish to comment and give their opinions, in the same way that newspapers don't publish letters to the editor written by people who have not been properly identified. Anonymity is admissible when it tries to ensure information on facts and opinions of unequivocal public interest or vital need, but the participant must be equally identified in front of the medium.

### 04. Continuance of documents on-line

The indefinite continuance on the web of documents and audiovisual materials could produce undesirable or uncomfortable situations for the people affected, either if they are information sources or witnesses. In the case that they ask for erasure of the data, the requirement should reconcile the public interest with the individual rights. In any case, the invocation of the right to oblivion should not be reason for the immediate destruction of items that in some ways are part of a *general archive* or *living memory* which is a collective heritage and eventually may be of interest to historians and social researchers.

- » As a general rule, the claim for destruction of on-line-traces on behalf of individuals or legal entities should not be accepted obligatory when they allege simple reasons as a change of opinion or image, or other strictly personal considerations.
- » However, the persistence of certain documents should not generate abusive or harmful situations at the expense of the fundamental rights of the person.
- » Consequently, the responsible publishers should prevent or palliate the possible damages caused to people who have given their testimony (image, voice or documentation), due to the singular fact of the continuity, the ease of access and the reproduction and manipulation of the materials present on the internet. This attitude must be especially prudent when the affected are children or young people in a situation of defencelessness or risk against the possible use of their presence on the Internet.
- » In any case, the very nature of the web as a global and permanent stock with all kind of contents of universal access makes it practically unfeasible to remove discretionarily, systematically, instantly and extensively materials considered improper or harmful to individuals, companies or institutions.

#### **05. Authorship and plagiarism**

- » The recognition of intellectual authorship and all kinds of derived rights must be respected on the Internet in the same way as on any other informative format. The ease of *copy and paste* provided by those digital products, becoming a daily written and mechanical practice, should never be a pretext for plagiarism and usurpation.

## Appendix C: Advice on plagiarism

The **critterion 1** of the Code urges to check all the information, while the **critterion 5** recommends, as a general rule, to quote the sources. These performance standards are the basis of the credibility of journalists, and their meticulous compliance depends greatly on the confidence of the public.

Plagiarism means the reproduction without any credits of a significant part of somebody else's work. Doing so may constitute a crime, but it can also severely undermine the credibility of a journalist or a news medium.

There are various forms of plagiarism, all of them detestable, although with different degrees of severity:

- » the literal reproduction of an extract of a literary work, a journalistic work or any other document of which the authorship is identifiable and provable.
- » the reproduction of photographs or images of any kind that have authorship, even though if they are not subjected to copyright.
- » the reuse of extracts of interviews or recordings that were obtained by journalists from other media and that could have been copied from broadcasts of someone else.

Although the reproduction is not literal, disseminating information without quoting the other medium that obtained and spread it first can also be judged as plagiarism. The citation is particularly required in the case of a scoop or highly relevant information that other media obtained from sources that were only available to them.

When the credits of the origin of the information are well expressed or when it has been obtained directly from the same source or multiple sources, it cannot be considered as plagiarism.

## Appendix D:

### Advice on treatment of war and armed conflicts

- 01.** Give voice to all actors and promote the understanding between the parties involved. Dialogue must be encouraged.
- 02.** Do not dehumanize one of the parts; it is necessary to report about the victims as well as the attackers.
- 03.** Avoid the language of the warring factions and their allies. Expose the machination of any of them.
- 04.** Show the groups that work for peace at the basis, not just the leaders; especially, the efforts of the civil society, which cares physically, materially and emotionally for the victims.
- 05.** Explore the conflicts in all their complexities and deal with the violence and its visible and invisible effects, but also deal with the causes that generated the conflicts.
- 06.** Avoid sensationalism and prevent the uncontrolled emission of warlike, xenophobic, racist and sexist online-messages.
- 07.** Report on a conflict even if there is no violence, because that can help to prevent it.
- 08.** Do not abandon the coverage after the cease-of-fire and deal with the resolution, reconstruction and reconciliation.
- 09.** Take advantage of the similarities between the conflicts, because the constructive experiences will benefit those who have not yet found a way to resolution.
- 10.** Quote always the information sources, particularly when they represent confronted factions, and bear in mind that third sources enhance the view of the conflict. In case that the information is made under censorship or with restrictions, it must be made clear to the recipients.

## Appendix E: Advice on the use of the term “illegal” referred to people

The term illegal applied to immigrants is wrong and violates the criteria of the Code of Ethics of the journalistic profession, for the following reasons:

- » People can never be illegal because this would deny to a human being the category of subject of law.
- » The inappropriate application of this word implies contempt of the dignity and self-image of these people.
- » The use of this word to designate, exclusively and continuously, the collective of workers who migrate means a discriminatory treatment and promotes stereotypes that criminalize the image of these people in the collective consciousness.

Declaration of the  
Information Council of  
Catalonia (CIC after  
the Catalan initials) of  
April 11, 2000

## Appendix F:

### Advice on citation of nationalities and ethnic groups

The use by audiovisual media of words and concepts related to the nationality or the origin to designate in headlines an individual or a group of individuals that have committed criminal acts is discriminatory.

When the information treatment given by the media enters a discriminatory context with the purpose of drawing the attention of the reader, that causes a negative attitude of the citizens towards migration and immigrants.

The CIC recommends the media to act with special responsibility and exactitude in the case of information or opinions with contents that could provoke discrimination for reasons of gender, ethnicity, belief or social or cultural background; they should avoid in any case the generalizations and the labelling of people because of differential features, whether ethnic, religious, economic or social. Anyway, if the medium believes that the nationality of the protagonists is relevant information, and without encouraging discriminatory ideas at the receiver, the CIC recommends mentioning it always, wherever the actors of the reported facts come from.

Declaration of the  
Information Council of  
Catalonia (CIC after  
the Catalan initials) of  
July 24, 2006



**Col·legi  
de Periodistes  
de Catalunya**

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#### **BARCELONA**

Rambla de Catalunya 10  
08007 Barcelona  
T\_933 171 920  
col·legi@periodistes.cat

---

#### **GIRONA**

Carrer Nou del Teatre 1, 2n 1a  
17004 Girona  
T\_972 209 162  
secretariagirona@periodistes.cat

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#### **LLEIDA**

Rambla Ferran 21, 8è 1a  
25007 Lleida  
T\_973 240 044  
lleida@periodistes.cat

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#### **TARRAGONA**

Carrer d'August 5, 1r 1a  
43003 Tarragona  
T\_977 245 454  
secretaria-tarragona@periodistes.cat

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#### **TERRES DE L'EBRE**

Plaça de Ramon Cabrera 7, 1r  
43500 Tortosa  
T\_977 442 490  
ebre@periodistes.cat

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#### **CATALUNYA CENTRAL**

Plana de l'Om 6, 1er  
08241 Manresa  
T\_938 723 720  
catalunyacentral@periodistes.cat

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@Periodistes\_org   
collegiperiodistes 

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**periodistes.cat**



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**FUNDACIÓ  
CONSELL DE LA INFORMACIÓ  
DE CATALUNYA**

Rambla de Catalunya 10, 1er  
08007 Barcelona

T\_933 171 920  
fcic.periodistes.cat  
cic@periodistes.cat  
@CICfundacio   
CIC.fundacio 