



## «Child Friendly Media»

# The Professional Guidelines for Arab Media Addressing the Issues of Child Rights «Executive Summary»

Best Interests of the Child  
Equality in Participation  
Freedom of Opinion & Expression  
Safety & Protection  
The Right of Reply & Correction  
Objectivity  
Correct Language & Terminologies  
Ensuring the Right to Privacy  
Protecting Privacy  
Protecting Personal Identity  
Positive Environment for Participation  
Transparency & Credibility  
Accuracy & Depth of Media Coverage  
Awareness  
Avoiding Political Exploitation  
Protection throughout Participation





## **“Child Friendly Media”**

### **The Professional Guidelines for Arab Media Addressing the Issues of Child Rights**

#### **“Executive Summary”**

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**The Arab Council for Childhood and Development (ACCD) is an Arab regional non-governmental organization working in the field of childhood development. ACCD was founded in 1987 upon the initiative of HRH Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, ACCD’s President, and a resolution issued by the League of Arab States.**

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**The opinions expressed in this Manual do not necessarily reflect the views of ACCD and its partners.**

“The issue of childhood should be advanced to occupy a leading position among our priorities. We need to focus our attention on arming the Arab children with the needed tools and skills to cope with this age, bearing in mind the achievements of the other nations that put children’s issues; education, health and culture in the forefront of their concerns, as well as arming our children with scientific thinking and enlightened culture, thus deepening their sense of belonging, history, civilization and openness to the cultures and arts of other nations”.

**Talal Bin Abdul Aziz**

The President of ACCD & AGFUND



## Arab Council for Childhood & Development (ACCD):

An Arab regional non-governmental organization working in the field of childhood development. ACCD was founded in 1987 upon the initiative of HRH Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, ACCD's President, and a resolution issued by the League of Arab States. ACCD works towards developing an Arab environment that promotes child rights in development, protection, participation and inclusion.

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## Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND):

A regional organization based in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. AGFUND was established in 1980 upon the initiative of HRH Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, AGFUND President, with the support of leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries. AGFUND works mainly in the field of development at the international level through an effective partnership with the UN organizations, regional and national development organizations, as well as governmental institutions, the private sector and civil society organizations.

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The Women, Family and Childhood Department, subordinate to the Social Affairs Sector at the General Secretariat of the Arab League, is the Technical Secretariat of the Arab Women's Committee, the Committee of Arab Children and the Committee of the Arab family, which have been established by the resolutions of the Arab Council of Social Affairs Ministers. The Department is divided into three sections; where their functions are integrated in addressing issues related to women, family and childhood.

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Thankfulness is also extended to ACCD's team members who undertook the tasks of coordination, management and follow-up throughout the preparation and implementation of this manual, as well as all partner organizations that contributed in the completion of this scientific and practical work in the field of media and child rights.

## Introduction

The Arab Council for Childhood and Development (ACCD), under the presidency of HRH Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz, seeks to achieve its mission to create an Arab environment supportive to the rights of children in development, protection, participation and inclusion within the family and the society. This is achieved through the implementation of ACCD's strategy (2014 – 2016), which adopts a new model of social upbringing of Arab children and based on a cultural change that ensures a new upbringing for a new world, as well as emphasizing the need to consider children's vision and their participation in such upbringing.

Within this vision, ACCD seeks to establish a Media Observatory for Arab Child Rights, funded by the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND) and in partnership with the League of Arab States (LAS), with a view to assert professional guidelines that are agreed to be a basic directive for the Arab media and would enable media professionals to know and understand children's rights, in addition to establishing valuable professional ethics in media performance, in accordance with the promotion of spreading the culture of child rights. This Observatory has initiated its work by preparing a series of scientific steps; the first was conducting a scientific study on the status of media performance to address the issues of Arab children's rights that was applied in six Arab countries. This study has concluded to recommend the importance of drafting general guidelines and standards or a code of ethics for media and children's rights; to ensure Arab media practices that respect and activate the rights of Arab children.

Secondly, stemming from this standpoint, ACCD has worked, with its partners, on drafting a manual on professional guidelines for Arab media addressing the issues of child rights, based on the related international, and regional experiences, as well as analyzing the professionalism of media work from a rights-based developmental perspective; so as to guide Arab media professionals in addressing the issues of child rights.

In a new qualitative leap, this manual includes a set of scientific tools to measure the commitment of Arab media towards those professional guidelines; monitoring tools and content analysis for all the traditional and new media outlets; to be used by the Arab media institutions and the Observatory itself.

The reality is that our ambition behind the Media Observatory for Child Rights is huge, especially that the time we live emphasizes the critical role played by the media, and that we do need a different vision to achieve a developmental goal of media, which is advocating for child rights in its various fields, in addition to highlight the good and successful media practices as models that help lighting the road, correcting media performance and, most importantly, that media professionals themselves believe that they have a professional commitment towards such developmental issues away from the excitement, abuse and lack of objectivity.

After this stage, we will begin a new phase of the Observatory's work, based on empowering media professionals to understand the issues of children's rights and draft periodic reports on media performance in the field of children's rights, whether in the phases of stability or other phases which occur and hit us all.

We aim that this Manual would be a call for unity and solidarity towards a child friendly media; media that respects the rights and works to enforce them; media that supports ethics and values, which we need most, based on professionalism, empowerment, citizenship, social justice, freedom and transparency; Media that establishes a culture that promotes the principles of upbringing based on free active learning, serious and effective participation, the acceptance of non-discrimination and the recognition of pluralism and diversity.

**Dr. Hassan Al-Bilawi**  
**Secretary General**



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## Arab Media Observatory for Child Rights

ACCD seeks, with the support of AGFUND and in partnership with LAS, to create an Arab Media Observatory for Child Rights to monitor the performance of Arab media in addressing child rights issues and to identify the extent of commitment to the professional guidelines in dealing with such issues.

The Arab Media Observatory project consists of **three consecutive phases, the first of which is completed through conducting an Arab study** in cooperation with LAS and funded by AGFUND that aimed at assessing the Arab media's addressing of child rights issues, monitoring the pros and cons of its approach and drawing procedural proposals, with a view to rationalize the Arab media's performance in this regard.

**The second phase** of the project is drafting **a manual for media professionals** on professional guidelines for Arab media addressing the issues of child rights, based on relevant international and regional experiences. The manual also includes a list of indicators to measure media's commitment to these professional guidelines; to be employed in monitoring and analyzing the media coverage of children's issues in the Arab world.

**The next third phase** of the project is to run Media Observatory based on the manual of the professional guidelines to **rationalize Arab media's performance in addressing child rights issues**, as well as the indicators to measure the extent of its commitment to these guidelines in practicing such issues.

## Executive Summary

- **Why is this Manual needed?**
- **Objectives of the Manual**
- **Target Groups**
- **The Professional Guidelines for Arab Media Addressing the Issues of Child Rights**

It is expected that this manual will enable Arab media institutions to develop media plans, which promote the rights of Arab children, this is in addition to rationalize and improve the performance of media through controlling violations that may occur within its performance in addressing the issues of Arab children.

It is important to note that the effective use of this manual by the targeted parties, diverse as they are, requires recognizing and evoking meaning and significance expressed by each idea or value of its ideas, as well as the guiding values that led to its building, including professionalism, empowerment, objectivity, citizenship, accounting, and, on top of all, humanity.

### **Why is this Manual needed?**

Most professional conventions targeting the Arab media professionals in general and journalists in particular are concerned with topics far from children. Also, the majority of professional development programs for Arab media professionals focus on providing trainees with skills to cope with press work environment and providing them with some information about professional safety to protect them from risks. Rarely that dealing with children represents a component of these programs; hence there is a need to draft a manual on professional guidelines to rationalize the performance of the Arab media in addressing children's rights issues. This need is emphasized by a number of factors; the most important of which are:

- The results of the study conducted by ACCD in 2013, funded by AGFUND and in partnership with LAS, including six Arab countries, with a view to evaluate the performance of Arab media in the field of child rights. These results revealed several professional violations to



child rights in daily media practices; whether deliberately to achieve greater profits and media excitement, or out of lack of awareness of the professional rules of the correct media's addressing the issues of children's rights.

- Low professionalism, in general, in covering children's issues and the predominance of shallowness in discussing their issues, neglecting deep addressing and accurate analysis thereof, illustrating their causes and impacts on children and the families surrounding them.
- Weak concern of the guidelines to direct media professional towards the professional reporting, which ensures children's rights. Moreover, such guidelines seems to be unclear for some media institutions.
- In several cases, failure to report violations of child rights and families' fear of negative media coverage thereof, forcing them to silence in order not to expose their children to violations including sexual and moral assaults and violence, and others.
- Failure of coordination between civil society organizations concerned with children's rights and media professionals. Despite that both parties are important lines of defense for child rights, yet each of them is apparently miscalculating the needs and expectations of the other.
- The need to draw media professionals' attention to several areas and main factors of the relationship among media and children rights; including: ensuring their effective participation and the negative stereotypes about them in such media, especially in the news content, drama, advertisements, media violations in covering children's crimes, either by describing them as victims or by considering them criminals.

### Objectives of the Manual:

The manual seeks to achieve a set of integrated objectives that focus on Arab media performance in dealing with children's rights. The objectives stress the guiding values upon which the manual is established, the most prominent of which are: empowerment and professionalism, represented in:

- **Guiding and Learning:** The professional guidelines, and its related indicators for monitoring media performance, are considered to be a tool for learning, raising awareness and guidelines to rationalize the Arab media performance, thus contributing to the empowerment of Arab media professionals and improving their professional performance.
- **Assessment and Diagnosis:** The use of monitoring indicators to Arab media performance towards child rights provides real information on professional commitment, good practices and violations in this area; helping to conduct assessment of this performance and enhance accounting at the same time.
- **Development:** Consequent to evaluating the performance of Arab media, based on information on its status, plans and programs shall be developed to enhance it through maximizing the use of good practices along with facing professional violations in dealing with child rights issues, thus supporting Arab media performance and enhancing professional employees therein.

### Target Groups:

Various groups and agencies could benefit from this manual due to the growing wideness of Arab media and its channels and staff. The most prominent targets of this manual are the professionals; the arrangers and presenters of radio and television children programs, editors of children affairs

in newspapers, general and specialized magazines and electronic magazines, children electronic blogs' and pages' managers and the leaders of child issues in radio, television, press and electronic media. The manual also targets media organizations and Arab children institutions, as well as media researchers in the field of childhood, parents and children.

### **The Professional Guidelines for Arab Media Addressing the Issues of Child Rights**

The importance of adopting a manual on the general and specific professional guidelines, that enables Arab media institutions to adjust its professional performance of traditional and new media in addressing the issues and status of the Arab child, stems from a number of factors including:

- The commitment to the Charter of the League of Arab States as well as the principles, objectives and policies, which are included in the international and regional conventions and experiences.
- The recognition of the importance of the national responsibility towards children, along with the role played by media in formulating the mental image regarding children and their different related issues.
- Encouraging Arab governments and peoples to protect children's rights in accordance with the international Convention on the Rights of the Child that is signed by the Arab countries.
- Asserting the best interests of the child and rationalizing the performance of Arab Media addressing the issues of child rights.

### First: General Professional Guidelines for Arab Media Addressing the Issues of Child Rights

The commitment to these guidelines includes:

- In all its production phases, media work is to be relied on respecting child rights and including all children regardless of their differences.
- Avoiding discrimination among children because of sex, race, age, religion, cultural background, educational status, or physical and mental abilities.
- Providing all children with opportunities to participate in media, throughout contributing with expressing their opinions, literary and/or artistic production, or even their inquiries.
- Confirming accuracy in all news that should not contain false information, rumors, distorted facts, or discriminatory and biased information that would harm children.
- Seeking equity to all parties and avoiding temptations and conflicts of interests.
- Avoiding generalization, whether the media coverage is for individual cases or widespread phenomenon according to scientific statistics.

#### General Professional Guidelines

- Equality and Non-discrimination
- Freedom of Opinion and Expression
- Credibility & Clarity
- Objectivity
- Protecting the Best Interests of the Child
- Protecting Personal Identity and Ensuring the Right to Privacy
- The Right of Reply and Correction



## The Professional Guidelines for Arab Media Addressing the Issues of Child Rights

- Providing the audience with the opportunity to elicit information on the status of children from its specific context, as well as identifying the nature of the reported information whether it is a fact, comment or personal opinion.
- Avoiding using stereotypes and exciting performance in the promotion of media contents related to children. Do not ask children to tell a story or take an action that is not part of their own history or life.
- Being cautious of doing harm to any child, and avoiding questions, attitudes or comments that are judgmental, insensitive to cultural and social values, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation, or that reactivate a child's pain and grief from traumatic event.
- Respecting the standards of public taste and decency, as well as avoiding displaying images of dead bodies, injuries, physical deformities, loss of limbs, or mentioning horrible descriptions of death and murder that affect children.
- Confronting any practices that violate child rights or abuse children, in addition to encouraging local, regional and international efforts to protect child rights.
- Do not publish any story, media news or image that might place the child, siblings or peers at risk or abuse even when identities are changed, obscured or not used.
- Being always careful to change the name and obscure the visual identity of children in the following cases:
  - a. Children victims or perpetrators of sexual abuse and exploitation.
  - b. Children infected with HIV and AIDS.

- c. Charged children or those convicted of crimes.
- d. Any child who is identified as current or former combatant in wars or conflicts, asylum seeker, refugee, internal displaced person, or street child.
- Obtaining permission from the child and his/her guardian, whether his/her families or others, when possible, for all interviews, videotaping, for documentary photographs. This permission should be in writing, when possible and appropriate.
- Providing all parties of any story or issue related to children with opportunities to explain their attitudes, defend themselves against any accusation, saying or action which they believe that it is attributed to them in wrong or distorted manner.

### **Second: Professional Guidelines for Children's Participation in Developing Media Content:**

The commitment to these guidelines includes:

- Protecting the best interest of children during their participation in media, in order to ensure protecting them from the exposure of various risks that may affect their physical, mental or psychological safety.
- Avoiding children's participation in scenes that contain physical or verbal violence, and/or inappropriate content to the traditions and norms of society.

- **Protection throughout Practicing Participation**
- **Providing Positive and Promoting Environment for Participation**
- **Freedom of Opinion and Expression**
- **Equity in Participation**

- Being cautious regarding hosting children victims of all kinds of violence, including sexual abuses, to ensure children's right to be protected from exploitation, as well as to maintain their full rights of privacy and the confidentiality of their personal rights.
- Choosing the appropriate time for children's participation in media that should not be inconsistent with their educational obligation, in addition to respecting their right to education.
- Granting children the appropriate time to express their problems and issues.
- Avoiding discrimination within children's participation in developing programs and media content, on the basis of age, sex, or economic and social levels.

### **Third: Professional Guidelines for Media Reporting on Children Victims of Sexual Abuse (or Perpetrators) and Armed Conflicts:**

The commitment to these guidelines includes:

- Considering, when reporting on sexual abuse, to achieve a balance between the victim's right to privacy and the audience's right to knowledge.
- Avoiding that media coverage on child sexual abuse contains embarrassing details, which violate the privacy of his/her personal life and might be attributed as an abuse, such as describing accurate details of the physical acts committed against children during their exposure to abuses and sexual assaults.

## Child Friendly Media

- Avoiding mentioning details that would endanger the victim, such as: home addresses, phone numbers, workplaces, as well as stereotyping victims, especially in cases of sexual crimes.
- Providing victims and their families with opportunities to accept or reject media coverage without intimidation through using the power of media, or threatening victims in case of their rejection. There is no obligation on victims to accept media coverage.
- Ensuring that media stories on children victims of crime are in the appropriate context that tackles the incidents of the crime within a frame that provides meaning and clarity. In addition to avoiding the generalization of individual incidents, as such an act implies the wide spread of crime, despite its limited occurrence.
- Avoiding mentioning false or misleading information, rumors, or relying on information of anonymous sources regarding the process of investigations and accusations that could be made by even the victim child. In addition, be cautious regarding naming the suspects before the formal indictment of the judicial authorities.
- Ensuring the importance and necessity of including media reporting the painful details on the nature of rape, violence, or injuries, as well as analyzing the impact of these details on the readers, the viewers, or other parties.

- **Protecting Privacy**
- **Safety and Protection**
- **The Accuracy and Depth of Media Coverage**
- **Transparency and Credibility in Interviewing Children**
- **Correct Language and Terminologies**
- **Awareness**
- **Safety and Protection**
- **Avoiding Political Exploitation**



## The Professional Guidelines for Arab Media Addressing the Issues of Child Rights

- Avoiding the usage of explicit sexual description or images that may solidify such behavior in the receiving mind of children, a matter that leads to their engagement in sexual activity at early age.
- Performing an active and positive role in drawing attention to the ordeal and suffering of children in armed conflicts, and contributing to promote the production and dissemination of media programs that target children affected by wars.
- Ensuring that media work during the conflicts and wars is based on providing protection for children, along with contributing to their rehabilitation and inclusion in society, so as to overcome the psychological and social effects of wars.
- Protecting children from annoying and scary exposure to television images; some children are more likely vulnerable to anxiety concerning events covered by media, as a result of various factors affecting their reactions, including: age, emotional mood and the tendency to anxiety.
- Confirming positive results that may rise from painful events, including: solidarity, evoking champions industry, the value of life, human's role in eliminating the pains and sufferings of others.
- Avoiding media and political exploitation of pains and sufferings of children in armed conflicts, throughout declaring alignment with one party of the conflict, as well as requiring children to express opinions and views that do not fit with their mental abilities, age, or experiences.

- Avoiding the exploitation of children affected by wars, as a result of economic and political reasons associated to them. Media should focus on potential powers and the abilities of children affected by wars, instead of only depicting them as victims.

### Fourth: Professional Guidelines for Media in Addressing Advertising Targeting Children

The commitment to these guidelines includes:

- Considering that advertising does not deceive or mislead children with false impressions regarding the nature, content, price, or the impact of any commodity or product.
- Verifying that advertising does not contain mysterious matters (such as drawings, and inaccurate or deceiving statements), which are directly or implicitly presented. Advertising should not use children's imagination to urge them to increase their consumption of the product.
- Avoiding the exploitation of children's innocence, and lack of information or experience, throughout presenting information likely to harm them physically or psychologically.
- Ensuring that advertising does not contain false information regarding the nutritional value of the product, or presents incorrect and misleading comparisons between it and the other products.

- **Realism**
- **Safety and Protection**
- **The Domination of Social Standards**
- **Family Appreciation**

## The Professional Guidelines for Arab Media Addressing the Issues of Child Rights

- Ensuring that the testimonies and views about the product presented in advertising are to be true, neither tricky nor exaggerated, and consistent with latest accepted scientific opinions.
- Ensuring that the advertising does not present sad and scary images or events for children. Advertising should not encourage children to adopt violent behaviors or values, which are incompatible with the culture of society.
- Verifying that the advertising does not degrade the dignity of a person or a group on the basis of race, gender, age, political belief, religion, physical or mental disability.
- Considering that advertising does not lead to weak parental authority or responsibility, as well as children's confidence in their families.
- Ensuring that prices mentioned in the advertising are clear and understandable for children, as well as that advertised product should not be depicted as being "within the reach of every family".

### **Fifth: Professional Guidelines for Media Addressing the Issues of Child Rights in New Media (social media – blogs – websites):**

The commitment to these guidelines includes:

- Being cautious towards what is propagated on children's issues, and considering searching for information and data from more than one source, in order to make sure of its accuracy and credibility.

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- Exerting efforts in verifying the accuracy of images and videos that are posted, shared and published on social media by ordinary people through the internet, and in case of suspicion, publishing must be stopped.
- Announcing the real identity of media professionals and their place of work, when asking questions on child rights issues throughout the social media, and avoid using pen names in performing any media work.
- Avoiding publishing media materials throughout the websites of social media that provoke hatred, violence or discrimination among children on the basis of language, gender, race or religion.
- Considering the disclosure of the source of information, and it is preferable to be attached as a hyperlink, which enables the reader to verify the credibility of disseminated information through social media or internet websites in general.
- Respecting the intellectual property rights of individuals, institutions, and different organizations. Despite the diverse cognitive flood that is available, and often free, by the internet, maintaining the ownership of ideas is one of the most important relevant professional guidelines for media professionals.
- In case of mistakes in publishing information, using the websites of social media, on public issues or concerning children, the correction and apology are to be made immediately. The users of social media, especially facebook and twitter, are saving on their personal

- **The Credibility of Media Content**
- **Disclosure and Transparency**
- **Privacy of Media Reporting**

computers the disseminated materials, therefore, it is recommended that after deleting fake or false information, an apology is to be submitted to the audience for the disseminated content.

### **Sixth: Professional Guidelines for Media Addressing Children with Disabilities:**

The commitment to these guidelines includes:

- Urging the individuals of the society and its institutions to develop interaction with children with disabilities, increase awareness of their rights, and that they are equal to all other children of the society in duties and rights.
- Providing children with disabilities with opportunities to communicate and to freely express their opinions and problems.
- Avoiding the promotion of negative images or stereotyping of children with disabilities that contribute to their isolation.
- Highlighting successful models, positive aspects, and special capacities of children with disabilities, as well as how to benefit from them.
- Considering the intensive and subjective reporting on the violations against children with disabilities, in addition to avoiding insulting or stigmatizing them.
- Working, through various mechanisms, towards raising public awareness on the issues of children with disabilities, being issues of human rights in general and children's rights in particular.

- **Non-discrimination**
- **Support**
- **Inclusion**

- Shedding the light on positive and successful models of the inclusion of children with disabilities in upbringing and education with their normal peers.

### **Seventh: Professional Guidelines for Media Addressing Gifted Children:**

The commitment to these guidelines includes:

- Developing various and appropriate media programs that target the public and especially the parents, and which tackle the definition of gifted children, their characteristics and capacities, as well as how to discover them.
- Supporting various media programs and events that contribute to discovering gifts among children, not only in certain fields, but in all fields.
- Increasing attention to scientific, cultural, artistic and sports media content, which is oriented to gifted children, this is in the context of providing support and care for those children, as well as developing their talents.
- Ensuring the adequate and continuous media coverage, in all media outlets, for scientific, educational, artistic and sports events and activities that are organized by associations and institutions concerned with providing support and care for gifted children.
- Considering the continuous appropriate media coverage to highlight the distinguished achievements of gifted children.

- **Awareness and Discovery**
- **Support and Care**



- Providing gifted children with opportunities to participate in developing media content, presenting their various talents, and expressing their opinions and visions that should be heard carefully to identify their needs and interests.
- Formulating strong positive trends and beliefs towards gifted children, along with the importance of discovering them, in addition to providing care and appreciation for their roles in the development and progress of society.

### **Eighth: Professional Guidelines for Media Addressing Street Children:**

The commitment to these guidelines includes:

- Identifying the nature of street children and the various factors or the forcing circumstances which lead them to the street, as well as shedding light on their sufferings and rights.
- Highlighting the various negative and dangerous effects (whether direct or indirect) resulting from the existence of some children in the community who are deprived from shelter and care.
- Developing systematic media reporting on children in difficult circumstances, including street children, throughout assigning specific materials in various media outlets.
- Avoiding mentioning embarrassing personal details or painful information for children, in addition to avoiding criticizing their appearances or humiliating them.

- **Awareness**
- **Safety and Protection**
- **Support**

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- Avoiding media exploitation and presenting negative sensational image of street children that contribute to marginalizing and isolating them in society, being a source of risks.
- Providing street children with various and appropriate opportunities to express their sufferings, needs and feelings, as well as answering their questions.
- Highlighting the violations and abuses against street children, and explaining how to confront and eliminate them, as a stage of dealing with these children.
- Striving to form a public opinion that promotes and advocate for the rights of street children and their rehabilitation and inclusion in the society.