



# **Media Ethical Charter For Equitable and Positive Representation of Women in Media in Kurdistan Region**

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## Introduction

The relationship between media and ethics encompasses several critical dimensions that are essential for understanding the media's impact on society and the ethical challenges that arise within the field of communication. In traditional, patriarchal societies, women are frequently subjected to social, psychological, and physical pressures and violence. They face harassment, marginalization in political, economic, social, and scientific spheres, and are often misrepresented or stereotyped in the media.

The media, as a powerful and influential force in daily life, often reflects a dominant gender perspective, resulting in the repetition of stereotypical narratives and mindsets. Through their content and journalistic discourse, many media outlets contribute to the marginalization of women by reinforcing harmful stereotypes, undermining positive representations, and presenting distorted or degrading images of women's roles and status in society. Social media in particular—and digital communication platforms more broadly—have become fertile ground for harassment, cyberbullying, and character attacks against women, enabling the spread of misogynistic content that damages their reputation and wellbeing.

Laws alone are not sufficient to prevent these harmful and pervasive phenomena. At this critical juncture, it is essential for media institutions, journalists, and social media content creators to uphold their responsibilities by adhering to a professional Media Ethical Charter—one that respects women's rights and actively counters the unethical and harmful messages directed at society in general, and women in particular, on a daily basis. This Media Ethical Charter represents a joint initiative by the High Council for Women and Development, in collaboration with UN Women, aimed at addressing existing gaps and establishing a professional framework for the ethical and accurate portrayal of women in the media across the Kurdistan Region.

The KRG Ministry of Culture and Youth (MoC&Y) and the Kurdistan Journalists Syndicate (KJS) recognize freedom of expression as a cornerstone of participatory and functional democracy. They affirm that women and men—in all their diversity—have an equal right to be heard. Members of the KJS and all registered media outlets acknowledge the media's critical role in upholding this right and commit to establishing mechanisms that ensure equitable representation of voices from all segments of society, regardless of gender, class, social status, or geographic location, whether urban or rural. They further recognize the media's power to shape public attitudes and challenge societal mindsets. Through this Charter, members pledge to promote gender balance, amplify diverse perspectives, and actively confront and dismantle gender stereotypes within media content and practices.

This Charter is informed by a range of national and international legal and policy frameworks, including the Kurdistan Press Law (2008), the Law on the Misuse of Communication Devices, the Kurdistan Gender Equality Policy, the Law on Combating Violence Against Women and the Family, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Beijing Platform for Action.

## Part One

### Theoretical Framework

#### 1.1. Relevance of this Media Ethical Charter

This initiative represents a serious effort to build a healthy media environment that actively supports the advancement and consolidation of women's rights, while promoting a deeper understanding of gender equality in society. It will serve as a solid foundation for journalists and media outlets that cover women's issues and regularly produce gender-sensitive content.

#### 1.2. Reasons for the Need for this Media Ethical Charter

This Media Ethical Charter provides a framework for promoting professional, ethical, and responsible media practices-particularly in the coverage of social issues, and women's issues in particular. In today's digital age, where information is widely shared through online platforms and social media, new forms of harm have emerged—including cybercrime, online harassment, defamation, and digital abuse. These evolving challenges require a heightened commitment to ethical standards in how media content is produced, shared, and consumed. The ethical treatment of women's issues-especially in digital spaces demands not only raising public awareness but also innovative, forward-looking approaches. This Charter responds to those needs by grounding media work in principles that uphold dignity, accuracy, accountability, and respect for human rights in both traditional and digital environments.

#### 1.3. Objectives of this Guide:

- I. Identify and define professional ethical principles to guide responsible and accurate media coverage of women's issues.
- II. Ongoing efforts to support media professionals and journalists in applying the professional standards outlined in this Media Ethical Charter, and to encourage their consistent practice across media platforms.

- III. Promote inclusive representation and equal opportunities in media content, strengthen the role of journalists in covering issues related to women, and reinforce adherence to professional ethics when addressing topics that reflect the contributions of women across cultural, artistic, political, economic, scientific, and social spheres.

## Part Two

### General Principles of Media Operation and Ethical Standards

When reporting on current events, media outlets should follow these core principles to foster social progress and sustainable development:

1. **Responsibility**  
Uphold honesty, balance, and objectivity to earn public trust. Journalists have an ethical duty to provide information that serves the common good.
2. **Freedom of Expression and the Press**  
Defend free expression and amplify diverse voices, enriching public dialogue and helping society address its challenges constructively.
3. **Independence**  
Safeguard editorial integrity. Media institutions and professionals must remain free from undue influence while promoting awareness and education.
4. **Accuracy**  
Publish only verified, factual content. Present information carefully so audiences can make informed choices.
5. **Objectivity and Impartiality**  
Separate personal opinions from reporting. Reflect all relevant perspectives and avoid letting individual or institutional bias shape coverage.
6. **Respect for the Rights of Others**  
Provide a platform for differing viewpoints without inciting hostility or violating freedom and dignity. Avoid unnecessary intrusion into private life unless clearly in public interest.

7. **Respect for Human Dignity**

Refrain from content-text, images, or sound-that degrades or humiliates. Obtain information lawfully and without deception.

8. **Equality**

Treat every person fairly. Coverage must be free from discrimination based on sex, ethnicity, social class, culture, or belief, and must not provoke conflict among groups.

9. **Proper Authorization**

Use information, images, and records only when legally obtained and with appropriate permission.

10. **Integrity of Information**

Do not alter, distort, or quote material out of context. Ensure that information is used solely for its intended purpose and protected from misuse.

11. **Commitment**

Journalists are committed not to seeking publicity contrary to ethical principles and not to violating those principles to gain fame.

## Part Three

### Portrayal of Women in Society and Media

There remains a widespread, culturally embedded negative image of women in both society and the media. Journalists must first understand these prevailing perceptions in order to address them with sensitivity and responsibility, working to challenge and replace them with more accurate, respectful, and human-centered representations. Common portrayals include:

1. **Women reduced to their bodies:** This view suggests that a woman's physical appearance is her most defining trait. It portrays her as deceptive, provocative, and a source of temptation or disruption-someone who uses her body to manipulate or weaken men.
2. **Women as consumers:** This stereotype depicts women as non-productive individuals, preoccupied with shopping and superficial items such as clothing, cosmetics, and perfumes, rather than as contributors to the economy.
3. **Women as inherently weaker:** This perception holds that women lack the physical or intellectual capacity to manage their affairs, participate in public life, or hold decision-making roles, thereby requiring constant support or oversight from men.

4. **Women as followers:** In this view, a woman's identity is tied to her husband; she must follow his lead, serve as a caregiver, and depend on him for her livelihood and direction.
5. **Women as passive members of society:** This stereotype assumes that men are the primary drivers of societal change, while women are portrayed as dependent, unengaged, or lacking agency.
6. **Women confined to traditional domestic roles:** This narrative equates women solely with household duties-cooking, cleaning, raising children, and creating a comfortable home for the husband-limiting the recognition of their broader societal contributions.
7. **Women as untrustworthy or emotional:** This harmful view characterizes women as emotionally unstable, selfish, manipulative, or cowardly, reinforcing distrust and marginalization.
8. **Women as decorative figures in media:** Some media platforms reinforce the idea that women's primary role is to enhance visual appeal, using their physical presence to attract audiences rather than valuing their skills, experience, or perspectives.

## Part Four

### Professional and Ethical Principles in Covering Women's Issues

#### 4.1. Key Outputs and Principles for Covering Women's Issues

1. **Correcting portrayals**  
Understand how women are currently depicted in society and the media, and work actively to present an accurate, respectful view of their roles and contributions.
2. **Upholding professional standards**  
Follow all relevant laws and ethical guidelines that protect women's rights and dignity.
3. **Building subject-matter literacy**  
Develop a solid grasp of equality and inclusion principles and apply that knowledge consistently in reporting.
4. **Rejecting assumptions of inferiority**  
Recognize the difference between biological sex and the social expectations attached to it. Treat women first and foremost as full human beings, not as a "category."

5. **Recognizing common media patterns**

Note that women are often shown in social or domestic settings-linked to caregiving, fashion, or appearance-while their roles in politics, economics, and rural life receive less attention.

6. **Believing in the medium's power**

Have confidence in journalism's ability to drive meaningful change and raise public awareness about women's issues.

7. **Avoiding stereotype reinforcement**

Be alert to ways coverage can inadvertently sustain outdated images of women or undermine equality.

8. **Maintaining ethics on every platform**

Remember that lapses in professional standards frequently occur online and on social media; hold digital output to the same ethical bar as traditional outlets.

9. **Presenting sensitive topics thoughtfully**

Some audiences resist concepts tied to equality. Frame these ideas carefully, using clear evidence and respectful language.

10. **Recognizing complexity**

Women's concerns intersect with cultural, religious, social, and ideological debates. Approach each story with that multidimensional context in mind.

11. **Seeing media as a mirror**

Portrayals of women often reflect prevailing societal attitudes. Shifting representation can help shift mindsets.

12. **Balancing representation**

Improving how women are portrayed does not diminish positive coverage of men; fairness benefits everyone.

13. **Resisting sensationalism**

Avoid using women's appearance merely to draw attention. Let substance guide editorial choices, not superficial appeal.



#### 4.2. Accuracy in the choice of words

Using careful and respectful language helps convey facts accurately and avoids reinforcing harmful attitudes that marginalize women. In Kurdish, as in many other languages, certain phrases and expressions carry implicit biases that diminish women's status, place blame on them, or suggest that harm they experience is somehow deserved. Journalists should be aware of these linguistic patterns and strive to avoid reproducing language that normalizes discrimination or violence.

**Table (a) Use of appropriate phrases**

Do not use this phrase!	Why is it detrimental?	What is an appropriate alternative?
Intercourse – sexual relation	Implies agreement	Rape Sexual violence
She admitted to being sexually assaulted	Indicates that the victim to be responsible in some way.	“I was sexually assaulted,” she said “She was sexually assaulted,” she said.
The alleged victim	It raises suspicion about the victim	Declared the victim
The victim did it against her will.	Indicates that the victim is responsible for the act.	Police stated that the suspect forced the victim to do so.
She claims	It raises suspicion about the victim	She says, said, announced, mentioned, revealed.
The suspect, the claimant, the complainant	Indicates that the victim harms the other	The victim, the survivor
The victim claims that she was sexually assaulted.	Doubts the veracity of the matter and assumes it did not happen	The victim revealed that she had been sexually assaulted.
Family / domestic quarrel	Signifies that domestic violence is not a crime and is a simple family affair.	Domestic violence
They have been in a painful and bad relationship	Places the blame on the relationship instead of the perpetrator. It also blames both sides equally	A partner who has acted violently. The woman who lived with an abusive partner.

She was beaten.	It only shows the physical pain and hides other forms of assault.	A woman has faced domestic assault. A survivor of domestic violence
A “prior” sexual violence incident	It includes a direction to take lightly the long-term impact of the sexual violence.	State the date, or time of what happened.
Defending honour	Justifies the crime.	Acts of violence should be named as they are.
Her father's house	It attributes property, power and ownership to the father	Her parents' house
He has two wives	Women have become the property of men	He was married twice.
A woman with three children was killed	The woman has been deprived of her motherhood rights.	A woman, a mother of three, was killed.
A woman committed suicide with a rope.	It involves a judgment.	A woman's body was found hanged.
Women of the political parties	It involves underestimation.	Women members of the political parties.
Women prisoners	It involves underestimation.	Imprisoned women.
The woman of the president	It is an insult and an underestimation.	The wife of the president, the first lady
She is a chatterbox	It is an insult and defamation	Such insults should be prevented
An old woman	It involves underestimation	An Elderly, a senior
It has become a women's mourning	It refers to gossip and noise	Not to be used
A street woman	It indicates a lack of social value	Not to be used
A manly woman	It removes the characteristics of being a woman	She is a feminine woman
Like a woman: he was hiding, crying, trembling, afraid	It is an insult to women	Not to be used

#### 4. 3. General Guidelines for Journalists Covering Issues Related to Women and Equality

1. **Report consistently on violence**  
Coverage should not be limited to isolated incidents; report regularly on the broader issue of violence and its root causes.
2. **Provide context**  
Explain the social and cultural conditions that contribute to violence within the community, helping audiences understand the systemic nature of the issue.
3. **Acknowledge all forms of harm**  
Avoid limiting coverage to physical assault or extreme cases such as rape or abduction. Highlight other forms, including emotional, economic, psychological, and digital violence.
4. **Ensure sustained coverage**  
Follow cases through to their resolution. Do not treat them as one-time news items.
5. **Use accurate and respectful language**  
Be specific and avoid sensationalism when describing incidents. Language should clarify, not distort or downplay, what occurred.
6. **Include referral resources**  
Where relevant, include hotlines and contact information for organizations that offer assistance to those affected.
7. **Report data responsibly**  
Provide relevant statistics and background information. If direct links to reports are unavailable, guide the public on how to access the data.
8. **Scrutinize institutional response**  
Ask critical questions: Are survivors receiving the protection they need? Are law enforcement and health services adequately equipped to respond? Report on systemic follow-up and accountability.
9. **Avoid graphic or invasive imagery**  
Do not publish disturbing images of injuries, blood, or other explicit content. Respect the dignity of individuals affected.
10. **Explore solutions**  
Go beyond reporting the problem-highlight efforts to prevent violence and provide space for voices proposing change.
11. **Ensure informed consent**  
Clearly explain to survivors the implications of publishing images or audio. If a person requests anonymity, visual obscuring or voice alteration must be respected. Never publish identifiable photos of children.

## 12. Challenge stereotypes

Avoid reproducing narratives that confine women's roles to household tasks or physical appearance. Media content-especially advertisements-should promote dignity and equal value in society.

### 4.4 Ethical Standards for News Editors and Content Producers

1. **Provide the full story**  
Present a clear narrative from beginning to end.
2. **Use accurate headlines**  
Titles must reflect the substance of the piece-no click-bait or provocation.
3. **Give violence the proper prominence**  
Place stories about violence in visible positions online and in print, not in marginal sections.
4. **Promote specialist training**  
Encourage reporters covering violence to pursue dedicated courses and study this charter thoroughly.
5. **Safeguard privacy**  
Protect personal details-especially those of women and other at-risk groups.
6. **Maintain a terminology guide**  
Keep an approved newsroom glossary handy and consult it as needed.
7. **Moderate audience comments**  
Actively monitor and address user feedback across websites and social platforms.
8. **Reference applicable laws**  
Have statutes on domestic violence, personal status, communications misuse, journalism, and similar matters readily available and cite them when relevant.
9. **Write with empathy and neutrality**  
Avoid language rooted in patriarchal norms; prefer inclusive, unbiased phrasing.
10. **Protect survivors from stigma**  
Ensure coverage never blames or marginalizes victims.
11. **Rely on credible sources**  
Verify the origin and reliability of every piece of information.
12. **Fact-check before publication**  
Confirm accuracy through multiple, independent avenues.
13. **Avoid premature judgments**  
Refrain from speculating on motives or guilt.
14. **Center the survivor's perspective**  
When gathering details, prioritize the voice and needs of the affected individual.
15. **Offer no justification for violence**  
Do not legitimize or excuse perpetrators' actions.

#### 16. **Amplify women's voices**

Make sure women's insights and statements feature prominently in reports, interviews, and features.

### 4.5. Professional Guidelines for Media Agencies and Institutions

#### 1. **Institutionalize standards on violence against women**

Media organizations should integrate the issue of violence against women into their internal policies, editorial standards, and operational frameworks. This includes aligning their existing Media Ethical Charters with these principles.

#### 2. **Ensure balanced representation**

In all reporting, give due attention to women's voices, participation, and presence. Both women's and men's perspectives should be reflected in a balanced and respectful manner.

#### 3. **Strengthen collaboration with civil society**

Establish formal partnerships-such as memoranda of understanding-with women's organizations and civil society groups to support the development and implementation of ethical and practical guidelines on related issues.

#### 4. **Build staff capacity**

Provide regular training and workshops for media personnel on how to report on issues affecting women, including how to handle sensitive topics like violence, and how to engage respectfully with victims and survivors.

#### 5. **Use media for public awareness**

Produce and disseminate public service announcements to raise awareness about women's rights and related social issues, treating such efforts as a core professional responsibility.

#### 6. **Promote fair hiring and career development**

Ensure gender balance in recruitment and actively support the professional advancement of women within the organization-especially into leadership and decision-making roles, not just supportive positions.

#### 7. **Portray women as leaders and contributors**

Depict women as capable actors in all spheres-political, economic, social, and cultural-not solely in domestic or caregiving roles.

8. **Ensure equal pay and fair treatment**

Guarantee equal compensation for equal work, prevent exploitation of women's skills, and avoid sidelining women in professional roles.

9. **Support workplace rights**

Offer paid menstrual leave (e.g., two days per month), in addition to maternity leave, and ensure all leave policies protect financial entitlements.

10. **Avoid objectification**

Refrain from using women's bodies or appearances to attract attention in advertisements or other content. Promote dignity and respect in all visual and editorial materials.

11. **Educate staff on forms of violence**

Ensure all employees understand various forms of violence, particularly sexual harassment, assault, and rape, and are trained on how to recognize and prevent them.

12. **Protect women journalists**

Implement protective measures in the workplace to prevent harassment and abuse, such as installing security cameras in common areas and ensuring office design supports visibility, transparency, and safety.

#### 4.6. Professional Guidance for Media Units of CSOs and Research Institutions

1. **Ensure balanced representation**

Media teams should strive to provide fair and equal space for both women and men in all reporting and publications.

2. **Challenge harmful stereotypes**

Broadcasters and media producers are encouraged to develop content that addresses social norms and challenges stereotypes, including programming that highlights women's roles and contributions.

3. **Include women's perspectives across all topics**

In coverage of politics, economics, conflict, and other major issues, ensure women's voices, opinions, and experiences are meaningfully included.

4. **Invest in staff training**

Establish regular training programs to deepen practitioners' understanding of equality-related issues and their expression in media narratives.

5. **Promote ongoing research**

Encourage media personnel to remain informed on evolving debates and social dynamics related to women's rights and inclusion, through continual research and analysis.

6. **Obtain informed consent from survivors**

Before conducting interviews with victims or survivors, secure written or recorded consent and clearly explain the purpose, use, and setting of the interview.

7. **Avoid sensationalism**

Do not use sensitive topics, particularly sexual violence, merely to attract attention. Treat such cases with respect, discretion, and a focus on facts.

8. **Support responsible media coverage**

Provide necessary guidance and collaboration to media outlets reporting on women's issues and violence-related cases, particularly when linked to research centers or legal matters. Ensure ethical and legal frameworks are followed.

9. **Respond to violations**

In cases of media misconduct, conduct a proper investigation and advocate for the protection and rights of the affected individuals.

10. **Preserve confidentiality**

Do not exploit private cases of violence for personal or organizational gain. Content should never be used to build popularity or seek public attention through likes, shares, or follower engagement.

**11. Avoid harmful portrayals**

Refrain from depicting women as passive or inherently victimized, unless their experience is central to the story and necessary for conveying the facts.

**12. Reject exploitative framing**

Do not portray women solely through the lens of violence or vulnerability. Acknowledge their resilience, agency, and role in rebuilding and leading.

**13. Highlight positive contributions**

Ensure media content recognizes and supports women's active roles in society, rather than undermining their status or reinforcing outdated roles.

**14. Avoid reinforcing stereotypes**

All content should be free from language or imagery that perpetuates discrimination, inequality, or social exclusion.

#### **4.7 Women Political Participation in Media Discourse**

This guideline offers practical recommendations for promoting women's political participation through ethical, accurate, and empowering media coverage. The media holds significant influence in shaping public perceptions and social attitudes toward women in leadership and decision-making roles. Given this responsibility, journalists and media institutions must play an active role in increasing the visibility, credibility, and protection of women engaged in political life. Ensuring fair and respectful representation not only strengthens democratic discourse but also encourages broader societal acceptance of women's leadership:

1. Strive for balanced and inclusive coverage of all individuals involved in political life, including women.
2. Encourage respectful and accurate representation of women leaders and candidates.
3. Be mindful of language and avoid stereotypes or bias when reporting on political figures.
4. Foster a media environment that values respectful and constructive dialogue from all voices.
5. Support a media space where women feel confident and secure in engaging with public platforms.
6. Include diverse perspectives by actively reaching out to women with expertise or leadership roles.
7. Recognize and reflect on the contributions of women in governance, community development, and peacebuilding.
8. Provide visibility to both community-level women leaders and those in formal political roles.



9. Uphold professional standards by respecting the privacy and dignity of all public figures, including women.
10. Avoid promoting or repeating content that may include personal attacks or unfounded criticism targeting individuals.
11. Work responsibly with online platforms to address content that may harm or silence voices in public life.
12. Engage with relevant civil society organizations to better understand and reflect the experiences of women in political processes.

#### 4.8 Misconceptions Regarding Gender-Based Violence

In many traditional societies, mistaken beliefs about violence against women help keep abusive patterns alive and shift blame to victims. Below are some of the most widespread misconceptions- each followed by a brief correction-presented in the same sequence and format you provided.

- **Misconception:** *Gender-based violence affects only a small segment of society.*  
**Reality:** Violence against women harms everyone. It undermines individual well-being, erodes social cohesion, and threatens community stability.
- **Misconception:** *Women put themselves at risk through their clothing or behaviour.*  
**Reality:** This view blames victims and excuses perpetrators. Responsibility always lies with the person who commits the violence, not the woman targeted.
- **Misconception:** *Rape is usually carried out by strangers.*  
**Reality:** Global studies-including World Health Organization data-show that most sexual assaults are committed by someone the survivor knows, often an intimate partner.
- **Misconception:** *Speaking out only brings victims more pain.*  
**Reality:** Silence protects offenders and allows abuse to continue. When women report violence and receive support, they reduce the perpetrator's power and help prevent future harm.
- **Misconception:** *Only "monsters" commit these crimes.*  
**Reality:** Abusers can appear caring or respectable in public. Violence is an act, not an inherent trait visible on the surface.
- **Misconception:** *Many claims are fabricated for personal gain.*  
**Reality:** False reports are rare. Fear of disbelief, retaliation, or social stigma actually discourages most victims from coming forward.
- **Misconception:** *Poverty or conflict are the root causes of violence.*  
**Reality:** Conflict and economic stress can intensify abuse, but they do not cause it. Violence stems from power imbalances and harmful social norms, and it occurs across all income levels.
- **Misconception:** *Men cannot control their sexual urges.*  
**Reality:** Sexual assault is an act of control, often pre-meditated. Biology does not excuse violence or override personal responsibility.

- **Misconception:** *Leaving an abusive relationship is straightforward.*  
**Reality:** Survivors may face threats, financial dependence, community pressure, or fear of losing their children. Exiting safely often requires extensive support.
- **Misconception:** *“If she were virtuous, it wouldn’t have happened.”*  
**Reality:** Violence is never a consequence of a woman’s moral worth. Such claims contradict ethical, religious, and humanitarian principles.
- **Misconception:** *Violence in the home is a private matter.*  
**Reality:** Domestic abuse is illegal and a public-health concern. Its effects ripple beyond the household, affecting communities and future generations.

By challenging these misconceptions, media, educators, and community leaders can help dismantle the attitudes that enable violence and better protect survivors.