

Migration as seen by media. How do we oppose the language of hostility?

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Freedom of speech and information is directly "... connected with the duties and responsibilities" of each journalist. This responsibility is of particular importance in coverage of topics or events related to migration.

Following the annexation of the Crimea and the outbreak of hostilities in the east of the country Ukraine faced lots of challenges in different areas of public life. One of them is a big wave of migration processes inside the country which has affected dozens, hundreds, thousands of people inside and outside the country. These people were forced to leave the occupied peninsula and flee their homes in Donetsk and Lugansk regions seeking refuge in other Ukrainian regions. As a result, media experts captured manifestations of hate speech in the Ukrainian regional and national media against internally displaced persons - IDPs — those Ukrainian citizens who were forced to leave the territory of Crimea, Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

As a rule, national television and websites are the sources of discriminatory language use against this group of individuals, which must be recognized as a relatively mild form of abusing freedom of speech. The language and formulations used by local newspapers and regional websites is a matter of considerable concern. Criminal chronicles, regional leaders speeches, deputies and a number of pseudo-analytical studies have become "leaders" in the formation of stereotypes and prejudice towards IDPs in the areas of their group residence.

The titles of regional publications speak for themselves: "In Uzhgorod, the settlers decided they are above the law," "Donbass brazen migrants set straight by Transcarpathian traffic cops", "Uzhgorod deputies want the settlers not to get bold", "Some eastern migrants in Transcarpathians behave inadequately and "in odd ways". This, as human rights activist Maxim Butkevich justly stated, is a bright manifestation of "hate speech", take the headings only.

Such publications, unfortunately, can be found in almost all cities and regions all over the country, where people were massively forced to flee the eastern regions of Ukraine and Crimea. So, in November 2017 "Saturday Plus" newspaper (Zaporozhye) published an article entitled "With faith in DPR" and a lock on refrigerators: how migrants from Donbass live in Zaporozhye". This article is an excellent example of stereotypes that mass media cultivates in relation to IDPs: "... They [migrants from the East] are fighting with each other and stealing food from neighbours", "cursing Ukraine but not refusing the state money", "domestic conflicts in a special Zaporozhye zone are of increasing frequency", "another characteristic of Donetsk residents is an unequivocal unwillingness to work" etc.

On numerous occasions such facts and publications became the subject matter for the Independent Media Council, which is a public monitoring and advisory body created to uphold high professional standards of journalism and to objectively address controversial questions and issues arising in the Ukrainian information space.

Stereotyping and opposition of one group of people to another, violation of professional standards and journalists ethical code are unacceptable. Journalistic unions and associations must be ready to give a precise assessment of hate speech manifestations. In cases of deliberate spreading of hate speech by the media, those matters must become the subject of investigation by law enforcement agencies. After all, history knows many examples when "words" became a weapon and caused harm no less than bombs and guns. And the topic of migration has been and remains one of most sensitive in our society and its media coverage requires special attention and heightened responsibility on the part of journalists.