

RESPONSIBLE REPORTING ON SENIOR CITIZENS IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA

The following recommendations contribute to respectfully, responsibly reporting on senior citizens in audiovisual media.

1. Use the term “senior citizen” or “senior” and avoid using out-of-context terms to refer to this social group made up people over 60.

It is advised to call those who are elderly “senior citizens” or “seniors”, which are respectful, inclusive terms that includes men, women and members of the LGBT community. Calling senior citizens “grandparents” is depersonalizing them and reducing them to a family role that does not apply to all the members of the age group, and it also invisibilizes the multiple functions these subjects of right may have in a society. Moreover, it is advised to use the term “retiree” when referring to senior citizens only when reporting on retirement.

2. Provide information about the context of ageing in Argentina and the world.

The world is in an ongoing ageing process that has economic, political and socio-cultural consequences and implications, which beg to be mediatized. Argentina is among the countries in Latin America with the eldest population, over 15% of which are senior citizens and in 2050, 25% of its population will be 60 years old or older and there will be as many senior citizens as children under 15. Moreover, there are two characteristics of the ageing process: feminization and the ageing of ageing. It is key for the media to report on this process that turns senior citizens into the protagonists of a demographic change that will reconfigure society.

3. Visibilize the coexistence of multiple ways of experiencing old age and highlight the heterogeneity of senior citizens.

Seniors make up the most heterogeneous part of society because the ageing process is multidimensional and varies according to place of residence, customs and traditions and the kind of work

done, among other factors. In this regard, it is important for the media to visibilize multiple ways of experiencing old age and to convey the different characteristics of senior citizens.

4. Avoid reporting in a strictly medical way or patronizing or infantilizing senior citizens.

It is advisable to portray old age with a gerontological approach. This implies an interdisciplinary, bio-psycho-social, cultural, integral outlook in order to overcome the strictly medical media outlook which enables the representation of senior citizens as “ill”, and which strengthens a discriminatory, stigmatizing social image. Moreover, it is advised to avoid using paternalistic expressions that may result in the infantilization of senior citizens, strengthening prejudices such as “elderly people are like children, they have to be looked after”. Old age is not made up of people at risk due to their age, but it is the cultural and economic conditions that make it a vulnerable group, as it happens with all other ages.

5. Include seniors and incorporate new, diverse topics and footage about this group in the agenda to broaden the representations of old age.

This will allow for the visibilization -through seniors themselves- of other representations and contribute to a more positive social portrayal of old age. It is important for communicators to also be more creative and do research when outlining and producing content, and when finding out about activities, problems and interests in the many environments that senior citizens usually participate in (cultural centers, universities, sport clubs, foundations, etc.). Moreover, it is advised not to resort to the repetition of footage of seniors wearing clothes that strengthen stereotypes.

6. Avoid using expressions that associate seniors with passivity, inactivity, sadness or loneliness.

It is relevant to work with an ageing and active ageing approach that, on one hand, challenges negative prejudices towards senior citizen and on the other, promotes spaces for participation. To that end, it is important to highlight the positive characteristics of old age, such as being more experienced and having more free time to do activities. This approach does not mean denying the damaging aspects that may be present in the ageing process, but focusing on the value of the participation of seniors in the society.

7. Visibilize sexuality and sexual diversity in old age, respecting senior citizens' sexual orientation and gender identity.

Seniors have active sex lives, desire and are desired. However, elder bodies, associated to ugliness and decrepitude, are usually ridiculed, invisibilized and/or desexualized. This limited outlook is strengthened when seniors do not identify with the heteronormative social model, as is the case of transgender, intersex, bisexual, gay and lesbian people because, according to specialists, old age abides by the “rules of heteronormativity” more than other stages of life. That is why it is important to visibilize sexual diversity in old age and identify its specific problems with sexuality.

8. Identify the different types of discrimination and abuse that seniors may be victims of, such as ageism.

Ageism is one of the most frequent types of abuse around the world. It consists in age-based discrimination and may operate subconsciously, without meaning to damage or discriminate against anybody. It is part of our society the idea that old age has to be camouflaged or delayed through every possible physical process and, because of that, ageism may act inadvertently. This “subtle discrimination” shows that the social status of senior citizens is clearly inferior. Moreover, other kinds of abuse can be identified, such as physical, psychological, economic and moral abuse, which violate the human rights and individual freedom of seniors.

9. Incorporate in the agenda October 1st, the International Day of Older Persons, and divulge the rights of this social group.

On December 14th 1990, the United Nations named October 1st the International Day of Older Persons in order to support activities that portray seniors as protagonists of the public sphere. The date also invites everybody to reflect on prejudices and stereotypes regarding old age and to promote the rights to equality, non-discrimination based on age dignity, independence, autonomy, participation and security, among others.

10. Ensure access to promote the independence and autonomy of senior citizens.

Hearing and vision loss are common problems of old age. That is why it is necessary to create technical conditions to ensure their rights. Moreover, article 66 of the Audiovisual Communication Services Law states the tools of access that all audiovisual communication services must include for nobody to have any restrictions: CC, sign language and audio description. Regarding space, it is important to ensure physical access in order to guarantee autonomy and full participation, which implies using well-signaled locations with no hurdles for those with limited mobility, among other strategies.