



# Moving Stories

International Review of How Media Cover Migration



Ethical  
Journalism  
Network

EDITED BY AIDAN WHITE

## **Moving Stories**

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A group of children in a refugee camp, with one child in the foreground wearing a blue shirt with text. The children are looking in various directions, some towards the camera. The background shows a clear blue sky and other children in the distance.

**FOREWORD**

# Beyond the headlines

» JAN EGELAND





**For years, the Norwegian Refugee Council and other humanitarian actors have called out – too often in vain – to the international community, to the media, the decision makers and the public opinion about the sufferings of millions of civilians fleeing war in Syria.**

As the conflict escalated, and the humanitarian disaster with it, creating the biggest refugee crisis in our generation, our appeals for wider media attention, with some notable exceptions, fell on deaf ears with an apparent lack of interest on the part of the vast majority of television and radio companies and major newspapers.

It was arguably only with the tragic death of Aylan Kurdi and the publication of pictures of his body on a beach in Turkey that Western public opinion and global media finally woke up. Immediately, media lenses focused sharply on the humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean and both politicians and ordinary people had to respond.

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**What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.**

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But this incident only raised another question. What about the many other humanitarian crises beyond the media's radar? In war-torn South Sudan, for example. This country is rarely in the limelight. In 2011, it gained independence from Sudan ending a generation of war. Two years later, the civil war broke out resulting in massive forced displacement and today the country is one of the world's impoverished places. Every two minutes another South Sudanese child becomes severely malnourished. But these stories are seldom told.

A South Sudanese colleague told me it was strange to see how things can change from one day to the other only because of international media attention.

“In Europe, it was that boy on the beach. Maybe we need a picture of a boy like that in South Sudan,” she said while preparing to go on a new mission to one of the world's hardest-to-reach areas where dropping food from World Food Programme airplanes is the only way to provide hungry people with something to eat.

Too often not even stories about children dying of starvation are enough to make headlines on the nine o'clock news. Humanitarian disasters that deserve our attention often go uncovered because there is no photographer or journalist on the ground to tell the story. Only a couple of conflicts receive our attention at any given time, while most dramas get none at all. Why is that?

The reasons are complex. It is not just a lack of humanity on the news agenda or a matter of luck or a matter of caring more about some people at the expense of others. We need a broader lens to see what really is going on.

In the Norwegian Refugee Council we annually publish a list of the world's 10 most neglected displacement crises. This year the Rohingyas have topped the list. This minority Muslim community under pressure in Myanmar is also found in neighbouring Bangladesh where hundreds of thousands have sought protection.

One criterion to be on the neglected crises list is a lack of media attention. Other factors include lack of funding, little humanitarian presence and difficult access to the victims of the conflict. Often, there is a strong correlation between the different factors: access problems can lead to lack of media attention, which again can lead to lack of donor concern, which again leads to even bigger access issues. This completes a vicious circle that is not easily broken.

But there is an important truth in all of this – decision makers pay attention to the media, and independent journalists reporting with care, humanity and professionalism have enormous power to tell stories that create a new path.

But, as this report reveals, mainstream media is currently under pressure with news companies struggling to adapt to a new reality with plummeting revenues and competition from new media. Often media will simply say they cannot afford to cover these stories.

But this should not be an excuse for adopting a herd mentality – where media follow each other to cover a small cluster of the most obvious stories. Media around the world are now reporting on the disastrous humanitarian consequences of the civil war in Syria and the exodus to Europe and they are going beyond the numbers story which has dominated news coverage so far.

Yet as the poignant human tragedies from Syria takes centre stage, where is the coverage of the second largest humanitarian crisis and war on our watch: in Yemen? Here, around 21 million people are in urgent need of emergency relief. They suffer from external and internal bombardment, blockade and totally inadequate assistance and protection.

Also the journalists themselves need to be protected to be able to report on the atrocities. For journalists reporting from conflict and war 2015 is another deadly year. Like humanitarian workers, journalists are not only at risk of becoming so-called collateral damage during military operations, they are also increasingly targeted.

It is therefore essential that the international community focus on the protection of journalists in armed conflicts to allow for less casualties in the imminent future.

In Europe we talk about a sharing of responsibility in terms of coping with the growing influx of migration. Maybe it is time to talk about a media “burden sharing” where media institutions, rather than chasing the same stories, divide the coverage of the human suffering so that children in grave risk in South Sudan or Gaza do not continue to stay in life-threatening situations without the world knowing.

This EJN report *Moving Stories* is a welcome step to allow journalists get an overview of the problem areas as well as promoting best practices when it comes to reporting on the wider migration story.

Without media attention, humanitarian crises, with their horrifying impacts, will continue to be learned by the outside world way too late.

**Jan Egeland** is the Secretary-general of the Norwegian Refugee Council





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## INTRODUCTION

# Moving stories

» KIERAN COOKE AND AIDAN WHITE

**Migration is part of the human condition. Ever since humankind emerged out of East Africa it has been on the move – searching for a better climate, looking for supplies of food and water, finding security and safety.**

Migration has suddenly jumped to the top of the news agenda. During 2015 journalists reported the biggest mass movement of people around the world in recent history.

Television screens and newspapers have been filled with stories about the appalling loss of life and suffering of thousands of people escaping war in the Middle East or oppression and poverty in Africa and elsewhere.

Every day in 2015 seemed to bring a new migration tragedy: Syrian child refugees perish in the Mediterranean; groups of Rohingyas escaping persecution in Myanmar suffocate on boats in the South China Sea; children fleeing from gang warfare in Central America die of thirst in the desert as they try to enter the US.

In response to this crisis the Ethical Journalism Network commissioned *Moving Stories* – a review of how media in selected countries have reported on refugees and migrants in a tumultuous year. We asked writers and researchers to examine the quality of coverage and to highlight reporting problems as well as good work.



The conclusions from many different parts of the world are remarkably similar: journalism under pressure from a weakening media economy; political bias and opportunism that drives the news agenda; the dangers of hate-speech, stereotyping and social exclusion of refugees and migrants. But at the same time there have been inspiring examples of careful, sensitive and ethical journalism that have shown empathy for the victims.

In most countries the story has been dominated by two themes – numbers and emotions. Most of the time coverage is politically led with media often following an agenda dominated by loose language and talk of invasion and swarms. At other moments the story has been laced with humanity, empathy and a focus on the suffering of those involved.

What is unquestionable is that media everywhere play a vital role in bringing the world's attention to these events. This report, written by journalists from or in the countries concerned, relates how their media cover migration.

They tell very different stories. **Nepal** and the **Gambia** are exporters of labour. Thousands of migrants, mostly young men, flock from the mountain villages of Nepal to work in the heat of the Gulf and Malaysia: often the consequences are disastrous. People from the Gambia make the treacherous trip across the Sahara to Libya and then by boat to Europe: many have perished on the way – either in the desert or drowned in the Mediterranean.

In these countries reporting of the migration of large numbers of the young – in many ways the lifeblood of their nations – is limited and stories about the hardship migrants endure are rare. Censorship or a lack of resources – or a combination of both – are mainly to blame for the inadequacies of coverage. Self-censorship, where reporters do not want to offend either their media employer or the government, is also an issue.

The reports on migration in **China**, **India** and **Brazil** tell another story. Though large numbers of people migrate from each of these countries, the main focus is on internal migration, a global phenomenon often ignored by mainstream media that involves millions and dwarfs the international movement of people.

What's considered to be the biggest movement of people in history has taken place in China over the last 35 years. Cities are undergoing explosive growth, with several approaching 20 million inhabitants. Similar movements are happening in India and, to a lesser extent, in Brazil.

In Africa the headlines focus on people striving to leave the continent and heading north, but there is also migration between countries, with many people from the impoverished central regions heading for **South Africa** – a country where media also deal with problems of xenophobia and governmental pressure.

In Europe migration and refugee issues have shaken the tree of European unity with hundreds of thousands trekking by land and sea to escape war and poverty. The reports here reveal how for almost a year media have missed opportunities to sound the alarm to an imminent migration refugee crisis.

Media struggle to provide balanced coverage when political leaders respond with a mix of bigotry and panic – some announcing they will only take in Christian migrants while others plan to establish walls and razor wire fences. Much of the focus has been on countries in South Eastern Europe which has provide a key route for migrants and refugees on the march. In **Bulgaria**, as in much of the region, media have failed to play a responsible role and sensationalism has dominated news coverage.

In **Italy**, a frontline state where the Mediterranean refugee tragedy first unfolded, the threat of hate-speech is always present, though this is often counterbalanced by an ethical attachment of many in journalism to a purpose-built charter against discrimination. In **Britain** the story has also often been politically-driven and focused, sometimes without a sense of scale or balance: this has been particularly evident in reportage of the plight of refugees in Calais.

In **Turkey**, seen by many European politicians as a key country in stemming the onward rush of migrants, most media are under the thumb of a government that punishes dissident journalists, so the public debate is limited.

Like their Turkish colleagues, journalists in **Lebanon** live with the reality of millions of refugees from war-torn Syria within their borders which makes telling the story more complex and it is not helped by confused mixing of fact and opinion by many media.

At the same time in the **United States** media have helped make the migrant and refugee issue an explosive topic in debates between Republican Party candidates for the presidency. Media time has focused on heated and often racist exchanges. This has obscured much of the good reporting in some media that provides much-needed context. South of the border, in **Mexico** media also suffer from undue political pressure and self-censorship.





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**“Open the world more equitably so we all may walk freely. Or close the borders and let each one return to his house and see how much poorer and drearier and darker the world is when we all stay at home.” – Chibundu Onuzo**

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In **Australia** the media in a country built by migrants struggles to apply well-meaning codes of journalistic practice within a toxic political climate that has seen a rise in racism directed at new arrivals.

These reports cover only a handful of countries, but they are significant. The problems of scant and prejudicial coverage of migration issues exist everywhere. Even reporting of migration in the international media – with a few notable exceptions – tends to be overly simplistic.

Migrants are described as a threat. There is a tendency, both among many politicians and in sections of the mainstream media, to lump migrants together and present them as a seemingly endless tide of people who will steal jobs, become a burden on the state and ultimately threaten the native way of life.

Such reporting is not only wrong; it is also dishonest. Migrants often bring enormous benefits to their adopted countries.

How would California’s agricultural industry or the Texan oil fields survive without the presence of hundreds of thousands of Mexicans and Central

American workers, often labouring on minimal wages? How could the health service in the UK continue without the thousands of migrant nurses and doctors from the developing world? How would cities like Dubai, Doha or Singapore have been built without labourers from Nepal or Bangladesh – or how would they function without the armies of maids and helpers from the Philippines and Indonesia?

These reports underscore why media need to explain and reinforce a wider understanding that migration is a natural process. No amount of razor wire or no matter how high walls are built, desperate migrants will find a way through. People will still flock to the cities, drawn by the hope of a better life.

The migrant crisis is not going to go away: the impact of widespread climate change and growing inequality is likely to exacerbate it in the years ahead.

The inescapable conclusion is that there has never been a greater need for useful and reliable intelligence on the complexities of migration and for media coverage to be informed, accurate and laced with humanity. But if that is to be achieved we must strengthen the craft of journalism.



# RECOMMENDATIONS AND USEFUL LINKS

## 1. Ethical context

Migrants and refugees are a vulnerable minority who can quickly become scapegoats for the ills of society – social and economic decline, crime and unemployment, pressure on health and welfare services and lack of security.

Media can counter this threat and help people better understand the complex migration story by applying ethical principles, avoiding crude stereotypes, developing good newsroom practice and engaging with the audience. In particular, journalists should apply and respect the following five core principles of journalism in their work:

- ▷ Accuracy: fact-based reporting, analysis and commentary;
- ▷ Independence: journalism free from self-censorship and political pressure;
- ▷ Impartiality: fair reporting that tells all sides of the story;
- ▷ Humanity: sensitive and careful journalism that avoids doing undue harm;
- ▷ Accountability: media transparency and commitment to correct errors.

## 2. Newsroom practice

Media companies and journalists' unions and associations should prepare concise guides to best practices for the reporting on refugees and migrants. In addition, all media should examine their internal structures to make sure they are telling the story in the most effective way.

News organisations can:

- ▷ Appoint specialist reporters with good knowledge of the subject to the migration and refugee beat.
- ▷ Provide detailed information on the background of migrants and refugees and the consequences of migration. It is especially important to note that some major studies reveal how migration can strengthen national economies in the longer term, even where there are short-term challenges.
- ▷ Avoid political bias and challenge deceptive handling of the facts and incitement to hatred particularly by political, religious or other community leaders and public figures.
- ▷ Respect sources of information and grant anonymity to those who require it most, particularly

those who are vulnerable and most at risk.

- ▷ Establish transparent and accessible internal systems for dealing with complaints from the audience over coverage of migrant and refugee issues.
- ▷ Review employment policies to ensure newsroom diversity with reporters and editors from minority communities.
- ▷ Provide training for journalists and editors covering everything from international conventions and law to refugee rights and what terms to use while covering refugee stories.
- ▷ Monitor coverage regularly. Organise internal discussions on how to develop and improve the scope of migration coverage.
- ▷ Manage online comments and engage with the audience to ensure that migration stories are not used as a platform for abuse or intolerance.

Media associations and journalists' unions can also support national structures for independent regulation or self-regulation of journalism, such as press councils. Where there are industry-wide codes of conduct and guidelines dealing with non-discrimination these should cover reporting migration.

## 3. Engage with the media audience and connect with migrants

Refugee groups, activists and NGOs, many of which provide vital information for media, can be briefed on how best to communicate with journalists and media can explain to the audience their policies and editorial approach which may encourage readers, viewers and listeners to contribute useful additional information.

## 4. Challenge hate-speech

Hate-speech is widespread in the media. Often it can't be prevented when it comes out of the mouths of prominent public figures, but journalists should always remember that just because someone says something outrageous doesn't make it newsworthy. The Ethical Journalism Network has developed a 5-point text for hate-speech as a useful tool for newsrooms. (See below).

## 5. Demand access to information

Media cannot report without access to reliable information and facts. When access to information is restricted, such as not being allowed to enter

refugee camps, media and civil society groups should press the government both nationally and internationally to be more transparent. Media and journalists' unions should meet regularly with police and state authorities and agencies to ensure journalists have safe conditions in which to work and access to the information they need.

## Some Useful Links

### Glossaries

International Organization for Migration (IOM Key migration terms)

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Media Friendly Glossary for Migration

### Statistics

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Statistics and Operational Data

International Organization for Migration (IOM) World Migration Report

Internal Displacement Monitoring Center Global Estimates 2015

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Resources Publications

### Sources

International Refugee Law – Everything you need to know from the UNHCR

Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM)

Refugee Studies Centre (RSC)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

Council of Europe (COE)

European Network Against Racism (ENAR)

European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)

Forced Migration Online

The Journal of International Migration and Integration (JIMI)

The Global Migration Centre (GMC)

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)

Red Cross Global Campaign on Migration

Middle East Migration Issues (Migration Policy Institute)

## Resources for journalists

Accountable Journalism Database

Africa's Media Silence over Migration Crisis

BBC: Migration in Figures

Climate News Network

Dart Centre Covering Migration Tips for Journalists

Ethical Journalism Network: Migrants or Refugees?

Ethical Journalism Network Five-Point Test for Hate-speech

Europe: The Migrant Files

Jean Paul Marthoz: "How to cover migration"

Getting the Facts Right: Ethnicity and Religion (ARTICLE 19)

Media Diversity Institute

Statewatch

UK NUJ Migration Reporting Guide for Journalists

Data-Based Study into Characteristics of Migration Coverage in Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States – Summary report and Full presentation

Why Al Jazeera will not say Mediterranean Migrants

David Cameron: "Swarm" of Migrants crossing Mediterranean

Ten myths about migration

Guardian Special Report:

Hardline Australia, confused Scandinavia and tense Russia: The global immigration picture

Generation E – Data Driven Project Report on Youth Migration from Southern Europe

The Med: One final danger in a migrant's odyssey

The Arduous Journey of Colombian Migrants Headed for Chile

What crime have I committed to be held like this? Inside Yarl's Wood

Risking their lives to cross the border: Europe or Die

Jimmy Breslin: "The Short Sweet Dream of Eduardo Gutierrez"

Giovanna dell'Orto/Vicki Birchfield: "Reporting at the Southern Borders Journalism and Public Debates on Immigration in the U.S. and the E.U."

Peter Andreas/Kelly Greenhill: "Sex, Drugs and Body Counts"

Fabrizio Gatti: "Bilal"





**THE VIEW FROM BRUSSELS**

# **Missed opportunities to call the European Union to account**

» TONY BUNYAN





**For millions of people across Europe the refugee crisis became “real” when the image of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, a drowned Syrian child found on a Turkish beach, went viral world-wide at the beginning of September 2015. But the scale of the crisis was already widely-known if not widely-reported a year earlier.**

On 5 January, 2015 *Malta Today*, from one of the European Union’s smallest members, but a frontline state in the Mediterranean, reported: “270,000 asylum seekers sought entry to EU in 2014: Frontex deputy executive director says numbers for 2014 nearly doubled the previous record of 141,000 registered in 2011.”<sup>1</sup>

European Union institutions were well-aware that the continuing conflicts in Syria, Iraq and Libya and growing refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, would bring an even greater exodus in 2015. And if media were unaware of the internal planning, a European Commission Factsheet published on 13 January, 2015 alerted them with: “Questions and Answers: Smuggling of Migrants in Europe and the EU response.”<sup>2</sup>

“In 2014, more than 276,000 migrants irregularly entered the EU, which represents an increase of 155% compared to 2013. Syrians together with Eritreans were the largest group apprehended at EU external borders trying to enter the EU in an irregular manner.”

In 2014 the main refugee routes were largely from Libya to Italy (170,816) and, in the eastern Mediterranean, mainly from Turkey to Greece (50,561). These figures reversed in 2015 with most refugees arriving in Greece. But if the mainstream media were largely ignoring the gathering storm, social media and civil society reported and forecast what we were to witness in 2015. Médecins sans Frontières reported in December 2014 from Greece:

“Thousands of refugees ... are being welcomed with a dysfunctional reception system and inhumane living conditions. Greece and the European Union (EU) must urgently improve living conditions ... and offer them adequate medical assistance and protection.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite numerous documents and reports on “migration flows” the EU institutions utterly failed to plan ahead. EU humanitarian aid on the Greek islands did not start until late September 2015. When it did it was tied to registration, fingerprinting and closed detention centres for those to be returned in so-called “hot spots” in Greece and Italy. The gap from April 2015 was filled by visiting civil society volunteers and local people.

The European story was there to be told, but media failed to alert their audience or to challenge the readiness of the European Union and its member states to deal with the crisis that was about to break upon their shores.

This lack of touch by the mainstream media community to raise the alarm highlighted the weakness of media and further underscored the problems facing many journalists and media as they grappled with the responsibility of covering this humanitarian crisis professionally.

The test for them was to report with accuracy and humanity, to treat government and political rhetoric with caution and ensure that refugees were treated fairly and as human beings who have travelled great distances to find safety. This is no easy task when politicians conjure up images of “swamping” or “mass invasion by illegals”.

Journalists know they must be cautious and report what politicians say but question intemperate language. The ethics of their trade mean journalists are responsible not just for accurately reporting political discourse but also for weighing the impact of what they publish.

## Words matter

Across the European media landscape media and journalists have struggled to strike the right note in the tone and the language of discussion of the crisis. A debate emerged on whether the EU faced a “refugee” crisis or a “migrant” crisis. In August 2015 *Al Jazeera* said: “There is no ‘migrant’ crisis in the Mediterranean. There is a very large number of refugees fleeing unimaginable misery and danger and a smaller number of people trying to escape the sort of poverty that drives some to desperation.”<sup>4</sup>

Despite the online debate that followed, a web search of the media in early October showed that the BBC widely used the term “migrant crisis” together with most other TV and online organisations, *The Guardian* and *The Independent* and the Brussels-based *Euractiv* and *EUobserver*.

The term “migrant” is perceived and used in the media as meaning an “economic migrant” a person who is simply seeking a better life, whereas all the aid agencies said that most were fleeing from war and persecution in Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia and Eritrea. The terms “refugees”, “asylum-seekers” and “migrants” have distinct meanings and cannot be used interchangeably.

Help for journalists is available. The Charter of Rome and the glossary of terms developed for Italian journalists and covered elsewhere in this report are useful as is the glossary provided by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM):

- ▷ “A migrant refers to someone who moves, temporarily or permanently, from one place or country to another. A migrant is someone who moves freely.”<sup>5</sup>
- ▷ A refugee is forced to move because of persecution,<sup>8</sup> or they are displaced by war or a humanitarian disaster or some other external and

compelling factors. States are obliged to provide them with protection under international law.<sup>9</sup>

- ▷ Asylum seekers are refugees seeking protection from war or persecution who apply for refugee status under international and national laws.

And it is important to remember that in law there is no such thing as an “illegal” migrant. A more valid term is “undocumented” migrant.

Other loaded terms that have been used interchangeably in the media are “smuggling” and “trafficking”. What we are seeing is predominantly not trafficking but people smuggling on a major scale.

As an article in *The Guardian* explained: “Smugglers are paid by people to bring them across borders. After the border has been crossed, the transaction between smuggler and migrant ends. Trafficking is a very different crime. Trafficking means bringing people into an ongoing situation of exploitation and then profiting from their abuse in the form of forced labour or forced prostitution.

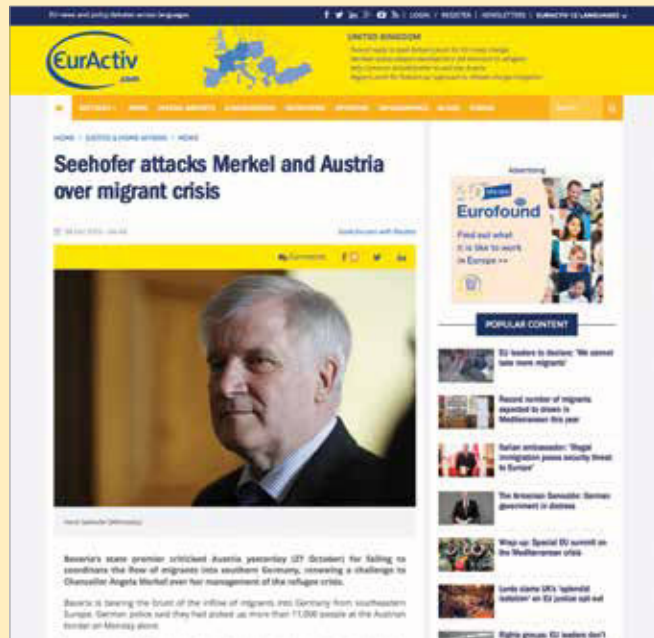
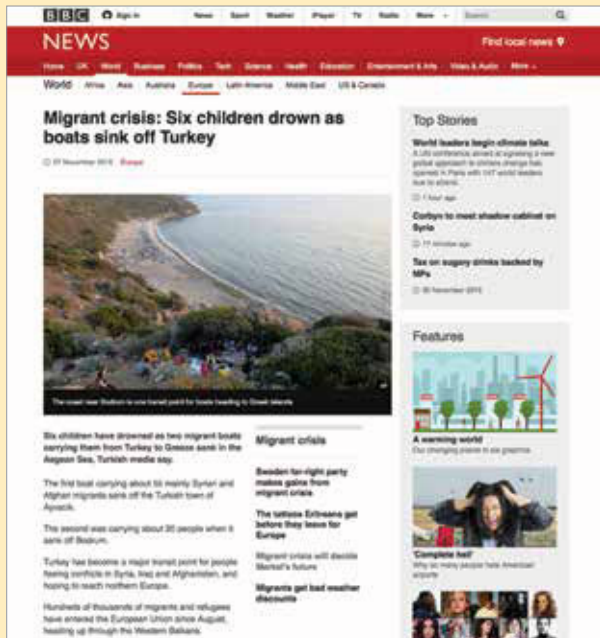
“Migrants usually consent to being smuggled. A trafficked person usually does not consent or their consent is meaningless because they have been coerced. Smuggling always happens across international borders. Trafficking does not. People can be trafficked from Coventry to Manchester.”<sup>10</sup>

This distinction squares with the United Nations Protocol against the smuggling of migrants which says that smuggling, contrary to trafficking, does not include exploitation, coercion, or violation of human rights.

If the European media have struggled to get the terminology right, they have also provided widely-contrasting national perspectives, often driven by governmental and political policy objectives.

For instance, one of Europe’s leading tabloids the German daily *Bildt* surprised many both in Germany and abroad when it launched a high-profile “We Help” campaign with its positive message of welcome to the hundreds of thousands of refugees clamouring to get into Germany after Chancellor Angela Merkel announced that the government would open its doors to all Syrian refugees.

This contrasts with the hate-speech of many media in the Western Balkans, Hungary and other East European countries where tens of thousands of refugees were met with political hostility and physical



**“There is no ‘migrant’ crisis in the Mediterranean. There is a very large number of refugees fleeing unimaginable misery and danger and a smaller number of people trying to escape the sort of poverty that drives some to desperation.” – Al Jazeera**

barriers were erected to slow their route march to northern Europe.

In Britain the equivalent of *Bildt*, the Rupert Murdoch-owned *Sun* newspaper, and another tabloid the *Daily Mail* were unrelenting in their opposition to joining the German call for major European countries to share the burden of taking in refugees. The media narrative changed dramatically in favour of a more humane approach with the Aylan Kurdi story, but second thoughts by political leaders in Germany and continued intransigence in the UK and elsewhere have seen a return to media coverage focused on refugee numbers rather than human interest.

### Europe’s need for functioning fourth estate

Media face a constant balancing act, to give voice to the refugee community and to reflect legitimate concerns over migration in the community at large, and this can be achieved through fact-based reporting that provides context, background and thoughtful commentary.

But more than this it is arguable that today the media – print, TV, online and apps – have more chance than ever to hold those in power to account, and to be the Fourth Estate in the EU. Media stories only emerge from effective, questioning and probing journalism that flows from hard preparatory work; reading lots of mainly boring official documents and following a paper-trail. It can be frustrating but is rewarding in terms of high-quality journalism and provocative stories. The problem is that on so many occasions media have failed to hold the European Union and its members to account.

Here are examples of stories that could have been explored in depth the issues, put the institutions on the spot and better informed civil society at large.

Why, for instance, was the European Commission not pinned down back in January 2015 when all the evidence pointed to more refugees arriving this year?

Its fact sheet said they were going to tackle smuggling – which “generally takes place with the consent of the person willing to move” – and get support from the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund



(AMIF) to set up “reception centres, with adequate conditions for families, minors, and other vulnerable groups ... in the Member State”, with Greece getting €259 million in 2014-2020. So why, media might ask, were there no reception centres providing humanitarian aid in Lesbos, Kos and Samos and other Greek islands from April 2015 onwards?

A second question concerns the myth fuelled by European Union leaders, national politicians and media that all the refugees arriving in Europe are from Syria. The Council of the European Union on 22 September set the priority as being to recognise people from Syria, Iraq and Eritrea, thus seeking to exclude the second largest group of refugees – from Afghanistan, which is far from being a stable country.

Other arrivals include people from Somalia, Libya, sub-Saharan Africa and Kurds from Syria and Iraq passing through Turkey.

So are the institutions seeing people from Syria, Iraq and Eritrea as “good refugees” to be relocated in the EU, and the rest as “economic migrants”, to be returned to their country of origin, and would this in the context of international law be mass “refoulement” (returning them to potentially threatening situations)?

A third question concerns coercion in fingerprinting all refugees in “hot spots”, a process to which people fleeing persecution might be reluctant to submit. Guidelines drafted by the European Commission have suggested that “officials trained in the proportionate use of coercion may apply the minimum level of coercion required,” including, if necessary, to “vulnerable persons, such as minors or pregnant women”. What, media might ask, is the “proportionate use of coercion” on minors or pregnant women?

But what is the role of EU agencies in “hot spots”? Refugees will be pre-screened in what is called “nationality screening” by Frontex (the European Agency for management of external borders) teams supporting national officials who conduct the first stage. Refugees who pass the “nationality” test will be transferred to open camps awaiting relocation to another European Union country. Those who fail, because they come from the “wrong” country, will be held in closed camps awaiting return to their country of origin.

Is it legal to determine who is to be returned simply on the basis of the country they come from, especially as most of those arriving come from countries which are not on any national EU Member State list? <sup>13</sup>



Another important question came up on 23 September when the Commission announced that only five member states were correctly applying EU asylum rules. Eighteen member states have not implemented the Asylum Procedures Directive which concerns “international protection” and 19 have not implemented the Receptions Directive which sets out minimum standards for applicants for international protection, including “housing, food, health care”.

“Not implemented” means they have not transposed the measures into national law, allocated funds and staff, let alone become operational (which is months away). Why did the Commission not accelerate the adoption of the new asylum law which would have put in place humanitarian aid?<sup>15</sup>



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**The European Union set the priority to recognise people from Syria, Iraq and Eritrea, thus seeking to exclude the second largest group of refugees – from Afghanistan, far from a stable country.**

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Lastly, there is the numbers game. By the beginning of October 2015, 533,591 refugees and migrants have arrived in the EU and most have moved on from the countries where they entered, especially Greece. As so-called “hot spots” had not started it can be said around 522,000 have relocated themselves in another EU country or are in transit: by the end of August 148,000 asylum applications had been made across the EU (EASO).

Relocation quotas – a “total of 160,000 people in clear need of international protection in the coming two years” – will only begin to come into operation as the “hot spots” in Greece and Italy come online over the next few months. Does this mean there will be an EU-wide sweep for refugees who have not been registered and fingerprinted?

All of these questions and the stories that flow from them highlight the failures and missed opportunities of European media in reporting the migration and refugee crisis. There has been a record of official decisions and some useful commentary from mainstream European Union news services such as the Brussels-based *Euractiv* and *EUobserver* and the weekly *Politico* (which took over the much missed *European Voice*) provides commentaries but patchy news.

And there has been some compelling television coverage which picked up after the death of Aylan Kurdi and began telling the “human story”, documenting the journeys northwards and providing horrific images of hastily constructed “walls”, and pepper sprays, gas and water cannon used to push back the





thousands trying to cross borders. A particularly courageous report by a Sky journalist showed her joining a crossing from Assos in Turkey to Lesbos, which was intercepted by a Turkish coastguard vessel with shots fired to get the boat to turn back, but it crossed safely into Greek waters.<sup>16</sup>

But across the mainstream media a toxic mix of challenges remains. There has been a “debate” about definitions and “Words Matter” but media continue to use “refugee” crisis and “migrant” crisis interchangeably. And the sharp political debate requires more sensitive and careful reporting. As the Director of the IOM told the UN at the end of September: “With populist leaders and elements of the media increasingly portraying migrants in a negative light, IOM points out that fear of the unknown is deepening community divisions and endangering the very people seeking a better or safer life.”<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, media and civil society groups have shown themselves to be important players in the face of what is happening on the ground while EU institutions are adrift, seemingly powerless and incapable of providing humanitarian help on the landing beaches and at the start of a new journey north.

Civil society and social media for their part quickly rose to the occasion, beginning in April 2015, recording history as it happened and servicing a growing network of ways to help, sending money, clothes and volunteering nationally and especially to Lesbos.<sup>18</sup>

It is volunteers who welcome refugees, provide water and aid and advice as to where to go and give lifts to the elderly and the young where possible. And some airlines and delivery firms were persuaded to join in and offered reduced rates for packages going to Greece.

NGOs have equally been very active in Greece, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia and then Austria, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. At the borders, rail and bus stations, volunteers are there to provide water, food and clothing. NGOs provided interventionist critiques of their government’s actions, for example, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, a human rights organisation, said “The right of asylum has practically vanished in Hungary”.<sup>19</sup>

The media need to focus on the EU’s response to the ongoing refugee-humanitarian crisis which will continue in 2016 and beyond, even if the signs are that we will see the construction of a new Fortress Europe.

Media need to focus on pressure that will be applied on Turkey to hold back the hundreds of thousands waiting to come to the EU with maritime patrols “pushing back” refugee boats and Eurosur (satellite tracking movements) coming on-stream. Reporters and newsrooms also need to monitor the creation of an EU Border Police force, and dozens of new detention centres holding tens of thousands for “return” (especially in Greece and Italy) or



awaiting asylum decisions,<sup>20</sup> as well as an expected police operation to track down many of the 500,000 who entered the EU before October 2015 who are not registered or fingerprinted.

This will all be taking place in a European Union divided between those who welcome refugees and others who are opposed. Opposition has been on the rise for years and recent elections in many countries have seen racists and extreme right-wing politicians with echoes of the fascist era elected to parliaments and present in some governments. The EU power elite have manifestly failed to combat these dangerous forces which are present in countries like Hungary which leads the so-called Visegrad group – Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic – which is opposed to the relocation of refugees.

Even central EU figures are conceding to popular racist rhetoric. *The Times* reported that a senior Brussels official warned: “The European Union must close its ‘open door’ to prevent millions of migrants entering Europe unchecked or there will be a backlash leading to a surge in support for extremist and far-right parties.”<sup>23</sup> And the EU Vice President Frans Timmermans said in an interview with BBC Radio 4 that: “Central European countries have no experience with diversity ... making them susceptible to fears about Muslim refugees. If no sustainable solution is found you will see a surge of the extreme right across the European continent.”<sup>24</sup>

As if the refugee crisis and the climate of racism and xenophobia were not toxic enough, media faced the additional challenge of telling these stories in the context of extensive European Union counter-terrorism operations to locate and neutralise “foreign fighters” going to support ISIS in Syria and Iraq. The Greek reception and relocation programme agreed with the European Commission includes: “Another action ... is to identify and register all places of gatherings of potential radical or extremism groups such as worship areas, cultural and artistic heritage places in the Greek territory.”<sup>25</sup> This echoes the ubiquitous UK Prevent programme which places Muslim communities under intense surveillance.

The need for careful, sensitive and informed journalism in Europe has never been greater and media that struggle to tell the story in context will need more support if they are to rise to the challenge.

Some practical work might involve helping media and journalist organisations to develop a set of European standards that will challenge the use of derogatory language and highlight the impact of words and images that incite racism and

xenophobia. This should be backed by a media complaints mechanism, operating at national level, by which if standards have been abused the culprits can be publicly named.

At the same time there is an urgent need to strengthen investigative journalism committed to in-depth research. There are already some good examples of networks for investigative journalism in many countries and working across borders. These need to be provided with more resources to help mobilise the voices of authentic journalism, using both traditional and social media sources.

For too long the back story of the refugee crisis in Europe has not been told, with those in power not held to account and too much focus on the bias and prejudice of unscrupulous politicians. Only investment in ethical, public-spirited journalism will provide the stream of informed and reliable information that people need.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/world/48061/270000\\_asylum\\_seekers\\_sought\\_entry\\_to\\_eu\\_in\\_2014](http://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/world/48061/270000_asylum_seekers_sought_entry_to_eu_in_2014)

<sup>2</sup> Factsheet with detailed information: <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/sep/eu-com-refugee-factsheet-15-1-15.pdf> And on 2<sup>nd</sup> version a useful map: <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/sep/eu-com-refugee-factsheet-15-1-15-2.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.msf.org/article/eu-and-greece-turn-their-backs-refugees-arriving-greek-islands>

<sup>4</sup> Why Al Jazeera will not say Mediterranean ‘migrants’: <http://www.aljazeera.com/blogs/editors-blog/2015/08/al-jazeera-mediterranean-migrants-150820082226309.html> and earlier in April the Guardian described the different terms: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/apr/22/migrant-crisis-smuggling-trafficking-politicians-dont-seem-to-know>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>

<sup>6</sup> Someone fleeing “persecution” is based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group, or political opinion

<sup>9</sup> The 1961 Geneva Convention: <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/sep/un-1951-convention-and-prot.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/apr/22/migrant-crisis-smuggling-trafficking-politicians-dont-seem-to-know>

<sup>13</sup> <http://heindehaas.blogspot.fr/2015/09/dont-blame-smugglers-real-migration.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/sep/eu-ms-safe-countries.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Some 25 Member States have fully implemented the Returns Directive.

<sup>16</sup> <http://news.sky.com/story/1550627/packed-in-a-dinghy-with-syrias-refugees>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.iom.int/news/spreading-anti-migrant-sentiment-endangering-lives-ioms-swing-warns-world-leaders>

<sup>18</sup> Channel 4 News: The British family helping thousands of refugees on Lesbos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UWa9u-W6eU&feature=youtu.be>

<sup>19</sup> <http://budapestbeacon.com/featured-articles/the-right-of-asylum-has-practically-vanished-in-hungary-pardavi/28090>

<sup>20</sup> Global Detention Project – Europe (at September 2015): <http://www.globaldetentionproject.org/countries/europe.html>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2010/sep/EC-Roma-France-report.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/news/world/europe/article4566487.ece>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.politico.eu/article/migration-news-diversity-timmermans/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2015/sep/eu-isf-nat-programme.pdf>



## Migration: It's the same old story

'The enormous change in human conditions to which nearly all our present stresses are due, the abolition of distance and the stupendous increase in power, have flung together the population of the world so that a new way of living has become imperative ...

'The elaboration of methods and material has necessitated a vast development and refinement of espionage, and in addition the increasing difficulty of understanding what the warfare is really about has produced new submersive and demoralising activities of rumour-spreading, propaganda and the like, that complicate and lose contact at last with any rational objective ...

'The uprooting of millions of people who are driven into exile among strangers, who are forced to seek new homes, produces a peculiar exacerbation of the mental strain. Never have there been such crowds of migrating depressing people.

'They talk languages we do not understand ... they stimulate xenophobia without intention ... Their necessary discordance with the new populations they invade releases and intensifies the natural distrust and hostility of man for man – which it is the aim of all moral and social training to eliminate ...

'For the restoration and modernisation of human civilisation, this exaggerated outlawing of the fellow citizen who we see fit to suspect as a traitor or revolutionary and also of the stranger within our gates, has to be restrained and brought back within the scheme of human rights.

– H. G. Wells, *The Rights of Man* (1940)



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