



Moving Stories

International Review of How Media Cover Migration



Ethical
Journalism
Network

EDITED BY AIDAN WHITE

Moving Stories

Published in London by the Ethical Journalism Network
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11 Vicarage Road, London, E15 4HD United Kingdom

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This report is published as part of a programme of assistance to the work of the EJN provided by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all of the authors for their contributions and to Douglas Morrision for his skilful editing of the report. We also appreciate the help of EJN Board members and others who have helped shape the final text. In particular, we thank Kieran Cooke and his colleagues at Climate News Network and Tony Bunyan at Statewatch who assisted in the selection of contributors. The quote from H.G. Wells on the back cover comes from Ali Smith in *The Guardian* on November 20th 2015.

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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.

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.

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.



“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

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"





INDIA

How missing facts and context are toxic for media coverage

» PRAMILA KRISHNAN

India is a country made up of many countries – a statement often made in discussions about India and migration. Studies show that three out of 10 Indians are internal migrants. A search for work, for a better life or for marriage are the most common reasons behind such migration. Parents seeking better educational opportunities for their children is also a factor. Generally it is people from the most vulnerable and marginalised communities who have been forced to migrate.

Millions move each year – many from the countryside to the city where they think they will find jobs and a better life. Many have to cope with different cultural traditions: for such people it feels like a move to a foreign land.

India is also a magnet for immigrants from other smaller neighbouring countries who are escaping poverty and political unrest. It has become a homeland for hundreds of thousands of Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, Nepalese, Pakistanis and other nationalities.

Particularly for Sri Lankan Tamils, India is viewed as a second motherland but the relationship with Bangladesh is more difficult. A fence along the 2,500-mile border between the two countries has been built by the Indian government to keep out migrants, though this has not stopped the most determined getting through. Estimates of Bangladeshis who have crossed into India illegally over the years range from four to 20 million but no one is sure of the exact number.

Yet despite the tension caused by such movements – and periodic outbreaks of violence between peoples of different cultural or religious backgrounds – India is in many ways a migration success story. Since independence in 1947 the many different states in India and the multiple languages and customs have been woven into the fabric of the world's largest democracy, with at least 2,000 ethnic groups united in their diversity.

One of the major problems for government agencies and journalists charting migration is a lack of up-to-date information. The numbers run into millions. The government has no accurate figures of where people come from – or where they travel to. It is also often hard to differentiate between internal migrants and those from neighbouring countries: to local people all strangers might appear foreign.



According to a 2011 census, India had a population of 1.210 billion, more than double the figure in the early 1970s. It is a country of youth: more than half of the population are below 25. It's estimated that within 10 years it will surpass China as the world's most populous country.

As in China, India has seen a big shift in population from rural to urban areas over recent years. The 2011 census recorded that the urban population increased from 286 million to 377 million between 2001 to 2011. The prediction is that almost half of India's people – about 600 million – will be living in cities by 2030. Already two cities – Mumbai and Delhi – have more than 10 million each while six others have more than four million.

Migration: An untold story across the media landscape

Media coverage of migration issues in India is – with a few notable exceptions – relatively rare and not very thorough, especially in the non-English-language media. In newspapers there are few attempts at serious analysis, partly because there is so little clear information available, though some journalists are now beginning to probe the issue in more detail.

Overall there is very little discussion of trends and no serious coverage of migration-linked human-interest

stories. Journalists instead tend to report in the context of a debate in Parliament or in a state assembly, giving the views of government but little else.

Where individual stories about migrants appear they tend to reflect a general public prejudice against them: if a crime, however minor, is committed by an immigrant it features far more prominently in newspapers than similar crimes committed by locals.

Recently there has been more media discussion, prompted mainly by two books by journalists. Another more recent development has been migrant use of social media to tell their stories and voice their concerns. Veerapandian, a journalist working in Tamil Nadu in south India, won a special literary award for his book *Parukai*, highlighting the plight of poor students who migrate from the countryside to the cities to pursue their studies.

Samir Kumar Das, a journalist and academic who has written extensively on migration issues, refugees and the plight of internally displaced persons recently edited a book entitled *Media Coverage on Forced Displacement in Contemporary India*. Looking at migrants in the Bengal region he says: "Local media, particularly the newspapers, have been successful to a certain extent in portraying forced displacement in the state. Problems such as ethnic conflicts, floods etc. and their impact on people are highlighted.

Where individual stories about migrants appear they tend to reflect a general public prejudice against them: if a crime, however minor, is committed by an immigrant it features far more prominently in newspapers than similar crimes committed by locals.

“However, the media have failed to address the issues in their totality, as well as objectively. Largely depending on official sources, local newspapers have tried to inform readers about the intensity of the problem, but failed to establish a lively communication between victims and civil society-at large.”

Assam and the north eastern region have seen some of the biggest migratory movements in recent years – with hundreds of thousands settling in the area from Bangladesh and Bengal and from countries to the east, including Myanmar. Tensions have risen between indigenous groups and the newcomers as people compete for farmland and living space: there have been periodic outbreaks of violence.

Journalist Nilajaana Dutta has come up with a reference book named *Forced Migration in North East India: A Media Reader* to inform fellow journalists on the issue, its history and ways to cover the story in detail.

Migration has been the core subject of reporting by journalist P. Sainath. He has written many articles featuring the urban-rural divide, migration of farmers to urban areas, how thousands of farm workers have vacated villages over the years and settled in urban and suburban areas in search of jobs.

Sainath's news reports, mainly in *The Hindu*, one of India's main English-language newspapers with a readership of more than two million, caused consternation in the bureaucracy and forced the government to look into the agrarian crisis. The 2011 census showed that, for the first time since population records began, India's urban population had grown faster than that in the countryside.

“Clearly, something huge has happened in the last 10 years that drives those numbers,” said Sainath. “And that is: huge, uncharted migrations of people seeking work as farming collapses. We may be looking at – and missing – this cruel drama in the countryside.

A drama of millions leaving their homes in search of jobs that are not there. Of villages swiftly losing able-bodied adults, leaving behind the old, hungry and vulnerable. Of families that break up as their members head in diverse directions.”

His articles have stressed how liberalisation and the mushrooming growth of multinational firms have eroded the lives of villagers in various occupations. He questioned poor labour management policies of the government and absence of facilities for migrant workers.

Sainath quotes Dr. K. Nagaraj, professor at the Asian College of Journalism, in Chennai, south India. “The migrations of these past 15-20 years are overwhelmingly distress driven and often disruptive of the life-style, roots and family bonds of the migrant. Very few gain in terms of acquiring skill and capital, unlike those from the middle and upper classes. When the latter migrate, they usually make big gains in skill, capital and mobility in the jobs ladder.”

Sainath also talks of the exploitation migrants are subject to: “A massive chain has sprung up of middlemen and labour contractors who gain heavily from this exodus and thus seek to organise it to their benefit. They supply labour at cheap rates to a variety of patrons – from town and city contractors and builders to corporations, including multinationals.

“This not only helps depress the local wage, but also offers patrons a pool of cheap labour that is desperate, unorganised and thus relatively docile. The employers don't have to bother about the migrants' security, workplace conditions or any standard benefits a city labourer might know of and claim. To the workers, this system offers quick if low payments, crushing debt and unending despair.”

Jayati Ghosh, social activist and a well-known economist, also writes for *The Hindu* and various other media outlets on migration. Ghosh has highlighted how the Indian statistical system is not really designed to capture short-term migration. She says this results in policymakers being unaware of the sheer extent and the likely increase in migration in the years ahead. She says the census captures only permanent migration by asking respondents if they had previously lived somewhere else and how long ago that was.

Ghosh, writing jointly with C.P. Chandrasekar in *The Hindu Businessline*, says India's economic growth has been fueled by the movement of labour. “Such migration is not only a sign of dynamism – it reflects increasing inequalities, agrarian crisis and inadequate livelihood generation in many parts of rural and urban India.

“Apparently, a growing part of it is short-term and often repeated, although destinations may change. And while it has already created huge changes in the lives and work patterns of ordinary Indians, these consequences are yet to be adequately recognised and addressed by public policy.”

Regional migrants and the media

Immigration from Bangladesh to India has long been a thorny issue for politicians and led to the building of razor wire fences along the border. People are often shot by Indian border guards as they try to cross.

According to the Indian government, the fence is also designed to keep out so called “Muslim terrorists” and to prevent illegal smuggling of cattle. India’s majority Hindu population regard cattle as sacred while Muslims eat them and this often causes ethnic tensions.

Estimates of the number of Bangladesh nationals in India vary enormously, and there are no accurate figures, though some politicians have claimed there are as many as 20 million. This figure proved emotive in local elections: some journalists sought to dispute it, quoting an official at the Indian Statistical Institute who called such estimates “exaggerated” and said that internal migrants from other Indian states can easily be confused with Bangladeshis.

While the fence is controversial, it tends to gain more media coverage outside rather than inside India. Writing in the online journal *The Diplomat* – a Tokyo-based online magazine looking at issues in the Asia-Pacific region – Joyeeta Bhattacharjee, a New Delhi-based journalist, says there is a need to understand what causes the Bangladeshi exodus.

“The major causes are socio-political strife, natural calamities, communal riots, and poor economic prospects. Amongst these the economic issue has been the most dominant factor. In spite of deportation, arresting the flow of immigrants from Bangladesh will be very difficult, since economic conditions and opportunities for employment back home are bleak.”

Bhattacharjee says dialogue between the two countries is the only solution and finding some way of providing work permits and regulating the ebb and flow of people is required.

There have been some signs that they are working to tackle some of the more difficult issues. One major problem, left over from the colonial era, has been the existence of enclaves of people from

Bangladesh and India on either side of the border. There are an estimated 100 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India.

Earlier this year the two countries agreed to an exchange of land and, for the first time, there are hopes that this highly contentious issue, involving the livelihoods of thousands of stateless people, is on the way to being settled. The settlement was given fulsome coverage in *The Times of India*, *The Business Standard*, *India Today* and other media outlets.

Immigration from Sri Lanka is treated differently from that of Bangladesh by both government and the media. Starting in early 1983, thousands of Tamils fled northern parts of Sri Lanka, caught up in a civil war between the Tamil Tigers, fighting for a separate state, and government forces. They sought refuge in Tamil Nadu, in southern India.

R. Bhagwan Singh, an Indian journalist who has written extensively on Sri Lanka, says: “The Tamil Nadu government, with funds from the federal government, created refugee camps to house Sri Lankan Tamils and took care of them by giving them monthly monetary doles and highly subsidised rations.

“Their children also had access to education. The Indian government provided necessary facilities and ensured that they are treated well. And compared to citizens, refugees received better treatment from the government.”

With the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka, some refugees have returned home, though others have attempted long, hazardous journeys, trying to gain entry to Australia and other countries. Singh has tried to document the suffering of these Tamils in search of a better life. “But now with the end of the war these countries have closed their doors to them because they are no longer fleeing from war but are now mere fortune seekers,” says Singh.

The Indian media has reported that many of these Tamils now feel more at home in India and are reluctant to return to Sri Lanka. One, Prasanth Sekar, was reported as saying he was not willing to return. “I am still scared and worried about security for the Tamils there. I am not willing to get back to my country. Moreover, I got used to Indian soil and I’m comfortable here. To me Sri Lanka is just a distant country. I feel that I am an Indian.”

Migrant issues surface in various parts of India, often in areas which are becoming more prosperous and where locals are concerned about an upsurge in migrants taking jobs. Madhumita Dutta is a Chennai-based activist and researcher who



has highlighted migrants' problems in Tamil Nadu in *The Hindu*.

He says migrants – many from poorer areas in northern India, have no working rights and live in bad conditions. “Tamil Nadu has a fairly large interstate migrant population, estimated to be over ten lakhs (one million), with large concentrations around Chennai, Coimbatore, Trichy, Madurai, Hosur, Tirupur, Kanyakumari and Tirunelveli.

“Hailing from Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and even Nepal, these men come to work on private and government construction sites, in small engineering ancillary units, steel-rolling mills, hosieries, foundries, in roadside eateries as well as fancy city restaurants, as security guards and even as farmhands. While walking past a slum or even a fishing kuppam (village) these days, one can catch a soft snatch of conversation or song in Bhojpuri, Hindi, Bangla or Oriya.

Dutta wanted to find out who were these men, sometimes labelled North-Indian “thieves”, and what their loot looked like. “So I met a few young men from Bihar who had just come back from ‘duty’. They were huddled together in a small room in one such slum. A 120-sq.ft. room with peeling green walls, a few shirts and pants hanging from the hooks nailed to the walls, a mirror, a plastic comb, small suitcases and bags, a kerosene stove, a few cooking pots and pans, plates, tumbler and two buckets, floor mats and mobile phones! No toilet and an open bathing area.”

While such focused, human-interest reporting is rare in the India press, other media platforms are covering migrant problems.

Social media is playing an ever-greater role. There are several online Facebook groups aimed at raising support for the rights of Tamil refugees and residents of communities trapped in the enclaves on the Bangladesh-Indian border. Young migrants in particular use Facebook, Twitter and other social media to highlight their problems: they say they are united in the virtual world and share views about their identity.

The information deficit that harms media

Several research studies have illuminated the prevailing unsafe environment for both internal migrants and immigrants. There is, however, a lack of basic information about how many immigrants there are and the movements of people internally and across borders.

This means that journalists lack accurate statistical information, which can often lead to ill-informed assertions about migration by the public and politicians, which under-resourced journalists find hard to refute or verify. Many researchers fail adequately to disseminate their material – important findings and data do not reach local news organisations and civil society.

Though the government has set up institutions such as helpline centres, and redress mechanisms to provide justice to migrants in difficulties, in many cases the institutions do not work on the ground.

For its part, the government needs urgently to update its records on numbers and movements of people – both in and out of India and within the country. Only then will the true scale of the issue be known – and proper policy measures put in place. Schools need to be established in urban areas to cater for migrant children – their education is vital for the future of the country.

The media also needs to be far more proactive. Too often, reportage tends to reflect ill-informed opinions from locals who accuse migrants of stealing their jobs or ruining their neighbourhoods. There are exceptions: several journalists are now taking a broader, more nuanced approach and presenting the migrants' point of view. But a great deal more could be done to ensure fair and balanced reporting.



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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