



Moving Stories

International Review of How Media Cover Migration



Ethical
Journalism
Network

EDITED BY AIDAN WHITE

Moving Stories

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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"





MEXICO

Shallow journalism in a land where political bias rules the newsroom

» ELVA NARCIA

If significance, proximity, prominence and human interest are the factors that decide if a story is newsworthy, migration should be top of the list in Mexican newsrooms.

To put things in context, Mexico sees 400,000 undocumented people, mainly Central Americans, cross it every year on their way to the United States; about 12 million Mexicans live overseas, most of them in the US; and every year billions of dollars are sent back home as remittances.

Mexico's northern border with the United States is about 3,000 km long and goes across six Mexican States: Baja California, Sonora, Coahuila, Nuevo León, Chihuahua and Tamaulipas. The region is inhabited by about four million people. The southern border on the other hand, often described as porous, divides Mexico from Guatemala and Belize, the latter a former British colony, is 1,179 km long and has a population of over a million and a half.

Even though immigration in Mexico has great relevance that doesn't show in mainstream media; in fact, activists, academics and even journalists believe that the migration story is of no interest to newsrooms unless some kind of human tragedy is involved.

There are some cases of outstanding investigative journalism, mainly from big newspapers and digital news sites, but the news of the day is usually covered by press releases, press conferences, news agencies and perhaps something more in-depth with reports from correspondents on the southern or northern borders.

Journalist Elio Henriquez, based in the southern state of Chiapas for Mexican newspaper *La Jornada*, regularly covers migration stories focusing on transit, detentions, human rights abuses, protests and human trafficking. To cover the stories he, as other correspondents do, often talks to activists, civil society organisations or visits shelters for migrants but, as he admits, accessing official information is not easy.

He is not alone when he says that – several other journalists consulted for this report, also mentioned that official information comes only as press releases or statements. Ery Acuña, director of news site *Monitor Sur*, says: “There are legal

impediments, bans to video recording at migrant detention centers – it has become almost impossible to have access to immigration authorities.”

Verifying facts with official sources sometimes takes weeks or months, and journalists often have to appeal to the federal law on transparency and access to information to be able to do that. The government institutions that appear least open are the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Immigration.

To get information from the Consulates an official request has to be made to the Foreign Office in Mexico City and it often takes weeks or months for them to respond. As journalists work on tight deadlines they often have to publish or broadcast a story without the official side of it, or they have to dig for quotes and information that have already been published in newspapers or websites.

In addition, reporters covering migration face a number of risks: Mexico is still one of the most dangerous countries for journalists – 80 have been killed and 17 have disappeared in the past decade. During the past five years organised crime has been closely linked to human trafficking. Tamaulipas and Veracruz states have become particularly dangerous.

Journalists seem to be aware that the migration story is not covered with the depth, frequency and professionalism that it should be. “We should be talking more to the experts and going into the field more,” says Francisco Mendoza, a reporter from the state of Guadalajara who did outstanding investigative work, accompanying a group of human smugglers for two weeks crossing the border between Mexico and the United States.

But investigative reporting can be expensive; some media outlets are doing it with the help of international organisations such as the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Institute. The big players, mainly newspapers and television channels, fund investigative journalism but not particularly on immigration.

Funds for field work have become scarcer says Elio Henriquez, and it seems that the financial situation of most media organisations is a major challenge. Government advertising plays an important role in keeping them afloat but the consequence seems to be to surrender editorial control.

“To survive, 99 per cent of Mexican media depend on the government,” says Gardenia Mendoza, Mexico correspondent of *La Opinión*, a Los Angeles-based daily and editor of a specialised news agency on migration, *D'Exodo*. She believes that the apparent lack of interest in migration from Mexican



media lies in a strong dependence on government advertising and “the government is not interested in migration, it is a topic unknown to them, the government is too self-absorbed and it always wants to see stories about itself in the media”.

In fact, when we open a newspaper or tune in to news programmes on radio and television, we find dozens of stories on politics or about politicians: “If the vote of Mexicans living overseas had an influence on the balance of power in the country, the situation would be different,” and migration would perhaps be at the top of the agenda, says Gardenia Mendoza.

Gerardo Albarrán, the Ombudsman of *Radio Educación*, a public radio station, is extremely critical of Mexican media because “it was born to serve the political power” rather than the people. “Media are more interested in surviving as a mercenary industry – what they haven’t realised is that journalism, good journalism, is our business and it could be a really good business if what we write, if the stories we tell, touch the souls and hearts of our readers, of our audience.”

And it seems that is not only about listening to the audience and addressing the issues that are important to them, but also about developing a more proactive, media savvy society that would be ready to demand quality news and information. That is the opinion of journalist Marco Lara Klahr, author of several books on media and justice and an expert in investigative coverage of crime, violence and conflict.

“What we have here is a lethal combination: a lack of political communication platforms within the official institutions capable of providing information with a human rights perspective; a government that polarises, criminalises and discriminates; a news industry that produces information that in the end is disinformation; disempowered journalists and an apathetic society.”



Stereotypes and how media get a helping hand

One of the main criticisms from activists, civil society organisations and academics is that media coverage on migration rarely goes further than the news of today.

Professor Ana María Aragonés, from the Institute of Economic Research at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), who is also a columnist at *La Jornada*, laments that coverage of migration focuses mainly on tragedies, with a lot of drama involved, victimising migrants and often using sexist and discriminatory language. “It is important to discuss not only migration as a phenomenon but also the reasons behind it, the impact of it on national development, the impact on democracy,” she says.

And as Professor Aragonés points out, stories of dismembered bodies, assassinations, rapes, robberies, kidnappings, mass graves are what get covered in the news, more so when the perpetrators are from organised crime or the security forces. National TV news reports are rarely more in-depth.

Gardenia Mendoza calls it a “vertical coverage”, centred mainly on what happens in Mexico, particularly with a focus on security. and what happens with Central American or Mexican migrants here until they reach the Rio Bravo and the US. The stories hardly ever cross borders.

Gerardo Albarrán says that when covering migration some media outlets tend to create stereotypes so that, for example, Salvadorans and Hondurans are portrayed as gang members, Colombians as drug dealers, Central American women as prostitutes. When a Colombian woman was assassinated with five Mexicans on July 31, 2015 in a Mexico City neighbourhood, some media hinted that because she was a Colombian she could have been involved with organised crime. She was young and also a

model and so some reports suggested that she could have been a prostitute.

“There have been many media stories that suggest that migrants in transit through Mexico bring criminality and that migrants themselves are criminals,” adds Maureen Meyer, Senior Associate for Mexico and Migrant Rights at WOLA (Advocacy for Human Rights in the Americas). “There is a tendency to view the migrants as creating problems, not as a vulnerable population in need of support.”

Undoubtedly, the media influence perceptions towards the migrants, and the challenge is to offer journalistic coverage with a human rights, gender, child protection perspective, not forgetting that migrants had to leave their countries either in search of a better life, escaping poverty or in some cases, for security reasons.

Gerardo Albarrán points out that society and the Mexican press treat migrants in the southern border area worse than Mexican migrants are treated in the southern border of the United States and “that is something we omit, we fail to acknowledge, we decide to ignore or to hide. Why don’t we give migrants a face and a name?” he wonders, “because in Mexico people don’t have a face, people become numbers, press releases, and government statements”.

Even though the panorama looks so bleak there are exceptional pieces of high standard investigative journalism. Salvadoran news site *El Faro* is a good example of a regional effort to cover migration from Central America through Mexico and all the way to the United States. With financial support from the Open Society Institute it covers all the complexity and its implications for security, human rights and democracy.

There is also a book, “*Me decían mexicano frijolero*” by Ana Luisa Calvillo, a 108-page testimony of Roberto Rangel, a migrant from the Mexican

State of Michoacán sentenced for homicide to a 57-year stretch at a maximum security prison in La Soledad, California, for a crime he did not commit.

There are also other examples of media funding investigative journalism on migration, such as the newspapers *El Universal* and *Reforma* or news sites *Emeequis*, *Sin Embargo*, *Animal Político*, or political magazines such as *Gatopardo*, but for coverage of the extent of the phenomenon and its complexity the main challenge is still the day-to-day coverage in which sexist, racist and chauvinist language still persists, according to Marco Lara Klahr.

Part of the problem is unreliable sources, untrained journalists, a media industry addicted to press releases and statements of government officials, unverified news stories and news stories published with only one source.

Towards good practice and quality reporting

There has been some excellent coverage from some Mexican media outlets on the plight of migrants as they travel through the country. For example *72migrants.com*, a multimedia project that pays tribute to the 58 men and 14 women from Central and South America murdered by the Los Zetas drug cartel in 2010 in the village of El Huizachal in the municipality of San Fernando, Tamaulipas.

In the words of Alma Guillermprieto, who coordinated the project, the idea was to express outrage and to return names, faces and identities to each victim “because for some media outlets and local authorities, the migrants were just corpses and numbers, not lives cut short, broken families or truncated dreams”.

The project, in which prominent writers, artists, activists and political scientists took part, started as a “virtual altar”, a website with texts, photos, music, flowers and donations, then added a series of radio programmes that were broadcast at a university radio station, *Radio Universidad*. One year later it became something more permanent – a book edited by Almadía and Fronteras Press.

There is also the series on Mexico’s Southern Border Plan produced by digital news site *Animal Político* in collaboration with CIDE (Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas), a Mexican centre for research and higher education, with the financial support of the Ford Foundation.

The project “Southern Border Plan: Hunting migrants” explores the impact of the Mexican government plan supposedly designed to facilitate the

legal flow of commerce, tourism and guest workers in the region, but as some media report, the plan pushed migrants to more dangerous routes and it made Mexico a barrier for undocumented persons heading to the United States.

Animal Político’s investigative journalism took reporters across the border and through the migrant routes, collecting testimonies, talking to official and unofficial sources. The production took about five months and involved a large team of journalists, graphic designers, editors, videographers, researchers and writers. It provides context, infographics, videos, photos, testimonies of migrants, information from government officials, expert opinions and comments from readers.

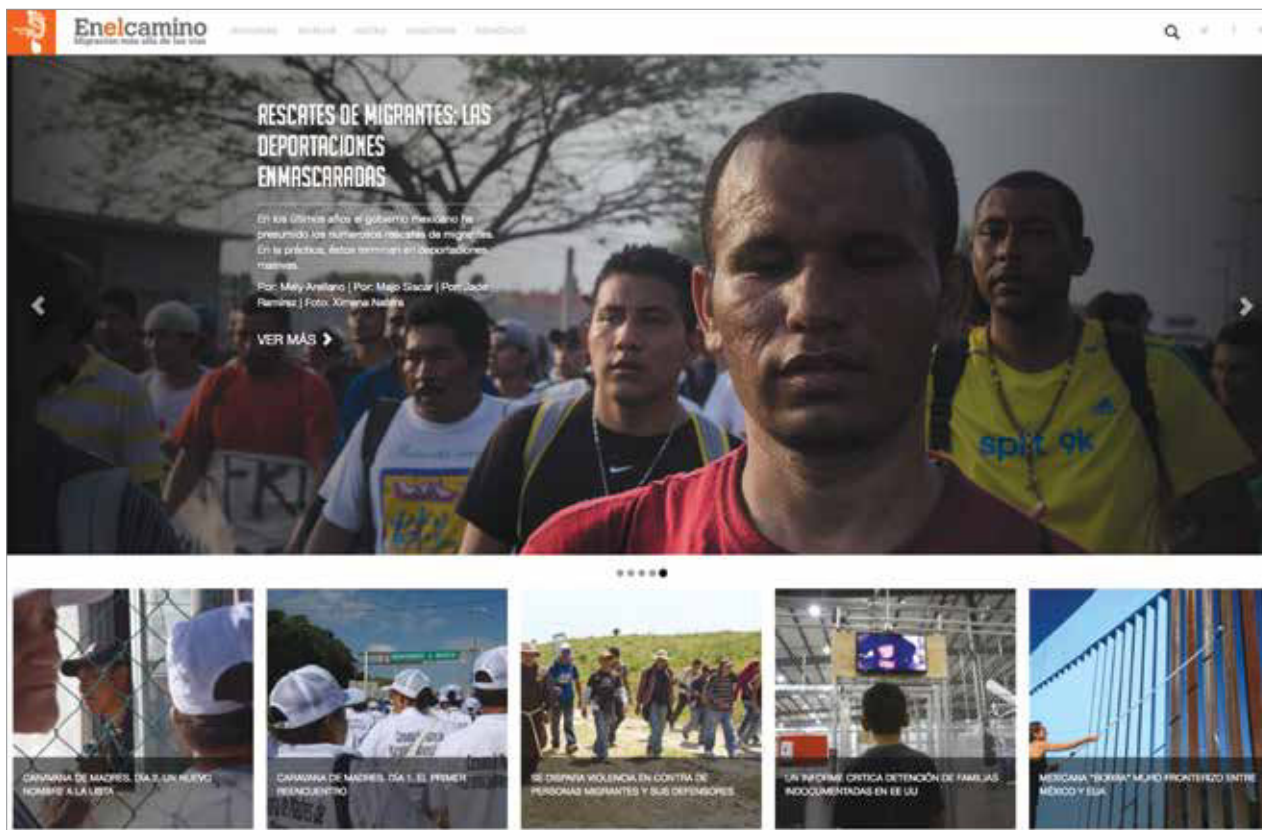
An important element was the security protocol. According to one of the producers, Manuel Ureste, journalists in the field reported on a regular basis to the news editor or to other colleagues, and always followed local advice, especially on no-go places where drug cartels actively operate.

En el Camino (<http://enelcamino.periodistasdeapie.org.mx/>) is another successful online project produced with the support of the Open Society Foundation by Periodistas de a Pie, a network of professional local journalists. As the website states, the purpose was “to make an adequate coverage of migration with an inclusive language, with an emphasis on human rights and respect for human dignity”. The intention was “to contribute to the construction of a culture of journalism that is closer to the reality of immigration, to explain the reasons behind the exodus, the inferno of the route to reach the American dream, the loneliness of the deported”.

The website contains written reportage, short pieces of video and photo galleries. The story of San Fernando, for example, described as a ghost town in the border state of Tamaulipas, shows silent streets, run-down buildings, memories of women raped, murdered, buried in mass graves, people burned alive ... an atmosphere of mistrust among the sparse population.

Another story describes an eight-day search of migrants through Tamaulipas, the most used route and probably the most dangerous, for undocumented people on the way to the United States. What the journalists found, they say, were signs of an “invisible and silent exodus that moves inside trailers or hotels and only emerges in the form of mutilated or assassinated bodies”.

With the examples mentioned above, it would seem that any strong journalistic coverage on migration



would require time, money and a large number of people, but Gardenia Mendoza believes that stories are out there waiting to be told, the only thing journalists need is to keep ears and eyes open, to talk to sources, to talk to migrants and to civil society organisations actively involved in the reality of the migrants.

Gardenia was particularly surprised by the way local and international media covered the story of Mexican government officials allegedly exploiting Cubans passing through *en route* to the United States. “It was like the whole package was there, available to journalists – testimonies, government officials’ statements, audios, videos ... everything.”

Recommendations for action

It seems necessary to increase coverage of migrants in transit in larger media outlets and Mexican TV. Although online and alternative media have done a wonderful job putting a human face to the migrants travelling to Mexico and the ways they are abused their reach is limited.

Changing the population’s perception of migrants and increasing pressure on the government to address crimes committed against them (kidnappings, murder, extortion, sexual assault) requires more mass media coverage and particularly more with a human rights perspective.

Introducing a code of ethics and editorial filters that ban from newsrooms racist, sexist and discriminatory language is crucial. Training journalists on migration and human rights and regular feedback sessions on content produced and distributed, could, perhaps, contribute to professionalisation of media. Playbacks and post-mortems have proven useful.

Coverage of migration has until now focused mainly on security and tragedy, Exploring new angles requires regular insights from sources, civil society organisations, migrants themselves and the audience.

Interacting more actively with the audience could be an inexhaustible source of information and story ideas. Working on media literacy in Mexican society could also build a more proactive audience that demands quality news and information.

Access to information from official sources seems to be a challenge. But organised pressure from media outlets and civil society organisations could perhaps influence the way government officials talk to the media.

Establishing a safety protocol for journalists, particularly in current times, is essential; and exploring alliances with different media outlets to increase the reach of coverage, especially in light of the financial difficulties, could be a way to ensure editorial independence.



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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