



# 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 EJNI provided by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.**

## **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to all of the authors for their contributions and to Douglas Morrison for his skilful editing of the report. We also appreciate the help of EJNI 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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## PHOTO CREDITS

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Page 14: A postcard by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

A photograph of a group of children, likely in a refugee camp, looking towards the camera. The children are of various ages and are wearing simple clothing. The background is a clear blue sky. A dark blue semi-transparent box is overlaid on the bottom left of the image, containing the text 'FOREWORD', 'Beyond the headlines', and '» JAN EGELAND'.

**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 provided 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"









## UNITED KINGDOM

# How journalism plays follow-my-leader with rhetoric of negativity

» ZAK SUFFEE

**For decades the issue of immigration has been a toxic and divisive political issue in the United Kingdom and in 2015, in the wake of the European-wide migration crisis, the debate around asylum and refugees became highly charged, volatile and polemical.**

In its reporting of the crisis the British tabloid press, already criticised in recent years for political bias over reporting of refugee and asylum issues, has found itself again under scrutiny during 2015 – this time from the international community.

In what was probably the lowest point for British media coverage, the country's highest circulation tabloid newspaper, the *Sun*, in April was carpeted by the United Nations human rights chief for describing migrants as “cockroaches” in a piece of journalism which he said was reminiscent of anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda.

In the midst of global media coverage of the tragic scenes of suffering by hundreds of migrants who drowned off the coast of Italy earlier in the month, *Sun* columnist Katie Hopkins wrote:

*“I don't care. Show me pictures of coffins, show me bodies floating in water, play violins and show me skinny people looking sad. I still don't care... these migrants are like cockroaches. They might look a bit 'Bob Geldof's Ethiopia circa 1984', but they are built to survive a nuclear bomb. They are survivors.”*

This incendiary piece appeared only hours before another migrant ship sank off the coast of Libya killing some 800 people. It prompted protests on a massive scale: more than 300,000 online protests and more than 300 complaints to the newly-formed Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO).

But the intervention of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein shows that the frustration over media-inspired hatred, particularly coming from Britain's biggest-selling newspaper extends far beyond the shores of the United Kingdom.

“The Nazi media described people their masters wanted to eliminate as rats and cockroaches,” said Zeid.



His intervention raised two issues concerning Britain's troubled press industry. The first is whether the tabloid press, despite promises of reform, is really willing to regulate itself effectively.

And the second is to explain why Britain appears to be the only settled democracy in Europe where the problem of hate-speech is generated less from outside the newsroom – by extremist political or religious leaders – than from within, where it is flourishes amidst a mix of editorial stereotypes, political bias and commercial self-interest.

As Zeid noted in his protest when bias and prejudice make the headlines in Britain it is often as a result of editorial choice, while elsewhere in Europe where “demonisation” of migrants is also taking place it is “usually led by extremist political parties or demagogues rather than extremist media”.

With a few dips, net immigration has steadily increased since the 1990s. Between 1994 and 2003, the share of annual net migration by asylum seekers ranged from 25 per cent to 54 per cent. This trend had changed decisively by 2004, as net migration increased but asylum seekers declined, so that between 2004 and 2012, their numbers ranged from 4 per cent to 11 per cent and was estimated at about 8 per cent for 2013.

Large peaks and troughs have occurred but each quarterly review of immigration creates in some media circles a new furore, often driven by

outspoken and intolerant political speech and generally leading to negative coverage of asylum seekers or migrants from other countries of the European Union.

This approach to immigration in particular places enormous responsibility on media to provide critical and informed journalism. And it is no longer enough to ensure that coverage avoids hate-speech or intolerance. New forms of communication have opened the door to more opportunities for critical journalism but have also flooded the debate with opinion over fact, pushing freedom of expression into hate-speech and prejudice.

The challenge of reporting the migrant and refugee crisis comes as the British press emerges from a period of intense public scrutiny in which corruption, scandal and political bias in the media have been forensically exposed. In 2012 a major tabloid newspaper was investigated for phone hacking and bribery. The establishment of an inquiry headed by Lord Justice Leveson into the state of the press found deficiencies in press regulation.

In his scathing report on the press published in 2013, Lord Leveson ripped into the media culture. He concluded:

*“There have been too many times when, chasing the story, parts of the press have acted as if its own code, which it wrote, simply did not exist. This has caused real hardship and, on occasion, wreaked havoc with the lives of innocent people whose rights and liberties have been disdained”*

In his report Leveson highlighted political bias in coverage of migration issues and highlighted a number of cases where tabloid media had fabricated stories concerning migrants and minority communities.

He pointed to examples of the tabloid press attacking migrants and recalled how the *Daily Express* 12 years earlier “ran 22 negative front pages stories about asylum seekers and refugees in a single 31-day period”.

That case (the only time in recent history when journalists have reported their own newspaper to the national press council) was also highlighted by Leveson. In his final report Leveson condemned “careless or reckless reporting” and concluded that regular discriminatory, sensational or unbalanced coverage of ethnic minorities, immigrants and/or asylum seekers amounts to press hostility and xenophobia.

He accused newspapers of manufacturing stories to suit their anti-migrant political agenda. A story in *The Sun* headlined «Swan Bake,» for instance,

alleged that gangs of Eastern European asylum seekers were killing and eating swans in London. Unidentified people were cited as witnesses. But the story was totally unfounded.

Among his recommendations aimed at cleansing the press was a demand to dismantle the disgraced and ineffective Press Complaints Commission (PCC), an independent watchdog, but which was seen to be a creature of the press industry rather than an effective guardian of readers' interests by holding the press to account.

This led to the establishment of a Royal Charter on Press Regulation and the appointment of an independent Recognition Panel which aims to monitor press self-regulators to ensure that they meet basic standards of independent governance but without any power to regulate the press and with no role in relation to the contents of newspapers and news websites.

The majority of the country's national and local newspapers decided to ignore this process and created a new body to replace the PCC: the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). Significantly, three leading media – *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and the *Financial Times* – decided not to join.

The new body was established in September 2014 and is tasked with regulating the press in conjunction with the Editors' Code of Practice, ratified by the PCC in December 2011. This Code, written by journalists in the newspaper industry, including current editors of broadsheets and tabloids, provides guidelines and ethics by which journalists are bound – albeit without legal sanction for breaking them.

Particularly important for reporting on migration are the Code Guidance Notes on asylum and refugees, originally established in 2003, which state:

*“Editors should ensure that their journalists covering these issues are mindful of the problems that can occur and take care to avoid misleading or distorted terminology. By way of example, as an ‘asylum seeker’ is someone currently seeking refugee status or humanitarian protection there can be no such thing in law as an ‘illegal asylum seeker’...”*

The guidance notes continue to underline the importance of Clause 12 (Discrimination) and Clause 1 (Accuracy) of the Editors' Code, to mitigate “the danger that inaccurate, misleading or distorted reporting may generate an atmosphere of fear and hostility that is not borne out by the facts”.

Despite the guidelines, many newspapers still fail to adhere to accurate and non-discriminatory report-

ing. A 2015 publication by the Media Standards Trust, as well as reports from campaign group Hacked Off, found a number of breaches to the Code, specifically on migration-related stories in major tabloids, with no rulings from the new self-regulating body IPSO. Most tellingly, there were numerous complaints to IPSO about the article by *Sun* columnist Katie Hopkins referred to earlier, but the organisation said it could not consider the issue, because the complaints did not come from people directly affected, that is from among migrants themselves.

It was in this context that the British press, in the summer of 2015, faced the challenge of reporting on the record numbers of asylum-seekers crossing the Mediterranean to mainland Europe – as many as 522,134 arrived by sea, with 2,892 dead or missing.

The pivotal moment however came at the beginning of September 2015 when a majority of the front pages on one day were dedicated to the death of a three-year-old Syrian Kurd, Aylan Kurdi.

Almost overnight this reframed the rhetoric from scare-mongering, as described by the front page (28 August) of the *Daily Mail* – “Migrants: How many more can we take” – to a more humane call for aid and hospitality “A tiny victim of a human catastrophe” (3 September).

This almost schizophrenic reaction to the so-called “migrant crisis” highlights the tempestuous relationship the UK press has with migration, fearful on the one hand and fearless on the other.

Playing alongside the Mediterranean migration crisis was a story closer to home: a growing number of asylum seekers had been gathering in camps at Calais, with 12 people killed whilst trying to get to the UK up to the end of September 2015.







The situations in Calais and the Mediterranean provided a contrast of approaches to media reporting. A number of articles, from media linked to politics of the right and left, often displayed a knowledge and understanding, albeit limited, of the complexities of European migration, with mention of European directives, regulations, or UN definitions of refugees.

However, many would continue to frame the Calais story in particular with the same rhetoric. This approach may have taken its cue from the Prime Minister's use of the word "swarm" in July to describe the numbers of migrants, but in fact even before then newspapers had long been using war-related terms such as "invasion" to describe migration.

In some cases, numbers and figures were twisted or exaggerated to portray asylum seekers as "sneaking in", yet in other examples lengthy articles provided profiles of asylum seekers, or of those helping refugee organisations working in Calais. The scale of the coverage of the Calais story astonished many, including Alan Travis, Home Affairs Editor of *The Guardian*, who commented:

*"What, however, is extraordinary is that the attempts of a few hundred migrants, many of whom may well be refugees fleeing war and persecution, have completely eclipsed the situation in the Mediterranean, where thousands do continue to attempt to cross"*

The schizophrenic media coverage of migration and refugees issues perhaps reflects current public attitudes. According to an August 2015 poll, 50 per cent of the public are not concerned about immigration, while 50 per cent are. Arguably this concern

has been influenced by the government's rigid and negative response. Britain has refused to be part of any European-wide quota solution to the refugee crisis and has insisted on taking only 20,000 from camps housing Syrian refugees in the region over five years, compared with the hundreds of thousands being admitted by Germany and Sweden. This stance is welcomed and supported by the majority of media.

The migration story is rarely told from the perspective of those arriving, or the resident communities. In telling the story of humane migration, journalists face a number of challenges. "It is no longer about myth-busting or being better informed, the debate has moved on, and is highly politicised", says Alan Travis.

There are a number of sources which provide reliable statistics, yet coverage of migration is still unbalanced. As the pressure group Hacked Off has found, newspapers continue to print inaccuracies and still allow space for extreme views, potentially inciting xenophobia. It may not be the decision of editorial staff to begin these discourses in order to sell papers; however there is little reason for them to diverge from what is becoming the mainstream.

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**"Accurately informing relevant stakeholders and the wider public about migration may be the single most important policy tool in all societies faced with increasing diversity"**

– International Organisation for Migration, 2011

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Without media challenging mainstream discourses in a critical way, coverage of migration risks remaining as polemic. Rare examples of media criticising migration coverage can be found both in *Al Jazeera* and *The Guardian*, which highlights a crisis of reporting rather than a migrant crisis *per se*.

*Al Jazeera's* "Listening Post" provided a 10-minute package solely on the coverage of Calais by the UK Press. They found that it was "difficult to separate truth from fiction", which tended to be a result of the "disproportionate way that stories are covered, which says more about the political agenda of news outlets than the story itself". As Arun Kundnani told *Al Jazeera*:

***“Media are driven by sales, but you can’t simply explain this through supply and demand, this is part of a deeper cultural shift going on in the UK”***

Interestingly, it is online where media such as *Sky News*, *CNN* or *Al Jazeera* have had more balanced and in-depth reporting, analysing who is fleeing and why they do so. This also coincided with a debate the media had around terminology. Many civil society groups began pressing for those arriving to be described as asylum seekers or refugees rather than migrants.

This debate was picked up by many papers, including *The Financial Times*, *The Spectator*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Telegraph*. Many news outlets, such as *The Mirror*, *The Guardian* and *Channel 4 News*, continue to use the word “illegal” in describing undocumented migrants, despite calls to avoid the term from NGOs such as the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants.

As the mainstream media falls within the narratives discussed here, it is the alternative media, or smaller media outlets which have shown themselves able to provide quality and nuanced reporting on migration. Media Diversified, *openDemocracy* and *Ceasefire Magazine* all have in-depth and accurate stories viewing migration from different angles, not toeing the government line, or reducing the argument to slogans.

If journalists are to successfully navigate the tricky waters of hateful and divisive politics around the migration story they will have to focus on balanced and reporting without polemics. People need to understand the facts about migration and need commentary and analysis which use the right terminology and avoid language that is pejorative in telling this story. That means care with words like “illegal” and “migrant.”

The media coverage often underlines the newsroom diversity deficit with limited numbers of women, people from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, and even those with precarious immigration status not themselves writing for major news outlets. Encouraging more journalists from refugee backgrounds will be beneficial in getting closer to the story and its roots.

Reporting around migration often remains framed through an old-fashioned perspective which for some people has an imperial, if not colonial tone. When the Prime Minister portrays Britain as a land attractive to migrants for its health and justice

system, without noting any historical link that may be evident in the nationalities of migrants he plays into familiar and well-worn descriptions of “them” and “us”. That is why there is a need to acknowledge a wider historical perspective when writing about recent migratory trends in order to provide a more well-rounded picture of the situation.

In Britain, some of the best examples of good journalism in this area are those stories which do not quantify the “migrant” story, or qualify between “good” and “bad” migrants. These are the stories that do not play into the invasion or flood imagery but that focus on the human story without emotionally manipulating the reader.

Much media attention has tapped into public uncertainty and focused on the fear of migration, on problems of security, or the threat to UK culture from “migrants”. Often too little attention is given to the failure of the political system to deal with a humanitarian situation, or on political failure over the last five years (and longer) to anticipate this latest crisis. That is why reporting on migration should not focus on scare-mongering about refugees but on holding to account those with political influence.

Given the UK media’s history of impunity and weak levels of self-regulation major press news outlets can be unrestrained in their reporting of migration. For some that means the freedom to use intemperate language, and even hate-speech.

The press in the United Kingdom provides some excellent examples of fine reporting, with good background and sensitive coverage, but in debate where fear often frames the story deceptive handling of the facts, political bias and a rush to publish without sufficient thought as to the impact on the audience provide traps for all journalists.

The unconscionable terrorist killings in Paris on November 11 with a reported link to the Syrian refugee crisis after a migrant’s passport was found at the scene at one of the incidents prompted new media speculation over migration policy. The story is becoming more complex.

Simple narratives – either of so-called migrant “invasion” or of a de-politicised ahistorical human story where hospitality in the form of “Refugees Welcome” is presented as a solution – are not enough. The challenges to journalism will be to show sensitivity, humanity and respect for the facts and, above all, to provide their audience with information they can understand.



## 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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