



# 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  
© 2015 Ethical Journalism Network  
11 Vicarage Road, London, E15 4HD United Kingdom

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the publisher. The contents of this book are covered by authors' rights and the right to use of contributions with the Editor and the authors themselves.

Designed by Mary Schrider (mary.schrider@gmail.com)

**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.

---

## PHOTO CREDITS

Cover image: "Syrian refugees crossing the Serbian-Croatian border"  
© Francesco Malavolta/IOM 2015

Page 1: "Eastern Chad - Universal Children's Day" by UNHCR/ Frédéric Noy, Dec.2011 licensed under CC BY 2.0

Page 3: "Repatriation of IDPs in North Darfur" by UN Photo/Albert Gonzalez Farran licensed under CC BY 2.0

Page 4: "A Cry for Those in Peril on the Sea" by UNHCR/A. Rodriguez licensed under CC BY 2.0

Page 7: "Border fence at Friendship Park, Tijuana" by BBC World Service licensed under CC BY 2.0

Page 10: "Refugees living in an abandoned factory, Lebanon" by Anthony Gale licensed under CC BY 2.0

Page 12: "Refugees near Saida" by Anthony Gale licensed under CC BY 2.0

Page 15: "Supporting Lebanese women as well as Syrians" by Russell Watkins/DFID licensed under CC BY 2.0

A photograph of a group of children, likely refugees, in a camp. In the foreground, a young boy in a blue shirt with text on it looks towards the camera. To his right, another boy in a white shirt is partially visible. In the background, a boy in a yellow shirt stands on a raised platform. Other children are visible, some wearing head coverings. The scene is set outdoors under a clear sky.

**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





---

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

---







## 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 plans 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"







## LEBANON

# Media put humanity in the picture as refugee crisis takes hold

» MAGDA ABU-FADIL

**If there is one country where migration is a meaningful crisis story it is Lebanon which, according to *Forbes-Statista/UNHCR*, has the most refugees per 1,000 inhabitants – 257 in mid-2014. Lebanon's population is estimated at 4.5 million. Syrian refugees are estimated at anywhere from 1.3 to 1.5 million, with unregistered numbers approaching 2 million, according to some studies.**

But the very definition of a refugee, an asylum seeker or a migrant, takes on more than the usual connotations in a country burdened by a history of sectarianism, political and economic uncertainty, feudal patronage and more.

*The Bloomberg View* offers a perspective on who is a refugee, according to the 1951 UN convention and a 1967 protocol, as well as the principle that countries can't send refugees away once they arrive, also known as nonrefoulement. However, Lebanon is not a signatory to the convention, so its situation is both murky and untenable – more so when media are covering a crisis well beyond the country's capacity.

Dr. Guita Hourani, Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center and Assistant Professor at Notre Dame University's Faculty of Law and Political Science wrote in an email interview on August 5, 2015: "As told by the media in Lebanon, various pressures shape the 'migration' story, including highlighting the calamity of displacement and its humanitarian consequences, especially at the onset of the crisis.

"However, as settlement occurred and years passed without any prospect of return, resettlement in a third country and inflow of assistance to the host community and country, the story began to recount the impact of the crisis in economic, social, and demographic terms.

"The latter was also emphasised as the 'takfiris' (Islamic fundamentalists who denounce the 'others' as apostates) began to infiltrate vulnerable refugee communities. The story changed too to reflect the economic recession and increased inflation – due in part to the protracted Syrian crisis, the involvement of Hezbollah in the fighting in Syria, and the lack of consensus on electing a president for Lebanon, among other issues."



**Media usually deal with refugees as a block and not as individual stories. There is some good coverage, but that does not represent the mainstream media.**

**– Diana Moukalled**

She added that Lebanese and foreign media coverage had contributed to the stereotyping of both communities – refugee and host. A point highlighted in October 2014, when the daily *Assafir* said the wrong questions in headlines and online content were being asked, citing examples such as: “Do you support not selling to Syrians from our shops to tighten the noose on them? Lebanese, who protects your rights to jobs? What do you say about illegal competition? After security, how does Syrian migration affect the Lebanese economy? What’s the Labour Ministry doing?”

In June 2015, the same paper ran a telling headline: “The Patriation/Naturalisation Choice: Syrians or Palestinians?” in reference to the hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers who have flooded in since the Syrian conflict erupted in 2011 and the earlier creation of the state of Israel in 1948, leading to successive waves of people from neighbouring countries and what their presence has meant to the already-sensitive issue of “sectarian balance”.

An alarmist article entitled “Before Lebanon Becomes a Depot for War Refugees” in the daily *Al Joumhouriya* on July 12, 2015 shed light on the crisis, noting that no country has had to face refugee numbers that almost match its population.

It quoted Rock-Antoine Mehanna, Dean of the Business School at Beirut’s La Sagesse University, pointing to an internal economic cycle within the main Lebanese cycle, when Syrian merchants buy products in Syria then sell them to other Syrian merchants in Lebanon who, in turn, sell them to Syrian labourers in Lebanon, thereby creating an economic crisis.

In January 2015, the daily *Annahar* published a diatribe by Hussein Hazoury who said Hamra Street, Beirut’s one-time Champs Elysées, had changed colour from “Hamra” (red) to “sawda” (black) with the unregulated influx of (dark-skinned) Syrians. He complained that the street had lost its charm, that the Syrian presence had changed Hamra’s demography, and that restaurant owners were decrying the proliferation of cheap Syrian labour and competition from Syrian eateries. The comments caused such a backlash on social media, charging *Annahar* with racism, that its administration had to publish a clarification hours later saying the commentary didn’t reflect the paper’s editorial line or values and that the writer had just expressed his personal observations.

However, there are stories in print, broadcast and online media that show sympathy for refugees and displaced people and that focus on the humanitarian aspects of the crisis.

A case in point is the story of Fares Khodor, a friendly 11-year-old Syrian boy who in 2015 sold flowers on the streets of the Hamra district and who one day on his way back home was killed by the anti-regime coalition’s air campaign, according to news reports. His death triggered a social media frenzy of sympathy, but it also led to unsubstantiated reports and questionable pictures of a boy resembling Fares who reportedly was said to have carried out a suicide attack in Syria.

For Diana Moukalled, a television journalist, documentary producer, columnist and women’s advocate,

Lebanese media contribute to hate-speech against refugees, displaced persons and asylum seekers in news stories, comments and columns. “Media usually deal with refugees as a block and not as individual stories,” she said. “There is some good coverage, but that does not represent the mainstream media.”

She added that during an assault by militants on the Lebanese army in the Ersal region near Syrian refugee encampments in the summer of 2014, media tended to label all refugees as terrorists.

Asked in an email interview August 5, 2015 whether the pressure of time, competition among Lebanese media and sources of information affected coverage, Moukalled replied: “The time factor is minimal. But there is a lack of professional and ethical will to cover these issues fairly. Again, there are really good reports sometimes but the main approach is negative and full of stereotyping and labeling.”

The Maharat Foundation released an invaluable study in August 2015 on Lebanese media’s coverage of mostly Syrian and Palestinian refugees, migrants, and displaced persons.

The 58-page project, *Monitoring Racism in Lebanese Media: Representations of “The Syrian” and “The Palestinian” in News Coverage*, takes a critical look at how these two communities are portrayed. It analysed coverage in newspapers, television, radio and news websites.

The study said the presence of Syrian and Palestinian refugees had long been a factor of division and conflict among Lebanese. That has translated into the political and media discourse, which becomes fodder for scaremongering against strangers and hate-speech that plays on identity, demography, everyday life and national-security issues.

Monitoring organisations representing different political and sectarian leanings it aimed to demonstrate the existence – or lack of – racism and whether it is overt or covert in media that signed a code of ethics in 2013.

Conducted between February 5 and 25, 2015 the study focused on determining the subject/topic of the media discourse towards Syrians and Palestinians in Lebanon and quantifying media content, its position and the tone used. It analysed the types of racial discourse, determined the targeted parties or categories and examined the journalistic framework and various stereotypes of the media discourse.

Using a very methodical approach to define racism, the study examined outward and obvious mani-

festations as well as indirect, veiled and reserved types. It noted that for the past century the media had played a key role in promoting and reproducing racism by looking at the stranger, the foreigner, the immigrant, the refugee, the displaced person and minorities as problems rather than inseparable parts of the host community.

Hard news stories tended to focus on crime, violence, drugs, disruption of security and terrorism, or on analyses that characterised the stranger as not only different but as an element of instability and a threat. In Lebanese print media Syria had most coverage, compared to the Palestinian issue. Only one newspaper had very little coverage of the topic.

The Syrian-related topics were:

- ▷ The right of entrance and exit in Lebanon
- ▷ Peaceful sit-ins and demonstrations
- ▷ Integration
- ▷ Civil, social, economic rights for refugees
- ▷ Civil society and activities
- ▷ Taking advantage (abuse) of women and children
- ▷ Medical care, hospitalisation, health and public safety
- ▷ Crimes against Syrians and Palestinians
- ▷ Learning and education
- ▷ Disasters and accidents
- ▷ Competing with (Lebanese) manual labour, irregular work, travelling salesmen
- ▷ Crimes committed by Syrians and Palestinians
- ▷ Housing, social care, infrastructure, water and electricity
- ▷ Government and administrative rulings
- ▷ The burden of refuge and responsibility of different parties
- ▷ Financial aid, food, clothing and supplies
- ▷ Arrests and security measures

The Palestinian-related topics were similar but in a different order, with more focus on security, social and health matters and civil rights.

Palestinians in refugee camps and others outside the camps (not tent cities but more deprived urban areas) have had outbreaks of violence over the years – often involving their respective warring factions and in earlier times, against the Lebanese themselves. Stories on Syrians and Palestinians were mostly on the inside pages, never on the front.



A key element of the negative security and terrorism-related issues, based on raw reports from security sources, is the fear within host communities that Syrians seeking refuge from the war could be members of terrorist groups, or be easy prey for terrorist recruiters.

TV coverage was mostly hard news, with little time allocated to features and interviews. The Syrian issue had most coverage, given the fast-changing nature of events. The tone varied between negative and positive, depending on the topic in question. Radio reports were mostly hard news, with hardly any features and very few interviews. Security issues, which took on a negative tone, predominated whereas social matters were positive. News websites offered a mixed bag, but human interest and feature stories were mostly positive.

In its content analysis, the *Maharat* survey found that Lebanese media were somewhere in the middle on racism. The definition of Syrians as “displaced” or “refugees” was a bone of contention. The same questions could apply to Palestinians, except Palestinians are recognised more as refugees worldwide and have been for decades.

Figures and statistics also varied considerably from source to source and agency to agency, which affected coverage and how stories were skewed, it said. It used specific questions to determine whether news and media reports were racist, how to determine racism (in words and pictures), and subliminal messages.

Scaremongering was a key element, relying on superlatives, exaggeration and manipulation of facts on the adverse effects of ballooning numbers of refugees, as well as the economic/social/security burden and existential threats to the indigenous population.

According to *Maharat*, the mixture of facts and value judgments exacerbates matters, as do expressions of hate and the demonisation of “the other” in Lebanon where 18 religious sects are officially recognised and vie for economic and political power, pitting locals against refugees and migrants in an “us-versus-them” scenario. The vocabulary used was quite telling, with some expressions dating back to the 1975-90 Lebanese civil war.

It concluded that the media landscape was a reflection of Lebanon’s complex makeup that creates a media discourse built on fear. Political differences are sharp, refugees may easily pose security threats since, unlike in other countries, they are often armed, so the locals are in full mobilisation mode.

To compound the problem, Lebanon has taken in Palestinian refugees from camps in Syria, who

like their counterparts in Lebanon, rely on subsistence handouts from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency that caters specifically to their needs. The agency is woefully under-funded and has cut back on assistance and personnel across the Middle East. It has been providing Palestinian refugees in Syria with \$100 per family per month housing subsidies and it cut food subsidies from \$30 to \$27 per head in April 2015.

Lebanese authorities fear the ramifications could lead to a social explosion, mostly in their own Palestinian refugee camps, where hundreds of thousands have resided since 1948. They also fear such a conflagration could spread to other areas.

Media, understandably, jump on headline-grabbing statements by officials calling for radical solutions. “Some political discourses call for repatriation of refugees,” said *LBCI* TV correspondent Yazbek Wehbe in an email interview August 5, 2015. “Media cover these statements and activities about refugees and sometimes disseminate pejorative terms used by those they report, but it’s unseemly.”

Wehbe explained that no intentional anti-refugee stance by the media existed, nor did any systematic editorial policy about such coverage. “Of course one can’t force a station to cover the topic one way or the other, but it’s important to avoid racism and patronising them and to focus on the humanitarian aspect, bearing in mind that no small number of Lebanese look down on Syrians because most menial labourers ... are Syrians and because Lebanon was subjected to 30 years of Syrian political and military tutelage that half the population rejected.”

To help mitigate the problem, the Samir Kassir Foundation (SKEYES) conducted a workshop on coverage of the refugee crisis in February 2014. The aim was to highlight the role of NGOs in helping refugees and the definition of human-rights journalism that can move public opinion to action. Journalists were also briefed with facts and figures from international organisations on what assistance they’re providing – shelter, water, food, education and protection.

A bone of contention between the Lebanese government and international organisations is how many refugees are actually registered. Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil has repeatedly maintained international organisations are registering refugees and displaced people without referring back to the government – a claim denied by the organisations and other ministers in Lebanon’s fractious cabinet – and that such procedures were illegal, thereby contravening international conventions, since any registration must occur with the host country’s consent.

Participants at the SKEYES event discussed the media's need to check numbers accurately and scientifically, notably the increase in thefts with rising numbers of refugees and charges leveled by refugees and others against NGOs that are allegedly scalping donor funds.

A panelist recommended upgrading coverage by following basic human-rights guidelines:

- ▷ Participation and collection of **eyewitness reports** from the field as well as inclusion of all different views
- ▷ Accountability and **holding officials responsible** for their duties
- ▷ Use of **unbiased and non-discriminatory and impartial language** to reinforce media credibility
- ▷ **Empowerment** by informing people of their rights and presentation of the issue to public opinion as well as **presentation of solutions** and efforts that can be implemented
- ▷ **Linking articles to international human rights standards** and presentation of legal views on the issue as well as local laws

Participants also examined how media were ill- or under-informed about the work of NGOs and aid organisations, their funding, disbursement of assistance, tensions between refugees and host communities over resources, refugees' lack of knowledge about their rights, as well as the media's obligation to shed light on projects that help large numbers of displaced people.

In mid-June, 2015, Amnesty International launched its world report from Lebanon entitled *The Global Refugee Crisis: A Conspiracy of Neglect*. Amnesty also released a sister publication *Lebanon: Pushed to the Edge: Syrian Refugees Face Increased Restrictions in Lebanon* since the country is considered the epicentre of the Syrian refugee crisis.

A June 16, 2015 story in *Assafir* described how participants at the Press Syndicate launch of the Amnesty report had to walk through the building's garage, where a Syrian refugee family had sought shelter, in order to feel the neglect and need and hear through the window of a room lacking light the shouts of children deprived of school.

Lebanese media have repeatedly decried the lack of burden-sharing by other countries in the face of an endless and growing crisis. Meanwhile, aid organisations and NGOs continue to pitch in with the humanitarian effort and with helping media tell the story.

Asked whether he saw pressures shaping the way the migration story is told from the perspective of resident communities in Lebanon, the Lebanese Red Cross director of public relations and communications Ayad El Mounzer said: "The Lebanese Red Cross is not interfering in any 'migration' issues; its only concern is to support the people's needs."



In their contribution to the book *In Line with the Divine: The Struggle for Gender Equality in Lebanon* published in 2015 by Abelian Academic in the US, authors Rouba El Helou and Maria Bou Zeid examine the absence of women in the refugee picture. In the chapter "Dissonance and Decorousness: Missing Images of Syrian Women Refugees in the Lebanese Media", an introductory summary explains the missing media components:

"Thus far Lebanese media coverage has centred on the impact of the displacement of Syrian women refugees, especially their need for humanitarian aid, their experiences of rape and torture, or sexual harassment during settlement. This partial coverage has given a one-sided perception of Syrian women suffering from forced migration.

"Findings based on content analysis of media releases between 2011 and 2013 show that the media have neglected the resilience of Syrian female refugees, their coping tactics and mechanisms within their new environment and the challenges they face. Media reports have failed to highlight how these women have become active in handling the organisation and distribution of aid and how they are facilitating their families' lives.

"They also have ignored the fact that Syrian women use their creativity to provide their families with basic needs through establishing and running small businesses or working for Lebanese employers."



## 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)



Ethical  
Journalism  
Network

[www.ethicaljournalismnetwork.org](http://www.ethicaljournalismnetwork.org)  
[twitter.com/EJNetwork](https://twitter.com/EJNetwork)  
[aidanpatrickwhite@gmail.com](mailto:aidanpatrickwhite@gmail.com)