

# RAM BULLETIN

## Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass media Project

Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

21 March 2001

### ROMA ASYLUM-SEEKERS UNDER ATTACK IN ROMANIA AND THE UK

*"Recently, at the World Congress of the International Roma Union in Prague, 400 representatives of this widely scattered minority heard, in their own common language, details of all the injustices done to the Roma people over the centuries: injustices that have yet to be documented at European level and range from discrimination and exclusion through expulsion to persecution and extermination."*

German writer Gunter Grass speaking at the European Conference against Racism, 11 October 2000.

According to *The Daily Mail* (8 & 9 March) the flight of a Roma family from Romania who smuggled themselves into the UK beneath a Eurostar train, was more of a criminal conspiracy than a genuine attempt to obtain asylum.

*'It (was) certainly nothing to do with being persecuted. Gypsies have not been persecuted in Romania since the Ceausescu regime... If they are picked on by the police, it is because they have committed a crime'* (8 Mar).

The family disappeared from Oakington Detention Centre, the day after the *Femail* magazine section ran a three page feature (*Asylum seeker or gangster queen? The disturbing truth about this Eurostar refugee. They all think it is their right to steal*, DM, 8 Mar) based entirely upon anonymous sources.

Among the Mail's informants were unnamed Romanians in London who claimed to know the family, and 'a source in the immigration service' (9 Mar).

Is it appropriate that civil servants responsible for processing asylum applications should be passing confidential information to journalists in advance of a formal decision about the case? Especially when the newspaper concerned is renowned for the highly pejorative and xenophobic language employed when covering asylum stories?

The disappearance of the family may lend credibility to the Mail's conspiracy theory, but it also raises questions about the impact of sensational coverage.

In an 'investigative' piece (*Persecuted? Not in Romania today*, 9 Mar) the Mail claimed that Roma now suffer little more than occasional discrimination.

Their source is '*the rotund*' Ivan Georgiou, General Secretary of the Roma Party and one of its two MPs, *'looking every inch the sharp suited politician in his well appointed Bucharest office'*.

But apart from its supercilious comments the Mail fails to place his cautious words to a foreign journalist in proper context.

A team of journalists working with PressWise has just returned from a week training 50 colleagues from all over Romania. The emotive and biased coverage of the Mail is little different to what Roma can expect at home.

Antipathy towards them is endemic; the newspapers constantly blame them for all society's ills - including bringing Romania into disrepute by seeking asylum elsewhere! The police regularly feed

confidential case files about Roma to journalists

There are Roma villains, just as there are criminals within any community, but the Roma are ostracised, living in virtual ghettos on the outskirts of towns. The official population statistics (quoted by the Mail) are almost ten years out of date. One UN official working with the Roma estimates that the true figure may be four times higher at close to two million (almost 10% of the population).

Levels of literacy and immunisation are well below the national average, but numbers unemployed or in prison are disproportionately high.

Those wishing to complain about the Mail articles may wish to point out the loaded comments in the features add a disturbing gloss to allegations that come from unnamed sources and might fall foul of both Clause 1.iv (Accuracy – Newspapers whilst free to be partisan, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact) and Clause 13 (Discrimination).

They may also wish to comment about the way in which the photo of the family home of one of the asylum seekers was taken. The house may have 5 bedrooms and be modern (and why not) but the angle from which is shot makes it look larger than it is, especially when compared with a much grander but unconnected residence on the same page.

The escapees have plenty of questions to answer, but so has the Mail – not to mention the immigration service.

Perhaps a few letters could be fired off to Barbara Roche to see what she thinks about the disclosure of personal details by her staff...

*For full text of Gunter Grass speech see: [www.refugeenet.org/](http://www.refugeenet.org/)*

## RAM Activities

### a. Sheffield meeting

On Friday March 23<sup>rd</sup>, at 10 am, the RAM Project is running a two hour media group discussion on asylum seekers and refugees in Sheffield Voluntary Action, 69 Division Street, Sheffield City Centre.

*For further information contact Terry on 0121 588 6341 or Anna on 0117 941 5889, email:*

[ram@presswise.org.uk](mailto:ram@presswise.org.uk)

### b. Seminar for exiled journalists

A free seminar for refugee journalists who want to build on their skills in order to work in the UK media takes place in London on Sunday 25 March.

Run by the RAM Project, the seminar takes place at the Stockwell and Vauxhall Neighbourhood Centre, 157 South Lambeth Road, London.

Starting at 11am the seminar will offer advice to journalists who want to start publications, intend to freelance or are looking for work in the mainstream media.

Says RAM co-ordinator Terry Williams: "One way of putting balance into the UK media coverage of asylum seekers is to help refugee journalists get back into the trade."

"That is why RAM supports the New Vision web site and electronic newspaper run by refugee journalists.

"The London seminar is the start of a process. We want to log the needs of exiled journalists and help them secure funding for support and training."

Members of the National Union of Journalists and the NUJ's Black Members Council and Ethics Council will contribute to the seminar.  
*Places can still be booked by ringing Anna on 0117 9415889 or emailing [ram@presswise.org.uk](mailto:ram@presswise.org.uk)*

### c. Enforcement and Detention Figures

In January 1,334 asylum seekers were in detention in the UK under the terms of the Immigration Act 1971, according to the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC),

Among them are 414 held in detention centres, 920 in prisons with convicted criminals, and only 231 in reception centres.

The Prison Service makes places available to the Immigration and Nationality Department as and when required. Asylum seekers and immigration detainees are subject to prison rules and treated as remand prisoners.

Most of them have been jailed for travelling on forged passports. Conviction of asylum seekers for such an offence is in breach of Article 31 of the Geneva Convention.

Those convicted can appeal and seek compensation from the Home Office. This month two Albanian asylum seekers who had each spent three months in prison for travelling on forged passports won compensation and have been accepted as 'genuine' refugees.

According to *The Guardian*, (14 Mar 01), *'between 500 and 1,000 are thought to have been prosecuted each year between 1994, when prosecutions were stepped up, and the judgement (of the high court) in 1999. Most sentences were for 6 months, some were 9 months, and a few 12 months.'*

*For more information visit [www.ncadc.org.uk/](http://www.ncadc.org.uk/) or [www.guardian.co.uk/refugees](http://www.guardian.co.uk/refugees)*

### d. Dying to get into Fortress Europe

Information on the deaths of refugees seeking a safe haven and a place to live in Europe is getting lost and rarely appears in the media, although one popular Spanish magazine recently published pictures of corpses washed up on its shores.

Some die in the boats bringing them to Europe, others in the backs of lorries, and some lose hope and kill themselves in detention centres.

The anti-racist group UNITED has already collected a shocking list of 2,214 such deaths, and would like more information (especially newspaper cuttings). UNITED has produced a campaign poster on the topic. *For further information, contact UNITED on tel +31-20-6834778, fax +31-20-6834582, email: [united@united.non-profit.nl](mailto:united@united.non-profit.nl)*

### UK ranks 7th in the EU and 73rd in the world for refugees

Sierra Leone's refugee 'burden' is 5,000 times that of the UK, when compared to national wealth.

New figures published by UNHCR show numbers of refugees as a proportion of the host country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Selected country indicators place the UK at 78 in a world league table with 0.2 people (265,000) 'of concern to UNHCR' per \$1 billion of GDP at the end of 1999. Top of the league are Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Azerbaijan.

The UK comes 6th in Europe (EU), with less than one third of the 'burden' shouldered by top-ranking Sweden. Comparing only figures for refugees against GDP, the UK ranks 7th in the EU and 73rd in the world.

*For more information, contact Richard Williams, International Protection Policy Officer, Refugee Council on 020 7840 4405 or 020*

7820 3000 ext 3349 Fax: 020 7820 3107, or visit the UNHCR web site [www.unhcr.ch/statist/trends/table.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/statist/trends/table.pdf)

## New Projects for Refugees and Asylum Seekers

### a. The Immigration and Asylum Resource Project

Established in January 2001, the Immigration and Asylum Resource Project (IARP) is a resource for agencies and organisations in Birmingham and the West Midlands which assists people with immigration problems and asylum seekers.

It organises training and information services in co-operation with other agencies, and undertakes casework for clients who are inadequately served by existing provision in the area, in particular for asylum seekers. It also assists local organisations campaigning on immigration and asylum issues.

IARP is managed by the Asian Resource Centre, a community-based project in Handsworth, Birmingham.

*For more information email [iarp@wordsmith.demon.co.uk](mailto:iarp@wordsmith.demon.co.uk) or visit the web site: <http://home.btconnect.com/Asian-Resource-C/IARP>*

### b. Relief Line

This recently formed not-for-profit organisation is recycling goods to provide relief to asylum seekers, refugees and other people who may be in condition of need, hardship or distress.

The project works closely with organisations that provide front-line services to asylum seekers in the UK.

Relief Line will be launched officially on Sunday 29 April 2001 at Cornerstone House, 14 Willis Road, Croydon at 2pm. Visit the website (still in development) [www.reliefline.co.uk](http://www.reliefline.co.uk)

### c. Refugee Week moves forward to June

This year Refugee Week will be celebrated in June rather than November to take advantage of the (hopefully!) warm weather, and to bring it into line with the first International Refugee Day on 20 June.

The theme is the cultural, social and economic contribution that refugees have made, and continue to make, to life in the UK.

**It offers an excellent 'peg' for positive refugee stories – why not ask your local paper, radio and TV station how they intend to cover it.**

Many of the events will be arts based with venues all over the country showcasing work from refugee groups or individuals.

London's South Bank will host 'Celebrating Sanctuary', with music, dance, theatre and poetry from refugee artists. 'Artists in Exile' plan to launch that week.

By raising public awareness, Refugee Week hopes to dispel some of the myths surrounding the asylum issue, and give refugees in the UK an opportunity to assert and celebrate their cultural identity. *If you would like to organise an event, or just want more information, contact the Refugee Week Information Line on 020 7820 3055, email: [Refugee.Week@RefugeeCouncil.org.uk](mailto:Refugee.Week@RefugeeCouncil.org.uk)*

### d. Nansen Refugee Award Nominations

The Nansen Refugee Award (previously the Nansen Medal) is being revamped and linked to the World Refugee Day, 20 June. The award ceremony will be held in Geneva.

The award (a commemorative medal and a monetary prize) is given annually to an individual, group or non-governmental organisation for outstanding services to the cause of refugees. Instituted by UNHCR in 1954 the award keeps alive the spirit

of Fridtjof Nansen, the first League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

To nominate someone, email [nansen@unhcr.ch](mailto:nansen@unhcr.ch) with

- \* your name, title, organisation, address, phone, fax and email;
- \* the nominee's name, title, organisation, office address, phone, fax and email, and their home address, phone, fax and email; the name, title,
- \* organisation, phone, fax and email of three referees, who familiar with the nominee's work but not related to them;
- \* brief details of the nominee's professional background and why s/he deserves the award.

Deadline for submissions: 30 April 2001.

*Get a UNHCR nomination form via the UNHCR web site [www.unhcr.ch](http://www.unhcr.ch)*

## Two guides for asylum seekers and activists

### 1. Signposts: information for asylum seekers and refugees

*Signposts* is a new comprehensive self-help guide for refugees and asylum seekers, produced by the National Information Forum (NIF), providing simple and accurate information for new arrivals in the UK about their rights and entitlements.

*To get a free copy, contact NIF on 020 7402 668, fax: 020 7402 1259, email: [info@nif.org.uk](mailto:info@nif.org.uk)*

### 2. European Address Book Against Racism

The 9th edition of the European Address Book Against Racism has been published by UNITED.

It contains addresses (including e-mail and websites) of 1,980 organisations, 133 funding institutions and 264 anti-racist magazines. It is an invaluable contact book for those active against racism, fascism, nationalism and in support of migrants and refugees in Europe.

*To obtain a copy contact UNITED on tel +31-20-6834778; fax +31-20-6834582; or email: [united@united.non-profit.nl](mailto:united@united.non-profit.nl)*

# Cut out and keep COMMUNICATOR

*These PressWise Guides are designed to assist those wishing to play a more active role in improving media coverage of refugee and asylum issues.*

## 3. GETTING ON THE AIRWAVES

### Pre-recorded radio interviews

(continued from 26 Jan edition of RAM Bulletin)

#### When the reporter arrives:

- Be hospitable (s/he is a worker doing a job, often on low pay);
- Explain what your time constraints are;
- Ask what s/he wants to talk about, and negotiate to ensure that your agenda and theirs are covered.

*Don't be surprised if the topic has changed slightly — a statement in Parliament may have 'moved the story on', for instance. Just ask for an explanation so that you can consider what difference it might make to your position.*

- Before the interview starts ask what question s/he will begin with.

*A good interviewer will have some prepared questions, but will be looking for cues in your answers for fresh lines of enquiry.*

- Explain the message you want to get across and ask to be prompted if you stray from the topic.

*A bit of 'negotiation' won't hurt. The reporter may have been told what to get from you, but you are under no obligation to go through with the interview. Reporters hate to leave empty-handed. They are always up against deadlines and you are their meal ticket. You have the whip hand and compromise is always possible.*

#### Before the interview starts:

- The reporter will ask you to say a few words to check voice levels and make sure you can be heard distinctly and evenly.
- Once any adjustments have been made — to the recorder or to you — try to keep your position still and your voice level constant.

*This will help the listeners to pay attention to you, and makes it easier to edit the tape 'seamlessly' — so don't move away from the 'mic', or shout suddenly or whisper.*

#### During the interview:

- Be friendly in your responses and put a smile into your voice — you are trying to have a conversation with all the listeners, and no one likes to be lectured.

- Try to repeat the question at the start of your answer — this allows the editor to remove the voice of the interviewer where appropriate.

*For example: In answer to 'When do you expect the Minister to make a statement?', DON'T say 'Next Tuesday', DO say 'We expect the Minister to issue a statement next Tuesday'*

- Keep it simple and try not to confuse the listeners who may know little about the topic or your organisation

*Long, complicated answers could be edited out, and so reduce the effectiveness of the interview or even misrepresent your case.*

*- Avoid jargon and abbreviations — you could lose your thread if the interviewer has to butt in and explain what you are talking about.*

- Try not to 'gabble'. Watch the interviewer to see if you going on for too long — that may be the reason s/he interrupts you.

*Unless they are 'tuned-in' to a formal talk, listeners begin to lose concentration if the same voice continues much beyond two minutes.*

- If you make a mistake, or drift off the subject, STOP — cough, laugh or simply say "I'm sorry, can we do that again?"

*The reporter will understand. If you perform well, s/he will get a better interview. Only the unscrupulous few will leave in genuine mistakes — and that is good grounds for a complaint later.*

#### When the interview is over:

- Discuss how it went, and remind the reporter of the important parts.

- Ask to hear some of it, if time allows.

*However, editorial control is NOT in your hands, and may not be in the hands of the reporter. S/he may well edit the tape, but the producer/editor will be shaping the programme, and s/he will only use the bits that 'fit', and is at liberty to drop the whole thing...*

- Find out when the item is to be broadcast, and make sure the reporter knows how to contact you (especially outside office hours).

#### After it is broadcast:

- If the programme goes well, ring up and congratulate those involved — it's a good way of being remembered, and it increases your chance of being asked back!
- If you have complaints about it, get members of your organisation to ring in and say so.

*All comments on programmes are 'logged' by the station and passed to the producer. Tapes are kept for up to 3 months, and if you are not satisfied with a station's response to a formal complaint, you can pursue it through the Radio Authority. PressWise (0117 941 5889) can advise on how to do this.*

## 'PEG' BOARD *the diary page*

**Keep your ears and eyes open for events which can provide you, and the media with a 'peg' on which to hang positive stories about refugees or asylum seekers.**

**Help to set the media agenda by generating stories rather than having to react to theirs.**

**Keep your media contacts informed about what is happening and why it is relevant for them.**

Saturday 17-Sunday 25 March 2001  
**European-wide Action Week Against Racism**

Across Europe hundreds of activities – debates, lectures, rallies, exhibitions & concerts - have been organised in 29 countries. Press campaigns and radio shows are organised in Finland, Germany, Hungary, Luxemburg, Malta, Moldova, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Yugoslavia. For more information, visit UNITED-website (<http://www.united.non-profit.nl/pages/act01mrt.htm>)

Wednesday 21 March 2001, 10am – 4.30pm

**HIDDEN TREASURE:**  
Prior skills, experiences and competencies of immigrant women.

The qualifications of immigrant women often go unrecognised. Venue: Main Lecture Theatre, West Building, University of East London Docklands Campus, 4-6 University Way, London E16 2RD. Fee £10.00.

Contact: Val Nobbs on 020 7247 7819, email: [admin@bridgeproject.co.uk](mailto:admin@bridgeproject.co.uk)

**Friday 23 March, 10 am**  
**Sheffield Asylum Media Group.** Organised by RAM. Venue: Sheffield Voluntary Action, 69 Division Street, Sheffield City Centre. For information contact Terry on 0121 588 6341 or Anna on 0117 941 5889, email: [ram@presswise.org.uk](mailto:ram@presswise.org.uk)

**Saturday 24 March**  
**Hands off Asylum Seekers, Keep Racism Out of the General Election**  
Rally with speakers, music, dance, poetry and prose. Organised by the National Assembly Against Racism to celebrate the UN Day Against Racism. Venue: Trafalgar Square, London WC2. Contact: Sabby Dhalu on 020 7247 9907, email: [contactsaar@hotmail.com](mailto:contactsaar@hotmail.com)

**Sunday 25 March**  
**One day Seminar for refugee journalists**  
Organised by RAM. Venue: the Stockwell and Vauxhall Neighbourhood Centre, 157 South Lambeth Road, London. To book contact Terry on 0121 588 6341 or Anna on 0117 941 5889, email: [ram@presswise.org.uk](mailto:ram@presswise.org.uk)

**Tuesday 27 March**  
**Halabja and Anfal: The Forgotten Genocides**  
Organised by Exiled Writers Ink. Speakers include: Rebwar Fatah (Director of Kurdishmedia), Nazand Begikhani (PressWise); Owen Bowcott (*The Guardian*), Ann Clwyd (Labour MP) Venue: Freedom Forum, Stanhope House, Stanhope Place, London W2 2HH. Contact Jennifer Langer on 020 8458 1910, email: [Jennifer@exiledwriters.fs.net.co.uk](mailto:Jennifer@exiledwriters.fs.net.co.uk)

**Saturday 31st March**  
**Protest against Nazis in Oldham**  
11am outside Oldham College, Rochdale Rd. Oldham. (Buses leave Chorlton St. Bus Station Manchester 10am). For more details tel Mark 0161 881 7352 or contact the Committee to Defend Asylum Seekers Immigration Aid Unit, 400 Cheetham Hill Rd. Manchester M8 9LE email [manchester@defend-](mailto:manchester@defend-)

[asylum.org](http://asylum.org) or  
[Markrantz@aol.com](mailto:Markrantz@aol.com)

**Wednesday 4th April, 6:00 - 8:00 pm**

**Open Borders: Is there a case for abolishing immigration controls?**

Organised by the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants and the National Assembly Against Racism. Speakers include Teresa Hayter; Ann Dummett; Jeremy Harding; Martha Osamor; Ed Mynott; Chair: Pritan Singh, Senior Lecturer, Oxford Brookes University. Venue: Hong Kong Theatre, Clement Building, London School of Economics, Aldwych, London WC2 Admission Free. For further information contact: Don Flynn, Policy & Projects Worker, Tel: 020 7553 7471, Fax: 020 7251 8707, email: [don@jcwi.org.uk](mailto:don@jcwi.org.uk)

**Saturday 7 April**  
**Manchester Defend Asylum-seekers Demonstration**

Keep racism out of the general election – asylum seekers welcome here! Assemble, 12 Noon, All Saints, Oxford Rd. Manchester, march via China Town to rally in the Peace Gardens, St Peters Square at 1.30pm.

**Sunday 29th April**  
**Launch of Relief Line for refugees, asylum seekers and others in hardship or distress.** Venue: Cornerstone House, 14 Willis Road, Croydon, 2.00 pm For further information, contact Robert on email: [egwea@hotmail.com](mailto:egwea@hotmail.com), tel & fax: 020 8409 0293.

### USEFUL WEBSITES

Visit [www.ramproject.org.uk](http://www.ramproject.org.uk) for news, contacts & information

**Journalists should always check their sources – and so should you. When quoting facts and figures always indicate your source. Authoritative information is vital if you want to be taken**

**seriously by the media. Here are some websites you might like to check out.**

European Roma Rights Centre  
[www.errc.org/](http://www.errc.org/)

1<sup>st</sup> festival of photography in Asia  
[www.chobimela.org](http://www.chobimela.org)

Human Rights Portal for Bangladesh  
[www.banglarights.net](http://www.banglarights.net)

Immigration Law Practitioners' Association  
[www.ilpa.org.uk](http://www.ilpa.org.uk)

Migrant Media  
<http://homepages.poptel.org.uk/migrantmedia/docs/migrantmedia.htm>

National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC)  
[www.ncadc.org.uk/](http://www.ncadc.org.uk/)

Relief Line  
[www.reliefline.co.uk](http://www.reliefline.co.uk)

Refugee Education & Training Advisory Service (RETAS)  
[www.refugeenet.org/](http://www.refugeenet.org/)

Oxfam  
[www.oxfam.org.uk/policy/pers/vouchers/intro.htm](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/policy/pers/vouchers/intro.htm)  
<http://www.oxfam.org.uk>

The Medical Foundation  
[www.torturecare.org.uk](http://www.torturecare.org.uk)

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**Email information or stories to Bulletin editor**  
Nazand Begikhani at [bulletin@presswise.org.uk](mailto:bulletin@presswise.org.uk)

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