

RAM BULLETIN

Refugees, Asylum-seekers and the Mass media Project

advice
information
research
& training
on media ethics



Promoting best practice in media representation of refugee and asylum issues

25 April 2001

MONITOR THE MEDIA DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The leaders of the main political parties have signed up to a compact brokered by the Commission for Racial Equality. The agreement states: "the right to free political expression must not be abused in the competition for popular votes by causing, or exploiting, prejudice and discrimination on the ground of race or nationality". (RCE News & Media)

In this edition of the RAM Bulletin, the COMMUNICATOR column provides a simple guide to monitoring the way politicians and the press handle the asylum issue during both local and general election campaigns.

How to Monitor the Media:

Two Examples on Monitoring Media Coverage of Refugee & Asylum Issues:

Two excellent studies have been published recently dealing with media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers. The first one, *Asylum: the Truth behind the Headlines* is published by OXFAM and compiled by Ceru Mollard from a survey of the Scottish press. The second one, *Welcome or Over Reaction? Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the Welsh Media* is published by Wales Media Forum and put together by Tammy Speers. They examine how Scottish local press and Welsh local media have covered asylum and refugee issues over a particular time during dispersal. In the first study, the researcher looked at six Scottish newspaper over a two month period, March-April 2000 and evaluated articles dealing with

asylum issues according to the language used, techniques employed, topic, tone and headline. The survey finds that the asylum debate in Scotland is based on false assumptions, pejorative statements, wrong figures, inaccurate information and exaggerated incidents. According to the research, this appears to be the result of the negative editorial line taken by the monitored newspapers and the level of hostile public opinion towards asylum seekers. This situation has created an atmosphere of hostility and xenophobia towards refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland. The second piece of research looked at Welsh local media from April to the end of 2000. According to the study findings, Welsh media "covers the issue of asylum seekers without the hostility or hyperbole that can be seen in the UK-wide national media". However, it confirms that the asylum debate is framed as an "official" issue dealing more with government asylum policies and procedures than with the human realities of refugees & asylum seekers. Refugee voices are hardly heard and the language in describing them is not free from the pejorative, "particularly in areas outside Cardiff & Newport".

To shift the focus of the negative debate about refugees & asylum seekers, the organisations behind these studies make some recommendations to the media, the Home Office, political parties, the national and local governments, and NGOs. As far as the media is concerned, the role of PCC insisted upon in establishing guidelines to encourage the media to avoid using false assumptions & negative language in covering asylum and refugee issues. In

order to produce positive coverage, editors and journalists are required to seek accurate information and real stories about refugees and frame their discourse in a positive language. For further information about these reports or to order them, contact Oxfam, for the first report, on 01865 311311 and Wales Media Forum, for the second one, on 029 2087 4041, email:

medialforum@cardiff.ac.uk

FED UP WITH THE WAY YOUR LOCAL MEDIA HANDLE ASYLUM OR REFUGEE STORIES ?

Why not complain to the media regulators ...

If you need assistance, contact PressWise on 0117 941 5889

pw@presswise.org.uk

WHAT IS THE USE OF THE RAM BULLETIN?

Is it helping you to obtain fair and accurate media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers? Help us improve its effectiveness. Cut and paste this questionnaire then complete it and email to bulletin@presswise.org.uk

Thanks

1. How do you use the RAM Bulletin?

- Read and discard/file it?
- Forward it others?
- Print it out and distribute it?
- Share it with media contacts?

2. What difficulties have you experienced in

- receiving the Bulletin?
- downloading the Bulletin?
- printing the Bulletin?

3. How many people in your organisation

- receive the Bulletin?
- read and use the Bulletin?
- I am not in an organisation.

4. What does your organisation do?

5. Is the Bulletin

- a. too long?
- b. too short?
- c. about right?

6. Should the Bulletin appear

- 5. about once a month?
- b. more frequently?
- c. less frequently?

7. How would you rate the design and presentation of the Bulletin?

- a. Excellent
- b. Adequate
- c. Poor

8. Please rate the most useful items in the Bulletin (1 = top)

News section
RAM activities
Features
The Communicator
Diary dates
Useful websites

9. Please suggest additional items that would improve the content of the Bulletin...

10. Please give an example of how the Bulletin has helped you in your work.

11. How would you rate media coverage of refugees/asylum seekers in your area?

- a. Non-existent
- b. Generally fair?
- c. Generally hostile?

12. Which RAM services would help you make a difference in the media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers locally?

- a. Use of the media training?
- b. Advice on how to complain?
- c. Setting up a media network?

13. Have you ever made a complaint about media coverage of refugees & asylum seekers to

- a. the PCC?
- b. the BSC?
- c. the BBC?
- d. any other media regulator?

14. What did you complain about, and what was the outcome?

15. What do you see as the main obstacles to fairer and more accurate representation of refugees & asylum seekers in the mass media?

16. What could the RAM Project do to help improve links between

refugees & asylum seekers and the mass media?

17. What local and national newspapers do you read regularly?

18. What other publications do you read about refugees and asylum seekers? eg, *In Exile* (Ref Cncl); *Refugees* (UNHCR); *European Race Bulletin* (IRR)

19. How often have you visited the RAM website

www.ramproject.org.uk

- a. Never
- b. Monthly
- c. More / less frequently

20. Please suggest someone else to whom the Bulletin should be emailed.

Refugees form Media Agency

Refugee journalists based in the UK have set up their own organisation to find work and promote media training courses. The London-based Refugee Media Agency aims to be the main contact point for refugees and asylum seekers with backgrounds in journalism. Journalists running the New Vision web site, who have been supported by RAM and the National Union of Journalists, are closely involved. Around two dozen refugee journalists have already joined the new organisation and further information can be obtained from Abebe Gellaw on The Refugee Media Agency is now looking for a permanent base in London and has set up an appeal for funds to promote its services. Says Abebe: "The agency will strive to help journalists get into the media through employment or freelance work. We are seeking paid work for our members as a way of meeting our costs." The agency recognises that refugee journalists in Britain need to understand the UK media and are talking to a London college about the possibility of setting up such a course.

"The New Vision web site will become a vital resource for the group as we will be able to provide information to existing and potential members as well as supplying details about asylum and refugee issues for the mainstream media. "The Refugee Media Agency is just what we need in order to be able to respond to some of the outrageous coverage of refugees and asylum seeker in the UK media."

Intolerance Towards Minority Groups on the Increase

"In the UK, the support shown for policies aimed at improving social coexistence between different ethnic groups is similar to the EU average. There is a lower level of acceptance where refugees & person seeking political asylum are concerned. Multicultural optimism is decreasing in the UK. In 2000, there is less agreement with the statement that it is a good thing for any society to be made up of different races, religion & culture. Furthermore, fewer people concur with the statement that a country's diversity in terms of race, religion & culture adds to its strength. At the same time, the demand for the repatriation of immigrants is increasing. In the UK, the percentage of missing values is high" (European Monitoring Centre on Racism & Xenophobia).

According to two European surveys carried out in the spring and summer of 2000 by The European Commission against Racism & Intolerance (ECRI) and the European Monitoring Centre on Racism & Xenophobia, intolerance, discrimination and racism have increased in the UK over recent years. ECRI's concern is expressed at "the appearance of racist or racially inflammatory material in the printed media and on the internet". ECRI stresses that discrimination, racism & xenophobia are acute particularly against refugees and asylum seekers. This is reflected

not only in the "local but also some national mainstream newspapers" and in the "tone of the discourse resorted to in support of the adoption and enforcement of increasingly restrictive asylum & immigration laws". For ECRI the rules contained in the Code of Practice of the printed media are "ill-suited to countering the publication of articles containing general racist assumptions and stereotypes against particular groups of persons". It encourages "the promotion of positive publications on ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and immigrants".

A similar finding flows from the survey carried out by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism & Xenophobia, *Attitudes Towards Minority Groups in the European Union*. It reveals that "nearly 39 percent of Britons who took part in the survey believed that legal immigrants who became unemployed should be forcibly repatriated... 15 per cent were totally intolerant towards minority groups while 36 per cent were passively tolerant".

For further detail on the *Attitudes Towards Minority Groups in the European Union* contact EUMC by email: information@eumc.eu.int or visit the website: <http://eumc.eu.int>

SIGN OF THE TIMES ?

Dear Friends

I have a sticker in my car saying; 'Hands off Asylum Seekers, keep Racism out of the General Election'.

It is a terrible indictment of Britain in 2001 that I should feel the need to display such a sentiment in the first place! The present xenophobia has been whipped up by both politicians and the press, all seemingly intent in outdoing one another in their rabid reporting of the situation. I would be interested in any practical ways

to help to rebalance the present dire situation.

Gill Sathanandan
Shrewsbury

Racists Attack On Asylum Seekers

Farid Hosefar, a 31-year-old Iranian asylum seeker, who had been dispersed to a hostel in Sunderland, was attacked by two knife-wielding racists on March 15. As Farid returned from the city centre to his hostel, he was set upon in a subway and stabbed several times. The attack resulted in serious injuries to his arm and back, requiring forty-eight stitches. Ten days earlier another asylum seeker residing in Sunderland had been the victim of a stabbing. For further information, visit:

www.hambastegi.org

Guides on/for Asylum Seekers

a. Asylum Seekers - A Guide to Recent Legislation

The third edition of *Asylum Seekers - A Guide to Recent Legislation* has been produced by the Immigration Law Practitioners' Association in partnership with Resource Information Service. It aims at supplying those working on/with refugees and asylum seekers with information about the effects of the Immigration & Asylum Act 1999 and its implications for their work. Contact Resource Information Service on 020 7494 2408, email: ris@ris.org.uk

b. The policing Needs of Asylum seekers & Refugees

Produced by the Association of Chief Police Officers, this guide explains the process by which the dispersal system can be managed. It is written according to the provisions & principals enshrined in the human Rights Act 1998. It identifies key

processes that help the Police Service to promote good community relations between asylum seekers, refugees and host communities.

The guide contains a chapter about Media strategy and practice in dealing with asylum issues. It recommends quality media methods to be adopted by different agencies involved with asylum issues in order to ensure a constructive and positive media coverage. It suggests that the Local Authorities facilitate Asylum Seekers Media Groups to develop and co-ordinate a "countrywide media strategy". To achieve that, a unified approach between different local agencies will be important in providing media representatives with accurate and consistent information. As "community safety is not just the responsibility of the police service", the ACPO highlights the role and responsibility of the media in promoting a harmonious relationship between communities. In one of the case studies contained in the guide, "a vicar made a public statement claiming that asylum seekers were taking housing & school places from local population". (New Vision) The story made front-page news and was highlighted by an extremist political party justifying its own position. It recommends that media spokespeople are made aware of the Press Code of Practice, especially item 13 and that action be taken through the PCC in cases of "inappropriate or racist reporting".

For further information, visit ACPO's web site:

www.acpo.police.uk

Cut out and keep COMMUNICATOR

DO-IT-YOURSELF MEDIA MONITORING OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

During passage of the Immigration and Asylum Bill 1999 Labour, Liberal Democrat, Plaid Cymru and Scottish Nationalist and Tory party leaders signed a declaration requiring MPs, MEPs, councillors and party officials:

'not to publish, cause to be published, or in anyway endorse any material which incites hostility or division between people of different racial, national or religious groups, or which might reasonably be expected to stir up or to incite such hostility or division';

and

'to ensure that in any dealings with the public, no words or actions are used which may stir up racial or religious hatred, or lead to prejudice on grounds of race, nationality or religion.'

Since then Lord Wakeham, who Chairs the Press Complaints Commission, has issued several reminders to editors that they should take similar care in coverage of refugees and asylum seekers.

Make sure politicians and the press stick to these principles during the election campaign

The local and general election campaigns will be the severest test yet of the extent to which the leaders of public opinion can be trusted to abide by these principles.

That is where YOU come in.

- Remind your local candidates of the 1999 commitment.
- Remind journalists that it is part of their job to challenge extravagant claims made by political candidates – including and especially pejorative statements about refugees and asylum seekers. They should demand to know the source of statistics, and refuse to publish unsubstantiated claims about asylum-seekers.

- Make a point of buying or reading at least one national and local daily paper and one weekly local newspaper during the election period. (Perhaps you can arrange for a couple of people in your organisation to do this between them.)
- Scan each copy for stories about refugees and asylum seekers. (Make a note of whether these are related to the election campaign or not.)
- Collect headlines and pictures – what messages do they communicate?
- Categorise each story by topic (eg Housing - Benefits – Crime) and by tone (eg Positive - Negative – Balanced).
- Are refugees and asylum seekers or their support organisations quoted? If not, ask the editor why not?
- Make a note of the language used – is it 'loaded', does it rely upon myths and stereotypes, or is it neutral?
- Keep an eye on the Letters column – everyone is free to express their own opinions, but are all view points getting a look-in? Write your own letter if necessary
- Make a special note of any editorials/comment columns (which are usually exempt from PCC adjudication unless they are based on factual inaccuracies). Are they generally hostile or sympathetic to refugees and asylum seekers, or do they challenge policies instead (for a change)
- It is the function of a newspapers to publish information about controversial topics, but if you think a story contains factual inaccuracies, comment masquerading as fact, or material that encourages prejudice or discriminates against people – make a complaint to the Press Complaints Commission (see <www.presswise.org.uk> for details)

Send us a copy of your results, along with an explanation of how you conducted your monitoring exercise. PressWise is always willing to help those making complaints.

'PEG' BOARD

Keep your ears and eyes open for 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.

**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, tel & fax: 020 8409 0293.

Wednesday 2 May 6.30-7.00

Anniversary of World Press Freedom Day: The Big Chill: Journalists Who refuse to be Silenced

Organised by The Freedom Forum, in association with Amnesty International Journalists Network & ARTICLE 19. A panel of 3 journalists will discuss their personal experience of censorship & persecution by the state. Panellists include: Mukalia Nampito (The Post), Mark Chavunduka (The Standard) & Anna politkovskaya (Novaya Gazeta). Moderated by Zeinab Badawi, chair of ARTICLE 19. Venue: The Freedom Forum, Stanhope House, Stanhope Place, Upper Ground Level, London

W2 2HH. For further information call: 020 7479 5900, email: dfurey@freedomforum.org

Saturday 2 June 12.00-5.00 pm

Annual General Meeting of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns.

Central London, venue to be confirmed. Contact Zrinka Bralo on 020 7701 5197, email: ncadc.London@appleonline.net.

Saturday 23 – Friday 29 June

REFUGEE WEEK

Do your local media know what are you organising locally during the Refugee Week? Organising agencies include Refugee Council, UNHCR, RefAid, Save the Children, Refugee Action, London Arts and the Arts Council of England.

For more details contact Refugee Week Information Line on 020 7820 3055, email: Refugee.Week@RefugeeCouncil.org.uk

Wednesday 20 June

INTERNATIONAL REFUGEE DAY

This day is being marked around the world and the UNHCR is organising a big event at the Statue of Liberty. For more information call Karen Jennings on 0292 066 6250

USEFUL WEBSITES

www.ramproject.org.uk

Visit the RAM Project website for information, contacts, news and views.

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.

Black Information Link

Run by the 1990 Trust, a national Black organisation, this site includes sections on everything from art and culture, to the Stephen Lawrence campaign, and the environment.
www.blink.org.uk

Chinese in Britain Forum

www.chinese-forum.co.uk

Commission for Racial Equality

<http://www.cre.gov.uk>

Ethnic Minority Foundation

www.emf-cemvo.co.uk

European Council on refugees & Exiles (ECRE)

ECRE is an umbrella organisation of 70 refugee-assisting agencies in 25 countries working towards fair and humane policies for the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees.
www.ecre.org

European Parliament

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights is available at the web-site of the EP:
<http://www.roparl.eu.int/>

Internet Centre Anti-Racism Europe

<http://www.icare.to>

Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)

www.jcwi.org.uk

Newcastle West: Tackling Racism Initiative
www.tri-west.org

Racial Harassment Organisation

www.racialharassment.org.uk

Refugee Womens Legal Group

<http://www.rwlg.org.uk>

Plus:

European Roma Rights Centre
www.errc.org/

1st festival of photography in Asia
www.chobimela.org

Human Rights Portal for Bangladesh
www.banglarights.net

Immigration Law Practitioners' Association
www.ilpa.org.uk

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

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

Relief Line
www.reliefline.co.uk

Refugee Education & Training Advisory Service (RETAS)
www.refugeenet.org/

Please download the printed version of this Bulletin and distribute it locally to support groups and interested individuals.

send information or stories to Bulletin editor Nazand Begikhani at

bulletin@presswise.org.uk

**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE
Monday, May 7th**