



Ethical journalism practices on migrants and refugees



ONLINE MODULE 1

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Introduction

The migration and refugee crisis in Europe not only presents a humanitarian crisis that demands political and social attentions; it also demands the media to act responsibly by reporting in a fair, accurate and accountable manner. However, this is not always easy. Sometimes, it can be a real challenge for journalists because it requires them to understand the different cultures, ethnicities and the complicated political backgrounds. Being objective in such an emotionally and politically charged subject is not easy. Every decision they made during the editorial processes, from choosing the angles, sources to the words they use, will shape the story differently.

Facing such a challenge, journalists need to be equipped with tools both emotionally and professionally in order to cover the story as accurate as possible without prejudice or furthering hatred on particular groups in society. The “Media Against Hate” highlighted the need to develop comprehensive training programmes for journalists and media organisations. As part of the project, the Journalism Practice Module on covering migrants and refugees to share existing good practices and encourage ethical reporting. The module focuses on the terminology, news angles, sources, the use of audio-visual content and most importantly journalism ethics which are part of the daily practice of journalists.

According to the code of ethics adopted by many journalists' unions and associations of the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ), one of them states that, "Journalist shall be aware of the danger of discrimination being furthered by the media, and shall do the utmost to avoid facilitating such discrimination based on, among other things, race, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinions, and national or social origins". This principle highlights the importance of ethics as it serves as the conscious for journalists and guide them to make the right editorial decisions.

Case studies

Media programmes for migrants and refugees

WDRforYou

The programme [WDRforYou](#), is broadcasted in Germany by the public broadcaster WDR. It was launched in January 2016 with the aims to provide first-hand information, reports and entertainment to migrants and refugees arriving or settling in Cologne. It focuses on stories related to integration, the German culture, asylum law, practical tips about Cologne, etc. The strength of the programme is its multicultural approach: the newsroom is mixed with journalists coming from various backgrounds allowing them to report in four languages (i.e. Arabic, Persian, German and English) and be culturally sensitive.

How to choose your source?

Expertalia

1. The journalistic sources – what sources do journalists use? Does it include a diverse source of experts?

The Belgian Association of Journalists (AJP) developed [Expertalia](#), an experts' database for journalists and media organisations, aiming to improve equality and diversity in the use of experts by the media. To date, Expertalia listed more than 350 experts in various fields from science, law,

economics, politics to sociology. Belgian journalists can easily consult the database online at <http://expertalia.be>.

Words matter

Are journalists aware of the words and terminologies they use could presents certain prejudice in the story? For example, the term “illegal migrants” is politically biased as it is often used by politicians to dehumanise and illegalise migrants. Words can also create an atmosphere of fear. In many media coverage of the migrants and refugees, the use of words like “a wave” or “an influx” of migrants created a sense of fear and panic among the public. Many journalists’ organisations or NGOs publish a glossary of terminologies for journalists to refer to when reporting migrants and refugees. Below are some of the frequently used terminologies: Further references can be found at:

- The International Organisation of Migration <https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>
- UNESCO <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/>
- UNHCR

2. Getting the fact rights

Getting the facts and numbers right are key in telling the story accurately. There is an inconsistency in the number reported by the media regarding the number of migrants and refugees. How can the readers know who is telling the truth? Where do journalists and media obtain the different figures from? Have they checked their sources? At a time when fake news is proliferating, especially those manufactured to incite hatred against migrants and refugees, journalists need to check their facts rigorously. There are a number of reliable, non-governmental resources that have detailed figures of migrants and refugees that journalists and media organisations can consult to illustrate their stories. Journalists can find new angles, reliable and non-biased data on migrants and refugees on the following websites:

- The International Organisation for Migration (IOM)
This inter-governmental organisation dealing with migration issues at the governmental,

intergovernmental and non-governmental levels. It offers infographics, interviews, figures on transit routes, migrants presence, relocated migrants, internally displaced and refugees, missing migrants, etc. Please check out: <http://migration.iom.int/europe/>

- The UN Refugee Agency has published a report on Reporting on refugees: guidance by and for journalists

- Statewatch is a key source of information regarding the state and civil liberties in Europe for journalists, researchers, NGOs, lawyers, activists, etc.

Apart from facts and data, using innovative ways to tell the story (e.g. datajournalism) while providing contextual background for the readers are also very important.

3. Ethics

The code of ethics is often considered the bible of the industry. Every journalist should abide to such codes that set the key principles to guide them when approaching sensitive and ethical questions. Although the code of ethics offer general principles for journalists, they may not necessarily tackle migration issues specifically. Here are some ethical guidelines (however, the list is not exhaustive) to journalists, media organisations and journalists' organisations working with migrants and refugees.

What are the ethical questions you should ask?

Before interviewing

- Make sure to approach the person you want to interview with sensitivity and due respect to their rights.
- Make sure you have the permission of the person to interview or photograph her/him.
- Researching about criminal, civil and administrative norms, as well as the various national and international legal instruments on human rights what are helpful for designating the various categories by the appropriate legal terms.

When interviewing

- Individuals approached to be interviewed should be informed of the potential consequences and particular care should be exercised when interviewing people in holding centres.
- Interviewees' health should be assessed, including physical and psychological trauma, pregnancy, etc.
- In case of a language issue, the services of an interpreter should be requested in order to ensure an accurate translation and respect for the interviewee's opinion and culture.

When drafting the story

- Maintain the anonymity if requested
- Only mention the person's nationality, origin, religion, if such information is relevant for the understanding of the story.
- Any element which could lead to the identification of the person should preferably not appear.
- Journalists are also dealing with political discussions in the public debate. That is why it is important to be aware of the definition of "hate speech".

4. What constitutes hate speech?

The European Court of Human Rights, in a definition adopted by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, considers hate speech as "*all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility towards minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.*"

The Court's most recent fact sheet on specific cases can be found [here](#).

5. What are the legal limits?

According to European law, the notion of freedom of expression extend to publish information or ideas that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb.

Case study: [5 point test for journalists on hate speech](#)

The Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) developed a 5 point test for journalists on hate speech which aims to help journalists to determine what is considered hate speech, what is acceptable and what is intolerable. It asks journalists to pose some ethical questions before publishing:

- Is there a danger of violence incitement?
- Have you avoided cliché and stereotypes?
- Did the picture tell the story without violence and voyeurism?

To help answer those questions, journalists should reflect on:

1. The status of the speaker: Is it exercising any kind of influence on you?
2. The content and the form of the speech: Is it provocative or Can it generate hate speech
3. The intention: Can it incite violence?
4. The social political context: Does your story address sensitive issues given the current context?
Can your speech be seen as provocative and can it fuelled intolerance?
5. The reach of the speech: is this interview going to be published? Is it going to be distributed on the internet?
6. What can journalists' organisations do?

Journalists' unions and associations representing journalists have an important role to play. The EFJ and its members have been advocating for fair and ethical reporting on migrants, refugees and ethnic minorities for years.

Some journalists' organisations have developed specific guidelines on the coverage of certain topics such as migrants, refugees or minority groups. The debate should remain open and be adapted at the national level. Here are some examples of some charters that include specific national context that individuals and media outlets can use.

The Charter of Rome

The Charter of Rome was developed in 2008 by the EFJ member in Italy, the Federazione Nazionale della Stampa Italiana (FNSI), with inputs from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees as well as from experts from the organisations and bodies belonging to the Rome Charter Association (Associazione Carta di Roma). The charter provides guidelines for journalists to cover asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants and focuses on interviewing methods, reporting on debates, data and opinion polls as well as how to best use sources. There is also a list of terminology for journalists to use and include a diversity checklist for journalists.

The Idomeni Charter

The Idomeni Charter was developed in 2016 by the Greek Journalists' Union of Macedonia and Thrace Daily Newspapers (ESIEMTH), in the name of the border control village where thousands of migrants were passing through to reach Northern European countries. It suggests 11 recommendations for local and foreign journalists, including tips to avoid stigmatisation, generalisation or misrepresentation, rules when photographing or interviewing as well as practical advices when approaching children and minors. They apply to migration issues but also to minorities or other socially vulnerable groups in Greece.

The Race Reporting Guide

In the United Kingdom, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and its Black Members' Council has produced guidelines on reporting race in the media, in 2014. The guidelines include how to report on Roma and traveller communities, immigration and asylum, as well as how to report on racist organisations.

If your unions or association would like to develop similar guidelines, the EFJ is happy to facilitate this – please get in touch.

What can media organisations do?

Media organisations should also reflect on their own practices, on both editorial and employment policy. These questions will help media outlets to identify their needs.

1. Does your media organisation have any editorial policy or guidelines concerning the coverage of migrants, refugees and ethnic minority?
2. Do you have any agreed glossaries when covering these topics?
3. Do you have a diversity policy in employment policy? Do your journalists come from a diverse background (e.g. race, gender, religious and ethnic minorities?)
4. Do you publish your content in different languages to reach different audiences?
5. Do you provide specific trainings focusing on ethical reporting, data journalism, safety, legislation, if needed.

For more information or resources, please visit
www.mediaagainsthate.org