

ICAR Briefing

Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Media

February 2012



Introduction

The topic of asylum seekers, refugees and media covers two potential areas of research: the analysis of the coverage received by asylum seekers and refugees and how refugees and asylum seekers use the media. While the latter area is broadly analysed in a number of pieces of research, including ICAR's 2004 publication "[*Media Image, Community Impact: Assessing the impact of media and political images of refugees and asylum seekers on community relations in London*](#)", this briefing sheet aims to provide an overview of how refugees are reported in the English media. The methodology used to conduct such an examination looks at statistical data and at major pieces of literature which analyse reporting on this subject. In addition, attempts will be made to point out related legal issues and the theoretical framework which includes historical background of the complicated relations between refugees and media, as well as the discourse strategies used to present asylum seekers and media to the public opinion. A resource section and a glossary with correct definitions are provided, in order to recall models of 'good reporting' as well as to define and clarify the terminology used in the briefing.

The appearance of commercial media on the scene of information has strongly affected the way in which the media report happenings to the point that it affects their initial purpose. Indeed, whereas in the past media has had a strong informative/educational intent, more recently we have borne witness to an increasing commitment of media to serve entertainment purposes, therefore provoking what media specialists have defined as a switch from information to 'infotainment': "information-based media content or programming that also includes entertainment content in an effort to enhance popularity with audiences and consumers" (Demers, 2005).

"Refugee protection in the host country should include protection from media misrepresentation" (ICAR, 2005)

The new connotation investing news content is also interested in reporting social issues. As a result of this, an amalgamation in the different ways to report has been noted, applying to social events the connotation of oversimplification, which sometimes appears to inadequately explain the complexity of the reality they represent.

Reporting about asylum seekers and refugees can be inserted in this framework and has been strongly affected by this attitude in reporting. Practical examples have included articles where no distinctions between migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are specified. In addition, these past articles have also made little reference to asylum seekers' situation of escaping threats in their own country, nor the difficulties in accessing the services of mainstream societies.

Refugees are not people who have been expelled, but ones who seek help

Essential glossary about Media and Asylum Seekers

Please note that you can find a [wider definitions list](#) in the media section of the ICAR website.

- **Refugee:** a person who has been granted this status according to the 1951 Refugee convention. The article 1 of the convention defines a Refugee as someone who “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it..”. (The United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 1951: Article 1 A (2)).
- **Asylum Seeker:** someone who is seeking protection under the 1951 convention and is waiting for the government to consider his/her case.
- **Illegal/bogus asylum seekers** is a wrong definition, as seeking asylum is not illegal in the UK, there cannot be illegal asylum seekers.
- **Failed asylum seeker:** asylum seekers whose claims have been denied the possibility to remain in the UK. Those who present a request of asylum and do not meet the requirements under the 1951 Refugee Convention to be granted the protection, including those whose claim is rejected because they are not able to show the reasons founding the request of asylum.

- **Dublin II** is the regulation that replaces the 1990 Dublin convention. It is a European Union law that determines that the EU member state responsible to examine an application for asylum seekers seeking protection under the Geneva Convention within the EU is the first state they enter. It includes a tool introduced to prevent abuses of asylum procedure such as simultaneously or successively submissions in another Member state, called 'Eurodec', which is a database collecting fingerprints of asylum seekers.
- **The Press Complaint Commission** is an independent body set up in 1991 to ensure the fairest balance between rights of individuals and freedom of expression.
- **UNHCR** - The office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is: 'an impartial humanitarian organisation mandated by the United Nations to lead and co-ordinate international action for the world-wide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems. UNHCR has two basic and closely related aims: to protect refugees and to seek ways to help them restart their lives in a normal environment'. (ICAR, 2009)
- **BME** Black and Minority Ethnic.
- **EHRC** Equality and Human Rights Commission.
- **RAM:** Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Media is a project run between 1999 and 2005. The project originated in 1990s, when an increasing number of people contacted Press Wise (which is the original name of Media Wise, an organisation set up to defend "victims of media abuse") to report about unfair pieces of information about refugees, migrants and Roma people.
- **Accuracy** is a characteristic of journalism where identifiable sources are used and factual information presented. Accurate journalism distinguishes facts, opinions and conjectures.
- **Balance** is a characteristic of journalism that presents alternative points of view, contextual information, a range of sources, and avoids extreme language or exaggeration, disproportionate headlines and/or distorted images.

- **Discrimination** in media reporting is defined in the Editors' Code of Practice as 'prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability' (The Editors' Code of Practice, article 12).

Statistics

Press articles and broadcast programmes contain expressions such as "thousand" or "hundreds" of refugees, which do not demonstrate a fair and balanced way to report about migration and humanitarian issues, nor do they make any reference to available statistical data. Precise data is crucial when talking about information on asylum seekers and refugees. In addition, journalists should use accessible figures rather than making assumptions when reporting about events which interest refugees.

48% of British respondents believed that immigration negatively affects British culture.
Ipsos Mori Issues index, Mar 2011

- **The Ipsos Mori index 2011** shows an overestimation by the public of the number concerning migration, perceived as the second "important issues facing Britain today" (following economy) which worries more English people (65% of the interviews) and the same trend about the estimate number of refugees and asylum seekers was registered in the past.
- Public's overestimation of the number of asylum seekers in the UK has been confirmed by a poll carried out in September 2011, which provides details on the public's perception. In ***Thinking Behind the Numbers: Understanding Public Opinion on Immigration in Britain (2011)*** authors investigate what people have in mind when they think about immigrants and if the registered hope to reduce the number of immigrants varies across specific groups. The findings show that when thinking about immigrants respondents mostly think about asylum seekers (62%), whereas according to the Office of National Statistics students represent the biggest group of immigrants in the UK (37%) whilst asylum seekers are one of the smallest groups among UK immigrants (4%).
- **The key findings 2010 on Transatlantic Trends on Immigration** show that in the UK immigration is still seen as a problem rather than an opportunity.

- Easy to access data are available on the **Home Office website**, where it is possible to consult an updated [list of publications on Immigration and asylum - research and statistics](#). The Home Office publishes UK asylum statistics every 3 months and more detailed data every 7 months.
- **ICAR's website has a statistic section** where data are available, and it also contains the sub-section on '[Analysis of asylum and refugee statistics](#)'.
- Other relevant sources are the website [whatdotheyknow](#), as the Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the possibility to ask questions related information which is held by a public authority.
- **The Office of National Statistics (ONS)** publishes international migration data including acceptances for settlement by region of origin and category of acceptance (including seeking asylum) and asylum applications by region of origin.
- Furthermore, the **Migration Policy institute (MPI)**, an 'independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people world-wide', also provides statistics about asylum seekers and refugees.
- Finally, on **UNHCR** website there are statistical data available for any country, and according to those statistics, as for January 2011, in the UK there are 238,150 refugees and 14,880 asylum seekers.

Literature review

ICAR's *Media Image, Community Impact (2004)* has monitored a selection of national, local and minority ethnic newspapers to investigate the hypothesis that "Newspapers often present images of asylum seekers and refugees that contain language, photographs, and graphics likely to raise feelings of fear and hostility towards asylum seekers and refugees among their readers".

The research also investigates how media images and community tension can be connected. It identifies the types of reporting likely to promote unfounded fear and hostility: the findings reveal that **unbalanced and inaccurate reporting is likely to promote fear and tension** within communities across London. In detail, recording views of Londoners on the impact of inaccurate and unbalanced reporting finds that a lack of understanding of diversity and of the limited access to resources which asylum seekers and refugees have in comparison to local

people, are two of the key factors affecting how far the media influences community tension. Moreover, the portrayal of allegedly overwhelming but unspecified influxes of asylum seekers from abroad is likely to bring apprehension to the minds of readers, while the frequent reporting of criminality among asylum seekers and refugees is likely to induce fear.

With reference to the content of the articles analysed it is found that they comprise **little reference to legal instruments** or to organisations working on behalf of asylum seekers and refugees.

Finally, the findings reveal that refugees and asylum seekers who have been victims of harassment feel strongly that the press presents **hostile images** of asylum seekers and refugees and that those **increase the likelihood of local persecution of individual asylum seekers and refugees**.

Article 19's *What's the Story? Media representation of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK (2003)* has analysed articles from national and regional papers, television broadcasts and has interviewed asylum seekers and refugees using a coding system similar to that used in the *Media Image, Community Impact* report. This research unveils an inaccurate and provocative use of language to describe those entering the country seeking asylum in Britain whilst it also registers insignificant and derogatory terms such as "illegal refugee" and "asylum cheat". It also notes that numbers of people entering the country to claim asylum presented in print and broadcast reports are frequently unsourced, exaggerated or inadequately explained. Contextual analysis of the relevance and meaning of official statistics is missing from the debate.

With reference to the images used to accompany print and broadcast reports on the issue of asylum, they are dominated by the stereotype of the "threatening young male". Women and children are rarely seen and stock images of groups of men trying to break into Britain are used repeatedly.

News and featured articles on asylum rely heavily on politicians. Individual asylum seekers and refugees are only quoted when they themselves are the subject of a report and "rarely contribute directly to the policy debate" (Article 19, 2003).

ICAR's publication *Reporting asylum The UK Press and the Effectiveness of PCC Guidelines (2007)* includes a best practice standard for journalists reporting asylum.

Articles must:

- Be informative
- Provide appropriate context
- Draw on a range of identifiable sources of information and viewpoints
- Include fair representation of the opinions and experiences of those people affected by the events reported
- Avoid generalised, unspecific allegations likely to inspire hostility.

In this regard, ***Uncovered: assessing media and communications needs and capacity of marginalised communities***, carried out by ICAR and Media Trust in 2009 shows that asylum seekers have little knowledge about the media. Regardless of this, 60% of those interviewed show dissatisfaction towards the representation of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in UK media. Only 30% of them stated that they had contacts with the media, and some of them did not want to engage with media, instead preferring face-to-face contact in order to engage their audience.

On the other hand, the research also provides a contribution regarding the object of interest of this briefing: the asylum seekers and refugees' portrayals in the English media. The research finds that the analysis of the coverage suggests that journalists are worried about asylum seekers. The qualitative analysis conducted shows little record of innovative or investigative approaches, and most stories appear to be repetitive with generic terms such as "hundreds" and "thousands", which also contribute to a de-personification of refugees and asylum seekers.

In a further ICAR's publication, ***Reporting asylum. The UK Press and the Effectiveness of PCC Guidelines (2007)***, authors also identified motivations likely to influence how journalists report, and those are:

- Professionalism: the commitment to accurate reporting
- Market appeal: the pressure of being competitive
- Habit: the repetitive nature of reporting on familiar themes
- Protection against complains
- Political influence

(Smart et al 2007:36)

In IPPR's publication ***Seeking Scapegoats, The coverage of asylum in the UK press (2005)***, Greenslade points out the courses of a public attitude, initially identifying the insular ideology as a potential factor which could motivate xenophobic ideologies in Britain. He also points out a crucial change in the reporting about asylum seekers and refugees: the merger of press and commerce, and the combination of information and entertainment which has left the floor open to the concept of "infotainment", which does not boost critical understanding.

Greenslade also observes that if questioned, **journalists strongly refuse to regard themselves as hate speech instigators**, on the contrary, they believe they are doing a decent job. This behaviour can be explained framing **journalists** as individuals within their communities: as citizens, they **perceive the growth of Islamophobia and in their articles they try to repeat their perceptions of**

individuals belonging to the mainstream society. According to Greenslade this is a “news food chain which works in two ways”, as headlines are influenced by their own public, whose perception they influence through their articles, with a reciprocal relation between the newspaper and its audience. Indeed, “when accused to be racists...editors justify what they publish by claiming that their sales demonstrate that they are representing the public interest” (Greenslade, 2005: page 13).

The research undertaken on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Media has focused on the past 5 years, with most reports being written between 1999 and 2005. Even if the material available is still very relevant, particularly because of the methodology used and the guidelines provided, further research would point out the current state of the representation and define how new media and citizen journalism have influenced reporting on asylum seekers and refugees.

Recently certain aspects of the issue have been examined. For example, in a Migration Observatory briefing issued in 2011, Blinder examines factors which affect public or negative perception of migration. Blinder establishes interesting key points, such as the weaker opposition toward immigration by certain categories such as London residents, young people, and ethnic minorities. However, none of these factors are specifically related to the refugee status.

Furthermore, in the Migration Observatory’s report entitled ***Thinking Behind the Numbers: Understanding Public Opinion on Immigration in Britain (2011)***, authors investigate the public’s perception of migration. They highlight a number of attitudes toward asylum seekers and refugees, including hopes of seeing the number of asylum seekers reduced, along with the number of low skilled workers.

The report points out a lack of correspondence between statistics and perceptions, given the fact that respondents indicate asylum as the most commonly chosen answer when questioned about reasons for migrating, whereas asylum seekers are one of the smallest groups among immigrants (4%). When investigating the reasons why perception of immigrants by the public does not reflect statistical data, the report’s editors mention “news coverage, and even entertainment media that include portrayals of immigrants” among the reasons which explain these impressions (Migration Observatory, 2011:10).

The report also contains a policy-related section, where authors note that the public’s hope to reduce the number of asylum seekers cannot reflect a policy intervention, as the UK is part of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and therefore it is obliged to determine the validity of the claims of asylum.

Finally, as Gabriela Quevedo points out in her recent article published in the Runnymede Trust's bulletin, there are articles reporting non negative stories about refugees and asylum seekers. However, rather than providing substantial information about problems which refugees and asylum seekers must face daily, or the backgrounds of the political situation in their home countries, they describe them as victims, who should inspire compassion. Indeed, they use "discourses depicting refugees as 'invaders', or as 'water' (as in 'flood of refugees') and lexical choices like 'failed' versus 'rejected'" (Quevedo, 2011).

Case study: Full fact

[Full fact](#) is an organisation that concretely acts to check that claims and statements made by politicians and by the press are confirmed by factual data. Its website contains a section, [factcheck](#), where authors check that public claims are correct and not based on assumptions.

Fullfact's Factcheck mechanism picks out a piece of information whose background is considered to be verified (selected by the staff or through suggestions that arrive via the website). It focuses on one or more key statements contained in the article, speech or intervention and searches factual information confirming or disproving the selected claim. Every Factcheck ends with a conclusive paragraph where it is stated if the assertion is valid or not.

In a recent example on the site: *'Was a failed asylum seeker allowed to stay in the UK because he goes to the gym?'* Full Fact investigates the truth behind a claim mentioned in an article in the Daily Mail that a judge allowed an asylum seeker to stay in the country because he was a member of a gym. After reviewing the judgment in question, Full Fact concludes that:

"The Mail's headline would seem to suggest to anyone glancing at the story that Mr Beheshti had been successful in his asylum application on the strength of his fitness regime. This is certainly not the case.

The Mail does qualify this for those readers persevering into the body of the article, however even once these provisos have been taken into account, much is left to be desired."

Source: http://fullfact.org/factcheck/did_an_immigrant_win_residence_by_going_to_gym-3057

Legal related issues

In some European states, following the expression of concern by the High Commissioner for Refugees and regarding the way media report about asylum seekers and refugees, a code of conduct has been developed with specific focus on asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants.

In the UK, the Press Complaints Commission administers the system of self-regulation for the press. It monitors inaccuracies and collects complaints about British media. Even if the commission does not belong to the newspaper and magazine industry, in January 2011 the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) ratified the [Editors' code of practice](#), which is a key document to ensure issues of accuracy and privacy in reporting and how journalists should behave in gathering the news.

The code does not include references specifically related to the reporting of asylum seekers and refugees, but as specified in the [PCC Guidance Note Refugees and Asylum Seekers \(2003\)](#), for concerns about media reporting on this topic it is appropriate to refer to Clause 1 (Accuracy), especially for distorted or misleading terminology to mention asylum seekers and refugees and clause 12, which is related to discrimination, and says that "the press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability", specifying that "details of an individual's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story" (Editors' code of practice, clause 12 (2)).

The website of the Press Complaints Commission contains a section where all the cases have been examined and eventually solved, and also includes [complaints about reporting on asylum seekers and refugees](#).

Full Fact, whose work has been included as a case study in the box above, sometimes also submits cases to the Press Complaints Commission, even if the former mainly concerns with accuracy and makes analyses articles' background information.

Following the summer 2011 happenings connected to phone hacking, the Prime Minister announced "an enquiry into the culture, the practices and the ethics" of the British press and in consequence of it Full Fact created [Press Inquiry](#), a dedicated initiative aimed at improving the Press Complaints Commission mainly in order to correct press inaccuracies and facilitate the Commission's work.

Key issues.

The connection between media reporting and public behaviours is not direct. ICAR's **Media Image, Community Impact** has comprehensively investigated the impact of media and highlighted that the readership point of view is strongly influenced by experience, which can operate as a "filter" modulating the reception of the media's message.

Moreover, the research work available, including the major pieces considered in this briefing, show that British public opinion overestimates the number of immigrants in the UK; for example, statistical studies such as the *Ipsos Mori index 2011* show, among other trends, an overestimation of the numbers concerning migration, which is also noted in many articles analysed.

Historical background

Major studies aimed at investigating society's opinion on refugees have also attempted to point out the causes behind the media's desire to represent refugees negatively. In order to explain these negative reactions, from a long term perspective some authors have looked at the conformation of Britain as an island as a factor which could eventually influence the negative perception and the consequential representation of refugees (Greenslade, 2005).

Instead, taking a more recent view we find that the beginning of the 1990s represents the moment when the image of refugees started to be characterised by the negative features which can be detected in contemporary reporting. Historically, this moment coincides with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the consequent growth in the number of arrivals. In order to respond to this, during this decade the government has begun to implement acts aimed at securing the borders (see the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act). Restrictive immigration policies represent the first step of the process which portrays refugees negatively; indeed if policies to secure borders are needed, it will be necessary to defend the nation from arrivals, consequently, refugees begin to assume features which characterise them as a threat.

At the same time, the media have not provided critical and diverse news to so that citizens can form an opinion and instead report about crime incidents involving refugees. This attitude, together with the policy line, contributes to creating myths and stereotypes concerning refugees, creating distorted images of people protected from persecution in their home countries. From this moment, the representation has started to be separated by the process of actually fleeing persecution, and the news focuses on chronicle incidents rather than on humanitarian issues.

Furthermore, it is necessary to note that this tendency corresponds to important changes in media technology, when instant information begins to load images with urgency and sensationalism. In parallel, from the policy point of view the construction of the negative perception of asylum seekers as a danger finds its cornerstone in the establishment of the UK Border Agency, which was created in 2008 and describes itself as a “line of defence” to employ increasingly stringent pre-arrival checks. These two elements show how the negative portrayal of refugees has corresponded to their stigmatisation by policies and further highlights that the media does not manoeuvre public opinion alone, but their coverage has social and political roots.

The findings of the research works available, supported by the statistical data, allow for the identification of recurring schemes used to influence public opinion about media and asylum seekers.

The question of identity

This refers both to the identity of asylum seekers and to one of the British population. In the first case, the problem with asylum seekers’ identity is that they do not belong to any group: they have to flee their home country, which makes them “outsiders” of that group whilst they also do not belong to the society of the country where they seek protection. Instead, asylum seekers are mainly represented by the media as a unique group.

One of the most common metaphors used by media to represent refugees is a “wave” (of arrival), which is only used thanks to this collective representation and the predicative strategies used to refer to refugees and asylum seekers who “fled”. This appears to be unsuitable because the action to seek asylum is an individual one.

Moreover, the identity attributed to “what is British” also appears to be inappropriate. When asylum seekers are presented as a united and strong group they represent a threat to British people, but there is another unexplained assumption in this argument, because British society is also a diverse one, therefore it is questionable whether considering it as a united group it is correct. In addition, the “Britishness” of the group, whose identity could potentially be in danger, is not in actual danger as the group reinforces its own identity when facing an external danger, and more importantly, this construction is based on the assumption that a diverse society should weaken identities.

In actual fact, as Innes points out in *When the Threatened Become the Threat: The Construction of Asylum Seekers in British Media Narratives (2010)*, this assumption is based on “imagined communities”, based on the myth of cultural

homogeneity. Instead, a more critical analysis would consider that identity is often constituted through difference (Innes, 2010).

Innes also explains that the problem with asylum seekers is that the outside, represented by the “others”, moves to be physically inside the state, which means the values, culture and identity of society must be reinforced within this context.

‘ Refugee and Asylum seekers stealing jobs from Britons ’

Asylum seekers as threat or asylum seekers under threat?

Media reporting about asylum seekers and refugees often presents them as a threat to the country's economic situation. Indeed the label of "asylum seeker" itself refers to someone who is trying to achieve something and the findings of the studies taken into account show that the presence of new, unknown, often purposely undefined characters is a good resource when you have to blame someone, for example the economic crisis. Indeed, the portrayal of refugees as an economic threat is a frequent image used in media reporting, where the arrival of people seeking asylum is associated with economic changes and with the fluctuating of the labour market. Moreover, it is also noted that the studies considered reveal many cases where asylum seekers are presented as criminals, reinforcing their negative representation.

The lack of accuracy in the media reporting makes it difficult to detect the difference between different migrant statuses; indeed, presenting the general overall term “migrants” as a blurred mass serves two purposes. Firstly, it makes this group very powerful, given its size, and investing in it would bring a shade of danger for the settled community. Secondly, this approach surely does not promote understanding: “generalised perception does a lot of damage” as is reported in an interview contained in ICAR’s *Media image, Community impact*. An analysis of pictures used to accompany news stories about refugees and asylum seekers reveals that the prevailing images are those representing the stereotype of the “threatening young male”, whereas women and children are rarely seen. This is due to the fact that they would eventually recall sentiments such as innocence and compassion which would not contribute to the representation of refugees as a threat.

Discourse Analysis used to build up images about asylum seekers

Extensive research about discourses of refugee and asylum seekers in the UK press carried out using critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics highlighted the strategies used to present refugees, namely as nomination, predication, argumentation, framing and intensification.

Other linguistic **techniques** used for reporting about asylum seekers are:

- Depersonalisation: “Hundreds” and “thousands” were used to refer to individuals as if they were objects, therefore preventing any kind of empathy towards them;
- Telling a tale;
- Presenting a common sense of view which the reader will easily embrace;
- Using the dichotomy ‘us vs. them’, as a tool to reinforce the identity of the groups ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘mainstream society’;
- Stereotyping;
- Promoting Urban Myths;
- Keeping anonymity;
- Engaging in a moral panic;
- Using humour.

Source: (Smart et al 2007: pages 37-38)

The relation between commercial media and the audience

In ICAR’s research paper *Reflecting Asylum in London’s Communities - monitoring London’s press coverage of refugees and asylum seekers* (2006), the authors argue that the refugee protection in the host country should include protection from media (mis) representation.

Asylum is a complex issue, because it includes policy implications (the states are obliged by the *non-refoulement*), cultural issues, and economical factors. Instead, media tend to present easy – simplified images. Picturing refugees as a homogeneous group creates the illusion of a unitary actor which is compatible with traditional understandings of security.

Commercial media characteristics are not suitable to the more time consuming process of integration of refugees: **immediacy** leads media to prefer specific and delimited events, while longer and deeper explanations are required regarding integration and the struggle of people seeking asylum because they are forced to leave their country of origin. **Simplicity** requires flashes and pictures which can polarise the conversation around two groups (“us” and “them”), but asylum seekers should not be considered as a homogeneous group, as they are far from being similar in many cases.

American journalism teaches that “*If it Bleeds, it leads*”, remarking media preference for drastic stories: a violent episode involving refugees (the others)

will indeed have a better chance of appearing in the headlines rather than a report about an integration project aimed at determining shared values of refugees and mainstream societies.

This vocation of media influences public perceptions, and as Greenslade explains in IPPR's report, journalists, who are part of the mainstream society, tend to repeat the perceptions. This statement does not imply that journalists are personally devoted to incrementing hate speech and stereotypes, on the contrary, there are many good examples of balanced reporting. Many of the research papers analysed suggest that a more critical approach could be achieved involving refugees in media organisations.

Apart from these general hopes, to tackle the negative representation of refugees is necessary to act both at local and national level. Rather than focusing on the general idea of "improving the perception of refugees in the mainstream society", they focus on specific purposes/products, eventually using a marketing-oriented approach with which they attempt to achieve smaller and well defined objectives, such as "reporting on inter-faith dialogue session of two churches in a borough of London" or "explaining the value that a refugee adds to the society".

Conclusion

The research analysed for this briefing shows that whilst much media reporting about asylum seekers and refugees is sensationalist and inaccurate, developing robust reporters and codes of practice for journalists to follow can be achieved. Agencies such as the Migration Observatory can be well placed to respond to such inaccurate reporting, while it has been suggested that the best way to contrast the misrepresentation of refugees and asylum seekers is by pushing for their integration into mainstream media in order to have representatives from refugee backgrounds in the industry. This leads to the production of more diverse information and policies aimed at engaging different audiences.

There are also a number of initiatives set up to endorse a balanced flow of information regarding asylum seekers and refugees. Among these is [Hatnews](#), which apart from being an instrument with which to inform refugees about changes in the legislation and promoting community development, acts as an information hub which disseminates balanced and factual information.

Further studies investigating the language used to portray asylum seekers and how the civil society perceive them through the media are necessary to highlight how accurate media report and to document how the enormous changes in media technologies have influenced refugees and asylum seekers' representation. In detail, further research is needed to investigate the impact of

digital media on both media representation and the public's perception, in order to map changes and consider effects on different audiences.

It is crucial that the media are not demonised: whether they think they are reproducing a common value or are trying to reinforce the identity of a group, journalists play a role in the society and collaborations between the media industry and the refugee sector are necessary in order to work together to improve information towards a higher standard of journalism.

Finally, similar to the early 1990s, advances in information technology have brought the introduction of new devices which have allowed broader audiences to be reached and the imposition of dynamics focused on oversimplification. Indeed, the actual changes in the media environment (we could mention as an example the introduction of social media and the diffusion of news hubs which allow some kind of differentiation in the types of media) are leading towards a reporting where there will be also space for citizen journalism, which will not substitute professional journalism, but can correct it and support it, filling the gaps left behind while responding to commercial timings.

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Smart, K., Grimshaw, R., McDowell, C., Crosland, B., (2007) [Reporting asylum. The UK Press and the Effectiveness of PCC Guidelines.](#) ICAR.

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Useful Organisations / Resources

Article 19 fights against censorship and campaigns against laws and practices that silence. It monitors, researches, publishes, advocates, campaigns, sets standards and litigates on behalf of freedom of expression wherever it is threatened and campaigns to safeguard media pluralism, independence and diversity of views. <http://www.article19.org/>

Full Fact is an independent fact-checking organisation. It analyses the context behind the claims made by the key players in British political debate and press those who make misleading claims to correct the record. <http://fullfact.org/about>

Hatnews acts as an information hub about news for asylum seekers refugees including those granted any form of status or those whose cases have been rejected by the Home Office forcing them into destitution. Hatnews also serves people who may be going through the immigration system, or economic migrants here on work visas. <http://www.hatnews.org/>

IPPR, the Institute for Public Policy Research, is the UK's leading progressive thinktank. It produces research and innovative policy ideas for a fair, democratic and sustainable world, combats inequality and promotes social responsibility.
<http://www.ippr.org/>

MediaWise (formerly PressWise), is an independent charity, set up in 1993 by 'victims of media abuse', supported by concerned journalists, media lawyers and politicians in the UK. www.mediawise.org.uk/index.html

Press Inquiry is a Full Fact's initiative aimed at improve the work of the Press Complaints Commission submitting inaccuracies in the British Press.

Runnymede Trust is the UK's leading independent race equality think tank working for a multi-ethnic Britain through research, network building, leading debate, and policy engagement. ICAR is based at the Runnymede offices.
<http://www.runnymedetrust.org/>

The Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. <http://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/about-us>

The Migration Policy institute (MPI) is an 'independent, non-partisan, non-profit think tank dedicated to the study of the movement of people world-wide', and also provides statistics about asylum seekers and refugees.
<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/>

The Press Complaint Commission is an independent body set up in 1991 to ensure the fairest balance between rights of individuals and freedom of expression. It administers a systems which monitors inaccuracies in reporting, including on issues on regarding refugees and asylum seekers.
<http://www.pcc.org.uk/>

UNHCR - The office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is 'an impartial humanitarian organisation mandated by the United Nations to lead and co-ordinate international action for the world-wide protection of refugees and the resolution of refugee problems. (ICAR, 2009) <http://www.unhcr.org.uk/>

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