

Photography and filming

Material that relies upon stereotypes for its impact (e.g. images implying threat and illegality) can mislead and distort perceptions, especially when they do not relate to the facts of a story. Make sure captions are also accurate.

If in doubt about the use of images – talk to the people being portrayed. UNHCR has a free photo library and other agencies listed under ‘contacts’ may also be able to assist in sourcing more appropriate images.

When publishing images that may identify individuals, please bear the following in mind:

- People fleeing persecution leave families behind who may face retribution from repressive regimes if relatives in the UK are identified
- Exiled political activists from other countries may risk death threats or attacks by agents of a regime they opposed, or by regime loyalists in the UK
- Normal considerations of respect for personal privacy apply to asylum-seekers and refugees, particularly when identifying children
- Giving prominence to individuals simply because of their immigration status could lead to unwarranted discrimination and hostility, or impact upon their asylum claim

Reporting on refugees around the world

The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) is one of the world’s leading humanitarian and emergency relief organisations. Funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions, UNHCR is charged with responsibility to protect and assist more than 33 million people worldwide. With its vast network of offices in over 100 countries, UNHCR’s field teams are well placed to assist media covering displacement and humanitarian crises. Global contacts for media are available at: www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/media?page=fieldofficers

Useful resources

- Her Majesty’s Stationery Office (all the latest laws) www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk
- BBC ‘asylum system jargon buster’ news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/3380397.stm
- Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees (ICAR) (FAQs, definitions and various independent reports into asylum and the media) www.icar.org.uk/?lid=1962
- Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) (various reports and projects on asylum and the media) www.ippr.org (search for asylum)
- MediaWise (‘The RAM Report: campaigning for fair and accurate coverage of refugees and asylum seekers’, and other reports and articles) www.ramproject.org.uk (see ‘refugees’ link on main page)
- Refugees & Asylum Seekers in Scotland – A guide for journalists. Useful material applicable UK-wide compiled by NUJ, Amnesty International Scotland, Oxfam and Scottish Refugee Council. www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/ukpoverty/downloads/Fair_Play_guide_for_journalists.pdf
- Article 19 – ‘What’s the story?’ Analysis of media coverage of asylum issues www.article19.org
- Media Diversity Institute (various handbooks and studies on reporting of migrant, refugee and displaced populations) www.media-diversity.org (select ‘refugees’ in the resources section)
- Forced Migration Online (worldwide database) www.forcedmigration.org
- ReliefWeb (Country and emergency profiles compiling UN, governmental and non-governmental information) www.reliefweb.int
- AlertNet for Journalists (Crisis briefings, country statistics, press monitoring and more...) www.alertnet.org/mediabridge/index.htm
- UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) ‘Basic Facts’ section www.unhcr.org/basics.html

Contacts for facts and quotes

Relevant Government Departments

- National Statistics Office UK www.statistics.gov.uk Tel: 020 7533 5725
- Home Office www.homeoffice.gov.uk Press Office: 020 7035 4848

Refugee-specific organisations

- Asylum Aid www.asylumaid.org.uk Tel: 020 7354 9631
- Exiled Journalist Network (holds directory of exiled journalists) www.exiledjournalists.net Press Office: 0845 002 0167
- Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees www.icar.org.uk Press Office: 020 7040 4596
- Migrant Helpline www.migranthehelpline.org.uk (south east England) Press Office: 01304 203977
- North of England Refugee Service www.refugee.org.uk Press Office: 0191 245 7311
- Refugee Action www.refugee-action.org.uk (London and regional offices) Press Office: 0161 233 1956
- Refugee Council www.refugeecouncil.org.uk (London and regional offices) Press Office: 020 7346 1213 Out of hours: 0870 055 5500 pager 865169
- Scottish Refugee Council www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk Press Office: 0141 223 7927
- Welsh Refugee Council www.welshrefugeecouncil.org Press Office: 029 2043 2996
- UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) www.unhcr.org.uk Press Office: 020 7759 8090

Refugee-related organisations

- Amnesty International www.amnesty.org Press Office: 020 7413 5566
- Helen Bamber Foundation www.helenbamber.org Tel: 020 7631 4492
- Institute of Race Relations www.irr.org.uk Tel: 020 7837 0041
- Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture www.torturecare.org.uk Press Office: 020 7697 7783 / 7792
- Save the Children www.savethechildren.org.uk Press Office: 020 7012 6841

Organisations dealing with wider immigration issues

- Bail for Immigration Detainees www.biduk.org Press Office: 020 7247 3590
- Equality & Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com Press Office: 020 3117 0251
- Immigration Advisory Service www.iasuk.org Press Office: 020 7357 7511
- Immigration Law Practitioners Association ilpa.org.uk Press Office: 020 7251 8383
- International Organization for Migration www.iomlondon.org Press Office: 020 7808 1084 / 1094
- Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants www.jcwi.org.uk Press Office: 020 7251 8708
- Migrants Rights Network www.migrantsrights.org.uk Press Office: 020 7288 1267



Reporting Asylum and Refugee Issues

Message from Jeremy Dear, General Secretary, National Union of Journalists:

The media plays a key role in how refugees and asylum seekers are perceived and, ultimately, how they are treated by the public at large.

The NUJ is only too aware that inaccurate, sensationalist and inflammatory stories harm community relations and can lead to violent attacks against some of the most vulnerable people in society.

When journalists join the NUJ, they sign up to our Code of Conduct; a document that sets the industry's ethical standards and includes a commitment for reporters not to mention a person's race, colour or religion unless it is relevant to the story.

The Code has been strengthened in recent years by the introduction of a Conscience Clause stating the union's determination to defend journalists disciplined for refusing to contribute to a story that breaks the Code of Conduct.

We believe the Clause is important not only because it protects our members and leads the way in ethical journalism, but also because it promotes accurate, fair and balanced reporting of these issues, which is the least our readers, listeners and viewers deserve.

This excellent publication will help them receive that. It's a fantastic resource because it gives journalists all the information they need at their fingertips and, hopefully, will help nail asylum myths by allowing our members to put the correct facts into the public domain.

Message from Bemma Donkoh, Country Representative, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) London:

Asylum and immigration issues are complicated areas of public policy and debate. Balanced and well-informed media coverage of refugee issues gives readers impartial and considered access to sides of the story often lost or misrepresented.

In recent years, strides have been made to address 'the danger that inaccurate, misleading or distorted reporting may generate and atmosphere of fear and hostility that is not borne out by the facts', including the recognition that such reporting could be a breach of Clause 1 of the industry Code of Practice (Press Complaints Commission Guidance Note issued October 2003).

Yet as the focus of the debate has switched to immigration, particularly in light of EU expansion, wide-spread confusion over what constitutes an asylum seeker or a refugee and how this differs from an economic migrant persists. Asylum seekers and refugees, who have already by definition fled conflict and persecution, are regrettably still subject to suspicion.

In re-launching this leaflet, UNHCR aims to offer journalists seeking to report on refugee issues practical assistance and guidance on how this can be achieved accurately and fairly.

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Terminology

Journalism uses shortcuts to convey information, but it helps to be precise and consistent when using terms with legal definitions.

Who is an asylum seeker?

Anyone who seeks protection claiming they have suffered persecution or fear persecution as described under the 1951 Refugee Convention, and is waiting for a decision.

Who is a refugee?

Anyone who has been granted asylum (refugee status) under the 1951 Refugee Convention, to which the UK is a signatory along with 146 other countries. The precise legal definition in Article 1 of the Convention refers to a 'refugee' as a person 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.'

What about those fleeing general conflict?

People who do not qualify for the strict definition of refugee status but who have recognised protection needs may be granted humanitarian protection allowing them 'leave to remain' in the UK for a defined or indefinite period. UNHCR describes these people also as 'refugees'.

Who is allowed to seek asylum?

EVERYONE – It is a fundamental human right to request asylum under international law. There are no 'illegal asylum seekers'. The term 'bogus asylum-seeker' is also inaccurate and misleading as it pre-judges the outcome of an asylum application – rather like describing a defendant as entering a 'bogus plea of innocence' during a trial.

Can those not granted refugee status or temporary leave to remain be sent back home?

YES – The term 'unsuccessful asylum seeker' covers individuals

What drives people to seek asylum?

Relatively little coverage is given to the human rights abuses and conflicts that force people to flee their homes, yet providing this global context would improve the quality of debate around asylum issues. Research has shown that historical, cultural and family links with the UK and a desire for safety under the rule of law are more significant than so-called 'pull factors' like access to benefits. A wealth of background information is available on the Internet, and balance can be achieved by referring to a variety of sources (*see: Contacts panel overleaf*).

Interviewing refugees and asylum-seekers

Asylum-seekers and refugees have a right to be heard, and many have amazing stories to tell. However fear of reprisals 'back home', negative coverage and public hostility in the UK make many reluctant to talk to journalists. Refugee agencies listed overleaf may be able to recommend individuals prepared to speak with the media.

When seeking interviews be aware of the impact your piece could

have on the individual's situation in the UK, any impact on friends and family in their country of origin and be sensitive to requests for anonymity.

Journalists are asked to respect the sensitivities of individuals who may be reluctant to talk about their reasons for flight because doing so resurrects painful or traumatic memories.

Who are 'economic migrants'?

Persons who leave their home country to seek work are economic migrants. The term could be applied to all those who obtain work permits from the government to fill labour shortages in the UK. UNHCR describes a 'migrant' as someone who makes a conscious, voluntary choice to leave their country of origin. When they want to, they can return home in safety.

What do you call someone who tries to enter the UK by unlawful means?

Some persons smuggled into the UK (hidden in lorries, etc.) will be seeking asylum, some employment, but it is inaccurate to categorise them all as 'asylum-seekers' or 'economic migrants' since their reasons for arrival cannot be known. 'Irregular migrants' might be a more accurate and less confusing term to describe these persons. People-smugglers are committing a crime but their clientele may not be.

Who is an 'illegal immigrant'?

The term 'illegal immigrant' could apply to people who can be shown to have:

- entered the country illegally, without permission from an Immigration Officer, who then continue to reside in the UK without contacting the authorities or making an asylum application; OR
- entered the country legally, with all the necessary documents, but then disregarded limits placed on their length of stay ('overstayers').

Note: Asylum seekers have registered with the Home Office and are allowed to remain in the UK while their claim is being considered. The 1951 Refugee Convention acknowledges that someone fleeing persecution may enter a country by irregular means (and often without any documents) in order to claim asylum. They are therefore not 'illegal immigrants'.

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What's the story?

Avoid mentioning a person's refugee/asylum status unless it directly relates to the story. For example, reporting a criminal's immigration status may appeal to certain audiences but can have serious consequences for the exiled community as a whole. Make sure that any such descriptions are accurate and in accordance with the PCC Code of Practice.

Getting facts and figures right

A failure to distinguish between fact and conjecture can have alarming consequences, as can distortion of facts and figures. It is always worth checking and challenging figures quoted by individuals or parties with a vested interest.