

REPORTING ON REFUGEES

Guidance by & for journalists

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Asylum and immigration remain controversial, newsworthy topics about which people have strong opinions.

Our Code of Conduct commits us to providing coverage that is non-racist. As in many other countries, there are manifestations of racism in Ireland and that makes our job all the harder. This leaflet is designed to assist working journalists. The NUJ has also published Guidelines on Race Reporting which are available on our website www.nuj.org.uk. In covering asylum and immigration related issues journalists must also remember their obligations under the Press Council of Ireland Code of Practice for Newspapers and Periodicals and under Irish broadcasting legislation.

It's important for editors, reporters, sub-editors and photographers to realise that, when we get it wrong, people suffer directly. Immigrant communities (which now include some of our own journalistic colleagues) have told us how inaccurate press articles or broadcasts have even led to violence against them, in some cases. But sloppy, unprofessional work on these subjects always hurts the vulnerable in some way.

That means always checking and cross-checking information; being aware of the veracity of sources; being mindful of the language we use and the context in which information is presented.

In seeking to improve standards we are not trying to stifle debate. Rather we are seeking to ensure that all of us meet our obligations through fair and honest journalism.

While there is a widespread awareness of the importance of accurate reporting some of our colleagues continue to print or broadcast myths and misinformation about refugees and asylum-seekers. Inaccurate terminology and commentary has increased confusion and that breeds prejudice. Frequently the words 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' are used interchangeably, without distinction. In some quarters these words are used as a lazy shorthand for 'foreign' or 'non-EU'.

The NUJ is committed to quality journalism for its own sake and also because journalists can only expect proper salaries and working conditions if they provide professional work. That is why we have co-operated with the UNHCR and the Irish Refugee Council in republishing these guidelines.— **NUJ Ireland**



DEFINITIONS

It's vital that we use the correct terms and the appropriate language when dealing with sensitive subjects.

Who is a refugee?

International law defines refugees as people

- who are outside their country of origin and
- whose life and, or human rights are seriously at risk because of
- who they are (e.g. their race, nationality, social group) or what they believe (e.g. their religious beliefs or political opinion); and
- their governments will not or cannot protect them.

Refugees are entitled to be protected against forcible return to their countries of origin.

Who is an asylum-seeker?

Asylum-seekers are people seeking protection as refugees, who are waiting for the government to decide on their applications. These people are entitled to stay in the state unless their application to be considered as a refugee is rejected. They also have a right to a fair hearing of that application and to an appeal if necessary.

There is no such thing as a bogus asylum seeker or an illegal asylum-seeker. Everybody has a right to seek asylum in another country.

People who don't qualify for protection as refugees will not receive refugee status and may be deported. But calling someone a bogus asylum-seeker is the same as calling a defendant a 'bogus defendant'. It is nonsensical.

What about people fleeing civil wars and other conflicts?

People who flee civil wars and other conflicts may be refugees. If they don't cross an international border, they are referred to as 'internally displaced people'.

Those who do not qualify for refugee status may alternatively be granted subsidiary protection or a humanitarian status allowing them 'temporary leave to remain' in Ireland for a defined period if they cannot safely return to their home country. Temporary leave to remain is usually granted for one year.

What is subsidiary protection?

Subsidiary protection can be given to a person who does not meet the legal definition of a refugee. Three grounds exist for giving subsidiary protection. They include when a person faces (1) the death penalty or execution in their country; (2) torture, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment; and (3) threats from an international or internal armed conflict. This status was created across the EU by a Directive.

Who are separated children ?

These are persons under 18 who are outside their country of origin and separated from both parents or their usual care givers. They are under the care of the Health Service Executive in Ireland. A separated child may have an asylum claim. They have unique challenges, including the need for safe accommodation and assistance with presenting their asylum claims, if they need asylum.

What is trafficking ?

Trafficking is the movement of a person, by means such as deception, coercion or force, for the purpose of exploitation.



Are 'asylum-seekers' illegally in the country?

NO. Asylum-seekers have registered with the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC) and are allowed to remain in Ireland legally while their asylum claims are being considered. Asylum-seekers may enter the country in secret or be smuggled in. But such means of entry doesn't make them illegal – if they register with the Commissioner after their arrival.

Refugees often have to flee in great haste and in secret, leaving passports and other travel documents behind. To lack these papers does not necessarily make a refugee illegal. Some of the people smuggled into Ireland (such as those hidden in lorries) will be seeking asylum. But it is inaccurate to categorise them all as 'asylum-seekers' since some may have no intention or valid reason to seek asylum.

Asylum seekers are housed in accommodation centres (Direct Provision) across the country, where they receive, among others, food and a small cash payment of €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child per week.

Getting facts and figures right

A clear distinction between fact and conjecture is essential. A blurring of this line can have alarming consequences. It is always worth checking and challenging figures quoted by politicians or others with an interest. To enhance credibility indicate the provenance of statistics.

INTERVIEWING REFUGEES & 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', stereotyping, negative coverage and public hostility make many reluctant to talk to journalists.

When seeking interviews:

- be clear about your purpose;
- be sensitive to requests for anonymity;
- inform yourself about countries of origin.

Photography and filming

Take care when publishing images that may identify individuals. Make sure captions are accurate. If in doubt about the use of images – talk to the people being portrayed making sure you have obtained their permission for use of the image or of footage for television.

People fleeing persecution leave families behind who may face retribution from repressive regimes as a result of the identification of relatives in Ireland.

Exiles who have been political activists in other countries may risk death threats or attacks by agents of a regime or by regime loyalists in Ireland.

Asylum-seekers and refugees are entitled to have their privacy respected. Special care should be taken when identifying children. Giving prominence simply because of their asylum or refugee status could lead to unwarranted discrimination and hostility.

Know your experts

When relying on experts and specialist organisations, it helps to check their details to provide context for the public – most will have websites that provide some background. Avoid relying on one source, especially when issues are contentious. There is a great variety to choose from.



Reporting the cause of asylum-seeking

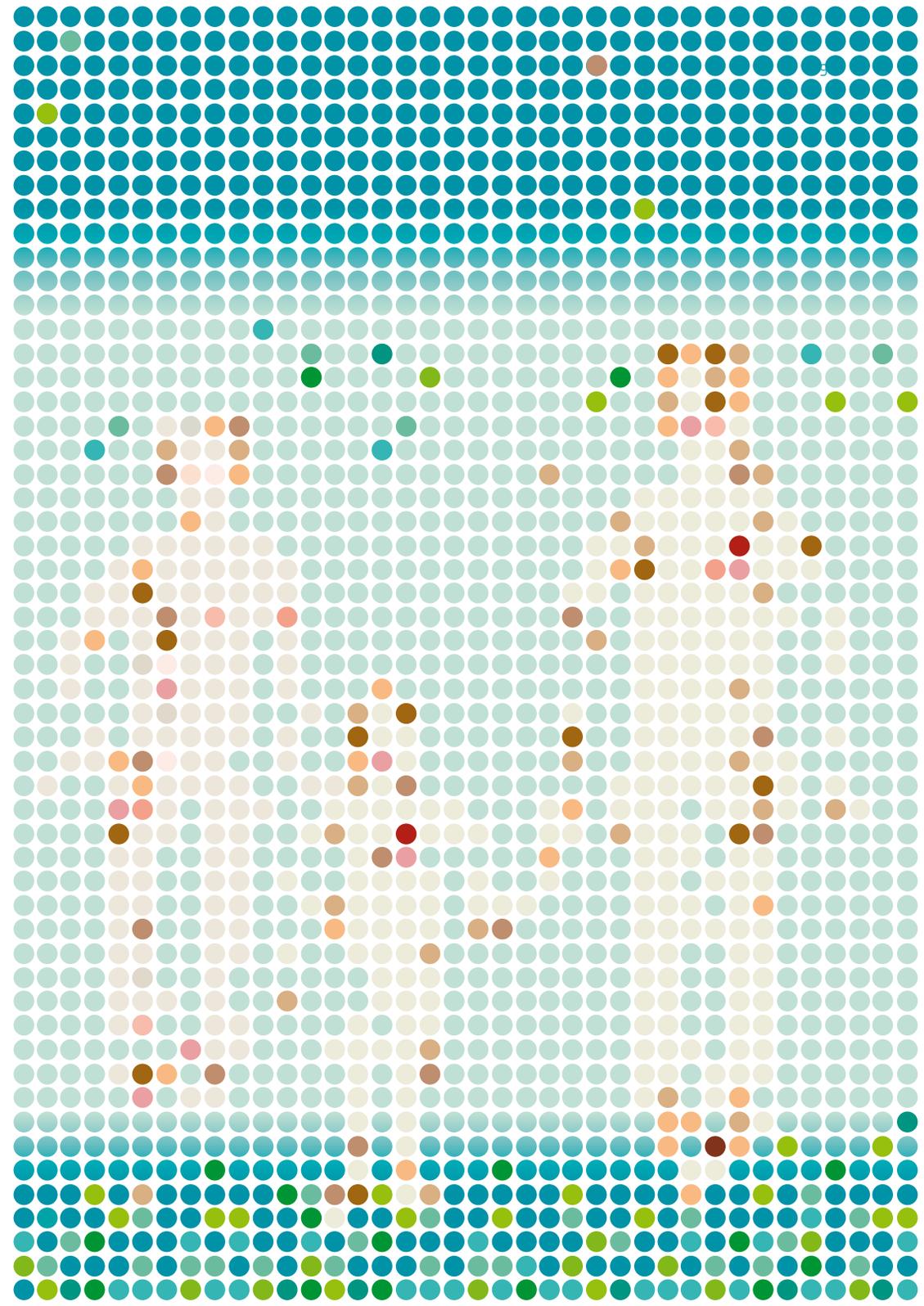
Relatively little coverage is given to the human rights abuses and conflicts that force people to flee their homes, yet providing this global context would improve the quality of debate around asylum issues. There has been an abundance of reporting on so-called 'pull' factors which attract people to Ireland. But for an asylum-seeker, cultural and family links and a desire for safety may be more significant than 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).

Reporting third party comment

To avoid misleading or distorted reporting, care should be taken when quoting third party comments – and the prominence given to them. Publishing unsubstantiated claims or comments is poor journalistic practice. In the case of asylum issues, publishing hostile allegations can generate fear and hostility that is not borne out by the facts.

When citing official or government sources include quotes from organisations representing refugees/asylum-seekers for fair and balanced coverage.



USEFUL RESOURCES

Code of Conduct

National Union of Journalists in Ireland
www.nuj.org.uk

CONTACTS FOR FACTS AND QUOTES

Press

National Union of Journalists in Ireland
01-817 0340 www.nuj.org.uk

Office of the Press Ombudsman
1890 208 080 www.pressombudsman.ie

Governmental & statutory sector

Office of the Minister for Justice, Equality & Law Reform
1890 221 227 www.justice.ie

Office of the Minister for Integration
01-647 3000 www.integration.ie

Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner
01-602 8000 www.orac.ie

Health Service Executive
www.hse.ie

Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service
1890 551 500 www.inis.gov.ie

Refugee Appeals Tribunal
01-474 8400 www.refappeal.ie

Reception & Integration Agency
01-418 3200 www.ria.irlgov.ie

Refugee Legal Service
01-646 9600 www.legalaidboard.ie

Voluntary sector

Akidwa
01-814 8582 www.akidwa.ie

Amnesty International/Irish Section
01-863 8300 www.amnesty.ie

Doras Luimni
061-310 328 www.dorasluimni.org

Galway Refugee Support Group
091-779 083

ICCL
01-799 4504 www.iccl.ie

Irish Human Rights Commission
01-858 9601 www.ihrc.ie

Irish Red Cross
01-642 4600 www.redcross.ie

Irish Refugee Council
01-764 5854 www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie

NASC
021-431 7411 www.nascireland.org

Refugee & Migrant Project
01-505 3157 www.catholicbishops.ie/refugees

SPIRASI
01-838 9664 www.spirasi.ie

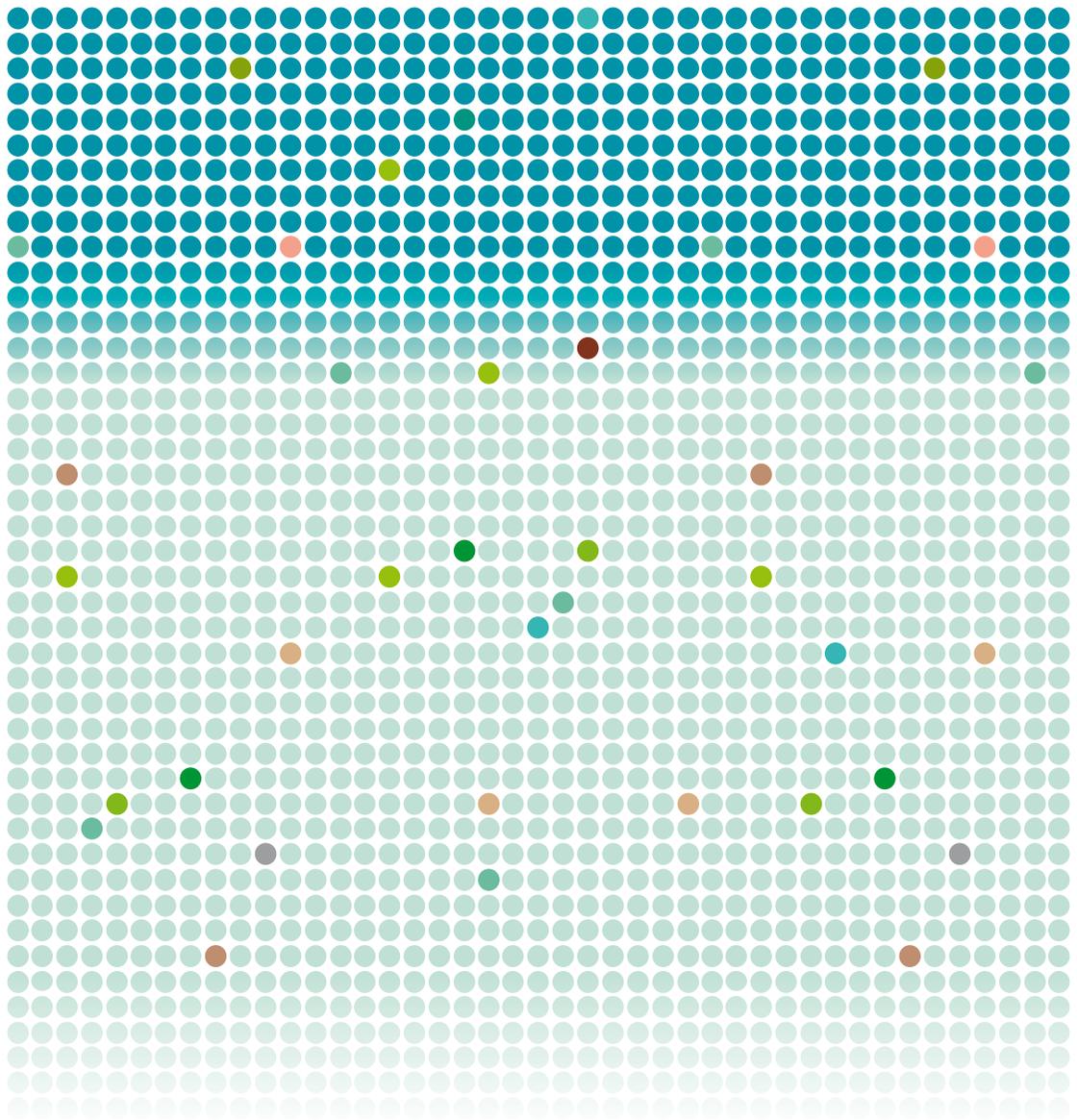
Vincentian Refugee Centre
01-810 2580 www.vincentians.ie

International organisations

UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
01-631 4614 www.unhcr.ie

International Organisation for Migration (IOM)
01-878 7900 www.iomdublin.org





www.unhcr.ie



www.nuj.org.uk



www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie

