

Case Study:

**Media Coverage of Refugee and
Asylum Seekers in Ireland
RAXEN 3**

**NCCRI/Equality Authority
Ireland NFP, April 2003**

DISCLAIMER: This study has been compiled by the National Focal Point of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). The opinions expressed by the author/s do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the EUMC. No mention of any authority, organisation, company or individual shall imply any approval as to their standing and capability on the part of the EUMC. This study is provided by the National Focal Point as information guide only, and in particular does not constitute legal advice.

Executive summary

This case study has been undertaken for the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. The study focuses on media reporting of refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland, with a particular focus on national newspaper coverage.

The introduction of the Study highlights the important role the media plays in respect of racism and diversity in Ireland. It is important to emphasise that this role has been both positive and negative. The study inevitably focuses on the more problematic coverage and seeks to identify a number of key strategies that can be enhanced or developed to address the problems identified.

Part One of the study focuses on contexts, in particular

- Inward migration into Ireland.
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers.
- The Media in Ireland.
- Media Reporting of issues related to Refugees and Asylum Seekers.
- Government policy.
- The role of the media in Ireland in reporting refugees and asylum seekers.

There have been significant changes in demographic trends in Ireland in recent times. The Republic of Ireland is now a country of net inward migration for only the second time since the State was established in 1922. This is a significant change from the mass emigration that has characterised population movement in Ireland in twentieth century in Ireland and, indeed since the early part of the nineteenth century.

Since the late 1990's there have been a significant increase in the number of people seeking asylum in Ireland, There were only 39 asylum applications in 1992, and over 11,000 per annum in 2002. While this increase has been significant new development, the most recent figures indicate that asylum applications to Ireland are not much higher than the European average per capita. The extent of the increase is considerably magnified by the almost not existent numbers of people seeking asylum to Ireland prior to the 1990's in the post second world war era.

The importance of newspapers as a source of news and comment is reflected in the fact that newspaper readership in Ireland is the highest per capita in Europe. The newspaper sector can be divided into nationally circulated broadsheets and tabloids and into daily and Sunday papers. There also 38 key regional newspapers, which are published on a monthly basis throughout the Republic of Ireland, some of which are widely circulated.

There is strong competition in the Irish market from both Irish papers and from British newspapers, which are increasingly seeking to produce Irish editions. The strongest and most dominant newspaper group in the Irish market is the Irish Independent Group which owns the daily and Sunday tabloid and broadsheet newspapers with the highest circulation in Ireland, It also owns 26 of the top 38 circulated regional newspapers in Ireland and has recently acquired titles in Northern

Ireland and the United Kingdom, including the UK published Independent, which is also circulated in Ireland.

There have been a number of the studies that have been undertaken at a European level, including the work of the EUMC and ECRI and the work of individual academic researchers, including Teun Van Dijk, Charles Husband and Klaus Schönbach, which have focussed on the role of the media and racism. These studies show there are often close parallels with newspaper coverage in other countries, including tabloid coverage of refugee and asylum issues in Germany in the 1990's.

Media analysis in Ireland has been the focus of limited attention until recent years. Much of the analysis that previously existed was largely restricted to circulation figures, and other commercial related issues rather than content analysis. With the development of media studies courses, as opposed to more vocationally orientated schools of journalism, there has been an increasing interest in content analysis.

Irish newspaper coverage of refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland is divided into three approximate phases to help illuminate different trends in coverage. The first period addressed the 1997/98 period and gives some examples of the near hysterical comment that appeared in both tabloid and broadsheet papers at this time. Such newspaper coverage appeared to be moderated in the second phase of coverage studies, which followed a number of conferences, publications and critical comment, by expert bodies, journalists and media analysts. The third phase which covers the period to 2002 shows that while overall newspaper coverage has improved, there has been renewed examples of irresponsible coverage, the worst of which appears to be from a British tabloid newspaper circulated in Ireland, the Irish Mirror.

The role of government policy and its link with media coverage is briefly considered. There is some evidence to show that the initial failure of the government to establish sufficient infrastructure to receive and to process the applications for asylum, was a causal factor in the negative coverage given to asylum seekers. This situation has now changed and there is now a significant infrastructure in place to both process applications and to provide for basic accommodation and other needs.

It is evident that irresponsible reporting of asylum seekers both predated and post dated the introduction of government infrastructure through the establishment of key reception and application assessment agencies. Indeed some tabloid newspapers continue to persist in presenting a misleading picture of asylum seekers entitlements through totally unfounded claims of social welfare support for cars, mobile phones and entertainment allowances. This has fuelled the racism that some asylum seekers have experienced.

The key stakeholders that have the potential to impact on the reporting of refugees and asylum seeker are identified in Part Two of the study and are as follows:

1. Media related organisations.
2. Government Departments and Agencies.
3. Specialised and expert bodies.
4. Non Government organisations

Part Three of this study examines relevant interactions and processes under the following headings:

- Guidelines and Codes of Practice
- Awareness raising
- Protection against incitement
- Minority ethnic participation in the media industry
- Specialised Reporting
- Complaint mechanisms
- Monitoring Mechanisms
- National Action Plan Against Racism

Part Four outlines a series of conclusions and recommendations including enhancing existing strategies and developing new strategies to look at the role of the media and diversity in Ireland, including a focus on refugees and asylum seekers. These strategies are considered under the following headings:

- Tackling Irresponsible reporting
- Effective External and Internal Complaints Processes
- Defamation
- Monitoring and Analysis
- Participation by minority ethnic groups
- The role of Sources

Introduction

The role of the media is crucial to the further strengthening of an anti-racist society in Ireland, where cultural diversity is valued and respected. In this regard, the role of the media in Ireland has been both positive and negative. Despite evidence of a more general growing understanding and analysis of the issues in recent years, and an acknowledgement that the media have a right to publish what is considered to be in the public interest, there continues to be examples of irresponsible of media reporting, and more often, reporting that fails to provide adequate context or wider understanding on complex issues.

This Study inevitably focuses on the negative reporting. The United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan stated that there was a growing tendency to equate refugees

“at best with economic migrants, and at worst with cheats, criminals or even terrorists”¹.

This is not intended to detract from the sometimes excellent reporting that is also evident in Ireland that provides both information about current events in the public interest and contextual research on issues related to refugees and asylum seekers.

This Study contends that there has been significant, though inconsistent, improvements in the coverage of issues related to refugees and asylum seekers in recent years in both the national and regional papers in Ireland since the worst period of reporting around 1997/98. However notable exceptions to this trend remain, particularly in some of the current coverage by some tabloid newspapers.

While criticisms of irresponsibility and sensationalism have been sometimes levelled at the media in respect of other forms of reporting, the reporting of issues related to groups such as refugees and asylum seekers can have a disproportionate impact. Irresponsible reporting can directly fuel racism and can contribute to creating the conditions that make racism more likely to occur.

There are a number of factors that make refugees and asylum seekers more vulnerable to irresponsible media reporting, including:

- The vulnerability of refugees and asylum seekers² to racism, including discrimination and in some cases assaults, harassment and other forms abuse, which can be fuelled by media reports.
- The low risk of legal action or other sanctions being taken against newspapers that have consistently engaged in irresponsible reporting.
- The ambivalence and sometimes antipathy towards refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland and concomitant lack of major public outcry.

It is also evident that some forms of irresponsible reporting are not immediately obvious and can only be detected through media analysis over a period of time. This form of irresponsible media stigmatises and in the worst cases defames the group concerned through the application of particular labels.

¹ Quoted in NCCRI, UNHCR, Know Racism, (2002). Myths and misinformation about Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ireland.

² And those perceived to be refugees and asylum seekers

Thus the perceived actions of individuals or some members of a particular community are ascribed to the community as a whole. In some cases, for example anti social behaviour, some commentators have even gone as far as to suggest that such behaviour is an inherent part of the group's culture. In other cases editors appear to have preconceived certainties about what they believe to be the correct overall picture and trends they selectively apply any emerging data to fit these prejudices and preconceptions.

The two most vulnerable groups to such reporting in the Irish context are the Traveller community and recent migrants to Ireland, in particular refugee and asylum seekers. This study focuses on media reporting of issues related to refugees and asylum seekers as an example of such reporting but draws parallels with the experience of other communities who have experienced racism in Ireland.

It is important to note that irresponsible media reporting is not just the concern of specialised and expert bodies, but has also become a matter of concern to journalists and the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), which are highlighted in this Study.

The role of the media and racism has also been the focus of a number of European focussed studies, including the EUMC and the focus of debates and conferences within Ireland and elsewhere. One recent example was the recent roundtable of racism in the media organised by the President of the European Parliament, Pat Cox, MEP and the EUMC that was held in Cork, Ireland in 2002.

This study will primarily look at media reporting of issues related to refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland in the print media as there have been not significant studies of the broadcast media on this issue. However there is sufficient evidence available to show that some local radio programmes and late night phone in programmes have also been vehicles of irresponsible journalism.

The focus of the study is forward looking and constructive rather than simply highlighting the deficiencies and the structure of the report is adapted from the guidance set out in the EUMC RAXEN 3 Guidelines.

Contents

Executive summary	2
Introduction	5
Part One: Contexts	6
Part Two: Stakeholders, actors, drivers and obstacles	19
Part Three: Relevant interactions/processes	23
Part Four: Perspectives and Conclusions	31
Annex I: Copy of NCCRI/UNHCR/Know Racism Leaflet	35
Annex II: Select Bibliography	37

Part One: The Contexts

The following contexts are briefly analysed in this part of the study:

- Inward migration into Ireland
- Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- The Media in Ireland
- Media Reporting of issues related to Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- The role of the media in Ireland in reporting refugees and asylum seekers

Inward migration into Ireland

The following is a summary of key features in the dramatic socio-economic and demographic changes that have taken place in Ireland in recent years:

- In the period up to 2001 Ireland's economic growth rate was more than double any other member state in the EU. This has resulted in significant labour and skills shortages across the whole of the labour market.
- There has been a dramatic fall in unemployment in recent years from over 20% in the 1980's to less than 5% in 2002. As a consequence there has been active recruitment of workers from both EEA³ and non-EEA countries.
- Ireland has been traditionally seen as a country of mass emigration. Largely as a consequence of almost continuous, though fluctuating levels of emigration, Ireland's population actually declined from 3m in 1926 to 2.8m in 1961. Between 1996 and 2002 the population of Ireland rose from 3.6m to 3.9m⁴, the most rapid increase in population since the foundation of the State.

The pattern of inward migration into Ireland in relation to the origin of migrants has changed dramatically in recent years. Between the period 1996 and 2002, returned Irish nationals accounted for 46% of immigration into Ireland, however this share has been declining since 1999, when it peaked at 55% share of total inward migration.

The most significant trend emerging in the most recent intercensal period, 1996 to 2002 has been the increase in the share of migrants coming to Ireland from the rest of the world⁵. Immigration from the rest of the world accounted for 35% of immigration in 2002, compared with 11% in 1996. Averaged out over the period 1996-2002, the proportion of people from the rest of the world was roughly the same as immigrants from the UK to Ireland.

Concomitant with this increase of migrants from the rest of the world, there has been a parallel decrease in the share and number of UK and USA migrants over the same period. The actual number of US immigrants to Ireland fell by half between 1996 and 2002 and their share of the total declined from 10% to 6%. The number of immigrants

³ The European Economic Area (EEA) consists of the EU, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein.

⁴ Central Statistics Office, (September 2002). Preliminary Report 2002 Census.

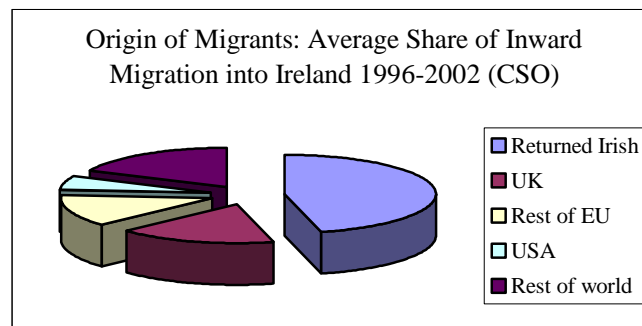
⁵ This category defined in the census as all countries in the world, excluding the US and the EU.

from the UK to Ireland declined by 39% between 1996 and 2002 as well as their share falling from 21% to 11% over the same period. The rest of the European Union's share of immigration into Ireland has remained almost static at 13% between 1996 and 2002.

**Table One:
Inward Migration into Ireland
Origin (% of Total) Inward
Migration into Ireland in 1996, 1999 and 2002 (CSO)⁶**

Origin	1996	1999	2002	Average 1996-2002 (Chart One)
Returned Irish	45%	55%	38%	46%
UK	21%	17%	11%	17%
Rest of EU	13%	14%	13%	13%
USA	10%	5%	3%	6%
Rest of world	11%	9%	35%	18%

Chart One⁷



**Table Two:
Inward Migration into Ireland
Number of Immigrants (000) in 1996, 1999 and 2002 (CSO)⁸**

Year	1996	1999	2002
Number (000)	39.2	47.5	47.5

Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The number of asylum seekers to Ireland has also increased significantly in recent years, although it now appears to have levelled out at approximately 10/11,000 per year in the period 2000-2003. This is slightly higher than the EU average per head of population. However it is also the case that the total number of asylum seekers and

⁶ Central Statistics Office (5 September 2002). Population and migration Estimates. April 2002.

⁷ Ibid Table 8

⁸ ibid

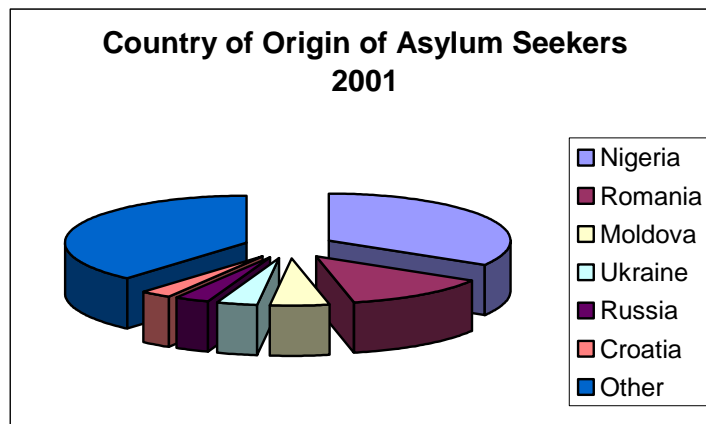
refugees in Ireland is much less than many other EU countries per head of population as there was virtually no asylum seekers coming to Ireland before 1996.

The main countries of origin for asylum seekers in Ireland in 2001 was Nigeria (33.5%) Romania (13.15), Moldova (5.3%), Ukraine (3.6%), Russia (3.0%), Croatia (2.8%) Other (38.7%).⁹

Table Two: Number of Asylum Applications In Ireland 1992-2001¹⁰

Year	Number of Asylum Applications
2002	11634
2001	10325
2000	10938
1999	7724
1998	4626
1997	3883
1996	1179
1995	424
1994	362
1993	91
1992	39

Chart Two



The Media in Ireland

This section provides a contextual overview of the newspaper circulation and ownership in Ireland

⁹ Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner. (2002) Annual Report 2001.

¹⁰ Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform

The following table sets out the independently audited circulation figures for the main daily, evening and regional newspapers in the Republic of Ireland.

Circulation and Ownership of Irish and Irish Editions of Daily, Evening and Sunday Newspapers¹¹

National Newspaper	Circulation Figures	Ownership
Daily Broadsheets		
Irish Independent	169,533	Independent Group
Irish Times	114,537	Irish Times Trust
Irish Examiner	64,628	Crosbie Holdings
Daily Telegraph (UK)	3,501	
The Guardian (UK)	4,136	Guardian Trust
The Independent (UK)	1,864	Independent Group
Daily Tabloids		
The Star	106,495	Independent Group
The (Irish) Daily Mirror (UK)	78,748	Trinity Mirror
The Irish Sun (UK)	116,140	News international
Dail Mail (UK)	9,055	Associated Newspapers
Evening Tabloids		
Evening Herald	104,137	Independent Group
Evening Echo	27,993	Crosbie Holdings
Sunday Newspapers		
Sunday Independent	305,182	Independent Group
Sunday World	283,612	Independent Group
Ireland on Sunday	151,630	Associated Newspapers
Sunday Business Post	48,949	Thomas Crosbie Holdings
Sunday Tribune	83,328	Tribune Newspapers PLC
Sunday Times (UK)	99,574	News International
Sunday Mirror (UK)	51,382	Trinity Mirror
News of the World (UK)	163,324	News international
The People (UK)	57,243	Trinity Mirror

Circulation¹² and Ownership of the Twelve Most Widely Circulated Regional Newspapers

Regional Newspapers	Circulation (Weekly)	Ownership
Connacht Tribune	30,216	Connacht Tribune PLC
The Kerryman	29,000	Independent Group
Limerick Leader	26,659	Limerick Leader Ltd
Western People	24,242	Thomas Crosbie Holdings
Wexford People/New Ross	23,300	Independent Group

¹¹ Circulation figures from www.medialive.ie Total ABC circulations January-December 2002.

¹² Circulation figures from Irish Media Contacts Directory, May 2002.

Standard		
Clare Champion	21,800	Clare Champion Ltd
Leinster/Offaly Express	18,685	Independent Group
Kilkenny People	18,428	Scottish Radio Holdings
Meath Chronicle	18,400	Meath Chronicle Ltd
Wicklow/Bray People	18,200	Independent Group
Donegal Democrat	16,837	Derry Journal Group (Trinity Mirror)
Drogheda Independent	16,485	Independent Group

Newspaper Ownership and Circulation

Tables show that while there is a diversity of owners and titles in the Irish newspaper market, the most dominant group is the Irish Independent Group, which own the most widely circulated daily broadsheet, (Irish Independent); daily tabloid newspaper (The Star); evening newspaper (Evening Herald); Sunday broadsheet (The Sunday Independent) and Sunday tabloid (Sunday World). The second most significant national newspaper owner is Thomas Crosbie Holdings, which owns the Irish Examiner, the Evening Echo and the Sunday Business Post, followed by News International (Irish Sun and The Sunday Times). The largest UK based media organisations in Ireland are News International, Associated Newspapers and Trinity Mirror.

At a regional level, the Independent Group has a dominant share of titles and the market, owning 26 out of the 38 regional titles listed as the leading regional newspapers in the Republic of Ireland¹³, including five of the top twelve most widely circulated regional newspapers.

The Independent Group also own the Independent newspaper published in Britain and also circulated in Ireland and the Belfast Telegraph and Sunday Life Titles, which are the most widely circulated daily and Sunday newspapers in Northern Ireland.

The dominant share of the Independent Group in Irish newspapers and circulation is clearly evident, although it is also important not to present a picture of a monolithic ownership and circulation of newspapers in Ireland. For example, the combined sales of the Irish Times and the Irish Examiner, indicate that half of daily sales of Irish broadsheet newspapers circulated every day are outside the Independent Group and the combined circulation figures for the Irish Sun and Irish Mirror shows that the Tabloid sector is very competitive.

Similarly there is significant competition in the Sunday newspaper market to the extent that some newspapers with lower are struggling to continue.

Readership of newspapers in Ireland is higher per capita than any other EU State. The Irish newspaper industry is a very competitive market and some newspapers appear to be particularly struggling in recent months. These include the (Irish) Daily Mirror whose circulation dropped by 10.8% (9,542 copies) to 78,748 in 2002

¹³ Irish Media Contacts Directory

compared with 88,290 in 2001. The Sunday Mirror was also down 17.4% (7,964) over the same period as was The People (10.9%).

For some newspapers, there can be sharp gains and losses in over a twelve-month period for individual titles that indicates a fluid and competitive market. This had lead to accusations of perceived sharp practices such as ‘bulking’ (giving away free copies to boost market share) and costly promotion tactic such as giving away free CD’s. There is therefore evidence to suggest that there is significant pressure on some editors to maximise their circulation figures.

Media Reporting of issues related to Refugees and Asylum Seekers

The media’s role concerning racism and cultural diversity has been the focus of a number of symposia, conferences and publications at a European level, including the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC and the European Commission on Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). The role of the media and racism has also been the focus of research by academics such as Teun Van Dijk, whose methodology has been widely adapted by other researchers in this area of concern. Other noted researchers in this area include Charles Husband, Bradford University and Klaus Schönbach of the University of Amsterdam.

Of most recent relevance are the outcomes of the World Conference Against Racism (Durban, September 2001) and the European Conference Against Racism (Strasbourg, October 2000).

In the General Conclusions of the Strasbourg Conference, media organisations and journalists were invited to reflect on:

- The importance of recruitment of journalists from targeted groups
- An inclusive coverage of society using diverse sources of information
- Factual and accurate reporting
- Avoiding stereotyping
- Treating individual behaviour without linking to a persons origin unless relevant
- Depicting diversity in society
- Presenting cultural diversity and immigration as a structural and positive component of European societies
- Opening the broadcasting system and programmes for intercultural issues
- Alerting public opinion to the dangers of intolerance
- Challenging the assumptions behind racist or xenophobic remarks made in the course of interviews, reports and discussion programmes
- Developing a multicultural approach to output.
- Developing self regulatory codes of conduct and self regulation to combat racism in the media
- The importance of in-house and initial training for journalists

The World Conference Against Racism also had a strong focus on the media and communication, with seven paragraphs in the Durban Programme of Action¹⁴.

¹⁴ Para 140-147. World Conference Against Racism. Programme of Action. www.unhchr.ch

The EUMC also published 'Racism and cultural diversity in the mass media. An Overview of Research and Examples of Good Practice in the EU Member States, 1995-2000', which includes a focus on Ireland.

The role of the media in Ireland in reporting refugees and asylum seekers

The media has played an important role in both challenging but also perpetuating myths and misinformation about refugees and asylum seekers in Ireland. Through an analysis of newspaper articles and headlines in recent years a number of general trends emerge.

Period One

1997/98

There was a lot of sensationalised newspaper coverage related to the increase in asylum seekers coming to Ireland, including extreme comment that sometimes bordered on hysteria. There were examples of poor and irresponsible media reporting in both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers during this period.

Period Two

1998/2000

Following complaints from bodies such as the NCCRI, NGO's, the NUJ related to newspaper coverage of refugees and asylum seekers there was improved coverage though inconsistent particularly in the broadsheet papers. Less change was evident in some regional and tabloid newspapers.

Period Three

2001/2002

The coverage of refugees and asylum seekers in broadsheet papers is generally more balanced and fair. However much coverage continues to lack context and there continues to be a focus on issues that present asylum seekers as a problem. A number of tabloid newspapers continue to engage in blatantly irresponsible reporting, with new forms of labelling.

Period One: 1997

The worst period for the coverage of issues related to refugees and asylum seekers occurred over the period 1997/98, which coincided with a significant increase in the number of people seeking asylum in Ireland (see above). A number of consistent labels were evident in much the newspaper coverage at this time

Alarmist reporting of the numbers of asylum seekers coming to Ireland

There was much exaggerated and alarmist comment about the number of asylum seekers coming to Ireland in during 1997/8. This took the form of repeated assertions that there was a 'tide' or a 'flood' of people coming to Ireland, with the underlying assumption that Ireland would be overwhelmed by such an increase. The following are examples of some of the press headlines:

'Demand to curb on tide of refugees'
Irish Independent, 29 May 1997

‘5,000 refugees flooding to Ireland’
Sunday World, 20 May 1997

‘Refugee flood to spark homes crisis’
Irish Independent, 12 June 1997

These headlines set the tone of the reports irrespective of their actual content. Indeed in many cases the content continues the alarmist tone of the headline with little attempt to put issues into perspective.

The application of the terms ‘flood’ and ‘tide’ was both alarmist and inaccurate. The Guardian newspaper¹⁵ commented at the time that ‘put in a European context, outside observers might express astonishment at any suggestion that Ireland is being flooded by a sea of refugees’.

The second labeling process that occurred during this period by some sections of the Irish media was the persistent attempt to associate refugees and asylum seekers with begging, petty theft and crime. Again, some newspaper headlines serve as examples:

- ‘Refugees: Police Act to Smash Gang’
Evening Herald, 6 June 1997
- ‘Police Inquiry on Rumanian Refugees’
Irish Times, 4 June 1997
- ‘Begging’: Rumanian refugees caption
Sunday World, 25 May 1997.
- ‘Refugee Rapists on the Rampage’
The Star, 13 June 1997.

The report from the Star seeks to label all refugees as potential rapists:

‘Gardaí have warned women to stay away from refugees after a spree of sex assaults. Prostitutes and minors are the main targets of rapacious Rumanians and Somalians, according to top Garda sources’.

The Gardaí when subsequently asked about the reported crime-wave amongst refugees and asylum seekers dismissed such reports as ‘hyperbole’ and denied that such a crime wave existed.

The third labeling process that was evident during this period was the often repeated assertion that refugees and asylum seekers were bogus and out to exploit the social welfare system in Ireland. Newspaper headlines at the time included:

- ‘Crackdown on 2,000 sponger refugees’
Irish Independent, 7 June 1997.
- ‘Images aimed at tourists attract refugees as well’

¹⁵ A British broadsheet newspaper

Irish Times, 19 April 1997.

- ‘ “Asylum seekers and homeless vie for shelter”, agency’
Irish Times, 9 May 1997.
- Refugees flooding maternity hospitals’
Evening Herald, 25 May 1997
- Refugees get £20m payments. Evening Herald, 6 June 1997.

The cumulative effect from these reports is that not only are refugees and asylum seekers exploiting services and ‘sponging’ but also effectively impeding access to shelter for the homeless (i.e. Irish homeless), and denying ‘Irish’ women access to maternity services.

There is no doubt that the increase in asylum seekers to Ireland during this period did contribute to the pressure on some public services. However few of these reports attempted to put the issues into context. For example there were numerous existing reports on the shortfall in both general and emergency housing in Ireland during this period that could not in anyway be blamed on refugees and asylum seekers.

Period Two 1998/2000

During 1997, bodies such as the National Coordinating Committee for European Year Against Racism in Ireland highlighted the issue of irresponsible reporting and worked closely with the National Union of Journalists to highlight on going concerns. During the Year Against Racism a number of initiatives were taken to address the issue, including:

- National Media Awards to journalists highlighting the issue of racism in Ireland
- The holding of a joint press conference
- The hosting of a NUJ conference ‘Racism in Ireland: The Media in Focus’ with funding from the European Year Against Racism.

Around this time some journalists and media analysts were also beginning to highlight the issue of alarmist and irresponsible reporting in the Irish Media. These included Andy Pollak and Paul Cullen of the Irish Times, staff and other members of the National Union of Journalists including Seamus Dooley, Eoin Ronayne and Ronan Brady and Cléaraun, which organised a conference on ethical media reporting that included a focus on racism.

Similar developments were also beginning to take place in Northern Ireland with an analysis of news coverage by Liz Fawcett from the Media Studies Department of the University of Ulster¹⁶. Similar concerns were also be raised by NGO’s including Comhlámh¹⁷.

¹⁶ Fawcett, L, (1998). Fitting In. Ethnic minorities in the News Media in Hainsworth, P, (1998). Divided Society. Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland.

¹⁷ Comhlámh, (1998). Focus on Ireland and the Wider World. Winter 1997-88

While it is difficult to measure cause and effect, there was a significant change in the tone and content of reporting of asylum seekers, which may indicate that the internal and external criticism newspaper received had some impact. However there were continuing examples of such stories being generated by tabloids in Ireland and the regional press were somewhat slower to change their coverage than national newspapers.

On 29th July 1998, *The Wexford People*, a regional paper in the South East of Ireland focused on the arrival of 47 Romanians in a freight container in the port of Rosslare and carried a front-page editorial claiming the 'latest influx' of asylum-seekers had brought public services in the town to 'breaking point'.

In an analysis of the media and racism, the Irish Times journalist, Nuala Haughey was particularly critical of the editorial which 'also peddled the usual urban myths about worries that young male asylum-seekers would deliberately impregnate local girls to get residency status here and that the new arrivals were dressed in designer clothes'¹⁸.

The same journalist highlighted the front-page lead story *The Sunday World* in February 2000 stated 'Refugee tried to bite me to death'. This exclusive story was about a young Irish mum whose refugee husband from Kosovo attacked her like a wild animal. This headline, and the accompanying story, attempted to dehumanise the refugee husband, much in the same way as other tabloid headlines dehumanise sex offenders by turning them all into beasts'.

Period Three: 2001/2002

Overall the improved newspaper coverage has been sustained into the most recent period. However this period has also seen the emergence of new forms of labelling and or variations on older themes. The coverage in the broadsheets continues to show significant improvements in coverage since 1997. Many of the main regional newspapers have also demonstrated more balanced and fairer (though at times inconsistent) coverage of issues related to refugees and asylum seekers,

There have also been improvements in some of the tabloids demonstrated by their willingness to highlight issues related to racism and diversity. However there remains notable exceptions and inconsistencies. For example the coverage of the Daily Mirror in recent years has been particularly irresponsible and unbalanced, to give three examples;

'Government declares war on refugees' Daily Mirror, March 6th 2000

'Free cars for Refugees: Cash Grants Buy BMWs'. Daily Mirror, Dec. 16th, 2002.

'Thousands of Refugees go Missing... at a cost of €750m'. Daily Mirror March 14th 2003

¹⁸ Haughey, N (2001) in Farrell, F and Watt, P (2001) Responding to Racism in Ireland.

This type of coverage seeks to consistently portray asylum seekers as a burden on the State. The stories present asylum seekers as living a life of luxury with entitlement to welfare mobile phones, cars and entertainment allowances. Here is no or else little real attempt to provide other perspectives.

The Department of Social and Family Affairs, health boards and the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform have sought to refute such misleading information through both press statements and also by circulating information on the actual entitlement of asylum seekers. In responding to such reports the Mid Western Health Board

‘Criticised what it sees as a ‘great deal of misinformation’ which has been circulating about asylum seekers. In a report to be presented to the monthly meeting of the health board, a senior official, Mr Séamus Woods, rejects allegations that the board has been providing assistance to asylum seekers towards the purchase of cars and mobile phones...The board is committed to providing accessible and appropriate services for all asylum seekers in the region, similar to that provided to our indigenous population’¹⁹

Because of the continuing levels of myths and misinformation, some of which can be directly attributable to newspaper reports, the NCCRI in partnership with Know Racism²⁰ and the Ireland Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) published a leaflet challenging myths and misinformation about asylum seekers and refugees, in particular to challenge labels have been applied to asylum seekers by those who would claim they are work-shy and out to exploit our public services.

‘Aside from the humanitarian considerations of providing adequate shelter and support for people who need it, the following points are relevant {the information leaflet outlined}:

- Asylum seekers are not treated more favourably than Irish citizens and are not, for instance, given assistance towards the costs of cars, mobile phones nor for socializing.
- Asylum seekers are accommodated in full-board accommodation centers across Ireland, and receive 19 Euro per adult per week, and 9.5 Euro per child and child benefit. Discretionary needs payments can also be provided in exceptional circumstances.
- If accommodation was not provided to asylum seekers, many would be homeless because of existing shortages and the costs of accommodation in Ireland.
- Asylum seekers are not allowed to enter into employment until they are granted refugee status. There are many asylum seekers who work in a voluntary capacity in community and refugee projects while they wait for their asylum application to be assessed.
- Asylum seekers are sometimes referred to as ‘bogus’ or having ‘unfounded claims’. While some asylum seekers in Ireland are recognised as having refugee claims, some asylum seekers are found, following an independent determination process, not to have met the definition of refugee contained in the 1951 Geneva

¹⁹ Irish Times, December 2002

²⁰ The Government’s national public awareness programme

Convention and in the Refugee Act, 1996, such terminology is prejudicial and should be avoided. The use of such terms ignores the fact that many asylum seekers, even though they may not qualify for refugee status under the terms of the Geneva Convention, are forced to leave their country of origin because of dire economic, political or social circumstances.

In respect of crime, the Gardaí {Irish Police} have dismissed the contention that there is a crime-wave among asylum seekers as '*hyperbole*', or exaggeration. However to label a whole community for the transgressions of the few is both offensive and inaccurate, and completely ignores the fact that asylum seekers and refugees are also the victims of crime, including sometimes violent assault and harassment.

In respect of health, there has been a tendency to inflate the potential risks that asylum seekers and refugees pose to public health in Ireland. This has included offensive speculation about the risks posed by children in schools and ignores the fact that:

- There is a comprehensive voluntary health screening system in Ireland for asylum seekers and there has been a high uptake of this service.
- Some of the health needs of asylum seekers and refugees are related to torture or other forms of persecution²¹.

²¹ NCCRI, UNHCHR and Know Racism, (2002). Myths and Misinformation about Asylum Seekers.

Part Two: Stakeholders, actors, drivers and challenges

This section considers some of the key stakeholders, actors, drivers and challenges in seeking to address both irresponsible media and to encourage support of more balanced reporting of cultural diversity in the mass media. Part Three of the study will examine some of the strategies that have been adopted to tackle irresponsible reporting.

The key stakeholders identified which have the potential to impact on irresponsible reporting of refugees and asylum seekers are identified as follows:

- Media related organisations.
- Government Departments and Agencies.
- Specialised and expert bodies.
- Non Government organisations

1. Media related organisations

The following are some of the key media organisations that need to be included in future strategies to address racism and to support diversity in the media:

Media Owners and Producers at national and regional level operating within Ireland.

The following is a summary of the main owners and producers of newspapers circulated in Ireland

Independent Group	Irish and Sunday Independent, Evening Herald, Star, Sunday World, 26 ROI regional newspaper titles and 2 NI regional titles.
Thomas Crosbie Holdings	Irish Examiner, Evening Echo, Sunday Business Post, 7 ROI regional titles, and two NI regional titles
News International	Irish Sun, Sunday Times also The Times
Irish Times Trust	Irish Times
Trinity Mirror	Irish Mirror
Associate Newspapers	Ireland on Sunday also Daily Mail and Sunday Mail

Media Regulatory and Complaint Authorities

In contrast to the broadcast sector, there is limited media regulation and complaints mechanism. The main media regulatory and complaints authorities are as follows:

- Broadcasting Complaints Commission (BCC)
- Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI)
- Radio Telefís Éireann Authority (RTÉ)

The Broadcasting Complaints Commission was established in 1977 and its objectives are to deal with complaints related to news, current affairs, ministerial prohibitions, invasion of privacy, advertising and published matters by RTÉ and local radio stations.

The Broadcasting Commission of Ireland was established by statute in 2001 and replaced an earlier statutory body, the Independent Radio and Television Commission, with a much expanded remit. Its main role is to provide, review and renew licenses to independent radio and television companies, including terrestrial and satellite platforms as well as the development of codes of programming and advertising services. The national broadcasting authority is excluded from the remit. The BCI has a range of powers, including the power to attach conditions on the renewal of radio licenses.

Radio Telefís Éireann established by statute in 1960, is Ireland's national broadcasting organisation. The nine-member RTÉ Authority is appointed by Government and provides oversight to RTÉ with day to day management delegated to an Executive Board.

Media Analysis

The company Medialive (www.medialive.ie) publishes independently audited circulation figures for newspapers in Ireland on a yearly basis.

Cléraun Conferences are an apostolic undertaking of Opus Dei, a prelature of the Catholic Church and published by Open Air. These annual conferences on the media have examined a wide range of issues including Northern Ireland and the peace process and ethical standards in the media.

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism has highlighted media reporting through its conferences (for example, Ireland preparatory Conference for the World Conference Against Racism and in its 6 month reports on incidents relating to racism.

Media related trade Unions

The main trade union for those involved in the media is the National Union of Journalists, although there is also some staff, particularly those involved in media production in other trade unions.

The National Union of Journalists is a trade union comprising 4,000 members employed in all sections of the media industry throughout Ireland, Britain and Europe under the auspices of the Irish Executive Council. In total there are 28,000 journalists working throughout Ireland, Britain and Europe who are members of the NUJ. The union sees its role as being primarily supportive to its members. Part of its role is to provide guidance to its members and the NUJ has published 'Guidelines on Race Reporting' and all NUJ members are bound by the NUJ Code of Conduct.

2. Government Departments and Agencies.

Government Departments and Agencies have an important role to play in both the regulation of the media industry and in respect of the provision of information. In respect of the provision of information the Press Offices play a very important role, both through the content of what they release and the way that such information is presented.

3. Specialised and Expert bodies

The establishment of specialised and expert bodies in the area of equality, anti-racism and human rights, has been an important development in recent years. These include the Equality Authority, the NCCRI and the Irish Human Rights Commission.

Equality Authority

The Equality Authority was established in October 1999. Its mandate is set out in the Employment Equality Act 1998 and is further expanded under the Equal Status Act 2000. This mandate is to:

- Work towards the elimination of discrimination and prohibited conduct under equality legislation.
- Promote equality of opportunity in relation to the matters to which equality legislation applies.
- Provide information to the public on the working of equality legislation, to keep this legislation under review and to make proposals for necessary change in the legislation.
- Provide information to the public on the Parental Leave Act 1998, the Maternity Protection Act 1994 and the Adoptive Leave Act 1995.

This mandate covers nine grounds - gender, family status, marital status, age, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion and membership of the Traveller community.

Initiatives, which have a direct relevance to combating racism in employment, include:

- Providing advice and legal representation to those who have experienced discrimination in cases that have a strategic impact.
- Preparing codes of practice under the legislation. The first code addresses sexual harassment and harassment in the workplace.
- Developing initiatives to build a consciousness of rights under the legislation among Black and minority ethnic groups.
- Anti-racist workplace week.
- Developing partnership with NCCRI the National Focal Point against Racism in Ireland (see below).

National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism. (NCCRI).

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism was established in July 1998, with funding from the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. Its functions are:

- To act as an expert body to develop an integrated and strategic approach to racism and its prevention, and to foster interculturalism within Ireland.
- To inform policy development and seek to build consensus through dialogue in relation to the issues of racism and interculturalism to promote the understanding and celebration of cultural diversity within Ireland.
- To establish links with other organisations or individuals involved in issues of racism and interculturalism arising from developments at European Union and international levels.

Project initiatives of the NCCRI relevant to the focus of this study

- Developing the training and resource unit that has been actively involved in delivering anti racism training both to Government and Non-Government agencies, including the Gardaí and the Prison Service.
- Providing technical assistance and support for the development of a National Action Plan Against Racism, including a focus on tackling racist crime.
- Providing technical assistance and support for the development of a National Public Awareness Programme 'Know racism'.
- Publication of a range of materials, resources and publications on addressing racism in Ireland, including guidelines on anti-racism training.
- In partnership with the Gardaí and the Equality Authority and the UNHCR The circulation of a poster to all Garda stations: 'Racism in the workplace: Challenge it'.
- A system of reporting and responding to racist incidents and the publication of a report of these incidents every 6 months, including reports related to violence
- In partnership with the Equality Authority, to act as the National Focal Point in Ireland for the EU Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia based in Vienna.
- The development of policy submissions and round tables, which will contribute to policy development on issues through the participation of the NGO sector.
- Regular meetings with the Garda Racial and Intercultural Office.
- The publication of a widely distributed leaflet challenging myths and misinformation about asylum seekers (in partnership with the UNHCR and Know Racism, the national public awareness programme).

Irish Human Rights Commission

Arising from the Belfast Agreement, the Human Rights Commission was formally established under the Human Rights Commission Act, 2000. The Commission is a powerful new independent body charged with the task of keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of our laws in relation to the protection of human rights in their widest sense. It will be within the competence of this body to commission surveys on discrimination. To date the IHRC has been active on the issue of racism through:

- The establishment of a sub committee on racism drawn from its own membership and the members of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commissions
- Participating in the development of the National Action Plan Against Racism.

Non Government Organisations

There are a range of non-government organisations that have highlighted irresponsible media reporting. In addition to media trade unions these include NGO's such as Comhlámh, an organisation representing returned development workers and the Irish section of Amnesty International. Pavee Point, the national Travellers Centre and the Irish Traveller Movement were among the first organisations to highlight the role of the media and racism, in respect of the Traveller community and to develop initiatives with the media, including opportunities for placements for Travellers in media organisations. At a local level, the Alliance to End Racism in Donegal has also produced one of the few regional studies, focussing on the portrayal of ethnic minorities in the Donegal Print Media.

Key Challenges

To date there has been interaction between some of these key stakeholders, in particular between expert and specialised bodies, NGO's including those representing or working with minority ethnic groups and the trade unions. However there has been less direct interaction with Media owners and senior editorial staff and with key sources such as government press offices.

A further key challenge is that there is at present no external complaints institution and complaints process in stark contrast to the broadcasting sector.

A further challenge is to ensure that existing strategies such as the NUJ Guidelines and Code of Conduct are more fully observed by those in the media industry, which may require more awareness raising strategies.

Part Three: Relevant interaction and Responses

These sections, includes a focus of some of the initiatives that have taken place to address the issue and concerns raised.

- These include Guidelines and Codes of Practice
- Awareness raising
- Protection against incitement
- Minority ethnic participation in the media industry
- Specialised Reporting
- Complaint mechanisms
- Monitoring Mechanisms
- National Action Plan Against Racism

NUJ Guidelines on Race Reporting²²

The NUI Guidelines on Race Reporting (1998) provide non-binding guidance to NUI members on how issues related to 'race' should be reported. These include a focus on reporting racist organisations and a general statement on race reporting. Some of the points highlighted are²³:

- Only mentions someone's race if it is strictly relevant.
- Do not sensationalise race relations issues
- Remember that Black communities are culturally diverse
- Do not sensationalise by reports, photographs or film or presentation the activities of racist organisations.
- Do not allow the letters column or phone in programmes to be used to spread racial hatred
- The NUI believes that the methods and lies of the racists should be publicly and vigorously exposed.

The NUI Code of Conduct²⁴ also includes important commitments to:

- Maintain the highest professional and ethical standards.
- A journalist shall only mentions mention a person's age sex, race, colour, creed, illegitimacy disability, marital status (or lack of it), gender and sexual orientation only if this information is strictly relevant.

Awareness raising

A key strategy to raise awareness of the role of the media and racism has been the hosting of conferences seminars and the publication of analysis of media reporting

The first such conference was a groundbreaking NUI organised conference on media reporting on February 20th 1998, which was funded as part of the programme of activities for European Year Against Racism (1997). Keynote speakers included

²² NUI, (1998), Guidelines on Race Reporting in NUI, (1998) Racism in Ireland, the Media in Focus. Conference Report.

²³ Ibid, p 27

²⁴ Ibid, p29.

member of minority ethnic groups, The NUJ Black member's council, The Irish Times and the Director of RTE Radio.

The contributions of keynote speakers some indications of the diversity of perspective among people working in the media industry.

Paul Cullen a correspondent working in the Irish Times broadsheet newspaper said that the media profession as a whole could not be blamed for racism in Ireland, some individuals and newspapers had been less careful in their use of language and this had lead to confusion and fear, particularly in relation to the number of asylum seekers and immigrants. He called for much greater awareness of the basis issues and the need for investigation of the wider picture. He conceded that there were examples of laziness used to describe ethnic minorities, especially in some of the more sensationalist headlines. Overall he believed that the media could have an extremely positive impact on society's understanding of racism and that individual journalists were making headway²⁵.

John Donlon, Political Correspondent in the Daily Star began by acknowledging the criticism that his paper had received but did not accept that such criticism was valid. He said it was in the nature of tabloid reporting to give space to more sensationalist headings. This should not be necessarily construed as racism. Short communication was the norm in tabloid newspapers and there was a consequent danger that such reporting might be perceived as negative reporting. Overall he welcomed the changing and more visible diversity in Ireland²⁶.

Helen Shaw, Director of RTE Radio charted the change in the response to the issue of racism in the media. Ms Shaw posed the question 'in reacting to such change what then is the role of the media? One of the issues she pointed out was that journalists some from a largely 'homogeneous pool'. She contended 'some people feel that we can't in many ways fully reflect a more multicultural society until there is a mix in the media too'. She challenged whether rules and structures can achieve this and reinforced the importance of the NUJ code of practice as a strong foundation to begin. She also recommended the redraft of editorial guidelines and a clear commitment to plurality. The ultimate role of the media is not to silence racists but to 'open the windows exchange ideas and to bring though, analysis and journalistic integrity and balance into play'²⁷.

The role of the media and its reporting of refugees and asylum seekers in particular was further highlighted through the seventh Cléraun Media Conference, held in Dublin 21-22 February 1998²⁸. The 1998 conference included contributions on the media reporting of refugee and asylum issues in Ireland by Andy Pollak (Irish Times) and in Germany by Klaus Schönbach (University of Amsterdam).

Andy Pollak provided an analysis of newspaper coverage in 1996/97 in which he was particularly critical of the coverage given by the Independent Group of newspapers in

²⁵ Ibid, p6

²⁶ Ibid, p6

²⁷ Ibid, p6.

²⁸ Subsequently published as Kiberd, D (Ed), (1999). Media in Ireland. The Search for Ethical Journalism.

relation to the coverage of refugees and asylum seekers. This analysis was further supported by other Irish Times journalists, including Paul Cullen and Nuala Haughey.

Klaus Schönbach analysis of the Bild Zeitung tabloid's coverage of asylum seekers in Germany in the early 1990's showed remarkable similarities to some of the most irresponsible reporting in Ireland. Headlines that were reported over and over again included:

- The assumption that there were too many asylum seekers in Germany and many more are flooding into the country.
- Asylum seekers being depicted as ungrateful and cheats who want to avail of Germany's social benefits
- The native population were suffering as a result, with greater homelessness and an increase in the crime rate.

Nuala Haughey, Racial and Social Affairs correspondent with the Irish Times emphasised the responsibilities of journalists:

'Journalists have responsibilities when it comes to covering race issues, and duty of a free press in a democracy is an ethical one. Indeed the very first rule in the National Union of Journalists' (NUJ) Code of Conduct, which its members are bound by, is that 'a journalist has the duty to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards'.

On a daily basis, many of the stories that Irish journalists cover are driven by a moral or ethical desire to unearth wrongdoing, duplicity and double standards in public life or highlight injustices. These are among the more noble of journalists' endeavours.

When it comes to racism, the ethical issue is pretty clear-cut. Our union stands full square against it. Journalists have a duty to not be racist, just as we have a duty to not be sexist -- in our reporting. The NUJ code of conduct and guidelines on race reporting tell us to think carefully about the words we use, not to sensationalise race issues and only to mention a person's age, race, colour, creed, disability, mental status (or lack of it), gender or sexual orientation if this information is strictly relevant. It states that 'a journalist shall neither originate nor process material which encourages discrimination, ridicule, prejudice or hatred on any of the above-mentioned grounds.'

The guidelines on reporting race relations actually go even further than this, by encouraging members to actively seek through their work to 'expose the myths and lies of racist organisations and their antisocial behaviour'. We also have specific guidelines on the coverage of stories involving Travellers which say journalists should strive to ensure that nothing they write could lead people to the view that Travellers are less than full citizens of the State.

New guidelines and codes of conduct are great things to have, but they are pretty useless if they are not implemented. Unfortunately, sections of the Irish media have been consistently flouting best practice in their coverage of the asylum/refugee/'race' issue in the past few years²⁹.

²⁹ Haughey, N. in Farrell and Watt, (2001). Responding to Racism in Ireland.

In one of the few studies to focus on the regional print media was a focus on the portrayal of ethnic minorities in the Donegal Print Media undertaken by Alliance to End Racism in Donegal.

The research involved a review of the Donegal Democrat, the Derry Journal, the Derry People, the Donegal News and the Tirconnail Tribune over the 12 months of 2001 and its categorisation according to content. The overwhelming number of articles were in reference to the Traveller community in all four publications and the articles in reference to asylum seekers where by and large factual and limited in number and prominence. However the report points out that there were relatively few examples of articles that provided any context to asylum seekers In Ireland³⁰.

Minority Ethnic Participation in the Media

This takes three possible forms:

- Media owned and controlled by minority ethnic groups.
- Greater diversity within the media industry.
- People from minority ethnic groups as spokesperson for their communities.

Media owned and controlled by minority ethnic groups.

This is an emerging sector in Ireland. In recent years there have been a number of newspapers and magazines that have emerged which are owned and edited by people from minority ethnic groups. The most important of these has been Metro Eireann, a monthly newspaper that was established in 1999 by two African journalists who were former asylum seekers to Ireland and are now recognised refugees. As well as producing a high quality newspaper, Metro Eireann also host annual media and multicultural awards, organise debates on a range of issues including the media and undertake research into African communities living in Ireland.

A monthly newspaper is also produced by SoRussi, the Society for Russian Speakers in Ireland. There are an estimated 15,000 Russian speakers in Ireland, mainly from the former USSR, the Baltic States and Poland.

A range of NGO's, including the African Refugee Network also produce newsletters for their members which are important sources of news and information.

Cultural Diversity within the Media Industry

There is little cultural diversity in the Irish media industry in the production, editing, marketing and distribution of newspapers circulated in Ireland. This situation is a little better in broadcast media where there diversity is a little more evident with a small number of journalist and production staff coming from black and minority ethnic groups. There have been a small number of modestly funded initiatives to encourage greater diversity, mostly in the broadcast sector by the national broadcaster, RTÉ.

³⁰ Alliance to end Racism in Donegal, (2002). Analysis of the Portrayal of Ethnic Minorities in the Donegal Print Media

Protection against incitement to Hatred

In announcing the Review of the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act (1989) John O Donoghue, TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform stated:

‘Ireland has legislation in place for the past ten years prohibiting incitement to hatred. The Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act, 1989 makes it an offence to incite hatred against any group of persons in the State or elsewhere on account of their race, colour, nationality, religion, ethnic or national origins, or membership of the Traveller community. I am aware that there has been some criticism of the effectiveness of this Act and I understand that since it was enacted only one case involving an alleged breach of the Act was referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions. That case was subsequently dismissed in the District Court. At my request officials have commenced a review of this legislation and I would welcome any suggestions which may lead to an improvement to the existing provisions of the Incitement to Hatred Act’.³¹

Prior to the Minister’s announcement of a review of the legislation there has been no successful prosecution under the Act. There had been a number of incidents that were referred to the Director of Public Prosecutions.³² One of these incidents referred to the comments made by a columnist with the Sunday Independent in regard to Travellers in January 1996 under the heading of ‘Time to get tough on Tinker Terror “Culture”’. Subsequent offensive comments made by the same columnist in regard to people with disabilities and their participation in the Olympics. After consideration by the Gardaí and the DPP, action was not proceeded with. Following the decision not to proceed there were calls for the review of the legislation.

However since the Minister’s announcement of a review there have been six successful prosecutions, although none of these referred to media reporting. In short, it is difficult to make conclusive judgements both in relation to the effectiveness of the Act and in particular in relation to media reporting.

The legislation is unlikely to provide protection against minority ethnic groups which have been consistently and deliberately labelled over a period of time in a way that does not amount to incitement as presently defined but which is similar to the defamation of a person.

Specialised Reporting

As racism is an issue that requires specialised knowledge and an understanding of diversity, one welcome initiative in recent years has been the appointment of special correspondents. The Irish Times appointed their first ‘Racial and Social Affairs Correspondent’ in 2000, which was both an acknowledgement of greater diversity in Ireland and concerns about racism. In other national papers, there are an emerging group number of journalists who have a particular interest in covering issues related to diversity and racism as part of a more generalist role. In others it is difficult to identify any one journalist with responsibility or particular interest in this area, and these are generally the newspapers that are most irresponsible and sensationalist in their outlook and tone.

³¹ NCCRI (1990) Report of the National Preparatory Conference for the World Conference on Racism. www.nccri.com

³² This Act is further analysed under Part Five of this study.

Complaints and Regulation in the Newspaper Industry

In Ireland there is no external complaints process for the Newspaper industry such as a Press Council or Press Ombudsman. The Government have indicated that wish to see the establishment of a Press Council. However, there is disagreement about whether such as Council should be established on a statutory basis and the institutional form it should take. The National Union of Journalists favours a non-statutory media ombudsman funded by media owners and answerable to a council drawn from the social partners. The Office would have both a complaints and educational role³³.

The NNI favours the establishment of an independent system of press complaints, or self-regulation, also funded by the industry. The commission would be made up of a commissioner would decide in a particular case whether the code had been upheld or breached, would try to resolve complaints, and could make recommendations and require the newspaper to publish his or her determination on whether there has been a breach of the code.

However the establishment an independent self-regulatory press council or similar body has not been progressed, because newspaper owners in Ireland have made the establishment contingent on changes to Ireland's libel laws. There has been no progress on the reform of libel laws since 1991, when libel law reform was first recommended by the Law Reform Commission in Ireland.

The lack of an external complaints and monitoring body for newspapers in Ireland is in stark contrast to the radio and television broadcasting sector where three bodies exist.

In relation to internal complaints mechanisms newspapers, which are members of the National Newspapers of Ireland (NNI) (an association involving the main newspapers in Ireland) have in-house readers' representatives. These are intended to provide access for readers to voice their complaints and obtain remedies such as corrections, retractions or apologies. There is no independent monitoring to the success or other wise of this process. However the space and prominence of a letter, correction or retraction is often far less than the prominence and space given to the offending article. While these mechanisms are important they need to be complemented by external mechanisms.

The National Action Plan Against Racism

The development of the National Action Plan Against Racism in Ireland (NPAR) represents a significant opportunity to both build upon and enhance existing policies and strategies to combat racism in Ireland and to identify new priorities, aspirations and arenas of work that can be drawn together into an overall, cohesive plan.

The commitment by the Irish Government to implement the NPAR was further reinforced in the Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005, which identified the Plan

³³ Haughey, N in Farrell, F and Watt, P, (2001) Responding to Racism in Ireland. Veritas

as a key element of a special initiative on migration and interculturalism to be undertaken during the period of the Agreement³⁴.

As part of the process of developing the NPAR, a report of the outcome of the consultative process *Diverse Voices* was produced which included a particular focus on the role of the media to address racism.

³⁴ Government of Ireland, (2003). *Sustaining Progress. Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005*, p26.

Part Four: Perspectives and Conclusions

The media have an important role in respect of racism and diversity in Ireland. This study has shown that the reporting of issues related to refugees and asylum seekers has not remained consistent from the period studied, between 1997 and 2002.

In 1997 there was an upsurge in examples of irresponsible and sensationalised reporting, which coincided with an increase in the number of asylum seekers coming to Ireland. There were a number of consistent labels that were attached to asylum seekers during this period including 'spongers', 'criminals', exaggerated comment about the numbers of people coming to Ireland and the risks to public health. These labels were attached by both tabloid and broadsheet newspapers.

The labelling of asylum seekers through these processes bears a close resemblance to similar processes in some Germany's tabloid press in the early 1990's.

Following a range of awareness raising initiative and criticism of press coverage, including by journalists and media analysts, the tone and content of media reporting improved, particularly the broadsheet newspapers.

However, media coverage remained inconsistent and in more recent months there has been a resurgence of irresponsible reporting in particular by the Irish Mirror, which coincides with a period when the Irish Mirror and the Sunday Mirror have experienced significant falls in their circulation. Misguided attempts to improve circulation may, therefore, have played a significant factor in the Mirror's coverage of refugee and asylum seekers. However it is also evident that although the worst form of reporting may have diminished, there are still examples in both some broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. There remains greater need to place individual news stories into a broader context.

Newspaper readership per capita in the Republic of Ireland is the highest in Europe. It is a highly competitive market and there has been renewed interest in British newspaper owners to increase their circulation in Ireland, in particular News International and Associate Newspapers and the Trinity Mirror Group. Despite the diversity and competition within the newspaper sector, the most significant group in terms of titles and in terms circulation, is the Independent Group.

There has been ongoing discourse in Ireland about the import of the Independent's share of the national and regional media market, including the role of some newspapers in the Independent group in the reporting of issues around refugees and asylum seekers, some examples of which are outlined in this study.

Irrespective of the issues around the Independent's share of the newspaper market in Ireland, it is clear that newspapers under other owners in Ireland have also engaged in irresponsible, sensationalist and one unbalanced reporting, most recently the example is given of the Irish Mirror.

Whatever the motivation of the Daily Mirror it appears to be engaged in a sustained campaign of half-truths, myths and misinformation with little regard of its impact on refugees and asylum seekers. The apparent campaign appears to have intensified

following a period when there was a steep decrease in the circulation figures of the Daily Mirror in Ireland. In short part of the motivation of the newspaper to engage in such tactics may be linked to using the refugee and asylum issue to boost its flagging circulation in the Republic of Ireland.

In respect of regional newspapers, the problem is often one of lack of challenge to statements given by local politicians. Much of the stories in respect of refugees and asylum seekers are sourced from reports of local Council meetings, where a minority of Councillors seek to gain publicity or notoriety from some of their statements on minority ethnic groups, including Travellers and refugees and asylum seekers.

While there is no reason to suggest that these comments are not accurately reported, there is concern that such comments are not challenged either through newspaper editorials or through seeking comment from Traveller or refugee and asylum support groups.

There is a wide range of stakeholders in the media industry who have a potential role to play in tackling racism. The most important of those are those, which have the ownership and editorial control of Irish newspapers.

The second group are those who work in the media industry as journalists or production staff who can seek to raise issues with media owners and editorial staff through normal communication channels, including the main trades union, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). While this is an important mechanism, there are also limitations to this approach. It is dependent on the management/staff relations within newspapers, the strength (including membership of trades unions) and the role of trades unions. Much of the focus of trades unions has been taken up in protecting terms and conditions in a rapidly changing and increasingly insecure industry. In this context the Irish section of the NUJ has undertaken important initiatives in seeking to uphold and improve standards on media reporting in difficult circumstances.

Specialised and expert bodies have also an important role to play including in media monitoring and analysis and the development of partnership initiatives with media based organisations. These have included awareness raising through conferences and publications and the support of initiatives such as the development of media owned and controlled by minority ethnic groups.

The development of specialised reporting has also been a significant development. This has meant that some individual reporters have built up an expertise and understanding of the context around diversity and racism. However, there needs to be strategies put in place to ensure that such knowledge and understanding is also shared as the role of individual correspondents can change. The selection of such correspondents is also important.

The media complaints and regulatory framework for newspapers in Ireland is wholly unsatisfactory. In sharp contrast to the broadcast sector there is no statutory regulatory and complaints authority(ies). These have been as a consequence of a range of factors, including the linking of a Press Council or Ombudsman with concomitant reform of Ireland's outmoded libel laws. While internal complaint mechanisms are a

valuable and complementary addition to external mechanisms, on their own they represent a limited and inconsistent solution.

Even with the establishment of a Press Council or a Press Ombudsman's office, problems may remain. For example the newspaper industry, including trade unions are resisting a body which is set up on a statutory footing, with concerns about the independence of the press being cited as the main factor. However there may be concerns expressed on the other side by bodies which to see a robust mechanism, with powers to enforce penalties that might not be forthcoming from a body primarily funded and controlled by those representing the interests of Irish newspapers.

The Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act, 1989, was invoked against a columnist working for the Sunday Independent newspaper following an extremely offensive article about Irish Travellers. This prosecution proved unsuccessful and was one of the factors which led NGOs to call for a review of the legislation. The same journalist was permanently removed from her post after making offensive comments about the participation of people with disabilities in the Olympics.

Unless there are significant changes to this Act or the Act is interpreted differently by the courts, it is unlikely that this legislation will be successfully invoked against the mainstream press, because incitement is a difficult charge to justify.

While the problem of the tone and content of individual articles is an important issue it should not detract from a more serious problem identified in this study where an identifiable group experiencing racism is defamed by a newspaper over the course of a number of articles and over a long period of time. While such articles will never constitute incitement, they have had serious repercussions for minority ethnic groups in Ireland, including contributing to creating the conditions where assaults and abuse towards such groups are more likely to happen.

Headlines can be directly transposed into hate speech and hate mail, and there are recorded examples of newspaper headlines being photocopied cut and used to embellish racist circulars. This points to the need for a number of new strategies and possibly legislation is needed to be targeted at combating such defamation.

The participation of minority ethnic groups in the media industry is a further important strategy that needs to be enhanced. Such journalists should not be typecast however to comment on issues and themes related to their ethnicity, diversity or racism.

**Annex I:
Refugees and Asylum Seekers:
Challenging the myths and misinformation**

The numbers of asylum seekers coming to Ireland

There has been much exaggerated and alarmist comment about the number of asylum seekers coming to Ireland in recent years. Apart from the fact that Ireland, like most other countries in the world, has an international obligation to provide protection to people fleeing persecution, the following points are also relevant:

- Asylum seekers are a relatively small proportion of the total inward migration into Ireland in recent years:
 - Between 1995 and 2000, some 50% of the total immigration into Ireland was returning Irish migrants (123,000 people). Both EU and US nationals accounted for 38% (79,000), and a remaining 12% (29,400 people) were from the rest of the world.
 - In 2001, there were 36,000 work visas and permits issued to people outside the EEA (European Economic Area) to allow and encourage them to work in Ireland compared with just over 10,000 applications for asylum.
 - The vast majority of the world's refugees continue to seek asylum in an immediate neighbouring country or within their region, for example, the millions of people from Afghanistan seeking protection in Iran or Pakistan.
- One in five recognised refugees in Ireland have voluntarily returned to their home country once circumstances have changed and made it safe for them to do so.

Offensive 'labels'

Offensive labels have been applied to asylum seekers by those who would claim they are work-shy and out to exploit our public services. Aside from the humanitarian considerations of providing adequate shelter and support for people who need it, the following points are relevant:

- Asylum seekers are not treated more favourably than Irish citizens and are not, for instance, given assistance towards the costs of cars, mobile phones nor for socializing.
- Asylum seekers are accommodated in full-board accommodation centers across Ireland, and receive 19 Euro per adult per week, and 9.5 Euro per child and child benefit. Discretionary needs payments can also be provided in exceptional circumstances.
- If accommodation was not provided to asylum seekers, many would be homeless because of existing shortages and the costs of accommodation in Ireland.
- Asylum seekers are not allowed to enter into employment until they are granted refugee status. There are many asylum seekers who work in a voluntary capacity in community and refugee projects while they wait for their asylum application to be assessed.
- Asylum seekers are sometimes referred to as 'bogus' or having 'unfounded claims'. While some asylum seekers in Ireland are recognised as having refugee claims, some asylum seekers are found, following an independent determination process, not to have met the definition of refugee contained in the 1951 Geneva Convention and in the Refugee Act, 1996, such terminology is prejudicial and should be avoided. The use of such terms ignores the fact that many asylum

seekers, even though they may not qualify for refugee status under the terms of the Geneva Convention, are forced to leave their country of origin because of dire economic, political or social circumstances.

Crime

The Gardaí have dismissed the contention that there is a crime-wave among asylum seekers as '*hyperbole*', or exaggeration. However to label a whole community for the transgressions of the few is both offensive and inaccurate, and completely ignores the fact that asylum seekers and refugees are also the victims of crime, including sometimes violent assault and harassment.

Health

There has been a tendency to inflate the potential risks that asylum seekers and refugees pose to public health in Ireland. This has included offensive speculation about the risks posed by children in schools and ignores the fact that:

- There is a comprehensive voluntary health screening system in Ireland for asylum seekers and there has been a high uptake of this service.
- Some of the health needs of asylum seekers and refugees are related to torture or other forms of persecution.

Glossary of Key terms:

- ***Refugee:*** A refugee is a person who is forced to leave his/her country (as defined by the 1951 Geneva Convention) due to a well-founded fear of persecution, and who is unable to return to his/her home country for reasons related to their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Ireland has a legal responsibility to determine who is a refugee and to extend the necessary protection to such a person. Once a person is recognised as a refugee he/she has virtually the same rights as an Irish citizen.
- ***Asylum seeker:*** An asylum seeker is a person seeking to be recognised as a refugee under the 1951 Convention. An asylum seeker has a legal entitlement to stay in the State while his or her application for asylum is being processed.
- ***Economic migrant:*** Persons who voluntarily migrate to Ireland having acquired a work visa to undertake employment in the State. Migrant workers from outside the EEA must have a work visa or their employers must hold a work permit to allow them enter employment. Because of rapid growth rates due to economic success, Ireland is actively recruiting outside the EU to fill skills and labour shortages. Much of the recent diversity in Ireland is a consequence of inviting people to work here.

Published by the NCCRI and the UNHCR in Partnership with Know Racism

This leaflet is published by the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in partnership with 'Know Racism' the government's national public awareness programme to address racism. The publishers also wish to acknowledge SIPTU the City Bridges Project and all those who contributed to the development of this leaflet.

Annex II: Select Bibliography

- Alliance to end Racism in Donegal, (2002). Analysis of the Portrayal of Ethnic Minorities in the Donegal Print Media
- Central Statistics Office, (September 2002). Preliminary Report 2002 Census.
- Comhlámh, (1998). Focus on Ireland and the Wider World. Winter 1997-88
- Fawcett, L, (1998). Fitting In. Ethnic minorities in the News Media in Hainsworth, P, (1998).
- Divided Society. Ethnic Minorities and Racism in Northern Ireland.
- Government of Ireland, (2003). Sustaining Progress. Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005, p26
- Haughey, N. in Farrell and Watt, (2001). Responding to Racism in Ireland.
- Irish Times, December 2002
- Mac Éinrí, P. (2001) Immigration Policy in Ireland in Farrell/Watt. Responding to Racism in Ireland. Veritas.
- NCCRI (1990) Report of the National Preparatory Conference for the World Conference on Racism. www.nccri.com
- NCCRI, UNHCHR and Know Racism, (2002). Myths and Misinformation about Asylum Seekers.
- NUJ, (1998), Guidelines on Race Reporting in NUJ, (1998) Racism in Ireland, the Media in Focus. Conference Report.
- Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner. (2002) Annual Report 2001.
- Kiberd, D (Ed), (1999). Media in Ireland. The Search for Ethical Journalism.
- EUMC, (2002). Racism and Cultural Diversity in the Mass Media
- Irish Media Contacts Directory, May 2002.
- Van Dijk T, (1991). Racism and the Press.