



Refugees, Asylum-seekers & the Media (RAM) Project

Country: United Kingdom

Organisation: MediaWise Trust (formerly Presswise) – www.ramproject.org.uk

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Partners involved: Information Centre on Asylum & Refugees, International Federation of Journalists, Jesuit Refugee Service, National Union of Journalists (United Kingdom & Ireland), Online/More Colour Media (Netherlands), Refugee Council and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Target Group: Media professionals, policy makers, refugee community organisations and support groups, and the general public

Programme Description:

The RAM Project operated on the MediaWise principles that press freedom is a responsibility exercised by journalists on behalf of the public, and that the public have a right to know when the media publish inaccurate information.

Its focus was to promote a fair and accurate representation of asylum-seekers and refugees by highlighting media misrepresentation, challenging the racist overtones that became associated with the use of terms such as ‘asylum-seeker’ and ‘refugees’, particularly after the ‘War on Terror’ began, and empowering members of refugee communities to engage with the media. Exiled journalists, refugees and asylum seekers were involved in all aspects of the project from its advisory board to staff (as researchers, trainers and editors). Activities included: the creation of a website and a monthly e-bulletin as a source of information for activists, refugee groups and media contacts in the United Kingdom and Europe; the use-of-the-media training and networking events; collaborative production of guidelines for media professionals on how to report on asylum and refugee issues; collective pressure on media producers and regulators; investigation and exposure of inaccurate stories; a national conference and regional seminars to link journalists with refugees and asylum-seekers; the creation of a ‘Directory of Exiled Journalists’ and ‘Exiled Journalists in Europe’; media work placements for exiled journalists; publication of The RAM Report, a detailed account to assist replication by other minority groups.

Challenge: Initial reluctance and hostility from within the media.

Solution: The involvement of exiled and other working journalists resulted in a gradual realisation among media professionals that the project had a valid purpose and was breaking new stories.

Challenge: Some anxieties within civil society groups concerned with refugee issues that the project was intruding upon their territory.

Solution: An inclusive approach, trying to work with and alongside existing groups, acknowledging their role but drawing attention to and helping to put right shortcomings.

Impact and Success Stories:

- The Exiled Journalists Network grew out of the RAM project. This network provides support for exiled journalists in the United Kingdom and promotes press freedom internationally.
- Media unions and regulators acknowledged the problem and acted to improve accuracy of coverage.
- Project staff worked with UNHCR and CSOs in several countries to transmit similar messages of inclusion and working styles.
- Local newspapers and regional broadcast media adopted a more sympathetic tone towards refugees and asylum-seekers as the project progressed.

“The reason why MediaWise is still necessary in Britain today sometimes scares me, but at the same time its existence reassures me.”
Zrinka Brahlo, Executive Director, Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum (MRCF)

“Your training opened our eyes to the workings of the media, and enabled us to handle often hostile questioning calmly, and present our case rationally and succinctly.” Voluntary Sector Press Officer