DW Akademie

Toolkit



Beyond borders

A toolkit for reporting on forced displacement and migration in Asia

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Introduction

Who the toolkit is for and how to use it

The polarisation of politics and opinions is, in many countries, of growing concern as populist politicians scapegoat minorities, such as migrants and refugees, and blame them for all social ills. This is a **dangerous dynamic**. The ongoing verbal blame can spur people on to vent their frustrations by attacking, often physically, the most vulnerable groups and communities, thereby violating the human rights of those least able to defend themselves.

While many media outlets report on the populist rhetoric, discriminated groups, challenges in the host communities and dangers that refugees and migrants face, and while journalists try to be **fair to all sides**, they do not always manage to do so.

Throughout Asia, migration and displacement are frequent topics in the media, albeit to varying degrees. However, many reports—although well-intentioned—present migration as a problem and rarely point to the benefits migration can bring or include the voices of those who have been forcibly displaced. This often has serious consequences for these groups: if a host community portrays them in a negative light, prejudice or even open hostilities may arise within the host population and thus threaten peaceful coexistence.

Media outlets therefore need to work towards a greater understanding and **not repeat stereotypes**.

Many journalists are more than willing to take further steps to report accurately. The question is: How?

This toolkit aims to **help journalists in host countries** who report on migration and forced displacement. Those communities live throughout Asia, with Afghans and Rohingya making up the largest refugee groups. While Afghans have fled primarily to Iran and Pakistan, the Rohingya have sought refuge in Bangladesh and surrounding countries. Media coverage of these and other refugee groups is often unintentionally false or distorted or tinged by prejudice; this is because migration and forced displacement is a complex issue.

However, journalists can greatly improve their reports by applying trusted migration-related reporting techniques as well as research sources. The overall goal is to foster **better understanding, social cohesion and peace**.

At DW Akademie, we are passionate about journalistic **storytelling**: captivating the audience with a compelling story that gives color and depth to valid and fact-checked information. We believe in involving migrants and refugees in researching and developing their story and amplifying their voices. **"Nothing about us without us"** is the motto of this toolkit, which introduces you to authentic storytelling techniques and ways to involve migrants and refugees so that they can tell their own stories.

Our toolkit was **written by journalists for journalists**. We know that in newsrooms, pressure is often high and time too scarce to delve into a story. That's why this toolkit has a clear, structured approach and considers what you as a journalist could need when reporting on migration and forced displacement.

The toolkit's **hands-on approach** offers tips, guidelines and checklists to support your reporting. It also includes best practices and examples, facts and figures, and links to resources and organizations to help you avoid time-consuming research and show you that you are not alone in your endeavours.

The toolkit has a wide scope, with content ranging from key concepts of migration and tools for conflict analysis, to research and data collection and conflict-sensitive storytelling techniques. It also looks at how to avoid stereotyping and bias, and explores language use and visual/multimedia reporting. In addition, it points to legal frameworks, and trauma and mental health support for journalists.

The toolkit is divided into three parts: Part 1 (Chapter 1) focuses on *Understanding Migration*. Part 2 (Chapters 2–5) is at the core of the toolkit and tackles the *Essentials of reporting on forced displacement and migration*. To offer

a deeper understanding of migration reporting, Part 3 (Chapters 6–9) helps with *Diving deeper into the context*.

What distinguishes this toolkit from others is its **Asian perspective**: While providing general information on a given issue, such as international migration laws, it always includes examples valid for an Asian context. This helps you find correct information applicable to your country and the issues you are covering. Each chapter begins with a fictitious journalist in a different Asian country, highlighting the challenges and range of issues that you may need to cover. The chapter then points to gaps and how you can close them. Again, we have focussed on the **practicability and usability** of the toolkit for **your work in and outside of the newsroom**.

There are many challenges when reporting on migration in Asia. We hope this toolkit encourages you to tackle this vital topic and makes it easier for you to do so.

PART 1

Understanding forced displacement and migration

CHAPTER 1



Migration and forced displacement

Facts, figures and concepts

Attaullah Mengal is a 34-year-old journalist from Quetta, the capital of Pakistan's troubled Balochistan province, and has spent his career documenting Afghan refugees in Pakistan. Born after the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, he grew up hearing stories of escape and survival. As new Afghan refugees began arriving after the Taliban took over in 2021, interacting with affected individuals made him aware of the uncertainty and challenges they faced, after having fled one precarious situation to the next.

Mengal felt his reporting lacked context and set out to trace the historical patterns of Afghan migration to Pakistan. From the mountain passes of Torkham to the arid trails near Chaman, he wanted to understand not only the politics but also the geography, the memories and the legacy etched into each crossing point. However, with scattered records and fading recollections, he wasn't sure where to begin.

1.1 A historical view on migration and displacement in Asia

Asian migration has a rich and intricate history shaped over the centuries by a variety of factors. Economic opportunities, ethnic, religious or cultural conflicts, diasporic ties, colonial policies and climatic issues have all played pivotal roles in driving displacement and migration, both within and beyond the continent. These influences have helped shape widespread Asian diasporas across the world, contributing to the region's complex migratory patterns.

We use the word "migration" throughout the toolkit as a generic term for all types of migratory movements. This can include both voluntary and involuntary migration such as forced displacement.

Here are significant conflicts that over the last 130 years have forced people in Asia to migrate (the figures are taken from various open sources)

- **First Sino-Japanese war (1894–1895):** Displacement figures for this are not well-documented but significant population movements occurred in Korea and Taiwan.
- **Second Sino-Japanese war (1937–1945):** Historians and academic sources suggest that the conflict displaced between 15 and 95 million Chinese.
- **Partition of British India (1947):** Open sources and media reports suggest that between 14 and 18 million people were displaced when British India was partitioned into the countries of India and Pakistan.
- **Korean war (1950–1953):** Various sources report that 10 percent of the Korean population (approximately 3 million people) were displaced during the war, with many having fled abroad as refugees.
- **Vietnam war (1955–1975):** During the 20-year war, several million Vietnamese were forcibly displaced internally and abroad. By the late 1960s, for example, about

half of South Vietnam's 20 million people had been internally displaced.

- **Bangladesh Liberation War (1971):** Around 10 million Bengali refugees fled from what was then East Pakistan to India during the nine-month conflict.

- **Afghan wars (1979–present):** According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as of early 2025, Pakistan was hosting approximately 1.43 million Afghans who held Proof of Registration (PoR) cards and 800,700 Afghans who held Afghan Citizen Cards (ACC). Approximately 143,900 unregistered individuals who are members of registered families were also living in the country. The government estimates there are about 1.7 million undocumented Afghan nationals, though exact figures remain uncertain. Iran hosts some 3.3 million refugees as well as those in refugee-like situations; the latter come mostly from Afghanistan. However, by July 2025, nearly 2 million Afghan refugees had returned or been forced to return to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan.

- **Sri Lankan civil war (1983–2009):** The Sri Lankan civil war resulted in over one million displacements, including in 1990 when civilians were forcibly displaced across ethnic lines.

- **Rohingya persecution in Myanmar (2017–present):** In 2017, over 723,000 Rohingya fled to Bangladesh. However, Rohingya had begun taking refuge in Bangladesh in the 1970s and 1980s, making the total current number of Rohingya refugees much higher.

- **Syrian civil war (2011–present):** The war has resulted in more than 6 million people fleeing to neighboring countries; more than 7.4 million people have been internally displaced.

- **Mindanao conflict in the Philippines:** The decades-long conflict has forcibly displaced more than a million people.

- **Myanmar civil war:** Myanmar's civil war began after the 2021 military coup and, according to the UN Human Rights Office, by 2024, over 3.5 million people were internally displaced.

- **Territorial disputes in the South China Sea:** Displacement figures are not well-documented but tensions have led to forced localized displacements.

1.2 Causes and context of Asian migration and forced displacement

Conflicts are one reason for migration and forced displacement but there are many other reasons, too. Why, then, do people migrate? There are four key factors:

- Economic (i.e., seeking a better life, poverty)
- Political (i.e., conflicts, persecution)
- Environmental and climate-related (i.e., natural disasters, climate change)
- Social (i.e., personal aspirations, education issues)

Migration in Asia

Why have people in **Asia** migrated throughout history?

Early migrations

- **Maritime Silk Road:** Over 2,000 years ago, the Maritime Silk Road made it much easier for people, especially those from China, to migrate to Southeast Asia. They established trade routes that led to the spread of goods, ideas and cultures.

- **Chinese trade hubs:** By the early 15th century, Chinese trade hubs like Palembang (Sumatra) and Malacca (Malaysia) had been established, reflecting the early presence of Chinese communities across Southeast Asia.

Colonial and economic factors

- **Gold rush:** The discovery of gold in California in the mid-1800s sparked a wave of migration, drawing Chinese miners to the United States in search of prosperity.

- **Labor needs:** Chinese laborers played a critical role in building the US transcontinental railroad and contributed to the nation's industrial growth. Railroad construction began in 1863 and was completed in 1869.

- **British Empire:** During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the British Empire transported millions of South Asians—particularly those from India—as indentured laborers to colonies in the Caribbean, Fiji and Mauritius. These workers faced harsh conditions under long-term

contracts. This system, known as "indentured labor" replaced slavery after it was abolished.

- **Indian Ocean trade:** South Asians, particularly those from the states of Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, engaged in trade across the Indian Ocean, establishing permanent communities in East Africa, Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The Indian Ocean trade network has a long history, dating back to at least the third century BCE.

Political and social factors

- **Wars and political turmoil:** The latter half of the 20th century witnessed mass migrations fuelled by wars, political instability and economic crises. Conflicts across Asia forced millions to seek refuge in safer territories.

- **Exclusion acts:** Laws such as the US Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which restricted Chinese immigration to the United States, highlighted the racial discrimination faced by Asian migrants in their host countries; this shaped immigration patterns and policies for decades.

Globalization and modern migration

- **Conflicts:** Contemporary conflicts continue to drive forced migration across Asia. Among the conflicts are the ethnic and sectarian violence in Myanmar, insurgency in Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power, and conflicts in Pakistan, India's Kashmir, Northeast India and the Philippine region of Mindanao. These clashes have forcibly displaced millions of people.

- **Economic opportunities:** With the rise of globalization and shifting economic dynamics, Asia has become both a major source of and destination for international migrants, with people moving in search of better livelihoods and employment.

- **Diasporic networks:** Well-established diasporic communities around the world continue to influence modern migration patterns, facilitating the migration of new generations seeking to reconnect with or join established cultural and economic networks.

These historical and ongoing migration flows have not only shaped Asia's demographic landscape but also created vibrant Asian communities across the globe.

1.3 Current trends and statistics in Asian migration

Here are some key statistics regarding migration and migrants in Asia (All figures taken from the IOM World Migration report 2024 and UNCHR):

Origin of migrants

- Asia has a population of 4.6 billion. In 2020, more than 40 percent of the world's migrants came from Asia (around 115 million).

Intraregional migration

- Intraregional migration in Asia grew from 35 million in 1990 to 69 million in 2020.

Asian migrants to North America and Europe

- In 2020, migration from Asia to North America stood at 17.5 million (slightly up from 17.3 million in 2015).

- Migration to Europe had increased to 23 million in 2020, up from nearly 20 million in 2015.

- In all, 46 million Asian migrants throughout the world were living outside Asia in 2020.

Migrants to Asia born outside of Asia

- The number of people born outside of Asia who have migrated to the continent remains low; Europeans make up the largest group, other migrants include people from Central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union.

- The number of migrants from Africa who now live in Asia has increased and now stands at nearly 5 million (2020).

Gender distribution

- Significantly more Asian males migrate to Gulf countries (i.e., United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia) than Asian females.

- Malaysia also has more male than female immigrants, while India shows a slightly higher number of female immigrants.

International forced displacement — top countries of origin

- Globally, at the **end of 2024**, the highest number of refugees came from Venezuela, with 6.2 million having been forcibly displaced; the second highest number of refugees came from Syria, with 6 million having been forcibly displaced.
- Following the 2021 Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, the number of Afghan refugees doubled from 2020 to 5.8 million.
- Myanmar is the third-largest country of origin of refugees in Asia. The Rohingya refugees from Myanmar have been hosted primarily by Bangladesh since 2017.

International forced displacement — top host countries

- Iran hosts the largest number of refugees (3.8 million) who come primarily from Afghanistan.
- Turkey hosts the second largest number of refugees (3.8 million) who come primarily from Syria.
- Pakistan hosts 1.43 million registered refugees (primarily from Afghanistan) along with hundreds of thousands who are undocumented.
- By July 2025, Iran and Pakistan had forced nearly 2 million Afghan refugees to return to Afghanistan.

Internal forced displacement

- In 2022, Pakistan recorded the largest number of disaster-related forced displacements (over 8 million people) due to severe flooding.
- Philippines saw nearly 5.5 million displacements due to tropical storms.
- In 2022, Myanmar saw over one million conflict-driven internal displacements, the highest number in its history, due to the ongoing civil war.

Please note: Figures can vary depending on sources readers use.

1.4 Types of migration in Asia

Forced displacement

Forced displacement occurs when people are compelled to leave their homes due to circumstances beyond their control. Causes include:

- **Conflict and violence:** Wars, civil unrest and persecution force individuals to flee for safety.
- **Natural disasters and climate change:** Earthquakes, floods and hurricanes can displace entire communities.
- **Human rights violations:** Ethnic cleansing, genocide and severe human rights abuses drive people to seek refuge elsewhere.

Voluntary migration

By contrast, voluntary migration occurs when individuals choose to move, typically in search of better opportunities, such as:

- **Economic opportunities:** Moving to find better jobs or higher wages;
- **Education:** Relocating to access quality education;
- **Lifestyle and climate:** Seeking a more favorable climate or lifestyle.

Blurring the lines — mixed migration

The distinction between forced displacement and voluntary migration can be complex. For example, extreme poverty may push economic migrants to move, making the decision to migrate a less voluntary one. Some voluntary migrants may also become trapped in situations that prevent them from returning home and so effectively become forced migrants.

It is crucial for policy makers and humanitarian groups to understand these complexities to ensure appropriate support and protection for all migrants.

For example, some countries manage mixed migration flows through a combination of policies and international cooperation. Key strategies are:

- **Humanitarian assistance**, such as shelter and medical care, is often provided in collaboration with organizations like IOM and UNHCR.
- **Border management** is conducted to control and monitor migration flows.
- **Integration programs**, including language and job training, help migrants settle, while border management ensures control and security.
- Through **long-term development efforts**, countries also work together regionally to share resources and address the root causes of migration, such as conflict and poverty.

Internal vs. international migration

Internal migration

- **Movement within a country:** Internal migration involves people relocating within the borders of a single country.
- **Rural to urban migration:** Many individuals move from rural areas to urban centers in search of better job opportunities, improved education and higher living standards.
- **Urban to rural migration:** By contrast, some choose to leave cities for rural areas, seeking a quieter lifestyle or escaping urban congestion.
- **Interregional migration:** This refers to people moving from one region to another within the same country, often due to economic opportunities or climate preferences.

International migration

International migration involves moving to a different country and is typically driven by various factors:

- **Economic opportunities:** Many migrate internationally for better job prospects or higher wages, seeking improved financial stability.
- **Education:** Some individuals relocate to other countries to access better educational institutions or specialized training programs.
- **Family reunification:** Joining family members who have previously migrated is a common motivator for international migration.
- **Asylum and refuge:** People also flee their home countries to escape persecution, conflict or natural disasters, and seek safety and refuge abroad.

Key differences between internal and international migration

- **Legal and administrative complexities:** International migration typically involves more complex legal processes, such as obtaining visas, work permits and meeting residency requirements.
- **Cultural and social adjustment:** Migrants moving internationally often face significant cultural and social adjustments, including language barriers and adapting to different social norms.
- **Economic impact:** Both types of migration impact the receiving country's economy; international migrants also frequently send remittances back to their home country which can be crucial for the migrant's family, community and country.

Common challenges

- **Integration:** Both internal and international migrants can face difficulties integrating into new communities; this can include finding housing, securing employment and accessing essential services.
- **Discrimination:** Migrants often face discrimination or xenophobia, which can impede their ability to settle and thrive in their new environment.

1.5 Why journalists need to understand historical contexts

By incorporating these approaches, journalists can provide a richer, more accurate and more meaningful coverage of migration issues.

1. Comprehensive analysis of historic developments

To give a more nuanced and comprehensive analysis of a situation, journalists should be aware of the historical context. For example, reporting on the Rohingya crisis is enhanced if journalists understand the history of Myanmar's ethnic tensions. Also, knowing that 2017 saw the biggest mass exodus of the Rohingya to Bangladesh, but that there had been previous exoduses as well, could give journalists a deeper understanding of the issue.

2. Preventing misguided opinions

During the refugee situation in Europe in 2015, some media reports focused solely on the immediate influx of refugees without explaining the long-term conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq which were driving people to seek asylum elsewhere. Providing the historical context helps prevent people's misconception that this was a sudden, uncontrollable crisis; instead, it highlights the prolonged nature of conflicts like these.

3. Highlighting patterns and continuities

The migration of South Asian workers to the Middle East can be better understood by looking at historical patterns of South Asian labor migration. Since the 1970s, millions of South Asians have migrated to the Gulf countries for work, motivated by economic opportunities and facilitated by bilateral agreements. This shows that current migration trends are part of a long-standing economic relationship.

4. Informing policy and public opinion

A well-informed public and policymakers can make better decisions if they understand the historical context of migration in Southeast Asia. For instance, Thailand's policies towards migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos can be better understood through the lens of historical labor demands and regional economic integration. In other cases, understanding how countries deal with refugee issues can be understood through legal frameworks, for example, whether or not the countries are signatories to the 1957 Refugee Convention.

5. Avoiding sensationalism

Some media reports sensationalize events or crimes by focusing on the involvement of migrants without providing context about the broader issues of integration and social tensions. Including a historical context about migration patterns and integration challenges can help avert sensationalism and provide a more balanced view.

6. Enhancing empathy and understanding

Reporting on the experiences of Vietnamese boat people who fled after the Vietnam war can enhance an audience's empathy by highlighting the boat people's struggles and contributions to their new communities. Understanding the historical context fosters a deeper appreciation for their resilience and the challenges they have overcome.



CHECKLIST

How journalists can include a historical context in reporting

- **Research and background checks:** Investigate a historical context before reporting (i.e., Rohingya persecution in Myanmar).
- **Incorporate historical data:** Use past migration trends to show patterns over time (i.e., labor migration from the Philippines).
- **Use historical analogies:** Draw parallels to past events (i.e., Vietnamese boat people crisis and current refugee situations).
- **Interview historians:** Consult experts for deeper insights (i.e., historians on Chinese labor migration to Southeast Asia).
- **Contextualize current events:** Explain how history influences current policies (i.e., Thailand's migration policies shaped by labor demands).
- **Highlight long-term impacts:** Show historical contributions of migrant communities (i.e., Japanese immigration to Brazil).
- **Use visualization:** Incorporate infographics on historical migration routes to engage readers.
- **Provide comparative analysis:** Compare regional migration trends with global patterns for broader context.

By following these strategies, journalists can offer more insightful and engaging migration reporting.

1.6 Glossary of key concepts of forced displacement and migration

Many key words pop up when we talk about migration. We might think we know what a migrant is, but what exactly is the difference between a migrant, a refugee, an internally displaced person and an asylum seeker?

When covering specific topics such as migration and forced displacement, journalists need a deeper understanding and use the correct terminology. This glossary provides key terms around the issue of migration.

Asylum seeker is an individual who seeks international protection in a country that is not his or her country. Although their claim for asylum began in the state they had fled to, their status has not yet been decided upon. Many asylum seekers (but not all) are ultimately recognized as refugees and then placed under international protection.

Border management is the monitoring and regulation of authorized border crossings of people (regular migrations) and goods. This is to prevent unauthorized border crossings (irregular migration) and the smuggling of goods.

Circular migration is when people move across borders to a neighboring country in search of seasonal work or are fleeing an outbreak of violence; they then return home after the seasonal work is finished or the violence has died down. They migrate again for the same reasons and then return to their country of origin.

Country of origin is a person's country of nationality or former country of residence who has migrated abroad, irrespective of whether the person migrated regularly or irregularly.

Country of transit is a country through which a person passes from his or her country of origin to reach his or her country of destination, or to return to his or her country of origin.

Forced displacement is the movement of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or where they live. They may be forced to go abroad or be displaced within their own country. The reasons for displacement are many, such as armed conflict, ongoing violence, violations of human rights and natural disasters, also connected to climate change.

Humanitarian visa is a visa granted to a person on humanitarian grounds, giving him or her access to, and a temporary stay in, the issuing state for a specified duration. It is based on national or regional law, in accordance with relevant human rights and refugee legislation.

Illegals are people who migrate to a country in violation of this state's migration laws. However, crossing a border without a visa to ask for asylum is not illegal but a basic human right, as outlined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Immigrant is a person who moves to a country that is not of his or her nationality or usual residence and stays in the new country permanently; the person's country of destination becomes his or her new country of residence.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes but have not crossed an internationally recognized state border—they are in effect displaced within their own country. There are many reasons for displacement, including armed conflict, ongoing violence, violations of human rights and natural disasters, also connected to climate change.

Labor migration is movement of persons from one country to another, or within their own country of residence, to seek employment.

Migration is the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a state.

Mixed migration: In border regions of countries that have seen political turmoil, people may migrate to a neighboring country for different reasons but use the same route, i.e., seasonal workers who cross the border and then return home after the season is over, and refugees who are fleeing persecution or violence.

Non-refoulement (principle of): This principle refers to any person who crosses a border to another state to seek asylum and cannot be turned back: it is the person's right to ask for asylum and be allowed to stay while authorities check if the person's claim of persecution is valid. The official wording

of the non-refoulement principles per the IOM Glossary on Migration is as follows: "The prohibition for States to extradite, deport, expel or otherwise return a person to a country where his or her life or freedom would be threatened, or where there are substantial grounds for believing that he or she would risk being subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, or would be in danger of being subjected to enforced disappearance, or of suffering another irreparable harm."

(Humanitarian) Protection: In humanitarian crises, i.e., in refugee camps and elsewhere, every person requires food, shelter, medical and psychological assistance, and children require education. People also need support to stay safe and keep their dignity. Protection refers to interventions that aim to prevent, reduce and respond to the risks and consequences of violence, coercion, deliberate deprivation and abuse in humanitarian crises.

Refugee (as per the UN 1951 Convention): "A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it."

Remittances are private international monetary transfers by migrants, usually to send money home to their families.

Stateless person (as per the UN 1954 Convention) is a person who is not considered as a national by any state according to its own legislation; i.e., somebody without citizenship or a passport.

Trafficking in persons: Sometimes people are forced to work in a different country, at other times people migrate voluntarily but then, i.e., their passport is taken away and they are forced to work without payment. Human trafficking is a crime and refers to adults and children being transported against their will and being subjected to forced labor and/or sexual exploitation.

Further reading

Glossaries of international organizations

- **International Organization for Migration (IOM) Glossary:** *https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms*
- **UNHCR Glossary:** *https://www.unhcr.org/glossary*
- **European Commission (EU) Glossary:** *https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary_en*

USEFUL LINKS

- **IOM, World Migration Report, 2024:** *https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int*
- **UNHCR, Asia and the Pacific Regional Trends, 2022:** *https://www.unhcr.org/asia/asia-pacific-regional-trends*
- **SIPRI Yearbook, Armed conflict and peace processes in Asia and Oceania, 2021:** *https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2021/04*
- **Prakash C. Jain, Emigration and Settlement of Indians Abroad, 1989:** *https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022919890110*
- **UNHCR, 1951 Refugee Convention:** *https://www.unhcr.org/media/1951-refugee-convention-and-1967-protocol-relating-status-refugees*
- **UNHCR, 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons:** *https://www.unhcr.org/ibelong/wp-content/uploads/1954-Convention-relating-to-the-Status-of-Stateless-Persons_ENG.pdf*
- **UNCHR Refugee Data Finder:** *https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics*

PART 2

Essentials of reporting on forced displacement and migration

CHAPTER 2



Research and data collection

Thào Nguyen, a reporter from Vietnam, is working on a story about struggles facing people with disabilities who, due to climate change, have been forcibly displaced along Vietnam's coastline. She knows that in 2022, several hundred thousand people were internally displaced because of natural disasters, but she lacks specific numbers for her report and wants to know which groups were moved where. She also hopes to estimate future displacements and believes spatial data could be valuable. However, she is unsure where to begin. She lives in the mountainous region of Hà Giang, far from the coastal areas, and so also faces challenges in finding affected persons to bring her story to life. How can Thào solve these problems?

Let's look at how she and other journalists can do research and find data from authentic sources.

2.1 Information sources

Government reports and statistics

Government websites can be valuable resources for reliable data on migration, labor, population trends and displacement. Many public departments publish annual reports, and agencies such as national statistical offices preserve almost all types of data. Immigration departments publish reports, censuses and real-time data. Many also offer open-access portals with migration figures, economic insights and spatial data for analysis. There are also departments that work with geospatial data.

For example, Pakistan's Ministry of States and Frontier Regions publishes yearbooks containing statistics about Afghan refugees. In Bangladesh, the Office of Refugee Relief and Repatriation publishes detailed data on Rohingya refugees.

Japan provides monthly data on internal migration from and to cities/prefectures and displays data on net migration to or from those cities in its government statistics department website. Its Immigration Services Agency also provides annual reports on foreign residents in Japan, as well as entries to and departures from Japan.

However, while not all countries have websites on refugees or specifically on migration, there are statistical office portals like Malaysia's open data portal that give an idea about migration trends to and from the country. Interesting data such as how many passports are issued each month is also included there.

Although the challenge in many countries is that the governmental data available online is not always up to date, the relevant offices should have the latest data. These offices can often be contacted directly.

Some government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) work with geospatial data. Geospatial data is information recorded with any geographic indicator, and coordinates latitude and longitude. To illustrate, satellite images are a type of geospatial data that can help understand the seriousness of affected areas and estimate displacements. Satellite images, for example, were crucial for reporting about Rohingya persecution. The Bangladesh government's Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) predicts river erosion patterns, and you can use this data to estimate displacements. These types of data are useful for understanding any geographic or demographic change over time. You can find more examples of geospatial data in Section 6.2.

NGOs and international organization data

Numerous organizations publish different types of displacement and migration data. For example, UNHCR's Global Trends Report presents annual statistics on forcibly displaced populations worldwide and includes detailed data on refugees and internally displaced people in Asia. The UN offers the Refugee Data Finder which is a database on refugee populations.

IOM'S World Migration Report — Asia Chapter presents a detailed analysis as well as statistics on migration trends, including internal disaster-related displacements in Asian countries.

The UN office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) also publishes reports on current trends and data related to migrant smuggling and irregular migration in the region.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) provides worldwide data on internal displacements.

Major organizations like IOM and UNHCR offer country-specific portals where more specific information on countries is available.

Information portals like Reliefweb can also be useful: they collect situation reports, press releases, evaluations, guidelines, assessments, maps and infographics published by different organizations.

CHECKLIST

How to correctly interpret data and statistics

The next step is to use the websites correctly and effectively.

The following is a checklist of how to use these data for responsible journalism, especially when dealing with sensitive topics like migration, refugees and displacement. Misinterpretation can lead to misleading narratives and erode public trust or deeply impact society. Here are key steps to ensure accuracy:

- **Understand the source:** Determine if the data is from a government agency (i.e., census bureau, immigration department) or an international organization (i.e., UNHCR, IOM, World Bank).
- **Check the methodology:** How was the data collected? Are there any biases or limitations?
- **Consider the frequency:** Is it an annual report, a real-time dashboard or outdated data?
- **Check definitions and categories:** Different organizations may differently define terms like "migrant," "refugee" and "internally displaced person" (IDP) (see also the Glossary in Section 1.6). Verify these definitions before comparing numbers. Understand how categories like "migrants," "asylum-seekers" and "irregular migrants" are used in official statistics.
- **Compare data across sources:** Government-reported numbers may differ from UN or NGO estimates due to differing methodologies or political factors. Cross-check statistics between national, regional and international databases for consistency.
- **Consider missing data and limitations**: Some reports may exclude undocumented migrants or forcibly displaced individuals in conflict zones. Surveys and censuses often underreport vulnerable populations due to accessibility issues or fear of legal consequences.
- **Watch for manipulation and contextual bias:** Be careful! Governments may downplay migration numbers for political reasons, while advocacy groups may overstate figures to highlight a crisis. Therefore, always contextualize statistics: Is it related to any specific event?
- **Use percentages and proportions, not just raw numbers:** A figure like "400,000 displaced people" may sound alarming, but in a country of 100 million people, it represents only 0.4 percent of the population.
- **Identify trends:** Compare numbers over time to identify trends, rather than relying on single-year data points.
- **Seek expert analysis:** Consult data analysts, migration experts and humanitarian agencies to clarify doubts. Ask them to explain the data.
- **Use visualizations:** Use charts, maps and infographics to clearly present complex data and avoid misinterpretation.

By following these steps, journalists can ensure accurate and well-contextualized reporting and make migration and

displacement data meaningful for their audience.

2.2 Conducting interviews for research

Interviewing migrants and refugees requires a sensitive approach, thorough preparation and a strong ethical foundation. Journalists in Asia face unique challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences and trauma experienced by displaced individuals.

However, there are some differences between interviews for research and interviews that are to be published. Research interviews are primarily exploratory, i.e., to thoroughly understand the topic and related issues; these interviews are not to be quoted or published unless explicitly agreed upon by the interviewees. These interview partners are generally experts, insiders or different stakeholders.

Best practices for interviewing migrants and refugees in Asia

Here are best practices for conducting interviews and they explore key ethical considerations when engaging with vulnerable populations.

Above all, make sure you include the people affected!

Participatory approach: ***"Nothing about us without us"*** is our approach, so include migrants and refugees in your reports as co-authors. They know best about these topics and as such are experts. Too often, reports on migration and refugees do not include those who have been affected, see chapter 3 and chapter 4.

Research is important: While it's important to have a clear understanding of the incident and its context (i.e., natural disasters, conflict and war), make sure you do proper research about the location, the people and culture and customs there before going to the affected area. It is important to know how to contextualize your questions based on your research.

Build trust and rapport: Building trust is essential, especially when speaking with those who have faced persecution, violence or discrimination. Approach interviewees with empathy and do not rush.

- Start with a lighter topic to make the interviewee feel comfortable before discussing sensitive topics.
- It is better to ask the interviewee where she/he would like to begin with her/his story. Still, some people may not know where to start and need a bit of guidance. However, don't push too much, give them options.
- Be transparent about your role, intentions and how the interview will be used.
- Offer the interviewee anonymity or pseudonyms if she/he fears repercussions.

Understand cultural and linguistic differences: Asia's diversity means multiple languages, dialects and cultural norms. Reporters should be aware of this.

- Use trained interpreters who understand both the language and cultural nuances. Avoid unofficial translators who might alter responses.
- Respect cultural customs, such as greetings, dress codes and body language.
- Be mindful of religious practices that might affect interview scheduling or comfort levels.

Prepare thoughtful and open-ended questions: Encourage storytelling with open-ended prompts instead of leading or yes/no questions. For example, "How did it all start?" "What was your journey like?" "How has displacement affected your daily life?"

Verify information: Migrants and refugees may share emotionally charged experiences but details might be incomplete or influenced by trauma. Verify information through secondary sources.

- Cross-check information stated in the interview with available statistics from i.e., government agencies, international organizations (i.e., UNHCR, IOM) and independent research bodies.
- Avoid amplifying false or misleading claims, even if they seem compelling.

Ensure safety and confidentiality: Speaking publicly can lead to threats, deportation or social stigmas for many displaced individuals. Be aware of this and make sure you:

- never share an interviewee's exact location or personal

identifiers without her or his explicit consent.

- are cautious when photographing or filming—blur faces if necessary.

- consult legal experts or NGOs when reporting on sensitive topics (i.e., human trafficking, asylum applications) to ensure ethical practices.

Ethical considerations when interviewing vulnerable populations

Obtain informed consent: Migrants and refugees should fully understand the implications of taking part in an interview.

- Explain who you are, the purpose of the interview and where their story will be published.

- Allow them to ask questions and ensure they agree voluntarily, without coercion.

- Provide them with this information in written form or through an interpreter if necessary.

Avoid retraumatizing the interviewee: Many displaced individuals have suffered severe trauma. Avoid prompting them to relive painful experiences.

- Pay attention to emotional distress and be prepared to stop the interview if necessary.

- Provide referrals to support organizations if the person expresses a need for help.

Respect anonymity and privacy: In politically sensitive contexts, publicizing someone's story may put them at risk.

- Offer them the choice to use a pseudonym or remain anonymous.

- Allow them to review their quotes before publication.

- Give them control over whether photographs or videos will accompany their story.

Avoid exploitation and sensationalism: Migrants and refugees should not be used merely as sources of dramatic or tragic narratives.

- Present them as individuals with agency, strengths and aspirations, and not just as victims.

- Balance personal stories with a broader context, including a policy analysis and expert opinions.

Be aware of power dynamics: Journalists hold more power than their interviewees, especially when interviewing displaced individuals.

- Approach the interviewee with respect, listen actively and avoid imposing assumptions. Do not tell the interviewee what to say.

- Recognize and explain the potential consequences of the interview for the person being interviewed. Ensure that the individual feels safe in participating.

By following these guidelines, journalists can conduct respectful and ethical interviews with migrants and refugees, ensuring that their stories are told accurately and attentively.

2.3 Using technology and social media

Leveraging digital tools for research in Asia

The advent of digital tools and new technologies has revolutionized how journalists do their research. In Asia, where access to information can vary depending on political and social factors, technology aids reporters in tracking trends, verifying sources and gathering real-time updates.

However, remember that nothing compares to being on the ground. Experiencing the situation on site and getting first-hand accounts provides more insights than any desk research.

Various digital tools can benefit reports if journalists use them effectively:

Data platforms and mapping tools

Geographic Information System (GIS) and satellite imagery: Platforms like Google Earth, NASA Earth Observatory, and UNOSAT offer satellite images to monitor displacement patterns caused by natural disasters or conflicts.

Crowdsourced data: Use crowdsourcing tools or collaborate with crowdsourcing platforms like Ushahidi.

Social listening for migration trends

Hashtag and keyword monitoring: Tools like X Pro and Hootsuite help track real-time discussions on migration issues.

Regional platforms: Check which messaging platforms are key sources for local migration news. For example, platforms like Weibo (China), Line (Thailand and Japan), Telegram (Central Asia) and X (formerly: Twitter, South Asia) can be valuable.

NGO and activist accounts: Organizations that work in the field can provide firsthand accounts and leads on underreported stories.

Digital security and encryption

Secure communication: Use top secure apps like Signal and ProtonMail to communicate with sensitive sources.

Data protection: Virtual private networks (VPNs) and encrypted storage solutions help safeguard research and contacts.

Anonymity for sources: Secure browsers (i.e., Tor browser) enable journalists, whistleblowers or migrants to share information safely.

Verifying information from social media and local sources

With the rise of misinformation, journalists must thoroughly verify online sources before reporting on migration issues. Here are essential steps:

Cross-check with official data

- Compare social media claims with reports from UNHCR, IOM, national immigration departments and local NGOs.
- Use fact-checking databases like AFP Fact Check, Snopes and regional initiatives like BOOM (India) and Rappler's Fact-Check (Philippines).

Geolocation and visual verification

- Use tools like Google Reverse Image Search, TinEye, and InVID to check if images have been manipulated or reused.
- Verify video locations through Google Earth, street view comparisons and metadata analysis.

Directly contact eyewitnesses and experts

- Reach out to verified humanitarian organizations or local journalists to confirm information.
- Conduct interviews with affected individuals, ensuring ethical practices and security considerations.

Identify bots and disinformation

- Use AI-driven tools like Botometer to detect fake accounts spreading migration-related misinformation.
- Check engagement patterns: coordinated posts with identical wording or suspiciously high activity may indicate disinformation campaigns.

How can Thào Nguyen now approach her story?

Thào needs to report on the impact of climate change on disabled persons who have been displaced from the coastal areas of Vietnam. She could start, for example, by asking for displacement figures from Vietnam's General Statistics Office (GSO), the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and disaster management agencies. The Vietnam Disaster Management Authority (VDMA) may have relevant data on natural disasters and their impact on communities.

She can also check reports published by UNHCR, IOM, and IDMC on internal displacement due to climate change. The World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) might have climate vulnerability assessments specific to Vietnam.

Vietnamese universities and think tanks like the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS) have conducted studies on climate change impacts and migration. It can be beneficial to collaborate with researchers who have worked on related topics.

To predict future displacements, Thào can use reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which provide projections on rising sea levels and extreme weather patterns in Vietnam. Platforms like Google Earth, NASA Earth Observatory, or UNOSAT can help visualize coastal erosion and flooding trends. Consulting Vietnam's Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment for GIS-based climate maps can be

also useful. In addition, by analyzing past displacement patterns due to typhoons and floods, Thào can identify trends and estimate future risks.

Since Thào lives in Hà Giang, far from the coastal areas she's reporting on, she can contact humanitarian organizations on the ground that work in affected provinces. Facebook groups and local online forums in Vietnam may provide leads on affected families. She can also partner with NGOs for her trip to the coastal areas.

Going into the field and talking to the affected population is key to any reporting!

However, Thào should not only interview the locals but also talk to climate experts, policymakers and perhaps disability rights activists to create an impactful story.



CHECKLIST

How to do research and data collection on migration and forced displacement

Prepare well

- **Engage communities before interviewing:** Build trust by spending time with affected individuals before starting formal interviews.
- **Clarify your story focus:** Define the specific aspect of migration or displacement that you are covering (i.e., climate-induced migration, asylum policies, labor migration).
- **Identify key stakeholders:** Make a list of relevant government agencies, NGOs, local experts and affected communities to consult.
- **Research local context:** Understand the political, economic and social dynamics influencing migration in the area.
- **Check legal and ethical considerations:** Be aware of laws on interviewing refugees, data protection and media restrictions.
- **Consult NGO and international reports:** Use migration data from trusted organizations (i.e., UNHCR, IOM, HRW) for insights and trends.
- **Use mapping and satellite tools:** Incorporate GIS and remote sensing to track displacement patterns if possible.
- **Accurately interpret data:** Understand methodologies, sample sizes and data collection biases before drawing conclusions.
- **Store research securely:** Protect sensitive notes and contacts with encrypted tools.

In the field

- **Be on site:** Talk to affected people to get an understanding of the situation.
- **Ensure informed consent:** Clearly explain to the interviewee how the interview will be used and allow anonymity if necessary.
- **Use trauma-sensitive approaches:** Avoid questions that can retraumatize the interviewee, and respect emotional boundaries.
- **Be culturally aware:** Use appropriate translators and understand cultural sensitivities.
- **Protect interviewee identities:** Use pseudonyms or blur faces when necessary to prevent harm.
- **Plan for personal and digital security:** Ensure safe travel, secure communication and data encryption when handling sensitive information.

Do your fact-checking

- **Use reliable fact-checking tools:** Refer to fact-checking platforms (i.e., AFP Fact Check, Snopes, BOOM) for verification.
- **Confirm eyewitness testimonies:** Whenever possible, corroborate stories with multiple sources.
- **Verify government and official data:** Cross-check statistics with multiple sources and assess potential biases.
- **Monitor online disinformation:** Identify coordinated misinformation campaigns and bot activity.
- **Cross-check social media claims:** Verify viral posts using reverse image searches and metadata analysis.

USEFUL LINKS

- **Report on Internal Migration in Japan, 2024:** *https://www.e-stat.go.jp/en/stat-search/files?page=1&layout=datalist&toukei=00200523&tstat=000000070001&cycle=7&year=20240&month=0&tclass1=000001148746*
- **Pakistan: SAFRON Yearbook, 2022–2023:** *https://safron.gov.pk/SiteImage/Downloads/Year%20Book%202022-23.pdf*
- **Bangladesh: RRRC portal, 2025:** *https://rrrc.portal.gov.bd/site/notices/0a632646-a11e-464a-a811-b74241e615c6/Report-at-a-Glance*
- **Malaysia: Open Data Portal:** *https://data.gov.my/data-catalogue*
- **India: Census Tables:** *https://censusindia.gov.in/census.website/data/census-tables*
- **Singapore: Foreign Workforce Numbers:** *https://www.mom.gov.sg/documents-and-publications/foreign-workforce-numbers*
- **UNHCR, Asia and the Pacific Regional Trends, 2023:** *https://www.unhcr.org/asia/asia-pacific-regional-trends*
- **UNHCR Refugee Data Finder:** *https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics?utm_source=chatgpt.com*
- **IOM, World Migration Report: Asia Chapter, 2024:** *https://publications.iom.int/books/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-3*
- **IOM Data Portal:** *https://gmdac.iom.int/data-and-resources*
- **UNODC, Trafficking in Persons, 2024:** *https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html*
- **The Counter Trafficking Data Collaborative:** *https://www.ctdatacollaborative.org*
- **IDMC, Internal Displacement Data, 2024:** *https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2024*
- **Reliefweb:** *https://reliefweb.int*
- **Migration Data Portal:** *https://www.migrationdataportal.org/data-catalogue*
- **International Detention Coalition, Immigration Detention and Alternatives to Detentions in Asia and the Pacific Region, 2022:** *https://idcoalition.org/publications/immigration-detention-atd-in-the-asia-pacific-region*
- **Asia Pacific Refugee Rights Network (APRRN):** *https://aprrn.org/publication*
- **OCHA:** *https://www.ochaopt.org/data*
- **Humanitarian Data Index:** *https://data.humdata.org/dataset*
- **Assessment Capacities Project:** *https://www.acaps.org/en/data*
- **NASA Earth Observatory:** *https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov*
- **UNOSAT:** *https://unosat.org*
- **Google Earth Engine:** *https://earthengine.google.com*
- **Marine Traffic:** *https://www.marinetraffic.com/en/ais/home/centerx:-12.0/centery:25.0/zoom:4*
- **Sentinel Hub:** *https://www.sentinel-hub.com*
- **RSF, Digital Security Guides:** *https://helpdesk.rsf.org/digital-security-guide*

CHAPTER 3



Reporting on migration and forced displacement

Principles, participation, protection

Disha Waswani is based in India and has been reporting on migration issues for some time. Her media house has sent her to cover various aspects, including internal work-related migration within India, Indian workers going to the Gulf states, and refugees from Myanmar and Afghanistan coming to India. Still, these topics are politically highly charged, and many migrants are complaining about distorted images and negative reports about them. Disha is often critical of her colleagues, seeing prejudices in media houses whenever migrants or refugees are mentioned. She wants to improve her reporting and not copy stereotypes that are constantly being repeated but is not sure how to do this.

Migration continues to be a major issue. In its 2024 report, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) states that there were 281 million international migrants (in 2020) worldwide, which equates to 3.6 percent of the global population. This percentage has incrementally increased over the decades. In 1970, for example, IOM recorded it as being at 2.3 percent.

According to statistics by UNHCR, by the end of 2024, 123.2 million people worldwide had been forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or incidences seriously disturbing public order. The majority (73.5 million) have been internally displaced—one out of every 67 persons—or 1.5 percent of the world's population (2025).

This can present a challenge for journalists who report on forcibly displaced refugees. While migrants work and thus contribute to their new country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), refugees initially require support to settle and integrate into the host community. Although the situation of migrants greatly differs from that of refugees, host communities or media often see them as the same and spread widely held notions that migrants are a burden to the host society.

The focus on refugees should be on the ethical responsibility to help them. Instead, the focus is on the costs. In Asia, dangerous rhetoric aimed at religious groups and ethnic minorities contributes to much of the negative narrative around migrants. Often, the most vulnerable ethnic groups are targeted, forcing them to move and seek asylum elsewhere where they may face further rejection.

Reporting that repeats and re-enforces prejudices and stereotypes sets host communities against migrants and refugees, and thus threatens their safety. As a result, journalists need to be aware of their own responsibility and adhere to ethical, accurate and rights-based reporting.

Disha needs to learn more about journalistic approaches for covering migration-related issues. She has also witnessed vulnerable people, such as foreign workers without proper documentation, being unintentionally exposed by journalists and encountering more difficulties. Disha does not want her reporting to bring harm to those she interviews or works with, so becoming familiar with ways to protect their privacy is important.

3.1 The participatory approach

There are several ways to improve reporting on migration and to make it more inclusive, and telling a compelling story is always central to journalism (see Chapter 4).

The most important feature here is the participatory approach, also known under the slogan: ***"Nothing about us without us."*** Too often, well-meaning journalists write about migrants but how often do you, as a journalist, ask a refugee how he or she wants his or her story to be told? How often do you actively involve them in the reporting to get their point of view? Do you make sure that journalists from minority communities are also involved?

The participatory approach aims to include, from the start, those who have been affected: in the research stage, in setting-up your story, and by making sure that you don't stay behind your desk but actually go to the field and ask people about their lives and views. Their stories from their perspective become part of your report, thereby amplifying their voices and giving a contrasting view to the perceptions that host communities or politicians may hold.

A plan: Diverse newsrooms

Diverse newsrooms where people with refugee or migrant backgrounds do the reporting themselves and feed into the editorial decision making would change much. Journalists from migrant and refugee communities would report using their access and knowledge on issues, thus breaking stereotypes and addressing biases that go unnoticed in mainly homogenous newsrooms. Having diverse newsrooms like this is not only crucial for accurately representing the diverse societies we live in but would broaden the perspective of media houses themselves and provide their audiences/readers with insights otherwise difficult to obtain. This, in turn, would attract new audiences/readers from communities that until then had never seen themselves represented in media.

3.2 Guidelines for journalists

Conflict sensitive journalism is a helpful technique when reporting on refugees and migrants.

Principles and techniques of conflict-sensitive journalism (CSJ)

What is conflict sensitivity?

Conflict sensitivity is the ability to:

- understand the context. It is important to know the socio-economic and political tensions, root causes, cultural and historical background as well as the structural factors in which you operate because all have the potential to become violent.
- understand the interaction between your reporting and the context.
- act upon your understanding of this, to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts.

When reporting on refugees, always mention why they the people had fled. If you are focusing on migrants, always consider the (potentially negative) effects it may have if you publish the photo of an undocumented migrant. Modify your report accordingly.

Conflict-sensitive journalism looks at capacities for peace

The purpose of identifying capacities for peace among various actors is to simply sift through the "spoilers" or "interest groups" who have a stake in perpetuating a conflict. You can do this by simply documenting the information you have and getting additional information and interviews to see if your analysis has been thorough and objective. The goal is to determine objective reasons that can be recognized by the actors involved in the conflict as common grounds for peace.

Example
In Papua New Guinea, ongoing tribal conflicts have claimed lives. Behind the conflicts are increasing land disputes because land has become scarce due to land-grabbing by international mining companies. It would therefore be important to show your audience that the hostile tribes are in fact facing the same external "enemy," namely the companies and their policies. By uniting, the tribes would have a better chance of fighting for their rights.

Conflict-sensitive journalism considers

- all stakeholders' needs, worldviews and interests within a given conflict (rather than presenting only one perspective).
- common ground, goals and interests among the stakeholders (rather than presenting only that which divides the conflicting parties).
- peacebuilding potential that originates inside and among all stakeholders.

Conflict-sensitive journalism does not use

- language/images that associate the reporter with one side of the conflict.
- emotional wording.
- subjective descriptions of stakeholders (use instead the language that people use to describe themselves).
- opinions presented as facts.



CHECKLIST

Conflict-sensitive journalism

(according to Ross Howard)

Checklist against prejudice

- Is the news item necessary? Is it of public interest?
- Even if the facts are correct, will the report increase prejudice and violence?
- Are there enough different opinions in the report? Did you seek enough different opinions, both from experts, host community and refugees?
- Does the report contain words/statements that offend other people or create prejudice against minorities? Are these comments balanced by other comments?
- In war reporting, are you reporting about victims and casualties? Is this information of public interest?

Checklist for conflict-sensitive reporting

- Avoid reporting a conflict as consisting of two opposing sides. Find other affected interests and include their stories, opinions and goals. For example, interview merchants affected by price increases; mothers from a host community and a refugee community who can't afford school fees; or IDPs from the countryside who want an end to violence.
- Go beyond elites. Leaders often repeat their favorite statements. Ask regular people to find out what most people think.
- Avoid reporting only on what divides the sides in a conflict. Ask opposing sides questions which may reveal common ground. Report on the interests or goals they may share. For instance, both the host community and the refugees may worry about access to clean drinking water in their community, therefore this is a concern they share.
- Do not turn a person's opinion into a fact. If somebody claims something, publish his or her name so that it is marked as his or her opinion rather than as a fact.
- Name groups properly. Ask people how they would like to be referred to.
- Be careful with strong language. Terms such as "tragedy," "terror" or "catastrophe" influence how audiences frame an event. Adjectives such as "innocent" or "destroyed" are used to win over an audience's emotions. Only include these terms if you are quoting someone who has used them themself. Report on circumstances and interests in a conflict. Simply relaying a few facts about a conflict is not enough. Interview people who are affected by conflict (i.e., vendors who are losing customers because of a general strike, migrants who are not allowed to work, refugees who want the violence to stop).
- Be concrete. Report on how regular people are being affected by certain government decisions, how agreements are being implemented in daily life, what needs to be changed, and who is responsible for the situation.
- Report on the interests or goals that can be common to both conflicting parties.
- Report on best examples. Explore peace ideas, efforts to solve the conflict/problem, regardless of where the efforts come from. See if those efforts on all levels. Report on these efforts, show your report to the leaders and publish their response.
- Call people by the names they give themselves.
- Avoid focusing exclusively on the suffering, fears and grievances, human rights abuses and wrongdoings of just one party.

Specific considerations for conflict-sensitive reporting on migration and displacement in Asia

Labor migration

There are two noteworthy issues concerning labor migration in Asia: first, there is a huge internal labor migration within India. Due to demands on the labor market, such as the need for unskilled workers, people from rural areas move across the country to work. At the last census, internal migrants made up 38 percent of the Indian population. As a result, reporting about internal migration has different challenges than reporting about international migration: journalists need to be familiar with local labor laws, constitutional provisions and lacking policy frameworks as well as demographics and changing social networks. Journalists must also be aware of trafficking, bonded labor and the lack of reliable data.

Secondly, international labor migration is an issue, given that workers from Asia often find work in the Gulf states. Researching the conditions of migrant workers in the region is often difficult due to limited data access, government restrictions, political sensitivity around labor rights, and the kafala system (workers bound to a specific employer). To facilitate your investigation, consider teaming up with local journalists, NGOs and human rights groups.

Refugees

There are several long-standing conflicts and fallouts due to former conflicts—such as in Afghanistan—that continue to result in people being internally displaced or having to flee. Afghans make up the largest group of refugees in Asia, and while some have lived in Iran or Pakistan or other countries for decades, others have only recently arrived.

The second largest refugee community in Asia are the Rohingya. Their latest mass exodus from Myanmar to neighboring countries, particularly to Bangladesh, began in August 2017. However, since the late 1970s, Rohingya have fled to Bangladesh several times following persecution and unrest. As a result, almost all are stateless and designated as "Foreign Displaced Myanmar Nationals" in Bangladesh (which hosts approximately one million Rohingya).

3.3 Avoiding stereotypes and biases

A **stereotype** is a widespread belief about a certain group and the assumption that every person in that group is the same or acts according to this stereotype. For example, women are often stereotyped as "weak" or "emotional." Stereotypes are often implicit—while we might think we're not judging according to stereotypes, we actually are.

Example
If we were always to think of women as being weak and emotional, in a situation where we're looking for a "strong and cool person," we might automatically look for a man, given traditional stereotypes. However, in a given situation where either a man or a woman could be chosen, the woman's personality might be more level-headed than the man's, and she might therefore be the better choice.

Thinking along stereotypes leads us to **bias**, meaning that we expect from certain people or groups a certain behavior. As a result, we interpret everything they do along these lines even though it doesn't reflect reality. This is called **cognitive bias**.

Example
If a woman speaks loudly and forcefully, many people might automatically think, "Oh, she's so emotional about the subject she can't make clear decisions." However, if a man speaks loudly and forcefully, he is often seen as assertive and strong-willed, leading some to think, "He certainly knows how to make decisions." Therefore, bias keeps us from seeing people and situations fairly and correctly.

Common biases and stereotypes in Asian media and their impact

Many biases and stereotypes regarding migrants and refugees are surprisingly similar, whether it concerns Rohingya in Bangladesh, Afghans in Pakistan or Indians in Malaysia. These widespread stereotypes can also be found outside of Asia. Stereotypes of Senegalese

migrants in France or Mexican migrants in the USA, for example, are also often alike (i.e., "They take away our jobs/they want to live at our expense/they threaten our women"). Another common example of refugee stereotyping is portraying them either as perpetrators or threats (i.e., to national security or national identity) or as victims who are helpless and without any agency. How refugees and migrants are seen as being different from the host country's population ("othering") is further described in Section 4.2).

The former Deputy High Commissioner for Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in Portugal, Rui Marques Pinto, identified 10 stigmas of immigrants that should be ended. These stigmas are also typically applied to migrants, refugees and other minorities and can be found in variations in almost every country.

10 stigmas of immigrants

(according to Rui Marques Pinto)

1. Immigrants constitute an invasion.
2. Immigrants take away our jobs.
3. Immigrants use our scarce resources in health, social security, and public services.
4. Immigrants are criminals.
5. Immigrants if they are women, they are prostitutes.
6. Immigrants carry diseases.
7. Immigrants are helped by government and inter-national organizations, giving them what we cannot get ourselves.
8. Immigrants are different, strange.
9. Immigrants do not pay taxes.
10. Immigrants are unreliable.

These biases often apply to migrants and refugees and are often repeated, going unchecked in the media. This leads to even harder positions against them and further conflicts with host communities and migrants/refugees.

For example, a study published in 2017 found that despite increasing violence against refugees in Germany, the media focused on migrant criminality. This skewed representation contributed to a distorted public perception, associating migrants with criminality and potentially fueling xenophobic sentiments.

As a result, journalists need to check if their reporting feeds these stigmas. Do you, for example, always focus on criminality when reporting about migrants? Do your reports focus mainly on resource conflicts with the host community? Do you use language or labelling that instigates more bias or even hate?

Check Chapter 4 for more tips on language and images.

Strategies for balanced reporting

Contextualize: Be aware of the historical, cultural and socio-political background of the regions and communities you cover. What may seem to be unusual or controversial from one perspective, may have a significant local meaning.

Use diverse sources: To avoid dominating stereotyped perceptions, talk to diverse sources and reflect voices of different communities. Your primary sources should be local sources and experts, thus adding authenticity and depth to reporting.

Editorial dialogues: Democratizing editorial decisions through newsroom discussions can challenge biases and help balance reporting.

Balance national and external perspectives: Many Asian media only reflect national narratives. To avoid one-sided coverage, it is crucial to portray regional or global perspectives on an issue.

Language sensitivity: Describing something as "mysterious" or "an ancient tradition" sounds interesting but can be detrimental. Instead, use neutral and specific language to describe traditions and social or political systems. (See also Section 4.2).

Media literacy: Reporting is constantly evolving, especially regarding displacement and migration issues. As a result, it's important that journalists continue to develop their own media literacy, including how to better understand news sources for balanced reporting, and how to verify social media content.

3.4 Privacy of sources

Protecting the identities of vulnerable populations

In general, vulnerable groups such as (persecuted) minorities, women, children, LGBTIQ*, migrants and refugees are more at risk if their identity is disclosed in a media

report, interview, quote or photo. Be careful, then, because being exposed can benefit those who torment or threaten them, such as jealous husbands, police or armed actors.

Migrants and refugees can face additional risks such as a lack of documentation, exploitation or human trafficking.

Being a source can aggravate these risks because the person might also be accused of being a "traitor." As journalists, our responsibility is to mitigate the risks for our sources and protect them.

Protecting vulnerable sources

Know that

- interviews or passing on information to you may put your source at risk.
- while you will likely be able to leave a dangerous place after the interview, your source will still be there.

Do not reveal information that could help armed actors identify your sources.

How to protect those who are vulnerable

- blur faces in photos, use stock photos or no photos at all. (Beware of metadata! Erase it!)
- give fake names to people and places and explain to the audience why you have done this.
- distort voices in audios.
- do not disclose your whereabouts or the place of your investigation on social media.

Using **migrants/refugees as sources** requires even more care. **They are highly at risk because**

- of their legal status (i.e., no passport, are illegally there, have not yet been given asylum).
- the powers that drove them from their own country may be present in the country they have migrated/fled to, or are still searching for them.
- people in refugee camps are generally not safe.

Interviewing children requires particular care. As a rule, children should never be interviewed alone, without their parents and/or guardians, and only if their parents and/or guardians have given consent.

USEFUL LINKS

Reporting on migration:

- **UNESCO, "Reporting on Migrants and Refugees: Handbook for Journalism Educators", 2021:** *https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377890*

Conflict-sensitive journalism:

- **Peter du Toit: "Conflict Sensitive Reporting. A Toolbox for Journalists" (Internews), 2012:** *https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/resources/ConflictSensitiveReporting-Peter_du_Toit_2012-03.pdf*
- **Ross Howard, "Conflict Sensitive Journalism", International Media Support, IMPACS, 2004:** *https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/ims-csj-handbook-2004.pdf*
- **Mykhailo Buromensky, Serhiy Shtirkhetsky, Emma Beals, Zoya Kazanji, Michelle Betz, Chris Schuepp: "Conflict Sensitive Journalism: Best practices and recommendations" (OSCE), 2016:** *https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/b/254526.pdf*
- **Ed Karlon Rama, Katja Gürten: "The Conflict Sensitive Journalism Teaching Guide: Philosophy and Practice", Forum ZFD/ Pecojon, 2018:** *https://www.propeace.de/system/files/document/Philosophy%20and%20Practice.pdf*
- **Pandeli Pani, Ulrike Fischer-Butmaloiu: "Introduction to Conflict Sensitive Reporting", Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, 2021:** *https://www.freiheit.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/introductiontoconflictsensitivereporting_0.pdf*
- **Annabel McGoldrick and Jake Lynch, "Peace Journalism: What is it? How to do it?", Transcend Network, 2000:** *https://www.transcend.org/tri/downloads/McGoldrick_Lynch_Peace-Journalism.pdf*

Interviewing children:

- **Global Center for Journalism and Trauma, "Essential Tips for Interviewing Children", 2018:** *https://gcjt.org/resources/essential-tips-interviewing-children*
- **Save the Children Fund, "Interviewing Children: A Guide for Journalists and Others", 2003:** *https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/interviewing_children.pdf*

CHAPTER 4



Sensitive storytelling and narrative techniques

Kamon Chanapai has investigated migration issues in Thailand and is familiar with all the figures, statistics and political implications. The journalist's reports contain well-researched facts about migrants, trying to dissipate the negative image. However, Kamon notices that the audience is often bored by the reports: mere facts don't seem to engage people and stereotypes about refugees are rampant throughout Thai society. However, correcting these misconceptions just with facts isn't working. Even politicians are constantly repeating the prevalent narrative about "lazy migrants" and "dangerous refugees."

Kamon needs to change the narrative and wonders how to do this. It's basically a matter of good storytelling and journalists can apply this technique for any topic—and not just when reporting on migration.

4.1 Crafting compelling narratives

The power of storytelling

As a journalist, telling a good story is your main challenge and central to your job. While providing your audience or readers with facts and cross-checked information is just as important, it needs to be packed in a way that people want to consume. In a time of information and communication overload, it's more crucial than ever to tell a good story that captivates audiences and readers.

"Telling stories" in many cultures is a polite way of saying "lying," but in journalism, storytelling illustrates an issue or event by relaying the personal experience of someone affected by the situation. This person's story gives color and depth to otherwise bland material and allows people to connect with the message of your report in a deeper, more meaningful and powerful way.

"Nothing about us without us"

Key for migration reporting is the **participatory approach** that includes those affected—migrants and refugees—in your reporting. As you set up your story, choose the angle, and do research: go to the field and work with the people there! Include their voices and views because migration reporting is not just writing *about* migration, but it's about working with migrants and refugees and making them part of your report.

As they say: "Nothing about us without us".

Personalizing migration stories with an Asian perspective

We are used to seeing photos of migrants and refugees depicted as a great mass. This fits the narrative of the "flood" or "deluge" of refugees that compares humans to natural catastrophes. Images usually show just a mass of people, where it's almost impossible to detect individual faces.

This makes it difficult for audiences or readers to feel a person's plight because we can only feel empathy when we recognize a person as being human and similar to us. That's why it's crucial to have **a single person or family as the main character** in your report, and to tell the whole story from their perspective. All **challenges** that migrants or refugees confront can be shown through this person's eyes. This personal view **creates empathy** among the audience.

Good storytelling includes the following elements:

- an emotionally significant **situation**.
- a **protagonist** whom the audience can feel/identify with.
- **conflicts** and **challenges** that the protagonist has to face and overcome.
- a clear story **development** (before and after).
- a **climax/peak** of the story.

Your task is to "humanize" the issue of migration and displacement, so develop a **human angle** to your story. One technique is to **choose a point of view**: do you tell your story through the eyes of a border guard, for example, or an asylum seeker?

Balancing individual stories with broader trends

As a journalist—rather than a fiction writer—you want your reports to convey facts and information. To clearly explain or illustrate an issue, **contextualize your story** by weaving in the experiences of individual migrants or refugees.

For example, you can tell a story about:
- **legal difficulties** by showing a migrant trying to get a work permit or a refugee applying for asylum but who cannot provide a passport because he or she lost it when leaving home or fleeing.
- **social challenges** by following a young woman who tries to find work in a new country. She is struggling with a foreign language and is in danger of being exploited and sexually abused.

However, do not just present migrants and refugees as victims but as **agents of their own fate**. Stories of people overcoming obstacles and **success** show the full scope of a person's abilities, and this commands respect.

For example, you could tell a story about:
- **contributions to a host community** by depicting a migrant engaged in social work in her new place of residence.
- **personal growth** by recounting the development of a young refugee who became a proficient musician.

4.2 Sensitivity to language and contexts

Conflict-sensitive language: Definition and use

Conflict-sensitive language is guided by the **principle of do-no-harm**. It avoids everything that could aggravate a conflict, such as:

- language/images that associate the reporter with one side of the conflict.
- emotional wording, which may stoke a conflict.
- subjective descriptions of stakeholders. Instead, use the language people use to describe themselves.

In conflict-sensitive journalism (CSJ), people are portrayed as individuals, not as a faceless group.

Examples of conflict-sensitive wording

- "refugee situation" (not "refugee crisis"): It has become a habit to label anything related to refugees a "crisis." This frames the people as a permanent source of trouble, although the fact that they had to flee is the **result of a real crisis elsewhere**.
- "large/rising number of refugees" (not "flood/tsunami/deluge of refugees"): Never equate humans with natural catastrophes!
- "fight about land" or "resource conflicts": Use terms like these and avoid words with an aggressive ring like "fight," "war," "belligerent" (unless you are dealing with an actual war or violent clashes) because words like these give a violent slant to any conflict.
- instead of writing "refugee from Myanmar," give the person a name and profession, i.e., "Aung, who used to be a chemist in Myanmar." With a few exceptions, **no one is born a refugee or stays a refugee forever**. "Refugee" is not a profession. People have names, professions, families. They have a past.
- in many countries, pejorative terms exist for certain migrant groups. For example, in some Indian northern states, migrants from the northeast are referred to as "chinki," a racial slur. In Myanmar, Rohingya are referred

to as Bengali to deny their ethnicity, implying that they are irregular immigrants from Bangladesh.

As a journalist, **never use prerogative terms**. Instead, ask migrant communities how they like to be called and use those terms.

Differentiate! Consider when it is necessary to write "migrant" or "Afghan" and when it is better to write, i.e., "teacher" or "hobby pastry maker" or "dedicated football fan."

Migrant communities are not homogeneous—people there have various (political) opinions. Try to reflect this in your articles and avoid adjectives that generalize, i.e., "The Muslims in Germany are very conservative."

How to avoid "us" vs. "them" narrative

Many journalists automatically use the word "us" when talking about their own country, town or football club, and the word "them" when referring to inhabitants of another country, city or fans of another football club.

Contexts regarding minorities, or conflicts that separate people into "us" and "them" can be dangerous because it leads to discrimination. This process is called **othering**.

"Othering" marks a person or a group as being different or foreign and **not belonging**. The group that consists of "us" is constituted as the norm; all others are outside of that. "Othering" is based on hierarchical and stereotypical thinking and consolidates existing power relations. This process describes the distancing to other groups in order to confirm one's own "normality." It also **attributes negative characteristics** to all those who differ from one's own normative social group. "Othering" is a permanent act of categorizing and differentiating between "us" and "them."

In journalism—particularly in conflict-sensitive journalism—this has to be avoided. Insisting on supposedly "strange" customs or behaviour of certain ethnic, tribal, social or religious groups further pushes the process of "othering." Divisions become deeper and harder to bridge. Minorities feel unjustly portrayed, and for good reason.

Journalists who belong to a certain ethnic, tribal, social or religious group should **not** fall into the trap of categorizing themselves as "us" and other group(s) as "other," because it's just a small step away from seeing "them" (whoever they are) as the problem or blaming "them" for it.

In CSJ, journalists use **language that encompasses all groups**; it finds common ground and does not group people along negative stereotypes. Instead of "othering," it is crucial to include everybody. A solution is to refer to each group (as well as your own) by their denomination (i.e., state name, like Cambodia, or tribal name, like Shan, or religious group, like Buddhists) instead of using "we" and "they."

It is extremely important to avoid negative generalized statements about another group, i.e., "they are backwards," "they are stubborn and don't want to negotiate," "they are aggressive by nature." Instead write, i.e., "many people adhere to traditional norms" or "it has not been easy to meet at the negotiating table." This describes a situation without stereotyping the whole group.

4.3 Visual and multimedia reporting

What is the most effective way to tell a story using visuals? One way is to understand that visuals themselves should be able to communicate without any captions or voice-overs. While creating powerful images is important, there is also a risk. Misrepresenting individuals in images could have deeper implications, especially when covering conflicts and forced displacement. Why is that?

Let's first look at two examples

In the first image *(pic. 1),* a boat carrying migrants arrives at a European shore and it is intercepted by coast guards. The migrants are seated on the lower deck with their heads bowed and avoiding eye contact. At one side of the deck, a coast guard stands with a gun, overseeing the



Picture 1

scene. A photo captures this moment from the upper deck, showing the migrants seated closely together. You cannot see their faces or identify them.

The coast guard with the gun, however, is clearly identifiable as he stands and faces the migrants.

In the next image *(pic. 2),* a rubber boat carrying migrants arrives at the shoreline. A woman in the boat is photographed in a moment of acute vulnerability. The image was taken from a low angle and at a close range. She is visibly exhausted and disoriented. She pleads for help.



Picture 2

What is wrong with both pictures? Before we analyze them, let's consider the ethical use of images.

Using photos and videos ethically

The ethical use of images in journalism is important for several reasons:

- to maintain public trust.
- to uphold subject's dignity.
- to accurately portray events.

Reporting means a commitment to the truth and portrayal of facts. The job of visual journalists is to ensure the images accurately represent the events they document without distortion or manipulation. How can they carry out their job?

- **Get consent:** Migrants, refugees and displaced people should be informed how their images will be used and disseminated and asked for their consent. There are fewer restrictions for large public events (where not every person i.e., in a crowd has to be asked for consent) than private ones.
- **Authenticity:** Photos or videos should be of real events. Avoid staging or reenactments. If enactment is needed, state that clearly.
- **Factual accuracy:** Use accurate information for caption, date, location and context. Cross-check and verify all information.
- **Contextual accuracy:** Do not manipulate images to exaggerate or downplay the severity of a crisis.
- **Protect sources**: Blur the faces and/or distort the voices of those who could be at risk if their identity is disclosed.
- **Data protection:** Journalists should balance the public's need for information and the subject's right to privacy. Consider protection, especially if portraying individuals in risky situations.
- **Don't over-edit:** Editing images too much distorts the meaning. A small technical adjustment like adjusting brightness or a slight color correction is fine.
- **Avoid bias and agendas**: Don't adapt the images to enhance any narrative or agenda.

Reinforcing stereotypes vs. conflict-sensitive images

The language of images is powerful: It can push stereotypes up the hate pyramid or change perceptions. Photos that frame migrants as security threats or burdens can contribute to xenophobic sentiments. It's important to understand the differences.

- **Avoid stereotypes:** Do not portray displaced people only as victims or perpetrators. Focus on their diversity and individual stories.
- **Respect human dignity:** Avoid exploiting people in distress. Images should not sensationalize their suffering or make them seem less human.
- **Individuals instead of numbers:** Portray people as individuals and not numbers. A mass of faceless people can reinforce negative perceptions.
- **Avoid voyeurism:** People in distress should be photographed with respect, especially women. They should not be portrayed in a way that objectifies them or promotes sexualization.

- **Challenge negative narratives:** Do not depict migration only as a crisis. Include images that show resilience and the contributions of migrants to societies.

- **Diverse representation:** Do not focus solely on young men or overcrowded boats. Make sure you represent a broader spectrum of people and their experiences, including women, children and elderly migrants.

- **Do not exacerbate tensions:** Do not publish pictures that could provoke more tensions or unrest. Instead, publish images that promote peace and understanding.

- **Cultural sensitivity:** Understand the cultural context. Do not misrepresent or disrespect local customs and values.

Now let's take a closer look at the two **visual examples** in the earlier part of this section.

The first photograph of a boat carrying migrants and arriving at a European shore was taken from above. As a result, viewers look down on the people in the boat who have bowed heads and whose faces are not clearly visible. One might perceive them as criminals or numbers and not as humans with a story.

In the same photo, the guard has a gun and is facing them. One might think that they are a threat themselves and not that the guard is protecting them from an external threat. In all, this can be viewed as a clear misrepresentation of the actual scene.

In the second photograph we see a woman in a boat who is crying for help. The photo was taken at close range and at a low angle. Close-up depictions of emotional suffering risk reducing the subject to a (dehumanized) crisis symbol. It could strip her of context and provide a more distorted truth. Photos like this can also result in voyeurism.

Let's now look at some positive examples. A young woman is sitting in a boat that is carrying migrants. The photographer is on the same platform or deck and is looking at her directly from a moderate distance. The angle of the camera is at eye level. We also see other migrants in the background. We see the woman and her expressions clearly. She is tired and uncertain and gives a blank gaze to something to her left, perhaps towards the sea or the shore *(pic. 3)*.

In the next photo *(pic. 4)*, we see a woman walking towards a border. She is carrying a bag that's perhaps full of her clothes or other belongings. She is at the front of the



Picture 3



Picture 4

picture, in the central part of the frame, and looks tired after a long walk. The background is unfocused but we see other people behind her.

Why are these two photos good examples of portraying migrants? First, they portray mainly one person, not "numbers" of people. This person is humanized as we see him or her from a moderate distance with a clear face and clear expressions, thus indicating there are personal stories here. The person is not objectified and retains dignity.

Remember: Refugees or migrants should not constantly be portrayed as people in distress or on the run. They should also be shown in "normal" situations.

Let's look at these two photos

The first one *(pic. 5)* was taken at a football club in Germany where refugee children get football training. Many of the children come from Asia. The second photo *(pic. 6)* shows two Rohingya refugee volunteers helping to restore a forest in and around the camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Both photos break classical stereotypes that portray displaced persons or refugees as victims or perpetrators.



Picture 5

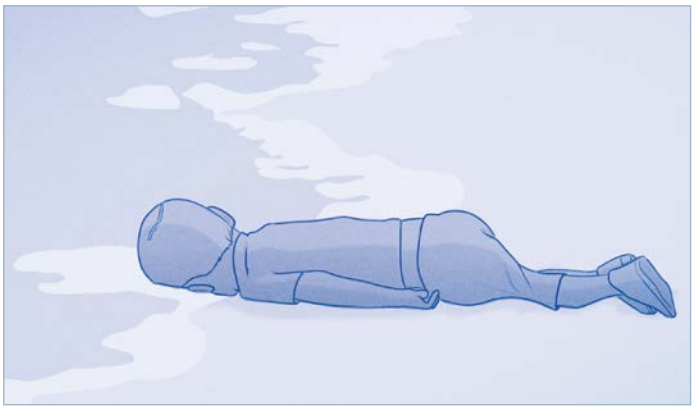


Picture 6

Photographing children

You may remember the haunting image *(pic. 7)* in 2015 of a two-year-old Syrian boy — Aylan Kurdi — who had drowned and whose body was washed up on a Turkish beach. Many newsrooms initially hesitated to publish the photo because of ethical concerns. But once the photo was released, it sparked urgent conversations about the failures of migration policy, war and the human cost of displacement. Most newsrooms usually avoid graphic pictures of children dying or in dire situations. One reason many editors did then publish the picture was an aesthetic aspect: it was not a graphic image but one that triggered vital discussions on the issue, showing how vulnerable people are, especially children, in situations like this.

In an article published on the Ethical Journalism Network, Aidan White, founder of the Network, said, "We need aesthetic in pictures as much as we need good language in use of words."



Picture 7

But please remember, the aesthetic aspect of a picture does not generally justify the publication of pictures of dead children. This editorial decision should be taken carefully, as was with the picture of Aylan Kurdi.

It is therefore crucial to think about children's safety, dignity and vulnerability before portraying them since they are among those worst affected by displacement.

Here are tips for photographing children

- **Don't add trauma:** Don't add stress to a distressed child. Avoid sudden confrontations or invasive techniques that might frighten them.
- **Show respect:** Don't portray them in an undignified way even if they are in the most vulnerable situation.
- **Know the boundary:** Only photograph children in extreme vulnerable moments if the gravity of the situation must be conveyed (and not just because you want to).
- **Seek permission:** Always seek permission from a parent or legal guardian before photographing a child.
- **Children unaccompanied by adults:** Use discretion and avoid taking identifiable images of the children who are not accompanied by adults.
- **Validate:** After capturing the image, show it to the guardian and older children to confirm that they are comfortable with how they were portrayed.

- **Protect identity:** Blur the faces of children wherever needed, particularly in cases of sexual violence or other sensitive issues.
- **Don't reveal locations:** If there is a safety concern, never include any identifiable location details such as schools, homes or camps.
- **Never sensationalize:** Do not exploit their suffering for dramatic effect or click baiting.
- **Don't further disrupt their lives:** Don't interfere in emergency situations, i.e., just after a trauma, or during critical aid efforts.
- **Create safe spaces:** Avoid intimidating children with large equipment or a crowd of people.
- **Long-term impact:** Consider the long-term impact the photo could have on the child's life. Avoid images that could harm the child's future.

4.4 Engaging the audience

Local people, especially in host countries in Asia and other parts of the world, often have misconceptions about migrant or refugee communities. Misconceptions include:

- **Criminality and disease:** Migrants are perceived to be the cause.
- **Economic threat:** Migrants are seen as taking away jobs.
- **Gender stereotypes:** Women migrants are seen as passive, economically dependent or as being engaged in sex work. Males are often seen as aggressive and threatening.
- **Discrimination:** Many believe migrant workers should not have the same rights.
- **Xenophobia and scapegoating:** Migrants are often used as scapegoats for broader social problems like terrorism, unemployment or social unrest.
- **Low level of awareness:** The public's understanding of migrants' real contributions is generally low.

The best way to engage the audience and address prejudices is to understand their cultures and make your report as relevant to them as possible.

This is how you can engage the audience

- **Fight misconceptions:** Reports should question common misconceptions by portraying different aspects of migration, the contribution of migrating communities and by showing the lives of migrants beyond conflict or disastrous events.
- **Contextualize:** Reporters should consider the historical, cultural and socio-political backgrounds of the regions they cover. What may seem unusual or controversial from one perspective, may have significant local meaning. Also contextualize the source of the misconceptions and debunk them through personal stories.
- **Personal stories instead of numbers:** While numbers are important for building the context and explaining the situation, personal stories make the report more relatable.
- **Use diverse sources:** To avoid dominating stereotyped ideas, journalists should talk to diverse sources, voices of different communities. Use local sources and experts as primary sources—this adds authenticity and depth to your reporting.
- **Editorial dialogues:** Democratizing editorial decision-making through newsroom dialogues can challenge biases and strengthen balanced reporting.
- **Balancing national and external perspectives:** Many Asian media focus more on national narratives. To avoid one-sided coverage of a particular issue, it is crucial to also portray regional or global perspectives.
- **Media literacy:** Reporting is constantly evolving, especially when it comes to displacement and migration issues. That's why it's important for journalists to develop their media literacy skills, i.e., in evaluating news sources for credibility, bias and accuracy, interpreting and understanding visual media, using information responsibly, especially online, navigating platforms critically, understanding algorithms, privacy and the spread of misinformation.

USEFUL LINKS

- **World Press Photo, Contest code of ethics, 2025:** *https://www.worldpressphoto.org/contest/2025/code-of-ethics*
- **The Canadian Journalism Foundation, Photojournalism Ethics** *https://cjf-fjc.ca/photojournalism-ethics*
- **UNICEF, Ethical Reporting Guidelines for Journalists, 2016:** *https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/sites/unicef.org.afghanistan/files/2018-03/afg-publication_UN%20Ethical%20Guidelines%20for%20Journalists%20-%20English.pdf*
- **UNICEF, Photographing and Filming Children Ethically:** *https://www.unicef.org/romania/media/7441/file/Photographing%20and%20filming%20children%20ethically.pdf*
- **National Press Photographers Association (NPPA), Code of Ethics:** *https://nppa.org/resources/code-ethics*
- **Global Center for Journalism and Trauma, Handling traumatic imagery:** *https://www.traumaawarejournalism.org/handling-traumatic-imagery*
- **International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Global Charter of Ethics for Journalists, 2019:** *https://www.ifj.org/who/rules-and-policy/global-charter-of-ethics-for-journalists*
- **Media Helping Media, Photojournalism and Ethics:** *https://mediahelpingmedia.org/ethics/photojournalism-and-ethics*
- **University of Arkansas, Ethics in Journalism and Strategic Media, 2023:** *https://uark.pressbooks.pub/journalismethics/chapter/chapter-11*
- **Laurence Cuelenaere, On the Migrant Image and the Violence of Photography, 2023:** *https://www.americananthropologist.org/online-content/migrant-image*
- **Child Rights International Network, Using images of children in the media:** *https://archive.crin.org/en/guides/communications/media-toolkit/ngo-communications/using-images-children-media.html*

CHAPTER 5



Case studies and best practices

Maw Oo Myar is a seasoned journalist based in Myanmar's Karenni State. Her reporting focuses on women's issues and the plight of internally displaced persons (IDPs)—a subject that has become increasingly urgent since the military coup in 2021 displaced over 200,000 people in the region. Karenni State remains one of the country's most volatile conflict zones, where human rights violations are widespread and ongoing.

Maw Oo is committed to shedding light on the realities of life in conflict-affected areas; to do so, she frequently visits camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) to conduct interviews and gather firsthand accounts. These visits require careful coordination with local authorities and camp management. In some locations, she can proceed without formal permission from authorities, relying instead on the cooperation of camp officials. However, access is often limited, and at times she can only speak with individuals who have been introduced by camp staff.

Security is a constant concern. Maw Oo remains vigilant against ever-present threats of military airstrikes, heavy artillery and unpredictable actions by local armed groups. Despite taking precautions—such as notifying local authorities before visiting camps or preparing to report threats to relevant bodies—there are no safety guarantees. In emergencies, she relies on local contacts to help her find refuge in nearby safe zones. She also faces the challenge of accessing reliable information. When interviews are conducted in the presence of local authorities, IDPs often feel pressured and are reluctant to speak freely. Many sources are only willing to share information off the record.

Despite these obstacles, Maw Oo remains adamant in producing reports that can have an impact. How, then, can she do that?

Before we take a closer look, let's remember that for reporters, investigating or delving into a subject is very important, but so is telling the everyday stories of people who suffer from conflicts or natural disasters. Maw Oo can tell these stories by getting help from local NGOs, working with local journalists and talking to people who have escaped conflict areas if going into these areas herself could be dangerous. Hearing directly from those who have been persecuted or have fled is valuable. It is also important to remember that refugees and migrants are more than just victims of conflict but are also affected by problems affecting people who lead "regular" lives and struggle with challenges such as inflation, economic and environmental crises. In addition, refugees and migrants contribute to society. It's important to tell their stories from these perspectives as well.

Let's now look at how impact or transformative journalism work.

What is impact or transformative journalism?

Transformative or impact journalism aims to do more than just inform the public; it aims to create genuine and measurable changes by uncovering systemic inconsistencies, finding possible solutions and holding powerful bodies to account. This form of journalism is evidence-based, focusing on tangible societal impact by sparking policy changes or forcing actions, and by shaping public opinion.

Forced displacement and migration are highly complex issues. Various social, political and economic factors are intertwined, pushing people to move from one location to another. Journalists have covered these aspects extensively, exposing major human rights abuses such as Rohingya persecution and trafficking networks ranging from South Asia to the Middle East. These impactful stories have shaped opinions, put pressure on those in power and driven changes.

5.1 Successfully reporting on migration in Asia

Examples of impactful journalism on migration in Asia

Reuters' Rohingya expulsion report: In July 2022, Reuters published new evidence showing how Myanmar's military planned its brutal purge of the Rohingya. The report is based on thousands of pages of leaked documents, including military orders, meeting minutes and administrative directives. Reuters conducted interviews with various sources, such as former Myanmar military personnel, Rohingya refugees, ex-government officials and Rakhine civilians, to corroborate information found in the documents. They cross-referenced their findings with information available on social media platforms and official statements to ensure the authenticity and consistency of the evidence. The report also features photographs and images depicting the aftermath of the military operations, including burned villages and displaced individuals, thus providing visual support to textual material. This evidence contributed to the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) genocide case against Myanmar. It also exposed Myanmar's military strategy to expel Rohingya, countering the government's narrative.

ICIJ report on trafficking: In October 2022, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) launched the Trafficking Inc. investigation to uncover human trafficking in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the United States. It examined labor and sex trafficking, revealing how force, fraud and coercion are used to exploit individuals. The ICIJ team included their own journalists as well as those from Reuters, NBC News, WGBH Boston, The Washington Post, Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, the Guardian US and the Investigative Reporting Program of the University of California, Berkeley. It aimed to expose the networks profiting from these activities and share untold stories of hardship and abuse. The investigation also revealed how major corporations could benefit from labor trafficking practices. After the reports were published during 2023 across different platforms, some companies told ICIJ that they were taking the revelations seriously.

NST's Malaysian mass grave report: In December 2017, The New Straits Times published the investigative report The Secrets of Wang Kelian Exposed, revealing the discovery of mass graves and human trafficking camps in Wang Kelian, Malaysia. The report found 139 graves and 28 death camps used by traffickers near the Malaysia-Thailand border. It also revealed that Malaysian authorities knew about these camps months before they were made public, raising concerns about possible cover-ups and delayed actions. After ensuing media reports, the Malaysian government established a Royal Commission of Inquiry in 2019 to further investigate the issue.

CHECKLIST

Impactful reporting

What can we learn from these reports? The following approaches are crucial:

- **Dig deep:** Thorough investigations might take time and effort but they can uncover vital truths.
- **Collaborating is key:** Partnering with local journalists, NGOs or consortiums enhances credibility and access.
- **Maintain ethical standards:** Protecting vulnerable populations requires sensitivity and informed consent.
- **Use data and technology:** Tools such as satellite imagery and data visualization strengthen reports.
- **Safety is a priority:** Journalists face risks and need secure communication and legal preparedness. Make sure you also protect your sources.
- **Hold power to account:** Persistent reporting on issues and holding power to account can create more impact.
- **Include evidence:** Strong storytelling supported by evidence can drive public sentiment and policy reform.

5.2 Collaborative journalism

Collaboration is key and reporting on forced displacement requires journalists to address various perspectives. There are several ways journalists can do this.

Work with both the host and migrant communities: Perspectives of host and migrant communities can differ significantly, meaning that journalists should listen to both sides for more nuanced and balanced reporting. This not only reflects how each side sees things but also creates a bridge between the communities; this in turn can help lead to social cohesion. DW Akademie, for example, has been running community reporting projects in Bangladesh since 2018, and in Pakistan since 2021, involving both the host and migrant communities.

Collaborate with experts: Many NGOs, researchers and human rights organizations work on forced displacement. Journalists can partner with them to better access resources and locations. In addition, collaborating may have a safety aspect.

Regional networks: Several platforms from Asia or those working on Asia-related issues offer opportunities for cross-border collaboration. See Chapter 9.

Shared reporting projects: News outlets throughout the world pool resources to conduct investigative pieces on forced displacement and migration trends. Pooling resources can also be effective across countries in Asia.

Data scientists and fact checkers: For more credible and data driven stories, journalists can partner with data scientists and organizations that work with data themselves. Fact checkers can also enhance information's credibility and impact.

Navigating legal challenges: Cross-border investigations require an understanding of different legal frameworks, press laws and potential risks involved in reporting on sensitive issues. Journalists can share this knowledge with one another using various networks.

5.3 Reporting from the field

Field reporting on forced displacement involves safety concerns, access restrictions and ethical considerations. How can journalists navigate this effectively?



CHECKLIST

Practical tips for field reporting

- **Prepare well:** Gather beforehand as much information as possible about the story, location, routes, people, culture and root causes of the conflict.
- **Prioritize safety:** Ensure personal safety and secure communication with sources. You can follow safety protocols recommended by organizations such as the International News Safety Institute (INSI) and Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).
- **Emergency contacts:** Keep emergency contacts, including legal support and media protection organizations, at hand.
- **Obtain access:** Develop strategies or partner with locals and organizations to overcome access restrictions and build trust with communities.
- **Ethical reporting:** Handle sensitive information with care, protect identities and avoid retraumatizing sources.
- **Collaborate:** Work with local journalists and organizations to enhance your credibility and gather diverse perspectives.
- **Verify information:** Use multiple sources and methods to cross-check facts to ensure accuracy.
- **Respect cultural contexts:** Try to understand and respect the cultural nuances of local communities.
- **Use technology and data:** Use GPS mapping, satellite imagery and social media tracking for more impactful stories.
- **Expect a change of plans:** Be prepared for unexpected changes such as sudden restrictions or security threats. Work with fixers and translators who understand the local context.

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- **International News Safety Institute:** *https://newssafety.org*

PART 3

Diving deeper into the context

CHAPTER 6



Tools for analyzing root causes of conflicts in Asia

Rahmatullah Afridi has always worked under difficult conditions and as a veteran journalist in Afghanistan has seen wars, terrorism, occupation, death and drastic regime changes. He feels his work mostly consists of covering never-ending spirals of violence: as far back as he can remember, even as a child, armed conflict has been part of his life and he feels it will go on forever. There are times when he cannot imagine that Afghanistan will ever be a peaceful country.

Rahmatullah and his family have been displaced several times due to local fighting and threats by armed actors. Many of his friends and colleagues have fled to neighbouring countries like Pakistan and Iran and, unable to come back, feel that they will always be in exile. Like many who live in a country with ongoing violent conflicts, Rahmatullah has lost sight of the root causes of the fighting. However, by using conflict analysis techniques, he'll see the chronology and development of the conflicts he is covering. Identifying underlying stakeholders' interests will also give his audience a better picture of the root causes and reasons for displacement and, hence, possible solutions that could end the conflict.

> *"Few journalists have any training in the theory of conflict. Having the skills to analyze conflict will enable a reporter to be a more effective professional journalist.*
>
> Ross Howard

6.1 Conflict analysis theory and frameworks

What is conflict?

We all think that we know what a conflict is: we have all had conflicts with neighbors, family members or strangers and have witnessed political parties or even states entering conflicts. However, journalists who cover conflicts are often overwhelmed by the many layers of information—countless stakeholders, complicated historical and recent contexts and a great number of national and international interests. This chapter looks at methods for untangling the layers so that as a journalist, you can better understand a conflict and its actors, making it easier for you to cover a conflict more precisely.

Sometimes the word "conflict" is confused with violence. However, conflict analysis theory, clearly defines this.

Conflict is a situation where two or more individuals or groups try to pursue goals or ambitions which they believe they cannot share.

- Not all conflict is violent.
- Conflict is normal when there is a change.
- When managed peacefully, conflict can be a positive process.

What causes conflict?

- **Structural issues:** Pervasive factors that have become built into the policies, structures and fabric of a society and may create the pre-conditions for violent conflict.

- **Proximate issues:** Factors contributing to a climate conducive to violent conflict or its further escalation, sometimes apparently symptomatic of a deeper problem.

- **Triggers:** Single key acts, events or their anticipation that will set off or escalate violence.

Examples
- *Resources are scarce and not shared fairly, as in food, housing, jobs or land.*
- *There is little or no communication between the two groups.*
- *The groups have incorrect ideas and beliefs about one another.*
- *Unresolved grievances exist.*
- *Power is unevenly distributed.*
- *A sudden, symbolic incident occurs.*

Resources are frequently distributed unevenly. An example would be a small number of rich families who own most of the land and live off the manual labor of the many small farmers who work hard tilling the soil but earn very little. Power and influence are unevenly distributed. This always creates conflict.

Conflicting groups rarely communicate and have strong prejudices about another group; this is often the case in religious or tribal conflicts. Scarce communication and interaction tend to strengthen stereotypes about the others, such as long-time residents of a city and recent immigrants, or a host community and refugees.

In general, **conflicts have a history**, with problems and misunderstandings accumulating or violent instances having occurred in the past. People refuse to forget them and instead pass old grievances on to their children. For example, two ethnic or religious groups who had clashed long ago, perhaps even centuries ago, keep the conflict alive even though the initial reason for the dispute no longer plays a role.

Trigger events spark a bigger wave of violence as long-term grievances and suppressed anger come to the surface. Typical trigger events are the killing of a hated leader or a nearby uprising.

Conflict analysis

Conflict analysis is the systematic study of the profile, causes, actors and dynamics of conflict. The Norwegian Professor Johan Galtung first analyzed conflict using the aforementioned definition, and in the 1960's founded the academic discipline "Peace and Conflict Studies." There are various approaches to analyzing conflict. The following are the best known and most useful ones:

1. **The Harvard approach**: The emphasis here is on the difference between positions (what people say they want) and interests (what people really want). It argues that conflicts can be resolved when actors focus on interests instead of positions.

2. **The human needs theory:** Conflicts are caused by basic "universal" human needs that have not been satisfied. The needs should be analyzed, communicated and satisfied for the conflict to be resolved.

3. **The conflict transformation approach:** Conflicts can be destructive or constructive interactions, depending on how conflicts are dealt with or "transformed." The emphasis here is on the different perceptions and the social and cultural context.

What does conflict analysis mean for journalists?

- Journalists should **seek out other parties than the main actors of the conflict**, and **other points of view** than theirs. They should not only repeat old grievances by the old elites.

- Journalists should examine what the parties are seeking and the **possibility for withdrawal, compromise or resolution**. Journalists should write about these **possibilities**.

- With conflict analysis, journalists can **understand** what diplomats and **negotiators** are trying to achieve and can therefore **report on this more accurately**.

- Using conflict analysis, journalists can identify **more sources** to approach for information.

Violence

There are several **types of violence** and not all are visible:
- Physical violence
- Psychological violence
- Cultural violence
- Structural violence

Physical violence

Physical violence of a group/person against another group/person can be considered as legal or illegal, depending on the context and those defining it.

- War/civil war (i.e., the civil war between army and insurgent groups in Myanmar, causing massive internal and external displacement)
- Violence perpetrated by insurgent groups/armed actors (i.e., violent gangs in India attacking displaced Kashmiris)
- Violence perpetrated by state actors (i.e., Myanmar army attacking Rohingya communities and driving them into neighboring Bangladesh)
- Torture/human rights abuses (i.e., Indian labor migrants in the Gulf states whose passports are taken away and are forced to work under unsafe conditions)
- Domestic abuse/spousal abuse (i.e., hitting or otherwise abusing the partner or other family members)
- Sexual harassment/rape (i.e., sexual harassment of Filipino domestic workers working in Lebanon)

Physical violence is visible

Psychological violence

Psychological violence reflects and entrenches power relations. Although pervasive, it often goes unnoticed or is done with little thought.

- Negative labels/names (i.e., Northeast Indians are called Chinki—a slur based on appearance and used by some people in other parts of India, reinforcing racial stereotypes and alienating ethnic minorities.
- Hate speech (i.e., on social media, using negative language when referring to refugees)
- Xenophobia, racism (i.e., exclusion or mistreatment of other ethnic groups, such as Rohingya in Myanmar, and justifying this with alleged racial differences)
- Religious discrimination (i.e., violent thugs in India forcing Muslims to publicly recite Hindu prayers or be beaten)
- Cultural exclusion (i.e., in India, prohibiting so-called "lower caste" members such as the Dalits from accessing certain temples, water wells or other areas)
- Gender discrimination (i.e., telling girls that they don't need to go to school because they'll be getting married anyway)
- Sexual harassment/rape (i.e., forcing a refugee woman to exchange sex for safe passage across the border)

Psychological violence is invisible

Cultural violence

Cultural violence is how one group thinks of another group – how they talk about and see them. Like psychological violence, cultural violence is pervasive but often goes unnoticed because it is part of our culture and/or religion and therefore feels "natural." Cultural violence often overlaps with psychological violence:

- Negative labels/names (i.e., calling women or refugees by derogatory names)
- Hate speech (i.e., on social media, using derogatory language when referring to refugees)
- Xenophobia, racism (i.e., referring to darker-skinned persons as inferior or ugly)
- Myths and legends of war heroes (i.e., Yasukuni Shrine in Japan honors Japan's war dead, including WWII war criminals)
- Unsolved grievances from the past (i.e., the ongoing conflict in Jammu and Kashmir in India)
- Religious justification (i.e., referring to people from other religions as "unclean")
- Gender discrimination (i.e., sending boys to school but keeping the girls at home because they need to "help in the house")
- Sexual harassment (i.e., men always judging and remarking on women's bodies)
- Homophobia (i.e., considering LGBTIQ* persons as "unnatural" and excluding them from social life)

Cultural violence is invisible

Structural violence

Structural violence is the inequality that is built into laws and traditional behaviour and where harm is permitted, condoned or ignored:

- Institutionalized racism or sexism (i.e., girls being banned from schools and universities in Afghanistan)
- Colonialism and lack of self-determination (i.e., denying certain minorities citizenship rights, such as the Rohingya in Myanmar and Bangladesh)
- Extreme exploitation (i.e., slavery or indentured work, often aimed at poor minorities or refugees without rights)
- Poverty (i.e., keeping the minimum wage so low that it is impossible to survive on this)
- Corruption and nepotism (i.e., political dynasties in the Philippines passing power onto their children and families)
- Structural segregation that separates groups by law. (i.e., Myanmar and Bangladesh leaders not issuing citizenship rights to Rohingya)
- Unequal access to resources (i.e., Pakistan denying Afghan refugee children access to public schools)

Structural violence is invisible

Reporting on violence

Because physical violence is clearly visible, and psychological, cultural and structural violence is often hard to discern, journalists tend to focus on physical violence and assume that where physical violence is absent, the situation is peaceful. This is incorrect and a reason why simmering conflicts are underreported.

Conflict response and intervention

In any conflict, there are people and organizations undertake efforts with an aim to:

- reduce direct violence and its impacts
- transform relationships
- have a peaceful resolution

Triangle of violence

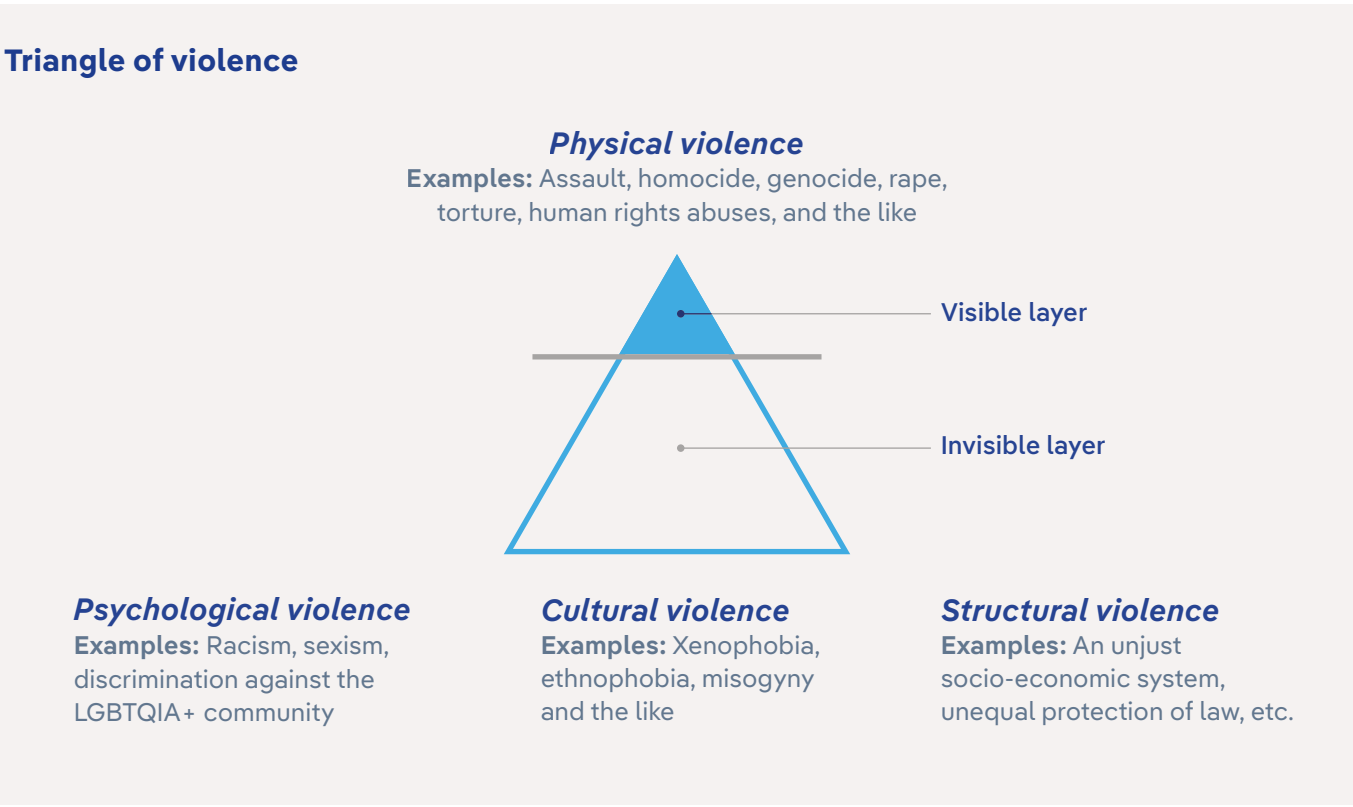


Figure 1 (Source: The Conflict-Sensitive Journalism Teaching Guide: Philosophy and Practice, 2018)

Journalists need to be aware of these efforts, even if undertaken by small NGOs or others seen as "powerless" such as the families of political actors who are in prison or have been killed. These attempts can develop into major movements that can even end dictatorships. The media should report on these endeavours in order to give a complete coverage of the conflict and strengthen efforts to wager peace.

Conflict timeline, stages and escalation

Although some conflicts seem endless, all conflicts go through phases that vary in their intensity. These phases can be predicted and analyzed.

Parties fuelling a conflict may be impossible to discern. A conflict is like an iceberg: only a small portion can be seen while the rest remains hidden below the surface.

In summary, remember that:

- conflicts are dynamic
- conflict tension can increase
- invisible layers of a conflict may cause escalation

And, even if tension has decreased: conflict resolution and conflict prevention are part of reporting on conflicts!

Phases of a conflict

Conflicts go through the following phases:

- Pre-conflict
- Confrontation
- Crisis
- Resolution
- Post-conflict

Role of journalists in conflicts

Journalists' role in a conflict is similar to their vital role in other situations: to be the "watchdogs" of the powers that be. They need to monitor the country's human rights situation, call out violations and generally keep an eye on the powerful.



Figure 2 *(Source: GPPAC Media Training Manual, Michael Shank, 2010)*

Conflict escalation model

1. Hardening of positions, first confrontations
2. Debate, polemics (polarization of thinking—us/them)
3. Actions, not words (empathy is lost)
4. Images, coalitions (original issue becomes unimportant)
5. Loss of face (public attacks)
6. Strategies of threats (acceleration)
7. Limited destructive blows
8. Fragmentation of the enemy
9. Together into the abyss (total confrontation)

Figure 3 *(Developed by Friedrich Glasl)*

Conflict stages and intervention

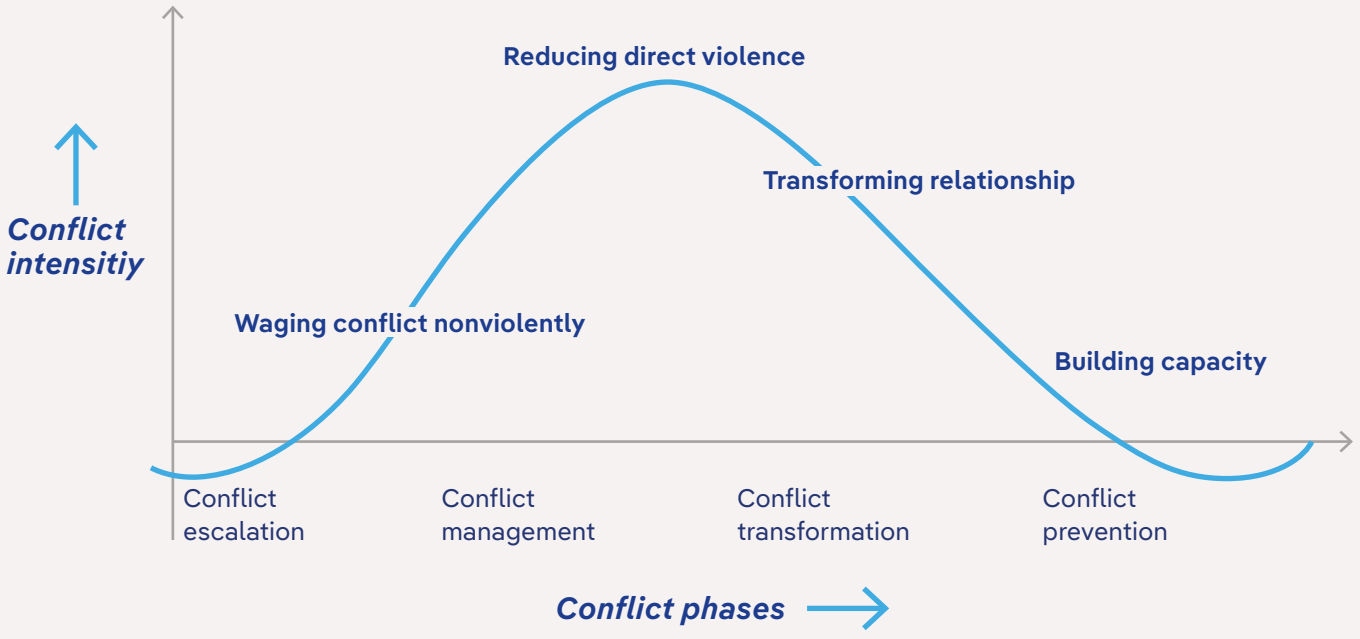


Figure 4 *(Source: GPPAC Media Training Manual, Michael Shank, 2010)*

6.2 Tools for conflict analysis

Stakeholder analysis

The stakeholder analysis helps us to better understand the view, needs and intentions of the key stakeholders of a given conflict.

As outlined in its Guide to: Conflict Analysis, UNICEF uses the following points to gather the information needed for a stakeholder analysis:

1. **Stakeholders:** Identify relevant actors who influence or are influenced by the conflict.

2. **Interests:** Analyze identified stakeholders' positions and interests:
   - The "what" aspect of the conflict (i.e., demands made by each key actor)
   - The "why" aspect of the conflict (i.e., motivations, needs, desires and objectives)

3. **Worldview:** Analyze identified stakeholders' "worldview," in terms of strongly held beliefs, attitudes and values, perceptions and underlying assumptions stemming from culture, context and experiences. Note that for people in a conflict, their "worldview" often feels non-negotiable.

4. **Perspectives on histories and narratives:** Analyze key stakeholders' views on the history and "narratives" of the conflict.

5. **Conflict dynamics:** Identify key "connectors" and "dividers" in the conflict dynamics. These are the stakeholders with capacities to influence the conflict dynamics either positively ("connectors") or negatively ("dividers").

6. **Relationships:** Analyze the relationships among key stakeholders (i.e., tensions, alliances, informal links, spheres of influence).

7. **Peace perspectives:** Analyze key stakeholders' "peace perspectives," i.e., how each stakeholder views opportunities for pursuing sustainable, equitable peace.

8. **Process:** Given your analysis, consider who to engage with and how to maximize your chances for promoting peace.

Root cause analysis

One way to make the root causes of a conflict clear is to draw a "conflict tree" *(fig. 5)* to help identify causes of the conflict that may otherwise be hard to discern. The tree has various conflict components: the tree trunk is the conflict itself, the trees' roots are the underlying causes, and the branches are the conflict's effects/consequences. The image of the tree reminds us that the real causes or roots of a conflict are often not visible but deeply entrenched. As journalists, we need to show where the roots are.

Conflict mapping

This method shows the relationship between the stakeholders of a given conflict. You typically draw small circles and in each circle put the name of a person (or organization or party, etc.). You then draw a connecting line to another circle. A simple line indicates a "strong link/relationship;" a double line indicates an "alliance;" a crossed-out line indicates a "disconnected relationship;" and a wobbly line indicates "conflict." Drawing the lines as arrows illustrates the power/influence one stakeholder has over the other. This map developed by DW Akademie gives an example.

Conflict mapping shows who has power over whom, and who is talking to whom. Although stakeholders sometimes appear on the sidelines of the public discourse, they in fact wield considerable power by financing specific parties. Conflict mapping sheds light on this.

Here are other tools that you can use to understand the dynamics and complexities of a conflict.

Surveys and interviews

Surveys and interviews play a crucial role in gathering information about social attitudes, perceptions and experiences related to conflicts. They offer both qualitative and quantitative data; these are invaluable for uncovering root causes and identifying potential solutions.

In situations of armed conflict or forced displacement caused by natural disasters, you can use surveys to evaluate the effects on civilians; interviews with key stakeholders can provide important strategic insights.

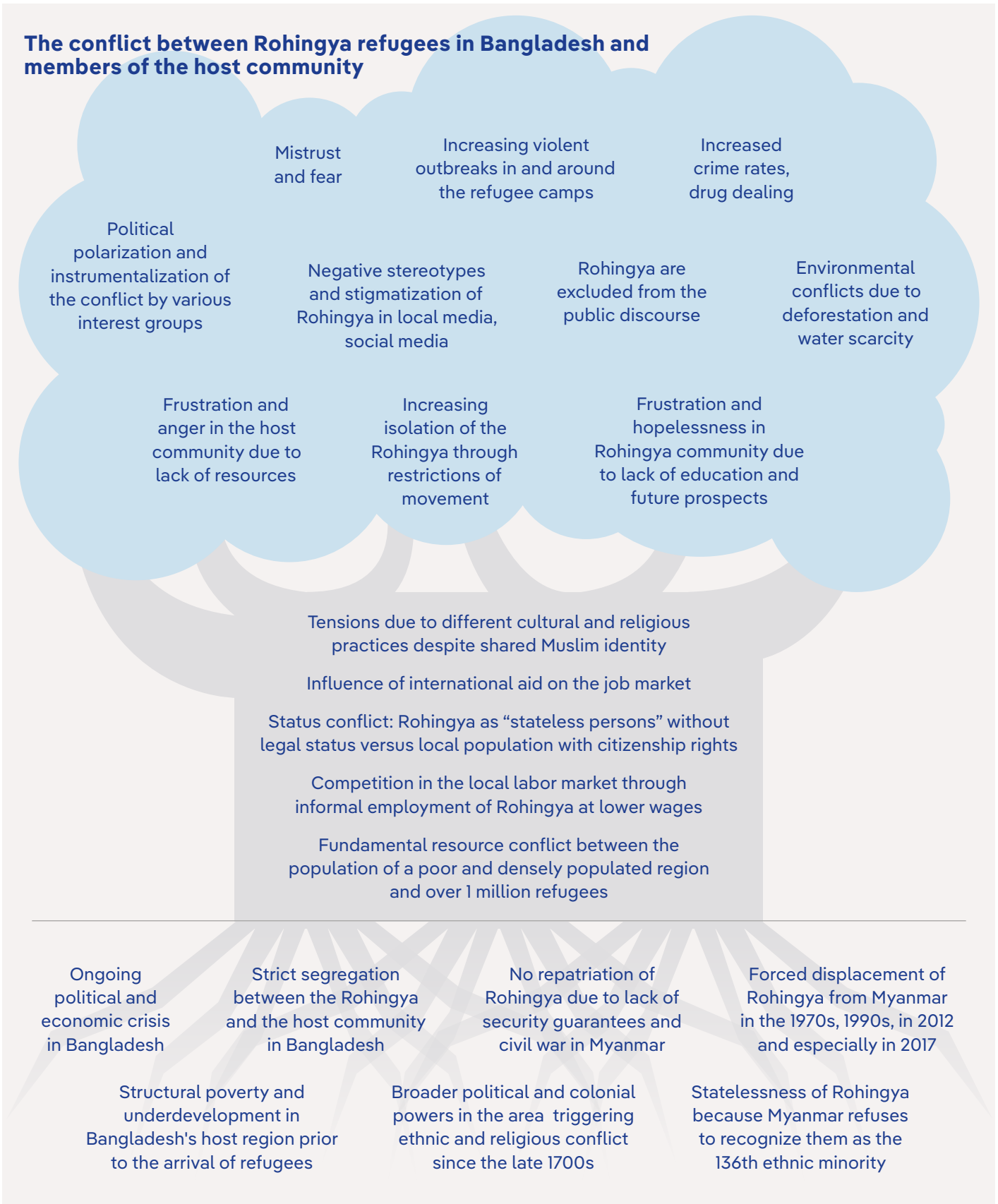

The conflict between Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and members of the host community
Mistrust and fear
Increasing violent outbreaks in and around the refugee camps
Increased crime rates, drug dealing
Political polarization and instrumentalization of the conflict by various interest groups
Negative stereotypes and stigmatization of Rohingya in local media, social media
Rohingya are excluded from the public discourse
Environmental conflicts due to deforestation and water scarcity
Frustration and anger in the host community due to lack of resources
Increasing isolation of the Rohingya through restrictions of movement
Frustration and hopelessness in Rohingya community due to lack of education and future prospects
Tensions due to different cultural and religious practices despite shared Muslim identity
Influence of international aid on the job market
Status conflict: Rohingya as “stateless persons” without legal status versus local population with citizenship rights
Competition in the local labor market through informal employment of Rohingya at lower wages
Fundamental resource conflict between the population of a poor and densely populated region and over 1 million refugees
Ongoing political and economic crisis in Bangladesh
Strict segregation between the Rohingya and the host community in Bangladesh
No repatriation of Rohingya due to lack of security guarantees and civil war in Myanmar
Forced displacement of Rohingya from Myanmar in the 1970s, 1990s, in 2012 and especially in 2017
Structural poverty and underdevelopment in Bangladesh's host region prior to the arrival of refugees
Broader political and colonial powers in the area triggering ethnic and religious conflict since the late 1700s
Statelessness of Rohingya because Myanmar refuses to recognize them as the 136th ethnic minority

Figure 5

Example I
Studies can record high response rates despite conflicts. For example, a study by the University of Michigan published in 2012 conducted a longitudinal survey prior to, during and following the armed conflict in Nepal. The study shows that survey data collected during armed conflicts can still be useful when the research approach is tailored to the specific conflict.

Example II
Using interviews to gain an understanding of a conflict can be found in Lived Experiences of Widows of Armed Conflict in Kashmir: A Qualitative Study published in 2022. The study provides deep insight into women's experiences with violence, deprivation, social stigma and psychological trauma. It also explores the coping mechanisms that they adopted and their ongoing efforts to seek justice. the coping mechanisms they adopted and their ongoing efforts to seek justice.

Content analysis

Content analysis is a research method used to study media reports, political speeches and various forms of communication to understand how conflicts are portrayed. By examining recurring themes and narratives, it helps reveal biases, misinformation and the ways in which public opinion is shaped. It also plays a key role in identifying language that may contribute to escalating tensions or fostering peace.

This approach is useful for analyzing how political leaders, media outlets and other influential figures frame conflicts in their messaging. It helps assess the impact of these narratives on public perception, political discourse and the overall trajectory of a conflict.

Example I
A study applied Teun A. van Dijk's Political Discourse Analysis to examine the speeches of Thai Prime Minister Gen Prayuth Chan-ocha. It analyzed key terms related to the speaker, audience and central themes, uncovering how the military government used language to justify its political agenda.

Example II
Another research paper shows how media narratives influence public perceptions of a war. It highlighted notable differences in how mainland China and Taiwan framed the Russia-Ukraine conflict, revealing underlying political agendas that shaped their reporting.

GIS and spatial analysis

The Graphic Information System (GIS) is a valuable tool for gathering, analyzing and managing geographic data related to conflicts. It helps visualize conflict zones, track the movements of key actors and identify high-risk areas where tensions are escalating.

GIS is also vital for monitoring displacements, especially through the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) created by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

For example, DTM uses ArcGIS technology to handle and analyze geospatial data. This involves generating maps and datasets that pinpoint the locations of displaced populations and assess their needs.

Example I
A study used the Uppsala Conflict Data Program Georeferenced Event Dataset (UCDP GED) to examine the spatial distribution of conflict density in Northeast India.

Example II
Bangladesh's Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) publishes predictions on riverbank erosion which can help estimate natural disaster induced forced displacement.



CHECKLIST

How to use conflict analysis tools for reporting on forced displacements

- **Conducting surveys:** Journalists can use the survey method to understand conditions, challenges and perceptions of displaced communities. Survey samples do not have to be as large as extensive research.
- **Conducting in-depth interviews:** Journalists regularly use interviews for reports. In-depth interviews with victims, perpetrators, policymakers and experts can make reports much more appealing and enhance audiences' understanding of the root causes of a conflict.
- **Analyzing media coverage:** Journalists can examine research to analyze media coverage in order to understand how different media outlets report on migration, and to identify biases or gaps. This can also help to understand how public opinion is shaped.
- **Analyzing political speeches:** This enables journalists to read between the lines of speeches and pose the right questions to those in power.
- **Mapping migration patterns:** Using GIS tools, journalists can use interactive maps to show migration routes, refugee settlements and areas of conflict-driven displacement.
- **Clearly explaining humanitarian needs:** Journalists can develop more effective news coverage by combining spatial analysis with information from local sources to identify regions that have shortages or are in need of aid.
- **Combining surveys with GIS:** Journalists can produce powerful stories by visualizing survey data on maps.

To become better reporters, journalists need to go a step further so that their stories can have a greater impact. The tools that have been described can help them do that.

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CHAPTER 7



Legal frameworks and policies

Tariqul Siddique is a journalist in Bangladesh. He usually works in Dhaka but his news outlet has sent him to Cox's Bazar in the southeast of the country, near the Myanmar border, to cover the situation of the Rohingya refugees. Now there, he is confronted with their dismal living conditions and the myriads of regulations that limit their movements. While the public discourse in Bangladesh focuses on repatriating the Rohingya to conflict-ridden Myanmar, Tariqul wonders whether their bleak circumstances in Bangladesh are congruent with human rights legislation or other laws and regulations. He is worried that his reporting may be overlooking crucial issues.

Tariqul needs to know more about international laws and conventions regarding refugees' rights. In Asia, international conventions and regional agreements do exist concerning the rights of migrants and refugees, but there are also national regulations that vary from country to country. The more Tariqul knows about the legal frameworks, the better he can call out officials who are breaking local laws or international agreements.

In many parts of the world, migrants and forcibly displaced persons are at the mercy of border law enforcement, officials or abusive employers. They often do not have the same rights as citizens there and are exploited or forcibly sent back to their home country.

However, migrants and refugees have human rights that apply to every individual. Many international laws exist that regulate migration and forced displacement. Journalists need to know these legal frameworks when covering migration/refugee issues because this is an area where human rights abuses are likely to happen. Being familiar with laws and regulations helps journalists fulfill their role as "watchdogs."

This chapter looks at:

- International laws and conventions
- Regional agreements and policies in Asia
- Rights of migrants and refugees in Asia

7.1 International laws and conventions

Laws exist to protect all individuals within national borders and/or worldwide. Here are international laws:

- United Nations Refugee Convention
- International humanitarian law (IHL)
- Global Compact on Refugees
- Global Compact on Migration
- International Organization for Migration (IOM) guidelines on international migration law

The rights of individuals can be found in

1. International legislation
- Conventions and other agreements
- Customary law

2. National legislation
- Constitutions
- Laws

These rights are ensured by international organizations such as UN bodies and/or by nation states.

The most important rights applying to everyone are entrenched in the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration was declared in 1948, in the aftermath of World War Two.

Below are Articles of the Declaration that refer to the rights of refugees and the right to freedom of expression. Being aware of these Articles provides journalists with a strong argument if challenged by politicians or other actors.

Human rights

*(Please note: We have **highlighted** certain words in the Articles.)*

Article 1

All human beings are born **free and equal in dignity and rights**. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 3

Everyone has the **right to life, liberty and the security** of person.

Article 14

1. **Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution**.
2. This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Article 15

1. Everyone has the **right to a nationality**.
2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.

Article 19

Everyone has the right to **freedom of opinion and expression**; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948

Human rights law: State obligations

All states are obliged to:

- respect human rights.
- protect individuals and groups against human rights abuses.
- take action so that human rights are respected and violations of human rights are punished by law.

International humanitarian law

International humanitarian law (IHL), also referred to as the **laws of armed conflict**, is the law that regulates the conduct of war. It is a branch of international law that seeks to limit the effects of armed conflict by protecting persons who are not participating in hostilities, and by restricting and regulating the means and methods of warfare available to combatants.

During World War Two, many who were being persecuted fled Germany and fascist-occupied countries in Europe, but many weren't able to find asylum elsewhere. This later led the international community to develop the definition of who is a refugee and, in several international conventions, formulate their rights.

Who is a refugee?

The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol define a refugee as:

"Any person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his (or her) nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself (or herself) of the protection of that country."

Rights of refugees

Refugees' international rights can be found in:

- 1951 Convention related to the Status of Refugees, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and the 1967 Protocol.

- 1969 OAU Convention (Organization of African Unity)
- 1984 Cartagena Declaration (adopted by several South American countries, non-binding)
- 2018 Global Compact on Refugees by the United Nations General Assembly (with UNHCR)

According to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, **refugees have**:

The same rights as nationals:

- Elementary education
- Public security
- Free access to courts (and legal assistance)
- Labor and social security

The same rights as other foreigners:

- Choice of place of residence
- Freedom of movement within the country

However, the media often ignore the fact that refugees have several rights that nationals do, such as elementary education, security, legal assistance and social security; they also have all the same rights that other foreigners do, particularly free movement within the host country.

The toolkit's section 7.2 offers more information on Asian countries which have signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol.

Obligations of refugees

Refugees not only have rights but also obligations. This is also noted in various refugee conventions, including in the 1951 Refugee Convention (we have **highlighted** certain words here):

Article 2

Every refugee has duties to the country in which he finds himself (or herself), which require in particular that he (or she) **conform to its laws and regulations** as well as to measures taken for the maintenance of public order.

Article 31

Upon crossing the border, every refugee must present himself/herself to the authorities and **apply for asylum without delay** and cooperate with refugee status determination procedures.

*(Please note: We have **highlighted** certain words in the Articles and have summarized Article 31)*

The principle of non-refoulement is often ignored or violated by states.

Article 33

1. No Contracting State shall expel or return ("refouler") a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.
2. The benefit of the present provision may not, however, be claimed by a refugee whom there are reasonable grounds for regarding as a danger to the security of the country in which he is, or who, having been convicted by a final judgement of a particularly serious crime, constitutes a danger to the community of that country.

However, the principle of non-refoulement is often violated, for instance at European borders. So-called "push-backs," i.e., pushing boats or people back after crossing the border into the European maritime zone or crossing borders by land, are entirely illegal under international humanitarian law. Similar incidents are also documented in the waters surrounding Australia where asylum seeker boats are forcibly intercepted by Australian authorities.

Global compacts

In many countries, people remain as refugees for long periods, settling in neighboring states and trying to become part of the host community without knowing if or when they can return home. This puts a great strain on both the host community and the refugees themselves. To better regulate this, the international community in 2018 designed the Global Compact on Refugees and the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF) to help countries deal with refugees in a positive, productive manner.

Global Compact on Refugees

The Global Compact on Refugees describes its mission and objectives as follows:

- The Global Compact on Refugees (2018) by the UN agency for refugees is an **international framework** for more predictable and equitable responsibility-sharing, recognizing that a **sustainable solution for refugee situations** can only be achieved with international cooperation.

- It provides a blueprint for governments, international organizations and other stakeholders to ensure that **host communities receive the support** they need and that **refugees can lead productive lives**.

- It constitutes a unique opportunity to transform the way the world responds to refugee situations, **benefiting both refugees and communities that host them**.

*(Please note: We have **highlighted** some of the words above.)*

Its four key objectives are to:

- ease the pressures on host countries.
- enhance refugee self-reliance.
- expand access to third-country solutions.
- support conditions in countries of origin for return in safety and dignity.

Global Compact for safe, orderly and regular migration

This Global Compact was initiated by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and sets out 23 objectives—each focusing on specific aspects of migration—to be implemented together and which are based on ten interdependent guiding principles.

IOM points out that the Global Compact:

- addresses all dimensions of international migration, including humanitarian, developmental and human rights aspects.

- promotes contributions to global governance and strengthens coordination on migration.

- outlines actionable commitments, implementation strategies and a framework for follow-up and review among Member States across all dimensions of migration.

- aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

- draws on the 2013 Declaration of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development.

Reporting on forced displacement and migration

It is important to familiarize yourself with human rights as well as the specific rights of refugees and migrants. The links provided are helpful when reporting on violations and those affected by or challenging violations. Make sure you also check practices in your own country.

7.2 Regional agreements and policies

ASEAN declarations and agreements

By 2024, only three of the 12 member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) had ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, or the 1967 Protocol or both: Cambodia, Philippines and Timor-Leste. The countries in East Asia that have ratified either the Convention, the Protocol or both are China, Japan and South Korea.

However, ASEAN has also established several key declarations and agreements to protect migrant workers and their families and which emphasizes their rights and welfare. Notable declarations and agreements include the:

- **ASEAN Human Rights Declaration (AHRD):** While not specifically focused on refugees, the AHRD includes provisions that can be applied to protect the rights of displaced persons, emphasizing human rights and fundamental freedoms.

- **ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (Cebu Declaration):** Adopted in 2007, the declaration highlights the importance of protecting and promoting migrant workers' rights, acknowledging their contributions to both the sending and receiving countries.

- **ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers:** Building on the Cebu Declaration, this framework ensures fair treatment, access to justice and social protection for migrant workers.
- **ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration:** The declaration focuses on safeguarding the rights of children affected by migration, ensuring they receive adequate protection and services.
- **ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations:** The document addresses the protection and safety of migrant workers and their families during crises.
- **ASEAN Declaration on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers:** The declaration ensures that migrant workers can retain their social security benefits when moving between ASEAN countries.
- **ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children:** This convention addresses trafficking, providing a framework for protection and cooperation.

SAARC policies on migration

Of the eight members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), a regional intergovernmental organization, only Afghanistan has signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol which came into effect in Afghanistan in 2005. However, some countries have shown interest in refugee protection through various national laws and policies:

- **SAARC Plan of Action on Labour Migration:** This plan outlines strategies for cooperation among all member states to ensure the safety and well-being of migrant workers. It aims to address root causes of migration, promote decent work conditions, and enhance regional economic cooperation.
- **SAARC Convention on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution (2002):** This convention seeks to tackle trafficking and safeguard the rights of women and children across SAARC member states.
- **SAARC Regional Action Plan on Trafficking:** This plan provides strategies for member nations to improve collaboration and coordination in their efforts to fight trafficking.
- **SAARC Framework for Migration Governance:** While not a formal convention, discussions have been held regarding the creation of a comprehensive framework to manage migration, with an emphasis on ensuring that migration is safe and sustainable.
- **Regional cooperation on refugees:** Although SAARC lacks a specific refugee convention, member states have discussed refugee-related challenges, especially in the context of forced displacement due to conflict and natural disasters.
- **International conventions:** As of 2024, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka from the SAARC region had ratified the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

7.3 National policies and regulations in Asian countries

Key national policies in major host countries

Bangladesh and Pakistan host the largest groups of refugees in South Asia.

Bangladesh hosts approximately one million Rohingyas in the camps and facilities of Cox's Bazar and on the island of Bhashan Char. The state addresses the issue of Rohingya refugees primarily through national laws and informal policies; it has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention or 1967 Protocol.

The state officially refers to Rohingya individuals as Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) and not as refugees.

The country's colonial laws such as the 1946 Foreigners Act and 1939 Registration of Foreigners Act are still in place. They govern foreigners' entry and stay in the country and control their registration, including that of Rohingya individuals.

While Bangladesh's 1972 Citizenship (Temporary Provisions) Order does not specifically address refugees, it does outline provisions related to citizenship and residency.

Pakistan: Approximately 1.36 million Afghan individuals living in Pakistan hold a Proof of Registration (PoR) card which allows them to stay in the country legally. Although Pakistan has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, it refers to the individuals as refugees. Other estimates suggest that an additional two million Afghan individuals are living in Pakistan without a formal refugee status. They are often referred to as undocumented Afghans.

On September 26, 2023, Pakistan's Ministry of Interior (MoI) announced the government's intent to enact an Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP) that targets undocumented migrants, including Afghan refugees. This plan has been criticized for violating international human rights norms, particularly the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the returning of refugees to a place where they face serious threats to their life or freedom of movement.

Domestic laws like the Foreigners Act of 1946 give civil authorities the power to grant or refuse permission to foreigners to enter Pakistan. It also applies to refugees.

By July 2025, nearly 2 million Afghan refugees had returned or been forced to return to Afghanistan from Iran and Pakistan.

Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) between UNHCR and Asian countries

To better protect refugees, UNHCR works directly with government authorities in the host countries. However, other international organizations at times play a larger role in providing services and managing the camps. For example, as of April 2025, 34 Rohingya camps were in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar. IOM leads the site management of most of these camps, including the expansion of significant portions of the Kutupalong camp, the largest refugee camp in the world; it is also responsible for infrastructure development, health services and emergency response. UNHCR manages some of the camps, focusing on protection, legal documentation and the coordination of services.

In 1993, Bangladesh signed an MoU with UNHCR, outlining responsibilities for the protection and assistance of refugees. Under this agreement, Bangladesh is responsible for ensuring the safety and security of Rohingya refugees, while the UNHCR handles international protection mandates, including registration and access to assistance.

The government has allowed humanitarian organizations to operate in refugee camps, providing essential services such as food, healthcare and education. However, Rohingya are often classified as "Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals" rather than as recognized refugees, thus limiting their legal status and rights.

In April 2018, UNHCR and Bangladesh signed a MoU which establishes a framework for cooperation on the safe, voluntary and dignified return of Rohingya refugees, in line with international standards, once conditions in Myanmar are conducive to this.

In June 2018, UNHCR, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the government of Myanmar signed a tripartite MoU which establishes a framework for cooperation aimed at creating conditions conducive to the safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable repatriation of Rohingya refugees to their places of origin or of their choosing. Since conditions are not yet favorable for a voluntary return, the MoU represents only a first but necessary step to support the government's efforts towards this.

In Southeast Asia, UNHCR has worked with the governments on comprehensive protection and resilience, such as expanded legal pathways and enhanced access to education and livelihoods. An agreement with Thailand, for example, concerned the release of children and their mothers from the main immigration detention center by the end of 2019. That same year, the Malaysian government was finalizing plans to grant refugees the right to work in certain sectors, and refugee children in Indonesia began enrolling in public schools.

Following a visit to Thailand by Filippo Grandi, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in October 2023, the UN body announced the launch of a large-scale group resettlement initiative together with the Royal Thai Government and the United States; it would offer a chance to refugees from different Myanmar ethnic groups in Thailand's Tham Hin camp to rebuild their lives in a third country.

CHECKLIST

How understanding human rights, international law and specific country laws can help journalists in reporting

- **Legal context and reporting accuracy:** Some countries may not have specific refugee laws, while others might not be signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention (i.e., India, Bangladesh). Knowing this helps journalists understand the legal constraints or protections facing those who have been displaced.
- **Immigration and asylum policies:** Because of restrictive asylum laws, some Asian countries, like Thailand and Malaysia, treat refugees as illegal immigrants. Journalists who understand these laws can better cover issues related to detention, deportation and limited access to essential services for refugees.
- **Cross-border legal complexities:** Understanding regional and bilateral agreements between countries (such as the Bali Process, a regional forum to combat human trafficking) helps journalists navigate the complex dynamics between countries.
- **Protection of refugees:** Journalists who understand the UNHCR's mandate for providing international protection to refugees can more effectively cover issues related to refugee rights, resettlement and international protection mechanisms.
- **Support role in refugee camps and urban settlements:** Many displaced people live in refugee camps (i.e., Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh) or urban settings (i.e., Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur). Journalists who are aware of the UNHCR's role in these settings – i.e., providing basic needs, registration, and advocacy – can bring attention to the conditions in camps or cities and hold authorities to account.
- **Documentation of abuses:** Journalists who understand local refugee laws and international conventions are better equipped to identify and report on human rights abuses, such as arbitrary detention, forced repatriation (refoulement) or denial of asylum. They can also highlight how the lack of legal protections affects the safety and well-being of displaced individuals.

USEFUL LINKS

- **1948 "Universal Declaration of Human Rights":** *https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights*
- **1951 "Convention related to the Status of Refugees":** *https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html*
- **The 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees:** *https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-02/1951-refugee-convention-1967-protocol.pdf*
- **2018 "Global Compact on Refugees":** *https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4*
- **2018 "Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration":** *https://migrationnetwork.un.org/global-compact-for-migration*
- **IOM, "Handbook on Migrant Protection and Assistance", 2020:** *https://www.iom.int/iom-handbook-migrant-protection-and-assistance*
- **IOM, "Essentials of Migration Management 2.0 Handbook", 2022:** *https://emm.iom.int/handbooks*
- **IOM, International migration law:** *https://www.iom.int/international-migration-law*
- **ASEAN, "Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers", 2018:** *https://asean.org/book/asean-consensus-on-the-protection-and-promotion-of-the-rights-of-migrant-workers-2*
- **ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, 2012:** *https://asean.org/asean-human-rights-declaration*
- **ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration, 2019:** *https://asean.org/asean-declaration-on-the-rights-of-children-in-the-context-of-migration*
- **ASEAN Declaration on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations, 2023:** *https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ASEAN_Declaration_on_the_Protection_of_Migrant_Workers_Family_Members-in-Crisis-Situation-and-its-Guidelines.pdf*
- **ASEAN Declaration on Portability of Social Security Benefits for Migrant Workers in ASEAN, 2022:** *https://asean.org/asean-declaration-on-portability-of-social-security-benefits-for-migrant-workers-in-asean*
- **SAARC Declaration on Labour Migration, 2016:** *https://ceslam.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/DECLARATION-ON-LABOUR-MIGRATION-Zero-Draft.pdf*
- **SAARC Plan of Action on Labour Migration** *https://ceslam.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/SAARC-Plan-of-Action-on-Labour-Migration.pdf*
- **Migration, Development Within the SAARC Framework: Towards a Migration Governance Model of the Future, 2023:** *https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-34194-6_15*
- **Bangladesh Foreigners Act, 1946:** *http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-216.html*
- **The Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939:** *http://bdlaws.minlaw.gov.bd/act-details-182.html*

- **Refugee Protection Under the Constitution of Bangladesh: The Rohingya Refugees in Context, 2023:** *https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-99-2579-7_16*
- **The Bangladesh Citizenship (Temporary Provisions) Order, 1972:** *https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-981-99-2579-7_16*
- **EUAA COI Query Response — Pakistan — 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan' (IFRP), 2023:** *https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/2102282/2023_12_EUAA_COI_Query_Response_Q71_Pakistan_Afghans_IFRP.pdf*
- **Pakistan Foreigner's Act, 1946:** *https://pakistancode.gov.pk/english/UY2FqaJw1-apaUY2Fqa-cJiW-sg-jjjjjjjjjjjjj*
- **Update of UNHCR's operations in Asia and the Pacific, 2018:** *https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/5b9f53ad4.pdf*
- **States Parties to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol:** *https://www.unhcr.org/us/media/states-parties-1951-convention-and-its-1967-protocol*

Examples of reporting on legal frameworks

- **Al Jazeera, "India says new law saves persecuted refugees. Rohingya ask 'Why not us?'", 2024:** *https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/27/rohingya-in-india-accuse-modi-of-double-standards-on-citizenship-law*
- **The Conversation, "Indonesia's refugee policy – not ideal, but a step in the right direction", 2017:** *https://theconversation.com/indonesias-refugee-policy-not-ideal-but-a-step-in-the-right-direction-75395*
- **Nikkei Asia, "Japan's new deportation rule for asylum seekers raises rights concerns", 2024:** *https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Japan-immigration/Japan-s-new-deportation-rule-for-asylum-seekers-raises-rights-concerns*
- **Al Jazeera, "As Malaysia faces CEDAW review, women refugees continue to struggle", 2024:** *https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/5/22/as-malaysia-faces-cedaw-review-women-refugees-continue-to-struggle*
- **Bangkok Post, "Child refugees finally get aid", 2024:** *https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2833008/child-refugees-finally-get-aid*
- **The Diplomat, "Indian Citizenship Law's Exclusion of Sri Lankan Tamils", 2024:** *https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/indian-citizenship-laws-exclusion-of-sri-lankan-tamils*

CHAPTER 8



Working in hostile environments

Safety and security of journalists

Maricel Ramos is a journalist from the Philippines who works in Davao, Mindanao. She has covered the region's ongoing Moro conflict and peace process and has written about some of the 1.7 million people who over the years have been displaced. Maricel recently heard about new unrest and her family worries if she's safe when travelling to remote areas. She has also been receiving anonymous threatening emails. All this reminds her of the worst times of armed conflict on the island; she cannot sleep at night and panicks when she hears loud bangs.

Maricel wants to learn about safety and security for journalists so that her working life becomes safer—both in terms of physical and digital safety. She also wants to manage her anxiety. After years of covering the civil war, she could be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Nevertheless, there are techniques she can use to strengthen her psychological balance and enhance her resilience.

When we think of safety and security, we mostly think of physical attacks and physical safety. But this is only part of being safe. What, then, constitutes a threat to safety and/or well-being? This can vary from one person to the next and depends on various factors, including, for example, gender.

When it comes to migration, safety issues are central, and primarily for the people you may be interviewing. Being a migrant—and particularly a refugee—always carries certain risks, such as having the right papers, a person's legal status or being part of a minority. For refugees, agreeing to be interviewed can be dangerous—they might be identified, harassed by hostile groups from their own country or by police, or even be deported.

At the same time, journalists may also be putting themselves at risk: certain political or economic groups may be against reports about minorities or the exploitation of migrants and refugees.

Journalists need to be safe to do their work, and so media houses should not put the safety or well-being of their staff and freelancers at risk. **No story is worth a journalist's life**.

This chapter focuses on:

- Physical safety
- Digital safety
- Psychological stability
- Gender-based violence and sexual harassment
- Identifying threats to personal safety
- Trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder
- Mental health
- Resilience
- Self-care strategies

8.1 Safety and security

Physical safety

There can be various threats to a journalist's physical safety and well-being

- Exposure to conflict zones/civil unrest/threats by hostile actors (i.e., groups who profit from trafficking people and don't want to be exposed).

- Mass protests, including risks resulting from law enforcement responses or activity of armed groups (i.e., beatings).
- Theft/destruction of equipment/crimes to retaliate against journalists for their reporting.
- Arbitrary detainment or imprisonment.
- Physical violence or torture (by individuals or groups who don't want any reporting, or who threaten migrants/refugees who collaborate with reporters).
- Kidnapping or "disappearing" (including threats to journalists who do not report on migration).
- Gender-based violence, rape and other forms of sexual assault (when going to the field or in a journalist's working environment, even though the reporting is not linked to migration).
- Death threats (not necessarily linked to reporting on migration, but to any contentious topic).
- Expulsion from the country of origin/exile.

Ensuring your physical safety

- Identify the threat to your personal safety: Who/what is threatening you? How?
- Do a risk analysis and contingency planning: Ask yourself: What is the highest risk for me? Is there a way to minimize this risk? How? Plan for unforeseen situations – what should I do if XYZ happens?
- Get legal support (if possible, from your media house).
- Get insurance (if possible, from your media house).
- Take a first aid course.
- Take a security training course (if possible).
- Get protective equipment, including medical kits and data encryption tools.
- Stay at well-guarded hotels or safe houses. If your home has become a liability, try to change locations often and stay at different safe places.
- Hire reliable vehicles and drivers.
- Hire dependable and vetted support staff like translators, fixers and security guards.

Your choice!
Do not ignore warnings! Balance your personal safety with the risks of fully reporting a story, especially for photographers and camera operators.

NO STORY IS WORTH YOUR LIFE!



CHECKLIST

When going to a (potentially) high-risk zone

- ☐ Dress accordingly: No camouflage, no high heels (you need to be able to run), no white caps or white headscarves (it makes it easier for a sniper to target you).
- ☐ Take your ID card/press card/some money in cash/personal medication/first aid kit.
- ☐ Pack and take a "running bag" (a small backpack containing everything you need in case you get into an acute threat situation and have to leave quickly and/or hide for a few days. The bag should contain the items in the list above (ID card/press card, etc.) as well as some canned food, a pocket knife, a candle and matches, a torch and batteries, a charger and power banks for your phone, a change of clothes, soap, female hygiene products and insect repellent.
- ☐ Leave a list of your contacts/destination with your team and/or family.
- ☐ Ensure that someone will receive you at your destination. Let someone know that you will be coming and when you expect to arrive.
- ☐ Build a chain of contacts for emergencies: When you are at one location, tell the contacts there where you will be going, and give them the details of the contacts at your destination, and vice versa. If you do not reach your destination, the people there will know whom to contact to alarm your team.
- ☐ Never post your whereabouts on social media!

- Use advantages: Females or local colleagues might not be noticed.
- Never go alone!
- Do not travel at night.

Digital safety

Although the digital world offers many positive aspects, it can also pose dangers to journalists. These can include:

- Hate mail
- Online harassment via social media
- Threats
- Leaked information
- Public defamation
- Hacking of computer or accounts
- Doxxing: When somebody publishes your personal information online without your permission, i.e., your private address or phone number; this can also become a physical safety issue
- Posting personal photos

CHECKLIST

Safeguarding your digital security

- Secure your work computer (passwords, etc.).
- Secure your personal computer (passwords, encrypting, etc.).
- Secure your mobile phone (passwords, etc.).
- Use safe apps for communication (Signal instead of WhatsApp).
- Encrypt address lists.
- Take a “clean” phone when going to the field, not your usual phone. A “clean” phone has only a minimum of personal information, no personal photos, no personal phone numbers and only a few necessary phone numbers, i.e., of your media house, a lawyer, and a hospital. If any hostile/armed actors get ahold of your phone, they will not be able to threaten your family.
- Use TOR Browser for research. This will hide your browser history so that no one is able to trace it.
- File legal complaints if you are being threatened (check the" *Useful links” at the end of the chapter for digital helplines).

Threats and intimidation

Journalists can be threatened or intimated by those who oppose their work. Risks can include:

- Written, verbal and digital threats to a journalist’s safety or that of their family and friends
- Physical or electronic surveillance
- Hate speech
- Censorship
- Legal persecution, including threats of civil or criminal lawsuits and charges of treason
- Infringements on licensing and operations
- Forced shutdown of media outlets

CHECKLIST

Ask yourself about your personal risks (physical threats, emotional instability)

- What dangers and situations have I faced in the past that were difficult to handle emotionally?
- What am I worried about now? What’s making me anxious?
- Has anything changed recently? Has something unusual happened?
- Does my manager/team/family know?
- How can I improve my safety?
- What measures are being taken by my media house?

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment

Challenges such as gender-based violence (GBV)—especially towards homosexuals—and sexual harassment can occur at any time and are not linked to particular topics or investigations. Aspects can include:

- Sexual harassment, assaults or rape by co-workers, supervisors, support staff, sources or random actors
- Request for sexual favors in exchange for safety, information, continued employment or access to i.e., sources, locations
- Blackmailing by ex-partners, spurned lovers or targets of investigation

CHECKLIST

How to overcome a hostile environment. This may include your workplace.

- Look for women's groups and helplines in your area.
- Pay attention to your (female) colleagues. Does anyone need support?
- Media house policy: Is there a focal point for helping in cases of GBV and sexual harassment? If not, suggest to your media house that it establishes one.

Psycho-social stability

Experiencing risks, threats and possible outcomes can take a toll on your mental health. This not only affects your work but also your life as a whole and that of those you hold dear.

CHECKLIST

Maintaining your mental health

- **Do a risk analysis and situational awareness:** Assess your own situation and regularly check if things are deteriorating. Take measures to improve the situation (if possible).
- **Identify stress factors:** What are your significant sources of stress: Family and relationship problems? Serious health problems? Workplace and financial stressors? Are you living in dangerous circumstances? Take measures to improve the situation (if possible).
- Communicate with colleagues/friends/family: Sharing problems can give you relief, and people might be able to help.
- Be part of a network for peer support (formal or informal).
- Seek access to psychological counselling!!
- Psychological and emotional self-care strategies (see Check list: Self-care strategies).
- Awareness and support of work team/media house.
- Avoid damaging coping strategies, such as drinking too much or driving too fast.

Media house safety policy

While it's important that you take steps to reduce your risks and maintain your mental health, your media house also has a responsibility. Below are steps that your media house should take:

- Risk assessments conducted before assignments
- Establishment of emergency communication protocols for when staff are in the field
- Editorial Safety Team to devise security protocols for journalists who work in high-risk environments
- High-level editorial approval for risky assignments
- Mandatory insurance
- Treatment of stress and trauma (counselling)
- Social media and digital policy
- Provision of security equipment: appropriate tools for work in high-risk environments, including satellite phones, medical kits, and body armor

– Focal point for advice/support in cases of sexual or racist harassment

If your media house does not have a safety policy, try to talk to those in charge and start a conversation about this with your colleagues.

Security risks for sources and interviewees

As journalists, our responsibility is to do no harm and not put vulnerable people at risk. It's not a given that sources and interviewees will always be happy to talk to journalists because this can pose risks for vulnerable groups. Those risks can include:

– Physical safety: Police, armed thugs

– Digital safety: Surveillance

– Mental health: Experiencing stressful conditions, traumatization, aggravation by opponents and/or gender-based violence and sexual harassment



CHECKLIST

Mitigating risks for your sources

- ☐ Do not disclose real names or places.
- ☐ Blur faces in photos, make sure that locations cannot be identified.
- ☐ Ask them about safety measures they consider necessary.
- ☐ Do not disclose on social media where you are doing your research.

8.2 Trauma

Years ago, when she was covering the Moro conflict, Maricel Ramos often spoke to people who had survived massacres or fled from violent attacks. Many had been deeply affected by what they had witnessed and often broke down while being interviewed. This, in turn, affected Maricel psychologically.

With new unrest breaking out in certain areas of Mindanao, Maricel's editor-in-chief has commissioned her to cover the conflict. She needs to be aware that potential interview partners may be traumatized, so she will need special interview techniques to help her speak with them in a responsible manner.

But first, it is important to understand how trauma is triggered.

Trauma and secondary trauma

The word "trauma" is derived from the ancient Greek word for "wound." Experiencing frightening or distressing events (such as a violent attack, rape, having to flee, losing a home and possibly loved ones) can result in a **psychological wound**, a **difficulty to cope or function normally**.

Regardless of its source, an emotional trauma has three common elements:

– The traumatic experience was **unexpected**.

– The person was **unprepared**.

– There was nothing the person could do to prevent it from happening (leading to a **feeling of helplessness**).

There are two kinds of trauma:

– **Primary trauma:** When a person has had a traumatic experience themself.

– **Secondary trauma:** When an individual is exposed to those who have been traumatized themselves, or when a survivor describes traumatic events or shows disturbing videos of violence.

Those who may be affected by secondary trauma are: first responders, nurses and doctors, children of traumatized parents, mental health care workers or journalists.

It is important to remember that being traumatized is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

A post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition triggered by a terrifying event, either by a person who has experienced it, witnessed it or heard about it. After a traumatic event, 80 percent of those affected do recover while only 20 percent develop lasting PTSD.

Those susceptible to developing PTSD after a traumatic event include young children; victims of sexual violence; those subjected to ongoing or repeated violence (i.e., war); those with previous mental health issues or those without a social network.

Trauma-related symptoms

- Involuntary flashbacks to the traumatic events
- Being overwhelmed by feelings of anger, helplessness, sorrow, shame or guilt
- Repeated nightmares/sleeplessness
- Difficulties concentrating/memory loss
- Irritability, angry outbursts or aggressive behavior
- Feeling emotionally numb
- Loss of sexual desire
- Short attention span
- Children: Wetting their bed when they are older
- Being easily startled or frightened
- Always being on guard
- Self-destructive behavior, such as drinking too much or driving too fast

How to interview traumatized individuals

For journalists, interviewing a traumatized person is a great challenge. On the one hand, journalists want the person to provide information about the incident in question to help a reporter cover the event more accurately. On the other hand, a traumatized person being interviewed may relive the situation and become retraumatized. Journalists need to avoid this at all costs!

As a journalist, you may not always know if the interview partner who lived through a terrible event was in fact traumatized by it or not (and the interviewee may not know this him/herself). Many refugees have lived through agonizing situations, either in their country of origin, while fleeing, or in the host country where they sought safety. As a journalist, you are not always aware of what a person has been through and therefore you need to tread carefully.

A main reason why people become traumatized is the feeling of having been utterly helpless during the event in question. This is why it is crucial that you give the interview partner the feeling of being in control of the interview situation.

Aspects that might not seem important to you, such as where the interview is to be conducted and who else will be present, are not minor details for a traumatized person and may make a difference in how the interview partner reacts during the interview.



CHECKLIST

Before the interview

- ☐ Give the person **control** over the situation!
- ☐ Give him/her all the details regarding yourself, your media house and the type of media house where the interview will be published (i.e., online news site, newspaper, international news organization).
- ☐ Be transparent about the focus of the interview and what you would like to cover, and then let him/her choose what he/she is willing to talk about.
- ☐ If talking about rape/sexual harassment, have a female colleague conduct the interview.
- ☐ Let him/her choose the time and location of the interview (i.e., outdoors/indoors, at home/elsewhere).
- ☐ Let him/her have a person at their side whom they trust (if they prefer).
- ☐ Ask whether he/she would like the door to be closed/open.
- ☐ Offer water and sweets.

- Make it clear to the person that he/she can stop the interview at any time! (And accept this if they withdraw their consent to conduct the interview).
- Do not pressure the person to talk about issues he/she does not want to mention.

Above all, be attentive. Contrary to the usual habits of a journalist, do not insist if the person becomes uncomfortable.

CHECKLIST

Do's and Don'ts during the interview

Do ...

- ... make this a non-directive interview: Let the person talk in a narrative.
- ... focus on the survival abilities of the person: "How did you manage to get out of this?"
- ... be attentive if the interviewee feels uncomfortable; offer to interrupt or to stop the interview (and accept if they do stop).
- ... have a female journalist conduct the interview if the subject of rape/sexual comes up.
- ... remember that looking at pictures/hearing quotes can trigger a terrible memory!

Don't ...

- ... ask: "What happened?" This forces him/her to relive the terrible event, which may lead to retraumatization.
- ... ask him/her "How did you feel?" when referring to i.e., the loss of a loved person or violent act as this forces him/her to relive the terrible event, and may lead to retraumatization.
- ... put pressure on the person about issues he/she does not want to talk about.
- ... contradict the interviewee, let him/her talk (don't question dates or minor details—this gives the person the feeling that you don't believe him/her).

CHECKLIST

After the interview

Remember that interviews of this type are never over when the interview partner has answered the last question. Take the following steps so that the interviewee knows he/she was always in control.

- Let him/her read the text/see the video/listen to the audio.
- He/she needs to have the power to change things.
- Let him/her choose the picture (if any).
- Offer the option to blur the picture.
- Let him/her opt to stay anonymous!
- Send him/her a link to the published text.
- Thank him/her for having the courage to do the interview.

8.3 Mental health of journalists

Many journalists suffer from various pressures such as stressful working conditions, low pay, difficult or dangerous assignments, to name just a few. Covering migration and refugee issues adds to the stress. Interviewing people who have lost their homes or live far from their families, people who are exploited by their employers because they don't have the necessary papers or because they don't know about their rights—witnessing this without being able to help can be psychologically stressful for journalists.

However, while we often pay attention to our physical health, we ignore issues that can affect our mental well-being. Particularly male journalists often perceive themselves as tough but mental stress can affect our overall health. **It's therefore crucial that you share your worries with family/colleagues, and/or seek counselling!**

First, though, let's see how journalists can boost their physical health.

CHECKLIST

Physical self-care

- Eat healthy food at regular times.
- Exercise (at least three times a week).
- Get enough sleep.
- Go to the doctor when sick.
- Take time off work when sick.
- Get massages.
- Take time for sexual activity.
- Do breathing exercises when stressed.
- Learn relaxation exercises.

However, as mentioned, journalists often ignore their mental well-being although mental health is essential for reporting effectively and accurately on refugee and forced displacement issues, and for interviewing those affected.

CHECKLIST

Psychological/emotional self-care

- Identify stress factors and try to avoid them.
- Structure your day.
- Spend time with friends/family—social contacts are life-saving!
- Talk/reach out to people! Look for peer support.
- Do things (even small ones) that make you happy (i.e., sing and dance, read books or watch films, meditate or pray, find a hobby).
- Ensure you have time/space alone.
- Keep a journal.
- Spend time outdoors, with plants or pets.
- Take time off from demands/Avoid extra responsibilities.

What are your own personal self-care strategies? Do the things you like and note them down!

Resilience

Resilience is a process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, workplace or financial stress or living in dangerous environments. Being resilient involves "bouncing back" from difficult experiences and can also mean personal growth.

CHECKLIST

Strategies for boosting your resilience

- Distinguish between real vs. perceived threats.
- Develop relaxation, grounding and containment skills.
- Seek/accept help!
- Go to counselling! It is not a sign of weakness, it's the best option to heal.

USEFUL LINKS

Safety and trauma in journalism

- **Global Center for Journalism and Trauma:** *https://gcjt.org*
- **Resources for Self-Care and Peer Support (Global Center for Journalism and Trauma):** *https://gcjt.org/resources?topic%5B0%5D=74*
- **Global Center for Journalism and Trauma: Covering Trauma – Impact on Journalists:** *https://gcjt.org/resources?keyword=Covering%20Trauma%3A%20Impact%20on%20Journalists*
- **UNESCO, Safety of Journalists:** *https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists*
- **UNESCO, "Safety Guide for Journalists," 2019:** *https://bne.unesco.de/sites/default/files/2019-01/Safety_guide_for%20Journalists.pdf*
- **Article 19, Safety of Journalists and Human Rights Defenders:** *https://www.article19.org/issue/safety-of-journalists-and-human-rights-defenders*
- **Safety of Journalists Platform, "Online Privacy Guide for Journalists", 2024:** *https://safetyofjournalists.org/resources/online-privacy-guide-for-journalists-2024-guard-your-sources*

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) resource for journalists' safety

- **Reporters without Borders, Digital Security Lab (getting help if your account was hacked):** *https://rsf.org/en/digital-security-lab*
- **Reporters without Borders, Digital Security Guide:** *https://resources.rsf.org/digital-safety*
- **Reporters without Borders, Physical Safety Guide:** *https://resources.rsf.org/physical-safety-2*
- **Reporters without Border, Mental Health:** *https://safety.rsf.org/mental-health*
- **Access Now, Digital Security Helpline:** *https://www.accessnow.org/help/?ignorelocale*
- **International Association of Women in Radio and Television, "Safety Handbook for women journalists", 2017:** *https://iawrt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/SAFETY-HANDBOOK-2nd-EDITION-ENGLISH-VERSION.pdf*

CHAPTER 9



Resources and support

Chandani Dahal is a young journalist from Nepal who wants to report on conditions in a refugee camp in a politically sensitive region but the government restricts access and journalists face harassment. She lacks training in conflict reporting, is unsure how to proceed, the security risks she might encounter and where to seek help if needed.

Chandani's dilemma is not unique. Many journalists are also struggling to find the right organizations for training, resources, legal aid or financial support. Knowing where to turn can make all the difference.

9.1 Professional organizations and networks

Let's first look at organizations and networks that offer resources for journalists wanting to work on migration-related topics:

- **International Journalists' Network (IJNet) offers training, grants and resources on migration reporting.**
  https://ijnet.org/en
- **Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) promotes ethical journalism, including guidelines for reporting on migration.**
  https://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org
- **The International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) offers training and fellowship opportunities for migration-focused reporting.**
  https://www.icfj.org
- **The Global Center for Journalism and Trauma offers resources on reporting migration with a focus on trauma-sensitive approaches.**
  https://gcjt.org
- **The Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN) supports investigative journalism with a focus on migration and human rights.**
  https://gijn.org
- **International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) defends journalists' rights and offers guidance on covering sensitive topics like migration.**
  https://www.ifj.org
- **Migration Matters e.V. provides media productions, dialogue events, and trainings to foster inclusive conversations about migration.**
  https://migrationmatters.me
- **Global Migration Media Academy is a global coalition of migration experts, academics and media professionals that offers free courses for balanced, accurate migration coverage.**
  https://www.mediamigrationacademy.org
- **Refugee Journalism Project (RJP) supports forcibly displaced and exiled journalists in rebuilding their careers.**
  https://www.refugeejournalismproject.org
- **Public Media Alliance offers tools and resources for journalists and media organizations to ethically cover migration and refugee crises.**
  https://www.publicmediaalliance.org
- **South Asian Journalists Association (SAJA) provides reporting fellowships and resources for journalists covering South Asia, including topics on migration and refugees.**
  https://www.saja.org

- **Asia Pacific Journalism Centre (APJC) provides journalism training programs that focus on leadership and reporting on economics, politics, and post-conflict media development.**
  https://www.apjc.org.au

- **Asia Investigative Reporting Network (AIR Network) empowers journalists in Southeast Asia through training, networking, and financial support.**
  https://www.icfj.org/our-work/empowering-truth-tellers-asia-investigative-reporting-network

Support organizations active in Asia

There are also organizations that offer support with legal issues and that promote safety precautions:

- **DW Akademie offers special training and support for journalists, including those from Asia, who report on displacement and migration. Through workshops, partnerships and customized resources, DW Akademie enhances the media's ability to inform the public and protect the rights of displaced communities.**
  https://akademie.dw.com/en/refugees-and-migration/s-62126558

- **International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Asia-Pacific advocates for better working conditions, safety for journalists, press freedom, editorial independence and gender equality. It represents 30 affiliated unions and associations across the Asia-Pacific region and manages regional networks such as the South Asia Media Solidarity Network (SAMSN) and Southeast Asia Journalist Unions (SEAJU).**
  https://www.ifj.org/regions/asia-pacific
  https://samsn.ifj.org/samsn-ifj-network
  https://www.facebook.com/SEAJUOfficial

- **Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA) promotes press freedom and freedom of expression in Southeast Asia. Members include organizations such as the Thai Journalists Association, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism and Cambodian Center for Human Rights.**
  https://seapa.wordpress.com/about

- **Press Freedom Monitoring in Southeast Asia is a joint initiative by seven Southeast Asian media organizations monitors press freedom and violence against journalists.**
  https://pfmsea.org

- **Confederation of ASEAN Journalists (CAJ) established in 1975, CAJ serves as a forum for cooperation among journalists in Southeast Asia, promoting solidarity and professional development.**
  https://cajnet.org

- **SAARC Journalist Forum fights for the rights and dignity of journalists, freedom of the press and expression, and raises voices for peace, humanity, democracy and liberty.**
  https://sarcjournalistforum.org

- **International Press Institute (IPI) promotes press freedom and the safety of journalists worldwide.**
  https://ipi.media

- **Reporters Without Borders (RSF) defends press freedom and protects journalists worldwide with active monitoring and support.**
  https://rsf.org/en

- **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) is active worldwide, providing assistance and advocacy for journalists under threat.**
  https://cpj.org/asia

- **Media Defence offers legal assistance to journalists and media organizations facing legal threats and operates globally with activities in Asia.**
  https://www.mediadefence.org

- **International News Safety Institute (INSI) provides safety training and resources for journalists working in dangerous environments worldwide.**
  https://newssafety.org

- **International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) supports female journalists through safety training, grants and advocacy, with programs extending to Asia.**
  https://www.iwmf.org

- **ARTICLE 19 is active worldwide and is committed to enhancing the safety and rights of journalists.**
  https://www.article19.org

↗ **International Media Support (IMS) runs projects to strengthen press freedom and support independent journalism in conflict areas and repressive environments worldwide.**
https://www.mediasupport.org

Additional international organizations

UNESCO, the International Organization for Migration (IOM)and other global and regional organizations work with journalists and/or migration experts and offer tools, trainings and funding for displacement reporting and journalists' safety.

Country specific networks/associations

Various country or city-specific journalists' networks and associations act as pressure groups against repressive behaviour by the state or other actors. For example, with a dedicated tool for digital legal aid, the Indonesian non-governmental organization LBH Pers has successfully piloted the provision of legal assistance for journalists.



CHECKLIST

How journalists can use networks and platforms for their reporting

- **Specialized knowledge:** The platforms help journalists access sources and experts for critical background information, data and analysis.
- **Training and capacity building:** Trainings on conflict-sensitive reporting—including ethics, legal considerations and the challenges of covering vulnerable populations—can help journalists report with a more balanced, aware approach.
- **Physical and digital safety:** Journalists can learn how to protect themselves from physical and digital threats by contacting networks and support organizations that provide safety protocols, training and emergency support in dangerous environments.
- **Psychological support:** Some support organizations offer counselling or mental health services to help journalists process the emotional toll of covering conflicts and forced displacements.
- **Legal assistance:** Networks like Media Defence and Reporters Without Borders help journalists who are facing legal threats or persecution.
- **Peer support:** Interacting with other journalists in the networks who face similar challenges can provide moral and practical support and a deeper understanding of the issues.
- **Joint investigations:** Journalists can also use the networks to collaborate on cross-border investigations.
- **Better reach:** Journalists can share their stories across the networks to learn about each other's work and distribute their own reports.

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