

Dates: 4-8 December 2017

Country: Romania, Bucharest



“Refugees are not the crisis. It is the narrative we tell about them”. This quote used in a presentation by Gabriela Leu from

[UNHCR](#)

, sums up the main message of a recent conference organised by the National Commission of Romania for UNESCO. Media representatives from 16 European countries gathered in Bucharest on 4 – 8 December to discuss the responsibility of journalists, editors and media outlets when reporting on topic related to refugees and migrants.

One of the topics discussed at the “The Role of Mass-Media in Treating the Refugees & Migrants Topic” conference was the language used in articles and reports on refugees and migrants. Depending on the country and depending on a status of an individual or a group, different terms are being used by the media. For instance “migrant”, “illegal migrant”, “asylum seeker”, “internally displaced person”, “refugee” – all these expressions refer to different situations and they must be used correctly.

Petra Sorge, a German journalist and media analysis, highlighted the importance of using correct terminology while understanding some of the legal framework behind migrants’ rights. Timo Tonassi, a migration research fellow at the [German Marshall Fund of the United States](#) ,

pointed out that journalists have to use the numbers relating to migrants and refugees precisely and in the context.

Adelin Petrișor, the chief international correspondent for Romanian media network [TVR](#) shared his personal experiences of reporting from refugee camps. Telling the participants how he was emotionally affected while reporting on reporting on the crisis, Petrisor explored the concept of [moral injury](#)

. Also, Eva Bognar, a senior program officer for the [Center for Media, Data and Society](#)

in Budapest offered an explanation of social constructionism and two most frequent frames used in the media: the humanitarian frame and the securitization frame.

Debating the ethics, participants at the UNESCO conference in Romania shared different opinions on whether journalists should help and interfere while reporting on a humanitarian crisis. Tom Law from the [Ethical Journalism Network](#) (EJN) presented the '[5-point hate speech test](#)'. The participants were given 5 minutes to write an introduction for an article based on a piece consisting of hate speech. This task showed how tricky it can be to report on hate speech and that dealing with it in an ethical manner is the key.

A visit to the Romanian branch of the [International Office of Migration](#) (IOM) was also part of the conference schedule. Participants learned about IOM, how they function and what they are doing to help during the current refugee crisis. Whilst there the group also listened to the stories of two refugees who have settled in Romania; their experiences were sobering and highlighted the need for fair reporting on the refugee crisis.

As the conference was held in Romania, there were many local elements to the conference. Participants heard from a variety of official on the topics of refugees and immigrants in Romania. There were talks from the Ministry of National Defense, the Romanian Immigration Office and the Romanian Border Police. The overall conclusion that could be drawn from these presentations is that Romania currently does not house many refugees, but that they have the capacity and willingness to welcome more in the future. Of course, one has to keep in mind that these presentations were given by spokespeople for these entities, and thus some critical evaluation has to be done.

The conference participants also attended the 2017 Gala of the National Commission of

Romania for UNESCO. At the gala there was a photo exhibition by Dimitra Stasinopoulou called “ [On the Path of Hope](#) ”, which showed refugees in Greece and their struggles. Overall, the conference was a thought-provoking one. The topic of refugees and migrants is one that is going to be present in the media for a long time, and thus informing journalists on how to handle to topic appropriately is vital.