

Writing about Refugees A Competition for Student Journalists

Jury Report

On 31st March 2006, members of the jury for the competition for student journalists run by the Jesuit Refugee Service met to decide on the winners. Journalism students across Europe had been asked to write an article on the theme of 'Refugees in Europe'. Entries had come from 14 European countries, and had tackled many different aspects of the topic. Overall, we admired the quality and the approach of the articles, which brought the reality of forced migrants in Europe to life.

We used a mixture of voting and scoring to come to the final decision, which was in no way an easy task. Criteria that we took into consideration were how relevant the topic was, the sources that were used, the style and the message. It was also important whether the article had news value.

We decided to award the first prize to Kasper Tveden Jensen from Denmark, who is studying at the Danish School of Journalism in Århus. His article, 'Suicidal Silence' investigated the high rate of suicides among asylum seekers in Denmark. The topic was excellent: we felt that highlighting this issue asked important questions to the Danish government, included comment, and had definite news value. This article could also be inspiring for other journalists, who would want to investigate whether this was also an issue in their own country. The author used good sources: the article was based on an interview with an asylum seeker who had tried to commit suicide; there were quotes from a university psychologist; and comments from a doctor at the Danish Red-cross. We were particularly impressed with the attempt (albeit unsuccessful) of the author to interview representatives of the Danish government who would respond to the accusations that the article makes. As for criticism, the author sometimes lacked a critical approach. Some statements were made without real factual support; for instance, the assertion the man had been tortured and that he had tried to commit suicide five times.

Second prize was awarded to H  l  ne Hofman, attending the Dublin Institute of Technology in Ireland. Her article 'Waiting to Check Out' investigated the lives of 'Aged Out Minors', a term used for separated children (who arrived in Ireland without a responsible adult) that have now turned 18. The jury liked the engaging and lively style and the people based approach: the author had based the article on interviews with two aged-out minors and their support worker. The chosen theme was an important one to highlight to the public and would appeal to a newspaper editor. On the negative side, the article lacked some background information. The jury would have liked to see some statistics on how many young people are in this situation in Ireland, and information on relevant international standards and government legislation.

Third prize was awarded to Kirsty Whalley, studying at City University, London. She wrote about destitute rejected Zimbabwean asylum seekers who are stuck in a limbo: unable legally to either stay in Britain or return to Zimbabwe. This was an excellent article, and was for a long time in line to receive the first prize. It was well written, the subject was engaging, and it raised issues for the British government on an extremely important topic. It was praised for presenting migrants as actors of their own fate, not as victims. Particularly interesting was the portrayal of the solidarity among members of the Zimbabwean community, as was the comparison made between Zimbabweans in exile and the ANC in South Africa.

The article was criticised because of its lack of fairness. Having made some very valid accusations at the British government, the jury would have liked to see evidence of the author having made attempts to hear a response from someone in authority.

Members of the Jury
Brussels 31/03/06

The members of the jury were:

Marian Hens
BBC journalist based in Madrid

Jeanne-Emmanuelle Hutin
Journalist for Ouest France

Jean-Paul Marthoz
Editorial director of the Brussels-based global affairs quarterly *Enjeux Internationaux*, a regular columnist for Belgian daily *Le Soir* and the chair of GRIP (Group of Investigation and Information on Peace and Security). He was the international media director for Human Rights Watch for nine years

Koen Vidal,
Foreign and political correspondent with *De Morgen*