

## Setting up Margins: Public Attitudes and Media Construction of Poverty and Exclusion in Irelands

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### Introduction

In this chapter we examine how poverty and social exclusion are represented in the Irish print media while also making reference to research on the broadcast media from 1992-1996 (see Devereux, 1998). As media sociologists we are interested in examining the relationship between media discourse and measured public attitudes and beliefs, drawing especially on the European Values Study datasets, 1981 - 2000. We examine data from two research periods, 1992-1996 and 1998-2000. The research periods were radically different. The former was characterized by record levels of unemployment in Irish society (18%) and outward migration. The latter was during the infamous 'Celtic Tiger' phase of the Irish economy, a phase that witnessed a reversal of migration patterns and an unprecedented dependency on foreign nationals in the Irish labour market. The 1997-2001 period, in particular, saw a growth in the number of immigrants seeking refugee status in Ireland. As media sociologists, we are specifically interested in how media discourse constructs the poor and socially excluded, including asylum and refugees. Our intention is to document the attitudes of the public to such marginalized groups while also attempting to analyse the media coverage of such groups, in an effort to understand the role that the media plays in the social construction of attitudes toward the excluded in Irish society. We return to the limitations of such analysis after examining the empirical data on social attitudes.

### The 'Deserving' and 'Undeserving' Poor

Prior to examining more recent attitudes and public beliefs about the poor and socially excluded in Ireland we briefly outline the historical precedents. As Table 1 indicates all of the available data on public attitudes and beliefs since the 1970s point to the fact that members of the public categorise the poor and socially excluded as being 'deserving' or 'undeserving'. A

**Table 1: Summary of principal findings on public attitudes to poverty in Ireland 1977-1996**

<i>The Causes of Poverty</i>	<i>Beliefs about the Poor</i>
<p>Davis et al (1984): The Irish are strongly fatalistic about causes of poverty. 57% of their sample agreed that 'lack of ambition is the root of poverty. 53% agreed that 'the majority of people on the dole have no interest in getting a job.</p>	<p>Davis et al (1984): 60% believed that 'Itinerants' (Travellers) were untrustworthy, careless, excitable and noisy. 23% believed that the unemployed had these characteristics.</p>
<p><i>Eurobarometer Survey</i> (1990) Public opinion in Ireland, Denmark and the UK was found to be negative in terms of public beliefs about the poor making it through their poverty. In Ireland, while structural explanations for poverty were strong, ones which blamed individuals for their poverty were also in abundance —e.g. Alcoholism/drugs: 39%; Broken families: 33%; Too many children: 19%; Laziness: 16%</p>	<p>MacGreil (1977) points to negative public attitudes to both the Travelling Community and the Unemployed.</p>
<p>MacGreil (1996) 11.8% of his sample agreed with the statement 'The poor person is generally responsible for his/her own poverty.'</p>	<p>MacGreil (1996) argues that negative public attitudes to Travellers have intensified. They were shown to have lessened where the unemployed were concerned.</p>

number of specific trends are worth commenting upon. While structural explanations for poverty and social exclusion are on the increase in Irish society, there is nevertheless a persistent pattern within public beliefs and attitudes that explain the reasons for poverty and need in personal or individual terms. MacGreil's (1977, 1992) research into prejudice and intolerance, drawing on data gathered in the early 70s and early 90s, suggests that while negative attitudes towards the unemployed may have lessened, negative attitudes towards members of the Travelling Community actually intensified in the late 1980s. The historical data on public beliefs and attitudes about the poor and socially excluded confirm the existence in

who deserve assistance — the deserving or God's Poor, and those who do not deserve help — the undeserving or Devil's Poor. Ireland is not unique in this respect. Golding and Middleton's (1982) analysis of the British print media *Images of Welfare* also found that dominant media discourses constructed the British poor as being deserving or undeserving. Such a discourse was profoundly influential in the shaping of political discourse and state policy about the poor and excluded. The construction of the poor as either deserving or undeserving has an obvious sociological significance. It allows 'us' to construct discourses and ideologies about 'them' and in the context of unequal relationships of power, it serves to sustain and legitimise such unequal relationships (see van Dijk 1991, 1998). As we will see later in this chapter, much of the lexicon used within media and public discourse more generally, to describe Travellers, the long-term unemployed or immigrants serves to problematize and further marginalize such social groups (see Table 13).

**Changing Contexts of Irish Poverty and Social Exclusion**

In more recent years, the context of the debate on poverty and social exclusion has changed radically. In the wake of unprecedented economic growth rates, and despite frequent references within centre-right political discourse to 'rising tides lifting all boats', Ireland still has a significant number of long-term unemployed and poor. In that same period, there has been a growing dependency in the Irish labour market on non-nationals. In 2002, for example, there were 38,000 foreign nationals working in Ireland on work permits.

While there has been a lowering of overall unemployment levels (3.7%), the 1997 *Living in Ireland Survey* showed persistent long-term unemployment and high rates of relative poverty. Long-term unemployment and social exclusion in Ireland has a strong spatial dimension with large concentrations of the poor and unemployed living in public housing in Irish cities and towns and where adult male unemployment, for example, can be as high as 70%.

The problem of poverty and social exclusion is even more marked in relation to Travellers. Constituting just 0.5% of the Irish population, a majority of Travellers live in either temporary halting sites or on the roadside. Their living conditions are comparable to those experienced by inhabitants of the Third World, with a marked lack of basic sanitation, running water and electricity. In contrast to the settled population, they suffer from higher rates of infant mortality and experience markedly lower life expectancy rates (Barry, 1987; O'Nuallain & Forde 1992; O'Donovan

et al 1995). The recent change in Irish law in relation to trespass (2002) further underlines the accommodation difficulties experienced by Travellers. Trespass has been changed from a civil to a criminal matter and yet the state has failed to meet its statutory obligations in terms of the provision of accommodation for the Travelling Community. Legal issues relating to Travellers, over both the issue of trespass and the new laws regarding equality, have been marked in media discourse by a demonising of Travellers with a specific emphasis on the 'Traveller problem'. We return to this later.

**"Haven't we got our own poor?"**

In the early 1990s the term 'New Poor' was used to describe those in the lower middle-classes who were being adversely affected by economic downturn. (See Devereux, 1998) By the early years of the 20 century the term 'New Poor' was in common use as a referent for immigrant groups who had achieved or were seeking to secure refugee status in Ireland; previously the term had been applied to middle class families who had fallen on hard times during economic downturns. An interesting development within public discourse at this time was the 'rediscovery' of the Irish poor vis-à-vis recent immigrants. A discourse that was hostile to asylum seekers and refugees stressed the fact that 'we' should be dealing with our own poor first and then (and only then if at all) with immigrants. Within media discourse there was a new merging conflation between the problems facing immigrants and those facing the Travelling Community and the homeless in particular. One interesting and noteworthy aspect of this discourse was the highlighting in the media of objections from Travellers to the provision of housing for immigrants and asylum seekers in the midlands. Despite this apparent point of conflict between the two groups, the conflation remains evident with social attitudes indicating either apathy or hostility to both groups.

**Recent Immigration**

The following three Tables, 2 - 4, show the actual state of the refugee and asylum seeker situation in Ireland and further afield. In Table 2 we see the numbers of persons applying for asylum in Ireland since 1992, representing a total of less than 52,000 over 11 years. This number, of course, needs to be set in context.

**Table 2: Numbers making asylum applications in Ireland 1992-2002**

Year	#	Year	#
1992	39	1998	4,626
1993	91	1999	7,724
1994	362	2000	10,938
1995	424	2001	10,325
1996	1,179	2002	11,530
1997	3,883	TOTAL	51,121

In Table 3 we see data provided by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which indicate that the number of refugees worldwide of concern to the UNHCR was almost 20 million in 2001. In that context, 40,000 represents about one fourth of one percent (0.025%) of the total.

**Table 3: Refugees worldwide by Region (UNHCR, 2001)**

Estimated Number of Persons of Concern who fall under the mandate of the UNHCR, 1/1/2002	
Asia	8,820,700
Europe	4,855,400
Africa	4,173,500
Northern America	1,086,800
Latin America & Caribbean	765,400
Oceania	81,300
Total	19,783,100

Looking at the data for asylum seekers and refugees of concern to UNHCR by country of distribution in Table 4, we can see the relative ranking of Ireland as a recipient of refugees and asylum seekers in comparison to its European counterparts.

While acknowledging the discrepancy between the UNHCR figures and the official Irish government figures, which may be simply due to a different form of 'year' calculation, it is interesting to note that the numbers in Ireland represent 0.21% of refugees and 4.05% of asylum seekers, a total of 0.75% of the persons of concern to the UNHCR. By way of comparison with Germany, for example, we can see the Irish figures in relation to the national population. Germany has 54.6% of the total of refugees and 32% of asylum seekers, for a total 51.5% of the total number of persons of concern. In other words Germany has 260 times as many refugees and 8 times as many asylum seekers as Ireland despite having a population that is

20 times that of Ireland. In reality Germany has 68 times as many persons seeking refugee or asylum status, as does Ireland.

**Table 4: Asylum-seekers, refugees of concern to UNHCR by selected country of asylum, end-2001**

Country of asylum	Refugees	Asylum-seekers	Total population of concern
Germany	903,000	85,533	988,533
Netherlands	152,338	78,550	230,888
United Kingdom	148,550	39,400	187,950
Sweden	146,491	17,600	164,091
France	131,601	34,551	166,152
Denmark	73,284		73,284
Norway	50,128		50,128
Finland	12,728		12,728
Belgium	12,265	664	12,929
Italy	8,571		8,571
Spain	6,806		6,806
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>3,598</b>	<b>10,841</b>	<b>14,439</b>
Luxembourg	1,201		1,201
Portugal	449		449
Totals	<b>1,651,010</b>	<b>267,139</b>	<b>1,918,149</b>

**Empirical data on attitudes**

Having looked at the historical situation in Ireland regarding attitudes to poverty, we need now to examine the contemporary situation. The *European Values Study* is a pan-European large scale study carried out at approximately ten yearly intervals with the most recent iteration taking place in 1999/2000. Table 5 indicates respondents' answers to a group of four questions relating to work. It is not unreasonable to see in these answers attitudes towards those without work or unable to work. Of particular note is the belief that 'people who don't work turn lazy' where 57.1% of respondents agreed or agreed strongly with the statement, which appears to reinforce the old myth that those who are without work are in fact lazy.

**Table 5: Respondents' attitudes to work questions in Irish, EVS data,**

**2000**

	agree strongly	agree	neither agree nor disagree	disagree	disagree strongly	Total
It is humiliating to receive without having to work for it	135 13.4%	339 33.5%	165 16.3%	320 31.6%	37 3.6%	996 98.4%
People who don't work turn lazy	141 13.9%	426 42.1%	136 13.4%	252 24.9%	37 3.7%	992 98.0%
Work is a duty towards society	126 12.5%	465 45.9%	184 18.2%	196 19.4%	11 1.1%	982 97.1%
People should not have to work if they don't want to	33 3.3%	247 24.4%	146 14.4%	458 45.2%	96 9.5%	979 96.8%

A further question asked respondents to identify the reason for people being in need. Table 6 summarises the responses with respondents stating the primary reason, in their opinion, for people living in need.

**Table 6: Respondents' beliefs about the reasons people are in need in Irish, EVS data, 2000**

	Unlucky	Laziness/ Lack of Willpower	Injustice in Society	Part modern progress	None of these	
N	228	210	321	188	37	984
%	23.2%	21.3%	32.6%	19.1%	3.8%	100%

These summary data hide strong contrasts that exist within the data according to age, e.g., in relation to those who choose 'injustice in society' and those choosing 'laziness or lack of will power.' In the former, only 16.1% of younger people chose 'laziness' as a reason contrasted with 35.2% of the oldest group, whereas in the latter the situation is reversed with 38.1% of the youngest group choosing 'injustice' compared to 26.2% of the oldest group.

Table 7 indicates the accumulated responses from the data set in relation to unwanted neighbours. Respondents were asked to state whether or not each of the mentioned groups would be regarded as 'unwanted' as a neighbour. In the data the top three groups are drug addicts, people with a criminal record and Travellers, with more than 50% of all respondents citing each of these groups as unwanted neighbours. The Travellers category was specific to Ireland and it is interesting to contrast the responses to the Travellers category (50%) with that given for gypsies (25%).

**Table 7: Respondents' mentions of specific groups as undesirable neighbours, Irish EVS data, 2000**

Drug Addicts	66%	Emotionally Unstable	25%
Criminal record	56%	Aids	23%
Itinerants/Travellers	50%	Muslims	14%
Heavy Drinkers	36%	Immigrants	12%
Left Wing	33%	Different Race	12%
Right Wing	32%	Jews	11%
Homosexuals	27%	Large Families	9%
Gypsies	25%		

In Table 8 we see evidence of the change in attitudes to immigrants and foreign workers as unwanted neighbours over the three cycles of the *European Values Study*. In both 1981 and 1990 the percentage of respondents mentioning these groups as unwanted neighbours was in the region of 5%. By 2000 this had risen to 12%.

**Table 8: Number of respondents mentioning immigrants + foreign workers as unwanted neighbours, EVS data 1981-2000**

Mentioned 1981	Mentioned 1990	Mentioned 2000
66	51	122
5.1%	5.4%	12.1%

Further evidence of such negative attitudes is found in the EVS data by comparing the expressions of levels of concern for family and humankind with that expressed for immigrants as seen in Table 9. More than 80% of respondents indicate that would be very much or much concerned about immediate family, 34% very much or much concerned about humankind, falling to 27% very much or much concerned about immigrants.

**Table 9: Levels of Concern for Immediate Family, Human Kind and Immigrants, EVS data 2000**

	Very much	Much	To a certain extent	Not so much	Not at all
Concerned with immediate family	689 <b>68.5%</b>	123 <b>12.2%</b>	53 5.3%	53 5.3%	68 <b>6.8%</b>
Concerned with human kind	152 <b>15.3%</b>	186 <b>18.7%</b>	409 <b>41.3%</b>	191 <b>19.2%</b>	54 5.5%
Concerned with immigrants	105 <b>10.6%</b>	168 <b>16.9%</b>	429 <b>43.1%</b>	240 <b>24.1%</b>	53 5.3%

Similarly in Table 10, the expression by respondents of their willingness to help specific groups shows a marked contrast for immigrants compared to other groups. The numbers responding 'absolutely yes' or 'yes' was 81.5% for 'sick and disabled', 80.7% for 'elderly', 72.3% for 'people in neighbourhood', and 34% for 'immigrants'. The immigrants' category has the highest level of ambivalence at 48.4% and the highest level of unwillingness to help ('no' or 'absolutely no') at 17.6%.

**Table 10: Levels of Willingness to Help for Sick & Disabled, Elderly, Neighbours and Immigrants, EVS data 2000**

	82				
	Absolutely yes	Yes	Maybe Yes/ maybe No	No	Absolutely No
Help sick and disabled	318 31.8%	497 <b>49.7%</b>	<b>161</b> <b>16.1%</b>	20 <b>2.00%</b>	4 <b>0.4%</b>
Help elderly	296 29.5%	513 51.2%	172 <b>17.2%</b>	18 1.8%	3 0.3%
Help people in neighbourhood	215 21.5%	508 <b>50.8%</b>	239 23.9%	35 3.5%	3 1.3%
Help immigrants	76 <b>7.6%</b>	262 <b>26.4%</b>	481 <b>48.4%</b>	164 <b>16.5%</b>	11 <b>1.1%</b>

**Questions Arising**

As sociologists, the questions that these data raise for us, in the light of the historical situation outlined above, is why this is so, i.e., why are there persistently negative attitudes to specific groups of people in Ireland, particularly those without work, Travellers and, more recently, as reported elsewhere, asylum seekers and refugees. Those who are in the greatest financial need seem to attract the highest levels of social opprobrium. We wonder why?

In search of an answer we turn our attention to the role that the media play in society. As the prime socialising agents in modern society, it is our contention that the mass media play a significant part in constructing representations of various groups in society. We are particularly interested in examining how groups on the margins of society are represented in the media, and whether such representations are truly reflective and balanced of the groups being described.

Previous research which we have undertaken (see for example Breen, 1997) shows that there is, in fact, a relationship between dominant media discourses and audience beliefs. The agenda setting hypothesis is well known and established, as is the reality of media frames for reporting on

complex issues. While we do not subscribe to a simplistic cause and effect model of media analysis, we do argue that media content is a primary source of meaning and understanding about the social world. Media consumers locate themselves in the wider world by using media content as a surveillance function in order to understand the social environment. The work of Gerbner (1990, 1994), Signorielli (1990a, 1990b), Shoemaker and Reese (1990, 1996), and many other media scholars provides strong empirical and qualitative evidence that supports a thesis of a media-constructed world, which many media consumers accept unquestioningly and uncritically.

With this in mind, we turn now to the data on media coverage of the groups in which we have a specific research interest. Specifically we examine the headlines used to draw readers' attention to stories about Travellers, refugees, and asylum seekers and in both the broadsheet and tabloid press in Ireland.

#### Media Data

The *Irish Times* used the term 'Traveller' in the headlines of some 679 stories between January 1996 and March 2003, an average of almost 8 stories per month over that time.<sup>3</sup> Eighty of these were Letters to the Editor. Table 11 shows the ten article headlines for those headlines that appeared on the front page of the *Irish Times*, less than 1.5% of the total number of articles headlined about Travellers.

Based on a simple reading of these headlines, a reader might readily infer that Travellers are a source of difficulty in schools (three stories), problematic about trespass (two stories), litigious (two stories) and a source of negative comment made by politicians but rejected by political parties (two stories). It is important to note that these headlines focus on Travellers *per se*, rather than, for example, on the issues of equality, or the reasons Travellers might be engaged in trespass through failure of local authorities to meet statutory requirements, or the bias that might exist in parents whose children's schools are attended by Travellers. The story about parents removing their children from two schools because of Travellers frames the story in terms of *Travellers' standards*, and not alternate readings such as parental prejudice, or the lack of facilities for Travellers.

**Table 11: Date, Headline and word count of Irish Times front page stories using 'Traveller' in the headline**

20/08/2002	School reopens next week with three Traveller	406
05/04/2002	President to decide next week on Bill to end illegal Traveller camps	399
28/03/2002	Traveller dismay as move to make trespass a crime rushed through Dail	305
03/07/2001	Travellers largest group on equality case list	277
01/05/2001	Parents plan to remove children at two schools over Traveller standards	501
28/02/2001	Two in five Travellers would like to live in a house or	260
23/03/2000	FF rejects remarks by councillor on loans to	365
26/09/1998	No licence renewal for publican who refused to serve	316
27/09/1996	Bias denied by Galway school that excluded traveller	532
11/04/1996	FF not to censure councillor over remarks on	481

Table 12 is a random sample of 30 stories drawn from the total set.4 The stories breakdown into 7 general categories as indicated. The highest average word count, 826 words, occurs under Education, driven by the Galway schools' issue in relation to Travellers, again focusing on Travellers rather than any other agents. The next highest word count is for Anti-Social Behaviour, a category which covers the attempted ban by some publicans on Travellers using their premises. The shortest story in this category was 160 words and appears to reject the ban as 'appalling' whereas two other stories about the ban (*Tuam publicans hope blacklist will tackle troublemakers: Publicans in Tuam have been wrestling with how to bar suspected troublemakers including Travellers without breaking the law* and *Publican claims equality law used by some Travellers for extortion*) are significantly longer at 875 words and 525 words respectively. The former of these stories goes to some length, literally, in its headline to make it clear that the target group is "suspected troublemakers including Travellers" lest any reader pause to think that anti-Traveller bias might drive such a desire to avoid trouble. The shortest stories in this sample are those dealing with Travellers' rights, on average just 260 words.

**Table 12: Date, word count, headline and category for random sample of Irish Times stories using 'Traveller' in the headline**

Poverty and Exclusion in Ireland

Table 12, continued:

14/05/1998	327	Travellers give assurances at meeting with Greystones residents	Anti Social Behaviour
23/07/1999	1006	Legal challenge to Donegal Traveller record	Anti Social Behaviour
11/03/2002	525	Publican claims equality law used by some Travellers for extortion	Anti Social Behaviour
15/05/2002	330	Travellers' appeal against housing scheme rejected	Anti Social Behaviour
05/08/2002	160	Pub ban on Travellers 'appalling'	Anti Social Behaviour
14/08/2002	418	Publicans v Travellers	Anti Social Behaviour
27/08/2002	875	Tuam publicans hope blacklist will tackle troublemakers. Publicans in Tuam have been wrestling with how to bar suspected troublemakers including Travellers without breaking the law.	Anti Social Behaviour
09/01/1996	51	Man shot at travellers' site	Crime
27/01/1996	717	Garda accused of linking travellers to crime	Crime
04/10/1996	731	Traveller says he was ill on night of the alleged rape	Crime
12/09/2000	213	Traveller accused of threatening official	Crime
16/02/1998	308	Traveller education forum urged	Education
23/10/2001	1343	Turning point in the state of Traveller education?	Education
31/07/1996	535	Efforts to find new home for traveller family continuing	Housing
01/08/1996	443	High Court stops County Council from moving travellers to inadequately serviced halting sites	Housing
30/07/1997	317	Council census to establish travellers' rights to housing	Housing
13/09/1999	260	Housing for Travellers	Housing
13/02/2001	381	Judge warns UDC on sites for Travellers	Housing
06/11/2001	450	Travellers to oppose new laws on camps	Housing
29/03/2002	460	Law rekindles debate on 'urban nomadism' The trespass law is being welcomed by those opposed to 'urban nomadism' but others say it may actually help the Travellers' cause.	Housing
11/12/2002	61	Traveller site locations rejected	Housing
26/07/1996	458	Galway travellers pulls no punches in making his Olympic dream a reality	Identity
08/04/1998	386	Genetics and Travellers	Identity
17/09/1998	347	President's first official visit to London begins with travellers	Identity

25/11/1999	614	Tullamore Travellers prepare to put their lives down on film	Identity
04/08/2000	589	Travellers have to state ethnicity in next census	Identity
19/04/1999	382	Treatment Of Travellers	Policy
16/04/2001	562	Task Force On Travellers	Policy
06/12/2001	310	Traveller sues over cancelled reception	Rights
27/02/2002	209	Travellers win costs of court case over eviction	Rights

Turning to the newer issue in Ireland of refugees and asylum seekers, we apply the same criteria. In Table 13 we have drawn on the work of Pollak (1999) and our own earlier research to give an indication of the kind of headlines seen, often in the tabloid media but sometimes in the broadsheets as well. ( See Devereux and Breen, 2003) While these may seem quasi-comical (e.g., Refugee tried to bite me to death), the data we have indicated above on attitudes to refugees and immigrants is clear evidence of a significant level of discrimination made against such persons in the Irish context.

**Table 13: Sample Irish Newspaper Headlines about Refugees and Asylum Seekers**

<p>5000 Refugees <u>Flooding</u> into Ireland                  Floodgates open as a new army of poor <u>floods</u> the country                  Garda( Increasingly Worried About Refugees in <u>Street Crime and Prostitution</u>                  A New Determined Style                  of <u>Beggar</u> Demand for curb on tide of                  'refugees' Refugee Children in Care to Top                  1,500 Refugee children sold as <u>sex slaves</u>                  Mother's anguish as junkie daughter marries Nigerian refugee for £5,000 in <u>asylum</u>                  scam Blitz on refugees' <u>sham</u> marriages                  Refugee <u>rip-off</u> is revealed                  Government crackdown on <u>bogus</u> asylum-seeker advisers                  Refugees <u>Flooding</u> Maternity                  Hospitals <u>Refugee Rapist</u> on the Rampage                  Tax- Payers Face Bills of £20m Crackdown on 2000 <u>Sponger Refugees</u>                  Inmates lobby to stay in jail as refugees <u>fill up hotels</u>                  Refugee Flood to Spark Homes                  Crisis <u>Alert on Bogus Refugee Weddings</u></p>
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**Refugee Tried To Bite Me to Death**

<p>Refugees: the great debate: <u>we're being ripped off</u>; it's an outrage                  Irish mothers snubbed as refugees <u>get free baby aid</u>                  35,000 asylum-seekers <u>get VIP menu</u>                  Asylum <u>cheats</u> on us out of £115m a year; 80% on                  fiddle <u>Fingerprinting</u> asylum-seekers 'may halt fraud'</p>
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## Nordic Irish Studies

The *Irish Times* used the term 'asylum seeker' in the headlines of some 707 stories between January 1996 and March 2003, an average of almost 9 stories per month over that time, marginally more than those using 'Traveller' in the headline. One hundred and ninety six of these were Letters to the Editor, almost 2.5 times as many as on the topic of Travellers. Table 14 shows the twenty article headlines for those headlines that appeared on the front page of the *Irish Times*, less than 3% of the total number of articles headlined about refugees or asylum seekers.

**Table 14: Date, Headline and word count of *Irish Times* front page stories using 'Asylum Seeker' in the headline**

20/11/1999	O'Donoghue faces confidence vote on asylum-seekers crisis	412
19/11/1999	Callely calls for tough line on asylum-seekers	352
15/11/1999	Millionaire asylum-seekers found no room at the bank	332
28/7/1999	More than 2,000 asylum seekers eligible to work under new ruling	567
6/4/1999	Department moved to deprive asylum-seekers of education	491
9/1/1999	Cabinet backs proposals on work permits for asylum-seekers	529
30/11/1998	Study says majority of asylum-seekers have skilled background	349
21/11/1998	Asylum seekers face bar on holding driving licences	336
27/7/1998	Services 'stretched' by asylum-seekers	210
20/5/1998	Romanian asylum-seekers face an uncertain future	431
12/3/1998	Dramatic increase in number of asylum-seekers being deported	497

### Poverty and Exclusion in Ireland

seekers are a drain on our resources, connected with fraud, in need of a 'tough line' being taken, and generally pretending to be something they are not in order to gain benefit from the State.

Table 15 is a random sample of 30 stories drawn from the total set. The stories breakdown into 6 general categories as indicated. The highest average word count, 696 words, occurs under Negative Attitudes. The next highest average word count, 430 words, is for Policy/Rights. Fraud has an average word count of 380, Housing 360 words, and the asylum seeker 'Controversy', composed of Letters to the Editor, an average of 135 words per story. As with the 'Traveller' headlined stories, we see again the emergence of a situation wherein the various stories are cast in terms of the asylum-seekers rather than other agents. One example of this is the story where 'Gardai advise asylum-seekers in some parts of Dublin not to go out on their own at night'. The general cast of the headline is that this is a problem relating to asylum seekers without reference to those who make the streets unsafe for asylum seekers at night.

**Table 15: 30 individual stories**

17/12/2002	New clinic set up for pregnant asylum-seekers	508
30/1/2001	Judge blames Minister for delays in asylum-seekers' review cases	354
25/10/2000	Mosney to be used to house up to 500 asylum-seekers following deal	248
14/8/2000	Government officials visit British detention centre for asylum-seekers	414
4/8/2000	Ballsbridge centre for asylum-seekers is closed	392
3/8/2000	Asylum-seeker's return puts deportation process in doubt	592
29/4/2000	Asylum-seeker policy criticised by Muslim cleric	493
20/3/2000	O'Donoghue to 'tighten up' illegal access to the State. Vouchers for asylum-seekers soon instead of welfare cash	526
14/3/2000	Ahern's asylum-seeker remarks cause concern	426

If we were to substitute the word 'Jews' or 'Homosexuals', or 'Unmarried Mothers' for 'Asylum seekers' in the above headlines, we would very quickly have a deeply uncomfortable sense of what is actually being constructed for us. Essentially these headlines communicate that asylum

88

06/05/2000	187	Asylum-Seekers Controversy	Controversy
06/05/2000	162	Asylum-Seekers Controversy	Controversy
06/05/2000	66	Asylum-Seekers Controversy	Controversy
01/05/2000	124	Asylum-Seekers Controversy	Controversy
12/12/2000	301	Arrival Of Asylum Seekers	General
02/10/2000	214	Churches and asylum-seekers	General
03/01/2000	303	59 asylum-seekers arrive in Rosslare from Cherbourg	General
19/06/1999	737	Two radio services this week put asylum seekers and refugees from Kosovo and elsewhere behind the microphone.	General
22/02/1999	272	Algerian Asylum Seekers	General
29/08/2002	612	Three countries shun stranded asylum-seekers	Housing
08/12/2000	375	Mosney opens to asylum-seekers	Housing
27/04/2000	92	Dispersal of asylum-seekers	Housing
27/09/2001	545	Asylum seekers face 'disbelief'	Negative Attitudes
16/03/1999	1058	Patrick a target of racist taunts. Smiling Irish eyes may steal your heart away but it seems to be an experience few refugees and asylum-seekers in this State have had	Negative Attitudes
28/04/1998	485	Gardai advise asylum-seekers in some parts of Dublin not to go out on their own at night	Negative Attitudes

89



Table 15, continued:

Poverty and Exclusion in Ireland

system to ensure equality of Travellers amongst others in society are often presented as Travellers abusing the law to make money at the expense of 'legitimate' business.

We freely recognise the limitations of research based on headline analysis, and we plan to engage in a more complete textual analysis of the stories in our dataset, which will incorporate an examination of content, producers and consumers. Nonetheless, limited as our research may be in this chapter, we are cognisant that headlines serve as primers or frames for story context, and that readers are drawn to stories by the story headlines. For this reason, the headlines are themselves worthy of analysis.

Further research is clearly necessary to expand and elaborate the nature of coverage in the Irish media of those on the margins of society. The phenomenon of asylum seeking, refugees and migrant workers in the world today has complex roots. Government policy is often informed by both public opinion and media coverage. It is regrettable that such media coverage, which is often a primary source of public opinion, is not as complete or as analytical of the phenomenon as it might otherwise be. It is our hope that in the chapter we will add to the debate, and we appeal to media producers in particular to offer more detailed analysis and more balanced coverage of the context in which Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers find themselves in Ireland today.

Notes

1. This chapter was first presented as a paper entitled 'Blind, Deaf and Dumb: The Media, the Middle-Class and the Representation of Poverty', EFACIS Conference 'Ireland and Europe at Times of Reorientation and Re-imagining'. University of Aarhus, Denmark, December 2001.
2. Source: Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, Dublin.
3. These data were derived from a Nexis-Lexis headline search on the Irish Times library with all stories referring to the tourist kind of traveller excluded from the dataset.
4. The sample was generated using Microsoft Excel's Random Sampling function with duplicated stories replaced by the next story in the sequence.

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09/04/2002	831	What's to befall these Irish children? Analysis: Hundreds of failed asylum-seekers are facing deportation after a High Court decision to roll back the rights accorded to their Irish-born children.	Policy/Rights
08/12/2001	109	Talks sought on asylum seekers	Policy/Rights
19/01/2001	185	Call to end asylum-seeker limbo	Policy/Rights
18/09/2000	232	Policy On Asylum-Seekers	Policy/Rights
11/08/2000	615	Concern over asylum-seekers held in prisons	Policy/Rights
11/05/2000	529	Dealing with asylum-seekers	Policy/Rights
24/04/2000	723	Strong support in poll for easing of asylum curbs	Policy/Rights
03/04/2000	209	Policy On Asylum-Seekers	Policy/Rights
04/03/2000	298	Asylum-seekers plan rejected	Policy/Rights
18/01/2000	637	Refugee adjudicator resigns over a system he does not believe in 'Legal standards applied to asylum-seekers lower than for Irish'	Policy/Rights
21/12/2002	355	New Obstacles To Asylum-Seekers	Policy/Rights
10/09/2002	540	Deportations Of Asylum-Seekers	Preventing fraud
10/05/2000	403	New Garda unit will detain failed asylum-seekers	Preventing fraud
20/10/1999	171	Fingerprinting Asylum-Seekers	Preventing fraud
14/10/1999	411	Fingerprinting asylum-seekers 'may halt fraud'	Preventing fraud

Conclusions

The data presented above raise important questions for sociologists and for Irish society as a whole. The media representation of Travellers initially, and now refugees and asylum seekers, is such as to present persons in these categories as a source of problem in and of themselves rather than offering any analysis of the sociological realities that underpin the experiences of these groups. The media focus, in relation to refugees and asylum seekers, on such elements as fraud, crime and sex, allied with a specific emphasis on 'a tidal wave' or 'flood' of refugees is one that presents an inaccurate and prejudicial picture, likely to inflame public passion against refugees and asylum seekers, given the power of the press in setting the public agenda. This is reinforced by the length of stories wherein negative stories tend to be longer, and the placement of stories, where it appears that negative stories are more likely to be put on the front page rather than elsewhere. In the context of Travellers, it must be noted that efforts made within the legal

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