

Media bias in the portrayal of asylum seekers and refugees



Jon Beech

lassn.org.uk

 [lassnleeds](https://www.facebook.com/lassnleeds)

 [@lassnjon](https://twitter.com/lassnjon)

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network

Leeds Asylum Seekers Support Network

Each year, 300 volunteers help 600 refugees and asylum seekers to

- Learn English
- Find somewhere to live
- Make friends & find out about life in the UK

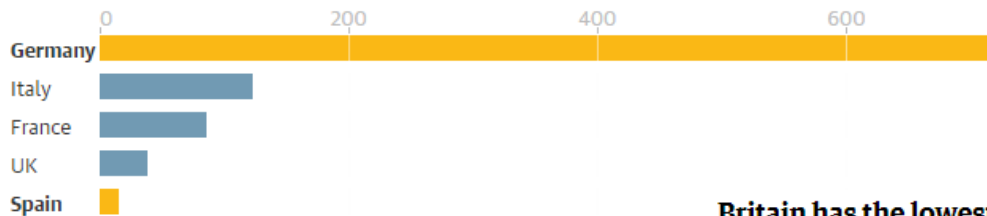


This presentation used to be different

I'd talk about numbers and facts

Of the big European powers, Spain has fewest asylum seekers, Germany the most

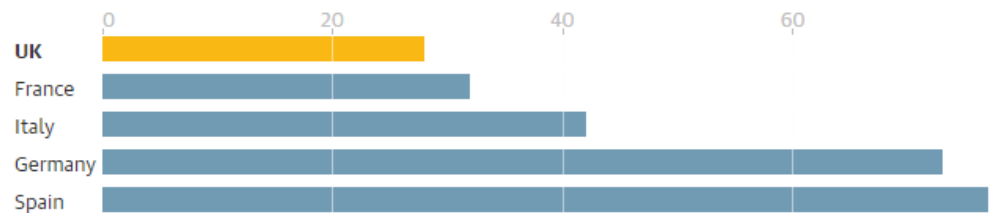
Number of new asylum claims, 2016, per head of population, thousands



Guardian graphic | Source: National statistics agencies, Guardian research

Britain has the lowest rate of asylum approvals among big European countries

Percentage of asylum claims approved, July-September 2016

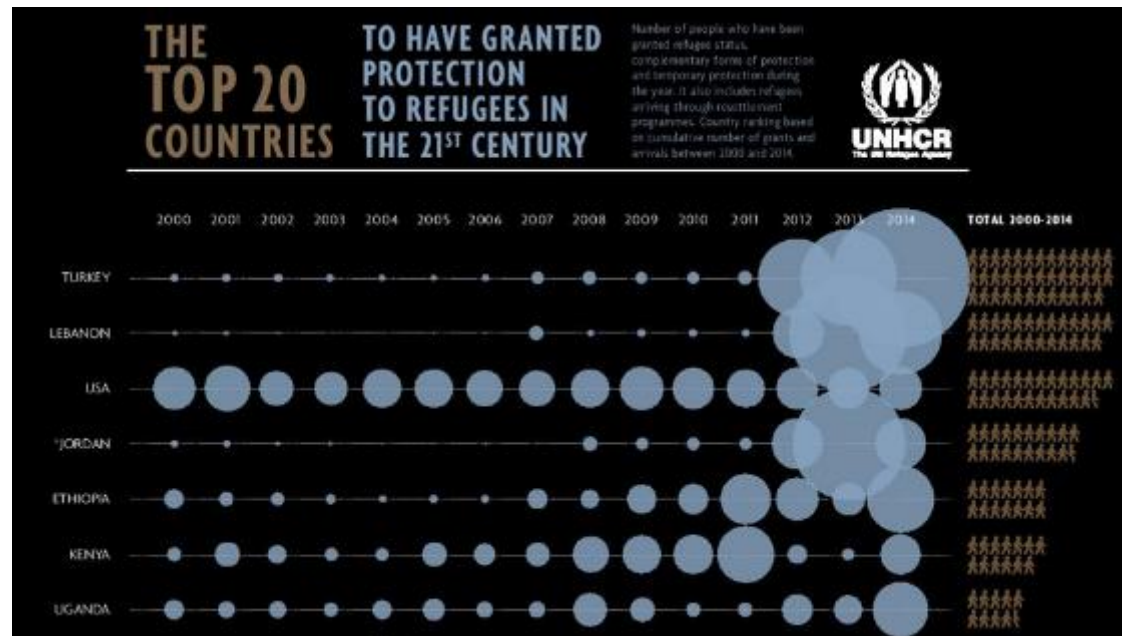


Guardian graphic | Source: Eurostat

Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network

This presentation used to be different

I'd talk about how most asylum seekers didn't even end up in Europe or the UK



This presentation used to be different

I used to assume that deep down, we all agreed facts were sacred, and lies and distortions were accidental.



This presentation used to be different

I told a story of long held prejudice by certain elements of the press



**New Flood of
Asians to Britain**



**QUEUE JUMPING
RUMPUS**

8th May 1976



**Another
20,000 Asians
are on the way**

The Daily Telegraph

**Mellish cries
'Enough' on
Asian influx**

18th May 1976

This presentation used to be different

A story
with a
long
history



There were Russian Jews,
Polish Jews, German
Jews, Peruvian Jews: all
kinds of Jews, all manner
of Jews. They fought and
jostled for the foremost
places

1900

The way stateless
Jews from Germany
are pouring in from
every port of this
country is
becoming an
outrage

1938



This presentation used to be different

Floods	Stream
Influx	Surge
Deluge	Awash
Swamped	Rivers
Tides	Torrents
Inundated	



Then the UN stepped in

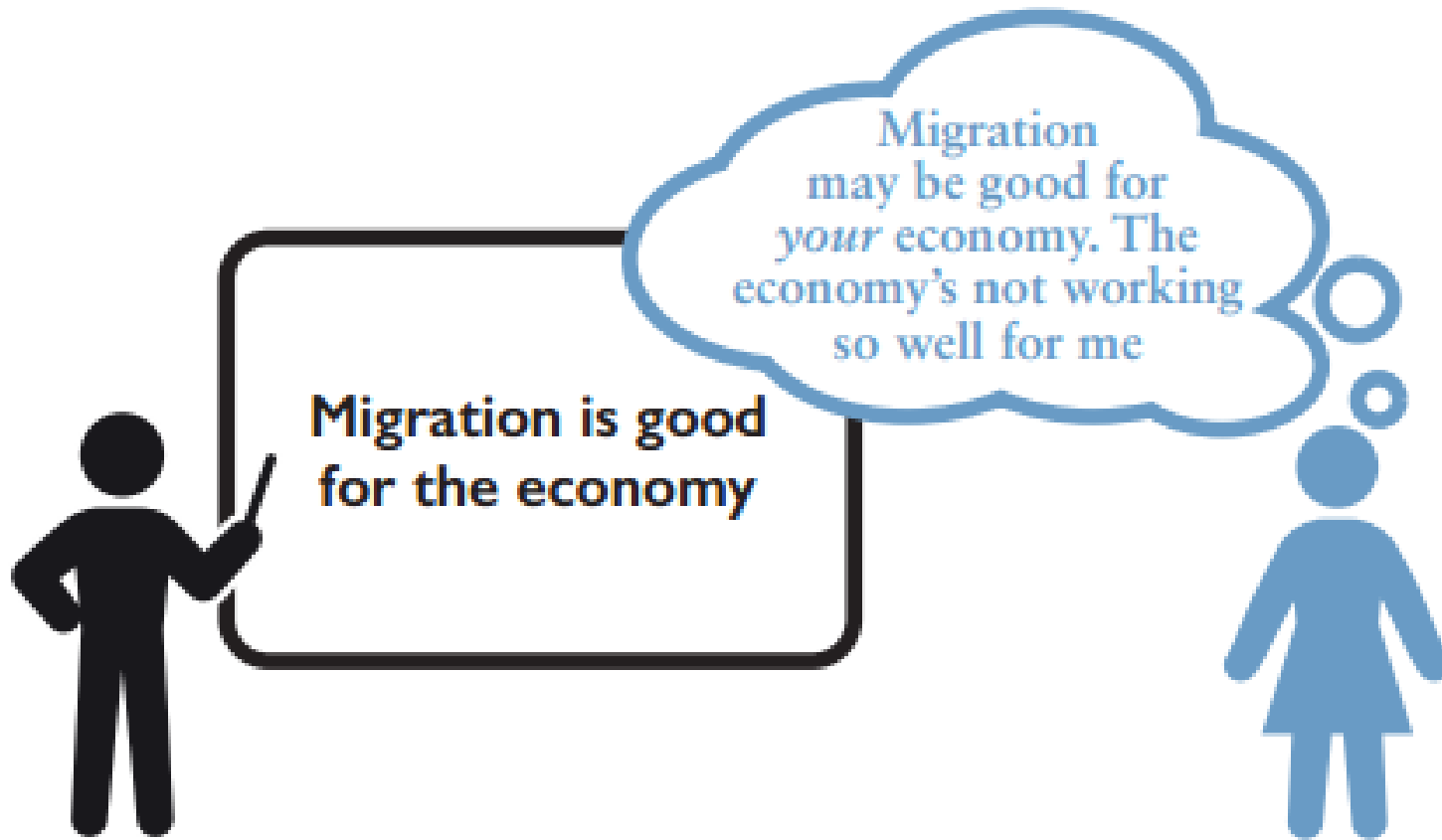


Speaking of decades of “sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse,” in the UK press, the UN Commissioner went on **“Many of these stories have been grossly distorted and some have been outright fabrications.** Elsewhere in Europe, as well as in other countries, there has been a similar process of demonization taking place, but usually led by extremist political parties or demagogues rather than extremist media”

It's clear that something isn't working



The myth of myth-busting



British Futures, 2015

The myth of myth-busting

Many people are
misinformed and don't
know what the
facts show



This person thinks
that I'm stupid.
I understand what he's
saying – I just don't
agree with it

British Futures, 2015

The myth of mythbusting



British Futures, 2015

The myth of mythbusting



British Futures, 2015

What is the role of journalism in a “post-fact” world?

“The difference between fiction and reality? Fiction has to make sense.”

Tom Clancy/Mark Twain



Why go after news, when you can have a story?

cITIZENS UK



HM Government

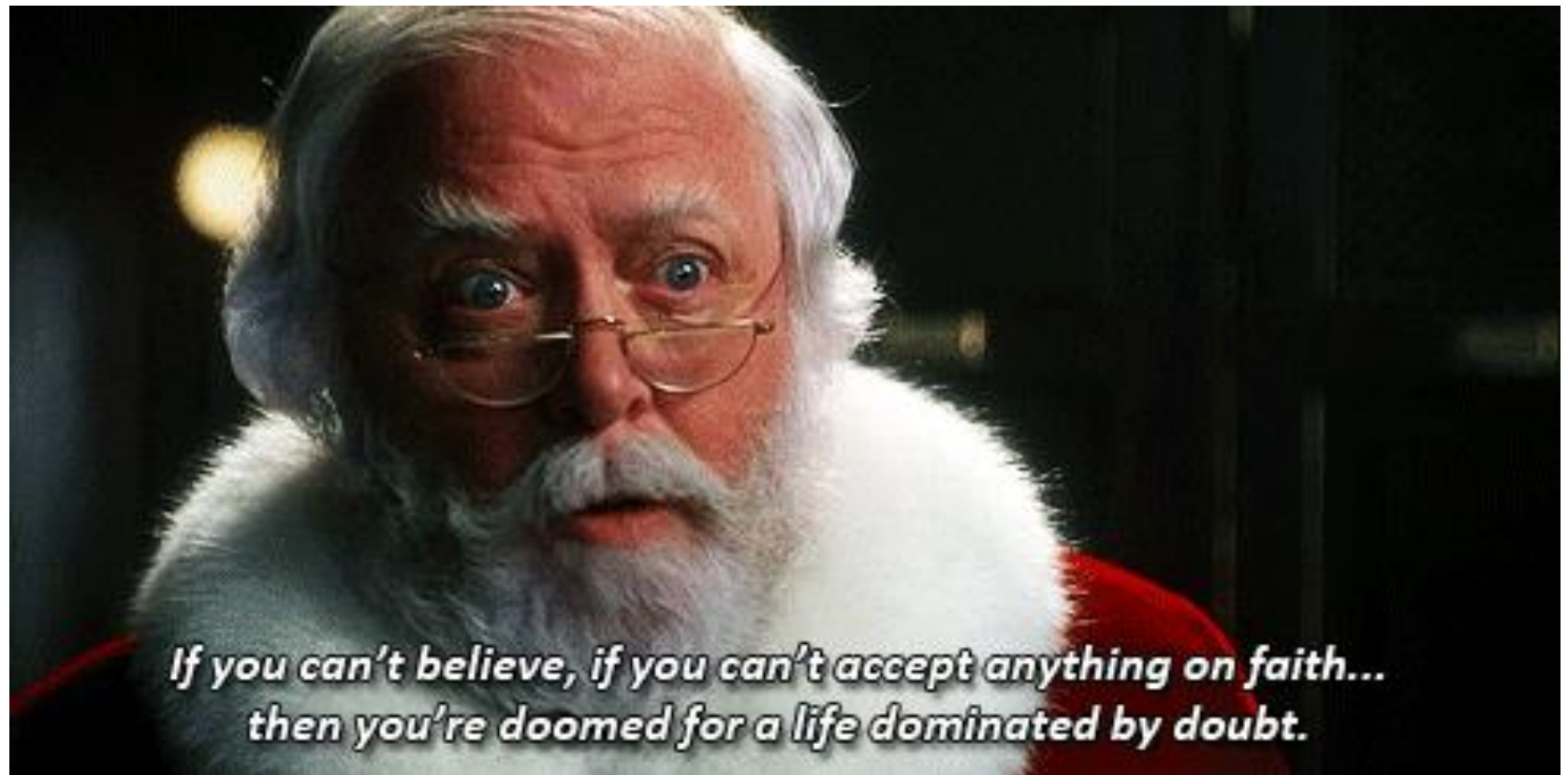


Real life is complicated



Leeds Asylum Seekers' Support Network

We create fictions then get angry when they're not real



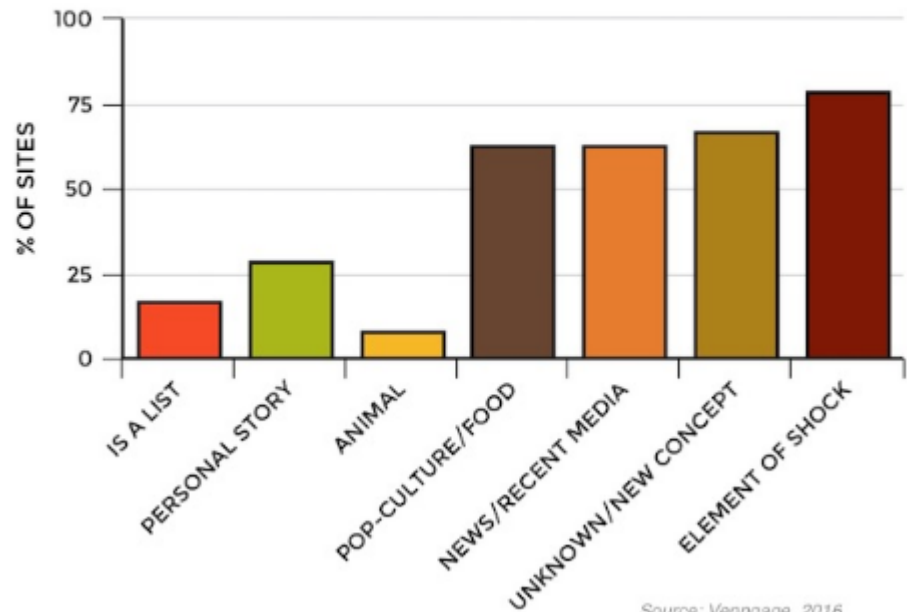
Our fictions often don't even include their subjects



What is the purpose of journalism?

To produce content or to produce news?

COMMON FACTORS OF A CLICKBAIT TITLE

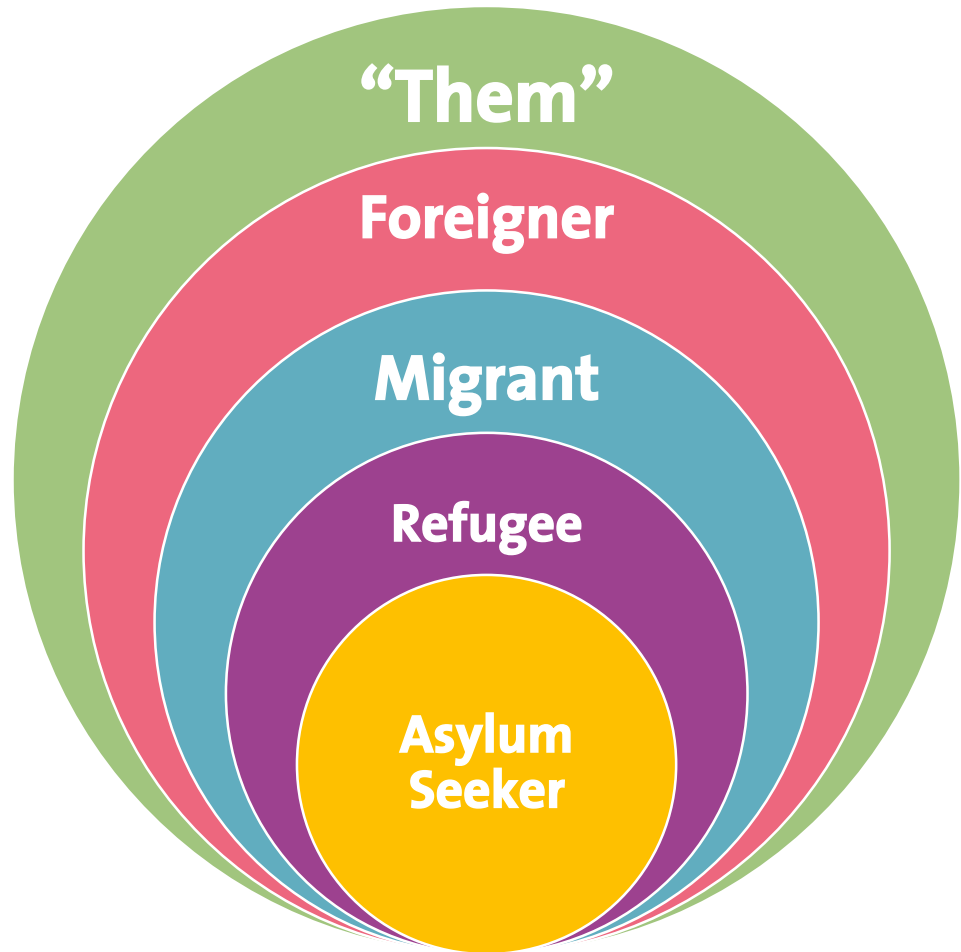


What is the outcome of the story?

What happens next?
Understanding, feelings, or clicks?



Neutrality or lazy thinking?



What does this mean for you?

Why are you covering the story – what do you want people to do as a result?

Have you already decided on your story, before you go looking for people to illustrate your point?

Who benefits from what you just wrote/filmed?

What does “post-fact” reporting mean?

- **Engaging with people’s day-to-day concerns and feelings: Housing, jobs, education, health, public services**
- **Small facts, and real life - not grand narratives and cartoon characters**
- **Asking asylum seekers & refugees what the story is not assuming you know**