



**MUCH DEBATED:** Debates on immigration and integration are often about Islam and Muslims. After *Dagbladet* published Muhammad caricatures in February 2010, Oslo Høyre (Conservative Party) city council representative, Amir Sheikh (in the middle) initiated a dialogue meeting between *Dagbladet*'s acting chief editor Lars Helle (on the left) and Imam Mehbob ur-Rehman (on the right). Photo: Scanpix

# Immigrants in the Norwegian media

Text: IMDi

Immigration and integration are issues high up on the political agenda, and receive widespread media attention. The Norwegian people are also concerned with these issues. A search in the newspaper Aftenposten's debate pages shows that immigration and integration are the topics in 324,319 contributions. By comparison, there were 19,049 contributions about schools and education and 62,209 on the environment.<sup>1</sup>

The topic of IMDi's annual report is how immigrants are portrayed in the Norwegian media. We have invited leading researchers, key media people and other players in the field to shed light on this topic from different angles.

One in ten Norwegian citizens is an immigrant or has parents who have immigrated to Norway. In Oslo, as many as one in four inhabitants is from an immigrant background. Is the diversity of the Norwegian population and among immigrants reflected on television, radio and in the newspapers? Are immigrants portrayed as a problem or a resource in newspapers? Are certain groups subject to criticism? Is this the case for Muslims more than for others? How do the Norwegian media portray integration in Norway? What definitions of 'Norwegian' are used?

Half the population thinks that integration in Norway is a failure.<sup>2</sup> The Norwegian media is criticised for portraying immigrants, and especially Muslims, in a generalising and stereotypical manner.<sup>3</sup> Immigrants, and Muslims in particular, experience discrimination in several arenas in Norwegian society.<sup>4</sup> In this article, IMDi puts the different contributions in context, highlights the main points and discusses the relationship between the portrayal of immigrants in the media, attitudes in the population at large and immigrants' experience of life in Norway.

## Islam dominates the media picture

Immigration and integration receive a great deal of attention in the media. But not all stories about immigration and integration receive equal attention. In 2009, there were almost twice as many hits for Islam/Muslims as for the word immigration. With 77,000 hits in 2009, there were almost as many hits for the topic of Islam/Muslims as for Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg, and more coverage than for the swine flu.

This emerged from an analysis carried out by Retriever on assignment for IMDi concerning the media's coverage of issues relating to immigration and integration in 2009. Retriever has searched hundreds of Norwegian media – print newspapers, online newspapers and TV and radio stations. In addition, they have carried out a content analysis of ten editions of eight Norwegian print newspapers.<sup>5</sup>

## WHAT IS INTEGRATION?

Having good Norwegian language skills is the factor most frequently mentioned by the Norwegian population (82 per cent) as an important aspect of being well integrated, followed by being able to support oneself and one's family through employment (69 per cent).<sup>6</sup> The opinions of the population at large concerning what characterises good integration are reflected in the authorities' integration policy. Most of the Government's integration measures are aimed at immigrants learning the Norwegian language and becoming financially independent.<sup>7</sup>

While there were 77,000 hits for Islam/Muslims in 2009, there were 2,225 hits concerning tuition in the Norwegian language for immigrants. This means that Norwegian newspaper readers, radio listeners and TV viewers were presented with 35 times as many stories about Islam as about Norwegian tuition for immigrants.

In other words, the integration topics that receive most attention in the media do not reflect the popu-

lation at large and the authorities' definition of what is important to good integration.

### HOW WELL IS INTEGRATION WORKING? IT DEPENDS ON YOUR PERSPECTIVE

In the Norwegian Broadcasting Company's (NRK) debate on immigration and integration during the election campaign in autumn 2009, the presenter began by saying: 'We will attempt to find out why integration is not succeeding in Norway.' This statement was not followed by an explanation of what is meant by integration, or what 'not succeeding' implies.

IMDi's annual report for 2008, 'How well is integration working?' presented the status of work on integration in Norway on the basis of the Government's objectives. The report highlighted challenges in several areas: young people with immigrant background are over-represented among those who fail to complete upper secondary school. There are big differences between different groups of immigrants with respect to participation in society and living conditions. Despite having lived in Norway for a long time, some groups have low participation in the labour market. However, over time the differences between immi-

grants and the rest of the population are evened out for most groups the longer they live in the country.

Immigrants in Norway have a relatively high rate of participation in the labour market compared to other European countries; this applies to women in particular. Norwegian-born children of immigrants have a high participation rate as regards both higher education and the labour market; here too, Norway scores well compared with other European countries.<sup>8</sup> In 2007, the proportion of people participating in higher education was 35 per cent for Norwegian-born persons with immigrant parents in the 19 to 24 age group, compared with 30 per cent for all young people.<sup>9</sup>

The annual report for 2008 shows good results in important fields relating to integration, and concludes that immigrants are becoming increasingly better integrated, but that it is a time-consuming process.

In other words, the premise of the election debate mentioned above, namely that we are not succeeding with integration in Norway, does not accord with the status of what the authorities have defined as important indicators for integration, which are the same indicators that the population at large consider most important.

The population and the authorities agree on *what* is important in relation to good integration, but not on *how it is progressing*. About half the population thinks that integration is progressing quite or very badly. Only one person out of a hundred thinks integration is working very well, while 20 per cent believe it is working quite well.<sup>10</sup> Is there a connection between what the population thinks about integration and how it is portrayed in the media?

### THE PORTRAYAL OF IMMIGRANTS IN THE MEDIA Problem and sensation-oriented

The problem-oriented focus of NRK's election debate reflects the slant taken in most media stories concerning immigrants and integration.

Articles about immigration and integration focus much more on problems than on resources. This is one of the findings of Retriever's content analysis of eight of Norway's print newspapers. Of all the stories that had immigration or integration as their main topic, 71 per cent are considered to be problem-oriented and 18 per cent to be resource-oriented, while only 11 per cent of the stories are considered to be neutral. Crime was



**INTEGRATION MEASURE:** Having good Norwegian language skills is the factor most frequently mentioned by Norwegians as an important aspect of being well integrated. This is shown in IMDi's Integration Barometer.

**“Somali immigrants get three times as much coverage as Polish immigrants, even though there are almost twice as many people with Polish background living in Norway than people with Somali background.”**



**IN EMPLOYMENT:** Immigrants in Norway have a relatively high rate of participation in the labour market compared with other European countries; this applies to women particular.

4

the topic most covered in all the newspaper articles about immigrants and refugees from 1976 to 2002.<sup>11</sup>

The media is – and should be – concerned with problems. As for other players in the integration field, such as researchers and the authorities, it is journalists' job to shed light on the challenges facing integration, and to generate debate about important social issues. There may be relevant journalistic arguments for why individual cases are reported from a particular angle, but what will the consequences be if the cumulative effect of all the stories about immigrants and integration is to paint a picture of immigrants as a problem and integration as unsuccessful?

#### **Particular focus on certain nationalities**

Some immigrant groups get more media attention than others. There is no connection between the scope of coverage and the group's size. Somali immigrants, for example, get three times as much coverage as Polish immigrants, even though there are almost twice as many people with Polish background living in Norway than people with Somali background.<sup>12</sup> Somalis are one of the most discussed groups, and they are also one of the groups that receive most negative attention.

Immigrants from Somalia are used to illustrate how integration is failing, also in articles that discuss other completely different groups. This is highlighted in several of the articles in this report. A systematic review of media coverage of Somalis from 1999 to 2008 shows that there are three issues especially associated with stories about Somalis: crime, cultural practices and 'lack of integration'. These issues 'function as explanations for each other, yet the relationship between these factors has never been systematically investigated or precisely defined'.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Polarised portrayals: Khat-chewers or polar explorers**

The portrayal of Somalis is polarised. The focus is usually negative; the exceptions mainly consist of a few success stories about particularly well-integrated Somalis who go walking in the woods or ski to the North Pole. These polarised stories put normal, everyday life in the shade, and this in turn results in a lack of nuance in the stories about Somalis in the media. This is highlighted by Elisabeth Eide and Anne Hege Simonsen in their contribution to the annual report.

**Retriever's content analysis shows that a third of all the articles about immigration and integration are about religion, and primarily about Islam.**



**RELIGIOUS FOCUS:** Previously, immigrants were usually discussed in terms denoting nationality ('Pakistani'). Now, religious terms such as 'Muslim', are more commonly used. Photo: Scanpix

#### **Which group will take over?**

That one minority is portrayed in a particularly negative light in the media is nothing new. Previously, other groups, such as Sami people and Jews, have been in the media's spotlight.<sup>14</sup> Danish researchers believe Somalis have 'taken over' from Bosnians as the most visible group in the Danish media.<sup>15</sup> In the past year, there has been a lot of media coverage about 'criminal Eastern Europeans', particularly people from Romania. Perhaps Romanians are 'taking over' the Somalis' role in the Norwegian media?

#### **FROM 'IMMIGRANT' TO 'MUSLIM'**

Debates about immigration and integration are often about Islam and Muslims. Retriever's content analysis shows that a third of all the articles on immigration and integration are about religion, and primarily about Islam.

Debates about 'sneak-Islamisation', 'extreme Islamism' and use of the hijab in the police force were all big issues in the 2009 media year. Islam has also been the topic of widespread debate in the media in other countries: a ban on wearing burkas has been debated in both Denmark and France. At the end of the year, the referendum in Switzerland on banning the building of minarets received a great deal of attention. The prevailing tendency since 11 September 2001 is for Islam to play a central role in media stories about immigrants and integration. Previously, immigrants were usually discussed in terms denoting nationality ('Pakistani'). Now, religious terms ('Muslim') are more common – especially when it comes to people with backgrounds from countries in which Islam is the dominant religion (cf. Eide and Simonsen's article).

## WHO IS NORWEGIAN AND WHO IS AN IMMIGRANT?

### The new, Norwegian 'we'

In 2006, the Norwegian Language Council stated that 'calling people from other countries "Norwegians" is incorrect', and that 'Norwegian' was synonymous with 'a person of ethnic Norwegian origin'.<sup>16</sup> The statement gave rise to protests and a great deal of debate, which resulted in the Language Council apologising and changing its view. In its reply to the Equality and Anti-discrimination ombudsman, it wrote: 'It is not necessary to be "an ethnic Norwegian" in order to call yourself a Norwegian or to be called a Norwegian.'

Reality shapes language. It is natural that a word like 'Norwegian' changes its meaning as the composition of the population in Norway changes. But language also shapes reality. Our understanding of who is 'Norwegian' and who is an immigrant and in what connections this applies is affected by how these terms are used.

In 2007, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Støre presented the concept of 'the new Norwegian we' in a feature article in *Aftenposten*.<sup>17</sup> Here, he argued that a narrow understanding of 'we' weakens the meaning of what it means to be Norwegian. 'We' cannot just mean those of us who look like Norwegians did 50 years ago.

To be Norwegian today does not mean that you cannot have immigrant parents or that you cannot have immigrated to Norway yourself. What Norwegian 'we' is the media creating and portraying?

### Typically Norwegian to be good

There are clear unwritten rules for how the press includes and excludes people from immigrant backgrounds from the Norwegian community.

'The main rule appears to be simple: when journalists discuss people linked to crimes or other negative circumstances, they turn to terms that indicate that the people in question do not belong to the Norwegian community. But when immigrants are successful, they do not have to have stayed in the country for long before they are promoted to Norwegians (cf. the article by Lindstad and Fjeldstad). Successful immigrants, especially in the sporting and cultural context, are usually described as Norwegian. Criminals are usually described as non-Norwegians ('of foreign origin', 'Somali background').

Retriever's analysis also shows that characteristics such as country of origin or immigrant status are cited more often when persons from immigrant backgrounds have the role of victims or are involved in criminal activity.

What it means to be Norwegian is also delimited through the use of the terms 'immigrant' and 'Norwegian' as opposites. 'Immigrants claim less disability benefits than Norwegians' (*Dagbladet* online, 18 May 2009). 'Parents with immigrant background set greater requirements for their children than Norwegian parents' (NRK morning news, 6 January 2010). These headlines do not allow individuals to be both immigrants and Norwegians at the same time. They refer to a narrow definition of the Norwegian 'we' that does not include people who have immigrated to Norway.

### Who is referred to as an immigrant?

The typical 'immigrant' in the media has an African, Eastern European or Asian background. People who have immigrated to Norway from Western Europe or



**MEDIA HABITS:** TV and the internet are the most frequently used media in the Norwegian population, also among immigrants.

**If the newspapers are to survive in the future, they have to accept that Norway is a multiethnic society and cater to a multiethnic audience.**

from the USA are far more rarely referred to as immigrants. In other words, whether you are portrayed as an immigrant is based on where you come from. This is shown by Merete Lindstad and Øivind Fjeldstad in their article.

In media stories, it is not always clear whether the person referred to as an 'immigrant' actually is an immigrant. The term refers just as often to Norwegian-born children who have immigrant parents. 'Immigrant pupils', 'immigrant boys' or 'immigrant youth' are terms commonly used both in the media and in research to denote people who have, in fact, not immigrated themselves, but who were born and raised in Norway.

In 2008, Statistics Norway (SSB) changed the terms used to refer to immigrants and the children of immigrants in their publications. Among other things, they have stopped using 'the immigrant population' as a generic term. The reason for this is that the differences between immigrants and Norwegian-born children of immigrants are so great, for instance when it comes to living conditions, that it is rarely expedient to report statistics for these two groups combined. Another reason for this decision is that people who are born and raised in Norway may feel excluded when they are 'locked' in the immigrant category.



**NEW TARGET GROUP:** 'You cannot just write for Ola if you want Ali as a reader,' write Lindstad and Fjeldstad in their book *Av utenlandsk opprinnelse*.

### IMMIGRANTS AS MEDIA CONSUMERS

TV and the internet are the most frequently used media by the Norwegian population, also among immigrants. However, the percentage that reads print newspapers and listens to the radio is considerably lower among immigrants from Asia, Africa, Latin America and non EU/EEA European countries than among the population at large and among immigrants from the EU/EEA area, the USA, Canada and Australia. Most immigrants find it easy to understand the news in newspapers, on the radio and on TV, however. These findings are from an SSB survey about media habits.<sup>18</sup>

On the one hand, the survey highlights the fact that immigrants make up a large percentage of media consumers in Norway. On the other hand, it shows that some types of media have challenges they need to overcome with respect to reaching more immigrant groups, and that these challenges are probably not due to language problems.

Multicultural Norway is here to stay. To adapt news dissemination to a multicultural population is about reaching the media consumers of today and tomorrow. For private players, this adaptation can be crucial if they are to survive in a market characterised by fierce competition. 'You cannot just write for Ola if you want Ali as a reader,' write Lindstad and Fjeldstad in their book *Av utenlandsk opprinnelse* [Of foreign origin]. 'People from immigrant backgrounds read newspapers as well. If the newspapers are to survive in the future, they have to accept that Norway is a multiethnic society and cater to a multiethnic audience. It is not enough to write for the well-established, white middle class to which most journalists themselves belong.'<sup>19</sup> This point is also emphasised in the article by Majoran Vivekananthan, the editor of *Utrop*. Adapting news broadcasting to a multicultural audience is about investing in the media market of the future.

### UNDER AND OVER-REPRESENTED

People from immigrant backgrounds are under-represented in Norwegian media as news reporters, sources and interviewees. They are highly visible, however, in stories about immigrants in particular.

### Sources and interviewees

Three of four journalists share the general view that people from immigrant backgrounds rarely participate as protagonists or sources in stories that are not specifically related to immigrant issues. Seven



**COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE:** Media that can adapt their news reporting to a multicultural audience will have a competitive advantage, according to editor Majoran Vivekananthan (second from the left) of the Norwegian, multicultural newspaper *Utrop*.

out of ten agree that immigrant sources are rarely used in stories where their immigrant status is completely irrelevant.<sup>20</sup>

Retriever's analysis confirms the impression of Norwegian journalists: only two per cent of the sources and interviewees in the country's biggest print newspapers have immigrant background.

In other words, people from immigrant backgrounds are far less visible in the media than their proportion of the population would indicate.

#### Who reports the news?

The question of representation in the media is also about who reports the news. The fact that there are few visible minorities among journalists is the basis for projects carried out by both NRK and the Faculty of Journalism, Library and Information Science at Oslo University College aimed at recruiting more journalists with a multicultural background. In their article, Anne Fogt and Nazneen Khan-Østrem highlight several challenges connected with introducing a quota scheme for students from minority backgrounds, for instance the danger of stigmatisation.

Even though an immigrant background can be an advantage when reporting issues relating to immigration and integration, it is neither a precondition nor a guarantee. Insightful, fact-based and balanced reporting about immigrants and integration requires journalists to have qualifications and expertise about Norway as a multicultural country. Such expertise is about understanding culture and language and about having networks in different communities. As Fogt and Khan-Østrem write: 'Educating journalists who can cover all aspects of society regardless of ethnic background is as much about students from ethnic Norwegian background being willing to seek out other communities than they usually do.'

#### Positive development: greater visibility

In recent decades, we have seen increasing diversity in the portrayal of immigrants in the media. While a great deal of space is devoted to stories about crime and immigrants living on the margins of Norwegian society, there has also been a clear increase in stories about people from immigrant backgrounds presented in a positive light. This applies in particular to stories about sports and culture, but immigrants also appear more in general news stories and reports. This is emphasised by Lindstad and Fjeldstad in their article.





**BETTER REPRESENTATION:** Since 2000, it has become more common for the media to employ journalists from immigrant backgrounds.

According to Fogt and Khan-Østrem, there is also a positive trend in relation to recruiting students to journalism studies. While it has long been the case that, as a profession, journalism has not had high status in immigrant communities, the authors of the article point out that more and more applicants from such backgrounds are now being accepted through ordinary admission procedures. This means that they are choosing journalism studies even though they have enough credits to be accepted for other studies that require a higher number of credits. They believe that having 'untraditional' journalists as good role models is the factor that has the most positive impact on recruitment.

The perhaps most noticeable change in the last few years is that more and more people with immigrant background are active and visible participants in public debate.

#### Debate about the debate

We are now also witnessing a debate about the debate, in which several important issues have been raised. Among other things, there have been calls for more active participants from minority backgrounds in public debates. In that connection, Usman Rana, a medical student and active debater, has questioned whether participating in public debates does Muslims more harm than good. 'Norwegian Muslims have had a high media profile. We have been active, and new voices are being heard. I think this has backfired on us. I fear that there is a strong anti-Muslim sentiment among the Norwegian people, a sentiment that is partly anti-Muslim and that is becoming more widespread, and whose conse-

quence is that the more exposure Muslims receive in democratic channels in Norwegian society, the more the hatred towards Muslims will grow,' said Rana to the newspaper *Klassekampen* on 2 December 2009.

Rana's statement reinforces the critique in this report about the negative media focus of stories about immigrants, and emphasises the fact that Islam and Muslims are particularly vulnerable in that context.

#### Immigrants talk about immigrants

Immigrants are more visible in the Norwegian media than before, but when immigrants are interviewed, it is usually about immigration and integration. Immigrants are used as sources in as many as 62 per cent of the stories about immigration or integration.<sup>21</sup>

Is the explanation for this that immigrants usually choose to talk about immigration and integration, or is it a fact that it is difficult for immigrants who want to discuss other issues to make themselves heard in the media?

Khalid Salimi, who has contributed with the article 'De tause i tale' [Getting the silent to speak] to this report, discusses what is expected of immigrants who participate in the media – by the media and by themselves. 'Immigrants are also good at exercising self-censorship. This has to do with adapting to specific perceptions about us,' writes Salimi, who also refers to how, in his experience, journalists look for a particular type of participant in debates. 'Journalists will often drop you because you do not have strong or controversial opinions. If you are too nuanced, you are not interesting.'

Journalists with multicultural background do not want to be 'immigrant journalists'. Many believe that they have experience and multicultural know-how that can be useful, but no one wants to only report from minority communities, only write about minority issues or only use sources with multicultural backgrounds. This emerges in Marianne Mikkelsen's Master's thesis *Verdsatt og feilvurdert* [Valued and misjudged], which is based on qualitative interviews with 15 multicultural journalists.<sup>22</sup> According to Fogt and Khan-Østrem, one of the main challenges for the Norwegian media and journalism training is to stop thinking that journalists with minority background should primarily cover issues relating to minorities.

**CONSEQUENCES OF BLANKET COVERAGE AND THE FOCUS ON PROBLEMS**

**Attitudes in the population**

About half the population thinks that integration is progressing quite or very badly. The population is more sceptical towards Muslims than towards people with other religious beliefs.<sup>23</sup>

IMDi conducts an annual questionnaire survey of the population on attitudes towards immigrants and integration, the Integration Barometer. For most of the questions in the survey small changes have been registered from the first time it was conducted in 2005 to 2009. The findings are not unequivocal:

in some areas, the population shows tolerance and positive attitudes towards immigrants, while in other areas, they are very sceptical. More than half the population agrees that we 'should not let any more immigrants into Norway'. The answers here have been stable since 2005, with a shift towards increasing scepticism. The population is divided on the issue of whether 'values in Islam are compatible with fundamental values in Norwegian society'. The percentage who agrees completely or in part increased from 39 to 48 per cent from 2005 to 2009.

**Increasing tolerance towards immigrants**

SSB's attitudes survey<sup>24</sup> shows that, since 2002, the population has shown a steady trend for increased tolerance towards immigrants. The percentage of people who believe that immigrants enrich Norway's cultural life has increased from 63 per cent in 2002 to 70 per cent in 2009. The percentage who would feel uncomfortable if their own son or daughter married an immigrant has declined from 40 to 25 per cent in the same period. However, IMDi's Integration Barometer shows that tolerance of a hypothetical son or daughter-in-law varies according to his/her religious faith. Fifty-three per cent would be negative if their child married a Muslim, while five per cent would be negative towards a Christian, and 26 per cent would be negative if the potential daughter or son-in-law was Jewish.



**MEDICAL STUDENT, MUSLIM AND ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN PUBLIC DEBATE:** Usman Rana (on the right) fears that maintaining a high media profile will backfire on Muslims. He became known when he won *Aftenposten's* feature article competition in 2008. Facsimile from *Aftenposten*, 25 February 2008.

## **People who have contact with immigrants believe to a greater extent than others that integration in Norway is successful.**

The vast majority of those participating in SSB's survey, seven out of ten, agree that 'most immigrants make a useful contribution to the Norwegian labour market', but here the result is down four percentage points from the year before. Half the population thinks that it should be more difficult for immigrants and asylum seekers to be granted a residence permit in Norway. Here, the proportion has increased by 11 percentage points in one year.

### **Contact with immigrants results in more positive attitudes**

The Integration Barometer shows that the percentage of the population that has contact with immigrants increased significantly from 2005 to 2009. Few people have no contact with immigrants, but on the other hand, few have a lot of contact with immigrants. This development is confirmed by SSB's attitudes survey, where the percentage that states they have no contact with immigrants declined from 36 per cent in 2003 to 25 per cent in 2009. The percentage that has daily or weekly contact with immigrants increased from 52 to 61 per cent in the same period.<sup>25</sup> However, far fewer people have close relations with immigrants. Forty per cent of the population have no immigrants among their acquaintances.<sup>26</sup>

Interaction with immigrants results in more positive attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. This is clearly shown in both the Integration Barometer and in SSB's surveys. The Integration Barometer also shows that, to a greater extent than others, people who have contact with immigrants believe that integration is working well in Norway.

### **The media's portrayal affects attitudes**

To what extent are attitudes towards immigrants affected by the media's portrayal?

Limited personal experience probably increases the media's influence, as does the number of media stories about a topic. This is highlighted by media researchers Lindstad and Fjeldstad in their contribution to this annual report. They ask whether there could be a connection between increased media coverage in 2009 of the increase in the number of asylum seekers and problems relating to asylum seekers and refugees, and increased support for a restrictive asylum policy in the population at large.

The media can also influence people's perceptions of how many immigrants there actually are in Norway. A survey presented in *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift* in late 2009 showed that many Norwegians believe that the number of non-Western immigrants in Norway is greater than it actually is. Moreover, the fewer non-Western immigrants living in your municipality, the more non-Western immigrants you believe there are in Norway. People who live in Oslo, where the number of non-Western immigrants is highest by far, have the most realistic idea of the number of non-Western immigrants in Norway. According to researchers Tor Bjørklund and Johannes Bergh, one possible explanation for this is that the media's portrayal of areas in Oslo with many immigrants gives an unbalanced picture of Oslo's population. People who live outside Oslo believe the picture of the city presented by the media more than people who live in Oslo themselves. This underlines the point that limited personal experience strengthens the media's influence in immigration and integration issues.

As we have seen, people who interact with immigrants have the most positive attitudes towards immigrants and integration. The fact that a greater percentage of the population socialises with and knows immigrants personally may be one of the reasons why the population shows increasing tolerance towards immigrants in many areas.

The media often focuses on problems when portraying immigrants, but, naturally, the media also reports experiences and stories with a different focus. Massive media coverage of one group is often followed by a debate that can balance such presentations. The numerous debates about Islam in 2009 gave Muslims massive media attention, but they also resulted in Muslims becoming more visible in public debate. The increased participation of people with immigrant background in public debate and focus on different perspectives can help to nuance the problem-oriented portrayal of immigrants in the media.

### **Consequences for those portrayed**

How does the media's presentation of immigrants affect those who are portrayed – immigrants in Norway?

*'Who am I really? When I run the 800-metre race for the national youth team, I am Norwegian. But when the media run stories about Somalis, people come up to me and ask whether I am a drug dealer and a*

*child mugger. Then, all of a sudden, I am Somali,*’ said Mohamed Abdi, who was then on the Olympic national youth team in athletics, in an interview with *Aftenposten* (see Lindstad and Fjeldstad’s article). The quote tells us something about how the press defines the boundaries of the Norwegian community, but it is also an example of the consequences that massive negative press coverage of one group can have for an individual.

A recently published doctoral dissertation shows that the media’s largely negative coverage of Iran, Iranians and immigrants in general contributes to making Norwegian-Iranians feel excluded from Norwegian society. ‘By reproducing stereotypes about “the others”, the media hampers their sense of belonging in Norway,’ said Sharam Alghasi in an interview about the dissertation.<sup>28</sup> There is reason to assume that the connection between negative portrayal and the feeling of being excluded also applies to other groups of immigrants in Norway.

**Muslims are subject to discrimination**

During the past year, Norwegian Muslims have expressed the belief that public opinion in Norway is becoming increasingly hostile towards Muslims and that there is a negative focus on Islam. Associating Muslims with terrorism and violence is highlighted as an increasing tendency in public debate in Norway in a report from the Council of Europe’s commission against racism and intolerance (ECRI).<sup>29</sup> The report also points out that immigrants are often portrayed in the media in ways that do not contribute to challenging stereotypes and generalisations about Muslims.

Muslims in Norway experience more discrimination than others. This is shown in an IMDi survey from 2008 among immigrants in Norway from Africa, Eastern-Europe and Southern and Central America.<sup>30</sup> The participants in the survey are ‘better integrated’ than the average for immigrants in Norway: almost one third of the sample have lived in Norway for more than 20 years, more than 80 per cent are in employment and 86 per cent have an education corresponding to or higher than upper secondary school. Seventy-six per cent of those who took part in the survey see themselves as well integrated into Norwegian society. Half state that they have experienced discrimination once or several times during the last year. People from Africa and/or from countries where Islam is the biggest religion experience more discrimination than others. The percentage that has experienced discrimination in the housing market, for instance, is more than twice as large among participants from Muslim countries as it is among other participants. Eight out of ten agree or partially agree that Muslims are particularly subject to ethnic discrimination.

Muslims also experience more discrimination than others in other European countries. An EU survey from 2009 shows that one in three Muslims has experienced discrimination during the last year.<sup>31</sup>

One of three Somalis in Norway has experienced discrimination in connection with employment in the last five years. Immigrants from Somalia experience discrimination in the employment and housing market to a greater extent than immigrants from other countries. Twenty per cent of young people with Somali background feel quite often or often that they are not accepted by ethnic Norwegian youth. The corresponding percentage of youth with immigrant background from other countries is 13.5 per cent.<sup>32</sup>

Several surveys thus show that Muslims and people with background from Africa experience more discrimination than others. As we have seen, these groups receive most negative attention in the media, and are the groups that the population at large is most sceptical towards.



**FEW STORIES FROM EVERYDAY LIFE:** The amount of problem and sensation-focused stories in the media is at the expense of stories about everyday life and ordinary events.

**“Cases about immigrants and integration get a lot of coverage in the media, but the coverage is unevenly distributed. While some groups are too visible, others are invisible.”**



**VULNERABLE GROUP:** Twenty per cent of young people from Somali background feel quite often or often that they are not accepted by ethnic Norwegian youth.

### CONCLUSION

In 2009, the Norwegian media devoted a lot of space to stories about immigration and integration. The amount of media coverage is not synonymous with broad coverage, however. Some groups are overexposed, while others are underexposed. Some issues receive too much coverage, others not enough.

### The invisible challenges

As implementer of the government's integration policy, it is IMDi's experience that the day-to-day integration work that goes on in all municipalities throughout the year rarely gets media coverage.

The Government has defined goals for its integration policy and concrete measures and indicators to measure the policy's success. In media debates on integration, policy and measures are often criticised at a general level: 'The integration policy does not work', 'we have to start setting requirements'; but the discussion is rarely based on actual measures and schemes – such as the introduction programme for newly arrived refugees, the right and obligation to complete Norwegian language training, and settlement in the municipalities. These are important and challenging responsibilities that deserve public attention and debate.

### Balanced news reporting – a joint responsibility

Contributing to more knowledge-based news reporting and debate on integration is the responsibility of the individual journalist, those responsible for educating journalists and the media companies. But it is also the integration authorities' responsibility. IMDi is responsible for contributing information that can inform the public debate. The fact that integration is usually debated without reference to the authorities' integration policy gives reason to ask critical questions not only of the media, but of ourselves. Do we do a good enough job of providing information about integration in Norway, about the measures that we are responsible for and about what works well and where the challenges lie?

However, the extent to which the messages we send reach their target also depends on the media being willing to use and spread this information.

Participation in the labour market and mastery of the Norwegian language are important indicators of integration, but integration is also about a sense of belonging. Using an inclusive language that does not limit 'the Norwegian we', is a challenge for everyone who provides information about integration and immigrants: the media, researchers and the integration authorities. Being conscious of the language and the terms we use is also about being precise in order to get our message across. To refer to Norwegian-born children as 'immigrants' in a news story or in a report can make the reader uncertain about whom the story or report actually refers to.

### What is diversity?

Immigrants get a lot of coverage in the media, but they are mostly spoken about. People with immigrant background are more visible in the media today than they were just a few years ago, both as journalists, participants in debates and interviewees. But the Norwegian media still have a long way to go in relation to reflecting the diversity of Norway's population. And what does diversity really mean? Do we have diversity if most of the visible minorities in the media are medical students in their twenties with parents from Pakistan?<sup>33</sup> This question was asked in a commentary in *Aftenposten* by debate editor Knut Olav Åmås.

Diversity in the media is not only about having more visible minorities on our TV screens. It is also about immigrants and the children of immigrants having the same opportunity as others to make their mark on the media's daily coverage of real life. Good representation of people with immigrant background in the media – as sources, interviewees and journalists – is also important in relation to communicating experiences about immigrating to and living in Norway as a visible minority.

People with immigrant background in Norway are a complex group in terms of age, gender, country of origin, level of education and reason for immigration, and they have different backgrounds and experiences. Goals for diversity in the media should aim to reflect this diversity.

### The media's influence

The review of press coverage shows that the media's focus on conflict, drama and sensation applies here as in other areas of society: most news stories focus on problems. Some groups, such as Somalis and

Muslims, get more attention – and negative focus – than others. Stories about Islam/Muslims dominate the media.

Focusing on problems is positive and can contribute to progress being made in areas where the integration of immigrants is particularly challenging. The media play an important role here. It becomes a challenge, however, if the sum of the media coverage creates a picture of immigrants that primarily focuses on problems.

Limited personal experience and the scope of media coverage of a topic probably strengthen the media's influence. Relatively few people in Norway have no contact with immigrants. Most, however, still have little contact and very few have close relations with immigrants. Many people's experience of immigrants is primarily through the media.

The polarised presentation of immigrants is at the expense of stories about everyday life and ordinary events. This can make it difficult for newspaper readers and the TV viewers to identify with the people portrayed.

The groups that receive most negative media attention are the same groups that say they are subject to discrimination in Norway. There is reason to examine the relationship between attitudes in the population at large, immigrants' experiences of discrimination and the amount of problem-focused stories in the media relating to certain immigrant groups. Journalism's fascination with conflict, sensation and drama can result in many stories that, together, create an image of some groups that is a problem for those concerned, and that can be negative for the integration of immigrants in Norway.

## Notes

- 1 Debattsentralen, *Aftenposten* 6 February 2010: <http://debatt.aftenposten.no/group.old.php>: <http://debatt.aftenposten.no/group.old.php>
- 2 According to IMDi's annual attitudes survey, the *Integration Barometer*, of in a representative sample of the population. The *Integration Barometer 2009* is pending publication.
- 3 Report from the Council of Europe's commission against racism and intolerance (ECRI): <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Norway/NOR-CbC-IV-2009-004-NOR.pdf>
- 4 Cf. *Integrert, men diskriminert*. IMDi-report 9-2008.
- 5 VG, *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, *Bergens Tidende*, *Stavanger Aftenblad*, *Nordlys*, *Dagens Næringsliv* and *Klassekampen*.
- 6 Cf. *The Integration Barometer 2009* [IMDi report, pending publication]
- 7 See *Proposition no 1 to the Storting (2009–2010)*, the Ministry of Labour. *Handlingsplan for integrering og inkludering av innvandrerbefolkningen and Mål for inkludering*.
- 8 OECD (2008): 'Jobs for Immigrants: Labour market integration in Norway'. URL: <http://www.imdi.no/no/Nyheter/2009/Yrkesaktive-innvandrere/>
- 9 Source: Statistics Norway. Quoted in *iFACTS 2009*.
- 10 Cf. *The Integration Barometer 2009* (pending publication). Forty-seven per cent of the participants answered that they think immigration is working quite or very badly.
- 11 Eide, Elisabeth and Anne Hege Simonsen (2007): *Mistenkelige utlendinger. Minoriteter i norsk presse gjennom hundre år*. Høyskoleforlaget.
- 12 Source: Statistics Norway, in *iFACTS 2009*. Immigrants and Norwegian-born people with immigrant parents, as of 1 January 2009. Poland: 44,482 persons, Somalia 23,633 persons.
- 13 Fuglerud, Øyvind and Ada Engebriksen (2009): *Kultur og generasjon. Tilpasningsprosesser blant somaliere og tamiler i Norge*. Universitetsforlaget.
- 14 Eide, Elisabeth and Anne Hege Simonsen (2007): *Mistenkelige utlendinger. Minoriteter i norsk presse gjennom hundre år*. Høyskoleforlaget.
- 15 Fadel, Hervik and Vestergaard (1999): 'De 'besværlige' somaliere' in: Hervik, P. (ed.): *Den generende forskjellighet. Danske svar på den stigende multikulturalisme*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels Forlag.
- 16 Read the letter from the Norwegian Language Council at: <http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/kultur/1.1296059>,
- 17 <http://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kronikker/article1761653.ece>
- 18 Vaage, Odd Frank (2009): *Kultur- og mediebruk blant personer med innvandrerbakgrunn*. *Rapporter 2009/29*, Statistics Norway
- 19 Lindstad, Merete and Øyvind Fjeldstad (2005): *Av utenlandsk opprinnelse*. Quote: page 131
- 20 See the survey from SKUP: [http://www.kim.no/upload/rapporter/0805%20SKUP\\_Holdningsundersøkelse\\_Nehru%20Sand.pdf](http://www.kim.no/upload/rapporter/0805%20SKUP_Holdningsundersøkelse_Nehru%20Sand.pdf)
- 21 From Retriever's media analysis
- 22 Marianne Mikkelsen (2009): *Verdsatt og feilvurdert. Flerkulturelle journalister i norske redaksjoner*. Master's thesis, University of Oslo
- 23 Cf. *The Integration Barometer 2009* [IMDi report, pending publication]. Forty-seven per cent of the participants answered that they think immigration is working quite or very badly.
- 24 Blom, Svein (2009): *Holdninger til innvandrere og innvandring 2009*. *Rapporter 2009/44*. Statistics Norway.
- 25 Blom, Svein (2009): *Holdninger til innvandrere og innvandring 2009*. *Rapporter 2009/44*. SSB.
- 26 Cf. *The Integration Barometer 2009* [IMDi report, pending publication]
- 27 Cf. survey by Tor Bjørklund and Johannes Bergh, referred to in the article by Lindstad and Fjeldstad.
- 28 Doctoral dissertation by Sharam Alghasi, from the research programme Cultural complexity in the new Norway, University of Oslo. See interview: <http://www.culcom.uio.no/nyheter/2009/alghasi.html>
- 29 Cf. report from ECRI.
- 30 *Integrert, men diskriminert*. IMDi-report 9-2008.
- 31 EU-MIDIS: European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey. See the report: [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/eu-midis/index\\_en.htm](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/eu-midis/index_en.htm)
- 32 Data from the survey *Ung i Norge 2006*, quoted in Fangen, Katrine (2008): *Identitet og praksis. Etnisitet, klasse og kjønn blant somaliere i Norge*. Gyldendal Akademisk.
- 33 Cf. feature article in *Aftenposten* 31 December 2009 by Knut Olav Åmås, debate editor: <http://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kommentatorer/aamaas/article3444150.ece>