

How to deal with the topic of refugees?

INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S TV EXECUTIVES SHARE THEIR APPROACHES

Children's TV experts from different countries in the world were asked if and how they tackle the topic of refugees and integration in their TV programmes or other media. Experts from Norway, Afghanistan, Argentina, Turkey, the Netherlands, Canada, and Slovenia depicted their approach towards the issue.

Hildri Gulliksen, Head of NRK Super, Norway



In Norway 150,000 of the 5.2 million inhabitants are refugees. 700,000 are immigrants (SSB, 2016).¹ In 2015 many refugees found their way to the Norwegian borders; 31,145 people sought asylum. In 2016 only 3,460 people sought asylum. NRK Super's vision is "The strongest community for all children in Norway". In NRK Super we believe that we can play an important role in welcoming the refugees and helping Norwegian children to understand and relate to the refugees' hopes and challenges. We do that in a series of different ways. This January we launched our documentary project *Modig (Brave)* where we got to know a series of different chil-

dren who have immigrated to Norway. Some of them have lived in Norway for a while and speak Norwegian fluently, others we meet in Istanbul and fly with them to the country up north for the first time. The strongest story is probably the one about 2 sisters

who survived their travel over the Mediterranean, and now challenge themselves to enter the pool to learn how to swim (Ill. 1-3).

Our daily news program *Supernytt* has aired numerous stories about the situation in Syria and about refugees around the world. They have made documentaries about children living in asylum reception centers, and they are working on a "Welcome to Norway" package to help the children to understand and adjust to their new society.

Nisar Ahmad Khyber, Chief Executive Officer, Aria TV Kabul, Afghanistan



More than half of unaccompanied child asylum-seekers who left Afghanistan for Europe, Iran, and Pakistan are deported back to Afghanistan. As my recent conversation with War Child UK reinforced, approximately 4,800 unaccompanied minor and separated children (UAMSC) have been deported through Islam Qala border at Herat province of Afghanistan by the Iranian government. The children and adolescents had entered Iran illegally by paying smugglers and human traffickers. We believe that

addressing this problem is the most important way to enable the government of Afghanistan and the international society to take the matter seriously. We also believe that it is supposedly their job and that lobbying meetings on how they can further their work on the issue of UAMSC and a robust awareness raising campaign through tri-media (print, radio, and TV) should be conducted.

Aria as an exclusive TV channel for kids and teens is looking for a funding opportunity to produce documentaries on the UAMSC and interview as many of these children as possible to understand what they have gone through, to spread awareness of the ups and downs they have faced on their way to their desired destination for seeking asylum, to discuss illegal immigration and risks ...

Along with UAMSC, there has been a large number of other Afghan kids who have been forced to return home from European countries, Iran, and Pakistan since 2015. Some of these kids used to study in schools from where they have been forced to leave without being able to take transfers to schools in Afghanistan; most of them have no access to education, health facilities, and pure water.

We will reach out to refugee kids to do the following:

- Analyze their primary needs by interviewing them face-to-face in order to influence others,
- arrange the greatest educational and entertainment programs by kids for kids to
- make their voice stronger to make them aware of their social life and so on.

Karina Wroblewski, Head of Pakapaka, Argentina

“Something familiar, resplendence in those faces. Perhaps it is the memory of our own history as refugees, or a certain human vulnerability that is more than familiar for us.”

David Grossman, Israeli writer



Argentina is a real crucible of races, a territory that before the arrival of the Spaniards was inhabited by native people and then received the successive immigration waves: European, Asian, and American. Over time, this mobility has made Argentina a multiethnic and multicultural country. Besides immigration, the country has received refugees. According to ACNUR² – which defines “refugee” as a person who escapes from armed conflicts or persecution and whose situation of danger and vulnerability forces them to cross borders seeking safety – about 5,000 refugees live in Argentina. And in this year, the first – and few – Syrian families came among the thousands of asylum-seekers who attempted to escape the war.

Such a country composition makes us deal with cultural diversity and pluralism with responsibility and critical thought. It is essential to transmit the ideas of respect to the others and not just the idea of tolerance. This is because tolerance implies an asymmetrical relationship between the one who tolerates and the one who must be tolerated. Respect is the ability to put ourselves in the place of the other and to have the humility that allows us to learn and enrich ourselves in this new bond.

With these ideas as our main axes, in Pakapaka we accept the challenge of generating contents that promote reflection on the idea of the other, respect and solidarity, and the construction of solid values that will allow us to build a more friendly society. These values are included in each of Pakapaka’s series and programs.

In the specific case of the refugee issue, we bring the subject to the screen through *Alta Noticia*, the first Argentinian news TV program for kids that without parody and with high professionalism provides tools so that boys

and girls can learn to handle the great amount of information that rains down on them. We produce reports that help understand the complex world we are living in, always in the illusion that we can make a better one, a fairer world, a world of integration, where the idea of that land of hope which those children dream of when leaving their countries is possible. A land of hope for everyone.

Ismihan Yilmaz, Deputy Head of TRT Çocuk, Turkey



TRT Çocuk is a public broadcaster that was founded in 2008. Since then, it has played a crucial role to help develop the animation industry in Turkey.

TRT Çocuk pays close attention to fulfil its social responsibilities and puts a lot of effort into all areas related to children.

In Turkey, many diverse cultures live together in harmony with different languages, religions, ethnic origins, and cultural riches. This experience forces TRT Çocuk to be active in the international arena. For example, the annual 23 April National Sovereignty and Kids Festival which is the only international

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kids festival in the world. This festival hosts 1,000 children from more than 40 countries.

Currently, Turkey hosts 1.2 million refugee children from Syria, given the fact that Turkey shares 911 kilometres of border with Syria. There has been a dire need to provide proper educational content for the kids living in the refugee camps. For this purpose, TRT Çocuk has published a children's magazine named *TRT Çocuk on Camp* in Arabic since 2015 (Ill. 4). This publication has created considerable awareness in the national media and led to an initiative to build playgrounds for children in the refugee camps which are set up by the state.

TRT Çocuk's efforts for the refugee kids has drawn attention to the necessity of preparing educational materials for those who are taken away from school by war. TRT Çocuk has been working on an online project (including educational videos, games, and other interactive materials in their own language) to support the efforts of the school system which was established by the state at the camps.

TRT Çocuk is dedicated to establishing a strong ground on which all kids from around the world can exercise their natural rights.

Jan-Willem Bult, Chief Editor WADADA News for Kids and Head of Children, Youth & Media at Free Press Unlimited, the Netherlands



In 2013, my last year as Creative Head of KRO Youth, I committed myself to the production of a youth documentary and a short film on refugee children.

I wanted their stories to be seen and heard. At that time already, being in touch with kids everyday taught us that there are real obstacles for those kids to be fully accepted and integrated.

Integration to me is not about refugees and migrants adapting to a country's

culture, but starts with a country accepting these refugees. Especially refugee children need to be embraced. They are in their most vulnerable and insecure stage of life. The local peers that they meet can have a positive impact on the refugee child and therefore it is crucial that the peers are well informed.

With the youth documentary *A home for Lydia* (Ill. 5) and the short film *Salam*, produced in 2012 to 2013 for Dutch public television, we provided children with 2 stories from the inside world of refugee children. The films contributed to a better understanding by showing the harsh reality of the life of refugee children in the Netherlands. Now as Head of Children, Youth & Media of Free Press Unlimited I work in over 25 countries. Many of them are young democracies and transition countries with all their complexities and conflicts. In eastern Ukraine, for instance, 1.7 million people had to leave their homes due to the conflict at the Russian border area and are trying to build a new life elsewhere in Ukraine. News about that region and the opinions and stories of the children over

there need to be seen and heard but the mainstream media doesn't provide them. Therefore we have developed a network of currently 20 countries that produce and exchange local *WADADA News for Kids* crossmedia programs. By listening to the stories of children like Lydia, and finding out that she is fed up with moving because she had already lived in 9 different homes, children and adults learn about the perspectives of a generation whose experiences will last a lifetime.

Marney Malabar, Director, Kids TV, TVO, Canada



By the end of 2016, approximately 25,000 Syrian refugees arrived in Canada with the majority settling in Ontario. TVOKids wanted to ensure our

young audience saw those refugees in a positive light so our in-house production team produced short vignettes profiling different children. In a special program called *Language Ambassadors* we met Ahmed and Lamees (ages 10 and 7) who helped their principal and teachers by acting as translators for Syrian kids and their families.

TVOKids also hosted a "Welcome to Canada Day", where we featured Marcel, a Syrian refugee, who taught himself to play piano using a toy instrument while living in a refugee camp. Today, Marcel is a budding classical pianist. In our *Super Citizens Awards* series, we met Lucas who mounted a "Mitten Tree" at his school and invited students to decorate the tree with mittens, hats, scarves, and other clothing donations to help refugee families adapt to our cold Canadian winters.

Sharing these children's stories helps our audience see the similarities with their own selves and break down barriers of differences. Canada has always been a home to refugees from around the world, including diversity in our programming is nothing new for TVOKids. We continue to work with

our production partners to ensure the faces featured on the screens – live action and animation – reflect the diverse faces of Ontario and Canada. TVO believes that allowing kids to see themselves on television and other media platforms in positive roles inspires change and develops an understanding of our differences.

Martina Pestaj, Head of Children's and Youth Programme, RTV SLO, Slovenia



Slovenia is a small country with a population of no more than 2 million people, and not a desired destination for refugees.

However, it lies on the so-called Balkan route, and within the last year and a half it has seen more than 400,000 migrants crossing its borders on their way to Austria and

Germany. This was the point when the people of Slovenia first met with the migrants, and their responses varied a lot. Many hotspots and migrants' accommodation centres were established, many people helped while on the other hand there were also many who did not approve of such activities and protested against the location of migrant centres or opposed the integration of migrants within society. This is the reason why we at the Children's and Youth Programme of TV Slovenia believe that it is of great importance to discuss this issue with children frequently and in an open way. We reported about the migrants on a regular basis in the weekly children's news programme *Infodrom*: we explained the background of the refugee crisis, accompanied migrants on their journey, visited young migrants in the asylum centres (Ill. 6 and 7). This year, however, we went one step further. The

Studio Kriškraš programme, aimed for the youngest viewers and presenting short portraits of children, displayed some portraits of certain refugee children. This was not an easy thing to do since the authorities protect them and try not to expose them in any public fashion. However, we do believe that their voices must be heard in order to help raise awareness, openness, and acceptance. This is one of the main reasons we are attempting to find our own methods to find them, give them a voice, and uncover their real faces. They voice their opinion and are grateful for the opportunity to do so. ■

NOTES

¹ SSB is the national statistical institute of Norway and the main producer of official statistics. (www.ssb.no/en) [23.02.2017]

² ACNUR (La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados) corresponds to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR).

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