



ITALY

The Pressure has Eased, but Media Coverage still Fails to Tell the full Migration Story

» Anna Masera

The infinite emergency of international migration continues. Read through the eyes of Italian media, the year 2016 confirmed the centrality of the migration phenomenon, but the tone of the information flow of all major media outlets (press, television news and social media) was often more useful to the political debate than to supporting understanding of what is really happening: often the ideological point of view leaves out, or even contradicts, the clarity of the numbers.

How does the media on both sides of the Mediterranean report on Migration?

A study by journalists, for journalists and policymakers

Migration media coverage in 17 countries from 2015 to 2016

Funded by the European Union



Implemented by



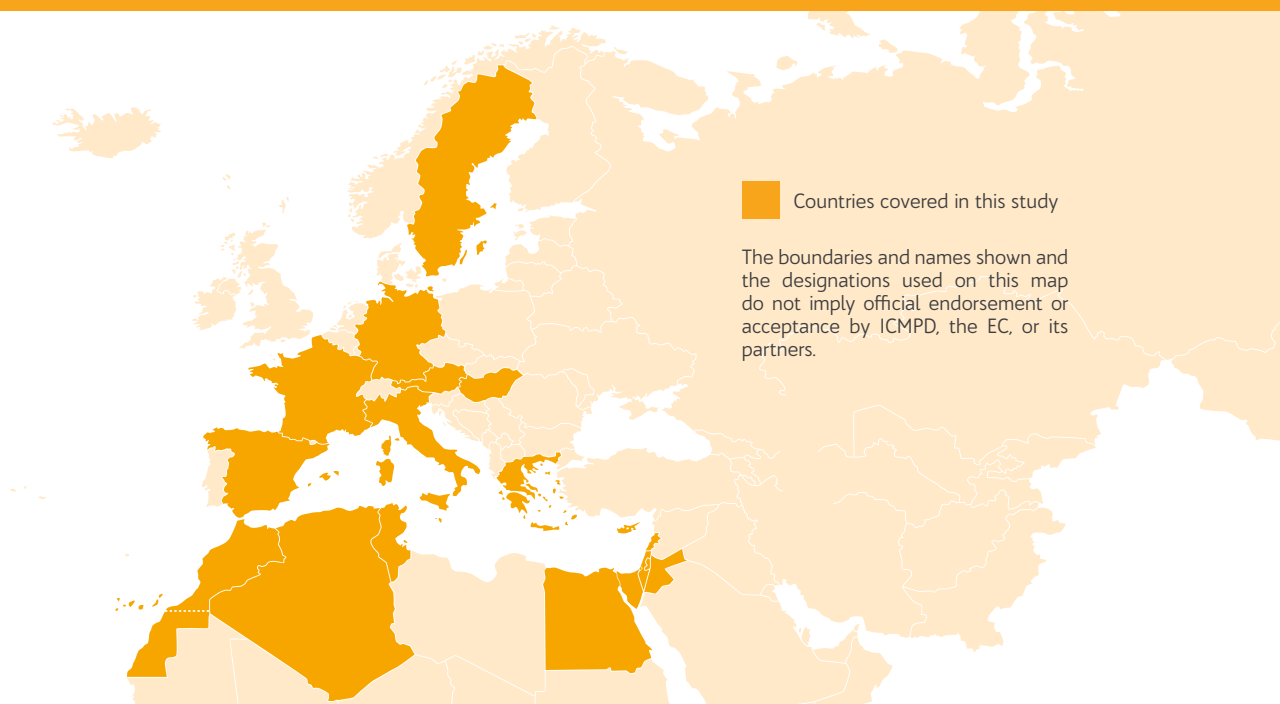
ABOUT EUROMED MIGRATION IV AND THE STUDY

“How does the media on both sides of the Mediterranean report on Migration?”

This is a Chapter of the Study “How does the media on both sides of the Mediterranean report on migration?” carried out and prepared by the Ethical Journalism Network and commissioned in the framework of EUROMED Migration IV (EMM4, 2016-2019). The objective of this project, financed by the European Union and implemented by ICMPD, is to support EU Member States and ENI Southern Partner Countries in establishing a comprehensive, constructive and operational dialogue and co-operation framework, with a particular focus on reinforcing instruments and capacities to develop and implement evidence-based and coherent migration and international protection policies. In order to achieve this objective, EMM 4 builds upon the results of the first three phases of the project (2004-2015) and

tailors its activities around two pillars: the first pillar facilitates effective North-South and South-South regional dialogues and co-operation in the four main fields of migration and international protection-related matters (legal migration; irregular migration; migration and development; international protection and asylum). The second pillar focuses on capacity-building by applying a new outcome-oriented approach that includes sub-regional activities, tailor-made national training programmes and targeted technical assistance packages for committed partners. Both pillars are supported by a horizontal and cross-cutting thread aimed at accumulating evidence-based knowledge and establishing effective communication in order to contribute to a more balanced narrative on migration.

Find the entire study at www.icmpd.org/EMM4migration_narrative



© European Union, 2017

The information and views set out in this study are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.



The Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) was commissioned to conduct this study.

This tendency continues and confirms the one already detected in 2015 (<http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/resources/publications/moving-stories/italy>), when international migration became central for Italian media after the tragedies that occurred in the Mediterranean Sea.

The pressure of migration in Europe hasn't been uniform over time and this has determined different responses in terms of public opinion.

By the time that the crisis had eased it was clear that the public had grown tired of the media coverage during 2015 and 2016.

As public editor at *La Stampa* this past year the message I got from readers on the migrants drama was that they couldn't stand being bombarded by tragic stories any longer.

"After all those stories about failed landings with sunken ships and drowned babies, I don't want to hear it anymore, the pain is unbearable, but what worries me even more is seeing the effect on my kids: they are becoming jaded because they feel sickened by emotional reporting that doesn't explain what is happening and just wants to impress and shock," wrote one reader last summer. "Please tell us stories also about those migrants who make it".

Italy has always been a frontline state dealing with migration from the southern Mediterranean and although the perception is that the sea favours an unchecked migration process is widespread, according to data the routes by land and by sea find a balance according to the border policies applied by the different states.

According to Frontex, the number of migrants that reached Italy by sea routes from January to November 2016 stood at 173,055 compared to the 122,557 who entered Europe by land in the same period of time. Only a year earlier there were 764,000 illegal crossings on the Balkans route (by land) compared to 153,946 by sea.

Even if Italy, after Spain and the United Kingdom, is the OECD country with the highest increase in international migrants – six percentage points between 2000 and 2010 (3.7% – 9.7%) – in 2015 Germany alone

received 175,000 asylum requests, compared to the 83,540 received in Italy.

Although the data represents an altogether fairly balanced, but nonetheless serious situation across Europe, much of the storytelling by newspapers was set more with the aim to satisfy the emotional mood of the readers than to give an objective account of why, how and how much the landings are changing and having an impact on the demographic composition of the country.

Analysis of how media cover the migration story is highly reliable in Italy because it is home to Carta di Roma (Charter of Rome) one of Europe's leading specialist media monitoring groups which is focused on the migration story and which came into being after a scandal over media discrimination.

The demonising of a Tunisian linked to a gruesome murder case led journalists' leaders in Italy – The National Council of the Journalists' Association (Consiglio Nazionale dell'Ordine dei Giornalisti, CNOG) and the Italian National Press Federation (Federazione Nazionale della Stampa Italiana, FNSI) to unite with press owners, academics and policy experts to prepare an industry code to combat poor reporting of refugee and immigration issues.

They acted after the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) criticised sensationalist media coverage of a multiple murder in Northern Lombardy in 2006. Raffaella Castagna, her two-year-old son, her mother and a friend were found dead from stab wounds.

Some sections of the Italian press rushed to judgement and swiftly blamed Castagna's Tunisian husband, who had served prison time on drug charges. In fact he was in Tunisia at the time of the murders. In January, police arrested Castagna's two middle-aged neighbours on charges of murdering her and the three others, apparently due to a feud over noise.

Many journalists were shocked that once the truth emerged none of the major media outlets apologised for their intemperate coverage. There was no display of conscience or responsibility, at best only a regretful shrug.

NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

La Repubblica

What stands out in *Repubblica* is an increase in attention for the subjects of immigration and hospitality. The peak was reached first in February 2016, regarding the political stance of the European Union, and then again between May and June 2016 due to an increase in the number of shipwrecks on the Italian coasts. Most of the opening articles in the newspaper were dedicated to the political aspect of immigration, in particular to the confrontation between the Italian government and the European Union. In the analysis of data, particular emphasis is given to the women and children who were victims in the shipwrecks. On May 30, 2016 *La Repubblica*'s opening headline was: "Landing emergency. Not enough boats. It's a children massacre" and again on the same day on the website an article describes the drama: "The mothers tried to hold their children high, but the water kept rising and many went under". Alarmist tones are accompanied by appeals to humanity and hospitality.





NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

Libero

The keyword that right wing Italian newspapers *Libero* and *Il Giornale* use to interpret the migration crisis is invasion. *Libero* is particularly negative. *Libero*'s declaration of intent can be read in the answer that its founder Vittorio Feltri gave to the president of the Republic Sergio Mattarella, who had written a letter to the newspaper following a controversy on the front page:

"We are sorry that the president never expresses solidarity to the poor Italian people who have to suffer the invasion of foreigners without anybody worrying about their own hardships... I live side by side with the people and I know their suffering, which are worsened by the massive presence of immigrants in disarray."

In a letter in January 2008 to the editors-in-chief of major media, UNHCR condemned the reports saying "Strong and rather unexpected evidence of xenophobic sentiments emerged, as did a media system ready to act as the sounding board for the worst manifestations of hate."

The protest opened up a dialogue on media coverage of refugee and migration issues, much of which has been characterised by alarmist and warlike language and which has been blamed for stirring up hostility and intolerance.

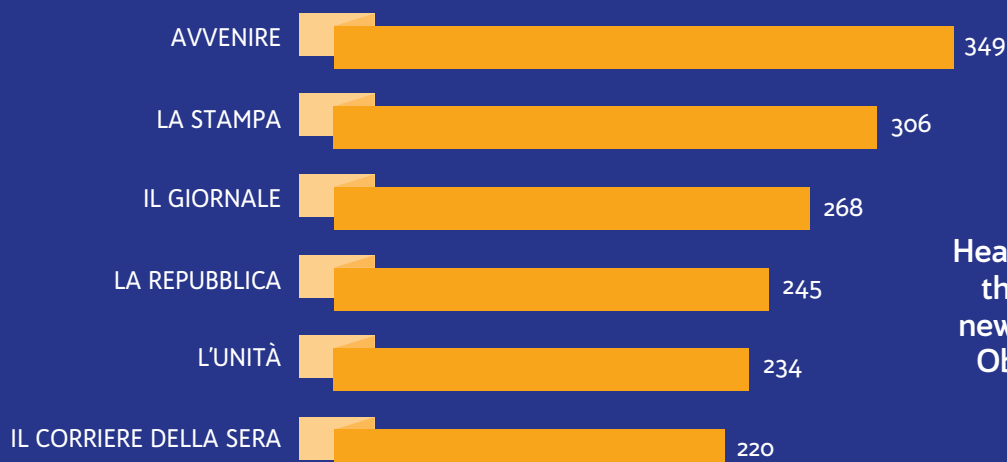
The FNSI, working with academics, press employers, media experts and UNHCR, prepared a draft a code. Once on paper it became a topic for wide-ranging, often heated, discussion inside media and beyond. The conclusion was the adoption of the Charter of Rome, a detailed code of conduct which urges media to be more responsible, tolerant and professional in their treatment of issues affecting asylum seekers, refugees, victims of trafficking and migrants, both those living in Italy and elsewhere.¹

In particular, the code says Italian journalists must:

- Use appropriate language, stick to the facts and avoid terms that inflame the situation;
- Avoid spreading inaccurate, simplified or distorted information;
- Protect asylum seekers, refugees, or victims of trafficking and migrants who choose to speak with media by protecting their identity;
- Use reliable and expert sources so people get clear, comprehensive analyses of the issues;

As well as the code, the journalists agreed to insert issues relating to asylum seekers and migrants into training courses for journalists and also put in place a series of national and regional debates on how the media do their job. (<http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/resources/publications/moving-stories/charter-of-rome>).

In collaboration with UNHCR, the Charter of Rome Observatory (Osservatorio della Carta di Roma) was established and today works with universities, research



Headlines on immigration on the front pages of Italian newspapers analysed by the Observatory (January 1st - October 31st 2016)

NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

Il Corriere

On *Corriere della Sera*, in 2016, the subject of migrants appeared in 67 front pages, with different angles. In the first part of the year the attention of the newspaper was polarized by European issues, starting from the complaints in Cologne on New Year's 2015/2016 to the crisis of the Schengen agreements. The newspaper tries to abandon the daily news spiral in order to give a global reading to the phenomenon and the political implications of the most involved States, in particular Germany. The paper changes its angle when a shipwreck with 562 migrants occurs. On May 28 on the front page the talk is about the "carnage of migrants", counting 45 victims in three days. The European nature of the emergency surfaces again after terrorist attacks in Nice and Munich, two events not directly related to immigration, but politicians evoke it in their comments. The attention on migration lessens in the second part of the year.



institutes and other groups to monitor coverage to ensure that different media outlets are doing their job properly when dealing with discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance.

Looking at **press coverage**, the Observatory has been particularly active, analysing media using as its benchmarks its own code of conduct and the Charter of Rome. For the past year, the research by the Observatory was conducted on the following newspapers: *La Stampa*, *Avvenire*, *Repubblica*, *Corriere della Sera*, *il Giornale*, *l'Unità*.

What emerges most clearly is the centrality of the migration topic in the papers: during 2016, 1,622 news stories were dedicated to the subject of immigration, 10% more than in 2015, a year that had already registered a peak in visibility (and landings). Furthermore, according to the Observatory, there is continuity in the treatment of the phenomenon, because in the newspapers that have been analysed there have been only 12 days without any headlines on migrants.

However, the Observatory found an important change compared to the previous years: there was a significant easing of the alarmist tone, down to 27% of the articles (compared to 46% the year before). This can be explained by the wide visibility of the political scene and the improvement in European and national management of arrangements for handling migrants on their arrival.

Yet some anxiety-provoking topics, as defined by the Observatory, remain: especially in order to mark a difference between "us" and "them", but these themes that highlight the different interests of communities in sometimes adversarial tones, are reduced.

Where the problem persists it is, in particular, related to those cases in which there seems to be a relationship between migration and terrorism, criminality and insecurity. In some cases there is a sarcastic and dismissive style directed towards migrants and refugees, but according to the Observatory this form of coverage and sentiment is found mostly in the coverage of a single right-wing newspaper, *il Giornale*.

Considering issues related to migration, the Charter says that the most frequent keywords are "hospitality" (34% of the information) and "migration flows" (24%).

The theme of humanitarian corridors, which is very relevant on a geopolitical level, remains unexpectedly marginal: only 12 headlines (articles) were fully dedicated to the subject, nine of them in the Catholic newspaper *Avvenire*. Instead, three times more articles were dedicated to social and cultural issues related to the phenomenon, with a negative slant.

Finally, there are significant differences in intensity regarding the treatment of migrants and immigration issues, with a particular focus and peak interest in the months of January and June.

What was mostly covered in January was the New Year's incidents of violence and attacks on women at the train station in Cologne (Germany), while in June all newspapers gave extensive coverage to stories concerning the wearing of the so-called burkini on French and Italian beaches and the three worst tragedies at sea that happened at the time.

In **Primetime Television News** the Observatory also conducted research on prime time television news across seven networks: *TG1*, *TG2*, *TG3*, *TG4*, *TG5*, *Studio Aperto* and *TgLa7*.

The subjects "migration" and "migrants" received, according to the Observatory, ample space on the prime time editions of television news: according to the research, the sample size was of 2,954 news stories in 10 months. And there were only eight days when the subject was not present on any of the seven networks analysed.

Also in this case, as for the press, the Observatory found that the first issue connected to the subject matter was hospitality and the conditions for dealing with migrants on their arrival (36%) followed by reporting on migration flows (27%) and issues related to security (24%).

This last issue was mainly dealt with by Mediaset, the major private media company, with 37% of news reports on security matters. During 2016 there were altogether 2,954 news stories on migration on Italian prime time television news, which is 26% less than during 2015.

The issues that found more space were the most striking ones to receive widespread coverage: in particular, the cases of sexual violence and assaults

in Cologne during the New Year celebrations of December 31, 2015, and the murder case in Fermo, a small town in central Italy, on 5 July 2016 when a Nigerian man was beaten to death.

He and his wife had arrived in Europe from Libya in 2015, after reportedly fleeing the terrorist group Boko Haram. His wife was immediately granted asylum status as a fresh debate erupted over how society and lawmakers should respond to racism.

There was also extensive media coverage of how a dozen migrant women had to be relocated after residents of Gorino, a small town in Ferrara in northern Italy, put up a barricade to stop them entering and chanted anti-migrant slogans. The protestors created road blocks at three entrances to the city against the asylum seekers on October 24, 2016.

Interestingly enough, the observatory points out that the landings are not as central anymore for the media as the issue of borders is.

There is also no proven correlation between the high exposure to the migration phenomenon and citizens' perception of insecurity or threat, but on the other hand there is a correlation between the sensationalist way in which the matter is told and the increase in fear. A glaring example is the connection between migration and jihadist terrorism of Islamic origin.

One last detail is finally very important regarding television news reports: immigrants, migrants and refugees are represented with their own voices only in 3% of the reports. The issues regarding them is present on television news through the stories told by institutions, citizens and special episodes, but what is almost completely missing is the self-narrative of those who live migration in the first person.

One of the main concerns for the Charter of Rome has been to work on the language of newspapers. The alarmist tone adopted by the main newspapers regarding migrants is seen as counterproductive for

the purpose of a constructive debate on integration.

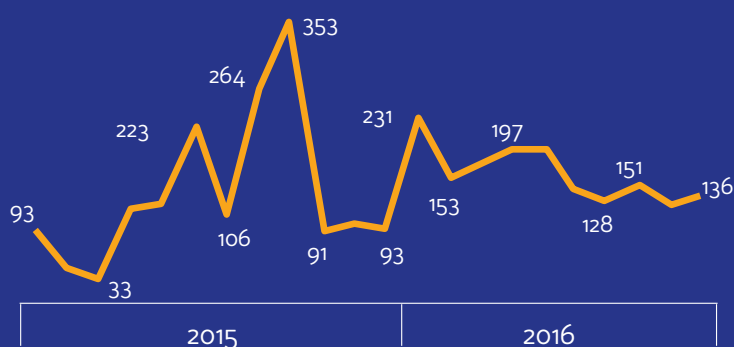
The use of words such as "irregular" or "immigrants" entices racial hatred, according to the Charter, especially when they serve the purpose to give visibility to articles that cast a shadow on refugees. When the ethics protocol was written, it said that migration as a subject was dealt with only in dramatic, negative terms. The journey of migrants too often became "an invasion" in newspapers and the political debate used sentences like "problem of national interest" to describe it. Also, there was a lot of reporting on the request for "security" to face what was considered by the press, a "problem".

The problem of terminology is also found in online sources. A post on Google Trends up until 2015 noted the use of the terms "clandestines" and "migrants" in searches with a substantial humanisation of the terminology. Limiting to the Italian media outlets which are gathered by Google News, a comparison of researches on the words "Refugees", "clandestines", "extra communitarians" and "migrants" shows the confirmation of this last description for all of 2016 (exceptions only in June and November).

And in the presentation of Carta di Roma Observatory, *La Repubblica* wrote that there are "... more moderate tones by 20 per cent in the media (TV and newspapers) but racism explodes on social media".

But as Valigia Blu, the independent news outlet, <http://www.valigiablu.it/razzismo-media-social-network/> explains this has to be seen in context: "The semantic analysis of 73,000 tweets posted between July 6th and July 20th on what happened at Fermo, is a small microcosm on Twitter with very low numbers, which do not allow extrapolation about social networks in general (sic)".

One of the key issues in media coverage has been the need to give voice to the opinions of migrants themselves. In Italy there are some participatory



Trend of the immigration headlines on the front pages of Italian newspapers, January 1st-October 31st 2016 noting the peaks over news of the Hungarian wall, the picture of Aylan Kurdi and the closing of the border.

During 2016 there were altogether **2,954 news stories** on migration on Italian prime time television news, which is **26% less than during 2015.**

journalistic projects that involve readers in a chorus of storytelling on migration in our society. One is *Migranti by Valigia Blu*, a constructive journalism project which has produced storytelling on migrants in the media, *racconto dei media sui migranti*; another is *Open Migration*, created by the Italian Coalition on Freedom and Civil Rights - Coalizione Italiana Libertà e Diritti Civili (CILD).

Also at *La Stampa* we have invited readers to *compose a choral story on migrants*. Stories that look like life. Hopefully a life than can allow for a happy ending.

Anna Masera is Public Editor of *La Stampa* and Director of the Master Degree in Journalism at the University of Torino.

Contributors: Additional material supplied by collaborators from Master in Giornalismo di Torino: Raffaele Angius, Alessandro Cappai, Lucrezia Clemente, Camilla Cupelli, Emanuele Granelli, Marco Gritti, Luca Indemini, Massimiliano Mattielli, Lovinia Rosi and Romolo Tosiani.

NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

Il Manifesto

Il Manifesto published the picture of little Aylan drowned on the beach on its front page the day after the tragedy of his death. It was a choice that many other newspapers also made to move the conscience of the readers on the tragedy of migrants, in spite of the polemics on social media where many Italian media analysts oppose the exploitation of human suffering through media sensationalism. In particular, this left wing newspaper is known to always make graphic choices of great impact on its front page.



NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

La Stampa

Across 70 front pages taken from *La Stampa* in 2016, migration appeared as the most noteworthy news and was read mostly from the political point of view. The tendency is not to use emotional images. Headlines, except in a few rare cases don't use sensationalist or emotional tones. When there were no updates on migration politics, the paper used stories and images on the lives of immigrants, especially those of children. The most used term is "migrants", often at the beginning of the headline, to contextualize the news story. Altogether, therefore, compared to 2015 there is a lower tone that fits the "normalisation" process described in Carta di Roma's 2016 report.

NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

Il Giornale

Il Giornale, part of the media empire of the family of Silvio Berlusconi, distinguishes itself for the continuous attacks on the world of Islam and on migrants, who are often associated offhandedly to terrorism. Its tone of voice is apocalyptic. The polarisation of the Italian press touches its apex with *Libero* and *Il Giornale*, which bluntly foment hostility among readers often using coarse language. Migration is treated like an invasion at the expense of tax payers, the suffering of migrants is not taken into consideration in the editorial line, regardless of events. The discourse is set on the rivalry between impoverished Italians and refugees, foreshadowing a fight without quarter.

