



**Saving Refugees or Policing the Seas? How the national press of five EU member states framed news coverage of the migration crisis**

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## **Saving Refugees or Policing the Seas? How the national press of five EU member states framed news coverage of the migration crisis<sup>1</sup>**

Kerry Moore, Mike Berry and Iñaki Garcia-Blanco<sup>2</sup>

### **Abstract**

*Migration from the Middle East and Africa to Europe increasingly hit the headlines in 2014-5 as the unprecedented scale of deaths at sea was gradually recognised as a newsworthy and important story. This article presents findings from research commissioned by UNHCR to measure how the issue of migration was framed in the news media across the EU. We compare the national press coverage of five member states: UK, Sweden, Germany, Spain and Italy, focusing upon the main themes of news coverage, reasons for and responses to migration outlined. We find striking variations in framing between national contexts, but also a significant disconnection, overall, between causal interpretation and treatment recommendation framing. We conclude that the resulting fragmented frames of European migration news in themselves signify 'crisis' - an unsettled discourse reflecting shifting anxieties between humanitarian concern to save refugees, and a securitising fortress mentality to better police European and national borders.*

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**Key Words:** Mediterranean; European newspapers; refugees; crisis news; framing analysis

In 2014-5, migration to Europe across the Mediterranean Sea made increasingly regular headline news, with public attention internationally drawn to the treacherous journeys, unprecedented scale of deaths at sea<sup>3</sup> and growing political anxieties surrounding the 'migrant crisis'. The 1,046,599 arrivals in 2015 represented a sharp increase on 2014, but still just 0.14 per cent of Europe's estimated total population of 738.4 million and just 0.2 per cent of the estimated 510.1 million total population of the EU-28 (Eurostat, 2016; United Nations, 2015). Over 50 per cent of people making this journey were escaping war in Syria, with the overwhelming majority of others from countries from which people are commonly granted asylum in Europe (Clayton and Holland, 2015). The public advocacy efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) focused on promoting recognition of the humanitarian emergency, as did numerous interventions from NGOs and notable public figures. In a speech to the European Parliament, Pope Francis declared, 'We cannot allow the Mediterranean to become a vast cemetery!' (Pope Francis, 2014). The 'crisis' has not solely been understood, however, as one concerning the immense harms surrounding human beings attempting the Mediterranean crossing. It has also been positioned as a crisis *for* and experienced *by* Europe – challenging 'us' in key areas of policy, including EU integration, cooperation and political identity and, especially, European and national border security.

The political climate in many European countries has been overwhelmingly negative on migration in recent years, driving mainstream debate significantly to the right under pressure from populist anti-immigration politicians (Boomgaarden and Vliegthart, 2007; Pitcher, 2006; Richardson and Colombo, 2013). EU opinion polls report widespread feelings of insecurity associated with immigration (cf. European Commission, 2010), and, some argue, it has become a marker of European identity for nations to demonstrate they can 'contain and repulse' migrants (King and Mai, 2011). Arguably, with such a securitising framework we might expect the deterrence of migrant journeys to be prioritised over the politics of humanitarianism (cf. Pugh, 2004).

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<sup>3</sup> According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Missing Migrants project, recorded deaths in the Mediterranean Sea alone totaled 3279 in 2014, 3784 in 2015 and 5098 in 2016. There are, in addition, numerous unrecorded deaths and missing migrants unaccounted for in these figures (International Organization for Migration, 2017).

As a key discursive site within which ideas, opinions and feelings about crisis issues and events are constructed as 'sensible' and through which certain 'truths' about are articulated (Hall, 1982 [2005]), national news media plays a critical role in conditioning public understandings of the migration crisis. How national press report migration events and issues is vital, because it potentially shapes the discussions and storytelling practices of journalists in other media (Brosius and Eps, 1995; Cushion et al., 2016); conditions policy and political communication processes (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007; Hečková, 2016) and influences public understandings of hotly debated issues (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2009; Moore, 2013). This is highly significant, given that in many so-called 'receiving countries' internationally, news coverage of migration has long been characterised by negativity and hostility - casting migrants as criminal or socially deviant, threats to public health, or a burden on social resources (Haynes, Breen and Devereux, 2005; Haynes, Devereux and Breen, 2004; Horsti, 2008; Sulaiman-Hill et al., 2011; ter Wal, 1996) or using inaccurate, dehumanising and socially stigmatising language (Abid, Manan and Rahman, 2017; Buchanan, Grillo and Threadgold, 2003; Cisneros, 2008; Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008; Kaye, 2001; Santa Ana, 1999). Whilst these negative trends are usually associated with the right-wing press, they are by no means entirely absent from 'liberal' titles (Kilby, Horowitz and Hylton, 2013).

Mainstream news discourse is productive of the 'material realities' of migration: constituting social identities (e.g., the 'refugee', the 'illegal migrant', the 'smuggler', the 'heroic rescuer'), organising social relations (those who legitimately belong and those who do not), defining contexts, (the 'humanitarian emergency', the 'security crisis') and rendering practices meaningful (e.g., the 'reckless journeys', the 'necessary' policy responses) and morally acceptable (or otherwise). News not only signifies a story to be 'newsworthy'; it also routinely 'frames' its apparent facts, events and issues as realistic, comprehensible and compelling by selecting and placing emphasis upon particular aspects whilst downplaying others (Gitlin, 1980; Goffman, 1974). As Entman notes, in making certain elements of a 'perceived reality' appear most consequential, a frame will 'promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described' (1993: 52). Articulated through common economising, neoliberal and/or securitising 'frames', refugees/migrants can be positioned as systemic threats to national security (McKay, Thomas and Warwick Blood, 2011; Moore, 2012), demonised as self-profiteering, super-charged neoliberal subjects migrating to predate on extant

populations (Moore, 2013) or collocated with social or political crisis (Gross, Moore and Threadgold, 2007). Many of these negative trends have been identified in recent studies of news coverage of the current crisis in a range of EU states (Backfried and Shalunts, 2016; Goodman, Sirriyeh and McMahon, 2017; Greussing and Boomgaarden, 2017; Holmes and Castañeda, 2016; Vezovnik, 2017; Zeitel-Bank, 2017; Zodian, 2017). However, others have identified more sympathetic, humanitarian, integrationist and/or solidaristic news frames, conditioned by contingent events and/or national social imaginaries imbued with an alternative, more hospitable ethics (Chouliaraki, Georgiou and Zaborowski, 2017; Dahlgren, 2016).

Studies comparing national news framing patterns of the migration crisis across multiple EU states remain few. This article addresses the gap in the scholarship, presenting significant findings from the first major published study using a systematic in-depth content analysis to compare national newspaper coverage of the migration crisis in Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Commissioned by UNHCR in 2014 to inform their strategic interventions in media and policy debates, the research focuses on the journeys, arrivals and settlement in Europe of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants from Middle Eastern or African countries, asking, what were the dominant news frames through which the 'migration crisis' in 2014-5 was articulated? We explore this by analysing the frequency of key themes (problem definition); the explanations offered for why people were trying to enter the EU (causal interpretation); and what, if any, solutions to the migration crisis are offered (treatment recommendation). In this, our investigation identifies framing device patterns within and across publications and nations, with the assumption that consistent framing processes are most likely to influence audiences (Berry, Garcia Blanco and Moore, 2016). However, whilst frequency in coverage is important, so are the contexts in which particular news framing devices appear and how they are used. Already-existing dominant or 'sedimented' discourses in particular national contexts clearly condition the plausibility of potential news frames and their intelligibility within migration stories. Framing recognised to 'make sense' as migration news will be contingent upon the historically specific social and political conditions of these contexts, but may also be shaped by the routine and professional practices of journalists and the particular ideological orientation of their news organisations (Philo and Berry, 2004; Philo, Briant and Donald, 2013; Reese, 2001). Multiple, mixed and even seemingly contradictory frames may feature within a single news narrative. Key terms or ideas, typically found within one type of frame, may potentially appear, translated in meaning, when re-

contextualised within another. Certain frames may, when combined or linked with others, reinforce or transform familiar meanings. Therefore, whilst the very concept of a ‘frame’ suggests an encapsulating, fixed structure, we want to suggest that this metaphor can over-emphasise the certainty, or at least rigidity, of organising ideas in news. Drawing on insights from post-Marxist discourse theory, we note that whilst some frames may be ‘sedimented’ (i.e., appear as compellingly rational, ‘common sense’ ways of organising and understanding certain types of news story), even these are always incomplete, contingent discursive structures, continuously communicating ‘in-formation’ in hegemonic struggle (Dahlberg and Phelan, 2011; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

**Table 1: Sample of News Items**

<i>El Mundo</i>	90	<i>Bild</i>	43	<i>The Guardian</i>	104
<i>ABC</i>	79	<i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i>	165	<i>The Telegraph</i>	57
<i>El País</i>	138	<i>Die Welt</i>	70	<i>Daily Mail</i>	62
<b>Total News Items Spain</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>Total News Items Germany</b>	<b>278</b>	<i>The Sun</i>	42
<i>La Repubblica</i>	121	<i>Aftonbladet</i>	53	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	24
<i>Il Corriere della Sera</i>	105	<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	119	<i>BBC News at 10</i>	15
<i>La Stampa</i>	74	<i>Sydvenska Dagbladet</i>	131	<i>ITV News at 10</i>	15
<b>Total News Items Italy</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>Total News Items Sweden</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>Total News Items UK</b>	<b>319</b>

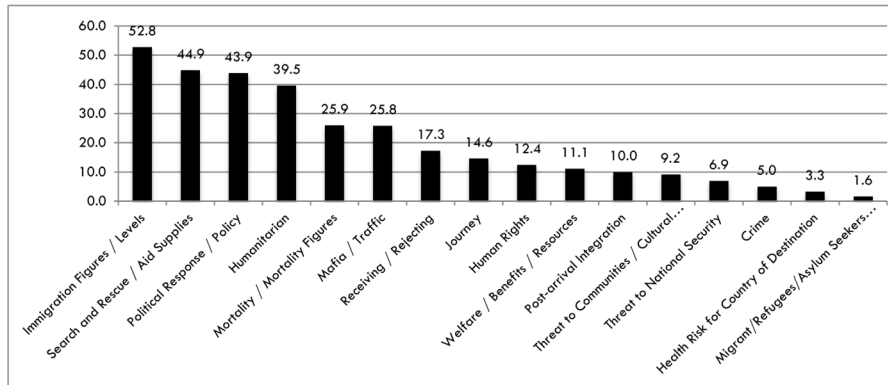
As illustrated in *Table 1*, our sample is comprised of 1500 news articles published between 1<sup>st</sup> December 2013 to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2015, including approximately 300 articles per country drawn from 17 high circulation publications and representing a spectrum of political orientations. These were selected using the databases Nexis, Retriever, Factiva and Medialibrary, comparable keyword string searches and systematic random sampling<sup>4</sup>. In addition, the analysis included 23 relevant UK broadcast news stories (9 items from BBC News at 10 and 14 from ITV News at 10) between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2014. The sample excluded stories about displaced people who had not sought to enter Europe and those where it was not possible to infer African or Middle Eastern origin.

<sup>4</sup> Selected countries represent a variety of roles in relation to the migration crisis (Germany and Sweden having agreed to accept the largest number of refugees; Spain and Italy, two significant points of entry for those crossing the Mediterranean; the UK vociferous in advocating new EU rules on immigration and asylum). The keyword string in English was *migra! OR asylum! OR emigra! OR immigra! OR refugee! AND ship! OR boat! OR vessel! OR Syria! OR Iraq! OR Palestin! OR Africa.*

## Findings and Discussion

### Main Themes

Figure 1: Themes Appearing Across News Outlets (% of News Items, n=1507)



The spread of themes identified across the coverage of all five nations reflects the range and variation of competing ideas from the particular political concerns of European countries and/or policy debates of the EU to more migrant-centred experiences. Four themes were present in more than a third of the coverage overall: ‘immigration figures/levels’ (52.8 per cent, n=795), ‘search and rescue/aid supplies’ (44.9 per cent, n=676), ‘political response/policy’ (43.9 per cent, n=661) and ‘humanitarian themes’ (39.5 per cent, n=596). In the majority of articles (86.2 per cent, n=1299) more than one frame was identified. As our co-efficient of variation comparisons in *Table 2* highlight, some news themes were much more consistent than others.<sup>5</sup> So whilst, ‘mortality/mortality figures’ featured strongly overall, coverage of this theme in comparison to other similarly frequent themes was uneven, with far less in the German and Swedish press than those of other countries (CoV=45.1%). By contrast, we can see that whilst ‘threat to communities/cultural threat’ made up only 9.2 per cent (n=138) of the coverage overall, its relative importance was reasonably consistent between countries (CoV=28.7%). The most prevalent themes overall were among the more consistent in terms of the proportion of coverage in each

<sup>5</sup> The co-efficient of variation for the percentage of each theme’s occurrence in news items across the five countries was calculated (ratio of standard deviation to the mean expressed as a percentage) to adjust for variation in the overall volume of coverage featuring each theme.

nation in which they appeared. However, they still varied significantly between countries, with the largest theme, 'immigration figures/levels' being the second most consistent (CoV=24.7%), but nonetheless varying significantly between the countries – the most prevalent in both the UK and in Germany (in 65.5 per cent, n=209 and 62.6 per cent, n=174 of news items respectively), the second largest theme in Spain (58.3 per cent, n=179) and in Sweden (47.2 per cent, n=143) but appearing in only 30 per cent (n=90) of news items in Italy. The largest theme across news items in Spain (64.5 per cent, n=198) and in Sweden (50.2 per cent, n=152) was 'political/policy response' to the migration crisis (CoV=27.4%). In the Italian press, 'search and rescue/aid' was most prevalent (65 per cent of news items, n=195), but its relative importance across countries was more varied (CoV=37.5%), largely because it featured far less strongly in the Swedish press (15.8 per cent of news items, n=48).

Typically, 'immigration figures/levels' was identified in reports emphasising the magnitude of the number of people making Mediterranean crossings or seeking to reach Europe. However, it is worth noting that the meaning of the theme 'immigration figures/levels' (and indeed any theme) could be differently inflected, contextualising and contextualised by the presence of other themes in an article. As such, 'immigration figures/levels' themed articles might be migrant centred, focusing on the need for the prevention of deaths at sea or other humanitarian issues, or concerned instead with the deterrence of migration, policing borders or articulating migrants with criminality, social problems, or threats to national security.

Across the Spanish Press, there was a dual focus in coverage, including stories focusing on what was happening in the Spanish territories (Ceuta, Melilla and the Canaries) and more generally covering events in the Mediterranean. More than the press of any other country Spanish coverage emphasised 'search and rescue/aid' (64.5 per cent of news articles, n=176) and 'mortality/mortality figures' (35.8 per cent, n=110), themes that coloured the 'policy responses/political discussions' upon which the press were reporting (64.5 per cent of news articles, n=198) and reflected political debate in Spain about responsibility for border control, the humanitarian consequences for migrants, and the issue of responsibility for sea patrols. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given Spain and Italy's geographical location, on the 'front line' in search and rescue operations, we found a fairly similar pattern in the Italian press with 'search and rescue/aid' the largest theme, present in 65 per cent (n=195) of articles. However, in Italy there was a notably stronger emphasis upon the role of mafia and trafficking in the crisis (43.3 per cent of articles, n=130). Typically the Italian



coverage focused on critiquing policy, in particular the withdrawal of the Mare Nostrum sea rescue missions and its replacement with 'Operation Triton', which was seen as less focused on saving lives.

**Table 2: Themes By Country (% of News Items, n=1507)**

	UK	Spain	Italy	Sweden	Germany	All Countries	Co-efficient of variation (%)
Immigration Figures / Levels	65.5	58.3	30	47.2	62.6	52.9	24.7
Search and Rescue / Aid	40.8	57.3	65	15.8	45.7	44.9	37.5
Political Response / Policy	35.1	64.5	34	50.2	34.9	43.9	27.4
Humanitarian	38.2	29	47.7	43.2	39.9	39.5	15.7
Mortality / Mortality Figures	31.7	35.8	33.3	13.2	14.4	25.9	45.1
Mafia / Trafficking	32	28.7	43.3	10.2	13.7	25.8	47.7
Receiving / Rejecting	38.9	15.6	14.7	5.3	10.1	17.3	58.0
Journey	15.7	22.1	14	3.3	18	14.6	40.1
Human Rights	10.3	14.3	22.7	8.6	5.8	12.4	51.0
Welfare / Benefits / Resources	19.7	6.8	7.7	11.6	9	11.1	42.7
Post-arrival Integration	2.8	3.9	8.3	13.5	22.7	10	70.9
Threat to Communities / Cultural Threat	13.2	7.5	10	9.2	5.4	9.2	28.7
Threat to National Security	9.1	6.8	11	2.6	4.7	6.9	43.7
Crime	9.7	2.3	5	3	4.7	5	52.7
Health Risk for Country of Destination	3.1	4.9	4.3	0.3	3.6	3.3	48.6
Migrant/Refugees/Asylum Seekers Success	3.1	1	1	1	1.8	1.6	53.1

In Germany, the coverage was more thematically focused than any other country on 'immigration figures/levels' (62.6 per cent, n=174). However, three other major themes were also regularly included: 'search and rescue/Aid' (45.7 per cent, n=127), 'humanitarian themes' (39.9 per cent, n=111) and 'political response/policy' (34.9 per cent, n=97). Policy was a key theme across German titles, featuring debates concerning African refugee processing centres, EU quotas for refugees and whether the EU was doing enough to prevent deaths in the Mediterranean. The distribution of themes across publications largely corresponded to what might be expected along editorial lines, with the more right-leaning *Die Welt* tending to focus more often on the scale of refugee flows as a burden disproportionately shouldered by Germany, whilst *Süddeutsche Zeitung* featured 'humanitarian themes' and 'Search and Rescue/Aid' more heavily, reporting the ordeals suffered by people trying to escape war or repressive regimes and making the journey across the Mediterranean. The

German press featured the theme of ‘post-arrival integration’ (22.7 per cent, n=63) much more than other countries. This too was largely attributable to the coverage of *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which was largely inflected with positive connotations. By contrast, ‘welfare/benefits/resources’ and ‘threat to communities/cultural threat’ themes were approximately twice as prevalent in *Bild* and *Die Welt* as they were in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The dominant ideas here were that the influx of refugees was putting a strain on public services, or that refugees sometimes received preferential treatment in comparison to German nationals as well as concerns about Islam, social cohesion and the challenges of assimilating refugees into German culture. By contrast, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* was more likely to feature the ‘receiving/rejecting’ theme, including a number of sympathetic stories featured about refused asylum seekers facing deportation and positive stories about refugee successes.

In the Swedish press, whilst ‘political response/policy’ (50.2 per cent, n=152) and ‘immigration figures/levels’ (47.2 per cent, n=143) were the most frequently identified themes, ‘humanitarian themes’ were more prominent than in any other country (43 per cent, n=131). These figures reflect a domestically oriented discourse on policy, which was often critical on humanitarian grounds towards the management of the crisis and an insufficiently welcoming approach to refugees. Whilst this was typically the trend, the theme of ‘post-arrival integration’ also featured in the Swedish press (13.5 per cent, n=41) and, to a lesser extent, the linking of immigration levels to concerns about ‘Welfare, benefits and resources’ (11.6 per cent, n=35) – themes largely introduced by political sources, such as the anti-immigration Swedish Democrats.

The UK news media also featured a dominant focus on ‘immigration figures/levels’ (65.5 per cent, n=209) and included significant coverage on the theme of ‘Search and Rescue/aid’ (40.8 per cent, n=130). However, overall, the policy discussion in the UK press was far more negative, paying more attention to ‘receiving and rejecting’ unwanted migrants (38.9 per cent, n=124), and placing greater emphasis upon concerns about ‘welfare/benefits/resources’ (19.7 per cent, n=63), the ‘threat to national security’ (9.1 per cent themes, n=29) and crime (9.7 per cent, n=31). This was attributable, in part, to the UK coverage focusing not just on refugee/migrant entry to Europe, but also on those seeking to reach Britain from Calais. The *Sun* and the *Daily Mail* especially focused less upon events in the Mediterranean in their reporting of refugee and migrant flows than upon the pressures faced at UK borders, crime and violence allegedly committed by migrant groups in Calais, difficulties of deporting and

keeping foreign criminals out of the UK, and the potential exploitation by of scant social resources should UK policymakers concede too liberally to those drawn to ‘El Dorado’ Britain. The thematic focus of reports varied greatly between different publications, however, with the *Guardian* and the *Mirror* affording much more attention to humanitarian themes than right-wing titles. How themes were represented also varied significantly: Although *Guardian* coverage did feature a significant number of ‘threat themes’, these were typically introduced by anti-immigration Conservative/UKIP politicians or organisations such as Pegida, and challenged within the body of the article. With respect to the theme of ‘human rights’, coverage also differed between the right and left-wing press, with *Daily Mail* articles framing human rights legislation as a foreign imposition preventing Britain taking action against ‘illegal’ immigrants, whilst in the *Guardian* human rights were discussed overwhelming in a positive light.

The thematic analysis demonstrates that across the EU, news media similarly identified ‘immigration figures/levels’ as the cortical issue to the crisis. However, there were significant variations in how this was depicted and articulated with other themes: from a dominant focus upon search and rescue and aid policy discussions in the South (Italy and Spain), to humanitarian concerns and accepting more refugees in Sweden, to a more mixed picture in Germany, including a focus on post-arrival integration, whilst a much more divided picture pertained in the UK press between right and left-wing titles, attending respectively to migrant threat themes and humanitarian concerns.

#### *Explanations for & Responses/Solutions to the Migration Crisis*

To further investigate these variations in framing, we turn to the ‘causal interpretations’, or explanations for what was driving refugee flows. Were refugees represented as fleeing from war, escaping repressive regimes or ISIS? Alternatively, were people conceived to be entering the EU due to lax border controls or because of the economic opportunities or welfare benefits available?

News media is often criticised for its decontextualized coverage, especially in focusing on the numbers of migrants without including any of the reasons and motivations for migration (Lewis and Neal, 2005). Causal explanations potentially contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the circumstances underpinning themes, whilst conversely, omitting causal attribution can mean insufficient information is provided for interpreting

coverage and a partial or incomplete framework for recognising the issues at stake.

**Table 3: Explanations for Refugee/Migrant Flows (% of News Items by National Press; n=681)**

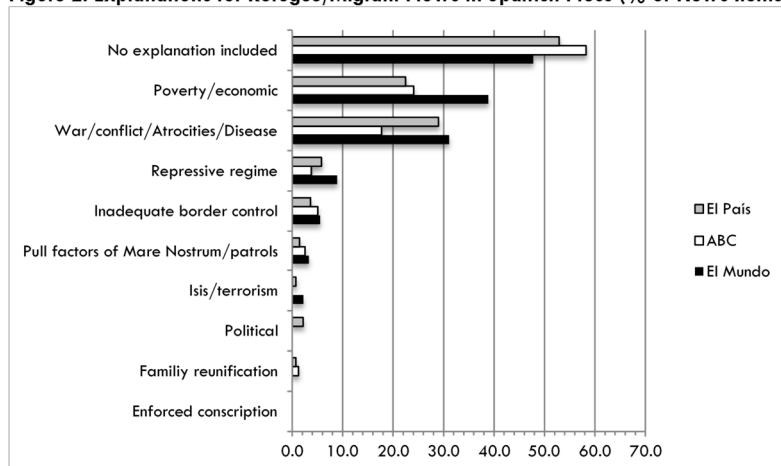
	UK	Spain	Italy	Sweden	Germany	All Countries
No explanation	42.6	52.8	66.7	55.4	57.6	54.8
War/conflict/Atrocities /Disease	43.9	26.7	29.0	39.9	37.4	35.4
Poverty/Economic	22.6	27.7	6.7	1.3	7.2	13.3
Repressive Regime	10.7	6.2	3.3	5.6	6.8	6.6
ISIS/Terrorism	3.1	1.0	4.3	5.6	4.0	3.6
Inadequate Border Control	5.0	4.6	0.3	0.0	0.0	2.1
Political (other)	0.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	0.7	0.9
Mare Nostrum/Rescue Patrols	0.3	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.7
Enforced Conscription	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.7	0.5
EU-US Foreign Policy Stoking Conflict	0.6	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.3
Family Reunification	0.6	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Climate Change	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.4	0.1
Global Capitalism	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.1

A common feature across the five countries was that in a large proportion of coverage, no explanations for the arrival of refugees/migrants were offered at all (54.8 per cent of news items overall, n=826). However, this varied between countries, with the Italian press featuring the fewest explanations (33.3 per cent of articles, n=100) and the UK press featuring the most (57.4 per cent of articles, n=183). The relative dearth of explanations arguably highlights a limitation in the analytical focus of the coverage. Such a deficiency could also be seen, however, as a characteristic to be expected of ‘crisis’ reporting. In a conjuncture of disruption, faced with acute phenomena and uncertain circumstances, in the interests of reporting accurately, journalists may invest less confidence in causal explanations and exercise greater caution in crafting news frames.

When explanations were offered, by far the most common was ‘war/conflict/atrocities/disease’, appearing in over a third of all articles (35.4 per cent, n=534). The next most frequent was ‘poverty/economic’ issues (13.3 per cent, n=201). This explanation was positioned both as a ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factor in driving migration flows, and in its prominence varied across different countries and publications. In Spain, the press attributed population movements to ‘poverty/economic’ factors more than other countries (27.7 per cent, n=85) and slightly more frequently than ‘war/conflict/atrocities/disease’ (26.7 per cent, n=82). This can be largely explained by stories in the coverage of

migration flows from North Africa to Spanish territories (as well as those generated by the conflict in Syria), particularly in *El Mundo* (38.9 per cent, n=35) and *ABC* (17.7 per cent, n=19).

**Figure 2: Explanations for Refugee/Migrant Flows in Spanish Press (% of News Items, n=307)**

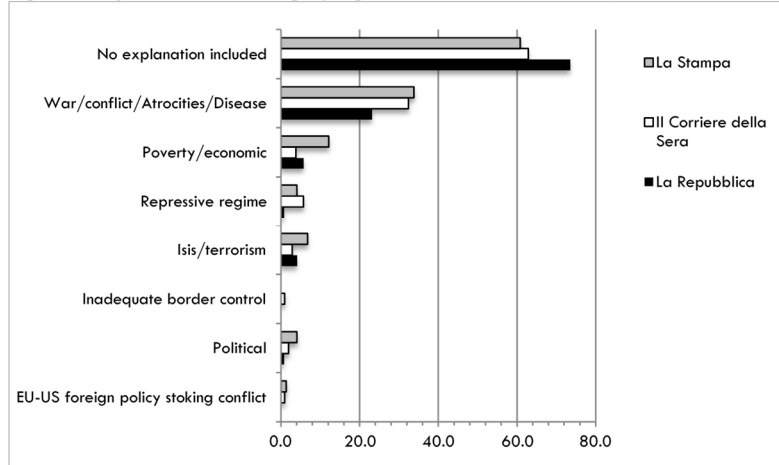


Less prominent explanations in the Spanish press included the activities of 'repressive regimes' in countries of origin of refugees (6.2 per cent, n=19), and the 'absence of effective border controls' (4.6 per cent, n=14). In over a third of the articles featuring explanations for refugee/migrant flows, multiple factors were included (35.2 per cent n=51). A combination of reasons for migration flows to Southern Europe, such as poverty, war, dictatorships, or oppression might be discussed, or economic factors as now having been eclipsed by war/conflict as the most important influences. Whilst policy debate themes in Spanish newspaper coverage focused on the immediate management of the crisis, including humanitarian assistance and 'inadequate border control', these issues did not feature prominently as part of the explanatory framework for refugee/migrant arrivals.

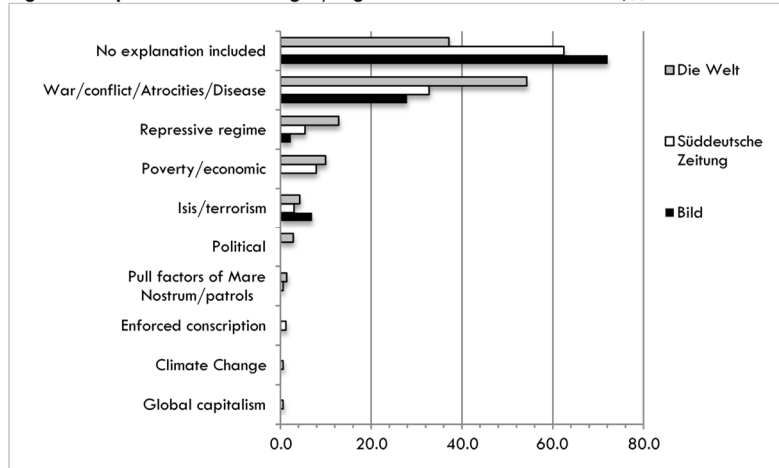
Similarly, across the Italian press, the notion of porous borders was unlikely to be cited as a driver for refugee/migrant flows. Over a third of articles in *La Stampa* (39.2 per cent, n=29) and *Il Corriere della Sera* (37.1 per cent, n=39) cited at least one explanation for refugee/migrant flows, although this was the case in only about a quarter of *La Repubblica* stories (26.4 per cent, n=32). Where explanations were included, multiple factors were cited in around a third of cases (35 per cent, n=35). These could suggest that refugee/migration flows were influenced by a combination of 'push' and 'pull' factors, including fleeing

conflict alongside escaping poverty, or its anticipated alleviation by reaching Europe. The most commonly cited factor, 'war/conflict/ terrorism/disease' was included in approximately one in three stories in *La Stampa* (33.8 per cent, n=25) and *Il Corriere della Sera* (32.4 per cent, n=34), and almost one in four stories in *La Repubblica* (23.1 per cent, n=28).

**Figure 3: Explanations for Refugee/Migrant Flows in Italian Press (% of News Items, n=300)**

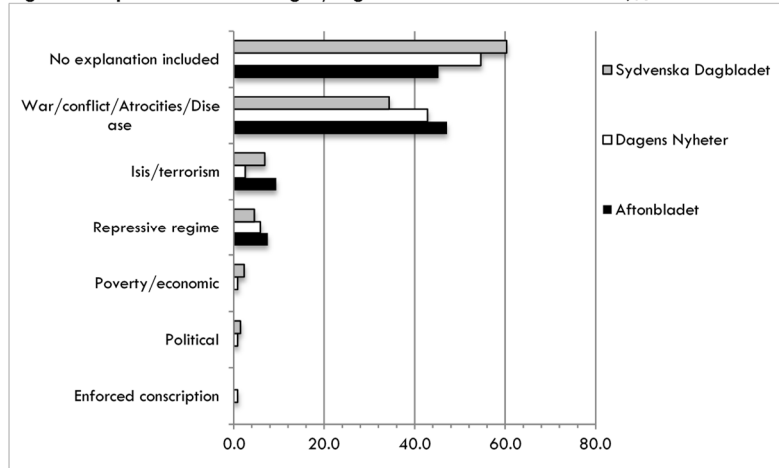


In the German press, *Die Welt*, tending to carry longer articles allowing greater scope for analysis and context (62.9 per cent, n=44), was far more likely than *Bild* (27.9 per cent, n=12) or *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (37.6 per cent, n=62) to provide explanations for refugees/migrants entering the EU. Fleeing 'war/conflict/terrorism/disease' was the most important explanation offered across German titles, followed by 'repressive regimes'. The argument that economic 'pull' factors might account for refugee/migration flows appeared relatively rarely, and tended to feature in relation to migration from areas such as the Balkans assumed to be 'safe'. Multiple reasons were included in around a third of articles featuring explanations (29 per cent, n=18 in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*; 34 per cent, n=15 in *Die Welt* and 33.3 per cent, n=4 in *Bild*), where fleeing 'war/conflict/atrocities/disease' did appear alongside the issue of poverty usually as a 'push' factor influencing refugee/migrant flows.

**Figure 4: Explanations for Refugee/Migrant Flows in German Press (% of News Items, n=278)**

Similarly, explanations included for refugee/migrant flows in the Swedish press overwhelmingly focused on so-called ‘push’ factors rather than ‘pull’ factors. Nowhere in the Swedish coverage was it suggested people were primarily enticed to migrate by the conditions European countries have to offer. Explanations were included in 44.6 per cent (n=135) of articles, with proportionately more featured in the liberal tabloid *Aftonbladet* (54.7 per cent, n=29) than the broadsheets *Dagens Nyheter* (45.4 per cent, n=54) and *Sydvenska Dagbladet* (39.7 per cent, n=52). ‘War/conflict/atrocities/disease’ featured most strongly across all three Swedish titles, followed by ‘Isis/terrorism’ and ‘repressive regimes’. These were the sole factors identified in *Aftonbladet*, although a slightly broader range of explanations appeared in the broadsheets *Dagens Nyheter* and *Sydvenska Dagbladet*, the format perhaps allowing for longer and potentially more nuanced analytical discussions.

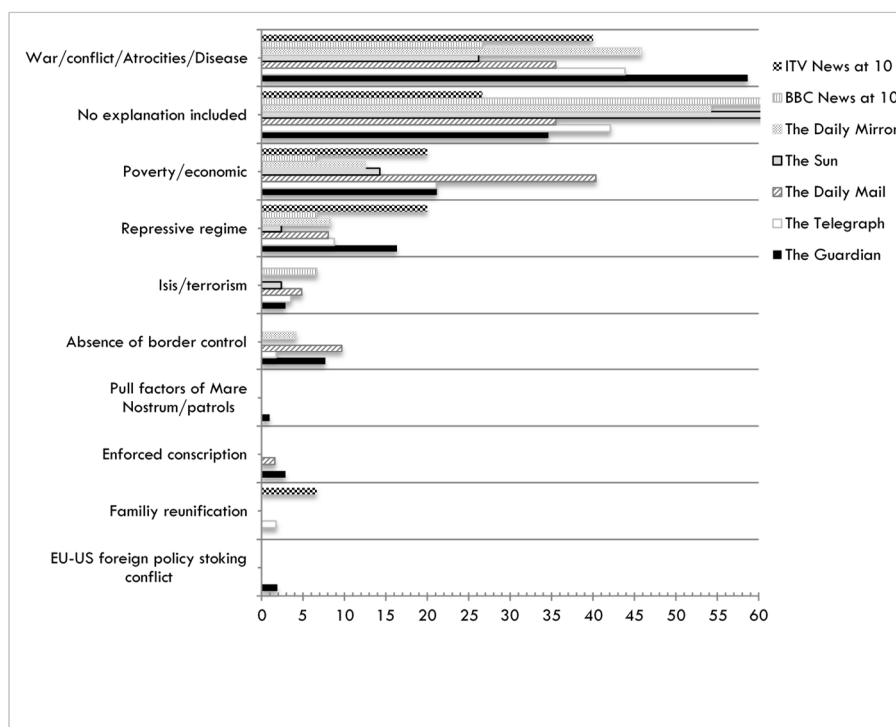
In the UK press, a more varied pattern in the representation of explanations for refugee/migrant flows was identified. Whilst the factor featured most frequently overall was ‘war/conflict/atrocity/disease’ (43.9 per cent, n=140), this was found in a much higher proportion of coverage of left-wing titles, the *Guardian* (58.7 per cent, n=61) and the *Daily Mirror* (45.8 per cent, n=11) than right-wing titles, *The Telegraph* (43.9 per cent, n=25), the *Daily Mail* (35.5 per cent, n=22) and the *Sun* (26.2 per cent, n=11), as well as the broadcast coverage of the BBC (26.7 per cent of items, n=4) or ITV (40 per cent of items, n=6).

**Figure 5: Explanations for Refugee/Migrant Flows in Swedish Press (% of News Items, n=303)**

In the UK press, a more varied pattern in the representation of explanations for refugee/migrant flows was identified. Whilst the factor featured most frequently overall was ‘war/conflict/atrocity/disease’ (43.9 per cent, n=140), this was found in a much higher proportion of coverage of left-wing titles, the *Guardian* (58.7 per cent, n=61) and the *Daily Mirror* (45.8 per cent, n=11) than right-wing titles, *The Telegraph* (43.9 per cent, n=25), the *Daily Mail* (35.5 per cent, n=22) and the *Sun* (26.2 per cent, n=11), as well as the broadcast coverage of the BBC (26.7 per cent of items, n=4) or ITV (40 per cent of items, n=6).

The UK news media, like that of Italy and Spain, also prominently featured economic factors to explain migrant/refugee flows. This entailed arguments about people fleeing poverty, coming to the EU to work, or more pejoratively that they were attracted by welfare benefits. Here an editorial divide in the coverage was clear, where the desire to find work (or escape poverty) tended to be identified in the *Guardian* and the *Mirror*, whilst the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* were more likely to highlight the alleged ‘pull’ of welfare, housing or the health service in their discussions. The *Daily Mail* focused more heavily on ‘poverty/economic’ factors than any other publication (40.3 per cent, n=25), ascribing more weight to these than humanitarian push explanations. The *Daily Mail* was also more likely than other newspapers to highlight ‘inadequate border control’ (9.7 per cent, n=6), framing the arrival of migrants as due to failures of border security, primarily at Calais.



**Figure 6: Explanations for Refugee/Migrant Flows in UK News Outlets (% of News Items, n=319)**

### *Responses/Solutions*

The question of how to deal with refugees attempting to enter the EU is deeply controversial. Many governments under pressure from domestic public opinion have advocated policies preventing refugees/asylum seekers entering the EU, dubbed 'Fortress Europe'. In contrast, NGOs and human rights groups have advocated a unified EU policy, which would see European states agree to take in more refugees. The inclusion of such suggestions in news function as potentially very powerful framing devices - 'treatment recommendations' in Entman's terms - which contribute, in conjunction with 'causal explanations', to the overall framework of understanding for key themes.

A range of suggested responses to managing the migration crisis were reflected in the coverage, varying considerably across the five countries. In over half of the coverage, however, no responses/solutions were included at all (51.7 per cent of articles, n=779), although northern European countries, Germany, Sweden and the UK featured responses/solutions more frequently than Spain and Italy.

**Table 4: Solutions/Responses to the Migration Crisis (% of News Items in each National Press; n=1507)**

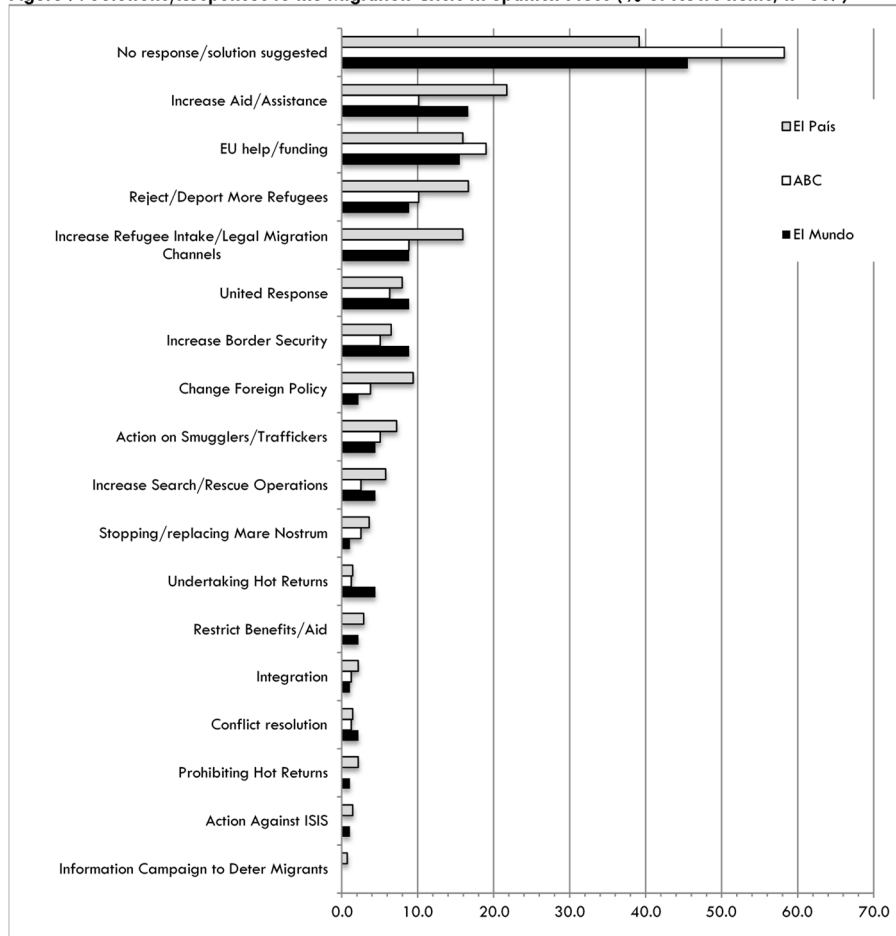
	UK	Spain	Italy	Sweden	Germany	All Countries
No Responses/ Solutions Suggested	52.4	45.9	38.0	59.4	63.7	51.7
Increase Aid/Assistance	13.2	17.3	14.0	20.5	11.2	15.3
Increase Refugee Intake/Legal Migration Channels	8.2	12.1	8.0	7.6	7.9	8.8
Reject/Deport More Refugees	9.4	12.7	9.0	4.6	7.9	8.8
United EU Response	5.0	7.8	18.3	6.3	2.9	8.1
EU Help/Funding	3.1	16.6	11.0	2.6	2.5	7.2
Increase Search/Rescue Operations	1.3	4.6	16.0	0.0	1.8	4.7
Increase Border Security	8.5	6.8	5.7	0.7	1.1	4.6
Restrict Benefits/Aid	8.2	2.0	1.0	10.6	0.0	4.4
Conflict Resolution	4.7	1.6	7.0	1.0	0.7	3.1
Action on Smugglers/Traffickers	0.9	5.9	5.3	0.3	1.1	2.7
Integration	1.9	1.6	0.7	3.3	6.1	2.7
Change Foreign policy	1.3	5.9	2.7	0.3	1.1	2.3
Close Down Migration Routes	1.6	0.0	4.0	1.7	1.4	1.7
Stopping/replacing Mare Nostrum	0.9	2.6	3.0	0.0	0.0	1.3
UN Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme	5.3	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0	1.3
Act Against ISIS	1.3	1.0	2.0	0.3	0.4	1.0
Refugee Processing Centres in Africa	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.2	0.6
Undertaking Hot Returns	0.0	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
Prohibiting Hot Returns	0.0	1.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3
Amend/Change Dublin Convention	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.3	0.4	0.3
Action on Climate Change	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.1
Information Campaign to Deter Migrants	0.0	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1

In all suggested response/solution categories an onus of responsibility upon EU states to act, located solutions to the crisis within Europe, rather than in the countries of origin of most refugees and migrants. However, there was significant variation in the range of actions suggested and degrees to which these advocated hospitality or hostility towards refugees/migrants entering the EU. 'Increase Aid/Assistance' was the most commonly featured response/solution across the UK, Spanish, Swedish and German press, whilst 'United EU Response' and 'Increase search/rescue operations' were most important in Italy. These categories evidently suggest sympathetic framings of the plight of refugees. However, multiple responses/solutions were often introduced by opposing political voices within single articles, and this accounts, at least in part, for the apparently contradictory profile of some countries. For example, although 'Increase Refugee Intake/Legal Migration Channels' (12.1 per cent, n=37) was identified more frequently in the Spanish press than elsewhere, this was also the case for 'Reject/Deport More Refugees' which received very similar levels of attention (12.7 per cent, n=39).

In the Spanish press, *ABC* was the least likely title to feature responses/solutions to the crisis (41.8 per cent of articles, n=33), followed by *El Mundo* 54.4 per cent (n=49) and *El País* 60.9 per cent (n=84). Although a range of explanations/solutions to the crisis appeared, the issue was largely constructed as if it should primarily be solved in Europe, with coverage calling for endogenous solutions in spite of the fact that the issue was constructed as having exogenous reasons. Thus, in spite of the fact that 'war/conflict/atrocities/disease' constituted one of the main reasons explaining why migrants embark on journeys (55.6 per cent of Spanish articles, n=82), few stories advocated conflict resolution (2.2 per cent in *El Mundo*; 1.3 per cent in *ABC*; 1.4 per cent in *El País*). Similarly, although 'poverty/economic' explanations appeared in 27.7 per cent of the Spanish sample (n=85), calls to reduce inequalities or invest in the economic development of migrants' countries of origin did not significantly feature as responses/solutions. Rather, suggestions for economic responses were focused on increasing emergency aid/assistance (*El Mundo*, 16.7 per cent; 10.1 per cent in *ABC*, 21.7 per cent in *El País*) and calling for funds to address the immediate crisis faced by EU member states (*El Mundo*, 15.6 per cent; 19 per cent in *ABC*, 15.9 per cent in *El País*). The idea that a change to foreign policy could affect refugee and migrant flows was merely touched upon (2.2 per cent in *El Mundo*, n=2; 3.8 per cent in *ABC*, n=3; 9.4 per cent in *El País*, n=13). Indeed, most of the response/solutions suggested were not aimed at solving root causes of problem themes – the 'push

factors' forcing refugees to leave their countries of origin - but instead at mitigating some of their negative consequences for Europe.

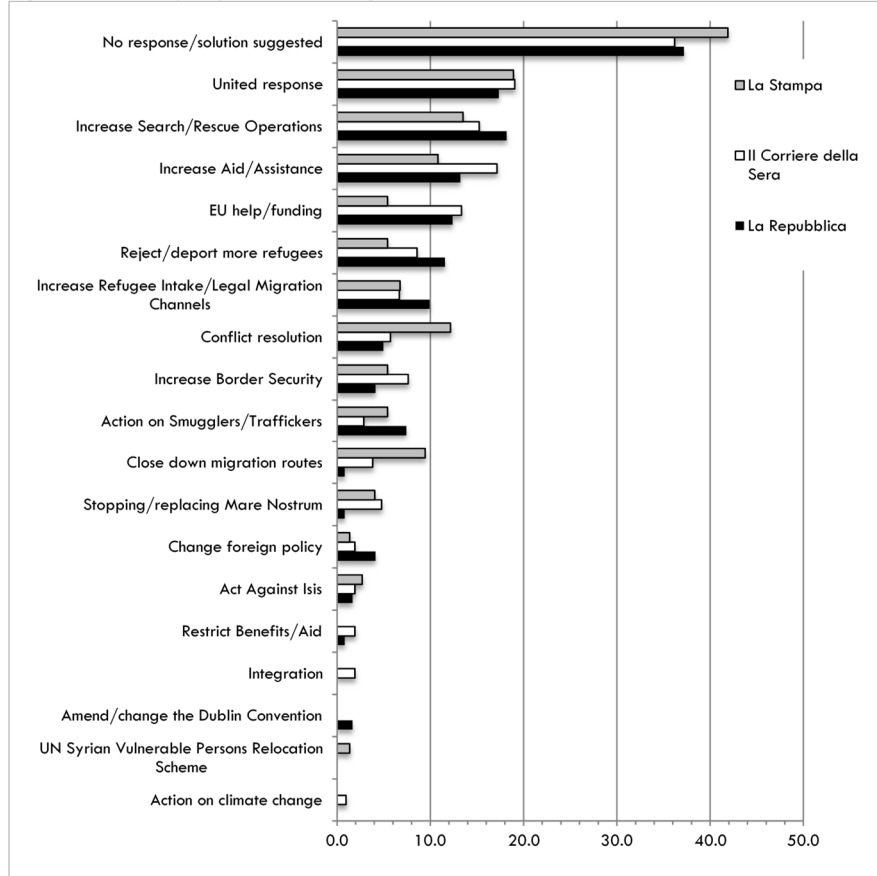
**Figure 7: Solutions/Responses to the Migration Crisis in Spanish Press (% of News Items; n=307)**



The Italian press featured a greater volume of responses/solutions than other countries in our study, perhaps unsurprisingly as the question of how to resolve, or at least manage the crisis in Italy, as one of the key entry points for refugees to the EU across the Mediterranean, has been particularly urgent. In line with the thematic focus upon 'search and rescue' and 'humanitarian issues', coverage in Italy was the most likely to propose a 'united European response' (*La Repubblica* 17.4 per cent; *Il Corriere della Sera* 19 per cent; *La Stampa* 18.9 per cent), and to 'increase search/rescue operations' (*La Repubblica* 18.2 per

cent; *Il Corriere della Sera* 15.2 per cent; *La Stampa* 13.5 per cent). In a similar vein, ‘increasing aid/assistance’ (*La Repubblica* 13.2 per cent; *Il Corriere della Sera* 17.1 per cent; *La Stampa* 10.8 per cent) can be read within the context of the arrival of unexpected numbers of refugees, and the budgetary pressures that result from rescuing, receiving and providing care to an ever-growing number of people in need.

**Figure 8: Solutions/Responses to the Migration Crisis in Italian Press (% of News Items; n=300)**



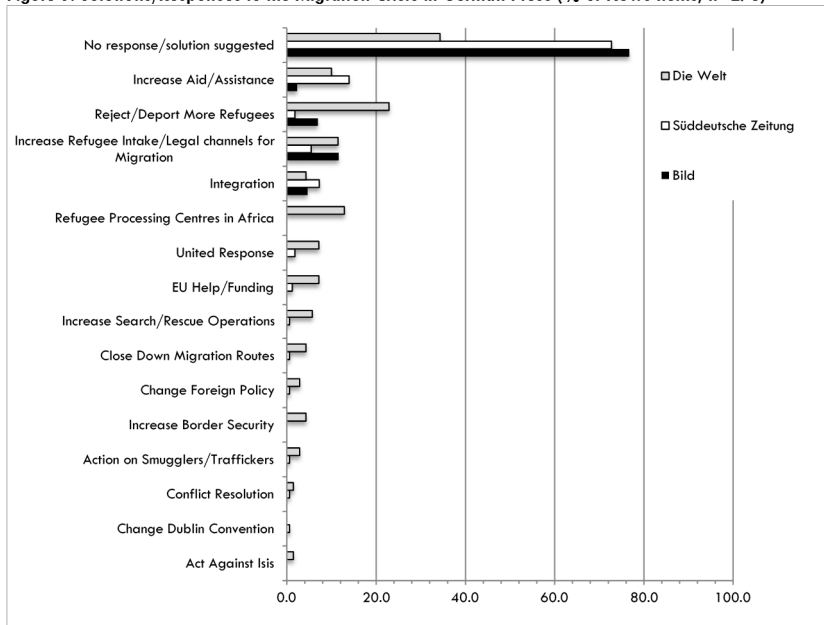
Although the Italian coverage did humanely stress the need to protect the welfare of refugees, the responses/solutions suggested framed the migration crisis primarily as a national challenge, preferably with the help and cooperation of other EU countries. While some articles, especially in *La Stampa* (12.2 per cent, n=9), emphasised the need to encourage conflict resolution, their major focus was upon stabilizing and re-establishing a strong central authority in Libya,

to increase the likelihood of more effective border controls preventing refugees and migrants embarking on sea crossings, but not necessarily reducing the humanitarian push factors forcing people to flee their homelands.

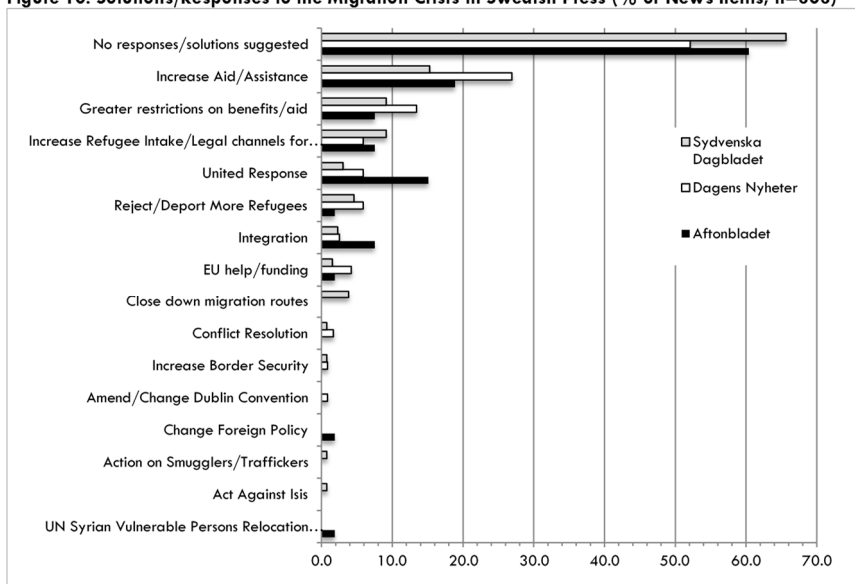
In the German press, relatively little space was afforded to concrete policy discussions on resolving the refugee crisis, with *Bild* least likely to include suggestions (23.3 per cent, n=10) and *Die Welt* the most likely (65.7 per cent, n=46). When responses/solutions did appear, a significant issue was the management of refugee flows, especially the issue of sharing responsibility for settlement within the EU. All newspapers included arguments in favour of increasing aid/assistance to refugees/migrants (*Bild* 2.3 per cent of articles, n=1; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13.9 per cent, n=23; *Die Welt*, 10 per cent, n=7) and for making it easier for refugees to reach the EU legally to claim asylum (*Bild* 11.6 per cent of articles, n=5; *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 5.5 per cent, n=9; *Die Welt*, 11.4 per cent, n=8) - primarily suggestions made by politicians, NGOs and citizens. Questioning Germany's share of refugees as disproportionate also featured, however, with *Die Welt* more likely than other newspapers to argue for securitising measures such as deporting refused asylum seekers (22.9 per cent, n=16), increasing border security (4.3 per cent, n=3), or closing down migration routes (4.3 per cent, n=3). Arguments for a more generally tougher stance towards refugees and migrants were also included, largely by CDU/CSU politicians arguing that refugee processing facilities should be set up in North Africa (12.9 per cent, n=9). Calls for a 'united response' to the crisis, perhaps surprisingly however, did not feature strongly in any German title.

Generally missing from German accounts were sustained discussions of how 'conflict resolution', or other strategies might mitigate the humanitarian push factors driving refugee flows. This was similarly the case in the Swedish press, despite all three titles strongly focusing humanitarian themes. Instead in Sweden, the response/solution to the crisis most frequently suggested was 'increase aid/assistance' (*Aftonbladet*, 18.9 per cent, n=10; *Dagens Nyheter* 26.9 per cent, n=32; *Sydvenska Dagbladet* 15.3 per cent, n=20). Whilst the category 'restrict benefit/aid' was second most important response/solution in the coverage, (*Aftonbladet* 7.5 per cent, n=4, *Dagens Nyheter* 13.4 per cent, n=16; *Sydvenska Dagbladet* 9.2 per cent, n=12) and some responses focused on the need to limit refugee numbers, reject or deport more people or close down migration routes, these arguments were largely introduced by sources of the anti-immigrant Sweden Democrats party rather than any editorial line. It was

**Figure 9: Solutions/Responses to the Migration Crisis in German Press (% of News Items; n=278)**

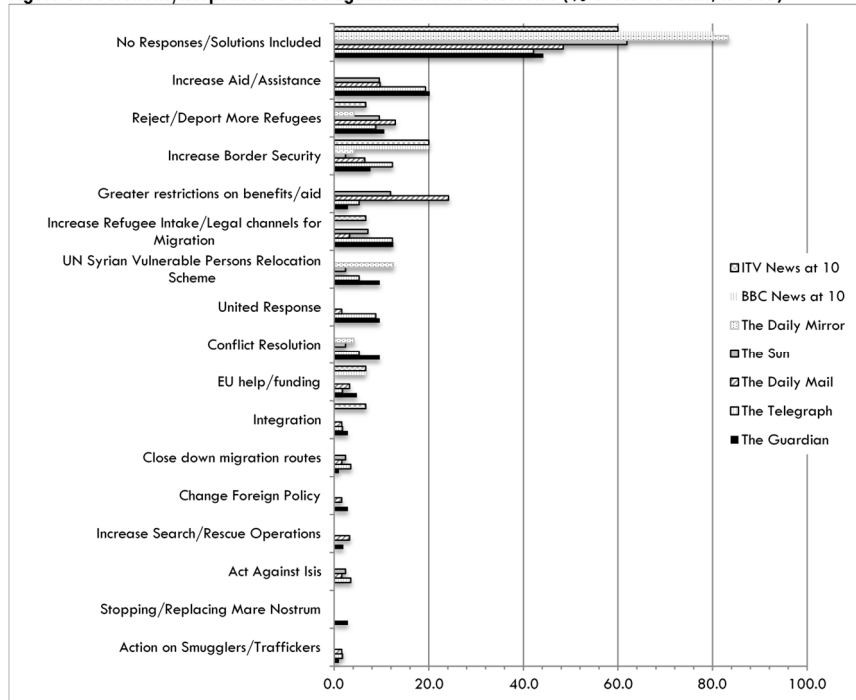


**Figure 10: Solutions/Responses to the Migration Crisis in Swedish Press (% of News Items; n=303)**



also notable that although Sweden has taken in far more refugees per head of population than any other EU country, calls for a 'united/EU response' to the crisis appeared at significant levels only in *Aftonbladet* (15.1 per cent, n=8) - the idea of 'burden sharing' being generally more important in the news framing of other national contexts than Sweden.

**Figure 11: Solutions/Responses to the Migration Crisis in UK News (% of News Items; n=319)**



In the UK, a large proportion of news stories did not discuss any potential solution to the crisis of migration, particularly in the *Mirror* (83.3 per cent, n=20), the *Sun* (61.9 per cent, n=26), and the broadcasters, the *BBC* (80 per cent, n=12) and *ITV* (60 per cent, n=9). The most prominent response/solution suggested across most news outlets was the need to 'increase aid/assistance' for refugees. However, a clear exception to this trend was found in the *Daily Mail*, which more prominently featured 'greater restrictions on benefits/aid' in 24.2 per cent of articles (n=15) and 'reject/deport more refugees' (12.9 per cent, n=8). In part, this focus was influenced by the *Daily Mail's* reporting of the Mayor of Calais, Natacha Bouchart's contention that Britain had such generous welfare benefits it was seen as an 'El Dorado' by refugees and other migrants. Whilst reported and challenged in left-wing titles such as the *Guardian*, restricting the rights of



newcomers to benefits was duly endorsed in the *Daily Mail*. Indeed, *Daily Mail's* coverage, which thematically focused on 'welfare/benefits/resources' and privileged economic 'pull' factors and 'inadequate border control' in its explanations for refugee/migrant flows was unique in its unambiguous framing of the crisis as, primarily, an economic threat to the nation.

Arguments for a 'united/EU response' featured infrequently across UK news outlets, especially in contrast to coverage in Spain and Italy. This may be because Britain has been largely successful in preventing refugees and migrants from reaching the UK and so any concept of burden sharing, quotas or a unified European response would involve taking more refugees. When such calls were made they came principally from European politicians and NGOs who were given some space in the broadsheets (9.6 per cent of Guardian articles, n=10; 8.8 per cent of Telegraph articles, n=5) but almost no representation in the tabloids or the broadcast news. More frequent attention was afforded to the suggestion that border security should be increased, an idea that featured across the press and the broadcasters.

Despite the fact that refugee/migrant flows were largely attributed to people fleeing 'war/conflict/atrocities' and 'poverty/economic' factors, very few responses/solutions to address these 'push' factors were proposed. Instead, most of the focus, particularly in the right-wing press, concentrated on turning people away, reducing eligibility to claim benefits or strengthening border security. The argument that Britain should take in more refugees or create safe routes for migration, mostly advocated by the UNHCR, NGOs and some columnists, appeared in the *Guardian* (12.5 per cent of articles, n=13) the *Telegraph* (12.3 per cent, n=7) and to a lesser extent the *Sun* (7.1 per cent, n=3), *ITV* (6.7 per cent, n=1) and the *Daily Mail* (3.2 per cent, n=2). Overall, the crisis was primarily presented in the UK media as one to be solved within the EU with tougher national borders and punitive restrictions.

## Conclusion

Across all five countries, news coverage predominantly focused on several distinct themes: immigration figures/levels, search and rescue/aid, political responses/policy and humanitarian issues. Variations in frequency between these themes across countries and news outlets reflected both differences in the editorial lines of newspapers and the extent to which themes resonated with national political priorities. Missing from the majority of articles, however, were framing devices signalling causal explanations or treatment recommendations

for these issues. As such, how themes might be understood, interpreted, or morally evaluated (i.e., how they were 'framed') lacked definition and direction. Moreover, where these framing devices were in play, a considerable disconnect was evident between the explanations offered for refugee/migrant flows and the suggested responses/solutions discussed. So, whilst war/conflict/atrocities/disease and poverty/economic factors were most often positioned as causes of the migration crisis, the suggested treatment recommendations that might logically follow in response to these problems - dealing with the root causes of forced migration and 'push' factors driving population movements - such as conflict resolution, discussions of foreign policy or climate change, are almost non-existent in the coverage. Those actually included primarily advocated humanitarian aid/assistance responding to the immediate emergency on the ground and securitising measures to manage its consequences. Furthermore, in the majority of publications, support for humanitarian responses were often mitigated by the inclusion of opposed political perspectives offering seemingly contradictory suggestions, such as greater restrictions on benefits/aid, focusing more generally on 'bringing migration levels under control, or taking a 'tougher stance' towards migrants by closing down migration routes or increasing border security. This means that whilst agency and concrete actions to deal with the crisis were focused within or on the borders of the EU, its causes were interpreted as a problem heralding from elsewhere and, moreover, not figured as the object of the response. In other words, the 'crisis' was not meaningfully framed as happening 'elsewhere', but in Europe.

This disconnection between what was signified by the framing devices of migration crisis news means not just that no one clear or coherent dominant frame prevailed across the coverage, but rather that there was largely no coherent 'frame' as such. Instead, what we see are fragmented frames, which in themselves, signify 'crisis', 'emergency', and a shifting set of anxieties between benevolent humanitarian concerns to save refugees and a securitising fortress mentality to better police the borders of the EU, and/or the nation.

Whilst framing research commonly acknowledges that frames are produced and reproduced through the framing devices used to construct, select and shape the preferred readings of stories (D'Angelo, 2002; Schudson, 2003), less commonly discussed is what happens when those framing devices set out intense problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and/or treatment recommendations that do not necessarily cohere or produce altogether logical news narratives. We suggest that this is a condition of

migration crisis news, and perhaps of crisis news more generally, where the concept of ‘crisis’, following historian Reinhart Koselleck, invokes a demand to respond with decision to ‘life-deciding alternatives meant to answer questions about what is just or unjust, what contributes to salvation or damnation, what furthers health or brings death’ in moments of inherent uncertainty when these questions cannot be convincingly or comprehensively answered (Koselleck and Richter, 2006: 361). The contingency of crisis news frames, then, potentially carries both positive and negative consequences for journalism. On the one hand, the uncertainties implicit in framing processes are useful in that they provide conditions of tension for compelling narration – communicating the sense that issues are ‘live’ or ‘at stake’ in any framing of the issues. On the other hand, with uncertainty comes an unsettling risk to plausibility – not just because any frame will exist in a field of competing alternative frames – but because the frame itself is internally unstable, liable to fragmentation and a constitutive lack of coherence on its own terms, potentially leaving news audiences without satisfactory structures of understanding through which to channel or resolve anxieties or make sense of events. As such, it may seem that migration crisis news frames are ‘broken’, but, it may be more accurate to say that the ‘completeness’ of any frame, especially in crisis news can only ever be partial, temporary, and unstable.

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