



DANDELION



Policy Brief #1:

The role of media in framing migration and contributing to migrants' integration



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DANDELION IN A NUTSHELL

Title	DANDELION – Promoting EU – funded projects of inclusive, innovative and reflective societies (IIRS) – <i>Grand Agreement N°: 693796</i>
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Coordinator	Q-PLAN International (www.qplan-intl.com) – Greece Mr Iakovos Delioglani
Project Overview	<p>DANDELION is a Coordination and Support Action funded by the European Commission under HORIZON 2020 programme, aiming to:</p> <p>“enhance the uptake and valorisation of research results deriving from EU-funded projects in the field of “Inclusive, Innovative & Reflective Societies” (IIRS) by promoting their work and bridging the communication gap”.</p> <p>The scope of intervention of the project will be in the following policy areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Migration and MobilityEmployment and New GrowthReversing InequalitiesCultures and CitizenshipGlobal Justice and Stability <p>The strategic objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Highlight the value-added for research, policy and society deriving from IIRS projects.• Offer advanced communication services to ongoing (and future) IIRS projects.• Deploy a wide variety of communication tools and activities to facilitate the interaction among all relevant stakeholders.• Create a sustainable and multidisciplinary community to raise the interest and visibility of EU-funded research in the field of IIRS and animate the discussion around the research policies and agendas.• Contribute to the fostering of societal impact out of IIRS research.
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1 Introduction – research context

The mass media has an important role to play in shaping public attitudes, especially in times of economic crisis and social tension. The media can either fuel or moderate existing conflict by the way it presents information, the language it uses and the conclusions it reaches.

As such, the impact of the media on public opinion is enormous and the dissemination of information is essential to modern society. As the so-called “fourth estate” and with this influence on public attitude and behaviour, the media also exerts pressure on decision makers in all walks of life, but particularly those setting the policy agenda whose decisions affect the citizens who in turn vote them into power.

When magnified through the lens of the media, many challenges Europe is facing become the main concerns of citizens, when otherwise they may not be so influenced.

This document analyses the role of media in framing the issue of migration and how it contributes to how the challenge is addressed.

2 Key observations

2.1 The media framing of immigrants between pity and violence

Migration is a complex phenomenon, with much of our knowledge about it and attitudes to it formed by a continuous flow of information from the media. The results of various public opinion surveys conducted in the European countries most affected by the influx of migrants show a high level of opposition to and scepticism of domestic migrant policies.

Many studies suggest that the extent of the influence of the media on public opinion depends on how the issue is framed, rather than on the level of coverage or size of the immigrant population (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009; Bonjour and Schrover 2015; Patler and Gonzales 2015).

A growing commercialization of mass media networks has led to many adopting a routinely sensationalist approach to issues of immigration, which, as shown by a number of analytical studies, reinforces negative public perceptions (Benson, 2002; Benson and



Saguy, 2005). Conversely, *this sensationalist approach often exploits human tragedy for commercial gain.*

During the 2016 POLIS conference on April 21 2016¹, researchers from the European Migration Crisis' media and communications department and the Media project presented their preliminary findings. A panel consisting of Dr Myria Georgiou and Dr Rafal Zaborowski, along with student researchers, discussed their research on European media coverage of the migration crisis. According to the researchers, the European press frames migrants through two extreme concepts: pity and violence. In every country, the media is filled with sympathetic stories and images of migrants fleeing war, suffering, or losing their lives during their journeys, while on the other hand, narratives call for interventions to make European countries more secure and protected from the "migrants invasion".

In the document "media representations of immigrants in Italy: framing real and symbolic borders"², Marco Bruno (2016) identifies three main frames in stereotyping the immigrants in the media:

- The landing issue and the invasion frame
- The immigrant as a security threat frame
- The threat to western culture and the religious frame



¹ <https://polisconference.com/>

² https://www.researchgate.net/publication/302983471_MEDIA_REPRESENTATIONS_OF_IMMIGRANTS_IN_ITALY_FRAMING_REAL_AND_SYMBOLIC_BORDERS

In general, there is ample research evidence to suggest that immigration is more likely to be presented in negative terms than it is in positive terms³ in the mass media (Gabrielatos and Baker 2008; IOM 2011; Lirola 2013; Schlueter and Davidov 2011). Much of the media tends to focus on sensationalist and superficial presentations of immigrants, which promote feelings of anxiety, and use, negative terminology and high-impact images to support this.

The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford conducted an extensive study of tabloid and broadsheet newspaper coverage in the UK 2010–2012⁴ and found, for example, that negative coverage was more common than positive (across all newspaper types). A significant proportion of the coverage associated immigration with criminality or deviance (commonly coupled with the terms: ‘illegal’, ‘terrorist’, ‘sham’) and another significant strand placed an emphasis on large numbers (‘million’, ‘thousands’), which convey an impression of the country being overwhelmed (Allen and Blinder 2013).

2.2 The role of emotions in the polarisation of perceptions

Almost 3000 refugees died in 2015 trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. Three-year-old Aylan Kurdi was one of them. Together with his mother and brother, the boy drowned when a boat carrying migrants sank at dawn on September 2, 2015. The photographs showing the young child face down in the sand after his family’s disastrous attempt to reach Greece from Turkey, appeared on front pages, in news programmes and on social media around the world and were seen by up to 20 million people in just 12 hours after they were first published.

The toddler became a tragic symbol the humanitarian crisis, an icon, an emblem, and an emotional vehicle prompting thousands of internet users to express their grief and outrage and manifest their compassion by sharing the dramatic images of Aylan and creating their own stories about the boy’s afterlife. Visual metaphors generated in this unprecedented way provide us with insight into the sentiments of ‘people like us’, who watch the evening news and create their own narratives reflecting their feelings about Europe’s refugee crisis. The emotional response of social media users who shared and

³ Chris Gilligan (2015) *The Public and the Politics of Immigration Controls*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41:9, 1373-1390

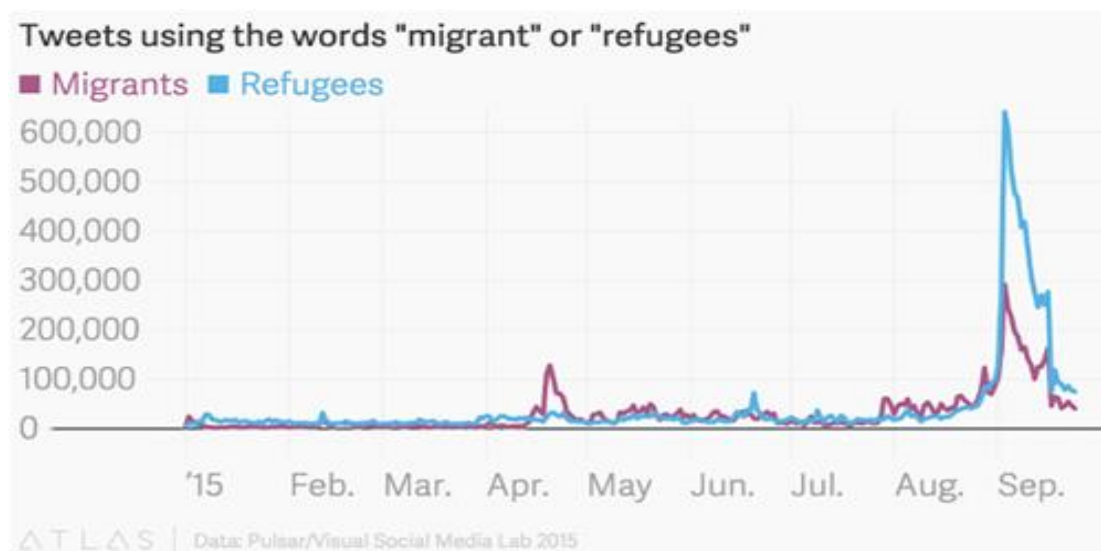
⁴ http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Report-Migration_News.pdf



disseminated the images of Aylan, and hash-tagged #Humanity Washed Ashore was extremely strong⁵.

Aylan's death shifted the narrative used by the media about the [refugee crisis](#) in the second half of 2015, which in turn influenced public perception and the political agenda. In the UK, for example, a campaign by the Independent newspaper, led to David Cameron agreeing to take in 20,000 Syrians over the course of the parliament.

According to several studies, the picture dramatically changed the language used to describe the crisis: from using the term "immigrants" the narrative tone shifted dramatically towards the use the word "refugees"⁶.



For most of 2015, the number of mentions of "migrants" and "refugees" were roughly equal. Yet after 2 September, people became three times more likely to refer to "refugees"⁷.

Dr Claire Wardle, research director at the Tow Centre for Digital Journalism at Columbia University and one of the report's authors, said: "2015 was the year the Syrian refugee crisis hit the European consciousness, but it's easy to forget that this was not the case

⁵ Magdalena Hodalska - #Humanity Washed Ashore: Social Media Users' Reaction to Europe's Refugee Crisis

⁶ Farida Vis, Simon Faulkner, Francesco D'Orazio and Lin Prøitz - The Iconic Image on Social Media: A Rapid Research Response to the Death of Aylan Kurdi - <http://visualsocialmedialab.org/projects/the-iconic-image-on-social-media>

⁷ <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/aylan-kurdi-social-media-report-1.533951>

before the Aylan Kurdi image. In April, more than 700 refugees and migrants lost their lives when their boat capsized off Lampedusa. After one day of coverage, the story disappeared, despite the tragic loss of life.



Figure 1 Social media's role in the emotional response to the Aylan Kurdi tragedy – Source prweek⁸

"The photo of Aylan Kurdi galvanised the public in a way that hours of broadcasts and thousands of column inches wasn't able to do. It has created a frame through which subsequent coverage has been positioned and compared."

The Horizon2020 **ENGAGE project** has investigated how the image of the death of Aylan Kurdi contributed to reshaping the conditions for active involvement among young people in Sheffield and Oslo. The iconic appeal of the image stems from its ability to articulate an abstract conception of recognition through figural composition in combination with its circulation through social media and ordinary people's affective and coordinated enactment with it. During the two weeks in September 2015, charity organizations and RW-groups represented networks of people with porous boundaries,

⁸ www.prweek.com/article/1376910/social-media-debate-immigration-transformed-following-aylan-kurdi-image

yet representing spaces where people engaged civically and politically. Despite political, cultural and socio-economic differences, despite differences in young Britons' and Norwegians' trust in the government and politicians, the image of Aylan Kurdi elicited an initial affective response that raised awareness of the refugee crisis among the younger generation, which in turn generated engagement and mobilisation. Whether these new forms of engagement have the capacity to affect politics remains to be investigated.⁹

This story is emblematic of how the public perception is largely influenced by emotions.

2.3 Emotional share in social media

Social media communication uses emotion to convey messages (through sharing) rather than promoting only reliable sources of information. This mechanism is well known by communicators and it has been widely manipulated to guide important decisions in recent years. In addition to that, there is an open discussion on how social media algorithms are influencing the decisions people make and the opinions they hold. This controversy was highlighted after Brexit and President Trump's election, when the term "fake news" became common.

2.4 The influence of the media in determining beliefs and behaviours

According to a study conducted by Jérôme Héricourt and Gilles Spielvogel¹⁰, exposure to media is a key determinant of belief, which in itself appears as a major determinant of policy preference. The images circulating in the media, the descriptions and the framing of immigrants, influence beliefs, public perceptions and attitudes towards immigrants and affects the political choices people make.

The FP7 **FIDUCIA project**¹¹ analyses the role of the media in the Criminalisation of Migration in Europe¹² and its consequences for society: while the media raise the alarm, other institutional actors are eager to exploit a symbolic threat and to validate, support and channel that threat towards certain targets. The result is a pattern of news coverage

⁹ ENGAGE: This project has been funded by Horizon2020's [Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions](#).

¹⁰ Héricourt, J. and Spielvogel, G. (2012). *How beliefs about the impact of immigration shape policy preferences: Evidence from Europe*.

¹¹ <http://www.fiduciaproject.eu/>

¹² www.ceps.eu/system/files/Criminalisation%20of%20Migration%20in%20Europe%20J%20Parkin%20FIDUCIA%20final.pdf



that sees cycles of attention focusing on crime news involving foreigners and which quickly assumes the characteristics of a moral panic, often leading to enhanced police activities and the introduction of administrative decrees and special legislation (Maneri, 2011).

The **SOM project**¹³, which analysed the media's treatment of migration and related political issues across several countries, found anti-immigration discourse to be highly variable between countries. A key finding was the persistent targeting and politicisation of Muslim migrants, noting that the vision of 'them', 'the Muslims', is largely shaped by non-Muslim actors. ([Prof Russell King and Dr Aija Lulle, Research on Migration - 2016](#))¹⁴

Threadgold (2009 in McAuliffe and Weeks, 2015)¹⁵ explains the coinciding relations between politics and media: "Politicians, media and academics provide the language for talking about immigration, setting the agenda and framing the stories. A certain policy focus is transmitted from government to media. The stories that the media then produce feed back into policy discourse. In addition to driving policy, 'media panics' also influence academic research on media coverage of migration. That in turn gives rise to further policy changes, thus feeding a cycle."

2.5 The role of the media in promoting migrant integration and enhancing societal cohesion

One way or another, people's perceptions of immigrants and migration affect the quality of community life, the possibilities of integration and immigration policies. It is therefore easier for appropriate policies to be designed if policy makers consider the real situation of immigration from all perspectives.

The research project "**Migration and the Media**"¹⁶ from the London School Of Economic's Department of Media and Communications focuses on understanding how the different histories and politics of European countries shape the variety of attitudes towards the migration crisis:

¹³ <https://sites.google.com/site/somprojecteu/>

¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/policy_reviews/ki-04-15-841_en_n.pdf#view=fit&pagemode=none

¹⁵ McAuliffe, Marie, Weeks, Warren (2015) *Media and migration: Comparative analysis of print and online media reporting on migrants and migration in selected origin and destination countries*. Canberra: Department of Immigration and Border Protection

¹⁶ <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/Migration-and-the-media.aspx>



- Media (can/do) support informed publics and shared responsibility
- Media (can/do) support the possibility of an encounter with strangers – common humanity even if others suffer

but what is missing

- Europe's narrative of 'the crisis' is one of threat to its territory, values, identity, and security
- Balanced debate
- More and better contextualization – history; war; geopolitics
- Recognition of who these people are and what they bring to Europe and to Europe's ethical space

The **project ACCEPT PLURALISM** suggests that mainstream political actors and the media play a crucial role in transforming isolated expressions of intolerance into a major public debate capable of changing the limits of tolerance in society.

The mainstream media play a major role in shaping public debate about migration and migrants. They reflect and construct the process by which anti-immigrant statements or debates about the toleration of migrants' practices and values have been mainstreamed. As in the political arena, positions and opinions expressed in the media are controversial. But they offer a public space for contentious discourses, which contributes in any case to present tolerance toward cultural diversity as a leading issue.¹⁷

The **MEDIVA**¹⁸ project also explores the role of the media in promoting migrant integration and enhancing societal cohesion. The project believes that promoting more inclusive societies is part of the ethical and business mission of the media sector in four concrete ways:

- promoting migrants' fair and polyphonic representation in the media;
- presenting a balanced view of migration-related issues;

¹⁷ <http://accept-pluralism.eu/Home.aspx>.

¹⁸ <http://www.eui.eu/Projects/MEDIVA/Home.aspx/>



- engaging immigrants as media professionals (journalists, audience, spokespersons);
- raising the awareness of both media professionals and audiences on inequality and discrimination suffered by immigrants.

Good uses of media to promote integration are experimented in the context of the project **MYSTORY**¹⁹, co-funded by the European Commission's Europe for Citizens Programme. The project is an initiative to raise awareness, promote discussion, training and assist migrants and refugees and the organisations working with them, to contribute to the media narratives of displaced peoples in a positive way.

The free United Kingdom newspaper [Migrant Voice](#)²⁰ is led by migrants and is therefore actively bringing their opinions to public attention while also introducing readers to the life stories of newcomers, their aspirations and plans for the future. It draws attention to migration policies and the effects they produce, including those on the British economy. The main aims of the paper are to build a more inclusive public debate and shift the narrative to help to change the public attitude.

Re-build Refuge Europe's²¹ is a project with the objective to counteract this discourse and beliefs. It builds on creative cultural proposals and offers spaces for processes of co-creation to be developed, in which refugees and migrants are considered as a constitutive part of the remaking of European communities.

Inspiring Initiatives



An image is better than 1000 words! The [2014 World Press Photo Award](#)²² went to a moonlit image showing migrants trying to get mobile phone signals and call home, as they make their way to Europe for better life. Photo projects across Europe serve as a lens through which

¹⁹ <https://www.mystoryproject.eu/>

²⁰ <http://www.migrantvoice.org/>

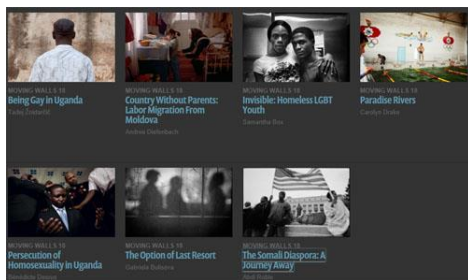
²¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/creative-europe/projects/ce-project-details-page/?nodeRef=workspace://SpacesStore/55d584f1-dfd1-4ee4-8ecd-7fcc5f0ab4c7>

²² <http://www.migrantvoice.org/> <https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2014>

the local population can get to know the diversity of migration experiences and confront stereotypes about migrants.



The Migrant Photography exhibition, [“Belonging”](#)²³, in Belfast gives a glimpse into the lives of migrants, combining art with workshop activities, engaging the local population into a much-needed dialogue. Each portrait of a migrant is accompanied by an audio-recording of their personal story and individual experience.



Another example is a global photo-project, the [“Moving Walls”](#)²⁴ that showcases images of migrants and refugees depicting a wide range of often under-reported social issues.

3 Key policy messages

Reflection on media representations of migration can only move from the assumption implied that policies are largely influenced by the public discourse that develops on a certain theme, in terms of agenda building and agenda setting²⁵.

3.1 The rapid evolution of the social media phenomenon

The 24/7 nature of the news cycle is quicker and harder to keep up with and respond to than it ever has been before. More tweets are now sent every day than in a whole year 10 years ago. And by 2018, around a third of the world’s population will use social media networks.

²³ <http://www.thebelongingproject.org/>

²⁴ <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/moving-walls/18>

²⁵ MC COMBS Maxwell E., SHAW Donald L. The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media; BENTIVEGNA, Sara (ed.). Mediare la realtà. Mass media, sistema politico e opinione pubblica; MARINI, Rolando. Mass-media e discussione pubblica.

These trends will only accelerate and continue to change the way democracy works. This creates new opportunities to facilitate public debate and to engage Europeans. However, Europe and its member states must move quicker to interact with citizens, be more accountable and deliver better and faster on what has been collectively agreed.²⁶

There is a need for additional research on social media and the influence of emotions, fake news and algorithms in shaping perceptions of citizens.

3.2 Exploitation of media and social media to promote integration

Clearly, public attitudes are not wholly shaped by media. However, in the age of globalization, the media has become a very powerful tool and one of the main determinants of public opinion. Depending on the type of media and the aims behind them, they can either reinforce the criminalized image of a newcomer and underline anti-immigrant rhetoric or, on the contrary, help to better integrate migrants and serve as a genuine transmitter of their stories, thus counteracting misunderstanding and fear. To ensure that the human rights of migrants are protected and that intercultural understanding (where diversity is seen as a positive phenomenon) is built, the international community needs to address the power of media and the effects they produce in the public conversation on migration.²⁷

According to the Conference Report “Understanding and Tackling the Migration Challenge - The Role of Research” Brussels, 4-5 February 2016²⁸, to better exploit the potential of communication technologies and social media to tackle migrant integration and its related issues, **more research is needed** to:

- Explore the relationship between public attitudes, political mobilisation and media framing of immigration issues
- examine the role of economic conditions, party political dynamics and security concerns in shaping such narratives

²⁶ White paper on the future of Europe - Reflections and scenarios for the EU27 by 2025 - Corporate author(s) and publication year(s): 2017, European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication - <https://bookshop.europa.eu/en/white-paper-on-the-future-of-europe-pbNA0117150/>

²⁷ <https://ourworld.unu.edu/en/media-and-their-role-in-shaping-public-attitudes-towards-migrants>

²⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/other_pubs/migration_conference_report_2016.pdf



- better understand the factors contributing to negative political and media discourse;
- understand the role of media (and especially social media) in shaping public perception and, as a consequence, in influencing the priorities and design of policy agendas
- benefit from media to resize public anxiety about immigration and its impacts.
- exploit the media (and the social media) to promote migrants integration and the value of a multicultural society
- understand the determinants and impacts of framing immigration in European countries, including the role of political elites and the media. Research should explore the relationship between public attitudes, political mobilisation and media framing of immigration issues

3.3 Increase communication of EC policies and actions

The media, and particularly social media should be used to better inform citizens and help align public perception with reality.

To that end additional Coordinates and Support actions are needed that promote EC activities and research results.

Research results should be widely available, not only through publications and deliverables, but also through packaged results in easy-to-understand formats and small documents, to be delivered to the media and communicated through social media.

EC-funded projects should specify in their grant agreements that the website will be available online for at least 5 years after the project ends and that the main results should be uploaded into a public repository that will guarantee open access to the data for several years.



4 Conclusions

Media and social media are important players in the migration challenge. People rely on them for information but often the “stories” they deliver use sensationalist headlines, contents and images and they often don’t reflect the reality of the problem.

This can generate a sentiment of fear that promotes xenophobia and this is often used by political parties (especially extremist ones) to raise interest and collect votes.

The role of the media and social media in shaping a multicultural Europe should be further studied and new strategies for the exploitation of this potential should be drafted and implemented.

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