

## Press release

European Journalism Observatory and Otto Brenner Stiftung present pilot analysis:

## Migration coverage in Europe's media



This comparative study of media coverage in 17 countries reveals different narratives – plus some blind spots

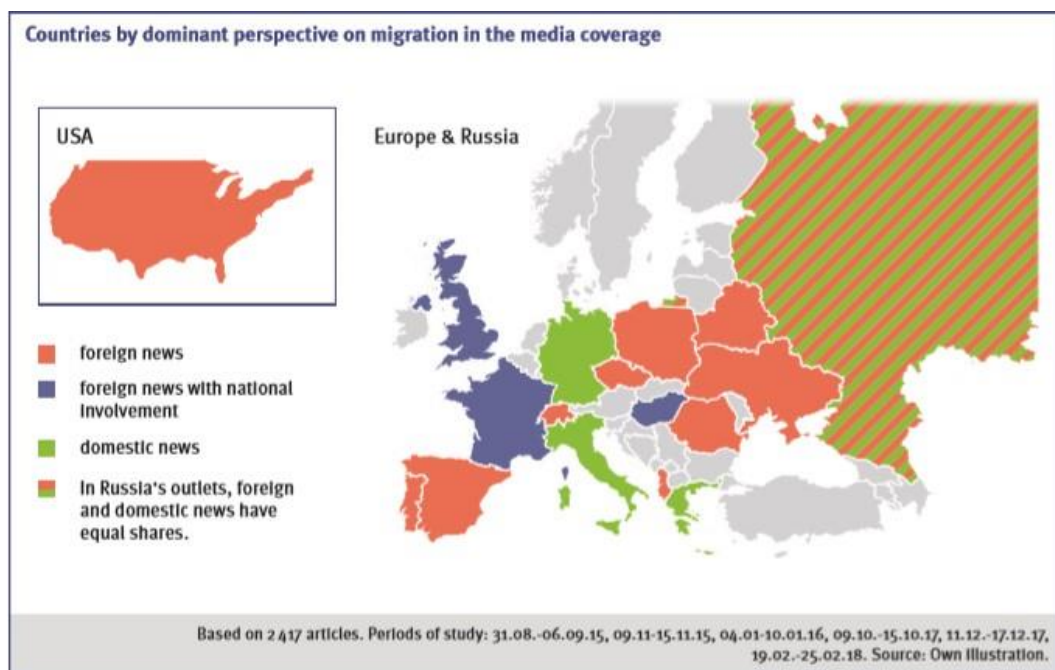
In the five years since the European refugee crisis began, controversies related to migration have deeply affected political landscapes across the EU, yet no “European solutions” have so far been found. **A new study by the European Journalism Observatory (EJO) now shines a light on the media’s role in the migration debate.**

EJO’s comparative analysis reveals that in each country, the media tell different stories about migrants and refugees. Clear differences in the quantity and quality of coverage can be discerned not only between Western and Central Eastern Europe, but even within Western Europe. The study also reveals a number of blind spots in the coverage of migration.

For this research project, a dozen EJO partners – based at journalism institutes across Europe – analyzed media coverage of migrants and refugees in 17 countries. The study is based on 2,417 articles published during six separate weeks selected between August 2015 and March 2018. **It is the first international project to compare the coverage of migrants and refugees across so many different political systems, media systems and journalistic cultures.** [Further details and the full report](#) are available on the website of the Otto Brenner Stiftung, which co-funded the study. [A summary of the report](#) can also be found on the EJO website.

## Key findings

- Germany, which currently provides a home to 1.1m refugees (according to UNHCR data for 2019), emerged from the European refugee crisis as one of the world's top five host countries for refugees. **Our research found that this unique position has resulted in a specifically German perspective on the issue.** The sheer quantity of coverage in Germany also far outstrips that of most other countries in the study.
- The study also reveals fundamentally different attitudes between Germany, Italy and Greece and all the other EU countries in our sample. **In Germany, Italy and Greece, migrants and refugees are presented as domestic topics,** reflecting the fact that these countries are primarily destinations of migrants and refugees. However, **the media in all other EU countries in our sample treat the topic primarily as a foreign affairs issue** – events related to migration take place far away from home. (see chart below)



- The study also finds **stark differences in the tone of coverage in different countries.** In general, media in Central and Eastern Europe focus more on problems experienced with, and protests against, migrants and refugees. Media in Western European emphasize the situation of migrants and refugees, and the help provided to them.
- One of the main problems identified in our study is that **media across Europe do not make clear to their audiences the background and legal status of people seeking to enter Europe** as a migrant or refugee. Coverage is dominated by political debates and political actors (45%), leaving almost no room (4% of the articles) for coverage of economic, cultural, historic, and other background information.
- Only a third of the articles (33%) make a clear distinction between refugees, who have a protected legal status, and migrants, who leave their countries of origin for economic, social, educational and other reasons. Most articles (60%) confuse migrants and refugees or remain unclear.
- The media only rarely make individual migrants and refugees the focus of their coverage. While 26.6% of articles do feature migrants and refugees as main actors, 18% cover them only as large, anonymous groups. A mere 8% of the articles feature

migrants and refugees as individuals or families, while citizens and civil society actors in destination countries are the main actors in 18% of the articles. As a result, the voices of migrants and refugees tend to remain silent. Very few of them are actually quoted: in the articles surveyed, the media quoted 411 migrant speakers, compared to 4,267 non-migrant speakers. While helpers are regularly individualised, those at the receiving end of help are not.

- **Public debate around the issue in other countries is often far from being as one-sided as is often assumed.** We compared the percentage of speakers quoted who had positive attitudes towards migrants and refugees with the percentage of speakers quoted who had negative attitudes. In almost all the countries covered by this study, the two media outlets in our sample offered contrasting positions. We conclude from these results that more diverse – or at least less black and white – approaches towards migration issues can be found in the media of each country.

*Susanne Fengler/Marcus Kreutler: "Migration coverage in Europe's media – A comparative analysis of coverage in 17 countries", OBS-Working paper 39, Frankfurt am Main, January 2020*

## About the report authors

**Susanne Fengler** is Professor of International Journalism at TU Dortmund University and the Academic Director of the Erich Brost Institute for International Journalism, Germany. She is also the director of the German EJO. She has directed numerous comparative research projects in cooperation with the Volkswagen Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation, the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union and many others. Her main research interests are media and migration, media transparency and media accountability.

Prof. Dr. Susanne Fengler

Erich-Brost-Institut für internationalen Journalismus

Telefon: 0231 - 755 4152 / Mobil: 0179 - 203 931 4

E-Mail: [susanne.fengler@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:susanne.fengler@tu-dortmund.de)

**Marcus Kreutler** is a research fellow at the Erich Brost Institute for International Journalism and a PhD Candidate at the School for International and Intercultural Communication (SIIC). He has taken part in several international research projects and co-ordinated an EJO study of coverage of the Ukraine conflict. He has worked as a journalist and as a journalism lecturer at the Institute of Journalism of TU Dortmund University.

## About the European Journalism Observatory (EJO)

The [EJO](#) is a network of independent non-profit media research institutes. It aims to bring journalism research, industry news and current media debates to a wider audience.

Each EJO partner institute has its own website, allowing the network to publish reports on journalism and the media in more than a dozen languages.

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