Foreword

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

A study by journalists, for journalists and policy-makers

Migration media coverage in 17 countries from 2015 to 2016
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Having long been a topic of public discussion, the issue of migration has over the past years taken centre stage in European, North African and Middle Eastern media. Conflicts in Syria and Libya coupled with political and economic instability in several countries in the Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Africa as well as the Middle East have resulted in large scale movement of migrants and refugees through and to North Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

We have all seen the stark images depicted in the media of migrants and asylum seekers packed aboard vessels of questionable seaworthiness, risking life and limb to make the perilous journey across the Mediterranean in search of a safe haven and a better future. These images convey in sharp relief the human struggle in its most desperate moments.

Over the course of the last three years, we have witnessed a range of different approaches to covering migration in traditional media on both sides of the Mediterranean. This study aims to unpack some of these approaches in order to identify and better understand the prevailing media narratives on migration that exist in different national contexts. It looks at the strengths and shortcomings and provides some insight into the interplay between editorial lines, political narratives, journalistic approaches and public discourse on this sensitive and often polarising subject.

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In this study, 17 journalists critically reflect on how their respective national media have addressed the challenge of reporting on migration. Their analyses are based on their insider knowledge and views of the realities of the newsroom, news gathering, editorial policies and various other constraints of professional journalistic work. As such, this study is the first element of a broader investigation into how journalists report on migration. It does not constitute an exhaustive, in-depth analysis of an academic nature preferring instead to give professional, migration-savvy journalists the opportunity to provide critical input and important food for thought for migration actors.
While the study was carried out with this narrow focus in mind, its findings are naturally of broad interest to a variety of other stakeholders in migration policy-making, civil society, international organisations and the public-at-large.

ICMPD has lent its support to this study because we believe that a fair and balanced view of migration in the media is an essential stepping stone towards developing a more nuanced understanding of migration among the general public as well as contributing to fair and balanced migration policies grounded in facts.

It identifies the main trends and contrasts between the different media approaches in a given country and highlights positive examples and constructive approaches to addressing the challenge of reporting on migration in a professional and appropriate manner.

The 17 countries covered include nine to the north of the Mediterranean and eight to the south, representing an assortment of different political, social and economic contexts and, as the study reflects, a collection of varying approaches to journalistic reporting on migration.

Through the EUROMED Migration IV programme, ICMPD has lent its support to this study because we believe that a fair and balanced view of migration in the media is an essential stepping stone towards developing a more nuanced understanding of migration among the general public as well as contributing to fair and balanced migration policies grounded in facts.

Migration is often a very polarising topic, which generates a fear on the part of the media of appearing to pick a side on the issue. Incertitude does not, however, make for good coverage and solid reporting. We therefore strongly believe that there is a need to allow for balanced narratives on migration to emerge on both sides of the Mediterranean.

Well-informed, fact-based reporting that eschews stereotypes and racial undertones is something that many media outlets deliver, but it is not universal.

The economic model favoured by the tabloid press remains deeply entrenched as it continues to generate revenue and operate with a high degree of impunity. This study explicitly targets traditional mainstream media, which are generally well-intentioned but often lack the resources, support and guidance to provide balanced reporting that is well-researched and contributes to a better understanding of migration as a phenomenon.

As mentioned previously, this study covers a wide variety of media environments across 17 countries. Journalists from these countries were given a great degree of freedom to examine their respective national media landscapes, identify main trends and come up with a number of key recommendations on how to better address and strengthen migration coverage. The end result is a formidable diversity in approaches to these questions between the different country chapters. While we are not always in agreement with the views expressed by individual journalists in the study, we believe that the study as a whole makes a valuable contribution to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of media reporting on migration in the Mediterranean.

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We invite media professionals and policy-makers to consider this study in our joint efforts towards achieving a balanced narrative on migration.

Michael Spindelegger
Director General
International Centre for Migration Policy Development