

# EXPOSED:

Media coverage of migration in Czech Republic,  
Estonia and Slovakia

## Comparative report



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**Pavel Pospěch**  
**Adéla Jurečková**

Ján Hacek  
Pavína Chalupková  
Peter Ivanič  
Esta Kaal  
Berit Renser  
Eliška Tokošová

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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Migration from Non-EU countries has been a frequent media topic in the Czech, Estonian, and Slovak media since 2015, although the actual number of immigrants with origins outside of Europe in these countries remains rather low<sup>1</sup>. Only 0.02% of the Czech population are beneficiaries of international protection, and in Slovakia, the figure is only 0.01%<sup>2</sup>. In Estonia, between 1997-2017, 445 people have received status as refugees de jure<sup>3</sup>.

The relatively low shares of immigrants, especially from the Middle East and Africa, indicate that people from the countries standing in the focus of this research have limited opportunities to gain direct experience with refugees and migrants through personal contact. According to the findings of the Eurobarometer survey (Special Eurobarometer 469, 12/2017), citizens of the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Slovakia are among those countries with the most negative attitudes towards migrants. 64% of the Czech population feels uncomfortable with at least some of the mentioned social relations with immigrants (of a certain ethnic or socio-cultural origin), as well as 48% of Estonians, and 47% of Slovaks. The Eurobarometer results therefore seem to confirm the view presented by the “contact hypothesis”<sup>4</sup>: lower instances of direct contact with immigrants within a population results in a more negative attitude towards them.

In this situation, the role of the media as mediators of knowledge, and still one of the primary gatekeepers of information, comes into play. Therefore, this analysis raises the relevant question as to how the media portrays migration and migrants, and which depictions are selected for their audiences.

## 2. METHODOLOGY: THE THREE CASES

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This analysis is focused on the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Estonia. The following research questions were common for all three countries:

- What are the main topics and features of migration reporting in each country?
- Who are the speakers on migration-related topics?
- What is the nationality of the migrants discussed?
- What are the loci of migration-related reporting?
- What is the approach of journalists and the media they work for towards the topic?

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1 Eurostat (general statistics on immigration): <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00157>

2 Asylum Seekers and Beneficiaries of International Protection in V4 Countries (2019): <https://www.clovekvtisni.cz/media/publications/1221/file/cr-v4niem-2019.pdf>

3 Estonian Refugee Council: <https://www.pagulasabi.ee/blog/kui-palju-eestis-pagulasi>

4 Allport, G. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Cambridge MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Due to organizational constraints and local conditions, different samples of data were used to answer these questions. In the Czech Republic and Estonia, two-month periods before elections at the local level were chosen. In the Czech Republic, this was the period before the municipal and Senate elections, between 5.8 - 4.10 2018. In Estonia, this was the period before the municipal elections, between 14.8 - 14.10 2017. In Slovakia, the period between 1.5 - 31.8.2018 was selected. While these time frames differed in scope, they shared a focus on the summer months, during which time the coverage of migration-related issues is usually higher. In all three countries, the appearance of the terms „migrants,“ „migration,“ and „refugees,“ in major print and online media were analysed<sup>5</sup>.

Table 1: Media outlets covered and number of reports per media type per country:

Estonia		Česká republika	
Print media	202	Print media	316
Postimees		MF Dnes	
Maaleht		Právo	
Eesti Ekspress		Lidové noviny	
Eesti Päevaleht		Online media	407
Online media	259	Novinky.cz	
Delfi.ee		Idnes.cz	
Postimees.ee		Aktualne.cz	
Maaleht.ee		Total	723
Err.ee			
Total	461		
Slovensko			
Print media	345		
Sme			
Pravda			
Plus 7 dní			
Online media	592		
Hospodárské noviny			
Denník N			
Aktuality.sk			
Total	937		

<sup>5</sup> See national reports for the full discussion of methods, the media included, the sample size and selection, and the keywords used.

The quantitative content analysis of the selected media outlets was complemented by qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 28 journalists from the three countries (12 from Slovakia, 10 from Estonia, and 6 from the Czech Republic). The aim of the interviews was to better understand:

- The journalists' approach towards migration-related topics
- The reasons for the journalists' and media's interest in the topic
- Approach and standards of the editorial offices/teams for migration reporting
- Work conditions of journalists working on migration
- Further observations during the interviews (topics and perspectives raised by the interviewees, their emotions, etc.)

The main criterion for the selection of interviewees was their experience with covering migration and integration. We tried to compile as diverse a sample as possible – therefore, we included journalists from public-service and private media, different media types (print, online, TV, radio, news agencies, freelancers), journalists focusing on domestic and foreign issues, as well as editors at different career levels within the media houses. Therefore, despite its limited size, the sample can be considered as largely saturated.

We used a prepared set of topics and questions – but left enough space for the interviewees to express their own perspectives – and allowed the conversations to develop freely, in order to ascertain what they considered important and worth sharing.

These interviews were transcribed and anonymized. Afterwards, we carried out an analysis of each interview's content, focusing on the main, common perspectives, and overlaps within the sample.

Even though the results cannot be fully generalized, they indicate trends, and give valuable insights into the "kitchen" of the media's coverage of migration topics within these three countries.

### 3. WHAT IS THE NEWS?

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In all three countries, different time periods were covered by the research. The methodologies also differed, with respect to local conditions and the resources of all of the partners involved. Nonetheless, some general observations can be made with respect to the general trends and developments within the coverage.

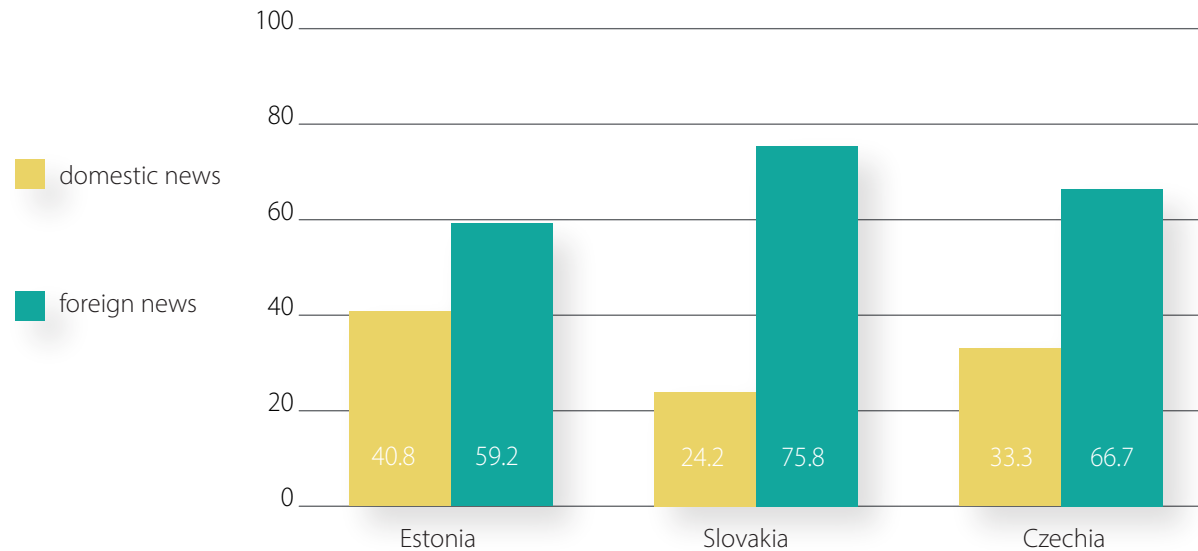
In Slovakia, out of the six pre-defined frames in focus (terrorism, crime, labour market, asylum process, causes of migration, integration processes), crime was the single most common point, with 29% of the coverage where those frames could be identified. However, these results are skewed, as is often the case in migration coverage, by two highly charged events: 35% of the total crime coverage during the selected time period can be attributed to (a) the murder of a Filipino man on a street in Bratislava (26.5.2018), and, (b) the abduction of a Vietnamese diplomat, and the subsequent political controversy. (The latter event took place at an earlier date, but new information emerged during the period under review.) Among the pre-defined frames, the labour market situation (20%) was the second-highest scoring frame. These reports discussed the lack of qualified labour and work-related immigration from European countries. 49% of all coverage fell outside of the pre-defined frames; these reports primarily focused on the situation regarding migration from outside of Europe, and they echoed the topics of the 2015 “migration crisis”.

In the Czech Republic, however, no prominent domestic events took place during this period, and the discourse was predominantly connected to foreign events. The migration policy of the EU and its members, (26% of all coverage) and migration-related problems in other EU countries (23%) took the centre stage, followed by reporting on migration-related problems in the Mediterranean (18%). This focus reflects the general tone of the discourse on migration within the country: migration has become a policy issue. Respective policies and political negotiations have come to the fore, rather than reports about individual incidents or the individual stories of migrants. When it comes to the latter, “the lives of migrants” are a marginal frame in the country’s media (6%). The stories of migrants are emphasised only when they are related to a policy issue, such as the controversies involving ships carrying migrants in the Mediterranean.

In the Estonian media, the news also focused on the situation abroad, albeit less dominantly. 59% of the coverage focused on foreign countries. 49% of the Estonian coverage (56%, if the secondary framing is taken into account) was coded under the “conflict” frame, and 26% under the “politics” frame (33% with secondary framing included). Again, human-interest stories, i.e., stories reporting on the experience and fate of migrants, were marginal (11%; 13% with secondary framing). The focus on migration as an issue of conflict and as a political issue is therefore predominant.

*The focus on migration as an issue of conflict and as a political issue is predominant.*

Graph 1: The share of migration-related domestic and foreign news, per country:

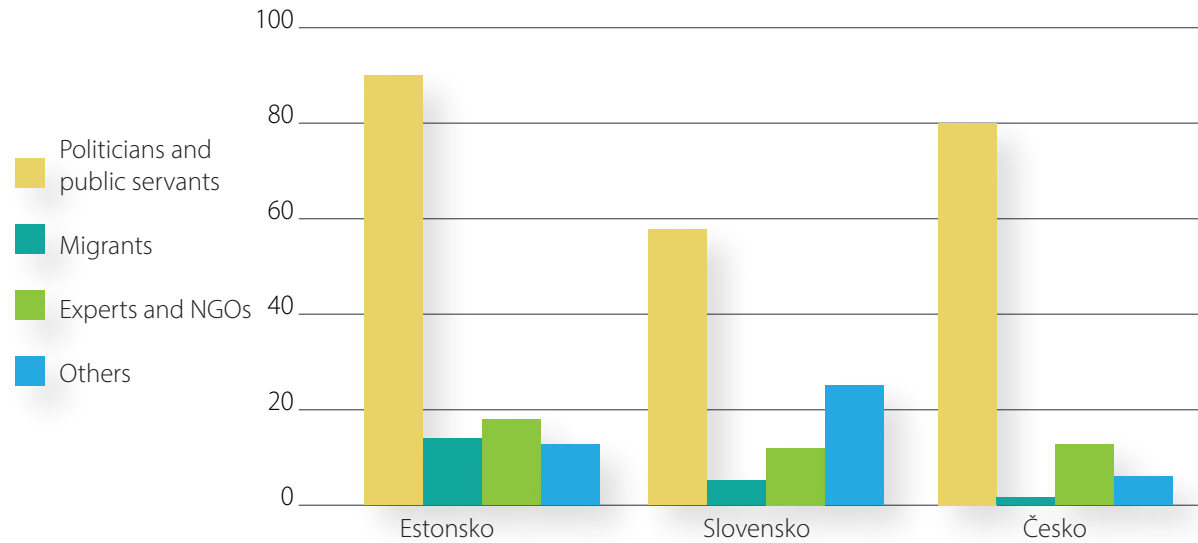


Overall, there are substantial differences in the ways in which migrants and migration are framed within the countries in question. In all three countries, reporting from abroad made up a substantial share of the coverage in question. In the Czech Republic, Germany was the most frequent foreign focus of the news. 59% of the Czech print news and 68% of the online news about Germany focused on the difficulties the neighbouring country was experiencing with immigration. Reports about migration-related difficulties in foreign countries were also substantial, albeit not so prominent, in Estonian media. In Slovakia, the coverage of foreign events was outside of the scope of the detailed research, yet, foreign-related issues were present, as well. However, they were overshadowed by the aforementioned local incidents. In Slovakia, the issue of the labour market and migration-related economics was also strongly present. In Estonia, this issue was much more marginal (9% coded under “economics” frame; 11% with secondary framing included), and in the Czech Republic, notably, the issue was all but absent.

» **Who Are the Speakers?**

To understand the way in which the media frames migrants and migration, it is vital to look at the individuals who are entitled to speak about the topic in the media. At this level, the cross-country results allow for a more direct comparison. In Slovakia, 58% of the speakers were politicians or public servants. In the Czech Republic, this figure reached up to 80%. In Estonia, 90% of migration-related coverage with speakers present included a statement by a politician, or a public servant. Experts and NGO representatives made up 15% of the coverage in Slovakia, 13% in the Czech Republic, and 18% in Estonia (here, experts were coded together with artists). As for giving a voice to the migrants themselves, this was a negligible phenomenon in Slovakia

Graph 2: Categories of speakers in migration-related news with speakers present, per country:  
 (Note: 100% represents the sum of all news reports with speakers present. Multiple groups of speakers could be coded per news report.)



and the Czech Republic, (6% in Slovakia, 2% in the Czech Republic,) and in Estonia (14% of all coverage with speakers present).

Considered jointly, this distribution echoes the general trend regarding migrants and refugees as mere objects of the discourse, rather than as participants. In other words, the subjects at the heart of the issue do not themselves<sup>6</sup> have an active voice in the conversation. These findings partly correspond to the previously mentioned lack of reports covering the lives of the migrants themselves. However, in Slovakia, even without direct voices of migrants, a not altogether insignificant part of the published media reports on migration was human-centered (human interest frame)<sup>7</sup>.

Overall, because migration is principally framed as a political issue, the media presents politicians as those most qualified to speak about the topic.

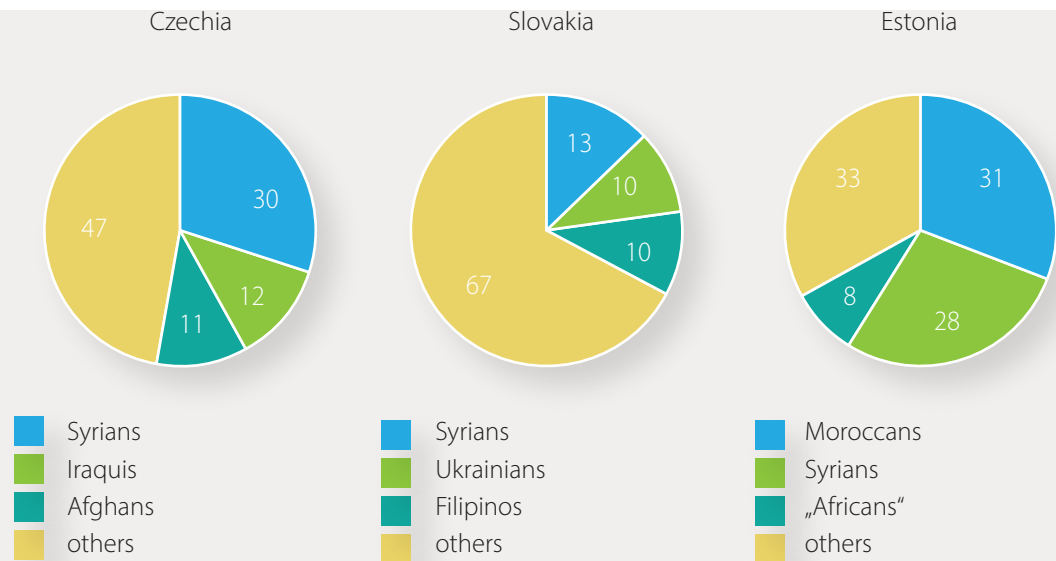
» **Who Are the People, and What Are the Countries Covered?**

Who, then, are the objects of this ongoing discourse, and where do they come from? The results are summed up in Graph 3.

6 In the Slovak and Estonian research, analysis of frequency of “human interest frame” (HIF - frame that tries to show personal life of migrants and migration groups) was conducted. The results showed that especially print media were relatively active in the coverage of life of migrants. When two indices of HIF presence were present, less than 7 percent of HIF articles in online space were found. On the other hand, almost 14 percent of all articles in print media were stories about life of migrants from different points of view. The Estonian research led to similar findings (5% online, 18% print).

7 ibid





Graph 3: Nationalities of migrants most often mentioned in the media, per country

In Slovakia, among the nationalities that could be identified, the largest share of coverage related to, in order: Syrians (13%), Ukrainians (10%), Filipinos (10%), Serbs (9%), Vietnamese (6%), and Afghans (6%), followed by other nationalities. Apart from the Vietnamese and Filipinos, whose over-representation in the sample was likely due to the aforementioned incidents, the focus is twofold: nationals of non-European countries who were strongly linked to the 2015 “migration crisis” (Syrians, Afghans), and nationals from countries such as Ukraine and Serbia, whose coverage is related to the labour market issues which are specific to the Slovak context.

In the Czech Republic, in those reports which did mention the nationality of migrants, Syrians were the largest group, with 30% of the coverage, followed by Iraqis (12%), Afghans (11%), Eritreans (8%), Pakistanis (5%), and other groups. The difference between the Czech Republic and Slovakia reveals how decidedly reporting in the former country was oriented towards immigration from non-European countries and, specifically, to those groups most prominent in the “migration crisis” of 2015. Given the lack of high-profile domestic incidents – or a lack of domestic topics involving migrants at all – as well as the lack of specific issues (such as the labour market issues in Slovakia), the Czech discourse is very strongly oriented towards the borders of the EU, and potential migration from Muslim countries. However, this discrepancy between the Czech Republic and Slovakia could also have been influenced by the difference in the time frames of the given samples. The national Czech report reveals that the coverage of these topics rises regularly in periods preceding elections – such as the period under review. Since the Slovak analysis focused on a period

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which did not immediately precede elections, topics related to migration may have been consequently less prominent in the Slovak discourse. In the Slovak journalist interviews (see below), none of the respondents mentioned migration as a relevant topic around elections, except for the parliamentary elections in March 2016.

In Estonia, Syrians were the second-largest group (28%), followed by generalized group of “Africans” (8%), the Rohingya of Myanmar (8%), Egyptians (6%), and Russians (6%). The single most mentioned group were Moroccans (31%). This anomaly can be traced to an extensively media-covered event: a knife attack which took place in Turku, Finland on 18 August 2017. The perpetrator was identified as a man of Moroccan origin, and the attack was generally described as the first terrorist attack in Finland by the Estonian and international media.

In regards to the three countries covered, in all cases, the biggest focus was understandably on the respective country. In Slovakia, 23% of all reports focused on Slovakia; in the Czech Republic, 33%; and in Estonia, 41%. Interestingly, the second most frequent, non-domestic location reported on was – in all three cases – held by a nearby country with higher numbers of immigrants than the country under analysis. Metaphorically speaking, we are observing a kind of “peeking over the neighbour’s fence.” In Slovakia and in the Czech Republic, the most prominently covered foreign country was Germany (14% in Slovakia, 18% in the Czech Republic); while in Estonia, this occurrence was held by Finland (17 %). Going down the ladder, and leaving aside the EU as a whole, we see much of the focus shifting to the situation in the Mediterranean. In the Czech press, Italy, Spain, and Malta were the most frequent loci of action. A similar focus was reported from Estonia, and partially from Slovakia as well. However, in the latter case, reports from neighbouring Austria and Hungary were equally significant.

» **What Do the Journalists Have to Say?**

The goal of the qualitative part of our research was to understand the perspective of the producers of media outlets in regards to migration, and to ascertain the causes of those tendencies, which we observed and described in the earlier parts of this chapter. How do editors and media houses approach migration topics, and are they interested in certain aspects of migration more than in others? Who creates the headlines, and who selects the illustrative images? How do they deal with terms like migrant and refugee? Moreover, under what conditions do journalists produce their articles – do they work under excessive time constraints? Do they receive any applicable training? Do they face hate speech and threats because of their work?

The statements of the journalists give valuable insights into common editorial practices, and show the recurrent traits and differences of individuals, media types, and respective countries, as they pertain to the topic of migration in media coverage.

» The Journalists' Own Approach to the Topic

When did the interviewed journalists in the Czech Republic, Estonia, and Slovakia first notice migration as a compelling topic to cover? The majority of the Czech and Estonian interviewees mentioned the 2015 migration situation as the critical turning point. Before this, few of them had worked on stories about migration, refugees, or integration. In contrast, the majority of the interviewed Slovak journalists already had experience with covering migration in 2015 – though mostly from the economic and labour market perspective. This data corresponds with the outcomes of the quantitative analysis, which shows that, whereas Czech and to some extent Estonian journalists mostly view migration through the lens of the 2015 “migration crisis,” Slovak journalists also consider labour market issues to be relevant to the overall topic.

A migration theme can raise a journalists' interest for different reasons. Several of the interviewees stressed that readers find the topic intriguing, and are therefore motivated by commercial success. On the other hand, a majority of the editors from all three countries also described migration as a key issue for the whole of society, and considered it their responsibility to report on it. Some of them, especially in Slovakia and Estonia, expressed their intention to fight against disinformation and prejudice, to explain facts and provide context, and to give migration a human face through their coverage.

When researching a migration-related topic, journalists from all three countries rely on similar sources: news agencies, politicians and ministries, international organisations such as UNHCR, and to a lesser extent, experts and local NGOs. Interviewees in Estonia mentioned a limited availability of local experts who could speak with the press. Although the journalists mostly agreed that migrants themselves could potentially be considered as a source of information and statements, no one from the Czech sample mentioned that possibility directly. In contrast, several Slovak journalists described interviewing migrants as very important and valued by their editors and colleagues. In Estonia, refugees often refused to speak to the press because they wanted to stay anonymous.

» Newsworthiness of Migration Topics

In all three countries, most journalists stressed their independence and own initiative when it came to suggesting and reporting on migration topics.

According to the majority of the Slovak and Czech journalists interviewed, migration-related news is often considered to be popular with readers, particularly when conveyed with an anti-immigration tone. The media assumes its readers to be especially interested in news focused on conflict, controversy, and fear provocation, which increases clicks, sales, and advertisement profit. Events like terror, crime, or any form

*Before 2015, only few of the Czech and Estonian interviewees had worked on stories about migration, refugees, or integration. In contrast, the majority of the interviewed Slovak journalists already had experience with covering migration in 2015*

of violence committed by migrants attracted media focus in all three countries. On the other hand, commercial success was not the only – and according to interviewed journalists in Slovakia, not even a dominant – reason as to why the media considered migration articles to be effective.

Content exclusivity, personal stories, and a high level of professionalism were all highly valued – including in-depth, fact-based research, expert opinions, direct contact with key participants, solution-orientation, and providing context for each piece as a whole. Human-interest and integration success stories were initially considered a topic of interest by Estonian journalists, and received positive feedback from fellow journalists as well as from readers. However, the narrative eventually became repetitive, and journalists who once covered the socio-cultural aspects of refugee integration, soon found that the topic had become stale. Controversy arose, suggesting that the topic had been over-exploited, or that some journalists had become too personally involved. As a result, some correspondents were compelled either to abstain from covering the topic, or to pass it to a colleague.

Some interviewees, especially in Slovakia and Estonia, stressed the point that they, as journalists, felt a responsibility to society and a respect for moral values. At least two of the Slovak interviewees explicitly stressed that their media outlets would not publish statements, which spread hate and disrespect to the human dignity of migrants, even if the speakers were politicians. These assertions could be ascribed to legislation in Slovakia, which outlaws hate speech, but they could also stem from a feeling of social responsibility for the discourse they potentially spread.

The frequency of migration reporting can vary widely. Therefore, we asked the journalists to identify those periods when the topic generally reaches its peaks. In Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the interviewees confirmed that because the issue is strongly politicized, elections could lead to a higher frequency of migration reporting, with some politicians pushing the matter as part of their agenda. This tendency differs between the sampled countries - e.g. Slovak journalists asserted that the migration issue would not be relevant during elections in Slovakia, except for the parliamentary elections in March 2016. According to interviewees, it was virtually absent in regional elections in 2018, as well as in the presidential election in 2019. One Slovak journalist even expressed gratitude that, unlike the period leading up to the 2018 Czech presidential elections, migration was not a dominant topic in the 2019 Slovak presidential campaign. Some Estonian journalists avowed that when politicians focus on a concern in order to appeal to their voters, an initially low-key topic can shift dramatically to a front page story – such as in the case of the UN Global compact on migration.

#### » **Editorial Practice**

##### » Usage of Terms

Out of all of the media outlets represented by a respondent in our research, only one of the editorial boards in the Czech Republic was said to have distributed prepared instructions, containing formal definitions of the terms migrant and refugee, so that their editors could use them correctly. None of the other outlets maintained internal policies on how to use these terms. It was left to each journalist to decide.

In the Czech Republic, with the exception of the

aforementioned case, no editors recalled any debate within the editorial teams about the correct usage of these terms. Usually, they were used synonymously. On the other hand, half of the Slovak journalists stated that there were such debates within their editorial teams, and almost all of them tried to differentiate between the descriptives. During one interview, however, it became evident that the journalists did not always use the terms in accordance with their predefined meaning. In one instance, the term refugee was used to describe a person who migrated 'for whatever reasons.' In Estonia, journalists stressed that the explanation for misusing the terms was not simply confusion on the media's part, but also owing to the complex nature of migration itself, which makes it difficult to determine whether new arrivals should be referred to as refugees or as migrants.

In all three countries, interviewees also described changes in the emotional charge of different words. Some respondents felt that in the Estonian public sphere, the term refugee (pagulane) had acquired a negative connotation over time. Therefore, as one interviewee mentioned, some journalists preferred to use the word põgenik (displaced person) instead. In the Czech Republic, the word migrant went through a similar transformation. Prior to 2015, it was a rather neutral term. After the supposed "migration crisis," it gained an unfavourable undertone, and became widely associated with asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa. Very similar transformations of the meaning of the word migrant have also taken place in Slovakia.

» Lack of Knowledge/Experience

Unlike Western European countries, where migration and integration have been discussed for decades, in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovakia, these topics were almost completely absent from public and media focus – apart from some exceptions, such as the debate about integration of the Russian minority in Estonia. Therefore, it might not come as surprising that in the Czech Republic and Estonia, interviewees mentioned a lack of journalistic experience and a missing knowledge base about the topic. One Czech journalist who has reported on migration for years, complained about the vast ignorance regarding the context of migration issues, and the laws and terms used in her editorial house, which have not changed in recent years. In Estonia, one of the respondents said that web editors were often young newcomers (the so-called media workers) who were less conscious of their role as "gatekeepers," and who lacked professionalism and experience.

» Balanced Reporting, Choice of Headlines and Photos

It is not easy to ensure balanced reporting, or to find a balance between the need to attract readers (especially by headlines and pictures), and an ethical journalistic approach that avoids spreading stereotypes and fears. All respondents in Estonia emphasized the importance of balanced and objective reporting, obtained by consulting a variety of people – experts, migrants, volunteers, and officials, as well as official documents. The Slovak journalists also stressed the necessity of using a variety of sources; however, there was no agreement as to what kind of "balanced reporting" strategy should be implemented. Some,

for example, had not considered it necessary to balance every single article or perspective, at least not in a schematic “50:50” way. Some said they were not willing to give voice to hate speech or fallacious statements, just because politicians pronounced these.

Questions of balance and objectivity were also raised in the context of selecting the right headlines and illustrative photos. Several Estonian respondents described their struggle to choose headlines and photos that were simultaneously eye-catching, accurate, and realistic. In the media outlets from all of the researched countries, authors usually propose their own titles, and pick illustrative photos from databases. Editors and graphic editors can alter these selections, and in practice, should always discuss the choices with the author of each piece, but this step is sometimes overlooked.

When asked about the role of headlines and photos, the interviewed Slovak journalists mentioned that marketing strategies play some role in online media, but none of them explicitly or implicitly admitted that its marketing function should exceed its informative function. At the same time, they did not consider these effects to be relevant for print, TV, or radio at all.

On the other hand, some Czech journalists working in online news said that marketing effects are valued over their informative function in their media outlets. According to one Czech respondent, a picture of a woman wearing a hijab is not enough – a fully veiled woman incites stronger fear and represents a greater danger, which is why the latter image would be chosen. Other respondents from the Czech Republic and Estonia asserted that they try not to overuse empathy-inducing pictures of

women and children due to their efforts to reflect the “real” situation of the majority of male asylum seekers, or, as in the Czech case, because people might react negatively if the media used too many of these photos.

» Ethical codes

Most of the media outlets represented by our interviewees followed some kind of ethical code. In Estonia, it was the Code of Ethics of the Estonian Press. In Slovakia, it was The Code of Ethics of the Slovak Syndicate of Journalists. Some Slovak and most of the Czech media sources retained their own ethical codes. Some Slovak journalists mentioned that there was no specific ethical code for migration established in any of the media forms, and said that they followed the general codes when covering migration topics. In Estonia and the Czech Republic, none of the journalists had ever experienced a team discussion in their workplace regarding the application of the code in the context of migration reporting – such as whether or not said coverage strengthens stereotypes and hate towards people of another race, nationality or religion – a clause which is often included in the media’s standard of ethical codes. The only mentioned ethical debates pertained to whether or not the real names or photos of refugees and migrants should be published, since doing so might put them in danger of persecution or attacks.



» **Working Conditions of Journalists**

» Workload

The number of articles/reports that journalists are obliged to produce per day or week varies largely according to the media type, the position of the journalist, the column they work for, etc. Some Czech and Slovak journalists were responsible for producing up to three articles per day, and a Slovak radio journalist had to create four reports per day. Some journalists described an increasing time pressure compared with just a few years ago. Even though the described conditions might seem insufficient for quality reporting on such complex and research-heavy topics as migration, most interviewees did not complain about time constraints.

» Fieldwork

Good migration stories, which include the voices of all relevant players, usually cannot be written from the desk alone. In order to discover and understand the context of such pieces, it is crucial that journalists venture into the field. In Slovakia, only the journalists who were working for public-service media felt quite satisfied with their fieldwork conditions. Other Slovak editors received only partial support for travel expenses abroad from their employers, and had to compensate the rest from their own wallets. Half of the Slovak interviewees mentioned that journalist trips organised by non-governmental organisations could partially compensate for the lack of financial support given by their editorial office. In Estonia, a lack of financial resources was also a frequently mentioned constraint, especially for foreign news correspondents. Two of the Estonian journalists also brought up safety issues as a concern.

» Gaining Knowledge/Experience

Migration came up suddenly as a new topic for many journalists in 2015, but none of the journalists from the three countries in this report experienced any offer of, or active support in, building up their knowledge on migration, refugee, and integration issues from their media houses or offices. Only one TV journalist from the Czech Republic mentioned that their board participated in a seminar on migration. One journalist from Slovakia visited a similar seminar. One Slovak media representative mentioned a person from their editorial board, who could be asked migration-related questions, if needed. Otherwise, it depended solely on the journalists' own interest and initiative. Approval by the various editorial boards was sometimes required before a journalist could make use of the few available external training resources (supplied e.g. by the Ministry of Interior, or the European Commission in Estonia, or by NGOs in the Czech Republic). Some Slovak respondents utilized other forms of self-education, such as informal peer-to-peer sharing between journalists. These kinds of meetings often focused on migration topics.

When it comes to expertise about migration issues, many of the interviewed editors stated that the media market in their country was insufficiently sourced to train journalists with a primary focus on migration. Some of the interviewees considered themselves to be the most knowledgeable people in their editorial staff on the topic of migration.

» Migrants in Media Houses

In the countries focused on for this analysis, journalists who have migrant origin are still a rarity. Only a few of the Estonians, two of the Czechs, and one Slovak journalist could name an example of such a person in their own or another editorial

office. One Estonian respondent mentioned a refugee who worked in the media, but who had not been utilized as a source of information on the topic for the editorial team.

» Facing Hate

The vast majority of the journalists in our sample have received hate mail, endured public bullying on social networks, and sometimes even received threats for their articles and reports on the topic. The names and contacts of some have appeared on ultra-right websites. On the other hand, one Czech editor mentioned that he had received positive feedback for his reports which covered the problematic cases of integration, pointing out that people more readily compliment content which is in line with their own views.

Different strategies on how to deal with expressions of hate were mentioned. In Estonia, these tactics ranged from ignoring to (unsuccessfully) filing police reports, publicly disclosing hate mail, and in one case, simply avoiding the migration topic all together on a call-in radio show. Some media outlets have moderated the comments sections on related articles, or closed them entirely. In Slovakia, many journalists considered hateful reactions to be a common consequence of their work, and said that these provocations would not influence their output. For the most part, they either deleted the emails, chose not to respond, or reacted with humour.



## 4. CONCLUSION

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Overall, news media coverage is still very much in the shadow of the so-called “migration crisis” of 2015. Migrants from non-EU, predominantly Muslim countries are still the primary subjects of the reporting, even though country-specific factors come into play as well – such as the labour market issues in Slovakia, and the attack in Finland, which was covered extensively by the Estonian media. The majority of the interviewed journalists, especially from the Czech Republic and Estonia, have been reporting on the migration topic only since 2015, and view the issue through this specific angle. Accordingly, much of the reporting is oriented towards the situation in the Mediterranean, with the Czech news media amplifying the issues there. Taking into account this and previous findings, it appears that the Czech media discourse is, among the three countries, the one most strongly oriented towards the 2015 “migration crisis,” and even though the migration flow has dried up, Czech journalists keep pointing their readers towards the Mediterranean sea and to the Muslim countries beyond it.

A specific phenomenon is apparent in all three countries; one which has been metaphorically described as “peeking over the neighbour’s fence,” – that is, taking reports from a nearby country with a larger immigrant population. For the Czech Republic and Slovakia, this part is played by Germany. For Estonia, the part is played by Finland. Based on the data available for the Czech Republic, we can conclude that the reporting from Germany is highly negative. As mentioned above, more than 60% of migration-related news from Germany in the Czech media is negative, primarily focused on

the difficulties caused by migrants and migration. Although the Slovak media was also “peeking over the neighbour’s fence,” into Germany (as well as into Hungary and Austria), the reported coverage was generally neutral – related to EU migration policies, the strength of Germany’s role, etc.

Several journalists from all three countries confirmed the tendency, especially of online media, to select events of violence and crime caused by migrants from the pool of stories offered by news agencies. This was mentioned in relation to the efforts of some media sources to appeal to their readers and generate a higher amount of clicks, which in turn, increases profitability. On the other hand, many journalists stressed their loyalty to ethical standards, and described successful migration coverage as any piece of journalistic work; replete with well-researched facts, voices of experts, and delivered in context. Moreover, some journalists from Slovakia emphasized the social responsibility of the media to ensure balanced coverage while avoiding hate speech, emphasizing human dignity, and ensuring that the voices of those without power are heard.

Politicians and public servants remain the most prominent group given the opportunity to speak about migration in the media. Migration is treated as a predominantly political topic in all three countries, and the voices of the other participants who could offer a different perspective, (migration experts, NGO representatives, etc.) are often marginalized – not unlike the voices of the migrants themselves. Again, there are differences across the three countries. In the Czech Republic, the discourse is most significantly monopolised

by politicians who allow little room for other viewpoints. In Estonia and Slovakia, comparatively, a slightly more balanced picture can be observed. Still, a significant part of the interviews in all three countries confirmed that the journalists realize how instrumental the migration topic can become when handled by politicians, especially in pre-election periods.

When pressed, the journalists mostly acknowledged the importance of including the voices of migrants and refugees in the coverage, however, no one from the Czech interviewees mentioned that actively. In Estonia, one of the barriers for including more voices of refugees and migrants into the coverage was attributed to a low availability for press interviews. In contrast, several Slovak journalists described interviewing migrants, and regarded the work as important and highly valued by their colleagues and editors.

Migration is generally portrayed as a polarizing, emotionally loaded issue, and therefore also sensitive to individual incidents, as the data from Slovakia and Estonia suggests. Yet, while individual incidents of criminal nature play a decisive role in the media, individual lives of migrants do not<sup>8</sup>. A focus on the experience of migrants within a “human interest frame,”<sup>9</sup> which would direct the readers’ attention towards the lives and problems of migrants and migrant groups, is all but absent in the media coverage. This may be caused in part by the character of the work of (especially foreign news) editors, who often report mainly from their desks. Due to time pressures and insufficient

financial support, these reporters are often unable to venture directly into the field and discover the topic from new perspectives, and are therefore unable to get closer to migrants and their stories.

Additionally, a deeper knowledge of the context of such a complex topic as migration (e.g. root causes, laws, migration and integration policies,) was largely absent before the topic moved to the spotlight in 2015. After this turning point, it remains a rarity for journalists to have the opportunity to deepen their knowledge in this area, either through seminars, trainings, or study trips. In each country, only a few journalists were considered knowledgeable enough about migration issues to be identified as experts. From the time of this report, the practice of sharing this information among colleagues was only being utilized in Slovakia, through peer-to-peer meetings.

Covering migration issues in the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovakia is not an easy task. Journalists often struggle to find a balance between economic pressures, time restrictions, readers’ interest, political agendas, and the effort to stay as unbiased as possible. Even in unfavourable conditions, many journalists still strive to do good journalistic work, while realising their social responsibility, and valuing ethical standards.

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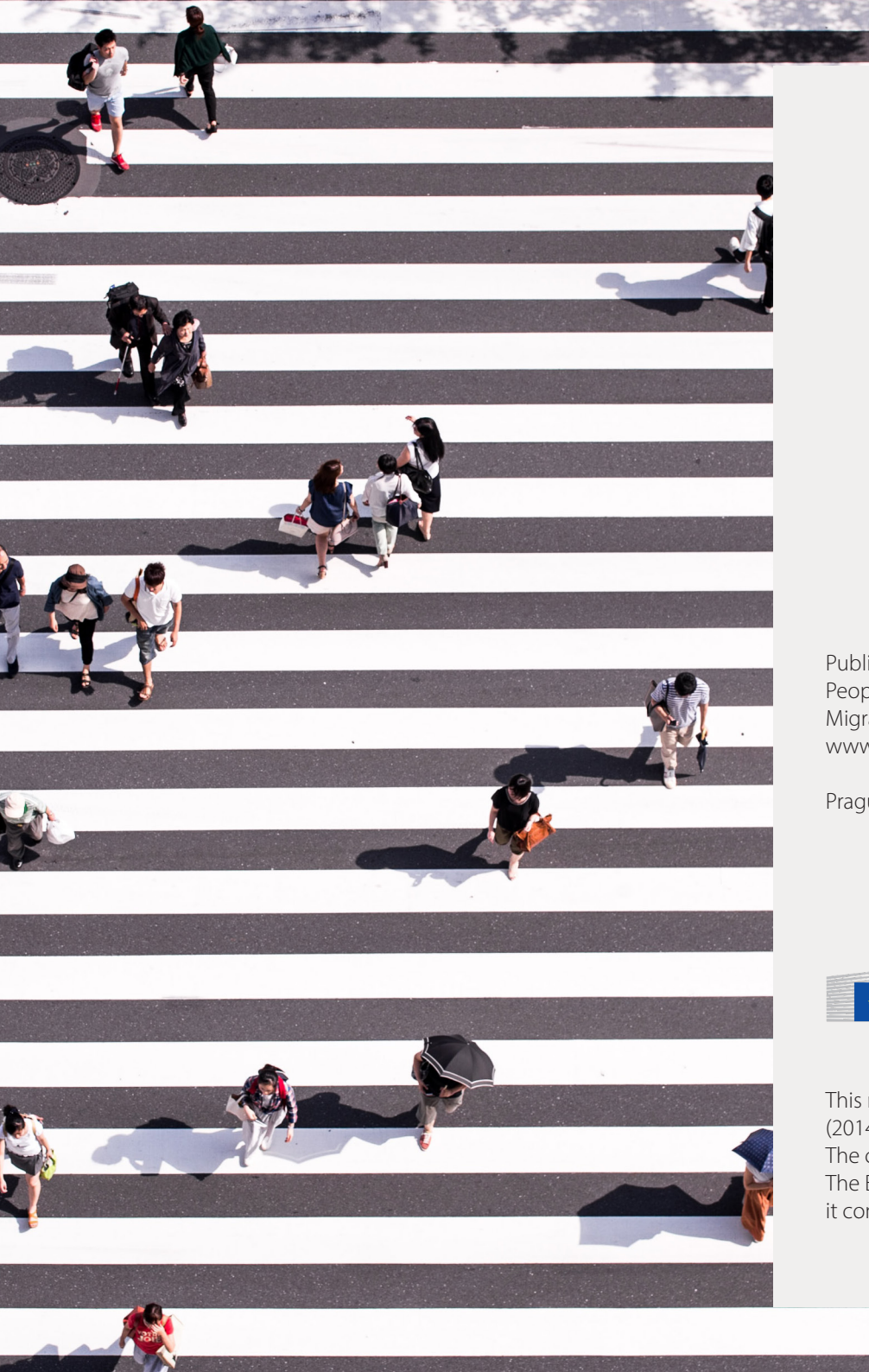
8 However, as mentioned before, criminality frame could be biased in Slovakia because of the two aforementioned incidents. Results of HIF analysis showed that especially print media tried to shed more light on the personal life of migrants.

9 Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. 2000. Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of communication* 50(2): 93-109

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