Media and migration: Comparative analysis of print and online media reporting on migrants and migration in selected countries (Phase II)

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Executive summary

1. This occasional paper is a result of the second phase of a collaborative research partnership between the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and private sector firm Cubit Media Research, and is based on work commissioned directly under the Department's Irregular Migration Research Programme. The findings of phase one of the project are reported in Occasional Paper 13/2014.

2. How migrants and migration are covered in the media matters for at least three reasons. First there is a general acceptance that the media can influence, and be influenced by, popular opinion and political agendas. Thus media coverage may be a barometer for political and public attitudes towards migration, and in turn shape these attitudes. Second, media coverage is likely to influence the perceptions of migrants in society, for example regarding to what extent they perceive themselves to be widely accepted or excluded or to be fairly represented. Third, it is possible given global access to much media, that media coverage may also influence the decision-making of migrants considering whether to move to particular destination countries.

3. This paper compares media discourses on migrants and migration in selected countries, focusing specifically on: the thematic content of print and online media messages; the extent to which that coverage was favourable, unfavourable or neutral; and the high level contextual framing in which migration messages were reported.

4. The paper is based on analysis of a dataset comprising over 500 million print and online media items published from 1 October 2013 to 30 September 2014 in 13 countries: Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom (defined here as 'very high human development countries') and Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam (defined as 'other human development countries').

5. The methodology for this project relied on a combination of qualitative content analysis of media articles in representative country-specific sample sets and quantitative modelling. The content analysis was undertaken by multilingual analysts working in both the original (published) language and English. The quantitative component involved the application of a sophisticated human cognitive modelling method able to deal with very large volumes of media articles.

6. The key findings of this study are:

   - Media discussion on migration in very high HD countries tends to be more 'mature' compared to other HD countries, where it was more likely to have been driven by specific events and so tended to be more sporadic.

   - Taking into account all print and online messages on migration and migrants in all countries, overall coverage was quite balanced. Reporting was largely assessed as being neutral, however, where it was not neutral, reporting was more likely to be unfavourable than favourable.

   - Some themes were more likely to be reported unfavourably, in particular 'people smuggling and trafficking' in all countries, 'irregular migration' in other HD countries and 'immigration and immigrants' in very high HD countries.

   - Messaging on migration and migrants in print and online media was predominantly depicted through a 'humanitarian' lens. 'Humanitarian' framing dominated in all countries in scope across phase two—a change from phase one, which saw some very high HD countries experience more 'economic' framing.
Media reporting tended to be framed in a border/national security context where it related to irregular migration or people smuggling and trafficking.

7. Focusing specifically on analysis of media coverage in the very high HD countries, the following key findings emerge:

- There was a reasonable level of convergence of media coverage on migration that does not exist to the same extent for other HD countries studied. This possibly reflects similarities in terms of their migration circumstances and issues.
- The volume of migration-specific print and online messaging has increased over time between the first and second phases of this study, due in part to the heightened coverage of 'asylum seekers and refugees' and/or 'irregular migration'.
- Comparing phases one and two there has been a slight shift toward more positive coverage. At the same time coverage of migration in print and online media remained more polarised than in other HD countries, with less neutral reporting and more unfavourable reporting. Very high rates of unfavourable messaging were experienced consistently for coverage on 'people smuggling and trafficking', followed by 'irregular migration'.

8. Turning to key findings from analysis of media coverage in other HD countries:

- There is a diversity of coverage by theme as well as tone and context.
- Overall there was a small but noticeable shift in message tone between the first and second phases toward more balanced coverage overall. While neutral coverage decreased slightly, favourable messages increased and unfavourable coverage decreased marginally.
- Coverage of migration in print and online media tended to be less polarised in other HD countries than in very high HD countries.
- Most media reporting on migration was framed in a humanitarian context, rather than economic, socio-cultural and security contexts.
- The main focus on migration in print and online media was on the multitude of aspects associated with the rights and treatment of citizens.

9. Three specific policy implications arise from this study. First, and given the significance of media coverage on migrants and migration, it is important to promote a fair and reasonable portrayal of migrants in the media, and as this analysis has illustrated this is often still not the case. Responsibilities lie with governments, regulators, media companies, and journalists.

10. A second policy area that can be informed by this analysis is the design and dissemination of information on migration policies and programmes, to settled migrants as much as to potential migrants. It is likely that media is more influential on migrants than many official sources of information, for example because the former may be more trusted and more easily accessible. Understanding how the media shapes its coverage of migration, as this analysis has begun to, has important implications for trying to predict and perhaps direct its influence.

11. Finally, one of the key contributions made by the research is the application of a consistent methodology to a selected number of countries to develop a measurable set of indices, which can be monitored over time. Detecting changes and shifts over time, in a solid and measurable manner, enables policymakers to consider a range of options, including for communications activities, with the benefit of evidence.
1. Background

To supplement research undertaken as part of the Department’s Research Programme on actual and potential migrant decision making (Jayasuriya, 2014; McAuliffe, 2013), research and analysis of media coverage in both destination and origin countries was undertaken. The aim was to better understand what and how media coverage of migration and migrants differs between 13 selected countries, including the media contexts in which potential migrants are assessing and re-assessing their migration options.

This occasional paper is a result of phase two of a collaborative research partnership between the department and private sector firm Cubit Media Research based on work commissioned directly under the Research Programme. The findings of phase one of the project are reported in Occasional Paper 13/2015. Where relevant, this paper will refer to sections or appendices in Occasional Paper 13/2015. This approach has assisted in keeping this paper to a reasonable length and in avoiding unnecessary repetition. For example, the phase one paper includes a brief overview of the literature on the portrayal of migration in the media, including on representations of migration and migrants in the media, the impact of such representations on the decision-making processes of migrants and the public perception of migration. Readers may wish to refer to that literature review.

This paper discusses findings from big data analysis involving two six-month study periods and 13 selected countries. Very large datasets in excess of 500 million media items were the starting point for the project, which involved multilingual analysts and human cognitive modelling techniques. Details of the methodology, research questions, study periods and countries in scope are discussed below.

2. Introduction

By its very nature international migration is transnational. The movement of people across borders necessarily relates to more than one state and given the increase in scale and diversity of international migration over recent decades, nearly all countries in the modern era are affected by international migration (Castles et al, 2014). Some countries, including some of those within the scope of the project, are affected by migration significantly, both positively and at times negatively. Immigration has become a first order public policy issue in many countries in the world. It is unsurprising then that the topic of international migration is often included in public opinion surveys, although arguably the political significance of migration often outweighs its numerical significance. Analysis of print and online media in the United Kingdom, for example, has shown that the substantial political interest on this complex public policy topic can be put in a somewhat different perspective by examining overall media coverage by themes. As discussed in Appendix A, migration-related media coverage in the United Kingdom accounted for around 2–3 percent of total coverage compared to, for example, sport (24–30%), the economy (19–20%), science/health (8–10%) and climate change (1–2%).

How migrants and migration are covered in the media matters for at least three reasons. First, although the chain of causality and the distinctions between causes and consequence is complex, there is a general acceptance that the media can influence, and be influenced by, popular opinion and political agendas. Thus media coverage may be a barometer for political and public attitudes towards migration, and in turn shape these attitudes. Second, media coverage is likely to influence the perceptions of migrants in society, for example regarding to what extent they perceive themselves to be widely accepted or excluded, to be fairly represented, or to be scapegoated. Third, it is possible given global access to much media, that media coverage may also influence the decision-making of migrants considering whether to move to particular destination countries.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this research is to analyse in more depth how the media covers migrants and migration. More specifically, the purpose of this research was to compare media discourses on migrants and migration in selected countries by examining thematic content, contextual
framing and the extent of polarisation of messages communicated via print and online media over two six-month periods.

3. Research questions and scope

The objective of the second phase of this research project was to create baseline analyses of media coverage of migration and migrants in 13 selected countries for two six-month study periods on:

- the thematic content of print and online media messages
- the extent to which that coverage was favourable, unfavourable or neutral
- the high level contextual framing in which migration messages were reported.

This phase replicated the methodology employed in the previous phase (discussed below) but widened the scope to cover an additional three countries, taking the total from 10 to 13. In this phase we analysed media messaging within two sets of print and online media pieces for the 13 selected countries during two six-month periods (1 October 2013 to 31 March 2014; and 1 April 2014 to 30 September 2014).

The 13 countries in scope have been categorised as either ‘very high human development’ countries or ‘other human development’ countries. This has been done for several reasons. Firstly, one of the key findings from phase one of the project was that characterising countries as either ‘destination’ or ‘origin’ countries for migration purposes was found to be overly-simplistic given the range of migration issues they may face. Pakistan, for example, is a significant destination and origin country as well as a transit country and the world’s largest host country of refugees. It could be argued that at least one of the additional countries included in this phase (Thailand) is perhaps more of a transit country for irregular migration than a destination or origin country, further complicating a destination-origin typology.

Secondly, the application of the Human Development Index (HDI) has been chosen because it incorporates a number of elements, including Gross National Income (PPP), life expectancy, mean and expected years of schooling so is more than just an economic indicator. In addition, the HDI is reasonably long-standing, widely-accepted and UN-supported. Thirdly, the HDI has been found to correlate with international migration flows (Kandemir, 2012), and so it is arguably one of the least worst bases from which to develop a dichotomous categorisation to analyse media and migration coverage in multiple countries. That said, any and all such categorisations are generally applied only to ensure high level analysis is as accessible and digestible as possible. Individual country reports are also provided to supplement the high level analysis.

The six ‘very high human development’ (HD) countries in scope are Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The seven ‘other human development’ countries are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam. Within these two types, a mix of countries was included, both from a geographic perspective and from a migration perspective (e.g. regular/irregular migration, asylum-refugee/labour/student migration). The three countries that were added for phase two were Australia, Malaysia and Thailand, which were considered to be of particular interest to the Research Programme.

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Table 1: Human Development Index rankings and groupings of selected countries in scope (2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ranking (187 countries)</th>
<th>HDI group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very high HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Very high HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Very high HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very high HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Very high HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Very high HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>High HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>High HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>High HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>Medium HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>Medium HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>Low HD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>Low HD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Content from both print and online sources was obtained from commercial media content suppliers or the publishers’ archives. Broadcast media content was generally outside the scope of the project, partly because of the prohibitive cost involved in sourcing such material retrospectively. The exclusion of broadcast material necessarily poses limitations on the analysis. This limitation is potentially more of an issue for some of the non-industrialised country analyses, given literacy and access issues within those countries. Radio broadcasting, for example, is a particularly important form of media in Afghanistan with its patchy literacy, poor infrastructure and low incomes levels.

Advances in journalism and digital media, however, have led to the converging of news organisations where news is more commonly published across a multitude of media platforms (Quandt et al, 2009; Edral, 2009). Research has also indicated that there are no significant differences in news coverage across the different platforms; rather, the main differences are between the types of news organisations and in particular the extent to which they use emotive language (Semetko & Valenburg, 2000; Keith et al, 2010).

Social media was also generally outside the scope of this project, primarily due to feasibility. Including broadcast and social media messages would have enabled a more complete comparative analysis. However, while broadcast media is a widely accepted form of mass media in all countries, and could have been included (if feasible cost-wise), including social media would arguably have posed methodological concerns. The extent of social media coverage remains highly variable (Andrew et al, 2012; International Telecommunication Union, 2013), with substantial differences within and between countries. This is less so for print and online media coverage. As a result, comparative analysis of
messaging in print and online media was considered the most reasonable approach. Further research on broadcast media would likely shed new light on aspects of the portrayal of migration in the media, but the initial findings from this study of online and print media are still relevant for both very high HD and less developed countries. With growing use of social media in some locations, this is an area that would benefit from targeted mixed methods research in the future.

It is important to note the very different contexts in which media reporting and messaging operates, including in relation to economic, political, social and security-related regulatory environments. These potential differences can include linguistic/socio-cultural tendencies towards expression, such that the same story is likely to be expressed using more emotive language in Italy than in Germany for example. In addition, the results are likely to reflect differences in the proportion of opinion-based coverage versus traditional fact-based journalism. For example, the United Kingdom media continues to publish higher proportions of pieces containing opinion compared to many other countries.

Of particular relevance to this project was the extent to which the media is free to report news and current affairs. Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontières or RSF) publishes an annual World Press Freedom Index that measures the level of freedom of information in 180 countries and ranks them accordingly. Final scores for each country range from 0 to 180 (with 0 representing the greatest degree of press freedom of the countries evaluated and 180 representing the lowest) and are based on measurements of plurality, media independence, environment and self-censorship, legislative framework, transparency, infrastructure, and the level of violence against reporters during the study period.

Table 2 shows the 2014 ranking for each country in scope as well as their corresponding ranking by RSF as either ‘good situation’, ‘satisfactory situation’, ‘noticeable problems’, ‘difficult situation’ or ‘very serious situation’.
Table 2: World Press Freedom Index ratings and rankings (2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Ranking (of 180 countries)</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Good situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Good situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Good situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Good situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Satisfactory situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>Difficult situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>Difficult situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>Difficult situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>Difficult situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>Difficult situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>Very serious situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>Very serious situation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Along with issues associated with press freedom, the results of the research need to be viewed within a range of other contexts, including economic, political, security and social—all of which are intrinsically linked to human displacement and migration. These different contexts feed into migration-related articles in the media.

4. Research method

The methodology for this project relied on a combination of qualitative content analysis of media articles in representative country-specific sample sets and quantitative modelling. The content analysis was undertaken by multilingual analysts working in both the original (published) language and English. The quantitative component involved the application of a sophisticated human cognitive modelling method able to deal with very large volumes of media articles.

It was important to begin with the most complete media dataset possible—within the cost, time and feasibility limitations—so that a reasonably precise, sizeable and representative sample of topic-specific media articles for each country could be developed. Refining the country samples involved a ‘top-down’ analytical approach based on iteratively designing, testing and fine-tuning search strings based on human analysis. The first stage involved multilingual analysts examining media material in its published language—English, Bengali, Dutch, Farsi, French, German, Malay, Dari, Norwegian, Thai, Urdu, Vietnamese, Sinhalese or Tamil—before being interpreted and stored in English for further analysis.
The methodology also relied on substantial quality assurance and data verification processes throughout the data collection, sorting and analysis phases. A detailed discussion of the methodology is contained in Appendix A of Occasional Paper 13/2015.

No allowance was made for significant in-country events, such as general, local or regional elections, which inevitably affected the analysis. The main reason for this limitation was the significant methodological complication required to account for a multitude of in-country events that may affect results, such as elections economic/financial shocks, natural disasters or terrorist events. In addition, the creation of time series data is assisted by maintaining a consistent approach across all study periods, including as more countries are added to the scope.

A series of country-specific datasets capturing migration-specific themes published in the media during the two six-month research periods was produced. The focal piece country datasets ranged in size from 20,000 pieces (Australia) to 500 (Bangladesh), while the country datasets used for in-depth analysis ranged in size from 1,400 pieces (Switzerland and Canada) to 500 (Bangladesh). Details of the Phase I and II country datasets are summarised in Appendix B.

It is important to note the potential for seasonal effects during the two six-month study periods. For example, and as can be seen from the 13 individual country reports in Appendix C, there was a tendency in very high HD countries for coverage on migration-related issues overall to drop during the Christmas/New Year period. Likewise, the volume of reporting of irregular maritime migration is related to activity, which can involve ‘sailing seasons’ in some parts of the world (McAuliffe & Mence, 2014), and reporting of overseas student issues can be related to seasonal student application, acceptance and/or departure times. To overcome some of the potential seasonal effects, future phases would be best undertaken on an annual basis.

4.1 Analytical framework

The country-specific in-depth analysis sets were analysed to determine thematic content, the tone of the media messaging (favourable-unfavourable-neutral), and how messages were contextually framed (humanitarian, socio-cultural, economic and security). This analytical framework has been replicated from phase one, and is discussed in detail in section 5.1 of Occasional Paper 13/2015.

By way of a summary, the three analytical frames employed are:

- examination of thematic content under headings that emerged from multiple rounds of analysis in phase one: ‘asylum seekers and refugees’, ‘emigration and emigrants’, ‘immigration and immigrants’, ‘irregular migration’, ‘migrant accommodation (including detention)’, ‘overseas students’, ‘overseas workers’ and ‘people smuggling and trafficking’—a glossary of the themes is in Appendix D;

- analysis of message tone as either favourable, unfavourable or neutral, with fact-based reporting being generally neutral and messages containing opinion being generally assessed as ‘favourable’ or unfavourable;


Key findings in section 6 are reported by variables including study period, country, theme, ‘favourability’, and contextual framing. This can sometimes result in small sub-samples being analysed. To ensure the veracity of the research, findings based on sub-samples of less than 50 messages (very high HD countries) and 30 messages (other HD countries) are not reported. It is also important to note that quantitative analysis is based on messages rather than articles.
How was a message determined to be favourable, unfavourable or neutral?

The assessment of whether a message was favourable, unfavourable or neutral involved a systematic and comprehensive method of qualitative analysis undertaken by multilingual analysts and rigorous data checking by senior analysts.

An article on the net increase in migration in the United Kingdom, for example, may have contained factual messages on the number and demographic characteristics of migrants and historical/trend data on the increase. These factual messages would be assessed as ‘neutral’.

In the same article, there may have been statements by politicians on the ‘failure’ of the government to meet its policy commitment to maintain migration at specific levels. This would have been assessed as ‘unfavourable’.

The article may also have contained quotes from migrant support groups on the economic and social benefits stemming from net increased migration. This would have been assessed as ‘favourable’.

By analysing individual messages rather than articles as a whole, a more sophisticated analysis was possible. Findings are all based on quantitative analysis of messages contained within articles.

5. Key findings

The key findings of the research presented in this paper focus primarily on comparative analysis across the two study periods.

- From the two phases of research, it is becoming clearer that the media discussions on migration in very high HD countries tends to contain more in-depth analysis compared to other HD countries, which were more likely to have been driven by specific events and so tended to be more sporadic.

- Taking into account all print and online messages on migration and migrants in all countries, it is evident that there was a small but noticeable shift in message tone between phases one and two toward a more balanced overall coverage. Favourable messages increased marginally and unfavourable coverage decreased.

- Despite the slight shift, reporting in phase two was again largely assessed as being neutral. However, where it was not neutral, reporting was more likely to be unfavourable than favourable.

- Some themes were more likely to be reported unfavourably (e.g. ‘people smuggling and trafficking’ in all countries, ‘irregular migration’ in other HD countries and ‘immigration and immigrants’ in very high HD countries).

- One striking finding of the research was that messaging on migration and migrants in print and online media was predominantly depicted through a ‘humanitarian’ lens. ‘Humanitarian’ framing dominated in all countries in scope across phase two—a change from phase one, which saw some very high HD countries experience more ‘economic’ framing.

- Media reporting tended to be framed in a border/national security context where it related to irregular migration or people smuggling and trafficking.

- Each country had its own particular set of migration issues being discussed in print and online media, and it was slightly clearer from the comparisons between the two phases that these migration issues can be linked to a range of broader discussions including those associated with factors such as political cycles and processes. The changes in Switzerland and the United Kingdom’s reporting, for example, would appear to be related to elections/referendums.
5.1 Key findings and comparisons—very high human development countries

The key findings from the analysis of the very high HD country datasets highlight a range of similarities and some differences across the selected group as well as some changes between the phases:

- Consistent with phase one findings, there was a reasonable level of convergence found in very high HD countries of media coverage on migration that does not exist to the same extent for other HD countries studied. This possibly reflects similarities in terms of their migration circumstances and issues.

- The volume of migration-specific print and online messaging increased in phase two for all countries, which appears to be due in part to the heightened coverage of ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ and/or ‘irregular migration’.

- Taking into account all print and online messages on migration and migrants in the very high HD countries, it is evident that there was a small but noticeable shift in message tone between phases one and two toward more balanced coverage. While neutral coverage remained the same, favourable messages increased marginally and unfavourable coverage decreased.

- Notwithstanding the small but positive shift, coverage of migration in print and online media remained more polarised than in other HD countries, with less neutral reporting and more unfavourable reporting.

- The limited extent of favourable messaging on migration across all very high HD countries is one of the more stark findings. Unfavourable coverage significantly outweighed favourable messages. Very high rates of unfavourable messaging were experienced consistently for coverage on ‘people smuggling and trafficking’, followed by ‘irregular migration’.

- In terms of contextual framing of all messages, there were noticeable shifts between the two phases with increases in ‘humanitarian’ framing and reductions in ‘economic’ and ‘security’ framing. This was almost certainly related to the increase in coverage on ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ (both proportionally and numerically) during phase two.

5.1.1 Thematic content in print and online media in very high human development countries

All media messages from the country-specific datasets were analysed against a number of themes (Appendix D contains a glossary of themes). A single print or online article may contain more than one message, and each message may relate to more than one theme. Analysing the datasets in this way allows for all messages to be accounted for in thematic terms.

As shown in Figure 1, the volume of migration-specific print and online messaging increased in phase two for all countries. While the increases may be related to seasonal effects (as discussed in section 4 above), they are clearly due in part to the heightened coverage of ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ and/or ‘irregular migration’ which increased in both actual and proportional terms in all countries between the two study periods.

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2 Involved analysis of more than 77,000 individual messages from 7,500 articles reported between 1 October 2013 and 30 September 2014 in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.
As outlined in the individual country reports in Appendix C, the increase was related to ongoing coverage of mass displacement in key parts of the world, such as Syria, as well as the large maritime flows of asylum seekers and refugees in the Mediterranean Sea and Italy’s Mare Nostrum operational response. Some countries, such as Switzerland, also saw increased coverage of integration of asylum seekers and refugees.

Figure 1: Thematic coverage of migration in print and online media in selected very high human development countries by volume—key migration themes: Phase I & II

When the messaging is analysed on a proportional basis, as illustrated in Figure 2 below, one of the first things to note is that countries experienced quite distinctive media coverage of migration themes. Outside of the theme ‘people smugglers’ (which was uniformly low in proportional terms at 10 percent or less in all countries), there was variation of themes proportionally in all six very high HD countries. Australia was the only country that experienced significant coverage of migrant accommodation, which was related largely to asylum seeker processing centres in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. Canada and the United Kingdom appeared to have a more generalised media discussion largely focused on the broad theme of ‘immigration and immigrants’ while Norway’s media coverage in both phases on the other hand was dominated by the ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ theme.
Figure 2: Thematic coverage of migration in print and online media in selected very high human development countries by proportion—key migration themes: Phase I & II

Messages: Australia (n=24,428), Canada (n=8,629), Netherlands (n=11,023), Norway (n=3,327), Switzerland (n=11,538), United Kingdom (n=17,840).

Articles: Australia (n=13,256), Canada (n=5,640), Netherlands (n=4,337), Norway (n=1,364), Switzerland (n=4,875), United Kingdom (n=8,360).

The other striking aspect of the data is that between the two study periods, thematic coverage was reasonably consistent proportionally. As shown in Figure 2, this was particularly noticeable for the United Kingdom, Norway and to a lesser extent Canada, with all showing little variation.

Several countries experienced significantly reduced coverage of the theme ‘immigration and immigrants’, most notably the Netherlands and Switzerland. In Switzerland’s case this related to the February 2014 national referendum ‘against mass immigration’, reporting of which was included in the ‘immigration and immigrants’ theme during phase one. A 30 November 2014 Swiss national referendum on limiting immigration was rejected and coverage in the lead up to the vote almost certainly occurred outside the phase two study period (which ended on 30 September).

In the United Kingdom...

‘Immigration and immigrants’ was the most prominent theme across the twelve month period, accounting for 45% of all local focal stories. It was most prominent in phase one of the study, when more than half of all coverage focused on this issue. It was again the dominant theme for the second study period, accounting for around half of all focal stories.

The late February 2014 release of figures showing a rise of more than 30% in net migration to 212,000 over the year to September 2013 was seen in many quarters as evidence the government had failed to meet its pledge to bring net migration to below 100,000. In late July calls for tougher restrictions on migrant benefits became more prominent after Prime Minister David Cameron proposed new policies.
5.1.2 Extent of polarisation of print and online media content in very high human development countries

Much has been written about the polarisation, and the perceived increasing polarisation, of the public discourse on migration in destination countries (IOM, 2011a; Koser, 2012; Koser, 2014). The discourse has variously been described as ‘toxic’, ‘unbalanced’ and ‘extreme’ (IOM, 2011a; Koser, 2012).

To a significant extent, this research supports those views and findings. However, as was the case with phase one, this phase has again found that there is considerable variation in the extent of polarisation when examined by specific themes. In addition, there is also variability between countries. More importantly, however, when all messages related to migration and migrants are aggregated across all very high HD countries, an interesting picture emerges. It is evident that there was a small but noticeable shift between phases one and two for the better in terms of overall balance. Overall, and as can be seen from Figure 3, neutral coverage remained the same (40%) while favourable coverage increased (from 14% to 17%) and unfavourable coverage decreased (from 46% to 43%). It would appear that no specific events or circumstances drove this change—it is more likely that a combination of changes in overall message volume in some countries (e.g. Switzerland and the Netherlands) together with variations in thematic content appears to have overall had a combined effect. It will be interesting to examine this high level indicator in future phases, particularly as it tends to blunt the more event-based changes and has the ability to provide a useful overall barometer on print and online media coverage of migration and migrants.

Figure 3: Favourable/unfavourable/neutral coverage of migration in print and online media in selected very high human development countries combined—all migration themes: Phase I & II

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Messages: Phase 1 (n=31,064), Phase II (n=46,552).
Articles: Phase 1 (n=16,226), Phase II (n=22,189).

Despite the shift toward slightly more balanced coverage between the two phases, it is clear from both Figures 3 and 4 that there is less favourable messaging than unfavourable messaging on migration and migrants in print and online media across all selected very high HD countries. This is one of the more striking findings, including because it holds true for both study periods. In all countries for both phases, unfavourable messages significantly outweighed favourable messages.

Figure 4 also shows that for both study periods, Australia and the United Kingdom had the highest proportion of unfavourable messaging of migration issues (ranging between 46 and 57 percent). Australia also experienced the lowest favourable coverage of all countries.
In Switzerland...

In December 2013 the media landscape was dominated by four stories: the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) initiative to cut mass immigration, conditions in the Lampedusa Island refugee camps, irregular immigrants arriving in the Spanish enclaves of Morocco, and debates in the UK about migrant worker access to benefits.

The SVP initiative remained a prominent story in January, with a focus on seasonal workers, the economy and social welfare. There was also discussion relating to Swiss support for Syrian refugees. Coverage spiked in February 2014 as the SVP initiative against mass migration was accepted by referendum. Much of this coverage consisted of short bulletin-type reports.

Canada again experienced the most polarised coverage, with the lowest neutral coverage (27%), the highest favourable coverage (28%) and the third highest unfavourable coverage (45%). Switzerland, on the other hand, again experienced the least polarised coverage of aggregate migration messaging, with the highest neutral coverage (61%). Switzerland and Norway both experienced shifts in tone of coverage, with slightly higher proportions of favourable messaging and slightly lower proportions of unfavourable messaging between the two study periods.

Overall, the consistency between the results for the two study periods is notable, particularly for the proportions of favourable messaging. The consistency occurred despite the changes in overall volume (Figure 1) and applied to both Switzerland and the United Kingdom whose citizens went to the polls in
or very near phase one. It would be very interesting to examine the proportions of favourable messaging over time. In relation to specific themes—the most prominent being ‘immigration and immigrants’, ‘irregular migration’ and ‘asylum seekers and refugees’—there was noticeable variability among the very high HD countries and compared with the aggregate results for all migration content.

Figure 5: Favourable/unfavourable/neutral coverage of migration in print and online media in selected very high human development countries—immigration and immigrants theme: Phase I & II

The United Kingdom and the Netherlands experienced the highest proportion of unfavourable coverage on ‘immigration and immigrants’, as shown in Figure 5, with Canada again having had the highest proportion of favourable coverage, as well as the most polarised coverage. As with the aggregate results, all countries experienced more unfavourable than favourable coverage.

It is also interesting to note that despite ‘immigration and immigrants’ being the least polarised theme across the five countries, it was again the most polarised theme within the Swiss context. That said, there was a slightly positive shift in Switzerland in phase two, which ended just prior to the November 2014 failed referendum on reducing immigration quotas. The Netherlands, on the other hand witnessed a shift between the two phases, which appears to have been related to discussion of the potential links between migration and social disharmony as well as the employment market. In Australia, ‘immigration and immigrants’ received the highest proportions of favourable messaging of all themes, notwithstanding the drop in phase two.

Media on ‘irregular migration’ showed increased unfavourable messaging across most very high HD countries. Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom all had more than half of all messaging on ‘irregular migration’ as being unfavourable, which was in contrast to the mainland European countries. It is, however, important to note that Canada and Norway experienced very low volumes of coverage on this theme. Australia recorded no favourable messaging on ‘irregular migration’, noting that proportions of favourable messaging were very low for phase two across all countries.

There was also noticeable variability between phase one and two in most of the countries (Australia, Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom), with Switzerland and the Netherlands remaining fairly constant. Australia was the only country that experienced a discernible positive shift in coverage tone becoming more positive in phase two, which is likely to be related to the much reduced volume and
tempo of coverage associated with irregular maritime arrivals (IMAs)—no IMAs reached Australia during phase two. In contrast, Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom’s coverage contained much higher proportions of unfavourable coverage.

In contrast to ‘irregular migration’, the theme ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ received more favourable messaging in most countries, with positive shifts occurring in Switzerland, Canada and Norway (as shown in Figure 7 below). Interestingly, Australia experienced the lowest levels of unfavourable messaging on this theme, which was in stark contrast to messaging on ‘irregular migration’.

The Netherlands saw a notable increase in unfavourable messaging on this theme. The country report in Appendix C shows that this related largely to criticism of the government’s handling of asylum...
seeker and refugee issues, including refugee intake numbers, accommodation and child pardon policies.

**Figure 7: Favourable-unfavourable-neutral coverage of migration in print and online media in selected very high human development countries—asylum seekers and refugees theme: Phase I & II**

Messages: Australia (n=4,850), Canada (n=2,913), Netherlands (n=5,871), Norway (n=2,021), Switzerland (n=4,718), United Kingdom (n=2,880).

Articles: Australia (n=2,860), Canada (n=2,637), Netherlands (n=2,516), Norway (n=785), Switzerland (n=1,808), United Kingdom (n=1,700).

Overall, and as was seen during phase one, there are substantial differences between countries on the extent of polarisation of media messaging on migration and migrants. As can be seen in Figure 4, Switzerland again exhibited a more nuanced discussion of migration and migrants as well as a much less polarised discussion. Canada's print and online media messaging was generally the most polarised overall, however, Australia and the UK experienced very high proportions of unfavourable messaging (and low or no favourable messaging) on specific themes. Overall, Australia experienced the most unbalanced overall discussion on migration and migrants in both phases.

Further breakdowns of coverage tone in the individual very high HD country are found in the summaries at Appendix C. These also contain information on the key issues that arose in the media, the coverage trend over the reporting period, the framing of the coverage and the prominence of specific voices in the media.

**5.1.3 Framing of the media discourse in very high human development countries**

As well as grouping messages into thematic sets to facilitate the quantitative assessment of media across the countries in this study, we also analysed media content according to a contextual-associative typology. This enabled critical examination and reporting on the overall context in which various propositions and/or themes were couched.

Overall, and as shown in Figure 8 below, the research found that migration coverage in phase two was more likely to have been discussed in a ‘humanitarian’ context in all countries, with very high proportions across all countries (ranging from 57% in the United Kingdom to 74% in the Netherlands). This appears to correlate to the increase in the ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ theme across all countries (see Figure 2). In contrast, the ‘security’ context dropped or remained the same across all
countries, although was still noticeably larger proportionally in Australia compared to elsewhere (at 17%). The ‘economic’ framing also dropped in most countries but most dramatically in the United Kingdom (from 53% to 20%).

Figure 8: Framing of migration messages in print and online media in selected very high human development countries—all migration themes: October 2013 to March 2014

At the aggregate level, and taking into account all media messages from all six very high HD country datasets, the variability between countries apparent in phase one was not found in phase two. All very high HD countries experienced notable uniformity in the framing of all media messaging in phase two, which may be related to the increase in proportional and actual terms of coverage of ‘asylum seekers and refugees’.

In the United Kingdom and Switzerland it does appear that migration was part of broader economic and political discussions during phase one, particularly in the lead-up to the United Kingdom local elections (May 2014) and the Swiss referendum on immigration quotas (February 2014). Both countries experienced substantial reductions in the ‘economic’ framing of messaging in phase two, and so were more in line with the other countries.

In Norway...

...it was the Asylum Seeker & Refugee theme that captured the greatest share of coverage, accounting for 57% of all the messages tracked.

This was also the only theme for which favourable commentary outstripped the unfavourable – although this only happened in the latter part of the study, as negative issues covered in the first half faded, to be replaced by greater coverage of Norway’s involvement in UNHCR programs. While many news pieces addressed global issues such as the plight of Syrian refugees and those in other pockets of unrest and strife throughout the world, the Norwegian press often brought the discussion back to the impact this is having on the numbers of people seeking refuge and asylum in the EU and by extension, Norway.
Notwithstanding the uniformity of message framing at the aggregate level with all migration messaging taken into account, there were differences both between countries and between phases when specific themes were analysed. As shown in Figure 9 below, the framing of media messages on ‘immigration and immigrants’ appeared to be quite different in the six very high HD countries. Australia and Canada were the only countries that had messaging framed in a security context, although Australia’s messaging was predominantly framed in a socio-cultural context (60%) and Canada’s was framed mainly in a humanitarian context (61%).

Economic framing was still high in Switzerland, although this had come down since phase one—a reduction in economic framing of this theme was experienced across all six countries to a greater or lesser degree but most noticeably in the United Kingdom (79 to 38%). While this reduction may be related to a post-election period of ‘normalisation’, it is interesting that the economic framing of this theme reduced across all countries. It may be that solid economic growth and a greater sense of economic stability is underpinning the change in these countries. It may also be possible that messaging related to ‘immigration and immigrants’ was affected by the substantial increase in the humanitarian framing of the ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ theme.

Figure 9: Framing of migration messages in print and online media in selected very high human development countries—immigration and immigrants theme: Phase I and II

Messages: Australia (n=2,185), Canada (n=4,738), Netherlands (n=1,488), Norway (n=813), Switzerland (n=2,630), United Kingdom (n=9,440).

Australia—which experienced a relatively small proportional coverage of the theme ‘immigration and immigrants’ in both phases—had a discussion on the topic that was more likely to have been framed in the socio-cultural and security contexts compared with the other countries. This would appear to be related to the messaging in print and online media on the integration of Muslim migrants in Australia, a topic that appeared to be dominated by unfavourable messaging (see Appendix C).

As show in Figure 10 below, a very different picture emerges of reporting of the theme ‘irregular migration’, with the framing of media messaging in Switzerland, Norway and the Netherlands having shifted from a predominantly security-related framing to a humanitarian framing, and bringing them more in line with the United Kingdom. The security framing of the phase one messaging appeared to have been related to discussion of border security within Europe and irregular maritime migration across the Mediterranean Sea, from North Africa in particular. It is difficult to fully account for the evening out of the message contexts, which now appear to be much more consistent across all countries. As with other themes, Australia’s messaging had a slightly higher proportion framed in a security context.
In the Netherlands...

Asylum Seekers & Refugees was the most prominent theme during the study periods. There was an increase in unfavourable commentary in phase two. This was driven by discussion of contentious issues including: the need for a “rejection quota” for unsuccessful asylum seekers, and limits on the extent to which asylum seekers should have access to health care. There was also a greater focus on asylum seeker processing and deportation in the second phase, which again served to increase the proportion of unfavourable messaging on asylum seekers and refugees. News of the arrival of asylum seekers from Eritrea and Syria also fed into these discussions.

Figure 10: Framing of migration messages in print and online media in selected very high human development countries—irregular migration theme: Phase I and II

Messages: Australia (n=7,908), Canada (n=166), Netherlands (n=2,548), Norway (n=269), Switzerland (n=2,498 ), United Kingdom (n=3,825).

Analysis of the ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ theme shows that the messaging was predominantly framed in the humanitarian context, although all three contexts were present in all countries. Norway saw a slight shift in framing of the theme, with an increase in ‘economic’ framing, while Australia’s socio-cultural framing in phase one dropped markedly to that of similar levels in the other countries.
5.2 Key findings and differences between other human development countries

There has been little research on the media coverage of migration issues in countries that are not the very high HD migration destination or receiving countries. Countries that have been rated as having lower HD, but particularly those with low HD, have not tended to be included in research on this topic. As discussed in Occasional Paper 13/2015, there would appear to be several reasons for this. Firstly, it can be very difficult to access and collect media articles from some countries. Secondly, the need for multilingual analysts with native language skills and an appreciation of current social and cultural environments poses challenges. Thirdly, and particularly in relation to comparative analysis, ensuring consistency across different country analyses can be difficult.

This project attempts to fill some of this research gap. In doing so, and taking into account the findings of phase one, the seven ‘other’ HD countries have been grouped to facilitate comparative analysis: Afghanistan (low HD), Bangladesh (medium HD), Malaysia (high HD), Pakistan (low HD), Sri Lanka (high HD), Thailand (high HD) and Vietnam (medium HD). We have moved away from categorising the countries in scope as ‘origin’ countries.

The key findings rely on smaller country-specific datasets compared with those compiled for very high HD countries. This was partly related to significant differences in media volumes and to difficulties with collection. Nevertheless, a comparative analysis produced some interesting findings:

- Consistent with phase one findings, there remains a diversity of coverage by theme as well as tone and context across the seven other HD countries.
- The inclusion of Malaysia and Thailand highlighted the very different volumes of media, with Malaysia’s volume being very high, which is likely to be related to infrastructure and access but also to the nature of the topics covered in those countries—Malaysia and Thailand’s coverage tended to reflect their status as migration ‘receiving’ countries.
• Taking into account all print and online messages on migration and migrants in the other HD countries, it is evident that there was a small but noticeable shift in message tone between phases one and two toward the more balanced coverage overall. While neutral coverage decreased slightly, favourable messages increased and unfavourable coverage decreased marginally.

• Overall, coverage of migration in print and online media tended to be less polarised in other HD countries than in very high HD countries, with more neutral reporting and less unfavourable reporting in origin countries. That said, reporting was more likely to be unfavourable than favourable, which is consistent with very high HD countries.

• Most media reporting on migration in both phases was framed in a humanitarian context, far outstripping economic, socio-cultural and security contexts.

• Perhaps partly due to issues related to press freedom—discussed in section 3 above—the focus on migration in print and online media related primarily to the multitude of aspects associated with the rights and treatment of citizens.

• Reporting in a security context was evident in both phases in relation to people smuggling and, to a lesser extent, irregular migration.

5.2.1 Thematic content in print and online media in other human development countries

All media messages from the country-specific datasets were analysed against a number of themes (see Appendix D for a glossary of themes). As noted in the previous section, a single print or online article may contain more than one message and each message may relate to more than one theme. Analysing the datasets in this way allows for all messages to be described in thematic terms.

As shown in Figure 12, the volume of migration-specific print and online messaging was relatively similar in phases one and two for all countries except Thailand and Vietnam, which experienced significant increases in the second phase. While the increases may be related to seasonal effects (as discussed in section 4 above), they are clearly due in part to the heightened coverage of ‘irregular migration’ in Thailand and ‘overseas workers’ in Vietnam.

As with the very high HD countries, the volume of migration-related print and online media messaging varied substantially between the two countries. Malaysia’s volume is akin to that of Canada and far exceeds all of the other countries in this group—a result that reflects the maturity and size of its media industry as well as the focus on migration in public discourse.

3 Involved analysis of more than 28,000 individual messages from 6,000 articles reported between 1 October 2013 and 30 September 2014 in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.
In terms of thematic messaging analysed proportionally, and as shown in Figure 13 below, there was considerable variation in the thematic content between the countries. It is likely that the differences between the other HD countries reflect the very different national discussions that occurred during the study periods. Further, the substantial differences and the nature of some of the thematic messaging, reflect the current state of migration more broadly within each country. Consistent with migration flows from Vietnam and Bangladesh, for example, ‘overseas workers’ dominated the print and online media messages in both phases. Reporting on phase one findings noted that the results from Sri Lanka were somewhat at odds with the long history of regular labour migration flows from Sri Lanka, however, phase two saw this theme become more prominent in Sri Lanka, with a reduction in both ‘irregular migration’ and ‘emigration and emigrants’.

Figure 13: Thematic coverage of migration in print and online media in selected other human development countries by proportion—key migration themes: Phase I and II
It is interesting to note the dominance of the media messaging on ‘irregular migration’ in Malaysia and Thailand, which is far greater proportionally than any of the other countries as well as the very high HD countries. This appears to reflect the current migration issues facing those countries. In Malaysia, for example, there are estimated to be up to two million irregular migrants residing in the country, many working in the unregulated economy (McAuliffe & Mence, 2014). In Thailand, the very high proportional messaging on ‘irregular migration’ was related mainly to the Thai Government’s crackdown of illegal migrant workers from Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos in early 2014, which preceded its migrant worker registration scheme (from June 2014). The scheme was reported as resulting in the registration and legalisation of more than one million former illegal migrants.

The amount of messaging on ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ increased in the majority of countries in phase two, with slight reductions experienced in only Afghanistan and Thailand. Unlike coverage of this theme in very high HD countries, examination of the articles related to ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ indicates that these tend to be on local issues rather than the more general material on refugee crisis situations (e.g. Syria) and Mediterranean Sea asylum seeker movements. For example, in Pakistan the focus was on Afghan refugees and repatriation while in Sri Lanka the discussion revolved around Pakistani asylum seekers in Sri Lanka as well as on Sri Lankan asylum seekers attempting to reach Australia. Bangladesh on the other hand witnessed a discussion on this theme that was dominated by Rohingya-related issues. More details of the messaging are contained in the individual country reports at Appendix C.

In Thailand...

The Immigration & Immigrants theme generated the highest level of favourable messages with commentary pointing to the economic benefits (legitimate) foreign workers bring to the country. Unfavourable messages relating to this theme appeared more in a socio-cultural context, with reports suggesting links between immigrants and criminal activity.

The Asylum Seekers & Refugee theme was another in which Thailand’s media was similar to its neighbour, Malaysia. Media in each country focused on the plight of Rohingya refugees, while also presenting news relating to the Australian government’s asylum seeker policy. Favourable messages were driven by support for the plight of Rohingya living in Thailand, while unfavourable messages highlighted the difficulties faced by asylum seekers suffering with deportation or detention.

While not overly prominent in terms of absolute message numbers, the Overseas Workers theme attracted a reasonably high level of favourable commentary (33%). Government support of Thai workers was a leading positive message, while unfavourable commentary (25%) appeared largely in connection with stories about the hardships faced by Thai workers, internationally.

5.2.2 Extent of polarisation of print and online media content in other human development countries

Consistent with the findings for very high HD countries, when all messages related to migration and migrants are aggregated across all other HD countries, it is evident that there was a small but noticeable positive shift between phases one and two toward more balanced coverage overall. Overall, and as can be seen from Figure 14, favourable coverage increased (from 11% to 17%) while unfavourable coverage decreased (from 49% to 46%) as did neutral coverage (39% to 36%). It would
appear that no specific events or circumstances drove this change—it is more likely that a combination of changes in overall message volume in some countries together with variations in thematic content appears to have overall had a combined effect. It will be interesting to examine this high level indicator in future phases, particularly as it tends to blunt the more event-based changes and has the ability to provide a useful overall barometer on print and online media coverage of migration and migrants. This summary result is based on analysis of over 28,000 individual messages from more than 6,000 articles.

Figure 14: Favourable/unfavourable/neutral coverage of migration in print and online media in selected other human development countries combined—all migration themes: Phase I & II

![Bar chart showing favourable, neutral, and unfavourable coverage across phases 1 and 2.]

Messages: Phase 1 (n=12,040), Phase II (n=16,349).
Articles: Phase 1 (n=6,035), Phase II (n=8,010).

In Sri Lanka...

Throughout the year-long study period, the Sri Lankan print and online media showed substantial interest in those citizens choosing to leave Sri Lanka. It explored these departures from a number of different perspectives. The message theme of Asylum Seekers & Refugees often dealt not just with those entering Sri Lanka, but also with Sri Lankans seeking refuge outside the country. Emigration & Emigrants addressed the matter of citizens leaving through proper channels, while Irregular Migration messages related to both irregular arrivals into Sri Lanka, and to some extent, news of citizens accused of irregularly migrating to other countries.

As was the case with very high HD countries, the research found considerable variability in the tone of the media coverage of migration between other HD countries. Figure 15 shows that higher proportions of unfavourable messaging were experienced in all countries except Malaysia and Thailand, which remained at high levels. Malaysia experienced the highest levels of unfavourable messaging (57%) and the lowest levels of favourable (10%), very closely echoing the results for Australia (49% unfavourable; 13% favourable).
The proportions of neutral media coverage between the two phases dropped in all countries except Malaysia where it remained the same. The print and online messaging in Afghanistan and Pakistan became noticeably more polarised in the second phase with both unfavourable and favourable messaging increasing. This was in a context of otherwise fairly consistent results between the two phases and across almost all countries.

Not surprisingly, the two countries with the highest proportional and actual messaging on irregular migration (Malaysia and Thailand) experienced the highest proportions of unfavourable messaging and low levels of favourable when all themes are taken into account. These results accord with the findings for Australia, which shared these key characteristics related to thematic messaging and the tone of the overall messaging. In all three countries, there would seem to be an emphasis on linking irregular migration to the success or otherwise of government policy and practice on managing immigration. More detail on the individual country findings is in Appendix C.
As shown in Figure 16, the theme of overseas workers received a reasonable amount of favourable media coverage in most origin countries during the study period, with a significant increase having occurred in Pakistan. Consistent with the findings for phase one, the two countries in which the theme dominated (Bangladesh and Vietnam) did not have the highest proportions of favourable coverage, although they both increased in phase two. One of the more stark findings is that all countries experienced polarisation of messaging on this theme—lower levels or much lower levels of neutral reporting occurred in phase two.

Figure 16: Favourable-unfavourable-neutral coverage of migration in print and online media in selected other human development countries—overseas workers theme: Phase I and II

In Pakistan...

The Asylum Seekers & Refugees theme accounted a third of all messages, and was the most prominent issue across the entire study period. While overall unfavourable messages still outnumbered favourable ones, the second phase of the study saw an improvement in tone with the announcement of monetary aid from foreign nations including the US and Japan, and support from the UN. Pakistan was also praised for the magnanimity with which it receives refugees.

Unfavourable messages related to the suffering of refugees in the country’s camps and their inadequate accommodation. We also saw significant frustration expressed about the level of ongoing support needed for refugees, and concurrently, concerns about potential links between terrorists and refugees, while the large economic and social burden placed on countries hosting refugees was also noted.

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In contrast to the tone of the media messaging on ‘overseas workers’, the coverage of ‘irregular migration’ was once again extremely unfavourable, although there were some changes evident in Pakistan and Vietnam. As was found in phase one, the tone of the coverage of this theme was the second most unfavourable of all of the thematic coverage across all very high HD and other HD country datasets—second only to ‘people smuggling and trafficking’, which received extremely unfavourable commentary in all countries.

Interestingly, the tone of the messaging on irregular migration in other HD countries tended to be much more unfavourable (35% to 75%) compared with very high HD countries (226). This reflected the focus on the dangers to potential irregular migrants, deportations of irregular migrants back to the other HD country as well as commentary on the dangers posed by irregular migrants from elsewhere. It should be noted, however, that the volume of messaging on ‘irregular migration’ was reasonably low, with only Malaysia and Thailand experiencing substantial volumes (see Figure 11).

Figure 17: Favourable-unfavourable-neutral coverage of migration in print and online media in selected other human development countries—irregular migration theme: Phases I and II

In Bangladesh...

Print and online media was highly focused on the Overseas Workers theme, typically addressing the hardships confronting these people. Over half of all messages reported during the one-year study period were on this theme. The prominence of stories and messages on the plight of overseas workers aligned with the often reported link between the health of the Bangladeshi economy and the remittances flowing from its foreign workers.

A long way back in terms of its prominence was the second-most reported theme of Asylum Seekers & Refugees (15%). The standout issue discussed here was Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh and Myanmar, which became more prominent in phase two.

Messages: Afghanistan (n=126), Bangladesh (n=205), Malaysia (n=6,516), Pakistan (n=298), Sri Lanka (n=338), Thailand (n=2,234), Vietnam (n=225).

Articles: Afghanistan (n=83), Bangladesh (n=129), Malaysia (n=2,544), Pakistan (n=220), Sri Lanka (n=227), Thailand (n=992), Vietnam (n=128).
Further breakdowns of the tone of the thematic coverage can be found in the individual other HD country summaries in Appendix C. The summaries also contain information on the key issues that arose in the media, the coverage trend over the reporting period, the framing of the coverage and the prominence of specific voices in the media.

5.2.3 Framing of the media discourse in other human development countries

The first striking result of the research is the dominance of the ‘humanitarian’ framing in all other HD countries across both phases. Messaging on migration and migrants in print and online media coverage is being predominantly depicted through a ‘humanitarian’ lens. Other framing is present and in some countries not insubstantial—24% ‘security in Malaysia and 25% ‘economic’ in Bangladesh—but all countries’ messaging is predominantly framed in a ‘humanitarian’ context regardless of the differences in substance and complexity of national migration issues.

The second key finding is the noticeable degree of uniformity between the two phases. All countries experienced similar results in the two phases, with moderate changes largely being limited to increases in humanitarian framing in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (with concomitant decreases largely in ‘socio-cultural’ framing). While it is difficult to anticipate the results of future phases, it would be useful to have this trend finding confirmed (or otherwise) through further research.

In Vietnam...

Print and online media on migration issues in Vietnam was similar in many respects to other countries that are ranked lower on the Human Development Index. It had a strong focus on the opportunities and challenges faced by citizens working in foreign countries, and the valuable contribution these workers make to the Vietnamese economy through the flow of remittances. Discussion surrounding in-bound migration in the Vietnamese press was limited and was largely driven by specific events.

This event-driven media surrounding in-bound migration produced something of shift when comparing the two phases in this study period. In the first phase of the study press articles relating to Overseas Workers made up the lion’s share of coverage (68%), while coverage relevant to Immigration & Immigrants was insignificant. In the second phase, tensions caused by the development of a Chinese oil rig in Vietnamese waters led to anti-China protests that targeted industrial zones housing large numbers of Chinese workers. The subsequent media interest in these events saw the Immigration & Immigrants theme jump to 15% share of coverage across the April to September 2014 period.
The two countries that experienced the highest proportions of ‘security’ framing (Malaysia and Thailand) have arguably the highest numbers of irregular labour migrants who are not asylum seekers or refugees in their communities (FIDH & Suaram, 2008; IOM, 2011b). While acknowledging that this is difficult to state categorically given the lack of hard data on migrant flows and stocks, the little we do know seems to be consistent with the media reporting outlined in Appendix C and with the overall results.

Consistent with phase one, the discussion of ‘overseas workers’ was more likely to have been framed in an economic context compared with the overall migration discussion, with an exception being Thailand. In Thailand, there was not much coverage of this theme either in volume or proportional terms, but the little that was reported was framed in a humanitarian context, indicating perhaps less of a reliance on remittances in this country.
In other HD countries, as was the case in very high HD countries, discussion on ‘irregular migration’ saw a greater proportion of messages framed in a security context, with little or no economic framing. While there was uniformity across the two phases for most countries, Vietnam was an exception—security framing jumped from 23% in phase one to 96% in phase two. There appear to be two main reasons for this. Firstly, the volume of messaging in Vietnam in both phases was small, and secondly, the coverage was mainly associated with event-driven reporting of Chinese irregular labour migrants and security-related incidents (including shootings) and threats.

Messages: Afghanistan (n=138), Bangladesh (n=1,255), Malaysia (n=8), Pakistan (n=424), Sri Lanka (n=414), Thailand (n=158), Vietnam (n=2,718).
6. Implications for policymakers

The purpose of this research was to compare migration discourses in selected countries by examining thematic content, contextual framing, and the extent of polarisation of messages communicated via print and online media over two six-month periods. It is the second phase of a research collaboration between the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and Cubit Media Research, designed to inform migration policymakers and practitioners by drawing on expertise built up in the private sector on large-scale quantitative media analytics.

The media is often accused of generalizing – usually negatively - about migrants and migration, for example by scaling up individual misdemeanours to entire populations, or failing to tell good news as well as bad news stories. One of the implications of the preceding analysis is that those who criticize the media in this way are in turn generalizing. It is clear that media coverage of migrants and migration is dynamic and quite sophisticated, and varies significantly between countries as well as within countries over time. This noted, a number of initial implications for policy makers can be suggested from this research.

First, and given the significance of media coverage on migrants and migration noted in the Introduction, it is important to promote a fair and reasonable portrayal of migrants in the media, and as this analysis has illustrated this is often still not the case. At a national level, promoting and protecting the freedom of the press is paramount. At the corporate level there are implications for example concerning safeguarding editorial independence from commercial interests. At the level of individual media outlets, providing internship or employment opportunities for journalists with a migrant background has been suggested as one way to increase a better understanding and more objective coverage of this and indeed other cross-cultural issues. There are powerful reasons to support these sorts of policies beyond just potential migration outcomes.

A second policy area that can be informed by this and subsequent analysis, is the design and dissemination of information on migration policies and programmes, to settled migrants as much as to potential migrants. It is likely that media content and comment has more influence on migrant decisions than many official sources of information, for example because the former may be more trusted and more easily accessible. Understanding how the media shapes its coverage of migration, as this analysis has begun to, has important implications for trying to predict and perhaps channel its influence.

In this regard one of the key contributions made by the research is the application of a consistent methodology to a selected number of countries to develop a measurable set of indices, which can be monitored over time. This can be appealing for policymakers, as it offers the opportunity to compare media discourses about migration in other countries, including other HD countries. Detecting changes and shifts over time, in a solid and measurable manner, enables policymakers to consider a range of options, including for communications activities, with the benefit of evidence.

7. Conclusions

The purpose of this research has been to compare migration discourses in selected countries by examining thematic content, contextual framing, and the extent of polarisation of messages communicated via print and online media over two six-month periods. It is the second phase of a research collaboration between the Department of Immigration and Border Protection and Cubit Media Research, designed to inform migration policymakers and practitioners by drawing on expertise built up in the private sector on large-scale quantitative media analytics.

This project involved large-scale quantitative research that relied on a combination of multilingual human analyses and a human cognitive modelling software system. This developed a unique
evidence base, albeit covering two finite periods and with certain limitations. The research has highlighted, with a reasonable level of confidence, the nature of the migration discussions occurring within the media in the selected countries as well as the relative ‘space’ devoted to different migration topics.

Overall, the evidence this research provides adds to the existing body of work on migration and the media, however, it could be argued that a more pressing longer-term benefit will only be realised through analyses of trends stemming from additional research phases. Discerning changes over time has the potential to uncover trends that are likely to have implications for policy makers and migration practitioners internationally.

References


Appendix A

Thematic analysis of all print and online media coverage in the United Kingdom

To determine the salience of migration-related print and online media coverage, extensive key-word searches for three separate months (accounting for a combined total of 3 months), were conducted to gauge the level of consistency across a broader time period. Two of these periods (October 2013 and February 2014) fell within phase one of the research project (October 2013 to March 2014), while the third month was outside the scope of the project (February 2015).

The themes ‘sport’, ‘entertainment and celebrity’, and ‘the economy’ dominated the UK media landscape during these periods. The ‘sport’ theme accounted for between 24–30% of coverage, while ‘entertainment and celebrity’ and ‘the economy’ were more stable, fluctuating by just one percentage point across the search sets at 19–20% each.

Migration-centric stories represented between two and three percent of the coverage analysed, which was broadly equivalent to the coverage on ‘violent extremism’.

During the analysis it became clear that while ‘politics’ accounted for a substantial part of the coverage, it was very often related directly to the thematic topics, and was not meaningfully or usefully able to be disaggregated from the thematic categories below.

It is also important to note that it is not possible, without content analysis being undertaken, to determine the tone or contextual framing of the coverage, such as the level of favourable, neutral and unfavourable messaging.

Figure 1: Print and online coverage by theme—October 2013

Articles: Sport (n=127,622), Entertainment/Celebrity/Culture (n=101,383), Economy (n=100,529), Science/Health (n=52,927), Technology (n=49,950), Crime (n=10,672), Violent extremism (n=18,843), Migration (n=15,846), Lifestyle (n=14,225), Climate change (n=7,798).
Figure 2: Print and online coverage by theme—February 2014

Articles: Sport (n=113,148), Entertainment/Celebrity/Culture (n=81,978), Economy (n=81,986), Science/Health (n=35,547), Technology (n=35,091), Crime (n=30,130), Violent extremism (n=11,848), Migration (n=10,224), Lifestyle (n=12,364), Climate change (n=6,816).

Figure 3: Print and online coverage by theme—February 2015

Articles: Sport (n=265,804), Entertainment/Celebrity/Culture (n=184,075), Economy (n=183,962), Science/Health (n=74,422), Technology (n=71,682), Crime (n=42,654), Violent extremism (n=26,574), Migration (n=18,885), Lifestyle (n=24,665), Climate change (n=9,772).
## Appendix B

### Summary of country-specific datasets—Phases I & II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country (P1)</th>
<th>Search term incidence of 1</th>
<th>Search term incidence of 4</th>
<th>Focal pieces dataset</th>
<th>In-depth analysis dataset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>&gt;186000</td>
<td>~63000</td>
<td>9,300</td>
<td>550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>58,000</td>
<td>16,200</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>28,100</td>
<td>6,100</td>
<td>2,600</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>14,000</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>34,800</td>
<td>7,400</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK (P1)</td>
<td>&gt;250000</td>
<td>~50000</td>
<td>2,590</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
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<td>275</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>250</td>
</tr>
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<td>570</td>
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<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>2,800</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>13,600</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** As a result of the smaller volumes of articles typically associated with the non-very high HD countries studied, and difficulties experienced with indexing text in script languages such as Sinhala, all relevant articles were included in the focal pieces dataset regardless of the number of incidences.

In relation to very high HD country sets (and Malaysia), search term incidence tests were run for 1, 2, 3 and 4 instances and empirical tests were carried out to determine the optimum incidence level, which was 4.
Appendix D

Glossary of migration themes

1. Asylum seekers and refugees.
2. Immigration and immigrants.
3. Emigration and emigrants.
4. Irregular migration.
5. Migrant accommodation (including detention).
6. Overseas workers.
7. Overseas students.
8. People smuggling and trafficking.

1. The asylum seekers and refugees thematic category

This was assigned to a message whenever that message contained the terms asylum or refugee, or where there was a derivative or inferred descriptor attached to the message, e.g. ‘seeking refuge’, ‘applying for asylum’, or ‘fleeing civil strife’. As with all themes, ‘asylum seekers and refugees’ was applied only where the article was focal to the study i.e. not, for instance, a piece about how a business leader’s family were refugees from the Second World War.

Example text:

Refugee lawyers have argued that the Tamils are legitimate refugees from a country wracked by years of civil war, and face possible abuse or torture if sent back. But the government has taken an aggressive stance to prove they are inadmissible to Canada and not genuine refugees—part of a wider effort to deter large-scale smuggling operations.

*The Gazette* (Montreal), 12/10/2013

2. The immigration and immigrants thematic category

This covered general discussions regarding immigration and associated policies, as well as specific mentions of migration and immigrants. Despite the appearance of the term ‘migrant’ in a message, the theme was not applied where it was clear that a message actually related to overseas workers or persons seeking asylum or refuge. It also was not applied to irregular migration or irregular arrivals. And as with all themes, ‘immigration and immigrants’ was applied only to messages where the article was focal to this study.
Example text:

Immigration minister James Brokenshire admitted the government is powerless to control the numbers of people coming from elsewhere in the EU, despite the pledge to cut the total figure. ‘Numbers are down across the board in areas where we can control immigration, but arrivals from the EU have doubled in the last year,’ he said. ‘The Government is ensuring that our controls on accessing benefits and services, including the NHS and social housing, are among the tightest in Europe. We cannot impose formal immigration controls on EU migrants, so we are focusing on cutting out the abuse of free movement between EU member states and seeking to address the factors that drive European immigration to Britain.’ Mr Brokenshire went on: ‘Uncontrolled, mass immigration makes it difficult to maintain social cohesion, puts pressure on our public services and forces down wages for people on low incomes.’

dailymail.co.uk, 28/02/2014

3. The emigration and emigrants thematic category

This was applied to messages referring to emigrants and emigration, or to policies around emigration. And, as with all themes, ‘emigration and emigrants’ was applied only to messages where the article was focal to the study—not, for instance, where references were to emigration or crisis-driven diaspora long past.

Example text:

After more than six decades since de-colonisation of Sri Lanka, what we observe today is a far more pervasive phenomenon of out-migration. Today, the migrants are mostly highly qualified, young professionals leaving the country looking for greener pastures elsewhere. Since the migrants are mostly young, the outflow has significant demographic implications as well. If you talk to ten middle class adults such as senior public servants, university academics, professionals, diplomats, business executives, etc, most of them will tell you that most, if not all, of their children are domiciled in overseas countries. These children have had access to the best education here or abroad and secured professional qualifications, but have settled down in other countries due to better prospects there.

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka), 20/01/2014

4. The irregular migration thematic category

This was assigned to a message whenever it described people who had arrived in a country illegally or irregularly. It was not applied to people who had over-stayed their visas, or who were overseas workers or students, working illegally. As with all themes, ‘irregular migration’ was applied only where the article was focal to this study.

Example text:

It is one of the worst such disasters to occur off the Italian coast in recent years; Prime Minister Enrico Letta tweeted that it was ‘an immense tragedy’. The boat was believed to have been carrying about 500 people at the time. ‘There is no miraculous solution to the migrant exodus issue,’ said Italian Foreign Minister Emma Bonino. ‘If there were we would have found it and put it into action.’ Also on Thursday, local media reported that around 200 migrants were escorted to the port of Syracuse on the island of Sicily, when the vessel encountered difficulties five miles off the coast. Earlier this week, 13 migrants drowned while trying to reach Sicily.

BBC, 04/10/2013
5. The migrant accommodation (including detention) thematic category

This category includes messages relating to detention centres, asylum application and/or refugee processing centres, official or unofficial camps, transit accommodation, as well as any temporary or permanent accommodation provided for migrants, asylum seekers or refugees.

Example text:

Human Rights and asylum seeker advocates were condemning a decision to employ a former Sri Lankan military officer as the acting operations manager of the Manus Island detention centre. The ABC has confirmed that the former Sri Lanka military officer has been running the facility for the G4S security company.

Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka), 25/02/2014

6. The overseas workers thematic category

This theme was applied to messages that related specifically to those people working outside their native countries, but who had not sought refuge or asylum, and who had not been migrating to the country in which they were working or intending to work. It was also applied to messages around foreign worker exploitation, poor treatment, deportation, remittances, as well as references to the extent to which remittances had contributed to an economy.

Example text:

Remittance inflows are believed to have played an effective role in poverty alleviation, assisting development process and in improving standards of living. In recent years, remittances are one of the largest sources of external finance for developing countries. Inward remittances are also associated with increased household investments in education, health and entrepreneurship. This has a high social return in most circumstances.

The Financial Express (Bangladesh), 23/10/2013

7. The overseas students thematic category

This category was attached to messages that related to students studying outside their native countries.

Example text:

Fouss said false stories and fake documents often end up with a refusal and a permanent mark against the applicant. He highly suggested anyone interested in studying in the US to go to EducationUSA instead of going to brokers for assistance.

‘The US likes having foreign students in their schools. This is good for Americans for a number of reasons...America benefits in so many ways. Visitors are good for US-Bangladesh cultural ties and they're good for the US economy.’ Press and Information Office of the US Embassy, Kelly McCarthy who was also present at the press conference said, ‘It's a win-win situation. The US institutions win, American students win and Bangladesh also wins when students return to Bangladesh.’

The News Today (Bangladesh), 16/11/2013
8. The people smuggling and trafficking thematic category

This theme was used to group messages relating to the act of people smuggling, as well as to the smugglers themselves and their organisations. It also took in the practice of human trafficking, the slave trade, and the steps being taken to combat these practices.

Example text:

Illegal migrants, no matter which country they belong to, risk life and limb for a shot at a better life. They often take the perilous road to greener pastures, prodded on by ruthless human trafficking syndicates. Pakistan, whose border controls are notoriously lax and shoddy, bears the brunt of this dangerous inflow and outflow of fortune-hunters. Small wonder, then, that Pakistan continues to feature prominently in international studies documenting the scale of the problem. On January 23, for instance, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) launched a report in Islamabad, naming Pakistan among the few countries facing human trafficking and illegal migration challenges.

*The Express Tribune* (Pakistan), 25/01/2014