

# Media discourses of the Ukrainian refugees during the war in Ukraine

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**Aim:** Our main objective was to follow the narrative and determine the media discourses during the coverage of Ukrainian refugees fleeing the country by three different online news reporting websites: BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera, each covering distinct geographic areas relevant to the investigation.

**Methods:** Using critical discourse analysis, we conducted this study at three levels by using descriptions, interpretations, and social analysis. Given the extensive scope of the subject, we had to restrict the volume of data (media articles) considered for analysis. A total of six articles from Al Jazeera, nine from CNN, and four from the BBC were meticulously analyzed, covering the period from the beginning of the invasion (February 24, 2022) until the end of the year (December 31, 2022).

**Results:** All analyzed media texts portrayed the Ukrainian refugees as safe, educated, and civilized, with the notion that Ukrainian refugees are welcome. The analysis demonstrates different strategies adopted by the media, where CNN attempted to evoke empathy and compassion among the readers, while the BBC and Al Jazeera focused on presenting verifiable facts and numerical data. However, in contrast to the BBC and CNN, Al Jazeera was critical of all the state actors on a European and global level and perceived that double standards were imposed among the key players. Namely, the classification of actors in the analysis shows how the media created an 'in-group' (Ukrainian refugees, Europe) and an 'out-group' (Russians, other refugees), where the European Union (EU) is considered as the actor that promotes European solidarity and peace. The only occasional criticism aimed at the EU came via Al Jazeera.

**Conclusion:** Critical discourse analysis applied in this research through the three-dimensional approach clearly demonstrates the role of the media in producing and distributing narratives that determine how Ukrainian refugees are represented. Since the beginning of the war, the media have collectively used respectful language towards the refugees, creating a narrative that Ukraine belongs to an 'in-group' representative of European values and norms. Such discourses emphasize the superiority of European values.

**Keywords:** Ukraine; Russia-Ukraine Conflict; Ukrainian refugees; critical discourse analysis; online news reporting websites; media portrayal

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## Introduction

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022, over 6 million people have fled Ukraine as refugees (1), escaping into neighboring countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Moldova. For example, Croatia alone took in more than 22 thousand Ukrainian refugees (1). European and other states have readily taken in the refugees; governments, non-profit organizations, and border control agencies quickly adopted strategies to enable them to enter their countries and receive support. This was accompanied by mass media coverage, which constantly reported from different Ukrainian cities with a strong focus on refugees and their unfortunate circumstances.

Media are powerful producers and distributors of different public discourses (2). Macdonald ((3), p. 3) argues that they persuade ‘our consent to ways of talking about the reality that is often regarded as normal and acceptable beyond the confines of media.’ While the social perception the media convey can reflect attitudes, it can also influence them, thus defining what is desirable social behavior (4). Media may also have their own biases or prejudices that affect the way they present the news (5). The pressure to produce news quickly and thereby attract viewers or readers can lead to oversimplification of complex issues, stereotypes, or generalizations that make the story more appealing or understandable (6). Moreover, journalists are aware of the power of the media in shaping public opinion and can use it intentionally or unintentionally (7). In doing so, they may utilise certain frames or narratives that are in line with prevailing societal views of refugees and that reinforce stereotypes and prejudices (8). Political and social contexts influence those narratives, including government policies and public discourse (9). Consequently, the media may feel compelled to align their reporting with these dominant narratives to avoid backlash or criticism. Therefore, they must be mindful of their biases to ensure accuracy and balance in their reporting, and to seek out different perspectives and alternative narratives (10).

In this study, we aimed to investigate how the discourse on Ukrainian refugees during the Russian invasion was presented by three different news reporting agencies – BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera. We focused on how the media articles identified the relevant actors and the differences in reporting between the three news agencies. Our goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the Ukrainian refugees’ experiences, including the reasons for their displacement and interaction with the countries and governments that received them. For this purpose, we need to study the terms used to describe and explain Ukrainian refugees and their experiences, as well as the terms used to describe other participating actors (11).

## Methods

Discourse analysis is a useful and appropriate method for understanding the social and political factors that influence how refugees are represented (12). Through discourse analysis, researchers can scrutinize these narratives and determine how refugee personas are constructed and represented. It can reveal power relations that are intertwined with language use, such as portraying refugees as passive victims and reinforcing power dynamics

between refugees and aid providers (13). Language, meanwhile, is a key element influencing attitudes and policies toward refugees, as it is present in media coverage, political documents, and public discourse (14). Therefore, by identifying and examining alternative narratives, researchers can use discourse analysis to challenge dominant discourses that are harmful to refugees, creating more nuanced understandings of their experiences. By studying the language refugees use to describe their experiences, researchers can gain insight into how refugees adapt to new environments and overcome challenges (15).

### *Discourse analysis*

Discourses refer to the practices of writing and speaking (16). Foucault (17) defined them as ‘practices which form the object of which they speak,’ while Alvesson and Billing (18) described them as ‘a group of claims, ideas, and terminologies that are historically and socially specific and that create truth effects.’ Despite some differences, all definitions agree that discourses have some effect or power implications because they form what is held as knowledge or truth (17). Thus, discourse analysis views language as not only representational, but builds on the idea that it is constitutive (19); it thus also looks at what is excluded from texts or other materials, and seeks for assumptions that are taken for granted or otherwise unquestioned.

Our method of analysis stands on Foucault’s principles (17). The first level (description) refers to text analysis, which reveals how the media texts identify the study subjects, where the media display their attitudes towards the subjects by choosing specific words. The second dimension (interpretations) includes interpretations on how language can affect change. The structure of the sentences, the choice of words, and the way the media describes the study subject are of great importance because they can change the perceptions and attitudes of the general public towards the study subject. In the third dimension (social analysis), discourse is regarded as a social practice. The language used creates attitudes that illustrate our viewpoints and creates social relations and power structures (20).

### *Method applied*

Due to the number of published articles and the operationalization of our study, we focused on the largest online news websites in terms of the number of visitors in the UK (BBC), the USA (CNN), and the Middle East and North Africa region (Al Jazeera) (21). We therefore analyzed six articles from Al Jazeera, nine from CNN, and four from the BBC. With this deliberate selection of sources, we wanted to capture a diverse range of perspectives and information relevant to the research topic. Although we rigorously scrutinized a considerable number of articles outside of this sample, the selected articles shaped the foundational structure and analysis of this work, significantly contributing to a fundamental understanding of how different media sources shape and convey information. We adopted a systematic, transparent approach in the analysis, where we reviewed the selected articles several times, recording the date they were initially accessed. The multiple reviews emphasize the thoroughness of the process, while the inclusion of access dates ensures the credibility of the information and recognizes the dynamic nature inherent to academic discourse.

The time from the beginning of the departure of refugees from Ukraine (February 2022) until December 2022 is divided into two subcategories. The first includes the phase of the invasion itself, in which the choice to use the terms ‘refugee’ or ‘migrant’ was of crucial importance. By choosing a certain lexeme, the media express a specific perspective.

The official definition of ‘refugee’ is given by the United Nations Convention on Refugees from 1951 and its protocol from 1967 (22); it is widely accepted by the international community and is used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to determine who qualifies for refugee status and who is entitled to protection under international law:

As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

Meanwhile, the EU classifies the official definition of ‘immigrant’ into two categories. In the global context, an immigrant is ‘a non-resident (both national or alien) arriving in a State with the intention to remain for a period exceeding a year.’ In the EU context, it is ‘a person who establishes their usual residence in the territory of an EU Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months, having previously been usually resident in another EU Member State or a third country’ (23).

The word ‘refugee’ is commonly used to describe people who have fled their homeland due to persecution, war, or violence, and are seeking safety and protection in another country. It conveys a feeling of despair and vulnerability and implies that the person needs help and support (24). On the other hand, the word ‘immigrant’ is more neutral and is used for people who have moved to a new country by choice with the intention of living and working there permanently. This implies that a person has made a deliberate decision to move and may have done so for a variety of reasons, such as better economic opportunities, education, or personal relationships. The term used by journalists depends on the context of the story and the specific circumstances of the people involved (25). Levy et al. (26) argue that if the story is about a conflict or humanitarian crisis, the term ‘refugee’ can be used to describe people fleeing violence and seeking safety. If the story is about immigration policy or economic migration, the word ‘immigrant’ can be used to describe people who move to a new country for work or other opportunities. Thus, in the first subcategory, the focus is on the choice of words used in the first reports and the analysis of how the media present refugees, Russia, and Europe to their readers.

The second subcategory covers the relationship between refugees and the receiving countries. The keywords we used to search for the relevant data were ‘Ukraine,’ ‘Ukrainians,’ ‘refugees,’ ‘immigrants,’ and ‘migrants.’ Even with the criteria imposed, the search yielded hundreds of articles, necessitating further limitations of the analysis. We thus sorted the search results according to the ‘relevancy’ criteria. We then read all articles and selected only those entirely related to the movement of Ukrainian refugees (full list available on the Open Science Framework: <https://osf.io/b9pse/>).

After collecting the data, we proceeded to the coding stage, which includes identifying recurring themes in the data. Both researchers read and analysed selected media articles

using the code-recode method, meaning they initially performed a primary coding round, followed by a secondary coding round. In the following phase, special attention was given to organizing the coded text segments into specific themes, which helped condense the data into a more manageable volume. We identified the following themes which guided further analysis: Terminology use; narrative framing; tone and language; emphasis on host countries; focus on discrimination; approach to Russia's role; visual representation and; focus on impact. For instance, the main codes comprising the theme 'Human rights and empathy' (Table 1) were: Personal Narratives (stories or quotes from refugees, personal experiences), human rights violations (discussions of rights being infringed upon in the context of the refugee crisis), empathetic language (use of language that evokes empathy or emotional response, and humanitarian appeals (calls for humanitarian aid or support for refugees). The main codes for the theme 'UK-centric & data driven' were: UK policies and responses (information on how the UK government or organizations are responding), statistical analysis (use of data to discuss the impact or scale of the refugee situation in the UK), comparative analysis (comparisons between the UK and other countries in terms of refugee intake or policies), and public opinion in the UK (coverage of how the UK public is reacting or their views on the refugees). After the coding was completed, we proceeded to analyse the data, whereby we studied the language used to describe Ukrainian refugees and other actors and identified how it was used to create meaning (27).

Table 1. Comparative analysis of identified themes

Theme	CNN	BBC	Al Jazeera
Terminology use	'Refugees,' 'people'	'Wave of refugees'	'Refugees,' 'invasion'
Narrative framing	Human rights and empathy	UK-centric and data-driven	Political and data-driven
Tone and language	Urgent, dramatic	Balanced, factual	Critical of Western policies
Emphasis on host countries	Europe, empathy	UK, critical	Europe, critical
Focus on discrimination	Yes (African, Roma)	No	Yes (African, Roma)
Approach to Russia's role	Neutral	Explicit	Explicit
Visual representation	Emotive imagery (children, families)	Emotive imagery (children, families)	Broader, contextual shots (the scale of the crisis)
Focus on impact	Local and Western impact	Personal impact	Global impact

## Findings

### *First sub-category: The invasion phase*

The first decision the media had to make was to select the term to describe the subject of the articles and to achieve consistency during the writing. BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera choose the term 'refugees,' as shown by the following examples:

Ukrainian refugees in the US have nowhere to return (28).

Ukraine-Russia invasion: Europe prepares for a wave of refugees (29).

Germany promises help to neighbors with refugees fleeing Ukraine (30).

The use of this term is related to the socio-cultural status that individuals carry with regard to their belonging. The media's choice to consistently refer to individuals fleeing Ukraine as 'refugees' rather than 'migrants' can be seen as a reflection of socio-cultural perceptions and biases. Studies have shown that Ukrainian refugees received unusually positive media coverage compared to other refugee crises (31). This coverage often emphasized cultural similarities between Ukrainian refugees and the countries they were fleeing to, portraying them as vulnerable and deserving of help (32).

### *First reports*

CNN begins their initial reports during February 2022 by presenting quantitative data, with the phrase 'more than' strategically used to amplify its significance. Notably, while the term 'refugees' is employed predominantly in headlines when referring to these individuals, the term 'people' is used in the body of the articles. This choice of terminology underscores the inherent rights to equality and freedom that each person possesses from birth, fostering a connection with the audience and eliciting empathy. The expression 'moved within Ukraine' not only provides a spatial understanding of the internal movements within Ukraine, but also suggests potential migrations to other countries. In relation to this, the phrase 'fleeing the violence for safety' was frequently utilized to rationalize these movements and promote the acceptance of Ukrainian refugees.

In order to satisfy the public curiosity about where Ukrainian refugees will be accepted, the media started discussing the role of so-called 'neighbors.' This is a term that denotes the geographical position of countries that are in the immediate vicinity, but can also be characterized by the principles of friendship and cooperation. In order to continue in a positive context, the term 'pledged support' is used, which means a formal promise to help and evoke a sense of community among the public. The widely used term 'influx of people' refers to the transition of a large number of individuals due to the clearly specified reason: 'Russian forces invaded Ukraine.' Some illustrative examples are shown below:

A quarter of Ukrainians have fled their homes. Here's where they've gone (33).

Germany has pledged support to its neighbors, including Poland, in the event of an influx of people after Russian forces invaded Ukraine (30).

More than 100,000 people have moved within Ukraine, 'fleeing the violence for safety' the United Nations refugee agency said in a statement Thursday (30).

CNN's use of the term 'quarter' in their headlines in relation to the quantity associated with the nation of Ukraine suggests it to be large. When this large quantity is further intensified by other lexical choices, including 'fled' (running away), 'danger,' and 'homes' (the safe place, one of the basic human existential needs), this paints a very specific picture for the audience. Leaving such impressions on the audience prepares us for the question of '*Where Ukrainians have gone?*' The use of negative emotions targets human sympathy, and thus acceptance:

At least 10 million people have been forced to flee their homes in Ukraine following Russia's invasion less than a month ago, the head of the United Nations' refugee agency said Sunday (33).

By using the expression ‘at least,’ the stated number is reduced to a minimum and gives the information that the real number is much higher. The reason for people leaving is also specified, as they are being ‘forced’ to do so, denoting coercion and thus the innocence of the other party. By adding the label ‘Russia’s invasion,’ the reason for people’s departure from their homes is likewise specified, while the population’s awareness of the undesirability of Russia is formed. Furthermore, the media often use authoritative expressions in order for the public to accept the above information such as ‘the head of,’ so people can accept the given information as reliable.

The BBC’s first coverage begins with an important issue that Europe will face, with the term ‘wave of refugees’ used widely in their reporting to describe what is going to happen. In addition, the reporting clearly presents the cause of this problem, illustrated by the following example:

As Russian air strikes hit overnight, many packed up and left Kyiv for the countryside or the border with the European Union. Traffic jams clogged the roads out of some cities, and some walked on foot into Poland and Hungary. The UN refugee chief warned that the humanitarian impact will be devastating (29).

Special attention is paid to the ‘border with the European Union,’ a phrase which emphasizes the proximity in which the war is taking place. In this report, the author goes further and invites the readers to reflect on possible future events, leaving a disturbing impression on the readers. Similar to CNN’s reporting, the BBC’s articles also attempt to answer the questions that arise while reading the introductory content. In order to evoke empathy in the audience, adjectives such as ‘wounded Ukrainians’ are used as illustrated below from BBC’s report on February 24, 2022:

Poland says it is preparing hospitals for an influx of wounded Ukrainians, and setting up reception points for refugees along its border (29).

Moldova, to Ukraine’s south, said it had already seen thousands of people flee Ukraine, including before Thursday’s invasion began (29).

Slovakia and Hungary are also sending troops to the border to deal with the expected influx of refugees (29).

Al Jazeera, like the two previous media outlets, emphasizes quantitative data, using a phrase that represents a much higher expected number than shown. We also observe the use of the term ‘wave,’ similar to the BBC. The phrase ‘sounded the alarm’ is added, which warns of the danger of the arrival of a large number of migrants, but this time the reason and the culprit are clearly specified through the use of the term ‘by President Vladimir Putin’:

Tens of thousands of people have fled Ukraine since the start of Russia’s invasion, the United Nations has said, warning that the violence could trigger a wave of up to five million refugees fleeing towards neighboring countries. The UN refugee agency sounded the alarm on Friday as Russian forces closed in on the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, on the second day of a sea, land, and air offensive ordered by President Vladimir Putin (34).

All three analysed extracts pay special attention to the refugees at the beginning of the war in Ukraine. It is evident that the media use a combination of pathos, ethos, and logos, emphasizing in different ways the difficult conditions that refugees encounter on their journey. Their search for security is emphasized as a basic human right that every individual has by birth. At the same time, CNN pays more attention to creating empathy and pity for

the people who are affected by the war, while the remaining two media, focus more on the facts that point to the impending danger and the preparation process for a large number of refugees seeking safety.

### *Actors in the analysis*

In some cases, the main protagonist is clearly specified as ‘President Vladimir Putin.’ By using a name, a clear culprit is determined, and an attempt is made to neutralize the attitude of the public toward the Russian people in general. CNN attempts to present Russia as neutral, not as under the control of Putin, while Al Jazeera explicitly uses Putin’s name. Meanwhile, the BBC’s articles bear many similarities to the Al Jazeera articles. For example, when BBC reports on the negative effects of the war, it uses the name ‘President Vladimir Putin’ and the term ‘the Russian army,’ as illustrated below:

The UN refugee agency sounded the alarm on Friday as Russian forces closed in on the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, on the second day of a sea, land, and air offensive ordered by President Vladimir Putin (34).

In terms of the refugees, they are often marked with an act of nationality, belonging to ‘Ukrainians,’ a group of people who originate from and live in a certain area. The word thus expressed in this context often represents a community of people without any distinction by race and social status, for instance:

While some of them have since returned, more than 4.2 million Ukrainians have registered for temporary protection status in European Union countries (35).

CNN uses the term ‘Ukrainians’ to focus more on the conditions in which these people found themselves:

On a sweltering summer day in July, hundreds of Ukrainians try to rest on metal beds lined up in a basketball court-turned-shelter. Their tales of horror and hardship along with a few belongings are all they have left (36).

Here, a ‘sweltering summer day’ is a day in which people usually stay at home to avoid the high temperatures or swim with their family and friends at the sea. This time, people were sentenced to conditions similar to those found in the ‘metal beds,’ akin to those in a prison. ‘Tales of Horror’ refers to something unexpected – to stories that leave a mark of the past on the psychological aspects of individuals. By using such detailed descriptive accounts, the report clearly presents compassion towards people who do not deserve to be in such situations.

All three analysed media are also similar in reporting on one of the main actors – the EU. It is considered the main actor when it comes to the provision of humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees, but also one that promotes European solidarity; its actions are not criticized in any aspect, but rather stand out as examples of being a ‘good neighbor’:

It’s extraordinary to see the comparative ease with which they’re being taken in by pretty much every European government, and how their plight against Russian aggression is resulting in overwhelming solidarity (37).



## Second sub-category: Acceptance

After the initial invasion and the answers to the questions of where all the refugees will be placed, the media focuses on the comfort and acceptance of the refugees in individual countries. The most critical discussions on this issue come from the BBC, as the UK's response to Ukrainian refugees was described using terms such as 'negligence,' 'negativity,' and 'hostile immigration policy.'

Almost 30,000 Ukrainian refugees have been in the UK for almost six months, analysis by BBC News shows. It means nearly a third of the total arrivals under the Homes for Ukraine scheme are facing the end of their initial hosting arrangements. So what happens to them now? (38).

The ruling Conservative government comes in for criticism for dragging its feet over Europe's biggest refugee crisis in decades (39).

It starts with a raised eyebrow and ends with a door slammed shut. A detail lost in translation, a wrong way to load a dishwasher, an awkward silence followed by a polite request to pack your bags (40).

The management of this issue was handled differently by each of the analysed media. To reduce the negativity related to the bad treatment of refugees, the UK-based BBC begins their reporting with stories from people who received refugees into their homes (through the Government's program). This is an attempt to reduce the negativity that casts a shadow over their immigration policy:

I used to drive them around to open bank accounts, to job center appointments, to the Ukrainian group meetings," she says. "They are extremely reliant on me. Their English is just not good enough to do anything by themselves. I can't blame them for that (38).

The BBC also refers to the poor organization of refugee acceptance, which is a direct criticism of the UK Government. However, due to the structure of the articles and the author's linguistic choices, the entire focus falls on the difficulties and sacrifices made by the people who welcomed the refugees into their own homes.

In contrast to the BBC, CNN (June 27, 2022 and March 16, 2022) provides its viewers with a slightly different perspective. They begin by citing historical events about the behavior of the UK in accepting refugees, but also about their great failures and negligence when dealing with the refugees. Also unlike the BBC, CNN presents the unpleasant experiences of the Ukrainian refugees, intending to stimulate an emotional response from the readers – to make them feel pity for the refugees and to feel frustrated with the UK's attitude.

Al Jazeera is using the situation in the UK as a political showdown. They allude to empty promises made by the UK to Ukrainian refugees and present all the evidence that suggests that they are not welcome in the UK. Another aspect of the media reporting focuses on non-Ukrainian refugees from Ukraine, who are also discriminated against because of their socio-cultural status, race, and nationality, which is administratively contrary to the idea of European solidarity. The media describes refugees as worthy of saving due to their physical appearance and a certain level of education. What happens if individuals deviate from the stated 'moral rules of equality?'

Roma refugees from Ukraine are routinely accused of not being Ukrainian; they are segregated in low-quality accommodation. According to several NGOs, many are given misleading information about their rights; and issues that are easily solved when faced by others

who've fled Ukraine – such as missing passport stamps – are often used as a reason for them to be turned away (41).

CNN consistently concentrates on human empathy in all articles. They use strong emotive imagery to provoke sympathy for the refugees. Al Jazeera's reporting follows CNN's narrative, yet is more formal and contains more objective information compared to CNN. However, we observed attempts to mitigate discrimination in our analysis. The problems faced by Roma refugees are of a more formal nature (lost documents) and are occasionally even cultural:

At the Manej hall, large families, some counting as many as 50 members, await their destiny to unfold. Because of their size, most Roma families have been unable to find accommodation in Moldova (42).

The BBC, on the other hand, does not publish articles about discrimination against Ukrainian refugees of Roma origin. It can be argued that the BBC and Al Jazeera are trying to preserve European solidarity so that the representation of Europe and its standards remains at the high level.

### *Discrimination of non-Ukrainians*

In early 2022, amidst the escalating conflict in Ukraine, numerous reports emerged concerning discrimination faced by African students and residents attempting to flee the country. These individuals, primarily students from various African nations, faced significant challenges at the Ukrainian borders and during evacuation efforts. The BBC did not report on this issue.

When reporting on the same news, CNN emphasizes nationality but not skin color:

One African medical student told CNN that she and other foreigners were ordered off the public transit bus at a checkpoint between Ukraine and Poland border (43).

The CNN article ends with the headline 'Are home countries doing enough to help their citizens?' through which it tries to exert pressure to take measures related to solving the problem.

In one article, Al Jazeera also presents African students in Ukraine as victims of discrimination and violence: 'African students in Ukraine face discrimination and violence.' Meanwhile, the Ukrainian government and police are portrayed as not taking effective measures to solve the problem: 'Human rights groups have long accused Ukrainian authorities of turning a blind eye to racist attacks on foreigners, including African students, and failing to properly investigate them.' The article also quotes African students speaking out against the discrimination they face, giving them a voice and making them a part of the story:

Barlany Mufaro Gurure, a space engineering student from Zimbabwe, shared with Al Jazeera their horror at the treatment they received at the Ukrainian border. After enduring a grueling four-day journey and waiting for nine hours in line, they were pushed aside and made to feel like second-class citizens. This experience served as a stark reminder that discrimination knows no borders. Gurure had come to Ukraine seeking safety and education, not to be treated like animals. Although this experience has shaken their belief in equality and unity, they remain hopeful that such incidents will spark conversations and actions towards a more inclusive and compassionate world (44).

## Discussion

### *Critical review*

CNN, BBC, and Al Jazeera each presented unique perspectives in their coverage of Ukrainian refugees, reflecting their distinct editorial policies and cultural contexts. Here we analyse these differences in relation to the two subcategories and outline the comparative analysis of the underlying themes (Table 1).

The first subcategory is characterized as the phase of the invasion, in which the choice to use the term 'refugee' or 'immigrant' was of crucial importance. The findings reveal the news outlets chose to use the term 'refugees.' In the context of media reporting, it is imperative to use accurate and appropriate terminology when talking about people who have migrated to a foreign country, to help avoid confusion and misrepresentation of the status of the migrants. Furthermore, the media reports mostly refer to the 'biggest refugee crisis in Europe since WWII' (45). The displacement of millions of people has created enormous challenges for countries and organizations tasked with providing humanitarian aid, shelter, and protection for refugees (46). The crisis has far-reaching consequences, affecting the lives of refugees, but also of host communities, as they often face increased demand for resources, such as housing, healthcare, and education. Moreover, the refugee crisis has implications for global politics, as it also affects international relations. The crisis has contributed to the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment in many countries and fueled debates about immigration policies and border control (47). It has also called into question the ability of international institutions to address the root causes of displacement and provide adequate protection and assistance to refugees (48). The scale of the current refugee crisis requires concerted efforts and comprehensive solutions to address the needs of refugees and the effects of displacement.

In recent years, the theoretical concept of hospitality has become dominant in migration studies (49). The concept of hospitality encompasses both conditional and unconditional aspects. The concept of hospitality, particularly unconditional hospitality, has been theorized by Derrida (50). Conditional hospitality refers to the provision of hospitality with certain expectations or requirements, while unconditional hospitality involves providing hospitality without any expectations or limitations (51). In the context of refugee acceptance, conditional hospitality may involve offering support to refugees based on specific criteria or conditions, such as legal status or employment prospects. On the other hand, unconditional hospitality entails providing refuge and support to refugees without imposing conditions or expecting anything in return. Gunaratnam (52) explores the dynamics of these two types of hospitality in the context of volunteer refugee hosting, shedding light on the ethical and political tensions between them. Jankowski and Gujski (53) focus exclusively on the public health implications for the refugee population in Poland due to the war in Ukraine. Their findings emphasize the urgent need for public health measures to ensure the health and safety of Ukrainian refugees, highlighting the application of both conditional and unconditional hospitality in the context of public health initiatives.

Additionally, Chioventa (54) discusses Derrida's differentiation between conditional and unconditional hospitality, noting the significance of this distinction in the context of ref-

ugee care. Causevic and Lynch (55) examine the interactions between the diaspora and their new hosts within the post-conflict setting of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their findings show that the intricacies of this specific relationship transcend the simplistic framework of commercial host-guest dynamics, owing to the fluidity in the roles of hosts and guests in this context. They propose the use of a hospitality social lens framework for a more nuanced understanding of host-guest relationships. Investigating the nature of hospitality extended to Syrian refugees from 2011 to 2016 in Gaziantep, southeastern Turkey, and the Akkar region of northern Lebanon; in this context, Carpi and Pinar Şenoğuz (56) found that hospitality emerges not only as a cultural norm and societal reaction to the sustained influx of refugees, but also as a tool of socio-spatial regulation employed by humanitarian organizations, as well as local and national governments. Although hospitality is commonly perceived as a marker of acknowledging and including the recipient within the social realm of the host (albeit in a conditional and hierarchical manner), it is imperative to critically examine the power dynamics inherent in such relationships and the modern political framing of asylum seekers and refugees as guests. Therefore, these early studies demonstrate the imperative to critically examine the power dynamics inherent in such relationships and the modern political framing of migrants and other groups, such as asylum seekers, as guests.

Our findings also show that the media use respectful language and avoid stereotyping refugees. Media reporting on refugees and other vulnerable groups is guided by the principles of responsible journalism, which include objectivity, accuracy, fairness, and respect for human rights (57). By using respectful language, media outlets can demonstrate professionalism, ethics, and empathy toward refugees and contribute to a more informed and compassionate public discourse (58). Using respectful language is especially important in the case of Ukrainian refugees, given the sensitive and complex nature of the crisis. The displacement of millions of people due to conflict and persecution in Ukraine has created enormous challenges for refugees, host communities, and humanitarian organizations. The use of respectful language acknowledges the seriousness of the refugee situation, shows empathy and compassion for their struggles, and helps to combat the negative stereotypes and stigmatization that can be associated with refugees. Negative attitudes toward refugees are often driven by fear, misinformation, and prejudice and can lead to discrimination and exclusion (59).

The second subcategory shows that BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera primarily focus on how host countries accept Ukrainian refugees and the discrimination these refugees face. Interestingly, only CNN and Al Jazeera report on discrimination cases perpetrated by Ukrainian authorities. The BBC's coverage is more UK-centric, offering diverse insights into public awareness of this global issue. It highlights stories of individuals in the UK who have welcomed refugees into their homes under a government scheme. Meanwhile, CNN shares the perspective of a refugee who encountered difficulties while seeking safety. In contrast, Al Jazeera criticizes the ruling party for its inability to effectively address the crisis. The differing narratives in these reports significantly shape public perception of refugees and their integration into society. The use of varied language, structures, imagery, and emotive visual representations influences how audiences view refugees and

their rightful treatment. These reports also have the potential to impact political decisions related to refugees, a factor that becomes critically important during major refugee crises.

Our analysis also points out that all three analysed media portray refugees in a positive light. The choice of how a certain media will inform its audience about events related to refugees is largely related to the culture of that media and even depends on the expressed political orientation that the particular media follows. All three media sources use positive examples (e.g. level of education of Ukrainian refugees) which counteracts any negative perceptions and stereotypes that the population may have. The analysed articles also specify the reasons why people flee their countries and, with the use of descriptive terms, promote tolerance and compassion towards refugees. The analysed texts raise awareness of the humanitarian crisis occurring around the world, as well as how individuals and organizations can provide support to refugees. The media can also have a negative impact on the acceptance of refugees if they publish stories that encourage fear and negative attitudes towards refugees, which was not the case during the reporting on the war in Ukraine. Pandir (60) argues that media discourses can motivate empathy, acceptance, and peace between groups when they intend to promote a culture of co-existence and mutual understanding in their portrayals of minority and vulnerable groups. This means that the media is both part of the problem and the solution, for media representations can produce effects toward the inclusion or exclusion of refugees.

A comparison between CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera across identified themes is outlined in [Table 1](#).

### *Social practice*

Finally, we have to consider the aspect in which the media presents the refugees. The analysis of the selected texts shows that they widely use pathos as a rhetorical device in the portrayal of refugees, appealing to the audience's empathy and compassion. The discourse does not focus on the economic or security-related implications of countries supporting the refugees. This sets up the assumption that Europe has to help, no matter the costs associated with such initiatives. The image of Ukrainian refugees in comparison to other refugees is also quite striking. Ukrainians are presented as European (which is very positive in this discourse), educated, and middle-class with jobs, which implies that they are better than, for example, lower-class refugees from Syria. In addition, only Al Jazeera reported on the discrimination and violence faced by African students in Ukraine. CNN reports on issues faced by Roma refugees. However, BBC evidently attempts to downplay acts of discrimination or even completely ignore them. The media's portrayal of Ukrainian refugees significantly influences public perception and policy-making. The empathetic and humanized portrayal by CNN likely aids in garnering public support for refugee aid. The BBC's critical analysis of the UK's response sheds light on policy shortcomings, possibly prompting policy re-evaluation. Al Jazeera's broader perspective, highlighting discrimination and the political dimensions of the crisis, contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

## Limitations

To conduct the analysis, we have had to limit the data, the number of articles, and the media sources. We opted to select the major online news reporting agencies covering the geographical area most associated with Ukraine and Russia in terms of political and economic interests. However, there are other media or voices with perhaps different but also important stories that we omitted from this analysis, such as Russian or Belarusian media. We also acknowledge there is a difference between the media portrayal of the refugees and the reality of their lived experiences. This research did not consider the latter. In terms of the analysis, the approach we adopted was interpretative, even though we followed systematic coding procedures and adhered to an iterative process, going back and forth between the two researchers. Finally, to conduct this study, we have had to simplify an extremely complex area. We hope this work will serve as a call to action for researchers to engage more deeply in the analysis of media and other documents (for instance, migration policies) to reveal stated and hidden discourses and the effects they have on positioning of the migrants and refugees.

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