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Citation for final published version:

Morani, Marina 2016. Italy (Chapter 10). [Project Report]. Press coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis in the EU: a content analysis of five European countries, Geneva: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/56bb369c9.html>

Publishers page: <https://www.unhcr.org/56bb369c9.html>

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Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content
Analysis of Five European Countries

Report prepared for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees
(December 2015)

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Chapter 10: Italy

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The week following 18 April 2015 saw substantial coverage of the crisis in the three Italian newspapers in our study. Table 10.1 shows that from a total of 190 stories, a sample of 95 articles was generated through systematic sampling.

	La Repubblica	Il Corriere della	La Stampa	Total
Total articles	90	60	40	190
Sampled articles	45	30	20	95

Table 10.1: Sampled articles in the Italian Press 18-25 April 2015

Coverage of the boat disaster of 18 April differed from the main study in three significant ways. First, the incident, which happened 60 miles off the Libyan coast dominated the coverage for the whole week. Key elements of reporting in the Italian press were the involvement of Italy in rescue operations, provision of care to the survivors and the homicide investigation triggered by the disaster. Secondly, the boat disaster generated a strong political response from the Italian government. The measures proposed by the government dominated discussion on how to tackle the escalating crisis. Compared to the previous study, a narrower range and a lower number of proposals voiced by non-government sources were present. Thirdly, the three newspapers shared a similar compassionate approach towards the loss of life caused by the incident. The proportion of humanitarian themes was larger than in the earlier sample. Anti-immigration views again came from right and far-right political sources such as the Northern League and Forza Italia.

The differences between the three newspapers related to different angles used in coverage. *La Repubblica* - given the greater volume of coverage - explored a wider range of themes and issues; *Il Corriere della Sera* focused particularly on trafficking rings; whereas *La Stampa* argued strongly for concerted and comprehensive EU action to tackle the Mediterranean crisis and alleviate Italy's burden of responsibility for rescue operations and reception.

La Repubblica

Opinion pieces/Editorials

La Repubblica, the leading national centre-left newspaper, was the publication in our sample which devoted most coverage to the disaster of 18 April. The coverage concentrated on a wide range of issues including: reports of the disaster and search and rescue operations, accounts of the ordeals of survivors, government and EU proposals, criminal investigations over responsibility for the incident, and local councils' negotiations with central government for implementing reception solutions.

In our sample there were three *Commenti* (comment pieces): one editorial and two opinion pieces. The first opinion piece was written by political analyst and columnist Ilvo Diamanti. The article called for a compassionate approach to the refugees escaping war and seeking shelter in Europe. Migration was acknowledged as a historical and global phenomenon that Italians themselves have experienced. The journalist also took a clear stand against proposals for a blockade:

Today, what people are fleeing is war. In fact, more than a ‘migration’, it is an ‘escape’. However, we seem to only understand the ‘scale’ of the crisis when the death toll is ‘immense’...Yet, migration is a recurring phenomenon. Increasingly and particularly in times of change and violent transformations people ‘mobilize’ in search of new and different living conditions. It happened to us Italians, we know it well...However, calling for blockades and rejections, in the face of immense tragedies, like the one that occurred yesterday in the sea of Sicily, it is not just inhumane, it is simply unrealistic. As if it were possible - as well as right - to stop people fleeing from war and terror a few kilometres from us. The only way to stop those who, in their thousands make their way to our shores - and, by the thousand, die on the journey, hostages of traffickers, is to close our eyes. Pretend they do not exist. Renouncing compassion for others. Not having mercy on human lives. (*La Repubblica*, 20 April 2015)

In line with the findings of our main report, the European Union was frequently criticised by a wide range of sources for failing to address the refugee crisis with long-term solutions and concerted action. Sharp criticism of Fortress Europe was at the centre of an editorial by Ezio Mauro, editor-in-chief of *La Repubblica*. Titled ‘The Shipwreck of the West’ (*La Repubblica* 21 April, 2015), the piece argued that the Mediterranean crisis revealed an inconsistency between democratic European values and the EU’s weak response in implementing effective and lasting solutions:

Europe sees the Mediterranean tragedy as a Southern regional crisis, equating the numbers of migrants from Eastern Europe to those who come from the hell of war and risk death every hour on the boats of despair...Italy now has a huge opportunity to urge Europe to restore moral legitimacy to a [migration] policy that should not consist of blind constraints and obtuse solutions, but instead combines safety with humanity. Meanwhile, we should launch a responsible search-and-rescue action to tackle the emergency. If Europe wants to comply with its duties and continue to be the land of democracy, human rights and democratic institutions, we should also demand that the crisis in the Mediterranean becomes a matter of conscience for the West. (*La Repubblica*, 21 April 2015)

The news accounts immediately following the shipwreck tended to editorialise even when the stories were categorised as *Cronaca* (domestic reporting). For instance, an

article classified as domestic reporting - by writer and journalist Roberto Saviano - was titled 'Mediterranean mass grave: those unknown dead lie heavy on our conscience'. The piece expressed compassion towards victims of the deadly shipwreck which had 'turned the Mediterranean Sea into a graveyard'. Saviano urged Italy to assume a strong leading role in Europe within the migration policy debate: 'Italy should demand to be listened to, without Europe passing the buck to us' (*La Repubblica*, 20 April, 2015).

A second piece categorised as *Commento* in our sample was a report by journalist Giovanni Valentini titled 'Our Navy lacks sufficient vessels' (*La Repubblica*, 22 April 2015). The report expressed concern for the current state of the Italian navy, which was allegedly inadequate to perform large scale successful search and rescue operations. The piece argued that, given Italy's crucial geographical position in the Mediterranean, the Italian navy needed more vessels in order to avoid 'international gaffes' similar to the one that occurred on 15 February 2015 when armed smugglers hampered Italian coastguard efforts to perform rescue operations off the shores of Libya.

To conclude, editorials and opinion pieces in *La Repubblica* took a compassionate stance on the 18 April disaster. Humanitarian reflections were regularly framed within criticism of the European Union for failing to adopt a comprehensive migration policy that would help alleviate 'the burden' on Italy. Inconsistency between 'European values' and 'indifference' towards the escalating crisis was frequently highlighted.

Sources

Table 10.2 shows the range of sources featured in *La Repubblica*. Domestic political sources dominated the coverage during the week of 18-25 April 2015. Compared to our main study, the proportion of political sources has increased and political elites were cited much more frequently in *La Repubblica* (43.4%) than in the other two newspapers in our sample (*Il Corriere* 25.6%; *La Stampa* 10%). Civil society and citizen sources were more likely to be cited in *La Repubblica* than in the other two newspapers, though appearances by both UNHCR/UN (1.8%) and NGO (1.8%) sources remained scarce.

Migrants / refugees were the second most cited source, albeit accounting for only 8% of sources appearances. The overwhelming majority of migrants cited in the stories in our sample were survivors of the 18 April shipwreck, and recounted their ordeals at sea to journalists, and prosecutors as part of the criminal investigation. Italian navy and coastguard officials were also more likely to be quoted in *La Repubblica* than in the two other dailies.

Domestic Politician	43.4%
Migrant / Refugee	8.0%
National Rescue Team	5.3%
Civil Society	5.3%
Trafficker/Smuggler	5.3%
Church / Religion	3.5%
MEP	3.5%
Citizen	3.5%
Journalist / Media	3.5%
Police	3.5%
Business	2.7%
Law / Judiciary	1.8%
NGO/Civil Society	1.8%
UNHCR/UN	1.8%
Academic / Expert	0.9%
Think Tank	0.9%
Other	5.3%
Total N	113

Table 10.2 Sources in *La Repubblica* (each source as a proportion of all sources)

Themes

Table 10.3 shows the proportion of different themes in coverage. In line with the main report, the discussion of search and rescue/aid supply was the most heavily featured theme in *La Repubblica* (64.4% of all articles). Reporting immediately after 18 April focused primarily on accounts of the shipwreck, search and rescue operations, and the provision of care for the survivors. However, the agenda later moved to the discussion of Italian and EU proposals.

Debate over policy (48.9% of all articles) mainly focused on the government's criticism of human trafficking and PM Renzi's call for an extraordinary EU meeting to discuss a joint European response. Reports frequently featured detailed accounts of government and EU proposals. Humanitarian themes (53.3% of all articles) were also common. These frequently featured compassionate reflections on the loss of life and sharp criticism of Fortress Europe from journalists and a wide range of sources (political, religious, Italian navy and NGO/UNHCR sources). Themes discussed through a humanitarian lens included, the ordeals of migrants at sea and calls for solidarity by religious authorities, as can be seen in the following headlines:

The Pope prays for the victims: 'Our brothers and sisters who were escaping war and looking for happiness' (*La Repubblica*, 20 April 2015)

The tragedy of unaccompanied child migrants: a crisis within the crisis (*La Repubblica*, 22 April 2015)

Sekou [refugee]: ‘I saw my brother disappearing into the waves. In that shipwreck I died too’ (*La Repubblica*, 24 April 2015)

Samuel’s journey [at sea]: two days to find his injured mum (*La Repubblica*, 25 April 2015)

In contrast, *La Repubblica* also featured critical and hostile reactions to refugees. Complaints about the influx of refugees came primarily from far-right political sources such as Northern League leader and MEP Matteo Salvini who called for naval blockades of North African ports.

Another angle featured in *La Repubblica* was the impact of refugees and migrants on Italy’s tourism industry. A piece titled ‘Hoteliers in revolt: no to the migrants’ reported on concerns about the impact of temporarily housing refugees in an area of Lombardy popular with tourists. According to tourism operators, the presence of refugees who were being temporarily hosted in local hotel facilities ‘would keep tourists away’ (*La Repubblica*, 23 April 2015). *La Repubblica* was also the only Italian newspaper which claimed that refugees posed a health risk. References to immigration figures/levels were more frequent in *La Repubblica* than in the other two newspapers. The statistics were provided within two main contexts. One, the reporting on the scale of the humanitarian crisis forcing people to make treacherous sea-crossings to Europe. Two, the ‘reception crisis’ in Northern Italian cities, who were facing an increase in refugees numbers as reception centres in the south of the country filled up.

Search and Rescue / Aid Supplies	64.4%
Political Response / Policy	48.9%
Immigration Figures / Levels	42.2%
Mafia / Traffic	42.2%
Humanitarian (Key Theme)	40.0%
Receiving / Rejecting	22.2%
Mortality / Mortality Figures	17.8%
Humanitarian (Elements)	13.3%
Threat to National Security	11.1%
Welfare / Benefits / Resources	8.9%
Threat to Communities / Cultural Threat	4.4%
Health Risk for Country of Destination	4.4%
Human Rights	4.4%
Post-arrival Integration	4.4%
Journey	4.4%
Crime	2.2%
Total N	151

Table 10.3: themes in *La Repubblica* (proportion of articles featuring each theme)

Labels

Table 10.4 shows the labels used in *La Repubblica*. In line with the earlier sample, the term *migrant* ('migrante') was the most commonly used across the three newspapers. The term *profugo* - another Italian label for refugee meaning 'someone seeking refuge' - featured prominently in *La Repubblica*. The term was more prominent than the label *rifugiato* ('refugee') which indicates that someone is entitled to the legal protections of refugee status. The term *asylum seeker* was rarely used by journalists and sources, accounting for only 5.3% of label mentions.

Migrante (<i>Migrant</i>)	36.8%
Profugo (<i>Refugee</i>)	34.9%
Rifugiato (<i>Refugee</i>)	9.9%
Richiedente asilo (<i>Asylum Seeker</i>)	5.3%
Immigrato (<i>Immigrant</i>)	4.6%
Clandestino (<i>Clandestine</i>)	3.9%
Straniero (<i>Foreigner</i>)	3.3%
Extracomunitario (Immigrant from outside Europe)	1.3%
Total N	152

Table 10.4: Italian labels by *La Repubblica*: (proportion of times each label is used as a proportion of total labels)

Explanations

In line with the findings of our previous report, *La Repubblica* was the newspaper least likely to feature explanations as to why people were making the journey across the Mediterranean. Once again, the most popular explanation for refugee flows was escape from war or atrocities which appeared in 26.7% of articles. The second most cited explanation for migration was economic pull factors, which featured significantly more often than in our earlier sample. Often economic explanations were combined with ones which highlighted war as a push factor as in the example below:

Europe should not ignore hundreds of thousands of refugees on the move who leave their homes to escape death, persecution, hunger. (*La Repubblica*, April 21, 2015).

Less commonly population flows were framed as an inherent consequence of globalisation:

It's been years already that migration is no longer a 'crisis'. It is a phenomenon connected to globalisation, to our wealth, to the opening of markets. (*La Repubblica*, 23 April, 2015)

Explanation	Proportion of articles
War/Conflict/Atrocities	26.7%
Poverty/Economic	13.3%
Global capitalism	2.2%
Total N	19

Table 10.5: Explanations for population flows in *La Repubblica* (proportion of articles featuring each explanation).

Solutions

La Repubblica was the newspaper in our sample which featured the widest range of proposals to tackle the Mediterranean crisis. The most frequently advocated solution was a concerted EU approach (appeared in 36.8% of articles) with more equal burden sharing. This was advocated by a wide range of actors (religious sources, politicians, journalists Italian navy officials, and journalists).

United EU response	37.8%
Aid/assistance/reception facilities	33.3%
Search and rescue operations should be increased	20.0%
Action/prevention taken on smugglers/traffickers	13.3%
Blockade Ports/Close down migration routes	13.3%
Reject more refugees/bring levels under control	11.1%
Taking in refugees/more legal channels for migration	8.9%
Conflict resolution / Political stability in Libya	4.4%
Amend/reform the Dublin Convention	4.4%
Total N	66

Table 10.6: Solutions to refugee crisis in *La Repubblica* (proportion of news articles featuring each response)

Prime Minister Matteo Renzi was regularly cited urging EU member states to share responsibility for search and rescue operations and the fight against people smugglers. The day after the boat disaster Renzi pleaded with EU leaders not to ‘leave Italy on its own in the fight against human traffickers, the 21st century’s new slaveholders’:

These people – PM Renzi explains – can only be saved by preventing them from departing. While continuing to commit to rescue lives at sea, we also think that the fight against human trafficking must be a priority; not only ours and of Malta. But of the whole of Europe. (*La Repubblica*, 20 April 2015)

The provision of aid and assistance to migrants and refugees was particularly prominent in *La Repubblica*, appearing as the second most frequently cited solution (33.3%). This solution featured in reports which focused on the provision of reception facilities and assistance services in northern city councils, which faced an

unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants. A few stories concentrated on the negotiations between central government representatives and local councillors for the identification of facilities to be adapted as reception centres.

The proposal to reinstate an efficient search and rescue programme was the third most discussed solution to the crisis. According to a number of sources, the boat disaster exposed, once again, the inadequacy of Frontex's current border control programme. In an interview-piece Vincent Cochetel (UNHCR Regional Refugee Coordinator for the Refugee Crisis in Europe) outlined the shortcomings of Operation Triton:

Journalist: One survivor says at least nine hundred dead. Is this an unprecedented disaster?

Cochetel: A tragedy waiting to happen, unfortunately. The European Union had four months to rethink its approach and it did not do so. No one considered the UNHCR proposals for a relaunch of the search and rescue operations at sea.

Journalist: What are the limits of Triton, the European programme of border control?

Cochetel: Frontex and the EU member states make very clear that Triton does not have a search-and-rescue mandate, but only border protection. The vessels have been used in a few operations, but so far, Europe has not yet agreed to give Frontex a search-and-rescue responsibility. For this reason, private rescuers should be rewarded for their continuous efforts. (*La Repubblica*, 20 April 2015)

Cochetel also outlined other solutions such as increased relocation of refugees with the right of asylum among member states, and improvement of repatriation processes in Italy and Greece.

Following the Special Meeting of the EU Council on 23 April, *La Repubblica* featured extensive criticism of the ten-point action plan proposed by the European Commission from journalists and politicians. Whilst the commitment to the fight against people trafficking was welcomed, the lack of funding for search and rescue was widely criticized:

As usual, the financial commitment of the European Union to cope with landings of refugees from Libya is 'timid'. A few promises, but nothing more. ... Europe demonstrates its traditional reluctance to pull out the cash for a continental problem. Those who hope for a launch of an expansive search and rescue operation such as Mare Nostrum, but the European version, remain disappointed. Only Italy, Greece and Malta were in favour of a solution of this kind. The vast majority of other countries continue to think that extending

search and rescue missions too far may constitute an incentive to human trafficking. (*La Repubblica*, 21 April 2015)

Whilst the discussion of responses to the crisis were dominated by the fight against people smuggling, calls for more aid and the restoration of an extensive search and rescue operation, other solutions were also occasionally featured. The introduction of more legal routes for migration into Europe was advocated in just under one in ten articles. In a piece reporting the shipwreck disaster, a journalist outlines some solutions that, had they been implemented, might have prevented the tragedy:

Yet there were opportunities for a timely action: establishing registration and processing centres in refugees' first places of transit; sharing among the EU member states the acceptance of asylum requests, notwithstanding the Dublin Regulation; ensuring a ferry service and charter flights. (*La Repubblica*, 21 April 2015)

The argument that the refugee crisis should be 'tackled at its roots', through efforts towards conflict resolution in African and Middle East states and crucially in Libya, featured far less prominently in *La Repubblica* (4.4.%) than in *Il Corriere della Sera* (16.7%) or *La Stampa* (15%). A news report (*La Repubblica*, 21 April 2015) cited Bernardino Leon – Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya – who stressed the importance of restoring political stability in Libya:

Any resolution needs a stable government in Libya. Bernardino Leon, the Spanish head of the Libyan mission, has informed the Foreign Ministry that '80 percent of the program for a government of national unity is agreed by local communities.' The step to give authority to the country it is then not too far away. In the meantime, however, Europe needs to give a signal of intent (*La Repubblica*, 21 April 2015).

Fortress Europe solutions such as naval blockades were mostly cited by far-right political sources such as the Northern League and appeared in 6.7% of all articles. Although the proportion of anti-migrant and anti-refugee arguments fell in comparison to the main study, *La Repubblica* was again the newspaper which most frequently featured sources who opposed humanitarian solutions to the crisis.

'The government is guilty' – argues the leader of the Northern League Matteo Salvini – for not having taken measures to block the refugees' departure. 'The more people who leave' – he says – 'more people die.' Salvini calls for the involvement of international institutions in order to immediately obtain a naval blockade of the Libyan and Egyptian coasts, or 'tomorrow we will mourn another 700 deaths'. (*La Repubblica*, 20 April 2015)

In the same article, Salvini's comments were challenged by both politically right-wing and left-wing sources. New Centre-Right (NCD) MP Fabrizio Cicchitto accuses Salvini of 'being a vulture' in line with the response by a Democratic Party (PD) source:

'This propaganda, at the expense of the dead, to obtain a few more votes should come to an end' – comments MEP Simona Bonafè – 'Salvini should instead commit to collaborative action pushing Europe to make constructive decisions on how to prevent these tragedies at sea'. (*La Repubblica*, 20 April 2015)

The proposals to enforce port, or naval blockades in international waters, were ruled out by Prime Minister Renzi in the press conference after the disaster:

Renzi ruled out resorting to naval blockades, a solution advocated by some political factions: 'A naval blockade in international waters' – he said – 'could paradoxically become a favour to the people smugglers, by turning out to be a sort of taxi service'.

To conclude, whilst *La Repubblica* featured the widest range of solutions, coverage tended to concentrate on the proposals put forward by the government. Humanitarian solutions were occasionally discussed by journalists and non-government sources such as the UNHCR and most often framed within criticism of Europe's failed migration policy.

Il Corriere della Sera

Il Corriere della Sera is Italy's second most read newspaper. Traditionally close to the conservative establishment, the newspaper took such a strong anti-Berlusconi stance that prior to the 2006 General Election, its editor-in-chief declared alignment with the centre-left coalition led by Romano Prodi. Whilst maintaining a conservative ideology, *Il Corriere della Sera* is today politically closer to the centre than the right.

Like *La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera* featured many compassionate accounts of the disaster in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, the loss of life was used as an opportunity for sharp criticism of Fortress Europe. A distinguishing feature of the way *Il Corriere* reported the crisis, however, was the interest the newspaper took in the criminal investigation and the broader issue of international people trafficking.

Editorials/Opinion pieces

In our sample there were two articles explicitly classified as opinion/editorials. The first was an opinion piece by UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres titled 'Opening doors to refugees with the post-war spirit' which stressed Europe's

humanitarian and legal duty to welcome people escaping conflicts. Guterres also expressed the view – in line with editorials in *La Repubblica* – that the boat disaster had called into question Europe’s credibility and its humanitarian values.

The ongoing crisis in the Mediterranean is testing Western humanitarian values, as never before in the last two generations. From the beginning of the year, over 1,700 lives have been lost at sea. This month alone, twice as many people drowned at sea as throughout 2013. Last week we witnessed the deadliest shipwreck ever recorded by my organization (UNHCR) in the Mediterranean. It is time for us Europeans to abandon the illusion of isolating ourselves from this crisis. The first thing we must do is to recognize that it is something more than a migration issue. Many of the people that go on these boats are refugees, fleeing conflict and persecution. This means that we have a legal obligation to protect them. (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 25 April 2015)

Criticism of Fortress Europe and emphasis on the ‘humanitarian duty to rescue human lives’ were also features of the second opinion piece in our sample titled ‘The duty to rescue refugees’ (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 21 April 2015). Written by Mauro Magatti, sociologist and columnist for *Il Corriere*, the piece called for concerted political action among EU member states and urged Prime Minister Renzi to respond to the refugee crisis with the same determination he had shown for other issues:

It is a humanitarian duty to save people drowning in the sea. However, today we are at the point that this is not enough. Solidarity is not enough to tackle the crisis. We need a political action...In terms of resources, it would be sufficient to create a dedicated funding channel under direct control of the European Commission. What is missing is the political vision of the problem, the ability to offer the public a decent and coherent solution. In his style, Renzi has used appropriate words when commenting on the boat disaster. But the question is intricate and requires hard and long-term work to build the political conditions to resolve the crisis. Renzi should act with the same determination that he has shown on other issues electorally more profitable. The elections are in three years. There are no alibis. For both Italy and Europe their political legitimacy crosses with the fate of refugees at sea (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 21 April 2015).

The tendency to editorialise in news reports was also frequent in *Il Corriere della Sera*. This was particularly noticeable in stories immediately after the boat disaster, where compassion towards the victims was paired with criticism of Fortress Europe.

Sources

Table 10.7 shows the type and frequency of sources featuring in *Il Corriere della Sera*. In comparison to *La Repubblica* there were fewer elite political sources though they were still the dominant voice in coverage. Italian Prime Minister Renzi was the

single most prominent source and he was regularly quoted calling for a more united response from the European Union. The centrality of Renzi is also reflected in the political affiliation of sources, 60% of whom were drawn from the Democratic Party (PD) the largest party in the ruling coalition led by Renzi.

Unlike *La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera* did provide some space for EU Commission sources and foreign politicians – even though these categories were rarely featured. The UNHCR/UN were also cited more often in *Il Corriere della Sera* than in *La Repubblica* though still at a relatively low level, and aside from the opinion piece by Guterres (UNHCR), statements from other UNHCR/UN sources²⁵ were usually very brief. Furthermore, NGOs were never quoted directly in any of the sampled stories.

Domestic Politician	25.6%
Migrant / Refugee	9.3%
Trafficker/Smuggler	9.3%
Law / Judiciary	7.0%
Civil Society	4.7%
Academic / Expert	4.7%
Police	4.7%
Foreign Politician	3.5%
Journalist / Media	3.5%
Church / Religion	3.5%
EU Commission	2.3%
MEP	2.3%
National Rescue Team	2.3%
UNHCR/UN	4.6%
UNHCR	2.3%
IOM	1.2%
Citizen	1.2%
Other	10.5%
Total N	86

Table 10.7: Sources in *Il Corriere della Sera* (each source as a proportion of all sources)

Themes

The range and frequency of themes can be seen in table 10.8. The first finding to note is the strong emphasis that *Il Corriere della Sera* placed on the theme of people smuggling. The discussion of this theme included stories which focused on the

²⁵ UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon; UNHCR Italy Carlotta Sami; Bernardino León Gross – United Nations Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya.

criminal investigations by Italian authorities into the shipwreck, the arrest of two men on suspicion of people smuggling, the hearings of the trial and a large-scale investigation by prosecutors in Palermo into a network of smugglers operating in Libya and major Italian cities. News accounts which covered investigations into migrant trafficking were published daily in *Il Corriere* from 20-24 April as the following headlines indicate:

Fares have dropped. 1000 Euros for setting sail from Libya. (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 20 April, 2015)

Giggles on the phone. The [trafficking] System wiretapped. (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 21 April, 2015)

How to punish the ‘new slaveholders’. Migrants and laws (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 22 April, 2015)

The two people smugglers accuse each other: ‘he was [the one] in charge [of the boat]’ (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 23 April, 2015)

Trafficking – People smugglers supported by Libya: ‘Soldiers are giving us the boats’ (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 24 April, 2015)

Reporting of search and rescue operations and discussion of search and rescue policy remained the second most frequent theme (66.7%). Political response/policy (56.7%) was also prominent with the government’s response to the crisis and policy debate amongst EU leaders frequently leading the news agenda.

Mafia / Traffic	80.0%
Search and Rescue / Aid Supplies	66.7%
Political Response / Policy	56.7%
Humanitarian (Key Theme)	40.0%
Mortality / Mortality Figures	33.3%
Immigration Figures / Levels	30.0%
Humanitarian (Elements)	23.3%
Journey	20.0%
Human Rights	10.0%
Receiving / Rejecting	10.0%
Threat to National Security	3.3%
Welfare / Benefits / Resources	3.3%
Crime	3.3%
Total N	114

Table 10.8: Themes in *Il Corriere della Sera* (proportion of articles featuring each theme)

Humanitarian themes which expressed compassion and empathy for the victims appeared frequently in the reports immediately after the boat disaster. For instance, a piece titled ‘May God help us written on their skin. The arrival in Malta of the nameless dead’ (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 21 April 2015) was entirely devoted to a report on the bodies of drowned refugees recovered from the Mediterranean near Malta.

Perhaps surprising, bearing in mind the extra burden Italy was shouldering as one of the key transit points for migrants and refugees, was the absence of threat themes. The argument that taking in migrants may constitute a threat to national security featured in one story in which PM Renzi was quoted as warning that ‘not all those aboard the traffickers’ boats are innocent families’. There was also a report on the arrest of 14 Muslims after they allegedly threw Christians overboard after a dispute on the boat.

Labels

The labels used by *Il Corriere della Sera* were similar to those employed by *La Repubblica*. However, the term *rifugiato* (refugee) was used twice as frequently (*La Repubblica* 9.9%; *Il Corriere* 20.9%). The negative term *clandestine* (clandestine / illegal), was more likely to feature in *Il Corriere della Sera* (7.9%) than in the other two newspapers. This can partly be explained with references to the legal ‘charge of *clandestine* migration’ in the context of police investigations into people smuggling.

Migrante (<i>Migrant</i>)	32.4%
Profugo (<i>Refugee</i>)	24.5%
Rifugiato (<i>Refugee</i>)	20.9%
Clandestino (<i>Clandestine</i>)	7.9%
Immigrato (<i>Immigrant</i>)	4.3%
Richiedente Asilo (<i>Asylum Seeker</i>)	3.6%
Straniero (<i>Foreigner</i>)	3.6%
Illegal (<i>Illegal</i>)	1.4%
Extracomunitario (Immigrant from outside Europe)	0.7%
Emigrante (<i>Emigrant</i>)	0.7%
Total N	139

Table 10.9: Italian labels by *Il Corriere della Sera*: (Each label as a proportion of total labels)

Explanations

Il Corriere della Sera featured the narrowest range of explanations for why people were trying to enter Europe. Explanations were also featured relatively infrequently. This may be because this story has been covered so heavily and for such a long period

that editors and journalists now assume that readers are aware of why people are crossing the Mediterranean. Whatever the reason there was a lack of context as to the factors driving migratory flows.

War/conflict	23.3%
Repressive regime / persecutions	10.0%
Poverty/economic	6.7%
Total N	12

Table 10.10: Explanations for population flows in *Il Corriere della Sera* (proportion of articles featuring each explanation).

Solutions

The responses proposed by the Italian government received most coverage across the news reports of *Il Corriere della Sera*. A concerted EU response (53.3%) involving a joint action plan against migrant trafficking (43.3%) and restoration of an extensive search and rescue mission (23.3%) were the three most frequently discussed solutions. Whilst the discussion of search and rescue was slightly higher in *La Repubblica* (20%), the fight against people smuggling received by far the most attention in *Il Corriere della Sera*. This extract from an article titled ‘The day before the extraordinary EU Summit’ outlines the solutions put forward by Renzi to tackle the refugee crisis:

The government advocates at least three responses: a mandate should be given to Federica Mogherini, from all 28 EU states, to study details and strategies for a military operation to capture people smugglers and destroy their boats; the concrete possibility, beyond a certain threshold, of the relocation of refugees and asylum seekers in all EU countries in order to alleviate Italy of the burden; the extension of the mandate of European missions Triton and Poseidon – both of which require a doubling of funds – to search and rescue refugees at sea, extending the current remit that merely involves maritime patrolling. (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 23 April 2015)

Another key aspect of the Italian government’s strategy to fight migrants was the demand for United Nations involvement in international police operation against migrant traffickers in Libya. A report titled ‘Mission in Libya for patrolling shores and ports: the Italian plan’ (*Il Corriere della Sera* 20 April 2015) detailed the government’s proposed policing operation that would involve a military contingent in Libya. The plan would need to be authorised by the EU and the United Nations.

United EU response	53.3%
Action/prevention taken on smugglers/traffickers	43.3%
Search and rescue operations should be increased	23.3%
Controlling migration routes /policing operation in	20.0%
Conflict resolution/ stabilise Libya	16.7%
Taking in refugees/more legal channels for migration	13.3%
Aid/assistance	10.0%
Amend/change the Dublin Convention	3.3%
Total N	55

Table 10.11: Solutions to refugee crisis in *Il Corriere della Sera* (proportion of news articles featuring each response)

Il Corriere della Sera news accounts featured extensive criticism of EU resolutions put forward at the summit on 23 April. A range of sources accused the EU of drafting policy responses that were inadequate and not proportionate to the crisis. In one article titled: ‘The Church challenges Europe: “They are selfish”’ (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 25 April 2015), Catholic sources criticised the reluctance of European member states – such as Britain – to share the burden of the crisis.

The proposal to tackle the refugee crisis by stabilizing Libya and other North African countries bordering the Mediterranean featured more frequently in *Il Corriere della Sera* (16.7%) than in the other two newspapers. *Il Corriere della Sera* also devoted most attention to the necessity of diplomatic efforts as urged by PM Renzi.

The discussion of more ‘humanitarian solutions’ aimed at the creation of legal routes into Europe, also appeared more frequently in *Il Corriere della Sera* than in the other two newspapers. The opinion piece by Antonio Guterres (UNHCR) outlined a series of proposals including the creation of alternative entry routes and more equal sharing of reception responsibilities among EU member states:

Western nations must also work toward the creation of further legal alternatives that allow refugees to find protection, including an expanded program of resettlement, schemes for humanitarian admission, more opportunities for family reunification, agreements of private sponsorship, and student and work visas. Without real alternative channels enabling people to achieve security, it is unlikely that the much needed increase in international commitment towards the fight against smugglers and traffickers will be effective. Some of the most recent proposals for shared responsibility in the European Union, including further support to the countries that receive the highest number of arrivals, the relocation of emergency refugees between EU member states, and a pilot project providing more resettlement quotas, represent a starting point. But much more needs to be done. We must share responsibilities in Europe, more fairly. A

system in which two countries – Germany and Sweden – welcome the majority of refugees is not sustainable. (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 24 April 2015)

La Stampa

Opinion/Editorials

La Stampa is Italy's third most popular daily after *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera* and has a centrist stance. In our sample we had 20 news articles from *La Stampa* making it the newspaper with the lowest number of reports focusing on the crisis following the 18 April shipwreck. The newspaper had on the whole fewer pages than *La Repubblica* and *La Stampa* and this partly explains the lower level of coverage.

Only one article in the sample was explicitly categorised as an opinion piece. Titled 'The shipwreck of European values', the piece was written by English journalist and *La Stampa* columnist Bill Emmott. The article presented very similar arguments to those expressed in editorials and opinion pieces in *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*. According to Emmott, 'The transformation of the Mediterranean into a graveyard' has exposed a divided Europe that is incapable of a concerted comprehensive action to resolve the refugee crisis:

We [Europeans] are capable of cooperation and coordination when we send our navies to fight pirates in the Indian Ocean. So why cannot we do the same in our sea, the Mediterranean, and in our eastern borders crossed by Syrian refugees? We could, but in order to make politically viable decisions we need a common approach for processing migrants who qualify to stay and where they can be allowed to settle. Then we need to have a shared strategy on how to integrate them, which means a communitarian approach on welfare costs and rights. This would make it easier to convince the public in our countries that what is happening is fair, reducing distrust and the blame game. Yet, as the latest shipwreck disaster has demonstrated, we are far, very far from this point. European values are sinking (*La Stampa*, 21 April 2015).

Whilst on the whole *La Stampa* presented more of a hard news reporting style and approach to coverage, a few reports had a tendency to editorialise, and criticism of Fortress Europe was frequently voiced by reporters and a range of other sources. One report positioned in the Culture section of the paper expressed strong scepticism about EU resolutions: 'Migrants. The Dublin Regulation is at risk of turning into a mockery' (*La Stampa*, 25 April 2015). The piece expressed disappointment over new resolutions put forward by an 'indifferent and divided' Europe and advocated a reform of the Dublin Convention.

Sources

Table 10.12 shows that, in our sample of 20 articles, *La Stampa* cited a narrower range of sources in comparison to the other newspapers in our sample. Migrants and refugees were more likely to be cited than any other source and this reflects the fact that *La Stampa* coverage was more focused on the events in Mediterranean and less concerned with policy than the other Italian newspapers. This is also reflected in the proportion of domestic political sources which was much lower than in the other two newspapers. These key elite political sources were eclipsed by EU Commissioners, who do not appear at all in *La Repubblica*. Of the political sources that did appear, all were affiliated to the Democratic Party, Prime Minister Renzi's ruling party. NGOs were infrequently featured, with Amnesty International Italy the only NGO cited in the sample.

Migrant / Refugee	32.5%
EU Commission	12.5%
Domestic Politician	10.0%
Trafficker/Smuggler	10.0%
Law / Judiciary	7.5%
NGO/Civil Society	5.0%
Police	5.0%
Church / Religion	5.0%
Foreign Politician	2.5%
Journalist / Media	2.5%
Other	7.5%
Total N	40

Table 10.12 Sources in *La Stampa* (each source as a proportion of all sources)

Themes

Table 10.13 shows the range of themes featuring in *La Stampa*. The most prominent themes were those most discussed by politicians such as the issues of people smuggling and search and rescue operations. However, discussion of policy only appeared in approximately one in three articles. References to human rights featured more frequently in *La Stampa* than in the other two newspapers. In particular, discussions around the 'right of asylum' featured regularly in news accounts which discussed the consequences of the Dublin Regulation (migrants stranded on the frontiers of northern Italy) and the need to propose amendments.

Search and Rescue / Aid Supplies	70%
Mafia / Traffic	65%
Humanitarian (Key Theme)	55%
Political Response / Policy	35%
Mortality / Mortality Figures	25%
Human Rights	25%
Immigration Figures / Levels	20%
Receiving / Rejecting	20%
Journey	20%
Humanitarian (Elements)	15%
Post-arrival Integration	10%
Threat to National Security	5%
Welfare / Benefits / Resources	5%
Total N	74

Table 10.13: Themes in *La Stampa* (proportion of articles featuring each theme)

Labels

In terms of the labels used in *La Stampa*, we find that the term *migrante* (migrant) is used at both a much higher level than in the other two newspapers and substantially more often than in the first phase of the study. In a similar vein the formal term for refugee – *rifugiato* – was again used more frequently than in the earlier sample. The other term for refugee, *profugo*, however, was more rarely used in this second sample and was also less likely to be used in comparison to the other newspapers in the sample.

Migrante (<i>Migrant</i>)	51.6%
Rifugiato (<i>Refugee</i>)	19.4%
Immigrato (<i>Immigrant</i>)	9.7%
Clandestino (<i>Clandestine</i>)	6.5%
Richiedente asilo (<i>Asylum Seeker</i>)	6.5%
Profugo (<i>Refugee</i>)	4.8%
Straniero (<i>Foreigner</i>)	1.6%
Total N	62

Table 10.14: Italian labels in *La Stampa*: (proportion of times each label is used as a proportion of total labels)

Explanations

In line with the findings in the earlier sample, *La Stampa* was marginally more likely to feature explanations for why people were attempting to cross the Mediterranean. *La Stampa* also featured the widest range of reasons, with an average of 1.1 explanations

in each news report. On one occasion an entire article was devoted to examining these factors. Titled ‘A population fleeing from wars, famines and dictatorships’ the report examined a range of reasons why populations fled their countries and drew heavily on comments from Italy’s Director General of Amnesty International:

Seven out of ten of the desperate people that at the present defy the Mediterranean, are potential refugees, argue migration experts. This means that among the people crammed on to precarious boats like the one that sank last Saturday, only a few are chasing the prospect of a job and almost all are escaping from the horrors of war, dictators, humanitarian crises, failed countries, to the point to leaving no alternative but to bet with death. The Director General of Amnesty International Italy Gianni Rufini notes that ‘they are often middle class, with greater financial means and a riskier political exposure.’ (*La Stampa*, 21 April 2015).

War/conflict/Atrocities/	45%
Poverty/economic	30%
Political reasons	10%
Repressive regime	10%
Absence of border control	5%
Isis/terrorism	5%
Natural disasters	5%
Total N	22

Table 10.15: Explanations for population flows in *La Stampa* (proportion of articles featuring each explanation).

Solutions

In our sample of 20 stories from *La Stampa* we found that on average almost 2 solutions were mentioned or discussed in each news report. In terms of what measures should be adopted to resolve the refugee crisis, table 10.16 shows a very similar pattern to that of *Il Corriere della Sera*. Particularly prominent in *La Stampa* was the call for united EU response which appeared in 80% of the articles. For instance, a front page piece published on 20 April was titled ‘A common policy in three moves’ and discussed three potential responses to the crisis. Firstly, it was argued the Mediterranean crisis could only be tackled with a concerted European response which recognised that ‘Italian borders are EU frontiers’. Secondly, the report stressed the need for the international community to restore stability in ‘key countries’ such as Libya:

Second point: no response to the refugee flows crisis will ever work without restoring some form of stability in key countries, Libya first of all. The Italian

Government rightly considers this an international priority. Libya is not a matter of our own backyard: it is the soft underbelly through which Mediterranean and African factors of instability reach the whole of Europe. (*La Stampa*, 20 April 2015)

Thirdly, the article argued that all EU member states needed to share the responsibility for hosting refugees because Italy ‘as the first entry point has at the moment a disproportionate reception burden’. This, it maintained, would require amendments to the Dublin Regulations. In a similar vein it was argued that Europe should share allocate more funds and vessels for search and rescue operations.

The article resonated with another piece which criticised Fortress Europe for failing to provide long-term solutions to a global crisis. Instead of border reinforcement, the article argued, the EU response should involve ‘specific interventions along the ‘exodus route’: from tackling the factors that drive migration flows through the processing of refugee claims to the refugees’ safe relocation, and ‘active’ reception which should include employment (*La Stampa*, 23 April 2015). The European Commission proposals were discussed regularly in coverage and criticism was repeatedly voiced at the absence of a strong search and rescue mandate in the EU’s revised maritime operations.

The proposal to enforce naval blockades in order to prevent refugee boats from leaving African maritime waters was mentioned on a few occasions. Strongly advocated by some of the opposition parties (Northern League, Forza Italia, and M5S), this resolution was by and large presented in coverage as not being part of the government’s proposed solutions.

The Senate approved the proposals of the resolution plans of the opposition parties M5S and FI. However, despite Forza Italia’s hopes for the enforcement of blockades, the government has made it clear that its plans are not in that direction. (*La Stampa*, 23 April 2015)

The enforcement of blockades as a measure to prevent perilous sea crossings into Europe was examined in greater detail and dismissed as ‘premature’ and ‘ineffective’ in a report which presented the view of the Chief of the Defence Staff, General Claudio Graziano:

Journalist: Part of the political world urges naval blockades to prevent similar tragedies happening again.

General Graziano: At present there are not appropriate conditions to implement a naval blockade. In the absence of a resolution from the United Nations or of a bilateral agreement [with Libya], such action would stand as a real act of war... We must also bear in mind that a naval blockade would increase the chances for the smugglers to take advantage of the massive presence of military ships,

which would be obliged to intervene in the rescuing of migrants. (*La Stampa*, 21 April 2015)

The solution proposed by the source in the article was to tackle human trafficking with joint international efforts:

The priority is to prevent traffickers from carrying out their activities... Italy has arrested almost one thousand people smugglers since the start of the crisis which is an important number, although not sufficient to suppress the phenomenon. It is thus necessary to identify more incisive interventions through reinforced international cooperation. (*La Stampa*, 21 April 2015)

Fighting against people smugglers was the second most frequently cited solution in *La Stampa*. In line with *Il Corriere della Sera*, its prominence reflected the fact that it was being strongly advocated by the Italian government.

United EU response/ quota sharing	80%
Action/prevention taken on smugglers/traffickers	30%
Search and rescue should be increased	20%
Taking in refugees/more legal channels for migration	15%
Conflict resolution / stability in Libya	15%
Blockade Ports/ Close down migration routes	10%
Reject/deport more refugees	10%
Amend the Dublin Convention	5%
Aid/assistance	5%
Total N	38

Table 10.16: Solutions to refugee crisis in *La Stampa*(proportion of news articles featuring each response)

Conclusion

Three key points emerge from our analysis of the second Italian sample. Firstly, the three newspapers reported the aftermath of the disaster in broadly similar ways. Reporting of the event along with the response of the Italian government and EU dominated coverage. Opinion and editorial pieces regularly argued that the disaster exposed the European Union's failure to take decisive and concerted action over an escalating humanitarian crisis. This meant that ultimately EU policy was held responsible for the incident. Criticism of EU policy was expressed by reporters and a wide range of other sources in stories which discussed various aspects of the crisis.

Secondly, the most frequently cited sources were political elites in *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera*. However, *La Stampa* cited migrants and EU Commission sources more frequently than domestic politicians. NGO sources and migrant advocacy groups appeared infrequently and at a lower level than in the earlier sample.

However, *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere* each devoted an entire piece to comment pieces from UNHCR representatives (respectively Cochetel and Guterres). Refugees appeared, on the whole, more frequently than in the main study. This can be explained by the strong focus on the disaster and the fact that testimonies from survivors were used as part of the criminal investigations by Italian prosecutors.

Thirdly, in terms of solutions to tackle the crisis, all three newspapers devoted the most attention to measures announced by the government and disagreements between the government and the EU. This meant debate concentrated on a relatively limited number of potential responses. These included the need for a concerted European action plan (featuring as the most cited resolution in all three newspapers, appearing particularly frequently in *La Stampa*), the fight against people trafficking (particularly prominent in *Il Corriere della Sera*), and the reinstatement of joint search and rescue operations. Diplomatic efforts toward political stability in Libya were also frequently mentioned. Humanitarian responses such as expanded legal routes for migration which were advocated by NGOs or UNHCR/UN sources appeared less frequently. *La Repubblica* featured hostile responses, such as the proposal to blockade North African ports, which were advocated by Northern League and other far-right groups, more frequently than the other two newspapers. However, such proposals were often challenged by journalists or other sources.

Finally, we should note that similarities in news agendas and arguments can be explained by the fact that all three titles are quality newspapers whose political orientations are similar. Whilst *La Repubblica* is considered a centre-left newspaper and *La Stampa* centre-oriented, *Il Corriere della Sera*, traditionally conservative and centre-right-oriented has been leaning towards the centre after taking a strong anti-Berlusconi stance since the 2006 General Election.