

The representation of environmental migrants in the mainstream Spanish press according to their geographical origin (2012-2023)

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Abstract. In recent decades, environmental disasters and climate change have increasingly forced individuals and communities to leave their homes, giving rise to environmental migration as a growing concern on social, political, and media agendas. This article examines how environmental migrants are represented in the mainstream Spanish press between 2012 and 2023, with a particular focus on how representations vary according to the migrants' geographical origin. Drawing on framing theory and employing a quantitative content analysis of 140 news units from four major Spanish newspapers (*ABC*, *El Mundo*, *El País*, and *La Vanguardia*), the study explores three key dimensions: the main topics addressed, the sources cited, and the frames employed in the media coverage. Findings reveal that while the predominant focus is on climate-related causes of displacement, the portrayal of environmental migrants varies significantly according to origin. Migrants from Africa and Asia are more frequently associated with frames of threat and vulnerability, while those from Europe and Oceania are often depicted through legal or scientific lenses. Civil society emerges as the most frequently cited source, although the voices of migrants themselves are largely absent from the discussion. The study highlights a dual framing pattern, characterised by a humanitarian versus threat approach, which reflects broader editorial and geopolitical biases. These findings underscore the need for more inclusive and balanced media narratives that account for the diversity and complexity of environmental migration.

Keywords. Media, environmental migration, communication, geographical origin.

ES La representación de los migrantes ambientales en la prensa generalista española según su origen geográfico (2012-2023)

Resumen. En las últimas décadas, los desastres medioambientales y el cambio climático han obligado a un número creciente de personas y comunidades a abandonar sus hogares, lo que ha situado la migración ambiental en el centro de las agendas sociales, políticas y mediáticas. Este artículo analiza cómo se representa a los migrantes ambientales en la prensa generalista española entre 2012 y 2023, con especial atención a las variaciones según el origen geográfico de los migrantes. A partir de la teoría del encuadre (framing) y mediante un análisis de contenido cuantitativo de 140 piezas informativas publicadas en los diarios *ABC*, *El Mundo*, *El País* y *La Vanguardia*, el estudio aborda tres dimensiones clave: los temas principales, las fuentes citadas y los marcos narrativos empleados. Los resultados muestran que, si bien el enfoque dominante se centra en las causas climáticas del desplazamiento, la representación de los migrantes ambientales varía de forma significativa según su origen. Así, los migrantes procedentes de África y Asia se asocian con mayor frecuencia a marcos de amenaza y vulnerabilidad, mientras que los de Europa y Oceanía son presentados desde perspectivas legales o científicas. La sociedad civil es la fuente más citada, aunque las voces de los propios migrantes apenas aparecen. El estudio pone de relieve un patrón dual de representación, humanitario frente a amenazante, que refleja sesgos editoriales y geopolíticos más amplios.

Palabras clave. Medios de comunicación, migración ambiental, comunicación, origen geográfico.

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1. Introduction

The leading causes for millions of people leaving their homes in the twenty-first century include environmental phenomena (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2021; Sritharan, 2023). The recognition of this global link between migration and the environment has led to the adoption of agreements addressing the need to introduce measures to meet the legal and humanitarian needs of the people affected. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2021), the primary documents in this regard include:

The Sustainable Development Agenda; the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction; the Nansen Agenda for the Protection of Cross-Border Displaced Persons in the Context of Disasters and Climate Change. (IOM, 2021, pp. 2–3)

This type of migration has a global extent. Indeed, it now not only affects countries most susceptible to environmental problems and strong climate phenomena (desertification and rising sea level, amongst others), but according to the Ecological Threat Report of the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP, 2021), by 2050, 141 countries will become vulnerable to some ecological threat. Estimates of the number of people worldwide who migrate for environmental reasons vary, ranging from 216 million (World Bank Group, 2021) to as high as 1.8 billion by the middle of the twenty-first century (IEP, 2023). The global extent of this phenomenon, along with these projected figures, depicts an alarming scenario that has led some to call such migration for environmental reasons “the human face of climate change” (Gemenne, 2013).

This type of movement has several defining characteristics. One of the features mentioned most widely in the scientific literature is its multicausality, i.e. such decisions to migrate result from a combination of factors that derive from social, economic, political, demographic, climate change and environmental degradation issues (Neef *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, Felipe Reyes (2018, p. 8) and Mosello *et al.* (2021, pp. 5–7) identify various characteristics of such movements. One of those they emphasise is their forced nature, albeit to a degree that varies according to the situation. They also point out that the majority of displacements occur from rural to urban areas. Furthermore, this phenomenon tends to occur within countries; however, it does not exclude the possibility that migrants may also cross international borders in distinct locations and at different times. These are movements that predominate in the so-called Global South, areas of high vulnerability. Finally, it is noteworthy that this phenomenon affects groups highly heterogeneous in their ethnic and demographic composition. Regarding this type of migration, other elements must also be considered, such as the willingness and ability to leave a place, i.e. whether the person has the ability or available resources to leave their home, what IOM (2019, p. 220) calls “trapped populations”, or whether it is a survival strategy, not only for those who leave but also for those who stay, either in the form of relief in

access to resources (water, land, etc.) or as recipients of remittances sent by migrants.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section addresses two key dimensions underpinning the study of environmental migration. First, it examines the terminological ambiguity surrounding the classification of environmentally displaced populations, with a focus on the legal and conceptual implications. Second, it explores media representations of this phenomenon, focusing on narrative strategies and framing processes that shape public discourse and perception.

2.1. Terminological controversy

Terminological debate has emerged over how to refer to people who move for environmental reasons, with different terms being used such as climate migrant, climate displaced person, environmental migrant, environmental displaced person, climigrant (Felipe Reyes, n.d.), ecological displaced person (Hiraide, 2023) and environmental refugee (Hinnawi & UNEP, 1985).

The definition of a displaced person tends to focus more on individuals who leave their home but not their country, according to the definitions of displaced person and internally displaced person (IOM, 2019, pp. 55 and 109). In contrast, the term “climate or environmental refugee” does not fit within the legal concept established by the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, Article 1A(2), as amended by the 1967 protocol amendment, which defines it as a person who:

owing to 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 (their) nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail (themselves) of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of (their) former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], n.d.)

Some scholars contend that broadening this definition to encompass environmentally displaced people would “remove these geographic and time-based limitations, expanding the Convention to apply universally and protect all persons fleeing conflict and persecution” (UNHCR, n.d.). Furthermore, the definition given in this Convention focuses on the individual rather than the group, which is the form of environmental displacement that typically occurs (Felipe Reyes, n.d.).

Given this situation and accepting climate displaced persons are a subcategory of environmentally displaced persons (IOM, 2019, p. 31), herein we use the term “environmental migrant”: “A person or group(s) of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive changes in the environment adversely affect their lives or living conditions, are forced to leave their places of habitual residence, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move within or outside their country of origin or habitual residence” (IOM, 2019, p. 64).

2.2. Media representation of the migration phenomenon

The media inform and shape social reality as one of the primary sources of information through which the public learns about various issues, including those related to the environment (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2007, p. 67). However, the media not only inform but also portray the practices and political measures taken to address or mitigate the rise of such environmental deterioration and its effects on populations, especially the most vulnerable, sometimes demanding concrete actions and climate justice, that is, “to do justice to those who, being more vulnerable to climate change, have had a lesser responsibility in causing it” (“hacer justicia a quienes, siendo más vulnerables al cambio climático, han tenido una menor responsabilidad en propiciarlo”) (Ervti, 2020, p. 69).

The media conduct their informative and control functions by applying various strategies. Amongst these, it is worth mentioning agenda-setting, i.e. the selection of what is newsworthy, thus providing greater coverage of some topics than others (Hameleers & Vliegthart, 2020; Heidenreich *et al.*, 2020). This selection is conditioned by the political–editorial leaning (Ervti, 2020) and the importance each media gives to, in this case, environmental issues (León & Ervti, 2011). This selective practice may affect the perception in the eyes of public opinion (Quesada-Pérez *et al.*, 2015), as can the so-called editorial balance, i.e. giving the same importance to news from climate change advocates as well as their opponents, which could contribute to distorting reality and confusing public opinion (UNDP, 2007).

The media will then select certain aspects of this reality, based on frames, through which to transmit a specific way of looking at, understanding, and perceiving the topic they are reporting. In any case, this information “transcends” the literalness of what is being narrated or referred to in each journalistic piece, providing its audiences with a richer and more nuanced understanding of the topic under consideration (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993; Nisbet & Newman, 2016).

According to the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD, 2017), the application of these informational strategies to the topic of migration has been characterised by its presentation through two lenses. On the one hand, there is the narrative that presents the “other” in a negative light, portraying them as a threat (Galantino, 2021; Martínez-Lirola, 2022). This otherness is often based on stereotypes (Olier & Spadavecchia, 2022), characterised by ethnocentric viewpoints (Gómez-Puertas *et al.*, 2015) and even with racist overtones (Echeverri *et al.*, 2022; Muscat, 2019), since in this type of discourse, the geographical origin of the migrants is usually specified, even though, in most cases, it does not contribute from an informative viewpoint. For this reason, various communication style manuals recommend abandoning this communicative practice (Consell de L’Audiovisual de Catalunya, 2021). In contrast, one has the more humanitarian, empathetic and hospitable narrative, with its strong emotional charge. In this perspective, migrants are seen as vulnerable, helpless people in need of

protection, especially women, children, the elderly, the sick or those belonging to ethnic minorities (Høeg & Tulloch, 2019; Mosello *et al.*, 2021; Ransan-Cooper *et al.*, 2015). In this regard, the sources are selected to build and transmit the narrative, which becomes an essential element (Rodríguez Reyes *et al.*, 2015).

Against this background, this study aims to analyse how much geographical origin is evoked in the representation of environmental migrants in the Spanish press: *ABC*, *El Mundo (EM)*, *El País (EP)* and *La Vanguardia (LV)*, from 2012 to 2023, by considering the following research questions:

RQ1. Is the issue of migration related to environmental and climate issues given importance in the Spanish press?

RQ2. What is the general representation of environmental migrants in the mainstream Spanish media?

RQ3. How are environmental migrants represented depending on their origin?

3. Sources and methodology

Regarding the sources used to conduct this study, note that we considered the four mainstream newspapers in Spain, according to the Asociación para la Investigación de los Medios de Comunicación (AIMC) (2021), which present different editorial lines. *EP* embodies the most progressive line, the most moderate option by *LV* and the most conservative by *EM* and *ABC* (Ervti, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2018). The selection of these four ideologically diverse newspapers aimed to cover the entire political spectrum, from left-wing to right-wing, and included both national and regional outlets, providing a more representative perspective on the dominant media discourse in Spain regarding environmental migration. A total of 140 units, spanning from January 2012 to June 2023, were analysed. The units of analysis were obtained by using the MyNews newspaper library service, applying two inclusion criteria: (1) that the units include the terms “refug*” or “migr*” along with terms such as “ecolog*”, “ambient*” and “clima”, and (2) that these terms appear in the headline, subheading, lead, or short description above the unit, to guarantee the object of study was prominent in each piece.

Also note that, for certain variables, one category was defined as the main one. The most important one was determined based on its appearance and prominence in the analysed piece. If two or more variables were similar in this regard, the main one was that appearing in the headline, subheading, lead, or brief description above the piece. A single researcher carried out the final coding of the units, following the authors’ previous testing of a codebook on a sample comprising 15% of the units. To limit any possible inconsistencies in intra-coding, another co-author monitored approximately a quarter of the framing variables of the units of analysis, which are the most interpretive for the analysis, resolving any differences in criteria that occasionally appeared through consensus. We are aware that this may represent a methodological limitation; however,

Table 1. Main themes according to geographical origin.

	Africa		America		Asia		Europe		Oceania		Various origins		Unspecified		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Causes	11	47.8	7	38.9	3	50	5	35.7	3	37.5	14	40	12	33.3	55	39.3
Legal issues	3	13	4	22.2	1	16.7	0	0	5	62.5	8	22.9	14	38.9	35	25
International political debate	3	13	1	5.6	0	0	3	21.4	0	0	4	11.4	3	8.3	14	10
Consequences of displacement	2	8.7	2	11.1	2	33.3	1	7.1	0	0	6	17.1	0	0	13	9.3
Integration difficulties	2	8.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5.7	1	2.8	5	3.6
Conceptual or academic debate	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	21.4	0	0	1	2.9	1	2.8	5	3.6
Problems generated by migrants	2	8.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.8	3	2.1
European political debate	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	8.3	3	2.1
Related to gender	0	0	2	11.1	0	0	1	7.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	2.1
Description of migratory journey	0	0	2	11.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1.4
Reception and humanitarian aid	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.8	1	0.7
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	7.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.7
Total	23	100	18	100	6	100	14	100	8	100	35	100	36	100	140	100

Source: Authors' own creation. The categories of Spanish political debate, childhood and religion were removed from the table because they were not identified in the analysed units.

it is mitigated by following a strict codebook and double-checking the coding process.

Using these criteria, among all the analysed units, the media seemed to pay more attention to this issue, with *EP* (40.7%) and *LV* (33.6%), whilst *ABC* (15.7%) and *EM* (10%) showed the least interest.

The selected material was studied by applying a quantitative content analysis, along the lines established by Berelson (1952, p.18), enabling the establishment of “an objective, systematic and quantitative description of the content manifested in the communication” This approach enabled the identification and attribution, in terms of the geographical origin of migrants, of the most frequently presented topics, the most familiar sources of information and the frames of reference, using the models described below.

The analysis of the main topics was based on 15 pre-established, mutually exclusive categories: causes of migration, effects of the journey, portrait of the journey, legal issues, reception and humanitarian aid, personal initiatives, racism, problems generated by refugees, political debate in Spain, agreements at the European Union, decisions by other countries/organisations, gender, children, religion and a final category capturing any topic not mentioned above.

The second major part of the analysis addressed the sources of information. These are never neutral (O'Neill *et al.*, 2015), so their selection or a propensity to use one or the other by the media, according to their editorial line, projects a biased reality (Cuenca *et al.*, 2023). For this reason, identifying the sources used by the media to prepare the news is fundamental to the study and analysis of the representation of migrants (Benson & Wood, 2015), in this case, environmental migrants. In this work, eight main types of sources were considered: (a) official Spanish sources, (b) official sources from other countries, (c) police or other security forces, (d) the European Union, (e) international organisations, (f) civil society, including experts, think tanks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), defenders of migrants' rights and non-migrant citizens, (g) testimonies from refugees or their associations and (h) the media itself.

To establish and analyse the frames used by the media, a comparative analysis of four models was proposed the most complete overview of the representation of refugees in the media: the models of Høeg and Tulloch (2019, pp. 236-237) and Ransan-Cooper *et al.* (2015, p. 109-112), which were proposed to analyse the issue of environmental migration; the frame proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, pp. 95-96), for more general studies of migration; and that of Chouliaraki & Stolic (2017, pp. 1167-1171), for visual analysis of refugee information.

4. Results

The results of this study are presented below, highlighting various characteristics that define the profile of the migrant, followed by an analysis of the topics, sources, and frames most widely used in the selected media.

4.1. Environmental migrant profile

Among all the units analysed (N = 140), for most (77.9%), it was not possible to identify the gender of the migrants, and when it was indicated, males were more frequently reported (12.9%) than females (9.3%). When a geographical origin prevailed in the unit (49%), those from the African continent stood out (16.4%), especially sub-Saharan Africa, followed by the Americas (12.8%, the regions of South America and the Caribbean), Europe (10%), Oceania (5.7%) and, finally, Asia (4.3%). In another 25% of the units, several origins could be identified, without any being clearly predominant, whilst the rest of the units dealt with the subject of environmental migration, but without specifying a particular origin (26%). In addition, note that the most common term used to refer to these people is “refugiado” (“refugee”) (41.4%), followed by “migrante” (“migrant”) (31.4%) and “desplazado” (“displaced person”) (27.1%), whilst the predominant adjective is “climático” (“climate”) (50.7%) as opposed to “ambiental” (“environmental”) (5.8%).

Table 2. Main source according to geographical origin.

	Africa		America		Asia		Europe		Oceania		Various origins		Unspecified		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Civil society	6	26.1	6	33.3	1	16.7	5	35.7	2	25	14	40	15	41.7	49	35
From the media itself	6	26.1	2	11.1	0	0	1	7.1	0	0	13	37.1	9	25	31	22.1
International organisations	7	30.4	1	5.6	1	16	3	21.4	0	0	6	17.1	7	19.4	25	17.9
Official sources from another country	1	4.3	4	22.2	2	33.3	3	21.4	3	37.5	1	2.9	1	2.8	15	10.7
Testimony by a migrant	3	13	5	27.8	1	16.7	0	0	3	37.5	0	0	0	0	12	8.6
Spanish official sources	0	0	0	0	1	16.7	0	0	0	0	1	2.9	3	8.3	5	3.6
European Union	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	14.1	0	0	0	0	1	2.8	2	2.1
Total	23	100	18	100	6	100	14	100	8	100	35	100	36	100	140	100

Source: Authors' own creation. Sources from police or security forces and other sources were removed from the table because they were not identified in the analysed units.

Table 3. Høeg and Tulloch (2019) frame according to geographical origin.

	Africa		America		Asia		Europe		Oceania		Various origins		Unspecified		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Humanitarian	17	73.9	13	72.2	4	66.7	7	50	8	100	17	48.6	12	33.3	78	55.7
Scientific	2	8.7	4	22.2	0	0	5	35.7	0	0	8	22.9	10	27.8	29	20.7
Radical	2	8.7	1	5.6	2	33.3	2	14.3	0	0	4	11.4	9	25	20	14.3
Geopolitical	2	8.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	17.1	5	13.9	13	9.3
Total	23	100	18	100	6	100	14	100	8	100	35	100	36	100	140	100

Source: Authors' own creation.

4.2. Main themes according to geographical origin

The main topics, as presented in Table 1, address four areas: the causes of displacement (39.3%), which are mainly due to climate change (95.7%), legal issues (25%), the debate generated at the international level (10%) and the consequences these displacements may have (9.3%). However, an intersectional evaluation considering the geographical origin reveals that the presentation of the causes as the central theme is especially important for Asia and Africa. On the other hand, when Oceania is highlighted, legal issues predominate. If the focus is placed on the Americas, legal issues are prominent amongst the main issues, in addition to the causes of migration. In the case of migrants from Europe, the commonest topics are political and academic debate, in addition to causes.

4.3. Main sources by geographical origin

An analysis of the main sources, as shown in Table 2, reveals a clear predominance of sources from civil society (35%), primarily in the European sphere and in units where multiple sources were identified. This is followed by sources from the media itself (22.1%), especially when specifying an African origin. The third most widely used source was non-governmental organisations (17.9%), with the African region standing out in this regard. This is followed in importance by sources from other countries (10.7%), particularly from Asia, as well as from migrants' testimonies (8.6%), especially those from Oceania.

4.4. Framing by geographic origin of the environmental migrant

As noted above, the chosen frame enables the media to provide large amounts of understandable information to their audiences, albeit from specific viewpoints. In this study, this approach was analysed based on four different models: those of Høeg and Tulloch (2019), Ransan-Cooper *et al.* (2015), Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), and Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017), all from the perspective of the geographical origin of the migrants.

Application of the model proposed by Høeg & Tulloch (2019), as shown in Table 3, indicates that the frame most widely used by the media is "humanitarian" (55.7%), followed by "scientific" (20.7%), "radical" (14.9%) and "geopolitical" (9.3%). In the case of the "humanitarian" frame, Oceania and Europe clearly lie at each end of the scale. However, heterogeneity is observed regarding the second most widely used mainframe, with the "scientific" frame prevailing in Europe and the Americas, and the "radical" frame in Asia.

The analysis according to the model of Ransan-Cooper *et al.* (2015), as seen in Table 4, indicates that the most widely used frame is "victim" (47.9%), followed by "political subject" (27.9%), "adaptive agent" (18.6%) and finally "threat" (5.7%). The "victim" frame stands out especially in the case of Oceania and Europe. In Asia, the leader is a "political subject". One can also observe that the "adaptive agent" frame is prominent for those from the Americas and Asia. Finally, note that "threat" is used as the main frame for migrants from Africa or when their origin is not specified.

Table 4. Ransan-Cooper *et al.* (2015) frame according to geographical origin.

	Africa		America		Asia		Europe		Oceania		Various origins		Unspecified		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Victim	14	60.9	10	55.6	2	33.3	12	85.7	8	100	14	40	7	19.4	67	47.9
Political subject	5	21.7	5	27.8	3	50	1	7.1	0	0	11	31.4	14	38.9	39	27.9
Adaptive agent	1	4.3	3	16.7	1	16.7	1	7.1	0	0	9	25.7	11	30.6	26	18.6
Security threat	3	13	0	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.9	4	11.1	8	5.7
Total	23	100	18	100	6	100	14	100	8	100	35	100	36	100	140	100

Source: Authors' own creation.

The frame analysis using the proposal by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) indicates that the most prominent frame is “human interest” (34.3%), followed by “socio-political” consequences (30%) and “responsibility” (20.7%). In contrast, the “conflict” (6.4%) and “morality” (4.3%) frames are the least used (Table 5).

However, consideration of the geographical origin reveals significant differences. Indeed, note that the “humanitarian” frame is the primary one for Oceania and Africa. In contrast, the “socio-political consequences” frame is the primary one for the Americas and Asia, and the “responsibility” frame is the primary one for Europe. It is worth noting that the “conflict” frame is primarily used when discussing people from Africa.

The overall analysis based on Chouliaraki and Stolic's (2017) proposal indicated that the most widely used frame (Table 6) is “biological life” (32.14%), followed by “empathy” (30%) and “hospitality” (25%). The term “threat” is much less used (11.43%), whilst the “self-reflexivity” frame is barely used (1.43%).

An analysis of the main frames, cross-referenced according to the geographic origin of the migrants, reveals that “biological life” is the most widely used term in the case of people from Africa or Oceania. In contrast, the “empathy” frame appears to be more related to those from Europe and the Americas. Meanwhile, the “hospitality” frame is prominent in the units of analysis depicting people from Africa (26.1%) or when various origins are identified. Finally, when an origin in Asia is recognised, the “threat” frame prevails.

5. Discussion

To answer the specific questions that have guided this study, the following section offers a discussion that examines the discursive and social construction

of immigration driven by environmental factors. Although the phenomenon of migration caused by environmental events is debated (Dreher & Voyer, 2015), the Spanish press does not pay great attention to this environmental issue (Cantero-de-Julián & Herranz-de-la-Casa, 2023) and even less so its link with migration, since 2012-2022, the number of units focussing on this issue published in the mainstream press in Spain was very low (140 units). Long periods of low coverage are broken by occasional moments of more exhaustive coverage, which coincide with natural disasters, the celebration of events, or the publication of institutional reports on this subject, as noted in other studies (UNDP, 2007). This may also explain the international dimension given to this subject matter, since the news is mainly focused on global issues rather than those occurring or evolving in Spain. Segmenting by media reveals a clear difference between those with a more progressive and moderate line, such as *EP* (40.7%) and *LV* (33.6%), which show greater coverage of this phenomenon, compared with more conservative media such as *ABC* (15.7%) and *EM* (10%).

The media often indicate the origin of the migrants or the areas affected by environmental effects to contextualise the information they provide, since 74% of the units identify at least one specific origin or geographical region. This enables us to specify the regions where people are most vulnerable to such phenomena, such as Africa, especially the Sub-Saharan area, as well as Central and South America and Asia, which coincides with the area's most susceptible to environmental problems and their effects (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023, p.5). Such categorisation based on origin presents the phenomenon in an apparently uniform way, hiding its multiple causes and the heterogeneity of those affected, including

Table 5. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) frame according to geographical origin.

	Africa		America		Asia		Europe		Oceania		Various origins		Unspecified		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Human interest	13	56.5	5	27.8	2	33.3	2	14.3	5	62.5	9	25.7	12	33.3	48	34.3
Socio-political consequences	3	13	6	33.3	2	33.3	2	14.3	2	25.0	13	37.1	14	38.9	42	30
Responsibility	3	13	5	27.8	1	16.7	6	42.9	1	12.5	9	25.7	4	11.1	29	20.7
Conflict	2	8.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5.7	5	13.9	9	6.4
Morality	1	4.3	0	0	1	16.7	4	28.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	4.3
Economic consequences	1	4.3	2	11.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	5.7	1	2.8	6	4.3
Total	23	100	18	100	6	100	14	100	8	100	35	100	36	100	140	100

Source: Authors' own creation.

Table 6. Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017) frame according to geographical origin.

	Africa		America		Asia		Europe		Oceania		Various origins		Not specified		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Biological life	9	39.1	5	27.8	1	16.7	5	35.7	3	37.5	8	22.9	14	38.9	45	32.1
Empathy	5	21.7	10	55.6	2	33.3	9	64.3	3	37.5	7	20.0	6	16.7	42	30.0
Hospitality	6	26.1	1	5.6	0	0	0	0	2	25	14	40.0	12	33.3	35	25.0
Threat	3	13	1	5.6	3	50	0	0	0	0	5	14.3	4	11.1	16	11.4
Self-reflexivity	0	0	1	5.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2.9	0	0.0	2	1.4
Total	23	100	18	100	6	100	14	100	8	100	35	100	36	100	140	100

Source: Authors' own creation.

women, who represent 80% of the environmental refugee population worldwide, according to Abrantes (2024).

To answer the first research question, which addresses the importance given to the phenomenon of environmental migration in the Spanish press, highlighting the superficial nature of the content and the lack of continuity in such coverage. This may lead to a perception that the challenge resulting from environmental migration is homogeneous, abstract and less urgent, which could reduce empathy and limit action by the public and policymakers towards this issue.

In addition, the more detailed analysis of the topics, sources and frames revealed the importance of conducting studies from a “micro” perspective, based on aspects such as the geographical origin of the migrants, as opposed to a “macro” perspective, which would address more general aspects of the phenomenon. The study of the main topics presented in the press about this phenomenon reveals that the causes of such displacements (39.3%), especially those originating from climate change (95.7%), as well as legal issues (25%), are the most common themes across all the studied continents. This highlights the importance of establishing the precise relationship between climatic and environmental phenomena and their impact on population displacement, as well as how to safeguard the rights of those affected and of citizens in the destination, to prevent or at least mitigate such effects as far as possible. However, the analysis by geographic origin revealed differences in the representation and treatment of people according to their origin. One can say that, when the news is focused on Africa, the Americas or Asia, the cause of such migration is the topic that receives the most significant prominence and debate in the analysed media, since these areas are the most affected by environmental disasters, being the reason for millions of people leaving their homes (IEP, 2023). Meanwhile, when the focus is on Europe, in addition to the causes, the consequences of such displacements are highlighted, which may indicate greater concern for the effects and the social and economic policies regarding the reception and integration of migrants in the destination society, possibly owing to the geographical proximity to the Spanish reader. This may also indicate the dual viewpoint on such migrants: as victims of events beyond their control, making them vulnerable and in need of help, and also as threats, from the perspective of the receiving communities, who are wary of

the effects on their security, culture, and resources (Sakellari, 2021). However, when reporting on situations occurring in Oceania, legal issues are the main topic, in this case, related to their request for recognition as climate refugees.

From the point of view of the most widely used information sources, note that these mainly come from civil society (35%), the media itself (22.1%) and government institutions (17.9%). This is relevant because it illustrates that the subject matter is approached more from an academic than a humanitarian perspective, since the discourses or approaches of intellectuals, think tanks or columnists from the media itself predominate, expressing their editorial line through columns and editorials. This prominence agrees with the emphasis placed on the idea of climate justice, which was present in 72.9% of the analysed units, highlighting the debt owed by many of the countries of the Global North to the countries of the Global South (UNDP, 2023), both for having been the most polluting and for the imbalances caused in these territories as former colonies. However, in addition to this general trend, analysis by geographic origin reveals some differences. For example, except for Europe, which best follows the general trend described above, sources from various international organisations are particularly prominent for the rest of the origins, mainly in Africa (30.4%), whilst when the unit focuses on Oceania, the use of official sources from another country and especially the testimonies of migrants (37.5%) become particularly noteworthy. These differences may point, to a lack or absence of data for many areas, which highlights the fundamental role played by these organisations not only from the point of view of support but also as a source when it comes to providing data, especially in the so-called Global South, whilst in other areas the availability of and trust in official records make these sources the preferred resource. This study highlights the poor coverage given to environmental migrants, which coincides with the media's representation of other types of migrants, such as economic migrants or refugees, thereby depriving them of their voice (Breitegger & Bertel, 2022).

The approach to representing environmental migrants in this study is complemented by an analysis based on various framing models. The first finding is that the results indicate that climate migrants are represented in the media using different narrative frames, which can lead to different representations in public and political opinion. This highlights those trying to invoke empathy, on the one hand, and

minority viewpoints that appeal to fear, suspicion, and alarm, as also revealed by Sakellari's meta-analysis (2021). In our study, the "humanitarian" frame stands out as the most frequently employed across all the models analysed, particularly in the methodological approaches of Høeg and Tulloch (2019) (55.7%) and Ransan-Cooper *et al.* (2015) (47.9%), both of which focus on the media representation of environmental migrants. However, the use of alternative frames, such as the political subject frame proposed by Ransan-Cooper *et al.* (2015), reveals how environmental migrants are often denied their fundamental human rights (Red Acoge, 2020, 2021). Additionally, the responsibility frame developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) (20.7%) calls on Global North countries, those most responsible for environmental degradation, to acknowledge and assume their obligations as a matter of climate justice (UNDP, 2023).

In contrast, the alarmist view, applying the threat or conflict frame, is detected in all the models analysed, albeit in a minority of cases. The model that highlights this most is that of Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017) (11.4%), followed Høeg and Tulloch (2019) (9.3%), Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) (6.4%), and Ransan-Cooper *et al.* (2015) (5.7%).

Considering both aspects and relating them to the geographical origin of the migrants reveals that those from Africa are the most representative example of the double lens through which this type of migration is viewed, as the humanitarian frame predominates. However, it is typically associated with the threat and conflict frames when compared to other migrants. Americans and Asians are also mainly framed in humanitarian terms, although to a lesser extent. However, in these cases, one can also recognise the frame of political subjects, i.e. being presented as activists, which may hurt their perception, being considered as protestors. Environmental migration from Europe is presented within the context of both humanitarian and scientific frameworks, providing a basis for informed political considerations. When the origin is identified as Oceania, this double lens would no longer be used, since the human-interest frame prevails. These differences and similarities in representation could originate, as Feagin (2010, as cited in Otto & Perkins, 2011) points out, from the existence of a dominant white racial framework, laden with stereotypes, values, and racialised emotions, which is present in numerous sub-frameworks used by the media to convey this reality. Therefore, in response to the second research question, it can be observed that the representation of individuals who migrate for environmental reasons is biased and influenced by their geographic origin. This bias may contribute to greater exclusion and discrimination against certain groups of migrants compared to others (Van Dijk, 2011).

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature on migration and communication by presenting a longitudinal analysis (2012-2022) of the representation of environmental migrants in the mainstream Spanish press. It offers a localised perspective within a research field dominated mainly by global approaches, situating its analysis within a national context marked by specific migratory dynamics. Additionally, it provides empirical evidence of

the hierarchical framing of these individuals based on their geographical origins. The integration of four distinct framing models further enhances the analysis, providing a more nuanced understanding of the media's construction of environmental migration and enriching both theoretical and methodological debates in the field.

6. Conclusion

In summary, this analysis reveals that the Spanish media do not consider environmental migration issues to be particularly relevant for inclusion amongst newsworthy topics, as indicated by the small number of news items that specifically focus on it. In addition, the general representation projected by the media on this type of migrants is usually focused on the causes that motivated their displacement, presented in a humanitarian frame, for which they mainly rely on sources from civil society or the media itself, but very little on testimonies of migrants to describe this type of phenomenon. All aspects of the representation of this topic vary depending on the origin of the migrants, as their geographic origin influences the perspective, which can be viewed through a double lens, based on the humanitarian and threat frames, which is particularly evident for those coming from Africa.

These findings have significant practical implications. On one hand, the study highlights the need to incorporate climate-induced migration as a relevant issue within the media agenda, thereby reinforcing the social role of the media as agents of awareness and environmental education. On the other hand, to foster a more comprehensive understanding of this migratory phenomenon among audiences, it is essential that the media avoid simplistic and stereotypical coverage and instead include the voices and testimonies of the migrants themselves. The study emphasises the imperative to advance communication strategies designed to overcome security-based or threat-oriented frames, as such frameworks tend to foster negative perceptions and perpetuate racist and xenophobic discourses. Finally, one limitation of the study is that the analysis is focused exclusively on the Spanish context. However, the approach of the work could provide a new line of analysis centred on studies observing the representation of climate migration in different regional and national contexts, as existing studies have tended to focus on general aspects of migration, leaving a gap in the specific analysis of how the media addresses climate migration. Additionally, although the quantitative perspective of the study provides a picture of the similarities and differences between variables that influence the representation of migrations due to environmental causes, it would be interesting to expand the analysis with qualitative methods, including the voices of the migrants themselves, to examine the potential effects of the media representation of environmental migrants.

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8. Authors' contribution

Conceptualization	Ideas; formulation or evolution of overarching research goals and aims.	Author 1
Data curation	Management activities to annotate (produce metadata), scrub data and maintain research data (including software code, where it is necessary for interpreting the data itself) for initial use and later re-use.	Authors 1 and 2
Formal analysis	Application of statistical, mathematical, computational, or other formal techniques to analyze or synthesize study data.	Authors 1, 2 and 3
Funding acquisition	Acquisition of the financial support for the project leading to this publication.	Authors 1, 2 and 3
Investigation	Conducting a research and investigation process, specifically performing the experiments, or data/evidence collection.	Authors 1 and 2
Methodology	Development or design of methodology; creation of models.	Authors 1, 2 and 3
Project administration	Management and coordination responsibility for the research activity planning and execution.	Authors 1 and 2
Resources	Provision of study materials, reagents, materials, patients, laboratory samples, animals, instrumentation, computing resources, or other analysis tools.	Author 1
Software	Programming, software development; designing computer programs; implementation of the computer code and supporting algorithms; testing of existing code components.	Author 2
Supervision	Oversight and leadership responsibility for the research activity planning and execution, including mentorship external to the core team.	Authors 2 and 3
Validation	Verification, whether as a part of the activity or separate, of the overall replication/reproducibility of results/experiments and other research outputs.	Author 1
Visualization	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically visualization/data presentation.	Authors 1, 2 and 3
Writing / original draft	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work, specifically writing the initial draft (including substantive translation).	Author 3
Writing / review & editing	Preparation, creation and/or presentation of the published work by those from the original research group, specifically critical review, commentary or revision –including pre– or post-publication stages.	Authors 1 and 2

9. Statement on the use of artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence (AI) has not been used in the conduct of the research or in the preparation of this article.

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