The impact of narratives on policy-making at the national level

The case of Spain

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Contents

Abstract

This study analyses the interplay of migration narratives as they traverse the media, politics, and policy-making arenas in Spain. More specifically, it examines how narratives on migration, circulate within the mass media and the political debate and subsequently influence policy-making processes. Building on the 'narrative policy framework' (Jones and McBeth 2010), the 'communicative' and 'coordinative' spheres of policy-making (Schmidt 2008) and the distinction between 'lay' and 'technocratic' styles of narratives (Boswell and Smellie 2023), this study tries to elucidate the dynamics of narrative circulation by focusing on three case studies: a) the European migration crisis in 2015 and the EU relocation scheme; b) the Ukrainian refugees after the start of the war in 2022; and c) the crisis of the rescue boat Aquarius in the Mediterranean in 2018. Results point to a common pattern of decoupling between the communicative sphere (media and political narratives) and the coordinative sphere (policy-making narratives) in the three cases. Yet, this does not mean that policy-making on migration is not affected by narratives. However, these are not so related to the specific events, but to the master narratives that have been present in all the governments (be them left-wing or centre-right oriented) increasingly influenced by a securitarian turn. On the other hand, there is a trend to produce more technocratic narratives based on facts as we come closer to the policy-making sphere and we move away from the media debates which are more dominated by lay narratives oriented to the wider public.

Keywords: migration narratives, politics, policymaking, refugee crisis, Ukraine, Aquarius

1. Introduction

This study analyses the intricate interplay of migration narratives as they traverse the arenas of media, politics, and policy-making. Our focus centres on understanding the dynamics of narrative circulation, identifying distinct narrative contents and styles, and on examining the relationship between event-specific and master narratives. To illuminate these complexities, we investigate three case studies in the Spanish context: a) the European migration crisis in 2015 and the EU relocation scheme; b) the Ukrainian refugees after the start of the war in 2022; and c) the rescue boats in the Mediterranean, with a specific focus on the Aquarius case in 2018.

Our analysis builds upon the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) developed by Jones and McBeth (2010), incorporating Schmidt's (2008) conceptualisation of the 'communicative' and 'coordinative' spheres of policy-making and the distinction between 'lay' and 'technocratic' narratives provided by Boswell and Smellie (2023). Based on this conceptual umbrella, several key research questions have been designed: How do narratives on migration, particularly those characterised by their simplicity and emotive qualities, circulate within the mass media and political debate and subsequently influence policy-making processes? What role do narratives play in shaping policy decisions, and how do they contribute to the development of migration policies? To what extent are these popular 'lay' narratives embraced, adapted, ignored, or explicitly rejected by political actors within the Spanish context, especially as they transition across different communicative and coordinative spheres?

Moving from such basis, we aim to unravel the relationship between narratives in the media and political debates and their influence in policy-making in Spain. This journey across different arenas offers critical insights into the evolution of narratives in the country.

This introduction is followed by Section 2, which delves into Spain's historical migration narratives, political and policy developments spanning the years 2012 to 2022, as well as an exploration of public attitudes in the country. Section 3 is dedicated to elucidating our research methodology, including a detailed account of our case selection criteria. In Sections 4, 5, and 6, we conduct in-depth analyses of our three selected cases. Finally, our concluding section synthesizes the findings, establishes connections between the cases and the national context, and imparts insights into the broader implications of migration narratives on Spanish policy-making.

2. Background and national context

2.1 Key narratives on migration with a brief historical background

Despite having become one of the top immigration countries in the first decade of the XXI Century, **public and political discourse on immigration in Spain have been surprisingly limited**. This is due to several factors, including: a national imaginary which is unwilling, and/or incapable, of tackling the issue of the Spanish (multiple) identity (which a debate on immigration would have triggered), parties' interest in preventing the politicization of the issue

(Matin-Perez and Moreno-Fuentes, 2012), and, until 2018, the absence of a right-wing anti-immigration party institutionally recognised (see section 2.3).

The lack of a public and political discourse on immigration at national level has had important implications. First, **immigration has been mainly debated within the historic autonomous regions** (particularly in Catalonia), where it has been primarily addressed as a political identity problem. Second, no national public philosophy (Favell, 1998), such as the French republicanism or the British multiculturalism, has driven the policy approach towards immigration. Conversely, **policy has emanated from the ground-up of governance praxis**, according to a 'practical philosophy' (Zapata-Barrero 2010). Third, immigration has been **mainly discussed in relation to irregular arrivals** at the Southern border and, thus, discursively bounded to the issue of border control and specific groups of migrants (i.e., from sub-Sahara African countries).[1]

Five main narratives have articulated the discourse on migration in the Spanish context over the last two decades:

- The "**non-narrative**". This first and dominant narrative on migration is shaped by the aforementioned lack of a clear and stable discourse on immigration at national level. What is not-said about migration defines much of the discursive space on the matter, marking the way in which immigration phenomenon is framed in the public imaginary. The fact that immigration from Latin American countries has remained rather invisible and unproblematic says much in this regard.[2] The debates about citizenship reforms represent another paradigmatic example. Even after the country became one of the top immigration countries in Europe, nationality has kept being conceived looking at the Spanish diaspora, as a means to guarantee emigrants and their descendants an easy access to citizenship while reinforcing their bond with Spain. But it has rarely been linked to immigration (Pasetti, 2019). This non-narrative reflects a hidden identitarian element related to the concept of Spanishness (Hispanidad) built on the pillars of language (Spanish), religion (Catholicism), and the country's colonial history. From this perspective, those who speak Spanish and profess Catholicism are seen as almost part of the nation. Until the political affirmation of the far right-wing party VOX, the identitarian discourse has remained unbound to the immigration matter in the public and political arenas.

- The **securitisation narrative**. This broad and multifaceted narrative, often employing confrontational and stigmatising language, portrays migrants as a threat (to national security, economy, welfare, and more recently, sovereignty) and calls for the defence and protection of 'us' (Spaniards, Europeans, Westerns) vs. 'other' (migrants). It is deployed mainly in relation to migration-matters at the Southern border (Ceuta and Melilla, Gibraltar Strait and Alborán See, and the Canary Islands). Formerly contained, this narrative gained momentum in the last years in conjunction with the affirmation of

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[1] This framing of the immigration debate disregards other migrant groups, such as those coming from Latin Americans countries, who represent the majority of foreigners in the country.

[2] Currently, anti-racist (and feminist) social movements are increasingly questioning this 'non-narrative' by making structural racism linked to colonial legacies more visible. This is more and more penetrating the political debate, especially in opposition with nativist discourses fostered by the far right.

the far right-wing party VOX (Stuardo Concha, Soler Campo and Riera Retamero 2021) and in relation to specific and particularly salient migratory crises, accompanying the legitimization of push-backs and the violent interventions of the Spanish police. The crises occurred in Ceuta (May 2021) and Melilla (June 2022) have represented a turning point in this regard and a step forward in the spread and institutionalization of the securitisation narrative, with the centre-left government, for instance, embracing the argument that any response is allowed to ensure national security and sovereignty vis-à-vis the 'instrumentalization of migration' by the Moroccan government.

- The **humanitarian narrative**. In their analysis of the 2015 refugee crisis, Greussing and Boomgaarden (2017, 1756) describe it as highlighting the host society's voluntary help, and their contribution to a welcoming culture, thus calling for a humanitarian stance in public discourse. In Spain, this narrative has been mainly observed in media and political debates on borders and irregular arrivals or in relation to particular migrant groups, such as Afghans in the summer of 2021 and Ukrainians in 2022, where migrants are depicted as 'victims'. The humanitarian narrative often blends with human-rights frames centred on the safeguards of migrants' rights and the call for policies and practices that comply with the national legislation and international law. This narrative is observed particularly among institutional and political actors on the left-side of the political spectrum as well as among NGOs and civil society organisations.

- The **utilitarian narrative**. This narrative conceives immigration based on its potential to maximise overall societal welfare. In Spain, its focus has mainly centred on migrants' contributions to the labour market (particularly in relation to the sectors of agriculture, construction and care) and – even if to a lesser extent – to the demographic need of the aging population. This narrative has been very explicit in periods of economic growth, particularly from 2000 to 2008 when it was mobilised to justify and legitimise liberal reforms, such as the collective regularisation campaigns in early 2000s and the introduction of the *arraigo social* (an individual regularisation mechanism) in 2005.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that, with the exception of the Ukrainian refugees' crisis in 2022, the **gender perspective is usually excluded from the main** discourses and **narratives on migration**. In this sense, migrants are often referred to in gender-neutral terms, where the category of 'migrant' is indirectly associated with a man, leaving the groups of migrant women largely invisible, although some of them (e.g., several Latin American groups) initiate the migration process and undertake the 'breadwinner' role. On the other hand, there are some nuances within some narratives. For instance, the securitarian narrative is most often associated with irregular migrants composed of black men who jump the fence or arrive in dinghies in the Southern border of Spain, but statistics actually show that migrant women outweigh the proportion of migrant men within the group of irregular migrants (Gálvez-Iniesta 2020) and arrive silently through the airport to undertake care and domestic work. On another vein, the images of Muslim migrant women as stereotyped passive objects without agency or of unaccompanied male migrants as potential aggressors or harassers are hypervisibilised within the securitarian narrative which frames them as a threat to the Spanish identity (Bourekba et al. 2023).

2.2 Politics and policy developments 2012-2022[3]

The decade between 2012 and 2022 has seen a **significant change in Spanish politics**, with the shift from the centre-right governments led by Rajoy of the People's Party (between 2011-2016 and 2016-2018), to the centre-left governments led by the Socialist Party, between 2018-2020 and 2020-2023 (the latter constituted by a collation with *Unidas Podemos* and other forces in the left).

This change in politics has led to **policy changes** in the migration sector, generally oriented towards an increased recognition of migrants and refugees' rights – at least *de jure* – and particularly in the field **integration**. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the recent reform (Royal Decree 696/2022) of the Foreigners' Law (Law 4/2000), approved by the second government of Sánchez, facilitating the incorporation of migrants into the labour market (along with providing a more stable circular work-migration scheme), easing access to residence for migrants in irregular situation, and promoting family reunification. Another example is the Royal Decree-Law 7/2018, through which the first government of Sánchez re-established universal healthcare, abrogating the 2012 reform of the *Partido Popular* (Royal Decree-Law 16/2012), which restricted the latter for people in irregular situation.

Contrariwise, **policy continuity is observed in migration governance** *stricto sensu* (e.g., entry policies, border management and returns), with both the right and the centre-left governments focusing on: 1) securitising frontiers, with increasing investments in border infrastructures and technologies of surveillance (particularly in the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco); and 2) externalising migration control to origin and transit countries. For its key geopolitical position, Morocco has been the main partner in this regard. Both Rajoy and Sánchez governments have signed different agreements on migration control in the period analysed, from the entry into force of the "Agreement on the Movement of Persons, Transit and Readmission of Irregular entered"[4] and that on unaccompanied minors entered illegally[5], approved in 2012, to the agreement on security matters signed in 2019.[6] It is worth remembering that, in the EU, Spain has been a pioneer in externalising migration control, with the first Africa Plan issued in 2006. This triannual strategic plan of foreign action in different African countries, included cooperation and development actions, but also measures for migration control and readmission agreements. New versions of the plan were issued in 2009 and in 2019 (see Garrido Guijarro 2021).

In the last five years (2017-2022), another critical matter of politics and policy development has been that of **refugee arrivals and reception**. In this regard, it is worth stressing the striking differences, both in terms of discourse and policy-making, between the response given by the Sánchez government to the crisis affecting Ukrainians vis-à-vis those given after the refugees' crisis of 2015. In the latter, the policy approach has been shortsighted and marked by the emergence. The exponential increase in the number of applicants, most of whom came from

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[3] Despite their legal and policy implications, being the analytical focus on policymakers' action, court rulings have not included in the analysis. Besides, due to their exceptional character, policies issued in relation to COVID-19 have not included either. For more details in this regard see Arango et. al (2021).

[4] https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2012/12/13/pdfs/BOE-A-2012-15050.pdf

[5] https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2013/03/22/pdfs/BOE-A-2013-3140.pdf

[6] https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2022/04/07/pdfs/BOE-A-2022-5595.pdf

Venezuela and Colombia, started in 2017 and triggered several adjustments of the reception system whose scope, however, has never been up to the humanitarian challenge and refugees' needs (see Pasetti et al. 2022). In the public discourse, this crisis has never been detached from – more or less explicit – considerations regarding border security and inflows control. The response observed in 2022 with the Ukrainian refugee crisis has been drastically different. At the level of discourse, the humanitarian narrative dominated the public discourse (see section 5) and no considerations related to border security and migratory flows were observed. At the level of policy, the early response of the Sánchez government has been swift, coordinated, and effective, with the deployment of new reception resources, executive actions and institutional devices.

2.3 Public attitudes: salience and public opinion data

Compared to the rest of European countries, Spain shows a more positive attitude towards immigration, as observed by Messing and Ságvári (2019). Among the 20 countries analysed, Spain displays a positive perception above the average and one of the lowest scores in the rejection index (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. Rejection and Perception Indexes by country (ESS R8, 2016-2017)
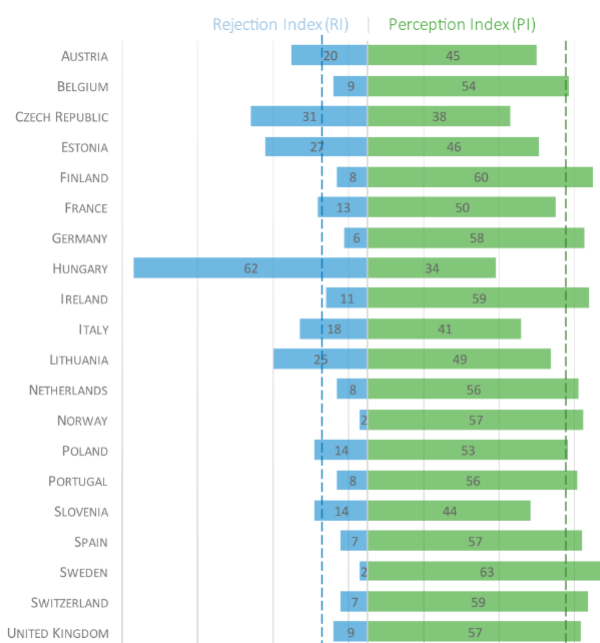
Source: Messing and Ságvári (2019)

These figures reflect a wider positive trend over time: between 2012 and 2022, immigration never represented one of the main concerns for the Spanish public opinion as it had been, for instance, in 2006 during the "cayucos crisis", when it became the first concern of public opinion (CIS, 2006). Its salience grew in 2018-2019 in parallel with the huge increase of asylum applications (Figure 2).

As pointed out by Rinken (2021), this positive tendency is especially marked among young, educated, left-oriented people, while concerns grow for low-educated and right-oriented one.

FIGURE 2. Immigration as a key issue in Spain (2012-2022)

What do you think are the two most important issues facing Spain at the moment? (%) (MAX. 2 ANSWERS) - Eurobarometer
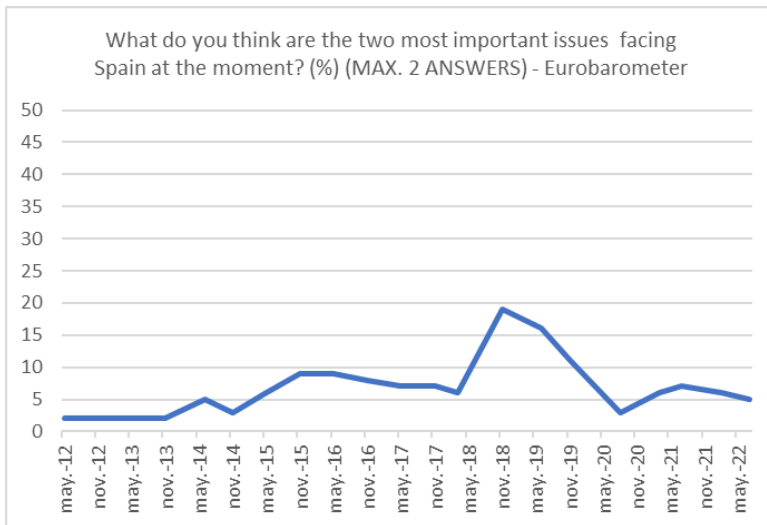
Source: Eurobarometer

Despite certain variation over time, ESS data shows that for Spaniards, immigration positively contributes to the receiving society (Figure 3) and, as pointed out by González and Rinken (2021), particularly to its economy (Figure 4).

FIGURE 3. Perception on immigration in Spain (2008-2018)

Is Spain made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries? (ESS)
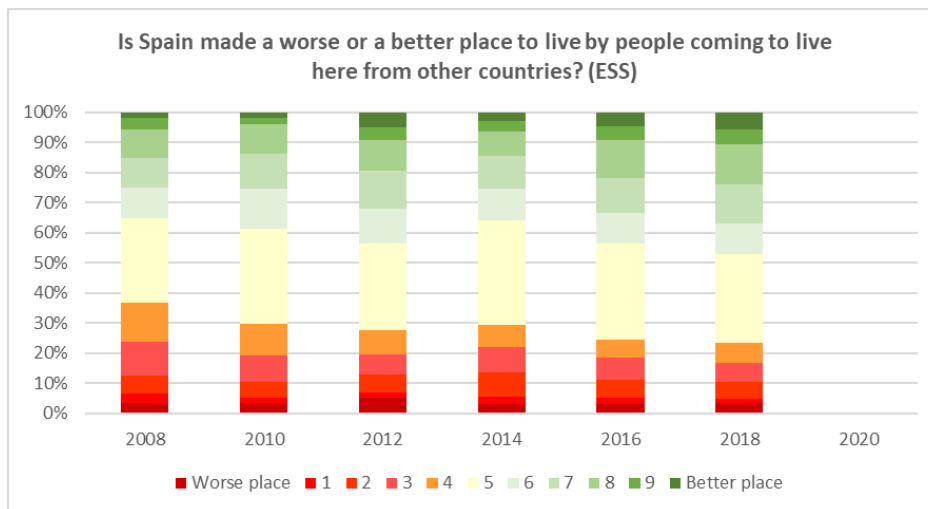
Source: European Social Survey

FIGURE 4. Assessment of the Impact of Immigration in Spain and on its Economy (2015-2020)
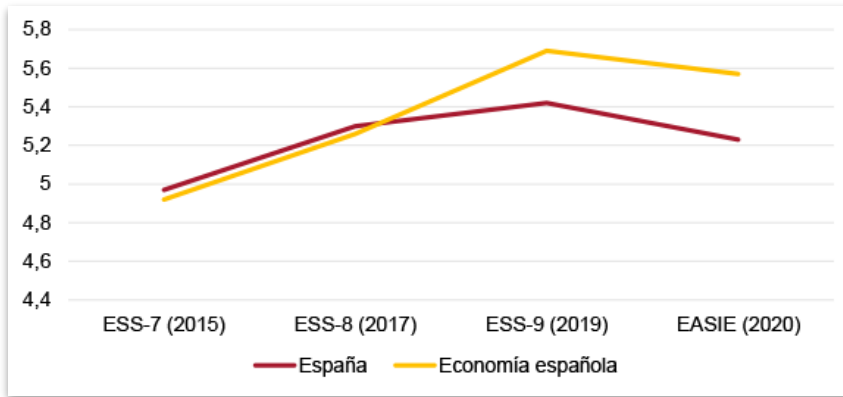
Source: Gonzalez and Rinken (2021)

The Spanish positive attitude towards immigration can be linked to several factors, including the legacy as emigration country, the rejection of Franco's nationalism, the significant presence of and frequent contact between natives and immigrants, and for the country's underlying value system, where humanitarian values prevail over security concerns (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. Humanitarian and security values in European countries in comparison to rejection of migrants (ESS R, 2016-2017)
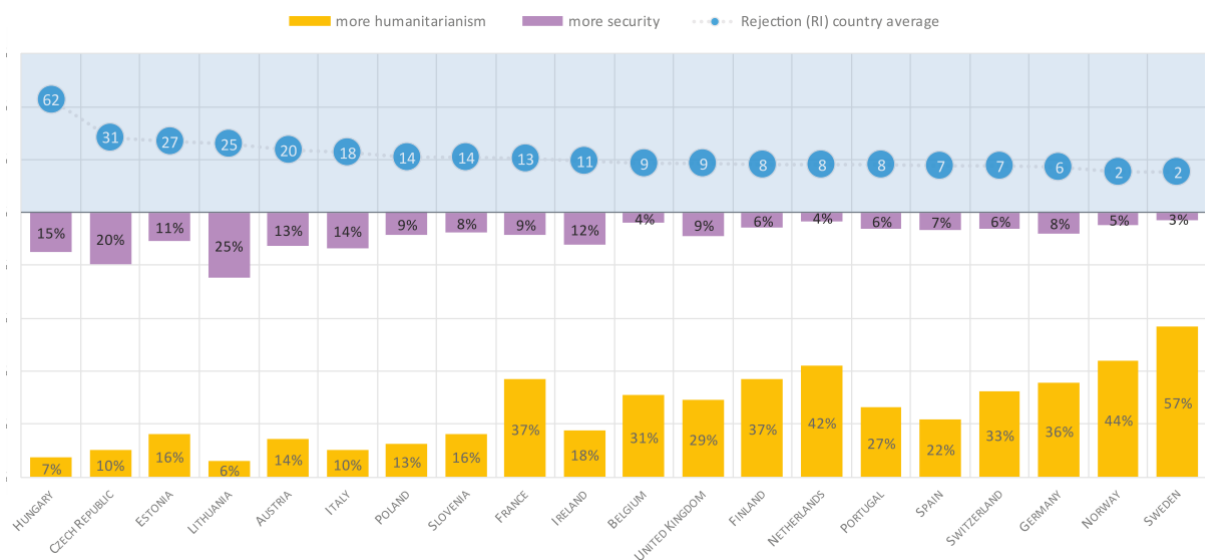
Source: Messing and Ságvári (2019)

The eruption of the right-wing xenophobic party VOX in Spanish politics, firstly in the region of Andalusia region (2018) and later on in the European and General election of 2019, has had a polarising effect on the Spanish public opinion, as highlighted by González and Rinken (2021). Between 2019 and 2020 the gap between left- and right-wing oriented persons increased significantly, with the latter closer to restrictive and nativist positions ("those from home first") and the former more open and oriented towards universal egalitarianism (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. Correlation between political ideology and attitudes on immigration (2015-2020)
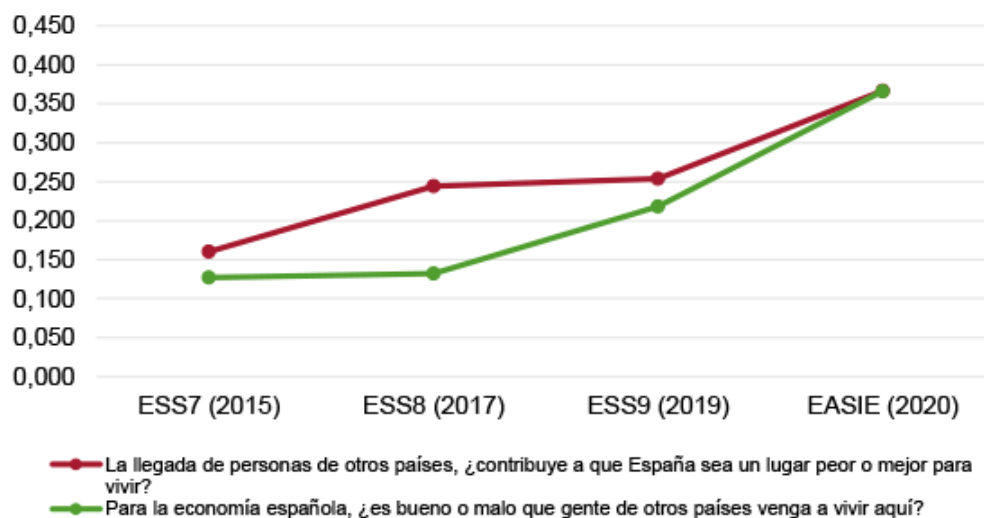
Source: González and Rinken (2021)

The authors point out that, even though VOX's affirmation has primarily been driven by the Catalan territorial conflict (and less directly by other contested issues like feminism, LGTBI, and cosmopolitanism), it has had a significant impact on the discourse on immigration, legitimising and institutionalising xenophobic stances, which might have been already present in the Spanish society, but until then had not been expressed.

3. Methodology

3.1 Selection of case studies

In line with the concept note of Boswell and Smellie (2023), we have selected two case studies that have been prominent in the European migratory context (ref comparative report WP7) and one that is more particular of the Spanish context. The first one has to do with the **refugee crisis of 2015** and the discussion around the **relocation quota** from Greece and Italy (as the number of arrivals in Spain was rather limited). This case highlights a very interesting confrontation between the multi-layered governments in Spain, where the regional and local administrations put pressure on the national one to accept the relocation quota and the arrival of refugees. Moreover, the role of certain civil society organisations (like Stop Mare Mortum in Catalonia) was also very notable in claiming for the compliance of relocation quotas' agreements, which brings in another interesting link between policies and politics.

The second case refers to the **Ukrainian refugees** after the start of the war in February 2022. The selection of this case is justified by the distinctiveness of the Spanish government's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis under the leadership of Pedro Sanchez. Unlike its handling of previous refugee situations, this response was notably swift, well-coordinated, and highly effective. Furthermore, this case is particularly significant as it signifies a transformative

moment in Spain's approach to international protection. It introduced a novel model of collaboration, involving a multi-level partnership between state and non-state actors, a development that was previously considered unattainable.

Finally, the third case revolves around the **rescue operations in the Mediterranean sea in 2018,** and in particular around the crisis of **Aquarius** when the newly born government of Pedro Sánchez (Socialist Party) offered the port of Valencia after Italy and Malta denied a safe port to disembark 629 survivors in a heightened media context. This case was selected for its interesting insights in relation to the decoupling between the communicative and the coordinative spheres. In other words, the humanitarian narratives of the media (especially of El País) and the government at the beginning of the crisis did not turn into substantial changes in the migration policies of Spain, which were much more concerned with the rise of irregular migrants in the Southern border. Moreover, in views of the European dimension of the case, it was selected to allow cross-national comparisons with the French report of Aquarius.

3.2 Research techniques and sampling methods

Following the guidelines of Boswell and Smellie (2023), this report is based on a **qualitative study** aimed to unravel how media narratives are taken up in politics and policy-making. It is divided in three phases and each of them comprises different research techniques. The first phase consisted of **mapping migration narratives**, which included a review of the most relevant developments in the politics of immigration over the last ten years in Spain through desk-research of academic literature and policy documents, and the charting of statistical data about attitudes of public opinion on immigration from the European Social Survey and academic papers (see section 2).

In addition, the first phase also included a **light media quantitative and qualitative analysis** to identify the main media narratives on migration of the three newspapers with a widest audience in Spain: El País (centre-left), El Mundo (centre-right), and La Vanguardia (centrist and mostly read in Catalonia). From a quantitative point of view, a first analysis was made to identify the peaks of migration issues in the media during the periods that concerned each case study. The selection was done with the keywords 'inmigración' OR 'refugiados' in the subjects 'human migration', 'illegal migration', and 'human trafficking' between 1 January 2012 and 31 December 2022 in Spanish through the web of Factiva, making a total of 21,336 articles. If we look at the following graph, we can easily observe that the three selected events correspond with three episodes which captured a very notable (if not the most) media attention during the last decade.

FIGURE 7: Number of media articles on migration in Spain (2012-2022)
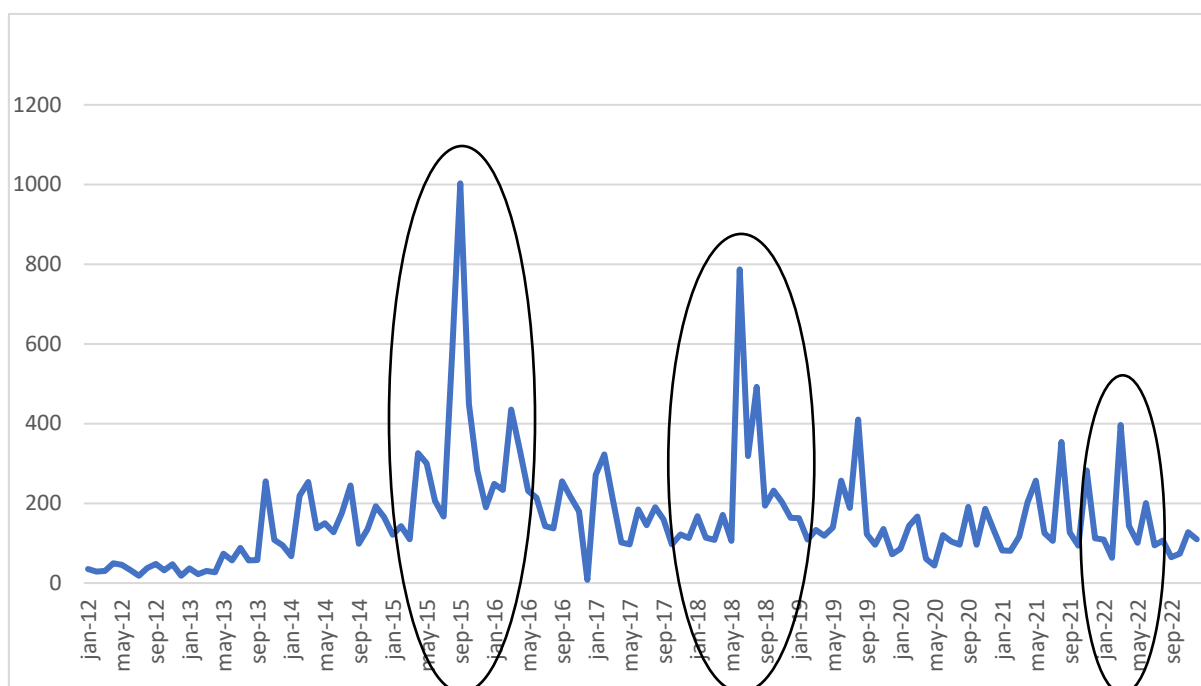
Source: own elaboration based on selected data from Factiva

This was followed by a **qualitative analysis of the four or five most representative articles of each newspaper**, having a total of 12-15 articles per event and around 40 for the three of them, taking into account the four dimensions of the definition of policy narratives, namely the setting, the plot, the characters, and the policy solutions (Jones and McBeth 2010)[7].

In the first case study, the issue of European migration crisis 2015 & EU relocation scheme captured the media attention between August and October 2015 when the presence and salience of news on migration and refugees in the three selected newspapers significantly grew: ranging from 167 news articles in July to 567 in August 2015. After this peak, the number increased to 1003 in September and decreased again to 449 in October. From a more qualitative point of view, this research reviewed 62 (out of 673) articles from El País, El Mundo and La Vanguardia between the beginning of August and the end of October. Then, 4 articles from each newspaper were analysed in-depth.

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[7] See Annex for further details on the sample of news of each case.

FIGURE 8: Number of media articles on migration in Spain (2015)
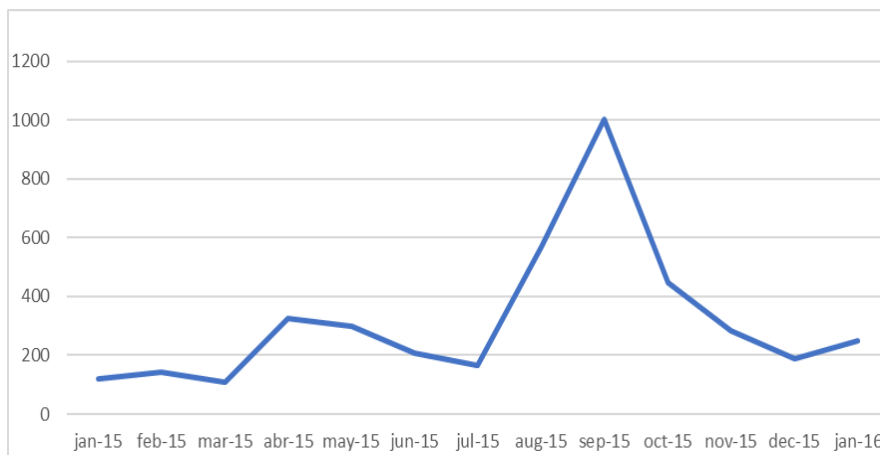
Source: own elaboration based on selected data from Factiva

In the second case study, the issue of Ukraine refugee crisis captured the media attention between the end of February and March 2022 when the presence and salience of related news reached a peak. From a more qualitative point of view, this research reviewed 59 (out of 659) articles from El País, El Mundo and La Vanguardia between the 24th of February 24 and the 31st of March. Then, 4 articles from each newspaper were analysed in-depth.

FIGURE 9: Number of media articles on migration in Spain (February-December 2022)
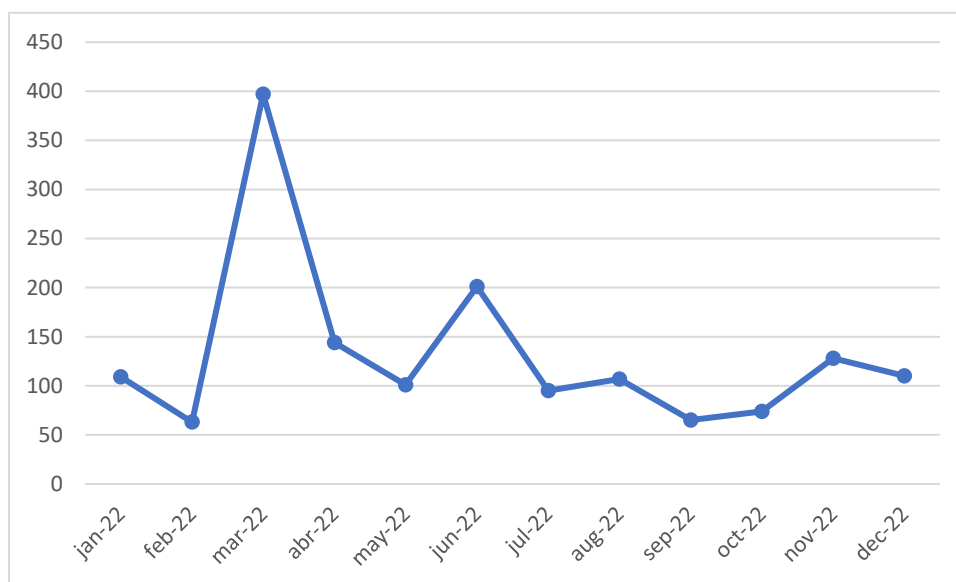
Source: own elaboration based on selected data from Factiva

In the third case study, the salience of news on migration and refugees during the summer of 2018 increased significantly, ranging from 108 news articles in May to 787 articles in June 2018. After this peak, the number decreased to 319 news in July and increased again to 492 news in August. This reflects the media context of this period, affected especially by the

episode of Aquarius and other rescue boats (mainly Open Arms) and the constant arrivals of irregular migrants in the southern coasts of Spain[8]. From a more qualitative point of view, this research reviewed 57 (out of 662) articles from El País, 115 (out of 540) from El Mundo and 94 (out of 160) articles from La Vanguardia between the beginning of June and the end of August[9]. Then, 5 articles from each newspaper related to two key moments were analysed in-depth. First, when Sánchez decided to host Aquarius in Valencia in early June and second, when he refused to do so in mid-August.

FIGURE 10: Number of media articles on migration in Spain (May-September 2018)
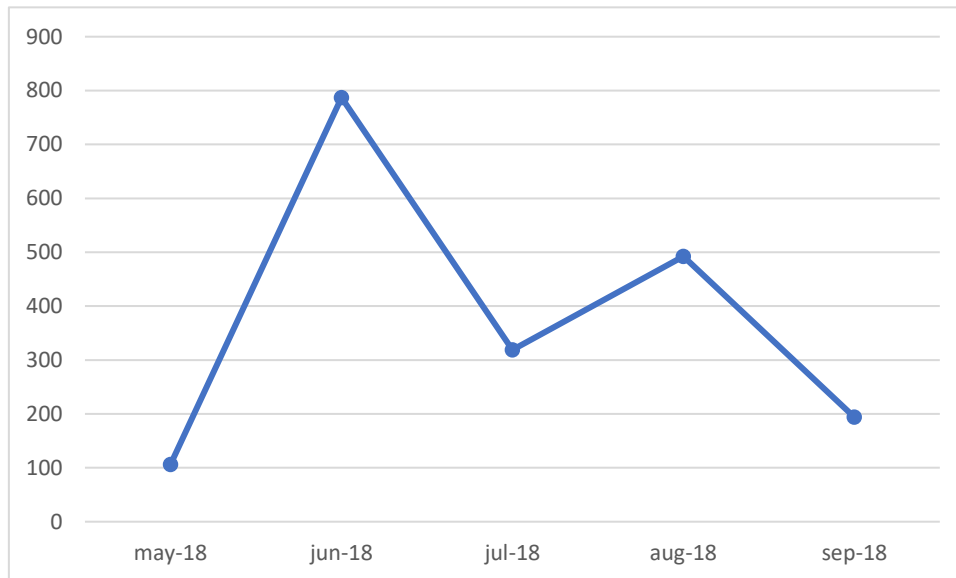
Source: own elaboration based on data from Factiva

The **second phase** consisted of analysing the **narratives in political debates**. The first step consisted of identifying and reviewing all the documents related to each event with a time frame of three to ten months since the event started, which were then analysed following the four dimensions of policy narratives (Jones and McBeth 2010). The documents include interventions of MPs of the government and the opposition in the plenary session of the Parliament in relation to general debates, royal decree-laws, motions, interpellations, as well as appearances of the president of the government or ministers and sessions of control to the action of the government[10].

After analysing the political narratives, the **third phase** consisted of **examining policy narratives** following the same dimensions (Jones and McBeth 2010). To this aim, the most relevant and closest temporally documents published within a year or 18 months of the issue

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[8] A recent study points out how the word 'Aquarius' appeared among the top 10 most used words related to immigration in the Spanish television channel (TVE) during the period 2014-2020 with 192 times after 'immigrants', 'refugees', 'migrants', 'immigration', 'sea rescue', 'dingy', 'refugee', and 'immigrant' (Arévalo et al 2021).

[9] This search was made with the keyword 'Aquarius' in the online and paper versions of the three newspapers through the database of Factiva. The selection of the reviewed articles was according to the relevance of the news by also excluding the repeated versions.

[10] See Annex for further details.

surfacing in the political debate were reviewed. These vary from case to case, including non-binding motions, migration and refugee plans, governmental policy reports, royal decrees, orders, royal decree-laws, organic laws, and agreements[11].

After coding and analysing the material of the media, political and policy narratives, we analysed the correlation of narratives across media and political debate ('communicative sphere') and across political debate and policy-making ('coordinative sphere') following the typology of Boswell and Smellie (2023): embracing, adapting, rejection and ignoring. In the analysis of this correlation, we looked at variation in narrative styles (lay versus technocratic) and variation in the content of narratives across the four components. Moreover, this report has tried to draw some patterns of influence in both spheres in order to capture the **processual character of narratives**, that is, to understand how they are built and how they influence each other when moving from one sphere to the other.

To this aim, two **semi-structured qualitative interviews** with stakeholders were also conducted to complement the document analysis from an insight perspective. In the case of Aquarius, two members of the NGO Médicos Sin Fronteras (MSF) in charge of the press and advocacy in Spain were interviewed to unravel their opinions on how the episode was narrated, and what impact the media narratives had in the political debate and in policy-making.[12]

Finally, some **gender considerations** were taken into account in the cases where there were more elements relating to gender inequalities, especially in the case of the Ukrainian refugees, when it comes to the gendered representations of Ukrainian women in the media as 'helpless victims'.

4. Case study 1: The European migration crisis in 2015 and the EU relocation scheme

4.1 Introduction to the case within the national context

From May to early September 2015 the Spanish government led by the centre-right People's Party explicitly opposed the relocation quotas proposed by the European Commission. This stance was rooted in the restrictive approach that has characterized the party in migration matters. It is worth remembering that a few months before (March 2015), the government had amended the Foreigners' Law giving legal recognition to pushbacks.

The government's argument against quotas invoked the risk of creating a pull effect and the fact that Spain, as EU-border country, was facing harder challenges and doing more effort in migration control and reception than other member states. On such basis, between May and August, the government rejected multiple times the quotas assigned at the EU level.

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[11] See Annex for further details.

[12] This project has tried to conduct further interviews with politicians for the three case studies, but there have been many difficulties of access in a context of national elections and the configuration of the new government.

The stance holds until September 2 when, after a meeting between the prime minister Rajoy and Angela Merkel, the Spanish government drastically changed its position. Despite certain scepticism towards the compulsory nature and the distribution criteria foreseen, the government accepted the EU proposal. On September 4, Rajoy affirmed that "Spain will have a constructive and positive position and all those people who are entitled to seek asylum will be assisted, for which we will collaborate with the European Union" (*El País*, 4 September).

The day after, Spain was assigned a quota of 14,931 refugees (three times the number assigned in May), making it the third destination country in the EU relocation scheme. On 9 September the government agreed to fully accept the new quota.

At the end of September, the government approved a new national strategy for refugee reception that increased the budget for refugee reception from €53 million to €253 million. The strategy was agreed among all parliamentary groups on September 29, basing on a proposal of the Socialist Party (*Proposición no de Ley sobre la crisis humanitarian de refugiados. 162/001298)*.

The drastic change of position of the government can be relate to institutional and political pressures: both internal, coming from the public opinion, local administrations and civil society organisations; and external, coming from other EU members (particularly Germany). These demands gained relevance and salience in the context of the dramatic situations that the Italian and Greek borders were facing and by the death of the Alan Kurdi, which shocked the public opinion.

4.2 Narratives in the media

In this period, media narrative is characterized by **low polarisation** (see Amat and Garcés 2018) and **few differences** among newspapers. Their different ideological positions do not turn into substantial diverging narratives. The discursive space in the media is marked by a dominant narrative, namely a shared and **consistent argument against the government's approach and the in favour of the acceptance of compulsory quotas.**

This narrative builds upon **humanitarian and legal frames**, stressing the moral and legal imperatives of saving lives, respecting human rights and complying with fundamental principles and treaties of the EU. The idea of solidarity and co-responsibility in the EU is set against nationalistic and strategic interests of member states.

Despite certain references given to 'pull factors' and a 'massive influx of refugees' (observed in the right-oriented press), the viability of the quota proposal is also recognized given its limited scope (compared to the overall scope of the refugee crisis) and the EU and members states' resources (GDP and labour market capacity).

Narrative components

Setting. Media narrative frames the EU relocation first and above all as an **EU political and institutional matter.** The issue is approached in the context of members states' diverging interests about EU asylum and migration governance, but also as a wider and deeper issue

challenging EU unity. At the same time, left and centre-oriented newspapers, call into question the **multilevel governance system of refugee reception**, highlighting concerns and demands of regional governments (along with those coming from local and civil society actors), who are willing to receive refugees and that are disheartened by the government's action and lack of transparency. The death of Alan Kurdi, occurred on September 2, broadened and deepened moral implications in the media narrative.

<u>Characters</u>: Victims, Villains and Heroes are defined following the framing of the issue as predominately an EU matter. Accordingly, refugees are seen as the *victims* of member states' electoral interests and xenophobic attitudes. *Villains* are countries opposing helping refugees and refusing the relocation scheme, betraying EU solidarity and fundamental principles. Villains include the governments of the Visegrad countries (with particular salience given to Victor Orbán), that of the UK and – especially until its change of position – the Spanish government, embodied by the Prime Minister (Mariano Rajoy), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (José Manuel García-Margallo) and the Ministry of Interior (Jorge Fernández Díaz). *Heroes* are the governments of countries more openly in favour of helping refugees and approving the EU relocation scheme (i.e., Germany, France and Sweden). Germany and Angela Merkel are depicted as the bastion of EU solidarity and values as well as the example to follow to solve the crisis.

<u>Plot</u>. The dominant argument in media narrative takes the shape of a **story of decline** (Stone 2012): nationalistic interests and the lack of solidarity among member states are having dramatic consequences on refugees' lives and rights, but they are also undermining EU's values and future. This calls for an urgent and substantial response to the refugee crisis, based on the political unity, solidarity and responsibility of the EU, which the Spanish government has to commit to.

<u>Moral of the story / policy solutions</u>. The **moral and legal imperative of protecting refugees' lives and rights, along with the risk of a rupture of the wide EU project, call for an urgent and effective response** to the humanitarian crisis, and the need to agree on a common relocation scheme. Besides, its limited scope (compared to the overall scope of the refugee crisis) vis-à-vis members states' resources (GDP and labor market capacity), make the quota proposal a feasible policy solution. As regards policy solutions, **certain variation** is observed across newspapers with the right-oriented one (*El Mundo*) stressing the difference between refugees and economic migrants, which is stated as an essential condition to accept the quotas; and the left-oriented one (*El País*), focusing on improving the reception system for refugees (also including the involvement and coordination with regional and local actors), but also legal and safe pathways for other migrants.

4.3 Narratives in the political debate

Political narratives variate depending on the party's ideological position and institutional role (in office vs. opposition), despite all recognizing the moral imperative to help refugees. While cutting across the parliamentary arena, such **humanitarian frame** takes different shapes between government and opposition.

The **government's narrative** highlights the i) challenging situation of Spain (as EU-border and top immigration country) (ii), the need to have a European solution (iii) and that both asylum and migration policies in force are working effectively, avoiding a humanitarian crisis in the Spanish borders like the one that Italy is facing (iv). In this narrative, the humanitarian frame **is combined with a securitarian frame** (v), centred on the **distinction between refugees, economic and irregular migrants,** and stressing the commitment to "order and legality" (vi).

The (provisional) **refusal of the quota** is not justified on political or ideological grounds, but **basedon the criteria employed** by the EU, which are deemed to penalize countries at EU-borders and with high unemployment rates, as Spain.

The **opposition parties** – mainly placed from the centre to the left of the political spectrum – hold a **stronger humanitarian frame**, marked by a more explicit moral duty of saving refugee and migrants' lives, along with the legal imperative of protecting their rights. This narrative highlights the responsibility of the Spanish government and of other member states, stressing the failure of their asylum and migration policies. At the notational level, the opposition narratives stress the need of liberal and right-based policies (e.g., in Ceuta and Melilla). At the EU level, they point out the need of a compulsory relocation scheme, as well as a new common asylum (and migration governance) system, centred on migrants' protection, human-rights and EU solidarity.

In the opposition narrative, the closer the party is to the left boundary of the political spectrum, the stronger the humanitarian frame and its moral connotations. In this regard, it is worth highlighting that, after a new national strategy is agreed among parliamentary groups, the centre-left Socialist Party gets closer to the government's stances – for the sake of agreement and political effectiveness – while left-wing parties maintain harsh critique towards the government and its policy response, believed insufficient vis-à-vis the humanitarian demand.

Both government and opposition narratives **combine lay and technocratic elements**. In the government narrative – and particularly among ministers – technocratic elements prevail, including: the use of data (on the wider immigration phenomenon); a long-term perspective applied to the framing of the setting and of policy solutions; the definition of characters in institutional terms; a dry plot referring to the wider migratory scenario. Contrariwise, lay elements prevail in the opposition narratives, including: a vivid and urgent setting; references to the will of the Spanish/European people/citizenry; personalized characters (especially as regards villains and victims); direct and concrete attribution of responsibility (addressing Ministries in force); as well as moral implications. The plot of the narrative is framed in dramatic terms and tend to draw clear causal relations between government's action and negative consequences.

Narrative components

Setting. Political narratives frame the refugee crisis and the EU relocation scheme both as a national and as an EU matter. Most significant variation is observed regarding **the way in which the crisis is understood** (in terms of scope and intensity) and the **assessment of asylum and migration policies in force**. The government narrative stresses the dramatic and challenging character of the crisis that the EU is facing, where Spain's critical position as border-country, is heightened by its role as top immigration country. On the other, it

emphasizes the Spanish society's welcoming attitude, migrants' successful integration, and the efficacy of reception and migration policies (thanks to which the country has avoided a humanitarian crisis at its borders). Opposition narratives share a different understanding of the setting: rather than to the increasing inflows, the crisis is attributed to the failure of EU and national migration policies.

<u>Characters.</u> Differences in settings are reflected in **different ways of conceiving characters**. Apart from refugees and smugglers, who are respectively victims and villains recognized across the parliamentary arena, government and opposition hold contrasting understandings of charters. For the government, refugees and Spain are the *victims* suffering the negative consequences of the crisis; *heroes* include the Spanish government and other member states controlling immigration; *villains* are mostly identified as smugglers and human traffickers, but sometimes include also parties opposing government's actions as well as migrants trying to enter in the country irregularly. For the opposition parties, *victims* are both refugees and migrants (regardless of their status); *villains* are Spain and other EU countries deploying restrictive and immoral migration policies; *heroes* include NGOs, civil society, regional and (even if to a lesser extent in terms of scope) regional and local administrations, helping refugees against and despite government's action.

<u>Plot.</u> Government and opposition diverging narratives build upon contrasting plots of control and decline. The **government maintains a story of control**: Spanish migration governance (based on increased border security, the fight against irregular migration, and cooperation with countries of origin and transit) is working effectively (as testified by the fact the country is not suffering the crisis faced by Italy) avoiding humanitarian crisis on the Atlantic route. National migration policies are believed to be adequate. The **refusal of the quota** is justified due to the **criteria of distribution proposed by the EU** , deemed to penalize border countries with high unemployment rates, as Spain. A new EU asylum and migration policy is necessary, but at the same time it is understood as a medium/long term project. In government narrative, the approval of a new reception strategy is the chance to reaffirm its story of control. **Opposition parties share a story of decline**, according to which it is precisely the inadequate and restrictive character of the asylum and migration policies in force at national and at EU level that lay beyond the humanitarian crisis. On such basis, it is called a radical change of approach in the field of refugee reception and in migration governance more broadly. The agreement of the EU relocation scheme is conceived only as the first step in such direction.

<u>Moral of the story / policy solutions</u>. The **government narrative** places the refugee crisis in the wider context of migration governance and, while doing so, it **restates the efficacy of the policies** in force, which have avoided the spreading of the crisis to Spain and, at the same time, have allowed to control irregular migration. The concrete issue of the relocation scheme is approached in the wider discussion of the reform of a common European asylum system, which is recognized but made conditional on an EU plan to fight irregular migration.

The opposition narratives point to the opposite direction: the refugee crisis calls for new solutions in the field of asylum both at national and EU level (i.e., the acceptance of a compulsory EU relocation scheme, safe and legal pathways, better reception measures) that ensure refugees' rights, in line with the funding principles of the EU and the Spanish society. The scope of policy solutions is broadened to the wide migration governance sector and to

urge a radical change of approach, centred on migrants' protection and consistent with national and international laws.

4.4 Relationship between media narratives and political narratives

Media narrative's shared and solid humanitarian frame seems to provide an unavoidable discursive ground for the unfolding of the political debate. Even the center-right government, initially refusing the quota proposal, claiming for the distinction of refugee versus "other migrants", and mainly centered on reducing border security and fighting irregular migration, root its stances on humanitarian grounds. As pointed out in the former section, the humanitarian frame takes different shapes across the political spectrum, with the government narrative merging it with a securitarian frame.

Beyond its content and substantive meaning, it's also **the salience of media narrative that seems to trigger politics.** The way in which the dramatic episode of Alan Kurdi resonates in Spanish and European media says much in this regard. It is no chance that the drastic change of position of the Spanish government on the relocation scheme takes place 24 hours after the death of child, as captured by an MP during the plenary discussion: "*The Government of the People Party has carried out a reactive policy on this issue <<at the stroke of the news>>. What we wonder in our parliamentary group is what will happen with the asylum demands that will continue to arrive in Spain, what will happen to the rights and the lives of those people seeking protection and asylum in Spain, when there will be an information blackout.*" (Calduch Cervera, Rafael; Union Progress and Democracy, Congress of Deputies, 30.09.2015).

In the media sphere **migration narratives are more homogenous and coherent than in the political sphere**. Newspapers show more similarities than differences in the way in which migration is conceived and described, so that it is possible to speak of a dominant migration narrative. This is not observed in the political sphere, where different ideological and institutional positions turn into competing migration narratives. Moreover, **political narratives are richer in terms of technocratic elements but also, and quite interestingly, of lay features**. Political narratives are not only more imbued with technocratic interpretations (particularly in terms of data and policy reasonings) but also more vivid, dramatic, and personalized than the media one.

In general**,** only partial alignment between media and political narratives is observed, which suggests a **prevailing adaptation dynamic**. Political actors seem to hinge upon and support media narratives, using some of its elements, whilst overlooking others. Alignment with media narrative is observed as regards the setting, where government and opposition's narratives *adapt to specific but different elements of the media narrative*, but also as pertain to the plot and the moral of the story, with the political narrative of the opposition parties mirroring the story of decline – based on legal and moral imperatives and calling for substantial policy changes – that dominates the media scape.

On the other hand, it is worth noticing the different configurations of characters mobilized between the media and the political sphere. This finding can be linked to the fact that in the

media the refugee crisis and EU relocation scheme are addressed mainly as an EU matter while in the political arena the issue is brought to the ground of domestic politics.

Finally, it is also worth noting a certain degree of **alignment between the media and the political spheres along ideological lines**, with the center-right government' mirroring elements of the narrative held by right-oriented *El Mundo* (e.g., difference between migrants and refugees) and the opposition narrative more in line with the left-oriented *El País* (e.g., stressing the responsibility of the Spanish government and the need of a radical change in both asylum and migration policies).

4.5 Narratives in policy-making documents

Policy-making narratives **significantly varies according to the kind of policy document analyzed**. The main shared traits refer to **predominance of technocratic elements** and the (almost) absence of lay elements and the predominance of technocratic elements. In the coordinative sphere, narrative on migration is built upon data, placed in relation to the broader European migration governance system, and framed in a wider and long-term perspective considering the country's normative context. In this narrative, moral reflections leave room to objective and strategic considerations regarding the migration governance's goals and executive actions.

A second important finding regards the **lack of a dense and consistent policy narrative on the refugee crisis**. Except for the agreement approved by the parliament, which somehow positions itself between the political and the policy-making spheres, the policy narrative captured in the rest of documents analyzed lacks most of the constitutive elements identified by Jones and McBeth (2010).

It is worth noting that the specific narrative built around the refugee crisis unfolds **in parallel and distinct from a broader policy narrative on migration governance,** held by the government, stressing the instrumental use of (work-related) migration, border security, and the externalization of migration control. In 2015, these policy-goals turned into concrete actions, such as the approval of the Law 25/2015, favoring high-skilled migration and foreign investors, as well as the increasing of resources dedicated to the fight against irregular migration.

Narrative components

Most of the policy documents analyzed **lack a narrative as this is defined by Jones and McBeth** (2010): apart from the setting (framed in terms of a humanitarian crisis affecting EU and Spain) and the victims (plainly identified as refugees), the rest of the narrative components are absent or too implicit to maintain the existence of an actual policy narrative.

To address this gap, this section centers on the only document where all narrative components are present: the **non-binding motion**[13] proposed by the Socialist party and approved on

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[13] Due to the heterogenous purposes for which non-binding motions are employed this document should be conceived in between the political and policy spheres.

September 29 with the support of all parliamentary group. This motion **sets the basis of the new national asylum strategy**, involving peace-keeping actions in conflict countries, the cooperation with origin and transit countries, the fight against human traffickers, enhanced reception and integration efforts for beneficiaries of international protection (including relocation and resettlement schemes). At the national level, it is stressed the need of cooperation and coordination with all the actors and stakeholders, and the fight against xenophobia to avoid the negative perception of refugees. Finally, it gathers the **explicit commitment of all parliamentary forces to exclude asylum matter from parties' confrontation**.

In this document, such policy goals are justified based on the scope and the dramatic character of the humanitarian crisis vis-à-vis the lack of reception capacity of EU member states. In this setting, Spain is framed as a welcoming and integrating country, despite its critical position as EU-southern border. Characters are depicted along the line traced by the government's political narratives: refugees are the *victims* suffering the negative consequences of the crisis; *villains* are mostly identified as smugglers and human traffickers, and *heroes* are the European Union and the Spanish government. The plot reflects a **story of challenge, but control**. The refugee crisis represents a crucial humanitarian challenge for the Spanish and the EU migration and asylum governance. However, the efforts and decisions undertaken at the European level, on the one hand, and the effective policy carried out at national level (been able to contain the migratory pressure in the Atlantic route) show that the situation is under control. The moral of the story and policy solutions are grounded on an "ethical duty" of doing more and better both at national and at European level. Yet, the **efforts that are being taken and the direction undertaken are the right one**, towards more responsibility and solidarity.

4.6 Relationship between media & political narratives, and policy-making narratives

If we restrict the lens of analysis to the agreement among parliamentary groups, a clear **dynamic of *adaptation*** is observed between the communication and the coordination spheres, with the policy narrative that **blends elements** coming from both the political narrative of the government and that of the main opposition party (which, in turn, mirrors elements of the media scape). If this, on the one hand, might appear as the inevitable consequence of the political agreements among the two major forces in the Parliamentary arena, on the other hand, it shows an interesting mechanism of adaptation.

This said, if we consider the whole corpus of policy documents, ***ignoring dynamics*** between the communicative and the coordinative spheres appear more broadly. Policy narrative seems indeed to proceed in despite of the media and political narratives. **In the shift between the communicative and the coordinative spheres, the migration narrative on the refugee crisis crystallizes on technocratic elements and becomes predominantly sectorial, loosing ties with and features of the** broader policy discourse on migration governance (e.g., the difference between refugee and migrants, concerns of border control and security).

FIGURE 13: Summary of narrative components in the media, political and policy fields

	Communicative Sphere		Media <> Political (within communicative sphere)	Coordinative Sphere	Media&Political <> Policy (between communicative and coordinative spheres)
	Media	**Political**		**Policy**	
Notes	Dominant narrative in favour of quotas and against GOV's initial stance; Humanitariam and legal frame	Narratives variate depending on ideology and office/opposition; humanitarian frame	Media sets an unavoidable discurisive ground, centred on humanitarianism, for the unfodling of the political debate Media salience triggers politics Migration narratives are more homogenous and coherent than in the political sphere Political narratives are richer of both technocratic lay elements Adapatation dynamic Alignment along ideological lines	No migration narrative on the matter; analysis carried out on only one policy-doc	Between adaptation and ignoring. In the shift between the communicative and the coordinative spheres, migration narrative on the refugee crisis to crystallizes on the technocratic elements observed in the communicative sphere, becoming essentially sectorial.
Style (form)	Both lay and tech elements	Both lay (crisis ans victims) and tech elements (policy criteria)		No lay elements	
Lay		predominantely in GOV narrative		Merely tech style	
Technocratic		predominantely in OPP narrative (secur.&human. Frames)			
Narrative components (content)					
Setting	Eu matter	Crisis: flows driven for GOV; governance driven for OPP		Spain as welcoming society; pressure on EU-southern border	
Characters					
Villains	EU countries opposing quotas	Smugllers; Opposition (GOV) vs Spanish governement (OPP)		Smugglers	
Victims	refugees	Refugees; Spain (GOV) vs migrants (OPP)		Refugees	
Heroes	Germany (merkel) and countries favourable to quotas	Spanish government (GOV); NGOs and local actors (OPP)		EU and Spanish government	
Plot	Story of decline (untill the agreement is reached)	Story of control (GOV) vs. Story of decline (OPP)		Story of challenge, but control	
Moral	Need of change: urgen and effective response	No change, but time needed (GOV) vs. urgent change needed (OPP)		Efforts and mesures undertaken are in the right direction	

25

4.7 Conclusions

Distinct discursive spheres (Schmidt's 2008, Garcés-Mascareñas and Pastore 2022, 9) appear characterized by **distinct types of narratives**, with the communicative sphere marked by more lay narratives (e.g., urgent settings; references to the will of the people; personalized characters and moral implications) and the coordinative sphere marked by almost exclusively technocratic elements (e.g., data, wider temporal and geopolitical perspective, normative context).

Quite interestingly, the **political arena is "richer" and more heterogeneous than the media one**. Probably due to presence of contrasting narratives and the lack of shared and dominant narrative in the political arena, parties' narratives are characterized both by more lay and technocratic elements. Both of them appear as useful discursive devices in the dispute on contrasting ideological and political stances of different parties.

The homogeneity and consistency of the media narrative seem to set a **discursive boundary** for the unfolding of the political narrative. The humanitarian frame and its related imperative of saving lives and safeguard refugees' rights seem to take hold of the political discourse in the parliamentary arena. So that even the centre-right People Party (in office), mainly concerned with border security and migration control, roots its stances on humanitarian grounds.

This must be read also in view of the **parallel pressures** that the government is receiving internally, from the public opinion and local administrations and civil society organizations, and externally, at the EU level, from other member states (particularly Germany).

Media effects on politics are observed also in relation to salience. The way in which the dramatic episode of Alan Kurdi resonates in Spanish and European media appears as one of the key factors - along with the pressures aforementioned – underlying the change of position of the Spanish government on the relocation scheme.

Finally, **in the shift between the communicative and the coordinative spheres, migration narrative on the refugee crisis significantly changes, becoming technocratic and sectoral**, losing the clear tie with the wider discourse on migration governance that characterize media and political narratives (and that, even if lessened and into a more technocratic shape, it is also observed in the broader policy discourse on migration.

The humanitarian zeitgeist, especially marked for asylum and refugee's matters, seems to mold the boundaries of a discursive sphere, traditionally flexible and unrestricted from stable and dense migration narratives, tracing the paths of transferability and pervasiveness between the communicative and the coordinative spheres. In this process, the lay and more restrictive government discourse observed in the media and in the political arenas turns into a technocratic and sectorial narrative (decoupled from migration governance), in which policy choices on asylum and refuge are legitimized mainly on pragmatic and operational grounds.

5. Case study 2: The Ukrainian Refugee Crisis in 2022

5.1 Introduction to the case within the national context

In Spain, the policy and institutional response to the Ukrainian refugees' crisis by the center-left government of Pedro Sanchez, has been fast, coordinated and effective, namely exceptional compared to its response to "other" refugees before.

In March 2022, the Temporary Protection Directive was applied beyond the scope ensured in the majority of EU members states (Figure 8). In fact, along with Ukrainian citizens, stateless and non-EU citizens with a long-term residence permit in Ukraine commonly covered in the EU, Spain has extended temporary protection also to other groups, including: i) Ukrainian citizens residing in the country before February 24, 2022; ii) non-EU citizens with a temporary residence permit in Ukraine; and iii) Ukrainian citizens in an irregular situation in Spain.

FIGURE 11: Subjective scope of application of the TPD in the EU (March 2022)
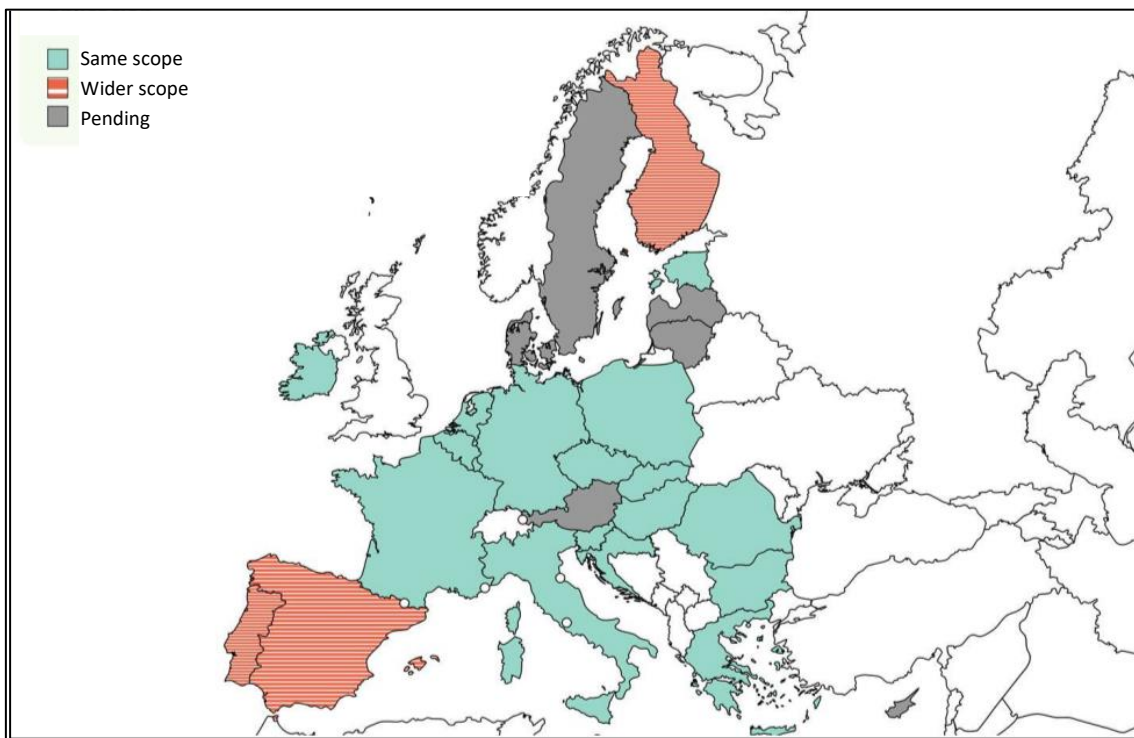
Source: Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migrations

This favorable normative framework has come along with significant institutional and policy innovations issued with the initial National Plan for the Ukraine crisis (Royal Decree-Law 6/2022 of March 29) and subsequent "policy-packages" (Royal Decree-Law 10/2022 of May 13, Royal Decree-Law 11/2022 of June 25, and Royal Decree-Law 20/2022 of December 27).

The National Plan for the Ukraine crisis creates four new macro-reception centers (*CREADE*) located in the key areas of arrival and high density of the Ukrainian population. These centers are managed in collaboration with regions, municipalities and NGOs, and provide early reception services before the passage to the national and local reception systems.

Apart from these new structures, the national reception system has been strengthened in terms of funding, resources, and staff in collaboration with the regional governments. Out of the 21.000 new places created, 15.000 were made available by the regions (Figure 9).

Figure 12: Strengthening of the national reception system at regional level (March 2022)
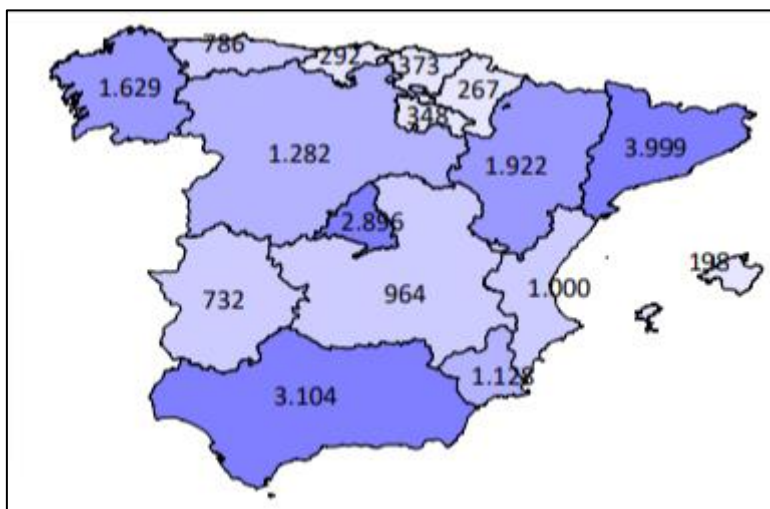
Source: Spanish Ministry of Inclusion, Social Security and Migrations

Administrative procedures have been simplified, ensuring response in less than 24 hours and - in the case that temporary protection is granted – the issuing of residence and work permits. All reception services and benefits have been extended, including housing, educational courses, health care, job placement, and legal assistance. A specific programme of family-shelter, involving the central government, municipalities, NGOs and Spanish families willing to shelter Ukrainian refugees, has been launched.

Beyond these policy and institutional changes, the crisis of Ukrainians has represented a turning point in the governance of international protection in Spain, with a significant improve in the collaboration between the state and non-state actors that until that moment seemed impossible to achieve.

5.2 Narratives in the media

The media coverage of the Ukrainian refugees crisis takes the shape of a **positive and unusual migration narrative**. The Spanish newspapers share a positive story centred on the solidarity efforts of all the Spanish stakeholders, including state-actors (at national, regional, and local levels), civil society, NGOs and enterprises from the private sector. This narrative highlights the exceptional challenge "we" are facing, emphasizing the equally exceptional answer given in terms of solidarity. The narrative is kept at the societal and institutional level, but mainly as a practical matter of how to receive "them" properly and effectively.

The Ukraine refugee crisis is treated as a **war-related matter, calling into question the European identity, solidarity, and future**. Across the media-scape **technocratic elements**,

such as data and strategic considerations, **merge with lay elements** referring to the Russian threat and the refugees' dramatic conditions*"[Ukrainians] suffer an invasion that threatens to destroy their country forever for having committed the worst sin that can be committed in the eyes of the Russian autocrat: the desire to live like Europeans. Their desire to live in a liberal democracy is an unforgivable betrayal for someone like Putin who is imbued with a messianic historicism that recognises neither borders nor laws nor human rights. And he has decided to punish them for it by razing their cities, their liberties, and their lives to the ground."* (*El Mundo*, March 4, 2022). Certain variation is observed in this sense, with lay elements prominent in the right-oriented press and technocratic elements more evident among centre- and left-oriented newspapers.

No room is left for negative acceptations observed in other migration-related narratives. As pointed out by Romano (2019), after the 2015 refugee crisis, Spanish media highlighted the threat that the crisis would have represented for the EU and its member states due to its magnitude and disorder. This time, the magnitude of the crisis is addressed and **rendered through daily updated data, but without negative emotional connotations**: no issues related to absorption capacity/demographic pressures, security threat, threat to cultural identity, economic/welfare threat, impact of control measures/deterrence effects are observed in the weeks following the outbreak of the war.

In line with a broader trend observed in the Spanish press (Fajardo-Fernández and Miras, 2017), refugees tend to be presented as passive subjects. However, no reference to migrant categories and related hierarchy of deservingness are mobilized (e.g., refugees vs. irregular and economic migrants).

The dominant media narrative gets back to the **humanitarian and legal frames** observed in Case 1, namely to duty to receive and help refugees; this time stressing the exceptional solidarity shown at societal level and the unprecedented policy and institutional responses provided by the Spanish and EU policymakers. In general, **low level of political polarization is observed** across media outlets. The main exceptions regard, on the one hand, the room given to the stances of the centre-right People Party at the opposition by *El Mundo* and, on the other, the criticism of double standards (vis-à-vis the refugees crisis of 2015), raised by *El País* and *La Vanguardia*.

Narrative components

Setting. That of Ukrainian refugees is acknowledged as the main migratory crisis in European history. The crisis is situated and **accounted for in the wider context of the Russian invasion and of the rising war**, along with related geopolitical considerations, and reflections on EU's defence, identity, and future. The exceptional challenge is juxtaposed to the solidarity shown by the EU and Spain, both at institutional and societal levels. Left- and centre-oriented newspapers bring in a more long-term domestic perspective reflecting on the critical gaps affecting the national reception system.

Characters. **Characters are clearly defined and substantially shared across media**: Ukrainian refugees are the *victims* of Putin and Russia's actions (*villains*), whereas *heroes* are made of Spain and other EU member states. Among the victims, **particular attention is given to minors and women**, highlighting the risks of human trafficking, exploitation and gender-

based violence linked to the new migratory dynamics. In this sense, it is worth stressing the gendered-dimension that characterizes the way in which characters are constructed and mobilized in media. Ukrainian women tend to be represented as undefended victims. However, this takes place without an equally explicit and clear male "heroic-counterpart", which has otherwise been observed in other countries (see, for instance, Ellner 2022). Most variation is observed among *heroes*, with the left-oriented (and pro-government) *El País* emphasizing government's efforts and achievements, and right- and centre-oriented media giving more weight to the actions of local administrations and NGOs.

Plot. Despite a common focus on the efforts and the solidarity provided by Spanish society and institutions, plots variate across newspapers. On the one hand, **the pro-government narrative of *El País* holds a stable story of control**, unity, and solidarity (at both EU and national level). On the other, **right- and centre-oriented newspapers present more diversified plots of both control and decline,** stressing that solidarity needs to be managed in order to be effective. *La Vanguardia* follows a **"change-is-only-an-illusion" story** that highlights the fundamental problems of national reception system, emphasizing the need of structural changes that go beyond the recent reform undertaken by the government.

Moral of the story/policy solutions.

Media narratives hinges upon a shared **moral imperative of protecting "our" refugees along with the need to defend Europe call for an exceptional response**. This kind of response is thought to be emerging, both politically from European and Spanish institutions, and in terms of solidarity from society. Variation is observed depending on political/ideological positions, with right- and centre-oriented newspapers, highlighting the need to address the structural limitations of the national reception system. It is interesting to note how the three newspapers address the differences in terms of policy responses between this crisis and that of 2015: with *El Mundo* justifying them basing on utilitarian and security grounds, and centrist- and left-oriented newspapers criticizing the **double morality that lies beyond them.**

5.3 Narratives in the political debate

In the political arena as well, the Ukraine refugees' crisis is treated as a **war-related matter.** However, here **it does not take the shape of a sound and consistent migration narrative**. No narrative on migration is observed, in fact, in the corpus of texts analysed. In the few mentions made by MPs on the matter - especially by the right-wing VOX - the **migration issue is kept apart from the issue of Ukrainian refugees and these are treated as two distinct matters.**

The absence of a proper narrative comes along with the inevitable **lack of both lay and technocratic elements**. The sole lay elements observed are those captured in the VOX's broad and vague populist narrative. In these few occasions, the party mobilize the frames of national security (linking terrorism to irregular migration) and cultural threat (embodied by Islam and multiculturalism), but without making any reference, not even implicit, to the Ukrainian refugees.

The lack of a specific narrative on Ukraine refugees is strictly **linked to the setting of the political debate**, which unfolds in relation to the approval of the National Plan for the Ukraine crisis and its subsequent policy-packages, all of which cover several sector-specific and broad-ranging measures. The parliamentary discourse predominantly revolves around the energy crisis and its implications for the Spanish economy, welfare system, and society. Given this particular focus, there is little scope for deliberations on policies concerning the reception of Ukrainian refugees.[14]

Beneath the narrative substance lies an underlying **ideational substratum in which the reception of Ukrainians is recognized as a moral and legal humanitarian obligation within the broader context of the ongoing conflict in Europe**. The lack of a consistent migration narrative, however, makes it hard to speak of a proper humanitarian frame. One instance in which this is made explicit occurs during the Minister of Defence's report to the Parliament regarding the actions of the Spanish military forces. One instance in which this is made explicit occurs during the Minister of Defence's report to the Parliament regarding the actions of the Spanish military forces. "[…] *our position is clear: solidarity with the people of Ukraine, both with those who have been forced to leave and with those who remain in their country suffering the Russian attack or fighting heroically for more than ten months. Here in Spain I would like to thank the Spanish citizens for their solidarity […]*" (Robles Fernández, Margarita – Ministry of Defence, Socialist Party, Congress of deputies - Commissions: Defence, 21.12.2022).

Narrative components[15]

Setting. The Ukrainian refugee crisis is acknowledged as a significant and harrowing humanitarian emergency. The crisis is situated and **accounted for in the wider context of the rising war**, along with broader considerations pertaining to the economic and social consequence of the war for Spain.

Characters. All parliamentary forces recognize Putin and Russia as the main *villains*. On the other hand, Ukraine and the Ukrainians along with Spain and its citizens are the main *victims*: the former suffering the direct and more dramatic consequences of the Russian invasion, the latter affected by the social and economic consequences of the war. Apart from these shared elements, two **contrasting sets of characters are mobilized in government and opposition narratives**, according to which *villains* and *heroes* are framed in opposite ways. Within the government's narrative, heroes include the government itself and the progressive forces at its helm, who are perceived as effectively managing the crisis. Opposition parties, in contrast, are depicted as villains for obstructing the government's actions. . These roles switch completely in the opposition narrative, where the government is placed among the *villains* and made responsible of the crisis affecting Spain, while opposition parties are conceived as (potential) *heroes* for offering more effective policy alternatives.

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[14] It is noteworthy to mention that significant measures directed at Ukrainian refugees, including the implementation of the Temporary Protection Directive, have been enacted through ministerial orders, which do not undergo parliamentary debates.

[15] Narrative components refer to the broad narratives observed in the political arena and not, specifically, to the narrative on Ukrainian refugees.

<u>Plot.</u> The clash between government and opposition narratives is reflected in the framing of the plot. On the one hand, **the government's narrative presents a stable story of control**, focusing on the crucial and fundamental measures implemented. On the other hand, **the opposition's narrative holds a story of decline,** emphasizing the shortcomings within the government's measures, situated within a wider critique of the government's action and ideological positions.

<u>Moral of the story/policy solutions.</u> **No specific moral of the story is discernable in relation to the Ukrainian refugee crisis**. The policy solutions debated and discussed in the parliamentary arena pertain to other policy domains, specifically those concerning energy, financial measures and social policies.

5.4 Relationship between media narratives and political narratives

If, following Schmidt (2008) and Jacobs (2015), we conceptualize narrative and ideas as two different domains, in relation to the issue of Ukrainian refugees, it becomes apparent that Spanish **media and political arenas differ in the domain of narratives, but coincide in the domain of ideas.**

In the domain of ideas media and politics exhibit striking similarities. Both **hinge upon an ideational substratum anchored in humanitarianism, framed by the context of the war paradigm**. Within the media arena, the humanitarianism is actively employed in relation to the Ukrainian refugees, taking the form of a plain narrative centred on the moral imperative to help them, as they are portrayed as victims of the Russian aggressor, and emphasizes the Spanish solidarity response.

In the political arena, humanitarianism does not take the shape of a migration narrative; nonetheless it serves as a guiding force shaping the broader political debate. In the wide political narrative, Putin and Russia are framed as the enemies in the Europe's ongoing conflict, while Ukrainian refugees are depicted as victims who warrant both solidarity and a humanitarian response. Although this is not explicitly articulated through a sound and coherent migration narrative, it is evident in terms of underlying ideas.

While, on one hand, this can be partly explained by the specific policy-setting within which political debate unfolds, on the other, it sheds light on an intriguing dynamic of "**downgrade adaptation"** between the political and the media arenas. The Spanish political arena appears to be largely impervious to the media discourse on Ukrainian refugees. This stance appears to be justified based on considerations related to both policy agenda and the public opinion: namely, sidelining an issue where, fundamentally, there seems to be substantial agreement among parliamentary groups (to focus on more salient and contentious matters), while legitimizing 'high politics' in the eyes of the public. In such dynamic, the security imperative takes precedence, reaffirming the role and power of the state, while the humanitarian is almost taken for granted.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that both in media and in the political arena, **plots seem to be constructed along ideological lines**, with government parties and pro-government

newspapers (*El País*) holding a story of control and opposition parties and pro-opposition newspaper (*El Mundo*) maintaining a story of decline.

5.5 Narratives in policy-making documents

The main finding gathered in the policy-making domain is **the lack of a dense and consistent narrative on the crisis of the Ukrainian refugees**. As observed in case 1, the narrative captured across main policy documents misses most of the constitutive elements identified by Jones and McBeth (2010).

Despite their relevance in terms of resources and change in the national asylum system, **measures targeting Ukrainian refugees find almost no discursive articulation in the policy-making arena**. These measures are loosely accounted for on the basis of the broad rationale inspiring the policy-packages in which they are included. The reception of Ukrainian refugees is almost taken for granted **as a humanitarian duty – among others – related to the rising war in Europe.**

This rationale is **complemented by legal and practical considerations** that, however can be captured only in policy-documents related to targeted measures such as those granting subsidies to regional governments and local entities for refugees' reception (Royal Decree 590/2022, Royal Decree 672/2022). Here, the legal duty of helping Ukrainian refugees set by the Asylum Law (Law 12/2009), blends with practical considerations concerning the insufficient capacity of the national reception system vis-à-vis the urgent and unexpected demand of Ukrainian refugees.

While referring only to a limited portion of the *corpus* analyzed, **these elements take the shape of a dry technocratic narrative**, based on data, on an objective evaluation of the normative framework in force, and on a clear assessment of the national reception capacity.

Narrative components

Most of the policy documents analyzed **lack a migration narrative** (as defined by Jones and McBeth, 2010). While these documents uniformly acknowledge Ukrainian refugees as <u>victims</u>, the remaining components are often either too implicit or too tenuously connected to the refugee issue, thereby undermining the development of a robust migration narrative.

To address this "gap", the focus of the analysis centers on policy documents in which all components of migration narrative are present. These documents include the two Royal Decrees aforementioned, which allocate subsidies to regional governments and local entities, as well as the Organic Law 13/2022, of December 20. This measure was specifically issued by the government to target crimes of human trafficking involving individuals displaced by an armed conflict or humanitarian disaster.

These policies are justified according to a narrative that underscores the exceptional scale and urgency of the humanitarian crisis, juxtaposed with the limited capacity of the national asylum systems. This <u>setting</u> is situated within the backdrop of the conflict in Ukraine, where refugees are the primary *victims* of what is characterized as Russian authoritarian and unjustified actions

(*villains*). The group of *heroes* encompass the key stakeholders engaged in refugee reception, including central and regional governments, NGOs, and local entities. Notably, the focus on places **special emphasis on minors and women**, identified as especially vulnerable profiles, significantly impacted by the consequences of war.

The plot delineates a **story of challenge but control:** the Ukrainian refugees crisis poses a crucial humanitarian challenge for the Spanish asylum system; however, the measures being implemented are deemed commensurate with this challenge. This plot pattern parallels what was observed in Case 1. Considering the differing political orientations of the governments in the two cases, **this seems to signify a distinctive aspect of the policy-making narrative**. The mantle of governmental power seemingly transcends ideological disparities when it comes to migration narratives. Whether it is a center-right or center-left party holding office, both tend to employ an analogous narrative plot to rationalize their respective policy approaches. In essence, migration narratives are adeptly molded to conform to and, in parallel, validate their policy stances.

Policy solutions proposed are rooted in Spain's **moral to Ukraine and its population,** forged within the context of shared faction and a common adversary in the ongoing conflict. "*The Spanish Government has expressed its unwavering commitment to the Ukrainian people and has pledged to look after their welfare and attend to their needs, both those in Spain and those who may arrive fleeing the war.*" (Royal Decree 590/2022, of July 19, which regulates the direct granting of subsidies to certain entities for the financing of the International Protection Reception System).

This points **to the wider "moral of story" that underlies the 2022 anti-crisis policy packages**, all of which derive their legitimacy from the friend/enemy distinction deeply embedded in the culture of war: *"The European response to the unjustified aggression against Ukraine is being unanimous and unequivocal, with a sound package of sanctions that are being directed from within the European institutions, and with an ambitious plan to reduce imports of Russian oil and gas that will help reduce dependence on the invading country, making it more difficult to finance this unjustified war."* (Royal Decree-Law 10/2022, of May 13, which temporarily establishes a production cost adjustment mechanism to reduce the price of electricity in the wholesale market).

5.6 Relationship between media & political narratives and policy-making narratives

The most noteworthy outcome concerns the transition between the media arena and the political one. While a well-defined and prevailing migration narrative exists within the former, the latter lacks a coherent discursive articulation of the "case" of Ukrainian refugees. This absence persists as the transition extends to the policy-making arena. Despite the significance of the government's efforts to provide reception and assistance to Ukrainian refugees, these measures are introduced as part of broader policy packages without a distinct rationale, and they are **not accompanied by a proper migration narrative**.

The discontinuity observed between the media and the political arenas, in contrast to the continuity between the political and the policy-making arenas makes hard identifying precise relationships between the communicative and coordinative spheres. This situation also raises questions about **the conceptual typology** defined by Schmidt (2008). While expected differences of style are confirmed (i.e., **mainly lay the communicative sphere and predominantly technocratic the coordinative sphere**), the discursive logics that characterize each sphere do not seem able to fully account for the case of Ukrainian refugees.

In this regard, it seems necessary to go beyond the domain of narratives and delve into the realm of ideas. **From an ideational perspective, we observed a substantial continuity (embracing/adapting dynamics) between the communicative and coordinative spheres.** Both spheres draw from the ideational elements of the Spanish humanitarian zeitgeist, moulded and framed within the context of the war paradigm where Putin and Russia are depicted as the enemies in the Europe's ongoing conflict, and Ukrainian refugees remain cast as victims deserving a humanitarian response.

In the communicative arena, this set of ideas evolves into a migration narrative exclusively within the media arena. Within the coordinative arena, these ideas continue to inform measures targeting Ukrainian refugees, but they do not crystallize into a distinct migration narrative.

FIGURE 13: Summary of narrative components in the media, political and policy fields

| | Communicative Sphere | | Media <> Political (within communicative sphere) | Coordinative Sphere | Media&Political <> Policy (between communicative and coordinative spheres) |
	Media	Political		Policy	
Notes	Positive and unusual migratio narrative (no negative features); War-related matter linked to EU's solidarity, identity and future; Humanitarian and legal frame	No migration narrarative on the matter War-related matte Humanitarian frame	"downgrade adaptation" Difference in terms of narrative, but shared underlying ideational ground (rooted in humintarianism and framed in the context of the war) Alignment along ideological lines	No migration narrative on the matter; Humanitarian zeitgeist + oeprational considerations	Mainly lay the communicative sphere and predominantly technocratic the coordinative sphere Difference in terms of narrative, but shared underlying ideational ground (rooted in humintarianism and framed in the context of the war)
Style (form)	Both lay and Tech	neither lay nor tech for narrative on the matter cultural and securitarian threat by VOX in relation to the whole migration governance, but unrelated to the matter		Neither lay nor tech for narrative on the matter Absent on the matter Minor mentions	
Lay					
Technocratic					
Narrative components (content)					
Setting	EU war; crisis, solidarity; narional reception system's gaps	EU war; crisis			
Characters					
Villains	Putin and Russia	Putin and Russia; Opposition (GOV) vs Spanish government (OPP)		Putin and Russia	
Victims	Ukrainians (vulnerable profiles <- gender dimension)	Ukrainians (vulnerable profiles <- gender dimension) + Spain		Ukrainians (vulnerable profiles <- gender dimension) + Spain	
Heroes	EU and Spain	Spanish government (GOV) vs Opposition (OPP)		Spanish state and non-state actors + EU	
Plot	Story of control (pro-gov.) vs. Story of decline (other)	Story of control (GOV.) vs. Story of decline (OPP)		Story of control	
Moral	moral imperative to help them; double morality vis-a-vis 2015 crisis	no moral of the story		War-related moral commitment	

5.7 Conclusions

The case of Ukrainian refugees in Spain represents a unique and distinctive "migration-case" in several dimensions. Firstly, in terms of narratives, it stands out for the notably positive media portrayal it has received. The media's focus centers on European unity and Spain's solidarity response, without any significant attention given to the typical negative aspects often associated with migration narratives, such as concerns about security, cultural identity, or economic and welfare implications.

Secondly, in terms of politics, despite the critical importance of the issue, the reception of Ukrainian refugees has gone relatively unnoticed within the Spanish political arena. This is remarkable in the sense that it has transcended political divisions and ideological stances on migration matters, largely escaping the usual political discourse.

Thirdly, in terms of policy, Spain's response to the Ukrainian refugee's crisis has been marked by its speed, coordination and effectiveness. It involved the deployment of an unprecedented array of resources, services and institutional arrangements. This contrasts sharply with previous migratory crises, when responses were often absent or delayed, characterized by disorganization, and failed to meet the humanitarian challenges.

To account for the puzzling case of Ukrainian refugees it seems useful to look at the realm of ideas. The imaginary mobilized by both the media and (especially) political actors deviate from the conventional "us vs. other" rationale that usually articulates the discourse on migration-related matters. In the case of Ukrainians refugees, this rationale is substituted by the "friend vs. enemy" distinction, underpinned by an imaginary rooted in the culture of war. From this perspective, Ukrainians refugees are not primarily seen as migrants, but rather as friends, due to their geographical, historical and cultural proximity, and because on, the map of the war, they are seen as allies sharing the same faction and fighting against the same enemy.

In summary, the case of Ukrainian refugees in Spain signifies a distinct departure from traditional migration discourse and response. It underscores how a migration issue can undergo a noteworthy transformation when interwoven with security and foreign/defense policy considerations in the policy narrative. The ability to depict these refugees not solely as migrants but as friends reflects the influence of ideas and conceptual frameworks in shaping policy responses. Furthermore, it underscores the significant, but changing role of humanitarianism, which assumes a broader, overarching character encompassing the culture of war, rather than being narrowly confined to the issue of migration.

6. Case study 3: Rescue boats in the Mediterranean: the case of Aquarius

6.1 Introduction to the case within the national context

One of the **first measures** announced by **Pedro Sánchez** (Socialist Party, PSOE) the 10 of June as soon as he was elected president of the government was to offer the port of Valencia to the **rescue boat Aquarius**. This was managed by the NGOs Médicos Sin Fronteras (MSF)

and SOS Méditerranée and was waiting to disembark in a safe port with 629 migrants on board, including 123 unaccompanied minors and seven pregnant women. Sánchez's decision was taken after Italy and Malta refused to receive the boat in their coasts. In the case of Italy, the stance of Matteo Salvini, who had been just elected vice-president, was marked by an electoral context where he aimed to consolidate his leadership as the main right-wing force in Italy. In the case of Malta, Joseph Muscat claimed that his country was not responsible since the boat was not within their territorial scope, as he had done in the past.

Once Pedro Sánchez made his announcement, several ministries, public administrations, and NGOs started to coordinate the rescue operation which would take three days to reach the port of Valencia. Migrants were distributed between three boats (including Orione and Dattilo provided by Italy), and they all arrived on the 17 June in a **context of high expectations** with more than 2,300 people waiting for them, including over 700 journalists from all around the world, turning this rescue operation into the most **widely covered** one by the media to date. This positioned Sánchez at the forefront of Europe as the main guarantor of international law in relation to humanitarian crises and solidarity with migrants. Was this move the start of a change of paradigm in the management of migration or just a symbolic measure? The events that followed the operation of Aquarius rapidly showed that this gesture had been, as a member of Médicos Sin Fronteras put it, a 'shooting star'.

Some weeks after the arrival of Aquarius in Valencia, there were a couple of disembarkments (in this case of Open Arms) which took place in the same context of denial by Italy and Malta. First, at the beginning of July in the port of Barcelona, with 60 migrants on board, and then, at the beginning of August in the port of Algeciras with 87 migrants. While the offer of Sánchez was praised as a temporary solution, the treatment to the survivors was not exceptional anymore. The survivors of Open Arms (unlike those of Aquarius) were not offered any temporary residence permit and followed the same protocol as any other irregular migrant arriving by sea. Such **different treatment** by the government was **justified** for the **exceptional and urgent character that Aquarius** gained for being a humanitarian emergency.

In **mid-August**, this exceptionalism was confirmed in the next decision of the government, when this **denied a safe port to Aquarius** with 141 people on board. Although the situation was very similar than in June in terms of distance and with Italian ports being closed, Sánchez justified the decision affirming that this **was not a humanitarian emergency** (even if there were 67 unaccompanied minors) and he expressed the need of handling the situation through a European solution. After several deliberations, an agreement between six countries (France, Portugal, Malta, Germany, Luxembourg, and Spain) was met to disembark Aquarius in Malta in exchange of adding 64 migrants more from another SAR operation and distributing migrants among these countries. Four months later, in early December 2018, SOS Mediterranée and MSF announced the end of Aquarius' missions after being two months blocked in Marseille and being prosecuted by Italy allegedly for throwing dangerous waste in the sea. About 30,000 people had been rescued during the whole activity of Aquarius (Solves and Arco 2022).

The elements that influenced in the **changing position of the Socialist Party** have to do with the overall context in which these rescue operations took place. During the summer of 2018, the **irregular entries in the southern border increased** significantly, which was used by the opposition to put much **pressure on the government**, and as mentioned in the section 2.3, the public opinion was also more and more concerned with the phenomenon of migration. The

government of Andalucía and City Councils claimed more resources to handle the reception of irregular migrants and speed up the asylum applications which reached a historical peak in a situation of collapse of the reception system. On the other hand, Morocco asked for more financial support to control the borders and on 26 July over six hundred migrants jumped the fence of Ceuta using very violent means against the police which led to massive hot returns in a quite polarised media environment.

Finally, it is important to contextualise this episode within the general frame of migration policies in Spain. Broadly speaking, as mentioned in the section 2.2, there has been a **policy continuity in migration governance** between the Socialist Party and the People's Party with an increasing turn towards securitarian measures during the last two decades. Besides Aquarius and other humanitarian measures like the return to universal access to the public health system and removing *concertinas* over the fences of Ceuta and Melilla, the **government of Sánchez continued to support restrictive measures**, which made him be criticised for acting with a double standard. Some examples include the proposal to create 'controlled centres' to classify economic migrants and potential refugees, strengthening the cooperation with countries of origin and transit, and increasing the financial support to southern European countries to control the EU external borders, all of which debated at the European Council meeting on June 29.

On the other hand, at a European scale, the case of **Aquarius opened a fracture in the core of the EU** between the countries that supported a major European integration (Spain, Germany, France, Greece and Portugal) and the euro-sceptical and populist governments led by Italy, Austria and Hungary which were reluctant to open the borders and facilitate search and rescue (SAR) operations. Although the number of arrivals in Spain increased significantly during the summer, this did not happen in the rest of Europe, which was witnessing a decrease in migration flows since 2015. Nonetheless, the episode of Aquarius was imbued within the European debates around a migratory crisis that was gaining force in a context of 'hangover' after the refugee crisis with lay anti-immigration narratives on the rise.

6.2 Narratives in the media

The first narratives appeared in relation to the urgent setting in which Italy and Malta denied the disembarkment of Aquarius and Spain announced its decision to welcome the boat in Valencia. Sánchez affirmed: 'it is our obligation to help in preventing a humanitarian catastrophe and offer a safe port'; 'we comply with our international duties in terms of humanitarian crisis' (*El País*, 12 June 2018). The **plot was a story of decline**, where **migrants had to be rescued from the villain Salvini** who had abandoned them at their own risk, and the policy solution was to offer a port to avoid a humanitarian crisis. In this context, **Sánchez** appeared as the **hero** who made sure to guarantee EU values and international law. However, the moral of the story went a bit further: this political gesture needed to be accompanied by other measures within an EU strategy to manage the migratory crisis. The three newspapers shared the interpretation of Sánchez's decision as a political move to gain EU recognition just after entering the government. Yet, while El País and La Vanguardia stressed the humanitarian gesture, El Mundo criticised it as a populist measure which could create a pull effect under the narrative of 'good actions can be counterproductive' (*El Mundo*, 12 June 2018).

As soon as Aquarius reached the port of Valencia, the **plot changed to a story of control**. **Migrants were assisted** and they would be given a **residence permit of 45 days** for humanitarian reasons. Being aware that this could cause a pull effect, the government justified this measure arguing that it was an extraordinary decision, and that they treated all migrants equally (including those that arrived irregularly in the southern border), which was by 'applying the law and the law considers exceptional circumstances' (*El País*, 18 June 2018). This is linked to the **discussion of how survivors should be treated, whether as economic migrants or as refugees**. El País reported that even if at the beginning the government did not specify it and some NGOs and regional and local administrations got ready to include them within the reception system of asylum seekers, some days later the government announced that survivors would be treated as any migrant entering the country. This meant that they would be offered the possibility to seek asylum, but those who did not meet the requirements as refugees could enter a detention centre (CIE) or be returned to their countries of origin. Yet, in practice, this only affected a minority, since most of the survivors entered the asylum system (*El País*, 29 July 2018).

Regardless of this, the **opposition** (People's Party and Ciudadanos, both right wing) **criticised Sánchez** for improvising and taking decisions 'with the heart instead of with the head', for **creating the perfect conditions for a pull effect** and for favouring the interests of smugglers. The argument was that the problem was not from Spain, but from Europe; as a consequence, the solution had also to be found in Europe (*El Mundo*, 12 June 2018). The government replied to such accusations providing numbers of the increasing arrivals since 2017 when the People's Party was in the power, denying the witnessing of a pull effect (*El País*, 4 August 2018). In this regard, El Mundo stressed the opposition's narrative of danger around the potential consequences of the reception of Aquarius, while El País adopted a more supporting role to the government's stance pointing out that the decision of Salvini to close the ports had not implied a dissuasive effect to stop migration so this was not the solution. La Vanguardia appeared more neutral when reporting the discussion about the treatment of survivors.

In mid-August, **the second time Aquarius requested a port** with 141 people on board, the Spanish government **denied** it affirming that this was **not a humanitarian emergency** and an agreement between six countries was met to disembark Aquarius in Malta. As mentioned in the introduction of this case, between mid-June and mid-August the setting changed. This became more problematic especially due to the significant rise of irregular migrants' arrivals in the southern coasts and the increasing pressure from the opposition and the public opinion.

In this new narrative of denial, Salvini continued to be the villain and migrants, the victims, but Sánchez was not the hero anymore. In this sense, the story did not turn into a situation of control but continued as a story of decline where in terms of Stone (2012) **change had been only an illusion**. The government of Catalonia and several municipalities offered their ports, but it turned useless due to the lack of competencies in the management of immigration issues. MSF, the NGO in charge of Aquarius, interpreted this change of position as 'cynical'.

Interestingly, while El País and El Mundo did not stand out any hero in this episode, La Vanguardia expressed its optimism around the agreement which was interpreted as a potential start of a European system to coordinate SAR operations and manage migration flows. Under this view, it was a story of control, the moral of which is that with political will, the EU could adopt joint migration policies with a humanitarian aim (*La Vanguardia*, 15 August 2018). The

heroes were the antixenophobic front led by the six European countries committed to cooperate against populisms and nationalism with the objective to facilitate quick and safe disembarkments, simplify the legal procedures for asylum seekers and speed up asylum applications (*La Vanguardia*, 19 July 2018). However, this agreement did not last for further rescue operations.

On the whole, we can conclude that the **media narratives were predominantly lay**, especially those referring to the first episode in June, with **vivid settings** and references to a humanitarian crisis, **personalised and polarised characters** (Sánchez vs Salvini), dramatic and simplified plots with **stories of decline of cause-effect and morally righteous solutions**, especially in the short term. However, the episode of August was not presented in such an urgent context and the negative of Spain fostered the search of a common response among EU states, moving beyond personified solutions. Migrants were regarded as 'less victims' (since they did not deserve a special status) and Sánchez stopped being the hero.

Finally, even if there were seven pregnant women in the boat and one gave birth in the boat while travelling to Valencia, it is worth adding that there were hardly any news that referred to them. As another study points out, the news articles dedicated to medical, economic, childhood or gender issues did not reach 1% out of the total news and only 6% of the news included survivors among their sources (Solves and Arcos 2020). Yet, as an interviewee of MSF points out, this NGO played an important role in deactivating a piece of fake news introduced in the social media by a deeply conservative journalist that there were rapists in the boat, which manipulated stories of women who had been abused during their migratory trajectory *before* being rescued.

6.3 Narratives in the political debate

One of the first findings is that **there was not much political debate after Sánchez announced to host Aquarius in Valencia**, especially when this is compared with the heightened media debate. The parliamentary activity consisted mainly in questions to the government, either in the plenary or in sessions of control at the Congress of Deputies. The first question was orally posed by Carlos Rojas (PP) on 14 June to ask about the rationale behind the decision to host Aquarius and to inquiry why the port of Valencia had been chosen (180/000660). It was presented as a **story of decline** in an urgent context of crisis, where the **reception of Aquarius contributed to increase the arrival of irregular migrants** in the southern coast of Spain. In this sense, the PP blamed the government for being too irresponsible and creating a pull effect, which turned Sánchez into a villain together with Italy and Malta, although these were not explicitly mentioned. This accusation was also used to ask him what treatment the survivors of Aquarius would have (i.e., a special treatment 'with a salary' or as irregular migrants 'arriving in dinghies'), making reference to the contradictory stances that had come out in the media by different members of the Socialist Party. On the other hand, the MP mentioned the law enforcement agents, the Sea Rescue body and some NGOs as the heroes of the story, since they were 'the ones who risk their lives every day'. The mention to the army, which had not featured in the media narratives, contributed to reinforce the national myth of the role of the armed forces in guaranteeing the national security.

The answer of Carmen Calvo, the vice president of the government, framed a setting of crisis, but the plot was not a story of decline, but rather **a story of control thanks to the humanitarian gesture of the Socialist Party**. This story was presented as a rational and ethical decision following the international treaties, while technical elements were used to justify the selection of the port of Valencia. Calvo also stressed that migrants had been duly assisted and offered a temporary residence permit of 45 days and the option to ask for asylum (unlike irregular migrants). Yet, this was not with disregard of their commitment to fight against irregular migration with the cooperation of Morocco. Finally, she also made clear that Aquarius did not cause a pull effect, since migration flows had started well before the episode of Aquarius.

On 15 June, Ángela Ballester (**Unidas Podemos, left-wing party** in coalition with the Socialist Party) put a written question (184/034960) in a similar direction to the PP but advocating for an opposite policy solution. In front of the unclear statements of the government, UP was **concerned with the possibility of survivors being sent to detention centres** as any other irregular migrant despite having been granted with a residence permit for humanitarian reasons. In this scenario, Ballester also took advantage to ask for the state of detention centres (after numerous complaints by NGOs for being a black hole of human rights) and to put pressure for their closure. The Socialist Party answered by confirming the correctness of the adopted measure from a legal and humanitarian frame, and in relation to the detention centres, by affirming that they would not be closed, but several mechanisms would be put in place to ensure that human rights were respected.

On 22 June, the **People's Party posed two written questions** (184/035150 and 184/035161) with the same setting as that of the oral question posed on 14 June. Besides repeating that Valencia was probably not the safest port, that this measure could create a pull effect and that the government had given contradictory declarations, the PP added two new questions. The first one around the cost of the operation, insinuating that this had been much higher than the regular SAR operations, and the second one around the state of collaborations with Morocco to stop irregular migration. In this sense, **apart from reinforcing arguments from a securitarian frame, the economic dimension was added**. The answer of the **Socialist Party** to the first question on 25 July was quite technic about the details on the human resources devoted to the Aquarius operation and reinforced the government's alignment with the international law. In addition, it **confirmed its commitment to fight against smugglers and human trafficking** through the national means and its collaboration with Frontex and the EU's and NATO's military operations. The answer to the second question on 21 September revolved around a story of control, where the government maintained the good cooperation with Morocco to restrain irregular migration, by giving some details about the meeting between the Ministers of Interior of both countries the 28 June. Moreover, the answer stated that in the end, 608 out of 629 survivors applied for asylum and only 15 of them would be opened a file of deportation.

On 14 **August**, after the second time Aquarius requested a safe port, the right-wing party Foro por Asturias presented a written question (184/037019) to ask why the government had decided to reject Aquarius' request given that the context was pretty similar. **Sánchez was blamed for taking decisions 'for his personal marketing** and to make European leaders believe that Spain is a paradise', while his actions 'attract Sub-Saharan migrants without a single proposal to fight against mafias', reinforcing the securitarian frame. The answer of the

government (26 December) referred to the agreement met between the six EU countries following the pacts of the European Council of last June to foster the cooperation in the management of migrant flows among member states.

After the summer, on 28 September, the **People's Party** put forward a **motion** to require the government a 'coherent and responsible migration policy', which accused the **Socialist Party to create a pull effect** (by establishing a causal relationship between the reception of the boat and 'a massive and uncontrolled arrival of migrants'). The policy solutions to address this, however, did not refer to Aquarius or SAR operations, but rather to fight against smugglers, invest in the development of sending countries of migrants, and treat all irregular migrants the same way. On the whole, this motion – presented three months after the episode of Aquarius – proves that even if the operation was very exceptional, it was politically used by the opposition to nurture the narrative of the government being too permissive with irregular migrants and erode the Socialist Party.

On the whole, we can conclude that the **political narratives were generally lay**, with **vivid settings, personalised characters** (e.g., Sánchez as the main hero/villain), dramatic plots with **stories of decline and a simple solution**. This was explicit in the arguments put forward both by the government and the opposition. However, it must be considered that some of the narratives within the answers of the government contain **technocratic elements**, especially in what regards the rationale behind the selection of the port of Valencia and the justification of the resources devoted to the operation. Even if it was an urgent crisis, the Socialist Party referred to the need of organising a complex operation involving different actors and numerous services from various territorial levels. At the same time, the exceptional character of the episode was seen as a trade-off within the European context, and this is actually why in August, Spain did not host Aquarius and waited for other countries to react. Moreover, this action was not with disregard with the general policy continuity in migration governance, as reflected in the narratives around the government's commitment to fight against irregular migration with the support of Morocco.

6.4 Relationship between media narratives and political narratives

In the relationship between media and political narratives, two patterns can be observed which belong to two different moments: a relationship of **embracing** (with minor adaptations) **in mid-June**, where the political narratives mirror pretty much the four components of the media narratives, and a relationship of **partial omission in August**, when the political narratives only mentioned the second episode of Aquarius in a written question by Foro de Asturias.

Going a bit more into the details, we can observe that the media and political narratives in June share the same interpretation of the setting. While the narratives of El País and La Vanguardia are more aligned with the narratives of the Socialist Party, those of El Mundo are more in line with the narratives of the opposition, which shows the ideological correlation between the newspapers and the political parties. This is especially visible in the characters, where El País and La Vanguardia highlight more the heroism of Sánchez than El Mundo which amplifies the voices of the People's Party in relation to the potential consequences of his humanitarian gesture (pull effect). Yet, when it comes to the plot and the policy solutions, we can find some

nuances. This relates to the economic argument put forward by the People's Party to question the reception of Aquarius and the policy solution to close the detention centres by Unidas Podemos (showing their scepticism on the potential treatment of survivors as irregular migrants), which did not come out in the media so clearly.

As for the relationship between media and political narratives in the episode of August, there is hardly any debate in the political sphere. The only document that shows a reference to the denial of the boat's reception is in the written question of Foro de Asturias. Besides the fact that the Parliament is not very functional during the month of August, this partial omission might be also explained because of the little resonance that this episode had in the media, especially when compared to that of June.

In terms of causality within the communicative sphere, it was the decision and the political agenda of Sánchez what caught the media attention in the first place. As a member of MSF reveals, the 'enormous' media coverage of Aquarius was because from the very beginning there were two important media outlets in the boat (El País and the Spanish National Radio) that could report what was happening from within, and because many European countries were expectant of the first political moves of the most leftist government that Spain has ever had. Aquarius turned a political issue that implied political responses. In this context, politicians used the media as gauge and sounding board to express their opinions and this was then reflected in the debates at the Congress of Deputies, where the politicians also reacted to what was being discussed in the media. In this sense, politicians did not just shape media narratives, but they were also influenced by them (Boswell and Smellie 2023). Finally, the fact that the case of Aquarius and SAR operations count with little parliamentary activity shows that the political debates at that time were actually more concerned with the increasing arrival of irregular migrants at the Spanish border and with the collapse of the asylum system.

6.5 Narratives in policy-making documents

Following the last section, there is **not a single policy document that directly refers to the Aquarius operation,** not even to evaluate it. In this sense, the types of documents that have been analysed refer more to the broader debate of SAR operations and migration policies from June 2018 to December 2019. More specifically, we have reviewed the Annual Reports on Migration and Asylum of 2018 and 2019[16], the Annual Action Plan of SASEMAR (the Society of Sea Rescue and Security) of 2019, an Agreement between several ministries to create an Authority of Coordination to fight against irregular migration in the area of Gibraltar's strait and the sea of Alboran (PCI/842/2018), and the royal decree-law 16/2018 of special measures to confiscate embarkations used to fight against illicit human trafficking and smuggling. Besides, there were several decree-laws that gave direct grants to some large NGOs to better manage the reception of migrants and refugees, which shows the double standard of the government: on the one hand, adopting securitarian measures to deter migration flows and on the other,

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[16] The Annual Reports on Migration and Asylum are produced by the European Network of Migration to inform EU and national institutions about migration and asylum issues, support the decision-making process of the EU, and inform the general society. In Spain, this network gathers representatives of the DG of Migration, the General Secretary of Immigration and Emigration, and the State Secretary of Migration.

facilitating (to some extent) the task of NGOs in charge of providing humanitarian assistance and reception services.

In the Annual Report on Migration and Asylum of 2018, the plot revolved around a **story of decline, pointing to the rapid increase of irregular flows**, but this was somehow **compensated** with several measures to **facilitate legal pathways** acknowledging that Spain would need 270,000 migrants annually until 2050 to compensate the ageing of the population. The policy solution proposed to counter irregular migration by sea was to create an Authority of Coordination (PCI/842/2018) and a protocol to coordinate disembarkments after SAR operations among several ministries (both approved on 5 December), in line with the first pillar of the report of an orderly, safe, and legal model of migration. In terms of characters, the distinction between potential refugees and irregular migrants was a bit blur when it comes to the arrival of migrants by sea. On the one hand, there was the willingness to improve the management of SAR operations to foster the international protection of refugees, but in the same section there was a reference to the elaboration of a protocol to face the large arrival of irregular migrants by sea.

In 2019, the plot slightly changed to a story of relative control, mainly due to the decrease of irregular migration down to 46.9% (and 51% the arrivals by sea[17]) thanks to the cooperation with Morocco. On the other hand, Spain also participated in several transfers of migrants after SAR operations disembarking in Italy and Malta. However, 2019 was marked by two national elections in April and in November (due to the failure of the first one to form a government), which implied that budgets could not be approved, and new policies remained on hold, giving continuity to the measures initiated in 2018. In this regard, the four components of the narrative did not change much, except that the more favourable setting of less arrivals reinforced the moral of the story of the government as a way to congratulate its fight against irregular migration.

The **efforts of improving the coordination and efficiency of SAR operations** were **also reflected in the SASEMAR plan** of 2019. The report includes two measures in a quite technical way: 'to adequate the organisation in terms of human and material resources and adapt the capacity of response to the emergencies of dinghies'; and 'to renew four small boats in collaboration with the Red Cross to foster the capacity of response in the coastal areas'. These measures are aligned with the data provided by SASEMAR in the same report, which reveals that 71,946 people in whole Spain were assisted by them (in 2017 it was 36,172). However, the increase of SAR operations was not causally linked to the rise of irregular migration by sea in an explicit way, so there is no narrative other than the mission of SASEMAR to contribute to save human lives in the sea.

As for the **agreement to create an Authority of Coordination** to fight against irregular migration in the area of Gibraltar's strait and the sea of Alboran (PCI/842/2018), the **narrative is more pessimistic in presenting the migratory pressure** by revealing that arrivals have increased 301.2% since 2013. In this setting, **irregular migrants and smugglers are presented as the villains** and there is only a humanitarian hint when it refers to the survivors of shipwrecks and vulnerable people like unaccompanied minors. The Authority of

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[17] Statistics provided by the same report, which refer to January 2019.

Coordination was a policy solution to facilitate the transfer of information among all the actors[18], avoid the exit of irregular migrants from the African coast and deter smugglers following the national and international legislation in terms of maritime rescue and security. In this regard, although this measure was to contribute to a humanitarian aim of saving human lives, the approach is quite securitarian considering also that the Authority was managed by the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior.

Making one step further in the fight against irregular migration, in October 2018 Sánchez decided to approve a **royal decree-law** (16/2018) to adopt **measures against smuggling and human trafficking by sea**. The setting was presented as an urgent context that needed a quick solution with a **binary representation of smugglers** as the **villains** and the **Spanish society** as the **victim**. The plot revolved around a rise of smuggling of drugs and tobacco which also involved human trafficking activities, posing a clear threat to the public and social order. This situation was partly due to the larger use of tire and semirigid embarkations by criminal organisations. Undertaking a legal procedure against captains or crew members through administrative or criminal means was deemed to be a difficult task, which produced a feeling of impunity and helplessness among the citizenship and law enforcement agents. In views of this, the royal decree-law set what types of embarkations were susceptible of participating in smuggling and trafficking activities, and allowed law enforcement agents to confiscate them (even if they did not carry anything) and initiate legal proceedings against crew members. This measure **reinforced the link between smugglers, human trafficking, and irregular migration** in a narrative where the national security was under threat.

On the whole, we can conclude that the messages in the policy sphere contain **mainly technocratic narratives with some lay hints.** All documents define a setting marked by the rapid increase of irregular migration, but whereas the Annual Reports on Migration and Asylum give an account of the legislative and policy context with data on arrivals and on demographic needs, the agreement (PCI/842/2018) and the royal decree-law present a more narrow and urgent context very much focused on the problems caused by the rise of irregular migrants which demand a quick reaction. The distinction of characters is not so explicit and does not fall into specific persons or groups, except for the figure of smugglers who is more clearly presented as the villain in the promotion of irregular migration. While this element of the narrative could be interpreted as lay, the royal decree-law (16/2018) contains quite a lot of technical details on the characteristics of the new embarkations used by smugglers (materials, capacity, scope…). As for the plots, not all documents contain an explicit story, precisely due to the technical character of the text. However, the documents with a more explicit narrative on irregular migration by sea, the story is closer to a dramatic situation of decline. This is followed by policy solutions that contain some moral elements related to the need of protecting the Spanish society from external threats (especially when it concerns human trafficking), but when it comes to the solutions related more specifically to SAR operations, the measures are described in a more objective way to ensure a greater efficiency.

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[18] These were the Ministry of Interior, law enforcement agents, SASEMAR, the Ministry of Work, Migration and Social Security, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Defence (with the participation of the Army), and the Ministry of Health, with the collaboration of local and regional authorities and NGOs.

6.6 Relationship between media & political narratives and policy-making narratives

As for the relationship between the communicative and the coordinative spheres, it is difficult to draw conclusions, since the communication sphere is more centred on the case of Aquarius (especially in the media) and the coordinative sphere on broader issues related to SAR operations and irregular migration. In this sense, a 'zooming out' exercise had to be done as we moved from media to political and policy fields. Having said this, the fact that Aquarius ended up as a symbolic measure without further consequences (not even in SAR operations) shows a **pattern of omission in the policy sphere** and therefore, in the policy narratives. The measures to foster the coordination and efficiency of disembarkments were not accompanied by humanitarian narratives as the ones circulating in the media debate. On the contrary, the few narratives of the policy sphere referred to actions to fight against irregular migration and promote an orderly, safe and legal model of migration. These were partly balanced with the narrative around the need to facilitate legal pathways to respond to the demographic needs of the country in the long run, but it was more marginal, as it only appeared in one policy document.

After the episode of Aquarius, **MSF and other NGOs** tried to put forward a **motion** (*Proposición No de Ley*) to pursue a more humanitarian policy on SAR operations as a mechanism of lobby, but they **did not achieve the support of any political party**, so it could not prosper. As a more general and current reflection, a member of the NGO points out that the fact that Spain is the only southern European country with a public company undertaking SAR operations (among other duties, called SASEMAR) serves as an excuse to justify the Spanish efforts in this area. Yet, at the same time, there is not much interest in making the company very visible to avoid attacks from conservative and right-wing positions, which contributes to a lack of public and political debate. Thus, the omission in the communicative sphere brings in an omission in the coordinative sphere, which following Boswell and Smellie (2023) it could be read as a **strategy to defuse the situation** and diminish the salience of the topic.

> 'It is the only country that maintains maritime rescue operations, although it is true that in recent years there has been a certain dismantling and invisibility of everything that has to do with rescue operations. In fact, they have been prohibited from communicating these actions, probably to avoid attacks from political groups with other approaches. [...] This is why there is so little documentation or real initiatives either from the Congress, the Parliament or the Government, it is something that is not discussed, is not addressed, is not communicated.' Responsible for advocacy in MSF

Finally, we can conclude a **pattern of decoupling in implementation**: narratives in the media are picked up by politicians (including the government), but not seen through in policy measures (and thus not in policy narratives). The only measure in relation to SAR operations is to foster the coordination between all actors, but this is not to be more humanitarian with migrants and refugees, but to control irregular migration within an orderly, safe, and legal model of migration.

6.7 Conclusions

As the figure below illustrates, the case of Aquarius shows that **as we move from the media to the political and policy fields**, there is a general trend to produce **more technocratic narratives** away from the public scrutiny, with less moralising attributes and more technical and specific solutions.

FIGURE 13: Summary of narrative components in the media, political and policy fields

Narrative components	Media narratives	Rel. media - political	Political narratives	Rel. media & political - policy	Policy narratives
Setting	Vivid, urgent marked by the reluctance to host rescue boats in Italy and Malta, increasing arrivals at the southern border, pressure from the opposition and a more concerned public opinion		Vivid, urgent marked by the increasing arrivals at the southern border and pressure from the opposition		Urgency of increasing irregular migration, but also acknowledgement of demographic needs (bigger picture) + long electoral period in 2019 which puts new policies on hold
Characters	Personalised and polarised → Villains: Salvini; Victims: migrants; Heroes: Sánchez + antixenophobic EU countries committed to facilitate disembarkments	Embracing (June) and partial omission (August)	Attributing blame to government, law enforcement agents as heroes (opposition) Government as hero (government)	Omission	Blurred distinction between migrants as villains and as victims + Spanish society as victim + smugglers as villains
Plot	Story of decline, which gets under control when Aquarius reaches Valencia, but the potential change of paradigm		Story of decline of cause/effect and too much expenditure (opposition) Story of control, humanitarian and legal frame (government,		More technical, fewer narratives. Yet, story of decline (2018) which evolves to a story of partial control (2019) due to a decrease of irregular migration

	ends up being an illusion		Socialist Party) + risk of sending migrants to detention centres (government, Unidas Podemos)		
Moral	Assessment of immediate measures: offering a safe port and assisting migrants (June), and agreement with 6 EU countries (August)		Assessment of immediate measures: rational and ethical solutions have been adopted, incl. agreement with EU countries in August (government, Socialist Party) + detention centres should be closed (government, Unidas Podemos) Morally righteous mid/long-term solutions: more efforts to control irregular migration (opposition)		Technical specific solutions: creation of an Authority of Coordination, more resources for SAR operations of SASEMAR and for law enforcement agents against smugglers (short/mid-term) and broader solutions related to an orderly, safe and legal model of migration (long-term)
Lay / technocratic	Predominantly lay, though in August display of complex trade-off in policy solutions		Predominantly lay with some technical details related to the rescue operation		Predominantly technocratic with some lay hints in the setting of irregular migration and human trafficking

Regarding the content of narratives, there is some variation across the communicative and coordinative venues. While in the **media and political spheres** the **setting** is very **marked** by the **more immediate context** of the humanitarian crises emerging from SAR operations and the increasing arrivals of irregular migrants in the south of Spain, this is not so explicit in the **policy** sphere, which includes a **bigger picture** of migration patterns although some documents do also make emphasis on the migratory pressure at the border. The **characters** tend to be more personalised and polarised between victims and villains in the communicative field, whereas in the policy field this distinction is made not so evident, with the exception of smugglers.

The **plots** are **more easily identifiable in the communicative sphere** than in the coordination sphere, with some interesting differences between the media and political domains too. In the media, it is very clear how the narrative evolution from a story of decline to a story of control ends up being an illusion (Stone 2012) as soon as the government denies the reception of Aquarius in August 2018. In this regard, the processual and changing character of narratives is more patent in the media sphere than in the rest. In contrast, the plots in the political sphere are more divided by the ideological stances of the government and the opposition. This distinction between spheres is also patent in the moral of the story. In the **political sphere, the policy solutions are distinguished by political blocks** (government and opposition), especially in June. In the **policy sphere**, the **moral** attribute of policy solutions is **hardly explicit**, and the proposed measures are technical and targeted to allow a more efficient way of managing SAR operations and dealing with irregular migration at the southern border.

Drawing from this analysis, we can conclude that the relationship between the media and political spheres is quite close, where **the political narratives tend to embrace what is being said in the media**. This is especially evident in the episode of June, which achieved a wide resonance in the public debate due to its symbolic power at a time when many EU countries were turning their shoulders back to migrants' arrivals. In contrast, political narratives partially omitted the denial of Aquarius in August which was a bit more present in the media landscape. Finally, as for **the relationship between the communicative and coordinative spheres, the general pattern is an omission or decoupling**, especially in relation to the plot and the moral components. This is justified by the fact that the Aquarius operation was not accompanied by a significant change in more humanitarian migration policies. While it is true that other inclusionary measures were adopted like the recovery of universal access to health or the removal of *concertinas* from the fences, the government also adopted securitarian measures in a climate of concern with the rise of irregular migration and the collapse of the asylum and reception systems.

In this regard, it could be argued that the **pattern of omission** was especially patent in relation to **humanitarian SAR operations**, but the application of securitarian measures also resonated with an opposition and a public opinion increasingly concerned with irregular migration. As a consequence, if we looked at the incidence of irregular migration and smuggling in the media and political debates more systematically (instead of looking at Aquarius), we would most likely find more polarised stances and patterns of adaptation and rejection.

Finally, drawing on the concept of **migration narrative success** (Garcés-Mascareñas and Pastore 2022), this case shows how the narratives associated to the case of Aquarius achieved a wide resonance in the media landscape with a **high level of pervasiveness**. While a more systematic analysis should be done in order to identify what frames prevailed, we can conclude that the humanitarian gesture of rescuing migrants in the Mediterranean as a moral and legal duty was told in all newspapers, even if this was countered or nuanced with other collateral narratives around the need to look for sustainable and non-improvised solutions. What is more, the narrative that the sea rescue of Aquarius in August was not an emergency hardly influenced the public debate.

However, in terms of transformativity, **this narrative did not colonise the coordinative sphere** and did **not imply a change of paradigm** in how to manage SAR operations or in

migration policies. On the contrary, broadly speaking, as it has been argued throughout the report, this case also shows a pattern of policy continuity in migration governance. In addition, as another study points out (Arévalo et al 2021), the (almost non) inclusion of survivors as sources of information despite being the protagonists was not used as a narrative strategy to promote social change. The lack of access of the press to the space where the victims were disembarked was probably aimed at protecting them in a moment of high vulnerability. Yet, the fact that hardly any life stories were covered after the disembarkment may have been a missed opportunity to foster the empathy towards survivors and get to the root of the structural problems that provoke migratory movements.

On the whole, we can conclude that combining the high degree of pervasiveness with the low degree of transformativity, the narratives around Aquarius became **viral** especially at the start of the crisis, but they **slowly became more and more marginal** as the episode faded out as a 'shooting star'.

7. Conclusions across the three case studies

This study has analysed the intricate interplay of migration narratives as they traverse the arenas of media, politics, and policy-making, in three case-studies in the Spanish context: the EU relocation scheme following the 2015 refugees crisis, the Ukrainian refugees after the start of the war in 2022 and the rescue boats in the Mediterranean, with a specific focus on the Aquarius case in 2018.

The first case has provided interesting insights about the discursive dimension underlying policy decision in relation to the EU relocation scheme. The way in which the dramatic episode of Alan Kurdi resonates in Spanish and European media appears as one of the key factors driving the drastic change of position of the Spanish government, eventually accepting refugees quota. This case has also shed the light on the strength of humanitarianism as discursive construct and political imaginary in Spain, as well on its impact on political narratives, compelled to legitimize and justify themselves based on the same moral grounds.

The case of Ukrainian refugees has shown a distinct departure from traditional migration discourse and response in Spain. It has underscored how a migration issue can undergo a noteworthy transformation when interwoven with security, foreign and defence policy considerations in the policy narrative. The ability to depict Ukrainian refugees not solely as migrants but as friends reflects the influence of ideas and conceptual frameworks in shaping policy responses. Furthermore, it has underscored the significant, but also changing role of humanitarianism, which assumes a broader, overarching character encompassing the culture of war, rather than being narrowly confined to the issue of migration.

The case of Aquarius achieved a high degree of pervasiveness in the media as soon as the newly elected president of the government Pedro Sánchez decided to offer the port of Valencia after Italy and Malta denied a safe port to disembark 629 migrants and refugees. From the very beginning, this episode became highly political in an expectant and divided Europe due to migration issues. While the narratives in the media were more lay and stressed the humanitarian gesture of the president, the political debate was rather scarce and embraced

the declarations of the media, reinforcing the ideological divide between the government (and left-wing newspapers) and the opposition (and right-wing newspapers). However, the denial of a port to the same Aquarius two months later in a very similar situation quickly showed that the humanitarian gesture had been an illusion of change and policymaking on migration continued to be dominated by securitarian approaches focused on irregular migration.

Taken together the three cases offer also compelling comparative insights. **First, they provide insights as regards the relationship between narratives' kinds and arenas.** In the three analysed cases, **media, politics, and policy-making are indeed characterized by different types of migration narratives**. Migration narratives vary in density, homogeneity, and coherence across arenas. In the media, migration narratives tend to be denser and to present a consistent, unified perspective on migration issues. They are tightly packed with information, providing a clear and accessible narrative for the audience. In contrast, political narratives on migration are frequently divided along ideological lines and by the governing or opposition status of political parties. This division results in a more fragmented landscape with varying viewpoints, reflecting the diversity of actors involved. The complexity arising from these differences in the political sphere can hinder the formation of a cohesive narrative. Lastly, within the policy arena, migration narratives often fade into the background. They become overshadowed by operational considerations and dispersed within the broader discourse on migration governance. This shift may result in a loss of focus on specific migration-related issues, like it was observed in those analysed in this study.

These differences are reflected in narratives styles: our research findings reveal a discernible pattern in the types of narratives employed across different arenas. **In the media arena we have observed a prevalence of lay narratives.** These narratives are designed to be straightforward, emotionally engaging, and readily accessible to a broad public audience. Their purpose is to evoke empathy, capture attention, and foster a sense of connection with the audience. This aligns with the media's aim to maximize their coverage's newsworthiness and appeal to a wide viewership.

On the other hand, **political narratives exhibit a blending of lay and technocratic elements**. Politicians often utilize narratives that combine emotionally resonant themes with elements of technical detail and evidence. These narratives cater to the need for mobilizing public support, targeting voters' emotions and values. However, they also incorporate enough factual information to provide a reasoned basis for policy positions. This hybrid approach in political narratives reflects the political sphere's dual role—engaging the public while simultaneously appealing to rational decision-making.

In contrast, **policy narratives mainly use a technical, fact-driven style**. These narratives aim to help policymakers and implementers work together efficiently. Technocratic narratives aim to make policy issues clear and suggest the best ways to tackle them. While these distinctions between narrative styles hold generally true, we acknowledge that the correspondence is not always straightforward and exhibit nuances across cases, depending on specific contexts, actors, and their communication strategies.

Another set of findings concern regarding the **discursive spheres. Significant variation has been observed within the communicative sphere, where each case exhibits a unique interaction between the media and the political arena**. The case of the Aquarius provides

a clear illustration of *'embracing'* dynamics, where politicians harness the media narrative to draw attention and shape public opinion. In contrast, the case of the EU relocation quota demonstrates an *'adapting' dynamic*, with political actors selectively incorporating elements from media narratives, such as the plot and moral of the story, while disregarding others. Finally, the case of Ukrainian refugees exemplifies a *'downgrade adaptation' dynamic*, where the Spanish political arena largely remains unaffected by media discourse due to considerations related to policy agendas and public opinion.

Beyond these dynamics, we have identified two intriguing, yet opposing trends in the relationship between media and politics. **Media can act as both a 'trigger' and an 'inhibitor' of political discourse**. In the first scenario, media salience appears to play a pivotal role, as exemplified by the Spanish government's dramatic shift in position on the relocation scheme following the widespread media coverage of Alan Kurdi's tragic death. On the other hand, media narratives can serve as a constraining factor in the development of political debate. As seen in the same case, the humanitarian frame set by the media influences political discourse to the extent that even the party primarily concerned with migration control, such as the People's Party, finds itself compelled to frame its positions in humanitarian terms.

Concerning the relationship between the communicative and coordinative spheres, the three cases exhibit analogous dynamics of "neglect": media narratives are embraced by politicians but are not translated into cohesive policy narratives. In other terms, when it comes to migration issues, **the Spanish communicative and coordinative spheres experience a decoupling.**

In the transition from the communicative to the coordinative sphere, the narrative on migration not only becomes more technical and operational, as previously observed, but it also **loses many of its constituent elements (Jones and McBeth 2010), blending into the broader policy discourse on migration governance**. This phenomenon is evident in the first case, where the loose narrative surrounding the refugee crisis runs in parallel with a more comprehensive policy narrative on migration governance, primarily focused on labor-related migration and border security. It is also apparent in the Aquarius case, where measures related to Search and Rescue (SAR) operations are integrated into a policy narrative centered on an orderly, safe, and legally compliant migration model. Furthermore, this process is even more conspicuous in the third case, where the narrative concerning Ukrainian refugees is deeply embedded within a larger narrative centered on security and defense policy considerations.

This finding should be interpreted, on one hand, in light of the absence of a robust and coherent migration narrative that characterizes the Spanish political context, and, on the other hand, based on the idiosyncrasies of the analyzed cases, which somehow deviate from the broader landscape of migration governance and policy-making.

Our study also offers intriguing insights into the dimensions of migration narrative success (Garcés-Mascareñas and Pastore 2022). The analyzed cases indeed shed light on the **high level of pervasiveness in migration narratives but a low level of transformativity**. This is notably exemplified in the Aquarius case, where, on one hand, the humanitarian narrative emphasizing the imperative of rescuing Mediterranean migrants gains significant resonance within the media landscape and permeates the collective imaginary. However, on the other hand, it falls short of influencing the coordinative sphere, indicative of its limited transformative capacity.

In conclusion, it is imperative to make some observations about certain **non-discursive factors that we have observed influencing the circulation and affirmation of migration narratives**. The first factor pertains to **the realm of ideas**, specifically the influence that the Spanish social and political imaginary and its value-system can exert on narrative circulation. As observed in the first case, where the humanitarian zeitgeist, historically rooted in Spain's positive attitude towards migrants and immigration, delineates the boundaries of the discursive sphere, charting the paths of transferability and pervasiveness between the communicative and coordinative spheres. This influence is also evident in the case of Ukrainian refugees, where the "us vs. other" rationale that traditionally underpins migration narratives is supplanted by the "friend vs. enemy" distinction, grounded in an imaginary shaped by a culture of war.

The second set of factors relates to **political and institutional constraints**. In the case of Aquarius, for instance, we have witnessed how the pervasiveness of the migration narrative in the media arena was amplified due to the expectations that the most left-leaning government of Spain raised especially within the country, but also among other European countries and EU institutions.

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Annex: Sampling details of the media, political and policy analysis

FIGURE 14: News analysed in the case of relocation quota (September-October 2015)

Newspaper	Date	Headline	Type of article
El Mundo	04.09.2015	German solidarity with refugees is an example of what Europe should be about	Editorial
El Mundo	10.09.2015	Why has Merkel opened Europe to refugees? (link)	Op-ed
El Mundo	15.09.2015	EU fails to reach agreement on refugee crisis (link)	News article
El Mundo	07.10.2015	Merkel and Hollande: 'Nationalism is war. We need more Europe, not less' (link)	News article
La Vanguardia	03.09.2015	Hungary, the bad kid of the EU's playground (link)	News article
La Vanguardia	08.09.2015	The Government will not specify until the 14th the quota of refugees to be received by Spain (link)	News article
La Vanguardia	09.09.2015	Spain will receive 14.931 refugees out of the 120.000 refugees required by Brussels (link)	News article
La Vanguardia	23.10.2015	Refugees: another project that challenges Europe (link)	Editorial
El País	31.08.2015	Urgent agreements (link)	Editorial
El País	01.09.2015	The Government uses migration pressure as an excuse to reject refugees (link)	News article
El País	04.09.2015	Rajoy: "All those eligible for asylum will be taken in" (link)	News article
El País	09.09.2015	Eight autonomous communities offer places to accommodate a minimum of 5.000 asylum seekers (link)	News article

FIGURE 15: News analysed in the case of Ukrainian refugees (February-March 2022)

Newspaper	Date	Headline	Type of article
El Mundo	27.02.2022	EU interior ministers meet in Brussels after 370,000 Ukrainians crossed borders	News article
El Mundo	04.03.2022	A responsible reaction to the migratory drama (link)	Editorial
El Mundo	18.03.2022	Roger Moorhouse: "Russia wants another big wave of refugees to destabilize Europe" (link)	Interview/ Op-ed
El Mundo	26.02.2022	The refugee crisis and the Spanish response: "There has been an avalanche of solidarity that is impossible to control" (link)	News article
La Vanguardia	01.03.2022	Spain takes action to welcome refugees in a joint EU action (link)	News article
La Vanguardia	06.03.2022	Arrival of Ukrainian refugees puts reception system to the test (link)	News article
La Vanguardia	10.03.2022	For a more coordinated solidarity (link)	Editorial
La Vanguardia	17.03.2022	Ukraine war causes fastest refugee exodus in history (link)	Interview with experts/ Op-ed
El País	27.02.2022	Europe throws itself into the Ukrainian refugees (link)	News article
El País	28.02.2022	Spain mobilizes in view of the uncertain number of refugees arriving from Ukraine (link)	News article
El País	03.03.2022	Our refugees (link)	Editorial
El País	15.03.2022	[The Ministry of] Migration prepares a family reception program for Ukrainians (link)	News article

FIGURE 16: News analysed in the case of Aquarius (June-August 2018)

Newspaper	Date	Headline	Type of article
El País	12.06.18	Sánchez drops a message and offers to receive the rejected boat (link)	News article
El País	18.06.18	The 630 rescued receive a special residence permit of 45 days (link)	News article
El País	26.06.18	After the fever of Aquarius (link)	Op-ed
El País	08.08.18	The government stops applying the advantages given to migrants from Aquarius (link)	News article
El País	14.08.18	Spain denies the reception of Aquarius: "we are not the closest port"	News article
El Mundo	12.06.18	Immigration and political do-goodism ('buenismo político') (link)	Op-ed
El Mundo	12.06.18	Spain assists Aquarius: 'let's not look the other way'; Sánchez orders the government in order to avoid a humanitarian catastrophe	News article
El Mundo	10.08.18	From the solidary spirit to recognising the massive arrival of immigrants (link)	News article
El Mundo	14.08.18	Sánchez does another sudden shift in immigration and ignores Aquarius; the president considers that Spain is not the safest port. Salvini celebrates that the boat with 141 migrants has no destination: "you can go wherever you want but not to Italy".	News article
El Mundo	15.08.18	Sánchez rectifies with Aquarius	Op-ed
La Vanguardia	12.06.18	Sánchez reacts against Italy: Spain will host refugees from Aquarius; the challenge of immigration (link)	News article
La Vanguardia	13.06.18	The opposition applauds the measure but warns about being a European problem (link)	News article
La Vanguardia	14.06.18	A Canadian gesture (link)	Op-ed
La Vanguardia	15.08.18	Spain will host 60 shipwreck survivors of Aquarius after an agreement of six in the EU (link)	News article
La Vanguardia	19.06.18	Spain, Germany and France lead a European front on immigration; the challenge of migrations (link)	News article

FIGURE 17: Political debates analysed in the case of relocation quota (May – October 2015)

Debate title	Date	Venue	Political party of narrators
What position does the Government maintain regarding the European Migration Agenda? (180/001320)	27.05.15	Congress of deputies - Plenary session (oral question)	Socialist Party (PSOE) and People's Party (PP)
Urgent questioning on the government's position in relation to the humanitarian drama that is taking place in the Mediterranean, the EU proposals on asylum policy and the Government's response to these proposals (172/000317)	27.05.15	Congress of deputies - Plenary session	People's Party (PP) and Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds
Motion resulting from urgent questioning on the Government's position in relation to the humanitarian drama that is taking place in the Mediterranean, the proposals of the European Union regarding asylum policy and the Government's response to these proposals (173/000217)	10.06.15	Congress of deputies - Plenary Session	Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds, Socialist Party (PSOE), Més-Compromís (Mixed Group), Canarian Coalition (Mixed Group), Euskal Herria Bildu (Mixed Group), Basque National Party (PNV), Union Progress and Democracy (UPyD), Convergence and Union (CIU), and People's Part (PP)
Motion on the Humanitarian Refugee Crisis (162/001298)	29.09.15	Congress of deputies - Plenary Session	Socialist Party (PSOE), Canarian Coalition (Mixed Group), Republican Left of Catalonia (Mixed Group), Euskal Herria Bildu (Mixed Group), Union Progress and Democracy (UPyD), Plural left Parliamentary Group, Convergence and Union (CIU), People's Party (PP)
What is the Government's policy on asylum for political refugees? (180/001392)	30.09.15	Congress of deputies - Plenary Session	Union Progress and Democracy (UPyD), People's Party, Socialist Party (PSOE), and Plural left Parliamentary Group
Motion resulting from an urgent questioning on the measures that the Government plans to adopt in the current situation of refugee reception (173/000229)	13.10.15	Congress of deputies - Plenary Session	Plural left Parliamentary Group, Convergence and Union (CIU), Euskal Herria Bildu (Mixed Group), Basque National Party (PNV), Union Progress and Democracy (UPyD), Socialist Party (PSOE), and People's Party (PP)

FIGURE 18: Political debates analysed in the case of Ukrainian refugees (April 2022 – January 2023)

Debate title	Date	Venue	Political party of narrators
Royal Decree-Law 6/2022, of March 29, which adopts urgent measures within the framework of the National Plan to respond to the economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine. (130/000079)	28.4.22	Congress of deputies - Plenary session (oral question)	Socialist Party (PSOE), Mixed Group, Euskal Herria Bildu (Mixed Group), Basque National Party (PNV), Ciudadanos, Unidas Podemos (UP), VOX, and People's Party (PP)
Royal Decree-Law 10/2022, of May 13, which temporarily establishes a production cost adjustment mechanism to reduce the price of electricity in the wholesale market. (130/000082)	9.06.22	Congress of deputies - Plenary session (oral question)	Socialist Party (PSOE)
Request for the appearance, at his own request, of the President of the Government before the Plenary Session of the Congress of Deputies, to report on the meeting of the European Council on October 7, and to report on the economic and social measures adopted by the Government to give response to the crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. (210/000111)	13.10.22	Congress of deputies - Plenary session (oral question)	Socialist Party (PSOE), People's Party (PP), VOX, and Unidas Podemos (UP)
Request of the Minister of Defense to appear before the Defense Commission, to report on the actions carried out and planned by the Government in support of the government of Ukraine to enable its defense against the invasion of its country by the Russian Federation, both by sending defense materials and humanitarian assistance or logistical support or cooperative security actions as well as reinforcing the presence of members of the Spanish Armed Forces in neighboring countries or in permanent defensive devices. (213/002273)	21.12.22	Congress of deputies - Commissions: Defense	Socialist Party (PSOE), Unidas Podemos (UP), VOX, and People's Party (PP)

Appearance, at his own request, of the President of the Government, before the Plenary Session of the Congress of Deputies, to report on the European Council held on October 20 and 21 and the European Council held on December 15, 2022, as well as the measures taken by the Government to address the economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine (210/000113).	24.1.23	Congress of deputies - Plenary session	Socialist Party (PSOE), People's Party (PP), VOX, and Unidas Podemos

FIGURE 19: Political debates analysed in the case of Aquarius (June – September 2018)

Debate title	Date	Venue	Political party of narrators
Opinion about whether the action taken with the Aquarius is going to be an exception or the norm of Spain's new immigration policy. (184/034880)	13.06.18	Congress of deputies - Control to the action of the government (written question)	People's Party (PP), and Socialist Party (PSOE)
What was the basis to take the "coordinates" as the reason for Valencia to be the port of reception of Aquarius? (180/000660)	14.06.18	Congress of deputies - Plenary session (oral question)	People's Party (PP), and Socialist Party (PSOE)
Reception of refugees travelling on the Aquarius and to the detention centres (CIEs) (184/034960)	15.06.18	Congress of deputies - Control to the action of the government (written question)	En Comú Podem, and Socialist Party (PSOE),
Immigrant rescue operation with Aquarius (184/035150)	22.06.18 and 25.07.18 (answer)	Congress of deputies - Control to the action of the government (written question)	People's Party (PP), and Socialist Party (PSOE)
Incidence in the work of containment by the Government of Morocco in relation to illegal immigration, of the pull effect produced by the "Aquarius" affair (184/035161)	22.06.18 and 21.09.18 (answer)	Congress of deputies - Control to the action of the government (written question)	People's Party (PP), and Socialist Party (PSOE)

FIGURE 20: Policy documents analysed in the case of relocation quota (September 2015 – December 2016)

Title	Author	Date
Motion not binding to government of the Socialist Group on the humanitarian crisis of refugees (162/001298)	All parliamentary groups of the House of Representatives	29.09.15
Approval of National Refugees' Resettlement Plan in Spain for 2015 (link)	Cabinet Government (Consejos de Ministros)	06.11.15
Abbreviated regulatory impact analysis report. Draft royal decree regulating the direct granting of a subsidy to the International Organization for Migration, IOM Spain, for the collaboration in the execution of the refugee resettlement program (link)	General Directorate of Migration (General Secretary of Immigration and Emigration, Ministry of Employment and Social Security)	26.05.16
Royal Decree 225/2016, of May 27, which regulates the direct granting of a subsidy to the International Organization for Migration, IOM Spain, for the Migration, IOM Spain, for collaboration in the implementation of the Refugee Resettlement Program. Resettlement of Refugees Program (link)	Ministry of Employment and Social Security	28.05.16
National Report of immigration and asylum policy 2015 (part 1 and part 2) (link)	European Migration Network - Experts of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice	End of 2016

FIGURE 21: Policy documents analysed in the case of Ukrainian refugees (March – December 2022)

Title	Author	Date
Order PCM/169/2022, of March 9, developing the procedure for the recognition of temporary protection to persons affected by the conflict in Ukraine. (link)	Ministry of the presidency, relations with the courts and democratic memory	9.03.22
Order PCM/170/2022, of March 9, publishing the Agreement of the Council of Ministers of March 8, 2022, extending the temporary protection granted under Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of March 4, 2022 to persons affected by the conflict in Ukraine who may find refuge in Spain. (link)	Ministry of the presidency, relations with the courts and democratic memory	9.03.22

Royal Decree-Law 6/2022, of March 29, which adopts urgent measures within the urgent measures within the framework of the National Plan of response to the economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine. economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine. (IN MAY CONVERTED INTO A LAW PROPOSAL 121/000100) (link)	Government input, voted in the Parliament	29.03.22
Royal decree-law 10/2022, of May 13, which temporarily establishes a production cost adjustment mechanism to reduce the price of electricity in the wholesale market. (link)	Government input, voted in the Parliament	13.05.22
Royal Decree-Law 11/2022, of June 25, which adopts and extends certain measures to address situations of social and economic vulnerability, and for the economic and social recovery of the island of La Palma. (link)	Government input, voted in the Parliament	25.06.22
Royal Decree 590/2022, of July 19, which regulates the direct granting of subsidies to certain entities for the financing of the International Protection Reception System. (link)	Government input, voted in the Parliament	19.07.22
Royal Decree 672/2022, of August 1, which regulates the direct granting of subsidies to the autonomous communities to promote and encourage better attention to the basic needs of the beneficiaries of the temporary protection regime affected by the conflict in Ukraine who lack sufficient economic resources. (link)	Government input, voted in the Parliament	1.08.22
Organic Law 13/2022, of December 20, amending Organic Law 10/1995, of November 23, 1995, of the Criminal Code, to increase the penalties for crimes of trafficking in human beings displaced by armed conflict or humanitarian catastrophe. (link)	Government input, voted in the Parliament	20.12.22
Royal Decree-Law 20/2022, of December 27, on measures to respond to the economic and social consequences of the war in Ukraine and to support the reconstruction of the island of La Palma and other situations of vulnerability. (link)	Government input, voted in the Parliament	27.12.22

FIGURE 22: Policy documents analysed in the case of Aquarius (August 2018 – December 2019)

Title	Author	Date
Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2018 (link)	European Migration Network - Experts of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice	Beginning of 2019
Annual Report on Migration and Asylum 2019 (link)	European Migration Network - Experts of the Ministry of Employment and Social Security, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice	15.11.19
Annual Plan of Action of the Anual de Actuación de Society of Sea Rescue and Security (SASEMAR) 2019 (link)	Society of Sea Rescue and Security (SASEMAR), which belongs to the Ministry of Public Works	Beginning of 2019
Agreement that provides for the creation of the Coordination Authority for actions to address irregular immigration in the area of the Strait of Gibraltar, Alboran Sea and adjacent waters and establishes rules for its action (link)	Ministry of the Presidency, relationships with the Parliament and Equality	03.08.18
Royal Decree-Law 16/2018, of October 26, which adopts certain measures to combat the illicit trafficking of people and goods in relation to the vessels used (link)	Pedro Sánchez, Head of State	26.10.18

BRIDGES: Assessing the production and impact of migration narratives is a project funded by the EU H2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and implemented by a consortium of 12 institutions from all over Europe. The project aims to understand the causes and consequences of migration narratives in a context of increasing politicisation and polarisation around these issues by focusing on six European countries: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. To do so, BRIDGES adopts an interdisciplinary and co-productive approach and is implemented by a diverse consortium formed by universities, think tanks and research centres, cultural associations, and civil society organisations.

The BRIDGES Working Papers are a series of academic publications presenting the research results of the project in a structured and rigorous way. They can either focus on particular case studies covered by the project or adopt a comparative perspective.