



ISSN: 2584-2455

International Journal for Research Trends in Social Science & Humanities
Volume 4, Issue 5
Sep-Oct 2026, PP 1-12

Framing Migration in European Economic News Narratives: A Linguistic and Economic Analysis

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Abstract: Migration has become a prominent and often contested issue in European economic and political discourse, particularly in relation to labor-market dynamics, public expenditure, economic growth, demographic change, and social welfare. News media play a significant role in shaping public understanding of migration by selecting particular linguistic expressions, emphasizing specific economic consequences, and constructing narratives that frame migrants as economic contributors, labor-market competitors, fiscal burdens, or essential resources for economic development. This study aims to investigate how migration is framed in European economic news narratives through an integrated linguistic and economic perspective. Drawing on critical discourse analysis and framing theory, the study examines lexical choices, metaphors, evaluative language, agency representation, and the use of economic statistics in news coverage. It also explores how these linguistic strategies construct competing representations of the economic costs and benefits of migration. A comparative analysis of selected European news outlets may reveal variations in migration framing across national contexts, editorial orientations, and economic circumstances. The proposed study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods approach, combining linguistic and thematic analysis with quantitative content analysis of selected news articles published within a defined period. By connecting media language with economic narratives, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how news discourse mediates public perceptions of migration and its economic implications. The findings are expected to advance interdisciplinary scholarship in media linguistics, migration studies, and political economy while highlighting the role of news framing in shaping debates on migration policy and European economic development.

Keywords: Migration discourse, European economic new, Media framing Critical discourse analysis, Economic narratives, Linguistic representation, Migration and labor markets, Media discourse, Political economy, Public perceptions of migration

I. Introduction

Migration in Europe is a key social and economic factor in the transformation of European societies in the 21st century. Migration flows are rapidly changing a country's demographic structure and labor market. The number of immigrants to the EU in 2024 is 4.2 million and 1.5 million previously migrated to the EU who have changed their country of residence (Eurostat, 2024). These statistics do not include residents of Ukraine who have been granted refugee status and temporary protection in EU countries. Europe's territory is a favorable destination for migrants, because the



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Schengen Area allows one to change place of residence without major problems and this increases mobility.

The researcher Van Dijk (2018) in his work raises the question that modern studies of European migration represent a broad interdisciplinary field. Based on the author's observations, migration transforms not only societies of senders, migrants' receivers, but also social sciences. The rapid institutionalization of migration research is not accompanied by a systematic discussion of qualitative methods (Van Dijk, 2018).

In this context, the media began to report on migration and its social and economic consequences for society. For example, Danaj & Wagner (2021) have raised the issue of how the media create a competing framework for migrants in interpreting the stereotype "poor migrants" to highlight the problem of low-skilled migrants as well as focus on rising crime rates. The study highlights how media create narratives of "poor migrants" by articulating public opinion and influencing policy debates, calling into question the legitimacy of freedom of movement in the EU for a segment of low-skilled migrants. This raises the issue of the importance of media coverage in shaping discussions on migration policy and assessing the legitimacy of mobility rights in Europe (Danaj & Wagner, 2021).

Thus, this paper addresses the problem of how media influence European migration and its social and economic consequences. The object of this work is framing of migration in news media, and it is affecting the perception of migration in society. The aim of this study is to evaluate framing of migration in news media leading to social action and economic regulations in European countries. To reach this aim, the following objectives were set: (i) to analyze theoretical information about migration; (ii) develop an occasional methodology for anesthesia of economic news and its interpretation from an economic and linguistic point of view; (iii) to analyze framing of migrants in economic news articles through the use of conceptual metaphors; (iiii) to analyze interpretations of metahistorical framings of migrants on the economy of Europe. The structure of the article is as follows: theoretical basis in linguistic and economic blocks, data collection and extraction, research methodology, results and conclusions. Finally, the results of the study are presented and conclusions are drawn.

II. Economic background

Migration is a very broad concept, where there is no single explanation of the legal term migrant. However, United Nations experts agree that an international migrant is a person who changes country of residence regardless of the reason for migration or legal status (United Nations, n.d.). Migration in the term of stay is short-term, when a person is between 3 and 12 months old, and long-term or permanent migration is 1 year or more. Also, there is the concept of internal and international migration. Internal migration is related to a change in residence within a single country. International migration refers to a change of country of residence for a short or long period (International Organization for Migration, 2021).

The reasons for migration may be different. Researchers such as Clark & Maas (2015), Mihi-Ramirez & Kumpikaite (2014), Syed et al. (2008) and Niedomysl



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(2011) have focused on the dominant causes of migration. Migration flows are a complex system with many different factors, which vary according to various factors: socio-demographic groups, geographical context and travel distance. Economic or labour reasons for migration refer to a change of residence in search of higher wages, career prospects and job availability. This reason for migration dominates among students and highly skilled professionals from developing countries who view migration as a strategic investment in human capital (Mihi-Ramirez & Kumpikaite, 2014; Syed et al., 2008). Other motives for migration are family and life events, which include family formation, reunification with relatives, birth of children, etc. These are universal factors that are seen in all types of migration and often have priority in accelerating the legalization of the migrant (Clark & Maas, 2015; Niedomysl, 2011). When considering internal migration, it is important to understand that it is a migration to the middle distance, and often due to housing motives: looking for more or better accommodation, lower living costs, etc. In addition, in internal migration there are motives for improving lifestyles: getting a prestigious job, moving to the capital, which is typical of more developed countries (Niedomysl, 2011; Clark & Maas, 2015). Other important causes of migration are “push factors.” These migration factors include the poor quality of vocational training, political instability, corruption and security problems, which significantly increase migration flows among professionals (Syed et al., 2008).

It is important to understand why migrants often view Europe as a migration destination. For example, researchers in Cummings et al. (2022) argue that the direction of Europe is not an accident but involves many factors. First, it is personal and political security. Many migrants from Africa and the Middle East are coming to Europe in search of safety, because Europe has asylum systems and international agreements. Second, it is economic security with potential prospects. Europe is considered an economically stable area, where high-quality education can be obtained with career prospects. In addition, having relatives in EU countries speeds up the process of legalization of migrants and makes it easier to find housing and work (Cummings et al., 2022). Other researchers at De Giorgi & Pellizzari (2009) argue that Europe is attractive to migrants because of its social benefits. Generous benefits from EU countries increase migration flows but are not the main reason for migration. Europe’s territory is attractive to migrants for its economic stability and prospects, but social benefits also play an important role. This gives the migrant time and opportunity to find a job or enter university (De Giorgi & Pellizzari, 2009).

Europe’s migration crisis peaked in 2015, resulting in tighter migration policies, including the 2016 EU-Turkey agreement, the expansion of Frontex, and the creation of trust funds for Africa. But despite the tightening of migration policies, migration has not stopped, but has adapted to new conditions, maintaining its dynamics and economic prospects (Scipioni, 2018; Helbling & Kalkum, 2018; Gladyshev & Sychov, 2020). The 2015 crisis was significant, with more than 1.8 million people arriving, particularly from conflict zones in Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and became a classic “failing forward” case, involving a complex failure to allocate quotas. But at the same time, the EU is strengthening its security and focusing on external agreements, such as the €6 billion with Turkey, the €3 billion with Libya, and the trust fund for Africa (Attinà, 2016; Niemann & Zaun, 2023). The crisis has not gone uncriticized, and the



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EU has been criticized for being a buffer zone, growing populism and Euroskepticism as a political movement, and an increase in humanitarian corridors and visas (Oliveira Martins & Strange, 2019; Helbling & Kalkum, 2018).

Overall, the economic crisis in the EU cost tens of billions of euros between 2015 and 2017, but in the long run this gap has been bridged by migrants in demographic and labor shortages (De Giorgi & Pellizzari, 2009).

Framing through conceptual metaphor

News outlets are an important medium for the depiction of migration processes due to the fact that they both discuss the current state of affairs in this field and shape public opinion on the topic of migration through the use of various communicative strategies. Among these communicative strategies that frame news narratives is conceptual metaphor, which serves to structure public perception of migration and to highlight specific information details while hiding others. According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff & Johnson (1980, 2003), conceptual metaphor refers to a cognitive tool, which uses domain mappings to explain more abstract ideas through more familiar concepts. Domain mappings occur in the following way: X is Y, where X refers to an abstract idea (target domain or what needs to be explained), such as migration, and a specific concept (source domain or what explains an abstract idea). The use of various metaphorical source domains makes metaphors a strong tool in media discourse, since the same notion or event can be perceived and understood completely differently, depending on the framings used to discuss the notion/event.

There are many strong conceptual metaphors in migration discourse that present the migration process as something negative and, due to this, form a negative and reprehensible public opinion towards migrants. According to studies by Santa Ana (1999, 2002), the American media tend to present migrants through metaphorical frames of water elements, invasion, animals, parasites and diseases. Subsequently, such frames present migrants as a threat to the safety of citizens and lead to real actions, namely policies to “protect” the local population, such as Proposition 187 or restriction of access to social benefits, along with social approval of such measures (Bitenc et al., 2022; Lakoff, 1993; Musolff, 2016; Santa Ana, 2002). Similar tendencies are observed in the European media, as defined by Baker et al. (2008) in a corpus study of the British media, where the words “asylum seekers,” “immigrant,” and “refugee” are considered collocations of the words “illegal,” “wave,” “burden,” “flood,” and many more.

Thus, migration is presented in the form of water flows that overwhelm the country and deplete its various resources (Baker et al., 2008, Charteris-Black, 2004). A study by Arcimavičienė and Baglama (2018) determines that conceptual metaphors in the media discourse contribute to the opposition of citizens with migrants, through “them vs us” narrative. The media tends to present local population through metaphorical imagery of order and sacrifice of their resources, while migrants are depicted with the imagery of chaos and danger for a country’s citizens. Such a tendency reinforces the social gap between citizens and migrants, which dehumanizes migrants due to negative framing in media and leads to the creation of anti-migration ideology within



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society (Arcimavičienė & Baglama 2018). This, in turn, decreases empathy from the local population and allows policymakers to adopt more harsh ways to treat migrants (Gatti et al., 2024; Musolff, 2016). This position is supported by other researchers who also argue that such metaphors go beyond the media discourse, namely, they find their application in the political arena to use rhetoric to intimidate the public (Krzyżanowski et al., 2018; Wodak 2015, 2021).

Regarding how the metaphorical frames of migration changed over time, several diachronic studies have been conducted, such as by Taylor (2021, 2022). As a result of the analysis of conceptual metaphors of migration in *The Times* dated to 1800-2018, the main metaphorical frames for this social phenomenon are metaphors related to water, such as streams, tides, and waves (Taylor, 2021). However, their use differed based on the needs of discourse: in earlier times, these metaphors were presented neutrally or even positively, which presented migration as an attractive and controlled process (Taylor, 2021). However, in recent decades, these metaphorical frames have received negative connotations, which contributes to the presentation of migration as a negative process that threatens security and order (Taylor, 2021). In their further study, Taylor (2022) confirms that the MIGRANTS ARE WATER conceptual metaphor remains the same in the media discourse at the conceptualization level, but the context and lexical choice change, which contributes to a different representation of migration (positive, neutral, or negative), depending on agenda and the views of the news source.

Thus, a conceptual metaphor is an important device in migration discourse that contributes to the formation of public opinion on this topic, which subsequently determines the public attitude towards a given social group. In the context of media, conceptual metaphors are used to simplify the complex concept of migration simpler and more easily accessible to the general public, while also more emotional due to vivid metaphorical imagery (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Musolff, 2016; Santa Ana, 2002; Wodak, 2015, 2021).

Metaphorical imagery ranges from natural images related to water, animals and resources to social ones such as disease, burden, invasion, and exhaustion (Arcimavičienė & Baglama, 2018; Baker et al., 2008; Santa Ana, 2002; Taylor, 2021). This has a negative impact on migration discourse, both at the media level and at a more extensive one. The choice of conceptual metaphors allows news sources to depict the migration agenda and to shape public opinions, which are beneficial for various stakeholders at specific periods (Bitenc et al., 2022; Gatti et al., 2024; Krzyżanowski et al., 2018; Taylor, 2022).

In conclusion, it is important to note that there are many motives for migration, but often the move is related to an unstable political situation, family circumstances, and difficult economic situation. This implies both positive and negative trends for the host country. In the case of the EU, post-crisis migration demonstrates a balance between work, protection, and economic rationality that still manages to maintain migration flows despite constraints. At the same time, migration is an interdisciplinary issue, since its meanings are constructed through language.



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Metaphorical framings can contribute to either a positive or negative perception of migration on the economy, since conceptual metaphors become a means of presenting the abstract social issue of migration through easily accessible narratives to readers. In other words, migrants can be depicted as an economic force or a burden, depending on the choice of metaphorical framings. Thus, the choice of conceptual metaphors in news sources becomes crucial, since they shape public perception, evaluation, and further action towards migration in the economic realm.

III. Methodology

1. Data collection and extraction

To achieve the aim of the present study, a corpus of 52 online news articles, with 20 online news articles from *Financial Times* and 32 online news articles from *Reuters*, was created. The number of articles was balanced by the total word count in both subcorpora, with approximately 17,500 words per subcorpus due to the different sizes of online news articles: around 800-900 words in *Financial Times* and 500-550 words in *Reuters*. This resulted in the creation of the corpus, which size is 35,000 words. The selection of data sources was based on several criteria, which are the high quality of journalism, economic focus of the source, the use of English in online articles, and regular coverage of European migration in their online news articles.

When selecting the data, several criteria were used as well. The articles had to focus on European migration, covering Europe as a geographical unit. Sections “Europe,” “EU Immigration,” “UK Immigration,” “Global Migration” were checked to sort the articles. Keywords, such as “(labor/illegal/legal) (im)migration,” “European (im)migration,” “migrants” were used to identify suitable for the analysis articles. The timeline was limited to March 2025 – February 2026 to examine the latest framing of migration in online news articles in the English-speaking media.

2. Research Methodology

To analyze the selected data, the analysis has a structure, consisting of several steps:

1. Metaphor Identification Procedure (Steen et al., 2010) is used to determine all metaphorical expressions in the selected datasets based on the contextual and actual meanings of lexical units. During the selection of metaphorical expressions at this stage, all of them, including direct, implicit, and borderline metaphors, metaphor signals and personifications are included.
2. To single out merely conceptual metaphors from all the identified initial metaphors, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 2003) is used. Based on CMT, domain mappings (source and target domains) are identified in the selected metaphors. This is done to determine conceptualizations and extract merely conceptual metaphors for further analysis.
3. After identification of domain mappings, it is crucial to analyze the use of the selected conceptual metaphors in the discourse they are used in. Critical Metaphor Analysis (Charteris-Black, 2004) enables to make possible



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interpretations of conceptual metaphors and the way they frame migration in the articles of both online news sources.

4. The economic dimension of the methodology interprets media narratives within the context of the migration economy. This study argues that the media has a direct impact on the economy through public perception and policy measures. Thus, the study is based on a conceptual model that integrates several areas, which are media discourse, public perception and opinion, migration policy, and economic consequences.

A comparative analysis based on the quantitative and qualitative findings both from linguistic and economic perspectives was used to determine similarities and differences between the two online news sources on the framing of migration in their online news articles and what effects migration has on the economy of Europe.

IV. Results

In both sub-corpora of the data selected for analysis, there is a tendency to use similar domains to frame migration in public discourse. Despite these similarities, the discursive features of domain usage in each of the online news sources differ to map the impact of migration on the economy from different perspectives. This leads to a different depiction of migration in news articles, and as a result, this concept is understood differently by the general public and this leads to different political and socio-economic decisions.

Water and economic resource domains are among the most common in the selected datasets. Both domains have many strong examples indicating different approaches of the two online news sources to the review of migration.

Water

1. “an influx of over a million refugees and migrants in 2015-16;”¹
2. “A lasting recovery in the south would stabilize internal migration flows;”²
3. “An influx of foreign workers would play a crucial role in countering the negative impact of demographic trends;”³
4. “Migration surge after Brexit and Covid lockdowns has eased while clampdown has slashed arrivals.”⁴

¹ Luthi, A. (2026, February 12). *Explainer: Swiss to vote on proposal to cap the population*. Reuters.com. <https://www.reuters.com/world/swiss-vote-proposal-cap-population-2026-02-12/>

² Mandala, A. (2025, October 14). *Italy's historically poor south sees brighter future as workers return*. Reuters.com. <https://www.reuters.com/world/italys-historically-poor-south-sees-brighter-future-workers-return-2025-10-14/>

³ Jones, C. (2025, August 23). *Rich economies will need foreign workers to fuel growth, policymakers warn*. FT.Com. <https://www.ft.com/content/8bdfd5d7-3584-444d-849e-b75adc2e07ed?syn-25a6b1a6=1>

⁴ Strauss, D. (2026, January 13). *Is UK immigration set for 'net zero'?* FT.Com. <https://www.ft.com/content/a17fdb36-f8dd-4316-a3e8-884c1ddc3aa0?syn-25a6b1a6=1>



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In *Reuters*, water images such as “influence,” “waves,” “flows,” and “surges” are used to map migration as a natural disaster. Strong images of natural water phenomena present the problem of migration as a large-scale social and economic phenomenon that is difficult to control. Other water images, “pressure” and “strain,” can serve as an indicator of the burden for the public as a whole, in addition to individual parties, such as governments, policy makers, or migration departments. Thus, migration appears as a “water” element, which, by its strength, requires response and control from the state.

The *Financial Times* also uses water imagery, such as “tributaries,” “waves,” “surges,” and “influxes,” but they are embedded in the context of the labor market situation. This presents migration with a different perspective from *Reuters*, since migration is not presented as a crisis, but has the image of the movement of social groups in various economic systems. Such a position depicts migration as a constant change in the number of people, which makes this process regulated and important from an economic (labor market changes) and social (demographic changes) perspectives.

Economic Resource

1. “British employers have expressed concern ... saying they are needed to fill shortages in the jobs market;”⁵
2. “Immigration has filled vacancies in the country’s care and construction sectors;”⁶
3. “Lower skilled migrants were “filling gaps where UK nationals did not want to work.”⁷

In the economic resource domain, there is a similar trend as in the water domain. Both online news sources rely on the same imagery, such as “to fill shorts,” “to fill gaps,” or “to fill vacancies,” to present migrants as a resource that contributes to the functioning of the economy. However, the discursive functions of the metaphor use are different again. In *Reuters*, migrants appear as a labor resource filling the shortage of professionals in various fields, but their discussion exceeds the economic sector. In other words, the role of migrants in a given domain is linked to a broader discourse where conceptual metaphors of economic resource are used to construct narratives in public debates on migration policies. This suggests *Reuters* relate this domain with broader notions of migration politics, such as control of migration through policies, laws, borders, etc.

⁵ Macaskill, A. (2025, May 11). *UK plans to end “failed free market experiment” in immigration*. Reuters.com. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/uk-plans-end-failed-free-market-experiment-immigration-2025-05-10/>

⁶ Bush, S., & Burn-Murdoch, J. (2025, September 20). *The truth about immigration*. FT.com. <https://www.ft.com/content/43dad7d6-3042-4697-b266-4252eba78ce3?syn-25a6b1a6=1>

⁷ Strauss, D. (2025, November 3). *OECD reports sharp fall in work-related migration to rich countries*. FT.com. <https://www.ft.com/content/671f1ec4-4dc8-4d6d-b76d-204a10458849?syn-25a6b1a6=1>



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In *Financial Times*, this domain is used more narrowly: merely to explain the impact of labor migration on the economy. In this online news source, migration is an integral part of the labor market, since the dynamics of the labor market strongly depend on it. Thus, migrants appear as workers who are able to support the economy and solve the problem of labor shortages in various separate fields of activity. This indicates that migration is a natural and essential part of various economic processes. From an economic perspective, the use of water domain shapes a population's perception that migration is causing a macroeconomic shock and endangering the country.

Emphasis is placed on “stabilizing” and “stemming” the movement of people, as there is pressure on housing, infrastructure, budgets, and social systems. This entails maintaining restrictive measures to strengthen border controls, establish external “return centers,” accelerate deportations, and tighten access to shelters and family reunification. That is, this water narrative leads to a policy of minimizing the volume of flows rather than optimizing their structures. This has some consequences: in the short term, it is a reduction of financing, but in the long term – a shortage of labor, a demographic crisis, and a decline in growth potential. In media, water shows that migration with both shortage and oversupply carries macroeconomic cost solutions.

In the economic resource domain, from an economic perspective, the focus is shifting from “surplus bodies” to economic functions to covering labor shortages in care, agriculture, high-tech sectors, construction, and logistics. There is also a kind of compensation for population aging, containing inflation through the expansion of labor supply.

That is, an image is formed that migration can be beneficial if properly used by the state. This narrative demonstrates the need to support migration policies, as it closes the skills shortages in various sectors of the economy. This leads to a number of positive changes: employment in critical industries, easing demographic challenges, and greater labor-market flexibility.

However, it also leads to a kind of segmentation that migrants work in low-wage jobs to fill “gaps,” because these dominant types of jobs are the fastest to close. Migration thus has a positive impact and macroeconomic implications, but it also redistributes costs to the most vulnerable groups of workers.

V. Conclusion

Based on the analysis presented, it can be concluded that media metaphorical migration patterns have direct effects on society and economic consequences for the countries of Europe. When using the same conceptual domains, such as water and economic resource in news sources, *Financial Times* and *Reuters* present different interpretations of migration: macroeconomic shock, labor-market functioning, and demographic improvement. In the water domain, media secures an image of migration as a flow that needs to be “stabilized” and “contained.” This includes taking tough measures to tighten border controls, accelerate deportations, restrict access to shelters, etc.



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This approach to water leads to policies that focus on reducing flows rather than improving infrastructure. In the economic resource domain, by contrast, migrants are represented as a labor force that can fill “gaps” and support a country’s economic growth.

The comparison of two news sources shows different interpretations of similar metaphorical domains, leading to different economic and political conclusions. *Financial Times* focuses on demographic and production constraints, which imply a need to maintain the competitiveness and resilience of European economies. The news source *Reuters* presents migration as a political risk and a need for countries to control. This demonstrates that the conceptual metaphors in media discourse are not neutral, but shape public opinion about migration flows, structure the field of acceptable policy decisions, and potentially economic consequences for European countries.

Thus, the presented analysis demonstrates that to influence migration on economies, media metaphors must also be considered, as they shape public opinion and influence the trajectory of political decisions and socioeconomic consequences. The combination of linguistic analysis of conceptual metaphors and economic interpretation of media resources provides a better understanding of how news about migration in Europe affects the labor market, demographics, and fiscal policy.

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