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# News coverage of immigration detention centres: dynamics between journalists and social movements

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** This article analyses the news coverage of immigration detention centres by Spanish mainstream news media, and the role played by civil associations and journalists when it comes to placing this issue on the media’s agenda. **Method.** The study is based on the quantitative analysis of the texts published by *El País*, *El Mundo*, *Abc* and *eldiario.es*, between 2009 and 2013, and in-depth interviews with journalists and representatives of civil associations. **Results.** Civil associations are the main source of information in news about immigration detention centres. **Conclusions.** The reports produced with the support of experts, about the conditions of immigration detention centres have enabled civil organisations to articulate a discourse that has been effective to reach the mainstream news media. The results also indicate that the interest of journalists in immigration detention centres has been rather limited.

## Keywords

Migration; media analysis; communication strategies; social movements; social role of the media; media influence.

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Translation by **CA Martínez-Arcos** (PhD in Communication from the University of London)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Reality, rules and access of immigration detention centres

The EU has no common immigration policy, i.e., each member state has its own legislation. However, the EU does have common mechanisms for immigration control. The Schengen Agreement eliminated internal border control in the EU and transferred the control of external borders to third countries, and then in 2004, European border management began with the introduction of the FRONTEX agency [1].

FRONTEX was presented as a formula to facilitate cooperation, training and logistics support for the reinforced control of the areas with greatest transit of irregular migration. In its first year, FRONTEX had a budget of 6 million euros. However, over time FRONTEX became a project of greater magnitude. In 2005, it launched the Integrated System of External Vigilance, which cost 260 million euros, to implement the latest technology in the control of the Strait of Gibraltar. Once the main irregular immigration entry point to Europe was closed, the other entry points were gradually closed: in 2006 the *Hera* project was introduced to control access to the Canary Islands; in 2008 the *Minerva* project was executed to control access through the southeast of Spain and the Balearic Islands; in 2009 the *Poseidon* was implemented to control the Aegean Sea; and in 2010, the *Shield* project was launched to restrict access by land through Turkey and Greece. On 1 November, 2014, FRONTEX replaced the *Mare Nostrum* operation, focused on the rescue of migrants, with the *Triton* programme, which had the participation of 21 EU countries with the objective of protecting their borders, without focusing on rescue operations. The FRONTEX agency, whose budget for the 2008-2013 period was 676 million euros, has become a kind of European army of large proportions.

These actions are only part of all the strategies that the EU is implementing to address the immigration phenomenon. FRONTEX operations are complemented with cooperation agreements to outsource the control of European borders to the countries of origin of immigrants, which are more than 15 since 2000; the Visa Verification System, which was launched in 2008; and the regulation proposal for the EUROSUR surveillance system, which according to the *Borderline* study (published by the Heirich Boell Foundation) has a budget of about 900 million euros.

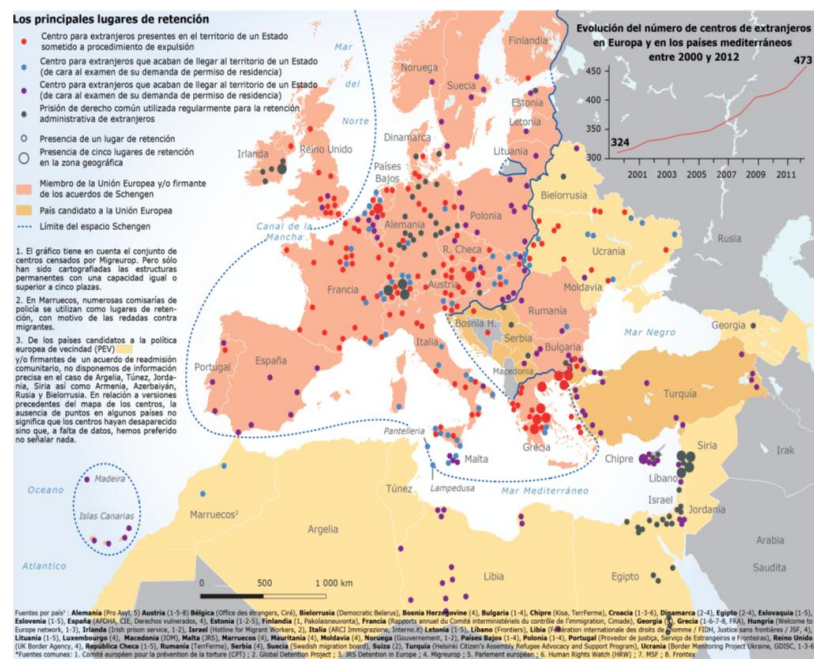
These operations with multi-million euro budgets reflect the underlying ideas of the positioning of the EU, which has been pointed out by Morice and Rodier (2012: 43): the idea of what has been agreed to be called, since the beginning of this century, chosen ‘immigration’, and the perception of immigration as ‘invasion’, which has been propagated by right-wing extremists in a growing number of countries, and is based on the perception of immigrants as job stealers and social-welfare abusers;

and the idea that their culture cannot be ‘assimilated’. One can easily imagine the dimensions of the drama and torment faced by migrants who try to gain access to the EU. The increased control of the EU makes the migratory routes more complex, prolongs the duration of the trip, increasing costs and dangers (Rodier, 2011: 50).

From 2009, the agency started publishing annual risk reports that show the number of intercepted migrants or irregular entries: 104,599 in 2009, 104,049 in 2010, 141,000 in 2011 and 72,437 in 2012. In 2014 the agency detected 280,000 entries, twice as many as in 2011, the previous record year. The agency qualified this situation as “the worst refugee crisis” since Second World War. One-third of all the arrivals were people from Syria. Despite this is a figure difficult to calculate, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in 2014, 3,419 people died at sea while trying to reach Europe. According to the blog of Italian journalist Gabrielle Del Grande (*Fortress Europe*), at least 21,439 people have died from 1998 to 2014.

With regards to the internal dimension of the phenomenon, the only community regulation that we can find is the Returns Directive (2008/115/EC), which regulates the power to detain, retain and repatriate irregular migrants, which is legally challenged by international regulations (Moya, 2008: 128-135), such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), which recognise the legitimate right of displacement; national legislations than establish that deprivation of liberty can only occur in the case of criminal offences [2], and the Schengen Agreement, which protects people’s freedom of movement within the EU [3]. Likewise, in May 2015, the European Commission proposed as an emergency measure the establishment of refugee reception quotas by countries, an idea that was not well received in some countries, such as Spain [4].

**Figure 1: Main Immigration Detention Centres**



Source: Open access Now.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, long before any EU policy was created in this respect, each member state began to build Immigration Detention Centres, hence IDCs [5], to detain and retain irregular immigrants until the time of their expulsion. The work of these centres have been virtually deregulated [6] until today and their operations have been completely opaque and almost invisible to society, until human rights associations gradually shed some light on this issue.

These associations began working at the local or regional levels, but over time they have become organised in national and European networks, to write reports about the deplorable conditions of these centres, to put pressure to improve their regulation and to try to introduce the issue in the media agenda.

These networks have indicated that the increase of IDCs in the EU, and the third countries with which it collaborates to control migration, is incessant. According to openaccessnow.eu, the number of IDCs went from 324 in 2000 to 473 in 2012. It is estimated that during that time more than 600,000 migrants have been detained in these centres [7].

In Spain, the IDCs are “public establishments of a non-penitentiary nature”, according to the Ministry of Interior. For many years they were only regulated by epigraphs D and E of article 61 of the Aliens Act [8], which establishes a precautionary measure of detention and deprivation of freedom for foreigners that are subject to expulsion from the national territory. In addition, it establishes a maximum of 60 days for detention (the European returns directive establishes the maximum at 18 months), and some rights for inmates, including the right to “get in touch with national and international non-governmental organisations for the protection of immigrants” (art. 61). It also recognises the right of social organisations to visit people under arrest at the IDCs: “organisations legally established in Spain for the defence of immigrants and relevant international agencies can visit detention centres. According to the rules, the conditions will be developed”. On 15 March, 2013, Spain’s official state gazette (BOE) published the Royal Decree that approved the internal operation and regime regulations of the IDCs, without specifying the issue of access any further.

The work of the associations at the national and community levels is of great importance here. Their reports indicate, first, the increasing prison population of the IDCs despite the fact that foreigners are usually detained because of administrative offences (the irregular situation of immigrants) and not for having committed a crime [9].

Social organisations have also denounced the little or non-existent control of these centres by the competent judicial authority, the lack of interpreters, the lack of guarantee of access to legal defence and the absence of cameras in parts of the facilities, which prevents monitoring the performance of officials.

The new regulation, the Royal Decree 162/2014, of 14 March, introduces changes, while maintaining the basic characteristics of the IDCs: the welfare services are left in hands of public and non-governmental organisations, but the direction of every IDCs and the competencies to determine the internal rules remain in the hands of the police. One of the main innovations [10] is that IDCs will have to annually “publish reports”, but access to them is still arbitrary.

On the other hand, according to the 2015 report of the Jesuit Migrant Service and Pueblos Unidos' IDC visits team, express deportations (those exercised directly from the police stations) are increasing, constituting 57.8% in 2014 and surpassing the proportion of expulsions that take place from the IDCs, which paradoxically may put people in irregular administrative situation in a state of greater vulnerability.

Despite being a phenomenon of considerable dimensions, the majority of the population hardly knows of the existence of the IDCs. One of the factors that explain this lack of visibility, which has been highlighted by civil associations, is the restricted access of IDCs'. At the end of 2011, the Migreurop network [11] and European Alternatives [12] launched the *Open Access Now* campaign in Europe, under the motto "Open the doors! We have right to know!". The press release that started the campaign demanded unconditional access for of civil society organisations and journalists to the IDCs.

Their demands are based among other arguments in the access to information as an inalienable right contained in article 11 of the Charter of fundamental rights of the European Convention (1950) relating to the "freedom to receive and communicate information and ideas without interference from public authorities", which in turn was inspired by article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which states that all people have the right to "do research and receive information and opinions, and to disseminate them, without being limited by borders".

This campaign involved dozens of visits to the IDCs located throughout Europe. It is striking that throughout Europe only over half a dozen permits were given to journalists to visit these centres. In the case of Spain, no journalist was allowed to enter the IDCs [13].

The Spanish Constitution, in its article 20.1.d, do recognises the right to "communicate and freely receive truthful information by any means of broadcasting", and, in article 20.2, remarks that "the exercise of these rights may not be restricted by any kind of prior restraint". In this case, the systematically denial of access to journalists precludes the right to give and receive information, in a kind of prior restraint that has made the IDCs almost invisible in the eyes of society.

## 1.2. State of the art review

Discourse plays a very important role in the reproduction of inequality (Van Dijk, 2003, 2007) and in the potential for social change through the construction of new representation frameworks. On the one hand, language assigns meanings to individuals, social practices, spaces and objects. On the other hand, representation policies refer to competition for the imposition of meanings between groups (Wenden, 2005). In this study, we depart from a habermasian perspective, in the sense that we understand that the media articulate and negotiate political and formal affairs. The public sphere is therefore an area of struggle for the imposition of hegemonic meanings or, in the words of Bourdieu, "for the imposition of the dominant principle of vision and division" (2005: 36). In the words of Manuel Castells (2004), "the main issue for the political players is not the shaping of opinion through explicit messages in the media, but the absence of a certain contents in the media". A political message is, therefore, a necessarily media message. Society, previously conceived in

terms of classes and levels, or divided according to ethnic or national identities, is now conceived under the metaphor of the network. “Now the world is divided between those who have a fixed address, ID and credit, access to information and money and those who lack such connections” (Canclini, 2004).

The study of international migration has a special interest in that sense, given that *immigrant* is a category created by the strategies of exclusion (Miguel Pajares, 2005), if one takes into account the unequal and restrictive legislation that affects the conditions of human mobility (Santamaría, 2000; De Genoa, 2002; Ybelice, 2004; Morán, García & De Lucas, 2012; Zolberg, 2012) and its consequences in terms of racial profiling and dehumanisation (Dal Lago; 2000: 129; De Sousa Santos, 2010; Checa & Garrido, 2011; Barbero, 2012). Disconnection is directly related with the restrictions of access to citizenship and with the legal limbo that characterises the procedures for expulsion of immigrants in irregular administrative situation (De Lucas, Javier, 2004).

The literature on the informative treatment of foreign immigration to Europe has been based mainly on quantitative and qualitative (study of the frequency of news on immigration, issues, terms and specific semantic fields / ‘frames’ and critical discourse analysis) and has promoted critical research of the role of the language used in the media in the formation of beliefs, opinions and attitudes about diversity in contemporary societies (for example, Van Dijk, 1991; Wodak, 1996). The perspective and the conclusions of these studies have varied across countries, depending on the migratory experience and the self-regulatory and legislative conditions of the media. However, as noted in the *Media Content* report, part of the *Media for Diversity* project (Gemi, Ulasiuk and Triandafyllidou, 2011), the review of such studies in six European countries (Ireland, Netherlands, Italy, Greece, Poland and the United Kingdom) indicates the predominance of a press coverage focused on themes and frames that associate immigrants with negative values. The findings include the stereotypical characterisation of immigrants (Riso, 2001. 5), their absence as sources of information in the news, and the association established between the immigrant and crime and terrorism (Mediva, 2012).

The relationship between negativity and the value of news, production routines and the construction of news events has been studied from the perspective of news-making (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Tuchman, 1978; Schelinger; Nygren, 2007; Preston, 2009; Mahugo, 2010). In this research, we believe that production processes are vital in the creation of news in the media, and complement this research perspective, which has been recommended as a means to deepen previous studies, among others by Barkho (2008), with the inclusion of interviews with journalists and the observation of news making processes. In addition, the work is part of the discussions on the relationship between journalism and democracy (Curran, 2011), credibility and quality (Franklin & Carlson, 2011) and on the perception of journalism by journalists (Deuze, 2005; Gómez Mompert, 2015; Ramírez de la Piscina, Ayestaran *et al.*, 2015).

IDCs constitute a unique case of great interest in communication research. On the one hand, because the media are practically the only transmitters of what occurs within the IDCs, we have the possibility to study without any filters the ability of associations to place an issue on the media’s agenda. On the other hand, we understand that we are facing a case in which the right to inform and be informed and the ethical and social responsibilities of journalism are at stake, which are normally quite abstract issues for which the phenomenon of the IDCs raises specific and measurable realities.

### 1.3. Research objectives, hypotheses and questions

This research has two objectives: to examine the news coverage of IDCs by the main Spanish news media and to examine the role played by the organised civil society and journalists when it comes to placing a hidden reality on the media's agenda.

To meet these objectives, we formulated the following research hypotheses (H) and questions (RQ):

H1: Most of the news about IDCs that are published in the media stem from the initiatives promoted by associations that support immigrants and supportive organisations.

RQ1: How many news stories about IDCs are published by the selected news media?

RQ2: Where do these news stories originate from?

RQ3: Which are the sources of this type of news?

H2: The initiatives of the most successful associations in terms of media impact are those that take the form of reports and are developed by networks of associations.

RQ4: Do the associations are really committed to introducing the issue of IDCs in the media's agenda?

RQ5: In case they are committed, what tend to be their most common communication strategies?

RQ6: Among these strategies, what are the most successful in terms of media impact?

RQ7: Did the “National meeting of associations against IDCs”, which took place in October 2011, have any impact in the news coverage of IDCs?

H3: The interest of journalists on the subject is rather limited.

RQ8: Which attitude have Spanish journalists shown towards the impossibility to access the IDCs?

RQ9: Have journalists developed group initiatives to demand greater transparency around the IDCs?

RQ10: What are the outstanding aspects of the journalistic coverage of this issue?

## 2. Methods

To achieve the previous objectives, the study combined quantitative and qualitative methods.

On the one hand, we carried out a quantitative analysis of the news that included the words “IDCs” and were published, from 2009 to 2013, by the newspapers with the largest circulation in Spain: *Abc*, *El Mundo* and *El País*. The analysis also took into account the news published in 2013 by *Eldiario.es* in order to compare the news coverage offered by major newspapers with a news-website that stands out for showing special sensitivity towards the issue of immigration [14]. To carry out the study we designed an analysis sheet with diverse categories based on the tactics suggested by Huberman and

Miles (1994) to create meaning: source of information (main actor of the news event), type of initiative (by associations); sources, genre, and identification (about the news' creators). A total of 324 items were analysed. In addition, the analysis aimed to establish the number of news published and their date of publication to document the evolution of media coverage of IDCs.

On the other hand, we carried out in-depth, semi-structured interviews to journalists and representatives of associations that work around IDCs. The interviews with these actors have allowed us to identify the role played by them in the dissemination of information about IDCs, the difficulties they face in this regard and, in a more subjective dimension, their level of motivation. The in-depth interviews allowed us to understand the interviewees' world and reality from their point of view (Taylor & Bogdan, 1987; Wimmer & Dominick, 1996). "The importance of in-depth interviews lies on the fact that they allow us to know people well enough to understand what they mean, and to create an atmosphere in which it is likely that they will express freely" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1987: 199). Likewise, we used qualitative methods to try to establish relationships between concepts of different areas (journalism and the work of associations), as recommended by Mariane Krause.

Firstly, we located the active organisations working in Spain in the dissemination of information about IDCs. Out of the ten organisations that we identified, we carried out in-depth interviews with leaders of the most active ones: *Pueblos Unidos*, *Cie's No Inmigra Penal*, *Andalucía Acoge* and *Sos Racismo*. To complement this phase, we attended the second National meeting of associations against IDCs, held from 14 to 16 December, 2012, at the Pompeu Fabra University of Barcelona.

Secondly, we carried out interviews with journalists who were covering news about IDCs in the analysed mass media (*Abc*, *El País*, *El Mundo* and *Eldiario.es*). Likewise, we decided to interview Nicolás Castellano, a journalist from the *Ser*, given that his journalistic work has transcended with publications about immigration and he has a long experience covering these topics.

Finally, we carried out a follow-up of the *Open Access Now* campaign. In-depth interviews were conducted with some of the leaders of the campaign: Peio Aierbe (Migreurop), Alessandra Capodanno (Migreurop) and Laure Blondel (ANAFE). In addition, the information collected through these interviews was complemented with a comprehensive monitoring of the websites of the actors playing an important role in the development of this campaign.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Media coverage

The search for the news published by the three major newspapers resulted in a total of 255 items. The temporal sequence of the collection is as follows: 65 news in 2009, 20 in 2010; 56 in 2011, 77 in 2012; and 37 in 2013.

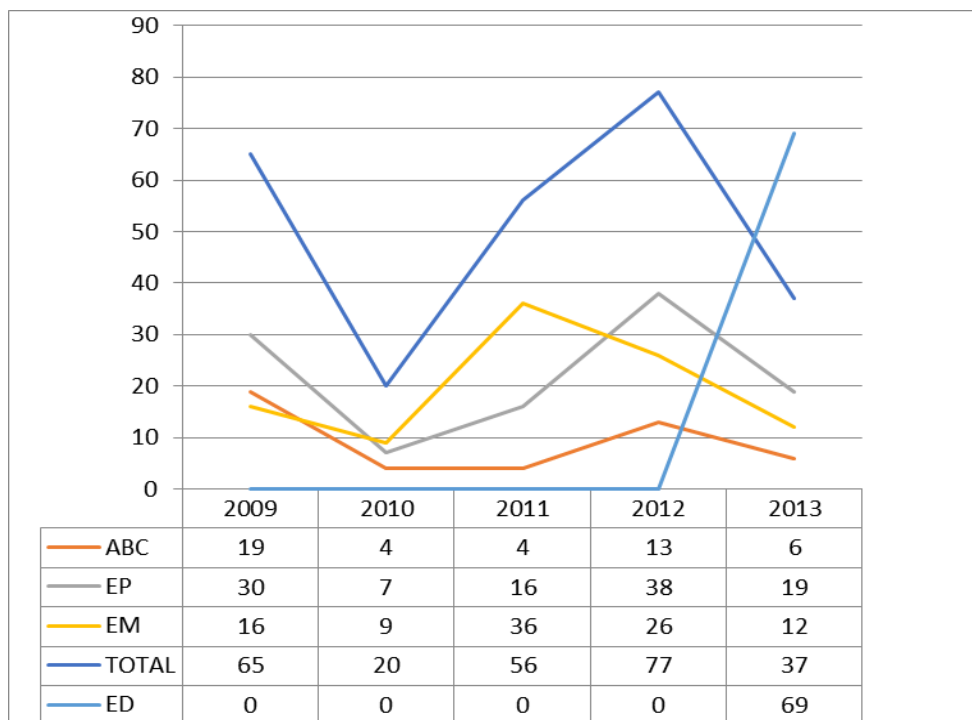
As we can notice, there was a peak in coverage from 2010 to 2012, and two drops in coverage, one from 2009 to 2010 and another from 2012 to 2013.



We understand that the first factor that determines the media’s coverage of an issue is the newsworthiness of this issue. Therefore, we examined the contents of the news collected from 2011 to 2012 to identify the events that were considered newsworthy:

- a) Two detained immigrants died in IDCs: Samba Martine, from the Republic of the Congo, in the IDC of Madrid in December 2011 and Idrissa Diallo, from Guinea, in the IDC of Barcelona in January 2012. The death of Martine Samba went to trial in 2012 and this had repercussions in the media.
- b) In the national elections of November 2011, the Popular Party snatched the power from the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party. The new Government seemed more receptive to introduce changes to the regulation of IDCs. A guided visit to IDC of Aluche, Madrid, takes place in June 2012. The government’s exploitation in terms of political marketing (used to publicise the draft regulation) had a greater impact.
- c) In April 2012 there was a strong institutional controversy over the Central Government denying the Catalan ombudsman [16] access the IDC of Barcelona.
- d) In May 2012 the scandal of the abuse inflicted on female detainees at the IDC of Málaga broke out. Five policemen were charged. A month later the Ministry of Interior decreed the closure of this IDC for its deplorable conditions.

Figure 1. Quantitative evolution of news about IDCs. Number of news published per year in the sample of news media



Source: Authors’ own creation. [15]

After having established the temporal sequence, we compared data from the various newspapers. It is clear that the newspaper that paid less attention to the IDCs is *Abc*. The newspaper owned by Group Vocento published 46 news about IDCs in five years, while the other two large national newspapers published more than double: *El País* 110 and *El Mundo* 99.

Now, none of these three newspapers is close to the number published by *Eldiario.es*. In 2013, the year in which we included the analysis of this newspaper to quantitatively compare the coverage of *Abc*, *El Mundo* and *El País*, 69 texts were published by *Eldiario.es*, which is almost double the amount published by the three newspapers: 37 texts.

It is obvious that in addition to the newsworthiness of the issue, the attention that each newspaper wants to pay is a fundamental factor in the coverage they offer.

A relevant finding is that no editorial piece was dedicated to the IDCs in none of the analysed newspapers. What is worse, there were only thirteen opinion pieces (including articles, columns, letters to the editor and notes), six of them in *Eldiario.es*, from a total of 324 analysed items. The genres in which the information is presented give us an idea of the attitude of the newspaper towards the subject, and also of the quality of the coverage. In the case of *Abc*, 98% of the published texts are news. Only one feature article was identified; zero opinion pieces and zero interpretative texts. This reflected little willingness to delve into the subject. Of the texts published by *El País*, for example, 18% were feature articles, 2% were interviews, and 7% were opinion pieces. Meanwhile, of the texts published by *Eldiario.es*, 20% were feature articles, 6% were interviews and 9% were opinion pieces.

Therefore, good coverage, as well as a larger number of texts, means a higher proportion of interpretive and opinion texts. In both aspects, the best coverage is offered by *Eldiario.es*, and the worst is offered by *Abc*, while *El Mundo* and *El País* are in an intermediate position.

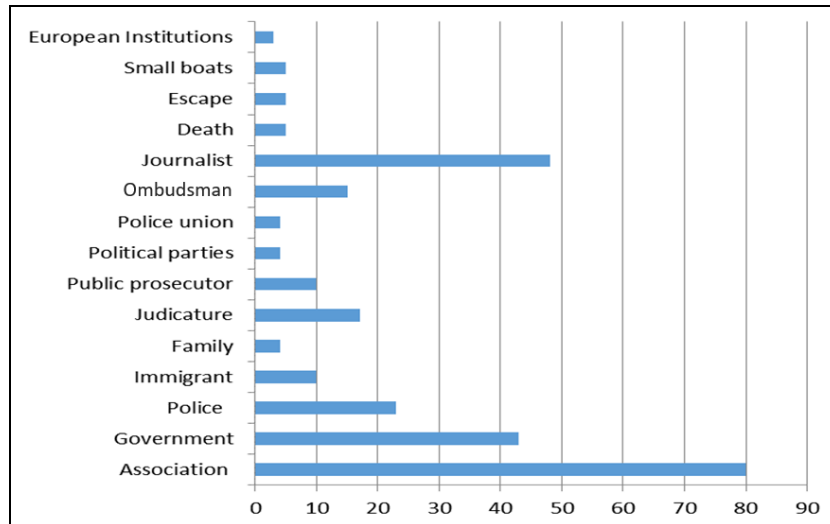
Taking into account that the change of Government took place at the end of November 2011, it is interesting to see whether there was a change in newspapers' attitudes before and after this date. The newspaper that exhibited the most natural evolution has been *El Mundo*. *El País*, the newspaper ideologically closest to the Socialist Party, has published less texts in proportion when this party was ruling the country. *ABC* has gone the opposite way. We also detected a tendency among newspapers to use more police and governmental sources when the party ideologically closest to them was in power.

### 3.2. The role of civil associations

It is clear that the restrictions do limit the capacity of civil society organisations to generate information about the reality that lurks within the IDCs but, paradoxically, the fact that journalists have even more restricted access, places them in a privileged position as a source of information. The institutions do not show great interest in bringing this issue to the public light, the internees who are not expelled are usually in a very vulnerable position, those who are expelled are sent far away,

journalists cannot get first-hand information, and the information that usually circulates is the one that associations can provide.

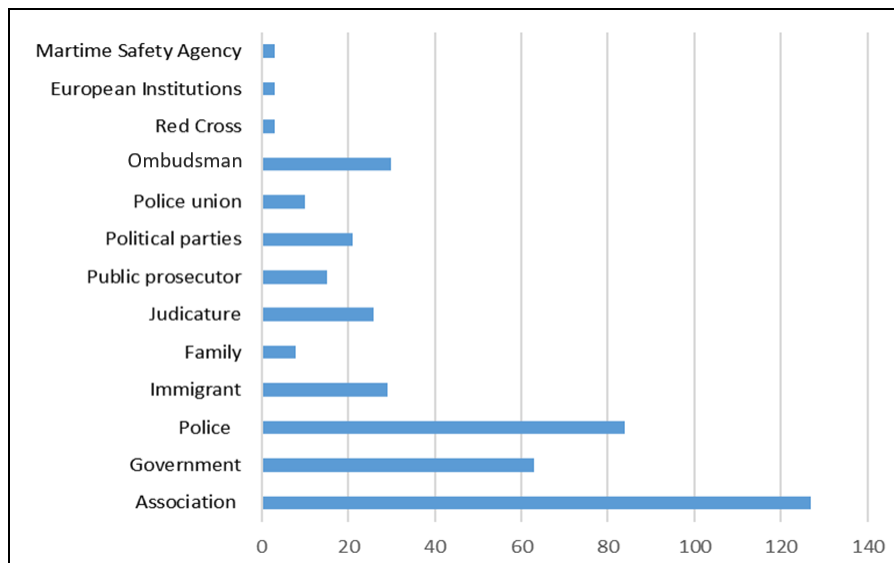
Figure 2. Distribution of news according to their origin (actors-events)



Source: Authors' own creation.

As you can see in Figure 2, a large part of the news published are based on initiatives developed by civil associations. Figure 3 shows that civil associations are also the main source of information in these news.

Figure 3. Information sources. Number of times each source is cited.



Source: Authors' own creation.

Given that organisations do not register each communicative action they carry out, the interview was chosen as a means to obtain information to better understand their strategies in this field.

Their approach to the media has not been a priority. The interviewed social organisations do not have a budget large enough to maintain a department specialised in communication, which has traditionally been a secondary element when compared with the assistance work provided to inmates and the dialogue with institutions to try to modify the conditions of the IDCs. Despite this, there is evidence of a change, given that the organisations are increasingly granting more importance to communication.

“I believe that the main effort must be made by those who work in this field because inevitably we cannot ask a media to make an extra effort. I understand the media as companies... we must work with them and do so aware of their information routines, the elements that will influence the media then most, and carry out a work expressly aimed at them”. (Cristina Manzanedo - *Pueblos Unidos*)

The channels most commonly used to inform the media are traditional: press releases and press conferences. However, the associations doubt their effectiveness. Organisations have started using social networks mainly from 2010 onwards to disseminate information to spread awareness about the existence of IDCs and everything related to them. The use of the internet for the achievement of specific objectives through platforms like Avaaz is outstanding. This organisation aims to fulfil its objectives through the collection of users’ supportive signatures [17].

Public events and protests are part of the strategy, but have failed to make an impact on traditional media. Social organisations periodically organise marches and protests against the IDCs. However, they recognise that such manifestations have hardly any impact on traditional media. The same applies to the organisation of conferences and seminars on the subject.

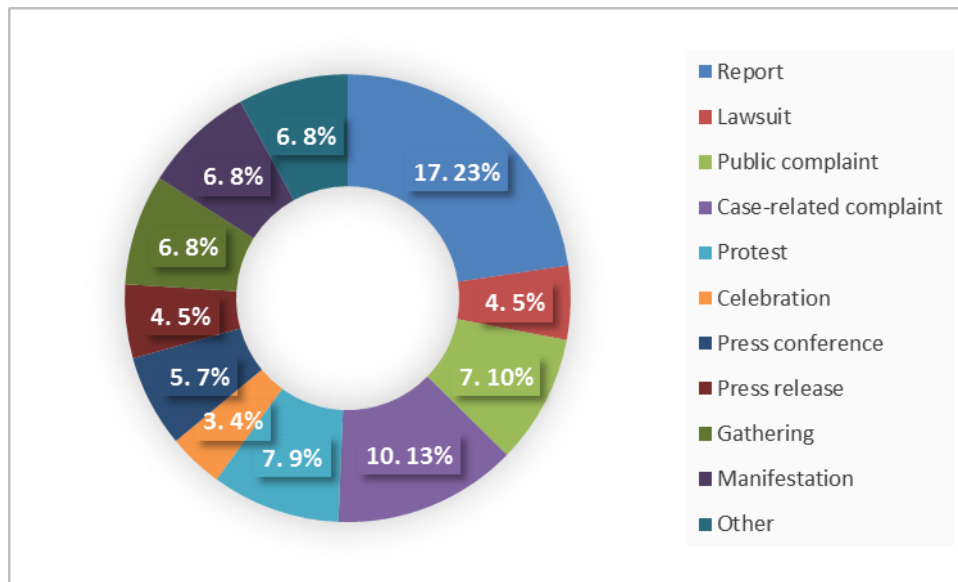
The creation of reports and work in networks have been key for the organisations to legitimise themselves as a valid source for the media. Organisations agree that one of the key factors to gain media attention is the creation of systematic reports, often supported by people trained in law, about the violation of fundamental rights in IDCs.

As you can see in Figure 4, the type of initiative carried out by associations that has received more media coverage is the report, with 23% of the total.

These reports have been produced thanks to the joint efforts of different organisations [18].

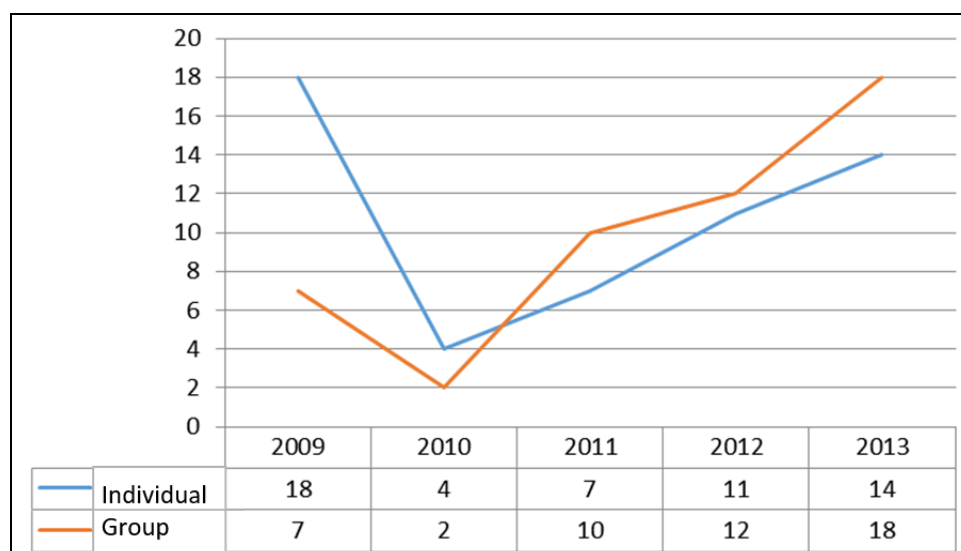
“It has been done in a coordinated manner, which is something novel... and this has been done by combining documentation on what is happening to provide the media with sources that can facilitate their work”. (Mikel Araguás - *Andalucía Acoge*)

Figure 4. Media coverage of the different types of initiatives presented by associations.



Source: Authors' own creation.

Figure 5. Number of news texts/news published per year, according to the way associations worked (individually or in group/as part of a network)



Source: Authors' own creation.

As previously noted, some of the factors that explain the peak in the coverage of IDCs in 2011 and 2012 were the deaths of two inmates, the attitude of the new government, the controversy around the

Catalan ombudsman and the scandal over the IDC of Malaga. It is clear that these circumstances do not depend on the will of the social organisations, but it seems reasonable to think that the work of these organisations did affected the media coverage that was achieved.

Two inmates died in the IDC of Barcelona: Jonathan Sizalima (from Ecuador) in June 2009 and Mohamed Abagui (from Morocco) in May 2010. These events hardly became news. In contrast, the death of Samba Martine in 2012 did become news.

Social organisations against IDCs have managed, through networking, which became consolidated after the First National meeting of organisations against IDCs of October 2011, to articulate a fact-based discourse that was effective to get the attention from the large media. At the end of 2011, they were prepared to place the issue on the agenda of the media and, therefore, of politicians and judges. They have managed to activate other players and to respond as referents in the wave of reactions triggered by various events.

### 3.3. The role of journalists

The *Open Access Now* campaign was launched in October 2011, but the attempts to access the IDCs were made in two phases: the first between March and April 2012 and the second between April and July 2013. In all cases, access was requested for both European Parliament members and journalists.

No journalist was given access in Italy, France, Poland, Bulgaria, Serbia and Spain. In Belgium only journalists selected by the authorities were given access. None of these journalists were involved in the campaign and the access was given only to visit Caricole, a brand new IDC with no detainees. The journalists that participated in the campaign were only allowed to the IDCs in Croatia and Romania.

The Open Access framework allowed us to find out how journalists react to this attack on the freedom of expression and the right to information: after tracking different websites and the interviews with Migreurop and AFEDE, we found that only one initiative has been coordinated by journalists, and it aimed to gain greater access to these centres. The campaign in question is “LasciateCIEEntrare” (“Let us enter the IDCs”), and one of its promoters was journalist Gabriele del Grande. This campaign emerged in response to Circular N° 1305 issued by the Ministry of Interior, which denied reporters and journalists access to any IDC. The campaign had the participation of the Ordine journalist association and about 20 journalists who decided to participate independently. They managed to nullify the circular.

The response of journalists was also more than remarkable in France. The NGO Reporters Without Borders joined the *Open Access Now* campaign. The Ministry of Interior, after meeting with representatives of Open Access, the Observatory of Foreigners Detention (OEE) and the French Press Association, was persuaded to regulate in favour of the access of journalists in the future immigration law. Finally, European Alternatives created the working group “Working with the Media”, which involved the French newspapers *Mediapart* and *Libération* and the organisation *Maison des Journalistes*.

In Spain, journalists supported the requests made by social organisations to participate in the campaign only individually. However, *El Periódico de Catalunya* launched a campaign to collect signatures, through the ‘Actuable’ online community, to ask the Ministry of Interior to end with the legal limbo of the IDCs. The campaign was launched in January 2012 [19], denouncing of the opacity of these centres.

“This was an issue that was of no interest to the public opinion and journalists... Apart from the individual interest of specific journalists who had another attitude, there was concern among journalists and their institutions... 20 years ago there was less precariousness, greater stability, and more possibilities to have staff with certain specialisation on the subject...”.  
(Peio Aierbe-*Migreurop*)

To contrast this information with journalists, we conducted in-depth interviews with Pablo Muñoz (*Abc*), Gabriela Sánchez (*Eldiario.es*), Manuel Altozano (*El País*), Olga Rodríguez (*El Mundo*) and Nicolás Castellano (*SER*).

To study the information strategies employed by journalists, we first investigated their motivations to cover the subject of IDCs. The motivational aspects comprise both the subjective aspects that motivate journalists to cover the subject and those aspects related to their activity and their request for greater transparency and access to the interior of IDCs. First, the reasons why journalists begin to cover the topic vary and are related to different issues. In most cases, it is their position within the structure of the newsroom. Only two cases referred to other kinds of issues, mostly personal:

“At that time I was participating in a programme on immigration at a college radio station and I started to discover everything that was hiding and all the people who worked to shed light on a reality that was not addressed by the mainstream media” (Gabriela Sánchez-*Eldiario.es*)

“It is because I’m Canarian (...) and small boats began to arrive. So we decided that instead of counting migrants as numbers and cold statistics we should go see them and talk to them (...)”. (Nicolás Castellano-*SER*)

Regarding the personal and/or professional motivations to pay attention and cover the situation of the IDCs, journalists generally offered explanations related to human rights. For example, Olga Rodríguez says that the topic does not motivate her, but that she feels “annoyed by the fact that there are people who have not committed any crime and are locked up”. Manuel Altozano points out that these are news events “related to human rights”. Sánchez also talks about the “helplessness of inmates”, “the darkness that surrounds them”. She also says she feels “rage when thinking that that lack of transparency suits the Government if journalists are on the lookout for both inmates and people who denounce their situation”. Castellano mentions that he has always been interested in “narrating what happens to the people”.

Among the obstacles to report on the issue, the interviewed journalists mention the lack of transparency from the Government. According to Muñoz, the Ministry of Interior “does not want people to know what happens inside the IDCs, not in this Government or in any”. Rodríguez says that there is a “lack of transparency by official sources, lack of data and inability to access facilities”. As he explains, for the “touristic visit” organised by Jorge Fernández Díaz, the authorities “had

cleaned the cells, prepared a delicious menu and isolated all inmates in a courtyard” so that journalists could not talk with them. Altozano considers that this issue is not the only obstacle to inform and considers that information about IDCs is treated as police and judicial information: “Almost all the information that is published is negative for public authorities so it is difficult to obtain official information of the Ministry of Interior, which is the institution that manages them”. Finally, Sánchez believes that there are many obstacles when it comes to reporting on the IDCs: “Answers only arrive when they are very notorious cases, when media pressure forces the authorities to give explanations, but they tend to be very superficial and without going into detail”.

When asked about any individual or joint actions to request the right of access for journalists, two of them mentioned the lack of union in the profession (*Ser, Abc*), which prevents actions of this type. For example, Muñoz says that “union is not a virtue that accompany journalists in Spain”. He adds that “editors should get involved, but do not do it”, which is an “ideal” scenario for the Government in turn. Rodríguez indicated that “job insecurity” and “the economic crisis faced by newspapers” makes journalists “more vulnerable than ever”. According to him, the government is aware of this situation and “exploits” it. Altozano offers another point of view: “a journalist’s work is simply to give truthful and contrasted information. A journalist is not a militant nor a person who should make political demands to institutions, which corresponds to other sectors of society”. Castellanos’ vision does not coincide at all: “I am sure that if this type of centres, with these conditions and that kind of abuse, were used to detain Spanish people, the media would have already been mobilised to do something”.

### 3.4. Discussion and conclusions

The study has confirmed that, in addition to being the first activator of news about the IDCs, social organisations are a source of reference for journalists when they want to acquire additional information or contrast the views of other actors in news stories. The first “National meeting of Associations Against IDCs”, held in October 2011 shows that networking is a new way for these associations. But its celebration also shows that this operation has achieved some level of consolidation. From 2011 the results of work in network have exceeded the results obtained from individual work in terms of media coverage. The analysis suggests that this factor, as well as the reports produced with the support of experts on conditions of IDCs and their inmates have enabled organisations to articulate a discourse that has been effective to reach the mainstream media.

Without forgetting the exceptionality which presents the case under study, given the denial of access to journalists to IDCs, we can say that organisations have managed to place their message on the media’s agenda, and have shaped those messages, and occasionally they have even been the unique voices that have marked the media’s news content. In any case, one cannot forget that the denial of access to communication professionals does not prevent them from using other sources to report on this issue: for example, the testimony of people that have been detained and repatriated by the IDCs.

After studying the quantity and genre of the news published by the newspapers that make up the sample (in general terms, there were very few in-depth news genres and virtually no opinion pieces), it can be concluded that the interest of journalists has been rather limited. Among the main factors



that have made the IDCs to become an invisible issue, the organisations pointed out in the interviews the disinterest of journalists. Meanwhile, the interviews with journalists who are experts in the field suggest that factors such as the lack of union, job precariousness and the lack of expertise among professionals have contributed to the invisibility of the IDCs in the media.

However, there are differences across newspapers and an increasing interest to address the reality of the IDCs. If the literature on the media coverage of migration highlights the under-representation of immigrants as sources of information, we can argue that in this case it has been the social movement (made up by people from different backgrounds) what has been established itself as main source of information, representing a unique case.

The development of the *Open Access Now* campaign (2012-2013), which demands the access of journalists across Europe, had an almost unanimous response from the authorities of the Member States: denying access to journalists, despite they were protected by community legislation and has the support of the European Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee. The answer given by the profession of journalism to the campaign has been uneven: in Italy and France a large number of journalists, and associations of journalists mobilised, but in the rest of countries involvement has been individual and limited. In Spain, the response has been almost nil.

\*This study is part of a research project funded by the University of the Basque Country: "Education in gender perspective: a new tool for the eradication of sexist content from the mass media" ([EHU13/38](#)). While the project focuses on the gender perspective, it includes different examples of access to the media by groups in a situation of exclusion, as it is the case of immigrants detained in the IDCs.

Dates:

- Start of research: 01-09-2012
- Completion of research: 31-07-2015

#### 4. Notes

[1] FRONTEX (from French: *Frontières extérieures* for "external borders"): European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders, with headquarters in Warsaw, and regulated by the Regulations 2007/2004 and 1168/2011.

[2] For example, the Spanish Constitution, in article 25, establishes that the civil administration will not impose sanctions that directly or indirectly involve deprivation of liberty.

[3] Some States have shown their desire to limit that freedom to precisely control the migratory flows. For instance, in 2010 France expelled Romanian Gypsies despite being EU citizens since 2007. Finally, The Justice and Home Affairs Council, of 7-8 June 2012, considers the possibility of restoring control at the internal borders in some cases.

[4] according to the latest news at the time of writing this report, the Spanish Foreign Minister disagreed with the criteria used to establish the quotas. News story from *El País* is available at: [http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/05/18/actualidad/1431953601\\_043194.html](http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/05/18/actualidad/1431953601_043194.html)

[5] These centres are known as CIE in Spain, CPTA in Italy, ARC or LRA in France.

[6] In each State, the conditions of detention are different in terms of the minimum conditions of hygiene, legal or medical assistance, visitation, and maximum duration of detention.

[7] Available at: <http://www.openaccessnow.eu/press-releases-open-access/>

[8] Organic Law 4/2000 of 11 January, regarding the rights and freedoms of foreign nationals living in Spain.

[9] In Spain, of the 11.325 foreigners that were detained in 2012, 48% or 5,924 were repatriated, and of them, only less than half had any penal sanction.

[10] Most significant developments: the regulation “will ensure” the separation of inmates with criminal conviction from those who have not committed any crime; the IDCs will offer legal services; a personal file will be created for each immigrant and inmates will have access to their records; the inmates may interview the Director of the IDC to make requests and complaints about the operation of the centre.

[11] Network of 38 associations spread over 13 countries, some of them African. Its main objective is to raise awareness about IDCs in Europe. It is based on militant work and networking. Available at: <http://www.migreurop.org/article630.html?lang=fr>

[12] “European Alternatives is a transnational organisation that aims to promote democracy, equality and culture beyond the nation-state”. Available at: <http://www.euroalter.com/mission/>

[13] The only time in which journalists were allowed to enter the centres as such was during the visit organised on 10 June 2012 by the IDC of Madrid. On that occasion, journalists were given a sort of tour and could not speak with the inmates. Newspapers were highly critical towards this sort of guided tour: “The IDC of the invisible immigrants” (*El Mundo*, 11 June 2012), “Ministry of Interior hides 156 immigrants in the visit of the Minister to the IDC of Madrid” (*El País*, 11 June 2012).

[14] *Eldiario.es* is one of the most-read digital newspapers. It has a section called *Desalambre*, which deals exclusively with the issue of migration. We only analysed the content published by this news website in 2013 because it was launched on 18 September 2012.

[15] EP: El País; EM: El Mundo; ED: Eldiario.es.

[16] Rafael Ribó, the Sindic de Greuges (ombudsman), has maintained a very active position in the defence of their right to access the IDCs. On six occasions the information emerged based on his initiative.

[17] For example, Avaaz has been used to get signatures to ask for a regulation that offers greater transparency from IDCs and got 45,000 supportive signatures.

[18] Particularly important is the creation of the “May the law does not end at the gates of the IDCs” (*Que el derecho no se detenga a las puertas de los Cie’s*) campaign, which involves most of the organisations existing in Spain.

[19] Further references about the campaign are available at:

<http://www.elperiodico.com/es/noticias/sociedad/senor-ministro-1320280>

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