

Human Migration in the News, 2019-2026: Attention, Geography and Tone of Global Migration Coverage, and How It Compares with Research

Fliar BI · Prism Research Layer · Working paper, October 2026 · Dataset and code: github.com/fliarbi/prism-news-api · Licence CC BY-NC 4.0

Abstract

We measure how human migration was covered in a global news index from January 2019 to July 2026, using 737,046 de-duplicated articles about migration, immigration, emigration, migrants and asylum seekers. We set that coverage beside 138,658 research papers on migration published from 2015 to 2025. Six results stand out:

1. **Attention moves in waves.** Migration's share of news fell by 42% between 2019 and 2022, then rose by 59% from 2024 to 2025, to 69.13 articles per 10,000. The peak month was January 2026, at 110.0 per 10,000.
2. **Geography.** The United States holds 58.58% of located migration news, 1.21 times its share of all news. India (0.36) and China (0.32) are under-represented. Libya (16.87), Tunisia (15.48), Rwanda (15.27) and Haiti (8.26) are the most over-represented countries, after the Canary Islands (31.78), which the index tags as a separate place; among the 20 largest, Greece (4.94) and Mexico (3.5) also stand out.
3. **States.** Within India, Tripura (3.43), Manipur (3.31), Assam (2.99) and Punjab (2.93) lead by lift. Within the United States, Minnesota (4.94), New Mexico (2.53) and Illinois (1.98) lead.
4. **Shifting attention.** Measured against each country's own news, migration coverage rose 3.02-fold in the United States from 2023 to 2025, and fell to about a quarter of its 2023 level in Ireland, Tunisia and Rwanda. In India it rose about six times in 2020, the year of the lockdown exodus of migrant workers.
5. **Tone and urgency.** 76.2% of migration articles are negative in tone (all news: 33.6%), and 75.4% are rated critical priority (all news: 42.6%). Among the 15 countries with the most labelled articles, the gap is widest in Greece: 94.3% negative against 31.2% of Greek news.
6. **Measurement.** 21.96% of raw matches for migration vocabulary were removed by exclusion patterns for non-human senses (cell, data and animal migration) and templated pages. Research share grew only 1.11-fold from 2015 to 2025 and peaked in 2018.

Findings stated for citation

- **F1.** Migration took 69.13 of every 10,000 news articles in 2025, 59% more than in 2024 (43.54).
- **F2.** Migration's share of news fell by 42% between 2019 (60.29) and 2022 (34.96).
- **F3.** January 2026, the month of Operation Metro Surge in Minnesota, was the peak month, at 110.0 per 10,000.

- **F4.** In India, migration took 129.96 of every 10,000 located articles in 2020, about six times its 2019 share.
- **F5.** The United States held 58.58% of located migration news (lift 1.21); India 4.78% (lift 0.36).
- **F6.** Libya (16.87) and Tunisia (15.48) had the most over-represented migration coverage of any country, far above Greece (4.94) and Italy (1.71).
- **F7.** 76.2% of migration articles were negative in tone, 2.27 times the all-news share.
- **F8.** 75.4% of migration articles were rated critical priority, 1.77 times the all-news share.
- **F9.** Human trafficking and modern slavery appeared in 1.45% of themed migration articles, 105.5 times its frequency in all themed news.
- **F10.** 21.96% of raw migration-vocabulary matches were removed by exclusion patterns for non-human senses and templated pages.
- **F11.** Migration papers rose 1.11-fold as a share of all papers between 2015 and 2025, peaking in 2018.
- **F12.** Within India, Tripura (3.43), Manipur (3.31), Assam (2.99) and Punjab (2.93) had the most over-represented migration coverage.
- **F13.** Within the United States, Minnesota (4.94), New Mexico (2.53) and Illinois (1.98) had the most over-represented coverage.
- **F14.** Migration's share of national news fell from 2023 to 2025 in Ireland, Tunisia, Italy, Greece and Pakistan (countries with at least 100 migration articles in 2025).
- **F15.** Migration's share of US news rose 3.02-fold from 2023 to 2025.
- **F16.** In Greece, 94.3% of migration articles were negative against 31.2% of Greek news overall (3.02 times), the widest ratio among the 15 leading countries.

1. Introduction

Migration is a frequent subject of news and of politics. People on the move appear in the news as workers, refugees, asylum seekers and deportees. Public attitudes toward immigration and asylum seekers are the subject of a large research literature [2, 6], and news is one of the ways the public meets the topic. Yet coverage is rarely measured as data in its own right. Statistical offices count migrants. Researchers study why people migrate and how migration affects health [1, 5, 7]. Few sources count attention, meaning how much of the news migration takes and when, where and in what tone.

This paper and its dataset do that. They combine a global news index with research papers on migration. Each comparison uses a denominator, so that growth in the index or in publishing is not mistaken for growth in interest. The companion dataset publishes an article-level sample (91,869 rows) and full coverage tables, so every figure here can be re-derived. The [Prism News API](#) serves the full history.

2. Data and methods

News. The Prism news index holds articles from outlets worldwide; non-English articles are indexed in English translation. Each article carries its opening text (the first few sentences), a primary location, a graded tone label, an editorial priority rating (1–9), themes, keywords and named organisations. We count unique article identifiers; repeated rows for the same

article are removed. When this release was built, 92.88% of the index was readable, so all counts are lower bounds.

Matching. An article is about human migration when its opening text contains *migration*, *migrants*, *migrant*, *migrant workers*, *immigration*, *immigrants*, *emigration* or *asylum seekers* as whole words. Several families of matches are excluded:

- non-human senses of migration: cell and tumour migration in biology, data, cloud and software migration, animal migration (birds, wildebeest, whales, fish), ion and chemical migration, and the migration of stents and other medical devices;
- templated text: navigation menus of news sites that list "immigration" as a section heading, research abstracts reproduced as news, and directory pages for immigration lawyers;
- one provincial planning bulletin that appeared under several thousand article identifiers.

Together these removed 207,455 of 944,501 raw matches (21.96%). One reviewer read 40 randomly drawn matched openings after the final exclusions. All 40 used the words in their human-migration sense (precision 100%), and in 34 (85%) migration or migration policy was the main subject. In the other six, migration was mentioned in passing, for example a crime story that described the accused as a migrant labourer. An earlier draw, made before the provincial bulletin was excluded, scored 38 of 40.

Measures. Coverage over time is expressed per 10,000 articles in the index that month or year, because the index grew from 11,807,177 articles in 2019 to 26,990,006 in 2025. Geography, tone, priority and themes use January 2023 - July 2026. Geography is expressed as lift: a place's share of migration articles divided by its share of all located articles. Place tags derived from ordinary words (714 words such as "Congress", "Earth", "Winter", "Cloud", "Mobile" and "Hurricane") were treated as unlocated in every location field, which removed 15.3% of city-tagged articles. For states, the comparison is with all located news of the same country. Attention shifts are expressed as migration articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, compared between 2023 and 2025.

Research and patents. Research papers are de-duplicated articles and reviews (2000–2025) with *migration*, *migrants*, *migrant workers*, *immigration*, *immigrants*, *emigration*, *asylum seekers* or *refugees* in the title. Repository deposits are excluded, as are titles in the biological, computing, physical and animal senses of migration. Patent families (2015–2024) were counted for *migrant workers* and *immigration* in the title; there are only 91, so they are reported briefly.

3. Results

3.1 How much and when

The index holds 737,046 migration articles from January 2019 to July 2026. Raw counts rose from 71,182 in 2019 to 186,570 in 2025, but the share of all news moved in a wave (Table 1). It was 60.29 per 10,000 in 2019, fell every year to 34.96 in 2022 (42% below 2019), and stood at 44.7 in 2023 and 43.54 in 2024. In 2025 it rose to 69.13, 59% above 2024 and the highest annual level in the period.

Year	Migration articles	All articles in index	Per 10,000
2019	71,182	11,807,177	60.29
2020	66,907	16,230,014	41.22
2021	65,745	17,281,220	38.04
2022	66,823	19,115,515	34.96
2023	91,574	20,484,506	44.7
2024	101,498	23,311,896	43.54
2025	186,570	26,990,006	69.13

Table 1. Migration articles per year and as a share of the index. 2026 (January-July) is partial and omitted.

The monthly series (Figure 1) shows sharp peaks on top of the wave. The highest monthly share was January 2026, at 110.0 per 10,000, the month of Operation Metro Surge, a federal immigration enforcement operation in Minnesota. Other high months were June 2025 (102.91) and May 2020 (98.75), the month Indian migrant workers left the cities under lockdown. These are coincidences of timing, not tested causes.

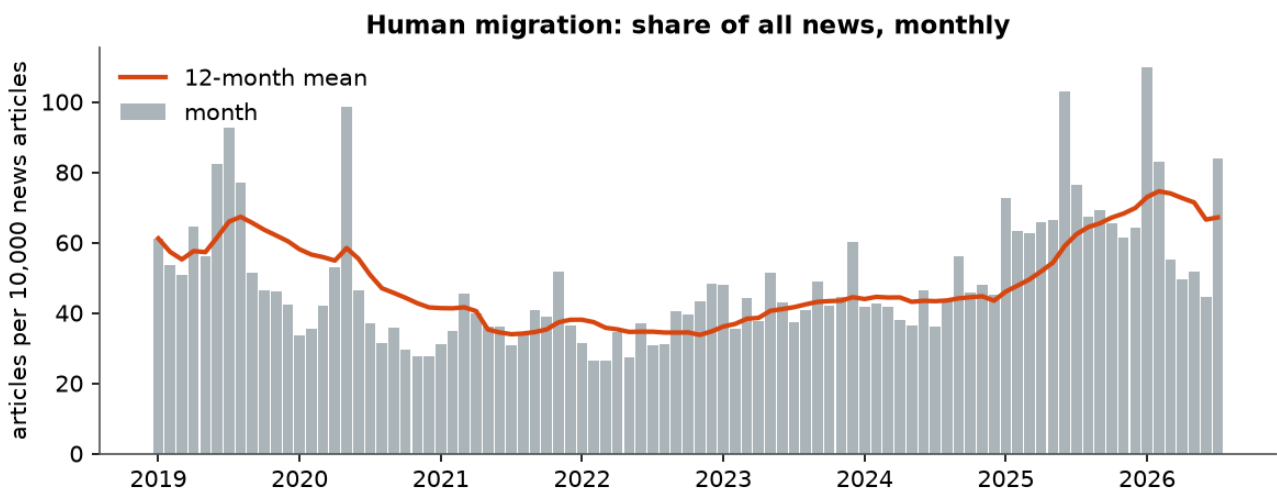


Figure 1. Migration coverage as articles per 10,000 news articles, monthly, January 2019 – July 2026. Bars are months; the line is the 12-month mean.

Unlike disaster coverage, migration coverage has no strong season (Figure 2). Each month holds between 6.99% (February) and 9.71% (May) of a typical year's articles.

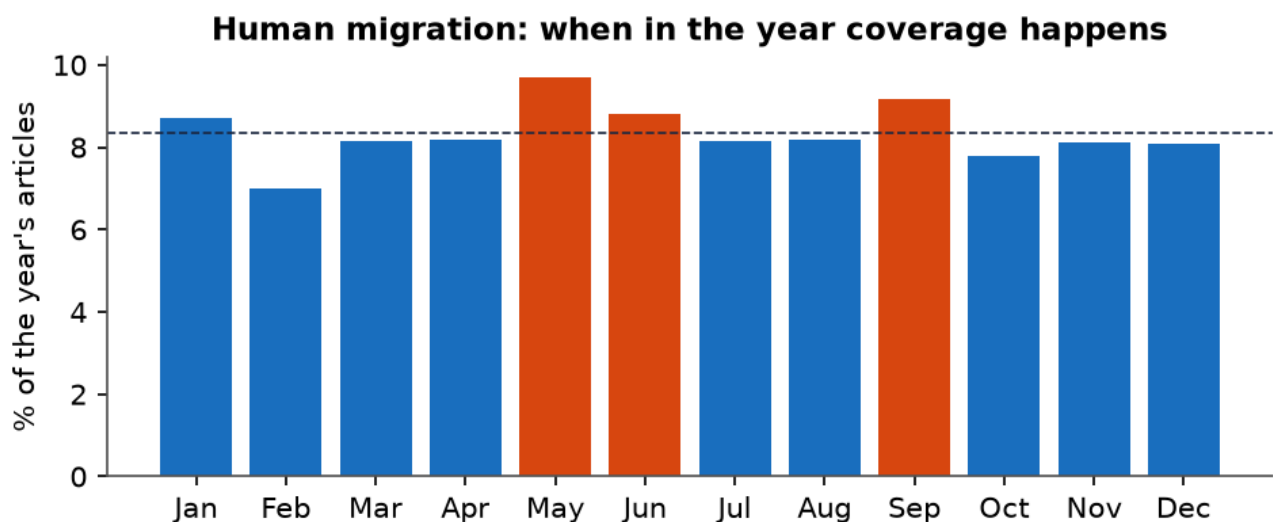


Figure 2. Share of each year's migration articles published in each month, averaged over 2019–2025. Dashed line = an even spread (8.3% per month).

3.2 Where

Between January 2023 and July 2026, 233,715 migration articles carried a primary location. The United States holds 58.58% of them, with a lift of 1.21: migration takes a larger share of American news than of news overall. India's share (4.78%) comes with a lift of 0.36, and China's (0.83%) with 0.32. Among the 60 places in the country table, Libya (16.87), Tunisia (15.48), Rwanda (15.27) and Haiti (8.26) lead; the Canary Islands, tagged as a separate place, reach 31.78. Among the 20 countries with the most articles, Tunisia, Greece (4.94) and Mexico (3.5) stand out (Table 2, Figure 3).

Country	Located migration articles	Share %	Lift vs all news
United States	136,911	58.58	1.21
United Kingdom	13,181	5.64	0.97
India	11,175	4.78	0.36
Australia	4,940	2.11	0.99
Canada	4,411	1.89	0.88
Germany	4,216	1.8	1.53
France	4,073	1.74	0.88
Italy	3,872	1.66	1.71
Mexico	2,528	1.08	3.5
Nigeria	2,201	0.94	0.69
China	1,940	0.83	0.32
Greece	1,447	0.62	4.94
Tunisia	1,096	0.47	15.48
Indonesia	1,096	0.47	1.69
Rwanda	959	0.41	15.27
Venezuela	907	0.39	3.28
Canary Islands	709	0.3	31.78
Libya	614	0.26	16.87
Haiti	513	0.22	8.26

Table 2. Selected leading countries in located migration news, January 2023 – July 2026, with lift against all located news.

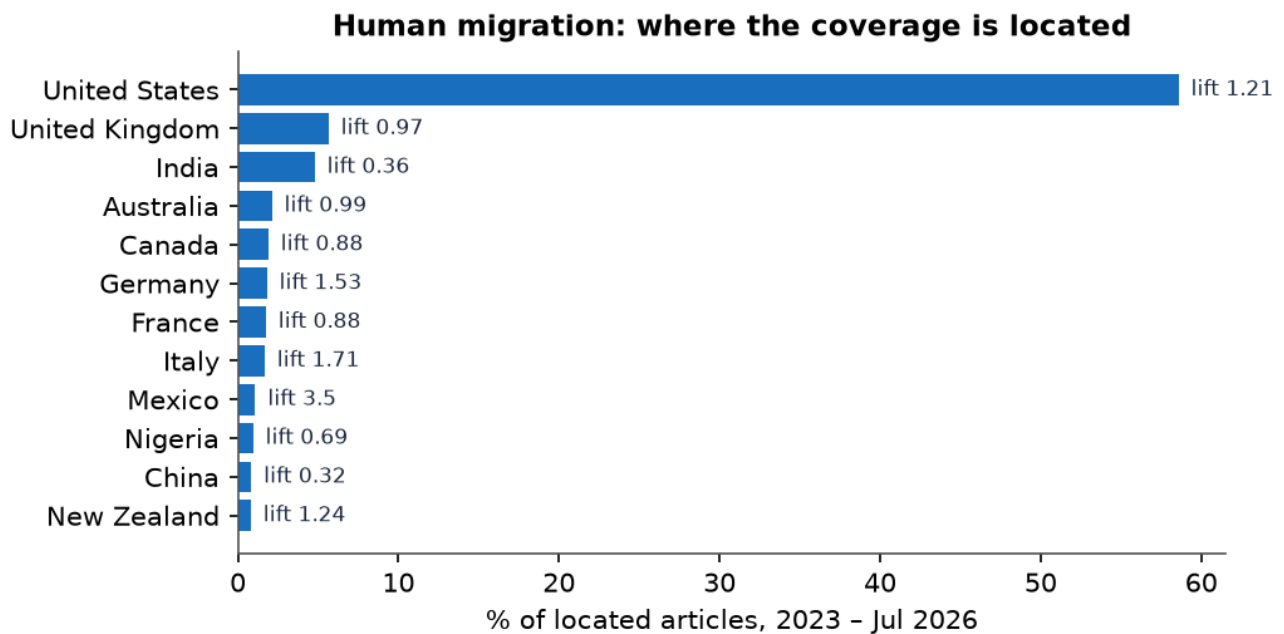


Figure 3. Leading countries by share of located migration articles, 2023 – Jul 2026, labelled with lift against all located news.

3.3 Geo intelligence: continents, states and shifting attention

The world map (Figure 4) shows the pattern at a glance. Migration is over-represented in the news of the United States, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, Venezuela, North Africa, Rwanda, Greece, Italy and Germany. It is under-represented in East Asia (Japan 0.23, China 0.32), India (0.36), Brazil (0.28) and Southern Africa (South Africa 0.53). By continent, North America (1.25), Africa (1.17) and Oceania (1.09) are over-represented, Europe (0.99) is close to parity, and South America (0.57) and Asia (0.51) are under-represented (Figure 7, left).

Human migration: which countries over- and under-cover the topic

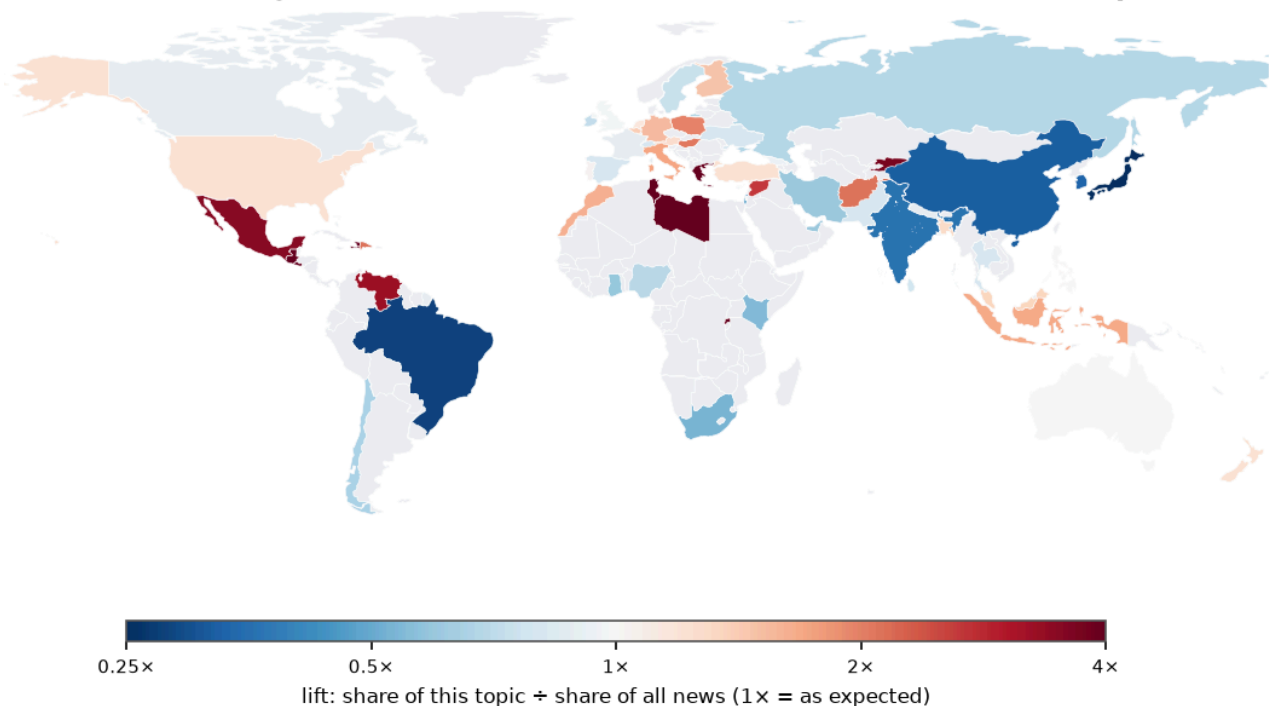
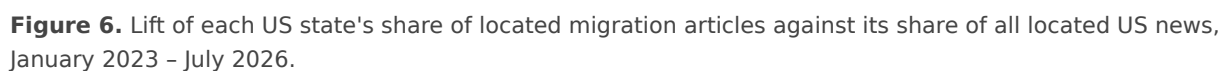
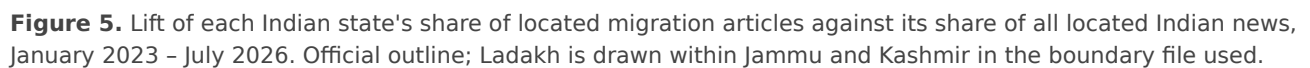


Figure 4. Lift of each country's share of located migration articles, January 2023 – July 2026 (red = over-represented, blue = under-represented, grey = fewer than 100 articles). India is drawn with its official outline.

Within countries, the picture is sharper (Table 3). In India, migration coverage concentrates in the north-eastern states and in Punjab and West Bengal. Measured against each state's share of Indian news, Tripura (3.43), Manipur (3.31), Assam (2.99), Punjab (2.93) and West Bengal (2.02) are the most over-represented. Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (0.47 each) and Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh (0.49 each) are the most under-represented; Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra have large article counts (Figure 5). In the United States, Minnesota (4.94), New Mexico (2.53) and Illinois (1.98) lead by lift, followed by Maryland (1.88) and Arizona (1.82). New Jersey (0.1), Delaware (0.3) and Hawaii (0.31) are furthest below their weight in American news (Figure 6). About a fifth of New Mexico's sampled articles carry the city tag Gallup, which there names the polling firm rather than the city, so its lift is somewhat overstated.

India: state	Articles	Lift	United States: state	Articles	Lift
Tripura	72	3.43	Minnesota	8,894	4.94
Manipur	169	3.31	New Mexico	1,000	2.53
Assam	445	2.99	Illinois	5,909	1.98
Punjab	676	2.93	Maryland	2,151	1.88
West Bengal	639	2.02	Arizona	1,230	1.82
Meghalaya	82	1.92	Texas	11,613	1.75
Kerala	387	1.75	Oregon	1,937	1.72
Tamil Nadu	678	1.49	Tennessee	4,108	1.6
Andhra Pradesh	102	0.49	Pennsylvania	2,368	0.35
Maharashtra	707	0.49	Hawaii	107	0.31
Uttar Pradesh	546	0.47	Delaware	144	0.3
Madhya Pradesh	127	0.47	New Jersey	2,159	0.1

Table 3. States with the highest and lowest lift in migration coverage, January 2023 – July 2026 (states with at least 50 articles). Lift = the state's share of the country's located migration articles ÷ its share of all located news from that country.



Attention also moves between countries from year to year (Table 4, Figure 7, right). Measured as migration articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, the United States rose from 36.49 in 2023 to 110.2 in 2025 (3.02 times), Germany 1.55 times, Indonesia 1.54 times and India 1.35 times. Ireland (0.25), Tunisia (0.27), Italy (0.4), Greece (0.42) and Pakistan (0.46) fell over the same years. Rwanda's share also fell steeply, from 1,291.61 to 359.09 per 10,000, but it had fewer than 100 migration articles in 2025 and is left out of Table 4. India's series has its own shape: migration took 21.04 of every 10,000 Indian articles in 2019, 129.96 in 2020, the year of the lockdown exodus, and 22.95 in 2021.

Country	Per 10,000, 2023	Per 10,000, 2025	Change
United States	36.49	110.2	3.02
Germany	81.72	126.6	1.55
Indonesia	85.93	132.74	1.54
India	20.98	28.38	1.35
Pakistan	80.29	37.04	0.46
Greece	544.86	231.31	0.42
Italy	172.81	68.5	0.4
Tunisia	1,761.6	482.12	0.27
Ireland	68.36	17.01	0.25

Table 4. Countries where migration's share of national news rose or fell most between 2023 and 2025, among the 25 countries with the most migration coverage that had at least 100 migration articles in 2025.

In most countries in the tone table, migration coverage is more negative than that country's news overall, but the gap varies widely. In Greece, 94.3% of migration articles were negative against 31.2% of Greek news overall (3.02 times). In Italy the figures were 82.2% against 29.4%, and in the United States 87.4% against 33.1% (2.64 times). In Ukraine (72.1% against 72.4%), where news overall is already negative, migration coverage is no more negative than the baseline, and in Russia (86.3% against 72.1%) the gap is small.

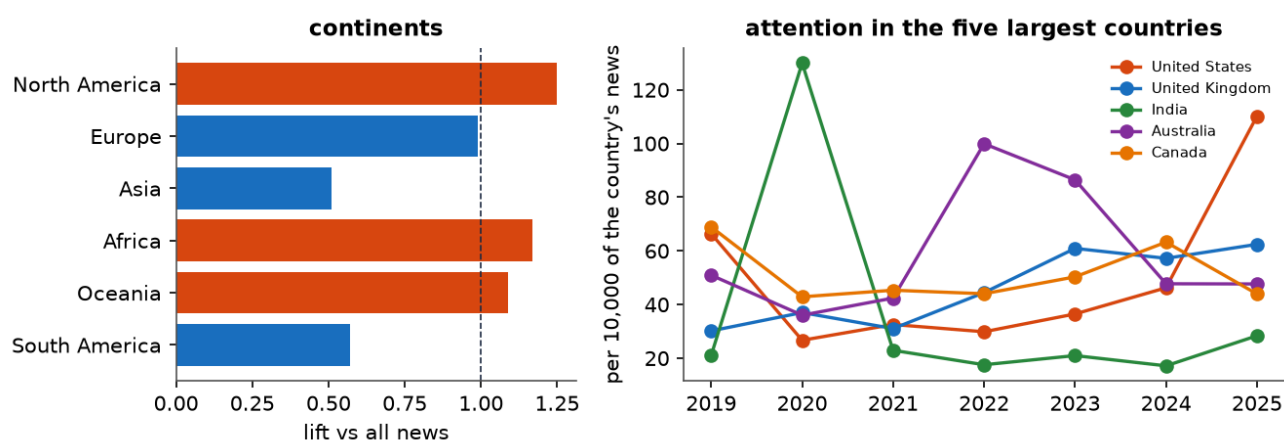


Figure 7. Left: lift by continent, January 2023 – July 2026. Right: migration articles per 10,000 of each country's located news, 2019–2025, for the five countries with the most articles.

3.4 Tone, urgency and themes

Migration coverage is far more negative and more urgent than news in general (Figure 8). Among articles with a tone label, 76.2% are negative, against 33.6% across the index (2.27 times). Machine-assigned priority puts 75.4% of migration articles at critical level (7 or higher), against 42.6% of all news (1.77 times).

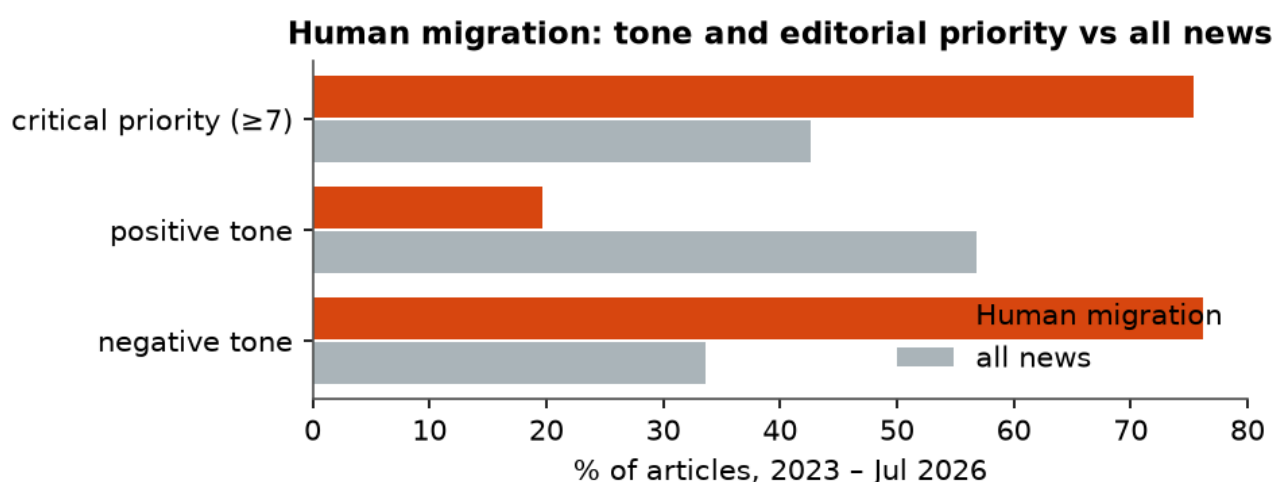


Figure 8. Tone and the share rated critical priority, migration articles vs all news, 2023 – Jul 2026.

Themes show what migration stories are about (Table 5). Immigration policy and migrant rights is the most common theme (26.08% of themed articles). Deportation and removal defence appears in 5.07%, and human trafficking and modern slavery in 1.45%, at 105.5 times its rate in all news.

Theme	Articles	Share %	Lift
immigration compliance and enforcement	4,870	1.74	107.48
human trafficking and modern slavery	4,037	1.45	105.5
immigration policy and migrant rights	72,865	26.08	101.99
deportation and removal defense strategies	14,177	5.07	100.12
refugee crisis and resettlement programs	22,599	8.09	97.35
refugee and asylum seeker policies	7,255	2.6	96.97
immigration court procedures and appeals	4,813	1.72	94.89
immigrant integration and settlement programs	3,168	1.13	90.14

Table 5. Themes most specific to migration coverage (lift against all themed news), January 2023 – July 2026.

The organisations named most often are US government agencies and news organisations: the Department of Homeland Security (44,194 articles), Customs and Border Protection (8,923), Citizenship and Immigration Services (6,797), the American Civil Liberties Union (6,608) and the UK Home Office (5,803). Wire services and broadcasters also rank high, which reflects how migration news is sourced and the weight of US outlets in the index.

3.5 Research attention and invention

Research on migration grew a little faster than the scientific literature. Papers with human-migration terms in the title rose from 16.9 per 10,000 papers in 2015 to 18.73 in 2025, a 1.11-fold increase in share. The share peaked at 20.87 in 2018 and has drifted down since. Between 2015 and 2025, 138,658 such papers were published. The most-cited include theoretical work on migration and development [1, 5], studies of public attitudes toward immigration and asylum seekers [2, 6], and work on environmental change as a driver of migration [3].

News attention does not track research attention (Figure 9). Research share was nearly flat from 2017, while news share fell to 2022 and then rose sharply in 2025.

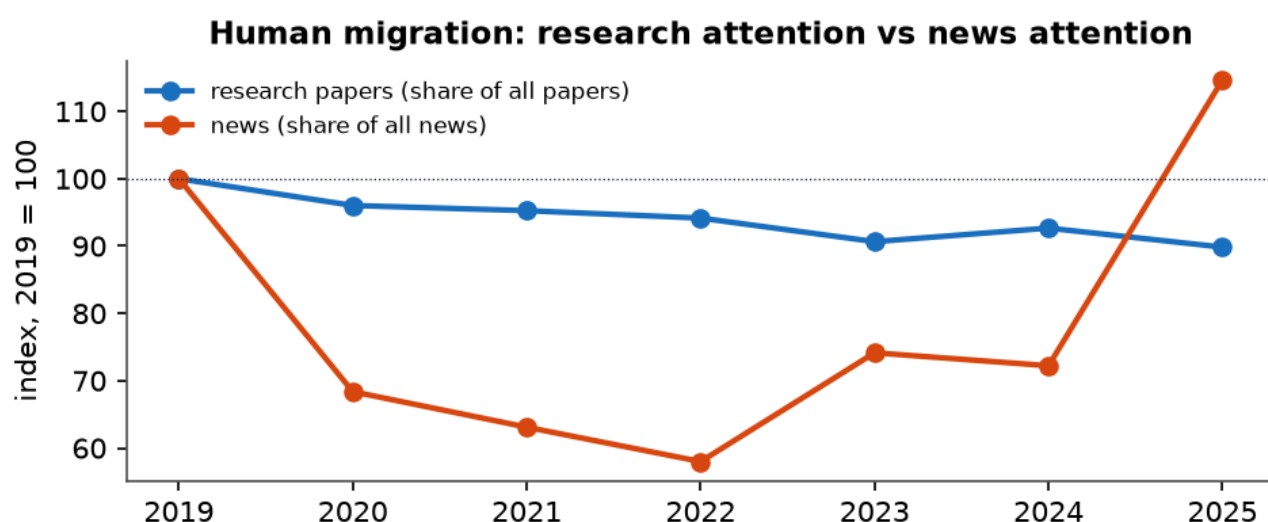


Figure 9. Research papers with migration terms in the title (share of all papers) and migration news (share of all news), each indexed to 2019 = 100.

Patenting on the topic is marginal. Only 91 patent families published from 2015 to 2024 carry *migrant workers* or *immigration* in the title, 50 of them filed in China and 12 in the United States, mostly in data-processing classes (G06Q, 17 families; G06F, 10) (Figure 10).

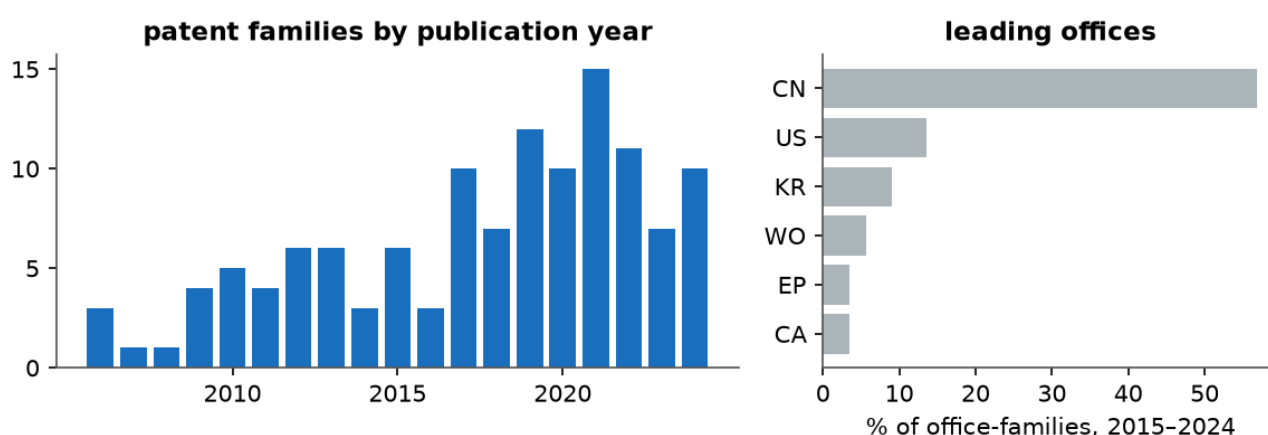


Figure 10. Patent families with migrant-worker or immigration terms in the title, by publication year (left) and the leading filing offices, 2015–2024 (right).

4. Discussion

Three points matter for anyone who uses news as a record of migration. First, coverage measures attention. The fall from 2019 to 2022 and the rise in 2025 describe how much of the news migration took, not the number of people who moved; this paper does not test what drove them. Second, raw shares mislead in both directions. The United States dominates migration news in raw terms and is also over-represented, so global totals are weighted heavily toward US immigration news. India, with large internal and international migration, is under-represented in this index except in moments such as the 2020 lockdown. Libya, Tunisia, Greece and Mexico, on the Mediterranean and US-Mexico routes, are among the places where migration is most over-represented. Third, a large share of what keyword searches return as "migration news" is not about people at all: exclusion patterns for non-human senses and templated pages removed about a fifth of raw matches.

Tone deserves care. Migration articles are mostly negative, but the negative label describes events such as deaths at sea, raids, detention and court disputes, not the people who migrate. The comparison with each country's own baseline shows where migration stands

out from the rest of the news, as in Greece and Italy, and where it does not, as in Ukraine. Research, by contrast, has held a steady share of the literature, so the swings in news attention are not matched by swings in research output. Researchers have also questioned the categories and the language of crisis used in migration debates [4].

5. Limitations

- **Index availability.** 92.88% of the index was readable at build time, so counts are lower bounds. Shares and lifts are less affected, because the missing part is spread across topics.
- **Coverage after May 2026.** The index thins after May 2026, so 2026 (January–July) is partial and is excluded from year comparisons.
- **Matching.** Matching uses the article opening. Articles that mention migration only later are missed. Terms such as *refugee* and *deportation* are not news terms, so some refugee and deportation stories that never use the matched words are missed.
- **Machine labels.** Location, tone, priority and themes are machine-labelled. The city field is noisy and is not analysed.
- **Place words.** Place tags derived from ordinary words were treated as unlocated (15.3% of city-tagged articles), so located counts are lower bounds and a real place that shares its name with such a word is dropped too.
- **Outlet mix.** The index over-represents English-language and US outlets. This shapes both the totals and the geography; lift corrects for the mix only in part.
- **Research and patent counts.** These match titles only. The research count includes *refugees*, which the news match does not, and patent counts are too small to support claims.

Data availability

The dataset (article sample, monthly and country tables, research and patent tables, all metrics) is released under CC BY-NC 4.0 with this paper. The sample holds 91,869 of 736,768 matched articles to 31 July 2026. Full article text, headlines, publishers, later articles and other topics are served by the Prism News API: <https://github.com/fliarbi/prism-news-api> (base URL <https://radar-api.fliarbi.com/news>). A worked query: `prism-news trends "migration" --since 2019-01-01 --until 2026-07-31 --granularity monthly`.

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