



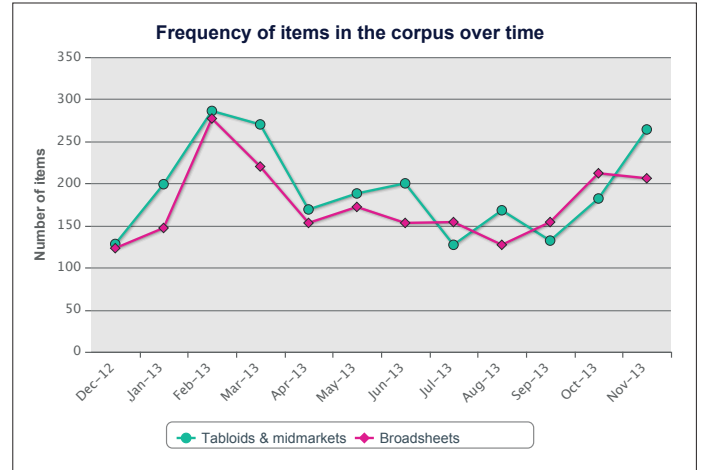
How did the UK national press portray Bulgarians and Romanians prior to the lifting of transitional controls on 1 January 2014?

This briefing explores the language used by the 19 main British national newspapers to describe Bulgarians and Romanians, as well as identifies similarities and differences in portrayals of each group separately¹. It draws upon research done by The Migration Observatory that analysed over 4,000 items published between 1 December 2012 and 1 December 2013 that mentioned either group.

The context and questions

On 1 January 2014 the British government was required to lift the temporary restrictions that had been placed on Romanian and Bulgarian (A2) citizens' rights to work in the UK. These transitional controls were introduced after Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007. In the run up to the January 2014 expiry of transitional controls, several sections of the British press discussed the potential magnitude and impact of migration after the limitations were lifted, despite the fact that data about actual numbers of A2 migrants coming to the UK are only now beginning to become available. Using a dataset (called a 'corpus') of 4,441 items published in the 19 main UK national newspapers between 1 December 2012 and 1 December 2013 that mentioned either of these groups, this briefing reports on two key questions: (1) What issues were raised alongside mentions of both groups when they appeared together? (2) What language was used in connection with mentions of each group when they appeared separately?

Looking at the data as a whole, overall coverage mentioning Bulgaria, Bulgarians, Romania, or Romanians was highest in February 2013 due to the horsemeat scandal which implicated Romanian abattoirs. Generally, tabloids and midmarkets published more items about these groups than broadsheets.



Source: The Migration Observatory: www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk

Portrayal of Bulgarians and Romanians When They Appeared Together

When tabloid and broadsheet newspapers used the phrases 'Bulgarian and Romanian' or 'Romanian and Bulgarian', they were usually describing people or things related to immigration: for example, Bulgarian and Romanian MIGRANTS, WORKERS, or IMMIGRANTS. This is important to note because the dataset was collected with no prior topic in mind other than collecting references to Bulgaria and Romania.



References to specific numbers also frequently appeared with mentions of these groups. The most common were 29 MILLION — the approximate combined populations of Romania and Bulgaria — and 50,000, which was a prediction from pressure group MigrationWatch of how many A2 migrants would be added to the UK population each year for five years following the end of transitional controls. Words that referenced general quantities such as THOUSANDS and MILLIONS were also frequent. These kinds of occurrences were more frequently seen in the tabloids compared to broadsheets. Observing the presence of a range of figures presented by newspapers is particularly striking given the lack of official data regarding actual or anticipated numbers of people moving from either country.

Verbs used to discuss Romanians and Bulgarians together across both broadsheets and tabloids were frequently related to travel (including words like COME, ARRIVE, MOVE, TRAVEL, and HEAD). Meanwhile, in tabloids these also included metaphors communicating the anticipated scale and speed of migration (such as FLOOD and FLOCK).

Comparing Portrayal of Bulgarians and Romanians As Separate Groups

The research also examined all instances where newspapers mentioned each group separately, in the absence of the other. This revealed some clear differences and similarities in the language used to describe each group.

People and objects described as Bulgarian by the tabloids and broadsheets tended to centre on references to football (MIDFIELDER, WINGER) or a specific case of an allegedly abducted blonde Roma child in Greece (as seen in words like WOMAN, COUPLE, and MOTHER). However, nouns described as Romanian clustered around ideas of criminality, anti-social behaviour, and economic hardship, as evidenced by words like GANG, CRIMINAL, SQUATTER, and BEGGAR. Along with words related to the 2013 horsemeat scandal (such as SLAUGHTERHOUSE and ABATTOIR), these were not present in descriptions of Bulgarians.

Actions associated with both groups tended to include references to movement or settlement, as seen by verbs like MOVE, LIVE, and COME. However, the word ARREST was usually associated with mentions of Romanians rather than Bulgarians, as in the phrase 'a Romanian or Romanians arrested for'. This echoes the links already drawn between criminality and nouns described as Romanian.

Conclusion

This study comprehensively documented the language which UK national press outlets actually used to describe two key groups at a critical time for migration governance and policy. Not only does it contribute an important set of evidence regarding press portrayals of migrant groups, it also demonstrates possibilities for large-scale analysis of media outputs and other political text.

¹National UK tabloids analysed were: The Daily Mail, The Mail on Sunday, The Sun, The Sun on Sunday, The Express, The Sunday Express, Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror, Daily Star, Daily Star Sunday. National UK broadsheets analysed were: The Times, The Sunday Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Sunday Telegraph, The Guardian, The Observer, The Independent, Independent on Sunday, The Financial Times.

About the speaker:

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COMPAS Breakfast Briefings present topical, cutting edge research on migration and migration related issues. This research is made accessible every month to an audience of policy makers and other research users.