MILD

More correct Information. Less Discrimination

Media, Migration and Inequality in Spain

A qualitative study of barriers to access and representation in the media sector

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This report has been produced as part of the **MILD** — More information Less Discrimination project, coordinated by Lunaria APS (Italy) in partnership with African Media Association Malta, Antigone (Greece), Carta di Roma (Italy), and Maldita.es (Spain). The project promotes the production of more accurate media coverage of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and racialized people through research, training and communication activities.

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Introduction

A. About the present study

The MILD (*More Correct Information Less Discrimination*) project addresses the critical challenge of racism, discrimination, and hate speech perpetuated through media and public discourse across Europe, with a specific focus on the challenges faced by migrants, refugees, and racialized communities. The project is grounded in the conviction that mis- and disinformation, biased framing and stereotypical narratives directly undermine social cohesion and institutional efforts toward equality. Implemented through a collaborative partnership among leading organizations from the Mediterranean and Southern Europe, MILD brings together expertise in human rights, investigative journalism, media ethics, and anti-racism activism:

- Lunaria (IT): Lead Partner
- African Media Association Malta (Malta): Partner
- ANTIGONE (Greece): Partner
- Carta di Roma (Italy): Partner
- Maldita.es (Spain): Partner

Within this framework, the present report examines how issues of access, representation, and discrimination are reproduced or challenged within Spain's media ecosystem. Drawing on the experiences of sixteen professionals — journalists, researchers, and activists— with migratory backgrounds, the study explores the structural and symbolic barriers that limit inclusion and shape dominant narratives about migration in Spain. Beyond documenting discriminatory practices, the research identifies spaces of resistance and innovation: initiatives and individuals working to reframe migration narratives, counter disinformation, and promote journalism that reflects the diverse nature of Spanish society. In doing so, the study contributes to MILD's broader objective of fostering an informed, equitable, and non-discriminatory public discourse across Europe.

B. Migration in Spain: demographic and social overview

Spain is now one of the main migrant-receiving countries in the European Union. According to the Economic and Social Council (CES, 2025), in 2022, it recorded one of the highest rates of foreign entries per thousand inhabitants —exceeding even Germany— while foreign residents represented 17.1% of the population, a proportion comparable to other major EU destinations. In absolute terms, Spain ranked fourth worldwide among countries receiving the largest number of permanent immigrants. Following the same report, migrants currently account for around one-fifth of the Spanish population. The foreign-born population is highly diverse. South America constitutes the largest group (3.4 million people, 38%), followed by EU nationals (1.6 million, 18%) and African migrants —mainly from Morocco— who represent 17% (1.5 million) (CES, 2025). These mobility patterns are increasingly shaped by geopolitical instability and by climate- and environment-driven displacement (CEPAIM, 2023). Research shows that the migrant population and their descendants are generally well established in the country, a fact reflected

in various indicators such as an intense naturalization process, high Spanish-language proficiency, strong settlement around the nuclear family with children, and growing social ties with native-born residents (Iglesias, Rua and Ares, 2020). However, this social anchoring has not translated into full economic or labour-market integration. Instead, integration patterns are marked by persistent "social and occupational segregation" which is particularly pronounced among refugees and asylum seekers —the group facing the greatest barriers to inclusion (Iglesias, Rua and Ares, 2020).

These inequalities are systematic. The 2024 EEMCIE Report reveals that gaps in exclusion and inclusion indicators between Spaniards and foreign residents range from 13 to 16.7 percentage points, respectively, consistently disadvantaging the latter. While nearly half of Spanish nationals are in situations of inclusion, this applies to only three in ten foreign residents. Exclusion levels among migrants almost double those of the Spanish population and are highest among non-EU nationals (32.5% versus 23.4% among EU citizens) (CEPAIM, 2024).

Labour-market disparities are central to these inequalities. Foreign residents experience significantly higher unemployment (14–17%) than Spaniards (12%), with discrimination based on origin or nationality explaining 3.5 percentage points of this gap —independent of education or age (CEPAIM, 2024). Women are particularly affected: the unemployment rate for foreign women reaches 19%, compared with 13.9% for Spanish women. Job quality also diverges sharply. Between 30% and 40% of foreign workers with higher education are employed in low-skilled jobs (versus 20% of Spaniards), with discrimination accounting for 14.4% of this overqualification gap (CEPAIM, 2024). A major structural barrier is the limited recognition of foreign academic credentials: 47.67% of surveyed non-EU migrants lack degree accreditation, often due to financial constraints or insufficient information (Garrido Casas, 2020).

During 2024, migration rose sharply in the hierarchy of issues perceived as major national problems, largely driven by media salience and political polarization. According to the July 2024 CIS Barometer, 16.9% of respondents identified immigration as one of Spain's main problems; by September 2024, this figure had nearly doubled to 30.4% (CIS, 2024b), levels not seen since 2007 (Red2Red, 2025). This shift correlates with negative public attitudes: 57% believe there are "too many" immigrants, and 75% associate them with negative attributes. Key fears relate to insecurity (29.5%), pressure on public services (27.2%), social conflict (21.2%), crime (19.2%) and unemployment (16.7%) (40dB, 2024). Although public salience declined somewhat in 2025, immigration continues to occupy a prominent position in national concerns: in the September 2025 CIS Barometer, it ranked as the second most important problem for 20.7% of the population, just behind housing. These attitudes are consistent with established findings in the literature: perceptions of economic threat are the strongest drivers of discrimination and rejection of immigrants,

whereas cultural threat most strongly limits the willingness to engage in close interaction with them (Cea D'Ancona, 2016).

C. Disinformation and hate speech targeting migrants in Spain

The social climate surrounding immigration in Spain continues to be shaped by persistent patterns of **hate speech and disinformation that reinforce a rigid "us versus them" divide**. This is not a new phenomenon, but recent monitoring illustrates its intensification: the Ministry of Migration identified more than **54,000 racist posts** on social media in June 2025 alone (Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones, 2025). Migrant communities have long been a central target for disinformation actors in Spain (Arrieta-Castillo, 2023), and current narratives remain largely consistent with this trend. They predominantly focus on individuals of North African origin (Maghrebi or Moroccan) and on the Muslim community, who are frequently subjected to othering and stigmatizing frames (Maldita.es, 2025; Romero, 2023). Other groups regularly targeted include sub-Saharan migrants and unaccompanied foreign minors (MENAs) (López, Sánchez-Núñez and Córdoba-Cabús, 2022; Narváez-Linares and Pérez-Rufi, 2022; OBERAXE, 2024).

In their study on disinformation targeting migrants in Spain, Narváez-Linares and Pérez-Rufi (2022) conclude that xenophobic discourse revolves around three major thematic axes tied to **fears of losing security**, **social and economic welfare**, **and national identity**. The predominant axis is **criminalization and the association of migration with violence and crime** —37.7% of the false claims analyzed by the authors relate to this topic— including the narrative of "violent and predatory MENAs." This narrative appears in messages linking migrants to violent acts, sexual assaults, and vandalism, often relying on manipulated or decontextualized content not based on factual or recent events (Maldita.es, 2024; Maldita.es, 2025). Similarly, OBERAXE's most recent annual report shows that the **association with public insecurity** remains pervasive, constituting the most frequent type of incident in content reported to platforms (2024: 22). A considerable share of this content promotes the idea that immigration is synonymous with threat, invoking the need for "secure borders" against an alleged "migrant invasion", and even advocating for the mass deportation of specific target groups (OBERAXE, 2024).

A second narrative pillar concerns the **supposed privileges granted to migrants in accessing social benefits**, portrayed as a perceived threat to the economic well-being of native citizens (Maldita.es, 2024a). These false claims allege that migrants, particularly Muslims and Maghrebis, receive exclusive or disproportionate benefits (such as the Minimum Vital Income) at the expense of Spanish citizens, depicting them as **"opportunists" who drain public resources** (Ruiz Andrés and Sajir, 2023). As Arrieta-Castillo (2023: 15) notes, this anti-immigration strategy leverages a benefit-based frame to **"victimize the native"** in contrast to the criminalized migrant.

The third axis focuses on **cultural threat**, **portraying immigration as an "avalanche"**

or "invasion" that not only jeopardizes security but also undermines Spain's social, cultural, or religious traditions (Arrieta-Castillo, 2023; Santamaría, 2002). This discourse intensifies by framing Islam as a danger to Western Christian values and accusing Muslims of attempting to impose their customs, thereby deepening polarization between "us" and "them" (Maldita.es, 2024c; Maldita.es, 2025).

The discursive strategies used to convey this hostility include the **dehumanization or severe degradation** of targeted groups (identified in 39% of the content monitored by OBERAXE in 2024) and the **use of explicit or coded aggressive language** designed to bypass moderation filters (Maldita.es, 2025; OBERAXE, 2024). Despite ongoing monitoring efforts, digital platforms' responses remain insufficient: **only 35% of reported posts were removed**, with platforms such as X and YouTube displaying particularly low removal rates (14% and 27%, respectively). The persistent circulation of migration-related falsehoods —many of them "zombie" hoaxes (older fabrications that resurface repeatedly)— feeds rising xenophobic sentiment among the population, promoting a distorted and stereotyped view that can even be linked to physical violence (Maldita.es, 2024a).

D. Media coverage of migration: dominant narratives and framing

The Spanish media system, while acknowledging the social relevance of migration, continues to produce a predominantly **stereotyped, negative, and partial representation of migrants and racialized communities**, one that contributes to the reproduction of structural racism (Arévalo Salinas et al., 2020; Solves-Almela and Arcos-Urrutia, 2020). Dominant coverage has traditionally framed migration through lenses of **conflict**, **criminalization**, and **politics**, rather than adopting a human-centered or rights-based approach (Solves-Almela and Arcos-Urrutia, 2021). Among the most recurrent frames, the literature highlights narratives about the "irregular arrival of immigrants by small boats" and the association of migration with crime, mafias, and security issues. The repeated use of metaphors such as "avalanche", "wave", or "invasion" amplifies perceptions of threat and fuels discourses portraying the arrival of migrants as an extraordinary, overwhelming, or uncontrollable phenomenon (Igartua, Muñiz and Cheng, 2005).

The lexical choices employed by the media also contribute to processes of **dehumanization**. Substantivized adjectives ("illegals", "undocumented") **solidify an administrative identity and reduce people to their legal status**, erasing their individuality and social complexity (Alonso et al., 2021; RedAcoge, 2024; Van Dijk et al., 2006). Added to this are the hate-driven narratives and disinformation mentioned in the previous section, which spread images depicting them as "opportunistic", "violent", or recipients of "supposed privileges" (Arévalo Salinas, Najjar Trujillo and Silva Echeto, 2021; Maldita.es, 2025).

Another defining feature of the system is the silencing of the protagonists within the coverage itself (Van Dijk et al., 2006).

The voices of migrants, refugees, and racialized individuals as information sources are "marginal" (Alonso et al., 2021; Arévalo Salinas, Najjar Trujillo and Silva Echeto, 2021). Discourse is overwhelmingly constructed from official, governmental, or police sources, relegating migrants **to secondary, passive roles or to the status of mere victims** for sensationalist purposes (Solves-Almela and Arcos-Urrutia, 2020). This discursive exclusion is also reflected in the **scarce presence of journalists of migrant origin in the newsrooms** of Spain's mainstream media (Fernández-Ferrer, 2012). Moreover, when they do gain access, they are often **confined to covering migration-related issues** or stories about their countries of origin, limiting their opportunity to enrich the public sphere with new voices and perspectives on broader social realities (Fernández-Ferrer, 2012).

The persistence of these practices is attributed to **structural deficiencies in news production**: lack of time, job insecurity, and the absence of specialized training make it difficult for journalists to engage in deeper reporting or contextualization (Solves-Almela and Arcos-Urrutia, 2020). Although there is a growing consensus among specialized journalists on the need to **adopt more complex, human-centered, and solutions-oriented approaches** —and although certain improvements can be observed in some digital outlets or specialized sections— these changes are described as limited and unstable in the face of the urgency and political polarization shaping today's media agenda (Solves-Almela and Arcos-Urrutia, 2021). Overcoming this negative and ethnocentric journalism requires much greater attention to language, genuine diversification of sources, and the effective inclusion of migrants and racialized people as professionals within the media industry (García-Castillo, Bueno Doral and Hänninen, 2024). With this premise in mind, our study will assess the extent to which these recommendations are, or are not, reflected in the current dynamics of the Spanish media ecosystem.

Research Methodology

To provide an in-depth understanding of how journalists and communication professionals with migratory backgrounds experience the Spanish media landscape, we conducted 16 semi-structured interviews. This qualitative approach sought to explore perceptions, lived experiences, and professional practices that are essential for understanding the social and institutional mechanisms shaping access, representation, and discrimination in the field of journalism. Semi-structured interviews (Gómez-Escalonilla and Barranquero, 2024; Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003; Maxwell, 2013; Bogdan and Taylor, 1990), as the main data collection technique, are particularly well suited to exploring perceptions and reasoning that are not always evident in formal documents but are essential for understanding the interpretative frameworks from which actions are designed, implemented, or questioned within organizations. The research design is grounded in a constructivist epistemology, informed by the social constructivism theoretical framework (Burr, 2024), and applied to the data analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach.

The sample consisted of 16 participants (10 women and 6 men), who were selected through theoretical purposive sampling, complemented by snowball sampling, to ensure diversity in terms of professional profile, migratory origin, gender, and geographic representation. The group comprised 11 journalists, three activists and two researchers from China, Colombia, Syria, Spain, the Dominican Republic, Western Sahara, Cuba, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. In terms of age, five participants were aged 18–30, nine between 31 and 45, and two between 61 and 75.

It is important to note that, given the strictly qualitative nature of this research and the limited size of the sample (see Appendix 1), it is not possible to draw generalizable statistical conclusions that are representative of the Spanish media sector as a whole. Nevertheless, an in-depth analysis of these interviews allows us to identify patterns, dynamics and tensions that offer valuable insights into the social, professional and institutional mechanisms that affect the careers of journalists and communicators with a migrant background.

Interviews were conducted between May and July 2025, either online (via Zoom) or in person, depending on the availability of the participants. They lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and participants did not receive any financial incentive for their collaboration. All interviews were recorded with prior consent, automatically transcribed and then manually reviewed to ensure accuracy. Participants were also given the option to anonymize their responses, and since some chose this option, the quotations used in this report are presented using coded identifiers (e.g., P1, P15).

The interview guide followed the common MILD framework, addressing six thematic blocks shared across all partner countries (see Appendix 2):

- Access to and commitment within the media sector.
- Knowledge and awareness of discrimination and racism.

- Organizational and editorial prevention policies.
- Cultural and media contexts of migration narratives.
- Manifestations of racism and exclusion in mainstream media.
- Best practices and recommendations for more plural journalism.

The analysis was carried out across all interviews to identify recurring patterns and derive the most relevant arguments in line with the specific objectives of the research. The material was analyzed using inductive thematic analysis, following the stages proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing, defining, and naming themes. Such a process ensured that themes emerged organically from the data, rather than being imposed a priori.

Main Findings

The analysis of the interviews reveals that, despite the individual awareness expressed by participants, the Spanish media landscape remains marked by a **persistent homogeneity** within newsrooms, which creates deep and systemic barriers to entry for migrant and racialized professionals. This exclusion is reinforced by the **limited recognition of racism as a structural issue** in mainstream media, where it is often treated as an isolated or incidental issue. As a result, coverage tends to be **superficial and paternalistic**, contributing to the invisibility of migrant voices in general narratives and reinforcing negative stereotypes by confining them to topics such as migration, crime, or folklore. In contrast, the third sector and civil society organizations display a markedly different approach, valuing "diversity" as both an operational necessity and a core element of their work in international protection and anti-racist communication.

- **Access barriers:** newsrooms are still dominated by white, nationally born profiles, with very limited representation of foreign journalists or those with migrant backgrounds. Access for these professionals is heavily constrained by the precarious nature of the sector, bureaucratic obstacles related to work and residence permits, and the need to pay for expensive master's programs that serve as the main entry route into major media outlets. Additionally, journalism often relies on informal professional networks, which adds another layer of difficulty for newcomers who lack an established network.
- **Linguistic bias:** there is a strong obsession with how one speaks and writes, enforcing a "neutral" form of Spanish. Accents become a barrier, and constant corrections are common, even among native Spanish speakers from different regions.
- **Discrimination based on perceived competence:** a lingering prejudice assumes that foreign journalists are less qualified, less rigorous, or unable to fully grasp the local political context.
- **Lack of structural recognition:** racism is often reported and understood in the media as an "isolated" or "occasional" problem. This lack of recognition stems from the fact that media institutions themselves are part of the same structure and tend to avoid self-criticism or questioning official sources.
- **Insufficient anti-racist training:** although widely recognized as essential and well established in the nonprofit sector, anti-racist training is rarely implemented in newsrooms. It is often dismissed as mere bureaucracy or met with defensiveness, as some professionals fear being labeled racist. There is little self-criticism or reflection on personal bias. While progress has been made in areas such as gender awareness, there is still no specific training on anti-racism or migration-related issues. Nor are there clear editorial guidelines for covering these topics, leaving decisions to individual journalists, resulting in inconsistent and often incoherent coverage.

- **Invisibility and thematic pigeonholing:** the invisibility of migrant voices continues to be a problem. They are only considered a source when the topic is migration, conflict, or folklore, which gives the impression that they are not part of society in general issues. Racialized journalists are also often pigeonholed into covering migration-related topics
- **Dominant narratives and stereotypes:** negative narratives tend to focus on crime, terrorism, welfare abuse, and the overuse of public services. The recurring image is that of a migrant arriving by boat —associated with poverty and Blackness—. Representations vary by origin, with Moroccan communities portrayed in the most negative terms.
- **The paternalism of victimhood:** migrants are frequently depicted as vulnerable, poor, or in need of help. Even supportive narratives can reproduce racism through condescension or pity. According to interviewees, these "revictimizing" narratives are the ones that most reinforce stereotypes.
- **Short-term and sensationalist coverage:** media outlets focus on sensational moments —arrivals, conflicts, border crises like Melilla— driven by click-based logic and virality. This leads to a "circus-like", superficial approach that ignores the broader migration process and long-term realities.
- **Political bias:** the use of egalitarian language and attention to these issues often depends on the political orientation of the media outlet.
- **Absence of protocols and safe channels:** most media organizations lack clear, confidential mechanisms to report incidents of discrimination or racism, as well as institutional spaces for professional advice and support for migrant journalists.

These findings highlight the need for an explicit, strategic commitment to inclusion policies and professional training programs that enable Spanish journalism to reflect the country's social reality more accurately and equitably. For a better demonstration of the key responses of the participants, Table 1 summarises the frequency of the most recurrent statements across the 16 interviews. The following sections delve into each of the identified themes, with supporting quotes from all the participants.

Table 1. *Frequency of key statements across the interview sample*

SHARED STATEMENT	N
There is a problem of access to the journalism profession for people with a migratory background.	16/16
The invisibility of the voices of foreigners or people of foreign origin in media narratives persists.	16/16
The media reproduce or rely on stereotypical, biased, or paternalistic narratives when addressing the issue of migration and migrants.	16/16
Racism is not recognized as a structural problem in Spanish media.	15/16
There are no formal policies that facilitate access to the journalism profession for foreign nationals.	14/16
When migrant voices appear, they are often limited to speaking about migration-related topics, and excluded from broader issues in Spanish society (the energy crisis, politics, housing, etc.).	11/16
Success stories or stories of achievement by migrants who do not fit the "poor or needy" stereotype are ignored.	11/16
Language and the use of non-standard vocabulary ("neutralized Spanish") are among the main barriers to accessing Spanish media.	10/16
The most common narratives link migrants with crime, security threats, and the misuse of state resources.	10/16
The type of stereotype varies depending on the person's country or region of origin.	9/16
There is a lack of specific internal training on how to address migration, racism, and diversity within newsrooms.	8/16
The lack of professional networks makes access more "difficult"	5/16

Source: Authors

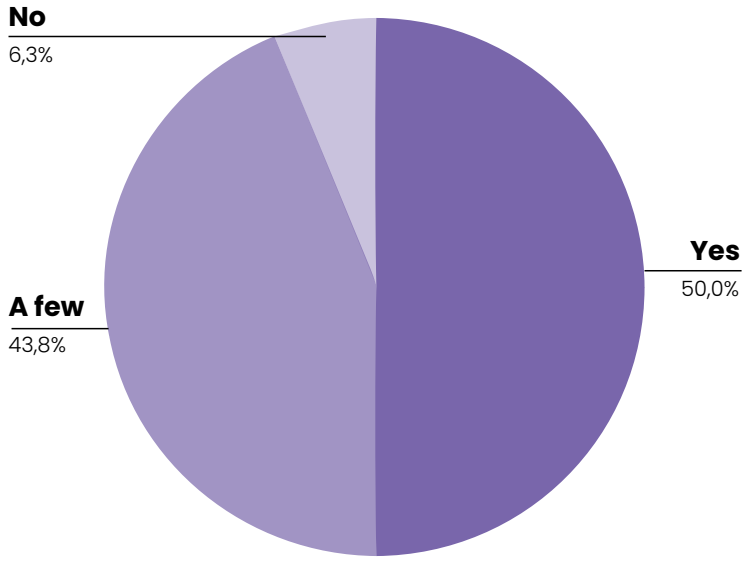
1. The organizational context

1.1. The composition of organizations and access barriers

The presence of foreign or migrant-origin individuals within the professional environments of the interviewees is mixed, but characterized by a **marked scarcity in the traditional media sector**. While the majority of respondents (93.8%) reported the presence of individuals of foreign origin in their workplaces, 43.8% —all of whom belong to the media sector— clarified that such presence is minimal or uncommon within newsrooms. Meanwhile, 6.3% stated that they have no colleagues of migrant background. In contrast, organizations specialized in activism or advocacy tend to exhibit greater diversity, partly due to the need for staff proficient in specific languages and cultural codes.

There is unanimous consensus among the 16 interviewees regarding the existence of a **structural problem in accessing the journalism profession** for foreign nationals and individuals with migratory backgrounds. The main causes identified depict a **field perceived as both elitist and precarious**.

Figure 1 – *Within your professional context, are there individuals with a migrant background?*



Source: Authors

Precarity emerged as one of the major barriers, as "not everyone can afford to be an intern and work for free during the first years" (P10). The profession is thus perceived as "very elitist" (P13), with "access often depending on very expensive master's programs" (P10). This situation is further compounded by **bureaucratic obstacles**, such as difficulties in validating academic degrees, obtaining residence permits, and securing work authorization. P9 explained that even with a master's scholarship, the exclusivity clause prevented them from working, while P1 reported that, after completing an internship, the complexity of obtaining a work permit discouraged companies from undertaking the process. Many interviewees described this dynamic as a **vicious cycle: "if you don't have papers, you can't get hired, and without a contract, you can't get papers**."

Respondents also noted that journalism in Spain relies heavily on **informal networks and personal connections** (P3). Newly arrived professionals often lack such networks, leaving them "completely excluded" from opportunities that are not publicly advertised (P6).

Additionally, persistent prejudices toward foreigners were reported, particularly regarding language and accent. Many participants pointed out an "obsession with how we write, how we speak, with accents" (P10), identifying **both language and pronunciation as major obstacles**. Even when Spanish is shared as a common language, the use of non-standard vocabulary (for instance, saying "carro" instead of "coche") or a different accent can lead to scrutiny or rejection. As P6 concluded, "If in Spain you don't even see Andalusians or Canarians reading the news, it's very unlikely there will be a Moroccan or a Colombian". Others emphasized that, when migrant professionals do manage to work in Spanish media, they are often confined to positions that do not involve voice-over or on-camera work. P8 added that "the perennial prejudice is not so much racial as intellectual or

educational; the idea that public education from our countries is inferior, and that you are therefore seen as less capable, and that's why you don't get the job".

1.2. Knowledge and awareness of incidents of discrimination and racism

The analysis of media professionals' perceptions in Spain reveals a polarized awareness regarding the existence of racism in the country and its impact on news production. This polarization manifests the persistence of discriminatory practices and a marked lack of formal inclusion policies. Although **more than half of respondents (9 out of 16) consider that there is sufficient awareness of racism** within their professional environments, this perception is notably **limited to highly sensitized contexts**, such as specialized NGOs and media outlets with a strongly progressive editorial line. In contrast, in mainstream journalism they observe less awareness or a defensive stance that denies the problem: "No, that doesn't happen here, we're not racist". **The majority of participants (15 out of 16) noted that the media do not address racism as a structural problem, but rather as a "sporadic" or "isolated" issue**.
Nearly all interviewees **(14 out of 16) reported being aware of cases or incidents of racist discrimination** in their professional context, either through personal experience or by witnessing them among colleagues. Within these experiences, which **extend beyond explicit physical or verbal violence**, participants highlighted the following forms of discriminatory exclusion:

- **Thematic pigeonholing:** assigning journalists of migrant origin exclusively to topics related to migration, while excluding them from general interest issues (politics, economy, etc.). This reinforces the perception that their journalistic capabilities are limited to their own backgrounds.
- **Access discrimination and intellectual prejudice:** participants described exclusion from newsrooms due to factors such as accent, or assumptions that a foreign journalist "will not understand the country's political context or history", even when their qualifications exceed those of Spanish nationals. One participant (P8) reported being told explicitly: "We prefer to hire a less qualified Spaniard than you". Others noted that even when they managed to overcome such barriers, they were denied opportunities for promotion or on-camera roles, being confined instead to writing or technical positions. Many also described the pressure to work disproportionately hard to prove themselves. As P11 put it, being a migrant means "you have to work three times harder."
- **Tokenism and superficiality:** several participants felt they were treated as "exotic journalists" or hired merely to "fill a quota", without genuine appreciation for their professional or cultural expertise.
- **Micro-racism and paternalism:** interviewees reported experiencing prejudiced comments and stereotyping, such as being expected to conform to the image of the "hardworking and

> submissive migrant", or being contacted only "to talk about being a victim" (P11).

Regarding perceptions of respect and recognition, only **4 out of 16 respondents stated that all employees in their organisations feel respected and valued**, regardless of their cultural or personal background. Notably, the affirmative responses came from individuals working in environments where humanitarian reception and multicultural inclusion are embedded in the organization's mission or where diversity is part of the functional norm. By contrast, most respondents working in traditional media either preferred not to answer or stated that they do not feel valued, linking this lack of recognition to the sector's overall precariousness and to specific prejudices. Participants also identified a significant gap between individual awareness of racism and institutional or corporate action. **Only two of the 16 interviewees reported the existence of explicit policies aimed at facilitating access to journalism for foreign professionals**. As P15 explained, in their media outlet, although it is a self-representative outlet targeting Latin American audiences, the origin of applicants is not considered during recruitment. Instead, hiring decisions are based solely on professional experience and journalistic skills, which has resulted in a majority of Latin American collaborators selected for merit rather than quotas. In traditional media, such policies were mainly linked to master's programs. For example, P1 mentioned entering the sector thanks to a master's program offering ten scholarships for Latin American students. The rest of initiatives were described as "individual efforts" (such as proactively seeking diverse profiles) or as mere "image-washing" attempts, with little transparency about their real impact. Furthermore, when training sessions or workshops are implemented, they often focus on gender or disability issues, while anti-racist initiatives remain rare. Ultimately, the **absence of safe reporting channels and clear protocols for addressing racial discrimination** was identified as a critical gap that prevents effective responses when such incidents occur.

2. Policies for the prevention and elimination of racism and discrimination

The implementation of formal policies aimed at preventing and eliminating incidents of racism and discrimination varies significantly across professional sectors, as explicit commitment and resource allocation in mainstream media are notably scarcer and more inconsistent than in activist, research, or socially oriented organizations. Awareness of racism as a structural problem within the latter means that **prevention and training policies are intrinsically linked to their core mission**. Specifically, they hire staff who are fluent in specific cultural codes and languages (such as Arabic or Wolof); regard multiculturalism as a functional requirement; implement mandatory anti-racist training for all newly incorporated staff; and engage actively in community awareness initiatives against hate speech, highlighting collective projects that counter negative narratives. In contrast, within mainstream media, the

application of formal policies is perceived by interviewees as insufficient, inconsistent, and often limited to the realm of editorial goodwill. What emerges is a pattern of selective commitment: **while certain outlets have implemented feminist or LGTBIQ+ protocols, none of the interviewees report the existence of comparable anti-racist frameworks**, which highlights a hierarchy in how discrimination is addressed.

Unlike social or activist organizations, one of the most critical gaps identified —apart from the lack of access policies— is **the absence of clear protocols and visible, safe reporting channels for harassment or discrimination** occurred in the work environment. This means that journalists encountering racist comments or exclusionary practices often **have no guidance on how or to whom to report such incidents**. Even where formal mechanisms exist, some participants note that they are "not taken entirely seriously" (P16), serving more as symbolic gestures. The lack of trusted, transparent systems for redress leaves individuals isolated and encourages self-censorship. As P16 observed, "you learn to be compliant and 'invisible', to adapt in order to survive, because if you don't, you simply don't get in, you leave".

Training initiatives are equally inconsistent in this sector. Because racism in traditional media is often perceived as an isolated or anecdotal issue, **few outlets include mandatory instruction on race, migration, or bias** in their professional development programs. When offered, its effectiveness is often undermined by internal newsroom dynamics: journalists, overwhelmed by heavy workloads and inflexible schedules, tend to perceive these sessions as "mere bureaucracy". Others reject participation due to the defensiveness the subject evokes, feeling that the offer of an anti-racism workshop is tantamount to "being called racist". Consequently, **journalists' understanding of discrimination relies on individual ethics rather than a shared professional framework**, producing inconsistent editorial practices. The recurring example of whether or not to mention a perpetrator's nationality in crime coverage —a practice widely criticized for its role in criminalizing entire communities— epitomizes this gap: absent a clear institutional guideline, the decision is left to personal judgment, often reproducing biased and stigmatizing narratives.

At the same time, the linguistic rigidity imposed by some outlets, which "correct" the accents or expressions of migrant journalists or interviewees in the name of "neutrality", reveals an **underlying prejudice that equates linguistic uniformity with professionalism**. This not only erases cultural diversity but also r**einforces the marginalization of voices perceived as "non-native"**. Similarly, some interviewees noted that some organizations include racialized journalists merely "to appear diverse", without altering newsroom hierarchies or editorial priorities. Consequently, **largely white, male, and aging leadership structures persist**, perpetuating a homogeneous newsroom culture that is resistant to systemic change. According to participants, these

shortcomings persist largely because market logic has increasingly shaped editorial decision-making. The drive for **virality and clicks often leads to the prioritization of sensational content over journalistic rigor**, leaving little space for sustained, critical engagement with racism —a topic considered "uncomfortable" and potentially detrimental to audience retention. Ultimately, **the promotion of a genuinely non-discriminatory environment in the Spanish media continues to rely on individual ethical commitment** rather than being institutionalized through coherent and sustained structural policies.

2.1. Access to the journalistic profession: alternative approaches

The need to reconfigure access routes to the journalistic profession in Spain arises from the unanimous consensus among interviewees regarding the existence of a structural problem of exclusion affecting foreign nationals and individuals with migrant backgrounds, one that is closely linked to bureaucratic, socioeconomic, and symbolic barriers. The general conclusion drawn from the interviews is that the absence of formal policies facilitating the entry of racialized or migrant individuals—together with the persistence of an entry system based on informal networks—means **that inclusion strategies within the media depend almost entirely on individual or collective initiatives emerging from the margins. In light of this situation**, it is considered essential that media companies demonstrate a genuine political and editorial will to reflect the diversity of Spanish society within their newsrooms, following the example of international outlets such as *The New York Times* or *Der Spiegel*, which have implemented concrete internal policies aimed at ensuring diversity in terms of origin, gender, and socioeconomic background (P13).

In response to access obstacles, the most significant reaction has come from spontaneous and informal initiatives seeking to counter invisibility through narrative protagonism. Unable to see themselves represented and confronted with insurmountable barriers, **many migrant professionals chose to create their own media outlets** to generate spaces for professional exchange and serve their communities. For example, P12 explained that he and his colleagues decided to "create their own outlets because there was no way to work within local or Spanish media", which led to the creation of publications such as *Quiu*, *El Colombiano en España*, and *Árabes en España*. According to P12, these projects also aimed to "include Spanish journalists, not just Latin Americans", so they could "learn from one another and create spaces for professional exchange". Similarly, after realizing the irony of facing language itself as a barrier and perceiving that Latin American voices were only heard "on the margins", P15 founded *Enlace Latino*, while P1 co-created the podcast Migrantes Anónimas to "demystify what migration means", "break down stereotypes", and show that migrants are "agents of change". Furthermore, some publishing groups have introduced proactive

measures to ensure the inclusion of diverse candidates and reduce the impact of implicit biases, such as **journalistic and aptitude tests preceding the evaluation of personal backgrounds or anonymized CVs**. However, interviewees agree that these efforts are still minimal.

To achieve substantive transformation, participants insist on a series of reforms prioritizing meritocracy and transparency. They call for explicit commitments from media leadership to promote diversity, which should translate into **transparent recruitment processes at all levels**, thereby ensuring genuine equality of opportunity. Since the recognition of linguistic diversity is considered key, interviewees propose valuing the cultural background, language skills, and unique perspectives of migrant professionals, whose contributions enrich journalism with greater depth, empathy, and contextual understanding, rather than undervaluing their abilities. Moreover, they regard the creation of advisory and legal support spaces for journalists seeking asylum or refuge as crucial, since bureaucratic hurdles are among the main causes of professional dropout. Incorporating this new grammar of access into editorial agendas would help ensure that migrant talent and success stories are no longer relegated to invisibility. As several interviewees emphasized, the underlying idea is that the path toward more plural access inevitably depends on a verifiable editorial commitment that values diversity not as a quota, but as a functional necessity and competitive advantage —one that is currently absent. As P6 noted, "the main measure for a non-discriminatory environment is access to newsrooms, so that information is diverse from its very origin, from the moment it is created".

2.2. New narrative grammar as an anti-discrimination strategy

Interviewees identified identified a second dimension of exclusion: the persistence of a **narrative grammar that reproduces racial hierarchies and symbolic boundaries** within Spanish journalism. This grammar manifests not only in what is told but also **in who is entitled to speak and in which linguistic and editorial registers**. As respondents repeatedly noted, the issue of representation in Spain does not merely concern the presence or absence of "diversity", but rather the reproduction of a **dominant cultural gaze that frames migration and racialized identities as external, problematic, or exceptional phenomena**. Migration is often covered as an event, rather than "as a process" (P11), stressing that the prevailing logic of news production continues to **construct "the migrant" as an object of coverage rather than a legitimate voice within it** (P5). This enduring grammar structures the symbolic geography of Spanish media: even in progressive outlets, migration coverage often remains trapped in a **paternalistic frame**, where migrants and racialized individuals are often depicted as victims, while their everyday realities, agency, and professional identities remain invisible. Respondents working within the media emphasized that linguistic conventions

play a decisive role in maintaining this exclusionary order. The insistence on a "neutral" or "standardized" Spanish, enforced through editorial corrections of accents or expressions, was perceived as a subtle yet persistent form of cultural erasure. As P15 explained, "your accent becomes a marker of difference that you are asked to hide", thus denying the legitimacy of foreign identities within journalism itself. In contrast, activist and independent media —such as porCausa Enlace Latino— intentionally subvert these linguistic and stylistic norms by validating vernacular voices, oral registers, and multilingual storytelling as sources of authenticity and epistemic richness.
Interviewees identified other narrative asymmetries rooted in newsroom routines, such as the selection of sources and story frames that tends to reinforce the authority of institutional or official voices, while the contributions of migrant communities are relegated to anecdotal testimony (P6). In this sense, they noted that Spanish journalism continues to privilege a "view from above", speaking about migrants rather than truly integrating them into the coverage.

> *"It is not enough to hire diverse people; you have to let them contribute their point of view. Often, we fall into a model of integration where migrants must adapt completely to the dominant model, with no space for their own voice. […] We must listen to those voices and trust those different perspectives"*
>
> *Interviewee P11*

In response to these dynamics, interviewees pointed to grassroots alternatives that collectively outline a new narrative grammar. The porCausa Foundation was frequently cited for its application of a "manual of new narratives", built on three core principles: "avoiding reactions to hate speech" to prevent amplifying it, "prioritizing faces over figures" by focusing first on the human story, and "breaking the boundary between *us* and *them*". Other examples include *Baynana*, a media outlet founded by Syrian journalists that focuses primarily on migration issues, and Ecos do Sur, which experiments with "participatory communication and training projects", using tools such as augmented reality and dramatizations performed by migrants.
Fact-checking organizations such as *Maldita.es* were also recognized for their work in countering disinformation about migration, in particular, its Migravoice initiative was highlighted as an example of cross-border collaboration that integrates experts with migration backgrounds into journalistic production as reliable sources and contributors. Projects such as La Parcería (LP) and the communication and advocacy work of collectives like Top Manta in Barcelona were likewise cited as powerful examples of community-based, transformative media practices. All of these initiatives were perceived as spaces in which journalists, activists, and community members collectively reimagine migration coverage without reproducing hierarchies of voice or gaze.
For most participants, building a genuinely inclusive narrative requires transforming newsroom culture rather than merely

adjusting vocabulary. As most agree, it's important to ensure that migration is included in every section.

> *"If the report is about the energy crisis, extreme heat or rising electricity prices, the voices of migrant residents are not included, even though they are also affected. By not including these voices in general topics, the impression is given that they are not part of society. This reinforces the idea that 'this is our space', and you, as a migrant, only appear when it is time to talk about migration. And that needs to be changed by the media, in order to normalise diversity"*
>
> *Interviewee P11*

That is to say, the challenge lies not in producing more content, but in embedding plural voices and perspectives within the very structures, authorship, and epistemic frameworks of journalism itself, so that what has long been treated as external or exceptional becomes integral to how the media represent, interpret, and narrate social reality.

2.3. Measures to counter hate speech

According to the interviews, Spanish media outlets still lack solid strategies for tackling hate speech on social media, partly due to the absence of the issue in editorial planning and internal policies. As P2 explained, for both social organizations and media companies, "anti-racism and feminism should be the first items in the manual, fundamental principles that must remain central even when people grow tired of hearing about them. We have to keep insisting". Despite progress over the past two decades, "xenophobia, hate speech, and disinformation have also advanced. The communicative tools of hate are extremely powerful. Just turn on any talk show on Telecinco and you'll hear people speaking disparagingly about Carabanchel, Tetuán, Puente de Vallecas… Coincidentally, neighborhoods with high concentrations of migrant or Roma residents. Entire areas are criminalized, and this becomes normalized, as if it were merely another opinion".
On social media, the emotional tone and algorithmic incentives of digital communication amplify hate speech, which circulates rapidly through disinformation and insinuation. Migrants —especially Moroccans and other African nationals— are one of the primary targets of misleading content circulating in Spain (Maldita.es, 2024a; Romero, 2023). Much of this rhetoric **operates through insinuation rather than explicit racism**, relying on coded language or so-called "dog whistles" that remain technically lawful yet convey unmistakably xenophobic messages which consistently link migrant communities to crime, terrorism, or sexism, while simultaneously stigmatizing entire working-class neighborhoods with high concentrations of foreign residents.
In this context, most **measures adopted by media organizations remain reactive rather than preventive**. The dominant response has been to moderate or disable comment sections to avoid hostile interaction, while fact-checking has emerged as the principal mechanism for countering disinformation. At the editorial level, some outlets have attempted to standardize inclusive language —e.g., Agencia EFE,

has developed a practical glossary to promote non-discriminatory terminology, and Servimedia published an early style guide aimed at preventing hate speech. Nonetheless, many organizations still lack clear, confidential, and accessible internal protocols for reporting discrimination and hate speech.

To achieve lasting change, participants proposed stricter moderation and active monitoring of online comments, noting that they have already reduced the perceived impunity of hate speech —e.g., P3 observed that audiences are "beginning to realize they can't just insult freely anymore". On the other hand, fact-checking and disinformation-tracking units should be further reinforced, given their crucial role in dismantling racist narratives. Editorially, several professionals advocated a strategic narrative-containment approach, **choosing not to respond directly to hate speech** in order to avoid amplifying it. As P13 explained, initiatives such as porCausa's manual of new narratives rest on three guiding principles:

> *"We don't react to hate speech; we don't give it visibility. We prioritize faces over figures, starting with the human story and then providing contextual data. And we break the boundary between 'us' and 'them.' For example, we don't mention that someone is a migrant until the end of the report; first we present them as a neighbour like any other"*
>
> *Interviewee P13*

Similarly, P7 warned against replicating the attention-economy logic of social media: "It's not about demonizing social networks per se, but about knowing where to draw the line. We are media organizations; they are something else".

In short, although the Spanish media ecosystem has begun to acknowledge the urgency of addressing online hate speech, current responses remain reactive, fragmented, and constrained by market pressures. Sustainable progress requires a multifaceted approach that combines structural reforms — such as mandatory anti-discrimination protocols and training — with editorial strategies that privilege ethics over virality and elevate plural, human-centered narratives capable of countering xenophobic discourse.

2.4. The issue of training and skills

As stated by most participants, although some organizations express an explicit commitment to good coexistence and acknowledge the need for self-reflection on personal biases, this awareness rarely translates into clear, consistent, or sustained training initiatives. Interviewees with experience in large, mainstream media outlets unanimously reported that specific **training on racism or communication regarding migrant communities is virtually non-existent**, with occasional trainings focusing on other areas such as gender equality:

> *"Measures have been implemented, but almost always related to equality between men and women. For example, when I write, I tend to be inclusive in terms of gender, but not so much in terms of cultural or racial diversity. Here at RTVE, many gender equality measures have been promoted, but not so much regarding*

diversity. We are not told, for example, what might constitute hate speech"

Interviewee P10

Equality measures —such as guides, workshops, and protocols— are almost always related to gender or 'inclusive' language, with progress in this field considered "rapid and commendable" (P3); while **racial or cultural plurality remains neglected**, with no dedicated guidelines or specific training on racial diversity, intercultural communication, or the identification of hate speech. As a result, **the use of non-discriminatory language and approaches is left to the discretion and personal sensitivity of individual journalists**.

The situation contrasts with the practices of civil society organizations operating in migration and international protection. For these ones, anti-racist and intercultural training is a strategic and mandatory requirement, embedded in professional onboarding and daily operations. For example, The CEPAIM Foundation requires all new staff to complete mandatory online training covering equality, anti-racism, and interculturality. While the NGO Educo provides compulsory introductory courses on inclusion and gender.

"At CEPAIM we've held workshops on new masculinities, and we have mandatory training for everyone who joins the team. It's online and covers topics like equality, anti-racism, and interculturalism. We all have to go through it. We work with people in situations of international protection, and that forces you to question your own privileges all the time. (...) I think the media also needs this training, but it's very difficult for them to accept it because it seems that if you offer them an anti-racist workshop, you're calling them racist. The same goes for workshops on new masculinities: 'Why bother? I'm not sexist'. But that's precisely the point: to examine communication codes, comments, and phrases you've internalized without realizing they can be harmful"

Interviewee P2

The effectiveness of existing training opportunities in newsrooms is further limited by various structural and cultural barriers. **High workloads, rigid schedules, and lack of incentives discourage participation**, with many journalists perceiving such initiatives as "mere bureaucracy". As P7 noted, these programs "are rarely completed" because journalists are "too busy with their daily work". This reflects a broader organizational culture in which professional development is relegated to personal initiative rather than institutional responsibility.

A second and more profound obstacle lies in **editorial resistance and defensiveness**. The general lack of awareness of racism as a structural issue in Spanish media outlets means that **many professionals respond to anti-racist training with discomfort or denial**. Several interviewees described colleagues who felt that being offered anti-racist training was equivalent to "being called racist", which prevents deeper reflection on communication practices and entrenched biases, thereby reinforcing existing communicative blind spots.

To address these shortcomings, participants proposed a series of strategic measures that

move beyond isolated or superficial efforts:

- **Explicit training in anti-racist communication**, especially regarding interactions with migrants, noting that this is not simply another reporting beat but one that requires professional specialization to avoid serious ethical lapses, such as revealing the identities of asylum seekers. Training should include opportunities for cross-cultural exchange and reflexive discussion to deconstruct reductionist perspectives.
- **Prioritize training for individuals in decision-making positions** —such as editors and directors— so they can accurately identify discriminatory practices and avoid tokenistic or "window-dressing" approaches.
- **Creation of joint learning spaces** that bring together journalists, NGOs, and academics working on migration and anti-racism, which would help develop shared terminologies, ethical frameworks, and mutual understanding between professional sectors that often view each other with mistrust.
- **Creation of professional support programmes, mentoring, dialogue and peer learning** for migrant and racialised journalists.
- **Clear, confidential, and well-communicated protocols** for reporting discrimination and harassment, ensuring that internal awareness initiatives are accompanied by tangible accountability mechanisms.
- **Integrate anti-racism into journalism curricula and continuous education programs at universities and professional associations**, aligning future generations' training with inclusive communication principles.

Despite some exceptional cases of good practice, **these initiatives remain largely confined to the third sector, while in mainstream media they are still exceptional** and depend largely on the individual commitment of journalists, section editors, or directors rather than on any formal or institutionalized policy framework. What emerges, therefore, is a fragmented and uneven landscape.

3. The cultural and media context: themes, approaches, and voices in the narrative on migration

Drawing on the experiences of journalists, academics, and activists, the study reveal that migration in Spain continues to be framed through a **dominant narrative that reproduces structural inequalities and offers a limited representation of social complexity**. Across the interviews, there was unanimous agreement regarding the persistent **invisibility of foreign voices** or those with a migratory background in media narratives, a situation closely linked to the pronounced homogeneity of newsroom staff. The principal deficit identified in media coverage concerns the **absence of recognition of racism as a structural and systemic issue** in Spain. Mainstream outlets tend to evade this dimension, addressing racism primarily as an "isolated", "occasional", or "individual" act — often

attributed to a "disturbed person". This interpretive framework is highly problematic, as processes of exclusion and marginalization are sustained through mechanisms of selection and representation that reproduce existing hierarchies of power. Nearly all participants noted that media narratives fail to convey that racism extends beyond acts of physical or verbal violence; rather, it constitutes a structural phenomenon shaping access to resources, healthcare, and even the spatial organization of society.

This limited conceptualization contributes to the perpetuation of recurring patterns of racialization in media narratives. **Migrants are frequently constructed as "objects rather than subjects of discourse"**, their perspectives and voices rendered marginal or absent. Moreover, several interviewees observed that media discourse has increasingly become subordinated to the logic of political spectacle and sensationalism. In the view of some participants, this dynamic has enabled the Spanish far right to "set the agenda" in shaping public and journalistic discourse on migration (P10).

Consequently, migration tends to be framed as a "perpetual crisis", a "social problem", or a "threat", with recurrent narratives emphasizing crime, welfare dependency, and fears of cultural imposition. This discursive framing produces a marked "thematic ghettoization", whereby migrants are consulted almost exclusively on topics related to their origin, violence, or incidents, while being **systematically excluded from discussions of broader public relevance**. When migrant voices do appear, they are often confined within a reductive binary of "heroes or villains", erasing the figure of the ordinary citizen or "everyday individual". Such patterns illustrate that diversity within Spanish media remains largely symbolic, amounting to "tokenism" or quota compliance rather than a genuine commitment to plural representation.

3.1. Recurring narratives and stereotypes

Interviewees described a media landscape in which simplifying and polarizing narratives persist, actively contributing to the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudices toward migrants, refugees, and people with a migratory background. All respondents agreed that most stereotypes revolve around three main axes: **security and crime, the perceived use of public resources** (such as welfare and employment), and **fears concerning the loss of national identity**.

One of the most frequently mentioned narratives is the growing association between migration, crime, and violence. Participants observed that, despite the absence of empirical evidence supporting such claims, **the narrative linking migration to criminality is on the rise** and has been instrumentalized by political discourses seeking to reinforce a sharp divide between "us" and "them." This is particularly evident in the sensationalist coverage of criminal incidents, where some media outlets still highlight the perpetrator's nationality when they are foreign, thereby risking the criminalization of entire communities (P12). As P5

Figure 2. *Word cloud of perceived dominant narratives and stereotypes about migrants in Spain*

Source: Authors

explained, "although the wording used to be much more aggressive, I still come across headlines like 'Ecuadorian kills his wife,' where nationality is emphasized over the crime itself", a practice that not only reinforces negative stereotypes but also "serves hate speech on a silver platter through social media" (P5). This tendency is especially harmful when it comes to the criminalization of specific groups. For example, the media's portrayal of unaccompanied migrant minors (MENAs) has shifted from depicting them as vulnerable to depicting them as "dangerous, armed, and aggressive" (P9). According to P7, terms like "MENAs" are as problematic as stigmatizing labels applied to other vulnerable groups.

> *"There are groups that are particularly criminalized and unprotected, such as minors who migrate alone. And there is still a lack of political will to end that impunity. Spreading hatred and falsehoods about vulnerable groups remains cheap and easy, especially because these groups lack a unified voice to defend themselves. But I'm optimistic. Despite everything, I think things are changing for the better"*
>
> *Interviewee P13*

At the socioeconomic level, narratives often display contradictions regarding public resources and employment. A recurring example is the double standard portraying migrants as both "taking our jobs" and "living off benefits" (P6, P7), a discourse that shifts depending on audience convenience (P1). This rhetoric is reinforced by narratives rooted **in fears of cultural imposition and the loss of national identity** — for instance, "the supposed cultural imposition of Muslims" (P3) or claims that "there are no real Spaniards left" (P6). According to several interviewees, many of these narratives are informed by a lingering sense of superiority

derived from Spain's colonial past, which sustains a "condescending gaze" toward countries of the Global South and perpetuates the notion of the foreign as a threat or a problem (P5).

Stereotypes also vary significantly by region of origin. Afro-descendant and Maghrebi communities were identified as among the "most stigmatized" (P5) and socially devalued, frequently represented through headlines that evoke "problems", "overflow", or perpetual "conflict" (P5). The prevailing image is that of the "Black migrant" arriving in a "small boat" (P10), reinforcing catastrophic imagery (P14), while Arabs and Moroccans are commonly associated with stereotypes of "thieves or criminals" (P11). In contrast, Latin Americans migrants tend to be portrayed more favorably due to cultural and linguistic proximity, though they still face enduring stereotypes —being seen as "submissive, cheerful, talkative, lazy, or careless" (P11). Within Latin Americans groups, these stereotypes become more specific: Ecuadorians are associated with "machismo or a supposed lack of education"; Colombians, although linked to "drug trafficking", also receive positive coverage for achievements in "art, science, or sports"; and Venezuelans are depicted through the lens of "crisis" and "political conflict", but also as "wealthy newcomers" (P5). Meanwhile, the Chinese community "barely appears" in the media except in "folkloric" contexts (P16), and other groups, such as Bolivians, are "practically invisible" (P5). Overall, respondents perceived that the intensity of stereotyping increases with geographical and cultural distance from "European and white patterns" (P6).

A persistent intellectual and educational bias was also noted, whereby it is often assumed that foreign journalists "will not understand the country's political context or history". Many migrants, despite holding advanced degrees and professional experience, reported being treated with condescension, feeling that the underlying message was: "Oh, you're Latin American… but you're so cultured for being Latin American". Such assumptions lead to "discriminatory barriers to entry" within the journalism profession.

Alongside overtly hostile portrayals, participants also identified the presence of an "equally problematic condescending gaze" that strips migrants of agency and complexity (P8). This dynamic manifests through their confinement within a dangerous duality: they are either depicted as "heroes or villains" (P7), with little room for the figure of the "ordinary individual", or they are portrayed primarily as "victims" (P11).

> *"The narratives that most reinforce stereotypes are those that re-victimize. For example, when reporting on the arrival of migrants, such as Africans arriving by boat, the focus is only on the arrival itself, not the broader migratory process. The context is left out entirely"*
>
> *Interviewee P11*

This "narrative of pity" assumes that migration is solely driven by "poverty or poor living conditions" (P1), thereby obscuring

the diversity of motivations and experiences, such as migration for study, opportunity, cultural affinity, or entrepreneurship — stories that "do not fit the stereotype of the poor or needy migrant" (P11). Such framing leads to re-victimization, emphasizing vulnerability and depicting migrants as people who "are always lacking something" (P14).

Regarding the evolution of these narratives, **interviewees acknowledged certain improvements, such as less overtly aggressive language compared to the past, or greater caution in highlighting nationality in crime reporting**. However, the overall consensus was that discourse has become more polarized, and that the rise of the far right has reinforced stigma, to the point where even the term "migrant" now carries a negative connotation. **The most harmful outcome, as several participants emphasized, is the erasure of complexity**: "When migration is treated from a single angle, and one laden with stereotypes, you generate more discrimination" (P11).

3.2. Invisibility of racialized and foreign individuals

Participants unanimously agree that foreign voices, or those of foreign background, remain invisible within Spanish media narratives. This lack is perceived as a structural issue that prevents the media from reflecting the "real diversity of Spanish society" and reinforces the idea that the migrant population does not form part of it. The causes of this invisibility are linked both to the lack of representation within newsrooms —where profiles remain predominantly "national", "white", and "male", which further deepens the absence of role models— and to the superficial treatment and thematic confinement of sources when they do appear.

It is worth noting that this confinement also occurs within newsrooms themselves, where journalists with a migratory background often face discrimination by **being assigned exclusively to migration-related coverage**.

> *"Sometimes it's difficult to step outside the role that's been assigned to you: if you're a migrant, you cover migration stories. And yes, it's important that we can tell those stories, but it's equally important that we have the opportunity to report on anything else. (...) The ability to report shouldn't be limited by our origin"*
>
> *Interviewee P6*

When migrant voices do appear as sources in news stories, they tend to be restricted to specific thematic areas that prevent their normalization in the media landscape. According to interviewees, they are most often consulted on migration, crime, or folkloric topics, but **remain absent from issues that affect society as a whole**, such as the economy, the energy crisis, or corruption.

> *"On La Sexta Xplica, they sometimes host a public forum, but you never see racialized people there. You don't see a Black man, a Black woman, a Roma woman... people from working-class neighborhoods who are also struggling with inflation, rising rents, evictions (...) They're part of society too, yet they're invisible. They only appear when there's violence, social conflict, or something folkloric.*

> *But why don't we ask an Ecuadorian woman what she thinks about corruption, the rise of the far right, or any other current issue? We live here too —it affects us as well. But we're not seen, and that's very clear"*
>
> *Interviewee P2*

Moreover, when migrants are included, they are often used as testimonies to reinforce narratives of "vulnerability" or victimhood (P14), repeating familiar patterns of suffering.

> *"It's very difficult for migrants to appear as primary sources in the media. This also relates to the structure of journalism itself, which prioritizes official sources over personal experience. And when migrants are consulted, they're often used to repeat the same storylines: How was your route? How many days were you at sea? How much did you suffer? There's this notion of the good migrant, the one who has suffered deeply and endured extreme hardship. And yes, migration is dramatic in many cases, but this leads to an overrepresentation of suffering and very little normalization of the migrant experience. We need more stories that aren't just tragedies"*
>
> *Interviewee P6*

This re-victimizing tendency is perceived as paternalistic, as it overlooks the complexity of migrants' lives and erases nuances such as the fact that "not everyone comes fleeing war or hunger" (P11).

> *"Often, those who write about racism have never experienced it. So the discussion lacks depth. It's addressed from a theoretical point of view, not from lived experience. And sometimes it feels like a casting call: I need a migrant with a certain profile to talk about this, as if everyone were the same. Migration is extremely diverse"*
>
> *Interviewee P11*

Ultimately, this limitation produces the frustrating sense that "people talk about us, but without us" (P5). In response to this reality, participants articulated a clear demand: **migrants must be recognized as "agents of change" and as "citizens", not merely as subjects of study or statistics**. As P1 noted, "listening to first-person stories fosters much more empathy than looking at a statistic".

3.3. Challenges and shortcomings of anti-racist communication

A recurrent critique of the communication strategies used by anti-racist activists and civil society organizations in Spain concerns the framing of their messages, noting that discourses of solidarity or aid sometimes fall into a "paternalistic gaze that, in the end, is also racist". This condescension becomes evident when narratives focus excessively on "re-victimization" or portray migrants primarily as "vulnerable individuals", overlooking their complexity as professionals and citizens.

> *"For example, the idea that all children in Africa need to be rescued by us, the white saviors, or that all Latin American countries are extremely violent, so we need to go there to help. That's something we're trying to change from within organizations. At first, in trying to mobilize people through solidarity, what we actually ended up doing was perpetuating stereotypes — just from a different angle."*
>
> *Interviewee P1*

Although these narratives are often well-intentioned, they tend to be "tiring

and limiting", and can even become counterproductive, as **they frequently reproduce the very categories they aim to challenge**. In this regard, P16 observed that "many victimizing narratives aren't created by journalists, they also come from the organizations themselves. NGOs are narratively limited. Even when they seek to give voice and autonomy to migrant and racialized people, they often maintain paternalistic, victim-centered approaches". A crucial element of this communicative deficit lies in the issue of language. Several participants pointed out that, in some circles, an "academic or overly rigorous language" or "jargon" is used, which is "completely inaccessible to the minorities themselves" and to the general public, resulting in communicative failure (P8). Instead of explaining how a given policy affects ordinary citizens, such communication often relies on a code intelligible only to those with a background in the humanities (P8). Beyond accessibility, it was also noted that these communication strategies tend to target "people who are already convinced", in other words, **they preach to the choir, thereby failing to reach more conservative audiences**. Similarly, some participants warned that direct confrontation or "high levels of aggressiveness" toward the audience expected to change their behavior can generate "more rejection than awareness", calling instead for the creation of "more conciliatory spaces" (P4, P10). To improve outreach and impact, interviewees proposed diversifying the argumentative repertoire of anti-racist communication, incorporating, without abandoning rights-based discourses, complementary economic and labor-related arguments (for example, migrants' contributions to GDP or the pension system).

> *"At porCausa we found that speaking only from a victimhood perspective is necessary, but not sufficient. We also need to talk about who benefits from this system. There are companies making money from migration control, from detention centers, from surveillance. That change in focus has allowed us to reach even more conservative audiences, people who don't mobilize for human rights, but do respond to economic arguments. And this is key: anti-racism must diversify its narrative toolkit. Without abandoning the language of rights, that must always come first, we also need to include economic and labor arguments, and discussions about the sustainability of the pension and healthcare systems. Not everyone is receptive to human rights discourse. And if the goal is to eradicate racism, we need more narrative tools"*
>
> *Interviewee P13*

Finally, the capacity to sustain effective communication strategies is hindered by the **fragmentation within the activist sphere itself and by widespread precarity**. Many organizations operate in isolation or depend on volunteers who dedicate their free time, which prevents professionalization and limits the long-term impact of their initiatives.

4. Proposals and recommendations

Overcoming the lack of internal diversity and improving the way migration is covered in the Spanish media requires deliberate, explicit, and structural intervention. The following proposals and recommendations, based on the experiences and analyses of journalists, academics, and activists, are organized into four key areas aimed at transforming both the internal structures of newsrooms and the narratives that reach society.

1. Access and professional inclusion

- **Guarantee genuine equality of opportunity.** Action is needed within recruitment structures to ensure transparency across all hiring processes, using tools designed to reduce the impact of implicit bias (e.g. through anonymous curriculum selection). A key recommendation involves diversifying newsroom staff and opening spaces for foreign, racialized, and migrant-background voices —recognizing that a diverse newsroom is essential to accurately portray the complexity of contemporary Spanish society. This requires explicit and active political and editorial commitment to "diversity", equivalent to the commitment already shown toward new channels and formats. It is also recommended to conduct a census of journalists not born in Spain to map and monitor their representation in newsrooms, as well as to challenge the monolithic notion of "neutralized Spanish" or the standard accent as an exclusionary criterion for journalistic work.
- **Create advisory and professional support spaces** for journalists who are asylum seekers or refugees, helping them navigate complex legal processes and overcome the lack of professional networks upon arrival in the country.

2. Training and awareness

- **Implement continuous anti-racist training.** Anti-racist training should be a priority, as "no one recognizes themselves as racist or sexist, but everyone holds biases". It also must be regular, mandatory, and adapted to the needs of different newsroom roles.
- **Training for decision-makers** —section editors, directors, etc.—, so that they can effectively identify and address cases of discrimination and racism when they occur.
- **Establish safe channels for reporting discrimination or harassment** that guarantee confidentiality, protect against retaliation, and include clear, visible follow-up procedures.
- **Develop clear internal protocols** for dealing with racism and discrimination, similar to existing frameworks for other forms of workplace aggression, such as "purple protocols" addressing sexual harassment and gender-based violence.
- **Integrate anti-racist education into journalism curricula** at both secondary and university levels, ensuring that future professionals receive early

and consistent training in equality, intercultural communication, and ethical representation.

3. Editorial practices and framing

- **Make migrant voices visible and adopt a paradigm shift** from telling stories *about* migrants to telling stories *with* them. This approach repositions migrants and racialized individuals as co-authors, experts, and legitimate voices within journalism, not merely as objects of coverage. The media should include migrant sources and experts in stories beyond migration or crime reporting, reflecting the complexity of Spanish society across beats.
- **Avoid thematic pigeonholing.** Journalists with foreign or racialized backgrounds should have the opportunity to cover general-interest topics —such as housing, economy, sports, or culture—, not only migration-related issues.
- **Move beyond the victim stereotype.** Coverage should abandon the paternalistic and simplified framing that reduces migrants to suffering subjects or associates them exclusively with poverty. Instead, narratives should highlight value, ambition, professional contribution, and the complexity of migrant experiences.
- **Provide service-oriented information.** Although progress has been made, migrant communities remain largely excluded from service-based information. Media should offer accessible, practical content —guides, administrative resources, legal information— that addresses the everyday needs of migrants and facilitates social participation.
- **Ensure careful and dignified use of language.** Interviewees emphasized the need for clearer editorial guidelines, including (i) mentioning nationality only when it is relevant to the story, as unnecessary references tend to reinforce stereotypes; (ii) using human-centered phrasing, placing "person" before the descriptor —e.g., "migrant person," "person with a disability"— to emphasize identity over condition; (iii) avoiding terminological inaccuracies such as using "illegal" instead of "irregular", which objectifies migrants and implies criminality rather than administrative status.
- **Seek community feedback** whenever possible before publishing sensitive articles —e.g., stories involving unaccompanied minors or police violence— to identify and correct potential biases or paternalistic framing.
- **Foster depth and storytelling**. Prioritize human stories over statistics, treating migration as a continuous social process rather than an isolated event, and avoiding sensationalism or short-term framing.

4. Anti-Racist communication and alliances

- **Build intersectoral alliances.** It is essential to foster collaboration and dialogue among journalists, academics, NGOs, and migrant collectives through joint training and learning spaces that

promote mutual understanding of each sector's realities and constraints.

- **Diversify argumentative repertoires.** In addition to human rights discourse, incorporate labor, economic, and sustainability-based arguments —e.g., migrants' contributions to the pension system— to reach more conservative or skeptical audiences.
- **Improve message accessibility**. Anti-racist communication should avoid academic jargon and inaccessible language that isolates minorities and the general public, opting instead for simpler language that connects with a wider audience.
- **Promote conciliatory spaces.** Avoid aggressiveness in social advocacy and seek more conciliatory spaces, since direct confrontation can generate immediate rejection in sectors reluctant to change.
- **Innovate in narrative formats.** New platforms and audiovisual formats — such as TikTok, podcasts, and short-form video— should be used to bring alternative narratives and research-based journalism to younger audiences.

Conclusions

Although not statistically generalizable, the interview findings reveal a set of structural dynamics that go beyond merely describing underrepresentation. The testimonies point to a journalistic system that, while professing awareness of racism in Spain, consistently reproduces exclusionary mechanisms that affect migrant and racialized professionals and that must be critically reviewed.

First, entry into the journalism profession remains governed by a recruitment model described as "elitist", in which access via costly master's programs and prolonged periods of job insecurity acts as a class filter. This model does not require overt discriminatory practices; its economic logic alone is enough to exclude those who cannot afford such initial instability, a situation that disproportionately affects migrant professionals for whom securing employment upon arrival is a pressing necessity.

On top of this, there exists a representational grammar structured through language, narrative framing, and legitimacy filters. The normative ideal of "neutrality", translated into demands for a "standard" Spanish, operates as a mechanism of cultural whitening and reinforces a linguistic hierarchy that expels non-peninsular voices from the professional domain. Editorial corrections, resistance to accents or non-hegemonic registers, and the erasure of non-European knowledge systems are inscribed within a power matrix where migrant identities are tolerated only if they adapt, self-censor, and are politically neutralized. This preference reinforces a professional identity associated with "nationality" and contributes to the exclusion of profiles that would otherwise enrich journalism with cultural and linguistic perspectives more aligned with the actual complexity of Spanish society.

The analysis of exclusion experiences also reveals a hierarchy of barriers based on geographic origin: prejudices and limitations increase in correlation with cultural and phenotypic distance from the white European norm. In this regard, while professionals from Latin America face significant challenges (precarity, accent bias, etc.), these are perceived as less insurmountable than those faced by individuals of African or Asian origin, whose presence in the media remains extremely limited.

Once inside the system, representation continues to be largely symbolic. Racialized journalists are often recruited under tokenistic logic, assigned to identity or migration-related topics, and rarely given access to general coverage, decision-making roles, or narrative authority. Their presence, therefore, does not transform editorial frameworks but rather reinforces them through a logic of "showcase diversity" or symbolic quotas. This pattern is mirrored in dominant narrative practices. According to the interviewees, media portrayals of migration continue to operate through a logic of exceptionality, urgency, or threat: the migrant as danger, victim, or folklore. Citizenship is represented as white and native-born; the migrant is the "other", and

thus only narratable through the lens of alterity.

In parallel, the contrast between the third sector and traditional media is stark. While the former positions anti-racist training, reporting protocols, and non-discriminatory language as basic organizational requirements, the latter relegates these issues to the realm of individual will. That is, despite growing awareness of racism in media spaces as expressed by participants, this awareness does not translate into structural governance mechanisms: there are no internal protocols, no mandatory training, and no clear editorial standards to prevent discriminatory practices. As a result, how these issues are addressed depends more on the "individual and editorial will" of sensitised editors or journalists than on any corporate policy, which often leads to narrative inconsistencies and the reproduction of stigmatizing frames.

While some spaces do challenge these dynamics —community media, independent projects, transnational initiatives— through counter-narratives and the reconfiguration of meaning-making conditions (e.g., shifting the focus from migrants as "objects" to "narrators", prioritising testimonies over data, and promoting shared authorship models that undermine traditional hierarchies), they still operate from the margins and under resource-scarce conditions that limit their reach. The possibility of a non-discriminatory media environment will ultimately depend on whether this new grammar, produced at the margins and grounded in lived experience, can permeate dominant narrative structures and interrogate the very foundations of journalistic perspective. Without this structural shift, any invocation of plurality will remain largely "cosmetic".

Finally, the results challenge the false dichotomy between professionalism and political commitment. The notion that journalism must remain "neutral" in the face of demands for racial justice serves as a pretext for keeping hegemonic truth-production frameworks intact. In this context, moving toward plural journalism does not simply mean "including more voices", but rather critically rethinking the material, linguistic, and symbolic conditions that determine which voices count, who gets to narrate, and under what rules.

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Appendix

A1. List of interviewees

ID	INSTITUTION / MEDIA OUTLET	CATEGORY
1	Campaña Mundial por la Educación (CME) and Migrantes Anónimas	Activist
2	CEPAIM	Activist
3	El País	Media
4	RTVE and Reinas del Balón	Media
5	University Complutense of Madrid (UCM)	Academia
6	Freelance	Media
7	Servimedia and Madrid Press Association	Media
8	Cinco Días, Retina and El País	Media
9	University Carlos III of Madrid	Academia
10	RTVE and Reporteros sin Fronteras	Media
11	Freelance	Media
12	Freelance	Media
13	porCausa	Activist
14	Freelance	Media
15	Enlace Latino and Review Energy	Media
16	Freelance	Media

Source: Authors

A2. Semi-structured interview grid

PERSONAL DATA

What gender do you identify with?

1. Female
2. Male
3. Non-binary
4. I prefer not to define myself

What is your or your family's country of origin?

_____

How old are you?

1. 18-30
2. 31-45
3. 46-60
4. 61-75

QUESTIONS

1.Commitment and accessibility

- Within your professional context, are there any foreigners or people of foreign origin?
- How does the organization where you work promote equal opportunities and the presence of foreigners and people of foreign origin?
- Do you think there is a problem with the access of foreigners, people of foreign origin or people with a migrant background to the journalistic profession? If so, what do you think are the main causes?
- Within your professional context, are there policies which facilitate access to the profession for foreigners or persons of foreign origin?
- Have specific interventions been promoted to prevent/counteract hate speech on the social platforms of the organization/media where you work?
- Could you describe 3 actions that contribute to a non-discriminatory working environment?

2.Knowledge and awareness

- Do you think there is sufficient awareness in your work environment about the existence of racism in our country and how this can affect information?
- Have you been informed about any instances of racist discrimination within your work context?
- In your opinion, do all workers of your organization feel respected and valued, regardless of their background of reference?

3.Prevention policies

- How does your newspaper/organization actively foster dialogue and mutual understanding between employees of different national origins? What is your newspaper/organization's commitment to recognizing and valuing different individual and cultural backgrounds?
- In your opinion, does your organization use 'inclusive' and non-discriminatory language in its internal communication? And in external communication?
- Are training sessions and workshops on equal opportunities and the prevention of all forms of discrimination planned within your workplace?

4.The cultural and media context

- Looking at the media landscape, what are, in your opinion, the narratives that feed stereotypes towards migrants, refugees and people with a migration background?
- What are the issues on which media narratives about migrants, refugees and racialized groups in general tend to focus? What are the most recurrent stereotypical narratives? Is there anything new compared to the past?
- Does the problem of invisibility of the voices of foreigners or people of foreign origin in media narratives persist in your opinion?
- Do you have information regarding possible good practices that may be promoted by traditional media, anti-racist movements and civil society organizations about monitoring and addressing misinformation and producing alternative narratives of migrants, refugees and racialized groups?

Free to decide if making the following questions only to antiracist activists and alternative media

- How much and how is racism reported in the mainstream media? Is it recognised as a structural problem?
- In your organization and more generally in the world of antiracist activism, is there or is there not a deficit in the ability to define effective communication strategies and relevant alternative narratives? If yes, how could one concretely intervene to fill this deficit?

MILD

More correct Information. Less Discrimination

Media, Migration and Inequality in Spain. A qualitative study of barriers to access and representation in the media sector is realised within the Mild - More correct Information Less Discrimination project. MILD promotes the production of more accurate media coverage of migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and racialized people through research, training and communication activities. The report offers an analysis of the forms of stereotyping, discrimination and racism present in the media and policies to date, with a view to promoting accurate information about racialized people and/or those with a migrant background.

FUNDACIÓN MALDITA.ES

Fundación Maldita.es is a non-profit foundation based in Spain that builds public trust by fighting disinformation and promoting transparency through journalism, education, technology, research and policy action. Its work is underscored by specialised teams, cutting edge technological tools, and an extensive community of citizens that collaborates with the organizations in the battle against disinformation. Maldita.es' mission is to provide all actors affected — from legislators and digital platforms to journalists, citizens & educators — with tools, capacities, and evidence-based content so that they can make informed decisions, and together foster a more resilient, accessible, and trustworthy media & information ecosystem.

Info: **https://maldita.es/**

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