

Visual Presentation of Refugees During the “Refugee Crisis” of 2015–2016 on the Online Portal of the Croatian Public Broadcaster

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This article examines the visual representation of refugees on the Croatian public broadcaster’s (HRT) online portal during the so-called European refugee crisis in 2015 and 2016. A content analysis of 887 images is linked to the main research question of how refugees were represented and what this means for framing the refugee situation. I examine how the visual presentation of refugees relates to the dominant discourses on migration: discourses of victimhood or threat. The analysis concentrates on both the macro and micro levels following some assumptions of social semiotics, as well as research in psychology, media, and migration studies. The study finds that the visual presentation is strongly linked to the local context. The humanitarian approach and the visibilities of biological life and empathy were most prominent.

Keywords: visual representation, refugee crisis, Croatian public broadcaster’s online portal

During the so-called 2015–2016 refugee crisis, European societies were faced with dramatic images of refugees published in traditional and new media that shaped public perceptions and political discussions perhaps more intensely than verbal messages (see, e.g., Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 2015; Giannakopoulos, 2016; Ibrahim & Howarth, 2016). An example is the images of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned in the Aegean Sea on September 2, 2015. In relation to the role that such images can play, researchers even speak of a *pictorial turn* (see Bleiker, 2018; Mitchell, 1994), stressing the importance of images for how people construct their social reality. Largely through images, some events (e.g., the 9/11 attacks) acquire immense symbolic dimensions. Images have been produced since prehistoric cave paintings; however, importantly, “the politics of images”—their circulation speed and reach—has drastically changed in relatively recent times (see Bleiker, 2018). The transformative power of widely circulated iconic images in traditional and especially social media has frequently been emphasized (e.g., Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 2015; Ibrahim & Howarth, 2016), as well as their impact on reporting on refugees (see Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017) and such phenomena as election results and mobilization among citizens (Carlier, 2016; Koca, 2016).

The emotional power of images frequently addressed in everyday life and research alike is perhaps because images have an immediate effect in creating emotional responses and attitudes (Bleiker, 2018; Hansen, 2011, p. 55; Mirzoeff, 2000, p. 15). Research in neuroscience links the emotional impact of images, and specifically empathy, to the brain architecture: “Our ability to identify with and imagine someone else’s point of

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view is deeply ingrained into the architecture of our brain. Photography plays a unique role in triggering the network of brain regions that underlie empathy" (Sariñana, 2014, p. 2).

Images of suffering that immediately relate to compassion and empathy have been addressed from a variety of perspectives (Chouliaraki, 2013; Höijer, 2004; Kotilainen, 2016; Zelizer, 2010), including the assumption of "compassion fatigue" (see, e.g., Moeller, 1999; for a critique, see Campbell, 2012).

How viewers actually process images of suffering or other phenomena depends on various factors, such as viewers' individual contexts and histories, what type of "visualizer" they are, and on their preexisting values, conceptualizations, and feelings: All of these can influence image interpretation (Domke, Perlmutter, & Spratt, 2002). Furthermore, images are always "read" in a historical and sociopolitical context (Campbell, 2004, pp. 62–63), and are ambiguous in the sense that different audiences perceive and interpret them differently. Diverging interpretations may relate to familiarity with an issue and the image's usage context (Hansen, 2011; Mitchell, 2005). The meanings of images are always ambivalent, and their power is thus elusive (Stocchetti, 2011, p. 14).

The majority of our knowledge about migration is mediated. Through their messages, media shape the understanding of, attitudes to, and responsibilities toward refugees. Audiences are exposed to "knowledge" distributed by the media. Other sources of information about migration (e.g., refugees' voices) are, as a rule, less visible or invisible in media presentations. Even when represented, the complexity of migrant voices is often simplified and limited to the victim and villain frames (see, e.g., Crawley, McMahon, & Jones, 2016).

For these reasons, visuals (and multimodal messages they frequently are part of) matter: The way people or groups are visually represented in the media may associate them with a humanitarian challenge, benefit for a society, or threats to its security: Certain "dehumanizing visual patterns" reinforce the politics of fear (Bleiker, Campbell, Hutchison, & Nicholson, 2013), influencing not only the way refugees are publicly framed, but also political responses to migration (see also Martínez Lirola, 2016, 2017a, 2017b).

Visuals representing refugees during the "refugee crisis" were not uniform in the entire European area. I argue that they were dependent on, and shaped by, specific national contexts, in addition to being part of a broader European and even global migration discourse.

This study is related to the specific national context of Croatia, a "transit" country that was part of the so-called Balkan route. The policies of Croatia regarding refugees in 2015 and 2016 were partially influenced by the country's status as an EU member state and partially because Croatia and other countries in the region (e.g., Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia) were seldom refugees' final destinations because of economic factors: The Balkan countries face economic emigration of a large number of their own citizens. The Croatian Social Democratic Government generally advocated a human(itarian) approach to the "crisis"; Župarić-Iljić and Valenta (2019) link this approach to the policy of enabling a humane "transit" process: Refugees were "welcomed into

the country on a temporary basis only" (p. 374).¹ Among a few local factors influencing Croatian discourse during the "crisis" were tensions with neighboring countries (Slovenia and Serbia) related to handling the refugee situation after the complete closure of the border between Serbia and Hungary in September 2015. A significant problem was lack of communication and coordination among the countries along the Balkan route, which resulted in holding refugees at border crossings without appropriate protection and aid and people being trapped between two countries with no shelter or assistance (see Sisgoreo, 2016).

A very important local factor influencing Croatian citizens' attitude toward the refugee situation was Croatia's own relatively recent experience with forced migration in the 1990s, when a large number of Croats were refugees for years. Settlements along the Serbian-Croatian border that were the "entry points" for refugees in 2015 were severely affected by the wartime conflicts in the 1990s when many people had to leave their homes. The refugee experience of the local populations influenced their empathy and humanitarian attitude, which were especially important in the early stages when the state failed to effectively deal with the "crisis." I claim that that experience also greatly contributed to the general image of the refugee as a suffering individual and one of "us," and to the overall representation of refugees in the Croatian media, including the Croatian public broadcaster's online portal (hereafter HRT).

However, a different attitude was also represented by some political groups. The first months of the "crisis" were a time of pre-election debates, in which some political groups and individuals raised negative sentiments concentrating on the large numbers of refugees and national security. However, this never became the dominant attitude, neither in political circles nor among the general population. The new Croatian conservative government elected in November 2015 continued a discourse of responsibility and humanity.

Two civil society and citizens' organizations were particularly effective during the entire period, providing direct help that larger organizations with strict hierarchies failed to do: the Welcome Initiative, consisting of various civil society organizations, and Are You Syrious?, which grew out of independent citizens' initiatives. These organizations were active in monitoring human rights violations at the reception and transit centers, and organizing solidarity marches and demonstrations against repressive measures and closure of the EU borders.

Some analyses noticed a shift toward securitization discourse in Croatia after the Paris terrorist attacks and Cologne harassment incidents (see Šelo Šabić, 2017b; Župarić-Iljić & Valenta, 2019) in statements by some members of the political elite, including the president (Jakešević & Tatalović, 2016; Mulalić, 2015). I examine whether such a shift can be traced in the HRT data.

The extensive visual data published on HRT in the six months of the 2015–2016 refugee "crisis" not only reveal HRT's representation patterns that contributed to shaping collective imaginations of the refugee situation, but these visuals also show a broader picture because HRT is representative of other mainstream Croatian nontabloid media.

¹ Župarić-Iljić and Valenta (2019, p. 375), claim that "the state's 'public-face' strategy of advocating human(itarian) approaches was, in practice, restricted to enabling a more humane 'transit' process rather than one of aiding 'longer-term solutions.'"

The Refugee as an Anonymous "Other" and Threat Versus the Refugee as an Individualized Suffering Individual in (Visual) Media Representations

Many studies have identified negatively framed reporting and stereotyping in the representation of refugees in the media (e.g., Bleiker et al., 2013; Elsamni, 2016; Esses, Medianu, & Lawson, 2013; KhosraviNik, 2010; Martínez Lirola, 2017a, 2017b). Securitization discourse (occasionally discussing visuals) that frames migrants as a security threat has been noticed in a number of countries: for example, Slovenia (Vezovnik, 2018), France (Sweet, 2017), Slovakia (Androvičová, 2016), Canada (Johnston, 2016), and the United States (Demata, 2017). However, the situation is often more complex and characterized by interweaving of multiple discourses (Caviedes, 2015; Colombo, 2018). Other discourses on refugees include victimization, humanitarianism, multiculturalism, and integration as dominant frames (see Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Horsti, 2012; Korteweg, 2017).

Visual strategies employed in frequent refugees' representations produce what Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017) label "visibility as threat" (p. 1169; see, e.g., Bleiker, Campbell, & Hutchison, 2014; Bleiker et al., 2013; Martínez Lirola, 2017a, 2017b).

Relatively recent analyses also reveal some more varied visual representations that imply tolerance (e.g., Permyakova & Antineskul [2016] on Russian and French print media). Visual representations that challenge the dehumanizing approach and can trigger empathy (these visibilities of empathy are also problematic [see Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017] because the humanitarian discourse in which refugees are shown as victims strips them of agency; see Antony & Thomas, 2017) have also been found in contexts discussing photographs of refugees' suffering, trauma, and deaths (Giannakopoulos, 2016; Ibrahim & Howarth, 2016; Lenette & Cleland, 2016).

I argue that, despite growing literature on the visual representation of refugees, there is still a lack of empirical research based on larger data sets. Moreover, the discourses of the "transit" countries are still underexplored. Research on the discursive construction of the refugee "crisis" in Croatia is relatively scant. Jakešević and Tatalović (2016) and Šelo Šabić (2017a) provide a general overview of political discourse; Sicurella (2018) concentrates on the discourse by Serbian and Croatian public intellectuals, and Felberg and Šarić (2017) focus on Croatian and Serbian public broadcasters' verbal discourse.

This analysis considers a news source representative of the Croatian government's official discourse and complements previous research by systematically examining a large amount of visual data that provide a solid quantitative foundation for the qualitative study that was carried out.

Theoretical Framework

This analysis is informed by social semiotics (see, e.g., Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2008) and psychological research on "the identifiable victim effect." Of further relevance are studies of European news, specifically, typologies of the visibility of the crisis (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017).

In social semiotics, images are systematically characterized in terms of their interactive meanings. It is assumed that images—that is, some of their visual features—can create involvement and empathy, whereas other features contribute to creating emotional detachment in viewers. The relevant categories related to interaction are *gaze*, *frame*, and *horizontal* and *vertical angle* (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), the gaze of the actors represented in an image directed at the viewer “creates a visual form of direct address” (p. 122): Such images are “demand images,” and their opposite is “offer images,” in which the actors represented do not gaze at viewers and, accordingly, do not address them. These images disable social interaction: The people are simply “offered” to readers’ gaze (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 140).

Social semioticians relate the frame of the image—that is, types of shots—to various degrees of social distance: Close shots in which the faces of the actors represented can be seen imply intimate distance. With medium shots, the social distance is greater, whereas long shots indicate impersonal distance (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). This is in accordance with the embodied worldview: One cannot interact with people who are far away in space. The large distance in space communicates a lack of interpersonal relationships and social distance (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 138). If people are depicted from a considerable distance, one cannot perceive their individual characteristics.

The vertical angle in the social actors’ representation relates to power. A low angle implies the power of the social actors represented, whereas a high angle stands for the power of the viewers.²

Another important theoretical notion for this analysis, the “identifiable victim effect” is used in psychological research examining how people react to catastrophes and what affects people’s empathy, philanthropy, and donations. This research (see, e.g., Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997) indicates that a single identifiable individual is more likely to arouse empathy or sympathy than a group (Ariely, 2008). One experiences much empathy for individual victims, but not when catastrophes, including large-scale migrations, affect many people (Slovic, 2007, 2010). The identifiable victim effect implies that visuals showing individualized persons or a few persons only (see, e.g., Lee & Feeley, 2016) are likely to arouse compassion and empathy (Ariely, 2008, p. 1). These important findings relate to social semioticians’ assumptions about *individualization* and *assimilation* (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 37): Visuals showing individuals and small groups individualize social actors, whereas those showing large groups assimilate them, often by aggregating them (i.e., concentrating on large numbers and statistics). Applied to visuals representing refugees, the single-victim effect implies that the number of people represented matters. Whether large groups, medium-sized groups, small groups (e.g., families), or single individuals are represented is of great relevance in addition to the gaze, shot type, and angle. Images of individuals and small groups in which the represented participants interact with viewers are more likely to evoke compassion than images of large groups. The larger the group and the less clearly identifiable the faces, the greater emotional distance in viewers.

These assumptions underlie the principles for coding the HRT visuals, which are explained in the next section.

² The meanings linked to these categories are potential and dependent on other factors.

Analysis of the HRT Visuals

Data and Method

The visuals analyzed are from the Internet portal of the Croatian public broadcaster (HRT).³ In its ideological orientation, HRT follows the official government policy (see the remarks in the introduction). As with all online sources, the object of the analysis was dynamic and part of the material tended to disappear after some time.⁴

The data were collected in a search performed in September 2016 on the portal's site, using its search function to look for Croatian equivalents of the keywords *refugee*, *migrant*, *migration*, *migration crisis*, *refugee crisis*, and *migrant crisis*. The sorting criterion was "relevance." The timeframe of the material was six months, from August 15, 2015, to March 15, 2016. These six months were chosen because they were characterized by intense media attention given to migration.

The headlines, subheads, and ledes of all of the texts were read to establish the main topic; in unclear cases, the entire text was read. Only the texts with migration as their main topic or one of the main topics were included in the final data set, which consisted of 150 texts with 56,031 words and 887 images.⁵ These images are embedded in the multimodal online journalistic "texts,"⁶ the majority of which are online condensed versions of TV news (for an example, see the Appendix). A smaller number are other genres, such as opinion articles and interviews. These polyvocal texts incorporate, refer to, and recontextualize discourse by refugees, politicians, humanitarian organizations, police, nongovernmental organizations, and other social actors from Croatia and other European countries. They also represent journalists' and editors' voices.

Typically, HRT's online news starts with a large image, which in some cases is the only one in the opening part of the texts. In other cases, two to five⁷ small images arranged horizontally below the large image follow. Each of these small images appears as the first, in a large format, if one clicks on it. A headline and a lede follow, and then the remainder of the texts. Video clips (whose number varies) from the main news program are embedded in the texts, and sometimes also additional (e.g., Twitter) images. The videos start

³ <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/>

⁴ The rubric "refugees," in which many articles were published in 2015–2016, was no longer available in Summer 2018.

⁵ The texts collected in the search were not the only ones published in that period. It was not possible to influence the search function in any way: The material can thus be considered a random sample.

⁶ Broadly understood, "texts" include all available semiotic resources, such as layout and photographs, in addition to verbal elements.

⁷ Up to five photographs appear automatically as part of the texts upon opening them, and the first impression is that these are all of the images. The number of images is, however, much larger in some articles. It is not immediately visible whether a text's opening part contains more than five images: The rest of the "gallery" appears only after one clicks on a small arrow to the right below the first five photographs.

with a still image, which was included in the data analyzed. Videos were not analyzed.⁸ The 887 images included all of those from the opening of the texts (one to [the first] five per text), and all of the other still images embedded in various parts of the texts. Some images are from HRT's main news program *Dnevnik* (the word *Dnevnik* appears in the lower left corner), and some are from different news agencies.

The photographs that accompany the news stories on the HRT portal represent various social actors and their actions (see Figure 1 for a few examples). They mostly use perceptual realism as a mode of presentation, showing, for example, refugees sleeping, walking, entering trains (see Figure 2), politicians talking to journalists, and humanitarian organizations' members distributing food.⁹



Figure 1. Examples of HRT's images.

Source: HRT <http://izbjeglice.hrt.hr/304448/do-15-sati-u-rh-uslo-3513-izbjeglica>), October 22, 2015; <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/295739/hrvatska-spremna-ako-migranti-krenu-prema-nasim-granicama>, August 19, 2015; <https://vijesti.hrt.hr/298750/na-hrvatsku-se-nece-preliti-izbjeglicki-val>, September 14, 2015; <https://www.hrt.hr/299638/vijesti/opatovac-kamp-za-4000-izbjeglica>, September 21, 2015

⁸ In Summer 2018 (when this article was being written), the majority of the videos were inactive.

⁹ The visual presentation (who is depicted and in what situation) was not always closely related to the main topic of the texts.

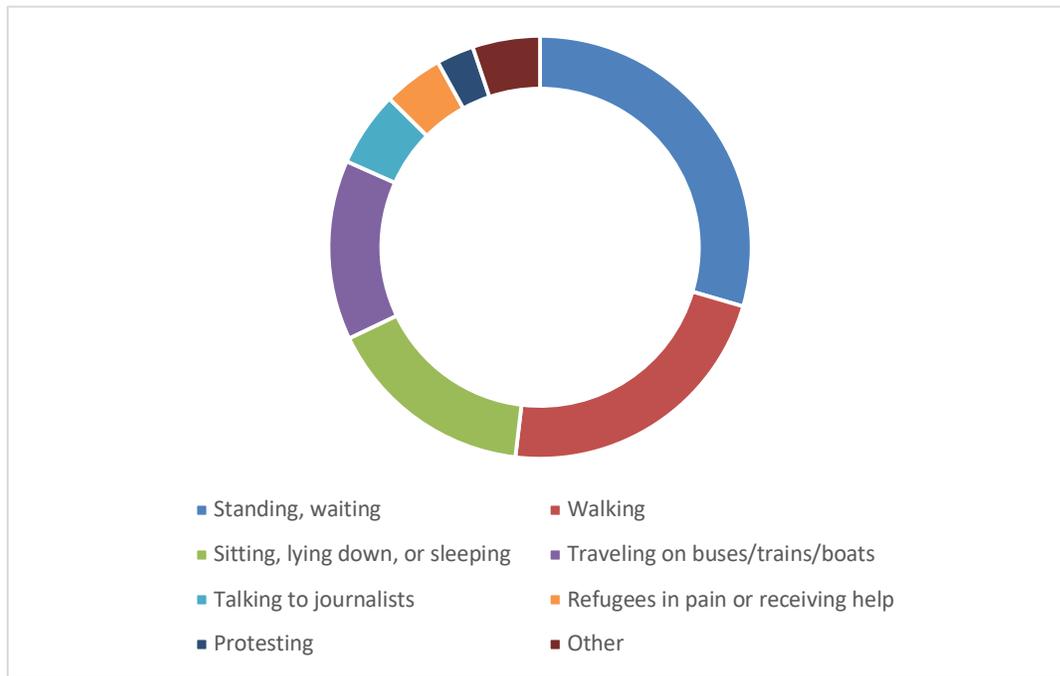


Figure 2. The represented activities of refugees.

Coding and Categorization

The photographs were coded by two persons¹⁰ following the main question of who or what was depicted and how. Who were the foregrounded social actors; that is, did the photographs emphasize refugees, politicians, the police and army, humanitarian workers, or some other actors? If the photographs showed refugees, did they depict groups (and were these large, medium, or small) without focusing on single individuals, or did they emphasize individuals? Did the photographs avoid representing social actors and show objects (e.g., buildings) instead? The main categories that emerged and their quantitative relations are shown in Table 1 and Figure 3. The categorization was made by determining either (a) who or what was exclusively presented (who was the sole subject), or (b) who was clearly in focus (when different social actors were present).

Table 1. General Distribution of 887 Images: Who or What Was Exclusively

¹⁰ The coders agreed in more than 97% of all cases.

Represented or Strongly Emphasized.

Social actors	Images (<i>n</i>)	%
Refugees	349	39
Journalists	146	17
Politicians	99	11
Police and army	72	8
Experts, volunteers, humanitarians, citizens	67	8
Mixed groups	38	4
"Subjectless" photographs (no social actors visible or hardly visible actors)	116	13
Total	887	

Note. Some images—still images from the videos—showed two overlapping images. These were classified according to the more dominant image.

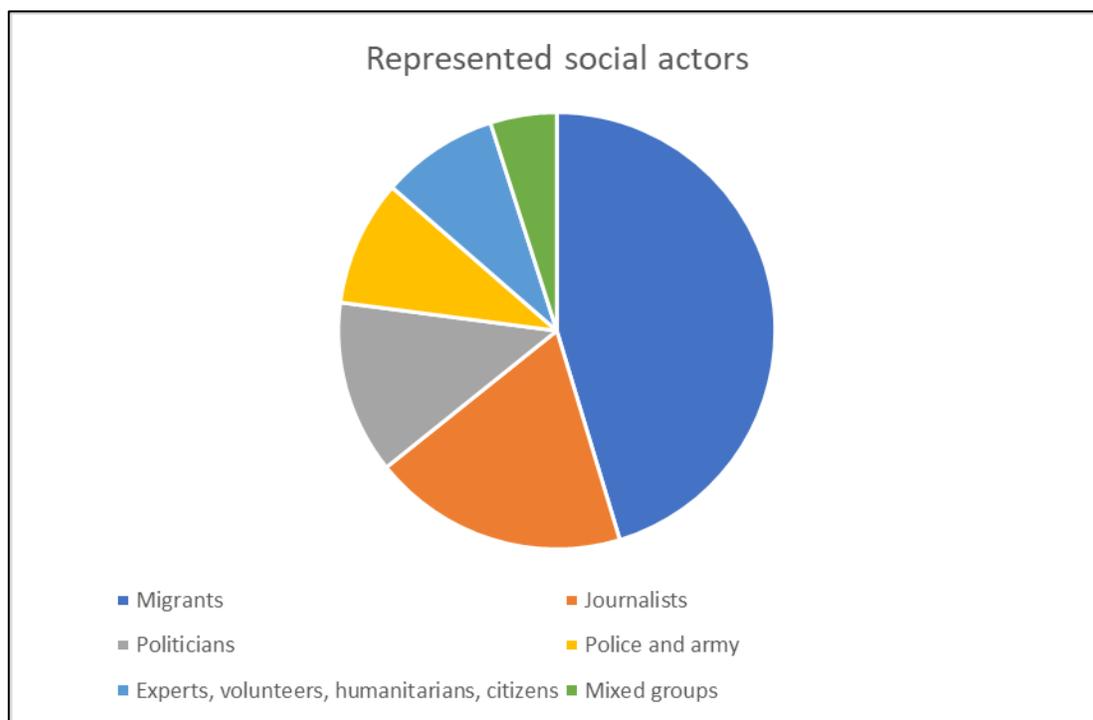


Figure 3. General distribution of 887 images.

The identified categories indicate which social actors and actions were foregrounded and backgrounded and which were excluded. Although all of the material had refugees as its main topic or

one of the main ones, refugees were visually salient in only around 40% of the photographs (this percentage included some images from the small category "mixed groups": The majority of visuals in this group showed refugees with some other equally salient social actors, such as the police and army). Other actors represented were those that directly or indirectly influence and/or produce representations: medium-external (e.g., politicians, policymakers, and police) and medium-internal (e.g., journalists and editors). Some were considered both internal and external because they not only influence and produce representations, but were also represented (e.g., politicians).

Findings

Representation of Medium-Internal and Medium-External Social Actors (Excluding Refugees)

In the entire period analyzed, journalists, correspondents, and thus the broadcaster as an institution were given a high presence. The personalization of text producers was high. The share of the photographs showing journalists was considerable, indicating that the news source was engaged in its own positioning. It did so by featuring journalists as the most salient social actors either commenting from the TV studio, reporting from the ground, interviewing migration experts, or talking to refugees. The first still image of the videos included in the data most frequently showed medium shots of journalists commenting from the field.

The share of the photographs showing national and foreign politicians was relatively high. Strong personalization of politicians was observed. The politician most frequently represented was Minister of Interior Ostojić.¹¹ Other politicians included Prime Minister Milanović, President Grabar Kitarović, some opposition politicians, and foreign politicians. The politicians were represented talking either to the press or to each other, and visiting refugees (e.g., at reception centers). Close-ups and medium shots were used in almost all of these photographs, focusing on politicians' personalities and functions. The politicians' gaze was most frequently directed at journalists outside the image frame.¹²

Politicians and journalists were more frequently presented than the army and police. The presence of the police and army in migration-related images could be related to securitization discourse. Securitization refers to a process of treating a political issue as an urgent threat to legitimize extraordinary measures and is based on the use of "security language" and speech acts.¹³ In her seminal work on visual securitization, Hansen (2011) sees this as "processes through which images come to have political implications" (p. 53). Images of police and the army may suggest a link between security and migration; however, the relevant factor is whose army and police are presented. In the majority of

¹¹ Ranko Ostojić, Minister of the Interior in the government of PM Zoran Milanović (2011–2016), was the head of the crisis management task force for refugees.

¹² Experts and politicians on TV are normally shown in profile (Baggaley, Ferguson, and Brooks, 1980, p. 30).

¹³ For the securitization theory, see Balzacq (2005); Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998).

the images on HRT, the Hungarian and Slovenian army and police (securitizing actors) were shown,¹⁴ not Croatian. The actions against refugees performed by the police of neighboring countries (e.g., their use of pepper spray) were frequently explicitly criticized by verbal means in the texts with visuals showing the police.¹⁵

Some images illustrating a humanitarianism discourse that portrayed refugees as vulnerable people in need of "our" help showed humanitarian workers and volunteers helping on the ground. On the one hand, this discourse emphasizes "our" humanity; however, it also reduces refugees' visibility to corporeal existence and the needs of the body. Although absent, refugees in such visuals were framed as subject to the humanitarian benevolence of the West (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017; Vaughan-Williams, 2015).

Representation of Refugees

In coding visuals representing refugees, a distinction was made between photographs showing groups versus photographs showing individualized refugees. Groups were further classified into three categories according to their size (one to five people, six to 15 people, and 16 or more). The group size distinction emerged from the frequent patterns observed in the data across the time period.

Table 2 and Figure 4 present the distribution of images by group size, indicating the relation between individualization and collectivization. The categories that emerged on a close examination of the photographs showing groups were (1) photographs of small groups (up to five people) in which no individuals were in focus; this category, often depicting families with children, was particularly prominent in the data; (2) photographs of medium-sized groups (six to 15 people) with no individuals in focus; and (3) large groups (16 or more) with no individuals in focus. Category 4 included images that focused on individual adult refugees: These individuals were sometimes part of smaller groups, but viewers could nevertheless clearly see refugees' faces, and single individuals stood out. Refugees sometimes looked away, but at other times they looked at the camera. Finally, a certain share of photographs (Category 5) clearly focused on refugee children, framing them as individuals, although they were sometimes parts of groups. In Categories 4 and 5, people were presented as individualized subjects with distinct features, and they were personalized.

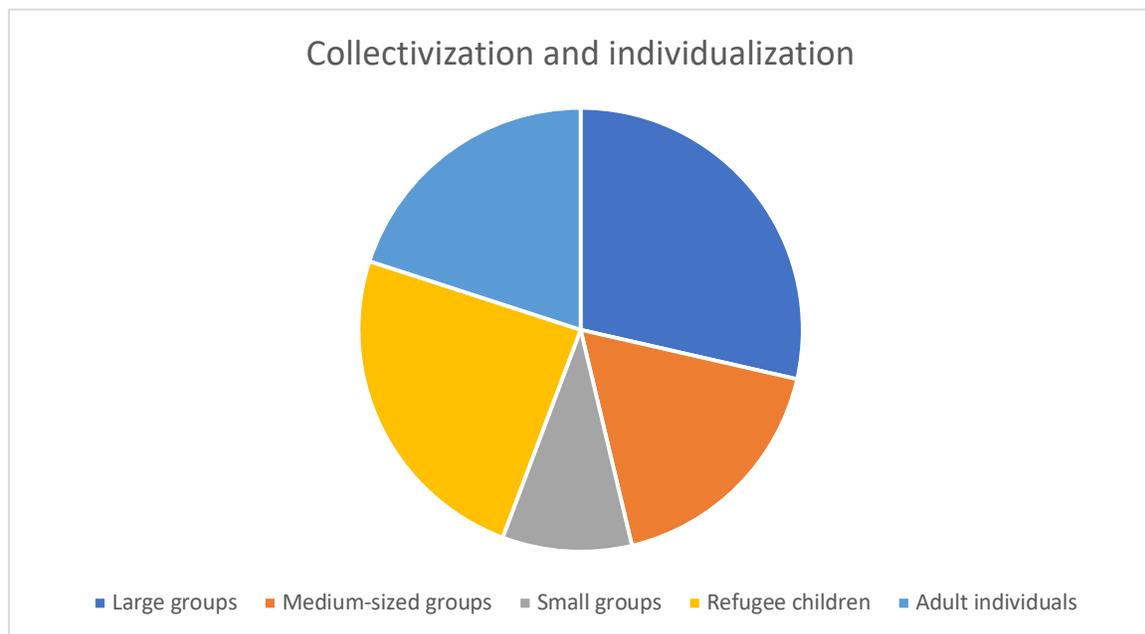
¹⁴ For example, <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/296511/tisuce-izbjeglica-na-srbijansko-maarskoj-granici>. Mađarska policija izbjeglice rastjerala suzavcem. August 26, 2015.

¹⁵ For example, <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/299245/slovenija-primila-150-migranata-cerar-nema-koridora-stitimo-schengen>. September 18, 2015.

Table 2. Refugees' Photographs: Coding Categories.

Category	Photographs (<i>n</i>)	%	Blurred faces, long distance (photographs [<i>n</i>])
1. Small groups (one to five); no individuals in focus	33	9	19 ^a
2. Medium-sized groups (six to 15); no individuals in focus	62	18	26 ^a
3. Large groups (16 or more); no individuals in focus	100	29	49 ^a
4. Individuals: adults in focus	69	20	0
5. Individuals: children in focus	85	24	0
Total	349		

^a The group was photographed from behind or the picture was taken from a long distance (consequently, faces were hardly recognizable)

**Figure 4. Photographs of refugees: Collectivization and individualization.**

Photographs of Refugees in Groups

In the photographs in which refugees were foregrounded or exclusively represented, groups of various sizes were shown in 56% of all cases: Within that share, large groups of refugees dominated (around half), medium-sized groups followed, and small groups were least frequent. Interestingly, with large and medium-sized groups, almost 50% of the photographs were taken from behind. Alternatively, people's faces were blurred or not clearly visible. In some cases, people were photographed from a long distance. One would expect more personalization (i.e., foregrounding of individuals) in photographs showing small groups; however, interestingly, the share of the photographs showing people from behind and photographs in which faces were not clearly visible was even higher in photographs of small groups compared with other photographs showing groups. Such photographs highly constrain or disable interaction (see Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2008). The size of the group depicted was thus not the only important factor. Additional decisive factors were the aforementioned front versus rear view and the light in the photographs. Many photographs were taken at night: These were rather dark and people's faces were not clearly visible, which had a lack of personalization as a consequence.

In photographs showing groups, either a large number of people were exposed to the viewers' gaze, or, if the number of refugees represented was smaller, viewers could hardly identify them as individuals with distinct features because the photographs were dark, they were taken from behind, and/or a long shot was used. This presentation mode reduced the possibility of viewers' involvement with the subjects represented; it depersonalized these subjects and transformed them into objects and an indivisible mass. Only in a few photographs were refugees shown from a bird's-eye view; they were "below" the viewer.¹⁶

Photographs on HRT showing refugees in groups were as a rule offer images depicting an indirect gaze; people looked away from the camera. A smaller number were a mixture of demand and offer images in which some people looked at the camera, but some others looked away. Photographs with an indirect gaze were less interactive: There was a barrier between the social actors represented and the viewers, and a sense of disengagement. Moreover, frequent representations in which subjects' backs were turned toward the camera, and/or their faces were not visible, constitute an additional category: absence of eye contact (Durrani, 2018, p. 72).

Photographs of large groups of people conveyed similar information to that regularly found in texts¹⁷ mentioning large numbers of refugees entering Croatia, the countries in the region, or the European

¹⁶ <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/297391/orban-migranti-su-njemacki-problem-izbjeglicki-val-prijeti-europskim-krscanskim-korijenima>. September 3, 2015. <http://izbjeglice.hrt.hr/304329/tisuce-izbjeglica-noc-je-provelo-na-otvorenome-kraj-sutle>. October 22, 2015.

¹⁷ The verbal dimension and its relation to nonverbal elements are of course central to understanding the overall message of the discourse. However, because much research has already documented verbal representation, this analysis focuses on visuals, a topic less frequently analyzed. The few remarks in this section are not intended to be a through multimodal analysis, which is an important subject deserving attention in its own right.

Union: If headlines and/or ledes used phrases mentioning large numbers, photographs using long shots and showing large groups were regularly employed in HRT's image gallery; however, most often individualized refugees were also shown in the same gallery.

Photographs of large and medium-sized groups without any focus on individuals conveyed the idea of assimilation often expressed through verbal means. For example, one still video image from *Dnevnik* in a text published September 13, 2015, showed a large number of people in a boat photographed from above and from a large distance. The text in the lower part of the image read, "Refugee wave persists."¹⁸

The numbers of refugees entering Croatia and travelling through the country on their way to their final destinations in the European Union were represented as too large in relation to what Croatian organizations could handle or to what was expected.

The representation strategies in texts employing group photographs were distancing and objectification. The refugees were not close to "us." The only "fact" viewers and readers knew was that there were many of them. They were conceptualized as a distant mass or numerous objects for scrutiny just about to continue their journey. Frequently, the groups were shown entering buses and waiting at train stations. These visuals contributed to framing Croatia as a transit country.

Photographs in Which Single Adults Were in Focus and Photographs of Children

Lenette and Cleland (2016) indicate that in recent times visual representations of migrants have focused more directly on individuals or small groups and their vulnerability rather than faceless groups. They see this as "a shift in *intent* toward re-humanising efforts, depicting women, men, and children as relatable in situations that are no longer quite as alien, to elicit viewers' sense of connection, concern, and empathy" (p. 79).

Photographs emphasizing individuals that are likely to produce "the single victim effect"—that is, evoke compassion in viewers—have been frequently employed by HRT. This is in line with the tendency noticed by Lenette and Cleland (2016). The share of photographs emphasizing refugees as individuals was significant (44%), and these photographs were in clear contrast to the photographs of groups. In the images showing individualized and personalized adults and children, these individuals were either the sole subject presented, or were focused on, "singled out" from the group they were part of. In the majority of them, a medium shot or close-up was used, implying less social distance (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) between them and viewers.

This individuation, a close-up perspective, as noted by Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017), "has the potential to offer a more humanised representation of refugees" (p. 1168). The verbal parts of news items that these photographs were part of frequently described refugees represented (e.g., children, families) as vulnerable humans in an extraordinary, difficult situation. For instance, in a news item describing the

¹⁸ <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/297391/orban-migranti-su-njemacki-problem-izbjeglicki-val-prijeti-europskim-krscanskim-korijenima>. September 3, 2015.

situation at the Idomeni detention center, the headline read, "Refugees in mud, children sick, women at the end of their rope."¹⁹ One of the four images included showed a small group of children walking through the mud, and another one showed children in small tents. Two images employed close-ups of children. In another news item with the headline "Croatia is ready if migrants move toward our borders," a photograph focusing on a child on a bicycle with his family was one of the three included. The lede described refugees as "desperate, tortured by the conflicts and chaos in their homelands, trying to find a better life in Germany and Scandinavia."²⁰

HRT frequently employed the emblematic imagery of children, conveying the idea of refugees in need of help. Children were represented as sleeping, walking, smiling, playing, crying, being desperate, looking happy, and waving—in short, as distinct individuals in a number of "everyday" although extraordinary situations. A few photographs showed children behind fences, metaphorically looking imprisoned.²¹ Children were often carried by adults. Photographs that focused on newborn babies with their mothers were also represented. HRT, like many other news sources in Croatia, paid special attention to several refugee babies born in Croatia.²² In the news items thematizing newborn babies, personalization was also realized through verbal means: Names of family members were provided, and parents' voices were included in the form of a direct or indirect quote.

In some texts, children were the focus of entire galleries of photographs; for instance, a text published August 28, 2015 (headline: "HRT in Kanjiža with refugees—moving stories")²³ was entirely devoted to refugees' tragic situations. The text was rather short; the video (inactive at the time of the analysis) seemed to be its main part. In all of the photographs embedded in this text, children were individualized, looking at the camera and interacting with viewers. Children (smiling or waving) established eye contact with the reader in these demand images, as they did in many others; for instance, two photographs with children in focus were embedded in a text thematizing the number of refugees who had arrived in Serbia from Macedonia.²⁴ In one, the center of the photograph (source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) was a child with his back to the camera carrying another child through a field, whose eyes (looking tired and desperate) were directed at the viewer, implying interaction. In the second photograph, the central part was a smiling child standing with a journalist and holding a toy.

¹⁹ <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/325901/izbjeglice-u-blatu-djeca-bolesna-zene-na-izmaku-snage>. March 10, 2016. All the translations are mine.

²⁰ <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/295739/hrvatska-spremna-ako-migranti-krenu-prema-nasim-granicama>. August 19, 2015.

²¹ <http://www.hrt.hr/308337/vijesti/u-sloveniju-jucer-uslo-7600-migranata-austrija-primila-5000>. November 13, 2015.

²² For example, to two babies born in Croatia that their parents named *Croatia* and *Muhammad Hrvoje* (*Hrvoje* is a typical Croatian name) as a gesture of gratitude of their parents to Croatia. <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/321311/u-slavonskom-brodu-roen-sirijski-djecak-hrvoje>. February 9, 2016.

²³ <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/296817/hrt-u-kanjizi-s-izbjeglicama-potresne-sudbine>. August 28, 2015.

²⁴ <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/296195/vise-od-tisucu-migranata-jutros-uslo-u-srbiju-iz-makedonije>. August 24, 2015.

Offer photographs with medium shots or close-ups—children not looking at the camera, and seemingly not interacting with viewers—were also represented. However, in these photographs, children were also identifiable individuals (interacting with their parents, carrying their belongings, and heading in a certain direction) that viewers could perceive and acknowledge as such.

Some photographs with children and individualized adults explicitly showed suffering: For instance, after the Slovenian police used pepper spray at the Slovenian–Croatian border, a photo embedded in the news item showed a medium shot of two people lying on the ground with their eyes covered by a cloth.²⁵

HRT frequently used “ideal victim images” that were likely to evoke compassion. Höijer (2004) claims that compassion is dependent on such images: “The audience accept the dominant victim code of the media and regard children, women, and the elderly as ideal victims deserving compassion” (p. 521). Images of individuals in general are open for compassion because people’s faces and emotions are easily identifiable, and viewers can interact with them. However, even when its dominant discourse seemed to be victimizing refugees, HRT often offered a more complex image beyond framing them as prototypical victims (e.g., smiling children were shown in a context in which many other elements, visual and others, connote suffering).²⁶

The variety of visual discourses suggested by the photographs discussed so far becomes even more complex with photographs with no visible social actors, or photographs in which certain objects were given prominence. The share of these photographs was 13%.

Photographs With No Apparent/Visible Social Actors

Some photographs showed various objects only. In some others, people were present but were backgrounded to the extent of not being recognizable. These photographs were in clear contrast to the photographs of large groups of people and those of individualized refugees.²⁷

As to their content—that is, the objects exclusively shown or foregrounded—a few subcategories were identified: (a) border signs, checkpoints, fencing, and razor wire; (b) infrastructure for detention (detention centers); (c) graphs, charts, and maps; (d) transportation for refugees’ travel (trains and buses); (e) objects belonging to refugees and things left behind (e.g., toys, drawings, tents, and trash); (f) vehicles belonging to the police and military; (g) national and supranational symbols (e.g., flags); and (h) humanitarian aid (e.g., food). Categories a and b were most frequent, followed by Categories c, d, and e. These images focused on objects that indirectly referred to the refugee situation, using

²⁵ <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/299245/slovenija-primila-150-migranata-cerar-nema-koridora-stitimo-schengen>. September 18, 2015.

²⁶ For example, <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/296817/hrt-u-kanjizi-s-izbjeglicama-potresne-sudbine>. August 28, 2015.

²⁷ The great variety of “subjectless” photographs and their complex meanings is only briefly addressed here. These photographs deserve attention in their own right.

metonymy²⁸ (the dominant device), symbols, and metaphors. The domain of the metonymies employed was refugees (e.g., a toy is shown instead of a child to whom the toy belongs), or a field of action by some other social actors (e.g., the domains are humanitarianism or security measures when blankets and police cars are shown, respectively: blankets stand for humanitarian aid, and police cars represent security measures).

Some subjectless images that used metonymy (showing, e.g., feet in mud) denoted refugees' suffering, whereas some other metonymic images evoked a representation of refugees as cultural "others" (e.g., photographs showing waste left behind).

Important artifacts shown in many photographs were fences.²⁹ As clear symbols of power and control, fences often included barbed wire and razor wire. In some photographs, one can see people through fences at a distance, and in others the razor wire was the foregrounded element. In some, the fence was a border between a viewer and a crying child (shown in close-up) behind the fence.³⁰ Depending on other elements in the immediate and broader context, the photographs with fences could be interpreted either as a plea for humanitarianism or support for the politics of exclusion: In the latter case, they symbolically visualized the (invisible) refugee as a threat. However, the plea for humanitarianism was foregrounded during the entire period analyzed: The fences shown were Hungarian and Slovenian. Many photographs of reception centers were ambiguous: On the one hand, they related to humanitarian actions—providing a temporary shelter—and metonymically represented Croatia's humanitarian approach, but, on the other, they also related to a specific form of confinement (Jovičić, 2017).

Discussion and Conclusion

The analysis of a relatively large set of photographs from the source that can be considered representative of the dominant, official Croatian view on the "refugee crisis," and of the representation of the Croatian mainstream quality (nontabloid) news sources in general, reveals an interplay of a few discourses and frames, and at times a somewhat cacophonous representation of the refugee situation.³¹

The HRT portal was intensely engaged in its own positive self-presentation, as well as in a positive presentation of the government's measures: The former is reflected in numerous visuals showing journalists, and the latter in visuals showing politicians and other state-related social actors. HRT was also intensely engaged in negatively framing measures against refugees undertaken by

²⁸ In metonymy (an *X* for *Y* relation), two entities belonging to the same conceptual domain are brought into a relation, for example, a body part (*X*) stands for a person (*Y*), or a person's work stands for the person.

²⁹ For example, <http://www.hrt.hr/305728/vijesti/video-na-sentilju-tisuce-migranata-koje-austrija-ne-moze-prihvatiti>. October 30, 2015; <http://vijesti.hrt.hr/323394/slovenski-parlament-odobrio-koristenje-vojnika-na-granici-s-hrvatskom>. February 23, 2016.

³⁰ <http://izbjeglice.hrt.hr/305489/u-dobovu-stizu-vlakovi-na-sentilju-4000-migranata>. October 29, 2015.

³¹ See Dykstra's (2016) notion of "assemblages of meanings" in the representations of Syrian refugees.

neighboring countries (e.g., by featuring visuals showing Hungarian fences and police, and criticizing them).

Many of the photographs of refugees in this source showed large groups of people, supporting the overaggregation and overspatialization expressed verbally (see Felberg & Šarić, 2017), and disabling the “identifiable victim effect,” which implies that visuals showing individualized persons, especially children, are likely to arouse compassion and empathy (see, e.g., Lee & Feeley, 2016). Nonetheless, individualization and personalization in photographs showing children and adults were also a regular representation pattern.

Many of the photographs of groups depicted deindividualized, “faceless” people; however, these groups were rarely depicted as a threat. Only in a very few images (e.g., in some showing very large numbers of refugees walking) could traces of “visualities of threat” or scare tactics (van Dijk, 1993)—connoting that “our” social order is disturbed by cultural “others” that threaten “our” safety—be identified.

The majority of the group photographs together with other elements of the multimodal texts conveyed an image of unfortunate, desperate people on the long path from their war-torn countries of origin to Europe, waiting at borders, sleeping in parks, and walking along roads.³² In these images, refugees were situated within the visual regime of biological life (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017, pp. 1167–1168): Their subjectivity was reduced to their moving, sitting, and sleeping, that is, to elementary activities and the needs of their bodies. An (extreme) reduction of subjectivity was also visible in part of the subjectless images, those showing humanitarian help (blankets, toilets, etc.) that connote that refugees’ humanity is reliant on Western emergency aid (Chouliaraki & Stolic, 2017, pp. 1167–1168).

In HRT’s photographs focusing on individualized adults and children, the refugee situation was frequently visually constructed as individualized suffering, making possible the identifiable victim effect. These visuals illustrate what Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017, p. 1168) label the “regime of empathy.” Child imagery, as the authors also claim, relates to infantilizing refugees: Such imagery may aim at mobilizing empathy, but it also portrays refugees as children in need and deprives them of agency and voice. Although infantilizing refugees might arise as one of the interpretations of the child imagery, that interpretation is context-dependent: In many of HRT’s news items, refugees were actually given a voice (although a variety of social actors spoke about and for them); their past stories, descriptions of their current situation, and future plans were told in their own (short) narratives embedded in the news items.³³ In such narrative sequences, refugees were not presented as acted upon, but as acting with “us.” They were given a “voice” in visuals presenting them as unique individuals: These visuals were often part of news items in which verbal elements also suggested individualization and personalization.

³² The most frequent migrants’ activities represented in the data were standing, waiting, walking, sitting, and traveling, accounting for 81% of all the activities shown (see Figure 2).

³³ For example, in the text of “Moving images: In darkness and coldness across the Sutla River” (headline). October 21, 2015.

Refugees were not deprived of agency: A range of their activities was given visibility. However, that range was limited by the general, most frequently represented scenario in HRT: being in transit.

Two visibilities addressed by Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017)—the visibility of biological life and the visibility of empathy—dominated HRT’s visuals. The visibility of threat was hardly represented. No shift toward securitization discourse could be noticed in the data: Humanitarian issues were most prominent in the entire period analyzed. This can be related to a few local factors mentioned earlier: to the specific situation of Croatia as only a “transit country” and not a final destination. The Croatian government’s representatives were engaged during the entire period in positioning themselves as humane actors, although showing that Croatia can control its borders because it aspires to join the Schengen area was important. Of considerable relevance for this overall positive and humanitarian approach is the experience of a great number of Croatians with displacement and being refugees in the 1990s and later after the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia and subsequent wars. Narratives by Croatian citizens linking their own refugee experience with the refugee situation of 2015–2016 were often embedded in HRT’s news stories.³⁴

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³⁴ See, e.g., <http://izbjeglice.hrt.hr/304155/mjesec-dana-izbjeglicke-krize-snimljene-hrt-ovim-kamerama>. October 21, 2015.

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Appendix



HRT Vijesti | HRT NA ZAHTJEV | HRTi | RADIO | TELETEKST | O HRT-U

VIJESTI | SPORT | MAGAZIN | RASPORED | HRT PRIKAŽUJE | ORKESTRI / ZBOR | VRJEME I PROMET | Pretraži HRT

Borba za ulazak u vlak prema sjeveru

Autor: IM/HRT
14. 08. 2015. prije 3 godine

Migranti s Bliskog istoka na željezničkoj postaji u Gevgeliji u Makedoniji sukobili su se tijekom ukrcajanja na vlak prema Srbiji. Izbjeglička kalvarija u Gevgeliji kulminirala je dolaskom vlaka. Više od 1000 migranata pokušalo se ukrcati, ali mjesta za sve nema i očaj lako prevlada.

U Makedoniju su stigli iz Grčke, a ondje je obalna straža spasila migrante koji su gumenim čamcima krenuli na otok Kos.

Popularno grčko ljetovalište postupno se pretvara u izbjeglički centar, već ih je sedam tisuća, više nego domaćeg stanovništva. Kos je od Turske, gdje je gotovo dva milijuna sirijских izbjeglica, udaljen samo 4 kilometra, pa se do otoka može u i gumenim čamcima. Grčka se suočila s pravom bujicom migranata. Samo ih je u srpnju stiglo 50 tisuća.

Desetabilizacija Iraka i rušenje Gadafija stvorili su milijune očajnih ljudi koji traže utočište. Gotovo 4 milijuna Sirijaca pobjeglo je od strahota rata.

Grčka će od Europske komisije dobiti gotovo pola milijarde eura pomoći, a 16 tisuća migranata poslat će u druge zemlje Europske unije.

HRT priprema i posebnu emisiju o velikoj europskoj krizi s migrantima. Bit će prikazana u ponedjeljak na našem četvrtom programu u 22.10. U njoj će govoriti stručnjaci i ljudi koji se na terenu susreću i bore s ovim problemom. Vidjet ćemo i priče naših reportera.

POVEZANE VIJESTI

- Reportaža: Jedan dan s izbjeglicama u Trstu
- Imigracija sve veći problem u Europi
- Izjava britanskog premijera koja je izazvala zgražanje
- 2000 emigranata pokušalo ući u Veliku Britaniju kroz Eurotunnel
- Mlada Palestinica koju je rasplakala Merkel ostaje u Njemačkoj

NAJČITANIJE | POSLJEDNJE OBJAVLJENO

- HRVATSKA
Preminuo Ivan Parać
- HRVATSKA
Grčki predsjednik Pavlopoulos u posjetu Hrvatskoj
- HRVATSKA
Osuđen Željko Dolački
- HRVATSKA
Lovci umjesto divljih odstrijelili domaće svinje!
- OTVORENO
"Euroskeptici su skeptični prema svemu u EU-u, osim prema svojoj plaći"
- HRVATSKA
Bernardić: Vjernici bi trebali davati crkvi iz plaća i mirovina
- HRVATSKA
Kineska nova godina na gradilištu Pelješkog mosta
- SVIJET
Guido zahvalio Vladi Republike Hrvatske
- OTVORENO
Otvoreno: Zdravstveni turizam kao strateško opredjeljenje
- SVIJET
Zbog lažnih prijetnji bombaškim napadima u Rusiji evakuirano 50.000

Figure A1. Text Sample.

Source: HRT, <https://vijesti.hrt.hr/295279/borba-za-ulazak-u-vlak-prema-sjeveru>. August 15, 2015.