

Framing the Future of Climate Migration in Finnish and Dutch News Media: Understanding Future Visions by Investigating Underlying Normative Judgement



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ABSTRACT

In this article, we analyse the kinds of futures envisioned by Finnish and Dutch news media in relation to climate migration. We find four frames that are used to present the future: a catastrophe frame, a migrant-positioning frame, an injustice frame and a panic-alleviation frame. Each frame is underpinned by certain normative judgements, i.e. the frames are presented in normative ways that express values. The core normative judgements used to envision the future of climate-related migration are securitisation, exceptionalisation, othering and the rejection of migration; normative judgements of sympathy and self-criticism are also present, albeit to a lesser degree. We find some divergences between the two countries: in the Dutch media, climate migration is more commonly described through self-identification and as a European and Dutch phenomenon; in Finland, it is primarily discussed through othering and securitisation. Overall, our analysis indicates that, while academic discussions may have moved beyond portraying climate migration in apocalyptic tones, the media in these two countries have not. Our data consist of 176 news articles published during 2020–2023, taken from three major news sites in each country. The analysis was conducted in 2024.

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change will have various influences on mobility patterns, and a significant number of people from areas affected by increased heat, drought, rising sea levels, extreme weather events, erosion and loss of agricultural land will be forced to seek more habitable living environments (Black et al. 2011; McLeman 2013). How climate-related mobility will be shaped in the future and what impacts this will have on societies is a topic of great interest to academics, the media and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (e.g. Baldwin 2022; Baldwin, Fröhlich & Rothe 2019; Boas et al. 2022; Durand-Delacre 2022; Nawyn et al. 2024; Sakellari 2023). Understanding how climate-related migration and its future are envisioned in the media is particularly important, as the media plays a significant role in shaping societal perceptions and understandings (Sakellari 2019). Furthermore, the way expectations about the future are presented can take on forms of agency, and through this it can influence current actions such as policy-making and its implementation (Ballo 2015; Castles, De Haas & Miller 2013; Jasanoff 2015).

Previous studies have found climate migrants to be depicted through certain common frames, such as victimisation, othering and securitisation (e.g. Dreher & Voyer 2015; Manzo 2010; Randall 2017; Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015; Sakellari 2019). We add to this discussion by adopting a future-facing perspective and by exploring the kinds of future that different media outlets envision in relation to climate migrants, along with the normative judgements that underpin those visions.

We focus on future visions because, as various scholars have noted, large-scale climate migration is yet to happen and, thus, analysing it is in many ways about anticipating future impacts and risks (e.g. Boas et al. 2022). We further contribute to recent literature by examining two contexts that have previously received little attention: Finland and the Netherlands. Focusing on two distinct contexts enables us to compare them and offer a more in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

We respond to the following research questions: first, what kinds of future does the media depict in relation to climate change? Second, what are the differences between the two countries in terms of framings and normative judgements?

We analyse 176 online news articles from a frame analysis perspective that focuses on how framing certain topics in certain ways constructs social reality and reflects societal power structures (Entman 1993; Entman 2007). By identifying specific frames in our analysis as well as the normative judgements that underpin them, we shed light on the construction of social reality.

BACKGROUND: THE FRAMING OF CLIMATE MIGRATION

Previous research has shown, how, in Western and English-language news media, climate change-related migration has often been portrayed through alarming narratives (e.g. Bettini 2013; Dreher & Voyer 2015; Methmann 2014; Sakellari 2019). Instead of focusing on the plight of vulnerable people living in areas at risk of climate change, or on the social inequalities underlined by climate change, the mass media have focused on depicting climate migration as a threat to potential receiving countries in the West (e.g. Dreher & Voyer 2015; Farbotko 2005; Farbotko 2012; Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015; Sakellari 2019; Schäfer, Scheffran & Penniket 2016).

One of the most commonly used frames in this regard has been securitisation, i.e. the construction of threats through the creation of links between societal unrest, conflict and climate-related migration (Boas 2015). The perceived threat stems from migrants, who are portrayed as desperate, unpredictable (Manzo 2010), unable to adapt (Baldwin 2013) and sources of conflict and terrorism (Randall 2017). This securitisation frame arguably works in favour of xenophobic sentiment towards migration in general and increases the risk of authoritarian policies (Bettini 2013; Hartmann 2010).

Victimisation and othering have also been used to frame climate-related migration (e.g. Methmann 2014; Randall 2017; Sakellari 2019). This frame depicts climate migrants as a passive mass of helpless and disempowered unfortunates, usually from the Global South, who are in need of saving because they have to abandon their homes (Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015; Sakellari 2019) and must be helped by wealthy developed countries in the Global North (Farbotko 2005; Farbotko 2012; Methmann 2014; Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015).

In addition, the commonly used frame of othering depicts climate migrants as distinct, racialised people who are different from the news outlet's audience (Manzo 2010; Sakellari 2019; Sakellari 2022), creating an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. When news articles focus on foreign environments, poor people and communities in developing countries, they thereby highlight this otherness, representing it in geographical as well as cultural and social terms. Such representation allows the audience to imagine climate migration as a distant problem (Sakellari 2019; Sakellari 2022).

COUNTRY CONTEXTS

We chose the Netherlands and Finland for comparison because of the significant differences in their immigration histories as well as their geographical positions and situations in terms of vulnerability to climate change.

The Netherlands is a relatively small and densely populated country with a long history of migration, partly related to its colonial history as well as labour migration. Currently, 15% of the population of the Netherlands is foreign-born (Statistics Netherlands 2023). Conversely, Finland is a sparsely populated country situated somewhat on the periphery of Europe, and its proportion of foreign-born individuals has always been among the lowest in Europe. In 2022, about 8% of the population was foreign-born (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2023). Anti-immigrant and especially anti-Muslim sentiment has been prevalent in the Dutch media since the early 2000s, which coincided with the time when right-wing populist parties began to increase in popularity, as well as with the international emphasis on the 'War on Terror'. Finland followed a similar trend later, in 2008–2009, when the right-wing Finns Party made significant gains in parliamentary elections (Pöyhtäri 2014).

In both countries, much media scholarship over the last decade has focused on the 'refugee crisis' of 2015–2016 (e.g. Konings & Notten 2021; Perälä & Niemi 2018; Pöyhtäri et al. 2021; Schoor & Viola 2023). Studies focusing on this period have found that news items about refugees in the Dutch and Finnish media were crisis-centred and depicted migrants and refugees through specific – and, at times, divergent – frames, such as othering, massifying, individualizing, depersonalizing and securitizing (e.g. Konings & Notten 2021; Martikainen & Sakki 2021; Perälä & Niemi 2018).

Finland and the Netherlands are also differently positioned in terms of climate change. Although climate change is having an impact on the Nordic climate and biodiversity,

the effects of sea level rise will not be felt as strongly in Finland as in other parts of Europe, particularly the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, it is presumed that sea level rise and flooding will have major future impacts. Twenty-six percent of the country's area is below the current mean sea level, and nearly 60% is susceptible to large-scale coastal and river flooding (Haasnoot et al. 2020).

THEORY: NORMATIVITY JUDGEMENTS BY THE MEDIA

Media frames play an important role in sense-making processes (Goffman 1974; Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015), and they organise the world for audiences by offering interpretive packages that give meaning to an issue (Gitlin 1980). Media frames can be future-oriented in that they represent future imaginaries envisioned by the media, reflecting shared socio-semiotic systems of cultural values (cf. Levy & Spicer 2013). Future visions and imaginaries are present-day representations and expectations of future circumstances and outcomes; at the same time, they entail shared norms, discourses and cultural meanings that can shape values and perceptions of issues in the present (cf. Jasanoff 2015).

Besides the media's other functions – such as reporting on current facts and statements – the media's use of framing provides interpretations of phenomena and exercises both normative and empirical judgement. While empirical judgement concerns what is true or false, normative judgement concerns what is perceived to be good or bad (Benson & Hallin 2007: 32). This article focuses on the normative judgements – or, to use, Entman's (1993) concept, 'moral judgements' – the media makes about the future of climate migration (on norms and values in institutional narratives about migration; see Dimitriadi & Malamidis 2019).

We build on the notion that normativity, or the making of normative judgements, is not simply the application of a rule, nor is it the expression of a mere taste or preference; rather, it is closely connected with valuation (Pardales 2002). What is valued is influenced by the social norms that define a group's behaviours, attitudes, beliefs and codes of conduct (Cialdini & Jacobson 2021). Matters related to climate change tend to be highly emotionally loaded, and scholars have argued that climate change-related emotions have become a matter of normative scrutiny – 'the normalisation of climate emotions', as it has been called. Thus, questions about how we or others ought to feel in the face of climate change (as opposed to how we and others actually feel) have recently gained attention (Mosquera & Jylhä 2022). Similarly, scholars have investigated normative judgements about migration and identified the norms, values and attitudes that are mobilised in discussions about it (e.g. Dimitriadi & Malamidis 2019; Ponizovskiy 2016). We add to the literature by combining these two fields to investigate normative judgements connected to future climate migration.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

We selected three major news media outlets from each country and analysed their online content. For the Netherlands, we included articles from the Nederlandse Omroep Stichting (NOS, Dutch Broadcasting Foundation); the country's largest newspaper, *De Telegraaf*, which is considered right-wing; and the third-largest newspaper, *De Volkskrant*, which is considered left-wing. For Finland, we included

articles from Yleisradio (Yle, Finnish Broadcasting Company); Finland’s largest broadsheet newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat* (HS); and the largest tabloid, *Ilta-Sanomat* (IS). Compared with the Dutch media, the political alignments of these Finnish news media outlets are less pronounced. For Finland, we also conducted an initial search on the website of the competing tabloid *Iltalehti*, but we did not include it in our analysis because, in most cases, our keyword searches yielded no articles. This may indicate that *Iltalehti* had published no articles on this topic, or, more probably, that the website’s keyword search function was less operative.

On each of the selected media websites, we used the search function to seek articles published online between 1 January 2020 and 2 November 2023. Focusing on this period enabled us to capture the current framing and was not intended to offer a long-term perspective. This time period included major events related to migration, such as the sharp increase in refugees from Ukraine (since 2022) and the temporary halting of international mobility due to the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic (in 2020). All of these events impacted the broader context in which the media discussed climate migration.

We conducted the search using the following keywords in Dutch and Finnish: ‘climate migrant’ (*klimaatmigratie/migrant/en* and *ilmastosiirto**) and ‘climate refugee’ (*klimaatvluchteling/en* and *ilmastopakol**). We acknowledge the risk that this approach may have excluded some articles that discussed the climate–migration nexus without using these specific keywords. Based on test runs, however, we are confident that the selected keywords managed to capture the majority of articles on the issue published during the time period of interest.

Our online search identified a number of articles, which we then screened to determine whether they discussed climate-related mobility. In the Finnish case, the search initially found many articles that did not discuss mobility and climate change in relation to each other, which we excluded since we only wanted to include articles that did so. For our analysis, we included a total of 176 articles: 120 articles from the Finnish media and 56 from the Dutch media. [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) present the types and total numbers of articles from each media outlet in each country that we included in our analysis. We included articles that mentioned climate migration as a subordinate topic (99 Finnish articles, 42 Dutch articles) as well as articles where it was a major topic (21 Finnish articles, 14 Dutch articles). Access to the articles required subscriptions to the selected newspapers.

	HS	IS	YLE	TOTAL
Column	4	1	2	7
Feature/reportage	29	8	24	61
Opinion	5	0	2	7
Reader’s letter	9	0	0	9
News	16	8	6	30
Review (e.g. book, theatre, film)	1	0	0	1
Editorial	4	1	0	5
Total	68	18	34	120

Table 1 Types of articles discussing climate migration in Finnish media, 1 January 2020 to 2 November 2023.

	VOLKSKRANT	TELEGRAAF	NOS	TOTAL
Column	4	5	0	9
Feature/reportage	17	3	2	22
Opinion	4	0	0	4
Reader's letter/opinion	3	0	0	3
News	0	0	9	9
Review (e.g. book, theatre, film)	7	2	0	9
Editorial	0	0	0	0
Total	35	10	11	56

Table 2 Types of articles discussing climate migration in Dutch media, 1 January 2020 to 2 November 2023.

We coded and categorised the selected articles according to their content, after which we conducted a frame analysis. Our analysis process ultimately yielded four main narrative frames. We identified the frames inductively, although previous research in the field guided our analytic lens to some extent (e.g. [Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015](#); [Sakellari 2019](#); [Sakellari 2022](#)). For each frame, we also identified normative judgements. In the analysis that follows, we use extracts from the articles to illustrate our findings and create links between the data and our interpretations.

ANALYSIS: UNDERSTANDING THE FRAMING OF FUTURE VISIONS OF CLIMATE MIGRATION

In this section, we present the four main frames according to which the Dutch and Finnish news media articles discuss the future in relation to climate-related mobility: the catastrophe frame, the positioning frame, the injustice frame and the panic-alleviation frame. The Finnish media use the catastrophe frame most frequently, while the Dutch media use the positioning frame most frequently. The panic-alleviation and injustice frames are less common in both countries' media (see Appendix). In what follows, we describe the frames in detail and analyse the normative judgements that underpin them.

The Catastrophe Frame

In the media articles from both countries, we find one common frame, underpinned by the notion that climate migration is first and foremost a problem and a catastrophe waiting to happen (cf. [Bettini 2013](#); [Methmann 2014](#)). The articles provide descriptions of the various negative factors that will cause climate migration – such as floods, droughts, failing crops and rising sea levels – and invoke fear regarding the massive scale of the phenomenon. Most of the articles depict climate-related migration as something that will involve millions of people, who will be displaced and seeking somewhere to live: ‘With the current level of emissions, we are heading towards warming by three degrees by 2100, which will lead to a significant sea level rise, more extreme weather and massive climate migration’ (*Volkskrant* 29 May 2020).

In the catastrophe frame, the underlying normative judgement is that climate migration is threatening due to its uncontrollability and unpredictability. Therefore,

migration is seen primarily as a security issue (cf. [Boas 2015](#); [Boas et al. 2019](#); [Castles, De Haas & Miller 2013](#); [De Haas 2020](#); [Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015](#); [Sakellari 2019](#)), both for Western countries receiving migrants and for the developing countries from which climate migrants are believed to originate: climate change ‘increases extreme weather events, which increases natural catastrophes, which increases epidemics and refugees, which in turn increases internal and external tensions’ (Yle 27 February 2020). This framing echoes current media representations that discuss most migrants and refugees as security threats to Western societies (e.g. [Naper 2022](#); [Sakellari 2019](#)), and, as such, it reflects the political reality where, for example, anti-immigration parties are gaining popularity. As an analysis in *De Volkskrant* (6 December 2021) notes, steps must be taken to ensure ‘that our world is not threatened by climate change and the climate refugees that result from it’.

Many articles directly relate securitisation to conflicts. In the Netherlands, for example, *De Volkskrant* (29 October 2021) presents the following extract from an interview with European Union Commissioner Frans Timmermans: ‘The climate crisis is not just for tofu-eating Tesla drivers. No, it is the largest security issue that the world has ever been confronted with. It is about war and peace. It is about stability’. Climate change will push people in different parts of the world to leave their homes, which will lead to conflict over living space, particularly in the Global South. NOS (28 September 2022) describes how climate change is pushing more and more people in the Global South to migrate, which may lead to conflict in some areas, as illustrated by the following description of the situation in the Iraqi city of Basra: ‘It is about thousands of people every month. Basra cannot handle that stream of people, and it leads to ever-greater tension’. This narrative – that climate migration will lead to conflict – also stems from the securitisation of the migration debate ([Myers & Kent 1995](#)), indicating how current representations affect future imaginaries.

Both the Dutch and Finnish media outlets, but especially the latter, describe the source of this conflict – which the media presume will ultimately impact Finland and the Netherlands too – as coming from outside Europe. This framing is underlined by the idea that climate change and climate migration will affect Finland’s security largely indirectly. For example, articles in *HS* (24 January 2023, 4 February 2023) describe how flooding and a lack of water, food and living space in countries in the Global South will eventually lead to the arrival of climate refugees in Finland, which will constitute a threat to Finnish security. The threat of disarray and conflict is thus considered to come from ‘them’, not from ‘us’.

The Positioning Frame: Identifying and Othering

Related to ‘them’ versus ‘us’, one central future frame is that of positioning, i.e. who the climate migrants or climate refugees will be. However, there is a significant difference between the Finnish and Dutch media articles in terms of the normative judgements that underlie this framing.

Previous studies have emphasised that Western and especially English-language media consider climate change to be something that will happen to ‘them’, i.e. to others that are not us. As [Methmann \(2014\)](#) notes, the discourse on climate-induced migration is almost exclusively a northern discourse whereby White people regard Black climate refugees as the racialised other. Climate migrants/refugees have tended to be particularly linked to poverty and underdevelopment (e.g. [Myers & Kent 1995](#)).

Our analysis finds that this is strongly the case with the Finnish media, which frames climate migration predominantly through othering. Climate migration is particularly discussed in relation to far-off places such as Africa, as the following excerpt exemplifies: 'The future looks particularly difficult for Africa, where the population is growing and droughts are increasing. As a result, there may be increased numbers of refugees' (Yle 23 February 2023). The underlying normative judgement is that having to migrate due to climate change is not something that can happen to Finns; the Finnish media discussion about what the future holds in terms of climate migration is completely focused on the migration of people from areas of the world other than western or northern Europe:

By 2050, for example, 86 million people might have had to migrate away from sub-Saharan Africa. Besides this, 40 million climate migrants could also come from South Asia, 19 million from North Africa, 17 million from Latin America, and 5 million from Eastern Europe and Central Asia (IS 14 September 2021).

By contrast, while the Dutch media treats climate migration as something that happens to people far away, it does also discuss it as something that will happen to 'us' (the Dutch) in future: a climate migrant could be someone 'from the Randstad who knocks on the door of a farm in the western part of the country' (*Volkskrant* 4 April 2022). Thus, an underlying tone of self-reflection and identification can be noted in the Dutch media. Compared with the Finnish media, the Dutch media discourse is at times less fixed on the binary of migrants versus non-migrants, at least when it is framing the future of the Dutch themselves. Several Dutch media articles speculate that Dutch citizens may have to resort to relocation at some point in the future due to climate change and particularly sea level rise (*Telegraaf* 31 October 2020, 1 November 2021; *Volkskrant* 7 June 2022, 1 August 2023).

Besides relating climate migration to Dutch citizens, Dutch news media outlets also describe climate migration within Europe far more often than do Finnish news media outlets. The Dutch media make several references to Europeans having to migrate due to climate-related phenomena such as flooding, drought and heat. For example, one article states:

Islands being threatened by climate change – it sounds like something that could only happen in the Pacific Ocean, but in Halligen, 10 salt marshes in the German Wadden Sea, it is a daily reality. [...] Without the new wharf, we would have been Germany's first climate refugees (*Volkskrant* 31 March 2020).

Several articles emphasise that some European people are on the front line of climate change, and there is an underlying tone of curiosity. For example, articles describe the residents of the Greek island of Evia (*Volkskrant* 22 August 2021), the inhabitants of the German Wadden Islands (*Volkskrant* 31 March 2020) and Italian tourists found in Dutch camping areas (*Volkskrant* 4 August 2023) as the first of their kind – in other words, the first European climate refugees.

The difference in how this frame is presented by the Dutch and Finnish media is largely explained by their different positionalities in terms of climate change, particularly rising sea levels. Some Dutch media articles explicitly describe how large areas of the

Netherlands will be underwater in future, and how this will lead to human mobility: 'The Randstad will be partly underwater, but we will keep the historic cultural cities: Gouda, Rotterdam, The Hague and Amsterdam. [...] We will live on the water, work, recreate and relocate' (*Telegraaf* 1 November 2021).

The Injustice Frame

Another common frame in the media articles focuses on how the future will be unequal due to global and/or historical injustices. Many articles identify it as a problem that, although climate change has mostly been caused by wealthy Western countries, it is the poorer countries in the Global South that will suffer most. The normative judgement underpinning this frame is injustice, which is described mostly on a global scale. This narrative appears frequently in both Finnish and Dutch media articles. For example, Yle (14 November 2022) states: 'Africans are the least responsible for climate change, but they suffer the most from it. In the city of Baidoa in Somalia, hundreds of thousands of climate refugees await help and mourn their dead children'. Similarly, *De Volkskrant* (26 January 2021) states: 'Right and left, the victims in the poorest countries of the world are paying the heaviest price for climate change, which is mostly caused by rich countries'.

A common narrative within the injustice frame concerns how climate refugees should be treated when they arrive, and here we detect underlying tones of sympathy and self-criticism regarding society's current attitude towards refugees. This is particularly evident in the tone of some news articles discussing the harsh prevailing political and legislative climate in Europe:

Not far away from Europe, thousands of migrants are kept in camps. Europe pushed them away [...]. Eighty years ago too, refugees were pushed away in Europe. In 1938, the Jewish refugees came to Europe. At that time, too, they were hunted down, arrested and sent back to Nazi Germany (*Volkskrant* 18 February 2022).

Harsh responses, such as keeping people out by force, are described critically, and some articles express disapproval of the general lack of sympathy. For example, one article asks: 'What will be done when millions of people start coming here? I hope that we will not greet them with guns in our hands' (*HS* 4 July 2021). Interestingly, Dutch media articles discuss harsh responses to (climate) refugees in relation to the Dutch themselves: If we keep people out by force and build walls now, what will happen when we are the ones who need help?

Meanwhile, we will let the same politicians who have built a wall around our country stop the arrival of a growing group of climate refugees from Greece, Tunisia and Gambia. For a couple of years, we will keep laughing about how wrong those who kept banging on about climate change were. Until the summer storm of 2063, when water levels will rise so high that suddenly we are the ones that have to escape. Through the dingy water, we will all wade towards the wall, where we will note with concern and full of sadness that it is suddenly staffed by Greek, Tunisian and Gambian border guards, who will say: thanks for your wall; from now on we will use it as our dam (*Volkskrant* 1 August 2023).

Here, there is a narrative shift in the imagining of the future: the Dutch will become the victims in need of help, who may be denied because of the harsh immigration and border policies of the past (i.e. the reader's present day). The sympathy expressed in these articles can thus be considered to some extent to stem from underlying self-interest.

The Panic-alleviation Frame

Although the catastrophe frame is common in the news media in both countries, other frames challenge that view by providing narratives that aim to calm fearful reactions to climate migration, or at least offer some solutions to deal with it. Some of the narratives visible within this frame are somewhat similar to those promoted by migration scholars, who have criticised discourses that pathologise migration by describing it in overly alarming tones and drawing direct causal lines between climate change and migration (Baldwin 2014; Bettini 2014; Black et al. 2011; Boas et al. 2019; Castles, De Haas & Miller 2013; Khavarian-Garmsir et al. 2019). The attempt to decrease the feeling of threat is made by means of various counter-narratives with alleviating undertones.

One such narrative relates to current representations of global migration and the fact that the majority of migration flows occur in the Global South. This narrative emphasises that most migrants are expected to migrate internally within their own countries or regions, not internationally or towards Europe. This frame is used in both Dutch and Finnish media. For example, one Finnish article states: '[President of the ECOWAS Commission] Touray recalls that 90–95% of African refugee and migration flows occur within Africa and are not directed outside of Africa' (HS 28 May 2023). Similarly, one Dutch media article appears under the headline: 'Attention to migration in climate report: "Not all of them will come to Europe"' (NOS 23 March 2023). A similar narrative within this frame suggests that migration and refugee flows related to climate change will not be as large as they are often depicted. The tone of both narratives is racialised insofar as they maintain the normative judgement that, if people have to migrate due to climate change, that is not so bad as long as they are not heading towards Europe or coming from outside Europe.

Various narratives within the panic-alleviation frame emphasise the role that action and policies can play in decreasing climate migration and its negative effects. There is particular emphasis on the need to try to stop climate change from happening since this will also decrease potential flows of climate refugees. Here we find a normative judgement according to which migration is unpreferable and a result of poor conditions or underdevelopment (Bakewell 2008; De Haas 2007: 833). Several articles emphasise that, if we take climate action now, we can still stop large flows of climate migrants from coming in future. In other words, policy actions can prevent the worst from happening: 'In a favourable scenario, in which much is done to ensure sustainable development, the number of migrants in our country could be 80% lower' (NOS 13 September 2021). This exemplifies very clearly that – as De Haas (2020) and Baldwin (2014) have noted – the threat of mass migration is used to cultivate environmental awareness and support the case for urgent climate action. An article in *IS* (4 April 2023), for example, states that 'nothing will increase uncontrollable and fast migration flows as much as climate change', and thus, 'if migration is a concern, the most important thing is to focus on preventing natural disasters'. This media framing, which describes migration as abnormal, contradicts research findings that recognise

the complex nature of migration and the different forms it can take (Boas et al. 2019; Wiegel, Boas & Warner 2019). Moreover, this framing ignores the fact that climate change influences not only people's willingness to migrate but, importantly, also their capacity to move out of affected regions (Oakes et al. 2023).

Furthermore, several articles, particularly in the Finnish media, make a connection between climate migration and development aid. In the current political environment, harsher immigration and border policies are often backed up with arguments that people should be enabled to stay where they are, and that this can be achieved by helping people in their countries of origin – for example, by providing development aid. Migration is exceptionalised as something that is abnormal (Bettini 2013; Schapendonk, Bolay & Dahinden 2020), and the underlying normative judgement is that it is unpreferred and something that should be stopped. Providing development aid to other countries is linked to and justified as something that may decrease the flow of migrants into Europe in future, and therefore funding cuts to development aid are criticised:

In Finland, the government is looking at how to reduce its development aid spending as much as possible. At the same time, other European decision-makers are looking into how to make the amount of development aid as large as possible. Southern Europe is experiencing the pressure of climate change more clearly than the north, both through changes in their own environment and through the pressure of refugee streams (HS 2 July 23).

DISCUSSION

We set out to analyse how Finnish and Dutch media outlets frame the future in relation to climate change. We have found that, in both countries, climate-related migration is predominantly described as something that has not quite happened yet on a large scale; instead, it is something whose impacts will be felt in the future.

Of the four frames we have identified, the catastrophe frame is the most prevalent in the Finnish media, and it is also common in the Dutch media. According to this frame, climate migration is inevitable and will have various negative implications due to its massive and uncontrollable nature. Existing media articles question neither the inevitability nor the massive size of climate migration, even though climate scholars have noted that we should not overstate the scale of the migration that might occur due to global climate change. The prominence of this frame is interesting since, as Boas et al. (2022: 3365) note, the 'discourse of apocalyptic climate change-induced mass migration is now past its prime', at least in academic discussions. Our findings indicate that the uncontrollable mass migration discourse is still present in the media.

The second frame we have identified relates to who the future climate migrants are perceived to be, i.e. the positioning of the 'victims'. Here, we find significant differences between the two countries. The most obvious difference is that the Finnish discourse sees Finland and Europe primarily as destinations for climate migrants, whereas the Dutch news media also describe future climate migration as an intra-European and Dutch phenomenon. Our analysis of the Dutch case demonstrates that there are various narrative shifts in the media representation of climate migration, adding to the literature by providing a case that deviates from previous findings.

In relation to the third frame, although previous studies have found that media discourses rarely emphasise climate injustice (Sakellari 2019), our analysis has found a frame that describes climate migration and climate change critically in terms of global inequality. Overall, our analysis does not indicate that the strong anti-immigration attitudes that currently prevail in both countries are comprehensively present in the media frames in relation to climate migration. Instead, narratives that criticise harsh responses to climate refugees and migrants are common.

The fourth frame tries to rein in overly negative predictions concerning climate migration. This final frame illustrates that, besides the 'maximalist' position (Bettini 2014), there has also been some room in the media for more cautious narratives that suggest counter-perceptions according to which, for example, climate migration may not be as massive as it is often described, and not all climate migrants will come to Europe. This framing demonstrates that the media narratives within a country's mediascape are not congruent and can compete or contrast with each other. However, it is interesting to note that these media narratives do not include researchers' warnings that the relationship between migration and climate change should not be considered to be purely deterministic (e.g. Baldwin 2014; Boas et al. 2019; Black et al. 2011; Castles, De Haas & Miller 2013; Khavarian-Garmsir et al. 2019).

As an overall normative judgement underpinning all four frames, we find a perspective that sees migration as abnormal and undesirable, i.e. something that, under 'normal' circumstances, should not happen either now or in the future. This normative judgement is especially visible in the catastrophe, positioning and panic-alleviation frames. The injustice frame is the only one that is not strongly underpinned by this normative judgement, as it expresses sympathy towards climate refugees. However, even the injustice frame perceives migration as a tragedy for the people involved. Media outlets in both countries suggest it would be better if people could stay in their places of origin, and the preferred future for European countries is one where climate migrants will not come to Europe from outside and the Dutch will be able to stay in the Netherlands.

Our results also underline findings made by previous research in other contexts. In particular, the way the media frames migrants and refugees creates racialised hierarchies of people through othering (e.g. Choularaki & Stolic 2017) and by creating a dichotomy of 'us' versus 'them' (for the NGO context, see also Sakellari 2023). Previous studies have shown that refugees from non-Western countries are especially portrayed as either victims or threats (e.g. Choularaki & Stolic 2017; Pirkkalainen & Pellander 2025). In our data, we find that, when it comes to the Dutch themselves, mobility is seen as part of the solution to coping with climate change and migrants are seen as adaptive agents (Baldwin 2014; Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015), but the same cannot be said regarding how climate migrants from outside Europe are described, which is mainly as disempowered unfortunates (Farbotko 2012; Methmann 2014; Ransan-Cooper et al. 2015; Sakellari 2019). These hierarchies created in the media are a prime example of racialisation processes, and they function in the construction of social reality.

CONCLUSIONS

We have conducted a comparative analysis of how the media frames the future in relation to climate migration in the Netherlands and Finland, two different contexts that have not previously been examined in relation to this topic. On a conceptual and theoretical level, our article contributes to the discussion of the role the media plays in the construction of social reality and its future.

We have identified four main frames used in the media: the catastrophe frame, the positioning frame, the injustice frame and the panic-alleviation frame. We have found that each frame is underpinned by several underlying normative judgements that deploy normative values to narrate the phenomenon. The main underlying normative judgements relate to securitisation, exceptionalisation and othering, although normative judgements of sympathy and self-criticism are also present. By focusing on these underpinning normative judgements, we have furthered the scholarly discussion on media framings of the future.

Our findings show that media framings of what the future looks like in relation to climate migration can diverge in different contexts. In the two media contexts we have investigated, we have found a difference in the framings of who the future climate migrants will be, and this fundamental difference reflects how climate migration is discussed, and what underpinning normative judgements are used in this. Besides the differences, we have also found that all four frames in both countries are underpinned by the cross-cutting normative judgement that immigration from the Global South to the Global North is abnormal and undesirable.

To conclude, our analysis indicates that, even though the academic discussion may have moved on from presenting climate migration in apocalyptic tones (Boas et al. 2022: 3365), the media in Finland and the Netherlands has not. As long as the media – along with policymakers, NGOs (Sakellari 2023) and documentary film-makers, for example (Durand-Delacre 2022) – maintain this (mis)framing, the securitised climate migration perspective and the racial hierarchisation of people will continue to impact policies. On a practical level, our findings provide tools to understand how the media (mis)presents the future in relation to climate migration, and we hope this will also help to ensure that commonly used frames do not find their way into policy-making and future planning, for example, without contestation and critical evaluation.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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