BREAKING GRIDLOCKS AND MOVING FORWARD

ICMPD
International Centre for
Migration Policy Development

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Establishing a Credible Narrative on Migration and Migration Policy

"The way forward needs an EU that delivers better migration policy results and communicates a credible narrative on migration, one aimed at preserving the discursive space necessary for democratic and rules-based policymaking."

**Breaking the Gridlock and Moving Forward:
Recommendations for the next five years of EU Migration Policy**
(ICMPD 2019)

Introduction

The need for more effective communication on migration and conveying balanced messages is a priority for EU Member States and partner countries alike. It has to be acknowledged that the fast-paced environment governing the work of migration policymakers, particularly since 2015, impedes long-term, broader reflections on communication strategies. Instead, ad hoc and reactive communication measures are applied, which often bring mixed results.

The proliferation of digital and social media has reduced the space and time available for the preparation of nuanced reporting, while the rapid growth in the number of information sources available makes it harder for the public to know which sources and information to trust. Whilst evidence shows that EU citizens rate migration and integration among the most important topics, which reflects the tendency toward extensive coverage of these topics by media outlets. Interestingly, citizens do not consider immigration the most pressing issue at national level; however, more than a third of EU citizens polled consider immigration the main concern at EU level, and it remains the policy area where EU action is considered most inadequate (Eurobarometer 2019; Eurobarometer 2018).

In autumn 2019, ICMPD presented its publication 'Breaking gridlocks and moving forward. Recommendations for the next five years of EU migration policy'. The 70 recommendations across eight thematic fields were discussed at the Vienna Migration Conference (VMC) in November 2019, with the objective of providing impetus for the forthcoming EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. ICMPD identified strategic and effective communication on the migration policy agenda and implementation as a cross-cutting priority in order to subsequently gain the confidence of the EU citizenry and reduce the gap between the expectations and perceptions of EU migration policy results. At the same time, the lack of a credible narrative on migration and migration policy was identified as a source of gridlock which needs to be broken in order to move forward with the new EU agenda on migration.

The migration-media nexus

Against this background, it is not surprising that ICMPD, as an intergovernmental organisation structurally linking migration research, dialogues and capacity building, has long engaged in work related to the migration-media nexus. The study "How does the media on both sides of the Mediterranean report on migration", developed within the EU-funded EUROMED Migration IV project, serves as one example of ICMPD's migration research on the media-migration nexus pillar. It includes recommendations which cover the migration narrative, media training, and the role of policymakers and dialogues at national, regional and international level, among other areas. Examples of media capacity building include both practical trainings for journalists and the production of training materials.

Since 2019, ICMPD's Migration Media Training Academy (MOMENTA) project, funded by the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has supported journalist associations and individual media representatives in six Eastern Partnership countries in building their capacities on migration. Furthermore, the Media and Trafficking in Human Beings Guidelines developed in partnership with the Ethical Journalist Network, within the second phase of the EU-funded Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings and Organised Crime project, provide a brief and accessible reference resource for consultation by journalists, assisting these professionals in understanding trafficking in human beings and helping them develop nuanced, informed stories when reporting on trafficking cases. Finally, networks, dialogues and cooperation are supported by, for instance, the Migration Media Awards jointly implemented by various partners and donors, including ICMPD, in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

The VMC 2019 roundtable debate and COVID-19

One of the roundtable debates in the frame of ICMPD's annual flagship initiative, the VMC, was dedicated to discussing effective communication on migration and migration policy. It brought together EU and government stakeholders, researchers, analysts and media representatives to discuss the underlying question of how the Member States can be best supported by strategic communication during implementation of the upcoming European Pact on Migration and Asylum and formulation of national migration policies. While the debate took place before the COVID-19 pandemic which has brought mobility and migration to a near standstill, it nonetheless offers valuable insights relevant to the current situation.

The COVID-19 crisis has seen attempts to create political gain by using migrants and refugees as scapegoats for the rapid spread of the virus, with refugees living in shelters and migrant workers being presented in some quarters as a public health risk. At the same time, the crisis has also had the effect of shifting the attention away from the refugee situation at the Greece-Turkey border, in the Mediterranean region more broadly, and generally long-term objectives such as the need to reform the Common European Asylum System. However, the crisis has also pointed out the critical need for migrant workers in the EU economy, which impacts the narrative on both migration and related policies alike. Whatever the ultimate impact of the COVID-19 crisis, once the dust settles, post-pandemic public policy on migration will have to take into account the new developments emerging from the crisis.

This paper highlights the main insights of the roundtable debate on effective communication on migration and migration policy, including expert recommendations for (re-)establishing a credible narrative on migration and migration policy, keeping in mind the background of the new European Pact on Migration and Asylum. Furthermore, it takes up the effects which the ongoing COVID-19 crisis is having in terms of increased demand for strategic, balanced and convincing communication on migration. The paper reflects the structure of the roundtable discussion, focusing on two main questions: *What shapes public attitudes on migration?* and *How to move forward and embed a strategic communication approach as an essential part of EU migration policy?* Points made by the experts regarding demand for a structured *EU migration communication strategy* concluded the debate and are summarised at the end of this paper.

VMC 2019 roundtable discussion

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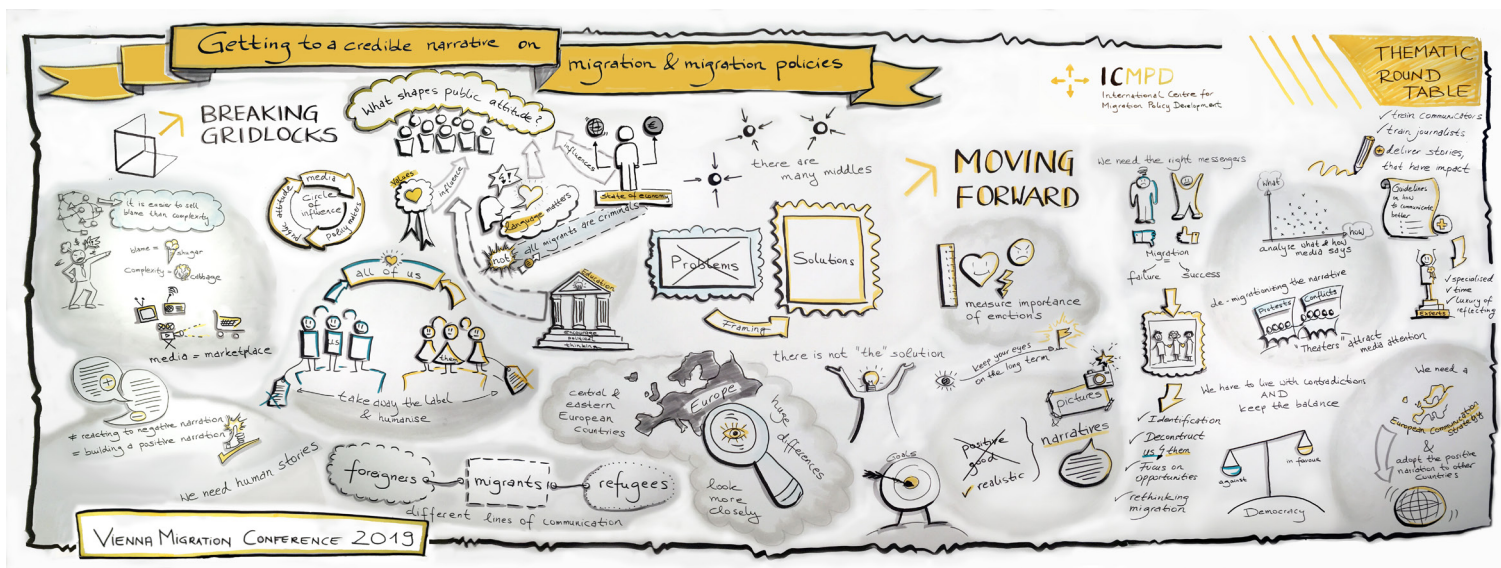
What shapes public attitudes on migration in Europe and what is the link to policy-making?

Key Points

• **European attitudes toward migration become steadily more positive.**

• **More than one third of EU citizens consider immigration the main concern at EU level, but few perceive current EU action as adequate.**

Since the 1990s, migration has become a polarised topic in Europe – following increased migration flows to Europe and diversified patterns of migration. This process has been exacerbated by the change in migration and refugee flows since 2015 and their coverage in the media.

European attitudes toward migration have gradually become more positive over the past years, albeit with different acceptance rates according to category of migrant (Dennison and Dražanová 2018). Refugees, for example, have a higher acceptance rate than low-skilled labour migrants (European Social Survey 2014 in European Social Survey 2016). Nonetheless, according to a 2017 Special Eurobarometer survey, nearly four in ten EU citizens think of immigration from outside the EU more as a problem than an opportunity (Eurobarometer 2018). In Central and Eastern Europe, attitudes are hardening, with a majority of respondents expressing negative feelings concerning immigration from third countries.

Another survey showed only 40% of young people from the four Visegrad Group states (also called the V4; Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), alongside Austria and Germany, responding in the affirmative when asked whether their country should provide safe haven to refugees. Moreover, only one in four respondents believed that immigrants contribute to economic growth and general prosperity. Youth from the V4 are also more sceptical of any benefits immigration might have for their country than their peers from Austria and, even more so, Germany (Kucharczyk, Lada and Schöler 2017). The abovementioned Eurobarometer study also confirms that more than one third of those polled consider immigration the main concern at EU level, whilst it is also the policy area where the least number of respondents perceive current EU action as adequate (Eurobarometer 2019; Eurobarometer 2018).

But where does this scepticism come from? Experts agree that this negative perception is based on reasons that in reality have little to do with migration itself, namely economic restructuring, widening income gaps and diminishing access to opportunities. What's more, anti-migrant attitudes are strongest, and likely to increase further, in countries where migrants are hardly present and where people, therefore, do not generally have any personal experiences with immigrants (Messing and Ságvári 2019). Attitudes towards migration are, with some fluctuation, rather stable and balanced across all EU countries. What has changed, however, is the salience of migration, i.e. the perceived importance of migration, which reached a peak in the EU around 2015.

Three major clusters of factors that influence public attitudes on migration are discussed below: the **link between the perception of migration and EU actions and policies**, the impact of **personal values and socialisation**, and **media coverage on migration and migration policy**. This paper specifically looks at these factors as they occupy an important role in any interpretation of the ways EU and Member State policymakers should engage in strategic communication on migration and migration policy.

The link between attitudes towards migration and trust in the EU

With increased numbers of migrants arriving in Europe during the period 2015-2016, the European Commission made an effort to address public opinion through an active communication approach, alongside a number of policy measures directed towards changing the perception of the realities of migration. Nevertheless, public scepticism on migration and the European Union itself is still prevalent today.

Key Points

• **Most people in EU Member States seem to regard migration as an EU issue rather than a national one.**

• **Positive attitudes towards migration are positively correlated to trust in the EU, which in turn goes hand in hand with the perceived ability of the EU and European governments to effectively and consistently handle migration.**

Most people in EU Member States seem to regard migration as an issue at the EU level rather than on a national or personal level (Scipioni, Tintori, Alessandrini, Migali and Natale 2020). The main reason why migration is considered by the public as the top EU priority, according to the spring 2019 Eurobarometer, was the shift in salience and attitudes in Central Europe. It is worth noting in this regard that positive attitudes towards migration are positively correlated to trust in the EU, which in turn goes hand in hand with the perceived ability of the EU and European governments to effectively and consistently handle migration. For example, having migrant integration policies in place seems to have a positive effect on public attitudes towards migration.

Generally, those living in what are perceived to be states with high levels of capacity are less likely to hold anti-migration attitudes. Following EU border measures and deals during and after the so-called 'migration crisis', the prevalence of extreme, negative attitudes decreased in most countries, especially in Western Europe; although across Central Europe very negative attitudes were still much more common than before 2015 (Huddleston and Sharif 2019).

The level of negative attitudes towards migrants during the periods 2014-2015 and 2016-2017 decreased from 15% to 10%. This also means that EU citizens have not become more fearful of migrants; on the contrary, in most countries they have become slightly more positive toward them. Similar negative attitudes towards migration are lower in Western Europe. However, it has neither changed nor increased in the Central and Eastern European Member States (Messing and Ságvári 2019). It is thus important to note that while in the post-2016 period the majority of EU citizens, particularly those from major destination countries, support a common EU migration policy, public support is much lower in Central Europe. This seems to be related to perceived threats at Europe's borders (Huddleston and Sharif 2019).

Values, socialisation and policy effects

Our early life socialisation influences the shade of our political values and thus naturally informs attitudes to issues such as migration. Generally, the funnel of causalities shaping attitudes towards migration depend on a variety of strong and stable effects, stretching from human values and personality type to moral foundations. This variety of the effects include, inter alia, life norm acquisition, education, lifestyle, political attitudes and ideology, neighbourhood and economic competition (Dennison and Dražanová 2018).

Education is considered a key factor in shaping attitudes, where a lower education level often leads to less tolerance for diversity and, in effect, to anti-migration attitudes. However, as emphasised by roundtable participants, education seems to be a decisive factor in shaping public attitudes in Western European countries, but less so in EU Member States to the East. In addition to education, personal values have strong effects on attitudes towards migration, particularly universalism, conformity, tradition and security (Dennison and Dražanová 2018). People driven by universalist values (empathy and care for all people and nature) tend to favour migration, while those driven more by conservative values (tradition, conformity, security) rather turn against migration (Dennison and Dražanová 2018; Huddleston and Sharif 2019).

The public's attachment to universalist values is generally weaker in Central Europe, with stronger attachment to conservative values in Central and Southern Europe (Huddleston and Sharif 2019). In between those driven by universalists or conservative values there stands a considerable "moveable middle" without a clearly defined position. This segment of society, which, as stressed during the roundtable debate, is very heterogenous in itself, consists largely of people whose values are driven more by self-interest and can be roughly divided into humanitarians, pragmatists, disengaged moderates, traditionalists, the security-concerned and the left behind (More in Common 2019, 2018).

In general terms, it appears that the level of security and control a person feels they have over their own life (and future) represents one of the main factors determining their long-term attitudes towards migration. Survey data shows that the demographic profiles of those who are extreme and absolute in their rejection of migrants do not differ from those of the rest of the population. However, they do appear to be united in their subjective perception of control. This leads to the conclusion that people who generally feel politically disempowered, financially insecure or who lack social support are most likely to become negative towards migrants. Conversely, those who indicate more trust in their country's institutions and more satisfaction with the performance of their governments, democratic institutions and national economies, are most likely to become more accepting of migrants (Messing and Ságvári 2019).

As discussed above, while personal values, and, as a result, also attitudes toward migration, are relatively stable, the opinions of the "moveable middle" as well as party positions have become more polarised since 2015-2016. The political mobilisation of this middle seems heavily context-specific (Huddleston and Sharif 2019).

Media coverage

The effect of media coverage on public perception and policy-making should not be overestimated, as people's reaction to news depends more on pre-existing values and political persuasion than the content and framing of the reporting. The impact of frames, understood as "patterns of interpretation through which people classify information in order to handle it efficiently" (Scheufele 2004, 402) is relatively small, particularly in countries with a longer history of immigration

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Key Points

• **The impact of frames of migration in the media is relatively small, particularly in countries with a longer history of immigration and thus long-term media interest in migration. It is stronger in countries where the topic is relatively new to the public debate.**

• **Reporting and the public debate following the crisis became less about those who came and more about related policies and their perception among the public, especially vis-à-vis the EU.**

• **The portrayal of migration in the media has become increasingly controversial in its tone. This tendency is particularly exacerbated in times of crisis.**

• **Although social media is clearly also a powerful vehicle for sharing content on migration, it likely contributes to polarising public opinion.**

and thus long-term media interest in migration. However, the impact of media framing is stronger in countries where the topic is relatively new to the public debate, as is the case in Central Europe (Dennison and Dražanová 2018).

The experts participating in the roundtable debate agreed that the EU became the scapegoat for imposing migration policies following the 2015-2016 crisis, particularly in Central Europe, and after introducing the EU relocation scheme. Reporting and the public debate following the crisis became less about those who came and more about related policies and their perception among the public, especially vis-à-vis the EU as a viable and effective institution. The expert consensus was that, generally, the media builds the migration narrative on voids and absences, together with a precise and definite choice of semantics. This means that the media does not really describe migration realities, but instead identifies the discourse to fit into a specific ideological approach, and, as a consequence, creates and constitutes the reality it should define (Jacomella 2010). This in turn results in a gap between the dominant and homogenous group of the local population and the out-group – migrants. The strong underrepresentation of migrants' voices in the media further broadens this gap, and helps shape the narrative on migrants as the "other".

As observed in the literature, the portrayal of migration in the media has become increasingly controversial in its tone, with a negative connotation of immigration prevailing. This tendency is particularly exacerbated in times of crisis (Martínez Guillem 2015), when migration is predominantly viewed from a security perspective, as occurred for example during the 2015-2016 migrant influx and the COVID-19 pandemic. Another important aspect to consider is that prolonged media debates and frequency of news on migration have a negative impact on public attitudes, regardless of their specific dynamics (Dennison and Dražanová 2018).

While the framing effects on shaping public attitudes towards migration are small, negative reporting can still increase hostility towards specific migrant groups, as was the case following extensive media coverage of sexual assaults in Germany on New Year's Eve 2015 (Dennison and Dražanová 2018). In terms of the framing applied to migration following the 2015-2016 influx, during the first phase the media used predominantly a humanitarian framing, of migrants as victims. The effect was a slight increase in positive attitudes towards migration, most likely among those with universalist values.

However, in the mind of those adhering to conservative values, this framing is likely to have increased a sense of insecurity and the potential negative impact of migration. Following the November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks, the humanitarian frame was partly replaced by a securitisation frame, particularly in Central Europe (Huddleston and Sharif 2019). In this process, a crucial role is played by social media and new forms of online activism and politics, which are increasingly enabling the construction of a migration narrative – and agenda – that is almost entirely based on the security discourse (WEF 2018). Although social media is clearly also a powerful vehicle for sharing content on migration, it likely contributes to polarising public opinion, as anti-migrant groups tend to be more coordinated (including at EU level) (Bakamo Social 2019).

The extent to which media influences public attitudes on migration depends on many factors that vary according to context. These include the ways in which different group of migrants are represented in the media, the country in which the particular media outlet operates, and the type of media, language and images used. The media effect in regard to how people think about migration thus needs to be further researched – not only in countries of destination, but also in countries of transit and origin. This also requires actions on different levels: at national, EU, and international level.

How to move forward and embed a strategic communication approach as an essential part of EU migration policy?

Key Points

• **Policymakers should pay particular consideration public opinion, as it can limit the available policy options and indeed their implementation.**

• **Policymakers can activate personal values (or not) by applying certain frames on migration and related policies.**

EU citizens perceive migration as a priority topic for the Union. Policymakers should pay particular consideration to this fact as public opinion can limit the available policy options, and indeed their implementation. While the relationship between attitudes and votes is not a straightforward one, the combination of long-term extensive media coverage and a negative public opinion creates significant pressure on migration policies and politicians (Huddleston and Sharif 2019). Policymakers might thus find themselves forced into a dilemma between the "need" to respond to public concerns (often framed and shaped by media narratives) by further restricting migration flows while also being elected to ensure a country's long-term development, which requires adequate human capital and workforce, a stable demographic situation, and improved technology and infrastructure – areas where migrants make significant contributions.

Public attitudes on migration are hence relevant for the formation and implementation of EU migration policies as they are likely to influence policymakers. This leads to the conclusion that the way governments communicate on migration and related policies influences the success of the migration policies themselves, through fanning a more positive public opinion. It would be challenging to isolate the influence of media on public attitudes toward migration on the one hand, and the impact of the political agenda on the media discourse on the other (and vice-versa). It has long been acknowledged that all three facets operate in mutually reinforcing ways that shape the contested public sphere (Consterdine 2018). To that end, citizens need to have access to reliable, comprehendible and trustworthy information on migration policies and migration realities, whilst being in a position to process this information astutely. This process tends to be undermined in times of crisis, when citizens are often misled by media outlets framing migration in an ambiguous or one-sided way.

Getting the right message across and subsequently gaining the trust of the "moveable middle" is a challenge for governments at all levels. The above review of the factors shaping public opinion shows that an individual's values tend to be rather stable and hard to change, but that policymakers can activate these values (or not) by applying certain frames on migration and related policies. To do so, governments also need to create and maintain sufficient room for manoeuvre with their sceptical public, facilitating actual engagement in future-oriented policy-making, based on facts rather than perceptions (ICMPD 2019).

A number of recommendations emerged from the roundtable discussion aimed at breaking the gridlock and moving forward with a strategic communication approach on migration policy decisions and migration realities.

(Re)framing the narrative

Key Points

• **Applying balanced and nuanced communication is important so as to decrease polarisation of the "moveable middle".**

• **Applying frames that highlight the similarities of migrants to the population, their contribution to the economy, and the general benefits of migration for development might be effective in helping to create acceptance for the new situation following the 2015-2016 influx and related policy measures.**

• **Policymakers should employ communication strategies that focus on a solution-, future- and hope-oriented approach rather than underlining the problems and threats.**

Framing is important for policymakers to consider as a strategy for helping their policy proposals to be heard and accepted. Specifically applying certain frames likely to be welcomed by potential opponents of measures is an effective way of creating understanding and trust in the political decision taken. Furthermore, applying balanced and nuanced communication is important so as to avoid people being "forced to pick a side" and decrease polarisation of the "moveable middle" (Dennison and Dražanová 2018, 8). In order to use framing as a strategy, policymakers need to understand the importance of human values in attitude formation. Certain frames might work well for those driven by universalist values, whilst others work better for individuals who place the utmost value on security, conformity and tradition. As an example, the family unity frame would work well for conservatives but also universalists, whom tend to be more receptive to rights-based frames on migration.

Generally, the literature shows that those who value security, conformity and tradition tend to be more sceptical toward migration. Hence, applying frames that highlight the similarities of migrants to the population, their contribution to the economy, and the general benefits of migration for development, instead of solely focusing on the obligation to protect refugees and emphasising their vulnerability, might be effective in helping to create acceptance for the new situation following the 2015-2016 influx and related policy measures (Huddleston and Sharif 2019).

Consequently, policymakers should employ communication strategies that focus on a solution-, future- and hope-oriented approach rather than underlining the problems and threats. Pragmatic messages on policy decisions can trigger positive emotions and win over the "moveable middle", whilst evoking feelings of hope, solidarity and empathy (Sharif 2019).

Facts and emotions

"Narratives are likely to be more successful where they meet three criteria: they are cognitively plausible, dramatically or morally compelling and, importantly, they chime with perceived interests" (Boswell, Geddes and Scholten 2011, 1). The lack of evidence in migration debates is often lamented, but presenting facts is not the only approach to challenging misperceptions. Related research shows that the topic needs a debate that speaks to both "hearts and minds", a debate which also accounts for emotions and creates opportunities for frequent contact and exchange with migrants and refugees (ICMPD 2019).

The usage of certain terminology when communicating on migration policies and migration realities influences the emotional side of intended audience. The same message framed using certain terminology may trigger understanding,

solidarity and empathy, or, on the contrary, create a sense of threat and uncontrolled inundation (if inappropriate terminology is used). For instance, using "migration flows" instead of "swam" or "flood" has a huge impact on consumption of the message on an emotional level (Ahad and Banulescu-Bogdan 2019).

Visual coverage also needs to be considered when designing effective communication strategies, as exposure to videos or photographs has the potential to change the minds of people (Huddleston and Sharif 2019). This can be seen in the dramatic and emotional visual coverage of the increased inflows to Europe in 2015-2016 and their impact in shaping the public discourse, creating a sense of crisis and reinforcing the divide between "us" and "them". Similarly, the public narratives on the COVID-19 crisis followed an alarmist pattern, with sectors of the media and populist politicians scapegoating migrants and feeding anti-immigrant sentiment by the general portrayal of COVID-19 as a "foreigner" virus.

The ongoing economic turmoil and its social consequences for European societies also bring the risk of reinforcing societal fault lines, exacerbating inequalities and contributing to the scapegoating of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. However, the COVID-19 crisis has also had the opposite effect, making Europe's dependence on migrant workers more visible. Migrants are now being represented as essential workers in key economy, particularly in health, agriculture, food and transport. In Europe, and around the world, stories of solidarity have begun to emerge, with many states turning to migrant communities and bringing in workers from abroad to fill current labour shortages in "systemically relevant occupations", with others starting to regularise migrants and grant long-term residence rights, both for public health reasons and to support agricultural and food security (Bilger, Baumgartner and Palinkas 2020; Brady 2020). The recognition of the importance of migrant workers for European economies may contribute to a deconstruction of the divide between "us" and "them", and hence to a positive shift in the perception of migration.

Media narrative monitoring and analysis

The media narrative on migration in a particular country tends to reflect the different factors in play: the various contexts in which the narrative appears, the type(s) and levels of migration, governmental policies directed at migration management, and the prevailing geopolitical situation, alongside many other factors. Thus, strategic communication on migration should take these different contexts into account if it is to reach the target audience and change the perception of migration. During the roundtable discussion, the experts agreed that media monitoring and regular analysis of what the media says about migration, and how it does so, are the key elements in developing efficient communication.

Media monitoring "creates a link between the media and their audience which has the potential to lead to democratic, professional, more equitable and diverse media systems. The results of monitoring provide a picture of media content

that allows discussion about representation in media at a level of specificity, based on 'hard' evidence" (Who Makes The News 2014).

More specifically, media monitoring aims to gain systematic and in-depth knowledge on how migration-related issues are represented in the media; including their frequency, content, language, use of terminology, images, etc. In this way, if implemented regularly, media monitoring contributes to the genuine transmission of sound and fact-based migration-related information, in the interest of migrant integration and social cohesion. Additionally, media monitoring supports counteracting misinformation, intolerance and xenophobia in the respective societies (Kintsurashvili, Pilipenko and Wagner 2018).

Media monitoring and its analysis applies mixed methods. It includes monitoring and analysis of the context of the different news outlets and formats, including visuals, tacit messages, language used, monitoring of prime time talk shows with a focus on perception of migrants and xenophobia, etc. Focus group discussions including experimental activities may produce more diverse data in order to attain in-depth information and knowledge on the subject. The discussions can be designed to determine how specific population groups perceive media messages based on their particular social setting. Monitoring can also benefit from additional quantitative research methods (Kintsurashvili et al. 2018).

Specialisation and training

Another recommendation that emerged from the roundtable discussion pertained to enhancing the capacities of communicators to pursue more evidence-informed and balanced reporting. The focus here lies in the training and specialisation of both media actors and communicators of migration policy-making. In this regard, the type of media monitoring and analysis described above could be a starting point for identification of concrete capacity building needs.

Fostering the specialisation of journalists in migration and promoting an "identity" among journalists across the EU as 'migration journalists' is another way of increasing the quality of reporting. To that end, "journalists [need to be supported] in becoming more migration-knowledgeable" (Ethical Journalism Network 2017, 1) and aware of the correct terminologies and their implications, as well as being able to access credible information and data to inform their work. In addition to training on the correct use of terminology, capacity building may cover the topics of international frameworks and the legal rights of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, alongside a focus on possible solutions. It is also important to target editors-in-chief and media owners in order to show how migration can be narrated in mainstream editorial work (Sharif 2019). In addition, trainings for policymakers that foster an understanding of how media outlets work and the use of social media as a way to enable interactive communication and provide information on migration will contribute to a more balanced debate.

Key Points

• Fostering the specialisation of journalists in migration and promoting an "identity" among journalists across the EU as 'migration journalists' is one way of increasing the quality of reporting.

• Trainings for policymakers that foster an understanding of how media outlets work and the use of social media as a way to enable interactive communication and provide information on migration will contribute to a more balanced debate.

Conclusions: Do we need an EU communication strategy on migration?

The data points to a large gap between expectations and perceptions of EU institution delivery in the field of migration policy, which means that much more needs to be done to address citizen concerns. The link between policy-making and attitudes on migration is twofold: on the one hand, policy-making is often motivated by prevailing attitudes; whilst on the other, public opinion is shaped by how political actors frame the issues and challenges at hand. Through both their policies and their internal discourse, governments play an important role in setting the tone for the national debate, and the same applies to EU institutions. EU policymakers and Member State governments must therefore invest more in discussing and explaining their policies to the public and ensure strategic communication on migration. A new and shared narrative and vision on migration which moves away from the crisis narrative will help to create new understanding of the political decisions taken. Strategic communication, enrooted in a common understanding within the EU on migration and migration policy objectives, should become an integral part of the EU migration policy cycle. In the same vein, furthering strategic communication which encompasses clear and long-term objectives, as well as targeted actions, will prove more sustainable and effective than spontaneous or ad hoc communication on migration issues (Sharif 2019).

Taking into account the challenges related to finding common ground on an EU migration policy, it is not an easy task to develop a corresponding EU strategic communication approach on migration. However, neither "not communicating" nor reactive communication will lead to a change in public attitudes on migration (and, subsequently, on public acceptance of EU actions in the field). Therefore, a proactive EU communication strategy on migration should be developed which would anticipate specific policies or events to be communicated at a certain time. As a matter of priority, communication should reframe the migration narrative to go beyond the crisis. Generally, differentiated framing or even "de-migrationising" the narrative, would help to shift the focus of public attitudes from threat and security concerns to future-oriented solutions. This could include, for instance, constructing a migration narrative on economic or values-based issues. Furthermore, telling the stories instead of the numbers would make the strategic communication more understandable and accessible, whilst speaking to the heart. The communication approach should also link migration issues to the national and local contexts of the audience, as well as to the different policy areas (Bamberg 2019).

Finally, a great deal can be learned from the ongoing COVID-19 crisis and the way in which EU institutions and governments have dealt with the "infodemic" (UN 2020) that has been generated. As observed over the past few months, public communication, both nationally and internationally, has faced difficulties in establishing a narrative on the crisis which is based on scientific and trustworthy evidence rather than ambiguous and alarming information (Ricorda 2020). This makes it particularly clear that there is an urgent need for a new approach to communication, one which should not only be reliable but also strategically

planned and designed in collaboration with relevant institutions and actors, such as policymakers, communication specialists and experts on the subject.

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