



Executive summary

STOCKTAKING REPORT

E-MINDFUL Project

E-Mindful Stocktaking Report

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The E-MINDFUL project aims to contribute to the investigation of the key factors that shape public perceptions about migration and migrants. Its goal is to provide guidance on how to build effective communication strategies that can reduce polarization. To achieve this objective, the project steers a comprehensive process through which infotainment formats are developed, tested and assessed on audiences in six countries: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Italy, North Macedonia and Serbia.

The first step of this overall process envisaged reviewing the existing literature on the topic and learning from past communication experiences, taking stock of lessons from impactful as well as ineffective communication strategies. The stock-taking exercise's primary function is to provide a critical baseline and inform the second phase of the project, in which teams formed by academic experts, media and content creators collaborate towards the production of infotainment products in a way that raise the awareness of migration's contribution to hosting societies.

The stock-taking task was assigned to a Multidisciplinary Working Group (MWG) that considered a series of communication initiatives:

- Seven projects implemented under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF), funded by Directorate General Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) of the European Commission;
- A pool of communication initiatives, selected by the MWG, which include awareness-raising campaigns, commercials, TV series and infotainments.

The stock-taking report first analyses and categorizes the main narratives on migration in Western Europe. It then explains why communication campaigns on the subject need to target primarily the “moveable middle”, that is the share of population that is not entrenched on strongly negative or positive positions towards migration. Finally, it highlights a series of key findings about what proved effective or not when communicating about migration, according to the members of the MWG.

Analysis of selected communication experiences of the AMIF projects

In 2017 the European Commission's Directorate General Migration and Home Affairs introduced the priority “Raising awareness on migrants' contribution to EU societies” within the programs funded through the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). The MWG analysed seven projects as relevant case studies.

According to the targeted population, six out of the seven AMIF projects addressed specific segments of audiences, such as local authorities, students/youth, and media professionals. They used the beneficiaries of the initiatives as strategic intermediaries or multipliers that can influence other members of their respective communities and peers. One project addressed the general public. Findings are clustered according to similarities in design and target groups. Key take-away points, according to the analysis carried out by the MWG are:

The educational projects in schools

- ✓ *Include the students' points of view:* since teen-agers' perspective may be different from adults, it is essential to look at the topic through their own eyes and harness their own expertise;
- ✓ *Students as agents:* stressing the teen-agers' agency and creativity throughout the ‘think’ and ‘act’ educational process brings better results; to this end, it is advisable not to use ready-made work-packages but leave space for contribution by the target population;
- ✓ *Ensure a meaningful learning space:* A learning environment that ensures a peer-to-peer atmosphere, where hierarchies or judgements due to the belonging to different social and/or cultural backgrounds are minimized, proves to work better. The learning environment is more impactful when it includes schools from different (socio-economic, demographic) areas within the same urban territory, as well as a variety of territorial features along the urban/rural lines;
- ✓ *The medium is the message:* the use of testimonials/personal stories is to be used with care. It is important to avoid processes of victimization of young refugees and migrants due to the difficult situations they may have

experienced, as well as processes that stereotype who is a migrant. Young peers may draw on different criteria rather than the mainstream ones;

- ✓ *Leading by example*: the full engagement of teachers and the school hierarchy makes the school community credible.

Capacity-development for decision makers

- ✓ *When facts matter*: the local level is the ideal environment to foster the understanding of the complexities related to the presence of migrants. A good strategy involves sound data and facts, evidence-based information, explaining how supporting processes of inclusion would benefit the whole community. Communication strategies need to transmit facts through an engaging storytelling that contextualize the situations of migrants while resonating with the concerns and fears of hosting communities;
- ✓ *A trouble shared is a trouble halved*: initiatives that engage local authorities are likely to be more effective when they involve networks/associations of local authorities.

Capacity-development for media professionals

- ✓ *Avoiding unilateral perspectives*: Active participation of refugee and migrant journalists and media professionals when crafting a storytelling has proved of help and has increased their resonating potential;
- ✓ *Fostering social and collaborative journalism*: A mixed environment of traditional and digital journalists proved effective. Greater creativity is also an outcome of the contamination of techniques and audiences;
- ✓ *Ethics matter*: Adopting a code of conduct for media professionals operating in the field of migration can be of help to promote a more balanced reporting.

Analysis of public and private sector awareness-raising campaigns, commercials, TV series and infotainments

- ✓ *TV series, movies, film festivals*: Traditional media, such as TV series and movies, still reach out effectively to the public at large and provide nuanced storytelling. They sometimes offer a chance for the viewers to challenge stereotypes and engage with alternative views. One way is to expose cracks in the dominant narrative, privileging irony;
- ✓ *Music and video-clips*. Music, lyrics and videos are powerful levers towards moving the audiences to challenge individuals' spheres of values, beliefs and ethics;
- ✓ *Commercials and advertisements*. Underlying messages associated with a product that aim to engage consumers in embracing a cosmopolitan lifestyle create a community built on a shared set of values. Although migration is not the main message of these campaigns, the technique generates a direct association between the brand and the feeling of living in a more just and fair world for everyone.

Key take-aways of the Stock-taking report

The narrative frame: focus on values, not only issues

- ✓ *Use values-based storytelling*. Information on migration is more likely to be impactful when based on values and emotions, especially when they align with the target audience's life experiences. Making this emotional connection is key to reframing processes and trigger feelings of familiarity. This approach requires *deep listening and understanding* of the motivations and fears of the receiving audiences, and should combine emotions and facts together in an entertaining way.
- ✓ *Talk about solutions, not problems*. Focusing on crises and problems alone is dangerous. The danger of focusing the attention primarily on representations that generate pity is that people become numb. Suggesting alternative visions and smart solutions that can trigger debate and show that transformation is possible have more chances to resonate and engage audiences.
- ✓ *Focus on 'us' rather than on 'them'*. When the storytelling focuses on *us* rather than on *them*, the potentialities to resonate with the 'moveable middle' are more promising. In this storytelling, the focus is no longer on migration/migrants and tends to appeal to *our* lifestyles and worldviews. The use of paradox and humour makes this storytelling more appealing.

Consider the audience and create a community

- ✓ *'Preaching to the converted' is pointless.* The tendency of mistaking the promotion of activities with the impact that these activities have on a specific group of people is common practice in public-funded awareness-raising projects.
- ✓ *Speak to people not to categories.* The tendency of considering migration as an experience that concerns primarily people on the move and hosting communities prevents from exploring narratives that resonate with universal themes. A universal theme is one that focuses on an element of the human condition and as such it appeals to or has meaning to people regardless of individual or cultural differences. The way these concepts are unfold in the story(ies) can reconcile apparent opposite positions of 'us' versus 'them'.

The right messenger with the right set of skills

- ✓ *Influencers are the new broadcasters.* Influencers, web stars and prominent web are able to create and entertain vast communities of followers through the production of personal, often unverified content. Their strength lies in a number of factors, mostly a sense of proximity that is perceived by specific audiences as authentic. The ability of influencers to provoke admiration can be instrumental towards reaching a target audience and raising awareness on contentious issues.
- ✓ *Giving a voice is not enough.* Co-creation and participative media are amongst the models that can contribute to content coherence. However, employing exclusively testimonials representing the broad and diverse community of migrants may risk to reinforce stereotypes and move away from a dimension of normalization or commonness.

Communication is a two-way process

- ✓ *Top down does not sell well.* The public has a tendency to meet with scepticism top-down pro-migration narratives and stories. It is crucial to create communication spaces for meaningful exchanges where the population can interact directly - including via online media - with communicators or policy-makers.
- ✓ *Peer-to-peer campaigning.* Peer-to-peer awareness initiatives might be more powerful than traditional information campaigns. The main vehicle for behaviour change is not the information itself, but the fact that the message is being transmitted by someone whom people can relate to.
- ✓ *Multiplatform and multimedia.* Facilitating multiplatform partnerships and collaborations with diverse media outlets can lead to the release of cross-platform content. Although this approach requires additional resources for the production of multiple contents, the advantages are significant in terms of engaging different audiences. Working off-line may reach fewer people, but it offers greater opportunities to discuss, exchange ideas and engage individuals towards considering different points of view.
- ✓ *Educational Entertainment.* Educational Entertainment can be an effective method to engage audiences embedding value-based features and specific fictionalized character design.
- ✓ *If no one sees it, it does not exist.* Producing content without a clear distribution strategy is futile. The media environment is experiencing an increasing competition for space and visibility in the "attention economy".



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The E-MINDFUL project is aligned with the following Sustainable Development Goals

