

Background paper for GFMD session 2.4 “Countering negative messages”

IOM initiatives on impacting public perceptions of migrants through diversifying information and promoting migrants' contributions

1. Introduction

When it comes to migration, the media often tend to focus on illegality, crisis, controversy and failure. A recent study of 58,000 migration news stories, conducted by researchers at the Oxford University¹, found that the most common word used to describe immigrants was “illegal”, even though by far the majority of migrants enter and reside legally. There was also frequent use of words such as “terrorist”, “criminal”, “destitute” and “vulnerable” when reporting on migration stories.

A 2012 Gallup survey commissioned by IOM found that 34 per cent of the world population would like to see the number of migrants in their country reduced. This figure goes up to 52 per cent in Europe².

While knowing that:

- There is no correlation between influxes of migrants and unemployment; migrants can in fact boost job creation in a country;
- Migration can contribute to poverty reduction through remittances and skill transfer³;

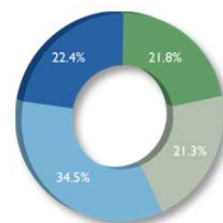
the following questions deserve to be asked:

1. Is the international community doing enough to strive for human non-discrimination?
2. How can we contribute to a more balanced and evidence-based portrayal of migrants?

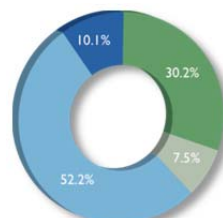
This paper will give examples and draw conclusions from recent IOM initiatives to influence people’s perception of migrants.

Should immigration be kept at its present level, increased, or decreased?

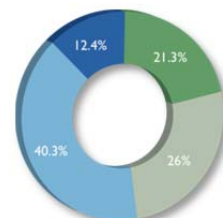
World view



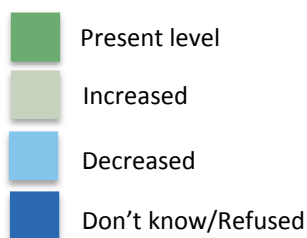
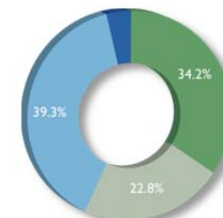
Europe



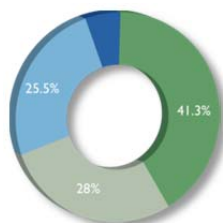
Africa



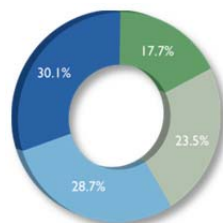
North America



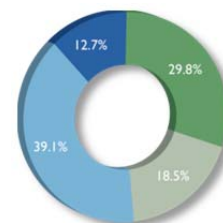
Oceania



Asia



Latin America



¹ See Migration Observatory, University of Oxford. “Migration in the News: Portrayals of Immigrants, Migrants, Asylum Seekers and Refugees in National British Newspapers, 2010-2012”.

² <http://iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/news-and-views/press-briefing-notes/pbn-2015/pbn-listing/how-the-world-views-migration-io.html>

³ See A. Constant. “Do migrants steal the jobs of native workers”; IOM and J. Wets. “Migration and Development: Myths and Facts”.

IOM's Director General, William Lacy Swing: "Accurately informing the wider public about migration may be the single most important policy tool in all societies faced with increasing diversity" (quoted in IPS News, 6 December 2011)

2. IOM communication campaigns

2.1. Advocacy at the Global level

On 18 June 2014, IOM launched its first global social media campaign called *#MigrationMeans*⁴. For a period of one year, we have asked people from all continents to share what migrations means for them. Using the hashtag *#MigrationMeans*, people took photos of themselves with their short answer⁵ and posted it on Facebook and Twitter. Through a Thunderclap Campaign for World Humanitarian Day, it garnered a social media reach of 580,846 people and posts regarding the *#MigrationMeans* campaign have reached 65,896 Facebook users. More than 749 *#MigrationMeans* related messages were posted on Twitter and Facebook with 45 IOM missions participating in the campaign.



Participant in the *#MigrationMeans* campaign



IOM'S Director General, William Lacy Swing, participating in the *#MigrationMeans* campaign

In 2015, IOM launched its second global social media campaign, *#MigrantHeroes*⁶. Building on the results of *#MigrationMeans*, IOM takes the experience one step further. People are asked to nominate a migrant hero who positively contributes to his/her host-society and country of origin. In November 2015, IOM will select three candidates that will become their goodwill ambassadors for the following year. They will carry a message of need to create a positive environment for migrants, protect them and also ensure their place and contributions to our societies are recognized. This message will be carried out throughout the Goodwill Ambassador's area of action and/or professional activity with the aim to change negative perceptions of the general public towards migrants. In parallel to this campaign, IOM is now working on broadening its partnership with the UK based *I am an Immigrant* campaign⁷. Building on IOM's *Migrant's Contribute*⁸ global campaign, the intention is to bring this UK based initiative to a global level in the near future.

⁴ <http://weblog.iom.int/migrationmeans>

⁵ <https://storify.com/IOM/migration-means>

⁶ http://www.iom.ch/cms/migrantheroes?v=1392752313000/_/jcr:system/jcr:versionStorage/af/f1/1f/aff11fe2-e04e-4a6c-80e7-6c44a740dc6b/1.2/jcr:frozenNode

⁷ <http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/i-am-an-immigrant-poster-campaign/>

⁸ <http://www.migrantscontribute.com/>

A common factor in most IOM global campaigns is the interest in human stories. In this sense, IOM has been collaborating with different actors on initiatives that promote a more positive image of migrants through the narrative of migrants. It is the case in the ongoing *Migrant's Path* project. In partnership with TEDx and Storycorps, IOM will record, preserve and share the stories of migrants with the world in a cultural archive. The recordings will be deposited in the archives of both the United Nations and IOM. An associated illustrated book (with cd) will be published to highlight the most compelling examples of migrant stories. IOM is also a co-organizer of the Plural+ Youth Video Festival⁹ that invites youth to address key challenges and opportunities related to social inclusion and cohesion, migrant integration, respect for identity, diversity, and human rights, both at local and global levels. These initiatives have all successfully put a human face on immigration. By doing so, they contribute to shedding light on how migrants can be agents of development.

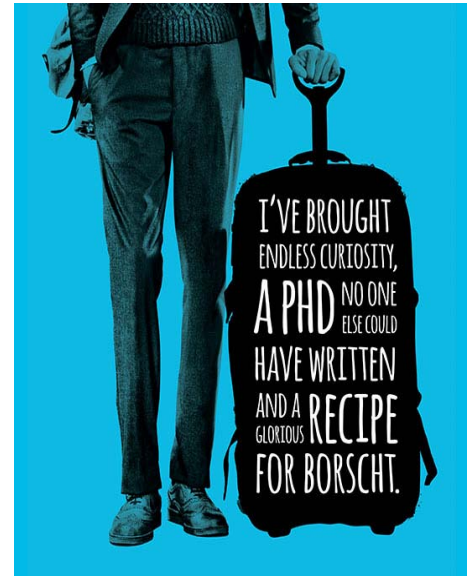
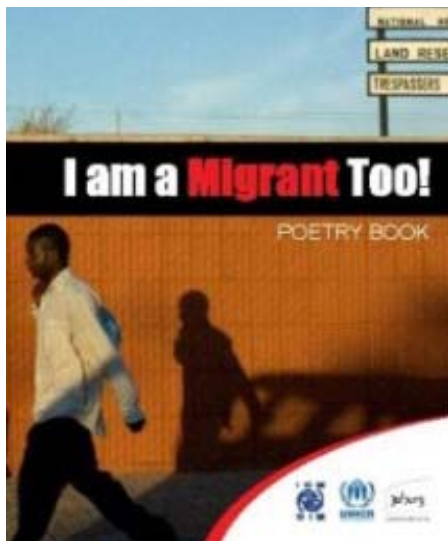


Image from the "Migrants Contribute" campaign

2.2. Initiatives at the National Level

At the national level, IOM is using similar strategies to spread a more positive vision of migrants. For instance, IOM's office in South Africa launched the campaign *I Am a Migrant Too*¹⁰ that aims at sensitizing the South African public to the reality of migrants in their country. By collecting stories of migrants through a writing competition, this project seeks to showcase the human side of migration. This project culminated in the launch of a poetry book¹¹ on International Migrants Day, 18 December 2012. This campaign was also accompanied by an effort to lobby South



Cover of the poetry book "I am a Migrant too"

African media so that they present a more positive and realistic image of migrants.

Several IOM offices have also initiated campaigns that sought to inform the population about the reality of human trafficking victims. Two awareness rising campaigns were organized by IOM Helsinki with collaboration of the Finnish Ombudsman for Minorities in 2011 and 2012. For the first one called *Work That Nobody Wants Do*¹², Advertisements and informative banners were published in newspapers and on the internet in order to stimulate a discussion on how to address the issue of human trafficking in the country. Following the success of this first project, a second joint-campaign called *Trafficking is not a fairy tale*¹³ was initiated. IOM and the Finnish Ombudsman for Minorities asked a famous Finnish musician to create a new version of a popular Finnish song, *Satunmaa* (the fabled land). The music video¹⁴ tells the story of a young woman who becomes a victim of sexual exploitation in

⁹ <http://pluralplus.unaoc.org/>

¹⁰ <http://iamamigrant.co.za/tag/migrants/>

¹¹ <http://southafrica.iom.int/publication/i-am-a-migrant-too-poetry-book/>

¹² http://iom.fi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=129:qwork-that-nobody-wants-to-do-q-awareness-raising-campaign-on-counter-trafficking-in-finland&catid=15:counter-trafficking&Itemid=126

¹³ http://www.iom.fi/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=197&Itemid=190

¹⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d_BEgitZPag

her search for a better life for herself and her family. As for most IOM campaigns, activities were organized on the International Migrants Day to raise awareness on this issue. Other video campaigns on raising awareness on the issue of human trafficking have been initiated by IOM country offices in countries such as Tunisia¹⁵, South Africa¹⁶ and the Philippines¹⁷ to name a few.

2.3. Effective use of Social Media



IOM_News twitter avatar

For every IOM campaign, social media play a vital role for reaching out to a broader public. Social media is used to launch and publicize campaigns, but they are also used to spread a more positive image of migrants on a daily basis. To this end, IOM has 59 different Twitter accounts. Our main one, *@IOM_News*, has more than 27, 000 followers and has been “Twitter verified”. IOM reaches out to the public via its country or regional offices, but also on specific issues with accounts such as *IOM Development*, *IOM Environment* or *IOM Labour Migration*. IOM also has a strong presence on Facebook with 58 different pages. Its main Facebook page, *IOM migration*, has more than 48, 000 likes.

Recognition and a greater presence on social media come at a price. In recent years, IOM has seen an increased number of fraudulent Facebook accounts using their logo or pretending to be affiliated. These fake accounts were often used by smugglers and traffickers to recruit their victims. In order to prevent such incidents, IOM met with Facebook’s head of security who agreed to intensify their cooperation in this regard. In addition to helping IOM finding and shutting down fraudulent sites, Facebook will provide some training to IOM staff on how to effectively use its platform to promote a more positive image of migrants.

3. Recommendations and concluding remarks

Now more than ever, people are exposed to a large quantity of new information and their attention span diminishes. Today’s campaigns need to adapt. In order for a message to be heard, it has to be clear and concise, but more importantly, people need to relate. Four main lessons can be drawn from IOM recent campaigns.

- a) **Tell a story:** human stories are an effective way to make people realize the real nature of migration in their country. Highlighting how individual migrants have contributed to their host-society and their home country puts a human figure on migration and draws people’s attention on its positive aspects.
- b) **Make good use of social media:** social media are central to any advocacy campaign. Addressing diverse channels with different social media accounts distributed geographically or thematically helps IOM to draw as much attention as possible on important issues. Nevertheless, social media must be used with caution. For this reason, organizations like IOM and social media platforms have an interest in building closer partnerships to address the different security issues.
- c) **Gather more and better data:** in order change people’s perception, we need to track and understand how they feel about migration. For this reason, IOM would like to see the Gallup survey of public opinion and migration become an annual global survey. To address people’s concerns and convince them to reject certain misconceptions, better data on migration, and its economic impacts, must be produced. We also need to gather more information to be able to measure the success of a campaign.

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bw2YiRodcvg>

¹⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6llw8GBK_0Y

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5FVzE2-1jNI>

d) **Cooperate with relevant partners:** changing people's perception of migrants is too big of a task for one organization to handle. Without the collaboration of its partners, IOM campaigns would not have achieved the same success. More efforts should be made to build partnerships among international organizations, NGOs, governments and media organizations to change people's perception; to let them know that if given the opportunity, migrants are far less likely to steal your job, than to create one for you.

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See also

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