

Outcomes Summary - Roundtable 3

The Interplay of Media and Culture to Construct and Deconstruct the Reality of Migration¹

First RT Consultations - Geneva, 6 November 2024

INTRODUCTION

This summary outlines the main results of the first consultations of the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) Roundtable 3 “The Interplay of Media and Culture to Construct and Deconstruct the Reality of Migration”, held in Geneva on 6 November 2024. The consultations focussed on identifying **challenges and opportunities** related to the thematic of the Roundtable. Specifically, the discussion was guided by the following two guiding questions:

1. *Information on migration circulates across multiple types of media, including social media platforms, which are increasingly used as an alternative source of information to media outlets. What are the key challenges to address misinformation and disinformation on migration?*
2. *What are the opportunities that can be leveraged to foster collaboration among policymakers, civil society, the private sector, local governments and the media to combat harmful and false narratives around migration and promote accurate information and quality analysis based on data and research?*

The outcome summary has been prepared with the following resources: flipchart protocols, recordings of the ‘harvesting of ideas’ and notes gathered from each small circle/host wherever available. The second consultations, which will be held in Geneva on 19-20 February 2025, will be focussed on the **exchange of policies and practices**. Main outcomes will be presented at the outset of the following consultations to ensure there is continuity and progression of discussions as the programme advances, allowing to build upon each step of the process.

MISINFORMATION AND NEGATIVE NARRATIVES

Challenges:

- **Excessive focus on negative aspects:** whilst issues related to irregular migration, such as border security vis-à-vis large displacement crises, are overly common in mainstream media reporting, stories that highlight the successful integration and positive contribution of migrants to their host society often receive limited coverage. This may reinforce negative perceptions of migration and foster xenophobic narratives among host societies. In the face of misinformation and negative narratives about migration, it is important to acknowledge that media coverage in several countries often frames migrants as contributors to national challenges. This portrayal significantly impacts social networks, which amplify these narratives by reproducing them on a larger scale.
- **Limited presence of migrant voices:** in line with the previous point, the limited inclusion of migrants’ personal stories and perspectives on migration-related issues may prevent people in the host country from developing nuanced views on migration.
- **Social media as vectors of misinformation:** information about migration/migrants is spreading through a lot of channels especially social media. Considering their inherent

¹ Roundtable 3 is co-chaired by Cameroon (represented by Nadjma Adoum, First Secretary, Permanent Mission), the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, represented by Luis Damiani, Second Secretary, Permanent Mission) and the European Union (represented by Helena Winiarska, Team Leader – Migration). It benefits from the facilitation of Marco Formisano, UNHCR (invited in his personal capacity), and the support of the technical expert Fatima Khachi, ICMPD.

focus on rapid and attention-grabbing news rather than even keeled and well researched stories, social media are particularly prone to disseminating myths and fake news which may amplify the polarisation of the migration discourse. It is also important to underscore the role of traditional media alongside social networks in shaping public narratives. Success stories within diaspora communities are becoming increasingly absent from media discourse. Certain restrictive policies, which have gained prominence in recent years, influence news outlets to focus on negative portrayals, marginalizing the achievements of immigrant diaspora members. Even when individuals excel, particularly in politics, they are often reduced to their immigrant identity. This tendency hampers their integration and reinforces harmful stereotypes.

Opportunities:

- **Use of storytelling to foster positive migration narratives:** the innovative use of storytelling (films, documentaries, virtual reality projects) that engages migrants and members of diasporas may be an effective means to stimulate empathy and promote a deeper understanding of migration experiences among the general population, thereby contributing to tackle stereotypes and foster balanced migration narratives.
- **Spread of positive narratives through popular culture:** information and narratives on migration diffused through popular culture, arts, music, fashion and literature may help render migration topics more accessible and relatable. Artists, celebrities and influencers may be involved to increase the resonance of a given message and promote balanced views on migration among the public.
- **Social networks play a dual role in the migration narrative:** while they can contribute to the spread of misinformation, they also serve as powerful platforms for authentic storytelling and sharing migrant testimonies. Platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and especially YouTube allow users to share documentaries, interviews, and reports directly, bypassing traditional media. Unlike conventional outlets that often overlook migrant perspectives, these digital spaces provide a unique opportunity for migrants to share their journeys and experiences openly and without filters.
- **Promote realistic information and narratives on migration through social media campaigns:** due to their capillary dissemination, social media can be utilised to promote balanced narratives on migration. The use of social media can be optimized by focusing on localized community-based campaigns. Such campaigns may contribute to render migration stories (which are often stereotypical and generic) more relatable by allowing migrants to provide personal experiences and first-hand testimonies. In addition, writing stories and collecting testimonies in the language spoken by migrants may further contribute to reinforcing the impact of migration-related communication.

MANAGEMENT AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION/DISINFORMATION ON MEDIA AND SOCIAL PLATFORMS

Challenges:

- **Rapid dissemination of misinformation/disinformation:** information about migration and migrants is spreading through media platforms with limited possibility for users to verify the identity and reliability of sources, and limited capacity of governments and media to fact-check the accuracy of the information provided. This dynamic is reinforced by social media algorithms that may fuel networks of ongoing misinformation/disinformation by incentivising the sharing of high-performing content (i.e. posts that generate views, comments and shares) as opposed to factually accurate information.
- **Normalization of misinformation cycles:** in line with the previous point, sensational content designed to elicit scandal, excitement or anger is widely spread on social media,

as it is more likely to generate attention and reaction among users. Given that ‘false but interesting’ stories usually win over ‘true but boring’ stories, promoting facts-based news on migration may be difficult.

Opportunities:

- **Connect with people through digital platforms:** digital tools and platforms may be used to bring migrants’ voices to the fore and facilitate the dissemination of factually sound information. Migrant-led digital platforms may allow migrants to take a proactive role in the dissemination of positive narratives by directly sharing their success stories.
- **Develop training and education opportunities:** in addition to the previous point, digital tools may create opportunities to increase public awareness and knowledge about migration by focusing on its historical dimension and its benefits for host and origin societies.

POLICY MAKING AND KEY ACTORS IN INFORMATION/DISINFORMATION ON MIGRATION

Challenges:

- **Politization and influence of political agendas on information about migration/migrants:** as information is often a pivotal point of political competition, media coverage about migration and migrants is particularly exposed to disinformation spread by political actors to support the agenda of their respective factions. This may lead to the increase of polarised narratives on migration that may impede the uptake of evidence-based information and reduce the space for effective policy-making.
- **Legal challenges to counteract disinformation/misinformation:** curbing disinformation/misinformation in the digital era requires governments to develop complex legal and policy frameworks that could balance the need to protect people’s freedom of speech with the need to safeguard the integrity of information spaces. In addition, although social media companies wield significant power to shape and select information, they are often difficult to be held directly accountable for spreading disinformation/misinformation, as most inaccurate or misleading content is shared by private users.
- **Limited knowledge and resources to verify information and counteract misinformation:** professional media are often ill-equipped to counter disinformation as they lack the specific migration-related knowledge to dispel myths and conduct effective fact-checking on disseminated content related to migration. In addition, governments have limited capacity to monitor information flows and track unreliable content, as this would require the use of advanced and resource-intensive digital technologies and protocols.

Opportunities:

- **Use and coordinate trusted messengers:** several actors (e.g. local governments, the private sector, cultural/religious circles, diaspora organisations, youth and social media influencers) may be involved in communication campaigns as trusted messengers to help media correct false information and promote positive narratives about migrants. Local governments and civil society may develop collaborative initiatives that campaigns feature migrant’s success stories and educational content to promote evidence-based narratives.
- **improve social media engagement:** governments may increase their presence on social media and adopt a proactive (rather than merely reactive) approach to media engagement with a view to foster balanced migration narratives.
- **Develop media literacy programs:** engaging media and communities at local level and educating the public, especially young people, on how to use media critically and discern

accurate information and fake news may be an effective tool to reduce misleading and inaccurate reporting on migration.

- **Strengthen policy coordination:** relevant forums, such as the GFMD, offer valuable opportunities for stakeholders to connect and discuss the role of media role in promoting accurate, fact-based information. Such type of coordination mechanism can further be expanded by developing initiatives to engage academic institutions and conduct media training programs on migration reporting, including curricula for journalism students.