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ROUNDTABLE ON ENSURING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION ON MIGRATION AND THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Summary Report

Strasbourg and online, 18 September 2026



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Roundtable was organised by the Council of Europe Division on Migration and Refugees (DMR) and the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) and brought together representatives from the European Court of Human Rights, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), journalists, civil society organisations (CSOs), academia, and policymakers to discuss how to strengthen fact-based and effective communication on migration and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

The discussion identified several main challenges facing the ECHR as well as obstacles to effective communication on migration in a highly polarised media environment. Experts highlighted problems such as the securitisation of migration, the dehumanisation of migrants, the lack of context, and emotionally charged narratives spreading hate speech and fuelling misinformation, as well as an overall distrust in the judiciary and the ECHR. Participants emphasised the need for proactive communication on various platforms, including those capable of reaching younger people and broader audiences.

The Roundtable highlighted the importance of national and international stakeholders proactively providing alternative perspectives on the Court's cases, migration-related topics, and other matters concerning the ECHR and the Court. Setting a communication agenda aimed at disseminating accurate, accessible and explanatory information can effectively prebunk [1] disinformation and misinformation narratives before they spread. This should include clearer, more accessible and more reader-friendly explanations of the Court's judgments and their execution by member states, that is, their impact at national level. It is essential to use less abstract language to emphasise the concrete value of the ECHR, the Court's judgments, and their impact on the rule of law and the human rights people enjoy on a daily basis.

Additionally, there is a strong need for the implementation of ethical journalism, greater engagement with audiences and groups outside the human rights' "bubble", collaboration with new media messengers, and human-centred storytelling. More systematic and continuous cooperation among and with NHRIs, CSOs, journalists, academia, and migrant-led organisations is crucial to making progress towards a more accurate and effective information environment.

[1] 'Prebunking' refers to the strategy that builds resilience to misinformation, disinformation, and manipulative narratives before an audience is exposed to them.

I. ROUNDTABLE CONCEPT, CONTEXT AND CONTRIBUTORS

1. Building on the first Roundtable on fact-based communication on migration which was organised by DMR in November 2025,[2] the DMR and ENNHRI convened this Roundtable, which focused on ensuring effective communication on migration and the ECHR. Institutions face the dual challenge of preventing disinformation and misinformation about migration, while also actively broadening their reach through various communication methods, including online platforms and social media. To do so, deliberative and strategic measures need to be taken not only to fact check and debunk misinformation, but also to provide the public with accessible and easy-to-understand accurate information.

2. This one-day, in-person and hybrid Roundtable[3] brought together representatives of the Registry of the Court and the Council of Europe, human rights lawyers, NHRIs, CSOs, journalists and policymakers (see Appendix), to identify strategies and tools for ensuring fact-based and effective communication on the ECtHR's case-law concerning migration. A total of 94 government officials from 36 Council of Europe member states registered for the event, with several participating in person. This level of interest provides a useful basis for considering how future roundtables could further support the active engagement of national authorities and the exchange of diverse perspectives.

3. Presentations were organised within three thematic sessions covering:

- Major challenges faced by the Court (and the wider ECHR system) in this context;
- Possibilities for furthering an impactful communication strategy and taking action to inform the public about the positive impact of the Court on national law and practice, and to counter misinformation;
- The vital roles played by NHRIs, CSOs, and mainstream and social media.

4. Presentations from various experts in the field outlined the challenges they face and proposed solutions, supported by data illustrating which communication practices are effective and which challenges persist. Across the presentations there was a strong sense of urgency about addressing the increasing misconceptions which drive polarisation and create harmful narratives.

II. KEY THEMES FROM EXPERT CONTRIBUTIONS

5. Defining the nature and scope of the problem

5.1. The framing of migration as a threat. The increasing securitisation of migration in Europe and beyond, whereby migrants are framed as a national security threat, dehumanised, and portrayed as criminals, was a prominent topic in the discussion. Migration, in particular irregular migration, is often discussed through negative, security-focused narratives centred on border controls, returns, migrant smuggling, and public safety. It has become normalised to treat any situation involving migration control as automatically constituting a situation of national security. In this context, criticism of restrictive migration policies can itself be portrayed as undermining national security or

[2] DMR Roundtable on Fact-based Communication on Migration, Strasbourg, 7 November 2025. See summary report at: https://rm.coe.int/roundtable-on-fact-based-comm-summary-report-rev-dmr-002-/488029a46c
[3] See concept note and agenda at: https://rm.coe.int/rt-echr-migr-4-sept-26-concept-and-agenda-public-2763-1541-8648-v-1/48802da554

serving the interest of neighbouring authoritarian states. Human rights and security are consequently presented as competing interests, placing those who advocate for human rights in a position where they must defend not only their arguments, but also their legitimacy in making them.

Moreover, migration is often framed in ways that associate it with societal problems, including economic challenges, job security and unemployment, even where these issues are not necessarily related to migration itself.

5.2. Limited public (and decision- and law makers) understanding of the Court and the Convention system. Building trust and confidence in the Court is important and, in some cases, challenging, partly because it is not a national court and is occasionally viewed as a "foreign court" with "foreign judges". Its limited number of public proceedings was also mentioned as a factor, alongside the difficulty of providing the public with a comprehensive understanding of what the Court actually does.

It was noted that there is a broader lack of public understanding of the Court and the Convention system. The public has limited knowledge of what the Court does, how its case-processing works, how decisions are made, and how judgments affect people's lives. The complexity of the European legal and policy landscape further contributes to this challenge, as the general public, including decision makers and law makers, do not necessarily understand the distinctions between the different courts in Europe.

In the context of migration, this is particularly relevant, as policies and decisions operate across several levels, including international and EU law and standards, Council of Europe standards and the jurisprudence of the Court, and national legislation, policy and jurisprudence. It was noted that this makes it difficult to communicate the Court's actual role and the implications of its judgments to the wider public, as a judgment may require different responses from States, including legislation, administrative changes, judicial procedures, or institutional safeguards.

5.3. Attention-grabbing headlines, loss of context and disproportionate reporting on migration. Several of the Roundtable's contributors raised concerns about the role of attention-grabbing headlines in shaping public perceptions of migration and the Court. Headlines cannot convey the nuances of a case and may skew how a story is understood by prioritising particular details. Importantly, participants observed that this does not necessarily involve the publication of false information. Rather, misleading impressions can be created through the hierarchy of information, for example where a particular detail is highlighted in the headline while relevant facts and context appear only later in the article. Participants also noted that, in some cases, headlines were clearly designed to convey a particular impression.

The so-called "Chicken Nuggets" case in the UK was discussed as an example. The case was widely reported as concerning the prevention of an individual's deportation because his child disliked foreign food, despite the decision not being based on this detail and having already been overturned by the time it received media attention. Other cases were

also mentioned where headlines concerned decisions that had already been overturned, a fact that would have been known at the time of reporting.[4]

Participants discussed the tendency of national media reporting to focus on controversial cases and adverse judgments against a country, particularly when cases have been brought by "unpopular litigants", including prisoners, and migrants who have committed criminal offences. The decisions themselves receive significantly more attention than the proceedings leading to them or the wider context of the cases.

It was also underlined that migration cases constitute only a tiny proportion of the overall cases dealt with by the Court[5] but receive considerably more publicity. Participants discussed whether repeatedly responding to such coverage risks giving these cases even more prominence in the public debate.

5.4. The political use of migration in anti-ECHR and anti-human rights narratives. Some migration cases are being linked to a broader political project concerning the reform or weakening of the Court and the ECHR system. It was noted that a shocking story in a newspaper relating to a case may subsequently be picked up by leaders of anti-rights or extremist parties and used to advance their political agenda.

Particularly in the UK, migration has become the focus of the anti-ECHR narratives among certain sections of the political establishment, media, and the general public. Calls for withdrawal from the Convention have been framed in terms of returning national sovereignty over decision-making, often in relation to migration. At the same time, human rights and equality law are portrayed as being on the wrong side of debates about justice, fairness, the safety of women and girls, democracy, security and border-control. One participant also noted that media outlets sometimes report on old cases that can no longer be considered "news". This was described as part of a coordinated and structured campaign in which there is a constant flow of anti-ECHR stories in major influential media.

A particular paradox was highlighted in the UK, where the salience[6] of migration has increased even as net migration has fallen substantially. This was in part linked to limited public understanding, including the fact that a significant proportion of the public still believes that migration is increasing and vastly overestimates the proportion of migration connected to asylum. Public attitudes were described as being shaped less by lived experience or statistical reality and data, and more by political narratives, racialised representative imagery, and performative interventions. These developments were presented as pushing the debate towards increasingly extreme positions, including through concepts such as so-called "re-migration". In this context, threats of deportation in the UK are increasingly extending beyond people without secure migration status to questioning the presence of settled migrants and even members of British-born ethnic minorities.

Examples were also cited indicating that certain political parties in France have been engaged in a constant race to adopt increasingly hardline positions. More than 20 laws

[4] An example included in the discussion was Wayne Truter v The Secretary of State for Justice. Headline associated with the case: https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/40307164/paedophile-payout-human-rights-claim/

[5] See DMR, *European Court of Human Rights and Migration: Frequently Asked Questions*, 2026; DMR, Thematic Paper, *The European Court of Human Rights' case law concerning the entry and expulsion of non-nationals*, 2026.

[6] 'Salience' refers to how prominent and prioritised an issue is (in this context, in the media and in public discussion) at any particular point in time.

related to migration have been adopted in 40 years, while the justice system and the existing legislation are increasingly being presented as part of the problem and as requiring change.

5.5. Positioning and resource imbalances. The discussion highlighted the challenge posed by anti-human rights messengers who position themselves as insurgents, disruptors and challengers of the establishment. This creates a broader reframing challenge for human rights actors, as it can be easier to argue for change than to defend an existing system. Participants noted the imbalance in resources; while anti-human rights actors are receiving more funding, human rights actors face a continued closing of civic space and significant funding challenges. The Council of Europe and the Court themselves have limited resources to address narratives that gain traction in the media, while factchecking and responding to misinformation requires considerable time and resources.

5.6. Challenges facing journalists. Extremism, discrimination, and intolerance are increasingly prevalent in the digital world. Powerful language embedded in news articles, headlines, and social media posts about migration which convey a sense of threat or emergency have the power to sway public opinion and spread false narratives. During the discussion journalists and organisations alike were called upon to pay greater attention to their choice of words when preparing articles and reports. The use of emotionally charged language or incorrect terminology when reporting on migration is a major contributor to the spread of hate speech and false narratives. Using the right terminology is key to maintaining accurate or neutral coverage of events (e.g. refugees, international migrants, asylum seekers) and the DMR's Migration Key Facts Sheet is a document to be referenced for this purpose.[7]

Journalists are often blamed for the current information environment. While maintaining ethical journalism is a challenge, deeper systemic issues perpetuate misinformation and lack of transparency. Since 2015, the increase in militarised borders across Europe has directly affected independent press access. The presence of armed forces and increased surveillance, combined with obstacles faced by journalists reporting from borders and refugee encampments, especially in countries that occasionally experience arrivals of large numbers of migrants or asylum seekers, has restricted much of the reporting needed to provide the public with a full picture of the violence and tragedy that occurs on a daily basis. While journalists have the duty to maintain ethical reporting, structural barriers and restrictive measures at national level contribute to an information environment in which independent reporting and truth-telling are becoming increasingly difficult.

III. GOOD PRACTICES AND POTENTIAL FUTURE ACTIONS

The following should not be understood as a comprehensive set of recommendations but rather as suggestions and existing practices mentioned by the Roundtable's contributors and conveners. They are presented in the context of potential future work and building on practices that are already in effect within the Council of Europe, NHRIs, CSOs, and journalist organisations.

6. **Proactively communicating the role of the Court before defending it.** The Court and the Council of Europe need to communicate the Court's role proactively, rather than primarily responding when the Court is challenged or questioned. While fact-checking

[7] DMR, *Migration Key Facts Sheet*, November 2025.

misinformation and disinformation is vital, panellists stressed that it cannot be the only mechanism for changing the existing media environment. If institutions exclusively engage with fact-checking posts and narratives that are negative and emotionally charged, without maintaining any other form of communication or public presence, they risk exacerbating an already contentious topic of conversation. This is not to say that factchecking should not be a common practice; rather, correcting misinformation puts institutions in a difficult position from which to communicate effectively and therefore cannot be the sole form of dialogue they maintain with the public.

Communicating the role of the Court before having to defend it means building public understanding of the Court and the principles underpinning its work. This includes explaining the rights protected by the Convention, how states can manage migration and security while respecting human rights obligations, explaining Court decisions, and what happens following a judgment. Providing this context makes misleading content harder to sustain and helps give the public the full picture of the Court and its role.

A more proactive approach also means engaging with the media before judgments are published. Giving journalists advance notice of upcoming judgments can help ensure that the context and implications of each case are better understood from the outset.

7. **Positive storytelling, shared values and human rights as an active tool.** Positive storytelling can make migration and human rights less abstract and more relatable. This means highlighting peoples' lived experiences in ways that resonate, ensuring that migrants are actively involved in telling their own stories rather than being portrayed as passive figures, while moving beyond security-driven narratives, and avoiding the "othering" or exceptionalisation of migrants. Human rights should also be presented as universal protections that benefit everyone, and as active tools to create the decent lives and fairer societies we want.

   An example of this approach comes from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission's (IHREC) support for a woman with a migration background whose Housing Assistance Payment was terminated after she was forced to leave her home with her children and seek refuge with a women's support service. IHREC worked directly with her and engaged with journalists to bring the case to public attention. The women's own opinion piece was particularly powerful, and the case received major media coverage. Instead of being defined by her migration background, she was portrayed as a person facing an injustice that others could understand and relate to.

   For the Court, communicating through positive storytelling and shared values means going beyond sharing the judgments alone. It means highlighting the positive impacts of the Court's work on people's lives and presenting the Convention as a practical tool for *all people without exception* to claim and exercise their rights.

   An example of this is the Council of Europe's dedicated website showcasing the positive impact of the Convention. Through case studies, it explains the background to individuals' situations and illustrates the concrete improvements that have resulted from the individual cases. It was noted that CSOs, NHRIs, national authorities, and other relevant stakeholders can play an important role in broadening the reach of this resource and bringing these stories to the general public.

8. **Dynamic social media presence is critical.** To promote digital outreach, the Court's communication policies must be further adapted to take advantage of the immediacy and visibility of social media, without compromising the nature of judicial discourse and its purpose. It is essential that institutions do not hold back from using social media as a communication tool. This is how younger audiences can be made aware of important judicial cases.

   Social media is advantageous due to its ability to track clicks and the number of people interacting with a post. It enables institutions to gain insights into which topics attract attention, which topics need better explanation, and how people engage with an issue on a particular media platform. Though analytics cannot completely reflect the extent to which peoples' views are influenced by the information they encounter, these numbers can help institutions understand which content generates the greatest engagement.

9. **Countering misinformation and disinformation by using case-based information and making Court case-law more accessible.** Misinformation and disinformation can be effectively countered through case-based communication, including summaries of judgments, video explanations and infographics. To further demystify legal information and complex terminology communication via social media can take the form of organised in-person events, YouTube or other social media livestreams, podcasts, slideshow posts, educational carousels[8] and interactive content. The goal is to ensure that institutions are making it as easy as possible for journalists, creators, and the broader public to find and understand critical information.

   The promotion of legal education through institutional communication is key. Through these accessible posts and publications, informing the public about basic checks and balances, democracy and the rule of law is critical.

   Moot courts with students, open house days, audio-visual productions, exhibitions, accessible publications and a whole-of-the-Court approach through values-based communication are also ways to engage successfully with the public.

10. **Communicating the journey of a Court judgment (including its execution by states).** The Court needs to communicate its rulings, but more importantly what comes after them. Following up on implementation is important. Too often communication ends with the judgment, and the context of the case and implementation processes disappear. When a judgment produces concrete improvements, those improvements need to be communicated systematically. The same applies when implementation stalls. Both are essential elements in demonstrating the value of the system and ensuring public understanding, rather than letting false narratives take hold. In addition, it is necessary to explain more clearly the different levels of European policymaking and the respective jurisdictions of the EU and the Council of Europe, as opposed to the powers of national authorities, as well as what the Convention requires and what the Court has actually decided.

11. **Engagement with different actors outside the human rights "bubble".** The importance of building new partnerships and coalitions in order to reach new spaces and audiences was highlighted by several participants. Many actors, such as health

[8] The creation of carousels of judgments concerning France and their implications for human rights by the Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme is a good example of this in practice.

professionals and trade unions, are interested in the societal problems that migration is often associated with, such as unemployment, economic challenges, and the cost of living. Addressing migration from a wider perspective, discussing it in relation to other issues and exploring why people feel anxious about or fear migration might be a way of approaching the issue differently, while also connecting with different actors that are already dealing with these issues.

Working with new media messengers, such as content creators, can also be considered as a way to reach spaces and audiences that are currently sceptical of institutions. In some cases, an institution or organisation may not be the most appropriate messenger to reach certain audiences, and another actor may be better placed to communicate with them and more likely to be trusted and to resonate with them.

12. **The crucial role of journalists.** Protecting and supporting on-the-ground reporting by addressing the systemic obstacles journalists face is crucial to improving media coverage. This means that powerful institutions need to address the restrictions on journalists' access to militarised borders, which continue to restrict media access and, consequently, public knowledge. Refugee encampments and borders are often sites where violence and human rights abuses occur, yet much of the public is unaware of what happens there because of these restrictions. To broaden public awareness and uphold freedom of the press, these deeper issues need to be tackled and exposed through cooperative efforts among institutions across Europe.

    Newsrooms need to reflect the diversity of society to prevent ethnocentric reporting, avoid the narrow framing of events and Court decisions, and ensure accurate representation of migrations and refugees from across the globe.

    In 2023, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) published a practical guide on ethical journalism practices on migrants and refugees. This was developed with the help of multiple partner organisations to challenge stereotypes and present alternative perspectives on migration through contextualised reporting across continents. With perspectives from European and African journalists, this collaborative approach combined best practices from various countries and provided tools for media professionals to use in their future work.

    Migration should be addressed with sensitivity whilst still producing factual coverage. Data, facts and evidence are key to ensuring accuracy, but stripping away emotion also carries the risk of stripping the story of its human dimension and making it less relatable to a wider audience. Journalists must balance evidence-based reporting with an appeal to the sentiments of human beings.

    Journalists must also aim to continually uphold the ethical values of journalism: truth and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity, and minimising harm to others.

    Greater investment in journalism is needed, particularly in ethical, independent reporting that expands coverage of migration and amplifies the voices of minorities. Organisations like EFJ and EJN (Ethical Journalism Network) are already actively promoting ethical journalism and continue to advocate for its importance in media reporting, especially considering increasing hostility towards migration. Workshops, training sessions,

conferences and discussions on how best to approach the topic of migration in the media are ways in which these organisations have begun to tackle the communication dilemma.

The EJN has developed 5 Ethical Guidelines for migration reporting:

1) Facts not bias (Basing stories on verified data).
2) Know the law (Accurate distinguishment between legal terms e.g. migrant vs. Refugee).
3) Show humanity (Centring human stories and granting victims a voice).
4) Speak for all (Ensure all people affected by a situation are spoken for).
5) Challenge hate (Calling out weaponisation and hate speech).

13. **Continued and systematic cooperation with and among national stakeholders.** NHRIs, CSOs and national authorities are key partners in disseminating the Court's case law at national level, and the continued cooperation between these actors and the ECHR is essential. In addition, NHRIs' bridging role can be used to connect diverse groups and build shared understanding. At the same time, the Court may consider how far they can go in this cooperation since these actors can be third-party intervenors. Participants also noted that NHRIs and CSO might be closer to the field on their national levels, but that they do not have the capacity to engage in the same type of communication that the Council of Europe can deliver.

14. **Strengthening Council of Europe's engagement with national authorities and broadening participation.** Building on the interest demonstrated by national authorities, future roundtables could seek to further encourage their active participation and ensure that a broad range of national experiences and perspectives can be heard. Consideration could be given to organising future discussions within the broader framework of the Council of Europe Network of Focal Points on Migration. This could provide an established platform for engagement with member states, support more sustained dialogue and help inform future activities.

Appendix

Contributors in order of presentation:

- Abel Campos, Deputy Registrar, European Court of Human Rights
- Clare Ovey, Director of Human Rights, DGI, Council of Europe
- Debbie Kohner, Secretary General, European Network of National Human Rights Institutions
- Rachael Kondak, Head of the Private Office of the Court's President
- Andrew Cutting, Council of Europe Media Department
- Edyta Tuta-Lorenz, Senior Human Rights Officer, European Network of National Human Rights Institutions
- Richard Adams, Communications Officer, European Network of National Human Rights Institutions
- Alice Donald, Professor of Human Rights Law, Middlesex University, UK
- Ophélie MARREL, Chair of the ENNHRI Working Group on Asylum and Migration; Legal Adviser, Commission nationale consultative des droits de l'homme, France
- Carol Hunt, Communications Specialist, Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
- Daniel Holder, Vice-President, International Federation for Human Rights
- Adriana Tidona, Europe Regional Office, Amnesty International
- Ioulietta Bisiouli, Director, European Implementation Network
- Oliver Money Kyrle, Freelance Journalist and Media Freedom consultant, Board member Ethical Journalism Network
- Ricardo Gutierrez, General Secretary, European Federation of Journalists
- Nikolaj Nielson, Journalist, EU Observer
- Ionna Lachana, Media Officer, European Court of Human Rights
- Ivyliet Ventura Kessel, Digital Communication and Data Analytics Officer, Council of Europe

