



MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

Which alternative narratives work and why

Checklist

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Dos and Don'ts

This list is intended to be used in conjunction with the Policy Brief [‘Migration and Integration: Which Alternative Narratives Work and Why’](#). It is intended for Intercultural City communicators who are trying to promote ‘alternative narratives’ on migration, integration and migration-related diversity in their city. Several points are, inevitably, relevant to strategic communications on many other issues. The advice on language, metaphor and imagery reflects that of leading progressive communicators at the time of writing (late 2020) but such advice is always evolving and being re-evaluated in line with new understandings of how people like to self-identify and in reaction to the tactics of hostile, anti-pluralist narrators.

DO	DON'T
<p>Do define your objective and from there identify your primary audience(s).</p>	<p>Don't use the phrase or idea of ‘changing the narrative’ as a substitute for having a clearer objective.</p>
<p>Do know what is most relevant to your audience(s) and authentic to their experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why has your chosen audience not internalised this narrative before? What are their top 5 daily concerns and how does your narrative relate to them? 	<p>Don't assume that your ‘base audience’ already cares about the issue or that other audience segments are ignorant just because they may not share your intercultural values.</p>
<p>Do know the core values of your audience(s) so that your narrative can trigger these values, at least as an entry-point.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How could your narrative be adapted to be more specific to your city's residents and their values or vision of themselves? Do you need to develop multiple narratives for multiple audience segments (with different values) in order to achieve your objective? 	<p>Don't let your communication be output-led (e.g. self-promotional), unless the change you want to see is greater uptake of your services or greater awareness of your policies. Even then, have you communicated the underlying values on which the service or policy is based?</p>
<p>Do involve people with lived experience, and from affected local communities, in the co-creation of alternative narratives. See them as co-creators, not just messengers of a narrative you or other communications professionals have crafted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have you thought about how to remove barriers to diverse participation in co-creation? Have you informed yourself about relevant historical injustices and their 	<p>Don't throw people together without planning and expect co-creation to happen, and don't confuse community consultation with co-creation.</p> <p>Don't ask refugees to perform or retell details of their traumatic experiences, such as their persecution or journey, unless it is directly related to their present concerns and to the narrative they wish to promote.</p>

<p>contemporary impact, so that you can hear where people are ‘coming from’?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is your city’s current intercultural forum a good place for co-creation or do you need a new forum that captures a wider cross-section of newcomers and locals? 	
<p>Do be careful to avoid reinforcing negative frames (threat-based narratives) that are unfortunately often associated with migrants and refugees.</p>	<p>Don’t go negative. Attacking those who are hostile to newcomers and pluralism with righteous outrage or hyperbole only adds to their popularity among alienated segments of the public whose narrative is often that they are under attack.</p>
<p>Do practice pivoting to your alternative narratives when issues of public health, crime or national security are being used to scapegoat newcomers.</p>	<p>Don’t be unclear about distinguishing between issues on which you will comment/react and those on which you will not. Avoid reactive communications unless you can do so from within the terms of your alternative narrative or unless you can pivot effectively in that direction.</p>
<p>Do consider using narratives based on the frames or meta-narratives of ‘shared humanity’, ‘shared prosperity’ and ‘shared health and security’. Test your chosen narratives in your own context and with your intended audience(s) to find out what is most resonant.</p>	<p>Don’t use national or international economic contribution narratives, unless you can translate them into more local and therefore relatable terms, with human stories attached, and also surround them with a ‘shared prosperity’ narrative.</p>
<p>Do emphasise elements of reciprocity and mutual benefit (for locals and newcomers) in your stories.</p>	<p>Don’t use images/photos or language that presents a negative (pitiful, distancing, infantilising, objectifying) version of the newcomer who has suffered or is at risk.</p>
<p>Do consider incorporating narratives relating to family and children wherever possible as these are often resonant with multiple value segments.</p>	<p>Don’t use images of poverty or squalor in refugee camps/centres or on borders/boats unless absolutely necessary, as they tend to provoke fear (of poverty, invasion and, more recently, of infection) in many audiences.</p> <p>Don’t use blurred or pixelated faces, which protect identity but are also associated with criminals. If identity must be protected, consider using animation instead of live action video, or images other than faces.</p>

<p>Do refer to recent migrants and refugees as ‘newcomers’, ‘new neighbours’ or simply as ‘people’ wherever possible.</p>	<p>Don’t use dehumanising or massifying metaphors – e.g. ‘floods of immigrants’, ‘mass arrivals’, ‘waves’, ‘hordes’.... Also avoid gaming metaphors, which can be dehumanising and reinforce negative frames, even if used with irony.</p> <p>Don’t talk about ‘illegal migrants’ but, instead, ‘undocumented people’. Don’t talk about ‘unskilled migrants’ but instead refer to their roles as carers, farm workers or hospital cleaners.</p>
<p>Do focus on a vision that triggers positive emotions. Tell human stories of hope, but without avoiding or over-idealising hard realities.</p>	<p>Don’t trigger shame or guilt in your audience, as these are the least motivating of strong emotions. Avoid narratives that talk about migration as the consequence of colonialism, as they are currently dissonant, however true.</p>
<p>Do be conscious of your pronouns so that you use an ‘inclusive we/us’ whenever possible.</p>	<p>Don’t use narratives predicated on the existence of an ‘us and them’ where the ‘them’ are newcomers.</p>
<p>Do, if planning a smaller scale community interaction, also plan and invest in how to record and showcase it for the media and/or for wider replication throughout the city and beyond.</p>	<p>Don’t set up a false choice between working through the media (including social media) and working at grassroots level to promote alternative narratives. Wherever possible, do both.</p>
<p>Do visualise (both literally and when using words) and tell a human story.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are your colleagues at all levels aware of the stories you need to generate and collect to promote your narrative? 	<p>Don’t tell individual stories of newcomers that are extremes of victimhood or virtue/success. Both can be a kind of ‘benevolent othering’.</p>
<p>Do give your message an authentic voice to which your target audience can relate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does your narrator/messenger speak the language (culturally and educationally, as well as linguistically) of your intended audience? If communicating with middle audience segments, can you show the ‘conversion’ narrative of someone who is much like them? Can you use a mixed assortment of narrators/messengers, with different 	<p>Don’t refer to the law and/or human rights standards as if they are evidence enough on their own that a policy is right or wrong. For those in ‘middle audience segments’, if you must mention them, then you have to go further, to the root of why those standards exist in the first place, their usefulness at producing solutions or the source of their moral authority.</p>

<p>roles, characteristics, and backgrounds, within a single communication?</p>	
<p>Do ensure accessibility in every sense, so that your narrative reaches as many people as possible within your target audience segment.</p>	<p>Don't use jargon or bureaucratic language. Even words we may consider quite normal like 'integration' and 'diversity' have been somewhat tarnished by hostile narrators and lack emotional resonance for many people. Instead, better to use phrases like 'living together in peace' or 'settling in happily' etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have you surrounded your narrative with boring bureaucratic introductions or conclusions? ▪ Would it be better to make your city's branding less prominent or are you a trusted enough source of narrative for its visibility to be a positive?
<p>Do avoid escalating the salience of the migration debate if you can, while not ignoring the needs and problems of newcomers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Can you ensure that the voices and concerns of newcomers are heard on wider issues facing the city? ▪ Can you support art or popular culture to implicitly cultivate your alternative narrative, or to prompt people to build their own alternative narratives in imaginative ways? ▪ Can you support educational establishments to implicitly cultivate your alternative narrative through interactive modes of learning? 	<p>Don't use emergency framing unless completely unavoidable. Don't use the language of crisis without qualification – If there really is a crisis, try to be specific: Is it a crisis of international protection? A crisis of local reception/processing capacity? A crisis of political/collective European will to share responsibility? – Whatever it is, don't simply call it a 'refugee crisis' or a 'migrant crisis' as if the individuals arriving are the sole cause or the morally responsible source of threat.</p> <p>Don't use images of high security or militarised borders, or even mention 'crossing borders' unless absolutely necessary, as this can trigger invasion threat narratives. Better to simply talk about 'the people coming here'.</p>

For further toolkits and recommendations from beyond the Council of Europe, see also:

- [Words That Work \(Messaging guide re asylum\)](#)
- [Reframing Migration Toolkit](#)
- [#StandUp4Migrants Toolkit](#)
- [Stronger Together Toolkit](#)
- [Welcome ALL Toolkit](#)
- [10 Keys for Effectively Communicating Human Rights](#)
- [PIRC Equality Toolkit](#)