MIGRATION AND INTEGRATION

Which alternative narratives work and why

Policy Brief

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Contents

Written by Ophelia Field

1 Introduction

This Policy Brief is based on research about the alternative narratives being developed by cities, big and small, in relation to migration and integration,[1] including interviews with staff from a selection of Intercultural Cities in late 2020.[2] The research builds upon research commissioned in 2019 by the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM). That research mapped the narrative tactics being used by around 75 progressive and human-rights-based non-governmental or inter-governmental organisations in the migration and integration fields, in Europe and North America.[3]

What do we mean here by narrative? The Ford Foundation's Narrative Initiative provides a useful definition of narrative as *'a collection or system of related stories that are articulated and refined over time to represent a central idea or belief'*. A narrative is larger – more overarching, underlying or archetypal – than any particular story relating to a specific individual, event or situation. It is a values-based way of explaining and understanding events, yet it is more complex than a 'frame' in that it often suggests the cause of a problem, and the nature of a possible solution.[4] In the context of professional strategic communications, narrative is about discourse as a social force, though it should never be imagined that narrative gains alone – unless matched with other types of power and action – can change issues like systemic racism.

When we talk about **'narrative development'**, we refer to the deliberate work of an organisation that has communications capacity – in this context, an Intercultural City – to decide upon and refine its own narratives around a given issue, usually in order to create coherence or meet a particular objective. The focus of such work is on communication with the general public, or with segments of that public, rather than on communications with national decision makers, with courts, or with technical experts, though these kinds of communications also contain and create narratives. Narrative development is not a one-off exercise, but an ongoing process of testing the impact of different narratives on intended audiences and adapting them over time, adjusting them to meet real world events. Some key principles of narrative development work in relation to migration and integration are discussed in Section 2.

What then do we mean by an 'alternative narrative'? This has been described in the December 2019 ICC Policy Brief by Daniel de Torres, '10 criteria for the creation of effective alternative narratives on diversity'. They are positive, pluralist or progressive narratives that are based on intercultural principles and respect for human rights. They are defined in contrast to the (often) dominant narratives of media and politics that tend to scapegoat or vilify migrants and refugees, depicting them as a threat or burden. In de Torres' Policy Brief, a distinction is also drawn between **a 'counter-narrative' and an 'alternative narrative'**. The former is a narrative that *reacts* directly to stories that scapegoat, vilify, mislead or misinform, whereas an 'alternative narrative' will start *more positively, pro-actively and independently* from its own values and its own framework. Despite the well-known

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[1] This Policy Brief will look at narrative as detached from all the other elements that may make a particular communication effective or ineffective: e.g. channel or media, style, language, or other issues of capacity. Narratives are, of course, shaped by these factors. 'The medium is the message' is increasingly true today, in so far as social media business models and their algorithms are having a polarising effect and are altering our social and political behaviour to make it more tribal, in ways often hooked on fears about newcomers and destructive of interculturalism.

[2] Sixteen cities participating in the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme responded to a survey circulated in November 2020, several sent additional follow up information, and representatives from four cities (Geneva, Haifa, Limassol and Turin) were interviewed in depth about their narrative work.

[3] The EPIM research was internal. Cities may contact the EPIM Secretariat directly if they are interested in more information.

[4] Another way to see it is that there are different levels of narrative, ranging from micro-narratives (or 'stories') about individuals or local activities, to mid-level narratives (or 'issue narratives') about policy solutions, to meta-narratives (or 'deep narratives') that are closer to 'frames'. This Paper focuses on the latter, which are often embedded within micro- or mid-level narratives.

recommendation to avoid replicating harmful frames,[5] counter-narratives are sometimes necessary tools, and there are sometimes grey areas where alternative narratives need to acknowledge the anxieties of their audience. These anxieties often derive from long-held negative frames of scarcity and security (e.g. zero-sum assumptions about how the economy reacts to newcomers, or assumptions about cultural or religious incompatibility). An example of such a 'grey area' is discussed in Section 4.2. It should also be emphasised that promotion of alternative narratives alone cannot tackle the proliferation of online hate and misinformation, which requires additional solutions.

To **avoid accidentally triggering or reinforcing negative frames**, one should be conscious of what they are. Most commonly, negative migration narratives are about newcomers as threats to security, law and order, culture (including the rights of women and LBGTQI+), national identity, the economy or public health.[6] National authorities' narratives often reinforce these threat narratives by matching them with defensive narratives of securitization and control.[7] There are also widespread xenophobic narratives that allege unfairness (preferential treatment of newcomers) and fraudulence. So, for example: If the dominant narrative is of newcomers taking advantage of the system, then an alternative narrative should not necessarily be constructed around the fact that, in the vast majority of cases, applicants or beneficiaries deserve the protection or help that they receive, as that narrative may merely trigger the negative frame in a sceptical person's mind.

No hard line can be drawn between narratives concerning migrant integration and wider narratives about diversity and equality. In many cases, narratives that normalise human mobility and/or racial, religious or ethnic diversity are the most powerful way to influence long-term attitudes to immigration, even if that means that the foreign backgrounds or migration journeys of those featured are never directly mentioned. It is also true, in general, that it is much easier and more 'comfortable' for cities to construct alternative narratives using stories about integration of those with long-term residency status, as opposed to other migration topics on which there might be less public or policy consensus.

Among the variety of city competencies, some of the trickiest narratives relate to irregular migrants. Often public authorities work within an unstated narrative that is not necessarily communicated openly: We are neutral about whether or not these people should be here, but since they are, we have to look after their health, their children and their basic well-being, or everyone here is going to suffer. For Intercultural Cities communicating with segments of the public who may not share the commitment to intercultural principles, the latter part of this narrative about the value of 'shared goods' can, at least, be useful. This is discussed in Section 3.

Cities can play a crucial role in promoting alternative narratives, not only among their own residents, but also as role models and leaders of inclusivity at national and international level. They can use their authority to convene and coordinate the private and voluntary sectors, or other networks of stakeholders, in ways that elevate and align certain narratives above others. They can fund innovative

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[5] The core lesson of George Lakoff cannot be repeated often enough: that you should not argue with or within your opponents' frames, or you will merely reinforce those negative frames in the audience's mind.

[6] See Butcher, Paul and Alberto-Horst Neidhardt, 'Fear and Lying in the EU: Fighting disinformation on migration with alternative narratives', *European Policy Centre Issue Paper*, 26 November 2020. Their paper analyses 1,425 news articles about migration that generated the highest level of engagement (as measured by BuzzSumo) in Germany, Spain, Italy and the Czech Republic during the period May 2019 – June 2020 and found that all hostile narratives could be grouped as threats to health (including physical and sexual safety, and therefore including both crime and terrorism), wealth or identity.

[7] Many securitization narratives are founded on highly dubious narratives of deterrence and administrative efficiency: for example, the assumption that a large immigration detention regime helps to deter and therefore reduce future arrival numbers, or that detention facilitates returns to countries of origin more efficiently than in-community alternatives to detention.

neighbourhood projects that build a narrative 'from the bottom up' and reassure older residents that an event is mainstream enough for them to risk participation.

Many cities prioritise changing the narrative through local 'community partnership' actions rather than through mass communications, which are more open to the accusation of being public relations exercises or propaganda. However, the same cities often fail to maximise the benefit of having put 'people in narrative motion'[8] by under-investing in showcasing these small but successful projects. The behind-the-scenes consultative work of city administrations may also benefit from being showcased in more creative and informal ways, to help a wider audience see examples of constructive interaction across cultural, religious or ethnic divides. Lastly, cities can help to loudly celebrate the value of local civil society organisations and their staff whenever they are being vilified or attacked alongside the migrants or refugees they assist, as is increasingly the case in several countries.

This policy study offers **evolving and context-specific evidence** of which narratives and forms of story are most effective. It is based largely on what NGOs and Intercultural Cities have reported anecdotally, based on their own practice. In a few cases, the advice is confirmed by large-scale testing exercises, both qualitative and quantitative. In very few cases, however, have resources been devoted to full evaluation of narrative impact, isolated from other variables.[9] Overall, there is a scarcity of scholarship about which narratives work best to meet the objective of reducing xenophobia,[10] but all scholars and practitioners agree that there is no 'quick fix'. Shifting the narrative is always a complex societal challenge that must be met at multiple levels.

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[8] This phrase comes from a piece by Rashad Robinson, 'Changing our Narrative about Narrative: The Infrastructure for Building Narrative Power' (April 2018)

[9] The barriers to evaluation of narrative work's impact are self-evident. Several project leaders interviewed noted that the common lack of rigorous and longitudinal city-level data collection relating to public attitudes to immigration (or racist crime or hate speech etc) means that – when the objective is to shift public attitudes or behaviour – it is almost impossible to measure impact in reliably quantifiable terms. In the 2019-20 EPIM research, however, a few pragmatic suggestions for evaluation were found, including: interviewing 'new joiner' volunteers about their reasons for volunteering in this sector; the use of digital tools to measure the average lift in a defined audience's agreement with a statement on immigration after watching a particular video; or qualitative evaluation of large-scale cultural/arts programmes such as that conducted by British Future in their Crossing Divides report. See also ICPA's Reframing Migration Narratives Toolkit and its page of advice on measuring reach, response and uptake.

[10] See, for example: Paluck, E.L. and D.P. Green (2009) 'Prejudice reduction: what works? A review and assessment of research and practice', *Annual Review of Psychology* 60: 339–367, or more recently, Kalla, J. and D. Broockman (2020) 'Reducing exclusionary attitudes through interpersonal conversation: evidence from three field experiments' American Political Science Review 114 (2): 410–425.

2 Setting a clear objective

2.1 The relationship between objectives and narratives

It is not enough to say that shifting the narrative is your objective. Identifying a more specific objective for your communications should be a large part of the work, because without knowing exactly what you are trying to achieve, it is almost impossible to evaluate whether your choice of narrative has made things better or worse. What do you want to see change? Who has the power or capacity to make that change? Or is your local objective to preserve a positive *status quo*, protecting it against anti-migrant or anti-refugee rhetoric? For cities, as opposed to advocacy organisations, a legitimate, non-partisan objective may be to inoculate a certain audience against increased prejudice and disinformation, or to find a narrative that opens up space for dialogue. Intercultural Cities interviewed for this Policy Brief listed objectives that included, among others: 'to acknowledge … reality [of diversity] and to make it more visible'; 'making migrants and refugees feel welcome'; 'to open people's minds, even a crack'; 'influencing public attitudes in the longer term'; and 'encouraging local community cohesion and participation'.[11]

2.2 Knowing your audience

A well-defined objective should include clear identification of your target audience(s). At present, the most strategic communicators on such issues focus on segmentation of public audiences by the core moral values that they hold.[12] A starting question is therefore whether you have recent public attitudes research in hand that maps the different 'recipes' of core values held by those living in your city, and especially those with whom you are trying to communicate. Most public attitudes research on immigration is conducted at national level, but these studies conceal massive variations within countries, and particularly between urban and rural areas.[13] If you do not already have such information, investing in it would be a worthwhile first step in the process.

National research tends to find several of the largest audience segments falling into the moveable (or 'persuadable', 'conflicted', 'ambivalent' or 'anxious') middle – groups of people who tend to be focused more on the values of contribution, conservation and conformity than others[14] and who constantly balance positive and negative ideas about migration.[15] It is important to be clear in your

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[11] NOTE: This Paper does not deal with cities' communications directed to refugees and migrants in order to inform them of their rights, or how to access support, or the linguistic/cultural translation of other official messaging such as general public health messaging.

[12] More in Common produces perhaps the best-known values-based research on these kinds of issues, with published reports on a number of countries. While each report is specific to its context, the organisation confirms that there are a number of parallels between all countries studied which should allow communicators in other countries to work by educated analogy for an interim period. The World Values Surveys – e.g. European Values Survey – are also relevant to those crafting value-based narratives. The same point about values is underlined by de Torres in 'Claiming the power of dialogue' (ICC, 2021) under the section on how to 'Generate a connection'.

[13] Dempster, Helen, Amy Leach and Karen Hargrave, 'Public Attitudes Towards Immigration and Immigrants: What people think, why, and how to influence them', *ODI Working Paper 588* (September 2020), p.12.

[14] Dennison, J., *What policy communication works for migration? Using values to depolarise*, ICMPD and OPAM-EUI, 2020.

[15] This concept of 'balancers' is emphasised by the organisation British Future, in order to get away from derogatory ways of talking about these middle segments as 'anxious'. One important alternative narrative that needs to be communicated to politicians and other decision makers is that majority European attitudes on immigration have not, contrary to common belief, become more negative/hostile over recent years. In fact, overall attitudes are stable or have become slightly more positive over the past decade. Certain segments of negative opinion, however, have been mobilised in new ways in the past five years, and there are a few countries (mostly in central and eastern Europe) where the overall trend has been more negative. See: Huddleston, T. and Hind Sharif, 'Who is Reshaping Public Opinion on the EU's Migration Policies?', ReSOMA Discussion Policy Brief, July 2019, p.6.

objective about whether you are trying to address any of these various middle audiences, and to therefore trigger their values, and/or whether you are aiming primarily to mobilise the base of people who are more supportive of human rights, inclusion and diversity, or to marginalise those who strongly oppose such beliefs. In the absence of in-depth polling research, you can at least consider certain questions about your intended audience: What do they hear underneath the words 'refugees' or 'migrants'? What is the first image that comes to their minds?

Many progressive campaigning organisations start their advocacy with the more sympathetic and supportive segments, believing that mobilisation of their base will then transfer the alternative narrative incrementally out into adjacent, less engaged segments of the population.[16] For city administrations, the idea of a 'base' may sound too partisan, but if we think of that base as those who, if asked, would support respect for the fundamental human rights of all residents and the principles of interculturalism, and who therefore probably hold 'universalist'[17] core values, then cosmopolitan cities obviously have a special role as places where this more liberal base tends to reside.

2.3   'Contact Theory' in cosmopolitan cities

It has been shown that attitudes tend to be more negative among those who lack direct contact with newcomers – so-called 'Contact Theory'.[18] So, for example, in a recent survey of people aged 15-35 in eight central and eastern European countries, those young people who lived 'in cities and regions with a higher percentage of ethnic minorities and immigrants among the population and who have a bigger chance of coming into contact with an immigrant are more tolerant towards immigration'.[19] At the same time, researchers have noted that people's narratives only tend to change if the contact they encounter is positive and supported by the system, and if it involves seeing the newcomers as equals and/or as partners in pursuit of common goals.[20] This is where smaller community building projects and face-to-face interactions link directly to larger narrative change.[21]

> **'Contact Theory' in action: Paris and other French cities**
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> The civil society organisation, SINGA, was founded nine years ago and is now working in more than twenty cities. It was originally inspired by the UNHCR statistic that only 10% of refugees in France at that time knew a French person. Their goal is to get at least 2.3 million people involved in

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[16] See the strategies regarding the right to same-sex marriage used in the USA or Ireland, for example. Or the 'Get Up!' campaign in Australia which initially focused on 'people who were compassionate and concerned about fairness and who had a less individualistic view of society and the economy. They were educated, skewed female and often baby boomers' but later was able to spread outwards with the momentum from this sympathetic segment to a wider national network that reached less liberal, more rural corners of the country. Henry Timms & Jeremy Heimans, *New Power* (2018). For many CSOs, communicating to their base and its adjacent segments is also about the imperative to communicate from a place of authenticity – see Section 2.2.

[17] See, for example, the values map on page 30 of this Equinet & PIRC communication handbook for Equality Bodies. This helpful visualisation is based upon Moral Foundations Theory and its extensive body of research.

[18] For how face-to-face contact reduces intergroup hostility, see: Allport, G., *The Nature of Prejudice* (Cambridge, Mass: 1954), and, Hewstone, M. and H. Swart (2011) 'Fifty-odd years of inter-group contact: From hypothesis to integrated theory', *British Journal of Social Psychology* 50:3.

[19] See the report, 'I Am European: Migration Stories & Facts for the 21st Century' on attitudes of young people (15-35) in 8 central and eastern European countries based on research launched in November 2019. These young people are also more likely to have travelled abroad and/or been migrants themselves to higher-income countries.

[20] Paluck, E.L. and D.P. Green, 'Prejudice reduction: what works? A review and assessment of research and practice', *Annual Review of Psychology* 60 (2009).

[21] Anti-rumours Handbook, Council of Euorpe, 2018; See also: de Torres, D., 'Claiming the Power of Dialogue', ICC, 2021.

cooperative interactions (the minimum, they calculate, needed to really change society). To achieve this scale, they increasingly work by training trainers, and their primary target audience for several of their projects are urban residents who are members of Generations Y and Z.

The Executive Director of SINGA notes that one of cities' assets is often the availability of a lot of physical space – venues – that they can donate to the narrative; this is especially true now that so many central city offices and buildings are being under-occupied due to COVID. See, as a model, Les Grands Voisins (Big Neighbours) project occupying a 3.4 hectare site of a former hospital in Paris. SINGA, the Paris Mayor's Office and Emmaüs co-created La Maison des Réfugiés where new Parisians could meet longer-standing Parisians, a project which the City now promotes very proudly. SINGA has had successful experiences with incentive schemes where, if a newcomer and resident pair go together to a football match or a museum (such as the Musée d'Orsay), they both do so for free. And they are contributing to the way that tourism is now being redefined, in light of COVID and climate change, by the desire to find new experiences and different cultures on our own doorsteps. In Villeurbanne, replication of the CLIC (créateur de liens interculturels) curriculum is boosting a local community of peace makers, for example, with Inspire Nights and Jardin du monde Nights.

Another organisation in Paris named Caracol asked the Mayor if they could take over an unused building next to the Louvre, to be converted and occupied by 25 housemates, half refugees and half French citizens. The housemates pay minimal rent (250 Euro per month) to the City and it saves taxpayers the costs of security in what would have been an empty site. Similar successful projects have been launched by Caracol in Toulouse and elsewhere.

Pulling in the reverse direction to Contact Theory, however, is 'Cultivation Theory',[22] emphasising the overwhelming influence of media on people's perceptions and narratives. The current debate, therefore, about whether alternative migration narratives are best promoted by local interactions or by mass media messaging mirrors an unresolved debate between these two communications theories, with the proportion of our social media interaction to face-to-face interaction changing ever more rapidly.

Researchers in public attitudes explain the contradictory views of some 'middle' segments – for example, about the economic impact of immigration at national versus local level – as being due to the tendency of most people to frame immigration as a 'state of the nation' issue.[23] When there are perceived fears about the future of one's nation or culture, generated or repeated in national media or politics, these can override first-hand evidence of successful local integration or even positive relationships with individual newcomers. Perhaps this increases the responsibility of city leaders to promote narratives based on local facts and human stories more vocally and creatively. It certainly suggests that you need both media work and personal contact strategies, in parallel, to successfully shift the dominant narratives.

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[22] Gerbner, George, *Against the Mainstream: Selected Works of George Gerbner*, ed. M. Morgan (NY, 2002). Although Gerbner's theories were developed in an era when the most immersive media was television, his conclusions are even more applicable today when social media platforms are able to arouse our brains' nervous systems and drive our attention towards the sensationalism of negative stories to an exponential degree.

[23] See Hainmueller and Hopkins' overview of all opinion polls in Europe and North America up to 2014 (confirming that 'sociotropic concerns' about the state of the nation, rather than personal economic experience, determine people's opinions).

3 Good practice for developing effective narratives

3.1 Relevance and local context

Because each city has its own politics, culture, history, demographics (including degree of mobility and diversity), infrastructure, socio-economic context and media context, each city will also have a different mix of majoritarian concerns relating to migration and integration. In countries where the majority culture perceives itself as threatened by the culture of a neighbouring country, for example, there is also likely to be less openness to cultural diversification in any other direction. And what works in one context does not always work in another: A Czech NGO, for example, reported successful dialogue with Czech citizens hostile to newcomers by showing them newspaper stories from London about discrimination against Czechs living there and pointing out the irony, while a city representative in another European region reported that locals there do not like to be reminded of their own diaspora overseas and, if this is done, will only draw imagined contrasts between their 'good' behaviour as immigrants elsewhere and the perceived behaviour of newcomers in their city.

Many cities share common narratives about their own futures, wanting to see themselves as 'international' cities for investment and tourism in a way that can simultaneously be leveraged towards greater interculturalism and tolerance.[24] Adding a place-based angle to your narrative, as a city, can also be a powerful way to make your narrative more resonant with your audience, depending on how deeply they identify, as urban citizens, with their city or neighbourhood.

> **Place-based narrative adaptation: US and UK cities**
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> Since 2009, following an initial success with shifting public attitudes in Nashville, Tennessee, Welcoming America has been developing bespoke narratives for a variety of US cities. In Northern California, for example, people wanted to hear messages about how well integrated their longstanding immigrant communities already were, whereas in Buffalo, New York, focus groups responded more positively to messages about how to attract and retain dynamic newcomers. In Nebraska, billboards referenced a shared love of football; in Colorado, they appealed to local pride in rugged individualism; in Utah, they referenced the historical idea of a pioneer culture. Most of these appeals emphasised that newcomers have, or would in future, come to share the same values as existing residents and so are joining the 'in group', rather than asking people to accept a diversification of values.[25] However, at the same time, Welcoming America organises activities and initiatives that pro-actively connect newcomers with longstanding communities in order to bring a realistic, grassroots level to their communications strategy.
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> Inspired by this US work, the 'Inclusive Cities Programme' (March 2017 – May 2023) run by the Global Exchange on Migration and Diversity (GEM) – the knowledge exchange arm of the University of Oxford's Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS), and a founding member of Welcoming International – facilitates and advises interested cities on how to develop alternative narratives relating to migration and integration. In the United Kingdom, two cities with which they have worked for several years are Glasgow and Liverpool. In both cases, narrative development involved Inclusive Cities facilitating workshops, at which, for example, city staff were asked to write how they would describe their city to a newcomer. It also incorporated an external community consultation process.

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[24] Though some see this city rebranding process in reverse, as taking the facts of migration-produced diversity and trying to depoliticise them into an asset narrative that strengthens the city's economy and global positioning. See: W. Belabas, J. Eshuis & P.W.A. Scholten (2020), 'Re-imagining the city: branding migration-related diversity', *European Planning Studies, 28* (7), 1315-1332

[25] See ICC Policy Brief, 'Political Communication and intercultural messaging in times of crisis' (2016) for more similar examples from Welcoming America.

Glasgow took the slogan 'People Make Glasgow', originally developed as a tourism and investment slogan by their Economic Regeneration and Tourism Team, and decided to expand its scope, linking it to work on diversity and inclusion within the city – for example, their centres for orienting newcomers or their office for recognising overseas newcomers' qualifications. City staff also went on a US-UK Inclusive Cities exchange in 2018, and have since signed a partnership agreement, based on their similar contexts, between Glasgow and Pittsburgh (USA), which will focus on issues of racial justice, universal basic income, citizen engagement, mobility, workforce development and climate change.

In Liverpool, the narrative development work originated from specific funding provided by the UK's Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. It was focused, from the outset, on asylum seeker reception and refugee integration. But Liverpool was interested in broadening out its scope and turning it into a more general branding for the city (so the inverse of Glasgow). Liverpool first consulted with Inclusive Cities in Autumn 2016, and from there developed the 'Our Liverpool' narrative, based around its history as a global port. Most recently, in response to COVID 19, Liverpool has developed a community arts project, Liverpool Without Walls, which provides grants for projects involving live music, theatre, dance, light installations, music, photography and animation to organisations and artists who will bring art and performance into Liverpool city centre's streets. Within this programme are many projects – such as billboards by artist Sumuyya Khader – which celebrate Liverpool's immigrant diversity.

Place-based narratives should be just one aspect of understanding the values and interests of your target audience. You may need to reach multiple audience segments in order to achieve an objective, and each of these may require a different narrative angle, relevant to their primary concerns and core values. Thus, within the single city of Atlanta Georgia, Welcoming America designed three different messages to appeal to three different segments: (1) We need to compete against other cities around the world in order to thrive, (2) We are the city of Martin Luther King and should stay true to that heritage, (3) We are a city of 'southern hospitality'. This last was the one meant to appeal most to middle segments. Appealing to these more conservative or control-focused audience segments does not mean giving up on appeals to altruism and appealing only to values of self-interest or security, however. Instead, it means widening people's empathy by drawing parallels between their immediate experience (e.g. as parents or workers) and the experiences of newcomers (e.g. as parents or workers). Few people in middle segments tend to have every anxiety about immigration in equal measure, so the person concerned about national security or Islam's treatment of women might also be concerned about a rise in racism and antisemitism or might be very aware that migrants are needed for the economy. If so, you can communicate with them on the basis of the latter and hope to tip the scales. Appealing to such segments also means gradually expanding the audience's understanding of what is in the true long-term interest of their society.

Some people worry about the ethics of public officials using social media to target different messages to particular audience segments. That is an important debate. But, for the moment, big data segmentation is the communications context in which we must operate, and we have to recognise that those who spread xenophobic threat narratives rely on such tools heavily and to great effect. It is not so different, ethically, from choosing a particular journalist or news agency to brief and adapting your style of interview in light of what you know about their viewers or readers, though the effect, thanks to algorithms, will be vastly more powerful. The key ethical point is to know that your multiple, adapted narratives all remain true to the facts and true to an objective that is democratically legitimate and transparent.

As well as segmenting your audience by values, you may wish to do so in terms of demographic features as well, though this is mainly useful if your objective is extremely specific. For example, one organisation working on maternity rights wanted to communicate about women who were not attending pre-natal checks because of their irregular immigration status, and so targeted new mothers

and pregnant women citizens, asking, 'Can you imagine what it would feel like if you were too scared to go for a check-up?' Even if your objective is not as specific as this, it is wise to ask a sample of your audience about their top five daily concerns at the moment. Then ask yourself: How do these intersect with the newcomer issue on which I am trying to communicate? If there is little intersection, then your narrative will probably fail to engage.

Targeting particular audience segments with stories designed to appeal most strongly to their predominant values is not in conflict with the intercultural goal of making your communication more sensitive to inclusion. The former is about developing alternative narratives that truly resonate and stick (especially beyond the 'base' of those who are already persuaded of interculturalism and pluralism), whereas the latter is about non-discrimination, sensitivity to your audience's reality, and deepening your reach within your target segment(s). Certainly, within each 'value segment' or 'migration attitude segment' of city population, there is likely to be demographic variety (of ethnicities, disabilities, ages, etc) which you would be wise to take into account. Never assume that middle segments, particularly within cosmopolitan cities, do not themselves contain ethnic and other minorities.

3.2   Authenticity and incorporation of lived experience

At the same time as being audience-centred, effective narratives need to be grounded respectfully in the experience of those who have really lived through an issue, otherwise they are likely to be superficial, short-term and, at worst, erroneous and damaging. It should not be like a commercial advertiser asking themselves how well they 'know the product' they are selling, but rather a situation where refugees and migrants become more directly involved in the co-production (or 'co-creation') of the alternative narratives about themselves.[26]

> **Narrative co-production in action: Berlin, Stuttgart and Leipzig (Germany)**
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> The Together Human Campaign in Berlin, Stuttgart and Leipzig, recently developed within the Narrative Change Lab of International Centre for Policy Advocacy (ICPA), provides a model of an affected community developing its own narrative, rather than being merely passive subjects or messengers. It was a two-week campaign (26 November – 7 December 2019) involving thousands of posters and billboards and social media posts in the three German cities. Working closely with the young Muslim activist organisation JUMA, narrative options (including the Campaign's visuals) were rigorously tested with the particular middle audience segment (German 'Economic Pragmatists') who were being targeted by the Campaign. The images finally selected for use showed young Muslims involved in everyday actions or undertaking acts of community service (so within a 'contribution frame'). Interestingly, testing with Economic Pragmatists also demonstrated that the audience were less suspicious of the Campaign when they were told that it was co-produced by Muslims themselves.

For such co-production, community empowerment is sometimes a prerequisite stage,[27] but it is also important to acknowledge the increasing diversity within newcomer populations, to think about

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[26] See ICC documents for further details on recommended participatory approaches, such as the 2017 ICC Policy Briefs on Refugee policies for the intercultural city or that on Migrant representation & participation bodies in the intercultural city: key considerations & principles
See also this UK-sourced guidance on helping people with lived experience to frame their narratives as they wish and to interact healthily with the media.

[27] See ICC paper on 'Community Empowerment and Mediation from an Intercultural Perspective', Workshop Report, Barcelona, 28-29 September 2015.

inclusivity within each ethnic community, and to draw out the individual voices of those refugees and migrants who may be less vocal or less interested in associating with their country of origin or religious communities. It is also important not to confuse community consultation (where you gather views and then decide what to do with them) with true co-production, where you give newcomers equal control over the product.

Community media, such as the Refugee Radio Network or Guiti News, provide spaces for migrants and refugees to present not only their collective concerns about issues affecting them, but also individual stories and passions that stretch far beyond their identities as newcomers.[28] This self-narration has a humanising and normalising effect, but the challenge is to find and maintain a wider audience for such self-produced media.

Authenticity of alternative narratives is also about checking that there are no contradictions between the content of your communications and the realities of your city's policies. If a neighbourhood knows itself to be 'left behind', or a refugee community knows itself to be excluded and penalised, then no amount of positivity about diversity advantage will disguise this tragic reality. Many negative impacts may be the result of national or international policies that you as a city have relatively little power to change, but the general public does not care which level of government is responsible, therefore passing the blame to other administrations is not a productive narrative. One negative narrative of specific relevance to some city governments will be the public's belief that there are crime-ridden 'no-go areas' or 'ghettoes' created by newcomers in certain neighbourhoods. A BBC report on Sweden's immigration policy, relating to the 'vulnerable area' of Rosengård in Malmö, is a brilliant example of how flipping a journalistic frame can completely alter an audience's perception of facts in such a case.

Inversely, if your city has successful projects that clearly express, through their design and implementation, the narrative that you wish to promote, then it is imperative that you showcase this reality beyond the few elite audiences who usually hear about them. Explain to staff working on the frontlines or on local projects the narrative you want to illustrate via social or traditional media with personal testimonies and visual imagery (ensuring consent and thinking carefully about the safety of any people featured). Then think about how to elevate and amplify this content so that it will reach your intended audience. Not to do so, perhaps out of fear that your city's hospitality and interculturality might have a magnet effect and attract too many newcomers in future, is to fall victim to the false narrative that exaggerates the power of such 'pull factors' on migration patterns.

When narrative and policy are in harmony, on the other hand, there can be a 'virtuous policy-opinion circle'[29] where policy (or implementation based on that policy) influences public opinion, and public opinion then supports elected officials to maintain good policy.

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[28] Bellardi, Nadia et al., 'Spaces of Inclusion: An explorative study on the needs of refugees and migrants in the domain of media communication and on responses by community media', Council of Europe Report DG1 (2018) 01

[29] Callens, Dr. Marie-Sophie and Bart Meuleman, 'Do integration policies relate to economic and cultural threat perceptions? A comparative study in Europe', International Journal of Comparative Sociology 58:5 (August 2016)

4 Narratives and frames (on migration and integration) that often work

The most effective alternatives to threat-based narratives on migration seem to be 'shared goods' narratives. This is particularly true for cities whose dominant objective is the creation of social cohesion and a shared sense of belonging. In this section, three main categories of 'shared goods' narratives – those that address 'shared humanity', 'shared prosperity' and 'shared health and security' – are discussed.

In this context, it is important to be aware of who is meant by 'we/us'. If it is a specific 'we', such as a particular department's officials, then be specific; if it is an inclusive 'we' that refers to all members of the city's diverse population then it will help build the narrative; if, on the other hand, it is a 'we' that refers only to longstanding residents or members of the traditionally majority culture, then, no matter how positive the statement being made, your choice of pronoun may undermine the intended narrative. The same goes, even more obviously, for talking about newcomers as 'them'.

4.1 Shared humanity

'Shared humanity' or 'the human family'[30] narratives have repeatedly tested to be widely appealing, and are particularly effective with audience segments who are supportive of more universalist values.[31] The Danish TV2 Ad, *All That We Share*, is a highly effective expression of this narrative, and more recently the [Look Beyond Borders](#) video (of Amnesty International) has gone viral for similar reasons.

The narrative is not necessarily that we are all the same underneath, but rather that as human beings we have more in common than whatever divides us, and we are all inter-connected. In this century, we are dependent on one another in both a local and global sense. This emphasis on interdependency is, in a way, a more self-interested version of (or motivation for) the so-called 'golden rule' common to most major world religions and philosophies: 'Treat others as you would wish to be treated'. The concept of 'sharing' is also fundamentally resonant with those in middle audience segments who hold predominantly communal rather than individualistic values.

In its simplest terms, a 'shared humanity' narrative can be expressed by trying to speak about refugees and migrants wherever possible as 'people' – so 'People are crossing the Mediterranean' rather than 'Migrants are crossing the Mediterranean' – and by reiterating references to 'humanity' in your statements: 'These are human beings'; 'Our city must demonstrate humanity…'

4.1.1 Reciprocity, solidarity and unity

Within 'shared humanity', we can distinguish between narratives that particularly express reciprocity (mutual assistance), solidarity (standing alongside) or unity (collective membership).

In solidarity stories, those that make the local community the story's 'hero' (that is, part of the solution) are particularly effective.[32] These stories tend to trigger values of compassion and generosity (helping), but they have to be very careful not to suggest that white saviours are needed to help passive brown victims.

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[30] 'The human family' is a phrase that appears in the first line of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948). Although human rights have now become tarnished by negative associations for some audience segments, they have also been one of the most powerful liberal narratives for over 70 years. Debate about whether it is important or counter-productive to reference them continues among progressive communicators, and the answer likely depends heavily on the intended audience segment.

[31] See, for example, More in Common, 'Attitudes Towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Germany' (July 2017). Extensive testing of narratives conducted during 2018-19 by Amnesty International (among its supporters) and Human Rights Watch (with various audiences) reached the same conclusion. The pan-European platform on irregular migration, PICUM, also emphasises this narrative in their messaging guide.

[32] This point is mirrored in the paper by Rune Kier Nielsen, 'How to tell the intercultural story – Engaging the audience in the human story' (ICC, 2021).

Reciprocity links particularly closely to the intercultural concepts of 'positive interaction', 'intercultural conviviality' and shared social development.[33] Of the three types of 'shared humanity' narrative, reciprocal narratives are the most powerful, as they do more to recognise the agency, resilience, skills and knowledge of newcomers, while also containing the implication that long-standing members of the community have needs and wish to improve their circumstances as well. In the 2017 report, Cities of Reciprocity, community hubs were seen working in Athens as key sites for mutual exchange of skills, resources and knowledge. It was not only the newcomer asking, 'What do I need?' and 'What can I offer?', but also the local community asking itself 'What do we need?' and 'What can we offer?'

Unity of need, and therefore unity of purpose, is also a powerful narrative in these times when many segments of society – not just newcomers – are suffering from different kinds of fragmentation and inequality. A 'whole community' approach to the design of reception and integration programmes, with projects that provide equal and/or mutual benefits for newcomers and others, has long been used within international development aid programmes relating to refugee, IDP or returnee integration, and is now belatedly coming to the fore in domestic policy and practice. These projects then become rich material for narratives of unity and shared futures because the false narrative that newcomers are privileged over locals cannot be triggered among the 'middle' or the hostile audience segments.[34] Hope Not Hate research found that increased positivity of British communities about their own futures led to more positive attitudes towards reception of refugees.

> **Reciprocity and unity in action: Utrecht and Antwerp (The Netherlands)**
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> The Utrecht U-RLP Project 'Plan Einstein Project', funded by the EU's Urban Innovative Actions Initiative is a project 'not only targeted to asylum seekers and refugees, but to all the residents in the neighbourhood'. The city used a new reception centre as an opportunity to revitalise the neighbourhood of Overvecht, with local youngsters living in the same building as the newcomers. The project's motto, 'Living together, learning together and working together in Overvecht', highlighted this narrative, as did communications about the mutual benefits of the project: for example, a Syrian and a Yemeni who gave computer lessons to Dutch locals from the centre. In Antwerp, a similar UIA buddying project is currently providing accommodation for young refugees and locals, showing that projects to support newcomers can do just as much to support 'host' or 'receiving' communities. At the local level, such an alternative narrative prevents alienation and resentment, and can reach a whole-city or even national audience either via local replication or concerted media dissemination.

Though some of the leading organisations working on narrative change in the migration sector over the past decade have branded themselves around the values of 'welcoming' and 'sanctuary', there has lately been a move away from the imagery of 'hosts' and the 'guest covenant' to a more reciprocal image of migration-related diversity. This also recognises that it is not the mobility or 'newness' of migrants and refugees that offends certain segments of the population but rather their race and/or religion. While European attitudes towards migration have generally been stable or improving for some years, surveys on the topic usually fail to capture an underlying growth in anti-Muslim sentiment.[35]

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[33] ICC meeting report, 'Community empowerment and mediation from an intercultural perspective', Barcelona, 28-29 September 2015.

[34] 'By connecting reintegration projects to existing local development initiatives, the risk of one group being favoured over others – thereby creating conflict between the local community and the returnees – will be reduced.' IOM, 'Reintegration Programmes: Successful Approaches', 2015, p.27.

[35] For example, a February 2017 Chatham House survey based on interviews with 10,000 people across 10 European countries asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement, 'All further migration from

> **Reversed hospitality in action: Turin (Italy)**
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> The Open Mosque Project was inspired by one Turin mosque that started inviting non-Muslim Italians in to join a meal during Ramadan. The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Human Rights then took the lead to expand the idea in order to include all the city's mosques and to reframe it so that it became about inviting neighbours in each area, not just an event in the city centre, and about offering guided tours beside the *Iftar* (meal). The Project's primary objective is to open up the unknown – the space of the mosque – and thereby reduce fears. It is based, in other words, on Contact Theory (see Section 1.3) and uses a narrative of reciprocity.
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> The organisers heightened the profile of the event by getting not just the Mayor and Mayoral Deputies but also other religious leaders (Archbishop, Chief Rabbi, etc) to tour the different mosques. This guaranteed the interest of local news media. However, according to one of its organisers, media coverage is less important than the event itself, which directly reaches at least 10,000 mosque visitors, and is widely shared as a positive experience by private individuals, both through word of mouth and personal social media.

Spreading positive stories of reciprocity, solidarity and unity in action is so important because, where we see 'people like us' acting in that spirit of shared humanity there is a natural 'social proofing' effect: Can you make your audience feel that they are out of step with their friends or those they admire if they don't approach newcomers in an intercultural spirit?

Many cities, taking on board the recommendation to tell stories of hope in addition to those of suffering, showcase individual narratives of newcomer resilience or success against the odds. Many such stories, unfortunately, tend to reach only those who already support migrant and refugee rights. One way of converting them into stories that interest more mainstream media, and which resonate with a wider audience, is to put the emphasis on elements of reciprocity. The story, after all, is often really as much about those who employed the person or gave them an educational grant, but we tend to only mention the newcomer's (first) name or picture them in the photo, while omitting the volunteers who supported them, or the members of the local community who will now benefit from their new business or career. The other problem with such 'happy stories' is that they can often seem over-idealised to those who are sceptical about refugee or immigration policy, and they can merely replace a negative stereotype with a different kind of stereotype.

4.1.2 Family and children

Multiple internal evaluations by advocacy NGOs have suggested that narratives about child migrants and refugees are the most reliably resonant campaign narratives, across all topics and audiences. This may be because protection of children, and caring relationships within families, are able to trigger both values of compassion *and* shared humanity at the same time. Even when the topic is apparently unrelated, children help shift the narrative: When the US office of UNHCR tried to find out what messages would gain public support for aiding Syrian refugees, for example, their consultants found that reassurance about security checks actually triggered increased fear, whereas highlighting the fact that more than 50 percent of the refugees were children caused a seven percent swing towards public support. A 2016 academic study similarly found that the only frame to make any difference when applied to American debates about legalisation and regularisation was that of family.[36]

On the other hand, the Frameworks Institute considers it unwise to promote the idea that children are blameless victims, because it can imply that adult migrants and refugees are, by contrast, to blame

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mainly Muslim countries should be stopped'. The majority of those surveyed in 8 out of the 10 countries agreed with the statement.

[36] Bloemraad, I., F. Silva and K. Voss, 'Rights, Economics, or Family? Frame Resonance, Political Ideology, and the Immigrant Rights Movement', *Social Forces* 94:4 (2016)

for their difficulties. Narratives about children 'in limbo' are therefore more resonant,[37] as are 'destruction of childhood' narratives such as 'No child should grow up alone'[38] or 'No child should have to live in fear of being separated from his or her parents'.[39]

Children also make very relatable and engaging messengers, especially when filmed or recorded speaking naturally, as in this video on human rights, or this video about forced returns. More broadly, family can be used as a powerful metaphor to describe the caring relationships and sense of belonging that we want out of a particular place, such as our home city.[40]

4.1.3   Shared prosperity

People often wonder whether using economic (and demographic) arguments – 'making the business case' – for immigration and diversity is persuasive when communicating with the more pragmatic of middle audience segments. The answer seems to be that it is not generally effective when the data or the argument is drawn from the national or international level, but that it works at the local or city level when very specific local costs and benefits are mentioned to which people can closely relate. This distinction between national and local effectiveness is less true when the population size of the whole country is very small.

But rather than simply using economic contribution narratives, it is advisable to use narratives of 'shared prosperity'.[41] Large-scale US testing exercises have found that narratives such as 'Prosperity requires harnessing every individual's skills and energy to grow our country's economy'[42] are more widely successful with sceptics than stories about how much value immigrants add to GDP. Shared prosperity should at least be the opening and closing of the story, with specific *local and human* stories about contribution perhaps sandwiched in between.

> **Private businesses as partners: Erlangen (Bavaria, Germany) and Montreal (Canada)**
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> In 2016, in partnership with the City of Erlangen, the engineering multinational Siemens AG ran an internship programme specifically for asylum seekers. The City sourced and referred possible candidates, while the firm constructed an internal programme to support them that included a buddy system, whole staff training sessions and monitoring/evaluation sessions. The programme was built around the firm's core value of collaboration, and a broader commitment to solidarity with refugees, which included rewarding employees with an additional five days of annual leave if

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[37] As in recent campaigns by Save the Children (SCF) and by the European Network on Statelessness (ENS).

[38] Never Alone, an initiative in Italy dedicated to the reception and integration of unaccompanied foreign minors.
[39] The Frameworks Institute suggested this statement, based on their earlier work on framing of childhood development issues, as an example of how communicators should be more explanatory in their style.

[40] Kier Nielsen, R., 'How to tell the intercultural story – Engaging the audience in the human story', 2021.

[41] The NGO SINGA (see Section 1.3) has a heavily entrepreneurial emphasis. In 2018 alone, 60 business projects came out its incubators, and in total it has incubated around 500 new companies. In Geneva, they support the SINGA Factory and in Paris they support Kiwanda which is an inclusive coworking space for entrepreneurs. However, SINGA is careful to emphasise the narrative of 'co-creation of a joint future' rather than simply narratives of economic contribution. Playfully, they also invite participation through the line 'Let's become rich!' but where the 'richness' is a wealth of experience, knowledge and know-how that can be traded through peer-to-peer interaction between newcomers and locals. They are always careful to ensure locals are empowered as much as newcomers, making no assumptions about who needs the most help.

[42] Frameworks Institute research involving a test audience of 13,000 Americans. See their 'MessageMemo' from October 2014 and the resulting Toolkit including its video about an Immigration Sail Explanatory Metaphor. Some may query whether this result is particularly American in character, and whether any economic argument, no matter how positive, is really an alternative (rather than a counter-) narrative. Some believe these arguments can reinforce the expectation that newcomers have to bring contributions that justify their right to stay and the over-simplistic division between economic contributors and humanitarian victims.

they volunteered at a refugee aid organisation. With Siemens employing around a quarter of those who live in the Erlangen area, this project operated as a public communications initiative, as well as bringing diversity advantages to the firm.

Similarly, the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) sharpened its general focus on inclusive recruitment when, in 2016, it launched an internship programme for Syrian refugees. They started small and then expanded as staff confidence grew with the programme. A roundtable for businesses interested in hiring more newcomers – which any city could convene – was the inspiration, and those who go through the programme can, at a minimum, boast 'Canadian experience' to future employers. Again, this is about putting into visible action an alternative narrative of contribution and mutual benefit. More recently, since 2019, the City of Montreal's Journée Portes Fermées platform has successfully elevated a narrative of inclusive employment through human stories, interactive quizzes with counter-intuitive answers, and engaging design.

Intercultural cities are used to highlighting the 'diversity advantage' of skills brought by migrants to their economies, but they may find it even more helpful to talk about how the wealth created later feeds back into each city's common pot for the benefit of all – for example, when the taxes or entrepreneurship of newcomers helps fund an event or a public service for the whole population. Stories that showcase locals and migrants working together for shared profit (reciprocity or unity, plus shared prosperity) are also more widely resonant than economic success stories about super-ambitious or super-hardworking individual newcomers. Shared prosperity avoids triggering the narrative of preferential treatment ('stolen jobs' or privileged access to communal resources), or the sense of threat sometimes felt by those who are perhaps ashamed and insecure about their own skills, education or financial success. This is particularly important to consider now, when the protracted economic impact of COVID will translate into heightened employment fears for many. A number of communities, such as Bologna, Auckland and Tenerife, are trying to pre-empt this narrative downturn by involving migrant and refugee communities in the planning of 'inclusive recovery' packages, and, just as importantly, planning to then showcase that joint effort.

Shared Prosperity within COVID recovery: Bologna (Italy) and cities in New Zealand

Since 2018, the City of Bologna has been one of the Italian partners of the CIAK MigrACTION project focused on changing the migration narrative and tackling disinformation. Now, looking to recovery of the urban environment post-COVID, Bologna Council, together with the support of the Fondazione Innovazione Urbana, is beginning to design and test participatory consultation methods with citizens and newcomers that can help inform how to build back a stronger society. The aim is to access recovery funds in a way that will promote reciprocal and joint newcomer-local projects and hence will restore the social fabric at the local level. Ideally, this will include investment in scaling up successful pilot projects and amplifying them via media communications.

Similarly, in a number of New Zealand cities, the Welcoming Communities Programme that started long before COVID (2017-19 pilot phase) is continuing to emphasise the importance of newcomer participation and connections between locals and newcomers, and is being replicated more widely. Participation of newcomers in local post-COVID planning is being incorporated into this Programme.

4.1.4 Shared health and security

COVID has made the need for a 'shared health' narrative on migration more prominent than at any time in modern history.[43] Positive interdependency and reciprocity – the contributions of medical, frontline and emergency workers with migratory backgrounds – have been highlighted everywhere from Erlangen in Germany (see below) to the World Refugee Day campaign of Palmerston North City Council in New Zealand (search #PalmyLegends). This has been spontaneously celebrated by both social and traditional media, as when the first vaccine was discovered by a German company founded by two children of immigrants.[44]

Yet scholars have pointed out that this 'all in it together' narrative can also be criticised for masking differences in how the pandemic has been experienced.[45] The need to prevent xenophobic scapegoating of newcomers as supposed 'spreaders' of the virus has sat alongside the fact that the virus exacerbates and exposes the social and racial inequalities suffered by newcomers and other ethnic minorities. Just as 'climate justice' is the narrative of how climate change is multiplying existing inequalities faced by marginalised groups, so 'COVID justice' is now the narrative of how the virus has disproportionately affected certain marginalised groups and ethnicities. Refugees and migrants, however, need to be woven into a larger narrative as just one of a number of marginalised groups, including the long-settled poor and vulnerable, avoiding divisive questions of who is worse off.

> **Uplifting migrants' contributions: Erlangen**
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> During COVID, the German City of Erlangen made a point of uplifting the stories of contributions by people with migrant backgrounds via their website and communications. These ranged from sewing and donating masks, to video keep-fit courses, helping neighbours to shop, telephone counselling, and cooking for the Erlangen hospitals. This is similar to the 2020 UNHCR video that uses a narrative of refugee 'heroes' but includes in the montage not only images of life-saving refugee doctors but also refugees going to the supermarket for elderly neighbours or undertaking other everyday acts of kindness. There is also a clear emphasis on host-refugee cooperation and shared humanity: 'Because everyone needs help sometimes…'

A few good news stories relating to migration have arisen due to the pandemic, such as the temporary regularisation of status, and release from immigration detention, of many migrants in Portugal. These stories need to be followed closely and then elevated to demonstrate to the general public how little of a threat or problem migrants and asylum seekers really pose when treated humanely (e.g. how few abscond from community-based alternatives to detention, and how few additional migrants were 'pulled' to Portugal by these humane governmental decisions).

Alongside other threats to physical safety and health, security threat and securitised response narratives are the other major strand of negative narrative. One source of these security narratives' power is how difficult it is to keep alternative narratives foregrounded, rather than lapsing into

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[43] Prior to the pandemic, More in Common had found, among the countries they had studied, that migrant or refugee 'threats to public health' only featured prominently in the attitudes of segments in Italy and Greece.

[44] More complex interdependency narratives about the need for so-called 'firewalls' between health services and immigration enforcement, or for regularisation initiatives, so that people without documents are not deterred from reporting their health status or seeking treatment, are little understood by the general public and could easily be converted into a hostile narrative of irregular migrants as 'spreaders'. On the various 'quiet' versus 'loud' ways in which progressive city administrations try to provide services to irregular migrants, see Piccoli, Lorenzo (2019) 'Traditions of regional citizenship: Explaining subnational variation of the right to healthcare for undocumented migrants', Regional Studies.

[45] Broadhead, Jacqui, Denis Kierans and Lucy Mort, 'Inclusive Cities COVID-19 Research and Policy Briefings: Connecting Communities', Issue 3, November 2020.

counter-narrative, when your city may be in the middle of a media storm – for example, following a terrorist act. Saying, for example, 'The vast majority of migrants [or Muslims] pose no threat' will only reinforce the negative frame that they might. Instead, more effective narratives are those which reinforce shared humanity – for example, by talking about 'people' rather than migrants and refugees, or by emphasising the everyday normality ('These are our neighbours, our classmates, our colleagues…') of the relevant community within your city (see the Together Human Campaign example in Section 2.2).

For further guidance, see the ICC Paper, 'Political communication and intercultural messaging in times of crisis' (2016).

5 Some features of successful narratives

Particular forms of narrative are also uniquely well suited to telling stories about migration and integration. Some of these are perhaps unexpected, given other communication 'rules' we are taught – for example, about framing. Some require us to take a step back and think hard about our timing, or about making a longer-term investment in slower and more open-ended methods of cultivating narrative change.

5.1 'Conversion' narratives, or ethical-emotional journey narratives

Despite the aim to move beyond counter-narratives, testing suggests that some of the most effective storytellers for middle audience segments are people that the audience consider to be like themselves (who share the same values and, if possible, superficial characteristics like accent), admitting to having once had fears about immigration and/or preconceptions (if not outright prejudices) about newcomers but then explaining how they changed their mind through meaningful personal experience. The entry point is acknowledgement of your audience's anxieties, framed in a way that relates to their values, and acknowledges the reality that integration is often a difficult process for both sides, but at a certain point there is a pivot to the alternative narrative of shared humanity. Like 'constructive journalism' (or what the US calls 'solutions journalism') recognisable local problems can be presented alongside their solutions in these narratives. The negative frame is not completely omitted but is explicitly converted to its alternative over the course of describing an inner journey.[46]

5.2 Mixed groups of narrators (messengers)

Aside from the narrative foundation of a message, the second most important element to test is your narrator (or 'messenger', though this word may imply people speaking from scripts that they have not been involved in developing, which should not, ideally, be the case). As a general rule, it is best to avoid bureaucrats, lawyers or other technical experts as narrators. Far better are narrators to whom more of your audience can relate, either because they are similar to the audience or because they work in more familiar, everyday roles such as health workers or teachers.[47] Other organisations prioritise refugees and migrants narrating their own lives or concerns, but these narrators usually test as most effective only when the objective is to mobilise the already-supportive base.

The EPIM research identified the key finding, however, that the most effective type of narration was usually a mixed assortment or 'ensemble' of narrators, each talking about an issue from different perspectives and identities, within a single communication.[48] The reasons for this are not entirely clear. Perhaps sceptical audience members are suspicious of each individual's motives or identity, but collectively the varying vested interests cancel one another out and suggest that what is being said is believed by everyone with common sense. Or maybe it is simply a visual and aural reminder about the natural diversity of humanity that puts a brief freeze on stereotypical thinking. One example of this is a series of videos produced by the ICMC SHARE Network called 'Small Places, Big Hearts' in which municipalities that had received and settled refugees talked about the benefits of the experience to an audience of other relatively small or rural municipalities. Another, in which migratory diversity is just one aspect of a wider Intercultural City message, is the 'I Belong' video made by the City of Melton, in Melbourne, Australia.

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[46] A similar point is made in other papers in this series by Rune Kier Neilsen (on story-telling) and Daniel de Torres (on dialogue), as when the latter advises: 'Share examples of people who have changed their minds'.
[47] See the US network 'Bibles, Badges and Business for Immigration Reform' as an example of coalition of faith, law enforcement and business leaders who are able to diversify the 'messenger pool' and thereby reach new audiences.
[48] 2019 testing by The Frameworks Institute in the US and by Migration Exchange in the UK.

5.3 Exposing opponents' tactics and motives

This might be thought too sophisticated a form of narrative for the general public, but testing suggests otherwise. Those who are conflicted about migration seem to react well to having the reasons behind the conflicting information explained to them.[49] This is not the same as myth-busting, fact-checking or reinforcing negative frames. It is talking about other communicators' ulterior or hidden motives.

For cities promoting social cohesion, it is particularly helpful to use the narrative 'Our enemies (those spreading rumours and disinformation against migrants, for example) seek to divide us'. When scapegoating is involved, it may even be possible to then pivot towards narrating the real causes of a given problem. Specialist migrant or refugee rights NGOs may not have the knowledge or mandate to do this, but city leaders should be able to move the conversation out of the migration sphere, or even the diversity context, and tackle other socio-economic, environmental or political issues from which attention may have been deliberately diverted by expressions of hostility to migration and pluralism.

5.4 Implicit narratives and intercultural education

One of the most important and under-appreciated points about communicating with the public on migration is the salience trap[50] – that is, when migration is debated frequently, especially in the media, this has the inherent effect of making it seem a problematic issue. Inversely, when the salience of migration debates is perceived as low, there tends to be greater space for balanced policy making. In 2015, 58% of Europeans said that migration was among the two most important issues facing the EU, whereas today it is only 23%.[51] This is despite the fact that hostile narrators have tried to combine COVID with border security fears and have used scapegoating of newcomers as a way to keep migration salient during the pandemic. During such a relatively low-salience period, care should therefore be taken if you decide to loudly promote even a positive alternative narrative on migration, as you may inadvertently stir up threat narratives that would otherwise lie dormant.

In other words, it may be a reasonable objective to simply keep migration out of the headlines. How then to raise public awareness of serious issues affecting newcomers, including issues of racism and prejudice? Part of the answer is 'mainstreaming without ignoring': that is, checking that migrant and refugee voices and concerns are being featured in your communications on other, apparently unrelated issues affecting the city. Migrant integration can be narrated as just one component in policies aimed at making people less economically precarious or vulnerable, for example (see the Bologna example under Section 3.2).

Another answer may be to stop thinking that the only two options are 'megaphone'[52] communications or local face-to-face interactions[53] and instead explore the use of other forms of public communication such as popular culture, the arts and education. The education of children and young people can be a powerful vehicle for narrative shift, with the history of cities a particularly under-exploited educational resource, rich in material for alternative narratives of local migration and identity.[54] Teaching children

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[49] See, for example, ASO Communications, 'Words that Work on Immigrant Rights'

[50] See, for example, Dennison, James and Teresa Tàlo, 'Explaining attitudes to immigration in France', *Migration*, 2017.

[51] Butcher and Neidhardt (November 2020), p.22. 23% is still, for most places, disproportionately high salience.

[52] Coombes, Thomas and Alice Sachrajda, 'From Megaphone to Mosaic', July 2020.

[53] De Torres, 'Claiming the power of dialogue – Toolkit for antirumours dialogues', 2021.

[54] It is currently untested how far the resurgence of racial justice movements (e.g. #BlackLivesMatter) may have changed public attitudes about migration as a legacy of colonialism. Previously, More in Common had found this narrative of historical guilt/responsibility not to resonate anywhere they studied except in Germany. This is perhaps because of Germany's very particular relationship with historical atonement. See 'Attitudes Towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Germany', More in Common (2017) p.12 and p.60. They have also found that narratives emphasising that a country is a longstanding 'country of immigration' are very rarely resonant with the majority of people, no matter how true that statement may be. While citizens may realise the

about the current demographic and social changes in their own cities, which they can often see amongst their own classmates, is also important.

Education as a channel for alternative narratives: Brescia (Italy)

The Italian Coalition for Civil Liberties and Rights (CILD) worked with the Municipality of Brescia from late 2018 to June 2019 on a project financed by the Civitates European Fund. The aim was to involve local institutions in the reformulation of the narrative about migrants and refugees, and the mayor of Brescia and his councillors proposed to involve the high schools in the area in order to plan a path of knowledge (from theory to direct experience) on immigration issues. In January, after a series of consultations, CILD organised two days in which the city's high schools had access to lessons based on national and international immigration legislation. A one-hour workshop for students tested their knowledge of immigration data in Italy. The Municipality's councillors then presented data on the incidence of immigration in the territory from a demographic, work and accommodation point of view, and showcased the positive impact of the Mayor's policies in a particular district of the city. Finally, in mid-March, the students were taken on a four-day trip to Thessaloniki, Greece, to see a parallel reception situation in action and they were given the opportunity, after careful coaching, to meet with a group of refugees from Syria, Palestine and Afghanistan there. At the end, there was a meeting between the two local administrations, Brescia and Thessaloniki, to exchange ideas, and then in June, the Mayor of Thessaloniki came and presented his city's experiences to 400 students and citizens in Brescia.

Similarly, a city's arts programme can be a place in which to make newcomers feel seen and welcomed, and it is ideal when an arts venue can also be a place for 'active learning' about migration promoted in intercultural curricula. Such projects are very different from others discussed earlier in this Paper, as they are exercises in open-ended narrative development, raising questions more than offering predetermined answers. People often open up in front of art or in response to music in a way that they don't when participating in public debates on an issue like migration that is weighed down by so many negative frames. By leaving audiences to do some imaginative work in constructing their own narratives or drawing out the implicit meaning of an artwork, 'cognitive empathy' is created, which research psychologists have identified as the most lasting and influential type of empathy.[55]

Interactive art for alternative narratives: Haifa (Israel) and Pavlograd (Ukraine)

The Beit Hagefen Arab Jewish Cultural Center, located in and part funded by the Municipality of Haifa, offers activities based on the premise that meeting and getting to know another culture, its stories and cultural and spiritual assets, is important for breaking down barriers and building trust among diverse groups. The Third Space is Beit Hagefen's 'subjective identity lab' which opened formally in December 2019 and in which workshops and other experiential activities focus on narratives of identity and belonging. Dominant narratives in public discourse are examined with the help of well-trained facilitators but the process is not overly directive. The main target audiences are students and educators from schools and educational institutions of all levels, as well as youth groups, pre-military academies, Israel Birthright (Taglit) groups, civil servants and heterogeneous teams. One teacher who brought a group of 150 middle school students commented afterwards on how many parents had written to share their appreciation for what the children learned from the visit.

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country has an immigrant past or foundation, they do not project that acknowledgement or views of past immigrants onto people who have recently arrived, sometimes drawing a sharp distinction. Whether this is equally true for 'cities of immigration' seems to be untested.

[55] See, for example, this journal article on the need for medics to build cognitive empathy across social differences.

The 'curatorial premise' is to raise a 'pinch of doubt' through the offering of artists' alternative narratives. It embraces the reality that there is a multiplicity of subjective narratives, with the belief that 'If your story is not on the table then you will never listen to my story'. Some of the exhibits aim to trigger shared humanity narratives – for example, a floor made out of 27kgs of spices from around the world, with the question, 'What is the smell of your home?'. Featuring those who have migrated to Israel from different cultures around the world is also a way for the Center to address, without a megaphone, the intercultural response to the native minority of Arab Palestinians. The biggest challenge is combining the didacticism of educators with the freedom of artists, which the Center resolved by making the artists attend workshops of the educators in order to understand their intercultural agenda, and to give time and space to the relationships between the two groups.

On a smaller scale, in Pavlograd, the ART-Territory space called 'All Ours' has been providing a venue for intercultural interactions between locals and newcomers (mostly IDPs) since 2017. As in Haifa, creative connectivity in a facilitated, artistic space is used to build new narratives that are not predetermined by public authorities but arise from personal experience.

Another example of implicit narrative working better than a megaphone narrative, is the telling of individual biographical stories. Some of these – especially those that have a surprising or witty aspect or narrative voice – can be great stories and may be good for 'grabbing the attention' of journalists. The story of Yusra Mardini, the Syrian girl who saved the lives of fellow refugees in the Mediterranean and then went on to become an Olympic swimmer and UNHCR ambassador, is a good example. But, as already discussed, presenting newcomers as heroes or self-made over-achievers, in an effort to escape the narratives in which they are helpless victims in need of saving, can also backfire if you are trying to appeal to certain audiences. It is partly as a solution to this dilemma that many cities have utilised more implicit narratives about migration-related (and other, intersectional) diversity via a series of photographic portrait and potted biography projects. Looking at this work, people can draw their own conclusions and are confronted by reality instead of stereotypes.

Portraits of diversity and shared humanity: Geneva

The photographic project *'Genève, sa queule'* started in March 2014, inspired in part by Humans of New York and similar projects elsewhere and instigated by Agenda 21 – Sustainable City department of the City of Geneva. The objective of the project is literally to give a human face to the story of Geneva's diversity, acknowledging and revealing its extent. Photo sessions, at which brief life stories are also taken via written forms, have now produced over 2,000 portrait images and matching biographies. No-one who wanted to contribute was excluded, and there is no attempt to reflect the demographics of the city in accurate proportions. Some of the photos were taken at completely open events, such as street fairs, whereas for others the project's staff sought out the less 'visible' members of the society, such as the elderly, disabled or those living in refugee centres. These images were used for poster campaigns and gallery exhibitions in 2015-17. Social media in general was rather difficult to utilise, because, although those who were pictured in the project signed consent forms, the organisers were cautious to post images and information about anyone who might receive racial or other abuse as a result.

The stories imply a shared sense of belonging to Geneva as much as the images show diversity. Questions on the forms included things like, 'What do you like/hate about Geneva?' designed to pick up on commonalities, and they asked everyone to put down the origins of their grandparents, so that some of those born in Switzerland might have to think for a moment about their own immigrant backgrounds. Subjects of the photos were also invited to the exhibition launch, while those who visited the galleries who were not already in the exhibits could sit for their own photographs and contribute their own stories.

Summary Recommendations

1. Define an objective that includes identification of your intended audience(s). Wherever possible, adapt your narratives to appeal to the core values that those audience(s) hold. Involve people with lived experience in narrative development work throughout the process, including these early stages.

2. In many cases, consider making 'shared humanity', 'shared prosperity' and 'shared health and security' the bases for your narratives. Within these, emphasise stories of local-newcomer reciprocity (or solidarity or unity) and also stories relating to families and children. Test whether these resonate with your local audiences.

3. Promote alternative narratives both through local community interactions (based on Contact Theory) and through traditional or social media (based on Cultivation Theory). Ensure investment in coordination between these different levels of work, so that small successes are properly promoted beyond their local neighbourhoods or outside an elite 'bubble', while larger media narratives remain firmly grounded in reality.

4. In media narratives, consider using ensemble groups of messengers speaking from a wide variety of angles on an issue, or a relatable messenger who can tell the story of their own change of opinion. Do not be afraid to expose the motives of hostile narrators and try to avoid telling stories that may sound too good to be true (even where they are true).

5. Beware of the correlation between the salience of migration debates and the activation of threat narratives by those who are hostile to migration. Consider how to work with the arts, pop culture and education to promote your alternative narratives, or to prompt individuals to participate in narrative creation in a more open-ended way.

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
Do define your **objective** and from there identify your primary **audience(s)**.	**Don't** use the phrase or idea of 'changing the narrative' as a substitute for having a clearer objective.
Do know what is most **relevant** to your audience(s) and authentic to their experience. ■ 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?	**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.
Do know the **core values** of your audience(s) so that your narrative can trigger these values, at least as an entry-point. ■ 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?	**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?
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. ■ Have you thought about how to remove barriers to diverse participation in co-creation? ■ Have you informed yourself about relevant historical injustices and their	**Don't** throw people together without planning and expect co-creation to happen, and don't confuse community consultation with co-creation. **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.

contemporary impact, so that you can hear where people are 'coming from'? ▪ 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?	
Do be careful to **avoid reinforcing negative frames (threat-based narratives)** that are unfortunately often associated with migrants and refugees.	**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.
Do practice **pivoting** to your alternative narratives when issues of public health, crime or national security are being used to scapegoat newcomers.	**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.
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.	**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.
Do emphasise elements of **reciprocity** and mutual benefit (for locals and newcomers) in your stories.	**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.
Do consider incorporating narratives relating to **family and children** wherever possible as these are often resonant with multiple value segments.	**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. **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.

Do refer to recent migrants and refugees as 'newcomers', 'new neighbours' or simply as **'people'** wherever possible.	**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. **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.
Do focus on a vision that triggers positive emotions. Tell human stories of **hope**, but without avoiding or over-idealising hard realities.	**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.
Do be conscious of your pronouns so that you use an **'inclusive we/us'** whenever possible.	**Don't** use narratives predicated on the existence of an 'us and them' where the 'them' are newcomers.
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.	**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.
Do visualise (both literally and when using words) and **tell a human story**. ▪ Are your colleagues at all levels aware of the stories you need to generate and collect to promote your narrative?	**Don't** tell individual stories of newcomers that are extremes of victimhood or virtue/success. Both can be a kind of 'benevolent othering'.
Do give your message an **authentic voice** to which your target audience can relate. ▪ 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	**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.

roles, characteristics, and backgrounds, within a single communication?	
Do ensure **accessibility** in every sense, so that your narrative reaches as many people as possible within your target audience segment.	**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. ▪ 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?
Do avoid escalating the **salience** of the migration debate if you can, while not ignoring the needs and problems of newcomers. ▪ 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?	**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. **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'.

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