

## Telling our stories: communicating migration

This is a series of four briefings synthesising the discussions held at EPIM's workshop in Barcelona in January 2014. Fifteen groups worked on different topics, reflecting on ideas from keynote speakers and their own experiences and ideas, led and facilitated by people from organisations funded by EPIM. Thanks to all of them and to our keynote speakers:

**Sunder Katwala**

British Future [www.britishfuture.org](http://www.britishfuture.org)

**Brian Sheehan**

Gay + Lesbian Equality Network [www.glen.ie](http://www.glen.ie)

**Carlos Saavedra**

United We Dream [www.unitedwedream.org](http://www.unitedwedream.org)

**Dani de Torres**

Barcelona Anti-Rumours Strategy  
[www.antirumores.com](http://www.antirumores.com)

The sessions were facilitated by **Sue Lukes** [www.suelukes.com](http://www.suelukes.com) who wrote up the briefings. The themes for detailed discussion were decided by participants in consultation with Sue, and each discussion produced notes which form the basis for these briefings. Where appropriate other material has been added to provide examples or more detail.

### The briefings cover:

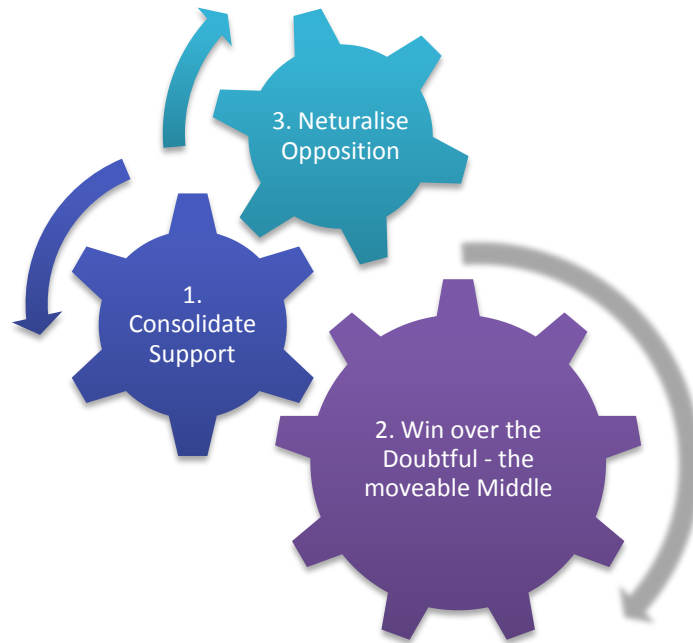
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They represent the learning and wisdom of many organisations and individuals who work to strengthen the role played by civil society in advocating for constructive approaches to migrants in Europe. They are designed as advice, information and helpful hints.

## Communications: what are we trying to do?

### *Who to talk to and why?*

Communication on migration, as with other controversial issues (especially those engaging human rights), has three purposes:



These are not separate: the supporters that are consolidated can be crucial to winning over the “middle”. Neutralising the opposition also frees up more of the middle.

The [Barcelona Anti Rumours](#) campaign found that they were not necessarily able to change the views of the diehard “antis” but the reaction of many people was “thanks! We were waiting for something like that: direct, easy and clear...now tell me what can I do...and I also have some ideas”

*It may be difficult for one organisation to do all three of these things: consider building alliances so that different organisations work on what they are best at but coordinate it.*

**GLEN** provides an example where that alliance was far from formal: some gay rights groups worked well to consolidate support but opposed the work that GLEN did which eventually successfully won over the middle.

This can work as well with policymakers: different organisations can present themselves as mainstream/constructive, militant/aggressive but work to the same end, and even coordinate their messaging as long as they understand and know how their communications work.

But to do this, first establish who you are trying to reach (which is why most EU wide messaging does not work: each country, and sometimes each region, is configured differently). And do not accept what is said about “everyone” or “most people” think. Keep digging deeper about this, do not accept what you are told by the media or politicians. Ask and research.

**British Future** says that to contest the story of attitudes, we need to:

- Create space with media and political elites,
- Reach the centre,
- Unlock the future (younger people often have more positive attitudes),
- Articulate the nuances that will appeal, such as being pragmatic and welcoming.

*The aim is to engage, the only power is the power to persuade.*

For this to work in national or large scale campaigns you need a bottom up strategy and a strong collaborative leadership to facilitate the creation and consolidation of social networks. You may need to be more creative and entrepreneurial to engage and connect with people. The aim is to create sustainable change so that if something is won now it is not lost with a change of government.

### *What are the messages that work?*

*Positive messages that appeal to values and resonate with the chosen audience are those that work.*

People who keep defending the last thing don’t know what they are fighting for next.

*Frame messages in active terms, about what you are for not what you are against. Be confident and optimistic, with messages that show that you like your country/town/region and think that you will get their support.*

**GLEN** believes “our job is to win rights not to be right” and this determines their strategies and communications.

Aim to merge the “us” and “them”. Maybe talk about our countries as countries of emigration to help with this. Or identify issues that might affect anyone such as rules on family migrants (“it could be your son who marries a woman or man from abroad”). But always picture the person to whom the message is directed: for example, it is less likely that the poor and socially less mobile will emigrate, or marry someone from abroad. But they may have family who have emigrated in the past.

Avoid being the “righteous few” telling people they are wrong. The Barcelona Anti-Rumours Campaign acknowledges that we all have prejudices, we are just as much a “target” for our campaigns as anyone else.

So move away from being seen to promote migrants’ rights towards promoting universal rights and equality. Emphasise how you are in the mainstream, telling a story about how you have made progress together and “we are getting there” (but can do more!) rather than complaining about what is happening. A constructive story will always have more traction when trying to achieve positive change.

*Messages should “show not tell”.*

They are about practical and real examples. Stories that are counter-intuitive or unusual will get more coverage. Show how the “new us” is blending the traditional and the new. Use key moments or pegs to reach sceptics, so know what those are for these audiences. Demonstrate that you listen and understand concerns but respond respectfully, and do not amplify the messages of the “antis”.

*Engage with everyone consistently and professionally, including government and politicians.*

Frame messages to appeal to the best traditions of each party. The aim is to get them to see that you and they can be involved in making progress in which everyone can take pride. In fact, you may be asking them to do a lot, but the idea is that they do not perceive it as such. Make simple, reasonable demands, framed positively, that the public can understand and digest.

*What about advocating publicly for unpopular groups such as prisoners or the undocumented?*

Maybe frame this as being about rights for all (to due process or equality) or focus on a part of the group that is perceived as more popular such as children. It is worth having focus groups discuss tricky issues to see how they will be perceived and which sort of messages work best for them.

## *Allies and messengers*

*Migrants and their organisations are a minority: they need allies.*

Some are already lined up, but must be kept on side and active. Keep talking to businesses, trade unions, universities, protection and human rights advocates. Keep in touch and know what their strategies are, discuss how their strategies can work for migrants, ask them what messages about migrants work best for them, work with them to get those messages out.

Build new alliances, so ask “Who could influence our target audiences most?” There is scope here for imagination and creativity. Get the army on board to influence the cultural sceptics. Get sports personalities to say something for the economic sceptics. Never discount the potential of faith leaders.

*Building political alliances is necessary, but often more difficult.*

Create the situation where you can tell politicians honestly that the (one, simple) thing that you are asking them to do:

- Is to tackle a real problem that they understand.
- Will solve the problem.
- Will not lose them votes.

When working with politicians, always offer them the solution at the same time as identifying the problem: so it reduces their room for manoeuvre and makes them feel confident in taking up the issue. Acknowledge and thank them for any small wins. Keep showing them the evidence that what they are doing has support, especially if that support is increasing. The aim, however, is to get it into the political mainstream, not to get associated with one “side” or another.

*But migrant voices are not heard enough, and that is a problem, even in the campaigns to defend migrants’ rights.*

Many of the most well-known champions of LGBT rights are gay themselves. Develop migrant champions of similar calibre: people who are living demonstrations that migrants are people who are here to stay, contributing, confident and challenging. Badge them as what they are: symbols of a new France/Belgium/Ireland/Spain/UK etc. It is a very simple, entirely effective way to bust myths and put the convinced “antis” on the defensive.

*At a local level, campaigns like the Barcelona Anti Rumours have proved that it is possible to engage and involve a large number of different people.*

But first, the city authority had to be convinced and prepared to act as a facilitator. The campaign encourages engagement at a lot of different levels. The numbers are not so important: what is important is the perception that this is creative, flexible, inclusive and rigorous and keeps reaching out to new people.

## Different media and audiences

Communication has to be specific: different audiences need different messages and different media. This briefing brings together what we discussed about how to work with different audiences and different media.

### *Local communities as audiences*

[Barcelona Anti Rumours](#) aims to reach across the city to as many different local audiences as possible. They target all inhabitants with the idea that anyone who gets their message can also become an actor in the campaign.

A mass local campaign targets everyone, but with a particular emphasis on those who may influence others or have more “reach”: health professionals, public servants, teachers, trade unions, school students can all be involved to start the process off.

Local campaigns need to offer:

- scope for cultural interaction,
- peer to peer education,
- alternatives including a migrant voice,
- empowerment of local areas,
- clear goals.

### *Local authorities as audiences*

Even when national governments are hostile, local authorities can make migrants welcome as residents and citizens, but sometimes they need a bit of encouraging.

[Grandhotel Cosmopolis](#) is “a concrete utopia – realising a cosmopolitan everyday culture without limits: here refugees, travellers, guests, artists and neighbours meet and are welcome”. They took over an empty building in Augsburg and now offer accommodation for asylum seekers and refugees, artist’s studios and work space, a hotel and a cultural centre. Conservative local politicians have supported the project and helped them with planning permission, encouraged by media interest in “Germany’s most unusual hotel”. But they sometimes find it difficult to manage the culture clash with those marketing the city or their need to maintain an identity independent of party political labels.

Cities have always played a role in challenging central government across Europe. This offers real possibilities of building up alliances with those who share a vision of the future city as a global place and connect that with the fact that it is often in cities that the hard tasks of making migration work well in communities takes place. Building up strong coalitions of civil society, linking different social actors and networks, can have more influence at a local level, especially since cities are often places where migrants, including undocumented migrants, are more visible and known.

How can we move from this natural common interest to local authorities playing a national role? Local politicians find it interesting and encouraging to be linked with and even recognised by national and international networks and connected to best practice at national and EU level. Encouraging participation in networks like Eurocities [Integrating Cities](#) and good practice disseminators like [Cities of](#)

[Migration](#) and the European Website on Integration [database of good practice](#) offers good publicity, sometimes even prestige and more resources. Local politicians may also be influenced by individual members of parliament or Members of the European Parliament.

*In targeting local authorities it is vital to ensure that at least some cross party support is secured for the broad vision of the city as welcoming to migrants. This allows the work to withstand changes of control after local elections.*

The campaign to “save hospitality” [Salvemos la Hospitalidad](#) in Spain started in response to government proposals to make offering accommodation, help or food to undocumented migrants a criminal offence. Many migrant and anti-racist NGOs and campaigns worked together to collect over 60,000 signatures against the measure, and encouraged all signatories to get their local council to pass a model resolution against any legislation that hindered solidarity with migrants, against the proposal in particular (and to tell the Spanish government this) and for the promotion of “convivencia” (roughly translated as co-existence) between all in the city or area. The pressure worked and the proposal was withdrawn.

## *Europe as an audience*

*First: which bit of Europe do you need to communicate with?*

**The European Commission:** DG Home has responsibility for migrant integration. But many other commissions and directorates are important to migrants’ lives: Justice, Employment, Education, Research, External Aid. Communication with civil servants in the Commissions is vital, but it is about building a longer term relationship.

*The European Commission can take infringement proceedings against member states, but they take two years or more.*

**The European Parliament** and Commission make decisions together (co-decision-making). [PICUM](#) has had important successes there, collaborating with other organisations, and getting undocumented workers covered by the victims of crime and seasonal workers directives. Generating the political will to change here is difficult. Building relationships with MEPs needs a systematic approach and working with organisations from several different countries. It is a long term project: 10 – 15 years. Messaging has to focus on broader issues: at the moment, talking about migration loses votes: the far right is making gains and others are scared. Over time not only the migrant vote but also the second and third generation migrant vote can be mobilised and have some influence, but that needs the development of a genuine migrant voice.

*How to influence the EP? Build coalitions that go much wider than migrants and the NGOs that work with them. Work with local authorities, health professionals, others who have supported migrants’ rights.*

The **Council of Europe** also has a role to play, but is often seen as inaccessible and secretive. The European Social Charter is a basic guarantee of rights and complaints can be taken via recognised organisations like [PICUM](#) and [ECRE](#)).

And there are other ways in:

- via the permanent representatives of the regions in Brussels who often have connections with individual commissioners,
- via European city networks: six mayors have asked the Commission to assist on undocumented migrants,
- through other lobbies like the European Women’s Lobby,
- through working with the Fundamental Rights Agency,
- through the Court of Justice of the European Union ([The AIRE Centre](#) takes cases there and intervenes).

Detention is one area where organisations are beginning to have an impact. NGOs are recognised as leading on good practice, the idea of detention as a last option is gaining traction, and globally there are conversations about alternatives. The arguments about the futility of detaining people who cannot be returned, put by [Point of No Return](#) are becoming heard at European levels and beyond.

### *Using social media*

Why use social media? It gets the message out, it is a campaigning tool, especially for urgent action, and it can raise funds. If a small organisation is just starting to use social media it is best to choose one of these goals and not try to do everything at once.

*Social media is good for finding and reaching a specific audience: for fundraising, for finding volunteers, to reach the people you know, to find new audiences.*

External help is available to develop a social media strategy and/or policy, and some may offer some pro bono work. Funding may also be available for an audit of current practice and proposals to improve. Developing such a strategy starts with profiling and breaking down the potential audiences and then tailoring the media appropriately. Doing it well will depend on developing good messages and using all the content available or that can be generated: images, videos, podcasts, soundtracks, text for blogs and websites, links to other resources like news reports. Weigh up the costs of production against the gains to be made from getting people to relate to your content. And the loop is completed by using analytical tools to find out about reach and effectiveness, information that is important to share with supporters and funders.

**Social media is not free: it needs resources**, not necessarily money. People must post, tweet etc., and it may be better done by a team, including volunteers, and then monitoring, using relevant apps to see who is most effective and why. But first colleagues must get engaged, learn how to do it and be convinced that it will work.

Publicity budgets should now include advertising on social media. Advertising on Facebook, twitter and google is not necessarily expensive and can be a cost effective way of getting the message out. It is also easy to measure in terms of return on investment: all the apps have their own monitoring and measuring tools and there are a lot of commercial ones like [tweetreach](#) which may also offer limited free services. Like any commercial user, an NGO can see how effective their advertising spend is, for example, in terms of donations that result.

Social media is also a research tool. It can collect data, help with formulating new projects, survey the “competition” and access other organisations’ audiences.



*Social media works well with other media: use it to collect e-mails and addresses, to link with offline material.*

E-mail remains the most important communications tool. Including “share this” links in e-mails makes them even more effective. It is important to keep people engaged, so e-mail lists need active maintenance and a regular routine of confirming with subscribers that they still want mail. This avoids getting labelled as spam by servers and can also reduce costs if paying for list services.

*Different media suit different content. And media use varies between countries and social classes.*

The ideal **Facebook** post is a header, large image, short message and a call to action. Pictures are essential and messages must be in the post itself, not confined to links to websites etc. There is a function that allows the scheduling of posts, and research that can advise of the best times to post. Facebook is also well suited to scheduling meetings and as a complement to an e-mail list for campaigns using Facebook events. Always encourage people to like any posts: it guarantees more exposure on timelines.

**Twitter** is best used by repeating posts 2 or 3 times a day ([hootsuite](#) offers a limited free programme to schedule this) as many tweets are not spotted by followers. Again, there are better times to post, but it is also important to be able to respond quickly as reactions to tweets are usually immediate. Tweeting during events enables feedback from people who cannot come to them. [Thunderclap](#) can be used to create events with increased reach.

Social media moves fast. Keep asking target audiences what they use, keep looking at different characteristics: there is a persistent story that younger people are leaving Facebook, where to? [Pinterest](#)?. Other platforms like VKontakte and Badoo may be the key to reaching some countries. [Storify](#) allows the creation of a story from across social media to explain how story has developed or been reported.

## *Mainstream media*

*Why work with mainstream media? Because people may trust it or regard it as legitimate, and that includes lawmakers and those with influence.*

Sometimes, an organisation has no choice: they, or the migrants they work with, become the focus of a media story. So everyone needs a policy and preferably a strategy for dealing with the mainstream media, and that should include proactive and reactive work. The aims can include:

- To challenge or change perceptions and misconceptions,
- To reach parts of the public not generally interested in migrant issues,
- To educate and inform,
- To respond to and engage with opponents,
- To offer alternative voices, especially those of migrants.

*Each message needs an elevator pitch: how you would explain it if in a lift with someone for 30 seconds.*

Condense it into one or (maximum) two sentences. Make sure you repeat it at least twice at each media opportunity. Teach it to other staff. The shorter and simpler it is the more difficult it is to edit.

*Even small organisations with few resources need a media strategy.*

Friendly organisations and allies may have communications departments that will help if you have an important message to get out. Sympathetic journalists can place articles. Smaller organisations can pool resources and do joint press releases.

*Press releases are proactive and put you in control, but how to get them picked up?*

- Tie them to key events or publications;
- Respond to major news events;
- Write a guide to what is happening that journalists can use;
- Summarise longer publications that journalists don't have time to read;
- Translate into different languages;
- Use press release content on websites and in social media and publicise via Facebook and twitter;
- Send them to mailing lists and supporters;
- Remember that some journalists know very little or may not be sympathetic;
- KEEP IT SHORT!

Comment and response must be carefully designed with thought about impact in terms of publicity (good or bad), possible damage to the cause, and what chances they offer for change. For migrant NGOs language can be a particular problem, especially when translation may be involved, or where the issues are technical and need presenting in a reader- and journalist- friendly way.

*Be prepared for media hype: monitor developments and have basic messaging in place.*

Prepare for questions: brainstorm about the worst they could ask. Prepare a briefing and identify spokespeople. Brief them on the approach, the message, the questions and the journalists and media involved. Do not feel pressure to speak on broadcast media, especially live, if not an expert: pass the request to others who specialise. If there is no way to make positive or useful comments in response to events and requests, don't: just say no-one is available, sorry, and do get in touch next time. Only lawyers and actors in telenovelas say "No comment".

*Journalists are not all the same. Newspapers may aim to be highbrow or lowbrow. Local journalists may know very little about the context or the national story.*

Where possible it is important to build up relationships with journalists, formally and informally. While negative and controversial stories sell, some may welcome help to present migration differently, especially if covering areas with large migrant populations. If possible, watch relevant media for changes in activity or personnel. Keep a record of all contacts with the press. Make sympathetic journalists key contacts.

If a journalist or outlet is determined to cause problems, be aware that most media (and some national governments) have codes of conduct or other ways to tackle unscrupulous journalism.

**Hope not Hate** ran a campaign against two national newspapers that consistently ran anti-migrant and untrue stories. They encouraged supporters to put pressure on advertisers, and ran a very specific and detailed campaign, working with sympathisers in other media outlets. "This may not make you very popular" they advise, "but you can have fun with it".

*Generally, newsdesks want a story that is interesting and will generate sympathy among readers.*

Some times present better opportunities: summer when news is slow, Christmas or Easter when refugee or asylum stories can be made more relevant.

Some media may be prepared to go into partnership around certain issues or causes. And most will consider a commercial arrangement, but it is important to be sure that this will generate the sort of traffic you need and so is actually worth it.

## Video

*Video can increase impact, raise awareness, change attitudes, get online attention and give a voice and even a face to migrants.*

[Undocumentary](#) is a web documentary made by [PICUM](#) in three languages. Since its launch in 2012 thousands have seen its powerful and moving description of the lives of undocumented migrants in Europe, told by themselves. PICUM secured grant funding to make it and deployed one communications worker to do it with an outside company who filmed and developed the website. But, in fact, it involved most PICUM staff members in one way or another, many of PICUM's members, a photographer and other volunteers, for example working on translation.

To make a documentary, first get a strategy: decide what you want out of it and why. Different aims will determine different styles and timescales. But for all, a core aim for video is to reach new audiences and engage them. Dissemination must be part of the planning process, and that will also determine form. A documentary should have a long shelf life, but videos can also be one-offs for a conference or a campaign tool useful for a short time.

Funding can also be part of dissemination.

[Into the Fire](#), an investigative documentary looking at the situation of refugees and migrants in Greece, in the face of severe austerity measures and rising racism, used crowdsourced funding but also crowdsourced some production and distribution. The international subtitles were successfully crowd-sourced using social media networks and a team of volunteers has translated the film into a number of languages. In 2013, it was released simultaneously on various websites and platforms around the internet under a Creative Commons license that allows for non-commercial distribution and performance. "Our distribution strategy is the compassion and outrage of everyone who hears about this story: We will work with everyone who is interested, online and offline, to organise screenings and publish the film online."

Pro bono professionals may be willing to help, and there is no harm in asking. Funds for documentaries exist: [Britdoc](#) is an example but their website also has information about many others. As with many other NGO activities, there may be volunteers who will help willingly. Film school students are a good place to start.

If working with professional filmmakers you will need to build in time to review as you progress. Start with the storyboard.

*Filming is often the easy bit: sound and editing can be harder.*

The level of technical sophistication depends to some extent on the content and the purpose. If content is good, that can make up for poorer quality. Some very effective videos have been filmed on smartphones. Short and very short videos, like those on [vine](#) can have a big impact.

Technical tools can be expensive but basic cheaper, open source or free software can be OK. NGOs may be able to get a discount, film schools may help, and increasingly cloud based applications are available for a monthly charge.

Using video to tell stories of migration can be sensitive. All those filmed must give permission, and know that they can withdraw it later if they change their minds or their circumstances alter. Work out at the beginning how you can protect people's identity if necessary and make sure all those involved know how to do that.

*Using animation can get around some problems of identification especially for children and vulnerable adults.*

Once a video is ready dissemination starts. For longer films, a short teaser can promote the main film and be used more widely, especially in social media.

"This is my home now" a documentary following the lives of three women migrants in Europe, produced by the European Women's Lobby and the [European Network of Migrant Women](#) has a trailer on [YouTube](#).

*Contacts and supporters can help with dissemination: blogging, tweeting and posting on Facebook.*

Documentary screenings promote engagement, so be prepared to follow up with audiences. Offer question and answer sessions afterwards, get supporters involved. Film festivals offer both an opportunity to screen and to disseminate further: look out for those that have themes where your film may fit. Work with the film-makers, who also have an interest in getting their work seen.

## Organising and measuring communications

### Organising communications

Where organisations are about creating wider social change, communications is clearly a vital part of what they do. But for those whose focus is on service delivery, communications can often be forgotten or seen as irrelevant.

*Communications is part of any strategy, objective or decision of the organisation.*

Without communications, you cannot achieve your objectives. Decisions that do not include ways of explaining them and involving people will not get carried out. And all decisions about communications include:

- The **objectives** (what are you trying to achieve).
- The **audience** (who needs to be reached for this to happen).
- The **message** (what are you telling them)

**Medecins du Monde** designed the communications about their 2012 campaign on healthcare for undocumented migrants internally: see more about it [here](#).

They challenged the withdrawal of healthcare from undocumented migrants, identifying health professionals, lawmakers and opinion leaders as key audiences.

They encouraged health professionals to identify themselves as “conscientious objectors” to the policies. They got lawmakers to question the policy and seek incremental changes that would help.

Once they knew what they wanted, they employed professionals to get their message across.

They got migrants to tell their own stories too: this empowered them and helped the campaign get into some different media.

Medecins du Monde also recommend:

- Look at the good campaigns that influenced you and others,
- Ask about them: go to the NGOs and agencies who ran them,
- Discuss how that might work for you, with your staff, your supporters, your users, other NGOs.

### Why measure communications?

*Once communications are part of your strategy, like the other parts you need to know how effective it is.*

- To run your organisation well.
- To decide on what resources to allocate.
- To convince funders that their money is well spent.
- To tell supporters how well you are doing.

## What do we measure?

*As with any other area of work, you need to measure **impacts** rather than **outputs**.*

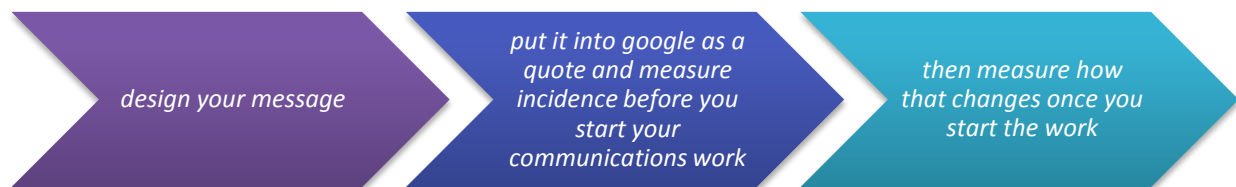
So the measurement is:

- Did your message reach your target audience?
- Did your message work (i.e. the audience did something as a result)?
- Was the result useful in achieving your overall aims (was this the right message or audience)?

Some measures that can be useful include:

- Evidence that the changes you wanted to make happen did (often easier at a local level).
- Evidence that people took action you asked them to.
- Polling to identify people changing their views: but this has to be done over a longer time period for difficult areas like migration.
- Comparing places where you believe you reached audiences with others where you did not: this can even be done by comparing countries.

*Simple messages are simpler to measure. A simple tip:*



Careful what you claim: very few big achievements are the result of one person or organisation's work. Tell funders and supporters what your contribution was to the change and how you have measured it.

Impacts may be negative as well as positive, especially if you work in an unpopular area that becomes the eye of a political storm. So it is important to assess the risk of that at the start, determine what will measure it and include it in your planning.

## How do we measure?

*Measurements in communications are not easy, even for those with big budgets to spend. Focusing on specific messages for specific audiences makes it possible.*

For each message decide what indicators may be relevant. Use a mix and include quantitative (number of website hits, number of articles published, number of enquiries generated) and qualitative (changes in "tone" in articles, statements by politicians). Look for changes in direction: different statements, new people involved. Once identified, think about how to measure them too.

Some measuring tools:

- [Google analytics](#) tells you how many people access your website and where they came from: that is a very useful measure of increasing reach, and of reaching more from specific audiences (e.g. .gov, .org, .eu).
- Facebook provides information on metrics (the numbers who like or share a post or page: sharing is always more useful than liking!) via [page insights](#).
- Twitter offers analytics on ads, but RazorSocial have a useful [article](#) on the different analytics available free. Again it is likely that comments (retweets with quotes and comments and replies) indicate more engagement than simple retweets.
- [Crowdbooster](#) is a commercial service that measures your reach in social media. It offers a 30 day free trial.
- [Kantarmedia](#) is a company that offers to measure the “return on investment” of your communications work, for a fee.

Some traditional measurements do not work well for migrant NGOs. Clippings services, for example, report on all references to the chosen them/organisation/message, but do not distinguish between positive and negative reports, or tell you anything about reach.

If you have the time and resources, comparing a before and after is always powerful and sometimes instructive. Ask targeted lawmakers a specific question before the work starts, designed to illustrate their understanding of the issue as much as their support for your aim. Then ask them a similarly revealing question afterwards.

Similarly, asking supporters (new and old) directly whether they took action as you hoped tells you about how effective the message was. If you have time you can also find out if the message worked better for some “types” of people than others which enables better targeting next time.

Some measures are obvious: if you were asking people to take action, you can find out if they did (for example, asking how many letters a decision-maker has received about an issue). Editorials in neutral or even anti-migrant publications that seem more positive are evidence of change. More formal supporters is another indicator of success. Even more so if they are actually from one of your target groups (e.g. health professionals, journalists, other NGOs).

*Is all publicity good publicity? Probably not. Some analytic tools do not distinguish good from bad. Negative responses may indicate reach, or may indicate poor targeting. You may have anticipated them: if not, are there lessons for your planning?*

### *Specifying communications: working with communications professionals*

**ECRE** commissioned Saatchi and Saatchi to run the campaign to [help Syria's refugees](#) which launched in March 2014. The campaign urges Europe to act now to allow refugees in, protect them at the border and reunite families. It is Europewide, in four languages, running on various media but essentially web-based, asking people to “give their voice” via social media. Participants find out about the lives of Syrian refugees and then offer the campaign the use of their Twitter or Facebook accounts to pass on messages about them. Over 7000 people have, reaching over 300,000 of their friends and followers. The decision to use social media was partly because ECRE members already used it well, and partly because it reflected the need to harness the grassroots appeal of the message.

*Good quality communications work can be expensive, but companies do offer pro bono services, usually to help design strategies rather than deliver actual campaigns or material.*

As with other pro bono work, this carries a risk that the work will be low priority, done by juniors, or delayed if other contracts interfere. Against this is the potential kudos that such work brings: the involvement of a well-known media company can be a news item in itself, and may go beyond the specialist press.

Fundraising for media campaigns takes time (three to four months at least), but is also best done if tied to particular and urgent needs. Planning and developing the campaign also takes time and resources. The discussions need to establish:

- **What everyone means:** both NGOs and media companies have their own languages and the first bit of communicating has to be to explain themselves to each other. That means being explicit about issues which are seen as delicate or technical, and being clear and learning from each other about what language is appropriate for different audiences.
- **The difficulties and risks both sides see in the work.** The cause may be difficult to sell, there are political and other risks which media companies are not used to dealing with.
- **Ownership and decision-making.** Who will own the website after the campaign? How will it be updated? Who will decide which specialist companies to use?
- **Timing:** a set of key dates around which the media campaign should work. These might relate to decisions, or to dates that resonate with particular audiences. Media companies can also provide good general advice on what works in relation to timing.
- **Resources:** both sides bring more than money and technical expertise. NGOs have supporter networks, potential campaign ambassadors and may also have some celebrity connections. Often their “reach” is greater than they realise. Media companies have their own networks: other companies they work for, other celebrities they work with who can also be involved.
- **Evaluation:** not just of the campaign and its successes, but also of the relationship and what each side has learned.



## Storytelling

The workshop had storytelling as a theme and this briefing looks at how we work with migrants and others to tell their stories. But first: how do you tell good stories?

Pixar makes films you have heard of: Toy Story, Monsters Inc, Finding Nemo. This much copied [list](#) was written by one of their storyboard artists as 22 rules of storytelling: here are some of the more relevant, the ones that work for real life stories.

- #1: You admire a character for trying more than for their successes.*
- #2: You gotta keep in mind what's interesting to you as an audience, not what's fun to do as a writer. They can be v. different.*
- #4: Once upon a time there was \_\_\_\_\_. Every day, \_\_\_\_\_. One day, \_\_\_\_\_. Because of that, \_\_\_\_\_. Because of that, \_\_\_\_\_. Until finally, \_\_\_\_\_.*
- #5: Simplify. Focus. Combine characters. Hop over detours. You'll feel like you're losing valuable stuff but it sets you free.*
- #13: Give your characters opinions. Passive/malleable might seem likable to you as you write, but it's poison to the audience.*
- #14: Why must you tell THIS story? What's the belief burning within you that your story feeds off of? That's the heart of it.*
- #16: What are the stakes? Give us reason to root for the character. What happens if they don't succeed? Stack the odds against.*
- #21: You gotta identify with your situation/characters, can't just write 'cool'. What would make YOU act that way?*
- #22: What's the essence of your story? Most economical telling of it? If you know that, you can build out from there.*

### *How do we work with migrants to tell their stories?*

Individual testimony is often the most powerful way to explain what you do and why. Migrant voice is the vital element most often missing from debates about migration, and working with migrants to tell their stories enables that voice to be heard. An obvious use is in work with media and campaigning, but migrant stories can also be evidence in litigation, part of advocacy decision-making, a tool for migrant integration and a lively way of promoting good practice.

Working with migrants to tell their stories demonstrates respect for their experiences, but can also be a source of anxiety for NGOs and migrants. Journalists can make unreasonable demands, migrants may worry about attracting attention, especially if their faces appear (and journalists may insist that the story will have no traction without a face). It is always important to retain a sense of responsibility towards vulnerable individuals, and preparation for any work telling stories publicly must include an honest and open discussion about risks and fears. These, however, must be balanced against the advantages to individual migrants (getting redress, changing their situation, building or bolstering self-respect) and to others (promoting policy change, changing the way migrants are viewed).

Inviting migrant users or participants to be part of explaining their lives and decisions to the wider world is the first step. Sympathetic journalists may offer help with explaining how the media works and what works well in presenting migrant stories. Where relevant, people can be offered coaching or training in

telling their story, interview technique or appearing in front of cameras. It is also important to ensure that they understand the core demands of the organisation or campaign and are in sympathy with them.

The most effective stories are those in the first person singular: they represent a strong authentic voice. Of course they may need editing, but too much editing, or too much coaching beforehand may make the story seem artificial.

Once a database of potential interviewees is available, this can be shared with journalists, ensuring that all requests for no pictures, anonymity etc. are respected. **Migrants must be told that they can withdraw consent at any time, can ask for help or to be accompanied, but that, above all, they themselves decide.**

[Detention Action](#) offers training to former detainees on campaigning which allows them to be involved and have ownership of the campaigns and also aids their integration. People who participate improve their confidence and self-esteem and some become brilliant campaigners. This provides a library of [detainee voices](#) and also forms the basis of the innovative [Community Support Project](#) which aims to demonstrate that, with reintegration support and training in confidence building, ex-offender migrants actually rarely abscond or reoffend, and therefore that the long-term detention of unreturnable ex-offenders is completely unnecessary.

### *Managing the problems when migrants tell their stories*

**It may be difficult to find migrants to tell the stories you need told.**

- Migrants themselves may lack trust in the media or worry that their story will be manipulated.
- Xenophobia makes people afraid to appear.
- Some people, such as detainees, are particularly difficult to access.
- Some people are particularly vulnerable, such as those whose legal situation is unresolved or particularly precarious.

Building relationships with trusted journalists enables stories to be told in a positive way, and this, in turn, may encourage others.

Using audio, graphics or animation avoids endangering individuals.

[Meet the Somalis](#) is a collection of 14 illustrated stories depicting the real life experiences of Somalis in seven cities in Europe: Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Leicester, London, Malmö, and Oslo. The stories allow readers a unique insight into what everyday life is like as a Somali in Europe. *Meet the Somalis* is based on the first-hand testimonies of Somalis in Europe interviewed during six months in 2013. The Open Society Foundations say “*Meet the Somalis* depicts experiences many of us will never know, like fleeing a warzone with your children or, worse, leaving your loved ones behind. But more often, these stories portray the values shared amongst many of us, like the importance of family, well-being, and identity in an ever-changing world.”

Sometimes it is possible to talk to detainees by phone and interview them like that. But in Ireland this may take a while, since they are limited to three minute calls.

Migrants waiting for decisions, especially those where it may be difficult to get a positive result must be clear about the likely effect any media work will have on their case. Some may have unrealistic hopes that publicity will make a difference. Of course, sometimes it does, but not always positively. The aim must always be to play to strengths, and many migrants display great strengths, while ensuring that good advice is available and honest evaluation of the likely effects of any actions is offered.

**Working with journalists presents challenges:**

- They have deadlines and may be unrealistic about timescales.
- Even when they report the story, they may omit the organisation.
- They may misunderstand, misrepresent or just leave out the context.
- They may not understand the arrangement with the migrant whose story is to be told.

Building relationships with journalists works well. Over time they and you get to understand how each other works, the respective aims, and so work together better. As in any relationship, providing positive feedback is a very good way to promote change.

NGOs can use letters pages, comments columns, tweets and Facebook posts to explain the organisation's role, and so use the media event to good effect. Sympathetic journalists can be asked to write more on the topic explaining the context or even exposing the failure to report the story properly.

It is never possible to make written agreements with independent journalists that cover the fears of NGOs and migrants. But there is nothing to stop the NGO writing down what they believe has been agreed, and asking the journalist to confirm that that is also their understanding. At worst, this can form the basis of a later complaint, but it may also highlight potential misunderstandings before it is too late to resolve them.

**Sometimes stories rebound:**

- A case that has appeared in the media may be refused, or attract publicity later for something more negative, which may lead to damaging publicity for the organisation.
- If the media make something negative out of a story, the NGO's board may blame the communications officer.

Even negative publicity can sometimes be turned around: a press release highlighting how rare such cases are. Refusals of cases may enable further press work on the human consequences of these decisions.

Staff working on communications need to document everything they do. Boards must also be educated about why media work is important, what is gained by it, the risks and the ways of mitigating these.

*Using champions to tell our stories*

Sometimes using well known individuals as champions is a way to get wider audiences for messages. This may be someone who is widely trusted as a source of information, or sometimes someone who will attract attention because his or her commitment is surprising.

### **Choosing a champion:**

- Champions must be convinced and unlikely to change their minds.
- It makes a good story if the champion has a personal reason for their involvement. An example was a famous painter who had been undocumented abroad once and became an advocate for undocumented people in his home country.
- A champion should be at ease with media work and not shy.
- Different champions work well with different audiences, so think about the target audience, brainstorm who might be popular with them, not just the people you respect or listen to.
- The champion can also be chosen within the niche you are working in: a famous lawyer for a legal organisation, a mainstream journalist with a migrant background for advocacy on media access to detention campaign.
- Then make personal contact if at all possible: ask all your supporters and contacts if they have a way to do this.
- If personal contact is not possible, it will have to be via an agency or intermediary and for that you need a well worked out proposition that makes it clear that this is a “win-win game”.

### **Working with champions:**

- Do not ask champions to advocate unpopular messages at first.
- Always frame messages for champions positively.
- If you can, offer several possible messages and different things to do.
- Ensure that the champion knows the issues, agrees with the messages and is confident about them.
- Build relationships: assign the time and human resource necessary. Send cards, updates on your work, relevant publications.
- If it is a one-off campaign, make sure you keep in contact afterwards.

### **What can champions do?**

- Reach a broader audience and promote media presence.
- Collect money.
- Raise awareness.
- Get different people on board (e.g. the young).
- Sign petitions, support campaigns and get others to do the same.
- Promote activities: film showings, book launches.
- Tackle rumours, present facts.
- Secure political commitment.
- Do something one-off and specific to them: a stylist could create a T-shirt with a message.

### **Managing the risks associated with champions**

Your organisation will be associated with the champion, just as he or she will be with you. People with a strong presence may alienate some people just as they attract support from others. If it is a politician there is also a risk that the organisation gets associated with a partisan position.

Clarity about the message helps avoid these risks. But if you are not sure that the possible champion is likely to be good for the organisation over the long term (because he or she is not sure about the organisation's positions or because it will not be good for the organisation to be identified with them over time) then you can ask them to just collaborate for one campaign or one event. Take a picture with a message and post it on Facebook. Use Twitter: [here](#) is an example of a one-off on Twitter.

Some celebrities expect payment for advertising. Most NGOs simply do not have the resources for this, and it needs to be made clear at the outset. Payment is not appropriate for one-off actions. But there may be some trade off in increased fundraising capacity that is worth considering.