

MIGRATION NARRATIVES: 2nd WEBINAR OF THE EPIC PROJECT

GOOD PRACTICES TO DESIGN COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGNS AIMING TO TACKLE RUMOURS AND FAKE NEWS ABOUT MIGRATION

Discriminatory or security-oriented discourse about newcomers leads to feelings of mistrust, stereotypical perceptions and can lead to actions that have a negative impact on the daily realities of migrants, or even put them at risk. This is why we must contribute to underline that migration is a natural phenomenon, that our societies have been built in diversity and that this heritage contributes to their nurturing development.

What can we do then to deconstruct wrong stereotypes, misperceptions and even racism and hate speech attacks towards migrants? This is what the EPIC project - European Platform of Integrating Cities – has been researching about, including identifying and analysing good practices.

EPIC hosted the second of a series of webinars on migration and communication on Tuesday, 22 October 2021. The webinar focused on learning how to design local communication campaigns, from past and current campaigners, and in turn highlight the benefits of local integration, building positive narratives and counteracting negative stereotypes towards migrant communities. The session was moderated by Patricia Martinez from AEIDL, and a total of 35 participants benefited from the ideas of four campaign promoters based in France, Portugal, The United Kingdom and Spain.

Starting with **Agata de Latour**, Intercultural and Language Trainer, we refreshed what alternative narratives and counter-narrative concepts mean.

“Oppressive narratives are exclusive, aggressive. What we want to create are inclusive narratives, not aggressive ones. We are also looking to create narratives based on human rights, on values such as equality, participation, respect and human dignity. And we have a strategic choice. We can choose a counter speech or an alternative speech. A counter speech is a short and direct reaction to hateful messages. It's about striking back. It's very direct and the objective is to occupy public space. The alternative speech, on the other hand, is not really dealing with the hateful message. It's about changing perspective. It's about creating another path. It's about creating a whole new story of yours.”

Agata continued her intervention presenting the case example of the ‘Migrant’scène’ festival in France organised by La Cimade. Some of the takeaway points from that example include

- The most effective message on the long-term is raising awareness as an alternative narrative. It is creating space for reflection on these complex issues as well as for developing competences and skills to empower active citizenship and respect of human rights.
- The first counter- narrative iteration of La Cimade was focused on prejudices, which were named and listed as part of the campaign. The method consisted of quoting and repeating the oppressive narratives. But in a further adjustment to this idea, the festival decided not to quote them, but directly provide an alternative narrative

focused on human rights. Instead of restating the oppressive statements and thus, multiplying them, open questions were addressed in order to provoke profound reflections.

Secondly, **Daura Vera**, from Juntas En la misma dirección ("*Together in the same direction*"), presented among other things, the Tenerife Anti-rumours Strategy in Spain. With the increase of migratory flows from mainly Western African countries to the Canary Islands since 2006, a flourishing of fake news arose.

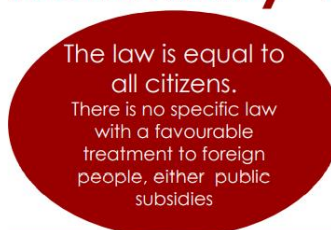
One of the main challenges Daura and her colleagues find when it comes to designing alternative or counter narratives lies in tackling the root causes of prejudices against migrants. Intentionally misleading statements, fake news, hoaxes and rumours about migrants spread by social media, politicians and the press contribute greatly to the manipulation of public opinion. On the one hand, to tackle misinformation, "Juntas en la misma dirección" works on raising awareness on the importance of verifying information found online. Through the project "Juntas Verificamos" (Together we verify) they provide fact-checking tools and guidelines to analyse messages online, such Reporterslab, a database of global fact-checking sites.

Through the "*More information, less fake news*" campaign, the approach is to thwart rumours by creating appealing infographics to transform misinformation and stereotypes portrait in those fake news and turning them in a positive way. One recurrent fake news spread in the Canary Islands is the idea that migrants receive a monthly wage from the government or that there are special laws that give foreigners a preferential treatment in Spain or special public funding. The reality is that the Red Cross gives arriving migrants a one-time pocket money contribution of 30 euros only and that Spanish law gives all citizens the same access to Civil rights. *Together in the same direction* launched a campaign with cards and social media posts spreading the word about this to fight against this type of misinformation.

Migrations: +Humanity-Fakenews



Historically, cultural diversity has been a significant feature of Canarian society. We should remember it



Disinformation affects real people and our democracy. Do not contribute spreading it, do not stay silent

Picture 1. Example of communication materials prepared by [Estrategia Tenerife Antirrumores – Juntas en la misma dirección \(juntasenlamismadireccion.com\)](http://Estrategia_Tenerife_Antirrumores_-_Juntas_en_la_misma_direccion_(juntasenlamismadireccion.com))

Dina Moreira, Office project and coordinator of the Municipality of Amadora, presented the Do not feed the rumour and the Rumourless Cities Transfer Network, implemented by the municipality of Amadora.

The three key success factors for Dina to achieve the goal of the campaigns have been:

- 1) Strong political commitment to push for the campaign. Without this first point the local campaigns would not be able to achieve the desired impact, even if the next 2 points were fully covered;
- 2) Civil society and local stakeholders;
- 3) Motivated local teams.

As part of this campaign, the city of Amadora set up a competition involving primary and secondary schools. By the means of a participatory approach, young people involved were invited to explore and reflect on the issues of rumours and prejudices, to deconstruct them and to develop imaginative responses to them.

Lastly, **Madeleina Kay**, Social Media Campaigner at the Media Diversity Institute, shared the actions undertaken by the Get The Trolls Out project to tackle hate-speech and disinformation targeting religious minorities in European media and online.

The overall objective of the Get The Trolls Out project is to identify discriminatory media texts through regular media monitoring and use the data to empower civil society organisations in Europe, to counter intolerance and xenophobia targeting minority communities. The media monitoring activity is based on the premise that mainstream media reach the largest audience, have influence on decision makers and play a vital role in shaping public opinion.

The 2020 media monitoring findings demonstrated that:

- Islamophobia accounts for 63.7%, anti-migrant and anti-refugee messages for 26.3% and antisemitism for 9.1% of incidents recorded in 2020.
- The main perpetrators are journalists / writers. (62.8%).
- Stereotyping accounts for the majority (43.6%) of incidents, spreading harmful misinformation accounts for 30.9% and insults for 13.8%.
- Most incidents happen in newspapers (37.2%) and on blogs (25.8%)
- The main problem with far-right blogs is that they are not regulated in any way

To address those issues identified, the get the trolls out project files complaints about identified hate speech articles and develops resources, articles, videos, workshops, and communication campaigns debunking hate speech narratives, conspiracy theories and challenging anti-religious myths.

The COVID-19 pandemic crisis has also shown many challenges ahead. In 2020, a year defined by the global pandemic, the Media Diversity Institute identified the extent to which

mainstream and social media merge in the case of pandemic news. As the world struggled to control the pandemic, the *'infodemic'* emerged as well, fostered by the use of social media, which gives worldwide visibility and capacity for disinformation to spread. Madeleine and her colleagues constantly work on reports, campaigning and complaints to tackle the spread of increasing conspiracy theories on social media.

We can conclude that designing a communication campaign to promote a more nuanced public opinion on migration can help address the root causes of prejudice by helping to combat fake news while raising awareness and informing the public about misinformation and providing fact-checking tools. This can also include monitoring and regulating social media by reporting incidents and linking social media platforms in the fight to prevent the spread of hate speech. In addition, it seems essential to provide new messages, to develop powerful narratives and to restore true stories. In particular, empirical campaigns have shown successes in answering oppressive narratives alternative rights-based narratives rather than citing rumours to counter them. Furthermore, method matters, and experience has demonstrated that participatory campaigns achieve better outcomes.