Side event: "Upholding the human rights guiding principle in the Global Compact for Migration"

Thursday, 19 May 2022, 1.00-3.00 pm EDT / New York

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On Road Media is a charity using communications to change the world. We condense and apply learnings from research on how to shift public perceptions. We then look at how these narratives play out in media and public discourse. Supporting people with direct experience, connecting them with the media, helping them to move the conversation around migration to deepen public understanding and improve support.

We all know and agree that there's a problem with narratives around migration. Migration is often represented in a one dimensional way, inadvertently othering the people at the centre of the story. This representation shapes public opinion of migration, and people who migrate, in a negative way. It can lead to policies that work against us as a society, rather than for us all.

But we've also come together because we know and agree that there's something you can do. Great messaging has the power to positively change narratives around migration, drawing audiences in and shifting understanding by representing migration in a relatable, fresh and nuanced way. It ensures people feel heard and seen.

Language - avoid alienating people
Migration is complex and there are many different legal terms that describe people's experiences. The Media Movers agreed that no one term fits all, but they were clear that it's important to identify people and their experiences accurately.

Say phrases like 'person who now lives in the UK', 'person who moved', 'young woman with refugee status'.

When we only use words like 'migrant', 'refugee' and 'asylum seeker' to describe people, we identify them only by their experiences and ignore the other aspects of their lives that make them who they are.

Making the CHOICE to add words like 'illegal' (e.g. 'illegal migrant') adds a criminal element to this, distorting the reality of migration and misrepresenting people who migrate. Words like these result in people subconsciously distancing themselves from this group.

3 practical tips for your own messaging
When it comes to your own messaging there are a few simple things you can do. These are also the kinds of messaging you can be promoting:

<u>Show why it matters to all of us</u>
The general public is already bombarded with so much news and information. Therefore, to get and keep their attention, you need to draw them in at the beginning and show them why they should care and why discrimination against people with migrant backgrounds affects all of us.

Values frames like compassion, kindness, freedom etc., guide them into taking in your message. The earlier you can remind people that they care about improving our migration system - and so they should care about your message - the better.

Language like 'us', 'we' and 'our' all move people away from othering and 'us versus them' thinking. They set up the current migration system as a problem that matters to all of us - driving us all to want action and to solve it together.

Widen the lens on the issue, rather than isolating individual experiences
Personal stories are a great way of drawing people in, but research shows that we subconsciously explain away an individual's experience to make the world feel more manageable.

We need help to see contexts and systems. - show people that it is the rules and the policies in place/the system that is the problem.

It's easier to imagine and blame people's choices or behaviour than to blame structural issues, but it's never that simple or even true. This is why it's important we widen the lens on the problem because individual stories can paint a picture of isolated, random incidents.

Use metaphors to be vivid and memorable when telling the truth. They are very effective in getting people to think beyond individual contexts and to how our current systems are failing people.

So, by bringing in the context we draw attention to systems - not individual attributes.

Talk about solutions and show what's working
It's really easy to assume issues around migration cannot be solved and so we need to bring them in. But it's not enough to just have solutions: we need to talk about manageable and realistic solutions, repeat them and always show that we can overcome the challenges we've mentioned.

When we don't give people an idea of what can be done or is being done to tackle the issue, they may feel so fatalistic or overwhelmed by the topic that they "close down". They then don't hear what you have to say. It helps to show people that systems have been designed – so they can be redesigned.

Promoting
Finally, it's important to promote stories that aren't about retraumatizing people (people with migrant backgrounds as well the general public), but also about highlighting the solutions. Share stories of people coming together within your community and country.

Point to platforms that do this work well, whether this is news, drama, tweets etc. Show people what good messaging around migration should look like.

And of course, support work and projects like On Road Media's that are designed to that train media professionals and improve narratives and public understanding around migration and the discrimination people with migrant backgrounds face.