



Expert roundtable on
Changing the public narrative on migration: promoting tolerance and
combatting xenophobia against migrants

Concept Note

Anti-migrant and xenophobic messages have permeated political movements in many countries and resulted in a climate of marginalisation, discrimination, and rising violence against migrants, notably those in an irregular situation. The public narrative on migration is deeply polarised, and often openly xenophobic.

Terminology has long been used to distance migrants and their communities from the mainstream, to stigmatise them as the unknown “Other”. Political leaders and social commentators in all regions have used hateful and demeaning language, often for electoral advantage.

In countries and communities around the world, migrants have been made into scapegoats and associated with criminality, disease, unemployment and other social problems. Public policies on migration are often made on the basis of flawed assumptions, misperceptions about the scale and nature of migration, prejudice and fear rather than on the basis of evidence.

Generating rigorous evidence on migration is, however, only part of the picture. Migration is an issue that raises strong – often visceral – emotions, and it is all too easy for politicians to reap the electoral benefits of whipping up base fears about migrants. Migrants as well as the communities into which they arrive deserve better and more responsible political leadership.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has called on States and other stakeholders to prevent and combat xenophobia against migrants, including confronting hate speech and incitement to hatred against migrants, and combatting impunity for xenophobic violence and other manifestations of xenophobia.

Scope of the meeting

At a time when anti-migrant sentiment is rife around the world, this expert meeting aims to examine the way that migration is being framed in the public narrative, including through the media and social media but also in other forms such as the creative arts, in order to work towards evidence-based and migrant-centred narratives on migration that uphold the dignity and human rights of all migrants without discrimination.

Some of the questions the expert roundtable discussion will examine include:

- How to craft rights-based messages on migration and migrants that resonate with the broader public?
- Is it possible to craft messages that resonate at the global level, or will the campaign necessarily have to be aimed at a national audience? Are there risks involved in a global campaign (e.g. of further alienating a national audience that sees migrants as 'foreign invaders')?
- Will it be possible to restrict a campaign to non-nationals; how to handle the commonalities in the experience of xenophobia between migrants and minority citizens?
- How can these messages be disseminated?
- Who are the partners to involve?
- What are the dos and don'ts in terms of framing, partnering, dissemination?

The aim of the round table meeting would be to explore the parameters and products for an eventual public-facing campaign by OHCHR and its partners on *Changing the public narrative on migration: promoting tolerance and combatting xenophobia against migrants*.

Participation

Participants at the expert roundtable will include: media professionals, social media experts, representatives from the creative arts, non-governmental organisations, UN agencies and other relevant agencies, regional organisations and other experts as relevant.