BACKGROUND PAPER
Raising Awareness to Promote Refugee Inclusion
SHARE Regional Conference
Bucharest (26-28 June, 2019)

To set the context and provide a basis for the four panel discussions during the **SHARE Regional Conference *'Raising Awareness to Promote Refugee Inclusion'*,** this background paper presents a brief literature review in three key areas:

- **Media, popular discourse & communication: migrants and refugees** (Panels 1 & 2)
- **'Encounters': bringing together host communities and refugees** (Panel 3)
- **Refugee self-representation** (Panel 4)

****

1. MEDIA, POPULAR DISCOURSE & COMMUNICATION: MIGRANTS & REFUGEES
(Panels 1 & 2)

a. The role of the media in shaping public opinion

The media actively shapes how we interpret the world around us and understand what events mean. In relation to migration, it contributes to how we understand *'what the story **is** on migration'* and how we perceive migrants and refugees.[1]

Mainstream media in particular has a strong role to play in framing public and policy debates. In general the more visible a topic is, the more significant the media's influence will be.[2] 'In Europe, migration policy and how migrants and refugees are *'contentious issues involving uncertainty and concern'*,[3] and the resultantly strong media influence can be seen in the impact of the widely published images of Alan Kurdi, a three-year old from Syria who drowned in the Mediterranean during his family's attempt to reach Europe by boat in September

---

[1] Hall, S (1997) *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*

[2] Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies, commissioned by UNHCR (2015) *'Press coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis in the EU: a content analysis of five European countries'*

[3] Kosho, J (2016) *'Media Influence On Public Opinion Attitudes Toward The Migration Crisis'*

2015.[4] This influence is not one-way, however: the media is also influenced **by** public opinion, and reflects and reproduces popular ideas about migrants and refugees.[5]

Mainstream media contributes to setting the political agenda on migration and asylum. It emphasises some potential policy solutions and removes others from view, and can create 'media panics' that shift the focus of policymaking.[6]

However, an environment in which political rhetoric is strongly anti-migrant and anti-refugee can present challenges for accurate and non-sensationalist reporting, particularly in contexts where political interference in media coverage is more common. The *'views and decisions'* of policymakers on migration and asylum affect both media coverage and public opinion.[7]

b. Popular discourse on migrants and refugees

Since the early 1990s, mainstream media discourse on migration in Europe has been predominantly negative,[8] albeit to differing degrees throughout this period. The sharp increase in the number of persons entering Europe to seek protection during 2014-15 made this a new, crucial period for *'agenda-setting for today's refugee and migrant crisis.'* [9]

Media coverage of the 'crisis' has fallen into two broad categories: *'humanitarian themes'* (such as reasons for people coming to Europe, situations in countries of origin, and migratory risks and experiences), and *'threat themes'* (the threats presented by the movements of people for welfare systems, crime, security, and the cultural character and traditions of receiving societies).[10]

Media coverage shows a *'fixation with migration figures'*, characterised by inaccurate, misleading and/or alarmist presentations and discussions of statistics relating to - for example - the number of migrant arrivals, asylum claims and irregular migrants in Europe.[11]

Inaccurate labelling of refugees and asylum seekers in media coverage means they are often conflated with other categories of migrant, a phenomena that has become a major focal point for both pro and anti-migration campaigners.[12] A 2017 study found that the terminology used to describe migrants and refugees varied significantly across mainstream media in seven European countries, noting how

---

[4] Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies, commissioned by UNHCR (2015) *'Press coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis in the EU: a content analysis of five European countries'*
[5] Moore, K (2012) *'"Asylum Crisis", National security and the re-articulation of human rights'*
[6] Threadgold, T (2009) *'The Media and Migration in the United Kingdom 1999–2009'*
[7] Kosho, J (2016) *'Media Influence On Public Opinion Attitudes Toward The Migration Crisis'*
[8] Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies, ibid
[9] Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies, ibid
[10] Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies, ibid
[11] De Botton et al (2006), *'Intersubjective and intercultural reading of the news coverage of the events in Ceuta and Melilla'*
[12] Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies, commissioned by UNHCR (2015) *'Press coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis in the EU: a content analysis of five European countries'*

'other terms besides "refugees," "migrants," and "asylum seekers" are being used with unknown positive or negative connotations'.[13]

It is difficult to disentangle the influence of the media on public opinion and popular discourses on migrants and refugees from that of other factors. Since 2008, populist anti-immigrant feelings have been revived by the economic and social insecurity created both by the global economic recession, and the subsequent austerity policies implemented in many destination/receiving countries (including those within the EU). Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants are subsequently (and not for the first time) discussed mainly in connection with concerns about labour market competition and their impact on public finances.[14]

The increased visibility of migrants and refugees since 2014-15, coupled with social and economic uncertainty and *'inadequate political explanations for the financial crisis and effects of austerity'*, has enabled immigration-related explanations from populist and right-wing actors to gain traction.[15] Populist political parties have achieved electoral successes in some Member States, thus moving negative discourses on migration into the political mainstream.[16]

The increased prominence of migration in the political, public and media arenas also means it has also become a focal point for political parties to attack the policy proposals of their opponents.[17]

c. Best practice in communication and advocacy on migration and asylum
As outlined above, the manner in which political actors communicate on migration and asylum can have an important impact on media representations and public opinion. Political communication on migration is much more effective when it is proactive rather than reactive: regular positive communication can set the tone for public debate, and create positive partnerships and dialogue with the media and general public.[18]

Public opinion is shaped far more by values, emotion and personal beliefs than statistics and objective facts.[19] Addressing contentious policy issues such as

---

[13] World Association for Christian Communication (Europe region) & Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (2017) *'Changing the Narrative: media representation of refugees and migrants in Europe'*
[14] Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies, commissioned by UNHCR (2015) *'Press coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis in the EU: a content analysis of five European countries'* & Kosho, J (2016) *'Media Influence On Public Opinion Attitudes Toward The Migration Crisis'*
[15] Mylonas, Y (2012) *'Media & the Economic Crisis of the EU: the 'culturalization' of a systemic crisis and Bild-Zeitung's Framing of Greece'*
[16] Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies, ibid
[17] De Botton et al (2006), *'Intersubjective and intercultural reading of the news coverage of the events in Ceuta and Melilla'*
[18] Papademetriou, D & Heuser, A (2009) *'Public Opinion, Media Coverage & Migration: Developing Strategies for Immigration and Integration Reforms'*
[19] Papademetriou, D & Heuser, A ibid & Campbell,T, Griffin, L & Neimand, A (2017) *'Persuasion in a post-Truth World'*

migration and asylum by presenting facts and data *'can backfire'*,[20] as people are more likely to reject out of hand this type of evidence when it conflicts with their core values and worldview.[21] While fact-checking and corrections are important, the majority of people cannot conceive of the numbers involved in discussions on migration: it is pertinent here to ask if '60 million refugees' looks substantially different in someone's mind compared to '40 million' or '20 million'.[22]

By contrast, stories can create empathy. They should however be presented in a way that speaks to the prevailing values and beliefs of the target audience(s). In the US, for example, creating positive associations for refugees and migrants might involve presenting them as *'good co-workers, caregivers and individuals that share American values'*.[23] Effective media advocacy in European countries, as elsewhere, therefore *'requires targeted, tailored campaigns, which take into account the unique (national) cultures and political contexts'*.[24]

2. 'ENCOUNTERS': BRINGING TOGETHER HOST COMMUNITIES AND REFUGEES (Panel 3)

Integration is a *'dynamic and multi-faceted two-way process'*,[25] the success of which depends in part on the willingness of receiving societies to welcome and meet the needs of migrants and refugees. This willingness is shaped by beliefs about and attitudes toward migrants and refugees. One way to build understanding and empathy and combat misinformation amongst those in receiving societies is through direct contact with refugees and migrants.[26]

The positive impact of direct contact with refugees has been evidenced in both academic research and evaluation of practices in this area.

A UNHCR study found that 68% of Austrians who had not experienced contact with refugees described their attitudes toward displaced persons as largely negative, compared to just 20% amongst those Austrians in direct personal contact with refugees.[27]

---

[20] Papademetriou, D & Heuser, A (2009) *'Public Opinion, Media Coverage & Migration: Developing Strategies for Immigration and Integration Reforms'*

[21] Campbell,T, Griffin, L & Neimand, A (2017) *'Persuasion in a post-Truth World'*

[22] Parater, L (2018) *'The failure of raising awareness for refugees in a world of data and disinformation'*(at https://medium.com/bending-the-arc/the-failure-of-raising-awareness-for-refugees-in-a-world-of-data-disinformation-and-empathy-71568b64f26c, *last accessed 14 June 2019)*

[23] Papademetriou, D & Heuser, A ibid

[24] Cardiff School of Journalism, Media & Cultural Studies, commissioned by UNHCR (2015) *'Press coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis in the EU: a content analysis of five European countries'*

[25] UNHCR (2007) *'Note on the integration of refugees in the European Union'*

[26] Bergmann, J (2016) *'Building contact between immigrants and host communities is vital to integration – and should be a central goal of the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants'* (at https://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/building-contact-between-immigrants-and-host-communities-vital-integration-and-should-be-central,last accessed 14 June 2019)

[27] UNHCR study quoted in Bergmann, J ibid (original study no longer available)

A review of 515 separate initiatives to bring together *'natives and immigrants'* implemented over 50 years similarly confirmed that such contact reduces prejudice and negative emotion, and that individuals from host societies tend to generalise these positive experiences and emotions to migrants and refugees in general. Such individuals also become more likely to support policy initiatives in support of refugees and migrants, and can positively influence the views and perspectives of friends and associates not directly involved in such encounters.[28]

Positive contact with refugees and migrants can also 'futureproof' the attitudes of those in host societies, making them more likely to retain a positive perspective in relation to refugees and migrants, even where subsequent encounters or contexts are experienced as negative.[29]

Evaluations of initiatives to facilitate encounters between individuals from host societies and migrants/refugees have identified how they work best when:
- **They respond to an existing interest.** In Germany in 2014, for example, 42% of Germans were interested in getting to know asylum seekers and 66% were willing to support them - yet only 22% were in direct contact with this group, and a further 47% had never met an asylum seeker.[30]
- **Contact is organised with institutional support,** to create shared goals and ensure equality between the individuals involved in the encounter.[31] Ensuring equality is particularly important, given the marginalised position of refugees and migrants in relation to those from receiving societies.[32]
- **Contact builds on common interests and purposes that transcend host/refugee identities,** such as participation in community associations and sporting and cultural clubs and activities.[33]
- **Contact is structured and sustained,** as *'fleeting encounters'* and/or simply being in close proximity in a public space do not tend to change attitudes or reduce prejudice in any significant way.[34]
- **Contact is supported by *'positive indirect contact',*** including for example accurate and up-to-date information and positive media reporting.[35]

---

[28] Pettigrew, T (2011) *'When Groups Meet: the dynamics of intergroup contact'*
[29] Paolini et al (2014) *'Positive and extensive intergroup contact in the past buffers against the disproportionate impact of negative contact in the present'*
[30] Robert Bosch Stiftung study (no longer available) quoted in Bergmann, J (2016) *'Building contact between immigrants and host communities is vital to integration – and should be a central goal of the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants'* (at https://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/building-contact-between-immigrants-and-host-communities-vital-integration-and-should-be-central, last accessed 14 June 2019)
[31] Pettigrew, T (2011) *'When Groups Meet: the dynamics of intergroup contact'*
[32] Piekut, A & Valentine, G (2016) *'Spaces of encounter and attitudes towards difference: A comparative study of two European cities'*
[33] Schaeffer, M (2013) *'Inter-ethnic neighbourhood acquaintances of migrants and natives in Germany: on the brokering roles of inter-ethnic partners and children'*
[34] Piekut, A & Valentine, G (2016) *'Spaces of encounter and attitudes towards difference: A comparative study of two European cities'*
[35] Bergmann, J ibid

- **Individual involvement in encounters is voluntary,** to avoid encounters being experienced as enforced and so producing unintended negative outcomes.[36]

Opportunities for direct contact can also be fostered by general approaches to integration for refugees and migrants. Best practice in this context includes early and equal access to education, language training and non-segregated housing for refugees and migrants, and opportunities for them to engage in productive activities (such as work and volunteering) that take place within mainstream settings in receiving societies.[37]

3. REFUGEE SELF-REPRESENTATION
   (Panel 4)
a. Refugee voices in the mainstream media
Despite the strong focus on migration, asylum and refugees in the European mainstream media, the inclusion of refugee voices in this coverage is extremely limited.

A survey of mainstream media in seven European countries, published in 2017, found that just 21% of surveyed news items focusing on asylum and migration referenced a refugee or migrant, whilst just over 75% did not identify an individual refugee or migrant nor include their voice or experiences. The study concluded that this *'pattern of invisibility'* creates a divide between the discussion of policy at the political level and '*the effects of those policies on people'*.

A 2016 survey of coverage of asylum seekers and refugees in three European countries concluded that the *'voices of the refugees are heard less often than those of politicians and experts'*, and are effectively silenced in favour of narratives provided by mainstream actors.[38] The 2017 study concurred in its findings that less than half of news items referencing an individual refugee or migrant included direct quotes from them, following a *'trend of indirect representation'* that misses an opportunity to build understanding and empathy amongst readers.[39]

A 2015 Council of Europe study of coverage in eight European countries similarly concluded that *'refugees were given limited opportunities to speak of their experiences and suffering'*, and were instead almost uniformly portrayed and discussed as *'silent actors and victims'* without reference to their lives or specific

---

[36] Laurence, J & Bentley, M (2017) *'Countervailing contact: Community ethnic diversity, anti-immigrant attitudes and mediating pathways of positive and negative inter-ethnic contact in European societies'*

[37] Bergmann, J (2016) *'Building contact between immigrants and host communities is vital to integration – and should be a central goal of the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants'* (at https://blogs.worldbank.org/peoplemove/building-contact-between-immigrants-and-host-communities-vital-integration-and-should-be-central, last accessed 14 June 2019)

[38] Finnish Institute in London & Finnish Cultural Institute for the Benelux (2017) *'Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Press Coverage'*

[39] World Association for Christian Communication (Europe region) & Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (2017) *'Changing the Narrative: media representation of refugees and migrants in Europe'*

experiences.[40] The 2017 study agreed that *'refugees and migrants are most often only identified by their displacement'* in mainstream media coverage, noting that of surveyed articles mentioning an individual refugee or migrant:

- Almost half (43%) did not state the refugee/migrant's occupation.
- 27% stated their occupation solely as 'refugee' or 'migrant'.
- Just 3% presented the refugee or migrant as an expert in relation to the article's topic.[41]

b. Refugee self-representation: a rights-based approach

In 2018, the Council of Europe concluded that whereas academic study and public debate has focused a great deal on both media coverage of the 'refugee crisis' and the portrayal of refugees, the *'communication needs and possibilities of participation and self-representation of recently arrived migrants and refugees have been rather neglected'*. It considers that inclusion can only be fully realised when refugees and migrants are recognised as legitimate and respected parts of the media audience, who are able to *'develop a voice that can be heard'*.[42]

A rights-based approach to communication understands media self-representation as an essential component of inclusion and human dignity, in which *'communication rights'*:

- Refer to the rights of individual and collective self-expression, which are vital to full participation and inclusion in receiving societies.
- Support an effective cycle of communication: creating content, being heard, and listening, responding, understanding and learning.
- Include areas such as *'democratic media governance, media ownership and control, cultural diversity, linguistic rights, and the right to education, privacy, peaceful assembly, and self-determination'*.
- Ensure debates on migration and asylum in Europe include *'the voices of those who are most affected by it: refugees and migrants themselves'*.[43]

Media participation gives refugees and migrants a position in the public debate and in society beyond just being a refugee, migrant or victim,[44] and addresses exclusion by transferring the power to decide how refugees and migrants are portrayed from mainstream actors to refugees and migrants themselves.[45]

---

[40] Council of Europe (2017) *'Media coverage of the "Refugee Crisis": a cross-European perspective'*
[41] World Association for Christian Communication (Europe region) & Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (2017) *'Changing the Narrative: media representation of refugees and migrants in Europe'*
[42] Council of Europe report, 2018
[43] World Association for Christian Communication (Europe region) & Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (2017) *'Changing the Narrative: media representation of refugees and migrants in Europe'*
[44] Council of Europe (2018) *'Spaces of Inclusion - An explorative study on needs of refugees and migrants in the domain of media communication and on responses by community media'*
[45] Silverstone, R (2007) *'Media and morality: On the rise of the mediapolis'*

c. Community media and refugee self-representation

In Europe, independent community media has long been acknowledged as a *'third tier'* of broadcasting (alongside public and commercial media) that is crucial to ensuring representation of the *'diversity of ideas and opinions'* present in a specific society, and *'broadening (the) exercise of freedom of expression and information'*.[46]

For refugees, coverage of whom in mainstream media is often driven by external actors and agendas, content that is produced by refugees and local communities can both *'encourage and promote spaces of inclusion'*[47] in a number of important ways:

- **Enabling communities to advocate for themselves,** by facilitating access to information and community-level discussion, and providing a platform for presentation of community issues, perspectives and concerns.
- **Building civic engagement and developing communities,** producing broadcasts and programmes that are *'closer to listeners, viewers and users'*, thereby building an *'informed citizenry'* that is more aware of local issues and general political processes.
- **Improving skills amongst participating refugees and migrants,** including basic skills such as language acquisition and IT literacy, and media-specific skills (production, presenting and so on).
- **Facilitating access to the labour market,** through training and skills development, but also by providing verifiable work experience in the receiving society and access to professional networks.[48]

---

[46] See European Parliament (2008) *'Resolution on Community Media in Europe'* & Council of Europe (1982) *'Declaration on the Freedom of Expression and Information'*
[47] Council of Europe (2018) *'Spaces of Inclusion - An explorative study on needs of refugees and migrants in the domain of media communication and on responses by community media'*
[48] Council of Europe, ibid