COMMUNICATING STRATEGICALLY ABOUT IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

POLICYMAKER PERSPECTIVES

Integration Futures Working Group

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The migration and refugee crisis that peaked in Europe in 2015–2016 created new urgency around efforts to communicate about the costs and benefits of migration. In the years since, the spotlight that was initially trained on the arrival of large numbers of newcomers has swung to focus on how those who remain are integrating into European societies. Yet as immigration and integration have become more controversial and politicised, governments at all levels—along with nongovernmental organisations and the media—face the challenge of finding ways to inject information into highly polarised and contentious policy debates and gain the trust of sceptical publics. Understanding target audiences, including what their concerns are and how they engage with different types of messages, is an essential step towards ensuring that communication initiatives meet their objectives.

Government communications related to immigrant integration can come from a variety of sources and have very different goals. They may be planned or spontaneous, supportive of diversity or critical of its costs, pro-active or reactive. Officials may aim to communicate neutral data points (such as unemployment rates among foreign-born residents), or they may be trying to persuade voters to support a specific policy position or view (e.g., that the construction of minarets should be banned or that diversity benefits the whole community). The tone and content of communications are particularly significant in the wake of conflicts or crises, when what politicians say (and how they say it) can either assuage or stoke anxiety. Policymakers at all levels also face the challenge of striking the right balance between proactive messaging (laying the groundwork for long-term integration goals) and reactive communication (appealing and responding to public emotions and anxieties). While narratives on immigrants and integration sometimes seem to cluster around the two extremes—un-abashedly positive views of diversity at one end, and fear-mongering about costs, cultural clashes, and crime on the other—there is in fact a vast grey area in the middle in which more nuanced and productive communications can be crafted.

Governments at all levels—along with nongovernmental organisations and the media—face the challenge of finding ways to inject information into highly polarised and contentious policy debates.

Although most governments are equipped with teams of communicators, few (if any) have had the training or developed the expertise necessary to design effective communication strategies in the area of integration. As a result, many integration-related campaigns happen on an ad hoc basis. Where this is the case, integra-tion policymakers have often felt forced to develop these communication activities themselves, working with an assortment of external stakeholders and relying on in-house communication professionals only for help in dissemination. But communication strategy and outreach should not be an afterthought; the way governments communicate on integration can be integral (or detrimental) to the success of the integration policies them-selves.

To better understand the challenges of communicating about immigrant integration, Migration Policy Institute Europe researchers conducted interviews with officials and other stakeholders from across Europe. This study revealed several important takeaways for local and national governments grappling with how and when to engage with the public on integration issues, and what narratives and other communication tools have proven effective:

- ▪ *Positive messages can sometimes backfire.* While highlighting steps taken to help immigrants integrate into a host society may seem like the obvious way to ease fears about immigration-related cultural change or social tensions, this may not always have the intended outcomes. Communications that feature interventions and services aimed at newcomers, for instance, could leave native-born

communities feeling left behind. Governments must communicate about immigrant integration in a way that reflects their responsibility to societies *as a whole*—and that does not appear to prioritise the needs of certain groups above others. In addition, messages that appear overly positive and do not match up to the more complex reality on the ground may appear disingenuous.

- *Messages can easily be ignored or dismissed.* Messages may fail to resonate with (or may be mis-interpreted by) an audience if they do not tap into people's lived experiences and emotions. Humans have a tendency to accept or reject information depending on whether it aligns with what they already believe and whether it is delivered by a trusted messenger. Messages delivered by trusted sources, such as local influencers and peers, can even soften the landing of unpopular information.

- *Attempts to communicate can sometimes confuse rather than enlighten.* Local integration priorities are not always reflected in national-level communications or policies, and vice versa. For example, national restrictions on minority practices, such as burqa bans, may raise tensions over what had previously been non-issues for some local communities. More broadly, messages that do not reflect consensus on integration objectives (whether between different communities or levels of government) risk confusing an audience with mixed signals.

- *Acknowledging conflict is difficult but necessary.* Particularly at a time of intense popular and political scrutiny, a certain level of tension is unavoidable when it comes to integration issues. But the choice of how and when to acknowledge conflict is a delicate balancing act. In order to be considered credible, governments and the media must be careful to present the benefits of immigration and diversity without descending into propaganda, and to acknowledge and address the real or perceived costs that make this a complex issue.

- *Words matter, but body language matters too.* Communication is not only a matter of word selection but also of timing, delivery, and unspoken messages. The actions that accompany communications, the contexts in which they emerge, and the agents who deliver them all send critical cues about their underlying intentions and assumptions. Done well, governments can use strategic communications to respond to a situation in a way that leaves all parties feeling heard and without further stigmatising or alienating migrant communities.

Ultimately, immigrant integration is an ongoing and whole-of-society process, and crafting communications with an eye to the 'big picture' is crucial. Conflicts are sometimes unavoidable as communities redefine their identities and adapt to changes, but proactive engagement and timely conflict resolution measures can help smooth the path ahead. And when developing messages on a contentious issue such as this, it is important to remember that what resonates with one group might backfire on another. It is critical for integration policy-makers and other communicators to understand how and when to speak to different audiences, and when to just listen.

I. INTRODUCTION

Governments across Europe are waking up to a radically changing communication landscape. With fewer people reading print media and press releases, and more content being created and shared online, including through attention-grabbing graphics and videos, there have never been more opportunities to tailor com-munications to suit audience preferences or to open two-way dialogues between public administrations and citizens. At the same time, the proliferation of content creators and digital media—as well as disinformation and 'fake news'—is making it harder for members of the public to know whom and what information to trust. This new media environment may also be reducing the space for nuanced and balanced reporting, with journalists working towards even tighter deadlines and with success increasingly measured in the number of clicks and shares. Alongside these trends, the way that policymakers and advocates frame information can significantly shape public opinion and influence the success of policies themselves.

As public attitudes towards immigration have become more and more polarised in the wake of the 2015-2016 European migration crisis, anti-immigration populist parties have made significant political gains, including entering parliament in Germany for the first time since World War II and joining governing coalitions in Italy and Austria. And even where they have been less successful electorally, they have had an undeniable impact on mainstream discourses about immigration.[1] In this environment, *more* information does not necessarily lead to more agreement on migration-related issues. Immigrant integration is a particularly emotive policy area, deeply entangled as it is with economic, social, security, cultural, religious, and identity issues, yet one with limited political consensus on what 'success' looks like and how to measure it.[2]

Communications related to immigrant integration can come from a variety of sources and have very different goals, from relaying information or building support for new policies, to promoting social cohesion or diffusing tensions. These messages are often woven into the very fabric of a city or locality, as part of the design of local diversity campaigns, city branding efforts, and other projects. But with large newcomer populations in some European countries and all eyes on immigrant outcomes, policymakers have found themselves on the back foot in terms of how and when they communicate with the public about the policy challenges they are facing and their proposals to address them. Ineffective communications can fail to resonate with target audiences, be dismissed or ignored, or even backfire by alienating certain constituencies.

In this environment, more information does not necessarily lead to more agreement on migration-related issues.

To investigate how communication strategies are employed—and how different immigration narratives feed into them—the Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI Europe) conducted interviews with stakeholders from Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the European Commission.[3] This report draws on the insights shared in these interviews to explore the challenges and opportunities for communicating transparently about immigrant integration with different stakeholders, particularly at the local level, in an increasingly polarised environment. This report also highlights some common pitfalls of integration communications and offers reflections on how policymakers can remain credible while conveying a strategic message. Finally, it explores the role governments, and especially local authorities, have played in promoting different kinds of narratives on integration and what tools and strategies have proven successful.

II. GOALS OF INTEGRATION COMMUNICATIONS

Government communications about integration policy fall into four broad categories: inclusive, informational, persuasive, and reactive. Proactive, inclusive communication targets communities as a whole with the aim of improving societal cohesion and promoting diversity over the long term. Informational communication at-

1   Martin A. Schain, *Shifting Tides: Radical-Right Populism and Immigration Policy in Europe and the United States* (Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/radical-right-immigration-europe-united-states.
2   For further discussion see, for example, Meghan Benton and Paul Diegert, *A Needed Evidence Revolution: Using Cost-Benefit Analysis to Improve Refugee Integration Programming* (Brussels: Migration Policy Institute Europe, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/cost-benefit-analysis-refugee-integration-programming.
3   Between May and June 2018, Migration Policy Institute Europe (MPI Europe) researchers conducted interviews with seven policymakers responsible for communication about immigrant integration at the local, national, and European level (from the cities of Mechelen and Molenbeek in Belgium, Nuremberg and Stuttgart in Germany, and Paris, France, as well as from the national government in Italy and the European Commission). They also interviewed a representative of a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) working on a communication project in Spain.

tempts to relay facts and statistics related to integration initiatives in a value neutral way. Persuasive communication is targeted to specific constituencies and aims to change minds or build support for a specific policy or initiative. And finally, reactive communication follows a crisis or emergency and tries to assuage public anxiety.

A. Inclusive communications: Promoting diversity and social cohesion

Cities and states have a long history of promoting diversity through formal campaigns, such as 'Yours Istanbul' or Bulgaria's 'Diversity is Tasty', which present immigration as a selling point and even as part of the city's brand.[4] Governments at the local level, while often lacking a voice in setting immigration policy (e.g., in determining the allocation of asylum seekers), are responsible for the organisation and use of public spaces, the development of affordable housing, and the planning policies that can be designed to meet the cultural, religious, or recreational needs of diverse communities. Using these tools to communicate a sense of belonging to residents of different backgrounds, therefore, can be a powerful lever to influence integration outcomes and counteract marginalisation.[5]

These messages of inclusion and belonging resonate best when they address the community as a whole—particularly in the current climate of hyperpolarisation around immigration issues.[6] Efforts to shine a spotlight on investments in immigrant and minority communities can exacerbate feelings of unfairness in how scarce resources are being distributed. This is particularly the case where initiatives appear to benefit newcomers at the expense of long-standing residents, such as expedited access to social housing or employment.[7] Some localities have even seen the use of community spaces, such as public squares and street parking outside mosques on Fridays, lead to conflict if residents view one group as using more than their share of public goods.[8]

Even though newcomers often do have specific needs—such as limited awareness of local social services, limited host-country language proficiency, and unrecognised skills and qualifications—established residents may find it difficult to understand why resources should be used to meet them rather than to alleviate pressures on the host society. For example, in Molenbeek, Belgium—where unemployment stood at 27 per cent in 2016,[9] and where there is a long waiting list for social housing—officials chose not to publicise an initiative to provide housing to homeless Roma families with children for fear that it could cause a backlash.[10] Some campaigns have instead emphasised integration initiatives that bring newcomers and locals together in order

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4   See Elizabeth Collett, *The City Brand: Champion of Immigrant Integration or Empty Marketing Tool?* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2014), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/city-brand-champion-immigrant-integration-or-empty-marketing-tool.
5   See Patrick Simon, *French National Identity and Integration: Who Belongs to the National Community?* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2012), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/TCM-french-national-identity.
6   Some experts have long recognised that messaging should focus on broader issues since 'talking about migration loses votes.' See European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM), 'Telling Our Stories: Communicating Migration' (working paper, EPIM, Brussels, 2014), http://resources.migrationwork.org/221695/4473240.
7   For example, the City of Stuttgart created refugee shelters in each of the city's 23 districts in response to increased arrivals in 2015 and 2016. Some communities protested that this would reduce the value of their properties and that scarce affordable housing would be diverted towards refugees. Author interview with a Stuttgart city official, 8 June 2018.
8   In Belgium, for example, the use of public squares to mediate family conflicts within Roma communities in Molenbeek, and the appearance that a mosque was 'taking all the parking' in Mechelen, led to disagreements. Author interview with Mechelen city official, 31 May 2018; author interview with Molenbeek city official, 8 June 2018.
9   Among young people (ages 15 to 24), the unemployment rate was even higher, at 38 per cent in 2016. See Brussels Institute for Statistics and Analysis, 'Chiffres-clés par commune: Molenbeek-Saint-Jean' (fact sheet, December 2018), http://ibsa.brussels/fichiers/publications/bru19/ibsa_cc_Molenbeek-St-Jean.pdf.
10   Author interview with Molenbeek city official, 8 June 2018.

to create tangible examples of community cohesion.[11] Yet this goal can nonetheless be perceived as unfair if funding is tied to interventions for disadvantaged communities. Going some way to addressing this gap, the European Programme for Integration and Migration (EPIM) and Impact Hub created support grants for socially innovative solutions that address the inclusion challenges of immigrants using a whole-of-society approach that holds benefits for other residents as well.[12] Striking the right balance between the needs of newcomers and those of long-standing communities—and communicating these compromises appropriately—is a tricky but crucial determinant of successful integration policy.[13]

Another challenge diversity campaigns face is that members of the public may bristle against being *told* that integration is positive before they have *seen* positive integration outcomes. In the same vein, overt efforts to improve attitudes toward migrants or point out prejudice against them may be ill received and even serve to breed further animosity rather than reduce it. An anti-rumours campaign in Barcelona that began in 2010, mindful of this potential pitfall, advertises the specific goal of dispelling stereotypes, prejudices, and rumours 'in all directions'—which is to say, it does not single out the behaviour of the host community.[14]

Overt efforts to improve attitudes toward migrants or point out prejudice against them may be ill received and even serve to breed further animosity rather than reduce it.

Even among local inclusion initiatives that are well received, many struggle with sustainability. They may be abandoned when new political parties come to power, or when they conflict with national priorities. Antwerp abandoned its 2006 'This City is for Everyone' initiative in 2012 after the election of a right-wing city government.[15] And the City of Copenhagen's 2011–14 'Engage in Copenhagen' plan, which included a diversity charter that aimed to make the city the most inclusive in Europe,[16] was replaced by a 2015–18 integration plan

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11 For example, since 2016, the Municipality of Amsterdam has supported a housing project called Startblok that brings together young refugees who recently received their residence permits and other young people from the Netherlands. The municipality has published a series of articles on its website highlighting refugee and nonrefugee residents' stories. The Startblok project opened a second residential location in the north of Amsterdam in December 2018. In Rotterdam, the city government, University of Applied Sciences, and a foundation of retired entrepreneurs developed the Rotterdam Business Case—a European Enterprise Promotion Award-winning model that supports entrepreneurs below the poverty line and that has been commended for being inclusive and supportive of migrant entrepreneurs. See European Commission, 'The Rotterdam Business Case Goes to Tampere – Supporting Migrant Entrepreneurs', Promoting Enterprise News Portal, 10 May 2018, https://blogs.ec.europa.eu/promotingenterprise/rotterdam-in-tampere/; Municipality of Amsterdam, 'Verschillende afkomst, zelfde toekomst', accessed 10 January 2019, www.amsterdam.nl/zorg-ondersteuning/ondersteuning/vluchtelingen/verhalen/verschillende/.

12 EPIM, 'Guidelines for the Submission of an Expression of Interest', accessed 7 January 2019, www.europe-kbf.eu/~/media/Europe/ENEWS/EPIM-Guidelines-Rethinking-Inclusion.pdf.

13 Across policy areas, policymakers tend to shy away from the language of 'tradeoffs', and potentially for good reason. Framing a decision as a tradeoff could backfire by reminding the public about the negative aspects of a policy, which may be more memorable than the positives. On the other hand, when those negative aspects are already well known, acknowledging the tradeoffs can be persuasive in justifying the decision. In August 2018, Germany partially lifted its ban on family reunification for persons with subsidiary protection. The ban was initially instated in 2016 to reduce the burden on social workers during the heightened arrival of asylum seekers. The new German coalition government agreed to partially lift the ban, accepting 1,000 people each month. Interior Minister Horst Seehofer framed the decision as a compromise that would 'allow us to achieve a balance between our society's integration capacity, humanity, and security'. See Sarah Pralle and Jessica Boscarino, 'Framing Trade-offs: The Politics of Nuclear Power and Wind Energy in the Age of Global Climate Change', *Review of Policy Research* 28, no. 4 (July 2011): 323–46; Riham Alkousaa, 'Germany Lifts Ban on Reunions for Refugees, Rekindles Integration Debate', Reuters, 1 August 2018, https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-migrants-germany/germany-lifts-ban-on-reunions-for-refugees-rekindles-integration-debate-idUKKBN1KM4TA.

14 Xarxa BCN Antirumors, *Pla d'Acció Xarxa BCN Antirumors, 2016-2020* (Barcelona: Barcelona City Council, 2015), https://media-edg.barcelona.cat/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/PAX-2016_2020.pdf.

15 Collett, *The City Brand.*

16 Cities of Migration, 'Engaging in Copenhagen', updated 22 November 2011, http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/engaging-in-copenhagen/.

that focused on more practical aims, such as getting immigrants into education and jobs and ensuring public safety.[17]

Finally, the success of this type of communication often hinges on the messenger. Local policymakers are often more successful at connecting with both newcomers and long-standing residents because, as fellow community members, they have greater credibility and can connect emotionally in ways other politicians cannot. An official from the Belgian city of Mechelen described how the mayor's strong and consistent message on embracing diversity—and his frankness in how he communicates—has built an enormous amount of trust among residents.[18] Diversity campaigns that are purely pro forma and lack authenticity will not resonate with their target audiences in the same way.[19] Officials who ensure that all of their constituents feel part of the collective 'we' of their city also shore up confidence in government itself, which has dipped to new lows in parts of Europe.[20]

B. *Informational communications: Weighing the costs and benefits of integration policies*

As migration has become an ever more polarising issue, communicating in value-neutral terms about its costs and benefits has become a high-risk political endeavour. Some national ministries opt out altogether, preferring to tread in safer waters by communicating factual data about new initiatives and corresponding legal frameworks without taking a normative stance.[21] For example, the Greek government launched a newsletter in May 2018 to inform members of the public and journalists on the situation of refugees and migrants in the country. It describes how the National Strategy for Reception and Integration is being implemented as well as data on arrivals, arrests, returns, and particular programmes.[22] The head of the Special Secretariat for Communication Crisis Management explained the value of the newsletter as creating open communication channels to give 'true dimensions to the status of the refugee issue'.[23]

One of the major challenges in crafting informational communications is how to make realistic commitments about what can be achieved through integration policy—and what cannot. Overpromising can score quick

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17   Municipality of Copenhagen, 'Integration i Københavns Kommune', accessed 19 October 2018, www.kk.dk/artikel/integration-i-k%C3%B8benhavns-kommune.

18   Author interview with Mechelen city official, 31 May 2018.

19   For example, the European Commission decided to host a public concert in Molenbeek, Belgium, as part of its annual European Development Days in 2018. However, according to a city official, they were only contacted to arrange the event a week in advance, which left little time to advertise it to locals. Ultimately, the concert felt more like a transplant of European Development Days attendees into the city than genuine community engagement. Author interview with Molenbeek city official, 8 June 2018.

20   A 2014 survey by Transatlantic Trends found that almost two-thirds of Europeans and Americans felt their governments did a poor job of integrating newcomers. Similarly, three-fifths of respondents to a 2016 Ipsos poll carried out in 22 countries were not confident that the refugees coming to their country would successfully integrate into its society. See Astrid Ziebarth, Tanja Wunderlich, and Joshua Raisher, *Transatlantic Trends: Mobility, Migration, and Integration* (Washington, DC: German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2014), www.gmfus.org/publications/transatlantic-trends-mobility-migration-and-integration; Ipsos, 'Global Views on Immigration and the Refugee Crisis' (charts, Ipsos, Paris, July 2016), www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/migrations/en-uk/files/Assets/Docs/Polls/ipsos-global-advisor-immigration-and-refugees-2016-charts.pdf.

21   For example, an Italian interviewee commented: 'Since in Italy, migration is a very political problem, our previous minister very rarely spoke about migration in public because he knew that it is the battlefield of political elections and political conflicts.' Author interview with a consultant of the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 5 June 2018.

22   Greek News Agenda, 'June 2018 Newsletter on the Refugee-Migrant Situation in Greece', updated 2 July 2018, www.greeknewsagenda.gr/index.php/fact-sheets/6764-june-newsletter-on-the-refugee-migrant-situation-in-greece.

23   Agenzia Nazionale Stampa Associata (ANSA), 'Greece Launches Special Newsletter about Refugee Crisis', InfoMigrants, 13 April 2018, www.infomigrants.net/en/post/8626/greece-launches-special-newsletter-about-refugee-crisis.

political points, but backfire when it becomes clear that the objectives cannot be achieved—such as the UK coalition government's pledge in 2010 to cut net migration to less than 100,000 annually.[24] Conversely, the strategy of overstating the risks of a particular policy course by tapping into and exacerbating people's fears of cultural change or resource scarcity, for example, can be effective in blocking proposals in the short run. This approach is frequently taken by anti-immigration political movements, as well as increasingly by some mainstream political actors in Europe eager to win voters back from populist opponents. For example, two months before the Dutch national elections in 2017, Prime Minster Mark Rutte tapped into fears of cultural change by calling on immigrants who cannot 'behave normally' to 'go away' in an apparent bid to woo voters from the anti-immigration Freedom Party.[25] But these 'quick win' communications are often not helpful in inducing action or creative solutions over the longer term, and may in fact hinder productive policymaking.

The means by which information is communicated also matters. Governments regularly rely on the media to disseminate fact-based messages—to mixed results. In response to the 2015–16 migration and refugee crisis, media outlets across Europe reported on a flurry of new initiatives and pilot programmes, not all of which were well understood. At the EU level, European Commission spokespeople dedicated considerable time to explaining new policies and terminology to journalists through press releases, press conferences, questions-and-answers sessions, and off-the-record conversations.[26] Nevertheless, confusion persisted over, for example, the distinction between relocation and resettlement.[27] Moreover, even when journalists became familiar with the terms and policies, editors sometimes inserted catchy but misleading headlines. In one noteworthy example, the *Financial Times* ran an article in December 2015 citing unnamed EU ministers and officials as claiming that Greece could be kicked out of the Schengen zone for mishandling the migration crisis. The story was later revealed to be untrue, but not before it ran in several other major news outlets, drawing ire from Greek officials.[28] Some interviewees for the present study felt that the media gravitated towards negative integration stories rather than positive ones, regardless of how much information was provided to them, and one reported that their city occasionally uses freelance reporters to cover the stories other journalists seem to miss.

C. Persuasive communications: Changing minds

Communication campaigns can be used to persuade publics or garner support for new policies, as one of an assortment of strategies to further a particular policy objective.[29] However, deeply entrenched opinions on hot-button issues such as immigration often cannot be budged by communications alone. People routinely

24 Anushka Asthana, 'Conservatives to Retain "Tens of Thousands" Immigration Pledge', *The Guardian*, 8 May 2017, www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/may/08/conservatives-to-keep-tens-of-thousands-immigration-pledge.

25 Jon Henley, 'Netherlands PM Says Those Who Don't Respect Customs Should Leave', *The Guardian*, 23 January 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/23/netherlands-pm-mark-rutte-dutch-citizens-open-letter-pvv.

26 Author interview with a spokesperson of the European Commission, 8 June 2018.

27 Relocation refers to the redistribution of asylum seekers already in Europe. The European Council adopted an emergency relocation scheme in September 2015 through which asylum seekers with a high chance of receiving refugee status were 'relocated' from their country of entry (Greece or Italy) to other Member States where they would have their applications processed. Resettlement, on the other hand, is a legal pathway to an EU Member State for persons who have already received international protection outside of the European Union. See European Commission, 'Relocation and Resettlement' (fact sheet, 6 September 2017), https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-migration/20170904_factsheet_relocation_and_resettlement_en.pdf.

28 Vince Chadwick, 'Greece Hits out at "Distorted" Migration Claims', Politico, 2 December 2015, www.politico.eu/article/greece-threatened-with-suspension-from-schengen-report/.

29 In 2013, the Vice Mayor launched the OXLO Business Charter, which states that diversity is a resource and reducing discrimination is important for economic growth. By framing integration as an economic objective—improving access to the labour market for persons with migrant backgrounds—the city was able to engage many business stakeholders. The following year, the city government created an action programme with a media and informational strategy, a strategy for equal municipal services, and a strategy to counter racism and discrimination. See Toralv Moe, 'OXLO: City Branding through Diversity', *The New European* 3 (Autumn 2014): 37–39, www.unitee.eu/media/book/the_new_european_3/images/pages.pdf.

discount or discredit information that does not conform to their existing views.[30] And repeating false information about migrants in an attempt to bust myths runs the risk of reinforcing rather than reducing stereotypes or misguided beliefs, as repetition can increase the chances that listeners misremember them as true.

When communications aim to change minds on policy, one of the major challenges is understanding and predicting public opinion. Policymakers use a number of tools to track public opinion (such as headlines in newspapers and posts on social media), but it is unclear how finely calibrated these tools are and how in tune they are with attitudes on the ground. Opinion polls are also used on more of an annual basis, but do not always isolate attitudes about integration initiatives or spending from broader public views on immigration or public safety.[31] With all of these measures, it is difficult to know what the baseline attitudes are and how much individual opinions can be swayed. More helpful measures would track changes over time and include socioeconomic and other contextual data that could help policymakers understand not only how many people feel a particular way, but precisely which segments of the population do.

Another challenge is finding the right messenger. At a time when immigrant integration is under the political microscope, public authorities can feel limited in what they can say. One strategy that has shown promise is empowering migrant communities to communicate effectively on their own behalf, such as through trainings on how to draft press releases, create manifestos, establish as legal entities, and lobby leaders. This approach has the double benefit of tapping into the expertise of communities and creating meaningful partnerships. The Italian Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs supported the creation of a network of immigrant youth organisations who sought to lobby for access to citizenship.[32] This allowed the ministry to engage on a subject that has important implications for immigrant integration in terms of labour-market access and social cohesion, without stepping on the toes of the Ministry of Interior which is responsible for naturalisation and citizenship issues. Messages from unexpected sources—for example, a policy endorsement from a political opponent, or support for diversity campaigns from a member of the armed forces—can also have greater resonance among target audiences.[33]

D. Reactive communications: Responding to crisis

Conflict—whether clashes over cultures and values, competition for scarce resources, or even violence—is another important driver of communication efforts. Some European communities that have welcomed large influxes of religiously different newcomers have experienced clashes over loud late-night iftars among Muslims during Ramadan, or tensions over when to accommodate face-covering garments in public spaces, for example.[34] The 2015–16 crisis also ushered in practical tensions at the local level, such as competition for jobs and social housing. In Stuttgart, for example, with 600,000 residents and host to 8,000 refugees as of 2017,[35] residents voiced concerns about reception centres contributing to spikes in violence or negatively affecting property values in nearby neighbourhoods. Occasionally, these conflicts have been the result of misinformation, such as news articles that misstate facts or omit important details. However, a shortage of proactive communications before such conflicts flare up may also allow tensions to fester.

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30   See Natalia Banulescu-Bogdan, *When Facts Don't Matter: How to Communicate More Effectively about Immigration's Costs and Benefits* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/when-facts-dont-matter-immigration.

31   For example, in Mechelen, as in the rest of the Flanders region in Belgium, there are annual surveys on safety, which policymakers have used to interpret how communities feel integration is going. Author interview Mechelen city official, 31 May 2018.

32   Author interview with a consultant of the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, 5 June 2018.

33   Banulescu-Bogdan, *When Facts Don't Matter*.

34   Author interview with Molenbeek city official, 8 June 2018.

35   Marie Baleo, Cécile Maisonneuve, and Chloë Voisin-Bormuth, *Villes européennes et réfugiés: Un laboratoire* (Rueil-Malmaison, France: La Fabrique de la cité, 2018), www.lafabriquedelacite.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Fabrique_refugies_WEB_VF-BD.pdf.

Once a conflict erupts, many local leaders rely on mediation—occasionally coupled with broader communication campaigns—to resolve it. According to one local-level official, 'the most important part of the process is that [different stakeholders] are all heard', and that their concerns are not subsequently ignored.[36] For example, when the City of Stuttgart planned to create a refugee shelter in each of its 23 districts, many people objected. The municipality then held a series of town hall meetings to engage with residents and better understand their concerns. In parallel, the municipality created a 'We for Refugees' communication campaign, which attracted 3,500 local volunteers and gave people a productive channel through which to discuss their concerns.[37] Research in other policy areas, such as climate change, has found that if opportunities are not created to help members of the public translate their concerns into realistic and effective actions, policy communications can instead result in denial, numbing, and apathy.[38]

During moments of crisis, it is particularly crucial to engage all the relevant actors so that everyone feels heard and mediators fully understand the situation.

Apart from using strategic communications to reduce opposition to specific policy decisions, they can also lead to more collaborative decision-making. When the City of Hamburg faced public uproar over where to build a migrant reception centre, city officials used a collaborative planning process to give residents access to all available data on possible locations and allow them to help identify the best spots. While the method was not without flaws (only a handful of people attended each planning session, and many could not understand the maps and satellite images the urban planners presented), it gave residents a greater appreciation for and say in the decision-making process.[39] These examples also illustrate that promoting a fully fleshed out message is sometimes less important than listening—as few policies succeed if leaders do not first make an effort to understand public concerns and involve community members in contentious decisions.

Other governments have used cultural 'ambassadors' from within immigrant communities to help mediate disputes and engage with difficult-to-reach groups. During moments of crisis, it is particularly crucial to engage all the relevant actors so that everyone feels heard and mediators fully understand the situation. In these efforts, it is important for policymakers and government officials to be clear about their intentions. Failure to do so can cause suspicion or even damage delicate relationships in the long run. In one case, an attempt by a city official in Mechelen, Belgium, to de-escalate a conflict situation over parking spaces outside of a mosque inadvertently drew more negative media attention and created lingering mistrust among local Muslims of future engagement with the official.[40]

Crisis has also sparked new narratives and initiatives at the European level. For example, while it can be difficult to measure the results of a particular communication, one European Commission official described how issuing a strongly worded press release after more than 700 migrants drowned off the Italian island of Lampedusa in 2015 was at least partially responsible for the series of events that led to tripled funding for Operation Triton, a search-and-rescue operation, and the EU Naval Force Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED), a EU military action to disrupt smuggling and trafficking networks.[41] The European Commission has also engaged in a type of mediation with the mayors of Greek islands that have received large numbers of maritime arrivals, inviting them to Brussels and arranging meetings in Greece. These meetings gave Commission officials the opportunity to listen to the mayors' concerns and to send the message that the challenges they were facing were being taken seriously at the EU level.[42]

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36 Author interview with Mechelen city official, 31 May 2018.
37 Author interview with a Stuttgart city official, 8 June 2018.
38 Susanne C. Moser and Lisa Dilling, 'Communicating Climate Change: Closing the Science-Action Gap', in *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, eds. John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
39 Ariel Noyman and Tobias Holtz, 'Finding Places: HCI Platform for Public Participation in Refugees' Accommodation Process', *Procedia Computer Science* 112 (2017): 2463–72.
40 Author interview with Mechelen city official, 31 May 2018.
41 Author interview with a spokesperson of the European Commission, 8 June 2018.
42 Ibid.

Violence and fears of radicalisation have also catalysed new communication initiatives in some corners of Europe, both in favour of and against growing diversity. For example, Oslo's 'OXLO' (Oslo Extra Large) started in 2001 as a city branding exercise in response to the murder of a mixed-race Norwegian teenager.[43] The initiative included an annual week of intercultural events, an achievement prize for anti-racist work, and a charter reaffirming the equality of all citizens regardless of their backgrounds. On the other hand, fear of the growing concentration of marginalised groups in certain neighbourhoods, and increasing gang violence associated with these areas, was the impetus for the recent launch of Denmark's controversial campaign to eliminate 'ghettoes' by 2030. The policy, which includes mandatory schooling for children as young as one in an attempt to imbue them with 'Danish values' at the earliest possible stage, has been heavily criticised for being discriminatory and stigmatising immigrants and low-income families.[44] In addition to responding to violence, integration-focused communications (both those promoting and discouraging immigration) have at times also led to violence. The attempted murders of the mayors of Cologne and Altena, Germany, for example, occurred in response to their support for welcoming refugees.[45] Outspoken leaders are not the only targets. After the 2016 Brexit referendum in the United Kingdom, for example, race and religious hate crimes soared by 41 per cent, attributed in part to anti-immigrant sentiment stirred up by the Leave campaign.[46]

Where violence is perpetrated by immigrants, government officials and the media have sometimes struggled to strike the right balance between communicating sensitive information to the public without stoking fears or prejudice.[47] Such was the case when groups of immigrant men were accused of attacking women in Cologne, Germany, on New Year's Eve 2015–16; public broadcasters and officials were criticised for being slow to respond or trying to downplay the story to avoid a negative backlash against refugees. Yet the perceived cover-up ended up further eroding public trust in elected officials and the neutrality of the media, highlighting the incredibly fine line policymakers must walk between transparency and managing social tensions.

III. USING COMMUNICATION TOOLS STRATEGICALLY

Strategic communication about immigrant integration is most successful when tied to tangible objectives within policy areas such as in housing, law and order, education, and employment. It is also critical that policymakers select the communication tools and channels that are best suited to their audience and their aims, whether that is to inform, to drive the public towards certain behaviours or attitudes, or to de-escalate conflict situations.

Policymakers employ different communication tools depending on their goals and their budgets. These include campaigns, face-to-face contact, media engagement, intercultural activities, diversity training for officials, network development, city branding strategies, and conflict resolution and mediation (see Table 1). Often, a successful campaign will incorporate a bouquet of communication strategies that includes both broadcast and interactive communications. For example, with funding from the Spanish central government and the European Union's Asylum, Migration, and Integration Fund (AMIF), Red Acoge—a network of or-

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43   Moe, 'OXLO: City Branding through Diversity'.

44   See, for example, Ellen Barry, and Martin Selsoe Sorensen, 'In Denmark, Harsh New Laws for Immigrant "Ghettos"', *The New York Times*, 1 July 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/07/01/world/europe/denmark-immigrant-ghettos.html.

45   The German town of Altena asked to take in more refugees than its quota under the German redistribution scheme in response to depopulation in the town. See Al Jazeera, 'Pro-Refugee Mayor of Altena in Germany Stabbed', Al Jazeera, 28 November 2017, www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/pro-refugee-mayor-germany-altena-stabbed-171128155950253.html.

46   Katie Forster, 'Hate Crimes Soared by 41% after Brexit Vote, Official Figures Reveal', *The Independent*, 13 October 2016, www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brexit-hate-crimes-racism-eu-referendum-vote-attacks-increase-police-figures-official-a7358866.html.

47   See Banulescu-Bogdan, *When Facts Don't Matter*.

ganisations that aim to defend immigrants' rights and support their integration—created a campaign to combat sensationalism in media depictions of immigrants in Spain. Called 'Inmigracionalism', the project produced best practices for reporting on immigration and immigrant communities, conducted focus groups with journalists to learn about the challenges they face in their work, held seminars with journalism students to sensitise them to word connotations, created awareness-raising YouTube videos, and launched a social media campaign for readers to denounce sensationalist articles.[48]

Table 1. Types of communication tools

Campaigns	Leaflets; posters; websites; social media; traditional media (e.g., newspaper, radio, television); press releases and media conferences
Personal contact	Welcome Centres ('one-stop shops' that provide a range of services and support to newcomers under one roof); 'buddy' mentoring projects; intercultural and interfaith councils; cultural ambassadors; community spokespersons; volunteering platforms; physical spaces for intercultural dialogue
Media engagement	Sensitising journalists to word connotations and global migration dynamics; promoting balanced coverage
Intercultural activities	Cultural festivals and events; art exhibits; documentary, film, and theatre exhibits; sporting events
Diversity training for officials	Intercultural communication; awareness raising
Network development	Building connections between institutions; between authorities and migrant organisations; and between communities
City branding strategies	Community consultations; roadmaps, frameworks, and agreements (i.e., strategic implementation documents)
Conflict resolution/mediation	Town hall meetings; dialogue processes

Source: adapted from Elizabeth Collett and Ben Gidley, *Attitudes to Migrants, Communication and Local Leadership: Final Transnational Report* (Oxford: University of Oxford, Centre on Migration, Policy, and Society, 2012), www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/PR-2012-AMICALL_Transnational.pdf.

Each tool has advantages and disadvantages when communicating particular information to particular audiences. For example, personal communication can transmit detailed information in a way that is tailored to address the concerns and interests of the target audience. Particularly where such contact is face to face and with a trusted leader or intermediary, this can build trust and inspire confidence. However, personalised communication can also be more costly and have a more limited reach than larger-scale efforts. Campaigns, on the other hand, are geared towards wider dissemination but include static content that is less tailored to particular audiences. However, it is possible to incorporate diverse perspectives into communication campaigns by, for example, holding focus groups with target audiences in the conception and development stages prior to rollout. Some campaigns can also be interactive, particularly those that use social media. In considering which tools to employ, policymakers should select those that align best with their communication goals, the type of message being communicated, and the preferences of their audience.

Improving synergies in the division of labour between policymakers and in-house communication teams could also lead to more effective use of strategic communication tools. Many policymakers, especially at the local level, are responsible for conceptualising and developing communications about immigrant integration, while in-house or external communication experts, most of whom have not received training on crafting mes-

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48   Author interview with Communication Representative, Red Acoge, Spain, 29 May 2018. See also European Commission, 'European Website on Integration—Inmigracionalism Project on the Media's Treatment of Immigration and Asylum in Spain', accessed 19 October 2018, https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/intpract/inmigracionalism-project-on-the-medias-treatment-of-immigration-and-asylum-in-spain.

sages in this policy area, focus on editing and dissemination.[49] By mainstreaming knowledge about integration within public communication teams, these experts would be better poised to guide strategic decisions on integration-related communication goals.

IV. CHALLENGES COMMUNICATING ABOUT IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

Even when communication objectives and tools are aligned, messages can miss their mark. When crafting public communications on integration, governments should consider the following set of common challenges related to how and why messages resonate differently with different audiences.

A. What works for one audience may backfire with another

Many public communications tend to adopt a universalist philosophy, in that all recipients are imparted the same information in the same format. Yet the audiences for many policy communications are generally much more heterogeneous and segmented; there is no such thing as a true 'average' in terms of how people feel about immigrants and immigration, and many groups include a range of opinions. For example, More in Common—an initiative founded in 2017 to promote social cohesion through unifying narratives, events, and campaigns—produced a seminal work on the attitudinal segmentation of different European publics and found that views on immigration and refugee policies varied in ways that cut across traditional dividers of age, sex, profession, and geography.[50] For public communication teams that rely on such markers when tailoring messages to different segments of the public, or who implement strict style guidelines that cannot be calibrated to different target audiences, this necessitates a fundamental rethink.[51]

Communicating strategically thus entails accounting for the differences between particular target audiences in terms of how they will respond to a narrative, what factors could be harnessed to make them more receptive to particular messages, and whether the tools selected suit the content. Without understanding the values, preferences, and concerns of particular audiences, and tailoring messages accordingly, there is a risk that communications that are effective with one group could backfire on another—at times even entrenching resistance to the message.[52] Experts have long believed that by injecting more information and facts into the marketplace

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49 Author interview with Molenbeek city official, 8 June 2018.

50 For example, in the French context, More in Common use the categories: Multiculturals, Humanitarians, Economically Insecure, Left Behind, and Identitarian Nationalists. See Annick Beddiar et al., *Attitudes Towards Refugees, Immigrants, and Identity in France* (N.p.: More in Common, 2017), www.moreincommon.com/france-report/.

51 For instance, the UK Government Communication Service typically aims to reach one of six audience groups: families, young people, working-age adults, older people, businesses, and international. See UK Government Communication Service, *The Government Communication Service: An Introduction* (London: UK Government Communication Service, 2016), https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/About-the-Government-Communication-Service.pdf.

52 For example, research into how to communicate effectively on climate change found that there was no correlation between knowledge about climate change and support for policies to reduce its impact. In some cases, supplying additional factual information about the issue even made the intended audience more resistant to the message. Similarly, efforts to debunk the myth common among 'anti-vaxxers' that vaccines are linked to autism by emphasising the dangers of preventable diseases did little to increase these parents' plans not to vaccinate their children. See Terence Flynn, 'How Narratives Can Reduce Resistance and Change Attitudes: Insights from Behavioral Science Can Enhance Public Relations Research and Practice', *Research Journal of the Institute for Public Relations* 2, no. 2 (2015): 1–25. See also Banulescu-Bogdan, *When Facts Don't Matter*.

of ideas, public opinions on particular topics would gradually converge around an established consensus.[53] However, on highly polarising issues such as immigration and climate change, it is rarely effective to simply supply new information—as if on a blank slate—without considering how this information will be interpreted and remembered, and how it resonates emotionally with its target audience.[54]

As communicators attempt to make their messages more relatable and improve how they are received, many are turning to narratives. Though already a popular technique among the media and politicians, they can be increasingly found in fields dominated by expository and descriptive communication styles, such as science, health, and public policy. Narratives are essentially stories that help make sense of complex phenomena, integrating otherwise disparate actions and events into a plausible storyline that is easy to understand.[55] Unlike less discursive forms of communication, narratives combine the sharing of information and feelings. While debates on immigrant integration have to date largely been intellectual battles, with very little room accorded to ordinary members of the public's lived experiences, narratives create space for emotional and personal connections.

Some scholars argue that storytelling is an especially effective technique because it is the kind of information that humans are programmed to process from infancy and, besides basic language proficiency, it does not require any additional education or training to understand.[56] Information transmitted in this form has therefore been found to be easier to memorise and recall later on. Narratives also hold several distinct advantages when communicating about contentious issues. Firstly, unlike in an essay or logic-based exposition, it is more difficult to unpack the underlying assumptions and conclusions that are embedded within a story, which reduces out-of-hand rejections or reactions against the information.[57] Secondly, narratives are adept at expressing nuances and contradictions.[58] In this way, they are more compatible with cognitive dissonance, the natural tendency that enables survey respondents to recognise, for example, that their country is reliant on foreign doctors and nurses while also believing that newcomers do not make their area a better place to live.[59]

However, despite their relative advantages for communicating nuanced information about immigrant integration, narratives should also be used with caution. As with other styles of communication, the language used in narratives can evoke and reinforce particular 'frames' that may resonate more or less with certain audiences (see Box 1). All humans give meaning to information through frames, or mental filters that describe how ideas are organised, stories are linked, and narratives built within the mind; the same person could respond differently to communications framed as 'drilling for oil' and 'exploring for energy', even when the basic information in both stories is the same.[60] For this reason, what one audience interprets as a positive integration narrative, such as a story of an immigrant contributing to the labour market, could tap into threat frames for another, which may understand the same narrative as one of immigrants taking jobs from native-born workers.

53 P. Sol Hart and Erik C. Nisbet, 'Boomerang Effects in Science Communication: How Motivated Reasoning and Identity Cues Amplify Opinion Polarization about Climate Mitigation Policies', *Communication Research* 39, no. 6 (1 December 2012): 701–23.

54 See Banulescu-Bogdan, *When Facts Don't Matter*.

55 Michael F. Dahlstrom, 'Using Narratives and Storytelling to Communicate Science with Nonexpert Audiences', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 111, supplement 4 (16 September 2014): 13614–20, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1320645111.

56 Matthew W. Kreuter et al., 'Narrative Communication in Cancer Prevention and Control: A Framework to Guide Research and Application', *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* 33, no. 3 (September 2007): 221–35.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 This was the case in a UK-based survey in which a majority of British respondents said someone in their family had been treated by non-British staff in the National Health Service, while less than one in five said immigrants moving to the United Kingdom made their area a better place to live. See Lord Ashcroft Polls, *Small Island: Public Opinion and the Politics of Immigration* (N.p.: Lord Ashcroft Polls, 2013), https://lordashcroftpolls.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/LORD-ASHCROFT-Public-opinion-and-the-politics-of-immigration2.pdf.

60 All humans give meaning to information through 'frames', mental filters that describe how ideas or themes are organised, how stories are linked, and how narratives are built. See Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

Box 1. Common immigration and integration frames

Information on immigration and integration can be 'framed' in myriad ways. Framing refers to the way that arguments are consciously or unconsciously defined and constructed. Frames are both triggered and reinforced by stories or narratives, which are used to make frames more cohesive and compelling. In turn, when a particular frame is triggered, it acts as a filter on the way an individual processes new narratives and information. Immigration narratives broadly fit within the following three frames:

- **Benefit frames.** These highlight the real or potential positive contributions that immigrants make to the economy or culture of a society. Narratives that fall into this framing can include stories of 'deserving' immigrants and their descendants who are entrepreneurial, hardworking, filling labour shortages, or have exceptional talents and achievements. Yet within this benefit framing, belonging and acceptance are precarious and strongly predicated on the actions of immigrants themselves. For example, Romelu Lukaku, a member of the Belgian national football team, remarked during the 2018 World Cup that when he plays well, the media describe him as 'the Belgian striker', but when he plays poorly he is 'the Belgian striker of Congolese descent'.

- **Victim frames.** Narratives that portray immigrants as victims, such as the many media reports of the death of Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who drowned attempting to cross the Aegean Sea with his family in 2015, can galvanise more empathetic and compassionate responses from host societies. However, victim framing can also reinforce harmful stereotypes of immigrants as requiring more from a society than they are contributing, potentially undermining public solidarity in the long term.

- **Threat or villain frames.** Immigrants are often portrayed as economic threats and burdens—competing with the native born for scarce public resources (including as so-called welfare tourists) and negatively affecting the labour market by driving down wages or taking limited jobs (such as the 'Polish plumber' in the United Kingdom). Threat frames also include narratives about the cultural incompatibility of newcomers vis-à-vis the dominant customs, identities, and values of the host society. Or they may be framed as dangerous criminals or violent threats to public order and safety, as when then U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump infamously referred to Mexicans as drug dealers, criminals, and rapists in 2016. These stereotypes can be difficult to disprove in an environment where anecdote is king and comprehensive data (e.g., on crimes committed by immigrants versus the native born) are either lacking or subject to multiple interpretations.

Sources: Heaven Crawley, Simon McMahon, and Katherine Jones, *Victims and Villains: Migrant Voices in the British Media* (Coventry: Coventry University, Centre for Trust, Peace, and Social Relations, 2016), https://pure.coventry.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/8263076/Victims_and_Villains_Digital.pdf; Katy Fallon, 'Three Years on from Alan Kurdi's Death and Life Is No Better for Child Refugees in Europe', *The Independent*, 1 September 2018, www.independent.co.uk/voices/aylan-kurdi-death-three-year-anniversary-child-refugee-home-office-a8518276.html; Marion Van Renterghem, 'Après le plombier polonais, l'infirmière sexy', *Le Monde*, 3 August 2005, www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2005/08/03/apres-le-plombier-polonais-l-infirmiere-sexy_677325_3214.html; Michelle Mark, 'Trump Just Referred to One of His Most Infamous Campaign Comments: Calling Mexicans "Rapists"', Business Insider, 5 April 2018, http://uk.businessinsider.com/trump-mexicans-rapists-remark-reference-2018-4; Romelu Lukaku, 'I've Got Some Things to Say', The Players' Tribune, 18 June 2018, www.theplayerstribune.com/en-us/articles/romelu-lukaku-ive-got-some-things-to-say.

B. Communications can be dismissed or ignored

Messages that are delivered by untrusted messengers or that fail to acknowledge people's lived experiences can have a difficult time resonating with their target audiences. When policy experts communicate about the benefits of immigration for a national economy, for example, they often do not delve into the particularities of how the effects of immigration are felt in specific localities. As a result of this broad-brushstroke analysis, expert communications have been increasingly side-lined as out-of-touch elitism. This sentiment has been on the rise in many national contexts and crystallised during the peak of the Brexit referendum campaign when UK member of parliament and Leave campaigner Michael Gove announced that 'the people of this country have had enough of experts'.[61]

Tapping trusted messengers—such as strong local leaders, influential community members, and peers—to deliver communications can make messages more credible and persuasive. For example, the mayor of Mechelen, Belgium, and 2016 winner of the World Mayor Prize, Bart Somers, has established a reputation for openly discussing the potential challenges of immigration while also arguing strongly in favour of integration and inclusion.[62] This strategy was rewarded at the polls in October 2018 when his party earned 14 per cent more votes in the local elections than they had in 2012, signalling high levels of trust for his leadership.[63]

Community ambassadors can play a particularly pivotal role in helping government communications penetrate difficult-to-reach communities, as well as in mediating conflicts. For example, in Molenbeek, Belgium, the city government received complaints from some members of the public about a perceived over-use of public spaces by the Roma community (particularly as the population grows in times of seasonal work). By appointing a Roma cultural ambassador, city officials were able to understand the source of the conflict and assist the community in finding a dedicated location to host cultural events and to resolve disputes.[64]

C. Messages can be confused by different priorities

Consistent messaging can make communications more memorable and credible, but this can be difficult to achieve when integration priorities vary between institutions, levels of government, and between policymakers and the most important transmitter of information to the people: the media.

1. Institutional inconsistencies

Interagency communication on immigrant integration is notoriously difficult. Responsibility for integration policy, especially at the national level, is often assigned to a single ministry whereas integration challenges are crosscutting and dynamic, spanning multiple policy areas and levels of government.[65] While moments of crisis can spur new interinstitutional communication tools, these mechanisms are often only as strong as the

61   Michael White, 'Should We Listen to the Experts on the EU Referendum?', *The Guardian*, 8 June 2016, www.theguardian.com/politics/blog/2016/jun/08/experts-eu-referendum-michael-gove.

62   Nikolaj Nielsen, 'Belgian Mayor Invites Orban to Migrant-Diverse Town', EU Observer, 14 June 2018, https://euobserver.com/migration/142078.

63   VRT NWS, 'Resounding Victory for Liberal/Green List in Mechelen', VRT NWS, 14 October 2018, www.vrt.be/vrtnws/en/2018/10/14/resounding-victory-for-liberal-green-list/.

64   Author interview Molenbeek city official, 8 June 2018.

65   Demetrios G. Papademetriou, *Maintaining Public Trust in the Governance of Migration* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2016), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/maintaining-public-trust-governance-migration; Dirk Gebhardt, *Building Inclusive Cities: Challenges in the Multilevel Governance of Immigrant Integration in Europe* (Washington, DC: MPI, 2014), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/building-inclusive-cities-challenges-multilevel-governance-immigrant-integration-europe.

relationships behind them.[66] During the 2015–16 migration and refugee crisis, for example, the crisis mechanisms within the European Union enabled communication staff in different institutions and policy areas to break across their silos to craft common narratives, but overcoming these traditional institutional barriers was time and willpower intensive, relying on weekly engagement and the sense of solidarity between officials.[67]

When not in the thick of crisis, strong public communication about immigrant integration may take a slightly different set of muscles. One respondent from the European Commission highlighted how important it is for all staff to have some familiarity with communication efforts on migration and integration—even when they do not work on these areas directly.[68] Ensuring that a government's policies and vision are well communicated and understood by all departments and arms-length bodies is also one of the four core capabilities of the UK Government Communication Service.[69] In many ways, employees are ambassadors of an institution. Even staff who are not working on migration and integration issues directly are likely to have conversations about these topics and can therefore benefit from learning more about their institution's policies and framing so as not to inadvertently undermine them in discussions with partners.

2. Diverging national and local priorities

National governments dominate when it comes to communicating about migration and integration. They often set the agenda, budget, and tone for policymaking. Yet sometimes national agendas fixate on issues that are not pertinent to all local contexts, reallocating resources and bandwidth towards what in some localities are less pressing issues, and even potentially undermining strategic communication initiated by local governments. One such example is national bans on Islamic dress, such as the burqa, which have proliferated in Europe[70] largely for symbolic reasons, given that only a few hundred women wear such garments in the majority of European countries that have contemplated banning them. When such restrictions are passed nationally, local policymakers are then confronted with the question of how strongly to promote and enforce them, particularly when they fall out of sync with the inclusive narratives and prodiversity city branding being cultivated locally.

Sometimes national agendas fixate on issues that are not pertinent to all local contexts.

Additionally, national governments may be responsible for issues that, if left unattended, can negatively affect integration and public attitudes at the local level. In France, for example, provision of shelter to asylum seekers is the responsibility of the national government, but many newcomers have found themselves on the street due to a lack of emergency shelters. In 2016, with the help of the media and Parisian residents, the mayor of Paris was able to escalate the urgency of the situation and compel the national government to find additional housing.[71] While overcoming such challenges can be a delicate political affair, proactive local leaders can effect real change for their communities by being vocal about local priorities.

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66   Elizabeth Collett and Camille Le Coz, *After the Storm: Learning from the EU Response to the Migration Crisis* (Brussels: MPI Europe, 2018), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/after-storm-eu-response-migration-crisis.
67   Author interview with a spokesperson of the European Commission, 8 June 2018.
68   Ibid.
69   Government Communication Service, *The Government Communication Service: An Introduction.*
70   MPI, 'Restrictions on Islamic Dress in Europe', updated June 2018, www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/charts/restrictions-islamic-dress-europe.
71   Author interview with an advisor to a Paris city official, 12 June 2018. See also Kerry Flint, 'Thanks to Anne Hidalgo, There Will Soon Be Two Refugee Camps at the Heart of Paris', CityMetric, 14 October 2016, www.citymetric.com/politics/thanks-anne-hidalgo-there-will-soon-be-two-refugee-camps-heart-paris-2508.

3. Sensational immigration reporting and 'fake news'

Traditionally, outside intervention in the free press has been anathema to democracy. Yet with the explosion of social media platforms on which anyone can create and disseminate unvetted information, and with the growing trend of 'fake news'[72] engineered to influence political events, this unregulated flow of ideas could be as much democracy's undoing as its foundation. As the distinction between news and entertainment becomes increasingly blurred in the race for the most clicks, and with limited accountability for spreading misleading or false information, the impetus for oversight is growing. In an attempt to self-regulate, Facebook, the social media platform through which millions of people access and share the news, recently introduced tools that would scrutinise text displayed over videos or images. It also employs factcheckers in some jurisdictions, such as the Philippines, but its efforts so far are limited.[73] In Sweden, the security services and Civil Contingencies Agency warned of increasing fake news and disinformation in the 2018 electoral debate. Swedish authorities took some countermeasures, such as a 'Facebook hotline' to report forged pages, training for students on how to evaluate sources, and handbooks and leaflets for the general public with guidance on how to spot fake news. Four of the biggest media outlets in Sweden also pledged to combat disinformation and raise awareness about the credibility of information sources.[74] Even so, it was found that one in three news articles about the 2018 Swedish election shared on Twitter were 'junk news' websites that publish deliberately misleading information, a clear indication of the massive scale of the challenge.[75]

Few officials fully understand the challenges media outlets face in the evolving news landscape, or how to make their interactions more effective.

The media is one of the most important intermediaries between policymakers and the public. It also plays an undisputed—even if not completely understood—role in influencing public opinion on immigrant integration. According to research by Ipsos MORI, there was a spike in Italian news coverage of immigration and integration issues following the sharp increase in the number of irregular migrant arrivals to Italy between 2014 and 2015; this was mirrored by a jump in the number of survey respondents who said immigration was the most important concern for Italy.[76] It has been argued elsewhere that people's attitudes towards migration do not change dramatically over time, but that consistent references to immigration by the media and politicians can activate voters to align more with populist parties.[77] For example, among voters who said they were mostly motivated by concerns over immigration and asylum during the 2017 Dutch national election, support was higher for the radical-right candidate Geert Wilders than among those mostly motivated by other concerns.[78] Although immigration became a more salient issue in 2017 than it had been in previous election cycles, attitudes towards immigration—based on responses to survey questions such as 'Does immigration make the country a better or worse place to live?'—remained fairly stable among the general Dutch population.

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72 'Fake news' is a type of disinformation that involves the intentional spread of falsehoods through mass media to influence political events. See Banulescu-Bogdan, *When Facts Don't Matter.*

73 Alexandra Stevenson, 'Soldiers in Facebook's War on Fake News Are Feeling Overrun', *The New York Times,* 9 October 2018, www.nytimes.com/2018/10/09/business/facebook-philippines-rappler-fake-news.html.

74 Federico Guerrini, 'Sweden's 2018 General Election Could Provide a Blueprint for Fake News Countering', *Forbes*, 14 August 2018, www.forbes.com/sites/federicoguerrini/2018/08/14/swedens-2018-general-election-could-provide-a-blueprint-for-fake-news-countering/.

75 Alice Cuddy, '1 in 3 News Articles Shared about Sweden Election Are Fake, Finds Study', Euronews, 6 September 2018, www.euronews.com/2018/09/06/1-in-3-news-articles-shared-about-sweden-election-are-fake.

76 Bobby Duffy, 'Attitudes to Immigration and Integration in Europe' (paper presented at MPI Europe's Integration Futures Working Group meeting, Brussels, 19 June 2018).

77 James Dennison, Andrew Geddes, and Teresa Talo, 'The Dutch Aren't Turning against Immigration: The Salience of the Immigration Issue Is What Drives Wilders' Support', Migration Policy Centre, 3 March 2017, https://blogs.eui.eu/migrationpolicycentre/dutch-arent-turning-immigration-salience-immigration-issue-drives-wilders-support/.

78 Ibid.

Despite the importance of the relationship between media coverage and public opinion, there is often a lack of understanding and clear communication between officials and journalists. Few officials fully understand the challenges media outlets face in the evolving news landscape, or how to make their interactions more effective. More research on these challenges could help communicators better tailor their outreach to journalists. For example, Red Acoge in Spain produced a good-practices guide for journalists reporting on migration but found this had limited impact.[79] In their next attempt, they held focus groups with journalists to explore the challenges they face in their work and identify how nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) could help.[80] In light of this information, Red Acoge tapped their network of NGOs to create a database of migrant and refugee testimonials. Since the Red Acoge communication team did not have access to newcomers directly, this made it easier for them to share these rich personal stories with journalists and to put them in touch with relevant organisations.

Different countries have different policies and traditions of media (self-)regulation. In the absence of state oversight, codes of conduct drafted and agreed by journalists, such as the Rome Charter (Carta di Roma) in Italy, are one approach to addressing sensationalism and inaccuracies in media coverage. Drafted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and two Italian journalism associations, the charter aims to decrease discrimination by calling on journalists to be as balanced as possible when selecting and covering stories related to migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, and victims of human trafficking.[81] An observatory was created to monitor its implementation, provide training to journalists, and clarify the meaning of key migration-related terms.[82]

Taken together, these governmental and media dynamics converge to form a steep set of challenges for public communicators seeking to effectively engage with the public on immigrant integration. To overcome these obstacles, they should aim to appropriately tailor communications to reflect the experiences and preferences of target audiences, while also ensuring messages are relayed by trusted figures and are not undermined by communications from different government and media actors.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR INTEGRATION POLICY

Integration challenges are nothing new. Yet the increased public and political attention to all things migration has created new pressure on policymakers to help immigrants succeed. On one hand, this has opened up opportunities to examine and amend ineffective integration programming, access newly available funding, and amplify efforts through new platforms. On the other hand, it can be hard to directly link individual activities or policies to successful outcomes, given the many other factors at play in long-term integration. And with different constituencies holding different expectations of newcomers and their communities in the integration process, narratives of success with broad appeal are likely to remain elusive.

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79   Author interview with Communication Representative, Red Acoge, Spain, 29 May 2018.
80   The challenges reported include: a lack of knowledge and time to learn about migration dynamics and policy initiatives; pressure from employers to write sensational pieces; short deadlines that put accuracy at risk; competition with social media and other online outlets for attention-grabbing and clickable content; and an inability to engage directly with refugees and migrants because of a lack of cooperation from protective NGOs.
81   Associazione Carta di Roma, 'Who We Are', accessed 10 October 2018, www.cartadiroma.org/who-we-are/.
82   Ibid.

There are, however, a number of key takeaways for policymakers and others delivering integration-focused communications:

- *Words matter.* Getting terminology right is important not only to ensure accuracy (such as understanding the difference between relocation and resettlement), but also to strike the right emotional tone. Expressions such as 'illegal immigrant' (as opposed to 'irregular immigrant') and 'waves of arrivals' (although less derogatory than 'swarm' or 'flood') can create a sense of threat and uncontrolled inundation,[83] and are often marshalled by proponents of greater immigration restrictions. Sensitising journalists to the connotations of different expressions can ensure more neutral reporting.[84]

- *Body language matters.* Communication efforts targeting immigrant communities can appear disingenuous when they are perceived as an afterthought, or where there is limited consultation with community leaders. Pro forma efforts to engage are not effective. Additionally, welcoming narratives should be matched by welcoming actions. For instance, complex and overly burdensome registration processes for newcomers can set a negative tone for further encounters with public authorities. Making the first encounter a positive one, and ensuring that officials who interface with the public have intercultural communication training, can increase the effectiveness of future communication efforts.

- *The messenger matters.* When communication is channeled via a trusted figure who is not viewed as having ulterior motives, people are much more likely to listen to the message in play.[85] There is a burgeoning field of research into which actors are most effective in delivering certain narratives to certain audiences. Personal stories from migrants themselves or from members of the public who work with them can be more compelling than official descriptions of events or initiatives. Instead of simply slotting into precooked news articles or communication campaigns, these testimonials should be sought at the earliest stages of conceptualisation so that they can help shape and inform stories.

- *Not everything should be communicated by governments.* Some debates will be too hot for particular ministries to play an active role, such as when issues have become highly politicised or when one ministry's involvement would spark conflict with another. Additionally, public authorities may not always be the most effective and most trusted messenger. Public sector communicators can, however, act as an amplifier for other voices, including those of immigrant community organisations. More fundamentally, governments need to interrogate the extent to which they can modulate their messages without straying too far from the public's expectations of government communications. There is a delicate line between communicating persuasively without falling into the territory of propaganda or manipulation.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In a media space increasingly characterised by disinformation and sensationalism, every communication initiative counts. And with trust in government at all-time lows in Europe and support for anti-immigrant populist parties near all-time highs, there is little room for failure. In order to maximise the potential of each public awareness campaign, community event, and training or networking opportunity, policymakers should weigh the following strategic considerations:

- *Know your audience.* Differences in attitudes towards immigrant integration defy traditional audience segmentation based on age, gender, occupation, or geography. To communicate effectively with different audiences, governments must spend more time getting to know the nuances that set them apart and how they will respond to particular framing and narratives. What is convincing to one group might backfire on another.

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83 Gregory Lee, 'Chinese Migrants and the "Inundation" Metaphor' (working paper for the EastAsiaNet workshop Framing Risk: Hazard Perceptions as a Crucial Factor in Imagining East Asia, Lund, Sweden, June 2007), https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00188544/document.

84 In Spain, the use of the word 'illegal immigrant' by mainstream media fell sharply after a series of sensitising campaigns aimed at journalists. Author interview with Communication Representative, Red Acoge, Spain, 29 May 2018.

85 Kreuter et al., 'Narrative Communication in Cancer Prevention and Control'.

- *Listening is more important than talking.* Truly understanding the concerns of one's constituents and making them feel heard is the most important part of developing successful narratives. And while listening to all segments of a society is important, proactively engaging immigrant organisations and NGOs is essential when it comes to communicating about integration as they can be crucial allies in generating content for effective and inclusive campaigns and for resolving disputes, should they arise.

- *Reflect the priorities of the whole society.* Particularly in contexts where resources are (or appear) scarce, such as where there is high unemployment, shortages of affordable housing, or under-resourced schools, campaigns that highlight initiatives to integrate new immigrants can spark concerns that newcomers' needs are being prioritised over those of existing populations.[86] Instead, policymakers may find it more effective to focus public attention on interventions that will have demonstrable benefits for both newcomers and long-standing residents, and those that bring communities together. One promising practice is the allocation of funding to all vulnerable groups rather than specifically to those with migrant backgrounds.[87]

- *Acknowledge conflict.* To some degree, conflicts are a natural part of integration and other forms of social change. But determining how and when to acknowledge and respond to clashes requires a delicate balancing act. In addition to presenting the benefits of immigration and diversity, governments and the media must be transparent about the challenges if they are to remain credible. Failure to discuss conflict, such as when public broadcasters in Germany delayed reporting on sexual assaults perpetrated by immigrants in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015–16, can undermine public trust in both the government and the media.

- *Success is often tied to the strength of individual leadership.* Integration communications are often most successful when they are championed by strong and trusted leaders.[88] In addition, the process of developing the networks to disseminate information through trusted sources can be an important opportunity to bring different communities and public officials together. At the local level, mayors play a pivotal role in building political consensus on integration objectives and narratives. Where broad political and interagency consensus is reached,[89] it is possible to mainstream responsibility for integration and the promotion of welcoming narratives throughout all relevant departments.[90] And while strong leadership is an important catalyst for action, training and getting buy-in from government officials at all levels is key to reducing the potentially disruptive impact of changes in leadership and personal missteps.[91]

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86 For example, in Molenbeek, Belgium—where unemployment is high and there is a long waiting list for social housing—officials chose not to publicise an initiative to provide housing to homeless Roma families with children for fear that it could cause a backlash. Author interview with Molenbeek city official, 8 June 2018.

87 In the United Kingdom, for example, this is done through the 'pupil premium' that allocates additional education funds based on how many children are eligible for free school meals. This allows all schools with high numbers of pupils from low-income families, whether native or foreign born, to receive additional support. See UK Government, 'Pupil Premium: Funding and Accountability for Schools', updated 6 July 2018, www.gov.uk/guidance/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

88 At the European level, European Commission President Jean-Claude Junker had to use personal political capital to help steer Member States towards a resolution during the migration and refugee crisis in 2015. Author interview with a spokesperson of the European Commission, 8 June 2018.

89 For example, the Stuttgart Integration Pact brought together public, private-sector, and civil-society stakeholders to shape an agenda around participation and equal opportunity for all residents, peaceful cohabitation and social cohesion, and the capitalisation on cultural diversity as a community and economic asset. See Cities of Migration, 'The Stuttgart Pact For Integration: The Power of Planning', updated 25 February 2009, http://citiesofmigration.ca/good_idea/the-stuttgart-pact-for-integration-the-power-of-planning/.

90 In Stuttgart, this also led to the creation of a Welcome Center for newcomers to the city—both Germans and non-Germans—that brought all of the different relevant services, such as employment, education, and registration, together under one roof. See Welcome Center Stuttgart, 'What We Can Do for You', accessed 19 October 2018, https://welcome.stuttgart.de/en/item/show/548332.

91 Elizabeth Collett and Ben Gidley, *Attitudes to Migrants, Communication and Local Leadership: Final Transnational Report* (Oxford: University of Oxford, Centre on Migration, Policy, and Society, 2012), www.compas.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/PR-2012-AMICALL_Transnational.pdf.

- *Professionalise in-house communications.* In many national and especially local migration ministries, policymakers are charged with designing communication campaigns, weighing word choices, and addressing public blowback, while communication experts add the final touches or focus on dissemination. In other cases*,* strict communication style guides leave policymakers unable to respond swiftly to citizens' concerns or to tailor messages to target audiences. With interest in migration and integration issues on the rise, the capacity to communicate effectively about these topics should be mainstreamed into core training for in-house communication teams, and not left as marginal issues for migration experts to tackle.

As immigration and integration have become more controversial and politicised policy areas, the risk of miscommunication—or missing the mark with one's target audience—has also grown. Efforts by governments to better understand who their target audiences are, what concerns they have, and how they experience different messages are crucial preconditions for ensuring that communications meet their objectives. Ultimately, immigrant integration is a long-term and whole-of-society process, and some conflicts will be unavoidable as communities redefine themselves and adapt to change. It is critical that integration policymakers and communicators understand how and when to speak to different audiences, and when to just listen.

Efforts by governments to better understand who their target audiences are, what concerns they have, and how they experience different messages are crucial preconditions for ensuring that communications meet their objectives.

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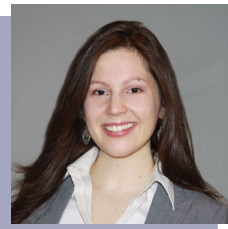
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Migration Policy Institute Europe, established in Brussels in 2011, is a non-profit, independent research institute that aims to provide a better understanding of migration in Europe and thus promote effective policymaking. Building upon the experience and resources of the Migration Policy Institute, which operates internationally, MPI Europe provides authoritative research and practical policy design to governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders who seek more effective management of immigration, immigrant integration, and asylum systems as well as successful outcomes for newcomers, families of immigrant background, and receiving communities throughout Europe. MPI Europe also provides a forum for the exchange of information on migration and immigrant integration practices within the European Union and Europe more generally.

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