

STAND UP FOR MIGRANTS

Regional roundtable on reshaping narratives on migration in Asia and the Pacific

Grande Centre Point Hotel Ploenchit

Bangkok, 17 December 2019

INFORMAL SUMMARY

One essential element to building human rights-based messages on migration

Mentimeter



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BACKGROUND

On 17 December 2019, in the context of International Migrants' Day, the UN Human Rights Office organised a regional roundtable on *Reshaping narratives on migration in Asia and the Pacific*. This is the first regional meeting on this theme in Asia Pacific, and it follows a number of years of engagement by UN Human Rights at the global level. These efforts have sought to bring together a diverse range of actors and activists to identify and encourage innovative approaches to reframe hostile narratives on migration; to share experiences and learn from each other's challenges and successes; and to find ways to collaborate and support each other.

The international community and the United Nations Secretary-General have placed a priority on the critical issue of addressing public narratives on migration and migrants that have harmful human rights consequences. The [New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants](#) and the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#) both contain commitments by UN Member States to counter expressions, acts and manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, violence, xenophobia and related intolerance against all migrants, while protecting freedom of expression, and to promote an open and evidence-based public discourse on migration and migrants in partnership with all parts of society. The UN Secretary-General has launched a United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action against Hate Speech, a system-wide programme, which has an overarching objective of identifying, preventing and confronting hate speech, including against migrants, through engagement with private companies, civil society and media and other stakeholders.

Building on these initiatives, the Asia Pacific regional roundtable brought together over 45 representatives from civil society organisations, local government, journalists, creative story-telling and media organisations, private foundations, on-and off line campaigning organisations, UN agencies, and migrant rights' defenders.

Following introductory remarks, the first session focused on the theory and principles of narrative change and the importance of understanding and shaping narratives in order to bring human rights change. Participants discussed ways of reframing narratives and disseminating values-based messages on migration. The next session introduced and discussed the practice of reframing narratives, and drew on a wide diversity of experiences and approaches. Participants reflected on opportunities and challenges and exchanged strategies on how to build support and mobilise new stakeholders. In smaller groups, the following session saw participants discuss and explore ways of telling compelling stories as part of a new narrative on migration and co-creating messages relevant for the Asia Pacific context. The final session encouraged participants to think about the actions that can be carried out and the actors who should be engaged in order to lead to effective and sustainable narrative change on migration in the Asia Pacific region. The meeting concluded by discussing concrete next steps to keep the momentum of this discussion going and how current and prospective partnerships can work together on reshaping hostile narratives in the region and bringing about positive human rights change. In order to take advantage of the wide range of expertise and experience in the room, the meeting modalities attempted to be as interactive as possible, including through using the mentimeter¹ application regularly through the day to gather feedback from participants.

The present document contains key outcomes, recommendations for action and next steps that emerged from this discussion, based on the seven key elements on building human rights-based narratives on migrants and migration that are presented in the UN Human Rights manual on the same issue². This meeting and its informal summary build upon the previous meetings that have taken place at the global level and should be read as part of the growing work of the UN Human Rights Office on reshaping narratives on migration.³

¹ The mentimeter is a tool that lets presenters engage and interact with their audience in real-time through a mobile phone app. See www.mentimeter.com

² OHCHR, *Seven key elements on building human rights-based narratives on migrants and migration* (2019), available at <https://bangkok.ohchr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Seven-Key-Elements.pdf>

³ OHCHR, *Meeting on shaping the public narrative on migration* (2016), summary available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/Shapingthepublicnarrativeonmigration.aspx>;

The UN Human Rights Office would like to thank all participants for their generous, expert and inspiring contributions. The meeting was conducted under the Chatham House rule, and accordingly no attributions will be made in this summary document.



SEVEN KEY ELEMENTS ON BUILDING HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED NARRATIVES ON MIGRANTS AND MIGRATION IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION

Key element 1: Create a vision of the world you want to see

Much of the media focus on migration in the Asia Pacific can tend to be negative, emphasizing the security aspects of large movements or misrepresenting the so-called criminal nature of migrants. Meeting participants discussed how these views could be changed, including through ensuring that the positive contributions of migration become more visible. Participants also remarked on the instrumentalization of rhetoric against migrants in many countries in the region, where powerful political figures intentionally build on people's fears to legitimise restrictions on migration, and to fuel religious and ethnic intolerance. The importance of presenting the human face of migration was stressed, through emphasizing that migrants can be professionals with talents and skills or fathers and mothers with the same motivations as majority populations, namely to create better lives for their families. It is important not to present migrants only as victims but to portray them as people with agency, dignity, and to show their dreams and aspirations too.

OHCHR, Expert roundtable on changing the public narrative on migration: promoting tolerance and confronting xenophobia against migrants (2017), summary available at

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/CounterAntiMigrantNarratives.aspx#video>.

OHCHR, Roundtable on confronting hate in our societies and reshaping narratives on migration (2019), summary available at <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Migration/Pages/StandUpMigrants.aspx>

Participants heard about a number of ongoing initiatives and actions that had sought to take this approach of ‘humanizing’; from the ‘ChinUp’ project in Malaysia to a spontaneous act of solidarity between migrants and citizens in Hong Kong.

Participants noted that the facts (for example relating to the generally positive impact of migration on national economies or the impact of migration on crime rates) are often contrary to the narratives we hear in public discourse. For example, 83 per cent of those surveyed by the ILO in Malaysia thought crime rates were increasing due to migration. However, research showed that an increase of 100,000 migrants in Malaysia actually reduced crimes by 9.9 per cent. The aim of narrative change strategies should be to bring people closer to appreciating these realities, while recognising that just presenting the evidence by itself will usually be ineffective in changing narratives. Participants noted that “logical does not equal impactful”, highlighting the importance of creating emotional connections. The meeting also heard the fundamental importance of being persistent in vision creation – “say it hard, and say it often...and everywhere”.

Key element 2: Promote values-based narratives

The meeting heard about the critical importance of values-based messaging in framing migration and migrant narratives. Research undertaken by the More in Common campaign⁴ highlighted that speaking to people’s core beliefs can move the debate beyond the polarization seen in most societies. Participants voiced the need to place a focus on migrants in vulnerable situations and to highlight their specific needs as rights holders. Some spoke about long-term goals of their work being to establish more inclusive public attitudes; ensure increased well-being of marginalized communities; and helping to establish improved public policy and legislation. The meeting heard from refugees and other migrants who had set out to tell their own stories using values-based and positive messaging to frame a counter-narrative such as Fadak Alfayadh who lives and tells her personal story to audiences throughout Australia.

Messages which reflect shared values and common humanity are more likely to evoke empathy and to be perceived as authentic and positive, which in turn is more likely to resonate with people and be able to draw them in. Mapping common values and identifying which values we are willing to and able to convey, is a useful step in shaping strategies to reframe migration narratives. Participants heard that in order to persuade the groups in the middle of the debate, it is more effective telling stories of a ‘bigger us’ emphasising what we have in common, than emphasizing the more abstract value of ‘diversity’ or only the message that we must embrace differences. While stressing the importance of a human rights-based approach to such narratives, participants noted that the language of human rights can at times seem abstract and complex, stressing that communications should be tailored to and seen as relevant by target audiences.

Key element 3: Use the power of story-telling

The importance of empowerment was stressed throughout the discussions, including through ensuring that migrants are enabled to tell their own stories. For example, participants from Hong Kong highlighted a social media campaign that they had implemented on everyday forms of racism where migrants and minorities led the creation of the campaign in order to present their own experiences. Others expressed the need to leverage the power of digital media to spread stories of people in Asia, to shape perceptions and inspire people to come alongside to support in tangible ways. Campaigns in Singapore are working with a network of impact storytellers to tell the stories of how marginalised communities are being empowered - giving voice to the voiceless.

Participants highlighted linking journalism and story-telling to public action campaigns as a way to mobilize support and bring change, such as through exposing the link between migration for education and exploitation in Malaysia. One participant noted that the goal of changing public perceptions of migrants could only be met by humanising and helping migrants tell their stories. Migrants should not be portrayed as a problem to be solved. While rights-based narratives tell stories using real people and identifiable times and

⁴ More in Common: <https://www.moreincommon.com/>

places, participants noted that ‘the dark side’ favoured narratives that portrayed ‘them’ from ‘over there’ using narrative tactics that dehumanize and distance.

Key element 4: Think local

The need for strengthened anti-discrimination legislation and regulations was noted in the context of some countries, particularly where inclusion of migrants and other minorities is only a “reluctant choice with many missed opportunities”. In some countries discrimination on the grounds of race has only recently been addressed through laws and policies, and in others this protection is still missing for many migrant groups. Some campaigns in the region had focused on showcasing genuine friendships and collaborations between migrants and locals as a way to show practical and tangible examples and inspire others to join in. Participants stressed the need to ground campaigns in a strong research base to reach the target audience, such as the example of information campaigns for migrant women at risk of violence and exploitation in the workplace. To ensure tailored content and the effectiveness of these campaigns, they were premised on research about the information consumption habits of migrant communities and the platforms that they access.

Strategies such as showcasing personal and local stories, and engaging in close-to-the-ground contexts (e.g. townhall meetings and community forums) have proven to be effective, and can illustrate through actions how solidarity can be part of the solution to bringing narrative change. Participants also noted the importance of working at different levels to create the desired change, recognising for instance the interconnections between public attitudes and legislative change. For example, the ILO highlighted that having been told in their survey that nearly 80 per cent of respondents in Thailand indicated they would support improved conditions for migrant domestic workers, the ILO is now seeking to push for legislative reform that better protects domestic workers. Participants also noted the importance of engagement at the local, grassroots level, including through communicating in local languages and dialects.

Key element 5: Find common ground

The discussions highlighted the fine line that needs to be navigated between freedom of expression on the one hand and ,on the other, restrictions which are needed to counter hate speech, intentional negative stereotyping and disinformation about migrants and minorities. How to make this delicate balance, while ensuring that the human rights of everyone in society are protected and respected? Participants also presented examples of initiatives that sought to target the concerns of the public in ways that would resonate with a broad group; for example by stressing that inclusion of migrants is an asset to a society that prioritises diversity and shared values, rather than focusing on anti-racism. Many participants stressed that context was key; the most effective messaging tended to be those that were customised to their target audiences, and that these messages needed to be communicated to the audiences with sufficient frequency to shape perceptions and behaviours. For example, messaging in Asia Pacific could tap into societal characteristics in the region such as traditions of hospitality and pride in a common purpose. At the same time, messaging should be aware of the diversity of the region, and be cautious of a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

Participants highlighted that the frequency, nature, and quality of interaction between the public and migrants were the strongest predictor of individuals’ support for migrants, and therefore strongly recommended that narrative change strategies should include opportunities to build these personal and positive interactions and allow individuals to experience personal connection, community and friendship or bondedness with migrants. Participants highlighted the importance of incentivizing such contact through providing the reasons that migrants and host communities should interact as well as the tools to facilitate this interaction, such as dedicated physical spaces. For example, one recommendation was to create offline physical places for young people to interact with migrants (the example being given of a campaign in Thailand that explored ways to bring migrant youth together with Thai youth). Caution was noted about strategies of engagement that may distance rather than resonate with the broad public or the target audience of the

‘persuadable middle’, for example it was highlighted that anti-racism messages that appear to talk ‘down’ to people may not achieve the intended effects.

Key element 6: Build a big tent

A whole-of-society approach, in which each individual, organisation or company recognises their role and potential contribution to the society we want to live in, is thus key to successfully address hate and reframe narratives on migration. In keeping with the whole-of-society approach, it is useful to demonstrate how everyone is part of the bigger picture of creating narrative change. “Tolerance is not enough” was the motto one participant used, to note the need to understand the factors that either hamper or, on the other hand, that promote positive interaction between migrants and host communities.

Participants noted ongoing programmes of work such as a fellowship to build up more empowered social justice leaders; stronger communities for social justice; and more public engagement on social justice. The call for social justice target marginalized communities broadly, which include but is not limited to migrants and their communities. The need to support key spokespersons from migrant and minority communities is important as they can be a bridge with the wider public, but also because it is important to see migrants who are being vocal and persuasive spokespersons for their own communities. Many participants stressed the vital importance of consultations with migrant communities as part of a successful theory of change. One recommendation that emerged from the discussions was to avoid branding campaigns, in order to build broad-based ownership of the messages. The fact that it is in cities where most strangers must learn to live with each other was highlighted to raise the key importance of bringing in local authorities and other actors at the city level. Participants learned that monetizing hate is often part of the media business model, and therefore a broad coalition can be built around the goal of making hate unprofitable, whether it is hate that is directed towards migrants or towards other minorities or on other issues. Actors in the Asia Pacific region can learn from the success of groups such as Stop Funding Hate in Europe who through consumer power have stopped media entities from publishing anti-migrant stories. The advertising industry and brands can be brought into the ‘big tent’ through efforts such as replicating the Conscious Advertising Network⁵ in the Asia Pacific.

Key element 7: Do no harm

While ensuring migrants are supported and provided platforms to share their stories, the principle of do no harm should underpin all efforts. Language can dehumanize and lead to harmful policy choices (e.g. using words such as ‘alien’, ‘flood’, ‘swarm’ to describe migrants). Even the terminology of ‘economic migrant’ can lead to commodification of migrants, or the impression that the case for inclusive migration governance can only be made by weighing up what migrants can do for the rest of ‘us’. Reducing migrants to the legal categories that they inhabit, or ascribing worth to people only on the basis that they belong to one or other of these legal categories, was seen by many participants as potentially harmful and certainly not in line with messaging that stressed common humanity. In this context, some participants also noted the key role of measuring impact, for example in terms of perception and behavioural change, to ensure that strategies are reaching their goals and also to explore and analyse potential negative impacts. In this context, some participants highlighted the potential paradox of working with social media companies such as Facebook or Twitter, while also holding them to account to do more to confront hate speech and to avoid their platforms being appropriated by anti-migrant narratives.

In line with the recommendation that migrants should not be portrayed as problems to be solved, participants noted that while investigative journalism that explored particular policy issues could unlock the political will to address that problem, in general such policy-led campaigns may do little to change less informed and broader public perceptions.

⁵ The Conscious Advertising Network: <https://www.consciousadnetwork.com/#Intro>

What are the values that will mobilise people on migration?



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TOOLS AND METHODOLOGIES

During the discussion, participants shared some of the tools and methodologies that they have used in their work on narratives in the Asia Pacific region, which include the following good practices

- Investing in research is a key part of the campaign strategy, to understand where your audience is, what the narrative is, and how to meet them in the middle. Be aware that research should include ways to understand ‘the public pulse’, going beyond empirical study to multidisciplinary analysis of narrative formation on the ground. Primary research could include large surveys on issues of social justice, or more targeted surveys of particular groups (such as employers), as well as smaller focus group discussions including as a way to test messages.
- Establishing partnerships (pro bono or otherwise) with private sector actors such as public relations (PR) companies as well as social media corporations, for example Facebook, in order to amplify messages.
- Being creative in the telling of stories, such as using comics and animation as a way to bring stories to life and strengthen outreach as well as to preserve anonymity/protect against reprisals, and focusing on authenticity as a goal of the story-telling.
- Ensuring sufficient resources and capacity to plan, implement and measure the impact of narrative change strategies, including through creative resource mobilization such as crowd-funding, and measure impact both qualitatively and quantitatively. One campaign measured impact both through online reach as well as how many volunteers were motivated to sign up after reading their stories. The More in Common campaign has invested around \$2.5m to apply and test insights around ‘what works’ on narrative change.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE

Finally, through the mentimeter exercise, participants highlighted a number of recommendations for the UN Human Rights office to take action in the Asia Pacific region. These include

- Creating a network on this issue in the region (ensuring that all parts of Asia and the Pacific are represented) and globally, ensuring that such a network brings together a wide variety of stakeholders in civil society and the private sector, meets regularly, adds value and does not duplicate the ongoing work of UN entities and other partners.
- Convening platforms where partners can share ideas, exchange best practices and contribute their resources in order to work strategically together, including in national contexts.
- Strengthening the capacity of groups and organisations including at the grass-roots level through providing training and resources.
- Supporting migrants' human rights defenders and civil society organisations, including through advocacy with central and local governments in the region.
- Supporting ongoing campaigns and platforms on narrative change in the region, including story-telling projects that aim to change the narratives on migration and migrants.
- Developing an advocacy campaign on the issues that; avoids 'talking down' to people and uses accessible communication techniques, assists governments in the region to see migrants as people with agency, dignity and intrinsic worth; and creates a counter-narrative to "the dark side".

CONCLUSION

Participants at the meeting heard that across the world there is a rise of 'us versus them' populism and societal polarisation, built around fault lines of group identities. The precise fault lines differ from one country to another but the 'in-group' versus 'out-group' dynamics are similar (e.g. anti-migrant narratives, 'people vs elites', nativists vs cosmopolitans, separatists vs nationalists). Social media platforms, private sector actors and local and central policy-and decision makers are playing a key role in making these conflicts more combustible. The endorsement by governments of the Global Compact for Migration (which has overwhelming support in the Asia Pacific region, with only Australia and Singapore having abstained in the General Assembly vote) is a key opportunity to develop multi-stakeholder coalitions which promote narrative change on migration and migrants. This meeting was seen as an important first step to bring together existing work streams on this important topic that are already happening at local, national, regional and global levels.

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AGENDA

9.00 Opening remarks

- Charlotta Bredberg, Counsellor, Development Cooperation Section Regional Asia and the Pacific, Human Rights & Democracy, Embassy of Sweden
- Dr. Ratchada Jayagupta, Thailand Representative, ASEAN Commission on the promotion and protection of the rights of women and children (ACWC), Senior Researcher and Lecturer, Chulalongkorn University
- Pia Oberoi, Senior Advisor on Migration and Human Rights, UN Human Rights Office

9.30 -10.15 Introductions of participants

In a brief tour-de-table, participants will introduce themselves and be introduced to the mentimeter.

- Moderated by Klaus Dik Nielsen, OHCHR consultant and Genevieve Sauberli, OHCHR Migration Team, Geneva

10.15 – 10.30 Session 1

***Stand Up For Migrants* - the work of the UN Human Rights Office on migration narratives**

This introductory session will briefly introduce the work of the UN Human Rights Office on migration and its linked work on seeking to influence narrative change from a human rights-based perspective. A video produced by UN Human Rights will be aired and a toolkit entitled “7 key elements on building human rights-based narratives on migration and migrants” will be presented.

- Christina MacGillivray, producer/director, India
- Pia Oberoi, Senior Advisor on Migration and Human Rights, UN Human Rights Office

10.30 – 11.00 Coffee break

11.00 – 12.00 Session 2

The theory - What is a “narrative” and how do we counter hate and reshape migration narratives?

This session will introduce the principles of narrative change theory, and begin to discuss the importance of understanding and shaping narratives in order to bring human rights change. We will explore what we know about reframing narratives and disseminating values-based messages on migration. We will also seek to understand what we are learning about public perceptions of migration and migrants in the Asia Pacific region?

Moderator: Isabelle Ng, Education University Hong Kong

Discussion starters (5-7 minutes each)

- Tim Dixon, More in Common, UK
- Ming Yu Hah, Deputy Director (Campaigns), East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, Amnesty International
- Ramakrishnan Nagarajan, Ideosync Media Combine, India
- Anna Olsen, Triangle in ASEAN Programme, ILO regional office

Questions for consideration in the session:

- What are narratives?
- How does narrative change work?
- What are the challenges to be aware of? Lessons learned?

12.00 – 1.00 Lunch break

1.00 – 2.00 Session 3

The practice - How to build support, engage partners and mobilise others to join?

We will discuss through examples some strategies and initiatives which have been successful; what the challenges and lessons learned are, and reflect on how we might be able to replicate these in our own contexts. We will explore who we should be engaging with and how we can encourage, build and sustain support.

Moderator: Roy Wadia, UNFPA

Discussion starters (5-7 minutes each):

- Richard Wilson, Stop Funding Hate, UK
- Fadak Alfayadh, Community Advocate, Australia
- Elroi Yee, R.AGE, Malaysia
- Helena Rojas, Department for Urban Development, Botkyrka Municipality, Stockholm, Sweden

Questions for consideration in the session:

- What was the situation that made you take action? What did your strategy look like?
- Who did you target – activists, affected communities, the broader public, others?
- How do we mobilise people to join us in standing up for migrants and migrants' rights defenders?

2.00 – 3.30 Session 4

Break-out session: building the message

In this session, we will break into smaller groups to discuss together how to tell compelling stories as part of a new narrative on migration and seek to co-create the messages that are likely to be effective in the Asia Pacific context.

Each session will be moderated by a participant rapporteur, with a member of the organising team acting as facilitator. The rapporteur will then report back to plenary.

Session moderator: Genevieve Sauberli, OHCHR

3.30 – 4.00 Coffee break

4.00 – 4.15: Presentation by Dan Archer on the use of creative media to tell the story of migrants, Empathetic Media, UK (Skype)

4.15 - 5.15 Session 5

The next steps: what is the way forward for changing public narratives on migration in the Asia Pacific region?

This session will draw together the experiences, lessons learned and new ideas discussed throughout the day and encourage us to think about which actions we could carry out that would lead to narrative change on migration in the Asia Pacific region. We will learn from other areas in which public narratives have been addressed and reshaped. The session seeks to help us envision the ways in which and the methodologies to use to move forward.

Moderator: Caroline den Dulk, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office

Discussion starters (5-7 minutes each):

- Veerawit Tianchainan, The Freedom Story, Thailand
- Rebecca Lim, Our Better World, Singapore
- Victoria Wisniewski Otero, Resolve, Hong Kong

Questions for consideration in the session:

- What messages have worked in your national or regional context to reframe narratives and why have they worked? What are the lessons learned?
- Are there any region or country-specific opportunities or challenges of which we should be specifically aware?
- Are there areas of commonalities in terms of the concerns and challenges across the different countries in the region that can help in developing broader strategies of engagement? What should we be aware of if we try to put these together?

5.15 – 5.45 Closing remarks, reflections and how to move forward together

- Genevieve Sauberli, Migration Team, Geneva, OHCHR
- Pia Oberoi, Senior Advisor on Migration and Human Rights, Asia Pacific, OHCHR

5.45-6.30: Reception with light refreshments