



2nd GFMD 2022-2023 GRT Consultations - 19 April 2023

GFMD Roundtable 5 (RT5) - "Improving the perception of migration in public opinion through narratives, culture, emotion and rational discourse"

Thank you for the invitation to share the insights of the NGO Committee on Migration, as well as our colleagues from the wider civil society mechanism as we frame the discussion about the importance of culture and narratives to the lives of migrants and their communities. Thank you to the French Chair for elevating this important and complex topic, to the co-chairs Canada and the Philippines, and also to ICMPD for serving as penholder for the outcome documents for this roundtable. Finally, thank you to colleagues from governments, the business mechanism, mayor's mechanism, and youth and civil society friends for sharing your knowledge and tools. I hope that these brief remarks will contribute to the questions already presented, and add to them to encourage further reflection and analysis.

Governments at all levels and all stakeholders have important responsibilities to ensure that the language we use and the information we share about who migrants are, why they move, and what they contribute to their communities upholds the dignity and identities of migrants, strengthens social cohesion, and works to eliminate xenophobia and discrimination against people on the move. As we all engage in this roundtable over the next 10 months, I hope we each consider the ways in which we as stakeholders and governments can together shape these narratives and influence cultural shifts to make our societies more inclusive.

In many places, we see politics used to drive a negative narrative around migrants and migration, and it's important to unpack what that means in terms of social cohesion and barriers to social inclusion. Too many governments remain silent, passive or insufficiently proactive in the face of increasingly toxic and dangerous narratives. And some governments even use negative narratives against migrants for their own political agendas. In our digital media age, misinformation, disinformation and malinformation is used by many different actors, both intentionally and not, to cause harm, mislead or manipulate public perceptions.

And these attitudes have real impacts. They leave room for, and fuel hatred, racism, xenophobia, criminalization and violence against migrants and their families. Race and ethnicity, and the systemic link between migration and racial injustice, are central to the human rights and non-discrimination principles of the Global Compact for Migration, and must also be central to the discourse on migration

and development. The GFMD is a unique space for us to name things that are difficult in order to dismantle systems that isolate, oppress, and dehumanize migrants and diaspora communities.

It's important that we consider how national governments, local authorities, media organizations and civil society can take responsibility for the narrative and recognize the profound power of the language we use and the systems we design and maintain. We should discuss and share practices about how we systematically repeal policies and practices that maintain, uphold or institutionalize racial injustice and the criminalization of migration. We should examine existing social, economic, and political systems for inequalities in both structure and delivery of services, to eliminate xenophobic biases. And we must include the voices of migrants and diaspora in the discussion and decision making to advance solutions to shape more balanced narratives.

Migrants and their communities play a vital role in creating environments that both honor the preservation of migrants' culture, language and identity and enable them to integrate into and contribute to their new communities. We have an opportunity in this roundtable to discuss the delicate negotiation between cultural preservation and integration, and the importance for migrant groups to be able to set their goals and to access the support they need from the surrounding communities while offering their unique experiences and knowledge to the development of an integrated society in which they can flourish in harmony with their hosts.

Of course we are always looking for specific resources, examples, and successful practices that may be used to achieve these goals, and the NGO Committee on Migration, through our subcommittee on Xenophobia, Racism and Social Inclusion, has gathered a number of these and submitted them both to UN Network for Migration's Knowledge Hub and to the GFMD's Working Group on Public Narratives and the It Takes a Community campaign.

But we wouldn't be having this discussion today if that was enough. How can we make positive, evidence-based narratives more effective? We know that statistics and facts don't move the needle on public attitudes when people have an emotional reaction to migration issues. Listening to the stories, voices and experiences of migrants and their communities is more compelling, but do we have more effective strategies? How do these discussions of culture and narratives turn into policies that contribute to the implementation of the GCM and make a difference in the lives of migrants and their communities?

There are no easy answers to these questions - concrete and specific implementation will depend on so many variables - but we appreciate the efforts to develop these two outcome documents, and are committed to dialogue and the sharing of practices from our member organizations throughout the year to eliminate misinformation and anti-migrant sentiment, to demonstrate the positive impact migration can have on communities, and to allow migrants and displaced person to protect and uphold their cultural identity while also creating an environment where communities can integrate, and contribute to the creation of more welcoming, resilient communities.