CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION FOR EUROPE

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LIBERTIES CIVIC SPACE MESSAGING LAB

MESSAGING FOR FAIR AND HUMANE MIGRATION POLICIES IN SWEDEN

By Israel Butler

Head of Narrative and Framing

Civil Liberties Union for Europe

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I. About the guide

This guide is intended for staff working in organisations that want to improve attitudes among the public towards people who migrate or people with a migration background in Sweden. The messages can also be used to build public support for positive measures and public opposition for negative measures towards people who migrate or with a migration background.

Public audiences tend to divide into at least three segments on issues related to human rights, equality and social justice. Those who are solidly in favour of your cause (the base), those who are solidly against (opponents), and those in the middle. The middle can be further divided into those who lean in your favour (soft-supporters), those who lean towards your opponents (soft opponents) and those who can go either way (undecideds).

Your 'base' includes your existing supporters, but also people who would be very likely to support you if you can reach them with your messages. Research in different countries on different human rights-related topics suggests that this base can be anything between 15% and 25% of the population.[1] The same is true of your opponents. Your base and your opponents won't usually change their position. But the middle segments can. This 'moveable middle' is usually the biggest chunk of the public.

Public-facing campaigns that are aimed at growing public support for a particular cause should try to mobilise your base and enlist their help to spread your message to shift at least part of the moveable middle over to your side. The messaging advice in this guide is designed to mobilise and persuade your base, soft supporters and undecideds.

The guide is informed by the science and practice behind narrative change or persuasive messaging. It draws heavily on the work of Anat Shenker-Osorio. This includes the 'people move' and 'golden rule' narratives, which Anat originally developed and tested in other countries.

The recommendations in this guide are based on an analysis of Swedish public opinion on migration and message testing. These were carried out through social listening over Facebook (June - August 2024) on selected Swedish language pages as well as focus groups with undecideds (September 2025). While the messages were tested with undecideds, they have been developed in a way that will also appeal to the base and soft supporters. Put otherwise, we did not test and have not included in this guide messages that risk alienating your base or soft supporters.

1 Much of this research is unpublished, but for published research that segments the population see research by More In Common on attitudes towards migration, available via their website.

Having said this, some ardent supporters and activists might feel more comfortable with the messages that they have used traditionally than the messaging suggested here. Section II of the guide explains why this messaging doesn't work well with people outside our base.

II. Drawbacks of current messaging practice

Campaigners tend to make certain mistakes when trying to persuade public audiences to support fairer and more humane policies towards people who migrate. These mistakes can be divided into two categories. First, in the way that they structure their messages. Second, in the details of their messaging. This section will outline these messaging mistakes to help you avoid them.

A. Structural Mistakes

Campaigners trying to shift public opinion to be more favourable in the field of migration tend to dedicate most of their messaging to talking about the harm they are fighting and then offering technical solutions, such as legal or policy changes. These are two elements that we need to include in an effective message. But there are other important ingredients required for a persuasive message that are missing. While focusing on the harm and the technical solution is enough to get your supporters to agree with you, it tends to be ineffective or even counterproductive when talking to moveable middle audiences.

i. Making our message mostly about the harm

Typically, when trying to stimulate public opposition to the regressive reforms in progress in Sweden, campaigners focus on the hardships facing people who migrate or with a migration background. For example, by pointing to the fact that a person or family faces deportation, or that new reforms make it harder to get a residence permit or for family reunification to take place. However, making your audience aware that people who migrate are facing a particular harm is not, by itself, capable of persuading people outside your supporters to support your position. Most of the time, the reason more people don't agree with us is not that they don't know how serious the problem is or that the problem is happening. There are a number of barriers that prevent more people from agreeing with us, as outlined in Section III.

Talking only about the harm results in several problems. First, it can cause your audience to tune out because they don't want to engage with a purely negative message. Second, it can make your audience feel like the problem is too big or difficult to solve. Third, it leaves your audience to fill in their own (usually mistaken) explanations for why the problem is happening or whether they even consider it to be a problem. Put otherwise, your audience filters the facts you give them through the frames they already have in their heads. And if they cannot interpret the facts in a way that is consistent with their frame, they will reject the facts altogether. This phenomenon was on clear display during the focus groups.

Among undecideds in Sweden, men tend to have a more negative frame of migrants and migration than women. Men's frame of migration is that Sweden allowed in too many migrants, especially during 2015, which is problematic because most of these people have not adopted Swedish values or integrated into Swedish society. In the focus groups, we presented them with a shortened version of the typical NGO message in relation to the tightening of residence requirements that focuses only on the harm the measure will cause: 'The government is tightening requirements for migrants to get residence permits. Now, many migrants who have lived and worked in Sweden for years face deportation even when they have children who have spent their whole lives here.' Because of their frame of migrants and migration, they approved of the restrictions, even if this resulted in the deportation of children. When presented with a further message telling the story of a teacher facing deportation, they argued that this was not representative of the broader consequences of new restrictions and contended that such 'difficult' cases would be exaggerated by the media. In contrast, women, who had a much more positive frame of people who migrate, had the opposite reaction to both of the messages.

This is not to say that communicators should not talk about the harm that they are fighting. But, as explained in the following section, this is only one element among several others that your messaging should contain. Importantly, if your audience does not share your frame of the issue, they will not interpret facts you give them in the way you want, unless you change their frame.

ii. Not giving your audience a reason to care about people who migrate

Beyond talking about the harm that a person who migrates is suffering, communicators tend not to give the audience a reason to care. Sometimes communicators will additionally appeal to the law or to high-sounding principles. That is, communicators will make arguments that a new policy violates national, European or international law, or that asylum must be protected because it is a 'human right'. This may be enough to get agreement from your supporters who understand their importance. But these kinds of arguments will not be effective with moveable middle audiences because they are too abstract and removed from their tangible experiences.[2]

In focus group testing in other countries, we found that using a legal argument at all backfired with undecideds who were presented with a typical NGO statement to the effect that violent pushbacks violate the European Convention on Human Rights. The statement seemed to trigger the negative frame of our opponents in undecideds, who reacted by saying that while they supported a right to asylum, they disagreed with people crossing the border illegally and asserted that securing

2 See, for example, published results of message testing bythe Anat Shenker-Osorio in Australia.

the border is important because some migrants are dangerous.

iii. Talking about the technical solution but not the vision

Communicators often have solid recommendations about the legal and policy reforms government should carry out. It's important to talk about policies and technicalities when you're telling the authorities what they need to do. But when talking to a public audience, focusing on laws and policies isn't enough to mobilise them, and going into too much policy or legal detail will turn them off.

Instead, you should mention the law or policy or decision that you want from the authorities. But you also need to set out your vision: if this solution is put in place, what will the world look like? Section III will offer some examples.

B. Mistakes in the details of the message

i. Using overly sophisticated language

Communicators should keep their language at a level that will be understood by their audience, who are not experts and may not necessarily have a university degree. This doesn't just apply to legal jargon - it also applies to using complicated language more generally. Research shows that when we use language that is too complicated for our audience, this frustrates them and puts them off from taking part in the discussion.[3] During focus group discussions, participants were comfortable with certain terms that might be considered technical: 'migrants', 'refugees', 'asylum', 'integration' and 'residence permit'. However, they tended to use plain, descriptive language, like 'people who come here for work', or 'people who are forced to come because of war'.

Communicators are recommended to avoid using technical terms (like 'family reunification', 'safe and legal routes', 'third country national' or 'subsidiary protection') without unpacking what they mean or just opting for descriptive language instead. For example, rather than saying 'we want safe and legal routes' try: 'we shouldn't force people to risk their lives to ask to get to safety. That's why we're asking for safe and legal routes.' Or, rather than saying 'we want to protect the right to family reunification', try: 'families belong together. We shouldn't force someone to choose between safety and being separated from their wife or children for years. That's why we want to protect the right to family reunification.'

3 See Schulman, H., et al., 'The effects of jargon on processing fluency, self-perceptions, and scientific engagement', Journal of Language and Social Psychology (2020); Oppenheimer, D., 'Consequences of erudite vernacular utilised irrespective of necessity: Problems with using long words needlessly', Applied Cognitive Psychology (2006).

ii. Direct contradictions

Our opponents spread a lot of misinformation about people who migrate, for example, that they are responsible for crime or terrorism, that they will replace Swedish culture or that they are taking up limited public resources at the expense of nationals. It is common for campaigners to try to correct the record with fact-checking, myth-busting and direct contradictions.

When we try to counter our opponents by directly contradicting their claims, we end up reinforcing the original damaging message, rather than the correction. To directly contradict a claim, we cannot avoid repeating it, and repetition makes information stick in the brain. The emotive words carry more weight, and the words we use to negate the false claim ('no', 'not', 'no one', 'nothing') get forgotten.[4] For example, saying that 'no one is illegal' or 'activists are not people traffickers' will just tend to entrench the original damaging frame that people who migrate and activists are lawbreakers. Section IV sets out how to counter misinformation by using a 'truth sandwich' or by reframing the issue.

iii. Choice of visuals

The visuals campaigners tend to use when trying to shift public opinion on migration often focus on the harm that they wish to fight. For example, showing pictures of people who migrate at a border, showing pictures of a border (e.g. the mediterranean), showing people in detention or abstract pictures of wire fences. It's likely that this choice of visuals backfires and confirms the negative stereotypes promoted by our opponents.

For example, testing in other countries has shown that using images of people who migrate in detention centres actually triggers the negative frame of our opponents in the moveable middle audience, which is that people who migrate are potentially dangerous (which is why they're in detention). In focus group testing in other countries, we found that a visual of migrants at a border fence and even a visual of a migrant family next to a train triggered our opponents' frames in undecideds. They reacted to these images by stating that while they agreed that people should be able to ask for asylum, they should arrive legally, and a country should be able to police its borders to check for dangerous migrants. Section III includes advice on positive visuals.

iv. One-way instead of two-way integration

Often, communicators emphasise the cultural benefits of migration as a way of stimulating positive attitudes towards people who migrate, in the hope that people will see the benefits of diversity. It's not uncommon to see communications products that highlight how migrants enrich the culture of their new home

4 See review of research in: Schwarz, N. et al., 'Making the truth stick and the myths fade: Lessons from cognitive psychology' 2 Behavioural Science and Policy (2016), 85.

by bringing new food, art, music and dance. The problem is that undecideds don't think like this. They're worried that Swedish culture is going to be weakened by new arrivals who keep their own culture, but don't adopt Swedish values. Although we did not test this in focus groups, it probably means that focusing only on how people who migrate enrich Swedish culture doesn't work well with undecideds.

At the same time, undecideds don't expect migrants to assimilate. Rather, they are happy with them to keep their culture while also adopting Swedish values and learning the language. Creative assets that showed this tested well with undecideds in other countries. Section III contains some examples of this.

v. Tone

Some of the messages tested in the focus groups included wording to which undecideds reacted badly. First, statements that said citizens or NGOs can 'demand', 'oblige', 'force' or 'make' the government take certain action. Men and women both found this too aggressive. Because of this, the messages in this guide use softer language. Second, the word 'deserve'. None of our messages actually said that migrants 'deserve' better treatment, though one did say that Sweden 'deserves' better migration rules. Nevertheless, focus group participants, especially men, didn't like this idea of entitlement, and it seemed to be part of their negative frame of migrants whom they see as taking resources.

III. Sample messaging and creative assets

Part III explains how to structure a persuasive message and gives examples of how to execute this, including through creative content, before covering how to respond to misinformation.

A. The structure of a persuasive message

Research and practice on public attitude change show that there are several common barriers that can prevent your audience from lending their support. These include: not seeing how the cause you are promoting delivers something that they find important; having an inaccurate understanding of why the problem is happening (leading them to support the wrong solutions); not having a vision to inspire them to action; and thinking that change is too difficult to achieve (referred to as fatalism).

Communicators can overcome these barriers by developing messages that follow a particular structure in a particular order. This type of three or four part message is referred to here as a 'narrative'.

1. Values statement: tell your audience how the cause you are advancing delivers something that they find important for themselves, people they care about or people whom they consider to be like them.

On the topic of migration, this means rewriting the frame your audience has of people who migrate so that they realise that migrants are 'people like them'. Undecideds are much more likely to want people they consider to be part of their group to get the same treatment they would want for themselves. Communicators can change the frame of migrants in two ways. First, by emphasising that people who migrate have similar hopes and fears to your audience. For example, wanting to live in safety, give their children a better future, contribute to their communities and support their families. Second, by dissolving negative stereotypes by showing how people who migrate integrate into and contribute to Swedish society.

2. Explain the problem: show your audience that the things they care about are at risk or aren't being delivered. Set out who or what is causing the problem. If executing a 'strategic' version of the narrative or a 'truth sandwich' you should also point out the motive behind the person causing the harm. This will be explained further below.

In our context, this requires communicators to point out how the laws or policies you are contesting will mean 'people like them' will be harmed, or how values your audience thinks are important (like the need to treat people with compassion and dignity) will be threatened.

3. Explain the vision your solution delivers: tell your audience what the world will look like if your solution is put into practice. This is often a call-back to the substance of the values statement. Do name your solution, but don't dwell on the policy details.

4. If necessary, show your audience that change is possible by reminding them of past positive social changes, and tell your audience what they can do to show their support for your solution.

When people take action to support a cause, it helps create a 'social identity' for them, which in turn makes them more likely to remain engaged and take further action in future.[5] This is important if you're trying to expand your base of supporters to mobilise in future campaigns. A call to action can be something small, like asking them to share or respond to your content. Research also shows that even when you convince your audience to agree with you, they can still be reluctant to do things you ask of them because they have a sense of fatalism and feel that 'nothing changes'. Pointing to past examples of positive social change can help overcome this.[6]

In practice, reminders of past successes can get merged into the explanation of the solution, because it makes the message less repetitive. Following these three or four steps in the order given has been shown to be the most effective structure for a message that shifts your audience's attitudes towards your position and mobilises them to take action to show their support for your cause.

The sample narratives include examples of past successes, such as: free pre-school and affordable childcare, paid parental leave, marriage equality and adoption and equality laws. Although we did not test these specific examples in the focus groups, based on other examples we tested on another topic, we think these examples might reasonably be expected to address fatalism.

B. How to use the four-part narrative structure

Follow the four-part structure in full as often as you can. Some formats make it possible to use a full narrative, or allow you to add to the narrative with more detail, statistics, storytelling elements, or hooks for the media. For example, press releases, speeches, lines to take in an interview, or a video script.

Of course, it won't always be appropriate or possible to deliver the narrative in full every time. Sometimes you will be using communication formats with limited space. In this situation, it's fine to use only part of your

5 See e.g., Bamberg, S. et al., 'Environmental protection through societal change: What psychology knows about collective climate action - and what it needs to find out', in Psychology and Climate Change (2018).

6 For an example of how fatalism affects your audience see: NEON, NEF, Frameworks Institute & PIRC, 'Framing the economy: How to win the case for a bet,ter system', (2018).

narrative. Choose which part of the narrative to focus on according to what you think your audience needs to hear the most. For example, our analysis of undecideds' attitudes and message testing shows that it's very important to dedicate attention to dissolving the negative frames about migrants that exist. Sometimes the format you have available only allows you to summarise the essence of your narrative, such as when you develop a campaign slogan and image or hashtags.

Look at your campaign materials in the round and ask: are there enough products carrying the whole narrative for my audience to see it; do my communications products either remind my audience of the overall message or help them understand it? And don't forget, you don't need to deliver all your message using words: you can represent elements of it through images and videos. Work with a creative person or agency who has some experience of narrative change work and has worked on social justice-related causes with non-profit organisations to convert your narrative into creative assets for campaigning. Examples are included below for inspiration.

C. Sample messaging

The sample narratives below are variations of the 'people move' and 'golden rule' narratives, both of which were effective in focus groups as well as in message testing in other countries. The 'people move' narrative can be adapted for use in relation to people seeking asylum or migrants moving for other reasons. Each of the narratives has a 'gentle' and a 'strategic division' version.

The 'strategic division' version of the narrative differs in the way that it explains the problem by pointing out the malign ulterior motive of our opponents in spreading misinformation about people who migrate. Communicators may feel uneasy calling out our opponents so explicitly. If so, you can always use the 'gentle' version. In the focus groups, participants reacted negatively to this messaging. However, it is likely that this is in great part due to the method used to test the message in the focus group, rather than the message itself. And when this messaging has been tested using methods other than focus groups (such as randomised controlled trials), in other countries, it has proven effective.

The sample narratives do not include a call to action, since this is something specific to a given campaign. The narratives can be adapted to respond to specific proposals for restrictive measures by adjusting the second part to specify the measure and the harm it's causing.

People move - for migration other than asylum (gentle)

Most of us will do whatever it takes to make a better life, whether we're born here or have made Sweden our home. We work, sacrifice, and even pack up everything to put food on the table, provide for our families, or send our kids to a decent school. [When using the narrative in relation to people who migrate outside the context of asylum.]

But our leaders are changing the rules to make it harder for people and families who have come here to build a future and contribute, and threaten to tear our communities apart by uprooting colleagues, neighbours and friends just because of where they were born.

We have the power to do things differently. In the past, ordinary citizens came together to call on our leaders to deliver paid parental leave and marriage equality. Today, we can join our voices to ask them to create fair and compassionate rules that keep our families and our communities whole and allow all of us to thrive.

[+ call to action]

People move - for asylum (gentle)

Most of us will do whatever it takes to keep our families safe and give them a better life. We work, sacrifice, and even pack our lives into suitcases to give our children a future. It's right that we welcome people who have risked everything to escape danger and support them to rebuild their lives.

But today our leaders are changing the rules to make it harder for people looking for safety to come here, make a new start and contribute to our communities.

We have the power to do the right thing. In the past, ordinary citizens came together to call on our leaders to create free pre-school care and pass laws against discrimination. Today, we can join our voices to ask them to create fair and compassionate rules that honour our values and offer a safe place for those who need it.

[+ call to action]

People move - for migration other than asylum (strategic division)

Most of us will do whatever it takes to make a better life, whether we're born here or have made Sweden our home. We work, sacrifice, and even pack up everything to put food on the table, provide for our families, or send our kids to a decent school.

But today, a handful of politicians are trying to win over voters by blaming people who migrate for our problems. Instead of coming up with real solutions to fix the cost of living crisis or fund our health service, they want to make it harder for families who come here to build a future and contribute, and threaten to tear our communities apart by uprooting our colleagues and neighbours just because of where they were born.

We can tell that minority of politicians they need to do better. In the past, ordinary citizens came together to call on our leaders to deliver paid parental leave and marriage equality. Today, we can join our voices to ask them to create fair and compassionate rules that keep our families and our communities whole and allow all of us to thrive.

[+ call to action]

People move - for asylum (strategic division)

Most of us will do whatever it takes to keep our families safe and give them a better life. We work, sacrifice, and even pack our lives into suitcases to give our children a future. It's right that we welcome people who have risked everything to escape danger and support them to rebuild their lives.

But today, a handful of politicians are trying to win over voters by blaming people who migrate for our problems. Instead of coming up with real solutions to fix the cost of living crisis or fund our health service, they want to make it harder for people who come here looking for safety to build a future and contribute.

We have the power to do the right thing. In the past, ordinary citizens came together to call on our leaders to create free pre-school care and pass laws against discrimination. Today, we can join our voices to ask them to create fair and compassionate rules that honour our values and offer a safe place for those who need it.

[+ call to action]

Golden rule - for asylum (gentle)

Most of us strive to treat others the way we'd want to be treated. If any one of us had to move because we feared for our lives or for our families, we'd like to know others would help us rebuild our lives and quickly integrate into our communities.

But today our leaders are changing the rules to make it harder for people looking for safety to come here, make a new start and contribute to our communities.

We have the power to do the right thing. In the past, ordinary citizens came together to call on our leaders to create free pre-school care and pass laws against discrimination. Today, we can join our voices to ask them to create fair and compassionate rules that honour our values and offer a safe place for those who need it.

[+ call to action]

Golden rule - for asylum (strategic division)

Most of us strive to treat others the way we'd want to be treated. If any one of us had to move because we feared for our lives or for our families, we'd like to know others would help us rebuild our lives and quickly integrate into our communities.

But today, a handful of politicians are trying to distract us from their failures to fix our problems, like worsening health care and the cost of living crisis. They encourage us to blame people who risked everything to come here looking for safety and say we should turn them away.

We won't fall for it. We have the power to do the right thing. In the past, ordinary citizens came together to call on our leaders to create free pre-school care and pass laws against discrimination. Today, we can join our voices to ask them to create fair and compassionate rules that honour our values and offer a safe place for those who need it.

[+Call to action]

D. The importance of dissolving negative stereotypes

Undecideds, particularly men, hold a negative view of people who migrate as not integrating into Sweden. In the focus groups, we saw that this led them to reject and question some of the messages we tested. However, we also saw that presenting them repeatedly with creative content that carried an alternative positive frame of people who migrate made them more receptive to our messages. Put otherwise, repeated exposure to a new frame of people who migrate has a cumulative impact and will dissolve negative stereotypes, making the audience more likely to agree with messages that call for fairer treatment of people who migrate.

As noted, this new positive frame includes two things. First, stimulating empathy by showing your audience how people who migrate are similar to them, whether because of shared lofty hopes and fears or shared banal hobbies, interests and music tastes. Second, dissolving negative stereotypes by showing how people who migrate are adopting Swedish values,

contributing to society and are integral parts of our communities as friends, neighbours, colleagues, teammates, parents we see at school or workers we rely on. These positive frames can be introduced through creative products focused solely on overwriting negative stereotypes, or they can be woven into creative products that carry other messages, like the 'people move' or 'golden rule' narratives.

E. Examples of creative products

Below are examples of creative assets we developed and tested as part of this project, as well as links to materials developed by other organisations. One thing to keep in mind when developing creative assets is your choice of messenger. Your audience should find your messenger credible, likeable and not self-interested. Case studies of past successful campaigns on different issues suggest that the following people may make credible messengers:

- people who migrate themselves talking about their lives in a way that highlights their contribution to society and their integration;

- people who migrate, combined with people from the majority population, to highlight integration and interconnectedness;

- people from respected professions who have some experience of the situation (e.g. teachers who can talk about how much in common children with a migration background have with other children, medical staff who can talk about the importance of people not excluding people from health care just because of their migration status, psychologists who can talk about how damaging deportation is for children, church leaders who can offer moral guidance on how we treat others)

- 'ordinary' people from the majority population who have some interaction with people who migrate (colleague, neighbour, parent of school child, school mate talking about their friends with a migrant background).

Having said this, most of the examples below feature people who migrate themselves, or together with people from the majority population.

i. Creative content aimed at dissolving negative stereotypes of migrants as not integrating or contributing

Omar's story (link to video)

This video was developed to show that people who have come here and face deportation have integrated, contribute to our communities and are part of our lives. Based on feedback we received, the video could be improved by better connecting the individual story to the structural problem by adding a more precise statistic about the number of people with a migration background at risk of deportation. Participants also disliked the word 'demand', preferring a more conciliatory tone.

Two-way integration (Croatia) (link to video)

This video was developed to show that people who migrate to Croatia are adopting Croatian culture, while also bringing something of their own culture to the country. It tested well with undecideds.

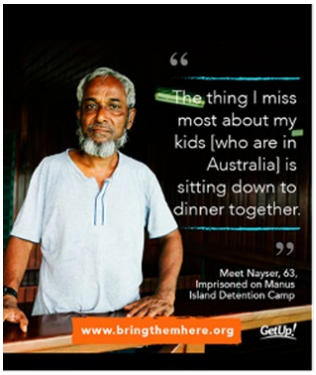
'Together Human' (link to campaign materials)

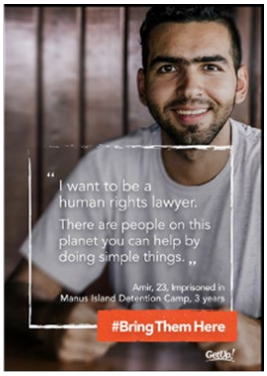
This pilot campaign was developed in Germany to improve attitudes towards muslim migrants and performed well in testing with a moveable middle audience. Many of the materials show people who have migrated to Germany as colleagues in valued jobs and in their personal lives as part of a team together with people from the majority population.

'Komm-mit' (link to campaign materials)

This pilot campaign has similar goals to the 'Together Human' campaign in Germany and also tested well with a moveable middle audience. The materials focus on how muslim business owners are contributing to their local communities.

'Bring them here' (link to case study)





These visuals are taken from a campaign in Australia that was successful in growing public support to take steps to dismantle offshore detention camps. In contrast to traditional images which show people in detention, the images focus on stimulating empathy with the audience by focusing on shared hopes and values.

ii. Creative content executing the 'people move' narrative

Nadya & Susanne's story.

This video conveyed the 'people move' narrative through the story of someone who moved to Sweden seeking asylum and someone who moved from one part of Sweden to another to look for work. Participants liked the story but felt it could have been more credible, questioning the likelihood of this kind of friendship developing. Participants also did not like the comparison between the two situations of the main characters (one fleeing war, the other moving from the countryside), nor the image of the stereotypical red Swedish house. Nevertheless, they liked the message and repeated the phrase 'people move' several times in the discussion, suggesting that the message would be easy to spread.

Below is another example of creative execution of the 'people move' narrative that tested well in Croatia:

Translation of text on visual: *Samane wants her children to be safe. JUST LIKE US/WE DO.*

Social media caption text: Most of us will do whatever it takes to keep our families safe and give them a better life. We work, sacrifice, and even pack our lives into suitcases to give our children a future. It's right that we welcome people who have risked everything to escape danger and support them to rebuild their lives.

iii. Creative execution of the 'golden rule' narrative

De flesta av oss strävar efter att behandla andra så som vi själva vill bli behandlade.

Om någon av oss tvingades fly för våra liv, skulle vi vilja veta att andra var beredda att hjälpa oss att börja om. Vårt asylsystem bör spegla våra värderingar.

This post rated highest with men and women in the focus groups. Participants repeated the term 'golden rule' or described the principle several times in the focus group discussion after they were shown this asset. They liked the aesthetic, which they described as clean and simple. They appreciated how the character in the story and the social media post text did not make 'demands' or say that they 'deserved' particular treatment, but rather that they talked about building their future in Sweden and articulated a shared desire: to be safe from violence.

iv. Things to avoid

Focus group participants did not like bright colours or cartoon images as used in the above posts, but rather preferred images of real people telling an authentic story.

F. Messaging for responding to misinformation

As discussed, communicators should generally avoid directly contradicting your opponent's messages, even if this is to correct misinformation. To contradict a claim, you need to repeat it, and repetition makes information stick in the brain. To neutralise your opponent's messaging, you can either reframe the topic on which you're being attacked, or use a 'truth sandwich'. A truth sandwich reframes the topic, but it has an additional layer, which is to expose your opponent's ulterior motives in using misinformation. For our purposes, a truth sandwich follows the same structure as a 'strategic division' version of the narratives. The way a truth sandwich works is by allowing you to repeat your framing of the issue twice (at the start and at the end) while nudging your audience to let go of the misinformation by discrediting the source, which is more effective than contradicting it. It's important only to allude to the lie and not repeat it.

While communicators might be reticent about using the strategic division versions of the 'people move' and 'golden rule' narratives

proactively, you should not shy away from using a truth sandwich in response to a direct attack. While we did not test it in the Swedish focus groups, it has been tested by others in other countries. The potential for your audience to react negatively to this kind of message is much lower when they are aware of the original attack that you are responding to. Indeed, in our focus groups in Sweden and other countries, individual participants who were aware of political attacks against migrants agreed with messages that called politicians out for these. When people reacted badly to this message, they also questioned whether such political attacks had occurred. The risk of this is much lower when you're responding to an attack more directly. Below are some examples of how to execute a truth sandwich and an example of a shorter reframe.

Depending on the context, the space you have available and whether you need to pay attention to political sensibilities, you may choose a short reframe or a truth sandwich. For example, in the context of an interview or a debate, you may respond to misinformation with a truth sandwich, and then use a short reframe to rebut a follow-up attack.

Attack: *crime in certain cities is caused by immigration*

Truth sandwich response:

We know what keeps us safe. It's living in communities where we treat each other like neighbours, no matter what we look like or where we come from, and where government provides the jobs, schools, hospitals and libraries we need to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

But today, a handful of politicians are trying to win over voters by blaming people who migrate for our problems. Instead of coming up with real solutions to fix the cost of living crisis or fund our health service, they make irresponsible statements that divide us.

Most of us would prefer to see them get on with the job of delivering the services our communities rely on. Because it's when all of us have the opportunity to build a good life that we have safe and thriving neighbourhoods.

Shorter reframe response:

These politicians should be ashamed of trying to spread fear and divide us against each other. They know, just like we do, that people who were born here are just as likely to commit crime as people who aren't. The solution is to free people from poverty and create a fairer society where all of us have the same opportunities to do well.

Attack: *migrants refuse to adopt Swedish values*

Truth sandwich response:

People come here because they want the same things as we do. A place to call home, a community to belong to, and a job so we can support our families and give them a brighter future.

But today, a handful of politicians are trying to distract us from their failures to fix our problems, like worsening health care and the cost of living crisis. They encourage us to blame people who risked everything to come here looking for safety, while emphasising our differences.

We can see through their attempts to divide us. The vast majority of people who come to build a new life here are learning the language, getting a job and contributing to our communities.

Shorter reframe responses:

People move here because they want the same things we do: to make a better life for themselves and their families. Evidence shows that people who make Sweden their home adopt our values, and so do their children who grow up here.

Most of us agree that Swedishness isn't about where you were born. It's about learning the language, embracing the traditions, getting a job and paying your taxes. And that's exactly what the vast majority of migrants are doing.

IV. Annex: Summary of target audience's attitudes on migration

[Inclusion in the final guide is optional]

This summary sets out the main attitudes of the moveable middle towards people who migrate in Sweden. It is based mostly on a social listening report carried out in 2024 and focus groups carried out in 2025, and supplemented with other research, which is cited. The social listening report gives us insights into how the broader 'moveable middle' group thinks. This includes 'soft supporters' (people who lean towards our position), 'soft opponents' (people who lean towards our opponents) and 'undecideds' (people who have very conflicted opinions or are unsure what to think). The social listening report doesn't distinguish between these three segments. The focus groups were held with 'undecideds' and the summary refers to them where insights were available.

Middle audiences are worried about how the debate on migration seems to be polarising Swedish society. While they don't fully take sides (which reflects their conflicted views), they are particularly put off by the hard-line narratives of our opponents. Instead, they favour a balanced and constructive dialogue. They seem to recognise that the far-right is using racism and fear to polarise society, but not that this is part of a strategy to gain or maintain political power.

Relative to other concerns, immigration ranks fairly low for Swedes, according to a 2024 survey. Swedes rate rising prices / inflation / cost of living, health and climate change as their top personal concerns and climate change, crime and education as the top issues facing the country.[7]

Moveable middle audiences in Sweden have mixed feelings about people with a migration background. They agree that Swedes should respect diverse cultures and traditions, but worry that this will destroy Swedish culture. This particular concern seems to apply to Muslim immigration, which is seen to threaten Swedish culture, especially on gender equality and acceptance of LGBTQ persons.

They think that migration has led to social tensions, crime and put a strain on public services like housing, education and healthcare. They are concerned that the government is spending money on migrants while Swedes struggle, and that certain migrants are abusing the system. There is some recognition that migrants face prejudice in society, leading to poorer outcomes in housing, education and employment and that this is unfair.

When it comes to undecideds, men and women attribute these problems to different

7 Standard Eurobarometer 102, 'Public opinion in the European Union', 2024.

causes. Women are more likely to blame the government for failing to adequately integrate migrants, for example, by concentrating migrants in certain areas, causing resentment among local Swedes. To women, the vast majority of migrants are trying to build a new life, adopt Swedish culture, integrate into social life and contribute through a job and mixing in public spaces. Whereas men think that most migrants do not want to integrate and that the government has allowed too many people in without regard for their intention to integrate into Swedish society and culture.

The social listening report suggests that at least part of the moveable middle (unfortunately the report does not distinguish between different middle segments) believe that policies towards people who migrate should be fair and humane. They are concerned about policies that unfairly harm families and children, and don't think that saving money justifies these policies. Presumably, this applies to policies that limit access to certain essential services, like education and healthcare. The report also suggests that part of the moveable middle worries that people with a migration background push crime up, and they support deporting criminal gangs. But, again, they don't think it's right to deport the families and children of criminals who they see as innocent. Taking into account the attitudes expressed in the focus groups, it seems that these more favourable attitudes are likely held by soft supporters and undecideds to an extent.

In the focus groups we saw a difference in attitudes between men and women. Men felt comfortable with the deportation of migrants who have been settled in Sweden for several years, including if they have children who have grown up entirely in Sweden. This was based mainly on their negative frame of people who migrate as failing to integrate. Men think that most people who face deportation are migrants who have not integrated and are not contributing to society, and so should not be entitled to stay. They think that 'hard cases' will be the exception and will be exaggerated by the media. Further, they blame most 'hard cases' on the fact that the decision-making system is so slow that people who are not entitled to stay end up settling down. In contrast, women - who have a more positive frame of people who migrate - see deportation of families or children, especially when they have lived in Sweden for many years, as unfair and inhumane, particularly when they've come to Sweden to find safety. They also think it makes no sense for the government to deport people who are working and paying taxes.

Recent research on five European countries, including Sweden, examines support for family reunification.[8] Although the study only records 'average' attitudes across the population, it's likely that this reflects how moveable middle audiences feel. The most important factor in deciding whether someone should be allowed to enter the country to join a family member is language skills. In sum, it's important that they

8 Gschwind, L., et al., 'Uncovering attitudes to family migration - A conjoint survey experiment with a dyadic approach', International Migration Review, 2024.

should speak at least 'broken' Swedish. Nationality, relationship with the family member and knowledge of local culture are less important, but preference is given to EU nationals, spouses over partners and good knowledge of local culture. For the receiving family member, it's most important that they have the financial means to accommodate and support the incoming family member. Their ability to speak the language fluently also makes a big difference in giving support. Their length of legal residence, legal status and knowledge of local culture are less important. But longer residence, having a permanent permit and good knowledge of local culture were preferred.

When it comes to undocumented migrants, recent research on (average public) attitudes in Italy, the UK, Sweden, Austria and Poland suggests that attitudes are conditional on several factors.[9] It's likely that these 'average' findings reflect where undecideds sit. There is support in all these countries for allowing undocumented migrants to apply for legal residence if they've been in the country for five or ten years and have no criminal record - with a slight preference for five years. Support is strongest if someone is described as a foreign worker who overstayed their visa, and even higher for someone who worked in an essential service (the example used was elderly care homes). But there is support even for someone described generically as irregular. Regularisation for someone with "refugee-type" status who has overstayed permission is supported more than a generic "irregular" person, but less than a foreign worker. People in these countries also tended to support access to primary health care and back pay (as a labour right) on condition that service providers report users to immigration authorities. There was a tendency not to support cash benefits at all.

Which factors increase or decrease favourable attitudes?

Readers should note that these attitudes represent the starting point for the moveable middle or undecideds. During the focus groups, we saw undecideds shift their attitudes in response to certain kinds of messaging, as explained in the guide. Based on the social listening and focus groups, the following factors can be said to have an impact on our audience's attitudes.

Where people who migrate are portrayed as involved in crime, abusing the welfare system and refusing to integrate, this increases negative feelings towards them.

But when people who migrate are portrayed as learning the language, working, paying taxes, respecting Swedish tradition and values, middle audiences are positive and accepting towards them. Swedishness is about satisfying these conditions rather than about ethnicity.

Middle audiences also show positive attitudes towards people who migrate when they are shown the merits, achievements or

9 Gschwind, L. et al., 'Public preferences for policies vis-a-vis irregular migrants in Europe: The roles of policy design and context', April 2025, PRIME.

contributions of people who migrate, such as sport or academic studies. Finally, middle audiences also express more positive attitudes when they are reminded that people with a migration background are already embedded and integrated into their communities.

Contact

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe (Liberties) is a non-governmental organisation promoting and protecting the civil liberties of everyone in the European Union. We are headquartered in Berlin and have a presence in Brussels. Liberties is built on a network of national civil liberties NGOs from across the EU. Unless otherwise indicated, the opinions expressed by Liberties do not necessarily constitute the views of our member organisations.

The Civil Liberties Union for Europe e. V.
c/o Publix, Hermannstraße 90
12051 Berlin
Germany
info@liberties.eu
www.liberties.eu

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