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LIBERTIES CIVIC SPACE MESSAGING LAB

MESSAGING FOR FAIR AND HUMANE MIGRATION POLICIES IN CROATIA

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CENTAR
ZA MIROVNE
STUDIJE



VLADA REPUBLIKE HRVATSKE
Ured za udruge

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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 Croatia. The messages can also be used to build public support for positive measures and public opposition against 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 Croatian public opinion on migration and message testing. These were carried out through social listening over Facebook (September - October 2024) on selected Croatian language pages as well as focus groups with undecideds (October 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 towards 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, campaigners focus on the hardships facing people who migrate or with a migration background. In the Croatian context,

this means that when activists are trying to shift public opinion on migration, they tend to rely on showing statistics and telling stories about pushbacks, injury or death at the border, confiscation of phones and other property, exploitation by landlords and employers, or rising levels of racism and Islamophobia.

Discussion in the focus groups suggested that undecideds are unaware of the problems facing people who migrate. For example, they were largely unaware of or did not believe that pushbacks at the border involve acts of violence, and they tended to believe that foreign workers have the same rights and protections as Croatian workers. This means that it remains important for campaigners to make the audience aware of the harms that people with a migration background suffer. However, awareness of the harms being suffered by people with a migration background by itself tends not to be enough to persuade people outside our base, and it has several drawbacks.

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. For example, campaigners might expect their audience to react to the news that the Croatian authorities carry out violent pushbacks at the

border by thinking that the government should provide more safe and legal routes. However, when we tested this message in focus groups, the audience instead blamed asylum seekers for trying to enter the country illegally, rather than using ‘legal’ routes. This reaction seems to be based on a mistaken belief that there are readily available legal routes that asylum seekers choose not to take, instead opting to avoid border checks to enter Croatia ‘illegally’.

For these reasons, it is important for your message to also explain why the harm is happening, and to include other elements in the message, such as a reason for your audience to care about people who migrate.

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 people outside our base because they are too abstract to make an emotional connection.²

To make your audience care, you need to connect your cause to something that they find important. To help you do this, think about the reason why the law you’re talking about exists. For example, if talking about labour exploitation, your audience is more likely to care if you remind them that all of us want to be treated with dignity and respect at work and be paid fairly, or that all of us want to treat the people who work in our hospitals or drive our taxis fairly, than if you point to Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

In addition, we found that using a legal argument (that violent pushbacks are illegal for violating the European Convention on Human Rights) backfired with undecideds. The statement seemed to trigger the negative frame of our opponents (about ‘illegal immigration’) 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 the border is important because some migrants are dangerous.

iii. Talking about the technical solution but not the vision

Campaigners often have solid recommendations about the legal and policy reforms the 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

² See, for example, published results of [message testing by Anat Shenker-Osorio in Australia](#).

mobilise them, and going into too much policy or legal detail will even demotivate them.

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', and 'foreign workers'. They tended to use plain, descriptive language, like 'people who are forced to come because of war'.

Communicators are recommended to avoid using technical terms (like 'safe and legal routes', 'third country national', 'subsidiary protection' or 'integration') without unpacking what they mean, or to just opt for descriptive language instead. Below are some examples.

<i>INSTEAD OF...</i>	<i>TRY...</i>
Safe and legal routes	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.
Family reunification	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).

Integration measures	We should support people who come here for work or for safety to learn our language and culture and get a job so they can support their families and rebuild their lives.
Access to healthcare	Being able to see a doctor.
Exploitation of foreign workers.	Foreign workers are being mistreated in different ways, like having to work longer hours, not being paid, being physically abused, having their passport taken away, and not being able to do anything about it for fear that they might be deported.

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 Croatian culture, that they are taking up limited public resources at the expense of Croatians and that they are responsible for emigration and suppressing wages. 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 contradict a claim, we need to repeat 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' is likely to activate and entrench the original damaging frame (that people who migrate are potentially threatening and enter the country illegally) in the minds of undecideds. Section III 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 have been mistreated by the authorities, especially

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.

people in detention centres, or images of sea and land borders.

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 a moveable middle audience, which is that people who migrate are potentially dangerous (which is why they're in detention). In focus group testing in Croatia, 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 by bringing new food, art, music and dance. The problem is that undecideds don't think like this. They're worried that Croatian culture is going to be weakened by new arrivals who keep their own culture, but don't adopt Croatian values. Although we did not test this in focus groups, it probably means that focusing only on how people who migrate enrich

Croatian culture will backfire with undecideds by playing on their fears that Croatian values are under threat.

At the same time, undecideds don't expect migrants to assimilate. Rather, they are happy with them to keep their culture while also adopting Croatian values and learning the language. Creative assets that showed people with a migration background simultaneously adopting Croatian culture while maintaining their own tested well with undecideds in the focus group. Section III contains examples of this.

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 Croatian society.

2. Explain the problem: show your audience that the things they care about are at risk or aren’t being delivered. Set out the harm you are fighting and 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. 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 different examples of times in the past where either people came together to achieve something (e.g. through protesting or volunteering) and/or where there was some significant legal or social change. Some of these were tested in focus groups. Others have been included here on the basis that they are similar and might reasonably be expected to work. e.g. preventing the privatisation of motorways, protecting Radio 101, obtaining education reform, support during COVID, earthquakes and flooding, the legalisation of life partnership for same sex couples and protecting Srd in Dubrovnik from developers. As an alternative, when speaking about the right to asylum specifically, campaigners can probably also overcome fatalism by reminding the audience how Croatians were welcomed as refugees in the past.

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

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 better system', (2018).

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 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 developed by Anat Shenker Osorio. Both of these were effective in focus groups as well as in message testing in other countries. Both narratives can be adapted for use in relation to people seeking asylum or foreign workers and can be adapted according to the particular aspect of the issue campaigners are communicating about. For example, the first sample narrative below ('people move - for people seeking asylum') has been written as if the problem it addresses is the lack of safe and legal routes for people seeking asylum. But it could be adapted to address the problem of the lack of integration measures.

Similarly, the narratives offer different explanations of the problem. Campaigners should feel free to swap around whichever description of the problem best suits the particular circumstances in which they use the narrative.

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 people seeking 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 rules make it almost impossible for people running from war or disaster to come here and ask for safety. To reach Croatia, they have no choice but to put themselves and their families in harm's way. And often the authorities turn them away without even allowing them to ask for asylum.

It doesn't have to be this way. Just like Croatians were welcomed in the past, we can demand that our leaders create a compassionate and effective asylum process so that people in danger can ask for safety without putting their lives at risk and have a fair hearing.

[+call to action]

People move - for people seeking asylum (strategic)


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 even harder for people to come here looking for safety.

It doesn't have to be this way. Just like Croatians were welcomed in the past, we can demand that our leaders create a compassionate and effective asylum process so that people in danger can ask for safety without putting their lives at risk and have a fair hearing.

[+call to action]

Below is an example of how to implement the ‘people move’ narrative in the format of a social media post. Focus group participants reacted positively to the post and appreciated that the message was simple and not overly dramatic. The message stimulated empathy in two ways. First, because it articulated a basic desire that the audience shares with the family in the message, which is that we’ll do anything to keep our children safe, including moving to another country. Second, because they recognised that Croatians found themselves in similar situations in the past.



Većina nas učinit će sve što je potrebno kako bi naše obitelji bile sigurne i imale bolji život.

Radimo, žrtvujemo se, pa čak i pakiramo cijeli svoj život u kofere kako bismo svojoj djeci osigurali budućnost.

Ispravno je poželjeti dobrodošlicu ljudima koji su riskirali sve kako bi pobjegli od opasnosti i pružiti im podršku u ponovnoj izgradnji njihovih života.

People move - for foreign workers (gentle)

Most of us will do whatever it takes to give our families a better life. We work, sacrifice, and even pack our lives into suitcases to put bread on the table and a roof over their heads. It's right that we treat people who come here to work hard for their families with dignity and respect.

But today, many foreign workers who deliver our food, drive us in taxis and build our homes are forced to work long hours in bad conditions, sleep in cramped rooms, and have their pay and passports withheld. A handful of unscrupulous landlords and bosses threaten them with deportation if they try to complain.

We have the power to stop this from happening. In the past, we came together to protect our motorways from privatisation and support each other after earthquakes and floods. Today, we can join our voices to demand that our elected representatives force bosses and landlords to follow the rules and treat the people who work for them fairly and humanely, whether they were born here or not.

[+call to action]

People move - for foreign workers (strategic)

Most of us will do whatever it takes to give our families a better life. We work, sacrifice, and even pack our lives into suitcases to put bread on the table and a roof over their heads. Everyone who works deserves to be paid enough to support their families, whether they were born here or came as foreign workers.


But today, many of us are struggling because certain politicians refuse to make greedy corporations pay people who work enough to live on and treat us with dignity at work. Instead, they point the finger at foreign workers, hoping we will blame them rather than the government for failing to protect us.

We won't fall for it. In the past, we came together to support each other through COVID and protect Dubrovnik from property speculators. Today, we can join our voices to demand that our elected representatives force corporate bosses to give all of us the pay and respect our hard work deserves, whether we were born here or not.

[+call to action]

Below is an example of how to implement the 'people move' narrative in relation to foreign workers in the format of a social media post. When tested in the focus groups, participants had a mixed reaction. On the positive side, they said it felt authentic because many of them knew of foreign workers in this situation, where they work very hard but keep very little of their income, which is mostly used to pay off agencies or sent home to family. On the negative side, they said that this made them feel sorry for foreign workers and that it didn't say anything new to them about the topic. This means that the message stimulated sympathy, rather than empathy. It's important to stimulate empathy because this causes the audience to recognise people who migrate as 'people like me' and to want the same standard of treatment for migrants as themselves.

It is very likely that this post didn't stimulate empathy because undecideds have a negative frame of migrants, which is that they are a potential threat to Croatian culture because they do not integrate. The guide will address further below how to overcome this problem by dissolving the negative frame of people who migrate as not integrating in Croatian culture.



Kiran radom prehranjuje svoju obitelj.
BAŠ KAO MI.

Mnogi od nas naporno rade da bismo mogli prehranjivati svoje obitelji. Ljudi koji u Hrvatsku dolaze raditi iz drugih zemalja, ostavljaju sve da bi svojim obiteljima osigurali kruh i krov nad glavom.

Jedan od njih je i Kiran, koji u Hrvatskoj radi i šalje novac obitelji u Nepal. Baš kao mi, on radi sve što može za bolju budućnost svojih najbližih.

Golden rule - for people seeking asylum (gentle)

Most of us strive to treat others the way we want to be treated. In the past, Croatians who feared for their lives and their families found safety and the hope for a better life in other countries. Today, it's right that we do the same for people who risk everything to escape danger.

But today, our rules make it almost impossible for people running from war or disaster to come here and ask for safety. To reach Croatia, they have no choice but to put themselves and their families in harm's way. And often the authorities turn them away without even allowing them to ask for asylum.

It doesn't have to be this way. Just like we were welcomed in the past, we can demand that our leaders 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 people seeking asylum (strategic)

Most of us strive to treat others the way we want to be treated. In the past, Croatians who feared for their lives and their families found safety and the hope for a better life in other countries. Today, it's right that we do the same for people who risk everything to escape danger.

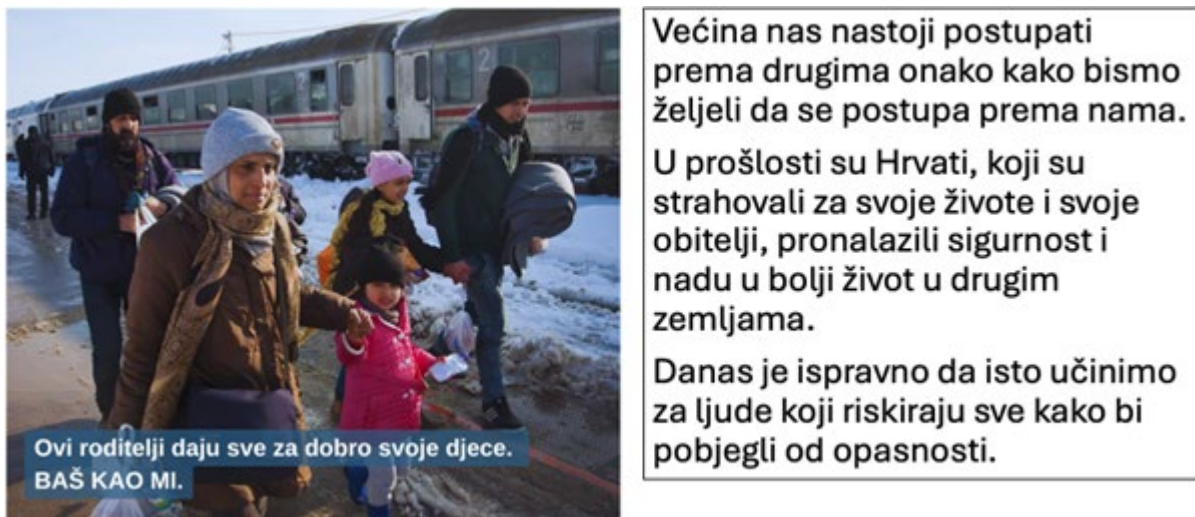
Today, many of us are struggling with rising costs, low income and a crumbling health system. And certain politicians try to win votes by blaming and spreading hate against people who migrate for our problems instead of offering us real solutions to improve our lives.

We can tell this minority of politicians that they need to do better. Just like Croatians were welcomed in the past, we can demand that our leaders create fair and compassionate rules that honour our values and offer a safe place to people who need to rebuild their lives.

[+call to action]

Below is an example of how to implement the golden rule narrative in a social media post. Focus group participants reacted positively to the post, recognising that it had an emotional impact. They appreciated that the message was simple, honest and not exaggerated, and that it evoked compassion and empathy, reminding the humanity they share with people from other countries and cultures - which is something they lamented is missing from media coverage of asylum. They thought the comparison

in the message and the image (which reminded them of the Independence War) to Croatians in the past made the post more impactful.



Below is a similar example of a social media post implementing the golden rule narrative that was tested in focus groups in Sweden. This received similar positive feedback to the above Croatian post. In particular, focus groups participants felt that the post stimulated empathy by articulating a basic shared desire to feel safe and rebuild one's life. Participants also noted, positively, that this portrayal was in contrast to the negative stereotype of asylum seekers promoted in media debate.



Text on visual:

When I lost my home in the fighting, I fled. I hope to rebuild my life in Sweden and sleep without fear.

Social media caption text:

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, we'd like to know others would help us start over. Our asylum system should reflect our values.

Campaigners seeking further inspiration on how to stimulate empathy between the audience and people seeking asylum could look to this [case study](#) of a series of campaigns in Australia to close offshore detention centres. One element of these campaigns was to present people seeking asylum in a way that highlighted their common humanity with the audience and dissolved negative stereotypes. The images below are taken from one of these campaigns.



Golden rule - for foreign workers (gentle) -

Most of us strive to treat others the way we want to be treated. If any one of us had to move to another country to find work to support our families or give our children a brighter future, we'd like to know we would be treated with dignity and respect.

- 7 The guide does not suggest a strategic version of the golden rule narrative for foreign workers. The opposition strategy is to set Croatian nationals against foreign workers by blaming foreign workers for low wages and poor conditions for Croatian nationals. This requires us to compare Croatian workers in Croatia to foreign workers in Croatia. But the golden rule invites the audience to want better conditions for foreign workers because they would want this for themselves if they went to work abroad. Because it risks triggering the opposition's comparison frame, a golden rule narrative for foreign workers in its strategic form would probably come across as incoherent to the audience.

But today, many foreign workers who deliver our food, drive us in taxis and build our homes are forced to work long hours in bad conditions, sleep in cramped rooms, and have their pay and passports withheld. A handful of unscrupulous landlords and bosses threaten them with deportation if they try to complain.

We have the power to stop this from happening. In the past, we came together to protect our motorways from privatisation and support each other after earthquakes and floods. Today, we can join our voices to demand that our elected representatives force bosses and landlords to follow the rules and treat the people who work for them fairly and humanely, whether they were born here or not.

[+call to action]

D. The importance of dissolving negative stereotypes

Undecideds hold a negative frame of people seeking asylum as potentially dangerous and wanting to enter Croatia illegally. This frame is triggered by messaging that includes legal language and arguments, and by imagery that shows borders or people with a migration background in detention or at a border. However, because of Croatia's own history with emigration during the Independence War, reminding the audience of how Croatsians were once themselves refugees who were welcomed by other countries stimulates empathy for people coming to seek asylum in Croatia. This is something that features in some of the narratives, but can also be conveyed through creative materials that implement the narrative. For example, by using visuals that remind

the audience of historical images of Croatsians seeking asylum abroad, such as the social media post with the train in the background, above.⁸

Undecideds also have a negative frame of people who migrate more generally as a potential threat to Croatian culture. They fear that, in the future, Croatian culture may be extinguished as Croatsians continue to leave and people continue to migrate to Croatia from other countries. In the focus groups, we saw that this negative frame led them to reject or question some of the messages we tested in relation to foreign workers. This negative frame did not have the same impact on our messages about people seeking asylum, probably because these messages were more focused on arguing that Croatia should establish safe ways to enter the country. In contrast, foreign workers are already living in Croatia, which makes the audience's concerns about integration more relevant.

⁸ Though if you are showing images that make the audience think of people crossing borders, do make sure that they are sufficiently similar to historic images of Croatsians fleeing the Independence War to avoid only triggering our opponents' frame that migrants are crossing illegally into Croatia.

This means that if you're trying to persuade undecideds to support better conditions for foreign workers or for refugees once they are living in Croatia, it is vital to also dissolve the negative frame of migrants as failing to integrate. Campaigners can dissolve negative stereotypes by re-writing the audience's frame of people who migrate. This largely involves repeatedly showing them people with migration backgrounds as integrated or doing things to integrate. This can be done within the same creative materials that carry a campaign's narratives or in separate creative materials that focus solely on re-writing the frame of people with a migration background.

Below are examples of creative assets either tested in the focus groups or developed by other organisations in other countries. 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.

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

As noted above, undecideds fear that Croatian culture is under threat because they are sceptical that migrants integrate. 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.

E. Messaging for responding to misinformation

As discussed, communicators should generally avoid directly contradicting their 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 the 'strategic' 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' 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 Croatian 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 Croatia 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.

In addition to the examples below, campaigners could also use one of the 'strategic' versions of the narratives if the circumstances fit, since these follow the truth sandwich structure. For example:

- The ‘People move - for foreign workers (strategic)’ narrative could be used to respond to attacks that foreign workers are to blame for low wages and poor working conditions for Croatian workers.
- The ‘People move - for people seeking asylum (strategic)’ narrative could be used to respond to attacks on asylum seekers by far-right parties that want to expand their voter share.

These narratives could be adapted to respond to other attacks by adapting the part of the narrative that explains who is spreading misinformation and what their motivation is. Further, the same truth sandwich could be repurposed to respond to different kinds of attacks because it does not respond directly to the specific attack or misinformation. Example 1, for instance, could be used to respond to a variety of smears against people who migrate that are being used to deflect attention from political problems.

Example 1: Response to attacks on people who migrate designed to deflect public attention away from corruption or scandals.

Truth sandwich

No matter who we vote for or whether we live in the city or countryside, most of us want leaders who use our contributions to fund the roads, hospitals, pensions and homes we need.

But today, certain politicians are using our resources to help out their business friends in exchange for favours. And when journalists call them out, they try to deflect attention by attacking people who have come to Croatia looking for safety or to work.

We won't be fooled. By coming together across our differences, we can demand that our elected representatives work for all of us and deliver the things we rely on instead of spreading hate against people just because of where they were born.

Shorter reframe

Certain politicians try to distract us from scandals by attacking people who migrate. Most of us would rather they get on with their jobs and try to make our lives a bit better, rather than spreading hate against people just because of where they were born.

Example 2: Response to argument that people who migrate can't adopt Croatian values

Truth sandwich:

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 they can support our families and give them a brighter future.

But certain politicians hope to win votes by spreading fear and emphasising our differences.

Most people know that we can do better than this. When we join our voices, we can demand leaders who unite us and offer real solutions to our problems.

Shorter reframe:

People move here because they want the same things we do: to make a better life for themselves and their families. They bring a piece of home, then build a new one here, learn new customs and contribute to new communities.

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 Croatia. It is based mostly on a social listening report carried out in 2024 and focus groups carried out in 2025, and supplemented with insights from a survey [published](#) by CMS in 2024.⁹ 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.

Relative to other concerns, immigration ranks fairly low for Croatians, according to a 2024 survey. Croatians rate rising cost of living, health and the financial situation of their household, pensions, and living and working conditions as their top personal concerns and cost of living, the economic situation and pensions as the top issues facing the country.¹⁰

Moveable middle audiences draw a distinction between foreign workers and asylum seekers / refugees. But they also have attitudes that apply to people with migration backgrounds more generally.

Asylum seekers

Middle audiences don't unambiguously support the arrival of asylum seekers. Our base and soft supporters think Croatia should be open to them.

Undecideds have more mixed feelings. On one hand, they think that asylum seekers deserve help and protection. They recognise that Croatians in the past were taken in as refugees by other countries after the Independence War and that this provides a moral imperative to show the same welcome to people coming to Croatia. On the other hand, they also hold a negative frame of asylum seekers as potentially dangerous criminals or terrorists. They believe that Croatia should be able to secure its borders and prevent people seeking asylum from entering 'illegally'. They believe that asylum seekers should cross into Croatia through legal routes, but seem not to realise that there are no safe and legal routes available.

The CMS survey and social listening report suggest that negative attitudes towards asylum seekers are partly based on suspicion that many asylum seekers are not genuine and their

9 While this survey does not segment the population into supporters, soft supporters and undecideds, this summary makes reasonable inferences where possible.

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

concern that public money is going to help refugees with housing, education and healthcare at the expense of Croatians who aren't getting as much help. However, these concerns were not expressed during the focus groups.

Foreign workers

Soft supporters and undecideds think employers and landlords who exploit workers or make them live in bad conditions should be punished. But they don't really recognise that foreign workers are exploited by employers, job agencies and landlords, except for the practice of having to repay high fees to agencies for finding them a job.

Undecideds (and presumably soft supporters) have positive views of foreign workers, probably in part because they recognise that Croatians also move abroad for work. They see them as hard working, friendly, attempting to learn the language and as making a contribution to the economy by filling labour shortages. Undecideds tend to agree that they should get equal pay for equal work, that we need foreign workers to do jobs Croatians aren't interested in, and that they should have the same rights as Croatians. However, men tend to think that they already have equal protection, while women tend to think that they don't.

Soft supporters and undecideds also think foreign workers are bad for Croatians because they keep wages low / push them down, which means Croatians don't want to do certain jobs because they don't pay a fair salary. And this also contributes to Croatians emigrating for work. Undecideds also think that foreign

workers get a better pay package than is offered to Croatians because it often includes accommodation, which they think is unfair.

About 'migrants' more generally

Soft supporters and undecideds think that migrants should be protected against discrimination and have equality before the courts, and tend to support access to the education system and free language learning. Soft supporters tend to support access to social protection, but undecideds less so.

The CMS survey suggests that soft supporters tend to disagree that people come to use the social welfare system, but undecideds tend to think they do. Soft supporters tend not to think that migrants cause crime to go up, but undecideds tend to think they do. Economically, the middle is worried about resources being spent to help migrants at the expense of nationals. They want conditions to be improved for Croatians too. Having said this, in focus groups undecideds did not raise any of these economic concerns.

Culturally, our base has favourable views about migrants and sees their differences as a strength: they enrich our culture, mixed areas are an important asset to Croatian society, and they like living in an environment with people from different cultures. Soft supporters also think that it's enriching when people from different cultures can mix with each other - but it seems only the base is enthusiastic about living day-to-day with people from other countries.

Soft supporters tend to think that migrants should be able to preserve their own culture. But for undecideds this is more conditional. They think that it's OK for migrants to keep their own culture if they also adopt Croatian culture. Undecideds are concerned about cultural replacement. They think migrants should learn the language and adopt Croatian norms. They're worried migrants won't integrate and will replace Croatian culture.

Soft supporters and, to an extent, undecideds, support access to education and free language classes to help migrants adapt to Croatian culture and ensure coexistence - but some have mixed feelings because of resource constraints.

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.

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