CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION FOR EUROPE

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LIBERTIES CIVIC SPACE MESSAGING LAB

MESSAGING TO PROMOTE SUPPORT FOR REFORM OF CITIZENSHIP RULES IN ITALY

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I. Purpose of the guide

This guide is intended for staff working in organisations that want to expand support among a public audience for reform of the law governing access to citizenship. The guide focuses on two possible reforms. First, the ius scholae reform, which would allow minors to acquire citizenship after completing five years of schooling in Italy. Second, reform of the rules for adults, which would involve reducing the number of years of continuous residence required from ten to five years.

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 aimed at growing public support for a particular cause should try to mobilise your base and enlist their help to spread your message in order 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 Italian public opinion on migration and message testing. These were carried out through social listening over Facebook (June - July 2024) on selected Italian 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

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.

guide messages that risk alienating your base or soft supporters.

Section II will briefly review how campaigners currently communicate about reforming citizenship laws, point out practices that are potentially counterproductive or ineffective and suggest how to improve these. Section III will then outline how to create a persuasive message, or narrative, and give examples of how to execute this, including sample material for use in social media campaigns. This section is based on the results of message testing in focus groups.

II: Current messaging and messaging practices

This section will review the main messages and messaging habits used by campaigners in the recent past to promote public support for reform of citizenship rules, including messaging used in the referendum campaign of June 2025. The aim of this section is to highlight to campaigners which of their current messages and practices are positive and which are likely to be ineffective or counterproductive. This review is based on consideration of both what is known about effective messaging in general, as well as the results of discussions and message testing in the focus groups, noted above.

A. Italy has changed

One of the main arguments used in the campaign leading up to the June 2025 referendum is that citizenship laws are not aligned with the reality of migration into Italy today. Campaigners argue that millions of people have come to make a new home here from a diverse range of countries and ethnic backgrounds, but that the law makes it unduly difficult for them to become citizens even though they have spent all or most of their lives here (when campaigners are talking about younger people) or have rebuilt their lives here, learnt the language and work and pay taxes (when referring to adults).

When tested in the focus groups, this message failed to attract any support or positive comments. Based on what the focus revealed about the attitudes of undecideds, this lack of support can be traced back to three ways of thinking amongst this group. First, they have a negative frame of people who migrate, whom they see as potentially threatening to Italian identity and culture and to resources. They are sceptical that people who migrate can successfully integrate into or contribute economically so as not to be a burden on Italian society. Second, they tend to frame citizenship as a prize or privilege to be earned by people who migrate once they can prove they have integrated into Italian society and are contributing economically. Third, they are unaware of the tangible day-to-day negative consequences that result from the current citizenship rules for adults or for children before they reach the age of 18. As a result, the current citizenship rules are seen as a reasonable and necessary safeguard to protect Italian values and culture and ensure that new citizens do not place an economic burden on the state.

It's likely that the argument that Italy has changed and therefore the law is out of date would backfire with undecideds because it stresses that a large number of newcomers from other countries wish to become citizens. And because undecideds hold the three ways of thinking outlined above, they are likely to perceive Italy's changing population as potentially threatening to Italian values and their material situation. This, in turn, justifies citizenship rules that require ten years of

continuous residence (to prove integration) and a minimum income requirement (to prove that they are not an economic burden).

B. It's not fair that people with Italian ancestry have it easier

Sometimes campaigners argue that current citizenship rules are unfair because they make it easier for people with Italian ancestry (but little factual connection to the country) to acquire citizenship, while denying it to people who have lived all or most of their lives in Italy and are making a contribution.

This argument failed when tested in the focus groups; principally, it failed because it prompts the audience to compare who is more deserving, or more Italian, out of two categories of migrants, rather than giving the audience a reason to make the rules fairer for migrants without Italian ancestry. Several participants responded by saying that people with Italian ancestry should indeed have less stringent requirements. Some participants objected that the argument was weak because it didn't set out what it was specifically about migrants without Italian ancestry that justified making the rules easier for them.

C. Return on investment

Campaigners sometimes argue that citizenship rules should be reformed because the state invests in non-citizens through public services, especially through educating children born or raised in Italy, and then loses this investment because, as adults, they decide to move abroad due to overly stringent citizenship rules.

Although the focus groups did not test this argument, it should be avoided. First, because it is unlikely to appeal to your base, who think that citizenship rules should be reformed because this is morally the right thing to do. We rely on our base to repeat and amplify our message to soft supporters and undecideds, which they will not do if they don't like it. Second, because, to the extent that it might stimulate support among undecideds for reform, this would probably be limited to support for rules benefiting those migrants who are capable of making a significant economic contribution. This is because the core of the argument is about recouping costs. Third, there is a strong body of evidence suggesting that purely economic arguments that focus on accumulating

wealth activate subconsciously held values, causing your audience to become more selfish and status-oriented and less likely to support things like equality and solidarity.[2] This is likely to undermine support for the reforms campaigners are promoting.

The only exception to this is if campaigners are carrying out advocacy towards politicians who place priority on the economy. Using the economic argument in this context may be necessary because your advocacy targets are fixed in their priorities, and because you can make these arguments directly to politicians without broadcasting them to the public through a campaign.

This is not to say that we shouldn't talk about how people who migrate contribute to Italy and its prosperity, including by working and paying taxes. On the contrary, it is important to do so in order to dispel the negative frames held by the undecideds towards people who migrate. And it's possible to do this without putting a price tag on people who migrate or encouraging our audience to view them as worthy only insofar as they can create wealth. Dissolving the negative stereotype of people who migrate by showing them as people who have a job, work hard and pay taxes is less about money, and more about showing our audience that they are people like them: honest, hardworking, wanting to make society better. And talking about prosperity is broader than just wealth. It's putting more focus on the end result, like clean streets, good schools and hospitals, which allow us to care for each other as a society. At a subconscious level, this is more likely to trigger values like care, solidarity, and being a good neighbour, rather than acquisition of wealth or power.

D. Unframed statistics

Some campaigners point to the large numbers of migrants legally resident in Italy who are not citizens, including young people born or raised there, seemingly in the expectation that this by itself will make their audience realise the scale of the injustice caused by the current rules, and therefore support reforms. However, as noted above, undecideds have a negative frame of people who migrate, view citizenship as a means of protecting Italian culture and resources, and are unaware of the tangible harms that non-citizens suffer because of the current rules.

2 Vohs, K., 'Money priming can change people's thoughts, feelings, motivations and behaviours: An update on 10 years of experiments', 144 Journal of Experimental Psychology (2015); Bauer, M. et al., 'Cuing consumerism: Situational materialism undermines personal social well-being' 23 Psychological Science (2012) 517; Common Cause, 'Communicating bigger-than-self problems to extrinsically-oriented audiences' 2012; Thibodeau, P. & Boroditsky, L., 'Metaphors we think with: The role of metaphor in reasoning', 6(2) PloS ONE (2011); Maio et al., 'Changing, priming and acting on values: Effects via motivational relations in a circular model', 97 Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (2009).

When we give the audience statistics or facts by themselves, they will interpret these according to the frames they already have in their heads. Accordingly, just informing them of the large numbers of legally resident non-citizens is unlikely to persuade them to change their views, and may even backfire. Undecideds are likely to react to these kinds of statistics by doubling down in their belief that it's important to have strict rules in order to protect Italian identity and societal resources from potentially millions of people who could otherwise be an economic burden and have not properly integrated culturally.

E. The way we talk about the harms

Undecideds are largely unaware of the tangible harms that legally resident non-citizens suffer as a result of the current rules, especially in relation to children before they reach the age of 18. At the same time, the focus group discussions revealed that undecideds believe it's very important that both children (once they grow up) and adults should be integrated into society and contribute, or be in a position to do so (for people turning 18).

As will be seen later, this guide suggests reframing citizenship as a vehicle that allows people who have started building a new life in Italy to better integrate and contribute by providing them with a sense of belonging and welcomeness, stability and opportunity (rather than a prize at the end of an obstacle course where people have to struggle to prove integration and that they can contribute). This means that it's important for campaigners to articulate how the current rules cause people tangible problems that make it harder for them to build a life, put down roots and otherwise integrate and fulfil their potential to contribute. Especially in relation to ius scholae, unless we show the harms that children suffer while they are children due to deprivation of citizenship, undecideds are likely to think that there's no point in making them eligible for citizenship when they are not treated any differently from children with citizenship.

Currently, when campaigners articulate the harm caused by the rules, they tend to focus on a handful of certain tangible problems that might backfire; namely, the right to access civil service jobs or vote, or the fact that children might not be able to travel abroad on a school trip or represent Italy in international competitions. With regards to the right to vote or access civil service jobs, undecideds probably see these as resources that should be reserved for people who have earned citizenship. And when it comes to trips abroad or participating in international competitions, this audience probably views it as something that is 'nice to have' rather than a basic requirement. It might be better to reserve these examples for messages that focus on the positive vision that citizenship will deliver (i.e. the ways people can contribute once they have citizenship), rather than explaining why the lack of citizenship is a problem.

Section III will discuss further how to explain the tangible harms caused by the denial of citizenship in a more impactful way.

F. Taking a pedagogical approach

Sometimes, campaigners' approach to messaging appears more pedagogical and resembles the format of 'explainers'. Certain materials focus on explaining to the audience the various types of rules that exist for acquiring citizenship and relating these to the various legal reforms that have been proposed to the citizenship law in recent years, such as explaining what 'ius soli' means.

Having this information available for journalists or to inform supporters who want to get into more detail is a good idea. But this pedagogical approach should not be at the forefront of your messaging. A pedagogical approach tends to give people facts and knowledge so that they can understand a topic in more detail, including the concepts and technical terms used. But it's not defining technical terms that makes people care about the issue. To make people care about the cause you're promoting, you need to explain what it delivers for your audience, people they care about or people they consider to be like them.

In the context of the current campaign, that could mean, for example, rather than explaining what 'ius scholae' is, explaining how it delivers on the values that our audience has. So rather than saying 'ius scholae allows children who spend at least five years in school in Italy to become citizens', campaigners could try something like 'by recognising children who grow up Italian as citizens, we make sure that every child, no matter who their parents are, grows up feeling safe and welcome.'

G. Using technical language and jargon

Using complicated language and jargon will put off most people outside your policy bubble. Researchers have found that using overly complicated language and technical terms towards the general public has a number of disadvantages: your audience is likely to judge you to be of low intelligence; be less interested in learning about your topic; consider themselves not to be competent in your issue and feel unqualified to take part in discussions on the topic; and be inclined to disagree with what you're saying. These findings held true even when experimenters provided readers with definitions of technical terms within the text. In contrast, when researchers presented participants with the same information but using more understandable terms, people were more likely to judge the author as intelligent, ended up feeling more knowledgeable on the topic, felt empowered to take part in discussions on the issue and were more likely to be persuaded by the point being made.[3]

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).

Undecideds were not familiar with and did not understand the term 'ius scholae'. This guide suggests that campaigners abandon Latin terms to refer to different citizenship rules in favour of more understandable terms.

Instead of ius soli, try citizenship of the country where you're born, or birth citizenship;

Instead of ius sanguinis, try citizenship inherited from your parents, or inherited citizenship;

Instead of ius culturae, try citizenship of the country you grew up in;

Instead of ius scholae, try citizenship of the country you grew up and went to school in.

Similarly, campaigners sometimes use terms like 'inclusion' / 'inclusive society', 'diversity', 'fundamental' / 'human rights' / 'civil and political rights'. These terms are likely to be understood by some supporters but are less likely to be understood by undecideds. Campaigners should try to break down what they mean in simpler and / or more precise terms for their audience.

For example, concepts like inclusion can be rephrased as something like 'all of us, no matter the colour of our skin or who we pray to, should have the same chances to do well in life / get a job / to have a say over who governs us / contribute to our communities'.

H. Negating your opponent's frame

Sometimes campaigners use messages that are simple negations of their opponent's messages. For example, their opponents argue that there's no need to change the rules because granting citizenship is just a formality and doesn't really alter an individual's situation. To which campaigners have replied, 'it's not just a piece of paper / it's not just a bureaucratic or legal issue'. Similarly, opponents may argue that Italians denied citizenship are asking for 'privileges', to which campaigners reply, 'we are not seeking privileges'.

Research shows that direct contradictions, in fact, end up reinforcing the original message because the brain is not good at processing negatives. This means that techniques like myth-busting or negation of your opponent's messages will backfire, at least when communicating to soft supporters and undecideds, who do not firmly share campaigners' understanding of the issue.[4]

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.

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.

When it comes to reforming citizenship rules applying to adults, this means highlighting to the audience that people with migration backgrounds are 'people like them' who have moved to Italy to build a new life so they can live in safety and / or give their families a better future. When it comes to ius scholae, this means highlighting how we want children to have the same start in life regardless of where their parents come from.

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.

Undecideds want people with a migration background to be integrated and (in a position) to contribute to society. In this part of the narrative, we should explain to them how the current rules make this more difficult.

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.

While campaigners have policy solutions, they rarely spell out their vision of what society looks like when citizenship rules are reformed. For example, in relation to ius scholae, the vision could be something like: a society

where all children feel welcome and are able to fulfil their dreams, no matter where their parents are from.

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] Currently, this is something that campaigners on reform of citizenship rules have tended not to do.

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 past successes where ordinary Italians and / or civil society played an important role. All of the following examples (except the legalisation of civil partnership) were included in a message tested in focus groups: the creation of the Workers' Statute, referenda to protect the right to divorce and legalise abortion care, anti-mafia reforms and the legalisation of civil partnership.

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

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).

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 vital 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 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 (describing the problem) to specify the measure and the harm it's causing.

Below are sample narratives on the ius scholae reform and the reform of citizenship rules for adults. Shortened versions of narratives on the ius scholae reform were tested with positive results. The narratives concerning reform of citizenship rules for adults are variations on the 'people move' and 'golden rule' narratives developed by Anat Shenker Osorio. These have been used successfully to expand public support for more humane rules for asylum seekers and foreign workers. A shortened version of the 'golden rule' narrative below was tested in the focus groups with positive results. Although the 'people move' narrative was not tested, it is still included as a recommended narrative in light of its success in other countries in relation to asylum seekers and foreign workers.

The four recommended narratives are likely to be persuasive to undecideds in increasing support for reform of citizenship rules, but only if campaigners address the three mental barriers described above. If these barriers are not addressed, undecideds are unlikely to agree that children should be eligible to acquire citizenship after five years of schooling or that the continuous residence requirement should be reduced from ten to five years. The below section will address how to overcome these barriers.

i. Narratives on the ius scholae reform

Children deserve to dream

This narrative stimulates support for the ius scholae reform on the basis that all children should be treated equally.

Most of us agree that every child deserves to grow up in a stable and welcoming environment so they can pursue their dreams, no matter where their parents are from.

But today, our citizenship laws deny many of our children an equal start in life just because their parents were not born here. These children are made to feel second class, and like they don't belong because they don't have the same rights and opportunities as their classmates, even though they grow up and go to school here. They are less likely to go to high school and graduate with a diploma or go to university than children who get citizenship while still at school.

This is a choice we don't need to keep making. In the past, we came together to create the Workers' Statute, protect our right to divorce and legalise abortion care. Today, we can tell our leaders that we want a common sense roadmap to citizenship for children, so that every child can grow up with the same rights and opportunities and have the stability and sense of belonging they need to follow their dreams.

+[call to action]

Below is an example of how to execute this narrative creatively in a social media post.

Children are the future

This narrative stimulates support for the ius scholae reform on the basis that all children should be treated equally so that they can contribute to Italy in the future.

Most of us agree that all children, no matter where their parents come from, deserve to grow up feeling safe and welcome so they have the same chance to contribute to our country's future when they become adults.

But today, our citizenship laws deny many of our children the equal start in life they need to fulfil their potential, just because their parents were not born here. These children are made to feel second class, and like they don't belong because they don't have the same rights and opportunities as their classmates, even though they grow up and go to school here. They are less likely to go to high school and graduate with a diploma or go to university than children who get citizenship while still at school.

We can decide to change the rules. In the past, we came together to protect our right to divorce, legalise abortion care and create anti-mafia laws. Today, we can tell our elected representatives that we want a common sense roadmap to citizenship for children. When we give all children the same rights and opportunities and the same sense of belonging, they have an equal chance to develop their potential and contribute to our country's prosperity when they grow up.

+[call to action]

Below is an example of how to execute this narrative creatively in a social media post.

💼 La provenienza dei propri genitori non dovrebbe influire.

🎓 I bambini cresciuti in Italia dovrebbero essere riconosciuti come cittadini così che possano contribuire alla prosperità del Paese.

ii. Narratives on reform to current citizenship rules for adults

People move

Most of us will do whatever it takes to make a better life, whether we're born here or have made Italy 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, our citizenship laws create obstacles for people who have come here to build a new life. We all raise our families, work, pay our taxes and celebrate Italian culture together. But many of us are made to wait too long for the equal rights and opportunities that give us stability and make us feel like we belong, so we can put down roots and contribute our full potential to our new home.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can do the right thing and create a fairer roadmap to citizenship. In the past, we came together to create the Workers' Statute, legalise abortion care and legalise civil partnership. Today, we can call on our leaders to create common sense rules that allow those who have made Italy their home to build a new, productive life.

[+ call to action]

Golden rule

Most of us strive to treat others the way we'd want to be treated. If any one of us had to move to keep our families safe or to give our children a brighter future, we'd like to have a fair roadmap to citizenship to help us rebuild our lives.

But today, our citizenship laws create obstacles for people who have come here to make a new home. We all raise our families, work, pay our taxes and celebrate Italian culture together. But many of us are made to wait too long for the equal rights and opportunities that give us stability and make us feel like we belong, so we can put down roots and contribute our full potential to our new home.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can choose to create a fairer roadmap to citizenship. In the past, we came together to create the Workers' Statute, legalise abortion care and legalise civil partnership. Today, we can call on our leaders to create common sense rules that allow those who have made Italy their home to build a new, productive life.

+[call to action]

Below is an example of a social media post. This particular post was tested in focus groups in Croatia, applying the 'people move' narrative to promote support for fairer rules for asylum seekers. But campaigners could adapt the caption to fit either the 'people move' or 'golden rule' narrative, and adapt the social media caption text to call for a fairer route to citizenship.

Samane wants her children to be safe. Just like we do.

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. The importance of changing frames about citizenship and non-nationals

Undecideds hold a negative view of people with a migration background, perceiving them as not integrating into or contributing to Italy. Probably because of this, they frame citizenship as a prize to be earned by proving integration and (actual or potential) economic contribution and see strict rules as a way to safeguard Italian culture and Italy's resources. While they view non-citizen children as deserving equal treatment, they also think it's necessary to Italianise them. Furthermore, undecideds seem unaware of the tangible harms that adults and children suffer (while still children) as a result of the current rules. These can be referred to as barrier beliefs that make them less receptive towards our messages and limit their persuasive power.

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

Below are examples of creative assets and links to materials developed by other organisations aimed at dissolving negative stereotypes of migrants are people who do not integrate or contribute to society. 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, psychologists who can talk about the impact of precarity on 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)

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. 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 are worried that Italian culture is under threat. Although we did not test this in the Italian focus groups, it probably means that focusing only on how people who migrate enrich Italian culture doesn't work well with undecideds. At the same time, undecideds probably don't expect migrants to assimilate. Rather, it's likely they are happy for them to keep their culture while also adopting Italian values and learning the language.

'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.

Citizenship reform in Switzerland (link to campaign materials)

Undecideds have a negative frame of children with foreign parents as needing to be Italianised. Campaigners should therefore underline how all young people who are born in or grow up in Italy are as Italian as each other. Campaigners could look to a referendum campaign by Operation Libero in Switzerland for inspiration if they wish to go down this route.

b. Changing the frame of citizenship

Campaigners need to shift the frame that undecideds have of citizenship away from being a prize to be earnt upon proving that one has integrated and is / can contribute and instead towards citizenship a vehicle for allowing people who have begun the work of rebuilding their lives and making a home in Italy to fully integrate and realise their full potential to contribute.

Inspiration can be found in the marriage equality movement. Part of the messaging of the marriage equality movement involved reframing marriage away from a union between people of the opposite gender and instead as a long-term relationship of trust, mutual respect, love and support. This way, gender became irrelevant, removing a barrier belief in the minds of the audience that prevented them from agreeing with marriage equality. Examples of video materials that did this through the testimonials of heterosexual and same sex couples can be found on the Freedom To Marry website.

Campaigners could consider trying a similar approach using different messengers. For example, talking to Italians abroad who have acquired citizenship of another country and how this made it easier to integrate and fulfil their potential once this happened. Similarly, campaigners could tell the stories of people with a migration background in Italy to contrast their experience before and after acquiring citizenship and how integrating & contributing became easier.

c. Explain the tangible harms to your audience

Undecideds are largely unaware of the tangible harms caused by living without citizenship for so long. The focus group discussion suggests that when they are made aware of how people trying to integrate and contribute face practical problems caused by their lack of citizenship, this makes them more open to reforming current rules. Campaigners should try to use concrete examples of how the rules make it harder for migrants to contribute or integrate. For example, not having citizenship might make renewal of certain documents like a driver's licence more difficult, making it harder for people to juggle jobs and pick up children from school. Or how finding accommodation close to a job is made harder by landlords who don't want people to officially register at their address (which is required to prove continuous residence). These could be conveyed through story-telling by people who migrate or people from the majority population who see people with a migration background struggling with these issues.

When it comes to children, campaigners could highlight the psychological impact of living in a precarious situation or feeling like you don't belong or have fewer rights than your peers.

This could be linked to children's prospects as adults. Recent research commissioned by Save the Children finds a correlation between citizenship status and the likelihood of graduating from high school (as opposed to vocational training) and going to university. Children of foreign parents without citizenship had worse education outcomes compared to children of 'native' Italians. But this gap in performance was smaller for children of foreign parents who acquired citizenship while children.[7]

iv. Messaging for responding to misinformation

As discussed, as communicators, you 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 follows the same narrative structure. The main difference is that the 'problem' part of the narrative focuses on explaining why your opponent is spreading misinformation. It's important not to repeat the attack against you, merely allude to it.

1. Values: rather than directly contradicting your opponents, begin by reminding your audience why they find the cause you are promoting important. Instead of directing attention to your opponents' message and letting them set the agenda, this allows you to bring your own cause back into focus.

2. Explain the problem: expose your opponents' malign agenda; why are they spreading misinformation? Allude to your opponent's lies but don't repeat them.

3. Your vision and solution: return to the cause you are promoting by talking about how we can bring the situation into line with the values you outlined in the first step.

4. If this is part of a campaign, remind your audience of past successes and ask them to do something to show their support. This was explained further in Part III of the guide.

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.

Reframing works by a) avoiding repeating the misinformation and b) giving your audience your alternative frame as a different way of understanding the issue. In a 'truth sandwich', the audience is, in addition, c) also prompted to let go of the misinformation by the revelation that the source of that misinformation is not trustworthy because they have an ulterior motive. In the context of an interview or a

7 Save the Children, 'Chiamami col mio nome', 2025.

debate, you may respond to misinformation with a truth sandwich and then use a short reframe to rebut a follow-up attack.

Below are some examples of what (longer) truth sandwiches can look like, as well as (shorter) reframes in response to common attacks or misinformation relating to your work. Because the nature of a truth sandwich is not to engage directly with the lie, you can use the same response for different attacks.

a. General response to misinformation on the ius scholae

Most of us agree that we should give all children the best start in life, no matter where their parents come from.

But our rules on citizenship are harming kids if their parents happen to not be Italian. And certain politicians want to stop us from making the rules fairer. Because for them, it's useful to blame people who migrate for problems in our society instead of fixing them, like the cost of living crisis.

This reform is a common sense solution that gives all our children the stable environment and feeling of belonging they need to reach their potential and contribute to our country when they grow up.

If you are in a situation like an interview or debate, your opponent has the opportunity to repeat or rephrase their attack. You can't simply repeat the truth sandwich. A satisfactory response will involve you addressing their question. Do this as quickly as possible and then pivot back towards your main message. Below are some examples.

Attack: 'The School Child Reform is a Trojan horse to destroy Italian culture. Children are shaped by their parents and their communities, especially when it comes to muslims. Five years of school isn't enough to turn someone into an Italian. Look at second and third generation muslims in France and Belgium.'

In the first instance, use the truth sandwich, above. If they repeat their attack, use this follow-up response:

Most of us agree that when children and young people grow up here, go through our schools, are part of our communities, live and later work alongside us, then they are Italian. The only difference is that we're telling some of them that they don't belong and stopping them from contributing to our country based on where their parents were born. It doesn't make sense and it's not how most of us want to treat our kids.

Attack: 'The School Child Reform will stop us deporting illegal immigrants if they have children at school / will automatically give citizenship to families of children at school.'

In the first instance, use the truth sandwich, above. If they repeat their attack, use this follow-up response:

This reform gives the child their own separate roadmap to citizenship. It doesn't affect the rules for their parents. Most of us agree that we should treat children who grow up in Italy the same. We shouldn't tell a child that they don't belong, they don't have opportunities and they could be sent to a country they don't know, just because of where their parents are from. Right now, this is what our rules do because whether a child gets citizenship depends entirely on whether their parents can fulfil conditions for their own application.

b. General response to misinformation on reforms for adults

Whether we were born in Italy or came here later in life, most of us want the same things. To be a good neighbour, feel like we belong, and get a job to support our families.

But our rules on citizenship are making it harder for people who've come here and made Italy their home to build a new life and fulfil their potential.

And certain politicians want to stop us from making the rules fairer. Because for them, it's useful to blame people who migrate for problems in our society instead of fixing them, like the cost of living crisis.

This reform is a common sense solution that recognises the commitment of those who are putting down roots in Italy and gives them the stability and opportunities they need to contribute.

Attack: 'These reforms will suddenly add millions of people to competitions for civil service jobs.'

In the first instance, use the truth sandwich, above. If they repeat their attack, use this follow-up response:

Our leaders have failed to create good, stable jobs for us and now they want to avoid the blame so they point the finger at people who look different. We don't solve this problem by shutting out people who have built a new home here. We solve it by joining together and demanding that our politicians come up with real solutions instead of trying to stir up hate and fear to distract us from their failures.

Attack: 'If we give citizenship away like this, it's just going to encourage millions more in the future.'

The choice we face is whether to give people who have spent years here fitting in, working hard and paying taxes, the stability they need to fulfil their potential. This is a common sense reform that allows people who have made Italy their home to put down roots and build a new, productive life.

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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