



## COVERING MIGRATION: CHALLENGES MET AND UNMET

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

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### OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations regarding improving the media's coverage of migration were proposed by the participants of a seminar organized by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), in partnership with the Global Editors' Network (GEN) in Paris on January 25-26, 2013 called "**Covering Migration: Challenges Met and Unmet**". At this seminar, top migration experts and media professionals came together to share their ideas on best media practices and ways to support journalists as they turn these practices into habits.

These recommendations come at a time of unprecedented mobility where the number of international migrants is 214 million, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This fact makes these suggestions pertinent now, as there is not one country in the world not involved or concerned with migration – either as a point of departure, destination, transit or some combination of those three. In short, this is a global issue.

Participants agreed on the assessment that the media has now more than ever the power and access to shape and influence public perceptions through its coverage. The media's reach and ability to influence public opinion makes it vital for journalists to fully understand the subject they cover, as well as their audiences, in order to secure the most accurate, balanced and informative reporting possible. Participants hold that the key to improving migration coverage begins with developing and honing journalists' knowledge on the subject.

Journalists need a **solid foundation** regarding migration before they can be expected to report on it, in an accurate and balanced manner. Participants suggest a series of

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documents including a uniform glossary of acceptable terms and a collection of guidelines explaining how to report on migrants. An alternate way of providing a base is to create a degree in journalism schools allowing reporters to specialize in the area. These methods will provide the media with the background knowledge necessary to tell the general public about the plights or successes of migrants.

To fully comprehend the situation of migrants or those affected by migration, participants propose **further inclusion of migrants --- the most active participants in many of the stories, as opposed to exclusively relying on experts or official spokespeople** -- in content creation, both in the composition of newsrooms and the inclusion of migrants as primary sources. These are the people who will be able to provide genuine and detailed insight into the subject because they have, in some capacity, directly experienced the very story being written.

For the necessary changes in migration coverage to occur, the **media as a whole** has the largest role to play. This requires journalists and editors alike to pay close attention to how they use the information acquired when doing a report. Seminar participants frequently stressed the importance of only using information that advances a story and of exercising particular care not to impart information that, without proper context, may be misconstrued in a harmful way. There was also consistent talk of not only using accurate data in stories, but careful portrayal of what the figures are truly expressing. Media organizations must be open and willing to evaluate themselves and make internal changes, as needed.

While the media undergoes this adjustment in daily practices, **the help and support from governments and non-governmental organizations** is crucial. Their support can provide a framework for the advancement of ideas, a platform to monitor coverage and trends, and a continuing conversation about the direction the media should go. Governments and NGOs also have the ability to simplify the job of journalists by providing easy access to documents and people that will enhance the content in media reports.

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Following the discussions, participants made recommendations in the following four areas:

### **1. Reporting on migration with a working knowledge of migration**

*In order for journalists to cover migration correctly, they must have not only a broad understanding of the topic they are covering, but a working knowledge of the nuances that go along with this type of story.*

- a. **Offer journalists a media-friendly glossary** of terms in multiple languages to ensure specificity and accuracy in their word choice. This is especially important in characterizing (and categorizing) migrants; i.e., creating a clear and accurate distinction between for instance those seeking asylum and those moving for family relocation, etc.
- b. **Provide journalists with a collection of codes and existing guidelines** on various types of coverage.
- c. **Create a professional degree on migration issues** to help journalists specialize in migration coverage to help create more specialized media professionals.
- d. **Facilitate access to refugee camps, detentions centers, etc,** to increase journalists' understanding of the reality on the ground.

### **2. Involving migrants in migration coverage**

*Journalists must be encouraged to more directly involve migrants in the coverage of migration. So often, the source of information comes from officials or organizations rather than the migrants.*

- a. **Employ (more) migrants or migrants of origin in the newsroom** to bring a different perspective and to enable them to use different sources and resources for a fuller and more balanced coverage.

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- b. **Use migrants as primary sources in stories** in place of experts and official sources, while allowing migrants to stay anonymous (both name and picture) if they wish.
- c. **Encourage the development of migrant's voice** for national press associations through migrant representatives

### 3. **Media Actions**

*The media should always orchestrate careful checks on all coverage to ensure balance and truth, but specific checks on sensitive stories should occur more frequently with more attention to detail.*

- a. **Media organizations should audit their coverage for facts and ethics**, and encourage editors and high-up media professionals to enforce this practice in their newsrooms.
- b. **Make it policy/ best practice to keep the anonymity of migrant sources**, the name of the migrant not making the story richer, but the situation described.
- c. **Encourage timely publication of accurate data and use of data (proportions, percentage and context)** to improve the coverage to be current and the country's migration status accurately presented.
- d. **Encourage balanced representation and portrayal** of migrants in photographs publications
- e. **Encourage more rigorous review and editing of stories** to determine if this story is or is not related to migrants.

### 4. **Government and Non-governmental Actions Involvement**

*Governments and NGOs play a key role in helping change the attitudes toward migrants and in changing how media covers migration. They are capable of providing a platform for dialogue, opportunities, and access.*

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- a. **Reward journalists for quality coverage of migration**, for instance by creating a national or international award for the best example of migration coverage, as well as give due recognition to media outlets paying special attention to the issue.
- b. **Request governments realize their role in migration coverage**, by recognizing their responsibility to eradicate hate speech and facilitate the work of journalists through open access to journalists both to information and migrant sources.
- c. **Coordinate with media outlets co-authoring sessions between migration experts and media professionals**, to produce articles
- d. **Convene some experts to newsrooms** (economists, historians, lawyers, statisticians, etc) and invite them to write analysis and articles about migration that would be published, in order to enhance a reciprocal and fruitful approach of direct exchanges at the place where information is being produced.
- e. **Facilitate dialogue and forge formal and informal links between journalists and other partners** (ie reliable migrant networks, bloggers, etc) in the field of migration through seminars to help journalists meet partners who could become sources and contacts (including police, border control personnel, experts and migrant organizations) and provide background information.

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