

Civil Society Advocacy Paper Migration Narratives

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Background

Over the course of the 2023-2024 Global Forum for Migration and Development, under the French Chairmanship, civil society engaged in all the official GFMD activities as well as conducted various global, regional and thematic consultations. This encompasses participation and engagement from large and small NGOs, CSO networks, trade unions, migrant community groups, migrant and diaspora-led organisations, faith-based organisations, research and academia. A calendar of activities can be found [here](#).

This paper is a compilation and consolidation of the main priorities and recommendations around **Narratives** that have come out from these consultations, and represents a snapshot of the breadth and diversity of civil society.

Key Messages: Global

The GFMD Civil Society Mechanism conducted virtual global consultations before each GFMD Preparatory Meeting in April and October, as well as a consultation before the GFMD Workshops on Climate and Narratives in June. Across these global consultations, and in the Civil Society Preparatory Meetings leading up to the Summit, participants put forward the following priorities:

- **Improve communication around migrant narratives by humanitarian institutions, international organisations and the third sector:** Counterproductive and problematic depictions of migrants, for example as portrayals just as victims or being desperate for funding, must be recognised, avoided, and de-sensationalised. As an industry, we must hold ourselves accountable to our own production of migrant-related narratives.

- **Incorporate and ground migration narratives in restorative justice**, through addressing and acknowledging the impact of colonisation as a driver of migration.
- **Highlight the benefits that migrants bring**, beyond economic, to the cultural and social development of countries of transit and destination.
- **Acknowledge radicalised perceptions of people on the move:** Narratives which criminalise and stereotype migrant communities fuel xenophobia not only in discourse, but also in policies e.g. the criminalisation of Blackness, Latinx migration, etc. Greater understanding of the origins of current narratives on migration is needed and should be led by affected communities and encouraged by civil society, governments, and other actors.
- **Promote holistic, representative inclusion and participation of migrant communities:** The 'diversity of migrants' that are included into discussions cannot be cherry-picked. True inclusion can only be achieved when migrants are fully integrated into political and cultural programs as an integral part of their communities of residence, particularly within the construction of both discourse and policies related to migration issues.
 - **Foster storytelling and content produced by migrants.** This should include investment, capacity development, and opportunity creation to ensure the involvement of migrant generations across all ages in media work and the media industry as a whole. This is crucial to removing the differentiation and dichotomy between "us" and "them".
- **Address the continued Othering of migrants, politically driven negative narratives, and promote balanced migration narratives:** Unpack the impact that politically-driven negative narratives have on social cohesion and barriers to social inclusion.
 - Promote further media literacy and understanding of the sources and drivers of current narratives on migration.
 - Combat the narratives driving the criminalisation and profiling of migrants based on race and ethnicity.
 - Establish evidence-based frameworks for rounded, accurate and complete migration narratives, supported by authentic, inclusive migrant stories. This should be supported by fact-based and historically holistic sources of information, including stories of migrant and non-migrant communities working together on shared goals, and facts around the impact of effective national and local policies that support rights-based migration and inclusion of migrants in their communities.
 - Promote the value and importance of inclusive and gender-responsive societies.
 - Foster and support the development of political will to address and change negative narratives, such as those currently being utilised by far-right politics in the West.
- **Address misinformation spread through artificial intelligence and media** with grounded, fact-based, and ideally migrant-led media sources that promote more balanced accounts of migration. This must include deconstructing bias representations of migrants.
- **Understand and promote balanced discourses and narratives as key to strengthening social cohesion.**
- **Strengthen the diaspora heritage sector and narrative cultural capital:** Links between diaspora, hospitality and heritage tourism should be strengthened and highlighted across migration narratives.
 - **Highlight the cultural contribution of diaspora communities.**
 - Situate the role of diaspora within a cultural history that **makes the link between current migration patterns and historic imperialism.**

- **Advance the conversation around the restitution of looted artefacts and ancestral remains linked to colonisation, incorporating diaspora advocacy.** Foster balanced history education throughout national education systems.
- **Address issues arising due to loss of / mixed identity:** Migrant and diaspora identities are inter-generational and closely connected to home cultural heritage, which must be acknowledged and encouraged to be explored in a positive way, e.g., through creative participatory processes.

- **Reframe the narratives on climate-affected migration:** Narratives on climate adaptation and resources need to be reframed to consider the impact of climate change on migration, and to present a broader picture of the different forms of human mobility in the context of climate change. Instead of promoting migration as an uncomplicated adaptation strategy, there should be a reflection on the conditions and type of support necessary for people to be able to make informed and rights-respecting choices about their movement.
 - **Deconstruct the myths conveyed around climate migration,** for example, the fear of waves of migrants from the Global South to the Global North, when climate migration has predominantly manifested as internal displacement.
 - **Address misconceptions around narratives on environment and climate drivers of migration.** In particular, highlighting evidence-based information around the drivers of climate change, with a clear assumption of responsibilities and call to action in order to address these root causes- including food insecurity, deforestation, land dispossession, illegal fishing and wildlife, and the impact of fossil fuels.
 - There needs to be a **focus on the right to stay** for people who are often left with no other choice but to move.
 - **Messages around climate adaptation should be centred around community-level and migrants' experiences to help advance a migrant-centred approach.** Inclusion of grassroots organisations and civil society in decision-making spaces and public messaging can help in this regard.

BEST PRACTICES

Welcoming Week

[Welcoming Week](#) is an annual multilateral, multistakeholder, multilevel campaign that celebrates the work in communities to become welcoming places for all, including migrants. Through Welcoming Week, organisations and communities bring together neighbours of all backgrounds to build strong connections and affirm the importance of welcoming and inclusive places in achieving collective prosperity. States participate by leading national campaigns that are locally-implemented. For example, the Governments of [Canada](#) and [New Zealand](#) have led campaigns over the past four years. Local and regional governments, CSOs, migrant and refugee-led organisations, local businesses and others participate by hosting events (670 events in 2023) and engaging on social and traditional media.

History of Welcoming Week:

Launched in 2012 by [Welcoming America](#) and its civil society and local government members in the United States, Welcoming Week provides individuals and organisations the opportunity to showcase their values through events and initiatives that foster connections and collaboration between migrants and non-migrants, as well as belonging for all. Through Welcoming America's initiative [Welcoming International](#), the Welcoming Week campaign has grown to include campaigns led by the Governments of Canada and New Zealand, and national CSOs in Australia and Mexico. Multilingual

toolkits, social media graphics and messages, and case studies are provided on welcomingweek.org and can be easily adapted to different contexts.

Principal objectives include:

- Affect the public narrative on migration to be more positive and hopeful.
- Bring neighbours together - migrant, refugee, and non-migrant - to build meaningful connections.
- Celebrate ongoing local multi-sector inclusionary efforts.
- Affirm the importance of “welcoming communities” in achieving collective prosperity.
- Engage new stakeholders through accessible events that lead to longer-term commitments for inclusive policies, programs, and practices.

See also the [related GCM & GCR pledge](#).

Caritas Internationalis “Share the Journey” Campaign

Caritas Internationalis has promoted this world-wide Share the Journey Campaign in 2017-2021 to create spaces and opportunities for migrants and refugees to come together with communities, promoting a culture of meeting and learning about each other.

Read more [here](#).

Key Messages: MENA

The Cross-Cultural Center for Refugees and Migrants held three thematic consultations related to the upcoming GFMD. The first was a subregional consultation in March 2023 around Narratives on Migration in the UAE; second, a consultation in Lebanon in June 2023 around Narratives and Labour Migration; and a regional third consultation in June 2023 on Labour Migration, and Migration and Climate Change. Participants put forward the following recommendations:

- Build alliances with diasporas and migrant community groups and organisations.
- Develop support programmes for media organisations and strengthen their capacity to report on migration issues, in addition to Media + Journalism awareness-raising around migrant issues.
- Encourage and build the capacity of migrant-led organisations (to enable further visibility, sustainability, and the creation of safe space) and develop comprehensive training programs.
- Enable further Advocacy Campaigns.
- Encourage governments to share information (statistics) in addition to further collaboration with governments.
- Promote the sharing of information and experience between countries and regional dialogue frameworks.

BEST PRACTICES- North America

Over the past 15 years, **Welcoming America's** (www.welcomingamerica.org) narrative change initiative in the **United States** has used a unified approach that links inclusive narratives with the civic, social, and economic inclusion infrastructure needed to support the flourishing of immigrants, refugees, internally displaced individuals, and all people in our communities. The organization's narrative work challenges the divisive "us vs. them" mentality around immigration, instead emphasizing an ethos of abundance where everyone benefits from the participation and inclusion of every community member, regardless of background.

As in prior presidential elections years, in 2024 Welcoming America will concentrate its narrative efforts and resources on promoting a forward-looking narrative centered on a multiracial democracy. This initiative seeks to empower local communities and everyday individuals to play a pivotal role in realizing this positive vision. One crucial ingredient of the initiative is inclusive storytelling: showing how migrant and non-migrant leaders are working together on shared goals to improve daily life in their communities. For example, the organization has promoted the story of the small city (2800 inhabitants) of Noel, Missouri, where local leaders came together to build a community garden to grow healthy food and connect meaningfully across lines of difference (see case study in the publication [Taste of Belonging](#)).

Capacity-building resources on how to reinforce balanced messages are available to the public on www.welcomingamerica.org in the **'Resource Library.'** Thousands of local civil society and government leaders, including migrant and refugee participants, have received training, toolkits, and personalized technical assistance to improve public narratives on migration at the local level across the United States in hundreds of localities, large and small, over the past 15 years of support from Welcoming America.

In 2023, civil society organizations and local governments in **Mexico** hosted the first national Welcoming Week in Latin America as part of the global campaign. Led by **Sin Fronteras** and in partnership with more than 20 civil society organizations, local and state governments, and international organizations, the campaign resulted in 27 'intergroup bridging' events across three major cities in Mexico and large-scale social and traditional media activation. At a time when Mexico is seeing exponential growth in the number and diversity of immigrants settling in Mexico, the campaign came at a critical moment to build social cohesion and advance a positive public narrative of welcoming communities.

Events in Mexico City, Queretaro, and Tijuana emphasized a uniquely Mexican narrative during the week of Mexico's Independence Day celebrations. Creative events in the metropolitan areas brought migrant and non-migrant residents together to work on common projects, such as an activism mural event in Queretaro where Mexican, Haitian, Salvadoran, Venezuelan, and Afghan neighbors socialized in an informal setting while painting a mural with a message about being an intercultural city.

Key Bibliography

- Civil Society Global Consultation Summary Advocacy Points (April 2023)
- Civil Society Global Consultation Summary Advocacy Points (October 2023)
- Civil Society Preparatory Meeting: Global Civil Society Priorities (January 2024)
- Cross-Cultural Center for Refugees and Migrants Consultation Recommendations Outcome Documents

Additional Resources

- Caritas Internationalis, [‘Share the Journey’ Campaign](#) 2017-2021
- Welcoming International, [‘Welcoming Week’](#)
- Welcoming International’s [‘Taste of Belonging’](#)
- [Sin Fronteras](#) website, Mexico