



Joint RCM-

GFMD Virtual Workshop on Public Narratives on Migration

Thursday, June 18, 2020

Background

When managed well, migration has the potential to create substantial positive impacts. The meaningful inclusion of migrants and refugees can boost innovation, respond to labour market needs, support economic growth and add valuable new perspectives to host societies. At the same time, migration is a complex reality that brings both opportunities and challenges, as the current health crisis has demonstrated.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically upended international migration and mobility trends on a global scale. As cross-border movement has slowed in the wake of lockdowns and travel restrictions, new conversations have arisen about what the future of migration holds for migrants and communities alike.

Around the world, stories of solidarity and support have emerged as communities have come together to counter COVID-19. Migrants themselves have increasingly been recognized for their contributions to countries' economies and societies, including as essential workers in key sectors like healthcare, agriculture and transportation. However, the perception of COVID-19 as a "foreign" virus has also sparked concerns about a surge in xenophobia and discrimination towards migrants and refugees¹. United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres raised the alarm in May 2020 that the pandemic has unleashed a "tsunami of hate and xenophobia," with migrants and refugees increasingly vilified as "a source of the virus."²

Countries have also begun to feel the economic impacts of the pandemic as the global economy slows and unemployment rises, potentially fuelling social tensions and contributing to harmful perceptions that migrants take jobs away from native workers. Taken together, the combined health, economic and social impacts of COVID-19 threaten to further exacerbate already-polarized public opinions on migration.

Public attitudes towards migrants and migration will have a key role to play in shaping what the future looks like in the long term as countries begin to look towards recovery.

In light of its widespread relevance, the topic of public narratives on migration will be explored in a virtual session of the joint Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) – Regional Conference on Migration (RCM) workshop series, in connection with the series' core themes of migrant protection, irregular migration and migrant skilling. Viewed in the context of irregular

¹ United Nations. 2020. "COVID-19: UN counters pandemic-related hate and xenophobia."

<https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/covid-19-un-counters-pandemic-related-hate-and-xenophobia>

² United Nations. 2020. "Secretary-General Denounces 'Tsunami' of Xenophobia Unleashed amid COVID-19, Calling for All-Out Effort against Hate Speech." <https://www.un.org/press/en/2020/sgsm20076.doc.htm>

migration, a coordinated approach to communicating accurately and objectively can help to counter public concerns and maintain support for a balanced public discourse. Similarly, narratives that recognize the diverse contributions of migrants and refugees to their communities can serve to build trust, belonging and engagement on a community level, thereby supporting social cohesion and combatting the spread of xenophobia or discrimination.

Objectives

The proposed virtual session seeks to identify how narratives on migration are evolving as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Americas, and how diverse stakeholders can proactively respond. More specifically, the session will:

- Identify how public narratives on migration in Latin America and the Caribbean region have shifted in connection with COVID-19 and what this means for stakeholders involved in communicating with the public.
- Facilitate the exchange of information and best practices in building effective partnerships between diverse stakeholders working to balance the public narrative on migration in the Americas, including states, local governments, international organizations, civil society organizations and businesses.
- Inform decision-makers on the importance of developing proactive messaging that is responsive to the current context, and outline the key steps of how to do so.
- Identify potential opportunities for new partnerships, collaboration and joint initiatives to support balanced migration narratives that stakeholders can explore beyond the workshop.

Expected outcomes

- Increased understanding among decision-makers of the importance of promoting balanced narratives on migration as part of a broader approach to communities' and countries' recovery from COVID-19.
- Increased understanding among all participants of how to create effective messages.
- Potential opportunities for new multi-stakeholder initiatives, partnerships and collaborative projects are identified.
- Gaps in capacity, resources, information and support in terms of creating a communications campaign or project are identified by stakeholders in order to tailor future GFMD activities towards participants' needs.

Methodology and guiding questions

This two-hour virtual session will consist of a short scene-setting presentation followed by interactive and informal group discussions. In order to maximize the time available for these discussions, two pre-meeting activities are also planned.

- **Pre-meeting Activity 1:** In advance of the meeting, registered participants will be invited to share links and information resources in a collaborative online document in response to the following questions:
 - What tools or resources currently exist that can be drawn upon to inform the creation of new initiatives or campaigns?

- What new tools, resources, research or data would be useful for actors involved in migration narratives work in the region?
- **Pre-meeting Activity 2:** Participants are also requested to provide input to an online [survey](#) on migration narratives that has been developed by the GFMD Working Group on Public Narratives on Migration. Responses should include **as much detail as possible**. Key takeaways from this survey will help inform the scene-setting presentation and subsequent moderated discussions.

During the breakout itself, a moderator will facilitate discussion and will invite participants to “take the floor” virtually to make interventions, ask questions and share comments in response to the discussion prompts outlined below:

- **Discussion Theme 1:** What is the current reality on the ground in terms of public narratives on migration throughout the region?
 - What actions has your country, local government, organization or business taken to promote balanced migration narratives and/or counter misinformation about migrants and refugees?
 - What key challenges or successes have been encountered in this work so far?
 - How is COVID-19 impacting public opinion towards migrants and refugees, whether negatively or positively?
- **Discussion Theme 2:** Looking ahead, what promising opportunities or partnership ideas exist that can help support a more balanced narrative on migration in the Americas?
 - What are some examples of partnerships in action that could be replicated elsewhere in the region or used as a starting point for further collaboration?
 - Where might there be opportunities to create new partnerships and engage non-traditional partners in the context of COVID-19 to promote balanced messaging on migration?
 - How can communications campaigns and initiatives be adjusted to fit the new realities of COVID-19 in a way that is responsive to unique local, national and regional needs?

As a primary goal of this workshop is to encourage participants to explore new partnership opportunities and identify where their interests or challenges align with others, **all participants are expected to come prepared to share examples or ideas for campaigns, initiatives or projects** that can contribute to balancing the narrative on migration. These can include anything from early-stage ideas and upcoming pilot projects to initiatives that are already in the works and could be scaled up or replicated elsewhere.

Participants’ profile

- Decision-makers in the Americas from states, local governments, civil society organizations, international organizations and the private sector.
- Communications practitioners from the Americas and other regions who are actively working to balance the public narrative on migration and migrants, or are seeking to begin initiatives to balance the public narrative.
- Academics and researchers with specific expertise on migration narratives and public attitudes towards migrants and refugees, especially in the Americas.