

**ELEVENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

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**INPUT PAPER OF THE UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS TO THE
ELEVENTH COORDINATION MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION¹**

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

¹ The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

A. REALITY OF MIGRATION

Today, migrants constitute 3.1 percent of the world population. Overall, there are 214 million migrants in the world, according to data from the International Organization for Migration (IOM). There is no country in the world not involved or concerned with migration. Every country is either a point of departure, destination, transit location or combination of these three. Migration is a topic that greatly impacts all aspects of society. The future relies on the collaboration and support of all countries in providing a social, political, economic, cultural and geographical environment open to migration.

B. PERCEPTIONS

The first step to more integrated societies is the relation of one to another. The essence of this relation lies in the experience and/or in the perceptions one has about the other. When built on experience, stereotyping is minimized but when built on mediated perceptions, the relation can be largely impacted by misconceptions. In this regard, the social environment, public figures and media, among other factors, play an important role. Stereotyping is an easy path; it is popular, it is demagoguery, it helps sell stories. It does also, however, create serious damage and impacts social cohesion on the short term and the long term. It is important to present a balanced dialogue to the public on all topics. As a citizen, as a politician, as a media outlet, as an organization, as the private sector, we all have a responsibility in engaging a dialogue based on respect, tolerance, and dignity and driven by an idea of justice.

C. UNAOC FOCUS

Since its inception in 2005 through the initiative of Turkey and Spain, the United Nations Alliance of Civilization (UNAOC) aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions. While the UNAOC concentrates on building trust and bridging gaps, the migration program works to minimize negative stereotypes as well as the tendency to discriminate against migrants and minority groups with a view to improve management of diversity and to enhance social cohesion. It works every day to promote positive dialogue about migration and encourages the exchange of ideas and practices to further enhance the migrant experience, recognizing that diversity is a positive reality. At the UNAOC, we understand the impact of the media on public perceptions. In a world characterized by globalization and shaped by information, the media can spread mainstream and politicized stereotyping at an unparalleled pace and with extraordinary reach. The media can either provide today's pluralistic societies with a common sense of belonging or undermine social cohesion by stressing divides rather than commonalities and by perpetuating myths and prejudices. During times of political turmoil or financial crisis, migrants are often used as scapegoats for the problems of society. In order to ensure stereotyping of migration is not taking place, media coverage of migration needs to be examined in relation to the facts and figures presented and its use of correct terminology on migration. Engaging in a dialogue with media experts is a priority in order to ensure the most accurate depiction of migration is presented in the media.

D. KEY STEPS

The media has the distinct ability to expand the positive or negative discourse on migration. It is the catalyst of discussion surrounding migration. Media can reach people in almost every area of the world, a task unachievable by most people. The UNAOC focuses on the specific relation between media and migration in order to advance the dialogue on migration. The UNAOC has outlined four key steps for coverage and advancement of this dialogue in the media.

1. *Giving a "voice" to migrants:*

Representation of migrants in media as "subjects," who perceive, instead of focusing on migrants as "objects," who are perceived, can help shift understanding from the theoretical aspect to the human side of the story. Representation of migrants in the media should occur at two different levels: at the level of "content," or substance, and at the level of "frame," or structure. At the first level, social and political diversity should be better reflected in media content. When writing about migration issues, journalists should bear in mind the importance of providing the audience with a migrant perspective to widen the audience's viewpoint. At the structural level, one should insist on the need to better represent diversity in newsrooms. Indeed, how can media report accurately on diversity when most newsrooms are actually lacking diversity? Diversity in newsrooms ensure better understanding and consequently better reporting on issues that may be misunderstood or mistaken by homogeneous and standardized newsrooms.

2. *Giving a "face" to migrants:*

Giving a face to migrants is essential to deconstruct the faceless mask of migration. The current discourse on migration erases all characteristics of individualization, which is the basis of human rights. It simplifies the complexity of migration and reduces the migrants to one single identity that compromises their rights as individuals. Moreover, public discourse is more inclined to condemn the group than to condemn individuals. Giving a "face" to migrants acknowledges their rights as individuals and works against the construction of an anonymous, unnamed, and faceless phenomenon.

3. *Highlighting the benefits of migration to help counter prejudices and polarizing speech:*

Given that migration remains a complex and challenging issue for today's societies, the media cannot lessen those challenges in their reporting. However, the topic can also be discussed by putting emphasis on its numerous successes. Today's discourse on migration is very disconnected from evidence-based research. Migrants have played an essential role in the development of many modern states and of all societies. Migration has contributed and continues to contribute to a society's prosperity, measured in economic development, social dynamism, cultural richness and diversity. This narrative is not sufficiently highlighted in the media or often does not embrace all aspects of migrants' contributions. Frequently, the positive discourse around migration focuses on the economic aspect of mobility. Promoting migrants as a driving force for the economy and development is not only true but also important. However, one should not forget the social and cultural aspects of their contribution. Migrants cannot only be portrayed in terms of economic gain for destination countries (labor force) or in terms of economic gain for origin countries (remittances). Today, as migration is a global phenomenon, no country can

argue it is not affected by migration. Demographically maintaining population levels and age structures, culturally and intellectually stimulating societies, bringing together talent for innovation--it is crucial and timely to engage countries and societies to look at these positive aspects of migration.

4. *Reduce the impact of polarizing speeches:*

Polarized speeches tend to be prominent in some media. They allow some media to break through the constant massive flow of information with catchy headlines. In order not to amplify such discourse, the media may want to reconsider their assigned space. In addition, moderate voices should be consulted and highlighted when addressing sensitive issues such as migration and integration. By presenting balanced opinions, moderate voices allow media to provide the audience with comprehensive information to help enhance understanding that shapes our societies.

E. CHALLENGES

The UNAOC strives toward the overarching goal of engaging in a dialogue with those who disagree with the core message of the UNAOC, which is to increase understanding and cooperation among people of different backgrounds, religions and cultures. In regards to the media, the UNAOC acknowledges the challenging environment surrounding the media. Media strives to provide information to the public while also making a profit off their service. This dynamic can be difficult when media success is dependent on capturing the public's attention on a topic. Dialogue must also be engaged in with media professionals who have views on the extreme ends of the migration spectrum. The UNAOC works toward overcoming these challenges in pursuit of their core goals.

F. UNAOC CURRENT ACTIONS

The UNAOC aims at increasing understanding between nations and people among cultures and religions. In order to achieve this, the UNAOC has partnered with media professionals, academic professionals and migration experts around the world. The specific focus of the UNAOC on media and migration leads to the following current actions.

1. *Covering Migration: Challenges Met and Unmet (Paris, France):*

The UNAOC held a seminar in Paris, France in January 2013 to engage in a dialogue with media professionals and migration experts about covering migration in the media. This seminar was conducted on the European-level for a multitude of European media professionals and migration experts. During this seminar, participants drafted a series of recommendations for media professionals when covering migration. Recommendations will be dispatched to media outlets and journalism schools in the coming weeks. They included reporting on migration with a working knowledge of migration, involving migrants in migration coverage, and other similar actions to be carried out by the media and government/non-government organizations. Future installments of this seminar will be conducted on the national level for various countries. For example, a seminar similar in composition to the Paris, France, seminar will be held in Switzerland on media and migration coverage. This seminar will be conducted on a national level specifically for Swiss media outlets. It is scheduled for April 2013. During the seminar, members of the Swiss media and migration experts will discuss the current Swiss migration

policy, and the Swiss journalist ethical code and how it can relate to the media's coverage of migration. This seminar's goal is to advance the dialogue surrounding migration and enhance the coverage of migration in the Swiss media.

2. *Video Project: Media Coverage of Migration:*

In partnership with the University of Missouri School of Journalism a video project documenting the media's current coverage of migration and how it can be improved was created during the Paris, France, seminar on media and migration. The project addressed the same issues of migration and the media discussed during the seminar in Paris, including the often-negative image of migrants created by the media and its effect on treatment of migrants. The video project is created for an audience of journalism schools, media outlets and migrant organizations in order to improve problems of misrepresentation and misinformation. It answers five core questions including: what is the general climate of media coverage of migration, what the largest problem, what is the best thing to fix the problem, what are concrete guidelines and why this is becoming such a pressing issue today?

3. *Data Journalism Study on Media Coverage of Migration:*

The UNAOC migration and media programs, in partnership with the European Journalism Centre (EJC), developed a first pilot of a data journalism project with a number of prominent academic partners around the world including, The University of Missouri School of Journalism (USA), University of Kings (Canada), Tilburg (Netherlands), Deutsche Welle Journalism Akademie (Germany), the National Audiovisual Institute (France) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies (IFRC). The project was conducted in the fall/winter of 2012, and focuses on migration coverage at times of elections in the countries of location of the journalism schools. It looks at the terminology and semantics used in online media in relations to migrants over a limited time period (elections). Through data collection, analysis and the use of new digital tools, an empirical assessment of migration coverage at times of elections will enable assess to viewing of the main trends that emerge in various national media outlets. This will provide a comprehensive picture of the perceptions around migration and better address them. The results of the study will be released on the occasion of the Vienna Forum and will be distributed among a wide network of partners in the five above-mentioned countries. In the coming months, the UNAOC will conduct a direct follow up with relevant authorities and civil society organizations in each country.

4. *Toolkit:*

The UNAOC migration program is developing a toolkit designed to offer new migrants and migrant organizations Web 2.0 skills that will empower them in efforts towards social inclusion at the local level. The objective is to minimize the barriers which migrants face in arriving into new social contexts by highlighting the importance of new media skills in processes of inclusion and social cohesion. The toolkit can be used by organizations to continue their work with migrants. The toolkit will be distributed to various organizations upon its completion in the coming weeks.

5. Advocacy Level Involvement:

At the advocacy level, the UNAOC is taking part in lectures, conducting studies, and working to advance the discussion surrounding migration. The UNAOC believes this outreach will further the dialogue on migration and positively impact society's understanding of the topic.

SUMMARY

Migration and its resulting diversity bring various challenges. Migration and diversity are demanding, making them complex issues to address. However, when looking at the big picture, one should recognize its benefits. In this era of the greatest human mobility ever recorded, communicating on the social, cultural and economic benefits of migration helps counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism. There is a real need to address the perceived risks of migration as a threat for stability, prosperity and identity and to emphasize that the ever-increasing cultural diversity is, indeed, a driving force for development, innovation and progress.

The media have to be aware of the responsibility they have when engaging dialogue around migration and integration. If some media are serving political purposes or even deliberately serving political discourse and consciously jeopardizing social cohesion with polarized speeches, others have to counterbalance such discourse and provide societies with a responsible coverage of these issues. When addressing cultural, religious or ethnic related issues, the media cannot ignore their role in shaping public opinion and should proceed with sensitivity and with a sense of duty.

On the other hand, migrants, civil society organizations, United Nations agencies and international organizations have a responsibility in providing the media and public with a more comprehensive understanding of migration and integration issues. Giving more visibility to a responsible and comprehensive approach of these issues is crucial to enhance social cohesion.

In today's societies, there is an urgent need to build a common sense of belonging based on reciprocity, justice, dignity and respect. For the benefit of the society as a whole, we should commit towards these values. It is important to stress that such commitment cannot be seen as generous, magnanimous or noble. It is simply a just commitment, based on rights and justice. Migrating is a right recognized by international law, and diversity is a reality. Building inclusive societies is therefore not optional. People are migrating. People have always migrated. Our responsibility is to reflect the complete picture of society.