36.

Balancing migration narratives through programming and media reporting in North Africa

Paola Pace,[1] Shireen Zayed,[1] Emma Borgnäs[2]

Abstract: This chapter explores a range of factors shaping attitudes towards immigrants in 18 countries in West and North Africa based on results from the Gallup World Poll survey. In particular, it looks at the relationship between public opinion on immigration and (a) individuals' perceptions of their countries' economy and labour market, (b) their perceptions of the quality and availability of public goods and services, and (c) their trust in institutions such as the police and government. These have all been identified as important factors affecting public opinion on immigration in the literature.

GLOBAL COMPACT FOR MIGRATION OBJECTIVES

17

ELIMINATE DISCRIMINATION

36.1. Introduction

Social exclusion is costly for migrants and societies in North Africa, as it leads to the ghettoization of migrants, which results in weakened social cohesion.[3] It also affects how migrants are able to use their human capital in destination countries, with a suboptimal use of their skills, and can result in increased violence and instability.[4] However, interventions and programmes to promote social inclusion and cohesion include not only providing skills development, training and job opportunities to migrants and host communities, but also efforts aimed at reducing misconceptions and improving public perceptions of migrants.

Research on public attitudes concerning immigration has found that the media have an important role to play; numerous studies have shown that, in general, the framing of the issue in the media affects public attitudes to immigration. In particular, there is evidence that negative stories provoke a perception of a threat to one's group, while images of immigrants engaging in common human activities increase positivity towards the migrant group. A key theoretical explanation for attitudes to immigration includes "contact theory", which predicts that increased contact with migrants lessens misconceptions about them. Actions to promote increased connectivity between migrants and host communities thus have the potential to make individuals more pro-immigration.

---

[1] IOM Egypt.

[2] IOM Global Migration Data Analysis Centre.

[3] Social cohesion refers to "behaviour and attitudes within a community that reflects a propensity of community members to cooperate" (OHCHR, 2020).

[4] See OECD (2011). See also Monson et al. (2012), and Cloete and Kotze (2009). Inter alia, interesting readings are also Pillay et al. (2008), Idasa (n.d.), De Wit (2008), Hickman et al. (2008), Chidester et al. (2003), Geldenhuys and Rossouw (2001), McGeary and Michaels (1998), Simpson and Yinger (1972), and Wagley and Harris (1958).

This chapter presents two concrete efforts implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and partners aimed at improving social cohesion in North Africa – one to contribute to more responsible reporting on migration, through the direct involvement of journalists in the region; and the other aimed at improving perceptions of migrants among children in Egypt, by increasing connectivity between migrant and Egyptian children.

36.2. Balancing migration narratives through responsible media coverage

If one searches images of migrants online, despair and suffering are dominating the screen. Sensational numbers and prevailing stereotyped negative images of migrants continue to produce distorted pictures of reality, and perpetuate a discourse centring on immigration as an "invasion" or a "burden", and as creating "insecurity" across the globe. North Africa is not immune from media coverage that often accentuates discrimination and racism.

Migration is much broader than what shocking images of migrants cramped into unseaworthy vessels might convey, and is a difficult phenomenon for journalists to report.

Irregular migration, for example, is the form of migration which tends to dominate current debates on migration. More specifically, the coverage of the issue nowadays among media outlets in Africa, just as in Europe, often concentrates on irregular movements. The reality is that migration, both from within and to North Africa, is mostly regular. In addition, irregular immigration in North Africa, just as in Europe, is mainly a matter of "overstay", by which the status of migrants who were previously in a regular situation becomes irregular (IOM, n.d.).

The role media play in shaping public opinion and therefore its importance for migration policymaking is undeniable (Protess and McCombs, 1991). It is therefore critical that journalists have the knowledge and skills to report on migration in an evidence- and human rights-based manner. In this vein, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration calls for States to "promote independent, objective and quality reporting of media outlets … including by sensitizing and educating media professionals on migration-related issues and terminology".[5]

In recognition of the pressing need to improve the accuracy of migration coverage, IOM, in cooperation with journalists based in North Africa, has over the past three years trained over 300 media practitioners working in Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia on factual migration coverage. The participants – media students, journalists and editors – were provided with migration statistics and good practices on migration reporting, with the aim to dispel commonly held myths and stereotypes. Participants were also trained on key migration concepts and terminologies, including on the definition of migrants and the differences between irregular migration and the crimes of trafficking in and smuggling of persons – a phenomenon and two crimes that are often confused in the public debate.

Some of the stereotypes and myths discussed during the training included the common belief that immigrants take jobs away from nationals or that migrants bring diseases. These two main preconceived ideas about migrants are refuted by facts, including abundant empirical macroeconomic evidence demonstrating the positive impact of migration on destination countries' economies globally as well as in specific low- and middle-income countries.[6] IOM is currently conducting studies in Egypt and Tunisia to analyse the economic impact of immigration in these two countries. The existence of a healthy immigrant effect – where immigrants are on average healthier than the native-born – is a fact.[7]

Another commonly held belief in the region is that countries in North Africa, including Libya, are merely transit countries towards Europe. Findings based on 13,228 quantitative interviews conducted through Displacement Tracking Matrix Flow Monitoring Surveys with migrants between January and August 2019, and 2,312 key informant interviews conducted in June–July 2019, show otherwise. Over 80 per cent of the migrants interviewed by IOM

---

[5]   Available at https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180713_agreed_outcome_global_compact_for_migration.pdf.

[6]   See, for example, OECD/ILO (2018), and Boubtane et al. (2016).

[7]   This phenomenon was observed by Raymond-Duchosal as early as 1929. Wanner, Manfellotto, Westerling and Rosén wrote on it decades later.

reported that Libya was their intended country of destination at the time of departure from their countries of origin, and that they were in Libya for work opportunities (Teppert, Cottone and Rossi, Chapter 5 of this volume).

The trainings were conducted in North Africa under the development pillar of the European Union–IOM Regional Development Protection Programme. The initiative was fist implemented in Morocco, where a master's programme on Media and Migration was established thanks to the fruitful cooperation between IOM and the *Institut Supérieur de l'Information et de la Communication*. Trainings of journalists have also been conducted in West Africa under the European Union–IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration, with over 600 journalists trained since 2018 (see Box 36.1) (IOM, 2019a).

INFO BOX

Box 36.1. Shaping public opinion in West and Central Africa

In West and Central Africa – a region where migration dynamics are complex and journalists sometimes lack proper training on media ethics and sourcing – local journalists require guidance navigating migration media coverage.

In 2018, IOM launched a series of workshops targeting journalists and media professionals from West and Central Africa. Over 600 participants attended these workshops, the main goal of which was to provide journalists with the necessary tools to report on migration in an informed way.

Participants were provided with information on the migration situation in their countries and regions, the typical profiles of migrants, and regional and global migration challenges. Through the trainings, they were familiarized with migration-related terminology and legal considerations of each term. Participants were also tasked with developing key messages for a new discourse on migration and proposed actions to improve media coverage on migration in their countries.

"At a time when sensationalism is gaining ground, it is crucial to better inform journalists about such complex issues as migration. Only those who are well informed can inform properly," says Florence Kim, IOM's Regional Media and Communications Officer and Spokesperson in West and Central Africa (IOM, 2019b).

36.3. Development of an IOM guide to train journalists on communication about migration

Over the course of the various training sessions conducted by IOM in North Africa, the organization received an increasing amount of requests from various media outlets for training materials developed for journalists. As a response, and in recognition of the need to increase the media's capacity to report on migration issues in the region, IOM Tunisia decided to develop a comprehensive guide for the training of journalists, with the central aim of supporting media practitioners in debunking stereotypes and misinformation surrounding migration.

The *Journalist Guide to Media Coverage of Migration Based on International Law and Evidence – Tools, Practical Cases, Recommendations* (IOM, 2019c), includes examples from the region but targets a global audience. It constitutes a resource not only for journalists, but also for organizations, universities and governments worldwide interested in improving the quality of migration media coverage and contributing to an evidence-based public discourse on migration. It comes in two versions: one is directed at journalists and one is developed for facilitators as a training tool for trainers – journalists and editors-in-chief who wish to train their peers, staff or university students, for example. It gives practitioners an understanding of the regional and international context of migration by citing

peer-reviewed evidence and international statistics on migration; explaining the terminology of migration; providing a framework to rethink media coverage of migration, addressing ethical aspects of migration coverage; analysing the representations of migrants in the media; presenting a primer on the international legal framework governing migration; and providing recommendations on how the media can move to a more responsible form of migration coverage, embracing evidence and international law, and rejecting sensationalism. The *Guide* comprehensively covers all aspects a journalist needs to consider, from course content and practical exercises and best practices in pedagogy, to practical issues such as the selection of candidates, venues and equipment needed. The training is divided into several modules, each designed to raise participants' capacities in a key area related to migration coverage in the media.

The Guide in its two versions is published in French, Arabic and English, and is accessible free of charge, giving journalists in the region, and beyond, the opportunity to access training tools.[8] It can significantly contribute to more responsible and ethical media coverage of migration in the region and globally (see Box 36.2). As a next step, IOM plans to transform this *Guide* into an online course on media coverage of migration. In a related effort, IOM also gathered over 40 executives from media regulatory authorities, editors-in-chief, journalists, photojournalists, university professors and researchers from four continents in Tunisia to draft an ethical charter on media coverage on migration. A committee for finalizing the charter was set up, as well as a website for its dissemination and the promotion of its adoption at the country level.[9]

INFO BOX

Box 36.2. Thoughts from Salaheddine Lemaizi, journalist and president of the Moroccan Network of Migration Journalists

The difficulties encountered by the media in covering migration in a professional and ethical manner have their origins, in part, in the reporting methodologies utilized (a preference for immediacy and sensationalism), as well as in the nature of public debate in the age of social networks (an increase in populism, hate speech and such as a result of anonymity online, for example).

In order to combat this, the media and public actors must be provided with tools that can offer verified, balanced and accessible information on migration. The Journalist Guide to Media Coverage of Migration Based on International Law and Evidence – Tools, Practical Cases, Recommendations (IOM, 2019c) is one such tool. I had the opportunity to pilot the Guide during a training for 100 Moroccan journalists, and found it fulfils at least four functions:

(a) Equipping journalists with the necessary tools and understanding to effectively report on the multifaceted complexities of migration;
(b) Exploring the basics of journalism, rooted in international law and professional ethics;
(c) Highlighting and challenging preconceived notions on migration; and
(d) Widening the perspectives of an innovative journalistic practice in regard to content and reporting methodologies.

The success of this *Guide* led to the creation of "The Ethical Charter for Media Coverage of Migration"[10] in December 2019. This ambitious and independent initiative aims to serve as an incubator of ideas and commitments on the theme. However, let us bear in mind that improving media coverage of migration is a long-term task. Progress made in this field will be contingent on the building and collaboration of numerous initiatives, linking media interest in migration, mainstreaming of ethical and professional practices in journalism and continuous advocacy to change perceptions at the societal level.

---

8   The Guides are available at https://tunisia.iom.int/resources.
9   See Facebook page. Available at www.facebook.com/Migrations-Charte-mondiale-d%C3%A9thique-109300947301204/?modal=admin_todo_tour.
10 See Facebook page. Available at www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=109328283965137&id=109300947301204&__tn__=K-R.

36.4. Creating social cohesion in Egypt through increased connectivity

To improve migrant integration in Egypt, the development pillar of the Regional Development and Protection Programme in Egypt designed an intervention to "change specified behaviour patterns" (Michie et al., 2011). In 2018, IOM Egypt started the implementation of its community cohesion intervention *Safarni* ("Make Me Travel" in Arabic) in Ard El Lewa, a marginalized area in the heart of Cairo, where large numbers of migrants, such as Sudanese and Yemeni, live. The intervention aimed at changing the perceptions and behaviour of children towards people from different cultures within their own community. The cultural diversity is a result of both the historic and more recent settling of immigrant communities in Ard El Lewa, bringing different traditions together while also giving rise to interpersonal conflicts and stigma between the different nationalities.

The intervention was preceded by an awareness-raising campaign on social media,[11] which was used to assess the public perception of the initiative. The online campaign promoting *Safarni* took children on an imaginary journey to a new country through a simulated travel experience. It included intercultural workshops with children 8–12 years of age (the appropriate ages for engaging with the programme) with different cultural backgrounds. The online campaign was a success, with more than 981,000 views, 29,000 likes, 7,000 comments and 5,000 shares, and was covered by top local media channels.[12, 13] The online engagement and positive feedback paved the way for the on-the-ground field intervention.

To ensure a successful behavioural change intervention, the *Safarni* team identified the most effective components to be included (Michie et al., 2011). Based on years of experimentation, the team developed its own methodology, taking inspiration from the Active Education and Montessori methods. *Safarni* has also developed its organizational structure, starting as an initiative under the umbrella of the *Selmeya* ("Peaceful" in Arabic) Network in Egypt and turning into a company focused mainly on delivering the *Safarni* programme and developing its content. The methodology has been developed and enhanced by the Safarni team over the course of seven years, and is based on evidence-based methods grounded in intergroup contact theory and peace education. It proved to be effective in developing the children's awareness and provoking behavioural changes in the long term based on the Safarni team's tests for the methodology and programme.[14] The intervention consisted of three sessions – (a) Diversity in the World, (b) Diversity in the City, and (c) Diversity in the Community – with children attending one programme session per week for a period of four months. Safarni engaged the parents at information sessions to also increase interaction with adults of the two target groups (migrants and Egyptians), and to encourage them to learn from their children's experience and be more accepting of differences. *Safarni* reached 150 parents and 180 children between the ages of 8 and 12 years who were both Egyptians and migrants of different nationalities, including Sudanese, South Sudanese, Yemenis, Eritreans, Ethiopians and Syrians. At the end of the programme, an assessment through the local educators and facilitators, in addition to a "body map"[15] – an assessment tool to measure children's impressions and perceptions of others of different nationalities and ethnicities – was conducted. The programme successfully achieved a 49 percentage point increase in Egyptian and migrant children's positive feelings towards migrants (increasing from 36% prior to the implementation of the programme to 85% after its conclusion).[16]

Within the framework of the project, IOM Egypt is replicating the Safarni initiative to expand its outreach in Cairo and Alexandria, while strengthening the ties between the Safarni beneficiaries and empowering the role of Safarni Alumni as agents of change.

---

[11] Click-funding-Video for the "Living Together Campaign", IOM Egypt, 2018. Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=PcenrufR7n8.

[12] Available at www.bbc.com/arabic/40888428 and https://bit.ly/3cbxGFo (both in Arabic).

[13] Available at www.aljazeera.net/news/lifestyle/2019/4/11/%D8%B3%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%8A%D8%B3-%D8%B4%D8%B1% D8%B7%D8%A7-%D8%A3%D9%86-%D8%AA%D9%83%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%BA%D9%86%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D9%84%D9 %8A%D8%AC%D9%88%D8%A8-%D8%B7%D9%81%D9%84%D9%83-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85 (in Arabic).

[14] *Safarni* Methodology.

[15] Body Map is a visual tool that is used to assess participating children's change in perception about the other nationalities and ethnicities, using drawing and colours as means of expression. The exercise focuses on body parts that reflect children's feelings and understanding of the other, including eyes, mouth, head, ear and heart.

[16] Regional Development and Protection Programme Annual Report.

36.5. Conclusion

Although it is everyone's responsibility to address the discrepancy between the current migration discourse and reality, the media have a special responsibility, both ethically and professionally, to uphold a nuanced and fact-based discourse on migrants and migration. Given the growing importance of migration in influencing the political landscape and policy debates around the globe, including along migration routes such as the Central Mediterranean Route, it is critical for the public to have access to accurate and evidence-based information. It is also vital to work on developing the critical thinking of future generations in Africa, as in the rest of the world, which is only possible through a diverse, balanced and well-equipped media.

Similarly, programmes aimed at increasing connectivity between host populations and migrants – especially when young – can contribute to reducing misconceptions and improving social cohesion outcomes. A systematic method should constitute a starting point for such interventions, as well as for assessing the appropriateness of replicating interventions across different communities (Michie et al., 2011). *Safarni* proved to be a successful behaviour-changing intervention in Egypt, relying on disseminating the behaviour and attitudes of children exposed to diversity (Ayres et al., 2013). Children are especially interested in and influenced by their peer groups, and peer-to-peer learning and collaboration are thus key to influencing narratives among this age group. However, the intervention in the Ard El Lewa community seems also to have brought about positive change in the behaviours and attitudes of children's parents towards the diversity in their own communities, suggesting that small interventions can have ripple effects across communities.

Ayres, I., S. Raseman and A. Shih

2013   Evidence from Two Large Field Experiments that Peer Comparison Feedback Can Reduce Residential Energy Usage. *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, 29(5)::992–1022. Available at https://doi.org/10.1093/jleo/ews020.

Boubtane, E., J.-C. Dumont and C. Rault

2016   Immigration and Economic Growth in the OECD Countries 1986–2006. Available at https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-01252406.

Chidester, D., P. Dexter and W. James (eds.)

2003   *What Holds Us Together: Social Cohesion in South Africa, Social Cohesion and Integration Research Programme.* Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), Pretoria.

Cloete, P. and F. Kotze

2009   Concept Paper on Social Cohesion/Inclusion in Local Integrated Development Plans. Department of Social Development.

De Wit, A.

2008   Introduction: Intuitive Interpretation of Social Cohesion. Unpublished lectures, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.

Geldenhuys, D. and J. Rossouw

2001   The International Protection of Minority Rights. F.W. de Klerk Foundation.

Hickman, M., H. Crowley and N. Mai

2008   Immigration and Social Cohesion in the UK: The Rhythms and Realities of Everyday Life. Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Available at www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/2230-deprivation-cohesion-immigration.pdf.

Idasa

n.d.   *Migration and Social Cohesion.* First Edition. Available at www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/migration%26social_cohesion1.pdf.

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

n.d.   African Migration to the EU: Irregular Migration in Context. Global Migration Data Analysis Centre (GMDAC) Briefing Series: Towards safer migration on the Central Mediterranean Route. Available at https://gmdac.iom.int/sites/default/files/03_-_residence_permits-bbb.pdf.

2019a   Student-Journalists Trained on Migration Reporting in the Gambia. Dakar Regional Office for West and Central Africa. Available at https://rodakar.iom.int/news/student-journalists-trained-migration-reporting-gambia.

2019b   600 Journalists Trained on Media Coverage on Migration, 25 in Côte d'Ivoire. Dakar Regional Office for West and Central Africa. Available at https://rodakar.iom.int/news/600-journalists-trained-media-coverage-migration-25-c%C3%B4te-d%E2%80%99ivoire.

2019c   *Journalist Guide to Media Coverage of Migration Based on International Law and Evidence – Tools, Practical Cases, Recommendations.* Tunisia Office, Tunis. Available at https://tunisia.iom.int/content/oim-guide-journalist-english.

Kretzmann, J. and J. McKnight
    1993   *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets.* ACTA Publications, Chicago.

McGeary, J. and M. Michaels
    1998   Africa Rising. *Time*, 30 March.

Michie, S., M.M. van Stralen and R. West
    2011   The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Science*, 6(42). Available at https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-6-42.

Monson, T.P., K. Takabvirwa, J. Anderson, T.P. Ngwato and I. Freemantle
    2012   Promoting social cohesion and countering violence against foreigners and other 'outsiders': a study of social cohesion interventions in fourteen South African townships. ACMS Research Report.

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
    2018   Human rights to live in harmony. 15 November. Available at www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/HumanRightsLiveInHarmony.aspx.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
    2011   *Perspectives on Global Development 2012: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World.* OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at https://doi.org/10.1787/persp_glob_dev-2012-en.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and International Labour Organization (ILO)
    2018   *How Immigrants Contribute to Developing Countries' Economies.* ILO, Geneva/OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264288737-en.

Pillay, S., V. Barolsky, V. Naidoo, N. Mohlakoana and A. Hadland
    2008   Citizenship, Violence and Xenophobia in South Africa. HSRC Xenophobia Study, June.

Protess, D. and M. McCombs
    1991   Agenda Setting: Readings on Media, Public Opinion, and Policymaking. Lawrence Erlbaum, New York.

Simpson, G.E. and J.M. Yinger (eds.)
    1972   *Racial and Cultural Minorities: An Analysis of Prejudice and Discrimination.* Harper and Row, New York.

Wagley, H. and M. Harris
    1958   *Minorities in the New World.* Columbia.