

Destination UNKNOWN

Championing the rights of children on the move

Stories

shape

societies



Creating new hope-based narratives about children, young people and migration:
Guidelines for communicators

This work is part of a new Destination Unknown initiative aimed at shifting to a more hopeful and positive narrative around children and young people on the move, creating more space for them to speak, and telling stories that create understanding, empathy and belief in the possibility of positive change.

We would like to thank all Destination Unknown members and partners involved for engaging in a truly collaborative and participative process to help us create this publication. We particularly want to thank the **Three2Six project** (three2six.co.za) and **Sophiatown Community Psychological Services** (sophiatowncounselling.co.za) in South Africa, and **Kopin** (kopin.org) and its partners in Malta, for their time, contributions, and insights. We are also very grateful to the members of our Editorial Group, **Alexandra Muntean**, **Louisa Peters**, **Nyasha Simon Dick** and **Randry Bigirimana**, for their knowledge and insights. Without their contribution, this work would not have been possible.

The publication was jointly written with **Kristin Hulaas Sunde** from PositiveComms.co.uk whose expertise and commitment to influencing global narratives on migration have been inspiring. Design by **Emily Sadler**, www.emilysadler.com.

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1. Introduction

About Destination Unknown

Destination Unknown is a global campaigning network that unites individuals and local and national organisations in championing the rights of children and young people on the move. It is led by Terre des Hommes International Federation.



Our vision is a world where children and young people can thrive, live safe from discrimination, and be free to pursue their dreams and a good future.

Creating new narratives



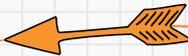
Destination Unknown will always speak out when governments and others violate the rights of children and young people who have been forced to leave their homes. We believe that by elevating their voices and using communication grounded in hope, more people will understand why children and young people migrate, empathise with their situations and experiences, believe that positive change is possible, and join us in creating it.

Methodology

Our journey towards creating new narratives about children and migration began by introducing the **hope-based communications method** to the Destination Unknown network in July 2020.

We gained further insight into current global and national narratives through a series of **creative workshops with professionals and young people in Malta and South Africa** - two countries where the public debate around migration is often deeply negative.

Based on these workshops, we developed sample messaging, narratives and content packages to test through online opinion research in Malta and South Africa. Finally, we used the results from our research to map out possible new directions for **telling positive, powerful and impactful stories and shape a better future for children and young people on the move around the world.**



Tip

Be clear about your goal.
Ask yourself: What do you want your communication to achieve?

2. Who these guidelines are for

These guidelines are intended as information and inspiration for anyone working with and communicating about children and young people who are migrating to seek protection, safety and a better future worldwide, including:

- children and young people affected by and interested in migration
- communicators, advocates, campaigners and others who want to reach new and existing audiences with impactful storytelling and campaigning that drives sustainable change
- journalists, social media experts, advertising specialists and others developing content and messaging about children, young people and migration.



3. How to use these guidelines

To make the most of these guidelines...



Read, download and share them



Share your own work with us - we'd love to hear from you



Use them to help develop your own creative ideas and storytelling about children, young people and migration



Help us improve potential future editions of these guidelines by emailing us your thoughts



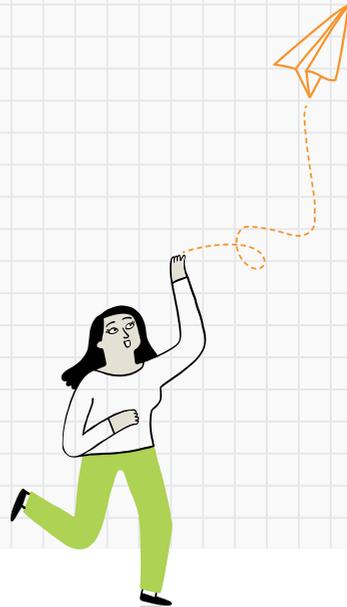
Read [our reports](#) from the opinion research to find out more

Get in touch! Email us:
info@destination-unknown.org

Tip



Think about distribution. Ask yourself: How will your communication reach the right people to help you achieve your goal?



4. Who are children and young people on the move?



'Children' means anyone under the age of 18.



'Young people' refers to individuals aged 18-24.



'Children and young people on the move' refers to children and young people moving voluntarily or involuntarily, within or between countries, with or without their parents or caregivers.

Why do children leave?

Like adults, **children and young people may leave home for many different reasons:** because of war, conflict and human rights violations, for environmental reasons like natural disasters, or for economic reasons or to further their education. Others are escaping abuse, neglect or violence.

While migrating makes life better for some children and young people, **being on the move can expose them to more violence, abuse, exploitation and trafficking, discrimination and stigma** – especially those who aren't with their parents or caregivers (so-called unaccompanied and separated children/minors).

**All the children
and young people
we support have
two things in
common: They
all want a place
to feel safe and a
chance to create
a better future.**

Who is a refugee or migrant?

Children, young people and adults who have been forced to leave their homes...

- ... and stay in their own country are **internally displaced**
- ... and flee to another country seeking protection from persecution (like torture) are **asylum-seekers**
- ... and are given asylum – or legal protection – abroad are **refugees**
- ... for other reasons are **migrants** (although this word is often used to describe people who are actually refugees or asylum-seekers).

Did you know?

People who go to live and work in another country are **migrants** too. They are sometimes also called **expats**.



There is no such thing as an **'illegal immigrant'** – we are all 'legal' with the same human rights.

'Irregular' or **'undocumented'** migration means crossing borders without official permission and key documents like visas and passports. You still have the human right to seek asylum.



Tip

Words matter, and no one likes being labelled. Instead of saying “migrant” or “asylum-seeker”, talk about “people forced to leave home” or “people seeking asylum”. That way you’ll also remind your audience that you’re communicating about human beings, not stereotypes.



Facts about people migrating and seeking refuge worldwide

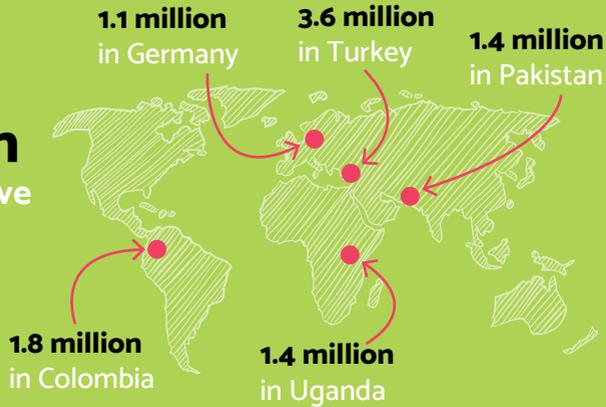
At the end of 2019,
79.5 million
people worldwide
had been forced to
leave their homes.

30-34
million
of these people
were under the
age of 18.

In 2019,
5.6 million
displaced people
returned home.

There were
26 million
refugees in the world
at the end of 2019.

9.3
million
refugees live
in just five
countries



Source: UNHCR, 2020

5. What are narratives, and why do we need new ones?

Narratives are stories created by the things we humans do and say all the time - in our own lives, in our societies, about other people and about our wider world. Our brains are hardwired for storytelling. People need stories to make sense of the complex world we live in.

The stories we tell each other shape how we think, our choices, and how we treat each other. **“Stories shape societies,”** is how Nyasha, one of our editorial members, summed it up.



So, what is today's global story, or narrative, about children and young people on the move?

Fear was a clear theme emerging from our workshop participants. Many saw political leaders, media outlets and others in powerful positions using racist and xenophobic rhetoric to paint people on the move – including children and young people – as threats.

By scaremongering about immigration, these players are creating negative narratives that anger and divide people, polarising communities and distracting attention from other important issues, like social justice, equality and peace.

Another important aspect of today's global narrative is the **disconnection, isolation and poverty** that affects so many of us right now – both refugees and people in host communities – and has been intensified by the impact of Covid-19.

In this story, the world's richest and safest societies are refusing to care for the youngest and most at risk among us – even those who are escaping some of the world's poorest and most dangerous places.

And in doing so, our societies are breaking old promises, tearing up crucial agreements – including human rights principles and international refugee law – and abandoning the values our global community has shared for many decades, like **dignity, equality, and respect**.

What's your story?



We all have our own interpretations of what's going on in the world around us. Here are some of ours. What are yours?

The wrong priority rollercoaster



We do have the resources to support children and young people seeking safety. The problem is that those who manage our resources have different priorities. They spend money on defence instead of on children, buying weapons that create more conflict and force yet more young people to flee. We're stuck in a cycle going round and round like a rollercoaster, and it will only stop when our priorities change.

Nyasha, Zimbabwe

Division and suspicion



It's like we've lost our ability to share, especially in rich countries. We forget how privileged we are. **We all have the same dreams, and we all want to pursue them.** Some of us have to move around to find opportunities, but then we realise that things aren't equal and that the opportunities aren't open to everyone. People have so much to offer and yet we look at each other with suspicion, as if we are stealing each other's opportunities.

Alexandra, Romania/Germany

No choice



Politics and violence cause parents to lead their children to a place of safety. Sometimes children have no choice but to follow. They have to run with their families – the choice is made for them. That's what motivates these young people – and the search for new hope.

Randry, Burundi/South Africa

Isolation and disconnection



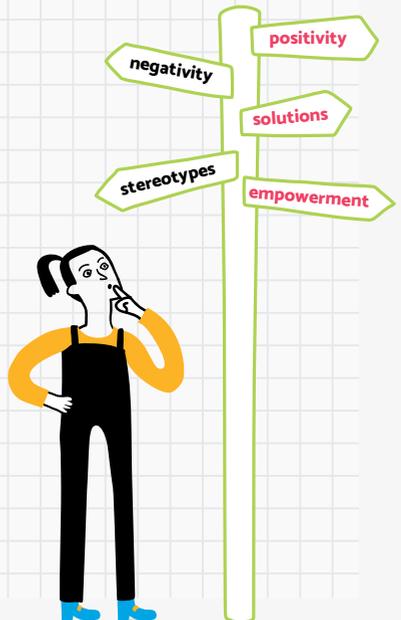
We are **isolating ourselves**, estranged from connections with people who don't share our lifestyle, divorced from the reality of people who are vulnerable – **we don't see how they are feeling**.

Louisa, Germany

Tip



What wider story or narrative is your communication feeding into? Ask yourself: Does it support the people you are campaigning with and for in an empowering, solution-focused way? Or does it unintentionally feed into a negative narrative that is reinforcing stereotypes and making things worse?



6. Using stories of hope to shape our societies

How do we change the current global story about children and young people on the move and create a better next chapter? This was the key question we asked throughout this project.

For us, the answer lies in something we humans also have an amazing capacity for, along with telling stories:

A thing called hope.

What is hope-based communication?

Put very simply, hope-based communication is a strategy for change. The aim of the method is to set our own agenda as human rights activists by creating new, **solution-focused narratives** of our own.

We can start by making these five simple shifts:



Step 1: Moving from fear to hope



Some politicians and media outlets rely on negative narratives, using fear to trigger emotions like suspicion and disgust, and a sense of crisis and chaos. Many human rights activists also use fear to create outrage, but instead we often end up triggering more fear. That's because **it's easy to trigger a fear response in humans**: our old 'survival-mode' brain is constantly scanning for threats to keep us alive.

To bring people with us we need to appeal to the part of people's brains where empathy and morality reside, alongside rational thought. **Hope** – the idea that things can change for the better – is the key to connecting to people with positive emotions like **joy, humour, compassion and empathy**.

Young people - their resilience, potential and dreams - are our sources of hope, and our heroes. Despite harrowing experiences, they are still fighting and hoping. They just want to go to school and are willing to climb mountains to get there. In this horrible situation where we're letting people drown and it's so bleak around us, **they are a ray of light**.

Workshop participant



Step 2: Say what you are for, instead of what you are against

We often focus our energy on saying what we are against, and what things are not, instead of what they are. Unfortunately, research shows that this often achieves the opposite of what we want. Because when we use negations, such as “seeking asylum is **not** a crime”, the word “not” doesn’t register in our brains. Instead, we subconsciously start linking people seeking asylum with crime.

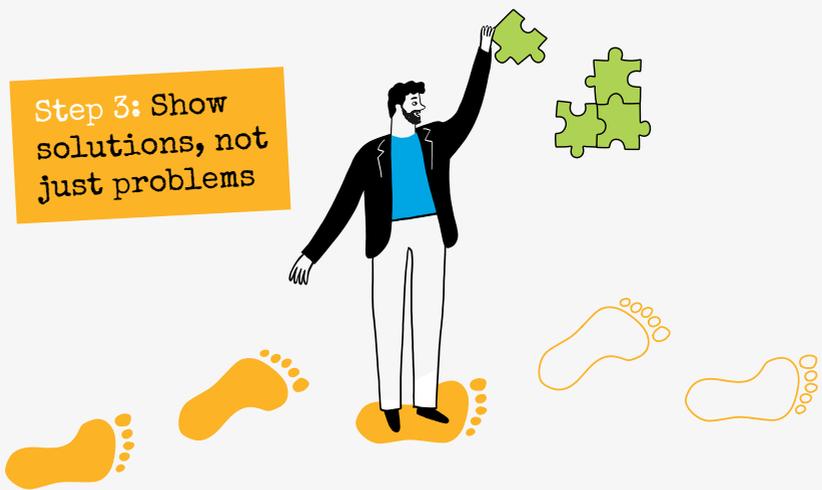
What should we do instead? **Talk about the values we stand for and the world we want to see**, and explain how we can make these real, together. In this way, we can show our audiences how our activism and campaigning can make things better for everyone.

Shared values expressed in our workshops to help frame our communications

Empowerment, resilience, unity, collaboration & cooperation, dignity, compassion, ambition, hard work and determination.

Stories of heroes rising can inspire others. In Africa there’s a spirit of **people coming together based on shared values**, for example, to look after a child who is orphaned or alone. This has been done traditionally and we can do it again. But the rise of nationalism is the elephant in the room. People take rhetoric from politicians into their lives - in Zimbabwe it has caused people to lose their lives. Stories shape our societies.

Nyasha



To bring people with us, we need to show **alternatives to today's problems**. Celebrating the good things we want to see in the world is as important as criticising the things we want to stop. Explaining what and who caused the problem, and what they or we can do to fix it, is also vital.

By using **positive, hopeful language, stories and images**, we can help people picture how our solutions will work in practice and understand how they can help make them a reality.

Instead of talking about the fear some people have that refugees come to steal jobs, talk about the **contributions** young migrants bring.

Randry

We want to see all children reach their full potential in life without any limitations. For this **we need global social justice, with the best interests of the child at the centre of every decision**.

Workshop participant

Step 4: Focus on the opportunity, not the threat



Instead of making people feel guilty or threatened, we can invite them to be **part of something special and successful**. Remember to show people how your work can make things better, paint a picture of the world you want to create, and explain how they can become part of making that change happen.

Preaching to the unconverted will be a game changer. Validating people's concerns to stop them feeling threatened and **finding common ground** with people who are not yet with us is essential - then governments will follow their lead.

Offering people opportunities to take a stand using shared values, and through initiatives that **create unity and fill knowledge gaps** about why refugees come and the roots of xenophobia.

Children on the move feel that they belong to the communities that they are in. They feel safe, are free to just be children, and able to pursue their dreams. Achieving this will enrich and benefit all our societies. **We want a world that feels like home to anyone.**

Workshop participants

Step 5: Show everyday human heroes, not powerless victims



It is easy to present people who are suffering as victims. Instead, we can show how **the people who need social change most, and those working with them to make it happen, are the real heroes of our stories.**

It is often easier to support and relate to people **when we see them as equals, with motivations and hopes that reflect our own.** Showing our audiences how people that they can identify with are doing the right thing, is also an effective way to get through to people and model behaviour.

The hope-based approach has changed how we use stories. Now we showcase how people have been shaped by their complicated stories to become stronger, with the **power to fight for their dreams.** It is important to tell the sad parts of people's stories, but it is also vital to frame our communication around people's love for their families, the drive to get an education, their ability to move on, thrive and become changemakers in their host communities. **Stories matter and solutions are empowering.**

Alexandra

7. Testing new narratives

For this project we collaborated with young people and professionals working with and for children and young people who have migrated to South Africa and Malta.



Through a series of workshops, they shared their perspectives on **current narratives**, their experiences of **working in often very hostile political situations**, and their ideas for new ways to **change negative attitudes and overcome problems**.

We used their insights to develop new messages that we then tested through qualitative opinion research in South Africa and Malta, alongside content sourced from our network and partner organisations.

Participants in our opinion research responded to surveys and completed different activities during moderated discussions over three days. Topics of discussion included participants' own **worries and hopes, attitudes to children and young people who migrate, sports and teamwork**, and themes including **unity and resilience, education, work and ambition, safety and belonging**, and the **reasons why children and young people migrate** from other countries.

Their insights helped us see which types of stories worked well - or not - in their particular context.

Here is a summary of the most successful narratives we tested. To read the full report from our opinion research, [have a look here](#).





What we learned:
South Africa

Most of our participants were worried about the impact of Covid-19, as well as unemployment, corruption, crime, drugs, gender-based violence, and violence generally. Many felt a sense of hope because of their families, as well as the opportunities that every new day brings.

Fairness

Many people expressed empathy with children and young people on the move, and some pointed to the many problems that also affect South African children. In a country where many feel pressures to compete for scarce resources, many respondents felt that **demonstrating fairness between host communities and newcomers** was important.

More economic security for the lower income households will most definitely foster greater tolerance to migrants. The lower income groups tend to misdirect their frustrations so helping them economically will definitely yield greater tolerance.

Female aged 18–30

Hopeful journeys

We tested people's assumptions about why people come to South Africa by showing them written stories about two young people seeking asylum. While both had experienced significant hardship, **the story ending on a hopeful note, with positive future prospects for the young man's future**, generated more sympathy. Some felt that the other story, which focused mostly on a young woman's traumatic experiences in her home country, was too harrowing to engage with.

Challenging stereotypes

Learning more about the reasons why people migrate was a big eye-opener for many. A story about Maya, a young Syrian woman who started a podcast featuring refugees' stories of survival, hope, and inspiration, was very well received and challenged many participants' assumptions and stereotypes about young people on the move.

Unity, community and Ubuntu

Stories around **team sports as a form of integration were very well received** as an allegory of how to help newcomers find their place in host communities. A video featuring Ode Fulutudilu, who arrived in South Africa as a refugee and became the first female to represent the country in Spain's top football league, was particularly popular.

The South African concept of Ubuntu can translate as 'humanity' or the wider idea that "**I am because you (or we) are**". This idea resonated strongly with our South African audience. Watching a video about an education project for refugee children in their own city, Johannesburg, also led some participants to express pride in their local community.



Good messengers

Videos featuring relatable messengers modelling ideal behaviour struck a powerful chord. Many saw a grandmother and a fisherman who welcomed refugees on a Greek island as heroes, **doing the right thing based on shared identity and universal human values** – including the concept of Ubuntu.



I am also a grandmother so this story speaks to me. When you have nothing else to give, love is all it takes to make a difference.

Female aged 61–70

They gave people love, courage and hope.

Male aged 18–30

We need more villages like this everywhere with kind-hearted people who care... This video has awakened an interest to become more involved and I would like to know more about them.

Female aged 41–50

Sacrifice, hard work and ambition

The story that resonated most with our South African participants was a [video about Rihanna](#), a girl from Ethiopia living alone with her siblings in a Kenyan refugee camp. **Rihanna is able to go to school and pursue her dream of becoming a doctor** because her older sister is taking care of the family.

Her sister's **generosity and sacrifice**, combined with Rihanna's **drive and ambition**, greatly impressed our participants, especially amid narratives about “other” migrants and refugees as people who “take”.

They and all refugees deserve all the help they can receive. Wonderful that despite the hardship there is determination to gain an education and succeed to make the world a better place.

Female aged 61-70

Tip



How well do you know the context you are communicating in? The more you understand about the local landscape, the more chance you have of finding good ways to reach the people who live there.





What we learned:
Malta

As well as being worried about Covid-19, many Maltese respondents shared a feeling that the island is overcrowded. This impacted negatively on some participants' views on immigration. Many also expressed concern about the environmental impact of local construction and heavy traffic.

Several people felt uncomfortable about increasing racism at home and abroad, while others felt Maltese values are under threat because of multiculturalism. Many were worried about corruption and lacked trust in public institutions.

People often drew a **sense of hope and pride** from content that showed **people being kind and establishing a good new life in Malta** after experiencing hardship.

What gives me hope is how change can happen quickly within our society and we can adapt to new ways of living. There is no one way of doing things and people have shown to be resilient in times of crisis.

Male aged 31-40



Tip

It is easy to make assumptions about how your audience will interpret your messages and imagery. Try testing different approaches to see what works well - or not - and use the learnings to shape your strategy.

Integration through education and sports

Most participants expressed empathy with children migrating to Malta, and the impact of this upheaval on their young lives. Several people mentioned the **need for better integration through education**, including by newcomers learning Maltese and avoiding adults transferring their own racist attitudes to younger generations.

Language barriers can be one of the biggest issues for a child to fit in the society... It is usually not the Maltese children themselves who choose to be racists, it is more due to pressure from parents and other adults.

Female aged 51-60

Most felt that **children are more welcoming and better at cross-cultural socialising than adults**. Kids' natural openness to diversity was also reflected in discussions around using sports and team building to integrate newcomers:

I would highlight the benefits of having more players, more skills and the strengths that they may bring to the team.

Male aged 31-40

The children should consider the new members as a vital addition, without whom success is not possible.

Female aged 18-30



Speaking the same language

The importance of **young people learning English and Maltese** came up repeatedly. Many participants appreciated that players on a cross-cultural football team had learnt to speak Maltese. They were also very positive about a local project through which volunteers offer newcomers language classes.

It's nice to see that others care to break the language barrier. This shows how discrimination can be tackled bit by bit.

Female, aged 18-30

The **value of speaking the same language** was also reflected in most people's warm responses to [a video featuring two refugees](#), Agnes and Dali, telling the interviewer their favourite Maltese word and food.

By **successfully combining many elements** – including humour, a trusted, well-known local interviewer, generating empathy through telling their challenging personal stories, and reflecting positively on Malta as generous host nation – **the video created a lot of common ground** which won most respondents over.

Very, very touching. They open up realities that for us, are unthinkable. It is unthinkable for a person to be treated as a criminal because he's gay, or for a woman to be treated like a slave. Does listening to them in any way change [my] perception of the reasons young people come here seeking refuge? Yes, it does! It proves that when someone really wants it, integration is possible.

Female aged 31-40

Loving your neighbour

Because Malta's population is 94% Catholic, we tested stories around Pope Francis' outspoken words and actions in favour of welcoming refugees. Some of these provoked cynical responses, often directed towards a wealthy Church seen as telling others to share their resources.

However, several people also seemed to draw feelings of **hope, solidarity and empathy** from the commandment to 'love thy neighbour', as well as from traditional prayers and stories.



Hard work and ambition

Many people liked the story about a young Somali man, Timo, who found a job with a local Maltese company. They admired his **strong work ethic, desire to learn and friendly relations** with his colleagues, and praised his employer for creating a welcoming atmosphere.

Many refugees come over to Malta with nothing to show for their education and they end up doing low-income jobs which no one wants to do. These schemes identify their abilities and suit them up with good jobs. Employers should take the example of this company. Instances like these should be more advertised to show the success stories.

Male aged 31-40

Like in South Africa, [Rihanna's family's story](#) of **sacrifice, drive and ambition** also resonated well in Malta.

8. Creating new narratives

When we embarked on our journey to find new narrative routes about children, young people and migration, we didn't know what we would discover. We knew that positive, solution-focused storytelling grounded in hope has worked well on other issues and campaigns, but we didn't know if this would also work for this project.

Overall, based on the feedback from our opinion research and our workshop participants, we are encouraged to see that the **hope-based orientation works well as a campaigning tool for children and young people on the move.**

Framing a young person's story of seeking safety in a way that is **imbued with hope for the future** clearly can make others see them in a different light, change negative attitudes and counteract fear and scaremongering.

Telling a new global story

So, what could a new, hopeful, global narrative about children and young people on the move look like?

Based on what we've learned from this project, it's clear that many people believe in every child's right to a good, safe childhood. We want to raise our young people in a world of opportunity, where they are free to develop their talents, rewarded for their hard work, and able to play a meaningful part in their communities.



But many of our children have had their chances of a safe childhood stolen - by conflict, poverty, violence or natural disaster. Forced to leave home by terrifying events outside their control, they have to make difficult, traumatic journeys towards unknown places and uncertain futures.

To recover and start new lives, these young people need safe, stable places to settle down, learn, make friends and fit in.

And around the world, many communities are coming together to welcome and support newcomers like them in inspiring ways. But at a time when so many of us face hardship and live in fear of what the future holds, we can't be expected to do that work alone.

That's why we urgently need to see a new kind of leadership from our politicians and governments.

As the most powerful players among us, it's their job to make sure our resources are shared fairly between us instead of just benefiting the lucky few. They have the power to bring people together for our common good instead of driving us apart.

With their support, we can create a world where all our children can thrive, no matter who they are or where they were born. Because when everyone is able and willing to play their part, we all win.



So where do we go from here?

The above is just one of many possible ideas for creating a new narrative about children and young people on the move using hope-based communication.

The stories you tell will differ depending on where you are based, who you are communicating with, and what you want to achieve.

However, we hope that these guidelines will equip you with enough tips, clues, tools and inspiration to start creating and testing new storytelling routes that will work in your context and for your particular audiences and purposes.



Tips

Here are some final tips based on what we've learned to help you along the way

- ➔ **Focus on young people's potential to succeed** by sharing stories showing what can happen when children and young people have the support they need to thrive.
- ➔ **Build your stories around impressive or sympathetic protagonists**, or everyday heroes, who people can admire, and choose a messenger that your audiences can easily relate to.
- ➔ **Be strategic and smart about your content** – the nuances really matter. Do your images reflect your message and story in the best possible way, for example?
- ➔ **Think about what can weaken your message and how it can be misinterpreted.** For example, could it unintentionally make your local host community feel like the outsider?
- ➔ Stress test your communication by **playing devil's advocate.** What are the tough questions people will ask when they see it?
- ➔ Be aware of narratives around scarcity and navigate them by showing that **resources can be shared out fairly between locals and newcomers.**
- ➔ Avoid relying on facts alone or assuming that people will accept a purely logical argument. While our communication should always be correct and factual, we also need to **appeal to people's emotions** to help them feel empathy and see new perspectives.
- ➔ **Steer clear of using negative frames** to make your argument. For example, talking about a “refugee crisis” can create the impression that refugees are causing chaos and that our societies can't cope.

- ➔ Instead, you can show that **welcoming people in an orderly way by respecting international law can work well in practice**. And that upheaval is precisely what happens when we tear up our vital historical agreements and accept living in a fearful, divided world.
- ➔ **Don't dismiss national identity or cultural pride as automatically negative elements of a story**. Some of our respondents felt deeply proud to see South Africans or Maltese people showing kindness and generosity. Others were delighted to see newcomers appreciating their culture and customs and giving something back to their adopted country.
- ➔ **Be sensitive to your current context**. For example, no matter how powerful your story is, using a photo alongside it of people without masks during a global pandemic can turn people off.
- ➔ **Test, learn and refine your communication** based on how your audience engages with it, and the results it brings. Good communication is a two-way, continuous process.
- ➔ **Keep up the good work!** Creating new narratives takes time and effort as you build trust and confidence in the stories you are telling among new groups of people.
- ➔ **Collaborate and share with others in the same field**. When we work together, we are stronger, with more chance of creating powerful and sustainable change.



Find out more

[Destination Unknown](#)

[Terre des Hommes International Federation](#)

[A guide to hope-based communications](#)

[Hope-based comms: Further reading](#)

[Words that work – making the best case for people seeking asylum](#)

[Narrative power & collective action – conversations with people working to change narratives for social good](#)

Follow [@letstalkmigration](#) on Instagram for more information from the United Nations Major Group on Children and Youth on Migration and on their #MoreThanMigrants campaign



Sources

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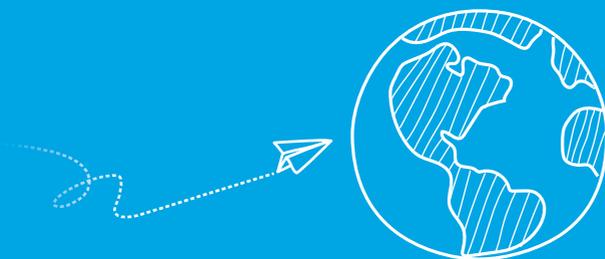
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