

Annual General Conference (AGC) 2017

Tallinn, 16-18 October 2017

Workshop: Communication Beyond The 'Ivory Tower'

Background document

The reactions to the increased number of migrants and asylum seekers to Europe culminating in 2015 from politicians at EU and national level is best described as a 'self-inflicted political crisis' – an uncoordinated 'race to the bottom' to escape responsibility and prevent arrivals at any cost. Border fences, push backs, detention, deportations and externalisation of protection through deals with often instable third countries illustrates a deteriorating political will to protect basic human rights and respect international law. As NGO's we cannot depend on traditional direct advocacy alone.

We have to 'take the battle to the streets!'

The panic reactions of our politicians are largely caused by and legitimized through the idea that they reflect extreme concerns in the European populations. However, public opinion studies are – although diverse across Europe - pointing to the fact that the radically negative attitudes towards refugees and migrants among European populations is not the consensus, in fact they are represented by a small but loud and influential minority as also illustrated through recent election results in European Member States like Holland, Germany, UK, France and Austria.

We have a potential audience!

KEY STRATEGIC QUESTIONS:

Communication is not the last step of the work-chain - simple distribution of already defined messages and material. Tweet, post, send, publish this report, joint statement, statistic etc. All efficient communication is based on some initial considerations and without being conscience of them we run the risk of becoming repetitive, irrelevant and self-referential rather than strategic.

Target audience:

Who do we target?

The segments of the people with categorically strong sympathy for refugees and preferences for universal human rights and people with categorically strong antipathy for refugees and highly sceptical human rights institutions, actors and law are comparatively much smaller than the segments of the so-called 'mushy middle' – people with a more complex and open perspective.

- » **The already converted:** are relatively easy to reach and mobilize as they are highly engaged and knowledgeable and likely to follow refugee related topics and organisations
- » **The sceptical hardliners:** are possible to reach as they are likely to follow the topic of refugees but difficult to engage in dialogue and extremely hard to convert
- » **The undecided:** relatively difficult to reach as they are much more diverse and less likely to have a prefer-

ence for the topic but they do represent the potential for change

Tone of voice:

How do we address them?

A little simplified it is possible to identify three main advocacy/communication positions with corresponding tones of voices across the 'refugee NGO sector' each of them also with a specific representation of refugees, migrants, asylum seekers.

- » **Activistic approach:** raising a voice to condemn injustice in strong vocabulary. Has the appeal of clear position and rightful indignation but little potential for dialogue.
- » Represents refugees as 'eternal victims' of injustice: *"cynical EU politicians are allowing migrants to die on the Mediterranean..."*
- » **Elitist approach:** educating the audience of human rights challenges through legal terminology. Has the ability to deliver complex messages but little potential for addressing non-expert audience.

Represents refugees as statistics or legal categories: *The Court found violation of Article 13 ECHR in conjunction with Article 3 ECHR due to lack of effective remedies to complain about the detention conditions for asylum seekers in the transit zone..."*

- » **Sentimental approach:** appealing to emotions through human interest narratives. Has the capacity to engage through identification but limited potential to deliver complex or multi-layered messages.

Represents refugees as thankful objects of our assistance: *"13 year old Mohammed's eyes are shining with gratitude as he talks about his dream for the future. Thanks to (ORGANISATION) he is now attending school in a refugee camp..."*

Strategic messaging:

What are we convincing them of?

Again a little simplified, there are three main lines of argumentation from NGO's on accepting, protecting and assisting refugees and migrants.

- » **Moral argument:** Establish that Europe cannot live with the shame of failing people in need – our policies are cynical and their consequence is human tragedy and loss of European identity and heritage.
- » **Legal argument:** Identify violations of individual human rights and human rights law in policy and practise explain their consequences and argue for solutions/improvements based on universal standards.
- » **Pragmatic argument:** argue that the comparatively small influx of migrants and asylum seekers to Europe is manageable represent a potential financial gain or that current policies are destructive for EU agenda – security, political influence etc.

Distribution Channels:

How do we reach them?

There are roughly four channels of communication in which NGO's target the public often used in some kind of combination especially for larger and well-funded campaigns.

- » **Organisational platforms and outlets (website, SoMe, reports, Newsletters etc.):** the benefit of total control of messages but with a very exclusive audience by definition mainly representing the 'already converted' segment of the broader population.
- » **Press work:** the advantage of relatively broad outreach but external media are of course less reliable and more selective. Our background information and quotes need to be adjusted to fit news criteria.

- » **Public ads, posters, banners:** provide the combination total control of messaging and broadest possible outreach but is extremely costly and has lesser credibility than external media. Audience is random and messaging must be adapted to the very short attention-span of the audience.
- » **Public events, happenings, demonstrations:** allows interaction and direct dialogue with our audience but also less control given the unpredictable interactivity. Also comes with challenges of either a very local outreach or (if covered by media) less control of framing.

NEW APPROACHES:

What are the challenges and potential?

To counter the disproportionate political influence of the narratives of the populist far-right NGO's and civil society organisations are forced to increase their ability to influence and mobilize the public. There are changing ideas, initiatives and perspectives out there but changing the way we communicate not only present new opportunities but also dilemmas to be addressed and discussed.

- » **Refugee voices:** how do we facilitate further inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers, migrants without patronizing or romanticising them?
- » It is positive that NGO's are increasingly including refugee voices in their communication but the tendency to reduce them to eternal passive victims in need of our help or identify them by individual overachievers are as problematic and misleading as the scapegoating and negative generalizations we are trying to counter – however well intended ultimately confirming the idea of 'them' and 'us'
- » Including them as what they are: people as diverse as the rest of us rather than the media for our messages - would require also 'allowing' opinions, perspectives and convictions we do not necessarily share
- » **Mobilizing new partners:** How do we engage with private partners without compromising our independence and messages?
- » There is a general positive trend of CSR partnerships between NGO's and private cooperation's/businesses including communication/branding components and mutual campaigning. However, the incentive to focus on communicating achievements and success can potentially influence choice of topic.
- » Insisting on less appealing or more controversial topics and messages could potentially cost of funding and outreach opportunities
- » **Unconventional joint messaging:** How do we capitalize on unexpected allies without compromising our identity and brand?
- » It is positive that NGO's are increasingly looking for external allies beyond the classic celebrity ambassadors, likeminded politicians at EU and national level, friendly journalists etc. Examples of new allies are security actors, political right-wing at local level and CEO's from the business world.

These unlikely alliances can be very efficient in carrying our messages but comes at the risk of alienating our core supporters and beneficiaries.

- » **Public opinion strategies:** How do we make our narratives more efficient without jeopardizing our positions and credibility?
- » It is positive that NGO's are conducting and using public opinion studies to efficiently target and broaden their audiences as well as their ability to convince. However, there is an evident risk of influencing the substance of our communication.
- » It is vital to strike the delicate balance between what are the popular messages and what are the most pressing issues.

POTENTIAL OF COORDINATED ECRE INITIATIVES:

With 99 member organisations in 40 countries the ECRE membership represents a voice to be reckoned with and the potential of joint messaging or mutual campaigning is self-evident.

CURRENT STATUS:

A few examples of what we are doing now?

#ShareOurEurope campaign: the campaign was designed to achieve four interlinked strategic aims and Member organisations have been invited to share content through the ECRE Media Officers Network (EMON):

- » To create a more diverse and engaging flow of content for the ECRE Facebook page
- » To present a positive alternative narrative to the harsh political discourse on migrants and asylum seekers
- » To introduce unedited and authentic voices of Europeans with refugee background
- » To widen our audience and mobilize them in favor of Member organisations, grass root initiatives and individuals of European and refugee background willing to make a positive difference

Involvement, reach and interaction:

- » The campaign has featured 12 ECRE Member organisations, refugee led organisations and grass root initiatives from across Europe.
- » The accumulated reach (the same individuals can have seen more than one post) of the campaign 12 posts is 119.031 people and the average post had a reach of 9.920 people.
- » The accumulated number of likes, shares and clicks (the same individuals can have interacted more than one post) is 12.829 with an average interaction of 1069 by post.
- » **ECRE Sharepics:** we have distributed Sharepics through the EMON group in appealing graphic design but stripped of ECRE logos to make them adaptable to Membership strategies.
- » **#DirtyDeals:** on the anniversary of the EU-Turkey deal included 8 sharepics with messages on the deal, its consequences and the situation in Turkey.
- » **#ASYLUMLOTTERY:** on the challenges of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) based on new information and statistics from ECRE's AIDA database included five Sharepics distributed to the EMON group along with newly published AIDA reports.
- » **#JHA:** reminding Justice and Home Affairs Council to endorse child migrant rights included three Sharepics distributed to EMON group prior to summit in June.
- » **#RefugeeDayQ&A:** based on the new format of short ECRE policy notes pointing out weaknesses and dysfunctions in the Common European Asylum System CEAS included four Sharepics sent to EMON group along with ECRE policy notes.

ECRE Weekly Bulletin: the bulletin has around 12.000 direct subscribers - EU and Member State politicians, Brussels based journalists, human rights actors and organisations and academics + SoMe exposure ECRE Twitter: 14.500 followers and ECRE Facebook: 21.700 followers.

- » **Articles:** often include quotes and background information from Member organisations with relevant local knowledge and insight.
- » **Op-ed's:** 6-800 words in the form of opinion pieces with a clear and critical angle *by commentators with relevant experience and expertise in the field who want to contribute to the debate on refugee rights in Europe. A number of Member organisations have contributed to this format.*
- » **Interviews:** we conduct interviews from time to time with key-actors on 'hot topics' related to the rights and protection of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. It is our intention to feature more Member organisations in the future.
- » **Reports:** articles present or refer to new and relevant reports from Member organisations on regular basis based on news criteria and relevance for our audience.

Press referrals: ECRE receives weekly requests for interviews, background information – legal analysis, statistics etc. from Brussels based and leading international media on a broad selection of topics. When relevant and mutually beneficial we refer to Member organisations for information at the national level and we coordinate messaging on controversial or sensitive issues.

CHALLENGES MOVING FORWARD:

Although the diversity in terms mandate, strategy, resources, geography and political context across the Membership is a strength there are a number of interlinked strategic challenges in cooperating across the network not least when entering unknown territory (in the context of ECRE) of public campaigning.

The balance of support, facilitation and initiative from ECRE secretariat:

What is the preferred role of the ECRE Secretariat and what are the criteria in terms of priorities?

The balance of specific and generic messaging:

What is the preferred strategy in terms of topic's – specific and exclusive or generic and inclusive?

The balance of available resources and level of engagement:

What is the potential for involvement given the diverse resources and strategic priorities across the Membership?

The balance of control and involvement:

What is the best way to ensure efficient coordination and input from different Member Organisations?

RESEARCH LINKS ON PUBLIC OPINION COMPILED BY MIGRANT POLICY GROUP:

<http://www.migrationnewsheet.eu/features/policymakers-be-as-bold-as-your-constituents-and-support-a-welcoming-europe>

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/03/03/the-dutch-arent-turning-against-immigration/>

http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/findings/ESS7_toplines_issue_7_immigration.pdf

http://www.economic-policy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/992_Refugees-and-Asylum-Seekers.pdf

<http://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/46245>

<http://www.economic-policy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/HATTON-Immigration-Public-Opinion-and-the-Recession-in-Europe.pdf>

LINKS TO ECRE PLATFORMS AND OUTLETS:

ECRE RESOURCES AVAILABLE:

The ECRE Daily Press Review: provides a daily (Monday to Friday) overview of European media stories related to the rights and protection of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. We will start distributing to all of you but in case you don't want to receive it please write Senior Communication Coordinator Villads Zahle vzahle@ecre.org

The ECRE Weekly Bulletin: provides a weekly overview of the most important developments at EU and national level across Europe related to the rights and protection of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in the form of editorials, interviews, Op-ed's and articles.

Subscribe [here](#)

ELENA Weekly Legal Update: provides information about important developments in international and European asylum law. The update covers the asylum-related judgments of the European Courts and domestic case law as well as asylum legal news from across Europe. Relevant training courses, calls for papers, and other important announcements are also advertised.

Subscribe [here](#)

ECRE publications & Short Policy Notes: are available at: <https://www.ecre.org/>

The Asylum Information Database (AIDA): is a database managed by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), containing information on asylum procedures, reception conditions, detention and content of international protection across 20 countries. This includes 17 European Union (EU) Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Germany, Spain, France, Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom) and 3 non-EU countries (Switzerland, Serbia, Turkey).

The European Database of Asylum Law (EDAL): is an online database managed by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) providing free access to key asylum and refugee case law from 19 European States as well as jurisprudence from the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The Database furnishes summaries of relevant jurisprudence in both English and the Member State's national language, providing a link and/or pdf to the full text of the original judgment where available.

ECRE Social media: [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)

OPEN FORMATS:

ECRE Weekly Bulletin (11.500 direct subscribers + social media distribution): Ideas for articles, topics or Op-ed's from members are a very welcome feature – please write Senior Communication Coordinator Villads Zahle vzahle@ecre.org

Examples of Op-ed's:

Niels Rohleder: Denmark's Red/Green alliance: [Danish chairmanship of the Council of Europe to weaken the European Convention on Human Rights](#)

Cavidan Soykan: Turkish academic former associated with ECRE member Mülteci-Der: [The EU – Turkey Deal One Year On: The Rise of Walls of Shame...](#)

Polish Helsinki Committee: ECRE member: [Draft amendment to the law on protection of foreigners – another step to seal Europe's border](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/TheECRE/photos/a.430042507227.215101.107028942227/10156337508232228/?-type=3&theater>

Facebook: the ECRE #ShareOurEurope campaign welcomes any ideas or contributions portraying individuals, projects or organisations (preferably including refugee voices) representing a welcoming Europe please send ideas to Senior Communication Coordinator Villads Zahle vzahle@ecre.org

Examples of posts:

#ShareOurEurope: [150.000 Danes mobilize for and with refugees](#)

#ShareOurEurope: [From unaccompanied to well connected](#)

#ShareOurEurope: [What happens when a group of strangers comes together to help asylum seekers stranded in the streets of Brussels?](#)