

THE RELATION BETWEEN MIGRANTS AND THE MEDIA¹

As stressed in the second meeting of the European Integration Forum in November 2009, **public perception** is a key issue for integration and the media plays an important role in shaping public perceptions. Therefore, it is crucial to work with and on the media in order to improve the way they portray immigration.

The relationship between migrants and the media is not an easy one. The media often choose to speak of sensational news also involving immigrants and do not necessarily portray migrants in a neutral, balanced and accurate way. According to the European audience research, immigrants themselves do not feel that they are being equally and fairly represented².

Migrants may have difficulties understanding their **host country's media environment**, including different levels (global, national, regional and local); formats (TV, radio, print and internet); ownerships and audiences. They can thus find it difficult to communicate to the media and to find the most appropriate media organisations and partners to work with. This can result in mutual distrust between migrants and the media.

Aware of the importance of public opinion in the integration process, the Commission introduced a media-related priority in the 2009 Call for proposals for Community Actions to be financed by the **European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals**. Indeed, priority 1 reads: *"Gather public and migrant perceptions and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the integration processes."* Among the specific objectives of this priority, one can find to *"promote knowledge and understanding of contributions that migrants make to European societies and the benefits of legal migration"* and to *"enhance the capacity of media to reflect the increasing diversity in the European societies and foster understanding of immigration and integration stories and processes"*³.

In June 2010, the Council agreed "to recognize the **positive aspects of migration**, especially in the context of the economic and financial downturn within Europe, and to continue to promote methods that help to fight racism and xenophobia and all forms of discrimination in our societies."⁴

Workshop 1: Training the Media to Communicate about Migrants

In the first workshop participants will discuss how the media can improve their communication about migrants. The objective is to reflect on what media professionals could do to bring more **diversity** to the media and to improve the quality and accuracy of news and stories involving migrants.

¹ This background note is based on the third edition of the 'Handbook on integration for policy-makers and practitioners', chapter 2: 'Mass media and integration' (pp. 25-47)

² Findings of the Migrants in the Media project: www.tuningintodiversity.eu

³ The 2009 Call for Proposals is available at

http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/funding/integration/docs/call_for_proposal_2009/call_proposals_2009_en.pdf.

Selected candidates will be notified during the summer.

⁴ Council document 9248/10, formal adoption of the Zaragoza Declaration.

Diversity is not always well reflected in the media, both in terms of representation of migrants and in the composition of media staff. Communication about migrants could improve with more diverse media able to report stories from different perspectives. In order to improve representation of migrants in the media environment, it is important to offer migrants opportunities to join the media industry.

Member States and regions have developed initiatives to improve the quality of information about migrants. Some professional **guides** advise not to mention ethnic group, skin colour, country of origin, religion or culture if they are not necessary to understand the story. They also recommend avoiding simplification, dramatisation and sensationalism.

Migrants often draw heavily on the Internet, on local community media and on transnational satellite television for their information, especially when seeking news on critical stories such as the Danish cartoons, the troubles in French suburbs and the Iraq war. One of the reasons is that they seem to have more **trust** in them than in the Western media⁵. If communication about migrants is not improved, there is a risk of increasing division between a mainstream audience and an immigrant audience, resulting in the constitution of two separate blocks of population receiving different information and developing different conceptions of society.

Workshop 2: Training Migrants to Communicate in the Media

The second workshop will look at how immigrants themselves – migrants' organisations and representatives – could **improve how they communicate** with the media and intervene efficiently to ensure that media-coverage on immigration is accurate.

An efficient communication with the media requires good knowledge of the host media environment: main actors, legislative framework, users and labour market. Civil society organisations and migrants' associations should 'map' the host media environment before planning their **communication strategy**.

If media coverage of migration-related news can be criticised, journalists reply that it is notably due to the fact that they do not have easy access to alternative information or to the views of migrant communities⁶. Migrants' organisations could **help journalists** by ensuring the effective dissemination of well-written press releases and necessary contextual information. They could also make sure that their websites offer updated, relevant and user-friendly information.

Open questions

- How can the media better serve integration?
- What concrete steps would you suggest to bring more diversity to the media?
- How would you help migrants' organisations to better communicate through the media?
- What could the EU do in this domain? Could you suggest concrete EU initiatives?

⁵ Migrants in the Media project, Description of the content of the project, Annex 1 of the Grant Agreement

⁶ Report of the workshop "Alternative information", available at www.tuningintodiversity.eu