

## Why a reframing approach?

### How this toolkit can help campaigners do better in the migration debate

This toolkit targets progressive campaigners and activists/advocates wishing to better engage the middle sections of society in order to push back the mainstreaming of populist narratives and put diversity and inclusion back on the agenda. There is a broad realisation that the standard approaches of only arguing facts and rights is not serving the progressive agenda, and as more and more populists influence the migration debate in Europe, we need to try something different to rebalance the public discussion. The toolkit was developed under ICPA's project, 'Reframe the debate! New migration narratives for constructive dialogue' (2017-2019) as part of the [Demokratie Leben](#) programme, supported by the [Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth](#) and [Social Change Initiative](#). Initial toolkit research and development work was kindly supported by [Open Society Initiative for Europe \(OSIFE\)](#) and our reframing video by OSIFE and [Robert Bosch Stiftung](#).

Europe in general is our main focus for these guidelines with a greater emphasis on Germany and UK as these are the countries in which we have most hands-on experience. However, we also draw on practice from the USA and at the global level, and as we see that the narrative challenges in the debate are often quite similar, we do hope the toolkit can offer some useful campaigning insights for many.

#### THE CHALLENGE

### Populist narratives are gaining ground in the mainstream migration debate and beginning to set the boundaries of acceptable policy choices

The migration debate in Europe is becoming increasingly polarised with more and more mainstream politicians not saying what they need to or adopting 'othering' narratives that scapegoat and blame refugees and migrants for larger societal problems (real and imagined)<sup>1</sup>. This mainstreaming of an anti-migrant discourse presents a danger to progressive values because the public narrative sets the boundaries for politically 'acceptable' policy choices<sup>2</sup>. So, if the only story around migration is one of threats, chaos and invasion, then the only solutions on the table will be security, fences and exclusion. This is why it is key that progressives find a way to broaden the boundaries of the debate to include the values and frames of diversity and inclusion.

### Standard progressive responses are missing the mark and getting angry responses

Seeing the challenge as straightforward, pro-migrant advocates have tended to argue rationally, around an approach squarely based on facts, myth busting and rights. These arguments don't seem to resonate with the broader public: in fact, campaigners often get dismissive, angry responses. Some report the approach comes across as arrogant and lectury, with audiences left feeling that we think them a bit stupid or even a bit racist<sup>3</sup>.

Getting angry responses in public debates means that many spokespersons/campaigners are understandably pulling back and staying out of the discussion, as they don't know how to respond and increasingly end up restricting their engagement to getting angry themselves and preaching to the converted.

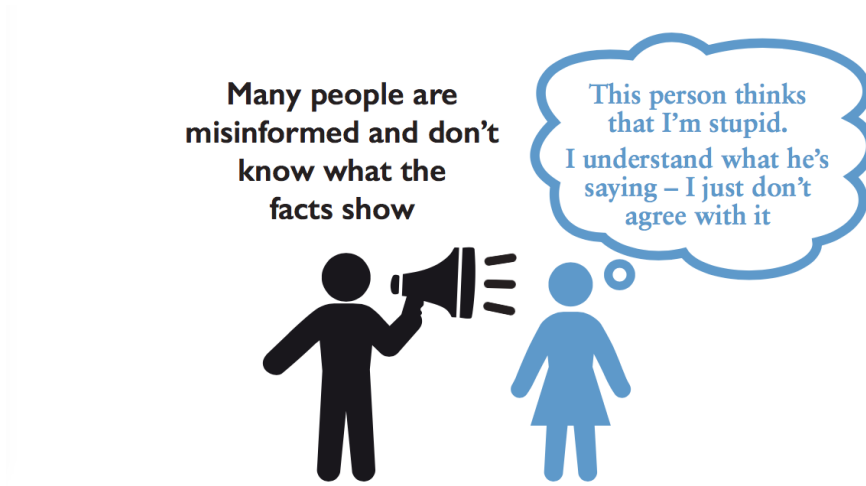


Figure 1 - Angry responses to standard approaches (British Future 2014)

### **Progressives often group all those outside their own group as “opponents”**

Progressive campaigners tend to see those outside their urban, liberal, supporter group in a rather negative light. However, in the wide spectrum of those outside of vocal supporters, there is a large segment of the population who are not that involved, knowledgeable or frankly interested in such debates, but are nervous and can be motivated by the fears raised by populists. These are often called the “movable” or “anxious” middle. This group should be a big target for progressives as they can be convinced and mobilised to help push back the populist mainstreaming process.

SO WHAT CAN BE DONE?

How progressives can do better in the migration debate



## Reframing the debate and campaigning to engage the public

The approach at the heart of this toolkit is based on established theory and international practice of narrative change campaigns built around a reframing approach (see [our definition](#)). In emotionally charged discussions such as the current migration debate, the values, concerns and emotional investment of stakeholders become an important gateway to real dialogue and engagement<sup>4</sup>. Such an emotionally smart, narrative change/reframing approach usually involves the following elements:

- Acknowledging the legitimate concerns of the target audience;
- Building the campaign on shared, positive, unifying values;
- Focusing on the affective, telling stories of experience, wishing to create a warm feeling that easily engages the audience, feels nearly like common sense to them, and ultimately is appealing to the heart rather than the head<sup>5</sup>;
- Leading with solution-oriented, resonant messages that engage the audience, and trigger feelings of familiarity and warmth;
- Leading with positive, solution-oriented, resonant messages that engage the audience, and having built warm familiar feelings, then adding an element that challenges audiences to think differently, i.e. adding an element of dissonance. This is the opening that such an approach creates;
- Listening, asking open questions in a reasonable and civil manner that allows for a constructive dialogue on the issues, building a space for a clear defence of progressive positions.

The power of a reframing approach is that you build your appeals on community-owned stories and values that easily resonate and from there, through an open and inclusive process of listening to each other's conversations, you can actually quite forcefully challenge populist views.

## Focus on groups we can win over in this debate – "the movable middle"

Campaigners need to be strategic in deploying the reframing approach with a group that you can win over, and also at a scale where winning them over can tip the balance in the public discussion. This is why our focus in the toolkit is on the so-called 'movable middle'. In most European countries, this is between 60% to 70% of the population who are not that involved, informed or engaged in the issue, but are susceptible to mainstream media agendas, i.e. they are movable.

Of course, this also means having a much more complicated view of those outside our supporter group and a willingness to engage this group in campaigning efforts. This approach may not be suitable for all, but the minimum needed is an understanding and support for those who choose this path and recognition that this is a key part of the fight.

## Both/And, NOT Either/Or – We need to better engage the middle AND the other segments!

One caveat: while we are advocating for the need to better engage the middle, this does not mean that campaigners should give up engagement of other segments, i.e. the message is we ALSO need to engage the middle. This may be challenging for one organisation to do all, but working in a coalition and/or analysing what allies are doing is a good way to find a path that suits you. Frank Sharry from [America's Voice](#) (and other sources<sup>6</sup>) say that tactics need to focus on the whole spectrum of opinion in the following manner, as depicted in the diagram below:

- Work to empower the base/your supporters
- Engage the middle
- Define and marginalise the strong opponents<sup>7</sup>.

## A [strategic communications approach](#) is needed to achieve the goal of resetting the boundaries of the public narrative

While our focus in the toolkit is on putting together single campaigns, the question of what we can expect to achieve in a single campaign effort often arises. The simple answer is not enough if the goal is to reframe a much broader public debate on a divisive issue. With a view to realistic outcomes, there is a straightforward need for campaigning work to continue and get stronger and louder over a long period of time. Such an approach is often called strategic communications, and again quoting Frank Sharry, the idea is that you need to create "surround sound" and "volume and velocity" of your messaging to tip the balance.

### ELEMENTS OF THE TOOLKIT

A core part of our work since 2017 is directly supporting progressive campaigners in the development of narrative change campaigns, and this toolkit is based on the campaigning practice and lessons we have learned from this German experience and international partners/campaigners. The toolkit provides step-by-step practical campaigning advice, case studies and tools to assist and inspire the broader community interested in developing or supporting campaigns that harness the untapped potential that exists through engaging and reshaping positions on the migration debate in the middle.

The toolkit is grounded in a multidisciplinary view of public advocacy, framing and agenda setting from the fields of political communication<sup>8</sup>, behavioural economics<sup>9</sup>, cognitive linguistics<sup>10</sup>, social psychology<sup>11</sup> and negotiation<sup>12</sup>, but the main focus is on how such insights have been more practically applied in international campaigning practice in migration work<sup>13</sup>.

The Toolkit features the following 6 elements:

Why a reframing approach	Reframing guidelines	Campaign Cases
Rationale and overview of the campaigning approach	Practical guidance on step-by-step campaigning advice based around the Narrative Change Campaign Planning Process and real campaign cases.	Documenting practice - an overview of campaign cases we develop in detail through the toolkit .
Core lessons	Core resources	Toolkit FAQ
Breakdown of the central campaigning lessons into '12 Keys' to understand the basics of the narrative change/reframing approach	The planning tools, worksheets and resources needed at various stages of the campaign planning process	We take on the big questions that arise when adopting a narrative change, reframing approach.

You can use the toolkit by dipping in to answer specific questions or understand the elements, approaches and practice of the narrative change campaigning approach. You can also be much more ambitious and follow the step-by-step approach outlined in the guidelines in the development of a full campaign.

- 1 Hope not hate (2017) [Going Mainstream: The mainstreaming of anti-Muslim prejudice in Europe and North America](#). & Pew Research Center (2018) [5 key takeaways about populism and the political landscape in Western Europe](#). & Cas Mudde (2016) "[Europe's Populist Surge: A Long Time in the Making](#)." Foreign Affairs. Vol. 95, No. 6, p. 25-30.
- 2 Crompton, T. (2010). Common Cause. The Case for Working with our Cultural Values. UK: WWF-UK & Fischer, Frank & Herbert Gottweis [eds.] (2012) The Argumentative Turn Revisited: Public Policy as Communicative Practice. Durham: Duke University Press & Kahneman, Daniel (2011). Thinking, Fast and Slow. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. & Scholten, P. & F. Van Nispen (2008) "Building Bridges Across Frames? A Meta-Evaluation of Dutch Integration Policy". Journal of Public Policy 28/2, p.181-205.
- 3 Institute of Public Policy Research (2014)[Alien nation? New perspectives on the white working class and disengagement in Britain](#) & British Future (2014) [How to talk about immigration](#).
- 4 Fischer, Frank & Herbert Gottweis [eds.] (2012) The Argumentative Turn Revisited: Public Policy as Communicative Practice. Durham: Duke University Press & Scholten, P. & F. Van Nispen (2008) "Building Bridges Across Frames? A Meta-Evaluation of Dutch Integration Policy". Journal of Public Policy 28/2, p.181-205.
- 5 Ganz, Marshall (2011). "[Public Narrative, Collective Action, and Power](#)." Accountability through Public Opinion: From Inertia to Public Action, edited by Sina Odugbemi and Taeku Lee, World Bank Group, 2011, pp. 269-286.
- 6 Working Narratives (2013) [Storytelling and social change: a strategy guide](#).
- 7 Organisations like [HOPE not Hate](#) (UK) and the [Southern Poverty Law Centre](#) (USA) have a significant focus on marginalising such extremists.
- 8 Entman, Robert M. (2003) [Cascading Activation: Contesting the White House's Frame After 9/11](#), Political Communication, 20:4, 415-432. & Druckman, J. N. (2001). On the limits of framing effects: who can frame? Journal of Politics, 63, 1041-1066. & Scheufele, Dietram A (1999) 'Framing as a theory of Media Effects' in Journal of Communication, Winter 1999, p.103-122.
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- 10 Lakoff, George (2002) Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. & Lakoff, George (2014). Don't think of an elephant!: know your values and frame the debate : the essential guide for progressives. 2nd Edition. White River Junction, Vt, Chelsea Green Pub. Co.
- 11 Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U., Seifert, C. M., Schwarz, N., & Cook, J. (2012). [Misinformation and Its Correction: Continued Influence and Successful Debiasing](#). Psychological Science in the Public Interest, Supplement, 13, 106-131.
- 12 Stone, D., Patton, B., & Heen, S. (2000). Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most. New York, N.Y: Penguin Books. & Ury, W. (1991). Getting past no: Negotiating with difficult people. New York: Bantam Books.
- 13 US – [America's Voice](#), [Frameworks Institute](#), [The Narrative Initiative](#), [Welcoming America](#) & UK – [British Future](#), [HOPE not hate](#), [Migration Exchange](#), [Social Change Initiative](#)