
Migreat!
Handbook:
Creative
approaches
to changing
the
narratives on
migration
through
visual tools



MIGREAT!

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Migreat! Handbook - Creative approaches to changing the narratives on migration through visual tools

This is a guide about collaboratively working with migrants to develop visual media (short films, posters etc.) that challenge negative narratives about migration. Visual tools can be an effective means of communicating messages, especially with the growing influence of social media in shaping public opinion. The guide is intended for school teachers, trainers, adult educators and activists. We hope that it will be useful for our fellow practitioners, to learn from our experiences, use the tools, share them, and hopefully feel inspired to do similar work. The guide aims to show, step by step, how you can produce a tangible result, the visual tool, to create alternative narratives and take action against discrimination.

The learnings and case studies shared here are drawn from the Erasmus+, Migreat! project in which practitioners in Italy, France, Hungary, and the UK worked with participants (adult migrants) to develop their own narratives. It was important to all the partners to create activities that serve to listen, genuinely and deeply, to what these alternative narratives were, not assume we know as practitioners and push the same old counter-narratives.

In this handbook we lay out steps and examples that aim to support practitioners to find new ways to free the participants' creativity, and to actively seek alternative narratives. It is not our intention to set out rules to follow but rather to share our experiences and invite other practitioners to experiment, adapt and improve on the participatory approaches we have presented here.

WHAT WE DID: OVERVIEW

To develop our counter-narrative tools, we followed these steps:

- 01 Get a group together**

Assemble a group of participants to work on the project including people with lived experience of migration and/or community members uncomfortable with the dominant narratives on migration.
- 02 Explore narratives**

Participants explore, discuss and analyse prevalent narratives about migration in mainstream discourse. Talk about what we like and dislike about these narratives and where we feel alternatives are needed.
- 03 Choose your narrative**

Participants decide collectively what narrative, tone and framing they want to produce in their group, taking into account what audience they want to reach and what impact they want the visual output to have. For example, in Italy, the group wanted to avoid 'sad stories' but opt for "ironic and funny" ones.
- 04 Create the visual tool**

Each group works together (sometimes with the help of outside professionals with relevant experience e.g. video making) to produce videos and posters

OUR VISUAL TOOLS

Organisation	Visual tools created
Giolli (Italy)	<p><u>Short videos</u> (2-4 minutes each) representing real stories of people who have been negatively stereotyped or experienced a discriminatory act. Participants chose to tell the stories in a funny and ironic style. The stories are all connected and were shared as a series on social media.</p>
Elan (France)	<p><u>Posters</u> based on the message: “The migration process is not simple and each journey is unique”. Each poster contains a QR code linked to an audio of the person sharing their story.</p>
EFA London (UK)	<p>A <u>campaign video</u> based on the message ‘It’s difficult to learn English, the government should give us more help’ which shares the stories of four English language learners in London.</p>
Nyitott Kör (Hungary)	<p>A) Two short videos: ‘<u>Ármin’s Dream</u>’ and ‘<u>He could thrive</u>’, which humanise their refugee protagonists living in camps in Hungary. The basic idea and concept of the visual tools were devised by the Drama Deutsch group.</p> <p>B) Hungarian minority group members from Nyitott Kör creatively developed a <u>thinglink platform</u> through a self- and co-facilitated collaborative process. The thinglink platform is an interactive poster, which includes various multimedia products. QR codes as stickers were printed and disseminated in Budapest’s public spaces and beyond.</p>

HOW TO DO IT

This handbook leads you through a series of steps to develop a participant-led visual tool. It goes through getting a group together, exploring what narratives are out there in society, deciding what narrative you want to focus on and what kind of visual tool you'd like to develop.

STEP 1: GET A GROUP TOGETHER

Invite people with migrant backgrounds to work on the creation of visual tools. Groups of language learners work particularly well because the notions of narrative, audience and purpose are questions of language and literacy as well as equality and fighting discrimination. However, it could just as easily be migrant rights campaign groups or support groups. The higher the trust and sense of community in the group, the easier it will be to collaborate effectively. Groups with pre-existing relationships of trust are easiest to work with, and partners who had to assemble groups from scratch faced an additional challenge, though they made it work!

If you are working with a new group, combine the stages listed below with activities to build trust and help people get to know each other. There are some ideas for these activities in [Changing Migration Narratives The Migreat Project Guide: concepts, methods, activities and good practices](#), chapter 3.1, community/group-building, page 48.



Giolli Cooperative on their experiences of initiating the project: “We carried out the meetings in Italian but allowed for linguistic inclusion, as far as was possible. We took care to contact each participant individually, introducing ourselves (if they did not already know us), introducing the Migreat! project and proposing the activity. We welcomed their questions and reassured them about the open atmosphere they would find. We asked for their preferences and availability in terms of times, days and methods: three of the four focus groups took place online, only one in person, in a city park.”

STEP 2: EXPLORE NARRATIVES

We feel it is important not to start by asking people about the dominant (generally negative) narratives but to start by sharing thoughts and experiences about the topic of migration in general. We start with what we think and only then move on to what others say and why.

EXAMPLE ACTIVITY 1: EXPLORING NARRATIVES WITH A PICTURE PACK

Introduce the topic of migration to the participant group using a picture pack (a pack of photos and pictures that you spread over the floor – or a digital version of this). Lay out pictures on the table and ask participants to choose one that reminds them of (or that they feel is connected to) the word migration. Tell the group that they will use their picture to say something about the topic. The picture is just a starting point, a way of stirring the imagination. Participants might start their turn with “This picture made me think of...” or “This picture reminded me of...” The participants can share a feeling, an anecdote, an opinion etc. It’s often helpful to ask people to speak in pairs before speaking to the whole group. It can be a difficult and emotional topic (see below) as well as an important and valuable one. It can be good to remind participants to only talk about experiences that they are comfortable sharing with the group.



Some examples from the digital picture pack used by Elan

The picture pack serves to activate participants' imaginations and validate their experiences. Next we need to turn their attention to the concept of narratives - by no means a simple idea but inherent in all of our societies. In order to build on what participants' already know we propose asking them what is meant by the word 'narrative' - one way to do this is by using a simple word association flower.

EXAMPLE ACTIVITY 2: NARRATIVE WORD FLOWER

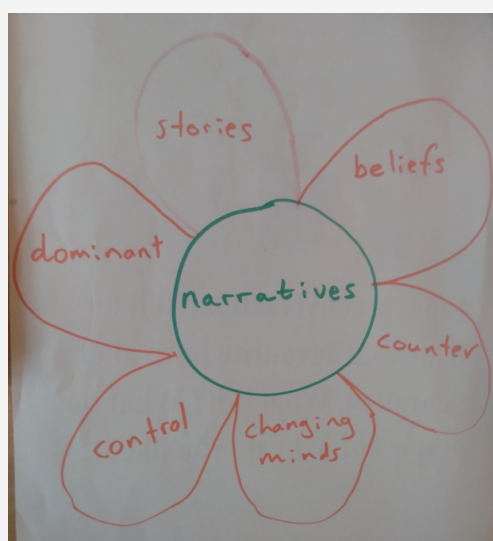
Ask the participants to make groups of fours and hand each group a piece of flipchart (or large sheet of paper) and marker pens. Instruct them to draw a circle in the centre of the page and write "narratives" in the circle. This is the centre of the flower, round the centre the group will add petals. Inside the petals they write words and phrases they associate with the word narrative, eg. "stories", "opinion", "domination", "resistance", "changing minds" etc.

Each group shares their word flower with the larger group and a whole group discussion follows picking up on some of the big questions like "what's the difference between a narrative and story?".

Finally present the definition of narrative that we are working with on the Migreat! project:

"Narratives are stories that circulate in societies. They emerge from shared social beliefs and also act to reinforce them, while guiding decisions and actions of individuals and groups. They depict reality in a partial way, through a particular point of view. Some of them are more dominant than others, but that can change."

Write this on the board or print it on slips of paper and ask the group to digest it in pairs. Some people will need help with translation. Ask them to put this definition in their own words. Or if you are familiar with theatre techniques, ask them to make a body image of the definition in groups.



Example word flower from EFA

Having defined narratives, it's time to ask 'so what are the narratives around our topic, migration?' Again we did not want to frame this as simply, 'what are the negative things people say about migrants and migration' so we propose a more open-ended activity such as example activity 3:

EXAMPLE ACTIVITY 3: CONSIDERING THE RANGE OF NARRATIVES ABOUT MIGRATION

In this activity participants work in groups of three or four and generate migrant narratives in four categories:

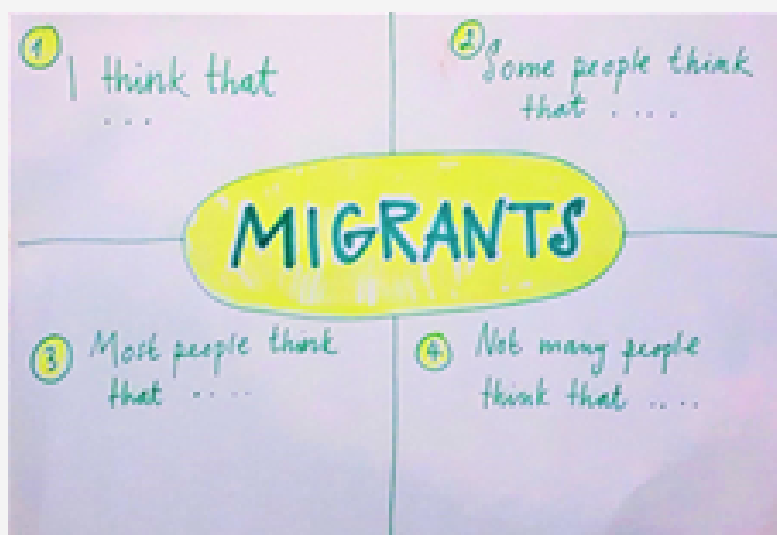
“Some people think...”

“Most people think...”

“I think...”

“Not many people think...”

This enables people to generate positive and negative narratives, but it does begin to focus the group's attention onto dominant/negative narratives.



Example of framework used by EFA

After generating the different narratives, analyse one or two of them that are particularly relevant to the group. You can ask questions like::

- Are there any other narratives associated with this narrative?
- Who does this narrative affect?
- Where have you seen/heard this narrative? Are there any organisations or groups who promote it particularly e.g. newspapers, politicians, campaigning groups?
- What does it make you feel?
- What other impact(s) does it have?
- Do you agree or disagree with the narrative?

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT FOR PARTICIPANTS OF EXPLORING NEGATIVE NARRATIVES

This differed depending on local contexts and the participants in question:



Samira, a practitioner from Hungary: “It was not an easy process, because the dominant narratives are not a past story for the Hungarian context, but they are present in the everyday, and I felt that participants needed to distance themselves from these thoughts. They wanted to live their lives, concentrate on practical things, like work and study, and not think too much about the local society’s negative attitudes, because the whole thing was still kind of a trauma for them.”

In Italy, a participant reported that Giolli’s workshop was very useful from her point of view, because it allowed her to be in a safer space where she could share her experience and think. She believed that our workshops could “play a role in changing narratives while being empowering to participants”.

At EFA, in London, we chose only to explore narratives that participants introduced themselves (which were mainly positive), rather than to bring in negative narratives that participants may have previously been unaware of. Additionally, although we discussed dominant narratives with a large range of our participants, we then developed the visual media with a self-selecting smaller group who were particularly interested in working on this.

STEP 3: CHOOSE YOUR NARRATIVE

Next, turn the group's attention to 'what we want to say' and to whom. This can be in direct response to a dominant narrative the group particularly object to or could be a narrative the group feels is not well-known and they would particularly like to communicate.

TIP: *If you select a negative narrative that you want to challenge - think up a positive alternative or counter narrative that does not replicate the original negative narrative. This is because communications research shows that restating a narrative reinforces it, even if you are only restating it to say that it's not true! E.g. saying 'Migrants are not criminals' actually reinforces the idea that migrants are criminals, because it still associates the words 'criminals' and 'migrants' in people's minds.*

Think about what you want the tool you're creating to do: who might your audience be and what impact do you want the visual media to have on them? Depending on the group, a discussion about what 'audience' means might be vital. It was a relatively new concept for some participants.

Once participants understand what we mean when we talk about 'audience' it's time to consider who your audience might be. To decide which group you want to focus on you can think about:

- Who is most easy for you to reach?
- Who can you most easily persuade?
- Which audience would create the biggest impact if you changed their mind?

TIP: *The 'moveable middle' – If this comes up naturally in your discussion (it did with one of our groups), then you can introduce the idea of the 'moveable middle'. On one extreme you have the people who already agree with you. On the other extreme, you have the people who are never going to change their minds. If your approach is to target people in the middle and bring them over to your side, you need to consider: who are they? How do you identify them?*

Next, get participants to explore together what they want their audience to think, feel and do as a result of seeing the visual tool. For example, what EFA participants wanted their audience to understand was 'migrants work hard to learn English. The government should give them more help'.



Example from EFA London's digital Google Jamboard exploring possible ideas for a campaign video. At this point EFA participants had chosen their audience, possible campaign allies, people who support and perhaps already take action on migrants' rights but might not know much about English classes for migrants (ESOL). The group considered the questions: 'what do we want our audience to feel?', 'what do we want them to do?', 'what do we want to show?'

Note: EFA participants found it quite difficult to narrow down what we wanted our audience to 'do' when they saw the visual tool. Participants said open things like 'help us' and 'support us'. There may not be a particular action you want your audience to take - and that's ok. When an opportunity for action comes in the future then the visual tool might have primed the audience to act in a different way (voting, signing a related petition, challenging friends' and family's views).



Elan, France: “At the end of the process, we agreed on the narrative we wanted to tell: “The migration process is not simple and each journey is unique”.”



In Hungary, Nyitott Kör involved an Iranian artist, Abouzar Soltani in the participant group, who as a refugee lived in a camp with his son. The ideas were brainstormed by the group (4-6 participants on weekly occasions for 3 months), and then creatively designed and recorded by Abouzar, mentored by Samira of Nyitott Kör, and edited by Helia Chaichi, a 17 year old member of the participant group, who has ambitions of becoming a multimedia artist.



Giolli Cooperative, Italy: “After our long discussion, interspersed with life stories, examples of campaigns that for the group were successful and functional alongside campaigns that we didn’t like at all, in terms of either form or content,

the result was to focus on irony and speed, the “displacement effect”. We want to strike a chord and make anyone, even people like us, smile about the endless opportunities for misunderstanding or, better still, for slipping into prejudice.”

Image right: “We asked each person to position themselves around the theme that was strongest and most heartfelt for them and on which they would have something to say to a wider audience.”



The story and audience you select will also guide what format of media you want to use (cartoon, video, animation, poster, meme, etc.) although you may also choose this based on the skillset of members of your group e.g. if someone has video editing skills already. Discuss the pros and cons of different visual tool formats.

STEP 4: MAKE THE VISUAL TOOL

There are two main ways that you can create the visual tool:

- Work with a professional or a creative team to develop the tool together with your participants or alternatively, send them a brief for them to produce the tool.
- Participants develop the tool themselves drawing on skills of individuals within the group.

Decide which approach you want to take, based on your organisation's capacity/resources and your participants' preference.



EFA London: "The biggest challenge was deciding the content and format for the video, given that everyone had slightly different ideas and so much to say. EFA hired a videomaker to help facilitate some scripting sessions and then a videographer to film. A core group of four participants wrote the script with the support of their teacher and the filmmaker, and all four are featured in the video, expressing how they feel about learning English in the UK and what they feel needs to change. The video is influential in its authenticity. It was created by ESOL students to talk about language learning, which is one of the major issues facing migrants and refugees in the UK (and across Europe)."



Nyitott Kör: "Our group was really sure that they didn't want to contract a professional. They felt that they had all the necessary capacities to create the visual tool themselves, and that it would be more powerful and more authentic if it was created by the group."

TIP:

Test your visual tool – On social media, you can test the effectiveness of different tools by creating two slightly different versions of the same tool and seeing how they perform with the same audience. Testing is not essential, but it is recommended by communications experts and it creates an interesting learning experience for participants.

FURTHER READING

- [The Migreat! project blog](#)
- [Changing Migration Narratives – The Migreat Project Guide: concepts, methods, activities and good practices](#)
- [The Bluffer's Guide to Framing](#)
- [Article by Sunder Katwala revisiting 'How to talk about migration' report.](#)
- [Guide to framing from the Public Interest Research Centre.](#)
- [Asylum Seeker Resource Centre report about changing discourse in Australia about asylum](#)

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