



Ad-Hoc Query on “framing of migration in the media”

Requested by NL EMN NCP on 30 October 2014

Reply requested by 28 November 2014

Summary prepared for NO EMN NCP on 5 February 2015 of responses from Belgium, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovak Republic, Croatia and Norway

Disclaimer: The responses were provided primarily for the purpose of information exchange among EMN NCPs in the framework of the EMN. The contributing EMN NCPs have provided, to the best of their knowledge, information that is up-to-date, objective and reliable. Note, however, that the information provided does not necessarily represent the official policy of an EMN NCPs' Member State.

1. Background Information

In the Netherlands, the issue of immigration is heavily contested in the public arena. In the public-political debate different actors use different images - also called frames - to portray immigrants. The Dutch authorities are interested in this public debate about immigration, and are currently in the process of developing a more pro-active communication strategy. One of the aims of the Dutch Directorate of Immigration Affairs is trying to create a more evidence-based debate about immigration and asylum. It would be worthwhile to learn from other Member States how they deal with the public opinion when an issue relating to immigration appears in the media. In addition, information about the relevant actors and the image of the national immigration authorities in the territories of the various member states is wanted.

The questions asked concerned the image about their operations that national immigration authorities are trying to communicate, misunderstandings that they would like to clarify, the most active actors in the public debate on migration and asylum, policies designed to strengthen public support for the immigration policies, research concerning the ‘framing om immigration in the media’, the public image of the immigration authorities existing among the public, the type of social media that are used by the government to inform citizens about immigration and asylum policies and practices.

Responses

Only one of the responding countries said that there is no specific communication strategy in effect, but it seems safe to assume that this is likely to be the case also for most of the countries that did not respond to this query. In 8 of the replies Ministries are mentioned as being involved to a larger or lesser extent in formulating and implementing the communication strategy, while 6 replies mention the executing agency (immigration authority). In 3 replies there is reference to both a Ministry and an agency.

Words used to describe **the image** that the national immigration authorities are trying to get across to its citizens about the way they operate include transparency (4), human (2), professional (3), truth (3), and it is said that the information strategy aims at creating policy support (3), consensus (1) as well as provide information for users (applicants and their references).

Among the **misunderstandings** in the public debate that the authorities would like to clarify are mentioned that the decision processes are arbitrary (3), closed (1), politicized (1) and inefficient (2). That the country is not an immigration country (1) and an overestimation of the number of immigrants or asylum seekers (4) are also mentioned, as are the notion that many or all asylum seekers are criminals (3) and that asylum seekers and immigrants generate very high financial and other costs for central and/or local authorities (3).

Most frequently mentioned as the **most active actors in the public debate** on migration and asylum are various types of NGOs (11), government authorities (9) and politicians (9). Other types of actors frequently mentioned are the media (7) and researchers (7). Local representatives of international organisations were mentioned by 4 replies, and lawyers only by one.

Specific policies pursued to enlarge public support for the government’s immigration policies were mentioned in 7 replies. In very general terms they seem to take the form of information campaigns of various types (4). Contacts with immigration groups (2), the education of media (1), a special publication (1) and research (1) were also mentioned.

References were given by 5 replies to recent or ongoing **research about the public framing of immigrants** and the decision-making body, and another 6 replies gave references to research about public perceptions to immigrants and asylum seekers and attitudes towards these groups without saying to what extent these studies addressed to what extent these perceptions and attitudes had been influenced by the media’s framing of immigrants.

Most of the replies (8) signalled that in the **public debate the images of the immigration authorities** would depend on the attitude towards immigrants and asylum seekers: thus the attitudes that the authorities both are too strict and too lenient co-exist.

That the government is using social media on a regular basis to inform its citizens on the subject of immigration and asylum was reported in 8 of the replies, and one reported that social media had been used on special occasions. Most replies said that more than one of these were used, and the most frequently used were Facebook (7) and Twitter (7). One reply said that Facebook had been dropped as it was not considered useful for the intended purposes. Among the others social media mentioned by at least one reply were LinkedIn, Google+ and Flickr.

Comment

Most of these replies were quite comprehensive, but several give the impression that it probably is misleading to talk about a coherent government policy to frame the public discussion on migration and asylum. It is probably for the best that the main objective seems to be to provide a correct and realistic understanding about immigrants and asylum seekers, how many and who they are, as well as about the government authorities work and capacity to regulate immigration and handling asylum applications.