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COVERING MIGRATION: CHALLENGES MET AND UNMET A LOOK AT SWITZERLAND

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations
Berne, 16 May 2013

OUTCOMES- RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations regarding improving the media's coverage of migration were proposed by the participants of a seminar organized by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), in partnership with the Club Suisse de la Presse held in Berne on May 16, 2013 called **“Covering Migration: Challenges Met and Unmet, a look at Switzerland”**. At the seminar, top migration experts and media professionals came together to share ideas on best media practices and ways to support journalists as they turn these practices into habits when covering migration related issues.

These recommendations come at a time of unprecedented mobility. There are presently 214 million international migrants according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). As there is not one country in the world not involved or concerned with migration – either as a point of departure, a destination, a transit location or some combination of those three – these suggestions are of immediate relevance. Migration and resulting diversity are an integral part of today's global society.

Participants agreed on the assessment that the media has, now more than ever, the capacity and access to shape and influence public perceptions through its coverage. The media's reach and ability to influence public opinion makes it vital for journalists to fully understand the subject they cover, as well as their audiences, in order to secure the most accurate, balanced and informative reporting possible.

Participants hold that the key to improving migration coverage begins with developing and honing journalists' knowledge of the subject. To fully comprehend the situation of migrants or those affected by migration, participants propose more synergies, networks and partnerships between the various actors to improve the coverage of migration. This includes synergies between mainstream and migrant media, between the media, experts (including in newsrooms) and international organizations, and the creation of networks of journalists who specialize in the coverage of migration.

For the necessary changes in migration coverage to occur, **the media as a whole has the largest role to play**. Journalists and editors alike must pay close attention to how they use the information acquired in their reporting and reinforce good media practices when covering the issue. The media should encourage newsroom diversity and reward journalists for quality coverage of the issue.

While the media undergoes this adjustment in daily practices, **the help and support from governments and non-governmental organizations** is crucial. Their support can provide a framework for shaping a more positive discourse, increase access to data and support media outlets financially to allow quality reporting. Governments and NGOs also have the ability to simplify the job of journalists by providing easy access to documents and people that will enhance the content in media reports.

Following the discussions, participants made recommendations in the following four areas:



1. Encourage a working knowledge of migration by journalists when reporting on migration

a. Organize more **regular trainings** on migration coverage with the help of organizations such as the UNAOC, journalists associations and other organizations involved in the issue.

b. Create modules or professional degrees on migration issues in journalism schools

c. Help journalists **specialize in migration coverage** to help create more expert media professionals.

d. **Offer journalists a media-friendly glossary** of terms in multiple languages to ensure specificity and accuracy in their word choice. This is especially important in characterizing (and categorizing) migrants.



2. Establish networks, synergies and outreach on the issue and between key actors

a. Ensure **all Swiss journalists and mainstream media** are mobilized in trainings and not just journalists already interested in the question

b. **Facilitate dialogue and forge formal and informal links between journalists, experts and other partners** (ie reliable migrant networks, bloggers, etc) in the field of migration through seminars to help journalists meet partners who could become sources and provide background information..

c. Establish international/ national and subnational **networks of journalists** covering the issue or having an interest in the issue and ensure continuity in trainings

d. **Multiply synergies** between mainstream, and migrant media, with press agencies, journalism schools and the artistic world

e. **Convene experts to newsrooms** (economists, historians, lawyers, statisticians, etc) in order to enhance a reciprocal and fruitful approach of direct exchanges at the place where information is being produced.

f. **Enhance the flow of information** and provide data, facts and figures, statistics



3. Reinforce good media practices in media coverage of migration: media action

a. Encourage **diversity in newsrooms** by employing journalists of migrant origins and/or minority origin to bring different perspectives and to enable them to use different sources and resources for a fuller, more balanced coverage.

b. Find a **balance** between securing a gatekeeper (with possible sanction, even just symbolic) by the Swiss Press Council and respecting freedom of the press

c. **Reward journalists for quality coverage of migration**, for instance by creating a national or international award for the best example of migration coverage, as well as giving due recognition to media outlets paying special attention to the issue, or by offering fellowships to allow reporting on migration during sabbatical or providing funds for such projects.



4. Governments and non-governmental involvement and responsibilities

a. **Request that governments realize their role in migration coverage**, by recognizing their responsibility to eradicate hate speech, modifying the sometimes negative public discourse about migration

b. Facilitate the work of journalists through open access to both information and migrant sources by **increasing transparency and accessibility of data**

c. **Foster reflection on how to release financial pressure on media outlets**