



Shaping Perceptions on Migration and Promoting Counternarratives of Xenophobia and Discrimination

A broad range of factors will affect the characteristics and scale of migration in the future. The decisions we make in the face of today's **unparalleled challenge to global mobility** and people on the move will affect the global social and economic landscape for years to come. The **benefits of international migration** are evidenced and substantiated by a plethora of research and recognized by states on both sides of the migration coin. Yet, discrimination, xenophobia, hate speech and hate crimes continue to plague our societies. If the **COVID-19 pandemic** has demonstrated the critical needs of migrants to ensure a global supply chain of essential goods and services, it has also "[amplified anti-foreigner narratives, racial and ethnic stereotyping, and biases that evoke fear, bigotry, exclusion, and violence](#)". This reinforces the importance of promoting strong counternarratives and anti-racism by advancing the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) framework and narrative on migration.

The **phenomenon of migration** is currently facing a **triple watershed moment**, at a global, European and national level, in consideration of the discussion and implementation, respectively, of the), the [New Pact on Migration and Asylum](#) proposed by the European Commission, and the immigration decree [21 October 2020, n. 130](#) recently adopted by the Italian government, which has an immediate impact on sea rescue operations.

A Transatlantic Discussion on Migration

In this context, on **May 19**, a [Transatlantic Roundtable on Human Mobility](#) will take place focusing on countering anti-migration narratives and xenophobia. This event will also help **inform the Regional Reviews of the GCM towards the International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) in 2022**. The discussion will **advance counternarratives of discrimination** in relation to migration, sea rescue, processes of externalization of borders, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The roundtable will feature two sessions ("Saving lives, protecting migrants, and advocacy for humane cross-border mobility" and "Enhancing cooperation on evidence-based migration policymaking and public debate") **mirroring the modalities resolution on the global reporting on the GCM at the IMRF**.

[Agora Europe](#) (AE) and its partners believe that migrants, as well as the host communities, civil society organizations, stakeholders and scholars, should play an active role in every phase of developing migration and integration policy: from the co-design of services to the implementation. For these reasons, AE will launch, on the occasion of this event, the "**Dictionary on Mobility and Borders**" (DMB), a cultural and action-oriented project consisting of critical entries based on a multi-stakeholder approach. The DMB aims to provide an extensive and structured contribution to the ongoing global debate on human mobility. It will contribute to create a common lexicon and will serve as a critical tool to shape a new political discourse on migration.

[Agora Europe](#) (AE) promotes a transatlantic debate on migration, unsettlement, forced displacement and disappearance narratives and counternarratives in order to encourage cooperation, promote inclusion, and develop connections across Euro-Mediterranean and Atlantic regions. The *Agora Europe Series* brings together scholars, representatives, practitioners, cultural actors, migrants and citizens to share their experiences and make their voices heard. Agora Europe works in partnership with [Studio Europa Maastricht](#) (SEM), a joint initiative of the Province of Limburg, Maastricht University and the City of Maastricht, and Columbia University's [Committee on Forced Migration](#) (CFM) on topics pertaining to saving lives, the Sea as connector and not a border, countering hate speech and advocating for inclusive policies. In line with this, SEM is currently organizing a citizens and migrants agora at the Refugee Reception Center in Maastricht (AZC) on the gender dimension of migrants' experience, since women in exile are more likely to be victims of **human rights violations and xenophobia**. This event is part of the **EU-MED consortium** ("Engaging citizens in Understanding Migration through cross-border Exchange and intercultural Dialogue: Towards dignified EUro-MEDiterranean narratives on migration") funded under the Europe for Citizens program of the European Commission. It will bring together citizens and migrants living in Maastricht, including local policy makers and civil society actors. By addressing vulnerabilities in migration and discrimination and promoting **evidence-based public discourse** to shape perceptions of migration, this event will contribute to the implementation of GCM Objectives 7 and 17.

In the process of the **regional and global review of the GCM**, Columbia's CFM experts work on finding interdisciplinary solutions to addressing the needs of migrants and displaced persons, safeguarding their rights and maximizing the **positive contributions of human mobility**. In 2020-21, the CFM organized [a year-long webinar series entitled "Forced Migration in a Post-Pandemic World"](#). The series looks at the impact of this crisis on forced migration, both current and long-term (post-pandemic) effects. The CFM's initiative is one of a number of forced migration-related activities the Global Centers supports. Others include the [Columbia University Scholarship for Displaced Students; Amman - Mellon Foundation Global Center's Fellowship Program for Emerging Displaced Scholars; New University in Exile Consortium](#) for displaced scholars in exile. Columbia's CFM channels the expertise of more than 50 faculties from across Columbia's schools and affiliates who work on forced migration and draws on the network of Columbia's nine Global Centers around the world to examine the **impacts of migration governance** at the local, regional and global levels, including the Global Compact for Migration. Through on-the-ground research and cutting-edge data analysis in public health, education, climate change, justice, and public policy, CFM experts support stakeholders to understand the key factors, obstacles and opportunities for effective and rights-based migration governance.

Our Joint Initiatives

In partnership with the CFM and SEM, in 2019, AE launched the [Otherside//Europe Series](#) featuring live events, podcasts and webinars on water as a border, migration, sea rescue, climate change and ocean protection, with scholars, practitioners, representatives, cultural actors, sailors, citizens, residents and migrants from several cross-border areas, to offer visions of Europe from overseas and across the oceans. Following the event, the [Joint Statement on Sea Rescue](#) was subsequently launched to open a **path of solidarity and cooperation** in the US, Senegal, UK, France and Italy. This statement aims to reinforce the **universal principle of non-refoulement**, in the

conviction that the protection of lives at sea shall endure in our societies both among the current priorities of European action and as long-standing transnational common value, that forced disappearances shall be visible and avoidable, and deaths avoidable and accountable.

AE has further identified **successful models** of local integrations implemented by civil society organizations, focusing on job creation, cultural and sport exchanges and legal support, with a multi-stakeholder approach. The consortium led by SEM at the European level recently submitted the proposal **RECIPROCITY** (“Reassessing Experiences and Co-creating Integration Processes through Reciprocal Ownership of Communities Initiatives and Trainings with Youth”) to the European Commission Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). In order to increase the involvement of migrants, refugees and host communities in the implementation of the GCM, AE is setting up a **documentary produced by migrants**, as part of the AMIF proposal, on the Mediterranean and Atlantic migration routes, aimed at presenting known facts from the perspective of the people who travelled these routes. The documentary will be produced in partnership with governmental and non-governmental organizations rescuing at sea migrants, as well as [New Sardiniasail](#), a sports association that, in Sardinia, helps young people with a difficult past to start over. Their project, “**The Route of Legality**”, consisting of sailing trainings aimed at participating in international regattas, gives a practical example of how migrants and asylum seekers can acquire the tools to build their counternarrative on migration.

Challenges and Ways Forward

With these initiatives notably, AE, SEM and the CFM aim at contributing to **fostering improved and continued dialogue between practitioners, stakeholders and scholars** in such a way that regional advocacy can be informed with and by best practices from the field and perspectives voicing out the concerns and opportunities shared by the field actors. There are a multitude of challenges in achieving this goal. The lack of scale-up opportunities for local successful models at the global or even regional level is concerning. Furthermore, an overall change of the current negative narrative regarding migration towards an evidence-based public discourse appears to be nearly too ambitious. Finally, at this moment there is a certain siloed approach regarding the interrelated issues of migration, environment and protection instead of a comprehensive one, creating overlap between many of the existing initiatives, instead of building on previous projects to achieve common or related goals. The **establishment of the UN Network on Migration** with dedicated resources to bring together all stakeholders to engage in the process, is a great step towards resolving these issues. Our vision considers that proposing new narratives on migration through the outlined collective actions can contribute to **inform the process of the GCM regional and global reviews** and help by promoting scalable models of **innovative practices and evidence-based discourses**, countering discrimination and increasing inclusion.

This piece is published as part of the UN Network on Migration’s Guest Blog series and does not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the UN Network on Migration nor its Secretariat.