

Migration crisis: communicating refugee integration locally

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Introduction:

- I will be sharing with you some of my personal experience during the research I took part in which took place in Berlin –Germany. The research we undertook was a ‘refugee Communications Qualitative Research’, and the purpose of the research was to uncover how government and third sector organisations can make reception and integration services more efficient by better understanding the communication preferences of the refugee populations they serve.

- I worked with WPP on this research as an independent researcher, and I will give you a sneak peek into the research findings from my perspective, and WPP will officially present the research findings in November in Berlin.

My speech is divided into four main sections, which are:

1. Communication tools and channels used by refugees
2. The main information gaps as perceived by refugees and meeting the new comers expectations
3. The need for a tailored communication strategy for specific groups of refugees,
4. The role of civil society in communicating with refugees in support of integration

The communication tools and channels used by refugees

- Social media is largely consumed by refugees to find information regarding to their asylum seeking as well as finding information about the services provided by the German government, while the majority of the interviewed refugees don’t watch TV or listen to the radio, the language barrier is one of

the reasons behind this as well as the fact that most of refugees don't own a TV.

- The majority of interviewed refugees stated that they only trust information from the official government channels or platforms whether it's from web or from governmental offices. However, majority of interviewed refugees said that they do not know how to get information directly from the government thus they have to rely on information from people they know, friends or family or Facebook groups or pages

(Recommendation) It will be very helpful and effective to create a governmental official platform on social media 'specifically Facebook' and an official website or upgrading an already existing one; these platforms should include updated information regarding seeking asylum and accessing services provided by the government and the content should be translated into the native language of refugees.

- Many refugees stated that the ideal method to communicate messages and information to them is by communicating directly with them. And that, for instance, could be by providing them with this information at the first court interview since all refugees must attend that.

Main information gaps as perceived by refugees and meeting the new comers expectations:

- One of the main challenges that face refugees is that there is no one single unified source from which refugees can obtain their information regarding seeking asylum and accessing services. Thus, refugees obtain the changing information from many different sources and include: social media accounts set up by their respective community, from different employees at different governmental agencies, from camp administration, from job centre, from their friends and family, and from integration schools.

Recommendation: therefore, there is a need amongst refugees for an official channel that is unified and current to date, one channel they can go to and get all the information they need. Especially that most refugees in the sample we interviewed said that they trust official governmental sources more than the rest but they have to resort to other channels due to the absence of such unified official platform.

- Refugees are faced with the challenge that there are many different government agencies and many different communication channels that specialises in many different fields.

Recommendation: to unify messages for refugees and make them coherent, a new information agency should be dedicated to the purpose of conveying messages to the refugees.

- Refugees Community feels that they are not being consulted when designing communication channels intended for them,

Recommendation: therefore, taking into consideration the opinion of the community in each tool that is being designed is a key step to making sure this tool is useful for refugees and it is actually going to be used. For instance, when building a new communication tool intended to help refugees' access information of their interest as well as accessing services provided by the government, the existence of such tools should be also communicated to refugees.

The need for a tailored communication strategy for specific groups of refugees

- Building on the previous two sections It's crucial to tailor communication channels for each group of refugees. According to research respondents, some elements that were designed for one community was found irrelevant to others.

Recommendation: Communication strategies should be tailored for different refugees groups, such as Iraqis and Syrians. For example; when the

government create a website or social media platforms intended for refugees they should consult the refugees about the type of information needed on this website as well as the type of features such as a live chat system for example

Recommendation Consulting influential community leaders who speak both Arabic and German and are active in communication and are trying to build bridges between the host community and the newcomers could also be very helpful.

The role of civil society in communicating with refugees in support of integration

Civil society can play a complementary role to the communication efforts the government is undertaking, since civil society organizations are working on the ground and could be in many cases more aware of the challenges refugees are facing and could also have solutions for these challenges.

Recommendation there should be an ongoing communication and support between the public administration and civil society representatives so they can exchange best practices and experiences. For instance: when the government creates a website or a mobile application intended to help refugees access information and services, civil society actors who work with refugees can be best to provide advice on this matter, and they could also help in communicating the existence of such tools to refugees.