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60th Meeting of the Bureau of IPDC Thematic debate on Media and Migration 18 March 2016, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. (Room IX)

Concept note

Covering Migrations and Refugees – are the media doing the right thing?

“When terms used for people fleeing war, violence and atrocities, or those used for people moving in search of work, or a better life, become pejorative and generate antipathy, we have a problem. We are choosing not to unite around a shared purpose, but to drive a wedge through society. We are taking an us vs. them view on the world.” A. Nardelli, The Guardian, 11 December 2015

The recent refugee flows from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and North Africa are forcing many Middle-Eastern and European countries to come face to face with their strength to uphold human rights and values of protecting the vulnerable. Migration and refugees are also issues in other parts of the world, such as south east Asia, the horn of Africa and central Africa, as well as central America.

From the perspective of media development, these dynamics raise many issues relevant to the work of IPDC. The challenges cover all media – including both news media and social media.

The news media play an important role in influencing and shaping public opinion, providing information and making diverse voices heard. They also have an important role to play in supporting society to deal with rapid social change by generating and fostering public debate, while keeping to democratic values.

But do the news media fulfil this role and if so, how do they achieve that?

Alongside and intersecting with news media is social media. The development of new media technologies has challenged the paradigms of mass-media theory, such as the sender-receiver divide. These technologies and new forms of convergence among different and distinct media platforms are transforming the life of the media “consumers”, be these migrants, refugees or citizens of the ‘destination’ country.

Are media really bridging the cultural differences and facilitating an intercultural dialogue? How are the immigrants and refugees portrayed in and by media? What about the portrayal of young men, versus women and children? What are the dangers of focusing only on trafficking and depicting only the illegal aspects of irregular and/or forced migration?

How do migrants and refugees portray themselves through news and social media? What is their knowledge about migration? Are the migrants and refugees taking part in any debate? Are they voiceless and uninformed, or given opportunities articulating their needs also through media?

What kind of information do the migrants and refugees do receive in the country of origin, while they are 'in transit' and at their final destination? What role do Internet and mobile communication play? What role do news and social media play in the migrants' and refugees' decision-making?

It is useful to also analyze how the refugee trends/movements are reported in different countries (the country of origin, the transit countries and the "destination" countries). The various forms of media can trigger migration, as well as connect migrants with the diaspora and their country of origin. They can also discourage and prevent migrants from leaving their home countries. What is the role of images of streets "paved with gold" in developed countries, as well as of tragic stories and doomed scenarios in all this?

UNESCO's IPDC is the UN's only intergovernmental programme that actively supports media development, freedom of speech and access to information. With this debate, IPDC will contribute to fostering an open debate about the role of media in dealing with migration, and especially the issue of refugees from the conflict in Syria, among media and migration experts and Member States' representatives.

The debate aims to better tune the work of IPDC with the needs of news media when reporting on migrants and the refugee crisis all over the world, for example by promoting best practices of professional reporting in various contexts or by fostering investigative journalism and high ethical standards.

One of the questions that will be considered in this line will be: How can journalism curricula on rights and migration incorporate the debate and improve the reporting?

Five experts, including scholars on media and migration, will be invited to take part in the discussion sharing their experience and their analysis of the role of media in reporting on refugees in the context of migration.

The IPDC Bureau members and representatives of Member States will be invited to participate and encouraged to share their views on the issue.

Outcomes of the debate

The debate will:

- demonstrate IPDC's response to contemporary issues
- focus attention on the media issues related to the Syrian refugee crisis in particular, as well as raise broader issues relevant to many other situations
- clarify the roles played by news media and social media
- provide the IPDC Bureau with insight that can enrich discussion on future priorities for projects

Moderator

Ms. Albana Shala, Chair, IPDC

Panelists

1. **Ms Melissa Fleming**, Head of Communications and Chief Spokesperson for the High Commissioner, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

2. **Dr Guita Hourani**, Director of the Lebanese Emigration Research Center, Notre Dame University, Lebanon
3. **Ms Nevin Yildiz Tahincioglu**, Hacettepe University, Ankara, contributor to recent report "Migration: Global Report on Journalism's Biggest Test in 2015"
4. **Dr Jacco van Sterkenburg**, Assistant Professor, Department of Media & Communication, Erasmus Research Centre for Media, Communication and Culture, Netherlands
5. **Mr Aidan White**, Ethical Journalism Network, author of Migration: Global Report on Journalism's Biggest Test in 2015