

Talking about regularisation: a hope-based approach



HOW DO WE CHANGE THE NARRATIVE AROUND REGULARISATION?

We know that regularisation is a straightforward way for countries to improve people's lives. Allowing families to stay and work regularly benefits not just their well-being, but also society as a whole. It strengthens social inclusion, enhances public service delivery, and brings economic benefits.

In short, regularisation works – for everyone.

But in a context of high polarisation around migration in Europe, regularisation is often a hard sell to politicians and voters. The media and other influential players often portray regularisation as a dangerous tool that will attract more migrants, or as an unjustified amnesty for people who have arrived without the 'right' papers.

This toolkit presents ideas for how organisations can communicate more effectively about regularisation by following the hope-based communications approach. The content is based on the outcomes from a workshop PICUM organised for its members in October 2023. It follows on from *Trust in people: Messaging migration with hope*, published in 2020, and supports our 2021-2025 objective to strengthen members' national advocacy and campaigning capacity.



WHAT ARE NARRATIVES AND NARRATIVE COMMUNICATIONS?

Narratives develop through storytelling. Humans tell each other stories all the time: our brains are hardwired to respond to and remember them.

When the dominant narrative around migration and regularisation is racist and discriminatory, it is easy to focus our own communications on opposing these negative ideas. But this can mean that we forget to talk convincingly about our own work, and explain the solutions we are proposing to create the society we want to live in.

Creating a new narrative starts with identifying **what we want our story to be**, and articulating the beliefs we want to spread.

While normal communications is about raising awareness, strategic narrative communications is about changing awareness: influencing long-term changes in attitudes and behaviour.

Identifying your narrative is an important step before going deeper into narrative communications work, from doing audience research and A/B testing to producing content. The hope-based approach is designed to help you do this through the five shifts outlined here.

THE 5 SHIFTS OF HOPE-BASED COMMUNICATIONS

Hope is the belief that tomorrow can be better than today. It is different from simply being happy or positive, or ignoring bad things that are happening.


Hope is a strategy for change: we all need hope to take action.

The 5 hope-based shifts involve moving from:

1. **fear to hope**
2. **problem to solution**
3. **against to for**
4. **threat to opportunity**
5. **victim to human**

This overview shows the 5 hope-based shifts, and how we applied them to the issue of migration in PICUM's 2020 Trust in People toolkit.

NB! We never want to ignore this column. The point is to create balance by putting the problems we face in the context of our solutions.



Fear From a worldview of a world in crisis...	Hope ... to an interconnected world.
Problem Governments scapegoat and ignore people who move, denying them basic rights.	Solution Governments earn our trust by treating all of us like human beings.
Against Leaving people on few regular ways to move and denying them papers they need to live a life of dignity.	For More humanity: Welcoming people who move and caring for the people who are here.
Threat From a world where we are overwhelmed by crisis and putting up walls...	Opportunity ... to a world where we are becoming more connected than ever and finding ways to open doors.
Victim From a world where we are scared of the other...	Human ... to a world where people are acting on their conscience and mobilizing others to follow their lead.

Table adapted from Trust in People



Building a hope-based
narrative about regularisation

From fear to hope

This shift is about **being conscious of the political emotions** we inspire in our audiences.

Insights from neuroscience and psychology show that while fear makes people feel despair and give up, hope makes us act.

While fear divides us, hope makes us feel able to connect, think and change our minds.

Fear makes people retreat and drives us towards self-interest. Hope makes us care about each other and focus on our common interests.

By building our strategy around what we hope for, we can build support for our solutions and long-term policy goals.



Ideas for how to create hope around regularisation:

- Show how **we are all connected** – as humans we have so much in common.
- Migration is a fact of life: **People move** – we always have, and we always will.
- **We all want the same things**: to feel safe, work, lead stable lives and progress.
- Regularisation is about giving everyone **an opportunity to lead a decent life**.
- With political will, **we can make regularisation work for everybody**. Countries have done it successfully before, and we can do it again.

From problem to solution ✨

This shift is about **making a good case for the solutions** we're proposing.

If we only show the problems we're addressing, they start to seem inevitable and 'normal', and can create despair among our audiences.

Instead, we can put the problems we face in the context of our solutions, and explain in simple terms how they can work in practice.

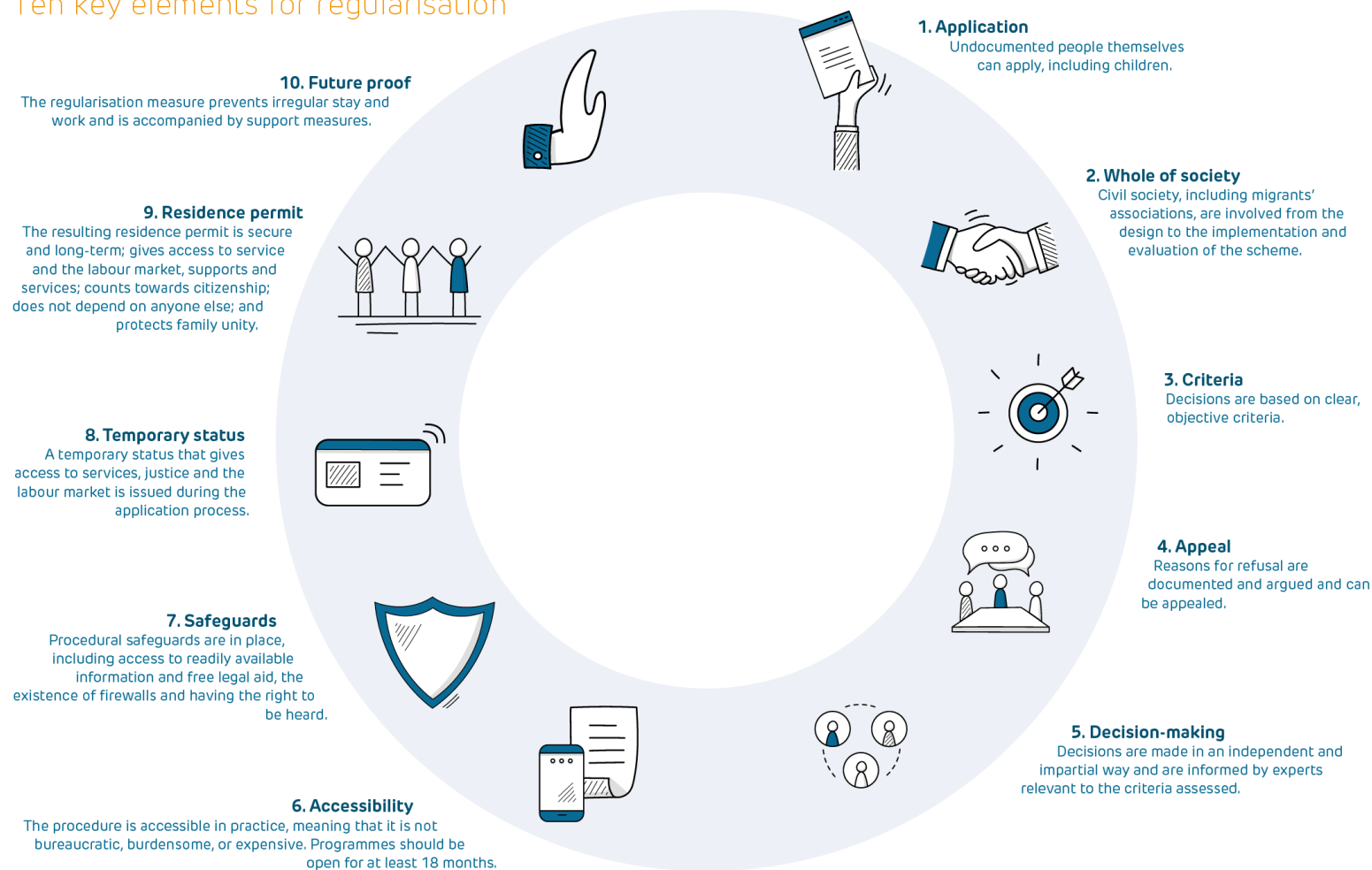
Humans find change frightening.

It's important to show people our vision for society once our solutions have been put in place.

Ideas for how to present solutions on regularisation:

- **Talk about the policies we want**, explain how the government could put them into practice, and emphasise the values it would be living by if it implemented them.
- **Reassure people** that there are processes and systems that can fix things, and that regularisation can lead to **safer lives and stronger communities**.
- Show the positive difference in people's lives before and after getting their papers, for example, by using examples of how regularisation functions well in other countries.
- Explain **how regularisation can work in practice** – as outlined in [PICUM research](#) and the following graphic.

Ten key elements for regularisation



PICUM (2023), Regularisation mechanisms and programmes: Why they matter and how to design them

From against to for ✨

This shift challenges us to talk about **what we stand for** and think carefully about 'framing'.

Research shows that words and images subconsciously activate 'frames' that influence how we interpret things.

It's tempting to talk about the things we oppose. But this can trap us in our opposition's narrative: by repeating their messages, we're reinforcing them.

Brain science shows that negation doesn't work in our favour. Saying "activism isn't a crime", for example, fuses together the concepts of activism and crime in people's minds.

It's more effective to promote the things we actually want, the values we stand for and having the conversation on our own terms.

Ideas for how to frame regularisation differently:

- Ask ourselves: "**What is the opposite of the thing we are against?**"
- **Be clear on the values that drive us** – our own moral reasoning – and which values we choose to appeal to in our messaging.
- **Ground our campaigns in shared values**, such as **dignity, equality, safety, community, belonging, compassion, trust, care and welcome**.
- Show that regularisation is a **better way of running society**: by looking after people, trusting each other and collaborating, we'll create stronger communities.

From threat to opportunity ✨

This shift is about offering people **a chance to be part of real and positive progress.**

Our audiences know that many things are wrong in the world. 'Crisis' messaging triggers fear in people's old survival brain and makes us retreat.

We can appeal to our ideas of ourselves as good people and offer a sense of community and belonging.

Instead of telling people what they shouldn't do and shaming certain behaviour, we can show them what we can do and offer clear, positive ways to support our work and campaigns.

Ideas for opportunities linked to regularisation:

- Show **how regularisation can make life better for everyone:** It can help create a more equal society, a fairer economy, and diverse communities with rich cultures, music, cuisine, etc.
- **Many people don't know what being 'irregular' or 'undocumented'** means. Instead we can explain what this situation means in practice, e.g. not having the right

papers, living in fear and uncertainty, etc.

- Focus on **what people aspire to** instead of what they lack – e.g. to live and work, to participate fully as citizens in society and play their part.
- Show **the difference getting your papers makes:** Finally being able to live without worry, go to school, live a full life.

From victim to human

The purpose of this shift is to **humanise people** in our communications.

We can unintentionally victimise people by telling their story for them, trying to elicit pity rather than solidarity, and leaving out their ambitions, hopes, strength and courage.


Co-creating stories with people with lived experience of migration is key to avoiding stereotypes and victimisation.

'Nothing about us without us'.

We can use our channels to elevate new, marginalised voices, showing people in a new light and highlighting the diverse human experiences that unite us all.

We can also simulate the behaviour we want to see, for example, by showing people welcoming newcomers into their communities and living together peacefully.

Ideas for humanising people without residence papers:

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- Show the **opposite of the 'undocumented migrant' stereotype** – for example, people doing sports, cooking, playing with their children – allowing others to identify and empathise by connecting with their experiences emotionally.
 - Demonstrate that **undocumented people are people**: Family, friends, neighbours, colleagues, a normal part of our communities and daily life.
 - Highlight **positive encounters** between people in daily life.
 - Show your audience a person **changing their mind** about this issue.
 - Show **people doing good things** – for example, politicians creating change for undocumented people (for examples, see 'find out more' at the end of this toolkit).



Bringing your
narrative to life



BRINGING YOUR NARRATIVE TO LIFE

Narratives grow through strategic messaging and consistent storytelling. It can be helpful to think of narratives as mosaics and the stories we tell as our tiles.

Narrative communications is a contest over which stories are being told and talked about every day. As progressive communications expert Anat Shenker-Osorio put it:

Our time, our stories should create a mosaic that reflects our values and vision.

Narrative change involves much more than words: **What you do is the narrative**. This means, for example, organising events and creating social media 'moments' grounded in your narrative and shared values, in support of your solutions and vision for a better world.

"Good messaging is to make popular what needs to be said."



Here are some tips for developing your own narrative about regularisation:

- Try applying the five hope-based shifts to your own communications. What ideas spring to mind? What could you do differently?
- Based on your ideas, draft messages that articulate your basic ideas. To you this might feel like stating the obvious, but it won't to others unless they hear it all the time.
- Follow Anat Shenker Osorio's messaging advice: 1. Establish shared values 2. Outline the problem and 3. Explain your solution and offer a call to action.
- Use clear, active language, avoid jargon and explain who is doing what to whom.
- Once you have articulated your ideas, try bringing them to life visually by working with a designer, photographer or artist.
- Test different messaging and content with your audiences, for example, through A/B testing or a survey. Optimise accordingly, and keep repeating what works.
- Share your experiences and learn from others working for the same solutions.

This the starting point for a narrative communications strategy:
We articulate what we want the narrative to be and find ways to spread it.

The more people encounter
our stories and messages, the
more familiar and influential our
narrative becomes.



Example narratives

Here are some draft narratives from a hope-based workshop PICUM organised for its members in October 2023, plus ideas for how to put them into practice. We include them here for inspiration, to show how fresh ideas can emerge by applying the five hope-based shifts.

NB: **Your narrative will depend on your specific context, goals and audiences.** By experimenting with new ideas, and testing these out in your communications and campaigning, you can start an ongoing conversation with the people whose support you would like to gain, and gather valuable insights into what works, and what doesn't.

People move

- ◆ **Lead with shared values:** We should all be able to feel safe, lead stable lives, progress, work safely.
- ◆ **Show the problem:** Explain what not having papers really means.
- ◆ **Emphasise that people are people:** People with family, friends, neighbours, part of our communities.
- ◆ **Explain our solutions as simply as possible:** For example, how having a contract means people can work and live normally, take care of their family, etc.
- ◆ **Show the impact:** The difference getting your papers makes: Transforming lives, being able to live normally, what we all want.

Putting it into practice:

- Run a campaign for regularisation supporting documentation for migrant workers, because they bring a positive economic impact.
- Create a 'living museum' at an event, displaying different objects that illustrate different jobs done by undocumented people – a wooden spoon, a drill, a hairdryer, etc. Invite local employers to visit, interact with the objects and listen to the stories of (undocumented) people who use them for work.
- Film people talking together, and encourage conversations focused on shared experiences. Explain the difficulties people face in finding a job, even though employers need them. Encourage employers to sign the petition.
- Create a video capturing the living museum objects and people's conversations, and use it to advertise your campaign.

Migration is human

- ◆ **Establish shared values:** People move, always have and always will. Regularisation is about giving everyone an opportunity to lead a decent life.
- ◆ **Say what you stand for:** Dignity, equality, safety, safe and strong communities, belonging.
- ◆ **Show how your solutions can work:** Examples of places where regularisation has worked and led to safer and stronger communities.
- ◆ **Demonstrate the opportunity:** Better lives for everyone, a fairer economy, being a part of a rich and diverse community.
- ◆ **Humanise it:** Show undocumented and documented people living together as neighbours, talking about daily life, and as aspiring citizens.

Putting it into practice:

- Create a petition calling for regularisation targeting citizens and residents who are ambivalent about migration.
- Publicise it with a video showing what it means to live undocumented in daily life.
- The video will have two parts: The first would establish common ground by showing an undocumented Latin American woman going through a normal day with her family, friends, at work, etc.
- The second part would show how her life is suddenly interrupted because of a sudden passport check on a train on her way to a concert.
- This would demonstrate in an emotive way the dramatic impact of not having papers, and the positive difference documentation can therefore make.

Stronger together

- ◆ **Migration happens.** And we can make it work for everybody. Our country has done it before, and we can do it again.
- ◆ **Migration adds value:** We need workers. We need a functioning pension system. We need each other.
- ◆ **We can make our economy and state work for us all.** Solidarity and justice will prevail. Because we are stronger together.

Putting it into practice:

- Activate shared values: solidarity, working together, building better lives and a better society together.
- Create videos showing how regularisation can benefit all of society. For example, of a farmer in desperate need of people helping him in the fields; a construction company owner needing workers; and elderly woman needing a carer; a student losing their visa; an undocumented migrant facing problems running a small business.
- The video would emphasise how things get easier for everyone when people can live and work regularly, because we are better able to cooperate and help each other.



FIND OUT MORE

Anat Shenker Osorio, [Words to Win By](#) [Accessed December 2023]

Anat Shenker Osorio, [Messaging this moment: a handbook for progressive communicators](#) (2017)

MRCI, [Regularisation: Policy Brief for NGO's, Activists and Campaigners](#) (2023)

PICUM, [Our work: Regularisation](#) (webpage)

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Thomas Coombes, [Hope-based communications](#) [Accessed December 2023]

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