



RESEARCH SOCIAL  
PLATFORM ON MIGRATION

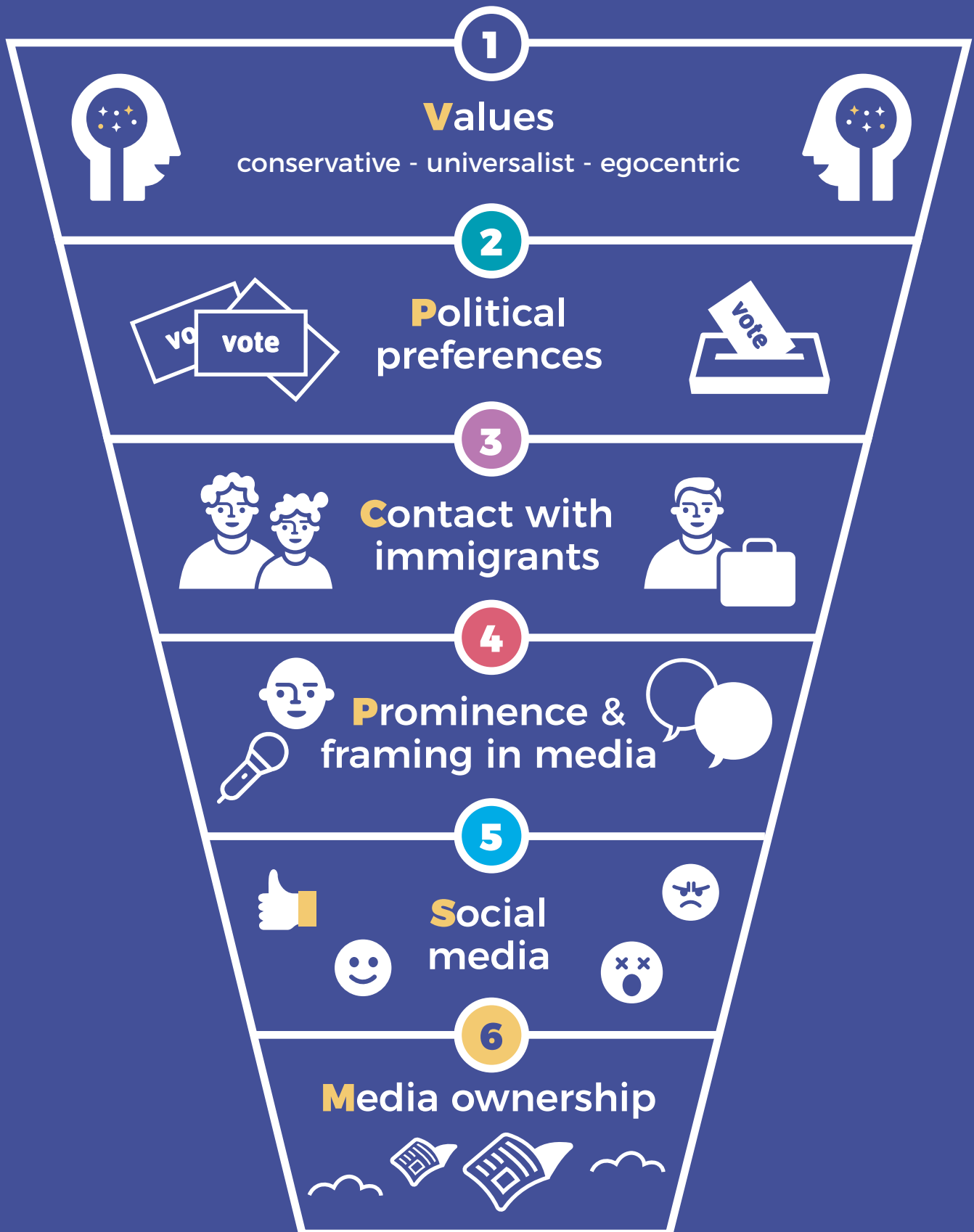
# Communicating effectively on migration: recommendations and drivers behind attitudes

---



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program under the grant agreement 770730

# Key drivers of attitudes towards migration



# Introduction to communicating on migration

The debate on migration in Europe continues **to polarise attitudes and impact mainstream political discourses**. Amidst a changing communication landscape characterised **by widespread fake news, limited space for nuanced and balanced reporting and an increasingly important role for social media**, it has become critical for policymakers, the media and civil society to understand how to effectively communicate on migration.

## Top recommendations by stakeholders:



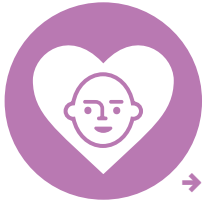
### Develop a communications strategy and leadership

- Be strategic: identify clear objectives, segment and target audiences and evaluation mechanisms
- Develop strong internal buy-in, leadership and resources
- Ensure that communications experts are in charge of directing strategic decisions on communications



### Choose credible messengers and embrace partnerships

- The messenger is as important as the message
- With the rise in public distrust in institutions and experts, seek out the most authentic and relatable voice for the target audience
- Example: doctors as messengers to promote labour migration as a solution to health care staff shortages
- Develop partnerships to access credible messengers and third-party endorsements



## Apply value-based and emotive approaches

- Understand the values, motivations and fears of the target audience
- Activate common values that unite rather than divide
- Use personal stories and testimonies that bring evidence into life and trigger emotions, rather than relying on statistics or myth-busting approaches



## Lead with hope-based solutions

- Talk about solutions, not problems
- Communicate stories that evoke feelings of hope, solidarity and empathy rather than fear and threat
- Move beyond frames of 'crisis' and towards policy solutions, common challenges and mutual aspirations



## Be visual

- Use images and videos that reflect our values and build understanding and hope
- Embrace visuals that include those who are impacted by migration (families, classmates, friends and neighbours of migrants)
- Refrain from visuals that portray migrants and refugees as victims or ideal role models



## Target a movable audience

- Most parts of the population are neither strongly pro nor anti immigrants - those should be a key target audience
- Understand who they are in each region and which group to target by examining their values and fears
- Acknowledge their concerns, activate their positive values, encourage an open discussion and offer solutions



## Support fair reporting

- Support programmes which allow media to better understand the migration phenomenon and the use of correct terminology when reporting on migration.
- Provide information on backgrounds of refugee and migrant groups and guidelines on where to access reliable information
- Give grants to independent journalists and non-profit media outlets targeting the movable middle
- Support alliances at the local level between NGOs and media professionals

## 1 People's values, psychology, socialisation and education

In general, the strongest determinants of attitudes towards immigration – and most other social issues – are a person's values, psychology, socialisation and education. Research shows that people driven by universalist values (empathy and care for all people) tend to favour more open migration policies, while people driven by conservative values (tradition, conformity, security) tend to favour more restrictive migration policies. Meanwhile, people driven by ego-centric values (such as power, achievement and stimulation) tend to avoid holistic views about migration and don't have clear or strong positions on immigration or social issues.

## 2 Political preferences

People's attitudes towards migration are heavily shaped by their political preferences and by the public debate on migration. Contrary to popular belief, it is not the size of immigration flows that affect public sentiment towards immigrants, but how these issues are framed by political leaders.

## 3 Immediate context: Positive and close contact with immigrants

People are more likely to be pro-immigrant in countries with higher levels of immigration, education, economic prosperity and in countries with more developed integration policies. Contact theory has proven that interaction with immigrants significantly improves public attitudes, so long as these interactions are frequent, intimate and positive—like friendship and work—rather than anonymous or conflictual.

## 4 Public debate: prominence and framing in the media

Media coverage is the main driver of the salience of immigration as a political priority for citizens. A prolonged immigration debate may reinforce negative attitudes over the long-term as the mere frequency of the news on immigration itself has a negative impact, regardless of the content. The long-term combination of extensive media coverage and negative public attitudes creates significant pressure on a country's immigration policies and mainstream politicians, even in the absence of an established far-right party. Further, the impact of media

framing is stronger and long-lasting in countries where immigrant populations are small and the topic is new in the public debate, such as in Central Europe.

## 5 The influence of social media

Social media accelerates the frequency, political bias and manipulation of coverage on migration. Firstly, migration-related content on social media is more frequent than on traditional media, which makes the issue seem more prominent as a political priority. Secondly, social media host a large portion of ideologically extreme and negatively framed content, particularly since it provides a platform for populist politicians, media outlets, fake-news websites, bots (automated accounts) and conspiracy theorists. In countries with poor press freedom, anti-immigration state-controlled media has a large presence on social media, which in turn engenders a chilling effect on progressive opinions.

## 6 The key decision-makers on media content: media ownership

Press freedom and ownership seem to be more important factors influencing the tone and framing of national media coverage of immigration than the attitudes of journalists. Media owners and political allies in Central European countries were key drivers of anti-immigrant and Eurosceptic content. In Bulgaria, ranking 111 on the Press Freedom Index – the lowest score in the EU – the media is heavily anti-immigrant and 80% of it is owned by one Member of Parliament. Similarly, Czechia's two most influential dailies and its most popular news website are owned by populist prime minister Andrej Babis. Hungary is also a notorious example of violations of press freedom, with repeated political interventions, forced removals of editorial teams and significant government control of the agenda and framing on migration.

---

# ReSOMA

RESEARCH SOCIAL  
PLATFORM ON MIGRATION  
AND ASYLUM

**ReSOMA is the European research platform on migration, asylum and integration policies.** Funded under the EU Horizon 2020 Programme, ReSOMA aims at connecting existing European networks of migration researchers, stakeholders and practitioners to foster evidence-based policy-making.

 [www.resoma.eu](http://www.resoma.eu)

 [@ReSOMA\\_EU](https://twitter.com/ReSOMA_EU)

 [resoma@resoma.eu](mailto:resoma@resoma.eu)



**Erasmus University Rotterdam**  
Make it happen.



In collaboration with

