Good practices

6

Reaching policymakers: Timing, tools and channels

Individualised engagement in targeted dissemination

Contributing INNOVATE partner: IRC International Rescue Committee

Objectives, basic principles & potential impact

In this good practice, we showcase how individualised engagement in targeted dissemination fosters deeper, more meaningful interactions. This allows for stronger, trust-based relationships between researchers, advocates and policymakers, ultimately increasing the potential impact in the policy-making process of evidence and data presented to policymakers.

Relevant steps to help researchers and practitioners to bridge the gap with institutional stakeholders and to increase the chance that their research feeds into policymaking include:

- **Getting to know the process(es)**: Understand how the policymaking process that you want to influence works, and at what level (e.g. local, national, international), and who are the institutional and non-institutional actors involved in such process(es).

- **Stakeholder and power analysis**: Focus on the stakeholders that are involved in the policymaking process that is relevant for the issue you are advocating for; and identify the actors that have the most power to influence the process, as well as those that are allies or opponents. This step includes an analysis of relevant chains of influence: since it is rare for researchers and advocates to gain direct access to the actor with the most power over the issue on which change is being sought, it is fundamental to identify intermediate actors who can help influence the most powerful actors.
- **Getting to know policymakers**: Once you have identified relevant stakeholders, research their role and persona by studying their CV, following them on social media and listening to their interviews. This will allow you to understand their interests, their professional background, and additional elements that will help relate your arguments to a specific policymaker and to package content according to the policymaker's anticipated interest in it.
- **Find a 'hook'**: When trying to secure a meeting with a policymaker, try to find an element that catches their attention to increase the chance of receiving a positive answer. This could be a report or a research paper that you have recently published, a policy change under discussion or any other event or recurrence that is relevant to the issue you are working on.
- **Prepare and tailor**: Once the meeting has been scheduled, prepare in advance to make sure that you and any other participants are aware of the goal of the meeting and the evidence you want to present. Draft tailored talking points to stay focused during the meeting, clearly state your evidence and recommendations, and ensure you work on dedicated individual messaging for each meeting. Relying on templates – which include the why, the goal, and the asks that are relevant to the meeting – may help you stay focused and pursue your objectives during the meeting (see section "Learn more").

Example 1

"Please, wait": IRC Italy's report on access to international protection

In 2023, IRC Italy started to work on access to international protection. The need to work on this issue came from the barriers and delays that people fleeing persecution, conflict and other violence and who are seeking safety in Italy face in the first stage of the process to receive asylum or other international protection, i.e. the phase of expressing their intent to apply with the authorities.

In several Italian cities, many protection seekers were – and unfortunately still are – not able to exercise effectively their right to seek protection, as instead they were turned away at the Immigration Offices of local Police Headquarters (Questure), which are supposed to promptly register international protection applications. These delays not only violate the law, but also leave people in precarious situations, unable to access accommodation through the reception system, seek work in the formal economy, receive healthcare services, or enjoy other critical protection available to people in the process of applying for international protection.

Barriers to accessing international protection were particularly concerning in the city of Milan, where in April 2023 the Police Headquarters and the Prefecture adopted a new online registration system for international protection. In theory, this system could have helped to alleviate the barriers, delays, precarious conditions, and violence facing people trying to start the application process. However, the new digitalised system, while offering to some a means to request appointments at the Police Headquarters, has largely shifted, but not solved, the barriers and delays many protection seekers continued to face, and made them far less visible to the public.

To shed light on the critical nature of this situation and put forward solutions to the problems encountered in various cities of Italy, the idea emerged to produce a report on access to asylum in Italy, titled "Please, wait: Barriers to access the procedure for international protection in Italy". Through collaboration with and the contribution of civil society organisations across Italy, including Milan, Trieste, Turin, Imperia, Bologna, Florence, Rome, and Naples, this report aimed to address barriers to accessing international protection. The city of Milan was given particular attention due to the rights violation suffered by people seeking protection there and in view of the recent attempt to digitalize access to the procedure for international protection.

Because of this geographical focus, the targeted policymakers were mainly representatives of the Immigration Office of the Milan Police Headquarters and representatives of the Milan Prefecture. However, since barriers to accessing international protection were – and are – a nationwide issue, recommendations were also provided to the Police Headquarters of Trieste, Turin, Imperia, Bologna, Florence, Rome, and Naples, as well as to the Ministry of the Interior.

Engagement steps

The work on the report "Please, wait" was initiated upon suggestion of some civil society organisations that had been working for a long time on the issue of access to international protection in Milan. These organisations advocated to put an end to the barriers and delays that people seeking protection were facing when trying to apply for international protection in Milan. But as they were small-sized, grassroots and often volunteer-based organisations, they did not have the capacity to lead the work on the issue. Instead, as IRC Italy had available structures and capacity to do so, an informal coalition was born, with IRC Italy leading the work and ASGI, Le Carbet, INTERSOS, Mutuo Soccorso Milano and NAGA being members of the coalition.

After setting up the coalition, IRC Italy established a workplan with regular calls among coalition members to start brainstorming about the structure of the report and on what needs to be done in order to address the issue of access to international protection in Milan and the other seven cities included in the report.

Once the structure of the report was defined, the coalition agreed on the tools needed to collect evidence on the issue:

- **Survey for international protection applicants**: A survey was disseminated both online (via the platform managed by IRC Italy) and in person to collect data and information directly from people willing to apply for international protection in Milan. The survey was made available in seven languages (Italian, English, Spanish, French, Arabic, Farsi, and Pashto).

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- **Survey for civil society organisations working with international protection applicants**: An online survey was disseminated in all involved cities to obtain testimonies that reflect the experiences and challenges of international protection applicants and of the civil society organisations which support them. Data collection was carried out between May 2023 and January 2024, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods specific to the place and subject.
- **Key Informant Interviews with civil society representatives providing support to access the procedure for international protection in Milan**: Interviews were conducted in two sets of online meetings to understand how the digitalised system for applying for international protection in Milan worked and identifying problems with the system, as well as demographic profiles of protection applicants.
- **FOI (Freedom of Information) request**: A FOI request was submitted to the Immigration Office of the Milan Police Headquarters to gather data regarding the slots available at the Immigration Office to apply for international protection and the number of protection applications registered at the Milan Police Headquarters in 2022 and 2023.

The information gathered through the tools described above was then collated by IRC Italy and complemented with desk-based research. At the same time, IRC Italy started building relationships with relevant stakeholders (representatives of the Immigration Office of the Milan Police Headquarters and representatives of the Milan Prefecture), with whom a first closed-doors meeting was held to present the organisation and the work that the coalition was planning to do.

When the first draft of the report was finalised, the coalition members hold a joint discussion to agree on the recommendations to be included in the report. The report was eventually published in April 2024, which marked one year since the introduction of the digitalised system to apply for international protection in Milan (see above, “Find a ‘hook’”).

The report was then published and disseminated through the channels (website and social media) of the coalition members. IRC Italy created a dedicated communication plan to disseminate the report. This helped to achieve significant national and international media coverage, and to receive several media requests. Finally, IRC Italy hold another closed-door meeting to present the report to representatives of the Immigration Office of the Milan Police Headquarters and the Milan Prefecture; and to advocate in person for the implementation of the recommendations included in the report.

Success factors

Critical factors for success included:

- setting up a coalition with a common voice and a variety of expertise to strengthen the relevance of the work and the credibility and impact of the report;
- strongly relying on evidence (and especially first-hand data) and diversifying the tools and methods used to gather evidence;
- investing time and resources to a dedicated communication plan – and, possibly, a communication expert – to ensure higher visibility of the issue in national and international media, and to potentially foster public debate on the issue;

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- engaging with policymakers from the beginning, to start building a personal relationship with them; and
- starting the meetings/conversations with policymakers on a positive note, focusing on common grounds and shared objectives when possible.

Impact and lessons learned

Before publishing the report online and sharing it with the media, we sent a copy of the report to the representatives of the Immigration Office of the Milan Police Headquarters and representatives of the Milan Prefecture with whom we have established a relationship, asking for a meeting to present our results and recommendations. Policymakers promptly agreed to meet us and listened to our asks.

During the meeting, they showed eagerness to implement some of the recommendations included in the report and followed up asking for our collaboration for this purpose. We agreed to provide support, and less than one month after the meeting, the recommendation to "Make information posted on the Milan Police Headquarters website more accessible, translating information into Dari, Pashto, and Bengali" was implemented (see here for reference). In general terms, recommendations were taken up the more specific and practical they were, as opposed to those that required political endorsement or large budgets.

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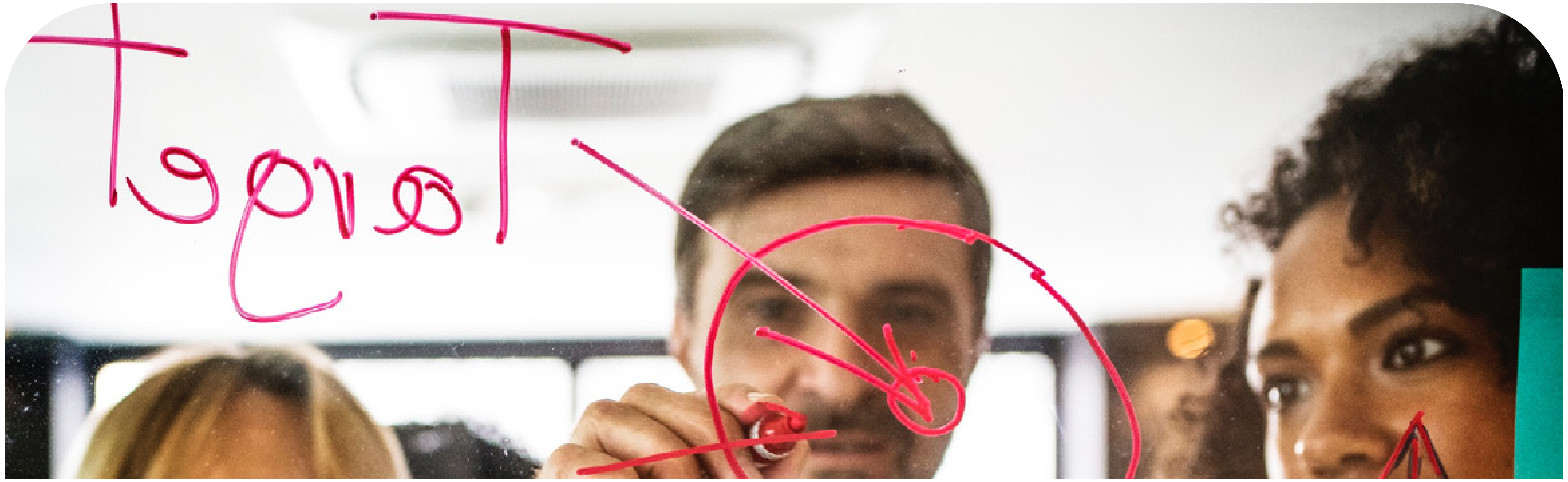
Learn more

- "Wait, please" - IRC's New Report Sheds Light on Violation of Asylum Rights in Italy
- Report: Please wait: Barriers to access the procedure for international protection in Italy (ENG)
- Report: Please wait: Barriers to access the procedure for international protection in Italy (ITA)
- Stakeholder meeting brief template [download document]



Targeted launch and dissemination of research reports with active communications support

Contributing INNOVATE partner: ECRE European Council on Refugees and Exiles

General objectives, basic principles & potential impact

This practice describes how ECRE launches and disseminates its research reports and how it supports the launch through its communication tools. The good practice begins with brief, targeted and useful research, reports and recommendations that have information that are relevant and will be of interest to different stakeholders. Based on the research or report, ECRE:

- develops targeted messages aligned with different social media channel audiences. ECRE currently uses LinkedIn, Facebook, X and Instagram and recently joined Bluesky;

- when the output (report) is ready, an article is prepared for ECRE's weekly bulletin, there is interaction with authors before the launch and dissemination, and the comms team provides support to reach additional stakeholders;
- a targeted email is sent by the author to selected policymakers and a longer mailing list. The email includes the report and related social media content;
- sometimes an additional op-ed is written for the ECRE weekly bulletin;
- there are specific dissemination lists for each publication that include policymakers across policy areas, MEPs, and other stakeholders. Bespoke email lists already part of power mapping to define the space for influence;
- ECRE has an internal database that is updated as required with the help of members and other stakeholders.

Example

The rights of women and girls in the asylum procedure and the implications of the recently adopted Asylum Procedures Regulations (APR)

ECRE published a policy paper on the rights of women and girls in the asylum procedure and the implications of the recently adopted Asylum Procedures Regulation (APR) in December 2024. The paper highlights the challenges faced by women and girls under the current legislation (i.e. the Asylum Procedures Directive (APD)), including those relating to personal interviews, legal counselling, assistance, representation, the right to an effective remedy, special procedural guarantees, the concept of safe countries and special procedures.

Drawing on reports and country reports from inter alia the Asylum information Database (AIDA), the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), the paper assesses whether the various challenges stem from legislative provisions or implementation gaps. It also evaluates the changes that have been introduced by the APR and their alignment with EU and international laws. Finally, it includes actionable recommendations and examples of best practices.

The paper targets policymakers, particularly EU Member States that are currently drawing up national action plans on how they will implement the changes in the Pact on Asylum and Migration that includes the APR, by June 2026.

Engagement steps

Timing: The report was launched in December 2024. Care was taken with the timing. It was launched on 11 December during Gender Equality Week to maximise impact and contribute to that debate. On a practical note, it also avoided clashing with holiday periods at the end of the year as stakeholders in Brussels often leave for Christmas and New Year.

Published on the website: The report was published on the ECRE website, as a temporary feature, but also in the relevant policy section for those interested in asylum procedures and the Common European Asylum system, so it could be easily accessed later.

An article was produced for the ECRE weekly bulletin that goes out to over 15,000 interested stakeholders per week. It was published on 13 December with links for relevant social media posts (Facebook, X and LinkedIn).

On X, nine known stakeholder allies were tagged in the post to ensure it was disseminated widely. The post included a link to the policy note as well as a post with a short summary of the paper.

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On Instagram a short reel was produced and the post targeted the negative representation of migration that focuses on 'waves' of foreign/brown men that not only dehumanises male refugees but also neglects 50% of displaced populations.

This was followed by a webinar on the main findings of the report.

Success factors

Critical factors are timing, working with stakeholder allies, targeted social media and communication support.

Learn more

ECRE policy note, the Rights of women and girls in the asylum procedure: https://ecre.org/ecre-policy-paper-rights-of-women-and-girls-in-the-asylum-procedure/

ECRE weekly bulletin article with links to social media: https://us1.campaign-archive.com/?u=8e3ebd297b1510becc6d6d690&id=f42bd5341b#POLICY%20PAPER%2014

Simple but holistic and contextualised outputs to gain attention of policymakers

Contributing INNOVATE partner: Chemnitz University of Technology, Prof. Birgit Glorius

Objectives, basic principles & potential impact

It is often not easy to get the attention of political decision-makers for the results of research projects. However, there are various ways in which science-based information can be communicated to stakeholders. This practice illustrates an example of how a blog post found its way to the highest decision-making levels.

On the one hand, the example shows the importance of getting to the heart of key information and communicating it in an easily understandable way. On the other hand, the practice shows how different forms of research-to-policy dialogue can be interlinked.

Example

Take every opportunity to share your work – how a blog piece changed my way of thinking

A couple of years ago, I wrote a blog post for a partner organisation about refugee reception in Germany and Poland. At the time, I did not think much of it because I did not believe it met the high academic standards expected of scholars. I also doubted its usefulness to policymakers and practitioners who already had a lot of information at their disposal. However, it was widely shared and led to opportunities for me to present to policymakers.

The experience led me to think about how we scholars can provide information in a useful and digestible way to policymakers by narrowing down the main points of policy papers and empirical data to one simple but tangible research question.

Engagement steps

Collaboration and then just a little bit of extra communication: It started in February 2022, when Russia began its full-scale war on Ukraine, resulting in immediate massive outflows of refugees to neighbouring countries. I had a conversation with a Polish colleague about the similarities between the experiences of Poland in 2022 and of Germany in 2015 regarding the challenge of massive arrivals of refugees. We decided to collaborate and convene an online workshop at the CMR Warsaw to share German experiences as a reception country and identify possible learnings for Poland in welcoming Ukrainians.

I prepared a presentation on the most important steps of refugee reception, from accommodation to aspects such as education, health, language acquisition and labour market integration. I compared my research findings on the integration of refugees from the Middle East since 2015 with what we then knew about the situation of Ukrainian refugees, even though our information was scarce at the time.

The workshop was well attended by fellow researchers and some practitioners. No policymakers attended. To see if the event could have a bigger reach, I wrote a blog piece for a Polish partner project, aimed at a broad audience of researchers, but also policymakers and practitioners in the field of refugee reception. I basically translated my spoken paper and my slides into written text, rather descriptive and data-oriented, but with a clear message regarding the similarities and differences between the refugee reception situation in 2015 in Germany and in 2022 in Poland and the crucial steps of the reception process.

From a blog post to presenting to German policymakers: The blog piece was published and I also put it on my own website, from where it made its way onto the website of the German Federal Agency for Migrants and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, BAMF). As a result, I was invited to present on a panel at a conference for lawyers and officials. After the event, one of the organisers, a high-ranking BAMF official, told me that he found the blog piece extremely valuable and that it was the reason for inviting me – to provide a holistic and contextualised view on the refugee situation and the challenges we were facing.

At the time, I felt embarrassed that a simple blog, which is not often thought of as the level of academic excellence that scholars should strive for, could be so helpful. However, the experience highlighted how easy it is for multi-faceted policy papers to be overlooked during the frantic daily responsibilities of a high-ranking administrative official or policymaker. What is needed, is to narrow down the main points of these policy papers and data collection documents to an even more straightforward but tangible research question, and to develop the argument step by step in easy, comprehensible language using empirical data to strengthen and contextualise the arguments.

Success factors

- **Keep it simple**: As scientists, we like to think in a complex and theory-orientated way and that, from this perspective, empirical descriptions or comparisons feel banal. But they are not! Policymakers and practitioners often lack time and critical distance for a birds-eye perspective on their daily work. We can facilitate this perspective by offering a simple but holistic and contextualised account.
- **Find the unexpected opportunities for R2P communication**: Research to policy communication (R2P), even if carefully planned, can be a very strenuous and disappointing experience, as it is often difficult to attract the attention of policymakers. But sometimes possibilities arise in situations we do not expect! In the case described above, it was my role on an advisory board of a Horizon 2020 project that led me to the conversation with the Polish partners, the online event, and eventually to a blog that gave me access to their networks.
- **Multiply your output**: If your carefully prepared R2P roundtable only attracted a handful of participants, don't be disappointed! Rather, take your nicely prepared work and multiply it by producing other types of output: transform the presentation slides into a text, a podcast, a video. Publish it on your website, talk about it on social media. Through this, the ideas of your initial event will slowly but continuously trickle down to a wider audience.

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Learn more

What can we learn from the German experience of hosting post-2015 refugees for supporting refugees from Ukraine? By prof. Birgit Glorius

Engaging with a policy-implementing audience

Contributing INNOVATE partner: SDU Süleyman Demirel University

Objectives, basic principles & potential impact

By customising training sessions, this approach seeks to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, fostering a rights-respecting approach in everyday migration work. The approach is built on adaptability, engagement, and relatability. The research team adjusts the content of a training's complexity based on participants' backgrounds, using clear language and relatable scenarios. By highlighting real-world consequences – such as the risks of violating the European Convention on Human Rights (ECtHR) – they make human rights standards relevant to participants' roles. Engagement is encouraged through open-ended questions and hypothetical scenarios, creating a supportive space for participants to ask questions and reflect on the personal and institutional impact of policies. Positive reinforcement fosters confidence, building participants' motivation to apply these standards in their work. The anticipated impact includes immediate retention of key concepts and, in the long term, improved policy implementation that aligns with human rights standards.

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Example

Strengthening policy compliance through tailored training

This example focuses on the development and delivery of targeted training sessions aimed at equipping frontline migration agency staff with a practical understanding of international human rights standards. The training was specifically designed for entry- to mid-level migration officials within migration agencies who are responsible for implementing policies that directly affect migrants' rights. Given their varied educational backgrounds and limited exposure to complex legal principles, the training sessions simplified key legal concepts and used relatable examples to highlight the importance of compliance with human rights standards.

The objective was to bridge the gap between theory and practice, empowering policymakers and practitioners to make informed, rights-respecting decisions in their day-to-day roles. This approach encouraged participants to engage thoughtfully, recognise the real-world implications of policy decisions, and apply human rights principles in their work.

Engagement steps

Before starting the training, the research team took time to understand the participants' backgrounds, including their career stage, educational level, and familiarity with human rights law. This initial assessment helped gauge how best to approach complex legal topics and set an appropriate tone for an effective learning experience.

Recognising that new recruits might lack a deep understanding of international human rights standards, the team simplified the content. They focused on the basics of refugee law, using straightforward language and minimising technical legal jargon. The team highlighted the potential consequences of neglecting international standards, such as ECtHR violations, making the material relevant to the participants' roles.

To make the material more engaging, the research team included real-life examples and hypothetical scenarios that participants could easily relate to. For example, they discussed cases involving detention practices and their impact on vulnerable groups, like children, to illustrate the real-world implications of policy choices.

The research team prompted participants to reflect on how they might feel if they or their loved ones were affected by similar policies. This exercise helped create a personal connection to the content, emphasising the importance of human rights standards.

Throughout the session, the team provided positive feedback and encouraged questions, creating a comfortable and engaging environment. By fostering a respectful and open space, they increased understanding and generated genuine interest in applying these standards.

Success factors

The success of this practice largely depended on adaptability, empathy, and fostering a respectful learning environment. The research team's ability to assess the audience's background and adjust content accordingly was crucial. By tailoring the complexity of legal concepts and using relatable examples, they ensured the material was both accessible and relevant. Additionally, encouraging open dialogue allowed participants to feel comfortable asking questions, enhancing their engagement and understanding.

Another key factor was the team's focus on fostering a personal connection to the content. By prompting participants to consider the impact of policies on themselves or loved ones, the team encouraged a more empathetic approach to policy implementation. This helped bridge the gap between abstract legal standards and real-world applications, reinforcing the importance of human rights compliance.

Do

- assess the audience's educational background and career stage to tailor the presentation effectively;
- use simplified language and relatable examples to make complex topics understandable and relevant for those who are new in the field;
- encourage questions and open dialogue to create a supportive environment where participants feel comfortable engaging;
- connect the material to personal experiences to deepen the audience's understanding and empathy.

Don't

- use overly technical language without considering the audience's familiarity with legal terminology;
- ask overly challenging or confrontational questions that might embarrass participants or make them uncomfortable;
- focus solely on theoretical aspects without showing practical implications, as this can make the training feel disconnected from real-world applications;
- be dismissive of questions; every question provides an opportunity to reinforce understanding and build trust.

> Go back to the *Toolkit Recommendations*

Migration Research to Policy

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