



## MODULE 12

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# Towards Collaborative Coverage of Migration

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### MODULE AIMS

- To demonstrate different forms of collaborative journalism and best-practice examples.
- To equip participants with knowledge about teamwork and intercultural communication.
- To point out benefits of collaborative journalism, especially for the coverage of migration.



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the end of this module, participants should be able:

- To recognise the importance of embodying various perspectives into their reporting.
  - **Cognitive LO: Analysing**
- To collaborate with journalists from diverse geographical backgrounds as well as with audiences in the production of migrant and refugee stories.
  - **Affective LO: Responding**
- To know what is required to be able to work in (intercultural) teams.
  - **Cognitive LO: Analysing**

## Outline

The previous chapters have shown how much data about migration and forced displacement is available – the International Organisation of Migration (IOM) Migration Portal, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), just to name a very few. These offer rich material to compare matters of migration and forced displacement between countries and continents. Combined with data from the World Bank, the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT) or the Mixed Migration Monitoring Mechanism Initiative (4Mi), they may allow journalists to conceive stories that transcend borders and relate the situation in countries of origin with the situation in destination countries. What are the facts and context factors in the home and transit countries of migrants and refugees, and what are the relevant statistics for destination countries? While the previous chapters have also served as an introduction how to make the best use of the available data, this chapter focuses on a promising perspective for telling the story behind the facts: Collaborative journalism may substantially broaden the scope of stories about migration and forced displacement by combining the efforts of journalists from origin, transit and destination countries. In a cooperative effort, they may achieve much more than a single journalist. Certainly, collaborative projects in journalism require a substantial investment of time and energy, and thus may be realized only once in a while, when the topic really merits the effort. However, the true story of migration and forced

displacement can only be told from more than one place. With a shrinking network of foreign correspondents even in the ‘Western’ media, and extremely scarce resources in many newsrooms to report even from neighbouring countries, collaborative projects may emerge as one viable solution to contextualize the coverage. Journalists may also team up in inter-continental or cross-continental networks to jointly analyse migration data and develop story ideas. Furthermore, collaborative projects may include migrants and refugees and finally make them more visible in the media.

### **Collaboration between media professionals**

Collaborations between journalists and news organisations have become increasingly important, especially for those media concerned with investigative journalism. Collaboration allows them to join resources and expertise to investigate issues of public relevance, for example in the fields of politics, business, trade, and crime – both at a pan-national and a cross-border level (Alfter, 2016; Sambrook, 2018). Especially with issues such as “highly developed systems of financial technology, or internet-enabled crime”, journalistic collaboration becomes an urgent need (Sambrook, 2018, p. 95). When there are massive amounts of data involved, there is a particular need for journalists to collaborate and support each other (Sambrook, 2018, p. 94). The trend of data-driven journalism, in particular, forces journalists to team up with software developers, designers and academics to investigate and interpret the data correctly, and present it in an attractive manner to their audiences.

One driving force of this new trend in journalism has been digitalization. While it enabled journalists to communicate and to collaborate more easily across newsrooms and national borders and made remote communication quick, easy and cheap, it also left legacy media struggling with decreasing audience numbers and advertising revenues (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 2). Collaboration became a way to “stretch limited resources” at a time when costs had to be cut, staff had to be reduced and audiences learned to search information online, more often than not deciding to stop paying for news and entertainment (Stonbely, 2017, p. 9). While major news organisations might still have “an institutional weight and broad audience reach which newcomers lack” they increasingly decide to join forces with new, online-only journalistic teams as those come up with fresh novel ideas that may attract a younger audience with new technical skills (Sambrook, 2017). In other cases, legacy media organisations collaborate with former competitors to build shared technology such as content management systems, audience metrics or paywalls in an attempt to cope with the economic struggles they face (Collaborative Journalism, 2020a).

The Panama Papers, revealed in 2016, have been a prime example of cross-border journalism. Led by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ), it has been the largest worldwide collaborative journalism project in history. More than 400 journalists – among them reporters, editors, computer programmers and fact-checkers – from nearly 80 countries, working in 25 languages, collaborated on the Panama Papers. They exposed offshore companies linked to more than 140 politicians in more than 50 countries (ICIJ, 2017; ICIJ, 2018).

In collaborative journalism, fellow journalists and newsrooms do not see each other as competitors – instead they team up “for the amelioration of their organisations, their products and their audiences” (Stonbely, 2017, p. 17). Also, Howe et al. (2017, p. 2) see “the beginning of a kind of sea-change, from a news industry that was competitive and siloed to one inclined toward sharing, cooperation, and transparency”. Howe et al. (2017, p. 3) observe that in innovative media outlets the “traditional newsroom balkanized production into departments – design, photo, research, city, sports, classes” will be replaced by collaborative environments which will “allow nimble, multi-faceted teams to self-organize”. The pioneers of collaborative journalism are those who got involved into the community of software developers and adopted the widely spread altruistic ethos of open source norms and practices (Howe et al., 2017, p. 2). Nevertheless, journalists still compete about best ideas and access to information and might find themselves confined by their employers in the future.



**SUGGESTION FOR CLASSROOM (TO ADDRESS THE COGNITIVE SKILLS OF UNDERSTANDING AND THE AFFECTIVE SKILLS OF RESPONDING):**

Discuss the advantages and challenges of collaborative projects in journalism. Use the table below to structure the outcome of the debate.

Benefits:	Obstacles:
Cross-disciplinary teams create journalistic innovations more easily.	Media organisations must construct collaborative environments to allow for teamwork.
Development of new formats of reporting (e.g. data journalism, multimedia storytelling).	Cross-border collaboration needs agreement on a common language and consider different time zones.
Development of new business models.	Multi-skilled teams can struggle with different work philosophies.
International network can protect against external interferences from national forces.	Partners might violate agreements, e.g. publishing prior to agreed deadlines, not deliver results, miss deadlines, story theft.
Enhancing the position of single journalists when negotiating with editors and newsroom managers.	Not all partners might have access to sources such as official statements.
Combination of journalists with highly specialized experts for example to analyse big data.	Partners might be hindered by structural or financial constraints.
Reach and quality of news reporting can be enhanced.	Digital communication might be under surveillance.

Koch (2018, pp. 64-77) also considers non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as Transparency International as valuable cooperation partners. Alfter (2018, p. 42) believes that “any cooperating team of disparate character such as journalists and scholars” can participate in collaborative journalism. According to Alfter (2016, p. 300) cross-border journalism includes four features:

“Journalists from **different countries** ...  
 ... collaborate to research a **shared theme or story**.  
 They **compile, mutually cross check and merge their findings** in order to ...  
 ... fact check and **tell these findings to their individual target groups** on regional, national or local level.”

While there is general agreement that competitive thinking is counterproductive to collaborative journalism, the dimensions of a potential cooperation vary enormously. Stonbely (2017, p. 14) sees collaborative journalism solely as “a cooperative arrangement (formal or informal) between two or more news and information organisations”. She distinguishes six types of collaborative journalism along the features of temporary or on-going, and in terms of the production of content by the collaborating partners in separate, co-creating or integrated working teams (Collaborative Journalism, 2020a; Stonbely, 2017, pp. 20-50).<sup>1</sup>



**SUGGESTION FOR AN EXERCISE TO ADDRESS THE COGNITIVE SKILLS OF UNDERSTANDING AND THE AFFECTIVE SKILLS OF RESPONDING:**

Ask participants to read the interview with Tabea Grzeszyk, a German journalist and co-founder of Hostwriter, an inclusive network that aims to connect journalists and enable its members to easily share story ideas and find partners from a variety of countries to work collaboratively on journalistic investigations (Hostwriter, 2020).

Ask your students to discuss in small groups if Hostwriter is a suitable form to connect journalists from across the globe and what other possibilities there might be to get in contact with journalists from other countries.

**Cross-border journalism and migration coverage**

*Three questions to Tabea Grzeszyk, journalist and one of the founders of Hostwriter*

→ See next page.



Source: fotostudioneukoelln.de

<sup>1</sup> See also her tip sheet online (Collaborative Journalism, 2020b).

**What are the advantages of cross-border journalism?**

**Tabea Grzeszyk:** I believe that at some point in the future there will be certain topics where this question won't come up at all anymore, because it will be obvious that we MUST collaborate to be able to investigate these topics. No matter if it's migration, cross-border crime or climate change coverage, how could one report on these issues as a single journalist? To be able to live up to the claim of being a watchdog and to aspire to quality journalism, I believe journalists have no other choice but to work across borders. After all, it is a fact that we live in a globalised world, and many big topics of the 21st century often have this cross-border facet. I don't want to deny that there are also local issues, so one does not always have to report everything per se across borders where it makes no sense. But if a journalist needs local expertise from abroad, if there are foreign languages involved, then she/he is dependent on colleagues who are at home in other countries and who have access to local sources.

**What would you recommend to journalists who have never worked across borders before?**

I would always recommend talking to people who have done this before. There are quite a few out there by now, organised in networks, be it Investigate Europe (Investigate Europe, 2020), the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (2020) or the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ, 2020). Often their members can be met at conferences and they are also very approachable and like to talk about their cross-border investigations.

We have also founded Hostwriter precisely for this purpose, motivated by the fact that we thought that cross-border journalism should not only be available to the best investigative journalists in the world, but that it is actually a craft that every journalist in the world will need in the future, so we also see ourselves as a very inclusive network where journalists can take the first steps. It is also open to journalism students, so even as a student you can register and search for other journalists and participate in discussions. We want to help to ensure that cross-border journalism becomes more and more mainstream and, above all, more accessible - even to people from regions that are less privileged in terms of access, money and contacts. Our aim with Hostwriter is to have a member in every country in the world. We already have members in 150 countries and are confident to eventually connect journalists in all countries in the world.

Trust is, of course, very important in cross-border collaborations. Trust develops with time – that's why I wouldn't recommend starting off with a giant investigative research right away. Beginners should start working with a small team on a project that doesn't require high trust and security levels; probably a person from the team already knows somebody who will also join the team, and so on. These journalists must first pass through some quite slow trust-building processes before they can think of a large-scale publication. One should also always try

to meet in person, keeping in mind that visa restrictions may apply to international journalists when choosing the most accessible location to meet.

**Why is the topic of migration predestined to be covered cross-border?**

People flee across borders. This fact alone makes it a cross-border story. It is not only worth reporting that the refugees have arrived in Germany, for example, but in every country they transit through, there are a lot of stories worth reporting to get the bigger picture. It is important to work collaboratively with journalists from the migrant's home country, the transit countries, and the destination country. Local journalists have better insights into the respective situation on site and can get beneath the surface. Adding the perspectives of journalists in transition countries can also help to overcome a reductionist narrative of migration – for instance, by including how European Union (EU) trade agreements have contributed to people fleeing their countries in the first place. After all, Europe is not only a destination for refugees; it has also contributed to the problems that cause migration.

**Collaboration with citizens**

While there is no consensus yet in the profession or in the scientific community about whether to understand the integration of the audience, also known as crowdsourcing, as being part of collaborative journalism, some scholars consider audience participation as a possible if not essential part of collaborative journalism. Stonbely (2017, p. 4) for example sees it as “an engagement element”. Bradshaw (2013, p. 4) proposes that collaborative journalism is “a way of pursuing stories that involve people outside of the traditional newsroom”, e.g. crowdsourcing with the help of social networks and online communities.

The boundaries of the term citizen journalism are blurry. The terms “participatory journalism” and “citizen journalism” are often used interchangeably to describe the use of content produced by non-media professionals in the reporting of mainstream media. Other terminology refers to user-generated content, reciprocal journalism, citizen media, networked journalism, co-creative journalism or social news. Participatory journalism typically refers to the production of professional journalistic content with members of the audience being involved. This implies a process of co-creating content, with both parties (citizens and professional journalists) contributing for example original content or commentary.

The amount of content produced by citizens is rising, be it that they are coincidentally eyewitnesses of an event or deliberately producing texts, photos or videos to raise awareness of a topic. However, content produced by citizen journalists is usually only seen by a mass audience when mainstream media organisations decide to circulate it (Usher, 2016, p. 248), although this appears to be changing in regard to some content on social media. When confronted with crisis situations

like terror attacks in urban settings, natural disasters, or civil war, the mass media is increasingly dependent on the use of content produced by non-professionals. In a time of rising political polarization, the need to fact-check any content from social media is paramount (Stearns, 2016; Wardle, 2016). Other important points when integrating user-generated content are to ask for permission, to educate citizen contributors about basic journalistic standards and to ensure their physical, psychological and digital safety.

A specific form of collaborating with the audience is crowdsourcing, a neologism which combines the terms “crowd” and “outsourcing” that was popularised by Howe (2006). The distribution of smaller jobs to members of the audience can be used for a wide range of tasks, such as the recognition of text and images or for verifying, analysing and categorizing different forms of content such as text documents, audio or video files or sharing personal experiences and gathering data (Aitamurto, 2015; Onuoha et al., 2015). Well-known examples from the journalistic world are The Guardian’s call to investigate documents on the expenses of members of the British parliament (Rogers, 2009) and the CrowdNewsroom by the German investigation center Correctiv (Correctiv, 2020).

### **Collaborative reporting – with migrants and refugees**

Collaborative journalism may enable newsrooms to include a much broader perspective on migration and forced displacement into their reporting, either by teaming up with journalists from abroad, with the audience or with the main characters of the coverage – the migrants and refugees. The Refugee Journalism Project, based in London, claims that journalists have to rethink their reporting as “the refugees [...] have often been passive by-standers in the construction of their narratives” (Abidi, 2018). It supports refugee and exiled journalists to re-start their careers in the UK. Participants are offered a range of workshops, mentoring and internships. The project’s core aims are to help prepare refugee journalists for work in the UK media industry, and to create opportunities to publish their work and build a wider network. One resulting story is an investigation about reverse migration to Syria as a growing phenomenon, the “Road back to Damascus”, published for the first time in Arabic in the Irish Times (Hayden & Ghandour, 2017). It was produced by UK journalist Sally Hayden, an award-winning journalist and photographer who is focused on migration, conflict and humanitarian crises, and Ziad Ghandour, a British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC) Arabic researcher and free-lance journalist who escaped Syria in 2015 (The Refugee Journalism Project, 2020).

Federico Tarditi, Innovation and Audience Engagement strategist at the news organization Fusion and one of the organisers of the “19 Million Project” (2015a), describes the issue of migration as “too complex for just a single point of view” (cited in Gupta, 2017, p. 6). The participants of these projects campaign for giving migrants and refugees a voice in the coverage of migration and forced displacement. Almost 150 journalists, coders, designers and citizens from around the world formed teams, brainstormed, talked to and worked with migrants and refugees, and created collaborative media and technology projects devoted to migration, with a focus on the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015. According to their mission statement, they are committed to finding innovative ways to



advance the narrative around the refugee crisis and explore how the latest technology and digital storytelling methods can improve the reporting and drive global action to address this topic. One of the resulting projects was “Moving Voices”, a mentorship programme that paired journalists and storytellers with migrants and refugees to help them share and publish their stories. It aimed “to empower migrants to tell their own stories in their own voices – direct, unfiltered and real. It is based on the premise that empathy derives from human stories told from first-hand experience” (19 Million Project, 2015b).

For one and a half years, El País (Spain), The Guardian (UK), Le Monde (France) and Der Spiegel (Germany) were closely following newly-arrived migrant and refugee communities in Europe to demonstrate their integration challenges, their humanitarian situation, their professional ambitions, and the impact of their arrival on both the destination and the home countries. According to the media’s own statements, the project closely follows the focus on migrants and refugees to ground their reporting on their realities (The New Arrivals, 2020).

During the peak of the so-called “refugee crisis” of 2015, the international non-profit media development organisation Internews partnered with the volunteer organisation Standby Task Force (SBTF) to collect and publish information with the aim to provide it to people on the Balkan route. Internews had noticed that many refugees arriving from Turkey lacked essential information such as the location and the extent of support organisations for refugees in Europe (Norris, 2016, p. 229). As the SBTF already had a wide network of volunteers experienced in gathering and verifying data, Internews collaborated with the organisation to collect information from public sources, media reports and user-generated content from the Internet and social media during one week in September 2015 (SBTF, 2015). Internews published the information through a range of online channels and in a variety of formats such as blogposts, spreadsheets, maps and visualizations. In the following month, drawing on the experience of collaborating with SBTF, Internews started the news service “News on the Move” to publish information relevant for people on the migration routes to Europe.<sup>2</sup>



**SUGGESTION FOR AN EXERCISE TO ADDRESS THE COGNITIVE SKILLS OF UNDERSTANDING AND THE AFFECTIVE SKILLS OF RESPONDING:**

Select one of the projects described above and study the stories with your participants. Discuss the outcome, and the added value provided by collaborative techniques. Discuss if, and how, such projects can be realized within the restrictions of newsrooms in your country.

<sup>2</sup> The webpage is not online anymore, but the Twitter channel, which was activated in October 2015 and ran until May 2017, provides an insight in the kind of published information: <https://twitter.com/newsthatmoves>.

## Cross-border collaboration

In recent years, cross-border collaborative journalism projects have attracted a lot of attention due to their mutually shared investigations of highly relevant stories in a wide range of countries despite their distinct languages and journalism cultures, and their simultaneous targeting of regional, national and international audiences (Alfter, 2018). A major advantage of teaming up with other reporters from abroad is that the story can be pitched to a broader range of media platforms and audiences. Additionally, being part of an international journalistic community might grant some degree of protection especially to journalists who work in a repressive environment. To be able to cooperate in international teams, intercultural skills as well as mutual trust are important (Alfter, 2019, pp. 64-78).

The sender-receiver model only functions partly in intercultural communication, that is to say only if intent and content of messages are understood by both parties in the same way [...]. Often, a successful intercultural communication can be only reached within a process. Intercultural communication can only function if one is willing to engage with a foreign culture, that is to say accepts it as alien to its own culture. It is important to acquire knowledge – language, important symbols of the body language, cultural peculiarities – and the ability to look patiently for different ways of communication. (Broszinsky-Schwabe, 2011, p. 40)

In general, it can be noted that the foundations of all intercultural communication are respect and patience. When there are disagreements and misunderstandings, patience with oneself and others help remove them. Some ground rules regarding punctuality, meetings, communication, disagreements, etc. developed collaboratively by the group are also beneficial. Asking questions when something is unclear is better than making assumptions. It is also important to check that all parties are 'reading from the same sheet' to avoid misunderstandings (Commisceo Global, 2016).

Alfter (2019, pp. 49-54) differentiates between three levels of intensity of cross-border collaboration: the loose network, the limited collaboration, and the close collaboration.

- In a loose network, there are colleagues with similar subject areas who report on the same international major corporations or use the same methods. It can be seen as a non-binding network, which makes things easier: It can give access to further contacts, stories or subject areas of the network members, thus it can be seen as a possible starting point for finding an actual cross-border investigation team. Contacts often emerge through encounters at a press event, a workshop or a conference.

- In a limited collaboration, network members exchange restricted but clearly defined information on companies in a foreign country or a request via the Freedom of Information Act or equivalent. Members should not forget that collaborating is supposed to be a win-win situation: One should not only ask for the experiences and insights from colleagues, but also offer one's own information. A limited collaboration can dissolve once the information is shared.
- The most intensive form of cross-border collaboration is the close collaboration with investigation teams in several countries. The network copes with a task which single journalists would have been unable to accomplish. All team members can access the materials and can use the information that is relevant to their national or regional target groups. Especially here, trust is an important prerequisite, and it is important to speak openly and constructively about working methods and cultural differences. As trusts builds over time, most journalists working in close collaborations have known each other several months or years. Often, they have done smaller and easier investigations first before they have engaged in more difficult investigations.



**SUGGESTED ASSIGNMENT TO ADDRESS THE COGNITIVE SKILLS OF ANALYSING AND THE AFFECTIVE SKILLS OF RESPONDING:**

1) Ask your participants to use the e-learning-session on “Implementing a collaborative project – intercultural communication”, developed within the EU project “New skills for the next generation of journalists” (NEWSREEL), to prepare themselves for a classroom discussion about intercultural skills.

2) Ask your participants to use the e-learning-session on “Planning a collaborative project”, developed within the EU project (NEWSREEL), to prepare a pitch to an editor in a newsroom or for funding by a foundation, and ask them to present it in the classroom and get feedback from their peers.

You can find both sessions here: [https://newsreel.pt.e.hu/e\\_learning/collaborative\\_journalism](https://newsreel.pt.e.hu/e_learning/collaborative_journalism)



### RECOMMENDED READING:

#### Academic:

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#### Journalistic:

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#### Institutional:

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Gupta, A. (2017). Bringing collaborative journalism to the issue of international migration: An interview about the 19 million hackathon. *Media Fields Journal* 12/2007, 1-19. Retrieved November 26, 2020, from <http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/707453/27402858/1483737599450/Gupta.pdf?token=dz6Kwt8D0ahp%2Fc1XHwJ%2BPAr9TKw%3D>

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