UM6P Research Chair on Forced Displacement – 2025 Webinar Series

(Re)Framing Migration: Examining Migration Narratives in the Global North and the Global South

UM6P Research Chair's 2025 Webinar Series

Although most forcibly displaced people reside in the Global South,[1] research on migration and forced displacement remains largely shaped by the Global North,[2] often sidelining the complex realities and inequalities experienced in the Global South. The UM6P Research Chair on Forced Displacement aims to address this imbalance by generating regionally grounded insights to inform policy development. The UM6P Chair's Webinar Series brings together diverse voices from the Global North and the Global South to explore key issues related to displacement, fostering dialogue between academics, policymakers, and practitioners.

This scene-setting brief introduces the topic of the second session in the Webinar Series, titled *"(Re)Framing Migration: Examining Migration Narratives in the Global North and the Global South."*

Introduction: Why narratives on migration and forced displacement matter

Migration remains one of the most emotive and contested issues in global politics today. As dynamics evolve and new challenges arise, the narratives surrounding migration and forced displacement are becoming more significant, playing a critical role in shaping public opinion, policy agendas, and impacting the everyday realities of migrants and forcibly displaced persons.[3] Although migration narratives vary widely, they often rely on overly simplified binaries (e.g., legal vs. illegal, contributor vs. burden, victim or deserving vs. non-deserving) and are frequently gendered and racialised.[4] Political actors and the media play a central role in constructing and influencing these narratives,[5] while civil society actors often provide counter-narratives through prioritising human rights concerns, legal protection, and integration—although with limited capacity to shift the broader discourse.[4,6] Given its importance for informed policymaking, it is key to understand the diverse narratives that exist on migration and forced displacement in both the Global North and the Global South.[2,3]

Divergent migration narratives in the Global North and Global South

Migration narratives differ significantly between and within the Global North and Global South, reflecting divergent political ideologies, policy frameworks, and historical migration patterns.[2,3] In the Global North, migration is increasingly framed through a securitised lens, with media and political actors portraying migrants and forcibly displaced persons as potential

[1] UNHCR. (2024). *Mid-year trends 2024*. https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends-report-2024

[2] Achieng, M., & El Fadil, A. (2020). What is wrong with the narrative on African migration? In A. Adepoju, C. Fumagalli, & N. Nyabola (Eds.), *Africa Migration Report: Challenging the narrative* (pp. 1–14). International Organization for Migration. https://publications.iom.int/books/africa-migration-report-challenging-narrative

[3] Rheindorf, M., & Vollmer, B. (2025). *Discourses about irregularised migrants: Representation and narratives in media, politics, and civil society in Europe*. *Comparative report*. I-CLAIM. https://i-claim.eu/project/discourses-about-irregularised-migrants-comparative-report/

[4] Rheindorf, M., Vollmer, B., van Liempt, I., & Sigona, N. (2025). *Understanding and reframing migration narratives: Towards an evidence-based policy discourse in Europe. Policy Brief*. I-CLAIM. https://i-claim.eu/project/understanding-and-reframing-migration-narratives-towards-an-evidence-based-policy-discourse-in-europe/

[5] FGSES-UM6P. (2025, January 24). *Migration Narratives* [Podcast]. SoundCloud. https://on.soundcloud.com/3VGFM1lMOXDWdH4jbz

[6] Colombi, D. (2025). *Discourses about irregularised migrants at the EU level: Representation and narratives in media, politics, and civil society. Country report.* I-CLAIM. https://i-claim.eu/project/discourses-about-irregularised-migrants-at-the-eu-level/

threats to national security, economic stability, and cultural identity.[7,8] Although these discourses differ, as they tend to reflect political priorities and electoral interests, a focus on perceiving migration as a crisis is common across different contexts.[3,5] This has fuelled perceptions of migration and forced displacement as urgent challenges that have the potential to destabilise Global North institutions, reinforcing political agendas that externalise border control and legitimise restrictive policies.[3,5]

Narratives in the Global South often emerge from histories of circular migration, informal cross-border economies, and regional integration. The 2020 Africa Migration Report emphasises that most migration is intra-continental, regular, and driven by economic or social networks, rather than irregular crossings to Europe.[2] Migration is perceived as a driver of development, with remittances playing a crucial role in national economies and poverty reduction.[9] In addition, regional responses such as the Cartagena Declaration in Latin American and the Caribbean and the 1969 OAU (Organization of African Unity -now African Union) Convention on Refugees offer broader protection for displaced populations than those typically seen in the Global North.[10] Yet, Global North frameworks, research, and political discourse continue to dominate narratives on migration and forced displacement, often marginalising alternative framings.[2,5]

Opportunities lie in strengthening local research and media ecosystems, foregrounding factual information to counter increasing mis- and disinformation, and creating space for alternative and positive narratives on migration and forced displacement.[2,5,11] Such narratives could enable migrants to access resources, build meaningful lives, and support integration in host communities.[5,12]

Outlining the second session in the Webinar Series

The second webinar will explore how divergent narratives on migration in the Global North and Global South shape practice and policy responses, influencing both the governance and experience of migration and forced displacement.

Professor Nando Sigona, Chair of International Migration and Forced Displacement at the University of Birmingham, took part in a podcast[5] to introduce the webinar topic. In this conversation, Prof. Sigona explored how migration narratives are shaped by politicians and the media, often resorting to crisis framings, which significantly influence public perception, policy responses, and the lived experiences of migrants.

➔ *Find below the invitation including more information about the second webinar in the Series, which will take place on Wednesday, July 9th, 2025, from 1.00pm to 2.30pm (GMT+1), via this Zoom link.*

[7] Borjas, G. J. (2016). *We wanted workers: Unraveling the immigration narrative*. W. W. Norton & Company.
[8] Triandafyllidou, A. (2018). Migration and globalization: Dynamics and contradictions. In A. Triandafyllidou (Ed.), *Handbook on Migration and Globalisation* (pp. 1–24). Edward Elgar Publishing.
[9] Ratha, D. K., De, S., Kim, E. J., Plaza, S., Seshan, G. K., & Yameogo, N. D. (2020). *COVID-19 crisis through a migration lens* (Migration and Development Brief 32). World Bank Group. https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/989721587512418006/covid-19-crisis-through-a-migration-lens
[10] Cantor, D. J. (2021, January 4). *Cooperation on refugees in Latin America and the Caribbean – The "Cartagena process" and South–South approaches. Southern Responses to Displacement*. https://southernresponses.org/2021/01/04/cooperation-on-refugees-in-latin-america-and-the-caribbean-the-cartagena-process-and-south-south-approaches/
[11] Allen, W. L., Ahlstrom-Vij, K., Rolfe, H., & Runge, J. (2023). Communicating economic evidence about immigration changes attitudes and policy preferences. *International Migration Review, 58*(1), 266–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183221142779
[12] Thravalou, E., Martinovic, B., & Verkuyten, M. (2020). Humanitarian assistance and permanent settlement of asylum seekers in Greece: The role of sympathy, perceived threat, and perceived contribution. *International Migration Review, 55*(2), 547–73. https://doi.org/10.1177/0197918320949826