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Unlike Migrants, Refugees Don't Have A Choice. The Project RefugeesIn Goes On

*On the World Refugee Day we, Slovenian members of the **RefugeesIn project** attended "Talking about the media and propaganda with regard to refugees", a round table that was organised in Ljubljana the participants being: Steffen Dobbert (Die Zeit and Zeit online journalist), Mojca Pajnik (Peace Institute And Faculty Of Social Sciences, Ljubljana, Mojca Širok an RTV Slovenia journalist, Tadej Troha Institute Of Philosophy, Academy Of Sciences And Arts and Max Zimani (Institute Global). The round table was moderated by: Jure Gombač from Slovenian Migration Institute).*

In 2015, the massive wave of refugees that arrived in Slovenia by the Western Balkan route led to a refugee crisis and later to the wide spread hatred targeting refugees and migrants in general. The security discourse and the discourse of politicians increased hatred and rejection of refugees by Slovenian population and caused islamo phobia. Moreover, "the mass media serve as a system communicating messages and symbols to general population. It is their function (...) to inculcate individuals with values, beliefs and codes of behaviour" (...) to this end they use propaganda. (Herman, Chomsky, 2002)¹ Propaganda and political populism are often supported by the news about migrants in the media and even more so by the news about migrants that are not true, nor are they accurate. What to do? How to dismantle myths and stereotypes refugees supported by the media? Would there be any chance of having access to quality ethical news on refugees and changing the discourse of the media?

¹ Herman, E.S., Chomsky N.(2002) Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media.

"The situation of refugees and migrants depends on their image constructed by the media as well as their audience." Are news accurate or are they a pure construct and propaganda? Should all newspapers have employees spending their time checking facts, finding out if tweets are not just a production of algorithms? " questioned the participants in this round table.

News about refugees and migrants are being multiplied, thus often misleading the audience. Explicit questions, where, when, who, how, what for etc. have to be asked if we want news to be more transparent. If journalists respect this simple rule of transparency and the audience raises these questions, there is less possibility that the news about refugees are propaganda.

Finally, what do we look for in the media? The confirmation of our own stand points and views! If we believe that refugees are "social opportunists", we will discover in the media that they are. But relying on the news in the media demands getting deeper in the meaning and messages of the news. The best way is to put ourselves in the shoes of refugees. "If we decide to work in a foreign country where salaries are better and we go there to find a job, are we social opportunists for that matter?" asked Mojca Širok. If we imagine ourselves or our relatives in the situation of refugees, than we will understand them better. If my uncle fled from a country at war, would he be a social opportunist? Probably not.

How to impact the mentality? Wide spread education matters

How to change public opinion, how to impact the mentality? Education for responsible citizenship matters but it should be systematic taking place everywhere, not just in single schools. It should take place in non-governmental organizations, companies, local communities etc. Education. We, who are involved in the **project RefugeesIn**, we have already had some experience with the impact of education, screening films, meeting refugees, having interviews with them. And we are positive that our feelings and opinion are getting transformed as a result of it.

Actually, talking about refugees is talking about poverty, functional illiteracy, war etc. But this is superficial. The next question should be "why"? "Why poverty, why functional illiteracy, why war? Understanding refugees means that we have to go deeper posing additional questions" said Max, a refugee himself.

Refugees don't have a choice, migrants do

There are numerous questions regarding refugees. There is a semantic war, the war of words in Europe. Who is refugee and who is migrant? "If they drown they are called refugees, if they float up to the surface, they are migrants" said ironically a French sociologist. There is *such semantic war* going on all over Europe and it is meaningful, demonstrating interests or hesitations behind them.

Moreover, one would expect the wave of refugees to consist of women and children. Why men? Are they real refugees or just migrants? But do not doubt, just

ask yourself, why would young men march thousands of kilometers, putting their life at risk, if there were not a serious reason for their exile. They are refugees because they do not have a choice, while migrants are those who do have a choice. *Speculations in the media about the reason why these young men came to Slovenia should be abolished..*