Xenophobia – How to Fight It
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In our discussions in last year's capacity building the subject of xenophobia came up. Xenophobia (here used in the sense of dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries) is part of the ideology of far right parties, directly or indirectly. An example of this is when Nigel Farage of UKIP claimed he would not want a Romanian family living next door to him while being perfectly fine with a German family doing so. Another is when a party advocates complete closure of borders, such as Golden Dawn in Greece.

Xenophobia is not in itself new and is something I myself experienced moving to the UK in 2001 from Eastern Europe. However, the rise of xenophobia within political parties in modern Europe is worrying as it is used as a tool to gain votes and also undermines the image of a diverse and welcoming European Union.

It is also necessary to look into the relationship between media coverage and xenophobia as various newspapers such as the Daily Mail have centred on the issues of immigration, with headlines such as 'Immigration causing housing crisis'. Current debates and tweets suggesting closure of borders, such as the recent one from the Slovenian Prime Minister 'Western Balkan routes for irregular #migracije no more . Greece will help, but it must itself meet the commitments given' and photos of refugee camps being bulldozed suggest that the narrative is shifting to a negative tone.

All of this gives rise to more xenophobia and right wing parties are able to take advantage of it as they present themselves as part of the solution. So what can be done to counteract xenophobia?

Firstly, counter arguments must be delivered in blogs, journals and newspapers dispelling the myths and showing the positive sides of immigration. This would counterbalance xenophobic headlines and may make more people question their views on immigration. Xenophobic comments and language used by politicians and journalists must also be called out, as the *Guardian* did when David Cameron described refugees as 'swarm' in 2015.To stand up against xenophobia means to show that xenophobic language is never acceptable.

Secondly, we can fight xenophobia through stories. Migrating from one country to another is a life changing experience and for many an incredibly tough one, filled with barriers, racism and poverty and no story is the same. Many migrants bring a wealth of experience, cultural awareness and can change communities for the better. This is why it's vital to share stories and experiences, not just statistics. There have already been campaigns such as 'I am an immigrant' which focus on the sharing of stories and spreading this awareness will help to challenge the negative rhetoric against migrants and refugees.

Thirdly, we must all stand together against xenophobia, regardless of our background, as said by Bashir Ahmed, the first Asian and Muslim Member of Scottish Parliament from Pakistan 'It's not where we came from that's important, it's where we're going together.'

Some great examples are campaigns such as 'not my xenophobia' which challenge everybody to stand against xenophobia, the refugees welcome movement in Germany which counteracts the Pegida demos and the help for Calais events which happened all over the UK this summer.

Finally, we must bring the debate about refugees, immigration and xenophobia into the open, too long this has been considered the issue of far right parties and this is partly why they have managed to gain a platform and new voters. We must challenge xenophobic attitudes every day and make people understand that a far right party is not a magical solution to all problems and fears.