



## The Bridges Project Case

### How to talk about migration in Europe?

### Understanding attitudes and changing frames

#### The policy challenge:

Ambivalent citizens

The debate on migration is dominated by alarmist polls and headlines: public opinion is perceived as hostile and resistant to the very idea of migration. This perception poses a **challenge for policy-making**: the public is presumed to oppose new, progressive initiatives on migration. But public opinion is neither uniform nor static. In a Bridges workshop we showed that inclusion and tolerance are more powerfully embedded values than the current debate would lead us to believe. We demonstrated how such values can be triggered in public opinion by **framing the migration issue differently**.

#### Our Tool:

Frames

**Frames** are mental constructs that help us understand the world by filtering information. They often operate at a subconscious level (as the majority of our thinking does) and are closely related to our values. For example, depending on the mental frames that people hold, they can perceive voting as *EITHER* an “opportunity to contribute” *OR* as a “waste of time”. Each is the result of the filters, or **mental frames**, that our brains subconsciously apply to make sense of new information by linking this information to pre-existing experiences in our brains. Each word activates a certain frame.

#### Our Method:

Framing

**Framing** is a method of communicating that deliberately activates certain existing mental frames, connects these frames and evokes certain values by using bundles of metaphors and concepts. Voting, for example, can be actively framed as “making a difference” by choosing this very set of words. This method is powerful in triggering specific values and associations. This is why when you negate a frame (“voting is not a waste of time”), you activate the ‘waste’ frame by triggering the association. Whether such framings work depends on the frames that already exist in a culture or audience since different cultures hold different mental frames that might be triggered.

#### Your Benefits:

More effective policies

In our Bridges workshop, we explored different ways of framing the migration debate, with the aim of triggering the values of openness and inclusion. For example, using “We will show solidarity with migrants” as a frame triggers a deep sense of interconnectedness, belonging and pride. Whereas the frame “We have a responsibility to support migrants” is less helpful: it tends to be associated with something that is imposed, an unwelcome duty and triggers resentment. To re-frame the debate it is therefore key to 1) know your audience well 2) identify the values that you want to evoke and 3) identify the frames that can evoke such values. For example, research has shown that the use of the “community” frame in English contexts triggers cooperation and the willingness to cooperate. Such frames can help to foster support for integration policies in the public and counter-act xenophobic discourses.