# C4i
## Communication for Integration

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antirumours

# How to Implement an Anti-Rumours Campaign

## General guidelines for the design and implementation of an anti-rumours strategy

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# Doc.5 How to Implement an Anti-Rumours Campaign
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**Contents**

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# 1. Introduction[1]

The "anti-rumour strategy" (ARS) has its origin in the city of Barcelona, in the context of developing the Intercultural Plan that defined the city in 2009, following a broad participatory process. In that process, the factors that hinder the positive interaction between citizens of different cultural backgrounds were identified. The most relevant were those referring to subjective aspects like stereotypes, prejudices and rumours related to the immigrant population and cultural diversity in general. Hence, one of the 10 strategic guidelines of the Plan deals specifically with the need to counter these negative stereotypes and rumours.

It was necessary, therefore, to undertake specific actions to try to dismantle these stereotypes and rumours. These actions took the form in June 2010 of an 'anti-rumour strategy'. The main elements of the ARS are: identifying major rumours existing in a city; collection of objective data and arguments to dismantle the false rumours; the creation of the anti-rumour network of local social actors from different profiles; providing training for "anti-rumours agents" and design and implement anti-rumours actions to raise awareness, creating and disseminating new tools and resources both creative and rigorous.

During 2013 the ARS was adapted and implemented to four Spanish cities (Fuenlabrada, Getxo, Sabadell and Tenerife island) belonging to the Spanish Intercultural Cities Network (RECI) linked to the "Intercultural Cities" program led by the Council of Europe.

The C4i project led by the Council of Europe is based on the Barcelona ARS and also on its previous experience in projects like the SPARDA, dealing as well with perceptions on cultural diversity. An important objective of C4i is to check if this strategy can be successfully adapted to the local contexts of many different European countries and especially to evaluate the results and its impact from the "social change" perspective.

The objective of this document is to explain and detail the most important aspects for the design and implementation of an "anti-rumour strategy".

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[1] This document has been elaborated taking into consideration the experience of the Barcelona's Municipality and the Antirumores Project. Further information at http://bcnantirumors.cat/ and www.antirumores.com. Additional information could also be found at the forthcoming "Estrategia Antirumor. Manual práctico para su implementación paso a paso" by Daniel de Torres and DCAS.

## 2. Rumours, stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination

If we want to dismantle rumours efficiently, it is inevitable to make clear what is actually meant by the term. Furthermore, where do rumours come from and how are they created? Generally the term refers to statements on people, groups or events that are transmitted from person to person. The important characteristic of rumours is that those statements are made without a real proof of truth, but often they are believed, simply for the fact that many people believe in them. We often refer to these as chitchat or gossip. Rumours, especially those involving specific minorities like migrants, have their breeding grounds in stereotypes and prejudices.

Stereotyping is happening when we give generalized, sometimes exaggerated attributes to all those individuals who share a common trait (sex, nationality, religion or profession etc.). Sometimes there might be an empiric rationale on which they are based, but it is the ignorance for particular characteristics of the individual and the neglect of changes and dynamics that make stereotypes problematic. In that sense, similarities between those that we consider belonging to the same group are emphasised, while at the same time their differences to other groups are exaggerated. For stereotypes to spread, personal contact with the stereotyped collective is not even required. We receive them from relatives, friends the media, political discourses...and not just we don't question but even accept them as ours

There are 4 main reasons for the prevalence of stereotypes:

- For their simplicity, they are easy to spread;

- They conveniently allows us to simplify the complex social reality that surrounds us, helping us to decide what to say or what to do in situations we are not sure about and don't control;

- Given personal and direct experiences that contradict our stereotyped ideas about certain people and groups, we often consider that our experience is an exception to a rule (the stereotype). So, instead of putting into question the validity of the stereotype and recognize the intrinsic heterogeneity among individuals in any group, we tend to continue to believe in the validity of the stereotype;

- Finally, stereotypes generate a 'selective perception' of reality: work like perceptual filters that make us see a part of reality, and not another. That is, our perception of reality is always more receptive to information that reinforce the assumed beliefs.

Prejudices are a logical derivation of negative stereotypes. Having in mind the underlying stereotypical assumption of how the other person is and acts, we determine our own, often preventive, actions towards the other. What is important, unlike stereotypes, prejudice presents a combination of feelings or emotions. Therefore, the task of trying to modify or challenge the socially accepted prejudice is as difficult as trying to modify a feeling or an emotion. We perceive the prejudged as a threat to our values and ethics, and sometimes, to our possessions. It is for the emotional aspect that prejudices are not easily tackled by rational arguments. This is why prejudices constitute one of the greatest obstacles for intercultural understanding:

- We tend to avoid the other due to distrust (even when we do not hold the prejudice as outright truth);
- We fear resentments from our own group when engaging in contact with a prejudiced individual.

Prejudice clearly predisposes to discrimination, which is when we act in a direct manner against another, motivated by assumptions we make about this individual based on the group we allocate him or she.

Now that we have identified where rumours come from, we need to explain their mechanism and their core structure. The best way to do so is by posing the relevant questions.

What are the requirements for an ungrounded statement to spread and to turn into a rumour?

- The existence of stereotypes and prejudices that make the statement credible;
- The reference to a topic that we perceive as important;
- It is explained in the context of uncertainty, discomfort or concern with regard to the topic;
- Simplicity and ambiguity, by leaving out details the statement becomes incapable of proof;
- The transmitter is somebody that we hold credible

When can we say that an ungrounded statement has turned into a rumour?

Its validity derives from the multitude of persons who believe it ("so many people can't be wrong"). Since most of the rumours are related to matters over which we have no direct or personal knowledge, the decision whether or not to believe them, we tend to leave it to the crowd. So, if most of the people we know believe a rumour, we also tend to believe it. We align ourselves in order to avoid confrontation.

However, mere information is not sufficient to block a rumour, It is necessary to adopt a multidimensional approach and consider the emotions and the underlying values, which explain and give meaning to the decisions.

For the Anti-Rumours Strategy (ARS), it is crucial to understand how we can dismantle the core structure of rumours:

- Many people believe in it – we need to show that some do not;
- Based on ambiguous, unproved information – we need to demand proof;
- It is told by someone who enjoys credibility – we need to refer to someone that has credibility too;
- Based on accepted stereotypes and prejudices – we need to question those.

## 3. What are the main characteristics of an Anti-Rumours Strategy?

In the following we present some of the main principles that portray the essence of any Anti-Rumour strategy.

### a) Political commitment and leadership in the context of local intercultural policies

Making the decision to promote an anti-rumour strategy requires commitment and political leadership, since this is not a minor decision but it deals with a very sensitive issue that often policymakers have serious doubts about how to deal.
The success of the strategy requires the will to lead the public debate on these issues, to be proactive, and also requires a "collaborative" leadership since the strategy is based on creating a social coalition with many actors.

The ARS works well as driving, support, facilitator, guide or coordinator. In addition to the ARS to succeed, must be framed in a more global context of local intercultural policies. If it does not exist, the ARS will have many problems to develop and make a real impact. This is because the ARS is not simply about to promote new actions but must also nourish many initiatives and actors are already working on these issues. This involves defining a strategic framework, an "umbrella" that provides a stimulating and motivating network environment from an innovative and attractive approach.

### b) The anti-rumour concept as a key element of the strategy

The use of the "antirumour" concept is essential to understand the impact of this project. There are two reasons to explain this. First, this concept is original and away from the usual concepts linked to public policy and generates a reaction of surprise and interest. This already represents a first success of a policy that seeks precisely to capture the interest and attention of the

people, the media, institutions and social actors. The concept is straightforward, clear, original, and this in itself is innovative in the field of public policy.

Secondly, the focus on antirumour has a conceptual consequence. The target audience of the strategy is the ambivalent majority, those that don't consider themselves being racists but often use negative stereotypes and spread rumours. This majority usually don't pay attention to clearly anti-racist campaigns because they do not feel challenged. However, the reference to rumours generates more interest and direct identification since they are able to recognize those rumours and to accept they use and in some way believe them.

It is very important to start accepting that we all use stereotypes and have prejudices. The goal is not to stigmatize or blame the ambivalent majority, but to provoke critical reflection, making people doubt and think before just repeating those rumours. But the strategy also pretends to identify those actors who are promoting these stereotypes and false rumours. By raising the mainstream's awareness for rumours, the breeding grounds on which racism and xenophobia can grow may be tackled. Finally, it's important to point out that as we all use stereotypes, anti-rumours strategy needs to address both majority and minority groups.

### c) Objective information is not sufficient

Attempting to remove stereotypes and prejudices is not an easy task. Prejudices have three closely related dimensions: cognitive, emotional and behavioral.

On this premise, the anti-rumour strategy is not intended only to provide rigorous information to contrast and refute stereotypes and rumours. Instead, campaigns and actions promoted must address, from this multidimensional perspective, the emotional component and offering opportunities for interaction in order to develop and strengthen new attitudes.

### d) Participation is crucial

The creation of an Anti-Rumour network is a key aspect of the strategy.

But why is its existence so vital for the campaign?

- It allows our strategy to be effective in daily-life areas that are sometimes out of reach from the public administration. As such, the network can create positive synergies between the actors and achieving better results.
- By means of a network, we get to grasp the reality of rumours at first hand, which serves not only to determine their area of operation, but also to identify the best way to dismantle them.

- It provokes a sentiment of solidarity among the actors and entities involved, as they realize and value the joint effort made and provides the protagonists with a feeling of legitimation and relevance

Involving many actors and working on a collaborative basis it is mostly a matter of efficiency and results. We have already said that trying to combat rumours simply disseminating data and factual information that refutes them is not enough. For this reason the need to influence the emotional side requires more direct, creative and spontaneous social interaction in which committed people, the "anti-rumour agents" and local associations and entities, may affect more effectively to dismantle the negative stereotypes and false rumours.

### e) Empowerment and training of anti-rumour agents
The commitment and good will are essential to participate in social projects like this, but they are not sufficient to ensure the rigor and the desired impact. Experience from Barcelona and other cities Antirumours strategies, has shown from the beginning the need to empower people that engage actively and voluntarily in the ARS. Given the complexity of dismantling prejudices and stereotypes, it is essential to provide a good training for anti-rumour agents. There is a need to understand the conceptual framework, learning the necessary skills to address situations in which they will interact with people from the multidimensional perspective that we discussed earlier. It is not only about how to organize specific anti-rumour activities. The question is what attitudes and strategies are most effective for people who spread rumours to make them doubt and think before just repeating what they have heard.

### f) Creativity and rigorousness
The "Anti-rumour" concept itself shows how important creativity is for this project. The reason behind this emphasis on creativity is the belief that it is necessary to do different things in order to get different results. One of the main weaknesses of the traditional awareness initiatives is the difficulty to impact and engage mainstream audiences, not just those already sensitized minorities. This is the main challenge of these policies and the ARS was proposed from the beginning to step forward in the goal of expanding the target audience. To do this, we need to combine most innovative aspects in the field of communication but also about the perspective and methodologies of social intervention.

Using more communicative tools such as cartoons, street actions, games, funny videos etc. and the good use of social networks have strengthened the dissemination of the messages of the strategy. But just as important is what do we spread as how do we spread it. We can make a great cartoon or a really funny video, but then we need to know how to use them to get real impact. We need methodologies, we need trained people, we need indicators to measure the impact. So we need to be creative but also rigorous, and here our idea is that we will only

achieve a great impact if we are creative. Creativity is not limited to producing "creative" products, but it has a much deeper significance since it requires a rethinking of how we do things, how to plan and propose awareness activities.

## 4. Implementing an Anti-Rumours Strategy

### *a) Preparatory steps*

What motivates us to conduct an ARS? What are the elements that really worry us and that we want to emphasize? It is important to do a preliminary reflection to share our motivations and thoughts. In this step we shall get to know our strengths and weaknesses that will accompany us on our journey. In that sense, we should reflect and work:

- Leadership and political coherency. As described in the previous chapter, political leadership is an important premise. The issues and the strategy need to be pronounced explicitly clear and visible.  On the other hand, we need to have a certain support from sides of the government. The political body should be sensitized and share a discourse that is in accordance with the ARS.

- Training the core team. It is required to ensure a minimum knowledge of these key elements:
    o Conceptual – the understanding of the subject and its concepts
    o The strategic approach – the understanding of the ARS methodology

- Identification of the key agents and areas. Whether social, cultural or sports entities, immigrants associations, journalists, universities, experts etc. the identification of agents in the territory of application is essential.

- Public presentation. While the previous aspects were of more internal nature, we shall make the launch of the ARS public. This is to let the public know about the project and to seek for impact on the media. We want to approach:

    o Citizens
    o The government
    o The technical team of the administration
    o Entities from all areas: social, cultural, sports, immigrants, neighbours, business etc.
    o Media

### b) Identification of the main rumours

Using a common methodology among all cities allow us to compare the results and ensure a certain rigor in the process. This is not going to be an academic research, but the goal is to obtain enough relevant information to get a general idea of what are the main rumours at a specific time and context.

The process of identifying the rumours has also an indirect objective, which is to contact potential members of future anti-rumour networks in each city. The people who will convene to participate in this process may end up being part of the network.

We need to reach people with diverse profiles and from different sectors who are in contact with citizens in their daily and professional life. We can separate between "internal" profiles (within municipal administration) and "externals".

To identify the main rumours in each city we propose a methodology based on three different instruments:

- Organization of 1-2 workshops
- Conducting a survey/interview
- Review of existing documentation

The identification of rumours should not be understood as a one-time aspect, but should work more in a cyclic manner.

### c) Compilation of data and arguments to dismantle false rumours

Even if we think we already know that the main rumours are not true, it is essential for the project that we find solid data and good arguments to be used by the anti-rumours agents. We have already said that having objective data is not enough to dismantle prejudices and rumours, as we need a multidimensional approach taking into account the emotional side. We need to be rigorous and we need to feel secure and supported, even if afterwards we don't use some of the data, but having it is important.

What sort of information do we need to get?

This depends on the rumours that were previously identified, but in any case we may need international, national and local data. Obviously, such compilation might prove to be relatively complicated, and there are also country specific differences when it comes to access to this information that need to be taken into consideration.

While the cognitive and rational information form one part of the data we need to collect, the other part is found on the emotional level. On the framework of the training for anti-rumours

trainers, we will provide with some tips and examples of how to look for this data and also how to use it.

### d) Creation of Anti-Rumour networks

It was mentioned earlier on why the network is indispensable for the ARS. It should be clear that the networks might differ substantially in its function and structure from city to city. In the process of creating a network we shall ask the following questions:

What degree of autonomy should the network have?

Networks as a participative space can have different levels of autonomy in the process of decision making, from purely consultative to such with great decision-making power. In that sense, we need to bring this question before the future members of network. It is possible to decide on the priorities, principal rumours and the target of the project before setting up the network, or the network is established from the start on and the fundamental decisions of the campaign will be taken from within the network. There is no better or worse, but the essence of the ARS is based on its participatory dimension, that makes the strategy a "city project" and not just a "municipal project." We can't forget this as the city dimension is crucial for its success and its long-term sustainability.

The network also allows the agents to prompt for actions in their sectors on their own. For this they can make use of materials and aides provided by the ARS campaign.

There is no actual counterargument against the amplification and incorporation of new agents into the network; however one should be aware beforehand of its future dimension and the resources at disposal.

### e) Anti-Rumours training

Given the complexity of dismantling prejudices and stereotypes, it is essential to provide a good training for anti-rumour agents. But who we aim at and what do we want to achieve with the training?

| Type of training | Target audience | Objectives |
|---|---|---|
| General skill enhancement to become an effective anti-rumours agent | Future Anti-rumours agents: (from local associations, municipal staff, social actors, politicians etc.) | Capacitate those persons to take active part in the campaign and the execution of activities |
| Specific for trainers | Anti-rumour agents who can become trainers | Capacitate a certain group of persons to be able to train new agents in the future, thereby guaranteeing the autonomy and sustainability of the ARS |

Main topics of the training:

- ✓ The main concepts related to the ARS (stereotypes, prejudices, rumours, discrimination, racism...)
- ✓ How to collect anti-rumours data and arguments
- ✓ To provide communication skills and strategies to dismantle rumours on a face by face interaction
- ✓ To provide tools and methodologies for raising antirumours awareness to different groups of people

### f) Anti-rumours Campaigns

The centerpieces of an ARS are the campaigns for citizen's sensitization on rumours regarding cultural diversity and immigrants. The fact that we come to describe this part in the end does not imply that we should implement it last. For that matter, we will see that i.e. the global communication campaign shall start in the instance that the first public presentation is held. Other, more specific campaigns may commence later. In that sense we can identify two different dimensions of campaigns: a global one and a more specific one. Additionally, there is what we can describe as a "spontaneous" dimension.

### 1. Global dimension of the campaigns

Here, we find actions that aim to make the citizens familiar with the project and try to raise general awareness on these issues and calling on citizens and social actors who want to become anti-rumour agents of the ARS

What information do we transmit?

- General information on the strategy and its international dimension
- Explanation of the goals, steps and main actions of the project
- Information on the main rumours that are circulating and arguments and data to dismantle them

It is recommendable that the global campaign gets a characteristic image by creating a logo and slogans. This could be created by actors within the network, in doing so enhancing the feeling of engaging with the project.

### 2. Specific dimension of the campaigns

Together with the global dimension, we need to develop more intensive actions focusing on some specific targets and topics. We can't reach the whole city population here. This is where we can "get down" to face-to-face interaction with some citizens in a profound and easy-going manner. In dialogue, the emotional aspect of the topic emerges, and we shall use this to call

upon the empathy of the people. From there it is possible to make them reflect and doubt the existing stereotypes, prejudices and rumours.

The anti-rumour agents will play a key role in many of these activities. As these require much more the participation and work of persons, we need to define the goals, priorities, necessities and evaluation of the campaigns beforehand:

- Define concrete and measurable objectives
- Confine the target audience
- Construct a methodology that incorporates the cognitive and emotional aspects
- Identify and involve the key actors
- Determine the products, resources and materials that will be needed
- Mark the timeframe
- Define indicators that allow to measure results and effects

The cities may develop one or more specific campaigns that include various actions that allow us to reach out target. They may be unreeled simultaneously or consecutively. It is just important that these actions are well coordinated and have coherence among them.

### 3. Spontaneous dimension of the campaigns

The characteristic element of this dimension is that some actions may be initiated by people and entities independently of the ARS team, but decided to adopt the anti-rumour focus. The ARS can serve as a model and provider for instruments, methodologies, economic or logistical support, but the implementation handled by these organizations is on their own.

This means that the ARS does not have direct "control" over such activities, but this is one of the potentials of the campaign. Like this we can reach out to a large and diverse public and communicate a common objective among a wide range of entities. Importantly, this objective is not perceived as imposed by the entities, but as developed on their own. The ARS "losing control" over these activities does not mean that they cannot be rigorous. And further, we might discover new approaches to activities that can be in turn incorporated into the ARS.

These are the main steps of the ARS, although its implementation will be different and unique in each city and this is the greatest wealth of the project, since creativity and flexibility is critical to its own success.

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To conclude with, it is important to note that the C4i project provides with other materials and reports dealing in more detail with crucial issues for the design and implementation of the ARS: a methodology to identify rumours, training materials, the evaluation methodology etc.

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