# TIPSHEET

**Migration: Investigating Movement of Peoples**
Moderator: Carla Minet
Panelists: Ronny Rojas, Imane Bellamine, May Bulman and Sameh Ellaboody

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**Ronny Rojas**, investigative journalist for Noticias Telemundo covering latino communities in the U.S. and stories from Central America, explained how he investigated the journey of migrants travelling in cargo trucks from México to the U.S. in sealed containers where it is hard to breathe.

**1. How to create a database from scratch when working with migration topics.**

- Define the questions you have to ask and systematize to have standardized data and convert them into categories for your homemade database. Some of these categories can be: time, number of migrants, number of deaths, etc
- Use press releases, local media reports, geolocated photos or videos
- Geolocate the interventions

Data standardization requires rules for values, structures, and formats, using the same codes or terms for categories. For instance, if you decide that age is important data, you can't mix numbers with words in the columns.

**2. How to move the project forward**

- Define the timeline
- Partner with other media to do it faster
- Get support for fact checking

**CASE STUDY**
The following case study describes the investigative process behind a seven-month investigation that reveals the scale of a dangerous human smuggling trade through Mexico, using overcrowded trucks to carry migrants in precarious and dangerous conditions from Central America to the United States. This cross-border reporting collaboration was led by Noticias Telemundo and the Latin American Center for Investigative Journalism (CLIP), with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), Bellingcat and local media outlets Pie de Página, Chiapas Paralelo and En un 2×3 Tamaulipas, in Mexico, Plaza Pública in Guatemala and Contracorriente in Honduras. An example of **how a breaking news story can trigger an in-depth investigation** that sheds light on a much larger and more complex problem. It also offers **some useful tips for building a database from scratch** when there is no systematized data available and the benefits that data analysis can bring to the investigative work around immigration.

**Crossing borders: how an international team uncovered deadly cargo trips across the U.S. and Mexico**

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**May Bulman**, investigations editor at Lighthouse Reports and previously social affairs correspondent for The Independent (UK), brought her experience covering rights violations at European borders, including unlawful detention and pushbacks in the Balkans and Turkey.

**1. How to gather visual evidence of detentions**

- First establish what is happening on the ground by speaking with and building trust with people on the move who are seeing it first hand, as well as cultivating sources within border authorities. Sometimes it's possible to obtain photos/videos of the violations from these sources
- Use Osint methods (geolocation, social media content monitoring, visual analysis) to dig out and verify visual material that has been shared online/on social media and show the violations taking place
- Go onto the ground and monitor the sites of the alleged violations, capturing footage when/if they take place (always ensuring the safety of journalists involved)

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**Imane Bellamine,** a Moroccan journalist at ENASS.ma, is investigating human mobility in a context where migration is highly sensitive and press freedom is restricted. She has extensive experience covering human rights violations against migrants in Morocco and along the Morocco–Spain border. Her work follows both Moroccan migrants heading to Europe and foreign migrants traveling from sub-Saharan Africa and Sudan to Morocco.

**1. How to investigate migration in a country with scarce sources and restricted press freedom?**

- Develop your own knowledge system, since official data is often incomplete, inaccessible, or intentionally unclear.
- Instead of waiting for ministries to respond, use parallel channels: local NGOs, lawyers, field actors, hospital staff, geolocated social posts, and migrant associations
- You can rely on micro-reporting: gathering fragments from different cities and communities, then assembling them to reconstruct the truth.
- Work with community archives that migrants and refugees create themselves: voice notes, WhatsApp groups tracking disappearances, photos, videos sent to relatives.
- Balance the need for transparency with the need to protect vulnerable people from retaliation, especially undocumented people, activists, and survivors.

**2. Our role as journalists: Explain, dissect, analyse the information**

Migration is often emotional, politically instrumentalized, and misunderstood. Our job is not to repeat official statements, it's to explain, break down, contextualize and analyse information so the public can understand what is actually happening, beyond rhetoric.

This means answering:

- Who is responsible for a policy or event?
- What are its implications,short and long term?
- Who supports it? Who opposes it? Why?
- Who is being impacted, and how exactly?
- How significant are these impacts?
- How does reality differ from what politicians claim?

Neutrality or detachment is impossible when the stories involve people's lives and human rights violations.

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**Sameh Ellaboody**, freelance Egyptian journalist working for european and arab media from Cairo and Athens, has been covering families moving from Sudan to the Sahara Desert using tools such as Whatsapp and Google maps, as well as refugees selling organs to pay for their journey to Europe, or human traffic in Libya through geolocated smugglers' directions. He addressed some basic decisions any reporter covering migration could face and elaborated on some methodology and ethical aspects.

**1. Some recommendations:**

- Maintain journalistic distance to observe the full picture without influencing events.
- Approach stories with empathy, but always uphold professional objectivity and distance.
- Encrypt sensitive information and maintain robust backup systems for all your material.
- Familiarize yourself with the laws and regulations of every country you report from
- Have a legal plan
- Prioritize the safety and well-being of yourself and your sources above any story or deadline.
- Reminder: journalists are not the heroes of the story. Your role is to report, not to participate or become part of the narrative you're covering.

**2. When protecting sources, you should:**

- Evaluate source safety VS. the scoop; consider safety above all else
- Protect sources and their identities
- Keep a professional distance, but maintain empathy
- Always obtain informed consent and respect privacy