

Tips for Effective Messaging about Economic & Social Rights

This guide can help you develop messages when communicating about human rights. It summarises a few of the recurring principles that appear in the research on human rights communications (see resources at the end). Also, the examples given show how these principles can be applied in the context of economic and social rights.

1. Lead with common values

The urge to sound the alarm about human rights issues at the beginning of your message is completely understandable; however, it's not what makes it compelling. Begin your message by addressing common, unifying values, such as compassion, solidarity and dignity.

SAY... ✓	RATHER THAN... ✗
Most of us believe that family is important	In this country, paid parental leave is not sufficient
All workers should be paid fairly	The minimum wage is not high enough

2. Describe issues of broad public interest

Relate to people's everyday experiences of a broad range of people, rather than focusing on the impacts on certain groups. Economic and social rights are issues of broader interest and that should be emphasised.

SAY... ✓	RATHER THAN... ✗
All work has value and all working people have rights	Refugees should have better working conditions
No matter our differences, most of us want a good standard of living	The gap between rich and poor in this country is at historic levels

3. Describe what you stand for, not what you're against

Rebutting or refuting false information can in fact strengthen people's belief in it ("confirmation bias") and therefore not have the desired effect. Rather than negating opposing claims, make your own claims that propose a positive vision.

SAY... ✓	RATHER THAN... ✗
Human rights ensure equality among all groups	Human rights <u>do not</u> elevate one group over another
Social security is an investment in our wellbeing	Social security is <u>not</u> a drain on public resources
[Programme] allows people to prosper and thrive when they're struggling	[Programme] does <u>not</u> discourage people from working

4. Create hope, not fear

Generating a sense of fear and threat around a problem can lead to defensive political impulses. By over-emphasising a problem, it is being reinforced in the minds of the audience. Instead, create hope by providing solutions and showing how they will achieve real change.

SAY... ✓	RATHER THAN... ✗
We support a programme that makes it affordable for any working parent to have their kid in great care	This is not an adequate child care plan
The government should adopt policies that ensure high-quality working conditions for all	The government shouldn't adopt policies that undermine the quality of working conditions

5. Give the issue a human face

Rather than referring to affected people as the subjects or beneficiaries of a policy, give them a human identity. People belonging to minority groups should primarily be referred to as *people*, rather than their minority label. Images should humanise rather than victimise.

SAY... ✓	RATHER THAN... ✗
Mothers, children, friends, neighbours, teenagers, etc.	Eligible individuals, recipients, enrolees, beneficiaries, etc.
A person who is Roma A migrant person A family of Muslim background	Roma, migrants, Muslims
	

6. Focus on outcomes, not processes

We often tend to label our desired solutions in terms of policies and processes, rather than the outcomes they aim to achieve. Instead of focusing only on policy, we should frame desired outcomes by referring to common lived experiences.

SAY... ✓	RATHER THAN... ✗
Food, housing, medical care	Safety net
People are paid enough to live a good life	Minimum wage increase
Care, treatment, prevention, medicine, getting and staying well	Healthcare coverage, access to coverage

7. Identify responsible actors

Human rights abuses are not of unknown origin. Provide more context for the issue by identifying responsible actors and giving a sense that people are *denied* their human rights as a result of actions taken by authorities or other actors.

SAY... ✓	RATHER THAN... ✗
Lawmakers refused funds for health and nutrition for people struggling to make ends meet	Health disparities are increasing
X are paid less than Y	X earn less than Y

Useful Resources

- Anat Shenker-Osorio, *A Brilliant Way of Living Our Lives: How to Talk About Human Rights* (2018), <http://australianprogress.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/A-Brilliant-Way-of-Living-Our-Lives-How-to-Talk-About-Human-Rights.pdf>
- Center for Community Change, *Messaging This Moment: A handbook for progressive communicators* (2017), <https://communitychange.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/C3-Messaging-This-Moment-Handbook-1.pdf>
- EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, *10 keys to effectively communicating human rights* (2018), https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-effectively-communicating-human-rights-booklet_en.pdf
- Equinet and PIRC, *Framing Equality* (2017), http://www.equineteurope.org/IMG/pdf/framing_equality_equinet_pirc_electronic.pdf
- Friends of the Earth and others, *How to talk about the societies we want in Europe – a guide* (2019), <http://www.foeeurope.org/sites/default/files/other/2019/how-to-talk-about-the-societies-we-want-in-europe.pdf>
- NEON, NEF, Frameworks Institute and PIRC, *Framing the Economy* (2018), <https://neweconomics.org/2018/02/framing-the-economy-2>
- Open Global Rights, *A Guide to Hope-based Communications* (2019), <https://www.openglobalrights.org/hope-guide/>
- Paul Brook, *Framing toolkit: Talking about poverty* (2019), <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/framing-toolkit-talking-about-poverty>
- Thomas Coombes, *Hope, not fear: A new model for communicating human rights* (2017), https://medium.com/@T_Coombes/hope-not-fear-a-new-model-for-communicating-human-rights-d98c0d6bf57b
- Tom Crompton, *How values-based campaigns can unite diverse movements* (2019), <https://www.openglobalrights.org/how-values-based-campaigns-can-unite-diverse-movements/>

Example

Based on the 7 tips on effective messaging, what does the example below do well and how can it be improved?

In our country, we embrace the belief in opportunity for all and treating others like we want to be treated.

Discrimination toward anyone, including different ethnic groups, is out of line with the values we hold dear.

Everyone should have the ability to provide for themselves and their families and to access quality healthcare when they are sick, regardless of who they are.

The government's policy denies ineligible persons full labour market access and health coverage. We propose a policy that treats everyone equally but does not take away from other people's rights.

