

# Humanising migration narratives – PositiveNegatives animations

## CASE STUDY



## AUTHORS

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### INTRODUCTION

Much of the media and political narratives around migration is driven by xenophobic attitudes and racialised portrayals of people who migrate. Migrants are often the first to be targeted while also facing structural and everyday racism, discrimination and hate speech. At the same time, those who are most impacted by these narratives are often excluded from the broader public discourse. As a Hub, MIDEQ focuses on creating space and using opportunities to challenge anti-migrant narratives. Doing so fosters a more informed and empathetic understanding of migration, which centres the lived experiences of migrants in the Global South.

Through our work with PositiveNegatives, we have sought to co-create a new narrative of migration through the arts. In total, five animations were produced; [The Story of Migration](#), [Covid Chronicles](#), [The Boy with More?](#), [Unstoppable Beat](#) and [Our Story of Migration](#). Our creative outputs draw attention to South-South migration, inequality and development, grounded in the research undertaken by scholars from the Global South. The animations not only bridge the gap between academia and the broader public but they also humanise migration experiences, sharing the lived experiences of migrants in the Global South.

### CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS

The production of the animations, from original concept to the recording of voiceovers in multiple languages, involved a large number of Hub members from different geographical contexts and disciplinary backgrounds. This ensured that the animations reflected the perspectives of those involved and was informed by the research that emerged from the Hub. For example, production on *The Story of Migration* animation began in April 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic with collaboration moved online as artists from PositiveNegatives drew upon a number of ideas that were developed in collaboration with Co-Is in the Global South. This was integral to the development of the animation: the feedback provided formed the basis of the final script. The artist, Karrie Fransman, created the animation based on the final script and which was made available in [English](#), [Portuguese](#), [Tamil](#), [Malay](#), [French](#), [Nepali](#), [Mandarin](#) and [Hadiyissa](#). As noted by Benjamin Worku-Dix, founder of PositiveNegatives:

*“The Story of Migration has been the most collaborative animation we’ve made at PositiveNegatives, co-produced with 17 partners across 11 countries and during the most challenging times when the COVID-19 pandemic has meant we needed to rely on new technologies to successfully collaborate and physically work independently.”*

### UNSTOPPABLE BEAT



Photo credit: PositiveNegatives

*Unstoppable Beat*, co-produced with MIDEQ Haiti and MIDEQ Brazil, further illustrates the co-creation process that lies at the heart of the partnership between PositiveNegatives and the MIDEQ Hub. The film was produced in [English](#) and translated in [Haitian Creole](#), [Portuguese](#) and [French](#). Focused on the emotional experience of family reunification from the perspective of a Haitian migrant in Brazil, the film took 16

months to produce from conception to its [launch](#) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Haitian artists and musicians played an important role in the production of music to provide cultural context to the film. Haitian artists and musicians played an important role in the production of music to provide cultural context to the film.

Critically, the film also involved collaboration with MIDEQ researchers to ensure that the story reflected the lived experiences of Haitian migrants in Brazil. Researchers shared findings from MIDEQ which shed light on the migrant experience such as reasons why Haitian men decide to migrate, the sacrifices made and the discrimination faced in Brazil. Key to this collaboration was making a film that not only challenges the anti-migrant narratives but also does not oversimplify the contexts in which they live. As MIDEQ Haiti researcher Toni Cela reflected:

*“Once we established connections with Haitian collectives and organisations, we endeavoured to understand their perception of justice. Our goal was to determine the extent to which their concerns fell within the realm of formal resources, addressable through legal means, and how many were informal issues embedded in society, such as relationships and a sense of belonging... We organised an agenda encompassing these emerging issues, with the intention of bringing them to the forefront of British society's awareness, as they often remain largely invisible.”*

## ENGAGEMENT AND DISSEMINATION

Each of the animations have been widely shared on social media, viewed at international film festivals and used as a “hook” to broader media engagement on migration, inequalities and development in the Global South. As of August 2024, the five animations have over 120,000 views and have been watched in different countries from the UK to Malaysia. *The Story of Migration* was highlighted in *The Guardian* newspaper resulting in over [95,000 views on Instagram](#). As a result of the animation, an interview with MIDEQ co-director Joseph Teye was published in [The](#)

## MIDEQ: MIGRATION FOR DEVELOPMENT & EQUALITY

[New Humanitarian](#). Reaching a wide range of audiences, the article discussed the Hub’s work and in particular its focus on migration and inequalities in the Global South. *The Story of Migration* was shortlisted for the Best Animated Film for the [AHRC Research in Film Awards \(RIFA\)](#) in 2021.

In addition, the Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, a development organisation in Switzerland, featured *The Story of Migration* at the [Ballenberg Open Air Museum](#) in 2024. Attracting up to 200,000 visitors per year, the theme for 2024 is the trails of historic and global migration.

### BALLENBERG OPEN AIR MUSEUM



Photo credit: Helvetas

*Unstoppable Beat* has been submitted to over 70 international film festivals. It has won eleven awards, two finalists, three semi-finalists, and received three honourable mentions. The film also has been picked as an “Official Selection” in thirteen international festivals. Festivals that have recognised *Unstoppable Beat* include:

- Sundar Prize Film Festival 2024 (Vancouver, Canada) - Winner;
- Los Angeles Film Awards 2024 (Los Angeles, USA) - Winner;
- Beyond the Border International Film Festival 2024 (Kolkata, India) - Winner;
- Seville International Film Festival 2024 (Seville, Spain) – Winner;
- London Film Week 2023 (London, UK) - Finalist;
- Human Rights Film Festival Brazil 2023 (São Paulo, Brazil) - Finalist;
- 40<sup>th</sup> edition of European Film Festival of Lille (Lille, France) – Official Selection;
- International World Film Awards 2024 (Newcastle, UK) – Official Selection;
- Hollywood Short Festival, 2024 (Los Angeles, USA) – Honourable Mention.

In total, the film has received 20 honours in the animation category at international festivals based in different parts of the world.

## ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION

MIDEQ’s collaboration with PositiveNegatives, and subsequent animations, have been transformed into education materials. Inspired by MIDEQ’s research, the resources and materials are being used across the UK. Animated Learning is an initiative and pedagogical approach co-created by PositiveNegatives and Lifeworlds

## MIDEQ: MIGRATION FOR DEVELOPMENT & EQUALITY

Learning. It uses the MIDEQ/PositiveNegatives animations as a tool to develop educational resources and materials for schools to explore issues around migration, human rights and politics among others. The materials are designed for teachers and educators working with school aged children from 11-16 years old.

### THE BOY WITH MORE?



Photo credit: PositiveNegatives

### [The Boy With More?](#)

learning materials are based on the story of Krishna in Nepal whose father is in Malaysia working. The animation, made in collaboration with MIDEQ Nepal, explores the experiences of families who stay behind when a parent migrates. The learning materials build on themes from the animation such as rights, belonging and imagination. Divided into activity

worksheets and discussion prompts, the learning materials are designed to support teachers as they navigate these sensitive topics with children. Resources are also being created for [Unstoppable Beat](#) and [Stories of Migration](#).

*Teaching Migration Through Data and Storytelling* course also highlights how MIDEQ's research is being used to engage teachers and school aged children. The course, designed in partnership with MIDEQ, SOAS University of London and PositiveNegatives, aims to develop teachers' capacities and skills to access large data sets and contemporary research. The course outlines the importance of data led evidence and empathic learning – using creative methods of storytelling, visual arts and design to humanise migrant stories. The course is accessible on [FutureLearn](#) and has been offered twice during the project. In 2020, 632 learners enrolled in the course from countries such as the UK, India and Italy. The most recent course, launched in 2022, has over 900 learners enrolled. Feedback from the course ranged from commenting on the use of storytelling to learning more about South-South migration.

*“...The stories in Positive Negatives made me realize how much a story can do, both for the teller and the listener/reader/viewer... I also realized that I didn't know much about projects going on in the South, eg MIDEQs partners.”*

*“I have felt like a student again and gained access to exciting examples of stories and student works on the topics of migration I had never knew before. I have advanced in my ability to streamline teaching. It was a fascinating time, thank you!”*

## MIDEQ: MIGRATION FOR DEVELOPMENT & EQUALITY

The animations provide a platform to presents complex topics such as migration from the perspective of those living and working in the Global South. As a vehicle for storytelling, they have become a tool to engage migrant organisations, policy makers, journalists and the general public with Hub's work. In addition, the collaboration between MIDEQ researchers and artists underpins the Hub's commitment to decentring the production of knowledge. Not only are they multilingual, accessible to communities most impacted by migration and inequalities, but also are being transformed into educational materials. Doing so ensures that the research, perspectives and experiences of migrants in the Global South continue to touch audiences across the world.

## RELATED CONTENT

Below are links to MIDEQ and PositiveNegatives animations, learning materials and educational courses. The animated learning materials will be available later in 2024.

### Outputs

- [The Story of Migration](#)
- [Covid Chronicles](#)
- [The Boy with More?](#)
- [Unstoppable Beat](#)
- [Our Story of Migration](#)
- [Teaching migration through data and storytelling](#)
- [Animated learning materials](#) – The Boy With More?, Unstoppable Beat, Stories of Migration



## **Cover Image**

Our Story of Migration and Inequality, photo still. Photo by PositiveNegatives.

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