

MIGRATION AND COMMUNICATION: INFORMATION AND AWARENESS-RAISING CAMPAIGNS IN COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN AND TRANSIT

Austrian National EMN Conference 2019 - Briefing paper

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Introduction

Information and awareness-raising campaigns for migrants or potential migrants in third countries constitute a central element of current migration strategies, both at the national and European level. Over the past decade, this form of communication with (potential) migrants has become increasingly relevant. These campaigns have not only increased in number but the target groups, types, formats, messages and strategies of such campaigns have also diversified. Across the European Union (EU), over EUR 23 million have been devoted to information and awareness-raising campaigns to counter migrant smuggling since 2015.¹ A total of 104 campaigns have been implemented by Member States and 25 campaigns by EU institutions.² Despite the heightened relevance of information and awareness-raising campaigns in current migration policies, little is known about their impact and effectiveness and how they influence migratory behaviour.

The National EMN Conference 2019 invited experts from academia, policy and international organizations and was joined by over 100 international participants, who discussed promising and innovative ideas on how to enhance evidence-based communication strategies targeting (potential) migrants. The discussion was centred around four key questions:

- **What do we know about the effectiveness of information and awareness-raising campaigns for (potential) migrants?**
- **Can information change behaviour?**
- **How can the impact of information and awareness-raising campaigns be measured?**
- **What should future campaigns look like?**



A VIDEO OF THE CONFERENCE CAN BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE WWW.EMN.AT/EN/EMNCONF2019/

¹ European Commission, European Commission contribution to the European Council, Managing migration in all its aspects: progress under the European Agenda on Migration, 2019, p. 11. Available at <https://ec.europa.eu>.

² Presentation of M. Mol, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



- **NEED FOR EVIDENCE:** Information and awareness-raising campaigns for (potential) migrants in third countries constitute a central element of current migration strategies, both at the European and national level. However, little is known about the impact of these campaigns and how they influence migratory behaviour.
- **INFORMATION AND BEHAVIOUR CHANGE:** In light of these limitations, we can learn from findings of rigorous evaluations in other fields, such as behavioural economics, and apply those to how information and awareness-raising can influence behaviour. Therefore, information and awareness-raising campaigns must be built on a contextual understanding of how people form beliefs and expectations and how these are transformed into decisions.
- **RANDOMIZED EVALUATIONS:** Researchers, donors, EU Institutions and Member States are increasingly aware of the importance of creating rigorous evidence and using this evidence to inform policy decisions. To isolate the impact of information and awareness-raising campaigns on migratory behaviour, randomized evaluations are being implemented by some selected researchers and institutions.³
- **LESSONS LEARNED:** Evaluations presented during the conference indicate that peer-to-peer information campaigns have the potential to raise awareness about the risks and opportunities associated with migration. Another example shows that information on the chances of obtaining a legal status in Europe impacts the inclination to migrate. Rigorous evaluations also shed light on how information campaigns compare against other policy interventions, such as providing economic opportunities at the local level. Most evaluations find that migrants and potential migrants respond to reliable and trustworthy information.
- **SOCIAL NETWORKS:** Beside rigorous evidence, which is still rare, qualitative evaluations suggest that campaigns should be built on trust: this can be achieved by using personal or peer-to-peer communication channels, a positive narrative, and messages of legal alternatives rather than deterrence. Finally, in order to create context-appropriate messages and to identify the right target group, diaspora communities and local experts are important stakeholders in the design and implementation of campaigns. Nonetheless, these findings need to be rigorously tested before concluding that they consist of key elements to successful campaigns.

1) What Do We Know About the Effectiveness of Information and Awareness-Raising Campaigns for (Potential) Migrants?

Information campaigns are defined as purposive attempts to inform, persuade and motivate behaviour by reaching out to audiences through organized communication activities.⁴ They are typically based on a set of common assumptions regarding the initial situation, i.e. what information people already have, and the possible effects of new information.⁵ Information and awareness-raising campaigns for (potential) migrants are built on the assumption that information available prior to the campaign is incomplete, inaccurate, characterized by uncertainty or miscalculations of risks, that new information is trusted⁶ and will influence knowledge, perceptions or attitudes,⁷ which would in turn lead to behaviour change.⁸

On the one hand, there is a compelling narrative suggesting that campaigns have limited effects on migrants' decisions to migrate, as the causes – particularly of irregular migration – are

driven by socioeconomic factors and conflict.⁹ On the other hand, opposing literature argues that additional information can be a “catalyst” for migrants with a propensity to move, indicating that information does affect decisions to migrate. As to the transmitter of information, Kosnick finds that the most trusted information comes from social networks, not government sources or international organizations.¹⁰ In practice, whether information campaigns are effective is highly contextual and has mainly been analysed based on qualitative or anecdotal evidence.¹¹

In short, there is a lack of externally valid evaluations and evidence on the causal effects that would qualify information campaigns as an established, functional migration policy tool. Moreover, there is limited transparency regarding the findings of evaluation studies, which prevents knowledge-sharing.¹²

³ Randomized control trials (RCT) constitute an evaluation method that allows for the identification of causal mechanisms behind information and awareness-raising campaigns. RCTs therefore serve to explore the external validity of specific campaigns; See also [presentation of C. Nolan](#), J-PAL Europe.

⁴ C.K. Atkin and R.E. Rice (eds.), *Public Communication Campaigns* (SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks, 2013).

⁵ See also [presentation of S. Morgenstern](#), University of Konstanz.

⁶ J. Tjaden, S. Morgenstern and F. Laczko, 2018, *Evaluating the impact of information campaigns in the field of migration: A systematic review of the evidence and practical guidance*, Central Mediterranean Route Thematic Report Series. (IOM Geneva, 2019); M. Geiger and Pécoud, A. (eds.), *The Politics of International Migration Management* (Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2010).

⁷ J. Tjaden et al., 2018.

⁸ C. Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, A. (eds.), Human trafficking, information campaigns, and strategies of migration control, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 2007, 50(12): 1674-1695; Tjaden et al., 2018.

⁹ E. Browne, Impact of communication campaigns to deter irregular migration. In: *GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1248*. (GSDRC, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, 2015).

¹⁰ K. Kosnick, Mediating Migration: New Roles for (Mass) Media, In: *Media, French Journal of Media and Media Representation*, 2014. Available at <https://journals.openedition.org>.

¹¹ See J. Tjaden et al., 2018.

¹² See also [presentation of S. Morgenstern](#), University of Konstanz.

2) Can Information Change Behaviour?

The provision and framing of information in the form of text messages, leaflets, edutainment and other “nudges” is not a new phenomenon and has been tested in many fields including returns to education, financial literacy, taxation and health care, just to name a few. What can we learn from the evidence provided by rigorous evaluations in these fields about how communication and the provision of information can change behaviour?

Individuals systematically deviate from rational decision-making processes: they behave altruistically, change plans and follow decisions heuristically.¹³ Scientific evidence has shown that the design of policies and even the functioning of institutions can leverage biases and influence decisions through introducing new, and sometimes differently framed information. Drawing on the evidence of evaluations in more than 80 countries, Cillian Nolan, Deputy Director of J-PAL Europe, explained that information is beneficial to the cost-benefit calculations of decision-makers and can indeed lead to behaviour change. Drawing on education, agriculture and health interventions, Nolan concluded with five generally applicable lessons:

- The information provided makes costs and benefits more salient.
- The messenger plays a critical role regarding the success of information campaigns.
- Networks can have important multiplier effects in successfully communicating new information.
- Before sharing information, a clear understanding of the target audience’s priorities is crucial.
- Behaviour change does not necessarily depend on a change in perceptions and attitudes.

Choices of (potential) migrants are not static – migrants’ cost-benefit ratios change over time and are shaped by cultural and societal norms. In some contexts, for example, the decision for an individual to migrate is a collective decision. At the same time, information and awareness raising campaigns do not exist in an information vacuum. On the contrary, they often compete with more powerful narratives from diaspora communities and smugglers, emphasizing the important role of the messenger. Furthermore, providing information as timely as possible is an important condition for behaviour change. Regarding the target group’s priorities, a particularly important distinction needs to be made between potential migrants and migrants in transit. Migrants in South-Eastern European transit countries for example, are often determined to continue their journeys, as they have already invested time, money and effort to overcome dangerous and exhausting steps of their journey.¹⁴

In summary, there is an array of studies and rigorous evidence in social science on how information can change behaviour, the lessons of which can be applied to the field of migration. We have learned that information can change behaviour when it speaks to the cost-benefit calculation of decision-makers and that a trusted messenger and supportive social network increase the likelihood of behaviour change. At the same time, behaviour change is highly contextual and the outcome of a complex decision-making process, consisting of different stages and a multitude of competing information.



Cillian Nolan (J-PAL Europe)



Sandra Morgenstern
(University of Konstanz)

3) How Can the Impact of Evaluation Campaigns Be Measured?

Randomized Control Trials (RCT) are a powerful tool to evaluate the impact of any policy, including information and awareness raising campaigns. Regardless of the campaign objectives, it is crucial to understand the campaign’s outcomes and whether they can truly be attributed to that campaign and not to other developments or policies. (For example: Did the fact that we distributed 5,000 leaflets with awareness-raising material lead to more awareness of the dangers of irregular migration? Did the documentary we showed in 300 villages change the opinion of potential migrants in those villages?) Only once this causal question has been answered, can we be certain that

- campaigns are achieving their intended goals,
- public money is being spent efficiently,
- and that there is a potential for scale-up.

RANDOMIZED CONTROL GROUPS

Randomized Controlled Trials (RCT) evaluate impact, i.e. the difference between the actual outcome and the outcome had the programme not been introduced (the counterfactual), by randomly assigning individuals to at least two different groups. One group receives an intervention, such as an information campaign, the other one, the control group, does not. On average, both groups are statistically identical and, therefore, any identified change in outcome can be attributed to the campaign.¹⁵

¹³ See also [presentation of M. Kocher](#), Institute for Advanced Sciences Vienna.

¹⁴ Presentation of M. Hummel-Sunjic, Transcultural Campaigning.

¹⁵ Randomized Control Trials, *Interventions for Poverty Action*. Available at www.poverty-action.org (accessed 3 January 2020).

Three On-Going RCTs of Information and Awareness-Raising Campaigns Presented at the Conference:



Migrants as Messengers **Insight from Senegal**

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) campaign “Migrants as Messengers” (MoM) aims to raise awareness about the risks related to irregular migration in Senegal, Guinea, and Nigeria. An impact evaluation for the campaign in Senegal was carried out in 2018, focusing on one pillar of the campaign, namely town hall events which consisted of screenings of video testimonies of migrant returnees followed by interactive Q&A sessions. Potential migrants in eight neighbourhoods of Dakar, Senegal, were surveyed several times over a period of five months after they had been invited either to participate in a MoM video screening (treatment group) or in a “placebo” screening with no information on migration (control group). Participants of the MoM screening were 19 per cent more likely to report that they felt well-informed about the risks and opportunities related to migration and 25 per cent more aware of the risks associated with irregular migration compared to the control group. The evaluation also found that the intervention had neither a significant effect on potential migrants’ knowledge on the legal context and the features of the journey nor on their perceptions of successfully arriving to Europe.¹⁶



The Myth of the Misinformed Migrant? **Insight from Nigeria**

Bernd Beber from the WZB Berlin Social Science Center and co-authors¹⁷ are evaluating an information campaign on irregular migration and misinformation in Nigeria. The ongoing RCT evaluates the impact of targeted information about irregular migration in videos and testimonials on the willingness to migrate and the beliefs about migration. The intervention targeting 3,200 adults consists of three treatments. One group receives household-targeted information about the risks associated with irregular migration, a second group receives risk information transmitted through social media via returnees and Nigerians in Europe and a third group matches participants with potential jobs and trainings. Insights from a pre-intervention survey¹⁸ of a representative household sample in Benin City already indicate that respondents have realistic pre-migration expectations about their potential economic prospects in the EU. However, respondents are poorly informed about the features of the journey, as only 1 per cent knows what means of transportation migrants typically choose to cross the border into neighbouring Niger. Moreover, respondents are disproportionately optimistic about their own chances of successful migration, i.e. four out of five believes they would be able to reach Europe and a similar

share beliefs that their claim for asylum would be successful. This is in contrast to the actual numbers, according to which fewer than one out of four asylum applications by Nigerians were accepted in the EU between 2011 and 2017.¹⁹



Information Gaps **and Irregular Migration to Europe** **Insight from the Gambia**

In the Gambia, Catia Batista from the Nova School of Business and Economics and co-authors²⁰ are evaluating three different policies to deter irregular migration: an information campaign, incentives for regional migration, and vocational training. The first treatment consists of deterrence information based on testimonies and a video on statistics about the migration journey. The second treatment includes cash transfers and support to connect with the Dakar Gambian immigrant association upon arrival in Dakar and the third treatment provides the opportunity to enrol in a tuition-free vocational skills training programme. The design of the three policies is based on the results of a lab in the field experiment,²¹ which finds that reliable information about migration is likely to change irregular migration decisions, although, the direction of the impact is contextual. Providing potential migrants with the official likelihood of obtaining a residence permit decreases the likelihood of migration by 2.9 percentage points, while information on the actual risk leads to an increase of 2.3 percentage points as migration risks, such as the probability of death, are highly overestimated. These estimates were also supported by follow-up data collected one year after the experiment, suggesting that potential migrants respond to reliable information.

To conclude, the insights from these three evaluations demonstrate that it is not only possible but in fact crucial to evaluate information and awareness-raising campaigns. The evaluation in Senegal revealed that in this context, campaigns based on peer-to-peer messaging have a positive effect and that migrant returnees are considered a trusted source of information for potential migrants. The importance of context appropriate messages and the specific decision-making processes was also underscored. For example, a campaign focusing on the risks of irregular migration to Europe may even lead to an increase in migration, as potential migrants’ assumptions about safety risks are overestimated. The evaluations in the Gambia and in Nigeria are ongoing and final results cannot be reported at this time. RCTs constitutes the most rigorous way possible to measure and compare the impact of different information and awareness-raising campaigns and other migration policies.

¹⁶ A. Dunsch, J. Tjaden and W. Quiviger, 2019, *Migrants as Messengers: The impact of Peer-to-Peer Communication on Potential Migrants in Senegal*. Impact Evaluation Report (IOM Geneva, 2019). See also [presentation of J. Tjaden](#), IOM GMDAC.

¹⁷ B. Beber, F. Foos, M. Humphreys, A. Scacco, and D. Yang, *Irregular Migration and Misinformation in Nigeria*. See also [presentation of B. Beber](#), WZB Berlin.

¹⁸ B. Beber and A. Scacco, 2019, *The Myth of the Misinformed Migrant? Insights from Nigeria*, Draft for EGAP Geneva, September 2019.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

²⁰ T.L. Bah, C. Batista, F. Gubert and D. McKenzie, *Can Information and Alternatives to Irregular Migration Reduce “Backway” Migration from the Gambia?*. See also [presentation of C. Batista](#), Nova School of Business and Economics.

²¹ T.L. Bah and C. Batista, 2018, *Understanding Willingness to Migrate Illegally: Evidence from a Lab in the Field Experiment*, *Novafrica Working Paper Series*, Working Paper No. 1803

4) How Should Future Information and Awareness-Raising Campaigns Look Like?

The limited evidence that has been generated on the effects of information and awareness-raising campaigns so far suggests that their success depends on many factors starting with the identification of concrete and realistic expectations on what the campaign could achieve. For example, it is rather unlikely that a campaign can change beliefs of an entire target group. Rather, it may be able to change beliefs and behaviour of a certain percentage of the target group. It is crucial to adjust expectations of the potential of information and awareness raising campaigns accordingly.

Another important lesson for future campaigns is the importance of understanding the local context, the reasons behind migration-decisions and the decision-making processes per se. Moreover, piloting interventions and involving local experts are imperative for defining the target groups and the campaign format.



Catia Batista (Nova School of Business and Economics)



Jaspar Dag Tjaden (IOM GMDAC)

The National EMN Conference 2019 concluded with important next steps to improve information and awareness-raising campaigns:

- **RIGOROUS EVALUATIONS:** The design of information and awareness-raising campaigns should include rigorous evaluations, not only to inform donors of the effective use of their public funds but also to contribute to more informed and evidence-driven policy decisions.
- **ALTERNATIVE INTERVENTIONS:** Limited knowledge on how the effects of migration campaigns and migration policies compare against other interventions, such as education and training, should be addressed to fill an important knowledge gap.
- **TRANSIT COUNTRIES:** While there is some evidence that campaigns change perception and attitudes of potential migrants, information and awareness-raising for more effective campaigns in transit countries still need to be studied.
- **POLICY DISCUSSIONS:** The emerging evidence on the effects of information and awareness-raising campaigns should further motivate collaboration between research and policy. In their concluding remarks, decision-makers and practitioners emphasized that growing expertise would provide a solid framework to support EU and national policy efforts in supporting (potential) migrants to make more informed choices.

About EMN Austria

The European Migration Network (EMN) is an EU-wide network, consisting of National Contact Points and providing information on migration and asylum. It was set up in 2003 by the European Commission on behalf of the European Council in order to meet the information needs of Community institutions and of Member States' authorities and institutions on migration and asylum, by providing up-to-date, objective, reliable and comparable information on migration and asylum, with a view to supporting policymaking in the European Union in these areas and to providing a factual basis for current discussions. In 2019, the EMN established a Working Group on information and awareness-raising campaigns to support knowledge exchange between EU Member States, EU bodies and external experts. The Working Group contributes to the conception and

implementation of migration information and awareness-raising campaigns with the view of preventing migrant smuggling and reducing irregular migration flows to the EU.



Team of the EMN Austria Conference 2019

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