

EU-funded information campaigns targeting potential migrants: State of the art

Florian Trauner
Omar N. Cham
Rosangela Caleprico

BRIDGES Working Papers
#03 February 2022

BRIDGES
Assessing the production and impact of migration narratives

This publication is part of a project that has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101004564.



Authors

Florian Trauner holds a Jean Monnet Chair at the Brussels School of Governance of the Vrije University Brussels (VUB). He is also co-coordinator of the Brussels Interdisciplinary Research Centre for Migration and Minorities (BIRMM) at VUB. He works on European integration with focus on EU asylum, migration, voluntary and involuntary return policies as well as police cooperation. Florian Trauner is a regular Visiting Professor at the College of Europe (Natolin Campus) and has taught or worked at the University of Vienna, Renmin University of China (in Beijing), Sciences Po Paris and the EU Institute for Security Studies.

Omar N. Cham, originally from The Gambia, is a PhD candidate at the Brussels School of Governance and the Department of Political Science of Vrije University Brussels (VUB). His PhD research focuses on the politics of return migration in The Gambia. He seeks to explore how migration cooperation between The Gambia and the EU evolved with transition to democracy in 2016. His research interests include EU-Africa cooperation in migration issues and externalisation policies.

Rosangela Caleprico is a Research Assistant at the Centre for Migration, Diversity and Justice of the Brussels School of Governance at Vrije University Brussels (VUB). She holds a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations and Development from the University of Sussex and is currently completing her postgraduate studies in Social and Public Policy and Migration at the London School of Economics (LSE). Her areas of interest include undocumented migration to Europe and migrants' integration policies, particularly in the labour market.

Acknowledgements:

The authors would like to thank Ilke Adam, Jan-Paul Brekke, Kjersti Thorbjørnsrud and Julia van Dessel for their constructive comments on an earlier draft.

Contents

ABSTRACT	4
1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS TARGETING MIGRANTS: WHAT DO WE KNOW?.....	6
3. INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS FOR MIGRANTS: AVENUES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH	10
4. CONCLUSION.....	12
BIBLIOGRAPHY	14

Abstract

Information campaigns aim at discouraging potential migrants from leaving their countries irregularly. This paper systematically reviews academic research on these campaigns and presents some avenues for further research. It is shown that (EU-funded) information campaigns have gained importance and become more diversified in terms of communication tools and actors involved. Future research projects may focus more on how information campaigns relate to the narratives and information landscape that influence the decision-making of potential migrants, the role of local actors in implementing these campaigns and the way narratives and frames are actually built up in countries of origin and transit. To better understand the effects of information campaigns, we need to understand and compare alternative and counter-narratives taken up or even produced by potential migrants.

Keywords: information campaigns, EU, migration, migration drivers, narratives, framing, implementation

1. Introduction

Information campaigns target potential migrants before they embark on a migratory trajectory. They have gained momentum within the EU's toolbox to strengthen border management and deter irregular migration (Musarò 2019; Pécoud 2010). The control of irregular migration has moved higher up the EU's agenda after the 2015-2016 "refugee crisis" in Europe and in view of a continuing use of the Mediterranean route by migrants, regardless of the high risks. The European Commission has dedicated over €23 million on information campaigns after the 2015 migration crisis. A total of 104 campaigns were organized by different Member States and 25 campaigns by different EU institutions (EMN 2019). A 2021 report of the EU Trust Fund for Africa estimates that €12 million of the protection portfolio was apportioned for information campaigns targeting potential migrants (Altai Consulting 2021).

Traditionally, with the support of migrants' receiving states in the Global North, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has implemented information campaigns in regions with high emigration rates. These include regions such as Central and Eastern Europe, South-East Asia, and Central America (Pécoud 2010). In more recent years, migrant information campaigns have increasingly focused on North and Sub-Saharan Africa, notably on major migrant-sending states such as Morocco, Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, and The Gambia (Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007). The content and modes of delivery of information campaigns have become more refined and more stakeholders including civil society organizations (CSOs) have got engaged in the implementation of such campaigns (Rodriguez 2017).

Policy-makers tend to consider information campaigns as a viable policy tool to deter irregular migration (Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud 2020; Browne 2015). Information campaigns are deliberate communication strategies to discourage potential migrants from leaving their countries irregularly (Oeppen 2016). Information campaigns address an information gap supposedly held by a specific target group. Therefore, potential migrants are seen to lack adequate information on the reality of a migration trajectory and the life and opportunities in a destination country. The knowledge held by potential migrants prior to being exposed to an information campaign is assumed to be incomplete or inaccurate. The actors behind information campaigns aim at making a potential migrant trust their information and change his/her behaviour and plans accordingly (Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2011). However, previous studies have critically reflected upon these assumptions (Schans and Optekamp 2016). Even if the prevailing objective of information campaigns relates to deterrence, potential migrants often dismiss the messages as untrustworthy and biased (Oeppen 2016; Schans and Optekam 2016; Pécoud 2010).

The perceived lack of effectiveness of information campaigns brings up a few questions that this paper seeks to address: to what extent do we have substantiated knowledge about the influence of these campaigns on potential migrants? How are migration narratives created and/or become dominant in countries of migrants' origin? Through a systematic review of the existing literature on information campaigns, we seek to pursue an in-depth study of the information campaigns that exist, their set-up and frameworks, the actors involved, and the different types of narratives that they propose. There have already been some serious engagements and overview articles on information campaigns, recently by Pagogna and Sakdakpolrak (2021). However, while they compare the findings of 17 peer-reviewed articles on the subject, our analysis focuses more on the research gaps and potential avenues of further research based on a wider look at policy and academic research on information campaigns. A

Potential migrants are seen to lack adequate information on the reality of a migration trajectory and the life and opportunities in a destination country. The knowledge held by potential migrants prior to being exposed to an information campaign is assumed to be incomplete or inaccurate.

relevant field of study remains the perspective of potential and irregular migrants vis-à-vis information campaigns. It is still not clear how they process the information provided by these campaigns in relation to the universe of other sources of information. Put differently, how do they make up their own decisions regarding migration and how important are information campaigns in this process? An analysis of dominant migration narratives in a local context may allow for an understanding of the interplay of actors and factors shaping migrants' behaviour and decision-making.

2. Information Campaigns Targeting Migrants: What do we know?

In the next section, we present a state of the art of existing research on the various forms of information campaigns, the different actors involved, the type of narratives deployed in such campaigns, and the lessons learned from previous information campaigns.

2.1. Different types of information campaigns

There are different types of information campaigns for potential migrants. Conventional methods of information campaigns include face-to-face conversations or information provided in theatres, workshops, concerts, roadshows, and the like (Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud 2020; Rodriguez 2017). Campaigns have been traditionally made also in print media such as leaflets, posters, billboards (Heller 2014; Browne 2015), as well as in cinema, TV, and radio broadcast (Heller 2014). Tjaden, Morgenstern, and Laczko (2018) through their review of sixty studies on information campaigns suggested that most information campaigns relied on alternative media options such as workshops, concerts, roadshows, and theatres.

With new technological possibilities, information campaigns have been implemented in more diversified ways (Pagogna and Sakdakpolrak 2021). The relevance of social media among young potential migrants have made web-based information campaigns relevant (Vammen et al. 2021). Stakeholders such as the IOM, EU member states and EU institutions have expanded web-based information campaigns, especially in key migrants' sending and transit countries. Social media platforms, first and foremost Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter have been used as tools to disseminate information on the dangers of irregular migration, of engaging with smugglers, and on local job opportunities (Musarò 2019).

To explain the rationale behind the use of social media, Brekke and Beyer (2019, 16) argued that these platforms 'have particular characteristics or *affordances*, including what type of information that can be forwarded (written, audio, graphics, and video).' The easy and comparatively cheap nature of social media has facilitated the engagement of stakeholders, including governments, with potential migrants (Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud 2020).

2.2. The actors involved

In all forms of public information campaigns, different actors are involved in their conceptualization, planning and implementation, albeit not all are equally influential. Pécout (2010, 190) argued that 'information campaigns rely on partnerships established with a wide range of societal actors.' In the context of information campaigns for potential migrants, governments of migrants' origin and destination countries, civil society organizations, NGOs, migrant returnees, celebrities, and educational institutions are the key stakeholders. The EU and its member states are central for demanding and deploying information campaigns (EMN 2019). Since the 1990s, the IOM has been a leading partner

in the implementation of information campaigns (Pécoud 2010). Moreover, private consulting and communication firms are increasingly hired for information campaigns (Pagogna and Sakdakpolrak 2021). Consequently, the main funders (EU and member states) have become increasingly invisible.

New strategies of conducting information campaigns have further expanded the range of involved actors. IOM-led campaigns in Africa have often employed a strategy based upon “Migrants as Messengers” (MaM). It is a peer-to-peer messaging campaign whereby returnees share testimonials of their journeys through (often emotional) videos to family, friends, and communities (Dunsch, Tjaden, and Quiviger 2019). This strategy is still being used to conduct information campaigns primarily in West African countries. According to Dunsch, Tjaden, and Quiviger (2019, 3), a major justification for doing so has been that ‘returnees are a trusted source of information for potential migrants, and that their emotional message has a large impact on risk perception and reducing intention to migrate irregularly.’ In the case of Sudan, Brekke and Beyer (2019) observed a similar pattern of engagement. Testimonies of former migrants were exhibited, accompanied by dramatic images and videos, emotional music, and voiceover to deter potential migrants from leaving.

Aside former migrants’ testimonies, local artists, musicians, and theatre groups have also become engaged in the dissemination efforts of information campaigns (Vammen et al. 2021). Browne (2015) argues that celebrities or high-profile individuals are seen to establish trust relations with potential migrants. An example is the “Aware Migrants Information Campaign” funded by the Italian government and implemented by the IOM in 15 African countries. A series of music videos transmitted messages that should deter young people from leaving irregularly. For example, the Ghanaian musician and songwriter Kofi Kinaata produced a music video titled “No place like home” as part of an information campaign. Musarò (2019, 635) describes the video as follows:

In this video, the images of the ‘cool’ musician singing ‘Say no to irregular migration’ are alternated with scenes of local young people discussing about travelling to Europe through Libya. After a long discussion with several warnings to change their mind and invest their money at home, at the end of the video we discover that one of them died along the route while the family was not even informed about that.

Within the same project, another video was produced by the well-known Senegalese musician-Coumba Gawlo Seck entitled “*Bul sank sa bakkane bi*” (Don’t put your life at risk). It also featured other famous Senegalese and African artists. The musicians distinctly discouraged young people from migrating irregularly and suggested to explore local opportunities and alternatives. Rodriguez (2017) highlights that a challenge to this message is that there are often few real alternatives in Senegal given a dense labour market and limited support by the government and NGOs. Another aspect highlighted by Vammen et al. (2021) is that the over-emphasis on the need to stay at home implies that people on the move are not giving precise and risk-reducing information.

Another group involved in the campaigns are local development actors (Rodriguez 2017). These local development actors tend to rely on the funding of EU institutions and governments. They provide training and income-generating activities for potential migrants and facilitate awareness raising campaigns. Knowing the environment, these local actors help adapting messages to a local context and have access to economic and political resources (Olivier de Sardan 2005). However, Rodriguez (2017) maintains that the effectiveness of such approach in influencing potential migrants’ behaviour, decisions, and aspirations remains largely unclear.

Educational institutions have also contributed to the dissemination of information campaigns. Pécoud (2010) noted that IOM information campaigns have targeted schools and universities to reach young people who are more likely to move abroad one day. School curriculums now regularly include sessions on irregular migration and trafficking (Pécoud 2010).

2.3. The framing

Information campaigns for potential migrants, like other forms of public information campaigns, seek to communicate a piece of information to a specific target group. For Borah (2011, 248), ‘to frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicative text.’ Referring to media studies, Borah (2011) argues that framing includes efforts to make certain stories or images more prominent. Depending on which messages the sender intends to communicate, frames serve those purposes.

In terms of the framing pertinent in information campaigns in Africa and other parts of the world, scholars have generally observed that migration is depicted in a negative light (Van Dessel and Pécoud 2020). Oeppen (2016, 2) further argued that since the inception of information campaigns targeting potential migrants, the message has consistently been the same: ‘Do not come here!’ These exclusionary messages, he added, are framed with the argument of protecting human lives. According to Schans and Optekamp (2016, 21), information campaigns are dominated by ‘dark messages about the risk, the inevitable failure, and exploitation but not complemented by messages of “making it”’. However, Carling and Hernández-Carretero (2011) highlight that not all information campaigns only aim at deterring potential migrants. They can also inform them on how to stay safe during a migratory journey. In a similar vein, Browne (2015) argues that some campaigns are not directed towards potential migrants but rather towards host communities. They may raise awareness on the needs and risks of migrants, thereby

promoting tolerance. Newer frames introduced in information campaigns have sought to sensitize the target public about the risks posed by human traffickers and smugglers (Brekke and Beyer 2019).

The “care and control” approach adopted by the EU towards migrants can be traced back to colonialism where the use of force to protect the ruled were legitimized in the name of protecting their interest.

According to Oeppen (2016, 11), ‘information campaigns fulfil a humanitarian narrative about protecting would-be migrants from exposing themselves to risk of being smuggled to Europe.’ This narrative, according to Oeppen, obscures the reasons why people want to leave their countries and fails to recognize the role of Europe’s securitized approach to migration. Moreover, Van Dessel and Pécoud (2020) noted that the “care and control” approach adopted by the EU towards migrants can be traced back to

colonialism where the use of force to protect the ruled were legitimized in the name of protecting their interest. Due to travel constraints, migrants often see no other possibility than relying on the services of smugglers. Optekamp (2016) also argues that hardly any link is made to the EU’s strict migration policies e.g., the high visa rejection rates. These measures make migrants opt for irregular routes, irrespective of information campaigns.

In his study on how the IOM used information campaigns to deter irregular migration in Cameroon, Heller (2014, 304) observed that such a strategy contributed to create ‘fictionalized representations of the conditions of precariousness, exclusion, and death.’ Again, a disparity between the restrictive policies promoted by the EU and the messages put forward in the information campaign was observed. ‘The shocking spectacle of the suffering of migrants was not used to denounce, but to justify and deepen the migration regime that produced it in the first place, all the while covering it with a humanitarian varnish’ (Heller 2014, 307).

Brekke and Beyer (2019) studied three information campaigns implemented in Sudan. All these campaigns contained deterrence messages which urged migrants to stay at home, to explore local opportunities, and to be aware of dangers of the journey. Through a desk review of 33 information campaigns, Schans and Optekamp (2016) maintain that most information campaigns across Sub-Saharan Africa, South-East Asia, Central and Eastern Europe have been framed around the dangers of

irregular migration and the risk of falling victim to smugglers, traffickers, and criminal networks. Pécoud (2010) and Pagogna and Sakdakpolrak (2021) confirm this type of findings by highlighting the negative framing of most information campaigns promoted by the EU and the IOM. While an emphasis is put on the need to migrate legally, little is done to inform or enable people to do so. As a matter of fact, low skilled individuals have very few legal pathways for emigration (Pécoud 2010). Through an impact assessment of mobile cinemas on potential migrants in Guinea, Zafinikamia, Tjaden, and Gninafon (2019) argued that most participants lacked basic knowledge on visa eligibility and asylum procedures. These topics have hardly ever been discussed in information campaigns.

The negative framing of information campaigns may be driven by incorrect assumptions (Vammen et al. 2021; Boswell 2011; Pécoud 2010). One assumption is that messages appealing to feelings of fear are likely to scare away potential migrants. Another is that migrants trust the messages provided by information campaigns (Schans and Optekam 2016). Despite the persistent negative depiction of migration to potential migrants, many still choose to migrate irregularly. They dismiss the messages of information campaigns as biased propaganda (Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2012) or downplay the risk all together (Townsend and Oomen 2015).

Another potential framing objective is to counter the narratives circulated by smugglers. Smugglers are framed negatively. As a matter of fact, a perceived need to fight them is a major justification for implementing information campaigns (Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007). Governments and NGOs have gone to great lengths to warn potential migrants about the risk of falling victims to smugglers. This engagement has also showed their own electorates that they are addressing the problem. Smugglers have been portrayed as ‘criminals’ (Oeppen 2016), ‘unscrupulous violent smuggler’ (Vammen et al. 2021), ‘liars and thieves’ (Bishop 2020), and ‘profit-driven criminals’ (Musarò 2019). Scholars are more hesitant to confirm these negative representations of smugglers by governments and NGOs. Alpes and Sorensen (2015) argued that despite the negative depiction of smugglers, migrants place a greater trust towards them than towards state officials. Smugglers tend to acquire more powers if legal migration is difficult or near impossible. They are chosen by migrants on the basis of their effectiveness to overcome barriers to travel. Migrants often perceive them as their last resort to navigate the ‘migration jungle’ (Alpes and Sorensen 2015). According to Musarò (2019, 638), smugglers certainly profit from the desperation of others, but migrants also consider them to ‘save lives, create possibilities and redress global inequalities.’ In light of the evident efforts of information campaigns to demonize smugglers, Vammen et al. (2021) argue that the overly strong focus on smugglers within European migration policy debates overshadows the abuses committed by border guards against migrants.

Governments and NGOs have gone to great lengths to warn potential migrants about the risk of falling victims to smugglers. This engagement has also showed their own electorates that they are addressing the problem.

2.4. The effects

The effects of information campaigns are probably the most difficult to establish (see next section) even if some assessments have been made by independent researchers. Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud (2020) study government-led information campaigns in Sudan. These campaigns tend to be considered successful when government notice a decrease in the number of people who are leaving, even if only to a modest extent. In reality, it is extremely complex to ascertain a causal link between information campaigns and migratory trends (and numbers). The development of an information campaign might correlate with a decrease in numbers, but this does not mean that it is the information campaign that has caused this decrease. Information campaigns are often seen as a symbolic policy. They allow governments to ‘do something’ and to show that they ‘are in control’. However, they do not address

the challenges leading to migration or those posed by restrictive border regimes (Heller 2014; Oeppen 2016). Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud (2007) suggest that information campaigns are merely a new form of delocalized migration control stemming from the shortcomings of traditional border surveillance. Regarding European information campaigns in Afghanistan, Oeppen (2016, 1) argued that:

These information campaigns are symbolic, fulfilling the need of policymakers to be seen to be doing something, and also – and more ominously – serve a role of shifting responsibility for the risks of the journey onto Afghans themselves, rather than the restrictive border regimes of the EU.

Some scholars do not only regard these campaigns as symbolic (if inconsequential) actions. Information campaigns can have negative effects on migrants. Musarò (2019) noted that information campaigns may contribute to the dehumanization of migrants. They do little to counteract the xenophobic sentiments characterizing much of the public debate on the topic of migrant smuggling in Europe. ‘The media portrayals of people crossing the border, through narratives and images of security and salvation, for example, can be understood as representational barriers that construe their identities as “desirable” or “undesirable”’ (Musarò 2019, 632). Migrants have manifested resistance towards restrictive border control policies, with information campaigns often seen to belong to this category. In his analysis of EU-funded IOM information campaigns, Pécoud (2010, 184) argues that ‘information campaigns point to one of the greatest obstacles to the control of migration, namely the refusal of migrants to accept the legitimacy of the policies aimed at stopping them.’

Anecdotal evidence from IOM-run information campaigns in the Western Balkans, Zimbabwe, Kenya (Browne 2015), Cameroon (Heller 2014), Senegal (Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2011; Rodriguez 2017), Ghana and Ethiopia (Tjaden, Morgenstern, and Laczko 2018) seems to point to a limited impact of such campaigns on migrants’ decision-making. Evaluations of online information campaigns also demonstrate a limited efficacy in changing the minds of potential migrants in Senegal, Guinea, and Nigeria (Haarman, Tjaden, and López 2020). Nonetheless, despite the evidence showing the lack of success of information campaigns, the governments of EU member states continue to provide funding to retain electoral support by showing that they are ‘doing something’ (Rodriguez 2017, 748).

3. Information Campaigns for Migrants: Avenues for further research

The literature review illustrated that studies have well-explored the evolution of information campaigns, their goals, actors, and (partly, but not systematically) their framings over time. However, research has struggled to establish hard evidence on the effects of these campaigns (Browne 2015). To better understand what information campaigns’ do, or what they do not do (and why so), we need to focus more on the migrants’ perspectives, or the context wherein information campaigns operate. If we do not know the alternative frames circulating and their status (dominant, minoritarian) we can never fully capture the effects of information campaigns.

3.1. How to assess “effects” or “impact”?

According to Obi, Bartolini, and D’Haese (2019), there is limited evidence of the effect of information campaigns primarily due to methodological issues. Evaluations which reported information campaigns to be successful would be often based on a small number of participants. They lack rigorous assessments tools, possibly exacerbated by the high costs of data collection. According to a review of academic studies on information campaigns, rigorous research on the implementation, local outcomes, and migrants’

perception of such campaigns is still missing (Pagogna and Sakdakpolrak 2021). Information campaigns are carried out in different local settings and often have slightly diverging assumptions and dynamics at play. This complicates a comparative and in-depth study of their impact. In his analysis of the impact of IOM information campaigns in Cameroon, Heller (2014, 313-314) argued that ‘in a context of which information circulates through multiple different networks which vary in scale from the local to the global, controlling information – let alone its reception-seems an impossible task.’ Even when a close scrutiny of the impact of information campaign is undertaken, it is difficult to establish a causal connection between the implementation of the campaigns and a reduction in irregular migration (EMN 2012).

These methodological challenges are serious. There are no oven-ready solutions to overcome them. However, there are ways. A first way is to study in more detail the narratives and information landscape that inform the decision-making processes of (potential) migrants. A researcher may analyse in more detail all the sources of information used by potential migrants – and to assess the role information campaigns play in them. The studies thus far have given great relevance to the information provided by governments and other stakeholder such as NGOs (Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud 2020; Rodriguez 2017). Scarcer attention has been paid on how these information campaigns actually relate to other sources that potential migrants consult and listen to. What is the role of migrants’ families and social networks (and social media) in shaping how prospective migrants view migratory options? To what extent and at which stages of a decision-making process may unfold an information campaign any kind of impact?

Information about migration has to be evaluated in the context of opportunities and constraints to migrate. Studies have highlighted that information campaigns may be ineffective as individuals are compelled to leave for different reasons including poverty, persecution, or climate change. It may not be a lack of information that is making a migrant to leave a country but a lack of livelihood opportunities to stay (see also Czaika and Reinprecht 2020). Information and knowledge of real and potential migrations has hence to be evaluated against migratory opportunities and constraints. Qualitative research methods, notably in-depth interviews or focus groups with real and potential migrants, may be an appropriate way to assess these questions and come closer to the role of narratives and information in the decision making of these individuals.

3.2. Assessing systematically different target audiences

Studies on the impact of information campaigns have faced another relevant challenges: how to define the target audience of information campaigns, usually seen to be “real” and “potential” migrants? A common definition for a migrant is someone who has crossed an international border and stayed for at least 12 months. But how do we define “potential” migrants for a study on the impact of information campaigns?

A way to define potential migrants is to look at individuals subject to ‘involuntary immobility’ (Carling 2002). Those people wish to migrate but are not able to migrate as their aspiration is not matched with their abilities. Carling (2002) names a range of factors deriving from a ‘common emigration environment’ that define such an ability including migration control policies, a lack of development but also the risk-aversiveness of potential migrants. From this perspective, a study on the impact of information campaigns may select “potential migrants” as people keen to migrate but not having (yet) had the opportunity or will to do it. In which ways have the messages of information campaigns influenced their decision to stay at home or not to migrate at first place?

However, potential migrants can be defined differently. In migration societies, there are often structural factors influencing of who gets to be a migrant. For instance, first-born sons may face pressure to migrate in order to contribute to a family’s income, irrespective of whether or not they have an individual aspiration to migrate. To reaffirm this, Gaibazzi (2015, 94) argues that ‘men shoulder the financial obligations for their parents and households, and since households are in a chronic need of cash for basic consumption items, men are expected to go and find it.’ From this perspective, potential migrants

targeted by information campaigns are not only people who express a wish to migrate but also those who are likely becoming migrants one day due to societal expectations and structural factors.

Finally, information campaigns may have a wider societal impact. This implies that they do not have only an impact on their immediate target audience – real and potential migrants – but at a society at large, notably by influencing a public narrative on migration.

3.3. The impact on migration narratives in countries of origin

Since information campaigns have been first employed in the 1990s, they have evolved considerably. Private consulting and communication firms have been increasingly engaged for using social media as a prime medium for information campaigns (Pagogna and Sakdakpolrak 2021; Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud 2020). The clips and messages are less and less described as being funded by the EU or any other international donor. In a way, the messages of information campaigns are getting more disguised as “ordinary” inputs to a wider public debate on migration. It is not only the messages that are getting less easily connected to international donors. The messengers of the campaigns have also changed. As we have seen, returnees’ and local celebrities have become central “faces” and actors of the information campaigns. Here again, a random observer may believe that these messengers act on own initiative given that donor structures remain in the background. A stronger acknowledgement of a given local context and local celebrities have professionalized the campaigns.

These changes bring about new avenues for research. Can high-profile local celebrities and “trustworthy” messengers (such as returnees) alter a discourse/narrative on migration? Have the campaigns managed that the public discourse in the target country focuses more on the “problematic” aspects of migration (such as risk factors)? To what extent do international donors influence a narrative on migration more widely in a given context? The impact of information campaigns may therefore be analysed (or included as a subject) in studies on migration narratives in countries of migrants’ origin and transit. This can be done by studying the debates on migration in public institutions (such as parliaments) or traditional and social media and discussing the relevance of the messages promoted by (externally funded) information campaigns.

There is another aspect to the “localization” of information campaigns. In which ways do they change the messages of the campaigns? Local actors, notably if they are celebrities, may have their own views and take on the subject even if they cooperate with international donors. As a matter of fact, the following question may evolve: Are they only implementing agents, or do they also influence the framing and the development of information campaigns? Do they, in particular circumstances, even alter the framing originally intended by the donors?

4. Conclusion

Though a systematic review of the literature of information campaigns targeting migrants, we have shown the different forms of information campaigns that exist, their set-up and frameworks, the actors involved, and the different types of narratives that they propose.

Information campaigns have become an important tool to control migration by the EU and member states since their inception in the 1990s. This is evident in the number of campaigns and financial resources committed to information campaigns. With the quest to make them more effective, funders of information campaigns have engaged more – and more different – actors to implement campaigns on their behalf. Different means of communication have been used to transmit messages ranging from conventional to social media. A diversification of the actors and the means of transmitting messages have implied a

higher level of exposure of potential and real migrants to information campaigns. In terms of messaging, information campaigns have tended to frame irregular migration in a negative and dangerous manner. Potential migrants should be discouraged from leaving in an undocumented manner. Smugglers have been portrayed in information campaigns as criminals who puts migrants' lives at risk. However, academic research has highlighted that the negative framing of smugglers may not be in line with how migrants view them. Due to the restrictive border regimes of the EU and its member states, migrants often see no other option other than drawing on the help (or falling victim) of smugglers.

Overall, information campaigns continue to have a momentum and are widely used – even more so when there is a perception of a looming “migration crisis” in Europe. That said, researchers may focus stronger on how these campaigns actually influence the information landscape and narratives that cause potential migrants to leave or stay. Despite the growing popularisation of the campaigns, the perception and perspective of migrants has not been examined in sufficient detail. One reason for this is that is methodologically challenging. It is not easy to define, in particular, as to who is a “potential” migrant – a key target audience of information campaigns. The paper has suggested to focus on either individual motivations (i.e. a person's personal aspiration to migrate) or more structural factors (a person facing pressures to migrate) when selecting these individuals. Furthermore, the role of local actors (such as returnees and local celebrities) – a group that has gained influence – remains unclear. In which ways do they influence the conduct and also the impact of information campaigns? Overall, therefore, a future assessment on the effects of information campaigns may focus more on the perspective of migrants, the role of local actors, and the diversification of the information landscape. Which alternative narratives to those portrayed in information campaigns do they produce and receive? What are the narratives on migration to Europe produced by local actors and European actors? Only by better understanding the full picture of migration narratives circulating in destination countries will we be able to understand the role of information campaigns therein.

Bibliography

- Alpes, J. M., and N.N. Sorensen. 2015. "Migration risk campaigns are based on wrong assumptions." *DIIS Policy Brief*. Dansk Institut for Internationale Studier.
- Altai Consulting. 2021. "Learning Lessons from the EUTF-Phase 2- Paving the way for future programming on migration." https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/sites/default/files/learning_lessons_from_the_eutf_final_0.pdf.
- Bishop, S. C. 2020. "An International Analysis of Governmental Media Campaigns to Deter Asylum Seekers." *International Journal of Communication* 14: 1092–1114. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/11982/2979>.
- Borah, P. 2011. "Conceptual issues in framing theory: A systematic examination of a decade's literature." *Journal of Communication* 61 (2): 246–263.
- Boswell, C. 2011. "Migration control and narratives of steering." *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 13 (1): 12–25.
- Brekke, J. P., and A. Beyer. 2019. "'Everyone wants to leave': Transit migration from Khartoum—The role of information and social media campaigns." *ISF Report* 2019: 11. Institutt for samfunnsforskning.
- Brekke, J. P., and K. Thorbjørnsrud. 2020. "Communicating borders – Governments deterring asylum seekers through social media campaigns." *Migration Studies* 8 (1): 43–65. doi:10.1093/migration/mny027.
- Browne, E. (2015). *Impact of communication campaigns to deter irregular migration* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1248). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.
- Carling, J. 2002. "Migration in the age of involuntary immobility: Theoretical reflections and Cape Verdean experiences." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 28 (1): 5–42.
- Carling, J., and M. Hernández-Carretero. 2011. "Protecting Europe and protecting migrants? Strategies for managing unauthorised migration from Africa." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 13 (1): 42–58. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-856X.2010.00438.x.
- Carling, J., and M. Hernández-Carretero. 2012. "Beyond 'Kamikaze Migrants': Risk Taking in West African Boat Migration to Europe." *Human Organization* 71 (4): 407–416. doi:10.17730/humo.71.4.n52709742v2637t1.
- Czaika, M., and C. Reinprecht. 2020. "Drivers of Migration. A synthesis of knowledge." *IMI Working Paper* 163. International Migration Institute, University of Oxford.
- Dunsch, F. A., J. Tjaden, and W. Quiviger. 2019. *Migrants as Messengers: The Impact of peer-to-peer communication of potential migrants in Senegal*. IOM Publication. <https://publications.iom.int/books/migrants-messengers-impact-peer-peer-communication-potential-migrants-senegal-impact>.
- EMN (European Migration Network). 2012. "Practical Measures to Reduce Irregular Migration. Synthesis Report." European Migration Network. <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/c8a2d449-85f8-4b70-aa44-e40c79c437d2/language-en>.
- EMN (European Migration Network). 2019. "Migration and communication: Information and Awareness-raising Campaigns in Countries of Origin and Transit." Briefing Paper of the Austrian National EMN Conference 2019. Vienna, December 3. https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/emn_conference.pdf.
- Gaibazzi, P. 2015. *Bush Bound: Young Men and Rural Permanence in Migrant West Africa*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.
- Haarman, E., J. Tjaden, and G. López. 2020. *Assessing the effectiveness of online Facebook campaigns targeting potential irregular migrants: A pilot study in three West African countries*. IOM Publication <https://publications.iom.int/books/assessing-effectiveness-online-facebook-campaigns-targeting-potential-irregular-migrants>.
- Heller, C. 2014. "Perception management – Deterring potential migrants through information campaigns." *Global Media and Communication* 10 (3): 304–314. doi: 10.1177/1742766514552355.

- Musarò, P. 2019. "Aware Migrants: The role of information campaigns in the management of migration." *European Journal of Communication* 34 (6): 632–638. doi:10.1177/0267323119886164.
- Nieuwenhuys, C., and A. Pécout. 2007. "Human trafficking, information campaigns, and strategies of migration control." *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50 (12): 1674–1695.
- Obi, C., F. Bartolini, and M. D'Haese. 2019. "Evaluating the impact of information campaign in deterring irregular migration intention among youths. A randomised control experiment in Edo State, Nigeria." Paper presented at the 6th African Conference of Agricultural Economists, Abuja, Nigeria, September 23-26.
- Oeppen, C. 2016. "'Leaving Afghanistan! Are you sure?' European efforts to deter potential migrants through information campaigns." *Human Geography* 9 (14): 1–11. doi: 10.1177/194277861600900206.
- Pagogna, R., and P. Sakdakpolrak. 2021. "Disciplining migration aspirations through migration-information campaigns: A systematic review of the literature." *Geography Compass* 15 (7). doi: 10.1111/gec3.12585.
- Pécout, A. 2010. "Informing Migrants to Manage Migration? An Analysis of IOM's Information Campaigns." In *The Politics of International Migration Management*, edited by M. Geiger and A. Pécout, 184–190. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rodriguez, A. 2017. "European attempts to govern African youths by raising awareness of the risks of migration: ethnography of an encounter." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 45 (5): 735–751. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2017.1415136.
- Olivier de Sardan, J. P. 2005. *Anthropology and Development. Understanding Contemporary Social Change*. London, UK: Zed Books.
- Schans, D., and C. Optekamp. 2016. "Migrant Information Campaigns." Den Haag: WODC.
- Townsend, J., and C. Oomen. 2015. *Before the boat: understanding the migrant journey*. MPI Reports. Migration Policy Institute. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/boat-understanding-migrant-journey>.
- Tjaden, J., 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 1*. IOM, Geneva.
- Vammen, I. M. S., S. Plambech, A. Chemlali and N. N. Sørensen. 2021. "Does Information Save Migrants' Lives?: Knowledge and needs of West African migrants en route to Europe." *DIIS Report*. Dansk Institut for Internationale Studier.
- Van Dessel, J., and A. Pécout. 2020. "A NGO's dilemma: rescuing migrants at sea or keeping them in their place?" Available at: <https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/research-subject-groups/centre-criminology/centreborder-criminologies/blog/2020/04/ngos-dilemma>.
- Zafinikamia, B., J. Tjaden, and H. Gninafon. 2020. *The impact of mobile cinema events on potential migrants in rural Guinea*. IOM Publication. <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/guinea-cinemarena-report-2020.pdf>.

BRIDGES

Assessing the production and impact of migration narratives

BRIDGES: Assessing the production and impact of migration narratives is a project funded by the EU H2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and implemented by a consortium of 12 institutions from all over Europe. The project aims to understand the causes and consequences of migration narratives in a context of increasing politicisation and polarisation around these issues by focusing on six European countries: France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom. To do so, BRIDGES adopts an interdisciplinary and co-productive approach and is implemented by a diverse consortium formed by universities, think tanks and research centres, cultural associations, and civil society organisations.

The BRIDGES Working Papers are a series of academic publications presenting the research results of the project in a structured and rigorous way. They can either focus on particular case studies covered by the project or adopt a comparative perspective.

How to cite this Working Paper:

Trauner, Florian, Omar N. Cham, and Rosangela Caleprico. 2022. "EU-funded information campaigns targeting potential migrants: State of the art." *BRIDGES Working Papers* 3.

© BRIDGES Consortium 2022

The texts are published in digital format in open access and under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) license.

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.5925129](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5925129)

ISSN: 2696-8886

Editorial Coordination: Barcelona Centre for International Affairs (CIDOB)

This publication has been funded by the European Union under the Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 101004564. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union. The European Commission and the Research Executive Agency are not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.