Impact of communication campaigns to deter irregular migration

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Question

What is the evidence of the impact of communication campaigns to deter irregular migration from developing to developed countries? To include media campaigns, but also targeted community focused messaging, social mobilisation, and other possible approaches.

Contents

1. Overview

The **meaning of irregular migration** is not always clear as there is no universally accepted definition. It is still often used interchangeably with 'illegal migration' even though 'illegal migration' is increasingly restricted to cases of smuggling and trafficking of persons (Lopez Lucia, 2015). For the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), irregular migration is movement of people that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries.[1]

Campaigns to reduce irregular migration generally occur in countries of origin, aimed at deterring migrants from leaving. Understanding the decisions to leave is therefore a key part of success. The assumption is that a lack of accurate information generates irrational and risky irregular migration behaviours (Pécoud, 2010). If migrants were informed of the proper conditions of entry, they would be deterred from unlawful migration (Pécoud, 2010). Information campaigns are not intended to stop migration, but rather to inform of the risks and dangers of irregular routes, smuggling or trafficking (Pécoud, 2010).

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[1] See IOM key definitions: https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms.

There is **extremely little evidence** on the impact and effectiveness of these campaigns. This report found no publically available evaluations of information campaigns. There is some information on the types of campaigns in existence and on what they do, but there is very little information on whether they are effective. Even where they are evaluated, showing a chain of causality between a specific programme and reduced migration is difficult (European Migration Network, 2012). It is almost impossible to track any reduction in the number of illegal departures (Heller, 2014). There is a strong anecdotal narrative in the literature that information campaigns have very limited effect on migrants' decisions to leave, as other factors play a more important role in this decision. Conditions of poverty, inequality, conflict and lack of economic opportunities at home, and reports from trusted social networks about conditions abroad, play a much stronger role in migrant decision-making.

The factors which may improve effectiveness of information campaigns are:

- Trust in the information received. Many potential migrants do not trust information disseminated through mass media / official channels.
- Targeting at specific groups of migrants.
- Real-life testimonies from returned migrants.
- Repeated messaging rather than one-off campaigns.
- Integration into broader migration policies and campaigns, including directing migrants to legal opportunities.

Some information campaigns are about informing migrants of how to stay safe during a journey, not necessarily aiming to deter them from leaving (Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011). Some campaigns are aimed at host communities, to sensitise them to the needs of migrants to help promote tolerance. This report does not include these types of campaigns. This report also excludes trafficking, as this is a standalone subset of illegal migration. The overall literature on migration is quite gender-sensitive, but within the literature on irregular migration, the most gendered focus is on trafficking of women and girls. There is less gender focus in the broader literature on irregular migration.

An older report produced by GSDRC also reviews information campaigns and migration[2]. The current report therefore only looks at publically available literature published since 2008.

2. State of the evidence

The overall evidence base on effectiveness of irregular migration policy and practice is weak (EMN, 2012). Policy-making currently relies on partial information rather than rigorous measurement and analysis (Koser & McAuliffe, 2013). Few programmes on irregular migration have been evaluated (EMN, 2012). This report found no public evaluations of information programmes published since 2008. There is some information on the types of campaigns in existence and on what they do, but there is very little information on whether they are effective.

Even where they are evaluated, it can be hard to show a chain of causality between a specific programme and reduced migration (EMN, 2012). The real measure of impact would be a reduction in the number of

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[2] Mcloughlin, C. (2008) Information Campaigns and Migration. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham. http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/HD529.pdf

illegal departures, but this is almost impossible to track (Heller, 2014). **Types of measureable impacts** include (Heller, 2014):

- Levels of awareness and information retention
- Changes in perceptions
- Changes in attitudes
- Changes in behaviour

There are also methodological problems with trying to collect data from irregular migrants, who may be difficult to contact and fear speaking to the authorities (Koser & McAuliffe, 2013). Irregular migrants may misrepresent their motivations for migrating, deliberately or not, trying to rationalise their decision (Koser & McAuliffe, 2013). Research in Pakistan found that interviewing family members of migrants was more successful and less sensitive than trying to contact migrants themselves (Koser & McAuliffe, 2013).

The literature suggests that **other interventions and factors** play a stronger role in determining whether people migrate. The unchanged social, political and economic conditions at home are the overriding factors which may influence these decisions (Heller, 2014). The presence of social networks in destination countries is perhaps the most important variable (Koser & McAuliffe, 2013). Some authors find it unlikely that information campaigns will have any effect on decisions to migrate. Risk information does not seem to change decisions to migrate, as the perceived opportunity abroad continues to outweigh the risks (Heller, 2014), and the most trusted information comes from social networks, not government sources (Kosnick, 2014). The literature is fairly clear that the causes of irregular migration are not lack of information about the dangers, as information interventions assume, but poverty, conflict and lack of opportunities, which information interventions do not address. These factors may be beyond the reach of policymakers.

3. Examples of what works

Campaigns to deter irregular migration are usually targeted at potential migrants in their country of origin, before they have made the decision to leave. Understanding reasons for leaving are therefore a key part of creating a successful campaign (Koser & McAuliffe, 2013). However, there is a lack of empirical information on migrants' reasons to leave (Koser & McAuliffe, 2013).

Information campaigns which warn of the risks of migrating irregularly have proven most effective when they are targeted at particular 'at-risk' groups; have specific goals; are repeated; and are part of a wider strategy (EMN, 2012). This study synthesises reports on EU countries' information campaigns.

The UNHCR (2011) has produced some **guidelines** on protecting refugees and mixed migration, which include practical examples of what works. The chapter on information campaigns suggests that (p.264-266):

- Information campaigns are most effective when they target the entire community rather than only potential migrants, since decisions to leave a home country are generally based on, and supported by, a family or community[3].

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[3] This contradicts the findings from EMN (2012). It is unclear where evidence is stronger.

- Information campaigns must not discourage legitimate refugees or asylum seekers. Raising awareness about legal migration opportunities, where they exist, can increase the effectiveness of information campaigns.

- Mass media campaigns, using radio or television, can address large audiences of different profiles and backgrounds.

- Discussion sessions and theatre productions may reach fewer persons, but they offer a more in-depth opportunity to discuss, exchange ideas and persuade individuals to change their minds.

- "Catch-phrase messages" are useful for attracting the attention of the audience and providing information on complex matters in a direct and memorable manner. The language of these messages can also be tailored to the culture of the audience.

- Real-life testimonies can render information more accessible and intelligible.

- Using celebrities or high-profile individuals to convey messages can help establish trust, reach the target audience, and raise difficult and sometimes contentious issues.

Their main **lessons** for stakeholders are:

- Disseminate information, education and communication materials to inform individuals of the risks of irregular movements, including human trafficking and smuggling.

- Use simple targeted messages that are age, gender and culture sensitive and translated into appropriate languages to reach a wide audience.

- Encourage the involvement of persons who have experienced hazardous journeys to help influence individual choices and shift attitudes of host communities.

- Include contact details for support services in information leaflets, as well as the rights and obligations of persons on the move and available international protection and legal migration options.

- Initiate awareness-raising activities on the plight of refugees and the protection needs of persons travelling within mixed movements.

- Involve law enforcement, government officials, politicians and local communities in information strategies, and encourage open debate to identify outcomes for persons travelling within mixed movements.

- Cooperate with relevant actors on developing information campaigns in countries of origin, transit and destination.

The remainder of the report contains case study examples of information campaigns, but none of these have been evaluated and there is little indication of impacts.

A series of evaluations of information campaigns in a range of countries concluded that their impact is at best neutral (UK Home Office, 2004, cited in Koser & McAuliffe, 2013). Some of the **problems encountered** were:

- Potential migrants did not trust information from governments and international organisations.

- Dissemination was extremely difficult, often not reaching beyond the capital city.

- Practical issues concerning translation, illiteracy, and access.

- Policies and procedures change so quickly that information campaigns were quickly out of date.

The International Organization for Migration has supported several external evaluations of its irregular migration programmes. These are available on request[4].

The IOM/EC AENEAS funded regional project 'Capacity building, information and awareness raising towards orderly migration in the **Western Balkans**' promoted safe migration within and from Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. The project started in February 2008 and closed down in January 2010, and an external evaluation (Verduijn, 2010) reports that the information campaign component was 'generally successful'. Its approach hinged on establishing Migrant Service Centres, which provided information and services to potential migrants, usually housed within state public employment services. Staff provided individual advice and assistance, largely the provision of information rather than, for example, job opportunities or referrals. 40 country fact sheets are regularly updated and distributed to MSC visitors, along with individual advice. A media campaign used newspapers, TV and radio spots to advertise the MSC services, which seemed to increase numbers of visitors directly after a campaign. Other project components included capacity building and policy development. The evaluation of the project's effectiveness states that the MSCs have been successful in reaching out to unemployed people (potential migrants). It suggests that there is a high demand for these kinds of services and information. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that very few of the MSC visitors actually manage to use the legal channels described in the fact sheets and move abroad.

The Safe Journey Information Campaign project, implemented in **Zimbabwe** between 2005 and 2010, was started in order to raise public awareness, particularly among youth, on safe and legal migration and the potential risks associated with irregular migration. The external evaluation (Development Data, 2011) found that illegal migration continues, with the most cited reason being to find employment. Respondents showed a higher awareness level of potential risks of illegal migration, such as sexual abuse, and a higher awareness of safe migration rules and regulations. The most successful materials used in this project were "edutainment", information education and communication tools, and radio shows. The evaluation concludes that the programme was successful in raising awareness levels.

The IOM **Kenya** project "Horn/Gulf of Aden/Yemen: Improving Protection of Migrants – Phase III" was implemented from October 2012 to September 2013. It was managed by IOM Kenya, and aimed at providing services to migrants, improving regional coordination and cooperation among stakeholders, as well as awareness raising and capacity building. These measures include: distributing education materials, posting warning posters, broadcasting radio programmes, carrying out community dialogue workshops, putting on educational plays and concerts, having returnee migrants give talks and working with local leaders. An external evaluation (Stewart, 2013) concludes that these activities were implemented successfully, but do not seem to have reduced the numbers of migrants. The evaluation suggests that follow-up monitoring is necessary to track the impact of the programme. This is not currently being done.

The IOM Regional Programme and Dialogue on Facilitating Safe and Legal Migration from South Asia to the EU operated in both **South Asia and EU** countries. Flyers, brochures, and videos aim to educate migrants about EU country-specific migration procedures and requirements, basic rights, precautions on the dangers and risks of resorting to irregular migration, and overall guide and basic know-how on how to access legal channels for migration. Materials sent to the EU include information on available skills in

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[4] https://www.iom.int/external-evaluations

South Asia to market them to EU employers and information on the overseas employment process in South Asia. Materials are available at centres and distributed through local regions. An external evaluation (Gera, 2011) notes that the lack of feedback mechanisms among target beneficiaries limits the assessment of the impact of the information campaign materials and services in terms of behaviour/perception change and knowledge acquired by target beneficiaries, and that irregular migration is itself extremely difficult to measure.

The pilot Transit and Irregular Migration Management project (TRIM) in **Libya** launched by the office of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Tripoli in 2006. The general objective of this pilot project was to enhance the local capacities to handle transit and irregular migration in Libya. The information campaign was limited to informing migrants in Libya about the existence of the Assisted Voluntary Return programme. This campaign consists of 10,000 leaflets distributed by the Tripoli office to selected embassies of African countries as well as to representatives from the Catholic Church in Tripoli. In turn, these institutions were supposed to distribute these leaflets directly to migrants and to community leaders who also disseminated them to the migrants of their community. An external evaluation (Gusev et al., 2008) concludes that leaflets are not distributed effectively, with many still in storage and some handed out once migrants are already in the AVR process, and that migrants do not seem to understand the role of IOM and the purpose of the AVR programme. The relative lack of knowledge about IOM and the AVR programme among the migrants suggests that campaigns based on traditional media such as leaflets, and by extension posters and TV advertisements, is not as effective in Libya as it might be in other countries. Consequently, the evaluation recommends that any new campaign should be community based, to maximise the possibility of reaching migrants and, thus strengthen its impact.

Paramjit (2012) describes an awareness raising campaign in **India** to deter irregular migration to Europe. In Jallandhar city, in the Punjab, irregular migrants are mostly unemployed, rural, males 21-30 years old. The Indian Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), with funding from the government of Belgium and assistance from IOM, organised 25 street fair/road shows in 15 villages, targeting up to 10,000 potential migrants in 2009. A second round of road shows were held six months later, 10 in the same villages and 20 in new villages, and with a slight shift of focus to educational institutions. These events consisted of performance, speeches, and a film showing, highlighting the problems of illegal migration and emphasising legal routes.

The project was deemed successful. During the second round of road shows the implementers conducted an opinion survey of attendees:

- 58 per cent responded positively to questions related to their awareness on migration-related issues, but a substantial number (42 per cent) were unreached.

- 90 per cent showed awareness on the pitfalls of illegal migration. This was a reflection on the success of the first set of road shows.

- 96 per cent of the respondents endorsed the awareness programme.

- Regarding the medium for the programme, there was a mixed set of suggestions – seminars (25 per cent); media (16 per cent), announcements and advertisements (14 per cent) and theatre (11 per cent).

- Most respondents supported the continuation and/or extension of the programme.

The authors highlight that changing attitudes is a long-term process, and repetition of shows and messages is likely to be more successful.

In **Cameroon**, the IOM broadcast an official video framing the dangers of illegal migration on television for 10 days (Heller, 2014). Due to accessibility and the audience's lack of trust in official channels, they also disseminated information through informal means: flyers and books distributed by local NGOs and cybercafes, and awareness-raising performances in schools. However, this intervention had no impact evaluation (Heller, 2014). Heller (2014) recounts some anecdotal evidence which suggests that the campaign was not treated seriously by its intended audience, and is doubtful that it had any effect.

Carling and Hernández-Carretero (2011) draw on policy measures and some ethnographic fieldwork in **Senegal** to examine the management of unauthorised migration in fishing boats from West Africa to the Canary Isles. They suggest that information campaigns have a limited effect on migration behaviour, for the following reasons:

- Potential migrants may consider themselves better informed about the risks than those producing the campaigns, especially fishermen familiar with the sea.

- When potential migrants perceive that information campaigns are driven by vested interests, they are likely to dismiss them as biased propaganda.

- Awareness campaigns may be irrelevant to prospective migrants who consider the attempt at changing their life to justify the risks involved.

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Key websites

- Bali Process – Bali Process Handbook on Addressing Irregular Migration through Effective Information Campaigns: http://www.baliprocess.net/regional-support-office/handbook-on-creating-effective-information-campaigns
- IOM – External Evaluations: https://www.iom.int/external-evaluations

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