

Implemented by



Funded by
the European Union

Communication on irregular migration

Author: Dr. James Dennison





© European Union, 2023

The information and views set out in this study are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Contents

Executive summary and recommendations	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Studies of public communication on irregular migration	7
2.1 Contextual and critical studies.....	7
2.2 Experimental studies.....	8
2.3 Lessons and weaknesses of current approaches.....	10
3. Four steps forward	11
3.1 Values.....	11
3.2 Emotions.....	16
3.3 Narratives.....	19
3.4 Impact Assessment.....	21
4. Conclusions	22
References	23



Executive summary and recommendations

- Attempts to deal with irregular migration have become more expensive, expansive, diffuse, complex, and contested, with responsible actors needing to balance an ever-greater number of demands and obligations.
- As such, public communication is today a prevalent tool used by actors seeking to achieve migration policy objectives via information, persuasion, and motivating behaviour.
- Yet we still know relatively little about how public communication can be most effectively used to uphold rights and safety, reduce irregularity, smuggling, and trafficking
- This report asks how we can achieve a step-change in persuasive communication on irregular migration.
- Identified weaknesses of current approaches include poor understanding of target audiences, naïve informative contents, and a lack of impact assessment.
- As such, this report applies theory and examples to advise policymakers to:
 1. Move from awareness-raising and security-based appeals to a broader values-based persuasive approach for at least three reasons. Would-be irregular migrants:
 - I. overestimate their chance of fatality while migrating, so awareness-raising is likely to increase the chance of irregular migration
 - II. come from situations of security risk, making security-based arguments relatively weak, particularly if no alternatives are offered. Fear-based messaging has limits.
 - III. likely strongly value self-direction and other openness and self-enhancement values.
 2. Collect data on the value-basis of would-be irregular migrants using existing academic psychological schema.
 3. Offer alternatives when attempting to change behaviour in general and particularly alternatives that appeal to the values of one's target audience.
 4. Persuade with cognitive (thinking) and emotive (feeling) components working in unison. Align emotional basis with physiological and behavioural objectives based on existing psychological schema: joy for participation, trust for support, anticipation for examination, etc. Again, fear-based messaging has limits.
 5. Use narrative-based messaging that is supported by relevant facts, delivered by trusted messengers, and, where possible, is interactive and audience-lead. Frame messages in understandable, generalisable causal narrative form.
 6. Incorporate impact assessment from the beginning of programmes. Use basic, first-principles steps that results in clear and open measures of impact on bottom-line objectives, using existing guides.
 7. Use such impact assessments to test for unintended consequences that may impinge on parallel policy objectives, in terms of safe, orderly, and regular migration and beyond, as well as the upholding of all migrants' rights regardless of status.

1. Introduction

Public communication has the potential to do enormous good for humanity. Regarding migration, public communication can be used to meet widely agreed-upon policy objectives such as safe, orderly, and regular migration. Moreover, it can help governments uphold democratic legal- and rights-based policy frameworks against nefarious forces and contribute to maximising the potential benefits and minimising the potential costs of migration to origin, transit, and host country populations, as well as to migrants themselves. In line with ongoing research from the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD) and the EUROMED Migration programme on how to use public communication to re-balance migration narratives and protect the rights, safety, and opportunities of migrants, this report asks how we can use persuasive communication to achieve policy goals regarding irregular migration. It gathers lessons learned and provides practical recommendations, with a particular focus on the Euro-Mediterranean region and the activities of the European Union.

During the 21st century, attempts to deal with irregular migration have become more expensive, expansive, diffuse, complex, and contested, with responsible actors needing to balance an ever-greater number of demands and obligations. The annual budget of the European Union's border force—European Border and Coast Guard Agency—continues to rise, up 430 per cent since 2015 to €754 million in 2022. The EU's 2015-2021 "Emergency Trust Fund for Africa" spent €5 billion addressing "root causes of migration". At least €200 million of this was spent on "awareness-raising" public communication activities¹. The broader programme into which it has been superseded, the EU's nascent €80 billion 2021-27 Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument, includes as one of its seven priorities "migration and mobility management"². Moreover, UN Secretary Antonio Guterres called "the fate of the thousands who die in doomed efforts to cross seas and deserts [...] a human tragedy". Indeed, the risks to irregular migrants are well-documented, including physical and sexual violence, forced labour, financial exploitation, abduction and extortion, and death. The number of *verified* deaths by sickness, drowning, disappearance, hazardous transport, lack of amenities, and violence of migrants *en route* to Europe is in the thousands annually (eg. Tjaden et al, 2018) with a shocking 175 per cent of Gambian irregular migrants—the country with the highest irregular migration rates relative to population—reportedly dying during their journey (Bah and Batista, 2018).

In this context, policymakers have increasingly turned toward public communication to reduce irregularity. Indeed, the motivation for public communication campaigns has long been characterised—albeit somewhat sardonically—as the policymakers' 'dream scenario' whereby such campaigns make border control unnecessary (Pécoud, 2010: 197). Pagogna and Sakdapolra (2021: 2) note that, between 2015 and 2019, the European Commission funded 104 such campaigns by member states and 25 by EU institutions, and that the line between helping potential victims of trafficking and simply reducing irregular migration is 'fairly thin'. They state (2021: 1) that 'due to general concerns about states' perceived inability to control migration ... [they] have externalized measures of migration management [... including ...] dissuasion and deterrence strategies in sending countries.'

¹ Based on Oxfam estimation of 4 per cent of total EUTF expenditure on awareness raising activities: https://www-cdn.oxfam.org/s3fs-public/file_attachments/bp-emergency-for-whom-eutf-africa-migration-151117-en_1.pdf

² That instrument dedicates €7 billion to the "New Agenda for the Mediterranean", itself listing forced and irregular migration as one of its five key priorities.

However, how public communications should be used and is being used regarding irregular migration remains remarkably understudied, despite its growing importance to matters of the utmost gravity. This stands in contrast to voluminous literature on describing, explaining, and testing communication interventions aimed at affecting public attitudes to immigration, in terms of preserving immigrants' rights, reducing xenophobia, prejudice, misinformation, and political polarisation, encouraging social and economic integration, and averting hate crimes. States and actors such as the EU have devoted significant resources to communication efforts to reduce *both* public hostility to immigrants and irregular migration. Aside from practical importance, scientifically testing the exact effects of a wide variety of forms of public communication contributes to broader theoretical, scientific questions regarding why humans think and act as they do, not least given the relative lack of robust studies so far.





2. Studies of public communication on irregular migration

Academic studies of public communications on irregular migration generally fall into one of two camps: on the one hand, broad contextual or “critical” studies and, on the other, experimental studies of the impact of specific campaigns. The findings of each are outlined below:

2.1 Contextual and critical studies

The uptick in the use of public communication on irregular migration has motivated several contextual studies that seek to broadly understand and describe the phenomenon of such campaigns. These studies have noted:

1. increased usage of persuasive campaigns (Pagogna and Sakdapolrak, 2021; Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 2007; Schans and Optekamp, 2016)
2. the important place of such campaigns within the broader externalisation of border management (Bartels, 2017; Carling and Hernández-Carretero, 2011)
3. the various types of campaigns (Tjaden et al, 2018) in terms of their:
 - a. key messages: policy restrictions/situation at destination, irregular migration, smuggling, trafficking, risks of the journey, alternatives
 - b. media: internet, TV, radio, print media, workshop, alternative, hotlines/info centres, and peer-networks
 - c. tone: emotional, factual, fun, religious, balance
 - d. objectives: changing attitudes, changing behaviour, increasing knowledge/awareness (of rights and risks), increase safety while in transit (Dennison, 2022a; Schans and Optekamp, 2016)
4. lack of impact assessments (Pagogna and Sakdapolrak, 2021; Tjaden et al, 2018; Browne, 2015; Toms and Thorpe, 2012) or critiques of their quality, openness, anecdotal basis, or unjustified claims of “success” (Tjaden et al, 2018)
5. reasons for difficulties in measuring impact (Dennison, 2022a; Pagogna and Sakdapolrak, 2021; Carling and Hernández-Carretero, 2011; Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 2007; Schans and Optekamp, 2016; Tjaden et al 2018)
6. reasons for scepticism of impact and criticism of the assumptions of the role of information (Schans and Optekamp, 2016; Rodriguez, 2019; Fiedler 2020; van Bommel 2020; Andersson, 2016; Prothmann, 2018; Ryo, 2013) including:
 - a. supposedly non-rational motivations of values, morality, and gender norms
 - b. poorly understood target audiences, including in terms of understanding of irregularity
 - c. difficulty in delivering credible messages in cross-border campaigns
 - d. difficulty to compete with informally spread stories of hope and success resulting from irregular migration by friends, family, and broader, more trusted networks
 - e. the uselessness of new information if alternatives are not provided.
 - f. risks of unintended consequences, including dissuading those in danger

Aside from public campaigns seeking to dissuade would-be migrants, there also exist less direct efforts by the IOM and humanitarian and community-based intermediaries (Maã, 2020) and campaigns in destination countries to encourage return (Cleton & Chauvin, 2020; Van Neste-Gottignies, 2018).

Finally, specifically regarding communication campaigns to deter irregular migration from developing to developed



countries'; Brown (2015: 1, 3) citing the UNHCR (2011), lists recommendations:

- 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.
- 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.

These contextual studies are separate from experimental studies of the impact of specific campaigns, outlined below, in that they seek to describe the phenomenon as a whole. However, in some cases they do move beyond simple description towards interpretation according to the *prima facie* assumptions—both empirical and normative—of Marxism, various post-Marxist theories, “systems theory”, etc. These interpretative approaches typically rely on analogy and characterisation rather than deduction from first principles to reach their claims. For example, Heller (2014) offers the analogy of persuasive campaigns to colonial education cinema while Bartels (2017, and others) interprets their role as upholding “neo-liberalism” or other meta-structural notions. Oeppen (2016) argues that information campaigns aimed at would-be migrants are, rather than genuine attempts at their stated aims, instead means of control, a political act aimed at domestic audiences, and a way of shifting responsibility onto would-be migrants. Musarò (2019: 629; Cappi and Musarò, 2022: 171) analyses the imagery of an Italian campaign to argue that such campaigns ‘contribute to nurturing a ‘compassionate repression’ that increasingly and silently legitimizes the difference between the ‘us’ (the figure of the citizen) and the ‘them’ (the figure of the foreigner)’ and characterise campaigns as a ‘neoliberal industry for symbolic bordering’. This approach is expanded by (van Dessel, 2021) and similar to the discourse analysis of Williams (2020; see also Williams and Coddington, 2022; Watkins, 2020; Heller, 2014), and ethnography of Vammen (2021). These studies typically share the strength that they carefully consider the contents of the campaigns themselves and move beyond accepting their stated aims at face value, though also typically share methodologically and theoretical weaknesses that preclude robust, generalisable findings.

2.2 Experimental Studies

Experimental studies typically seek to explain the effects of campaigns on their objectives in quantitative terms. Such campaigns include film screenings, awareness raising events, peer-to-peer communication, and various forms of counselling for would-be migrants (Bah and Batista, 2018; Mesplé-Somps and Nilsson, 2020; Bia-Zafinikamia et al, 2020; Batista and McKenzie, 2021; Shrestha, 2019, 2020; Tjaden and Dunsch, 2021; Tjaden and Gninafon, 2022; Dennison, 2022a) with impact typically measured as change in self-reported propensities, perceptions, and knowledge. These recent studies typically frame themselves as a response to the lack of robust impact evaluation amongst policy practitioners—with good reason—and sometimes argue that their tests provide evidence of one or more theoretical approaches. However, more often the generalisability of their findings is questionable, not least because the contents of such campaigns—and thus the specific mechanism that causes the desired changes—are left relatively un-analysed, which instead focus on the bottom-line impact.

Bah and Batista (2018) test the effects of correcting misperceptions about dying *en route* and obtaining a residence permit on intention to migrate irregularly. They do so in Guinea amongst young males by having them play an incentivised game in which migration-related decisions are made based on various combination of information. Notably, it is shown that participants already drastically *overestimated* both the chance of obtaining a residency permit and the chance of death so that, ironically, when more accurate information was given on chance of death, their reported propensity to migrate irregularly increased. Overall, this study showed that providing information does affect migration intentions, with follow-up research a year later showing that actual migratory behaviour correlates strongly with self-reported intention. A similar lab experiment by Batista and McKenzie (2018) in Portugal and Kenya showed that adding information on risks of unemployment affected migration decisions. This finding was supported by Shrestha (2019), who showed that providing information on mortality rates and expected wages in Nepal affected migration decisions (see also Shrestha, 2020, for expanded version). Bah et al (2022) test three approaches in The Gambia: (1) providing better information and testimonials about the risks of the journey, (2) facilitating migration to a safer destination by providing information and assistance for migration to Dakar, and (3) offering vocational skill training to enhance. Of the three, the first had only small effects on long-term intention to irregularly migrate to Europe, whereas the second and third had large effects, pointing to the need to raise awareness of alternatives.

On the other hand, Mesplé-Somps and Nilsson (2020) test the effects of short documentary films on migration intentions in Mali. By contrast to most studies, they show that neither positive stories from migrants who were successful in getting to Europe, nor negative stories from unsuccessful migration, have any meaningful effects, leading them to conclude that the rewards of irregular migration are too high for communication interventions to have meaningful effects.

Tjaden and Dunsch (2021) show that peers—i.e. returned migrants—providing information on risks of irregular migration to potential migrants increases information levels, risk awareness, and reduces intention to migrate irregularly and that these effects are still observable three months later. This study used an RCT design to measure the impact of the “Migrants as Messengers” campaign, implemented by the IOM, in which would-be migrants were invited to information events that included personal video testimonials and face-to-face discussion with returning migrants about the ‘dangers of irregular migration including personal experiences of physical abuse, extortion, robbery, blackmail, forced labor, lack of food, water and medical care, witnessing death, detainment, sexual exploitation and situations akin modern-day slavery. Some returnees spoke about their relief about being back in their country safely. The stories were deeply personal ... From the many hours of collected short snippets, a documentary-style movie was created 50-minutes in length [called] “we are together” (Tjaden and Dunsch, 2021: 4). Discussions after the movie screening sometimes went on for two hours with most attendees reporting that they took part. Theoretically, this study highlights, although does not separate, the potential effects propensity to migrate irregularly of (1) risk awareness messaging (in security and safety terms), (2) using trusted messengers, and (3) interactivity in communication.

Similarly, Tjaden and Gninafon (2022; also Bia-Zafinikamia et al, 2020) show that participation of would-be migrants in a mobile cinema screening and community discussions in Guinea leads to awareness gains and a reduction in high intention to migrate irregularly. The contents of the screening were personal testimonials and entertaining movies that were consciously designed to avoid being a ‘fact-based information intervention’, instead strikingly titled *“Migrant, Retour de l’Enfer”* in which five irregular migrants recount ‘exploitation, abduction, extortion, and detention in Libya; ship wreckage and homelessness in Côte d’Ivoire and Italy; and lethal sea crossings on the shore of Morocco’ (*ibid*: 754). Following the movie there was an interactive discussion. Three months later only some of the effects of the intervention remained observable: perception of costs, risks of exploitation and likelihood of migrating to Europe without a visa, particularly.

Finally, Dennison (2022b) tests the effects of four types of interventions—telephone and online counselling, technical and vocational college outreach, and pre-departure sessions—by “Migrant Resource Centres” in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, and Pakistan. Each of these interventions are highly interactive and, in the case of counselling, are largely led by would-be migrants asking about migration. This study found that, overall, the MRC’s interventions significantly reduced plans to migrate irregularly, slightly increased intentions to migrate regularly, and dramatically

increased self-reported awareness of safe options and who to contact for government assistance while in transit, with the central mechanism argued to be the interactive conversation, making the information gained more resonant, personally relevant, and trustworthy.

These studies typically frame themselves as a response to the lack of robust impact evaluation amongst policy practitioners—as bemoaned by the policy reports listed above—and sometimes argue that their tests provide evidence of one or more theoretical approaches. However, more often the generalisability of their findings are questionable, not least because the contents of such campaigns are left relatively un-analysed in these studies.

2.3 Lessons and weaknesses of current approaches

Overall, the above studies highlight several lessons and outstanding weaknesses centred on poor understanding of target audiences, naïve contents, and a lack of impact assessment.

1. Increased information can have modest effects particularly when certain conditions are met, including
 - a. The suggestion of alternative forms of behaviour
 - b. The use of peers who are trusted as messengers of their narratives
 - c. When given in an interactive format lead by migrants
2. Campaigns often show a lack of awareness of their target audience
 - a. As such, more information on the socio-psychological profile of would-be irregular migrants, including in terms of values and identities, will assist in the improvement of design
3. Most information campaigns tested focus on risks and threats to personal security
 - a. Information related to alternative motivational values besides safety should also be tested
 - b. Risk and threats have specific emotional tones that may be limited, others should be considered
4. Campaigns risk can have unintended consequences, such as dissuading those in danger or with a legitimate claim to asylum from travelling
 - a. Communicators should also design programmes to ensure that those in danger are aware of their rights
 - b. Campaigns on irregular migration should only reach their Vi
5. There is still a lack of robust, open, intelligible, comparable impact assessment. This precludes learning lessons on whether, when, to what extent, and why campaigns have desired effects.



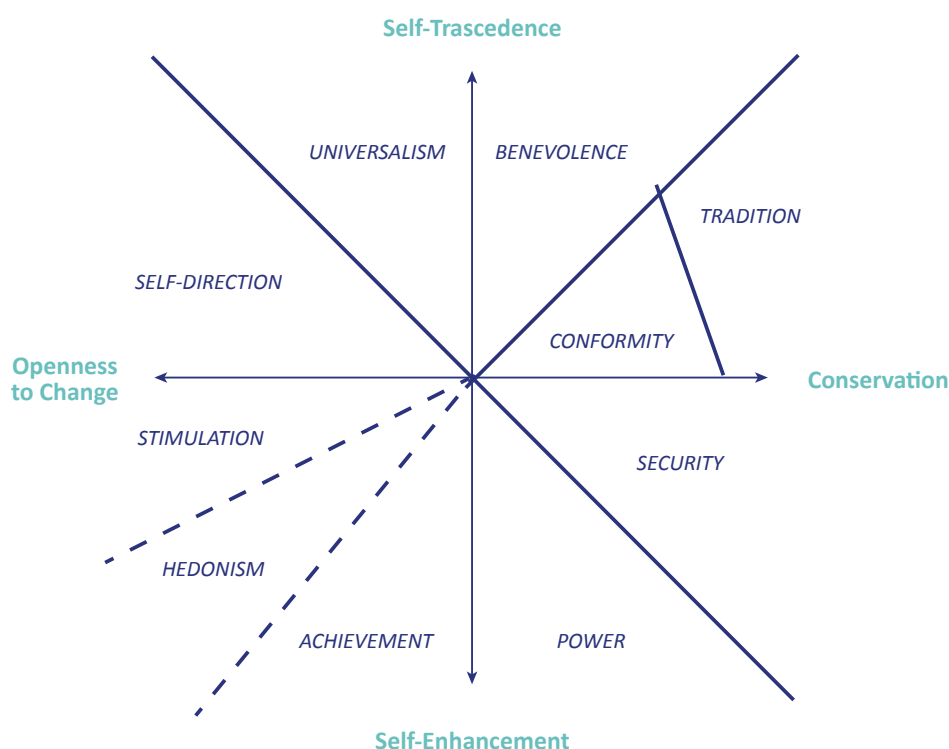
3. Four steps forward

Given the above shortcomings and potential ways forward, we overview the use of four tools that academics and practitioners advocate and that have already been studied regarding public communication campaigns aimed at attitudes to immigration in destination countries: values, emotions, narratives, and impact assessment.

3.1 Values

Of the key recommendations from existing best-practice guides for migration communication, the most common is to focus on values-based messaging (Dennison, 2020b). However, very little work has considered what values-based messaging is and what type of value-based messaging is likely to work regarding migration. Although there is a vast academic literature on values, Schwarz's theory of basic human values, defined as broad, stable motivational goals that individuals hold to different extents, have been shown to repeatedly predict attitudes and behaviour. A visual ordering of these ten values—universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, security, power, achievement, hedonism, self-direction and stimulation—is displayed in Figure 1. Dennison (2020b) showed that individuals who score high on measures of universalism, benevolence, stimulation and self-direction are associated with pro-immigration attitudes, whereas conformity, security, tradition and power are associated with anti-immigration attitudes.

Figure 1. Schwartz's (1992: 45) 'Revised theoretical model of relations among motivational types of values, higher order value types and bipolar value dimensions'



The way that each of the ten values is measured in the European Social Survey—asking individuals the extent to which 21 descriptions of an individual is or is not similar to them—provides greater information on the specific goals of each value. Notably most individuals will hold each of the values to *some* extent—their explanatory power lays in the different extents to which they are held relative to other individuals. This 21-item battery is shown below in Table 1. More information can be found in Table 1 in the Appendices.

Table 1: Schwartz’s (1992) ten values and their European Social Survey operationalisation

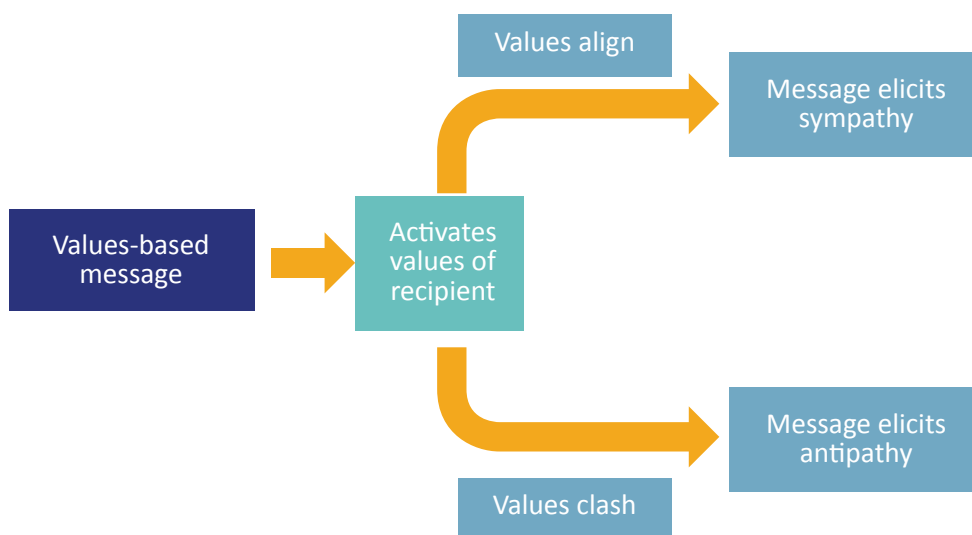
	Value	ESS operationalisation (underlining by author)
		Question: “Now I will briefly describe some people. Please listen to each description and tell me how much each person is or is not like you.”
		Responses: (1) Very much like me (2) Like me (3) Somewhat like me (4) A little like me (5) Not like me (6) Not like me at all
1	Universalism	She ³ thinks it is important that every person in the world should be treated equally. She believes everyone should have equal opportunities in life.
		It is important to her to listen to people who are different from her. Even when she disagrees with them, she still wants to understand them.
		She strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to her.
2	Benevolence	It’s very important to her to help the people around her. She wants to care for their well-being.
		It is important to her to be loyal to her friends. She wants to devote herself to people close to her.
3	Tradition	Tradition is important to her. She tries to follow the customs handed down by her religion or his family.
		It is important to her to be humble and modest. She tries not to draw attention to herself.
4	Conformity	It is important to her always to behave properly. She wants to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong.
		She believes that people should do what they’re told. She thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no-one is watching.
5	Security	It is important to her to live in secure surroundings. She avoids anything that might endanger her safety.
		It is important to her that the government ensures her safety against all threats. She wants the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens.
6	Power	It is important to her to get respect from others. She wants people to do what she says.
		It is important to her to be rich. She wants to have a lot of money and expensive things.
7	Achievement	Being very successful is important to her. She hopes people will recognise her achievements.
		It’s important to her to show her abilities. She wants people to admire what she does.

³ Feminine pronouns and possessives are used when the respondent is female. Masculine pronouns and possessives are used when the respondent is male

8	Hedonism	It's important to her to show her abilities. She wants people to admire what she does.
		Having a good time is important to her. She likes to "spoil" herself.
9	Stimulation	She seeks every chance She can to have fun. It is important to her to do things that give her pleasure.
		She likes surprises and is always looking for new things to do. She thinks it is important to do lots of different things in life.
		She looks for adventures and likes to take risks. She wants to have an exciting life.
10	Self-Direction	It is important to her to make her own decisions about what she does. She likes to be free and not depend on others.
		Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to her. She likes to do things in her own original way.

For communicators, this matters because using values-based appeals have been shown to be one of the most effective forms of persuasive communication. Joyal-Desmarais et al (2022) analyse 702 experimental studies to show not only that matching the values, needs, and deeper motivational forces of one's message with those of the recipients is consistently shown to be a persuasive technique, but that it is more persuasive than other techniques such as framing (focusing on certain "gains" or "losses" from a choice) and tailoring (personalising the message to the recipients' situation). This form of values-based message matching is shown in Figure 2, below.

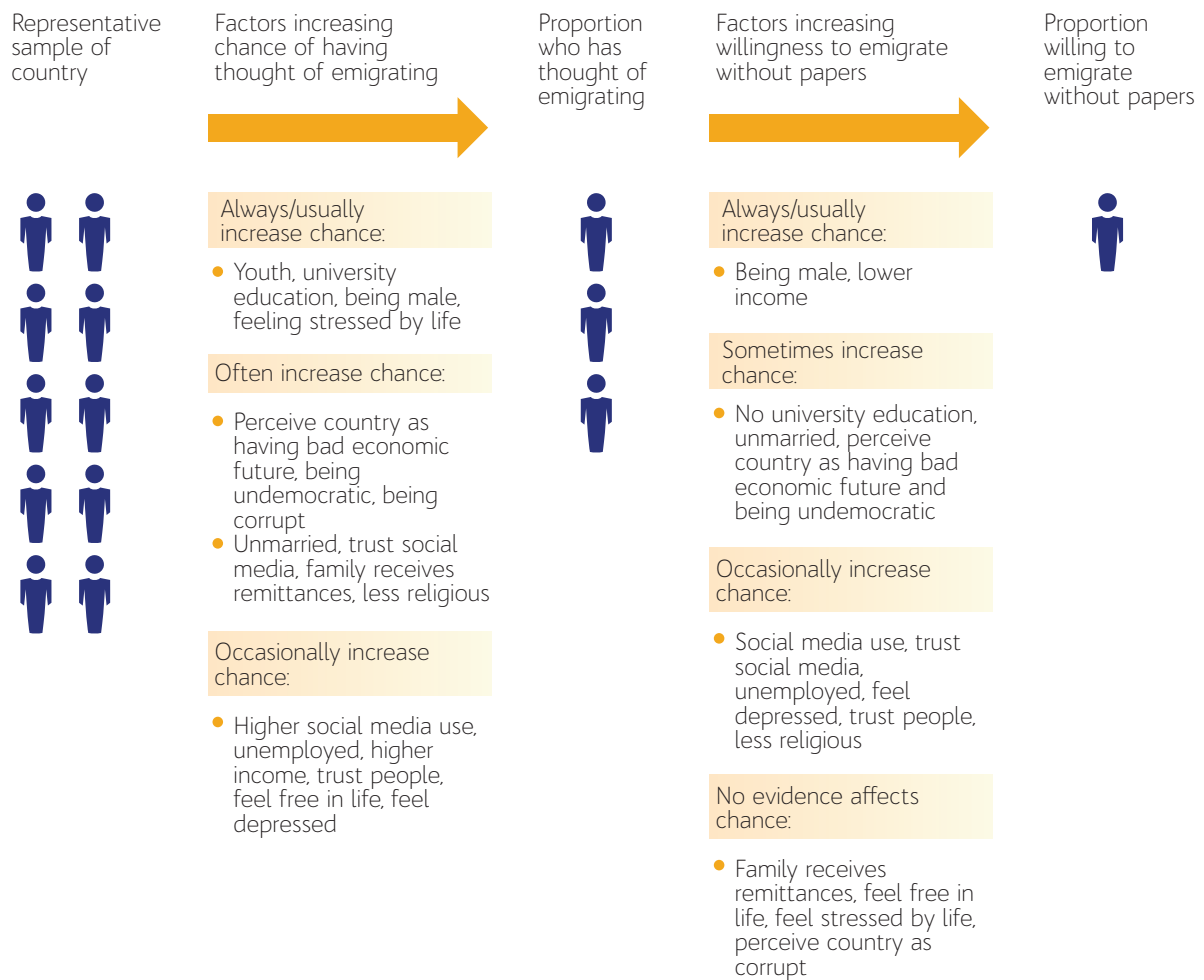
Figure 2: A model of the effect of value-based messaging on the effectiveness of the message (Dennison, 2020b: 10).



Notably, there is no data on the values of migrants or would-be migrants, despite high quality social science surveys. More broadly, there is seemingly little data on the psychological profile of migrants in general. In Dennison's (2022b: 5) study of the motivation of both regular and irregular migration intentions across 12 MENA countries, he states 'Psychological indicators have been overlooked in the literature on propensity to emigrate and may be of particular use to practitioners, since, unlike stable socio-demographics or macro-level trends, they can be more easily used to

make persuasive or informative communication effective ... future research should also consider other psychological schema, such as basic human values and other personality traits and orientations.' This is even more stark given the abundance of socio-economic data on migrants but, according to that study, their only partial role in predicting irregular migration and small role in predicting regular migration (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Factors increasing chance of having thought of emigrating and factors increasing willingness to emigrate without papers, across the MENA region (from Dennison, 2022b)



Despite the lack of data on the motivational, values-basis of target audiences, in the case of would-be irregular migrants, we can hypothesise that they are likely to relatively *under*-value security concerns given their intentions and, as noted in other studies, their *over*-estimation of fatality rates. By contrast, the elaborations of each value in Table 1 assist us in hypothesising which values those intending to migrate hold to a larger extent: in particular, stimulation (operationalised as 'she looks for adventures and likes to take risks. She wants to have an exciting life' in the European Social Survey) and self-direction ('It is important to her to make her own decisions about what she does. She likes to be free and not depend on others'). Depending on the extent to which theoretical assumptions of economic drivers and normative drivers (such as displaying masculinity, Prothmann, 2018) can be proven, the self-enhancement values of power and achievement may also be disproportionately held by irregular migrants. Utilising these values also combines well with the noted need to provide alternatives to affect behaviour. Overall, then, communicators should measure the motivational, value-basis of their target audience using existing psychological schema (e.g. Schwartz, 1992) and align their persuasive argument with that value-basis.

Figure 4: Security value-based communication by Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation



Notes: taken from Oeppen (2016: 63) 'A poster shared on social media by the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation, warning their 'compatriot' of the potential risks of migration, and pointing out starkly that there may be no return. Source: www.facebook.com/morr.gov.'

Figure 5: Security value-based communication by IOM Cameroon, alternative provided in value-less terms



Notes: taken from Heller (2014: 308)

Anticipation	Examine (eg. observe, consider, compare)
Surprise	Jump back (eg. hurry, defend, react)
Disgust	Reject (eg. remove, distance, separate)
Trust	Embrace (eg. accept, support, celebrate)
Primary dyad	
Love (joy + trust)	Connect and embrace
Submission (trust + fear)	Embrace and feel small
Awe (fear + surprise)	Feel small and jump back
Disapproval (surprise + sadness)	Jump back and withdraw
Remorse (sadness + disgust)	Withdraw and reject
Contempt (disgust + anger)	Reject and feel big
Aggressiveness (anger + anticipation)	Feel big and examine
Optimism (anticipation + joy)	Examine and connect
Secondary dyad	
Guilt (joy + fear)	Connect and feel small
Curiosity (trust + surprise)	Embrace and jump back
Despair (fear + sadness)	Feel small and withdraw
Unbelief (surprise + disgust)	Jump back and reject
Envy (sadness + anger)	Withdraw and feel big
Cynicism (disgust + anticipation)	Reject and examine
Pride (anger + joy)	Feel big and connect
Hope (anticipation + trust)	Examine and embrace
Optimism (anticipation + joy)	Examine and connect
Tertiary dyad	
Delight (joy + surprise)	Connect and jump back
Sentimentality (trust + sadness)	Embrace and withdraw
Shame (fear + disgust)	Feel small and reject
Outrage (surprise + anger)	Jump back and feel big
Pessimism (sadness + anticipation)	Withdraw and examine
Morbidity (disgust + joy)	Reject and connect
Dominance (anger + trust)	Feel big and embrace
Anxiety (anticipation + fear)	Examine and feel small



Furthermore, narratives (see below), personal-based messages, facial expressions and body language, and aesthetics can be used to create emotional resonance and reduce psychological distance. Frames, ordering (“emotional flow”), intensities, and certain combinations can also be used to elicit different emotions with predictable outcomes. Emotions should be used to make one’s argument more resonant, but the argument should not be simply based on the emotional reaction—the “appeal to emotion” logical fallacy. Indeed, for emotion-based communication to work it should also use facts, values, identities, and efficacy. Emotion-based communication in the field of migration, although widely used, is largely untested. Already, the tendency for migration communicators working on irregular migration is to use themes of death and desperation (Kosnick, 2014: 6; Williams, 2020: 9). Hypothetically, we should expect eliciting emotions of joy and its dyads to motivate participation, anger and its dyads to motivate confrontation, and trust and its dyads to motivate support. Sadness, fear, anger, and disgust—and their dyads—should have opposite effects and can be used to dissuade, particularly if combined with more positive emotions associated with alternative behaviours. Particularly important to raising awareness is eliciting the emotion of anticipation and its dyads of optimism, pessimism, hope, anxiety, aggressiveness, and cynicism.

Figure 7: “Dare to hope” project as part of Migrants as Messengers IOM programme, with the expected physiological reactions of examining (from anticipation) and embracing (from joy)



Source: <https://www.migrantsasmessengers.org/volunteer-association/great-esan-returnees-association-gera>

Figure 8: Despair emotion-based communication by Australian government with the expected physiological reaction of feeling small and withdrawing

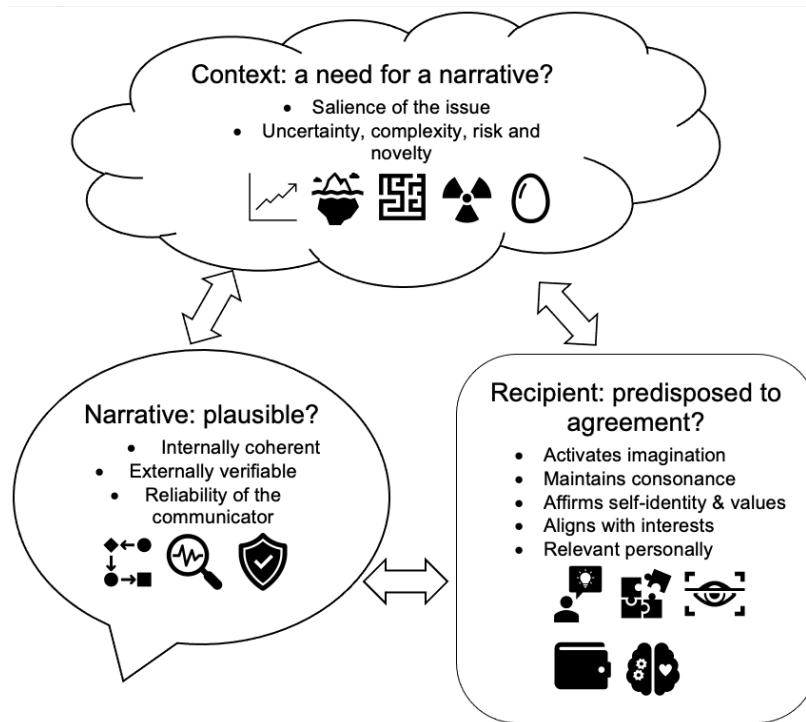


Notes: Taken from Musarò (2016; see for critique) at <https://openmigration.org/en/op-ed/dangerous-journey-limited-effect-of-information-campaigns-to-deter-irregular-migration/>

3.3 Narratives

Narratives are increasingly cited by international organisations, NGOs and governments as one of the most important tools for effective public communication, having a strong effect on public opinion and behaviour. However, the concept of narratives is typically underspecified, with relatively little known about why some narratives become popular and what narratives people actually believe. Dennison (2021) draws on recent scholarly advances to better specify what narratives are and to explain variation in their popularity before considering how their effects on migration policy preferences varies. Narratives are defined as: *selective depictions of reality across at least two points in time that include a causal claim*. Furthermore, narratives are necessary for humans to make sense of and give meaning to complex reality and generalisable and applicable to multiple situations, unlike specific stories. We can explain variation in the popularity of narratives—in terms of the proportion of individuals believing them—with numerous factors as arranged in Figure 9.

Figure 9: The determinants of the popularity of narratives



Source: Dennison, 2021

Narratives are an inescapable part of humanity’s attempts to understand their own reality. As such, policymakers and communicators must prioritise the effective use of narratives in their work to be understood and believed. As demand for understanding an issue increases, multiple, competing narratives may simultaneously become popular. As such, the popularity of narratives must be used as a gauge of public opinion with extreme caution. A narrative’s popularity is partially reliant on its plausibility: both in terms of being internally theoretically logical and supported externally with evidence. In short, facts—when combined with compelling logic—do matter. However, other factors matter too: communicators and policymakers must construct their narratives and make their points around the recipients’ own pre-existing cognitive pillars rather than challenge them or try to recreate them from scratch. Future research should robustly test the effects of narratives on attitudes and behaviour via the use of experimental evidence or more complex narratives and storytelling. Already studies listed above have noted the persuasive and motivational power of narratives, particularly those told by peers

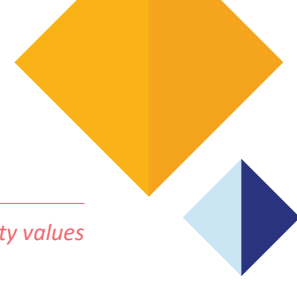


Figure 10: Narrative-based communication using personal anecdotes from "Aware Migrants" project, based on security values



Notes: for full video see <https://www.awaremigrants.org/spots/video-tchamba>

Figure 11: Powerful personal narrative-based communication combined with facts from "Aware Migrants" project, based on security values



Figure 12: Narrative-based communication lacking internal coherence from "Aware Migrants" project, based on security values



Notes: for full video see <https://www.awaremigrants.org/spots/video-i-remember-english-subtitles>

3.4 Impact Assessment

As governments and advocacy organisations have, in recent decades, poured additional resources into communications campaigns, they are now demanding that their public sector communications campaigns are shown to be necessary, cost-efficient and effective (Macnamara, 2020: 361). However, there remains a ‘stasis’ in understanding how to measure and evaluate such campaigns (Gregory and Watson, 2008). However, ‘there is extremely little evidence on the impact and effectiveness of these campaigns’ with very few evaluations being made publicly available and those that are being typically of fairly low reliability (Brown, 2015: 2). Moreover, identifying a causal effect of a specific campaign on such objectives has been described as ‘difficult’ or ‘almost impossible’ by the European Migration Network (2012). Meanwhile, academic and scientific recommendations for such impact assessments have often severely underestimated the financial and logistical difficulties in performing them.

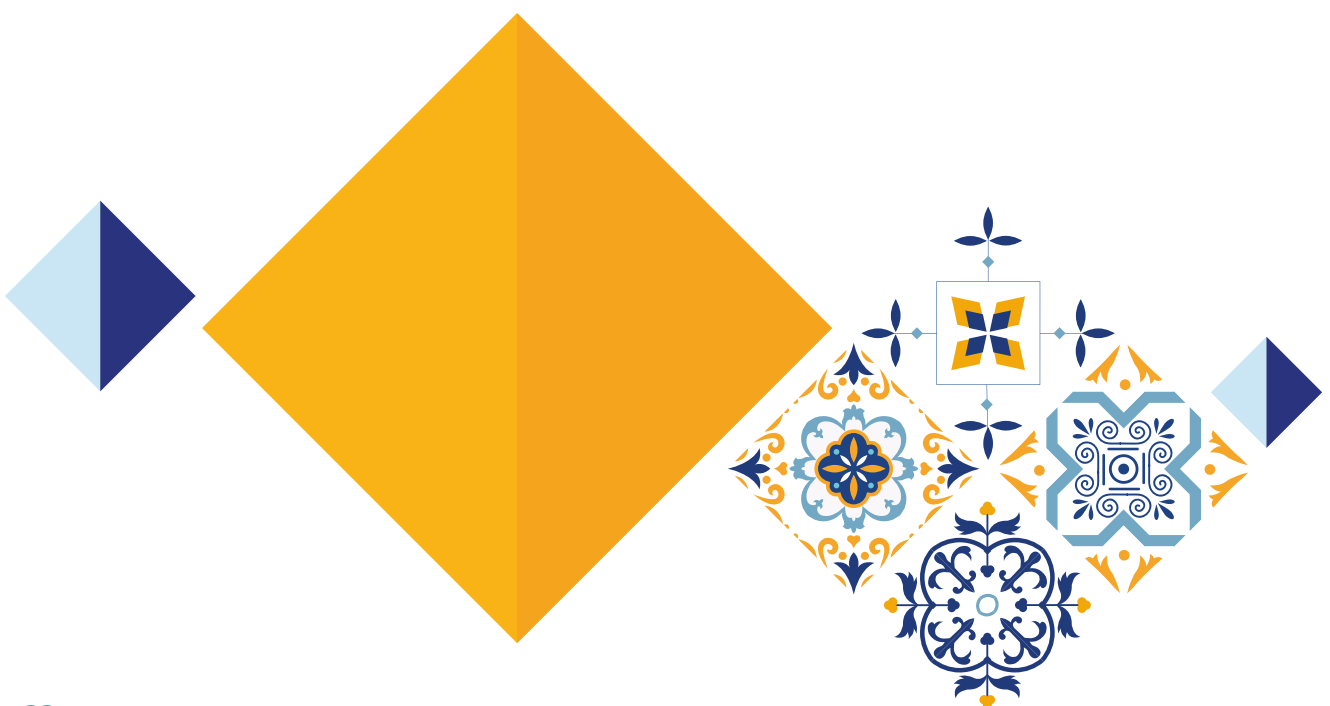
Dennison (2020a) brings together disparate terminology, findings and recommendations from the private and public sectors and academia to synthesise a set of five general steps for practitioners when performing IAs in the migration sector. The overriding argument is that, rather than being a necessarily complex and expensive exercise as suggested by current guides, IA simply involves comparing a variable of interest *after an intervention* to what it would be *if there had been no intervention*. Given the hypothetic nature of the comparison, the results are necessarily qualified and contingent and, once migration practitioners understand the theoretical and methodological considerations resulting from this, the quality and quantity of impact assessments in migration policy should increase, potentially a source of significant progress in the sector. Examples of studies taking this broad approach include those overviewed above in the literature review section. The five steps are (see Dennison 2020a for details):

- Step 1: Define objectives for the intervention that describe what the desired effect is. These should be ultimate outcomes (eg. increase migrant safety while in transit), rather than *only* outputs (eg. number of reports; views/likes on social media).
- Step 2: Identify a measure of the impact(s) that the intervention has as its objective. These should be (1) clearly defined and unambiguous; (2) externally valid (they act reliably if used for other interventions) and (3) internally valid (they measure what they claim to measure).
- Step 3: Estimate what would have happened had there been no intervention, known as a ‘counterfactual’. Ideally, but not necessarily, this requires performing a pre-intervention measurement, also known as baseline assessment. However, this is not always possible and alternative control groups are possible.
- Step 4: Perform the intervention. This may involve separating a randomised sample into a treatment group(s)—that receives the intervention(s)—and a control group—that does not. If this is not feasible, other forms of counterfactual are possible that ‘construct’ a control group.
- Step 5: Post-intervention measurement and analysis: (1) those receiving the intervention should be measured post-intervention (ideally, as well as, either a genuine or constructed control group); (2) the impact must be calculated: essentially, the difference in the variable of interest pre- and post-intervention and/or between the treatment and control group; (3) theoretical consideration of *why* and *what aspect* of the campaign caused an impact; are the findings likely to be generalisable?; (4) creation (and, in some cases, incorporation) of recommendations based on combination of impact and theoretical considerations.

4. Conclusions

Attempts to deal with irregular migration have become more expensive, expansive, diffuse, complex, and contested, with responsible actors needing to balance an ever-greater number of demands and obligations. As such, public communication is today a prevalent tool used by actors seeking to achieve migration policy objectives via information, persuasion, and motivation rather than physical infrastructure only. Yet we still know relatively little about how public communication can be most effectively used regarding irregular migration. This report considered the academic literature, both in terms of the few empirical studies measuring effects and the broader contextual studies that critically consider current approaches. Identified weaknesses include poor understanding of target audiences, naïve contents, and a lack of impact assessment, with likely suboptimal outcomes.

Several recommendations are offered and expanded upon based on recent advances in understanding attitudes to *immigration*—alongside migration communication examples related to smuggling, trafficking, irregularity—including: (1) collect data on the motivational, value-basis of target audiences, such as would-be irregular migrants, using existing psychological schema (eg. Schwartz, 1992) and base one’s argument on that value-basis; (2) Use distinct values-bases. Most current campaigns argue with a security values-basis, but potential irregular migrants are, by definition, disproportionately likely to (i) value security lowly given overestimation of mortality risks; (ii) come from situations of security risk; (iii) highly value self-direction and other openness and self-enhancement values; (3) Offer alternatives when attempting to change behaviour that appeal to the values of one’s target audience; (4) Persuade with cognitive (thinking) and emotive (feeling) components together and align emotional basis with physiological and behavioural objectives based on existing psychological schema (eg. Plutchik, 1980), eg. joy for motivation and participation; anticipation for attentiveness; trust for persuasion. Fear-based messaging has limits; (5) Use narrative-based messaging that is supported by relevant facts, delivered by trusted messengers, and, where possible, is interactive and audience-lead. Frame messages in understandable, generalisable causal narrative form to ensure message spreads; (6) Incorporate impact assessment from the beginning using basic, first-principles steps that results in clear and open measured impact, using existing guides (eg. Dennison, 2020a). Use such impact assessments to also test for unintended consequences that may impinge on parallel policy objectives, in terms of safe, orderly, and regular migration and the upholding of rights and obligations. Future research should consider distinct types of border management public communication campaigns in further detail, particularly those not covered in this report, such as assisted voluntary return and reintegration programmes.



References

- Andersson, R. (2016). Europe's failed 'fight' against irregular migration: Ethnographic notes on a counterproductive industry. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42(7), 1055–1075. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1139446>
- Bah, T. L., & Batista, C. (2018). Understanding Willingness to Migrate Illegally: Evidence from a Lab in the Field Experiment. NOVAFRICA Working Paper No. 1803. Nova School of Business and Economics
- Bah, T. L., Batista, C., Gubert, F., & McKenzie, D. (2022). Can Information and Alternatives to Irregular Migration Reduce "Backway" Migration from The Gambia?
- Bartels, I. (2017). 'We must do it gently.' The contested implementation of the IOM's migration management in Morocco. *Migration Studies*, 5(3), 315–336. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnx054>
- Batista, Catia; McKenzie, David. 2021. Testing Classic Theories of Migration in the Lab. Policy Research Working Paper; No. 9751. World Bank, Washington, DC ...
- Bia-Zafinikamia, M., Tjaden, J. & Gninafon, H. (2020) The impact of mobile cinema events on potential migrants in Guinea. Impact Evaluation Report.
- Browne, E. (2015). *Impact of communication campaigns to deter irregular migration*. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham. GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1248. Retrieved from: www.gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/HQ1248.pdf.
- Cappi, V., & Musarò, P. 2022 Awareness campaigns to deter migrants: A neoliberal industry for symbolic bordering. In *Refugee Externalisation Policies* (pp. 171-188). Routledge
- Carling, J., & Hernández-Carretero, M. (2011). Protecting Europe and protecting migrants? Strategies for managing unauthorised migration from Africa. *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 13(1), 42–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j1467-856X.2010.00438x>
- Cleton, L., & Chauvin, S. (2020). Performing freedom in the Dutch deportation regime: Bureaucratic persuasion and the enforcement of 'voluntary return'. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46(1), 297–313. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2019.1593819>
- Dennison, J. 2020a. *How to perform impact assessments: Key steps for assessing communication interventions*. ICMPD report: [here](#)
- Dennison, J. 2020b. 'A basic human values approach to migration policy communication' in *Data and Policy*, 2: E18
- Dennison, J. 2021. 'Narratives: a review of concepts, determinants, effects, and uses in migration research' in *Comparative Migration Studies* 9, 50
- Dennison, J. 2022a. 'How Migrant Resource Centres affect migration decisions: quasi-experimental evidence in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, and Pakistan' *International Migration*
- Dennison, J. 2022b. 'Rethinking the drivers of regular and irregular migration: evidence from the MENA region' in *Comparative Migration Studies* 10(1): 21

Dennison, J. 2023. Using emotions in migration policy communication. ICMPD report

Dennison, J. and Turnbull-Dugarte, S. 2022. 'Populist Attitudes and Threat Perceptions of Global Transformations and Governance: Experimental Evidence from India and the United Kingdom' in *Political Psychology* 43(5): 873-892

European Migration Network (2012). Practical Measures to Reduce Irregular Migration. Synthesis Report. European Migration Network http://extranjeros.empleo.gob.es/redeuropeamigracion/Estudios_monograficos/EMN_Synthesis_Report_Irregular_Migration_October_2012.pdf

Fiedler, A. 2020. From being aware to going there: On the awareness and decision-making of (prospective) migrants. *Mass Communication & Society*, 23(3), 356–377. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1666992>

Frank, D., 2014. 'Changes in Migration Control During the Neoliberal Era: Surveillance and Border Control in Swedish Labour Immigration Policy'. *Journal of Political Power* 7 (3): 413–32

Gregory, A., & Watson, T. 2008. Defining the gap between research and practice in public relations programme evaluation: Towards a new research agenda. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 24(5), 337–350.

Heller, C. 2014. Perception management—Deterring potential migrants through information campaigns. *Global Media and Communication*, 10(3), 303–318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1742766514552355>

Infantino, F., & Sredanovic, D. (2022). *Migration Control in Practice: Before and Within the Borders of the State*. Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.

Joyal-Desmarais, K., Scharmer, A. K., Madzelan, M. K., See, J. V., Rothman, A. J., & Snyder, M. 2022. Appealing to motivation to change attitudes, intentions, and behavior: A systematic review and meta-analysis of 702 experimental tests of the effects of motivational message matching on persuasion. *Psychological Bulletin*, 148(7-8), 465–517. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000377>

Karamanidou, L., & Kasperek, B. (2018). Border Management and Migration Control in the European Union

Kosnick, K. 2014. Mediating migration: New roles for (mass) media. *InMedia*, 21, 5.

Maâ, A. 2020. Manufacturing collaboration in the deportation field: Intermediation and the institutionalisation of the International

Macnamara, J. 2020. 'Public sector communication measurement and evaluation' in, eds. Luoma-aho, V. and Canel, M-J, *The Handbook of Public Sector Communications*. John Wiley and Sons, pp. 361-365

Mesplé-Somps, Sandrine & Björn Nilsson, 2020. "[Role models and migration intentions](#)." Working Papers DT/2020/13, DIAL (Développement, Institutions et Mondialisation).

Musarò, P. (2019). Aware migrants: The role of information campaigns in the management of migration. *European Journal of Communication*, 34(6), 629–640. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323119886164>

Nieuwenhuys, C., & Pécoud, A. (2007). Human trafficking, information campaigns, and strategies of migration control. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50(12), 1674–1695. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764207302474>

Oeppen, C. (2016). 'Leaving Afghanistan! Are You Sure?' European efforts to deter potential migrants through information campaigns. *Human Geography*, 9(2), 57–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/194277861600900206>

Pagogna, R., & Sakdapolrak, P. (2021). Disciplining migration aspirations through migration-information campaigns: A

systematic review of the literature. *Geography Compass*, 15(7), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12585>

Pécoud, A. (2010). Informing migrants to manage migration? An analysis of IOM's information campaigns. In M. Geiger & A. Pécoud (Eds.), *The politics of International Migration Management* (pp. 184–201). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230294882_9

Plutchik, R. (1980). A General Psychoevolutionary Theory of Emotion. *Theories of Emotion*, 3–33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-558701-3.50007-7>

Prothmann, S. (2018). Migration, masculinity and social class: Insights from Pikine, Senegal. *International Migration*, 56(4), 96–108

Rice, R. E., & Atkin, C. K. (2001). *Public Communication Campaigns* (3rd edition). Sage.

Rodriguez, A.-L. (2019). 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. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1415136>

Rogers, E. M., & Storey, J. D. (1987). Communication campaigns. In C. R. Berger & S. H. Chaffee (Eds.), *Handbook of communication science* (pp. 817–846). Sage Publications, Inc

Ryo, E. (2013). Deciding to cross: norms and economics of unauthorized migration. *American Sociological Review*, 78(4), 574–603

Schans, D., & Optekamp, C. (2016). Raising awareness, changing behavior? Report from the Ministerie von Veiligheid en Justitie. Netherlands. https://www.weerstekamer.nl/overig/20170328/raising_awareness_changing

Schwartz, S. H. (1992). Universals in the content and structure of values: Theoretical advances and empirical tests in 20 countries. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 25, pp. 1–65). Academic Press

Shrestha, Maheshwor. 2019. "Death Scares: How Potential Work-Migrants Infer Mortality Rates from Migrant Deaths." *Journal of Development Economics* 141: 102368. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2019.07001>

Shrestha, Maheshwor. 2020. "Get Rich or Die Tryin': Perceived Earnings, Perceived Mortality Rates, and Migration Decisions of Potential Work Migrants from Nepal." *The World Bank Economic Review* 34(1): 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhz023>

Tjaden, J., & Dunsch, F. A. (2021). The effect of peer-to-peer risk information on potential migrants—Evidence from a randomized controlled trial in Senegal. *World Development*, 145, 105488.

Tjaden, J., & Gninafon, H. (2022). Raising Awareness About the Risk of Irregular Migration: Quasi-Experimental Evidence from Guinea. *Population and Development Review*, 48(3), 745–766

Tjaden, J., Haarmann, E., & Savaskan, N. (2022). Experimental evidence on improving COVID-19 vaccine outreach among migrant communities on social media. *Scientific Reports*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-20340-2>

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," IOM, Central Mediterranean Route Thematic Report Series. Geneva. Pp. 23–24

Toms, H., & Thorpe, K. (2012). Practical measures for reducing irregular migration. Home Office.

- Triandafyllidou, A., and Ambrosini, M. 2011. 'Irregular Immigration Control in Italy and Greece: Strong Fencing and Weak Gate-Keeping Serving the Labour Market'. *European Journal of Migration and Law* 13 (3): 251–73.
- Vammen, I. M. S. (2021). 'When Migrants Become Messengers': Affective Borderwork and Aspiration Management in Senegal. *Geopolitics*, 1-20.
- van Bommel, S. (2020). The perception of risk among unauthorized migrants in Ghana. *Journal of Risk Research*, 23(1), 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1366987720181517376>
- Van Dessel, J. (2021). Externalization through 'awareness-raising': the border spectacle of EU migration information campaigns in Niger. *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 1-21
- Van Neste-Gottignies, A. (2018). What are we telling immigrants? Communication within Belgium's reception centers. *Hermes, La Revue*, 3(3), 41–46. <https://doi.org/10.3917/herm.082.0041>
- Vogel, D., 2000. 'Migration Control in Germany and the United States'. *International Migration Review*, 390–422
- Watkins, J. (2020). Irregular migration, borders, and the moral geographies of migration management. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 38(6), 1108–1127.
- Williams, J. M. (2020). Affecting migration: Public information campaigns and the intimate spatialities of border enforcement. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 38(7-8), 1198–1215
- Williams, J., & Coddington, K. (2022). Deterring transnational migration: public information campaigns, affective governmentality, and the family. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 1-22.
- Wolff, S. (2008). Border management in the Mediterranean: internal, external and ethical challenges. *Cambridge review of international affairs*, 21(2), 253-271.



ICMPD Regional Office for the Mediterranean

Europa Centre, 2nd floor
John Lopez Street
Floriana, FRN 1400
Malta
Tel: +356 277 92 610

 **Euromed Migration**

 **@EUROMEDMigr**

 **emm5team@icmpd.org**

 **www.icmpd.org/emm5**

