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Grey Noise:
Migration and Strategic Communications

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Executive Summary

Over the past two decades, strategic migration communications campaigns (SMCCs) have become an increasingly popular tool among policymakers seeking to reduce irregular migration and raise awareness of the risks of migrant smuggling and human trafficking. Despite their growing popularity, however, the results of these campaigns have been mixed. There is little clear evidence about their specific intended outcomes, the means by which they intend to provoke change, or their effects on the attitudes of potential migrants over time. Drawing together recent academic research and data collected from the review of eleven recent strategic communications campaigns, this report identifies common successes and failures, highlights gaps in the evidence base, and develops a preliminary set of best practices for future programming. **The first section** of this report reviews the existing academic literature on the effect of information treatments on migratory behaviour. **The second section** analyses a range of recent SMCCs to understand how these programs operate in practice. **The final section** evaluates the results of previous campaigns to understand what might make strategic migration communications campaigns most effective.

Key Takeaways

1) Define a clear target audience and understand their baseline attitudes to migration: Communications interventions are more effective when they target a specific, well-defined audience. Ideally, SMCC campaigns should implement a target audience analysis including a media usage survey to help understand how the target audience receive and process information. Campaign stakeholders should have a strong, granular understanding of baseline attitudes towards migration, including the drivers of migration, migrant aspirations and preferences, and perceptions of the costs and benefits of irregular migration.

2) Develop a credible, trusted voice: Potential migrants are likely to ignore information about irregular migration that they perceive to be biased or inaccurate. As with any other public information campaign, SMCCs must be regarded as trustworthy sources of information by their target audiences. Evidence suggests that content that lifts up the voices and experiences of migrants among their community members is more likely to be perceived as trustworthy.

3) Avoid short-term, fear-based messages: Previous SMCCs have used cynical, fear-based messages to emphasize the short-term risks of irregular migration. Although these campaigns may play to domestic political interests, they have limited effects on migratory behaviour. Evidence suggests that fear-based messages are often perceived as untrustworthy and that potential migrants may tolerate short-term risk because they believe the potential long-term benefits to be transformational.

4) Know what you are trying to change and how you're going to measure it: Previous SMCCs have frequently lacked clear goals and have failed to properly assess intervention outcomes. Communications interventions should have a robust and clearly developed theory of change outlining how the proposed interventions will seek to change attitudes and behaviour.

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For monitoring and evaluation (M&E) purposes, interventions should be measured in terms of outcomes rather than outputs.

5) Understand the limits of strategic communications: Strategic migration communications campaigns have the potential to produce valuable, targeted results in the short-term. Yet, as they become a more popular policy tool, policymakers should understand their limits. Communications interventions are unlikely to produce significant changes in migration behaviour over the long term without concomitant efforts to address the structural drivers of migration and increase access to regular migration pathways.

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Introduction

In the first shot of an advertisement paid for by the Spanish government that ran on Senegalese television in 2007, a mother grieves for her son, who disappeared while trying to reach Spain by boat. In the next, the camera pans to the body of a drowned migrant washed ashore. Famous Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour then addresses the camera in Wolof[1]: "You already know how this story ends. Thousands of young people have died. Don't risk your life for nothing. You are the future of Africa" (International Organization for Migration, 2007). A year earlier, IOM co-sponsored a similar messaging effort aimed at irregular Romanian migrants in the United Kingdom. A campaign poster depicts a migrant looking over his shoulder at a silhouette in the shape of a police officer. The caption reads 'You cannot outrun your shadow! […] The only way is the legal way' (UK Home Office, 2006).

Figure 1 : 'You Cannot Outrun Your Shadow', UK Home Office, 2006

These are just two examples drawn from a larger body of recent strategic migration communications campaigns (SMCCs) which aim to inform potential emigrants of the risks of irregular migration, alert them to potential opportunities in their home countries, and in certain cases actively deter irregular migration. Although most campaigns have been carried out by Government offices in migrant-receiving countries, others have been organized by international organizations like IOM and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and have also frequently involved local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). These campaigns generally have three overall goals: to help migrants make more informed decisions, to provide humanitarian protection to vulnerable migrants, and to reduce irregular migration. A limited number (See for example: McNair Research, 2013) have explicitly aimed to deter all migrants and asylum-seekers. They also target a wide variety of people: from low-skilled migrant workers, to individuals at risk of trafficking, and even asylum seekers and forced migrants. These campaigns have used a variety of mediums: posters, TV and radio

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[1] Wolof is a language native to Senegal, the Gambia and Mauritania. It is the most widely spoken language in Senegal.

programs, social media campaigns, and in the case of the 2016 film *Journey*, a GBP £3.5 million feature-length film produced by the Australian government (Rasmussen and Doherty, 2016).

There is little clear evidence, however, about the intended outcomes of these campaigns, the means by which they intend to provoke change, or their effects on attitudes towards emigration over time. Drawing together evidence from recent academic research and previous communications interventions, this report will seek to identify gaps in the current evidence base and develop a set of best practices for future campaigns. **The first section** of this report reviews the existing academic literature on the effect of information treatments on migratory behaviour. **The second section** analyses a range of recent SMCCs to understand how these programs operate in practice. **The final section** evaluates the results of previous campaigns to understand what make strategic migration communications campaigns most effective.

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How do information treatments shape migration decisions?

Although considerable resources have been devoted to designing and implementing Strategic Migration Communications Campaigns (SMCCs), there has been comparatively little academic research on the effect of information treatments on migration decisions. This is partially the result of the difficulty of conducting research on this subject. Properly identifying potential emigrants is often difficult. In regions where migratory aspirations are high, such as the Caribbean or West Africa, many individuals respond affirmatively to survey questions about their desire to migrate abroad but never actually make migratory journeys, either because their preferences change, or because they lack the financial or social capital needed to migrate (Carling and Hernandez-Carratero, 2011). This makes it difficult to accurately identify the target population and can potentially skew results. Given that migratory aspirations are highly fluid and likely to change over time, tracking these preferences longitudinally is difficult. It is equally difficult to track the specific effects of information treatments versus other factors. There are also significant ethical qualms to research on this subject. On the one hand, migration has the potential to significantly improve the material conditions of an individual's life, so it may not be ethical to subject that person to an information treatment that may dissuade them from emigrating. Alternatively, in situations where not giving potential emigrants certain information may lead them to migrate irregularly, migrants are likely to be exposed to increased risk or personal danger, and may violate laws and regulations in transit and destination countries. Although research is difficult for these reasons, a series of recent studies have broadened the evidence base on the subject.

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Recent quantitative research has examined how perceptions of risk and economic benefit may affect decisions to emigrate. One study of 3,319 potential migrants in Nepal (Shrestha, 2016) found that respondents systematically overestimated both their likelihood of dying during migratory journeys and their potential earnings abroad. First-time potential migrants provided with accurate information about the 'low' mortality rate were 7 percentage points more likely to subsequently emigrate, while those provided with accurate information about 'low' wages were 6 percentage points less likely to migrate afterwards. In effect, Shrestha argues, when provided with accurate information 'a simple and well-targeted informational intervention can change perceptions as well as the actual migration decisions of potential migrants.' In one sense, this study is compelling because it is the only project that has been able to reasonably approximate the conditions necessary for a randomized controlled trial (RCT). Yet, by using RCT-like methods, the study loses some of the important context that defines how SMCCs work. To gain necessary access to informants, enumerators were embedded in the Nepalese Government's Visa Office, and informants were encouraged to participate in the study while applying for travel documents to go abroad. Although useful for the purposes of randomization, this research design means that potential migrants were likely to implicitly trust information received from study enumerators. There is a strong possibility, then, that potential migrants would behave differently in response to information received from this study, which they perceive as trustworthy, versus information received from a media campaign, which they may

perceive as biased or unreliable. Shrestha's study also targets potential regular migrants but does not examine how informational interventions may affect irregular migration decisions.

Two similar recent studies examine how perceptions of risk and economic benefit may affect emigration in the context of West Africa. In one preliminary study (Bah and Batista, 2018) of migration attitudes in rural Gambia, 584 households were surveyed about the potential risks of irregular migration to Europe, and the likelihood of receiving legal residency once they reached Europe. In a 'game' scenario, migrants were provided with information about the probability of dying en route to Europe and the likelihood of receiving residence permission once they arrived. They were then asked whether they would choose to migrate. Like Shrestha (2016), the authors found that respondents consistently overestimated both the likelihood of dying during their journey and the likelihood that they would be able to receive residence status once in Europe. Based on these results, the authors argue that providing potential migrants with accurate data on the likelihood of receiving residence would decrease the likelihood of migration by 1.75 percentage points, while accurate information on the risk of mortality would increase the likelihood of migration by 2.78 percentage points.[2] Although these results are interesting, they should be treated sceptically. It is likely that the probability of mortality is underestimated, both because most migrant deaths go unreported (Pecoud, 2016) and because the risk of mortality for West African migrants is likely to be significantly higher than migrants from other regions (Pecoud, 2016). More recently, an analysis of a series of focus groups conducted among West African migrants in 2017 found that many migrants had first-hand information of the risks of the journey to Europe through Niger and Libya, but either discounted those risks, or continued to migrate despite knowledge of them. In the words of one young man from Senegal: "If God says I'm going to die in the desert or in the sea, nothing can change that" (Kirwin and Anderson, 2018).

Qualitative research on the effects of SMCCs on emigration suggests that these treatments may be limited by a confluence of factors. One study of a media campaign in Senegal run by the Spanish government after the 'cayuco' crisis in 2006[3] identified three primary factors that limited the campaign's effectiveness (Carling and Hernandez-Carretero, 2011). First, potential migrants often considered themselves better informed about the risks of irregular migration than those producing the media campaigns. During the crisis in 2006, many migrants were fishermen familiar with life at sea, often confident that they knew more about conditions at sea than the Spanish government. Second, migrants ignored information received from sources they perceived to be biased against migration or driven by vested interests. Since many migrants were aware that the Spanish government was actively trying to dissuade migration, they interpreted information campaigns in this light. Many interviewees also viewed the campaigns as an attempt to save face by the Senegalese government, who were trying to control the embarrassing prevalence of irregular migration. Lastly, echoing results from

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2   Bah and Batista find that potential migrants estimate the risk of dying during an irregular migration journey to be roughly 50%, while they estimate the probability of receiving a residence permit in Europe to be 40%. The authors estimate the actual potential for death to be roughly 20% and the actual potential for legal residency to be 33%. Measures of the increased or decreased likelihood of irregular migration based on accurate information are significant at the 10% level. See tables 5-7, Bah and Batista, 2018.

3   The phrase 'cayuco' crisis refers to the large uptick in irregular arrivals in Spain's Canary Islands in 2006. See The Guardian, 2006. 'Canary Islands fear disaster as number of migrants soars.' Available online: **https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/sep/04/spain.mainsection**.

Shrestha (2016) and Bah and Batista (2018), media campaigns emphasizing risk had little effect on prospective migrants who considered migration to be an opportunity to dramatically transform their life prospects, or who were fleeing conflict or severe economic scarcity.

These results fit with a subsequent study (Fleay et al, 2016) of migration decisions made by Hazara asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Australia. Interviewees travelled to Australia between 2010 and 2013, during the implementation of Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders program, which actively sought to deter asylum-seekers. Notably, however, none of the interviewees recalled interacting with online information campaigns that sought to deter migrants. Individuals who paid smugglers to take them to Australia were often restricted from accessing the internet or communicating with friends or families, except through phones provided to them by smugglers. Among those who could access the internet, they generally did so to contact friends or family at home or abroad, from whom they received guidance on the next steps of their journey. Describing his media consumption, one interviewee said "I

'Among those who used the internet to research the journey to Australia, most relied on diasporic news sites written in Dari or Farsi, rather than English-language media sources.'

was worried about home, looking to see if people killed (sic). In two months while I was [in detention] about 50 people killed (sic) in Quetta, I was worried about my family. That's why I was using the internet" (Fleay et al., 2016). Among those who used the internet to research the journey to Australia, most relied on diasporic news sites written in Dari or Farsi, rather than English-language media sources. Altogether, asylum-seekers relied overwhelmingly on information from migrant networks and people smugglers during their journeys to Australia and had little knowledge of government-led media campaigns. Frequently, asylum-seekers focused simply on finding a safe place, traveling to Australia simply because it was the only option available to them. Affirming Carling and Hernandez-Carretero's study of Spanish policy in Senegal, Fleay et al conclude that Australian government efforts were undermined by the fact that media campaigns were conducted without substantial knowledge of how migrants sourced information before and during their journeys.

These conclusions fit with other qualitative studies that suggest that migrants ignore or disregard information about the risks of irregular or potential immigration violations. One study of US-led media campaigns that aimed to discourage irregular entries from Mexico found that migrants ignored and discounted information about the dangers of migration because they believed that the campaigns were propaganda intended to prevent them from migrating (Cornelius and Salehayn, 2007). Similarly, an ethnographic study (Kyle and Siracusa, 2005) of irregular migration from Ecuador to Spain found that migrants did not believe themselves to be committing a serious crime by migrating without authorization. Forced to emigrate from Ecuador because of corruption and poor governance, and drawn to Spain by demand for cheap unskilled labour, migrants discounted warnings about committing immigration violations because they believed immigration restrictions were used unscrupulously as a tool to restrict the rights of migrant workers (Kyle and Siracusa, 2005). This suggests that campaigns that

rely on fear-based messages communicated through top-down channels are likely to alienate, anger, or simply be ignored by the target audience.

> *'Campaigns that rely on fear-based messages communicated through top-down channels are likely to alienate, anger, or simply be ignored by the target audience.'*

Altogether, this literature suggests a series of conclusions about the impacts of information treatments on migratory behaviour. Quantitative evidence suggests that SMCCs can have significant impacts on migrant decision-making, either increasing or decreasing migratory behaviour depending on the context. Interestingly, the available evidence suggests that potential migrants frequently overestimate both the risks of irregular migration, and the likelihood that they will receive legal residence status in their destination countries. Qualitative studies of the effect of media campaigns that have aimed to reduce irregular migration suggest that these campaigns frequently encounter obstacles that limit their effectiveness. Potential migrants often have limited access to the channels used for SMCC content, and frequently discount information received through these campaigns either because they believe they have more accurate knowledge, or because they believe the information to be biased. In situations where individuals trust the information received, it may not affect their decision to migrate either because they are willing to accept the risks, or because they are seeking refuge from violence or state fragility.

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Previous Strategic Communications Campaigns

This section surveys eleven previous strategic communications campaigns, undertaken from 2005-2016. Where possible, analysis of the campaign is based on external evaluations made available publicly or upon request.

A) 'Safe Journey Information Campaign' – IOM/UKDfID, 2005-2010: Communicating irregular migration as a public health risk

The 'Safe Journey Information Campaign' was implemented by IOM and partners between 2005 and 2010 in Zimbabwe. The primary goals of the campaign were to raise public awareness of opportunities for safe and legal migration, and of the potential risks of irregular migration.

The primary risk emphasized by the campaign was the risk of contracting HIV, and the limited access to sexual health services abroad. Outreach efforts targeted potential migrants, focusing on youth who are more likely to emigrate irregularly to South Africa seeking political stability and economic opportunity. Outreach activities were conducted through three channels. First, potential migrants were targeted with a media campaign that included posters, billboards, leaflets, as well as television and radio programs. Second, the establishment of Safe Zone Centres in targeted communities were used to target outreach locally to youth considered at risk of HIV infection or irregular migration. Lastly, the campaign organized a series of 'road shows' which gathered together information campaigns, music, and theatre performances and travelled around targeted regions to increase awareness.

Figure 2 : IOM Advertisement for the 'Safe Journey Information Campaign'

An external evaluation of the project was completed by the consultancy Development Data in 2011 (DD, 2011). This evaluation deemed the project to be a success based on survey evidence indicating that awareness of the risks of irregular migration and HIV infection had increased in targeted districts. Survey respondents also indicated an increase in the number of people who said they knew where to seek out information about safe migratory options. Yet, the evaluation notes that awareness of the risks of migration among respondents were already quite high, so it is unclear how the campaign affected migratory behaviour. The evaluation also identified a series of areas for improvement. As most targeted informants don't have access to newspapers, radio, or television, there is a need to identify better media channels for outreach. Additionally, more coherent monitoring and evaluation techniques were needed. A baseline survey to better identify needs was recommended for future programs. The evaluation also advocated a
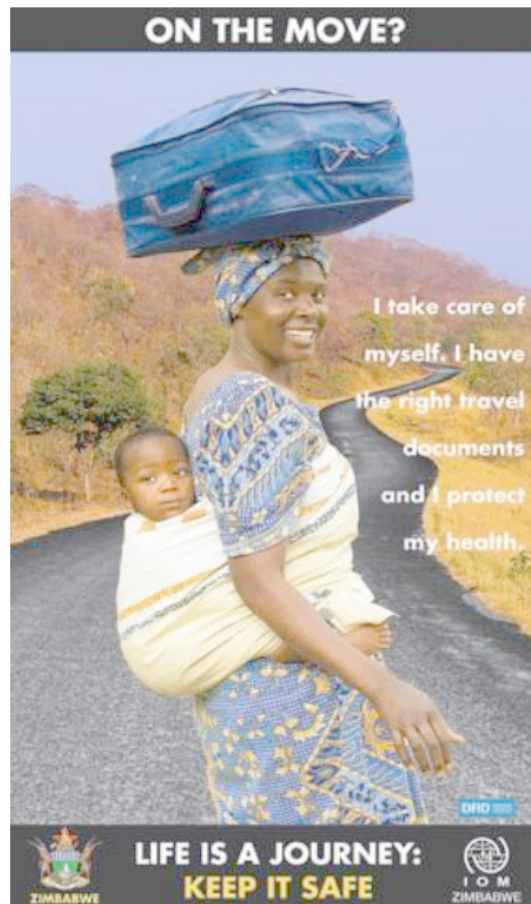
more concrete M&E strategy that identified clear outputs, milestones, and could be used to inform follow-up efforts.

B) AENAES: Informed Migration Project, IOM Bangladesh, India and Philippines 2006-2008: Initial attempt to promote 'informed migration' as a goal of good migration governance

Emerging out of the Colombo Process, a regional consultative process on labour migration issues facilitated by IOM with a number of key Asian stakeholder countries in 2003, this project ran from January 2006 to December 2008. The three core project sites were Bangladesh, India, and the Philippines. The project's two main aims were to develop the capacity of national authorities to assess and respond to current and projected foreign labour needs in the EU and the dissemination of information on legal labour migration opportunities and the risks of irregular migration. The project's information campaign was a key component implemented to support achieving the latter goal.

Initial design of the campaign's strategy was based on a baseline survey in Bangladesh and India, and on secondary source information in the Philippines. Based on this information, the campaign decided that billboards, films and television serials would be the most effective information channels for disseminating the campaign message. An external evaluation (Hayes, 2009) of the project stated that the communication strategy employed was 'rather ineffectual' in India but received positive feedback from stakeholders in Bangladesh and the Philippines. The external evaluation also notes that the decision not to use radio as an information channel was likely a mistake, given that it is a key channel in Bangladesh and India, and more economical than film or television.

Confusingly, although the external evaluation (Hayes, 2009) concludes that the information campaign was 'one of the successes of the project' it also notes that the 'communication strategy lacked a monitoring and evaluation framework and the impacts are not readily mea-surable.' Given that the external evaluation concludes that the campaign met its expected goals, this suggests that the program was not formulated with any specific attitude shifts in mind but rather focused simply on disseminating information. Overall, this project seems to have been an interesting initial attempt to raise awareness risks of irregular migration with extremely limited impact.

C) 'Promoting Orderly Migration in the Western Balkans' – IOM/European Commission, 2008-2010: A 'flood' approach to communicating 'informed' migration

Running from 2008 to 2010 in several countries in the Western Balkans, this project aimed to provide information, advice, and referrals to migrants and potential migrants on the risks of irregular migration. Migrant Service Centres were established in each of the targeted regions, where recipients were provided with information about the risks and difficulties of irregular emigration, opportunities for legal emigration, and information on accessing local opportunities and skills training. Through the Migrant Service Centres, potential migrants were provided with a glut of information, including fact sheets on 40 common destination countries in addition to more individualized advice. This was combined with a wider media campaign that used TV, newspapers and radio spots to advertise the Service Centres. Information was

also available to migrants through a website that centralized information on emigration and regular migration pathways.

The campaign was subject to an independent evaluation (Verduijn, 2011) which found mixed results. The program was well managed, and the activities were completed efficiently. The program was also successful in generating wide reach to individuals considered to be potential emigrants.

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However, it is not clear how the information provided to potential emigrants was used, or how it affected the decision to migrate. Individuals interviewed for the external evaluation cited difficulty in accessing regular migration pathways, and the evaluation found that only a small percentage of individuals provided services through the service centres were able to use these pathways (Verduijn, 2011). Despite increased awareness of the risks of irregular migration, many respondents continued to make irregular journeys. In a broader sense, this highlights the difficulty of understanding the specific relationship between shifts in attitudes towards irregular migration, and the actual decisions to make irregular journeys.

D) 'Gulf of Aden/Yemen: Improving Protection of Migrants' – IOM Kenya, 2012-2013: Does 'informing' migrants protect them?

This project was housed under the broader IOM project 'Horn/Gulf of Aden/Yemen: Improving Protection of Migrants – Phase III', which ran from 2012 to 2013. The project had a total budget of US$1 million and was managed by IOM Kenya. The project had three key goals: to improve the regional coordination and capacity in mixed migration management, to mitigate and address the protection concerns of migratory populations, and to improve the frameworks for regular labour migration out of the Horn of Africa to the Gulf States. Outreach to migrants and potential migrants formed a significant part of the second goal. The two primary goals of strategic communications interventions were to improve awareness of regular migration channels, and to increase understanding of the dangers of irregular migration. The campaign was carried out through a range of mediums: distributing educational materials, posting warning posters, broadcasting radio programs, carrying out community dialogue workshops, putting on educational plays and concerts, and hosting talks by returned migrants in local communities.

An external evaluation (Stewart, 2013) of the project states that the project's theory of change can be understood in two related clauses. First, the 'theory of change understands the vulnerability of migrants in the Horn of Africa as being causally related to the lack of a clear and coordinated cross-border regulatory framework for labour migration, which incentivises irregular/undocumented migration' (Stewart, 2013: 17). Second, the project 'sees irregular migration as stemming in part from the lack of information/awareness on the part of migrants of … existing legal channels of labour migration, and on the other hand of the dangers of clandestine migration' (Stewart, 2013: 17). Although the project evaluation acknowledged the validity of the former, it questioned the latter clause's applicability. In interviews for the project evaluation, key stakeholders voiced their frustration with the limited effects of outreach. One stakeholder stated, "there's something that isn't getting through… we need to think more creatively about how to reach people better, to better educate them' (Stewart, 2013). Given the strength of the factors driving migration (dire economic circumstances in particular) the

evaluation suggested that 'it seems entirely possible that even with perfect information about channels for legal migration and the dangers of clandestine migration, people would still choose to leave' (Stewart, 2013: 17).

This frustration was linked to the limited effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation efforts. Although implementation of the activities (output metrics) was successful, the project evaluation notes that monitoring efforts were either ineffective (e.g. surveys were simply not filled out) or never attempted. Altogether, the external evaluation concluded that 'The project has enjoyed good success in carrying out most of its activities… yet weaknesses in terms of monitoring limit the ability to judge the true effects of some of those activities' (Stewart, 2013). The evaluation recommends that subsequent projects implement follow-up monitoring systems which may make it possible to better judge the effects of outreach activities and refine and design more effective programming in the future.

E) 'By boat, no visa' – Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2013: Scare tactics: Can communications be a deterrent?

This project was initiated in 2013, in an effort to raise awareness among migrant diaspora communities in Australia about the changes to the processing of asylum-seekers arriving in Australia without authorization. The 'Papua New Guinea solution' announced by Kevin Rudd in July 2013 outlined a new policy whereby asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat would be returned to Papua New Guinea where their asylum claims would be processed. If their claims to refugee status were successful, they would be settled permanently in Papua New Guinea rather than being allowed to enter Australia.

Aiming to raise awareness among diaspora communities, the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection (DIBP) contracted with the PR agencies Y&R Group and Diverse Communications. The campaign was produced in six languages, using both online and offline messaging, and included spots from prominent celebrities including Sri Lankan cricketers Muttiah Muralitharan

But when he arrived to Australia with his family by boat, they all were sent to Manus Island.

0:19 / 1:00

Figure 3 : Still image from a 'By boat, no visa' campaign video aimed at Afghani asylum-seekers

and Lasith Malinga. The campaign's total budget reached 30 million AUD (US$21.8m), although it is not clear how much of the allocated budget was spent (McNair, 2013).

To evaluate the campaign, DIBP contracted an independent evaluation by McNair Ingenuity Research (McNair, 2013). The evaluation consisted of 501 telephone surveys conducted with individuals from the seven ethnic groups targeted by the media campaign, including a

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benchmark survey to establish awareness and attitudes. The evaluation found significant evidence that the campaign generally increased awareness of the risks of irregular boat migration, but there was significant variance in awareness between ethnic groups, e.g. Sinhalese respondents were significantly more likely to recall campaign content than Tamil respondents. The evaluation also found that respondents were likely to have absorbed key campaign messages, including awareness of legal migration pathways, and the new policies regarding the processing of asylum claims. Most of this shift, however, came among English-speaking respondents. Most non-English speakers stated that they received information about policy changes through family and friends and non-English language media, suggesting that the campaign did not achieve significant penetration through those channels.

Overall, the evaluation deemed the campaign successful: 55% of respondents recalled campaign advertising, and 40% of this group recalled the key campaign message 'come by boat and you won't be able to settle' (McNair, 2013). This suggests that targeting diaspora and migrant networks in receiving countries can be a successful strategy for raising the awareness of the risks of irregular migration. However, the campaign generated significant controversy and negative media coverage, both because of concerns that it violated the basic principle of *non-refoulement* in international refugee law[4], and because it was viewed as a politically-motivated campaign used to generate domestic support in the run up to a general election.

F) 'Surprising Europe' – Al Jazeera/European Return Fund/Netherlands, 2015: Using documentary narratives to communicate the 'reality' of irregular life in Europe
This project was composed of a documentary film and television series about migrant experiences in Europe and a website-based discussion forum for potential African migrants seeking to journey to Europe. The documentary film followed the story of Ssuuna Golooba, a Ugandan photojournalist who travels to Europe to improve his life, but eventually decides to return home because he is unable to find suitable work due to his immigration status. The subsequent television series, broadcast through Al Jazeera, profiled migrants and asylum-seekers in Europe.[5] Although not a conventionally humanitarian-oriented strategic communications campaign like many of the other campaigns included in this report, it merits inclusion here both because it was funded in part by the Return Fund of the European Union's Commission on Migration and Home Affairs, and because it illustrates how SMCCs have frequently blurred the lines between communications campaigns and conventional journalism.

Although no formal evaluation is available to assess project impact, the project is notable in the sense that it foregrounds the voices of migrants and asylum-seekers themselves, rather than simply disseminating information that comes straight from government officials of immigration offices. One episode contrasts the situation in a small village in Burkina Faso that relies on remittances from migrants in Italy to fund the construction of a new school and

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4   Non-refoulement is a principle established in international refugee law that prohibits states from returning individuals to regions where they may face persecution. See UNHCR: **https://www.unhcr.org/excom/scip/3ae68ccd10/note-non-refoulement-submitted-high-commissioner.html**. A report issued by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in 2017 titled 'Unlawful death of Refugees and Migrants' directly criticizes Australia's 2013 border policy. See: **https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1725806.pdf**.

5   An overview of the project and past episodes are available online through Al Jazeera English: **https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/surprisingeurope/**.

hospital with the experiences of male and female migrants who are forced into the drug trade or prostitution because they are unable to find other work. Due to the important dynamics of trust described in the section above, stories told by migrants with previous experiences in Europe are likely to be received more positively than generalized information about the risks of migration received from government sources. At the same time, however, purely online campaigns that use mainly English-language media are unlikely to generate significant engagement among potential migrants in origin regions.

G) 'Egypt: Comprehensive approach to address smuggling and trafficking' - IOM/USAID, 2013-2016: Tackling smuggling and trafficking through conventional communications channels

Implemented between 2013 and 2016 by IOM and funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the primary aim of this project was to help the Government of Egypt protect the rights of vulnerable migrants and prevent smuggling and trafficking flows in the Sinai peninsula. The project budget was just over 1.5 million USD. The project aimed to raise awareness of migrant smuggling and trafficking in persons, targeting youth living in Sinai, and deprived areas where Egyptian youth were at risk of 'social pressure to engage in human smuggling or migrate irregularly to Europe' (Melis, 2016). To achieve the goal, the project engaged both in outreach to potential migrants, and worked to provide vocational opportunities to potential migrants that would help them engage in local job markets. Outreach efforts included print media campaigns, and radio and TV broadcasts. These efforts were targeted at Egyptian youth 18-35-years-old who were 'vulnerable to smuggling.' An external evaluation (Melis, 2016) of the program commissioned by IOM notes, however, that there was no clear definition of who this target group was, leading to a communications campaign that was too broad in scope.

More broadly, external evaluation noted broader problems with the design and monitoring of project goals. The evaluation concludes that the project design failed to 'clearly link activities to measurable and achievable outcomes, articulate underlying assumptions, or align indicators with planned results or objectives' (Melis, 2016). In the context of the SMCC, there was no clear indication of the goal of outreach efforts. Additionally, 'shortcomings in project design, monitoring and reporting results make it difficult to attribute stated project results to completed project activities.' One stakeholder quoted in the external evaluation stated that 'the project didn't seem to have a theory of change' (Melis, 2016). Moreover, although the evaluation notes that there was broad stakeholder support for increased capacity building in migration management, IOM's decision to implement vocational training on its own generated frustration that this was not its area of expertise, and thus overstepped its organizational remit.

H) 'Enhancing Protection and Improving Knowledge on the Risks of Irregular Migration in Sudan' – IOM/Norway, 2014-2016: The 'resource center' model

Running from 2014 to 2016, this project was led by IOM's office in Sudan, and was funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Justice. The overall objective of the project was to strengthen the 'humane management of mixed migration flows in Sudan.' Within this goal, the campaign aimed to raise awareness of the risks associated with irregular migration as well as an understanding of the basic rights of migrants. The project identified two outcomes: potential migrants and migrants en route increase the use of safe and regular migration opportunities, and mixed migrant populations become more aware of their protection rights. To achieve these goals

IOM established a Migrant Resource and Response Center (MRRC) in Khartoum in 2015. The MRRC provided migrants with information and counselling on the risks of irregular migration, medical assistance, psychosocial support, and assisted voluntary return and reintegration (AVRR) to their countries of origin.

An external evaluation commissioned by IOM (Melis and Marshall, 2016) reports receiving universally positive feedback about project outreach from migrants who received support from the MRRC. One significant flaw, however, was a lack of baseline information on existing levels of migration knowledge, and a lack of clarity about the safe and regular migration opportunities available to migrants. At the same time, the evaluation noted that the campaign's programming suffered from a vague definition of who was a 'potential migrant', often having difficulty distinguishing between the different dimensions of mixed migratory flows in the region. Altogether, the evaluation reported that the project was successful in implementing all stated objectives. In 2016, IOM announced an agreement with the Norwegian Government to provide $430,000 in funding for the next phase of the project, which focuses on strengthening the MRRCs.

I) 'Telling the real story' – UNHCR, 2016: Online diaspora-based messaging

Initiated by UNHCR in 2016, this project aimed to raise awareness as to the risks of irregular migration among potential migrants in the Horn of Africa, focusing on Somalia and Eritrea. The campaign consisted of a multi-media campaign anchored by a website which collected stories about the journey to Europe from members of the diaspora who had gone abroad. These stories were frequently recorded as videos and disseminated online through YouTube and social media channels. Given that migrant networks and diaspora members in Europe are frequently cited as the most influential source of information for potential migrants, the campaign deliberately attempted to engage this information channel.

Although the materials generated through the campaign are extremely compelling, and the effort has been applauded for foregrounding the voices of members of the diaspora, there are concerns (Schans and Optekamp, 2016) that the campaign's web-based platform may not be the best means of engaging potential migrants in local communities in the Horn of Africa. Critics have also questioned the role played by

Figure 4 : Still image from a Tigrinya children's book produced by UNHCR

UNHCR in disseminating this information (Schans and Optekamp, 2016). Whereas IOM has traditionally worked to help states manage migration, UNHCR's primary duty is to provide humanitarian protection to refugees and vulnerable migrants. There are reasonable concerns

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about whether UNHCR's involvement in a program that focuses on reducing irregular migration comes into conflict with the agency's primary humanitarian mandate.

J) 'Community Conversations' – IOM/Ethiopia, 2014-2017: Reducing irregular migration through community-led interventions

This initiative grew out of earlier IOM programming in Ethiopia (See Heading C). Sparked by the deportation of a large number of Ethiopian workers from Saudia Arabia in 2013, the campaign aimed to help facilitate community-led dialogue about the risks of irregular migration journeys to Gulf States. A 'community conversation' was defined as a process of engaging local communities in interactive discussions through facilitated dialogue in which people were grouped together to raise awareness and generate collaborative action. To spread the campaign message, IOM partnered with local government officials in Ethiopia to provide training to community facilitators who are then responsible for leading conversations about the risks of irregular migration. These interventions targeted regions with high emigration rates, mainly in Southwestern Ethiopia. Subsequently, community-led conversations were paired with grassroots events including a football tournament and theatre performances.

The basic principle of the 'Community Conversations' model was to provide key information to communities, and then help local communities to develop grassroots solutions. The project focused on publicizing information about increased alternatives at home, helped individuals take action against exploitative smugglers or traffickers, and promoted regular migration pathways. IOM officials emphasize that partnership with local government officials has been crucial. Meetings were recorded by trained facilitators and an agreed record of the meetings outcome was delivered to local government officials. Links to government are used to connect community members with government services that can help them access economic opportunities at home.

An external evaluation of the program suggests that it has been successful in reducing aspirations to migrate irregularly within target areas. It is likely that the program has been successful for two reasons. First, it has focused on communicating directly through word of mouth migrant networks, an information channel through which evidence suggests the target audience gets much of their information about migration prospects. And second, by engaging community-led facilitators to develop and spread the campaign message, the campaign was likely able to generate more trust among respondents who would otherwise ignore or be sceptical of migration information.

H) 'Ghana Integrated Migration Management Approach (GIMMA)' – IOM/EU 2014-2017: Using strategic communications to 'manage' migration

IOM implemented the GIMMA project in coordination with local stakeholders in Ghana from 2014 to 2017. The project received three million euros in total funding from the European Union (Bugnion de Moreta, 2018). Broadly, the project aimed to improve the Ghanaian government's management of migration through an 'integrated migration management approach.' The project had three specific goals: to enhance the institutional capacity of the Ghanaian Immigration Service to implement effective migration management measures, to increase

awareness of safe and legal migration and alternative livelihood options, and to strengthen Ghana's migration data management system.

To achieve the second goal, the project engaged in three primary tasks: rehabilitating the Migration Information Bureau (MIB) in Accra, constructing a Management Information Centre (MIC) in Sunyani, and developing alternative livelihoods to emigration. The MIB refurbishment was aimed at improving the ability of the Ghanaian Immigration Service to provide information about safe and regular migration opportunities. The primary purpose of the MIC in Sunyani was to facilitate community outreach, both through radio and television broadcasts, and through in-person presentations to community groups. 62,720 people were exposed to campaign communications. Overall, the external evaluation reports that feedback from local authorities was positive, and that there was significant engagement with women-led community groups to distribute information about legal pathways to work in the Middle East.

Based on informant feedback, the external evaluation (Bugnion de Moreta, 2018) suggests that the project increased awareness of the risks of the dangers of migration, but also notes that no evaluation measures were used to identify targeted outcomes beyond the volume of outreach, so it is difficult to know the exact effects of this programming. Moreover, although the program increased awareness of risk, the external evaluation questions the direct attribution of all communications activities to the Ghanaian Immigration Service. In one sense, this attribution may have increased engagement among communities with high levels of trust in the government. At the same time, this attribution may have alienated or failed to reach individuals considering irregular migration, who are likely to have low levels of trust in the government. Overall, it is possible that the branding of the program as an attempt to 'manage migration' limited the effectiveness of the message. The external evaluation also raised concerns about the sustainability of MIC activity, as there is no funding to continue outreach activities past the funding allocated by the EU. Overall, the external evaluation concludes that the project was a success, despite the fact that it was not supported by a strong results-based management framework.

What works? Evaluating the effects of previous campaigns

The previous two sections of this report have provided an overview of academic research on how information treatments may affect decisions to emigrate and surveyed the outcomes of previous strategic migration communications campaigns. Drawing together this evidence base, this section will highlight the key takeaways and themes from this analysis, to generate a better understanding of what makes such campaigns successful or unsuccessful.

Who makes migration decisions and whom should campaigns target?

One of the primary difficulties facing SMCCs is who to target as a subject of the campaign. One common finding from programme evaluations in the previous section was that the effectiveness of campaign activity is reduced by a vague, overbroad target group of 'potential migrants.' The IOM/USAID project in Egypt was burdened by a target audience that was too broad, leading to limited engagement and messaging impact. In scenarios like IOM's programming in Sudan 2014-2017, where multiple mixed migratory flows travel along similar routes and use similar means of transport, it is difficult to distinguish migrants moving for economic reasons from those fleeing conflict or persecution, or those vulnerable to human trafficking. In other cases, as with UNHCR's 'Telling the Real Story' campaign, communications have aimed to influence migration decisions through online messaging that leverages the stories of migrants and diaspora members in Europe who have experience with irregular migration. Given that evidence shows clearly that diaspora members and migrant networks are a key source of information for potential migrants, this approach is interesting and innovative. However, given that other evidence suggests that online/social media are not the primary channels used to gather information by potential migrants, there are questions about which strategic communications campaigns should use to successfully leverage migrant networks and diasporas abroad.

There is also substantial debate as to who makes migration decisions, suggesting different potential target groups. Within migration theory, there is significant debate over how much agency individuals have over migration decisions, and many researchers have highlighted the key role played by household and community members.[6] UNHCR's manual (2011) on effective communications in situations of displacement contends that communications campaigns should be undertaken at the community level, given that emigration is frequently a decision taken at the household level or slightly above. This advice conflicts, however, with recommendations made by the Dutch Ministry of Justice (2016), based on a study of the information consumption patterns and decision making of Syrian refugees in Amsterdam, and a desk review conducted by the UK's Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (Browne, 2016). Previous campaigns, like IOM's 'Community Conversations' in Ethiopia, have acknowledged that family and community members often exert significant influence over the decision-making process of individual migrants and sought to involve these groups in developing policies that may help reduce irregular migration. Overall, effective SMCCs are likely to balance the need for extremely targeted 'potential migrant' subjects against the need to influence community-level decision-makers as well. One potential solution to this dilemma

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[6]   Debates over the relative importance of structure and agency have occurred at least since the introduction of neo-classical migration theory in the 1960s. For an overview see Castles, S., de Haas, H., Miller, M. (2013) The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

may be to address these target groups separately, using differential sources of information or media channels to target individuals and community members.

Calculating risk: short term vs long term, and discounting negative information

Most strategic communications campaigns that aim to reduce irregular migration assume that irregular migrants are imperfect decision makers, and that once they are properly appraised of the dangers of irregular migration, they will make different decisions. Yet, evidence from the academic literature and previous campaigns suggests that this is not the case. Shrestha (2016) and Bah and Batia (2018) have both demonstrated that potential migrants actually tend to overestimate the riskiness of migration but decide to migrate regardless because they believe the long-term benefit of migration outweighs these risks. When migrants received accurate information about the dangers of migration journeys, both found that potential migrants were actually more likely to migrate. Overall, this suggests that messaging that emphasizes long-term prospects is more likely to shift attitudes towards the relative benefits of irregular migration.

Potential migrants may also process information about risk in seemingly irrational ways. Ethnographic evidence from Carling and Hernandez-Carretero (2013) and Kyle and Siracusa (2011) suggests that migrants may discount negative information if they believe themselves to be more knowledgeable than the source of the information. Alternately, receiving information about risks may make certain migrants more likely to emigrate because they believe themselves to be fully appraised of the risks of emigration, and able to avoid the dangers faced by other migrants (Kirwin and Anderson, 2018). In other situations, as with IOM's programming in the Horn of Africa from 2012-2013, evidence suggests that perfect information awareness would not have reduced irregular migration, given the strength of the forces driving migration. As might be expected, communications campaigns have little effect on individuals who are emigrating because of persecution, conflict, or severe scarcity (Fleay et al, 2016).

Altogether, this demonstrates that irregular migration is frequently not the result of 'information gaps' and will require more nuanced communications strategies. In many cases, simply receiving 'accurate' information about the risks of irregular migration may actually undermine the goals of migration governance, as this information may increase the likelihood of emigration among certain risk-taking individuals. Communications campaigns are likely to be more effective if they take into account the different ways in which potential migrants process risk and communicate information in ways that make it less likely to be ignored or discounted. As discussed below, communications programming is also likely to be more effective if it is combined with more concrete development programming that can provide potential migrants with the support needed to develop realistic alternatives to irregular migration.

Building trust: different sources of information and different levels of trust

In an obvious sense, potential migrants are likely to disregard or ignore information about irregular migration that they perceive to be biased or inaccurate. As with any other public information campaign, strategic migration communications campaigns must be regarded as trustworthy sources of information by their target audiences. As Carling and Hernandez-Carretero note in their study of Spanish efforts to reduce irregular migration from Senegal to the Canary Islands in 2006, potential migrants are likely to disregard messages that they believe

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are biased by political interests. This seems to have been the case in the GIMMA project in Ghana, where information campaigns took a backseat to more enforcement-oriented efforts to 'manage migration', leading many to disregard the campaign's messaged because it was believed to be biased by the interests of migrant-receiving countries. In other cases, potential migrants may simply regard certain media channels as less trustworthy than others. The evaluation of IOM's campaign in Egypt in 2013 notes that engagement was limited because the campaign used primarily conventional media channels, which many considered to be biased. Altogether, this fits with Kyle and Siracusa's study of irregular Ecuadorian migrants in Spain, which finds that irregular migrants often disregard migration controls because they believe them to be morally contradictory or biased. Effective SMCCs are therefore likely to engage the most 'trusted' channels to spread or corroborate their message, i.e. diasporas abroad, migrant networks, and word-of-mouth within communities.

Emphasizing fears or alternative opportunities? Positive vs. Negative messaging

Many previous SMCCs have employed fear-based messages that appeal to self-preservation to change the behaviour of potential migrants. As with the Australian Government's 'By Boat, No Visa' campaign in 2013, images of overcrowded boats, dangerous sea journeys, and miserable conditions in immigration detention centres are used to provoke changes in migratory decision-making. Yet although these campaigns may play to domestic political interests, as critics of the Australian campaign have argued, they often have limited effects on actual migration.

Townsend and Oomen (2015) highlight three reasons why these strategies may have limited effects: first, as noted above, people are not good at calculating risks, and routinely discount risks in everyday decisions. Second, the risk of future danger may seem worth taking compared to more imminent threats of social or economic instability facing potential migrants. Lastly, short-term risks are often differentiated against long-term risks, meaning that potential migrants may be willing to tolerate short-term risks like dangerous crossings or potential apprehension at the border, but are less likely to be willing to tolerate long-term risks like lack of legal residency status in Europe.

Assessing the effects of communications campaigns

Analysis of previous strategic communications campaigns demonstrates how difficult it may be to link communications interventions to changes in migratory behaviour. Although these effects may be inherently difficult to measure, investment in and attention to how interventions are monitored and evaluated is critical to properly assessing program effects. Before communications programming begins, campaign authorities should have a strong, granular understanding of baseline attitudes towards migration, including migration aspirations and perceptions of the costs and benefits of irregular migration. A robust understanding of baseline attitudes will provide critical insight for developing a nuanced campaign target audience. This baseline should be paired with a target audience analysis (TAA) including a media usage survey. This information will be critically important in understanding how the target audience receives and processes information, helping policymakers to invest in the most effective media channels. As demonstrated above, previous campaigns have had limited effects because of

the failure to accurately identify the target audience and understand the most effective media channels before implementation.

Previous SMCC campaigns have failed to clearly identifty campaign goals or properly assess the results of communications interverntions. Future campaigns should have a robust and clearly developed theory of change outlining how the proposed interventions will seek to affect attitudes and behaviour. Past campaigns were often implemented reactively in response to a perceived migrant 'crisis' and have lacked a robust theory of change (see, for example, Stewart, 2013). At the same time, where previous campaigns have implemented a clear M&E strategy, communications interventions have measured interventions in terms of outputs and engagement rather than outcomes or attitude change. Of the eleven campaigns surveyed above, only two had a clear M&E strategy that sought to measure the outcomes of communications interventions. Together, these steps will provide a much clearer picture of how strategic communications shape attitudes towards migration, and help establish a critically needed evidence base for future communications interventions.

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Conclusion

Strategic Migration Communications Campaigns have become an increasingly popular tool for policymakers and international organizations aiming to reduce irregular migration, shape migratory behaviour, and improve humanitarian protections for vulnerable migrants. On one hand, SMCCs cost significantly less than investments in border security and migration controls. They also promise to help prevent irregular migration at its source, reducing the increasing number of deaths at the borders of migrant-receiving states. On the other hand, SMCCs offer the possibility of producing targeted results in the short-term. Although limited, short-term results may prove valuable as broader, costlier development interventions like those funded through the EU's Emergency Trust Fund for Africa take time to demonstrate success.

Yet, despite their growing popularity, previous SMCCs have frequently lacked a clear theoretical framework or basis in empirical evidence. This report has drawn together evidence from recent academic research and previous communications interventions to begin to fill this gap. Evidence from academic research suggests that information treatments can have some effect on migration decisions. Yet this research also highlights the limitations of messages that emphasize fear and short-term risk and emphasizes the importance of disseminating information from a credible source. Review of eleven previous strategic migration communications campaigns illustrates how these programs have taken shape in practice, emphasizing the importance of developing clear goals and a robust monitoring and evaluation framework. Learning from previous campaigns, the final section of this report highlights a series of key areas of improvement for future efforts.

Irregular migration seems likely to remain high on the agendas of policy makers and public officials in the future. For policymakers seeking to reduce irregular migration, strategic communications campaigns will continue to be a popular tool. Although campaigns can have positive effects, stakeholders should also remain keenly aware of their limitations. As one prominent textbook on public information campaigns notes, 'communications campaigns are often used to hide the sad fact that no other effective action can or will be taken' (Ostergaard, 2011). In the case of irregular migration, strategic communications are unlikely to have significant effects over the long-term without concomitant efforts to address the structural drivers of irregular migration and significantly increase the availability of regular migration pathways.

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