International Initiative for Impact Evaluation

Evidence summary brief

Social protection



What We Know About Information Campaigns

What this summary covers

This summary synthesizes the available evidence on the effectiveness of *information campaigns* targeting potential migrants. It draws on 16 impact evaluations (IEs) identified in the 2025 update of the Irregular Migration Evidence Gap Map (EGM), a thematic collection of rigorous evidence on the effects of interventions addressing the root causes and drivers of irregular migration, and includes only studies that met our predefined study eligibility criteria. See the study search and selection summary for more details.

In this summary, *information campaigns* for potential migrants refer to interventions that disseminate messages to individuals who may consider moving abroad, whether through regular or irregular channels. These campaigns typically provide information about the risks of irregular migration, available regular and safer options, local opportunities, or the quality of intermediaries, and are delivered through community outreach, media, or interpersonal communication.

The summary describes the characteristics of *information campaigns* and their evaluation designs, and summarizes what is currently known about their effects, using quantitative meta-analysis. It assesses the risk of bias for estimates included in the analysis and highlights key limitations in the evidence base. The variation in effects on intentions to migrate and expectations-related outcomes was also examined for a small number of study characteristics. For other outcomes, namely migration behavior and perceptions of well-being, there were too few studies to assess differences in the results by campaign features or contextual factors.

Key takeaways

- The evidence base includes 16 impact evaluations of information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration, available regular and safer options, local opportunities, or the quality of intermediaries.
- Information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration have a very small effect on intentions to migrate irregularly, but have no effect on migration behavior.
- The evidence base evaluating the effects of *information campaigns* for potential migrants is emerging, with most studies using experimental designs to evaluate campaigns in North and Western Africa.
- The evidence base has key gaps: limited ability to assess differences by campaign design or target group; minimal qualitative evidence; and no cost or cost-effectiveness analysis.

How *information campaigns* influence migration pathways

The root-causes-of-migration framework

This synthesis draws on the EGM's conceptual framework on the root causes and drivers of irregular migration, which is adapted from the aspirations–capabilities model proposed by Carling (2002)[1] and further developed by Carling and Talleraas (2016).[2,3] In this framework, migration occurs when individuals both aspire to migrate and possess the ability to do so, where capabilities are shaped by economic resources, legal constraints, social networks, and broader structural conditions. *Information campaigns* are expected to affect aspirations; they typically would not alter the migration infrastructure or the underlying capabilities required for migration.

By treating information, or the lack of it, as a driver of migration decisions across contexts, *information campaigns* are an increasingly attractive option within a broader set of international migration policy instruments.[4] An earlier scoping review published by IOM in 2018 highlighted the rapid growth and diversification of migration *information campaigns* but concluded that the evidence base was dominated by descriptive and observational studies, providing little robust evidence on causal effects.[5] Since then, a growing number of robust IEs have become available, enabling a systematic synthesis of the causal effects of *information campaigns*, which is the focus of this research.

Causal pathways and assumptions

Within this framework, *information campaigns* are intended to operate through distinct yet related pathways, depending on their focus.

Awareness pathway: Campaigns to increase awareness of risks and reduce perceived benefits, thereby lowering intentions to migrate through irregular channels.

Substitution pathway: Campaigns to increase knowledge of legal or safe migration pathways or opportunities at home, with the expectation that better-informed individuals will substitute away from irregular options when legal pathways are equally or more accessible, or when local opportunities are available.

Updated beliefs pathway: Additional interventions that target specific information gaps, such as the performance of migration intermediaries or realistic employment prospects abroad, with the aim of correcting biased or misleading beliefs that shape perceived returns to migration.

Across these pathways, the effectiveness of *information campaigns* is assumed to be conditional on contextual factors beyond message content. Institutional trust, the messenger's credibility, delivery channels, and accessibility of legal alternatives all shape whether campaigns translate into changes in intentions or behavior. Further details on the conceptual framework for migration *information campaigns* are provided in Appendix Table A1.



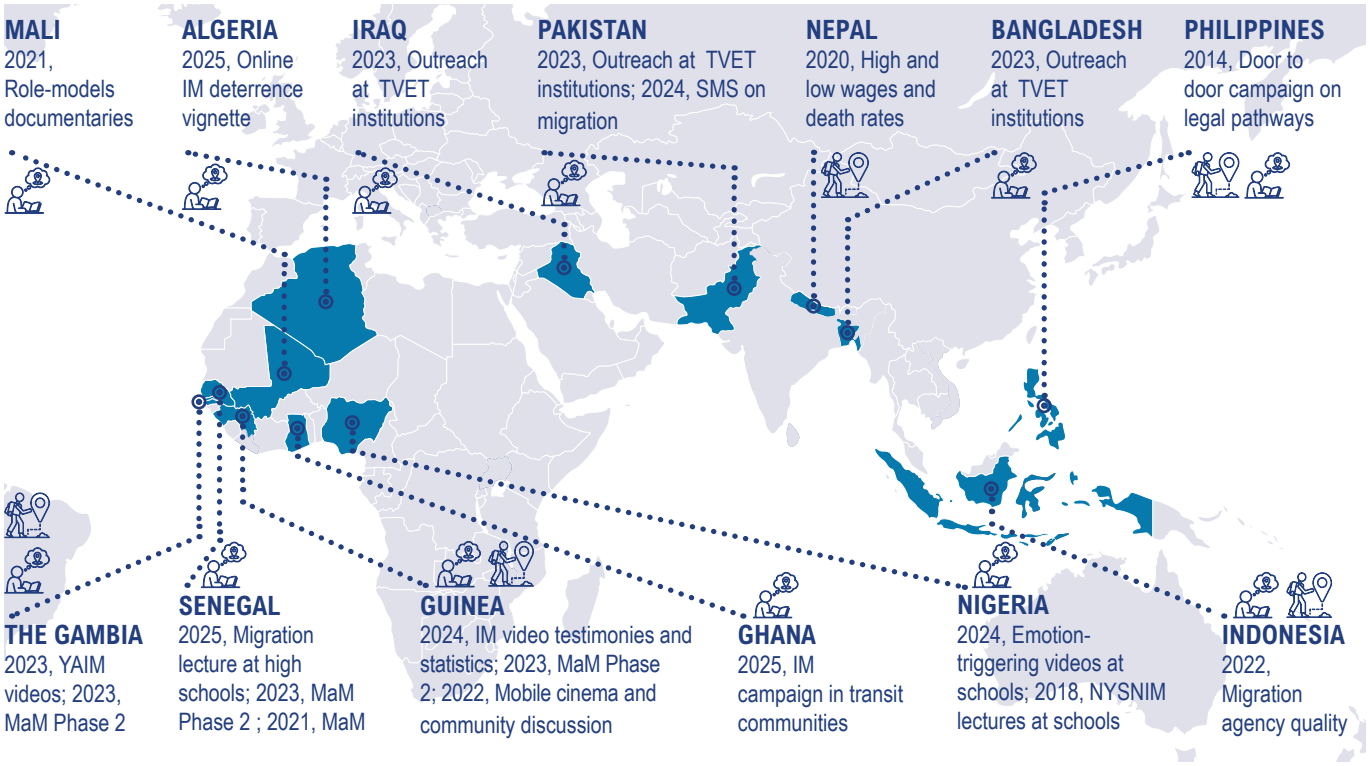
Evidence base characteristics

The 16 included studies are geographically concentrated in Sub-Saharan Africa: 10 of the *information campaigns* were implemented in this region, with most in Western Africa. The remaining evidence comes from East and South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa regions (Figure 1). The EGM did not identify evaluations of *information campaigns* targeting migrants from Latin America and the Caribbean. This geographic concentration of the evidence reflects regions characterized by high levels of outward migration and exposure to risky, irregular migration routes.[6]

Five *information campaigns* explicitly targeted potential migrants by either identifying participants who stated intentions or aspirations to migrate during the baseline survey,[7,8,9,10] or by surveying participants outside offices of overseas employment providers.[10] Eight additional *information campaigns* targeted youth, as this demographic group is considered among the most likely to migrate.[11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18]

The focus of most campaigns was on deterring irregular migration by either informing participants about the risks,[9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20] making local opportunities more salient,[17,20] or updating expectations about potential gains.[8,12,14,18] Three campaigns covered different topics: two provided information on the performance of migration intermediaries in Indonesia[7] and Pakistan,[21] and one informed participants in Sorsogon, Philippines about overseas job applications, placement fees, and passport requirements.[22] Finally, three campaigns provided information on legal pathways[22] or safe migration options.[13,16]

Figure 1: **Information campaigns targeting potential migrants are concentrated in Western Africa**



Almost all *information campaigns* were disseminated in a single instance. Evaluated campaigns were delivered only once using channels such as a mobile phone text message, an online vignette, or a one-time session or lecture. The sole exception was the Indonesia campaign, which provided information on the quality of migration service providers.[7] It redistributed intervention materials two years after the initial exposure to increase treatment intensity and maintain salience.

Most *information campaigns* were delivered through in-person group sessions and relied on audiovisual materials, particularly risk-focused documentaries featuring peer or returnee testimonials.[9,10,11,12,15,16,17,18,20] Printed materials were uncommon in awareness-raising, risk-focused campaigns, but were more frequently used in substitution or updated beliefs interventions with content other than risks.[7,8,22] One study evaluated an SMS-based campaign that provided information on overseas employment opportunities.[21]

In terms of messengers, campaigns commonly relied on peers or returnees, though in some cases information was delivered by specialized international or local migration organizations[9,10,13] and local NGOs.[14,18] In many of the remaining studies, campaigns were primarily research-driven, with no distinct messenger identified beyond the research team itself. Further details on the design of the information campaigns are provided in Appendix Table A2.

Evidence on long-term behavioral outcomes was scarce. Overall, the evidence tested short-term effects, with outcomes often measured immediately after exposure to the information campaign. Six studies assessed outcomes at the end of the intervention, primarily capturing immediate changes in knowledge and expectations, perceptions, and migration intentions.[11,13,16,18,19,20] A further eight studies measured outcomes within four months of the intervention, reinforcing the emphasis on short-term effects.[8,9,10,12,14,15,17,21] Two of these studies also followed participants 12 and 18 months after the campaign to assess migration behavior.[11,12] Only two studies measured outcomes beyond two years (at 24 and 48 months), both capturing the effects on migration abroad.[7,22]

Most studies included in this brief used experimental designs. Information is one of the few components of the migration decision-making process that can be randomized while taking the broader migration infrastructure and policy environment as given, thereby allowing for causal evaluation of migration policies.[4] It is therefore not surprising that all but one of the included IEs are randomized experiments; the exception uses a quasi-experimental design to evaluate a mobile cinema campaign in Guinea.[10]

None of the included evaluations assessed the cost or cost-effectiveness of *information campaigns*, which limited conclusions about their value for money. Furthermore, only two IEs reported a qualitative component that was used to develop the information campaign content and to understand the context and targeted population.[7,16] None included qualitative methods to triangulate the quantitative IE results. Further details on evaluation designs are provided in Appendix Table A3.

Findings on effectiveness

Nine *information campaigns* aimed at deterring irregular migration led to a very small average decrease in intentions to migrate irregularly (-0.04 SMD, p = .02). While the direction of the effect is consistent with the intended goal of these campaigns, its magnitude is minimal. Due to the limited number of studies and estimates, we could not meaningfully assess if effects differ across contexts or campaign designs.

There is no evidence that *information campaigns* affect outcomes beyond irregular migration intentions (Appendix Table A5). In particular, there were no effects on:

- **Migration behavior** (measured as movement abroad or steps taken to attempt migration);
- **Broader migration intentions** (whether through regular or irregular channels); or
- **Intermediate outcomes** (including expectations and knowledge-related outcomes, and perceptions of well-being).

Aside from intentions to migrate and expectations, the findings are exploratory, as five or fewer studies contributed to those analyses. Where intentions were measured, studies rarely assessed intention-to-action dynamics by evaluating whether revised intentions led to observable changes in migration behavior.

Where sufficient studies were available, results also did not differ by the targeted population or the assessed risk of bias of the estimates (Appendix Table A6). There was generally a lack of information to explore other moderators, such as focus, setting, and campaign characteristics (e.g., modality or sender). Across outcomes and study designs, estimated average effect sizes are generally very small in magnitude and statistically indistinguishable from zero. Complete meta-analysis results, including pooled effect estimates, significance levels, moderator analyses, and forest plots, are reported in the appendix.

Quality concerns remain across the body of evidence. One common issue was the use of self-reported measures of intentions to migrate, which can be at least partially vulnerable to social desirability bias or strategic response. One study addressed this limitation by using a more indirect measure based on hypothetical scenarios, designed to mitigate strategic responses.[18] In addition, six studies were assessed as having a high risk of bias in their results due to methodological issues detailed in Appendix Table A4. To address these concerns, we systematically assessed and documented the risk of bias for each estimate and, where sufficient evidence was available, examined whether results varied by assessed risk of bias.



Discussion

Information campaigns implemented in isolation appear to have limited effectiveness, especially on behavior change. Effectiveness is also expected to be low when exposure is brief, generic, or delivered as a one-off intervention, as was the case in most of the studies we reviewed. Further research is needed to assess whether and how they may contribute to broader policy packages when combined with complementary interventions, such as technical and vocational training[11,23] or cash transfers.[11,24]

Factors that might help explain the results (such as baseline beliefs, knowledge, and risk perceptions), as well as campaign designs (such as communication tools or channels), were not reported consistently enough across studies to allow for an assessment of their moderating effects. In addition, respondents exposed to *information campaigns*, especially those where the campaign and the research appear to come from the same source, may be less willing to openly state their intentions to migrate. This could lead to underreporting of intentions, potentially underestimating small but meaningful changes that are not captured by direct survey questions.

Implications

Based on the findings of the review, the following implications are drawn for decision makers, program designers, and researchers:

Policy implications

- Align the use of information campaigns with realistic outcome expectations—for example, when aiming to improve knowledge and risk awareness and support informed choice. But do not expect effects on more distal outcomes, such as migration flows.

Research implications

- Researchers could systematically measure baseline knowledge and beliefs to support a more nuanced understanding and synthesis of the evidence base.
- Expand the evidence base on bundled intervention packages. For example, future research agendas could aim to fill the evidence gap for information campaigns coupled with economic or skills interventions.
- Fill evidence gaps by evaluating information campaigns using follow-up periods that are long enough to capture realized migration outcomes, rather than only short-term intentions or expectations, even when such events are relatively rare.
- Given that migration is a low-incidence outcome, ensure that future studies are powered appropriately.
- To aid synthesis efforts, future studies should report on baseline belief distributions, describe the messaging content and delivery in detail, and provide information on contextual factors such as trust, norms, and exposure.
- To improve the credibility of estimates for migration intentions, future evaluations should apply blinding procedures, such as limiting participants' awareness of the study objectives, minimizing disclosure about the specific intervention received, separating outcome data collection from the intervention delivery, or using indirect measures that reduce respondents' incentives to provide socially desirable answers.



Endnotes

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[24] 3ie's EGM identified two studies examining information campaigns alongside training components and a single study combining information with cash transfers, which is insufficient to support a conclusive synthesis. Therefore, our synthesis focused on information-only treatment arms.

About this brief

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