

# Beyond the Humanitarian Rhetoric of Migrant Information Campaigns

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Recently mediatized images of capsizing boats and dangerous maritime crossings have become symbols of Western nation-states' difficulties to control their borders and manage undocumented migration, despite intensifying governmental efforts (Townsend & Oomen, 2015). Indeed, increased irregular migration flows combined with the struggle to implement durable solutions and an ever-widening gap between policy and outcomes have rendered irregular migration a key challenge for Western countries (Optekamp, 2016). This has prompted governments to include information campaigns in their 'comprehensive' approach to pre-emptively intervene in migration flows (Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011). Implemented since the 1990s in European countries, Australia and the United States (Musarò, 2019), the so-called 'refugee crisis' renewed interest in this 'preventive' migration policy instrument (Optekamp, 2016).

Out of a vast array of migration management tools, information campaigns are deemed 'attractive' (Optekamp, 2016). Often cheaper and easier to implement, they generate less negative press than other policy instrument such as harsher border enforcement efforts or increased state power (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). Rather than changing the legislation or authority system, information campaigns work through spreading ideas and information to alter attitudes and behaviours towards a stated desirable outcome (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994): in this case, to prevent more migrant fatalities (Schans & Optekamp, 2016).

Because of this stated humanitarian goal, information campaigns are generally conceptualized in partnership with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the International Organization for Migration (IOM) promoting 'humane and orderly migration' (McCloughlin, 2008, p.6). This humanitarian outcome is attempted by purportedly informing migrants of risks and countering 'illusions' broadcasted by smugglers (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud 2007, p. 1675). This is so potential migrants can make better informed decisions, refrain from risk-taking behaviours and, ultimately, reduce their vulnerability. Officially, campaigns are also intended to 'inform public opinion and ensure support for migrants in host societies' (Bern Initiative, 2005, p.24).

Although considered key in the management of migration (IOM, 2003), information campaigns are overlooked from research on media and migration (Kosnick, 2014). Evaluations of information campaigns are rarely conducted, likely because of the difficulty to 'test' their impact on migrants' decisions and behaviours (van Bommel, 2020). When they have been conducted, they are often operated and financed by those running the campaigns (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007), which calls into question their reliability. Regardless, existing research points to information campaigns' inefficacy in providing new information to migrants and affecting their decision (Browne, 2015).

If there is little evidence of their effectiveness, then why do states insist on developing migrant information campaigns? In this paper, I first consider the purported humanitarian rationale of information campaigns: to save lives through information provision. By unpacking the flawed assumptions upon which these campaigns rest and problematizing discrepancies between their rhetoric and practical implementation, I argue that they rather serve a deterrence purpose. In attempting to dissuade migrants before the border, I analyze information campaigns as extra-territorial control strategies, albeit a 'softer' form infiltrating migrants' everyday lives disguised as humanitarian concern. Finally, I examine campaigns' symbolic function in signifying states' concern with irregular migration to

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domestic audiences, in ways that naturalize migratory risks to occult their responsibility. In portraying migrants as naïve victims, I lastly examine how they help legitimize repressive policies against unwanted migration.

## Informing Migrants To Save Lives: The Stated But Ineffective Humanitarian Rationale Of Information Campaigns

To begin with, information campaigns cover four aspects of irregular migration: the dangers of the journey, the difficulties of living undocumented in destination countries, the immigration policies in receiving countries, and the risks of relying on smugglers and traffickers (Optekamp, 2016). Official guidelines state information campaigns should 'provide objective information without prejudices', and therefore must not 'actively dissuade migration' (Bakers & Massey, 2009, p.3). This informational function rests on the promise of equipping migrants with new and balanced information for them to make better-informed decisions about leaving (IOM, 2003). This rationale, however, relies on multiple flawed assumptions revolving around the idea that migrants are unaware of the risks of migration, and therefore need to be accurately informed (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007). These assumptions are deciphered next, to demonstrate how they inevitably limit campaigns' informational function.

The first assumption of information campaigns is that migrants are unaware of the hardships they face when deciding to migrate. However, research shows that most aspiring migrants are well-informed of the dangers migration entails, but decide to migrate nevertheless (Alpes & Sørensen, 2015). For instance, Ghanaian prospective migrants in van Bommel's (2011) research displayed extensive knowledge of migratory risks acquired through the media and trusted social relations. Senegalese prospective 'boat' migrants in Carling and Hernández-Carretero's (2012) study in fact deemed themselves more knowledgeable about potential risks than campaign producers, particularly if they had seafaring experience. This assumption that people risk their lives because of a lack of information has thus been empirically disproved, which already points to information campaigns' inefficacy.

The second assumption upon which campaigns rest is that migrants' decision-making relies on available and objective information. This implies that migration is an individual 'rational' decision, in which a person moves to improve their life. This simplistic stance disregards that conflict, persecution, repressive governments and human rights abuses may force people to leave through mechanisms unrelated to the availability of information. Additionally, it obscures that migration can be the result of collective action, arising from complex social, economic, and political root causes as well as structural dynamics (Optekamp, 2016). This goes against an abundance of research demonstrating the preponderance of other factors in influencing whether people migrate, such as social networks in host countries (McAuliffe & Koser, 2017). Notably, the 'cumulative' approach proposes that a 'migration culture' is created over time, in which migration becomes a rite of passage to be undertaken despite the risks (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007). In this sense, the importance implicitly given to information minimizes the embeddedness of migration decisions in collective, social and familial networks, and overlooks their well-documented grounding within external and structural factors.

The third assumption – that the information provided will be trusted and sufficient for migrants to reconsider their departure – has been countered by evidence that many prospective migrants deem the opportunity to change their life to warrant the risks (Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011). Indeed, if prospective migrants' situation seems unendurable or if they face threats to their safety, they may consider inaction a greater risk than those mentioned in the campaigns (Townsend & Oomen, 2015). Additionally, when considering how migrants interpret information from campaigns, Carling and Hernández-Carretero (2012) found three mechanisms through which prospective migrants trivialize migratory risks to justify their departure. The first is avoiding negative information and focusing solely on 'success' stories encountered through (social) media, social networks or returning migrants, which are deemed more trustworthy than official sources (McLoughlin, 2008). Migrants in Townsend and Oomen's research (2015) for instance claimed unsuccessful migrants were lazy or unlucky, and justified their own departures by arguing they would be more careful and smarter. The second strategy is discrediting risk information as 'propaganda', particularly if the source is perceived to have vested interests in stopping border crossings (Kosnick, 2014). The third risk-minimizing strategy is to reframe risks as individually controllable. For instance, Ghanaian migrants believed that faith, prayers and proper preparations would minimize the probability of adverse outcomes (van Bommel, 2015). If the outcome of migration is perceived as determined by individual characteristics, then awareness of risks may not

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influence migrants' decisions who are likely to dismiss them. Townsend and Oomen (2015) actually found that their participants interpreted information to support their migratory aspirations no matter what: increased border patrols meant a safer journey while decreased border patrols meant less chance of detection. Information campaigns can thus even become counter-productive for migrants determined to justify their departures. As Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud (2007) assert, the 'objective' knowledge produced by campaigns is not always enough to counteract their migratory 'disposition'.

Unpacking the flawed assumptions upon which campaigns rest leads me to a conclusion supported by existing research: information campaigns are unlikely to succeed in providing new information to migrants to prevent more deaths. The literature makes clear that the relation between risk information and migrants' decisions is much more intricate than the 'rational' individual assumption upon which these campaigns rest, particularly when considering the role of social networks and the context surrounding departure. Not only do these assumptions trivialize the realities of irregular migration, but they also minimize migrants' agency in the decision-making process by implying that they are mere recipients of information.

In addition to flawed assumptions discrediting their informational rationale, campaigns' practical implementation is often much less balanced than suggested by their rhetoric. Whilst policymakers claim to produce 'objective' and 'balanced' material, most campaigns are not neutral in their message (Pécoud, 2010). A recent example is the 'Aware Migrants' campaign, created by the Italian government and the IOM to target 15 African countries in response to the challenges posed by irregular migration (Schans & Optekamp, 2016). Aiming to combat 'false expectations', the campaign includes textual and video testimonials of migrants recounting tragic memories of physical and sexual abuse endured on their journey (Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2017). The stories presented are all of despair, shock, sorrow and anger, and often end warning 'brothers' and 'sisters' that unauthorized migration is a 'road with no return' not to be attempted (Musarò, 2019, p.633). This campaign, like many others, obscures the reasons people leave, does not mention available avenues for legal migration or suggestions for alternatives. It consists largely of fearful imagery and testimonies, warning of the 'nightmare' migration can become (van Bommel, 2015). In doing so, it hopes to generate emotions of anxiety, tragedy and sadness among potential migrants, so they reconsider their departure (Musarò, 2019).

Another example is a television campaign launched by the Spanish government and the IOM in Senegal (Kosnick, 2014). To illustrate the dangers of crossing the Mediterranean Sea, it produced pictures of capsized boats, washed-up bodies, and parents grieving their children. To increase migrants' trust in the message, famous Senegalese singer Youssou N'Dour featured, pleading prospective migrants not to leave because they represent the 'future of Africa' (Kosnick, 2014). Images in magazines and on buses were also displayed, stating 'it makes no sense' to 'risk your life for nothing' (Kosnick, 2014). Again, the factors propelling migrants to risk their lives are not mentioned at all. A similar campaign was produced by the Swiss government to depict the difficulties of undocumented life in a Western country (Schans & Optekamp, 2016). A fictional Cameroonian migrant is shown calling his father back home to reassure him of his new comfortable life and his success in his studies. The viewer is then shown the migrant's 'real' life, a life of begging and trying to evade the police. His harrowing reality is put into contrast with that of his father's, who is portrayed living comfortably in Cameroon as the viewer is told not to 'believe everything you hear'. This campaign frames home as safe and comfortable, while undocumented migration is represented as dangerous and destined for failure.

These examples illustrate how, through fearful imagery, dark messages, cautionary narratives and sensationalized representations, information campaigns largely portray migration as a detrimental and threatening process, leading to inevitable failure and exploitation (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007). They are rarely complemented with more positive messages, the possibility of 'making it', information on safe and legal routes, or with a discussion of the diversity of migratory experiences (Pécoud, 2010). This is odd as producing exaggerated visual and textual elements and inducing fear without offering alternatives are ineffective in producing behavior change (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). Importantly too, while official guidelines raise the need to improve host country citizens' awareness of migrants (Bern Initiative, 2005), in practice only campaigns targeting migrants are implemented (Pécoud, 2010).

Despite their rhetoric of providing 'balanced' and 'accurate' information, campaign producers not only seem to

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disregard evidence on migrants' decision-making and risk-taking, but also present a one-dimensional negative and decontextualized view of migration that is unlikely to be trusted. It is hence doubtful that these campaigns will have the intended policy result of saving lives by making migrants reconsider their departure. There emerges a discrepancy between authorities wanting to implement evidence-based policies, while at the same time no sound evidence for the efficacy of migrant information campaigns. Yet, they remain a prominent policy instrument among Western states (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). This begs the question: what function do information campaigns perform beyond what is officially communicated?

## **Deterring Migrants: The Undisclosed Instrumental Function of Information Campaigns**

As demonstrated, campaigns disseminate predominantly negative information about potential risks. In choosing to depict migration from this angle, I argue that campaign producers – whether consciously or unconsciously – engage in an inherently ideological and selective process of media framing. By emphasizing – or framing – negative, discouraging and fearful information through the words, symbols, tone, and images used, information campaigns do not objectively reflect the reality of migration. Rather, they privilege, fix, and consolidate a particular construction of this reality (Curran & Seaton, 2003). Media framing encourages the communication of a desired interpretation of an issue to an audience (Cooper et al., 2017). In this regard, in framing migration negatively and in fearmongering ways, information campaigns aim to mobilize emotions of fear and doubt to encourage a change in prospective migrants' perception of migration not as an opportunity but as a source of danger (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007). By conveying migration to Western states in a negative light, information campaigns thus aim to deter prospective migrants from leaving in the first instance, despite them perhaps facing desperate situations and qualifying for an asylum claim. In that sense, if the deterrence works, this would constitute the opposite of the humanitarian goal of protecting migrants that campaign producers advocate for and may even constitute a subtle impediment to the principle of non-refoulement. Although this is not a goal explicitly formulated by the actors producing them, information campaigns thus perform an instrumental function: reducing emigration before migrants reach the border (Musarò, 2019).

Because of the shortcomings of traditional migration control and as part of a shift towards more restrictive migration regimes, Western governments are developing strategies to push migration controls beyond their state territory (Musarò, 2019). Although borders remain primary sites of regulation and enforcement, strategies of 'remote control' (FitzGerald, 2020) help Western states pre-emptively stop unauthorized migrants before they reach the physical boundaries of destination countries. Offshore detention centers, extra-territorial and maritime patrols, checkpoints and camps in transit countries as well as restrictions on air, land and sea travel form part of the 'set of practices, physical structures and institutions' enabling the externalization of migration control (FitzGerald, 2020, p.9). What these strategies have in common, and what differentiates them from traditional border control, is a spatial expansion beyond the territorial edges of nation-states as well as a broadening of the actors and the domains that governments attempt to shape through these external bordering practices (Heller, 2014). Because information campaigns exhibit these same characteristics, they should be considered practices of extra-territorial migration control.

Like remote control strategies which displace the 'geographical locus of control' from the borders of destination countries to sending and transit countries (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007, p.1677), information campaigns intervene beyond receiving states' territories. When externalizing their migration control, countries like Italy, Spain and France request – and sometimes pressure – North African countries to cooperate in patrolling passageways, creating and financing refugee camps and detention centres, and organizing repatriation operations (Williams, 2020). As a result, Torpey (2018, as cited in FitzGerald, 2020, p.5) argues that individual states no longer monopolize the 'legitimate means of movement' within their territory. Nonetheless, the collaborations established between different states do not necessarily result in equally sharing the burden of remote control. There is indeed a 'hierarchy of sovereignty' (Lake, 2009, as cited in FitzGerald, 2020, p.5) as origin and transit countries do the work of remote control for destination countries who do not wish to see migrants enter their territory. This spatial expansion of control beyond destination countries is mirrored in the functioning of information campaigns. They depend on inter-state cooperation too: they are instigated and financed by destination states who outsource their dissemination inside source and transit states to target prospective migrants before they reach the border (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007).

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Furthermore, strategies of remote control and information campaigns alike shift away from states' traditional function as 'gatekeepers', who stop or filter migrants at the border (Pécoud, 2010). Remote control strategies focus on other domains, such as efforts to intercept migrants in transit, the use of surveillance technology to police maritime regions, and the use of electronic databases to share information about migrants between states (FitzGerald, 2020; Kosnick, 2014). From stopping and filtering, they widen out to identifying, gathering information, deporting and deterring (FitzGerald, 2020). To do so, extra-territorial control strategies involve new actors, such as airline carriers and intergovernmental agencies enabling operations outside the national border (Guiraudon & Joppke, 2001). NGOs are also often involved in remote control, with structures like refugee camps combining the provision of humanitarian aid with surveillance and control (FitzGerald, 2020).

Because information campaigns likewise centre on a new domain of control –influencing perceptions to deter migrants – they fit into this trend of remote control. Indeed, rather than using effective and direct control at the border, they work to control the migration movement 'upstream' by targeting prospective migrants (Oeppen, 2016). Information campaigns similarly involve partnerships with new actors like the intergovernmental organization IOM, NGOs, celebrities like Youssou N'Dour and local media. In using videos, images, advertisements on buses, social media and television, they move away from the classical 'law and order', top-down surveillance of migrants (Pécoud, 2010). Importantly, they also broaden out to incorporate humanitarian concerns alongside security concerns with their 'lifesaving' objective. As Carling and Hernández-Carretero (2011, p.49) express, information campaigns 'ostensibly seek to protect migrants by warning them against the dangers of migration but are primarily geared to shielding Europe from migrant arrivals'. Disguising objectives of deterrence under demonstrations of care and concern for the safety of migrants enables information campaigns to be funded by humanitarian and development budgets and supported by humanitarian actors such as the IOM (Optekamp, 2016).

Whilst the case was made for information campaigns to be recognized in the taxonomy of remote control, it is essential to recognize that the kind of control they practice has little to do with 'strategies of militarization, securitization and criminalization' predominantly found in the literature (Walters, 2020, p.1198). Rather than mobilizing 'hard' tools such as military equipment, fences, weapons and drones, information campaigns deploy the 'soft' tool of strategically crafted, targeted and distributed messages about the dangers of migration (Williams, 2020). The distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' I make emanates from international politics, wherein 'hard' power refers to coercive power wielded using threats or force, and 'soft' power refers to the subtle use of persuasion to influence behaviors (Wilson, 2008). Using the latter, information campaigns circulate messages of suffering and hardship through images, narratives, videos and slogans that penetrate the intimate spaces of migrants' everyday lives as they are disseminated in sending and transit regions (Williams, 2020). By spreading negative imageries of what migration entails in the spaces where aspiring migrants live and socialize, information campaigns attempt to subtly shape migrants' perceptions and influence them towards a 'culture of immobility' (Pécoud, 2010).

In using this subtle, non-coercive strategy, Musarò (2019) argues that campaign producers aim to redefine migrants' 'truth' about irregular migration to modify their 'choices, desires, needs and wants' in a way that deters them from migrating (Watkins, 2017, p.284). In seeking to affect migrants' conduct, these campaigns are an example of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 2004). Governmentality represents power that is not about external domination or violence, but about less conscious, visible and direct forms of internal self-regulation. Its aim is for individuals to become voluntarily compliant to objectives of control, not because they fear punishment but because they are led to believe it is the right thing to do. With information campaigns, the premise is that if migrants perceive migration as dangerous and scary, they will govern their own mobility by deciding to stay home (Heller, 2014). Regardless of whether this is actually effective, the exercise of power through persuasion represents an addition to the exercise of power through force as emotions become instruments of governance. Importantly, the fact that this strategy of self-governance is developed and required by governments is indicative of the limits of traditional coercive migration control in deterring migrants, as information campaigns aim to 'erect in people's minds the borders they fail to control' (Pécoud, 2010, p.198).

## **Gaining Public Support and Legitimizing Restrictive Immigration Policies: The Symbolic Value of Information Campaigns**

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At the heart of migration control lies a significant dilemma for governments: they must be seen to be in control of their borders, yet direct and hostile actions such as physical confrontations between migrants and border patrols do not depict them positively to significant sections of the public and attracts negative media attention (Oeppen, 2016). In comparison, information campaigns are 'politically palatable' policy instruments (Optekamp, 2016, p.49), enabling governments to be seen favourably as they address both anti-immigration parties' security concerns and to pro-immigration parties' humanitarian concerns. Whilst they have little prospect of achieving their informational purpose and there is limited evidence of their deterrence effectiveness, I argue that information campaigns can yield political advantages and symbolic value to governments.

On the one hand, information campaigns' stated humanitarian objective makes it hard for the public to contest them, particularly in contrast to other more visible and costly forms of migration control. Rallying NGOs and agencies like the IOM in their purported humanitarian mission enables those who implement information campaigns to be framed as benevolent and protective, as well as concerned and caring for migrants' safety (Optekamp, 2016). Because it is arguably hard to say that they are 'bad' or take up unnecessary resources, they help governments be seen favorably by those in support of migration (Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011). Indeed, it is difficult to argue against the idea that information campaigns are doing migrants a favor by keeping them away from smugglers and preventing them from risking their life on the journey. As such, the protection of migrants is not only a policy objective, but also a rhetorical tool for justifying control measures.

On the other hand, by publicly cautioning aspiring migrants of the dangers of migration, information campaigns fulfill the need of policymakers to be 'seen to be doing something' (Oeppen, 2016, p.9) to reduce irregular migration numbers without putting in place substantive or costly changes (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994). For governments, information campaigns represent an easier strategy than diminishing structural inequalities or tackling root causes and can thus help them be seen favorably by those against migration viewing it as a security threat (Optekamp, 2016). Hence, by playing on the ambivalent and dual narrative of security and care, information campaigns make for a compelling and federating policy that speaks to different audiences and thereby helps gain citizens' support and the cooperation of different actors in the migration field. With its rhetoric flexibility, information campaigns ensure adherence on a polarized issue. This raises the question of who the actual intended audience of information campaigns is: prospective migrants or domestic audiences?

In addition to enabling governments to be 'seen to be doing something' (Oeppen, 2016, p.9), information campaigns serve to symbolically displace responsibility for the risk of migrant deaths and injuries from restrictive immigration regimes to traffickers and migrants themselves (Oeppen, 2016). Campaigns for instance obscure that the risks of the Mediterranean Sea journey have increased because of migrants having to evade detection by border police, or that the dire conditions endured by the migrant in the Swiss campaign mentioned earlier are the product of restrictive immigration policies. Recognizing that these migration regimes leave few safe routes for people to cross borders, thereby forcing migrants to take greater risks, would not be in policymakers' interest, particularly if they hope to gain public support through the campaigns. As a result, information campaigns present the risks as naturally given, for instance as resulting from the dangers of the sea (Kosnick, 2014). Alternatively, they blame the cruelty of people traffickers, or the naivety of migrants who have been warned but nevertheless choose to go (Oeppen, 2016). 'Blaming the victim' for their own injuries and fatalities is indeed a much less 'politically painful' strategy (Weiss & Tschirhart, 1994), helping government deflect criticism of their own failures by scapegoating migrants and smugglers. The seemingly neutral, or humanitarian, nature of information campaigns make it even harder to render these abuses visible and the subject of discussion.

Producing tragic images alongside obscuring the causes of migration and shifting the blame for risks unto migrants themselves means information campaigns portray migrants in 'specific ways' that play onto stereotyped and sensationalized narratives (Musarò, 2019). In assuming migrants are naïve and ignorant individuals needing to be informed, information campaigns negate their agency in elaborating coherent and informed migratory strategies (Pécoud, 2010). This portrays them as vulnerable, desperate and passive victims if despite being warned of the risks, they decide to leave. Additionally, by presenting facts about migration without giving a historical or political framework, information campaigns present irregular migration as a tragic 'game of fate' (Musarò & Parmiggiani, 2017). Whilst in reality a large portion of irregular migrants in Western countries are visa overstayers, by depicting

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them in this way, information campaigns give a sense that migrants only come in illegally via the sea or illegal passageways (Kosnick, 2014). As a result, they can reinforce the mainstream media imagery of 'being swarmed' by 'threats' to the nation. This contributes to silently legitimizing the difference between 'us', host country citizens, and 'them', migrants (Musarò, 2019). In doing so, information campaigns produce 'new bordering practices', constructing the migrant as 'Other' in the minds of host country citizens (Musarò, 2019). Similarly, campaigns warning against the risks of people smuggling and trafficking often make no distinction between the two, presenting both types of individuals as exploitative and profit-driven criminals (Musarò, 2019). This depiction obscures that smugglers are often voluntarily approached and oftentimes help migrants escape dangerous situations, overlooking the fact that their service exists as a result of visa restrictions and border controls (Nieuwenhuys & Pecoud, 2007).

By portraying migrants as threats, it can be argued that information campaigns legitimise and garner public support for further restrictive immigration policies (Heller, 2014). In portraying migrants as victims of smugglers and emphasising illegal aspects of smuggling, information campaigns can forward states' agenda of criminalizing activities that aid migrants in crossing borders (Heller, 2014). Indeed, they justify their harsh policies as preventing the exploitation of migrants by smugglers and hence as serving a humanitarian purpose of saving migrants that lies in their best interest. If anything, this helps justify demands for stepping up the fight against irregular migration, including the deployment of new border control technologies (Kosnick, 2014). In this sense, images of migrants' suffering advance the same policies that produced their dire circumstances in the first place. At best, information campaigns, in legitimizing a divide between 'us' and 'them', give fuel to the xenophobic sentiments characterizing much of the public debate and media coverage of irregular migration (Schloenhardt & Philipson, 2013). Ultimately, information campaigns can be a tool to advocate for restrictive immigration policies, whereby the 'spectacle' of suffering is not used to denounce the exclusionary migration system producing it in the first instance, but instead covers it with a humanitarian varnish and makes it appear as necessary.

## Conclusion

Whilst, at first a glance and on paper, information campaigns seem to be a straightforward informational tool helping aspiring migrants understand the challenges awaiting them in migrating, it is worth remembering that 'there is no such thing as an intrinsically innocent instrument of government' (Hood, 1986, p.140 as cited in Weiss & Tchirhart, 1994, p.90). Indeed, a closer look at the inaccurate arguments put forward to justify the implementation of information campaigns raises questions as to their true and undisclosed purpose beyond that of saving lives through information provision. As demonstrated, research has disproven the assumptions that migrants are unaware of migration realities, that their decisions to leave depend on the information provided, and that information campaigns will be trusted. Not only that, but official guidelines stipulating the provision of balanced and objective information are also not adhered to as information campaigns disseminate largely one-dimensional negative and fearmongering portrayals of migration which can, in fact, become counterproductive if they reinforce migrants' decisions to leave. Because policy instruments should be based on established evidence, and the evidence on migrants' decision-making and risk-taking is largely overlooked, information provision does not seem to be information campaigns' only objective.

Indeed, in framing migration negatively, information campaigns aim to change migrants' perceptions to deter them from leaving in the first place. This pre-emptive deterrent purpose resembles that of extra-territorial migration control strategies, both through information campaigns' spatial expansion beyond borders and their broadening of the actors involved and domains incorporated. Militarization, securitization, and criminalization are complemented by persuasion as information campaigns aim to subtly change migrants' aspirations towards a 'culture of immobility' (Pécoud, 2010) by accentuating the dangers of migrating and, conversely, the opportunities back 'home'. The goal is for migrants to govern their own mobility, which, if information campaigns succeeded, would make other forms of border control unnecessary. This mixture of care (through information provision) and control (through deterrence) objectives that information campaigns ambivalently display enables governments to 'be seen to be doing something' from both an anti and pro migration point of view (Oeppen, 2016). Information campaigns further symbolically shift responsibility for the risks of migration from restrictive immigration systems to smugglers and migrants themselves. In doing so, they portray migrants as naïve, ignorant and vulnerable beings who threaten Western nations, thus giving way for the legitimization of further restrictive immigration policies.

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Weiss and Tschirhart's (1994, p.110) argument that to 'inform, educate, and persuade is, from another point of view, to distract, deceive, and manipulate' holds true in the case of information campaigns. While much academic attention has focused on how media images frame refugees visually and how, in turn, they play a role in dehumanizing migrants (Esses et al., 2013), more research needs to delve into the reception of the visuals and slogans of information campaigns. It would be interesting to unveil how information campaigns can shape our imagination of refugees and migrants, particularly when examining their racialized and gendered narratives of danger and failure which were beyond the scope of this paper.

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