



Migration Communication Campaigns Revisited: It's not all the same!

Testing effects of communication channels

May 2022

Introduction

Since 2015, irregular migration has been high on the political agenda in the European Union (EU) and domestically within most Member States.¹ Awareness raising campaigns on the risks of irregular migration have been a popular response. Despite considerable investment in such initiatives, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of campaigns remains insufficient.

Seefar's experience in conducting migration communications has shown that migrants look for information, that they care about what they hear, and that information can change attitudes and behaviour. Seefar's innovative monitoring and evaluation approaches add to the scarce evidence base. Seefar also continues to conduct additional research outside campaigns.

In one of these studies, Seefar directly compared the three most commonly used communication channels in migration communications today: Articles, videos and word-of-mouth communications. We tested how these channels influence three key outcomes: 1) knowledge increase, 2) risk internalisation, and 3) changes in irregular migration plans. There is no comparative experimental evidence on these three methods' different impacts on potential migrants.

A carefully designed experiment on communication channels shows that the communication channel matters: The experiment (described in more detail below) demonstrates that communicating information about the risks of irregular migration through a one-on-one approach is more impactful than communication via videos and articles.

Channels tested



One-on-one consultations



Reading an article



Watching a video

Potential irregular migrants were more likely to show increased knowledge about irregular migration risks and realities when they received information through one-on-one consultations than when they read an article or watched a video. After a one-on-one consultation, potential migrants were more likely to abandon their irregular migration plans. Outcomes on risk internalisation were the same for all channels used.

¹ European Commission. (2015). *COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS - EU Action Plan against migrant smuggling (2015–2020)*.

The Experiment

Seefar's researchers conducted the communication channels experiment in Kayes, Mali. This city is a prominent departure location for irregular migration journeys, given that the region shares borders with Mauritania and Senegal.

In total, 140 male aspiring (irregular) migrants participated. They were either planning or considering engaging in North-bound irregular migration and affirmed they were willing to reach Europe by any means possible.

Seefar's field researcher identified potential participants via a convenience sampling approach, i.e. through their network and visiting places in Kayes.

The experiment aimed to understand how the three different channels (articles, videos and one-on-one consultations) affect the following three key outcomes: a) Increase in knowledge about irregular migration risks and realities; b) Improvements in the risk internalization process and expectations of life in Mali vis-a-vis irregular migration; and c) Changes to irregular migration plans.

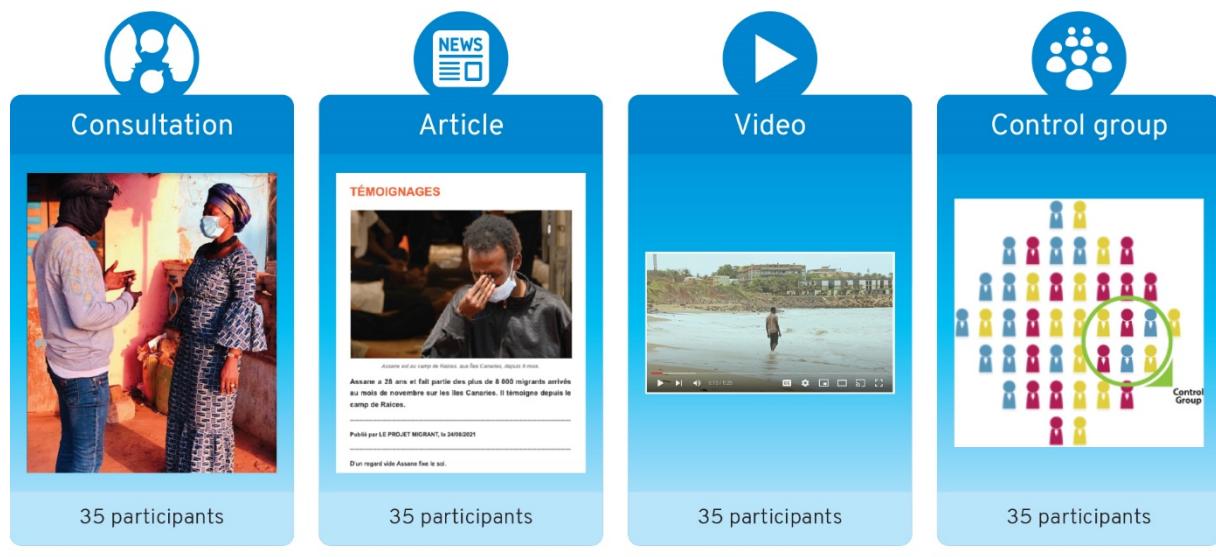
Respondent demographics

Respondent	: Malian
Place of residence	: Kayes
Sex	: Male
Age	: 18-35
Occupation	: Unemployed or informal worker
Language	: Ability to read and write in French

Methodology

The 140 respondents were randomly assigned to one control and three treatment groups:

- Group 1: Received information by attending a one-on-one consultation;
- Group 2: Received information by reading an article;
- Group 3: Received information by watching a video;
- Group 4: Control group.



Each treatment group was composed of 35 participants, and all participants received the same information regardless of the treatment. All treatments were delivered under the same conditions. Participants received their treatment in person by one researcher who gave the consultation, provided the article, or showed the video. The person delivering the consultation was not allowed to provide additional details to avoid differences across treatments. He was, however, allowed to answer clarification questions. Participants had 20 minutes to receive the consultation, read the article or watch the video.

All groups had similar levels of knowledge before the treatment. We compared the three treatment groups' results to the control group's results. The control group represents the counterfactual, meaning this group has valid characteristics that mimic the world in which the participants would not have received the treatment.

The Results

Knowledge increased most among respondents who received a one-on-one consultation

Any information is better than no information. All groups had significantly increased knowledge of risks and realities of irregular migration at the endline compared to their responses at baseline. This knowledge increase may need to be measured at longer intervals to understand lasting effects, but results showed that all three treatment groups showed significantly higher knowledge increase than the control group.²

Articles and videos result in similar levels of knowledge increase - but consultations have the most significant effect. Articles increased correct answers to knowledge questions in the survey by 1.5 and videos by 1.19. The consultation treatment had the most significant impact on knowledge change, increasing correct answers at the endline by 2.7. This result was likely the result of the interactive nature of one-on-one engagement. The beneficiary has an opportunity to receive information and ask for clarification or more details.

Channels did not affect risk internalization and expectations around life in Mali

None of the treatments significantly affected the participants' risk internalization. Whereas the communication channels affected the increase in knowledge, the channel appears not to be related to outcomes around risk internalization - the understanding of how likely a respondent thinks they are to face risks as part of their irregular migration journey personally.

Similarly, the interventions did not influence views around respondents' attitudes toward staying in Mali. The extent to which participants agreed with the statement "I think it is best to build my future in Mali" did not change between baseline and endline. The measurement served as a proxy for understanding potentially changing perceptions around staying in Mali as a "better" option compared to risking their lives in irregular migration journeys.

Channels - especially one-on-one consultations - change migration plans

All treatments significantly changed participants' irregular migration plans, but consultations had the most significant effect. Having received a consultation increased the likelihood of respondents reporting they are not considering irregular migration anymore by 56 percentage points. The next best performing treatment was the video, increasing the probability of reporting not considering irregular migration anymore by 42 percentage points. Articles only increased the likelihood by 34 percentage points.

² 95% confidence level

What does this mean going forward?

Irregular migration and migration decision-making are complex, and this experiment is an attempt to shed light on how best to support migrants via information provision. Migrants can benefit from communication campaigns by receiving knowledge they may not have before, which can sometimes also change minds.

The experiment confirmed that the three main communication channels used in irregular migration communication campaigns (articles, videos, and consultations) increase knowledge about the risks and realities of irregular migration among beneficiaries. Of the three channels, 1:1 consultations do better at increasing understanding and influencing irregular migration plans. Given the one-on-one approach, individual migrants' questions and information needs can be considered, supporting them in making more informed decisions.

Questions about the best ways to improve risk internalisation and perceptions of life in origin countries (in this case, Mali) remain open. They should be further examined - likely beyond the influence of channels - since they are vital components of a successful approach to changing migration plans.

More comparative data with larger, representative samples and case studies from other countries are needed to increase information and inform future migration communication campaigns.



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