# SEEFAR

# 3E IMPACT MANUAL

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# 🔍 Foreward

I'm a proud Australian citizen. But it was a hell of a journey to get to this point. You see, I'm originally from Iran. In 2011, my sister told us she was going to travel to Australia, and a few weeks later she called from Sydney Harbour where she was having a beer. She kept calling my wife to encourage us to take the same journey, then introduced us to someone who could arrange the trip which they promised would be a piece of cake.

So along with my wife, two daughters and some of my neighbours I flew to Jakarta. We spoke with a smuggler who told us we would take a boat trip in a couple of weeks. We had a great time, eating ice cream and seeing a movie at the mall. When we got on the boat and set sail, I thought that this was turning out just like we were told. Then the boat sank. We spent days on an island before eventually being rescued by a fisherman. I knew that some boats had trouble. But being in that trouble was totally different. Imagine seeing your daughters in the water, then stuck on an island and running out of food.

The smuggler refused to return our money. Anyway, we were too scared to try another boat. We ended up living in Indonesia for two years until we were eventually resettled by Australia, flying safely over the same water where we'd swam desperately before.

I didn't have a clue about the refugee system until I was involved in it. I remember taking my CV to the first resettlement interview with UNHCR in Indonesia, since I presumed that Australia would want to hire me if I was a good worker. I proudly showed off my fluent English, not yet realising that the system was really looking for vulnerable people (but not too vulnerable – or too religious).

I feel seriously lucky that I slipped through the closing door of Australia's refugee system. Many more people came after me on the boats, even as Australia started sending them to Nauru and Papua New Guinea. I started telling people back in Iran not to try the journey, but many of them believed I was being selfish, trying to keep Australia to myself.

After looking through the pages of this book, I see a lot in my story that could have been different with better information and someone knowledgeable to talk to. Now that I'm safe in Australia I see my decision as justified. But I probably wouldn't have taken the trip if I'd understood it properly to begin with. If that sounds complicated, I hope I'm making the point that migration communications campaigns are about people – individuals and families making difficult decisions. I was one of them, so I can say that if you're reading these words and planning a campaign, please do it well, because there are lots of people depending on you.

**Hamid the Australian.**

# 📖 Introduction

Migration communications campaigns are strange beasts. Governments and international organisations spend millions on them in the hope of reducing irregular migration. Departments tasked with doing so generally start with no idea how to do them. Activists generally do not recognise their importance. And the general public usually has little awareness that they exist.

Interior or foreign ministries are usually responsible for these campaigns. The person in the ministry responsible for creating the campaign may not be a migration expert or a communications specialist. At some point they will engage an international organisation or a commercial communications agency to implement the campaign. Flabby performance metrics will be set; hundreds of thousands (or millions) will be spent on social media, posters and mass media broadcasts; and at the end no one will know for sure if it had any effect. But because the topic of irregular migration is so politically sensitive, governments will continue spending money on migration management even if there is no evidence that it is effective.

So governments risk wasting money. What's the big deal? They do it all the time. The problem is not the wasted money but the wasted opportunity to help vulnerable people make safer and more informed decisions.

Between 2014 and 2024, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) recorded at least 74,421 migrant deaths worldwide during migration journeys. [1] In 2024 alone, at least 8,938 people died on migration routes worldwide, making it the deadliest year on record. [2]. An unknown number of migrants died on earlier stages of the journey. An even greater number experienced serious abuse. Seefar's research with migrants tells us that they did not expect the danger to be as chronic, frequent or prolonged.

Migrants are making decisions about irregular migration based on imperfect and incomplete information. When they have a fuller understanding of the issues and facts, some make different decisions. This empowers people to avoid hardship, while simultaneously serving the needs of a donor seeking to reduce irregular migration.

This book shares insight to designing effective migration communications campaigns intended to change the behaviour of people migrating or considering migration.

In the last seven years Seefar has tracked over $150 million spent in this field. Migration communications has gone from an under-scrutinised niche to an at times contentious, widely adopted, practice. After 10 years of experimenting and learning, the time seems ripe to build stronger structures to guide the arguments and practice behind migration communications.

This iterative approach has seen the development of a range of practices that migration communications campaigns have come to rely on, with varying levels of perceived effectiveness and requiring varying levels of investment. Activities include:

- Scripting lines for politicians to deliver.
- Providing information and counselling face-to-face, over the phone or online.
- Unacknowledged support to news media and documentary makers.
- Advertising on billboards, television, radio or the internet.

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[1] https://missingmigrants.iom.int/data
[2] https://migrantaffairs.info/2024-becomes-deadliest-year-for-migrants-as-iom-reports-record-deaths/

- TV, radio or internet dramas and sitcoms.
- Training and education for community leaders, teachers, media personnel, CSO actors.
- Community events.
- Comic books, pamphlets and messaging collateral.
- Participating in conversations on social media.
- Educational outreach initiatives, raising awareness of the youth on risks and alternatives to irregular migration in countries of origin.

If you are reading this book, you are probably a practitioner like us. We are going to share lessons about our failures and successes and those that we have seen around us. We are also going to share what we have found to be best practice. For newcomers to the field, we hope this will accelerate learning, avoid waste and make the job more fun. Veterans will recognise some of the pitfalls and find value in the unique combination of approaches we've refined through evaluation.

This book will help you design a communications campaign that is effective for current and potential migrants and for the people financing the campaign. It is a guide to each major component of the 3E Impact method, though it does not try to cover every detailed decision that will be required when using it in your specific campaign.

The focus is on campaigns that address irregular migration, such as people moving countries to work illegally or people crossing borders without visas to claim asylum. We will look at campaigns developed with top-down funding from governments, international organisations and NGOs. Bottom-up ideas that emerge between migrants will not be covered as we presume these are not prompted by externally-driven campaigns. We will also exclude activities and events such as unscripted politicians insisting migrants should be locked up and refugee rights groups holding demonstrations to welcome refugees.

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*"A migration communications campaign should focus on serving migrants, not stopping migration."*

A migration communications campaign should focus on serving migrants, not stopping migration.  Do the former well and the latter will occur on its own for a meaningful proportion of people. If it does not, the tools we describe throughout the book will enable you to understand why your campaign is not working.

We want people considering risky migration to understand the reality of the processes and outcomes they are facing. That reality can be liberating, but it can also be treacherous. We believe there is a strong obligation to help people to work through their options, but the decision is theirs.

## Our Lessons

Seefar has worked on migration communications design, implementation and evaluation for governments, international organisations, private foundations and private companies. We are not experts in every area of this relatively young field. But donors, migrants and peers are kind enough to tell us that we have something useful to say about some important parts of it. The lessons in this book provide examples of problems faced – the 3E Impact method is a key plank of our response.

The Seefar team comes from Afghanistan, Australia, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Eritrea, Germany, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Libya, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Singapore, Sudan, Syria, the United Kingdom and the United States. We have strong experience of migration in Africa, the Middle East, and Central and South Asia. We have much less expertise in migration through and from Latin America. Our focus is not on visa policy or border security systems but on the migrant's perspective.

We cannot say that every design, implementation and evaluation has worked; we can say that we have learned from them all. The result is the 3E Impact method.

## The Context for your Campaign

We do not need to tell you that you have got a tricky job. But before we jump in, let's take a look at the landscape in which we are travelling together and some of the successes and failures.

A major lesson from all kinds of communications activities is that there is a chasm between what the speaker says and what the receiver hears. We give examples in this book of ways in which your audience filters what you say and twists it to fit with their existing knowledge and ambitions.

The key point is that you cannot sit at your desk and get your point across – you will need to be out in the field, where you will discover that you are not the only one trying to get their point across. The communications space includes: politicians from across the spectrum; smugglers; a migrant's family and friends; members of the diaspora, community leaders, journalists; a vibrant social media community and highly influential social media content creators; and international music, TV, films, and social media content that act as advertisements for life in your home country. All of these voices can support, confuse or contradict what you are trying to do. Cutting through the noise will be a major challenge you have to overcome.

You will also notice that there is little support back home for what you are doing. It is easy – and usually justified – for taxpayers and politicians to question the use of public money on communications campaigns. On your left will be people arguing that the entire effort is illegitimate and a waste of money as it is premised on stopping people in need from claiming asylum. On your right will be people who want to preserve a distinct national culture and identity by excluding those from other cultures, believing instead that "charity starts at home".

Some friends, colleagues and enemies will ridicule the idea that communications can solve the problem. You will agree and explain that you are solving just one part of the problem. As hundreds of thousands of people are risking their lives to migrate, you will be convincing these peers that the work you contribute to has helped tens of thousands to choose not to.

In the next few chapters, we process lessons from countless research and dozens of communications campaigns to highlight what to embrace and avoid when designing effective migration communications campaigns that help people, while also achieving public policy aims. The outcome is the 3E Impact method.

# Chapter 1 Planning a Communications Campaign

The first thing to do is set expectations and prepare to get the evidence.

Just like a migrant, if you are planning a communications campaign, it is good to know your destination. This is critical for campaign design and for sustaining your donors' support. A subtle problem is to define what your campaign will not achieve in order to defend your objectives and focus on what it can deliver. You need to communicate whose behaviour will change and what they will do. Your campaign never targets the "general public" and usually focuses on a small proportion of a given nationality or ethnicity in a particular location.

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> It is 2025 and Margot is a European government official responsible for developing strategy on information campaigns. She has plenty of experience with irregular migration issues, and her bosses have given her a budget for communications. But she is sceptical, telling colleagues, "Let's be serious, an information campaign is not going to stop hundreds of thousands of people running away from conflict."

She is right, but she is on the wrong track. It is true that the structural and environmental factors encouraging emigration – like war and poverty – do not magically fade in the light of new information. But she is ignoring the psychological factors. Moreover, she is emphasising one type of behaviour: Hundreds of thousands leaving the country because of conflict. This obscures the opposite behaviour: Millions of people not leaving the country. Margot is setting herself up to fail by misconceiving the purpose of the communications campaign – it means she will not choose the optimal audiences, channels, content and measures of success.

A good communications plan does not aim to stop hundreds of thousands of people. A good communications plan does not try to engage with the whole population. A good communications plan aims to understand and help a distinct group of people. It should include the following elements:

- An understanding of which segments of the total population need what kinds of information. That's your audience.
- An assessment of the life choices available to the audience and what proportion leans towards which option.
- An outline of pathways from current intent to changed behaviour.
- A calculation of the value for money that can be achieved.

When all of the above is in place, you'll find that a good communications campaign is an efficient way to change the behaviour of a minority of the population. If you are challenged by someone asking how communication is going to "solve the problem", you can reply that it is not. It is going to be an efficient way to address hundreds of thousands of people's needs, and some of them will choose not to migrate in the near future. You can show your value for money calculation and compare it with other options to achieve the same result.

When you think of Margot, think of setting expectations and getting evidence.

# Planning a Communications Campaign: Case Study

The advertising executive David Ogilvy once said, "The consumer isn't a moron. She is your wife. You insult her intelligence if you assume that a mere slogan and a few vapid adjectives will persuade her to buy anything." A western government ignored this advice years ago when it developed a migration campaign in a post-conflict country. For discretion's sake let's call the donor country Zembla and the post-conflict country Freedonia.

Zembla designed a mass media migration campaign based on a fairly extreme message of "You will not make it to Zembla." The campaign involved billboards, television ads and radio ads, implemented by a multinational communications company, call it Glossy&Bossy. Zembla spent nearly USD 1 million on the campaign with Glossy&Bossy.

Zembla conducted a baseline survey of the audience's perceptions of Zembla as a destination for irregular migration prior to the campaign. At the end of the campaign, a second large-scale survey was conducted to see what the impact had been.

The campaign was a disaster. Rather than discourage migrants from coming to the country, the campaign made the target audience in Freedonia more aware that Zembla was a potential destination for irregular migration. Worse, they were unable to recall the messages of the campaign.

So what went wrong? Lots of things, but we will just look at four.

First, Zembla violated the cardinal rule of conducting an effective campaign – it was in a hurry and did not do research to test messages with the target audience. That meant campaign messages were unconnected with their thoughts, feelings and motivations. How could Zembla know what would have an impact on potential Freedonian migrants without enough research?

Second, Glossy&Bossy conducted a national campaign advertising irregular migration as an option to people within Freedonia who had never considered it.

Third, Zembla used the country's coat of arms as the brand rather than creating a new brand for the campaign. This meant that the target audience more easily identified the destination country as an option for migration.

Fourth, Zembla did not consider that each potential migrant had unique motivations for leaving home. Therefore, the simplistic, unidirectional messages that Glossy&Bossy created had little bearing on their decisions.

The biggest lesson to take from this example is that it is perilous to focus on speed rather than spend time on research and campaign design. If you make this trade-off then you are making your minister, commissioner or donor vulnerable.

# Planning a Communications Campaign: Irregular Migration Decision Making

> *Elham is our goddess of luck. She lives in the middle of Iran and participated in one of Seefar's longitudinal research projects, in person and over the phone, patiently answering our questions. We select people for these projects by checking whether they intend to migrate irregularly in the next 12 months.*
>
> *After a few months, Elham explained that she had abandoned her plan to migrate. The travel options all seemed to be expensive and risky; plus she was not convinced about the payoffs.*
>
> *The next month, we could not find Elham. When we eventually tracked her down she was in Sweden, happily settling into her new home. She explained that a relative living in Europe had offered to pay for a gold standard smuggling option, telling her that it would be safe and that she'd be happier in Europe. Elham had packed up and departed within a month.*

There is a tendency in the academic literature on migration and in some policy circles to imagine that the decision-making process on whether to migrate develops predictably. Someone looks at their life, does not like it, considers migration, formulates a plan, arranges the logistics and departs. Like this:

Reality is not so neat. When you think about the timing and channels for your communications campaign, think of Elham and remember that migration decision making is not linear. In reality, it tends to look like this:

Non-linear decision making has many implications for your migration communications campaign. It means that we should listen but also question what people tell us about their migration plans. It is better to track who actually departs, then look back and see what is special about them, rather than just ask their intentions. This will help to target your activities.

The charts above also highlight that there are multiple opportunities to work with people considering irregular migration. They are not on an escalator, they are in a pinball machine. You need to be available to people when they want to talk; when they have just heard something new; when something has changed in their lives. Static messaging through billboards and advertisements designed last month can provide reference points, but to be effective you will need to be much nimbler and more fluid.

# Chapter 2 Avoiding Mixed Messages

Countries, like people, enjoy talking about themselves. Countries also like talking to themselves. Many politicians spend many hours a day telling citizens about what they, as citizens, value or want. Many a foreign policy is therefore really a domestic policy in disguise, a stern message a society sends to the world that is in fact a love letter written to itself about its needs and desires.

If politicians want to communicate effectively with the goal of reducing irregular migration, then they have to be careful that the messages they are sending out are not contradictory – on one hand telling migrants to stay away and the other suggesting they are welcome.

If countries say loudly that they are good international citizens and respect the rights of refugees, some people will naturally believe that they are encouraging them to come and claim asylum. If they muse boldly about the need for immigrants to do their domestic work and balance their ageing populations, some people will expect jobs if they can only reach that labour market.

We have to be careful about matching purpose, message, audience and channel.

Politicians funding migration communications have two audiences to communicate with. The first is their intended target audience in countries of origin. The second is their constituents at home whose tax are funding these projects. These two audiences are distinct and therefore warrant two separate communications strategies. The case study below illustrates the consequences of combining the two.

## Avoiding Mixed Messages: Case Study

One country's campaign in Afghanistan to reduce the number of people risking their lives and money through irregular migration had the opposite effect. The themes of the campaign were:

1. We are an open and generous country that respects our international legal obligations.
2. There are legal channels and illegal channels to enter the country; don't take the illegal channels.
3. Stay at home and work with your friends and family to build your country.

We can unpack why it did not succeed.

The first theme was for a domestic audience and was more likely to encourage Afghans to choose the donor country as a destination. It is understandable that countries want people to believe they are open and generous and respect international legal obligations. However, many migrants will see this as implying that irregular arrivals are welcome. Hearing that a country is open and generous can easily be misunderstood as an invitation, especially since many migrants are already predisposed to look for facts that support their ambitions.

The second theme, on legal and illegal channels, fails to take the Afghan perspective into account. Most people considering irregular migration understand the idea of permitted and forbidden, but interpret it in a different way than a donor government official. There is behaviour that many Afghans know to be

forbidden, but which is acceptable for reasons of survival or advancement in a precarious environment. The country produced over 4,000 tons of opium in 2016, for example.

The idea that a destination country considers it illegal to take a journey that results in long-term prosperity suggests to many Afghans that it is better to beg forgiveness later than ask for permission first. If the facts show that Afghans can stay in a European country for years, or even forever, what does illegal really mean? As we show in the 3E Impact method, it would be much better to engage with ambitions, concepts and language that are meaningful from the other side's point of view.

The third theme of the campaign in question was encouragement to stay in Afghanistan with friends and family to build the country. This one was the best-conceived. It at least engages directly with the audience, and the message can be understood on their terms. That is not to say it would be effective on its own or add much value. We do not have enough evidence for that, and there are reasons to be sceptical. But at least this message could work if it travels clearly from sender to receiver.

It is an impossible challenge to keep all the voices in your communications space on message. But you should certainly be ambitious in engaging and advising a wide range of people.

For example, if a minister gives you money for effective communications campaigns, you can often help your objectives by giving the minister talking points in return. Explain what will work best and what to avoid. Also draw up a long list of those who are likely to speak out on the issue and think about how to reach out to them. If not, all your hard work and subtle messaging can be blown away by a single unscripted comment.

A more subtle and far-reaching challenge is determining if the right people are listening to your messages. As with a lot of public policy communications campaigns, it can be difficult to know whether the feedback you are getting is from those already sympathetic to your cause. It is easier to like something on Facebook if you already believe in the message than if you do not.

There are two ways to deal with this, and we discuss each in more detail in the 3E Impact method. First, audience segmentation allows us to engage more accurately. Some audience segments are ignored. Some receive gentle prompting. Others are engaged and immersed. But all audience segments have different start states, expected end states and pathways in between. That means you need to engage with each audience differently and on their own terms – not as one amorphous blob.

Second, we need to track what happens to the people we engage. A randomised controlled trial or a longitudinal study are excellent for this. In any case, we need some way of checking whether we are talking to ourselves or to the people who really matter.

# Chapter 3 Selecting Audience Segments

Seefar has conducted primary research with migrants in source, transit and destination locations in West Africa, North Africa, East Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, Europe and Oceania. But those are just places. What you need to think about is people. And you need to move quickly past the continent, country, even ethnicity, in order to identify useful segments of your audience. Each piece of the pie is different.

There is rarely a homogenous ethnic audience within a source country, so your campaign approach (i.e. your channels and messages) needs to be sensitive to this.

We can deconstruct this by looking at the example of Nigeria – a country of more than 228 million people with a lot of ethnic groups and languages. A campaign focused on Nigerians needs to first determine which Nigerians will be targeted and how they are different from their fellow citizens. What channels and filters do they have? What evidence do you have for how they respond?

Although this seems like a problem, it is really an opportunity. A national campaign is unnecessary. Your engagement space is much smaller than that. If you have access to a destination country's data on the States, districts or towns where Nigerian migrants begin their journey or transit through, you will see that most come from 5 States or fewer (Edo, Delta, Imo, Lagos, Kano), and usually transit through 2 to 6 key States (Lagos, Edo, Kano, Borno, Ogun, Seme) that are migration hubs. Delivering a campaign in the other provinces (there are 36 States and one capital region in Nigeria) won't be as impactful as delivering it in regions that host a high number of origin and transit migrants. That's why Seefar has focused its previous campaigns in Nigeria in Lagos and Edo States which are both locations of origin and transit. And you do not want to end up like Zembla – increasing interest in irregular migration among people who were not previously considering it. If you don't have that data, do a research project first.

So now you know the priority populations. You next need to understand motivations, knowledge and perceptions in the different segments of your audience. This means assessing not only what people know and believe, but also their capability to act and whether their environment enables or constrains those actions. Chapter 7 explores this in more detail.

It's also essential to examine how these patterns shift at different points along the migration journey. A lot changes as migrants move from source countries, to early transit countries, to key staging locations, to destination countries. Their access to communication tools and information varies hugely between locations. Their sensitivity to, and perception and fear of, risks grows. And the narrative of their decision-making process changes.

The issues of a Pashtu-speaking man in Kabul are going to be different to a Kurdish-speaking man in Erbil. Insecurity may be a key concern for both. But the opportunities at home, access to funds and feelings of patriotism will be different. It is also useful to determine their levels of knowledge about the trip and the intended destination; the role of their families; the psychological and cultural references used to justify their trips; and their sensitivity to different kinds of information or beliefs.

This boils down to research. Your research has to identify audience segments and what they know and think. It has to identify how each segment thinks and feels about migration or they will not listen to you. You will waste money, the opportunity to help people in need and your own time.

# Selecting Audience Segments: Communities vs. Individuals

Most migration communications campaigns over the last decade have focussed on driving change in the attitudes and behaviours of individuals. But campaigns could also aim to create wider behaviour change by altering social norms and values in a whole community.

Why have campaigns usually focussed on the individual level? In a nutshell, it's easier and cheaper to verify the impact of your intervention at the individual level. When you design a campaign to create change in the behaviour and attitude of the direct beneficiaries of your campaign activities, you can always interview a sample at different time periods, easily obtaining data points about the impact of the activities on them. However, if you design a campaign to change social norms and values at a community level, you'll need to find a way to show how people who potentially have not been involved directly in your campaign activities have been impacted by them. You'll also need more funding and longer project cycles than most migration communication campaigns have traditionally been granted.

Examples in this book tend to be from individual-focused campaigns, because that's the approach we've tried, tested and evaluated the most. But in recent years, we have also implemented community-level campaigns with civil society and media personnel training and community influencers. Research shows that there are many communities in origin countries where irregular migration is driven by deeply entrenched social norms. For example, in some communities in Nigeria, we've found that young males are often heavily influenced by a sense of duty to take on a dangerous journey to Europe in the hope of eventually supporting relatives through remittances. In such cases, attempting to eradicate this social pressure is a worthy investment. In 2024, one of our projects in Nigeria included consultations with parents and relatives also called «household influencers». They played a critical role in shaping migration decisions within families, with 83% (100 out of 120) successfully initiating migration-related discussions. Among them, 64% reported that their relatives had reconsidered or delayed irregular migration plans.

In another project concluded in 2024 in Nigeria, Seefar led training and capacity development workshops with women-focused CSOs to enable them to lead effective and gender-sensitive migration communication campaigns in their communities. As a result of this training and mentoring, one CSO designed community workshops to promote engagement on the topic and implemented a hotline service generating over 400 requests for further information on irregular migration. Another CSO delivered community events in marketplaces in Nigeria leading to 100 migration consultations with women and built a network of journalists to champion the issue of migration resulting in 20 pieces of media coverage on the campaign.

These examples show the power of including secondary audience/beneficiaries in the migration communication campaign design as a way to influence social norms to amplify and sustain the impact of the project on the longer term.

When it comes to counselling secondary audiences, the first step is to use pre-campaign research to identify those communities (which could be geographical, but could also be digital) and to understand the extent to which social norms are influencing their migration decision-making.
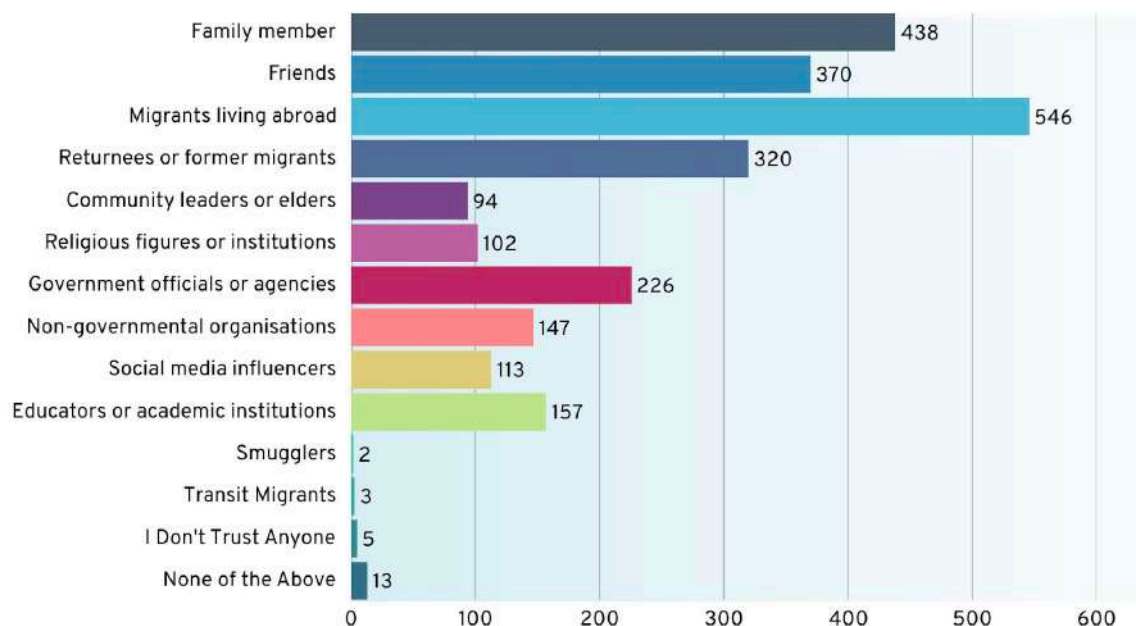
# Chapter 4 Channels and Messengers

Migration intentions are often preceded by informal discussions and social cues shaping individuals' outlooks on mobility. Influences include members of the diaspora, family members, social networks, returnees, religious leaders, community elders, smugglers, and, to a lesser degree, institutions such as NGOs or government authorities.

The chart below shows the results of  of 958 quantitative surveys [3] conducted with representative population sample of migrants, potential migrants, and their communities [4] in Niger, Nigeria, and Tunisia in 2024. The combined results exclude some differences between countries, migration status, and age (discussed further below), but the pattern is clear: people considering migration go to members of the diaspora, friends and family, and other people with experience of migration for information. These people are who they trust the most to give them information about migration. People need information delivered personally from others they trust. This is a critical consideration when designing a migration communications campaign.

## Most Trusted Influencer to Provide Accurate Migration Information

Who do you trust the most to provide accurate information about migration?

| Influencer | Value |
| --- | --- |
| Family member | 438 |
| Friends | 370 |
| Migrants living abroad | 546 |
| Returnees or former migrants | 320 |
| Community leaders or elders | 94 |
| Religious figures or institutions | 102 |
| Government officials or agencies | 226 |
| Non-governmental organisations | 147 |
| Social media influencers | 113 |
| Educators or academic institutions | 157 |
| Smugglers | 2 |
| Transit Migrants | 3 |
| I Don't Trust Anyone | 5 |
| None of the Above | 13 |

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[3] 402 in Niger, 390 in Nigeria, and 166 in Tunisia
[4] Participants were selected based on predefined criteria to ensure diverse representation across demographics, socioeconomic backgrounds, and migration experiences. The survey participants represented a varied demographic. Female participants made up 40.6% of those surveyed. The largest age group (27.1%) was 18 to 21 years old, and over half of the participants (54.8%) were single. Concerning migration, 34.4% indicated potential for irregular migration, while 11.5% were in transit. The remaining 54% of respondents were either legal migrants or non-migrants.

Another source which has emerged from our research as commonly used and highly trusted is social media and messaging apps. The popularity of social media as a source for migration information has become prominent in the last few years, especially for younger audiences. But it's important to remember that when people say they trust social media for information, what they're most likely saying is that they trust the people they follow on social media for information – which takes us back to family, friends and other migrants or returnees, and influential figures such as social media influencers. International organisations, NGOs and government sources, on the other hand, come in significantly further down the list in terms of use and trust. So if you want to include a social media component in your campaign, you'll still have to take into consideration the question of building trust in the messenger you use online; be that a brand, or actual individuals with names and faces.

## Channels and Messengers: Role of the Diaspora

In this book we look at communications activities that recruit members of the diaspora as communication messengers to inform potential migrants about irregular migration.

At first it seems logical to work through the diaspora to communicate to those in countries of origin about irregular migration. People in the diaspora speak the language, understand their compatriots back home and can talk credibly about life in the new country or the journey to get there.

Seefar's 2024 research on information and misinformation influencing migration decisions in Niger, Nigeria, and Tunisia reinforces this view. Across all three countries, friends and relatives living abroad emerged as the most influential and trusted sources of migration information. They not only serve as motivational figures but also as practical advisors, sharing logistics, contacts, and testimonials that shape decisions and expectations.

More than half (56.9%) of surveyed respondents identified diaspora contacts as their most trusted source, far surpassing the influence of traditional institutions. Their credibility is amplified by the constant stream of curated daily life content shared via WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Facebook. Even when their success abroad comes with hardship, their visible material gains validate migration as a communal aspiration. This bolsters community-wide endorsement of migration and reinforces the perception that success abroad is tangible and replicable, especially for the younger audiences who are especially active online.

Rate the Influence of Relatives or Friends Living Abrooad

Age group: ● 18-21  ● 22-34  ● 35-44  ● Total

| | No influence at all | Slight influence | Moderate influence | Strong influence | Very strong influence |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18-21 | 10,0 | 10,0 | 15,0 | 23,1 | 41,9 |
| 22-34 | 11,7 | 15,3 | 17,0 | 27,0 | 28,9 |
| 35-44 | 8,1 | 12,7 | 19,9 | 28,5 | 30,8 |
| Total | 10,4 | 13,3 | 17,1 | 26,3 | 32,9 |
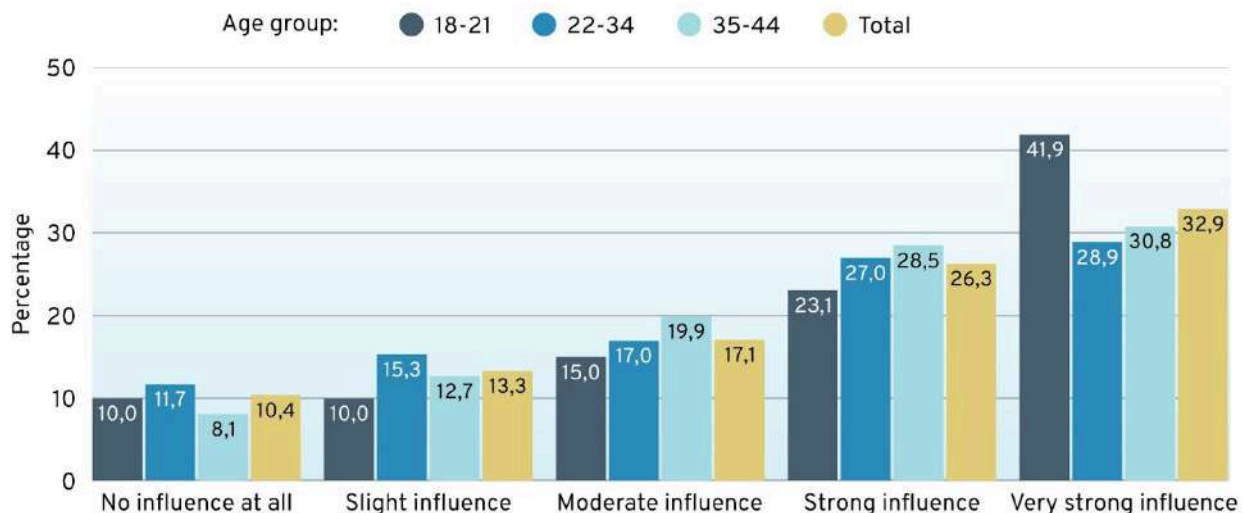
Therefore, closer inspection and experience suggest that it is only a good idea to invest in communications through the diaspora if there is a clear path to increased knowledge, a shift in attitudes and/or behaviour change. Effective and efficient behaviour change campaigns will expend their effort on the audience whose behaviour is the focus, rather than on interlocutors.

An initial problem is figuring out who in the diaspora actually agrees with your perspective that irregular migration is risky. It is not obvious – and research shows it is not accurate – to presume there is a strong willingness among the diaspora to help provide information that may discourage irregular migration. You will usually need to spend time and money identifying and motivating people to be part of the effort. That is time and money you could spend on the potential migrants themselves.

You will also need to identify members of the diaspora with the cultural awareness and connections to help with the campaign. The Iranian diaspora in Australia, for example, is mostly Bahai, a minority group somewhat culturally distinct from many other Iranians. Sectarian divides need navigating in countries like Syria and Iraq. Similarly, the more educated and eloquent Nigerian migrants who are attractive interlocutor candidates to government communications departments may not have the relevant networks and capacity to influence poorer people back home.

Our experience studying and evaluating campaigns has found that campaigns find it difficult to recruit diaspora that arrived through irregular methods, though their experiences are most relevant. As such, campaigns end up gravitating toward hiring diaspora members who are more educated, successful or may have arrived using legal methods. This frequently means they are hiring from a different socioeconomic class of migrants than the target audience. One interviewee mentioned that the campaign exposed her to people that she never would have interacted with at home.

Migrants trust diaspora when they give them information on how to successfully migrate and if they provide "positive pictures of Europe". They were distrustful of any messages from these groups that would deter them from migrating.

More of a problem is that members of the diaspora are by definition an example of success. They have made it, and they are settled. Listening to a member of the diaspora tell you not to migrate is like hearing

a recently minted millionaire tell you that, sure, he got rich by playing the lottery, but when you really think about the odds it makes no sense to waste money on a lottery ticket.

> *"The journey is risky."*
> *Okay, but you made it.*
> *"Beware of smugglers, they'll rip you off."*
> *Okay, but you made it.*
> *"Life over here's not as good as you think it is."*
> *Yeah, well, life back here's not as good as you think it is either.*

The complexity of working through the diaspora was underlined by a bizarre pattern in our research. If you ask someone who travelled irregularly whether their life is as good as they expected, a majority will say yes. But if you take a description of their life and show it to someone who hasn't travelled yet, they say it is worse than they had thought.

The reason for this is rationalisation. Members of the diaspora have often invested a lot of time and effort to get where they are. Humans tend to be more positive about things they have invested in.

We are not saying that all diaspora engagement is ineffective. But it tends to be more costly and complicated than going straight to the primary audience. Diaspora engagement adds links in the chain of communication, and it is better to talk directly to the people you want to reach. If you are looking for influencers, find people within the target communities themselves. This lets you replicate the advantages of the diaspora without the downsides and the risks.

## Channels and Messengers: Family Members

Families, particularly parents and elders in rural areas, play a pivotal – and sometimes overlooked – role in driving migration decisions. Migration is frequently described as a "family project," involving pooled financial resources and communal expectation. In the Learning, Awareness, and Counselling for Empowerment (LACE) project research in Niger, Nigeria, and Tunisia, family was rated as the second-most influential source (after diaspora), especially among youth aged 18–21 and those with secondary education or lower. Nearly half of the survey respondents (45.7%, 438 out of 958) selected family members as one of the most trusted sources of accurate information about migration.

Analysis by planned migration pathways reveals important distinctions in perceptions of family influence. Those intending to migrate irregularly were more likely to report strong family influence. For example, 35% of this group rated family influence as "very strong" compared to 32.4% of those planning to migrate legally and 16.2% of those not planning to migrate at all.

This influence can manifest as encouragement, pressure, or a sense of duty – particularly among young men. As such, the household becomes a crucible where aspirations and social obligations intertwine, generating a sustained push towards irregular migration.

In 2024, one of our projects in Nigeria included consultations with parents and relatives also called household influencers. They played a critical role in shaping migration decisions within families, with 83% (100 out of 120) successfully initiating migration-related discussions. Among them, 64% reported that their relatives had reconsidered or delayed irregular migration plans.
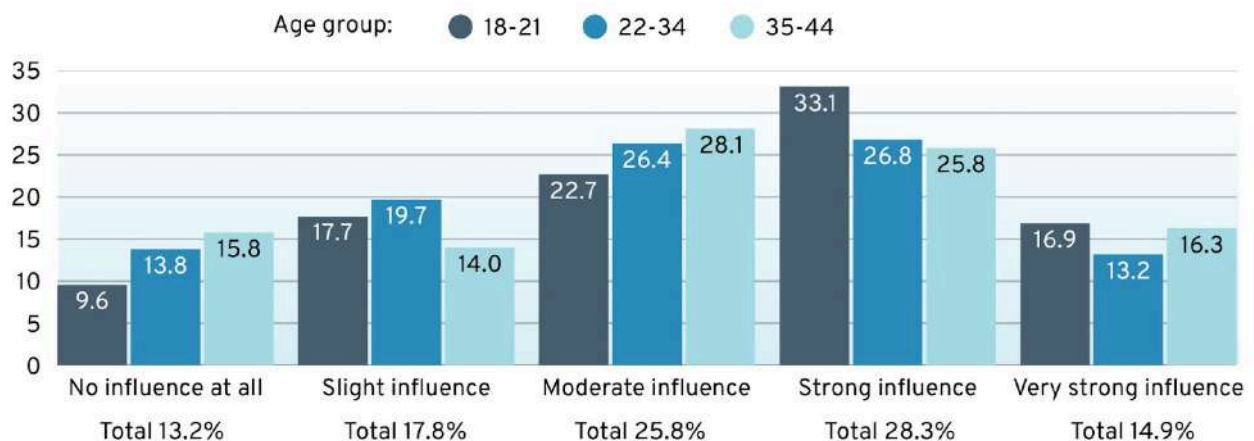
For campaign designers, this underscores the importance of including household influencers as a strategic secondary audience. It is also important to reflect on the best way to reach out to them, which, from our experience in advertising household influencers' consultations in Nigeria and Morocco, proved to be more efficient in person (through direct in-person outreach, schools, community events, local organisations), than through social media advertisement.

## Channels and Messengers: Role of Returnees

### Rating of Returnees by Age

Rate the Influence of Returnees

Age group: ● 18-21 ● 22-34 ● 35-44

| | No influence at all<br>Total 13.2% | Slight influence<br>Total 17.8% | Moderate influence<br>Total 25.8% | Strong influence<br>Total 28.3% | Very strong influence<br>Total 14.9% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18-21 | 9.6 | 17.7 | 22.7 | 33.1 | 16.9 |
| 22-34 | 13.8 | 19.7 | 26.4 | 26.8 | 13.2 |
| 35-44 | 15.8 | 14.0 | 28.1 | 25.8 | 16.3 |

When looking for influencers, it might also appear attractive to recruit those who have previously migrated from within the target communities. Audiences at events we run often appreciate testimonials from returnees that share the problems they experienced on the journey and reflections on their lives in the destination countries. Returnees speak the language, understand their compatriots back home and can talk credibly about the journey, life in the new country and even their experiences of return. They can also highlight the risks of deportation and directly compare life abroad with life at home.

Seefar's research on information and misinformation in Niger, Nigeria, and Tunisia confirms that returnees are perceived as credible and authentic messengers. Their influence is especially strong among younger

people aged 18–21, who are more likely to view them as having a "strong" or "very strong" influence on migration decisions compared to older age groups. This likely reflects the younger audience's stronger connection and sensitivity to peer narratives and social aspiration.

Having experienced quite a tough journey, arrival and return, many returnees feel motivated to support potential irregular migrants to spare them the same experience. For some it might even be a way of dealing with their experience. Returnees we interviewed said that they have a sense of familiarity in interacting with audiences and their experiences and that they feel an "emotional connection" to their audiences. Many returnees spoke positively about their ability to contribute to improving access to information about irregular migration.

However, the effectiveness of returnees as messengers can be limited by the stigma they face. In many communities, returning without significant financial success or before achieving expected milestones is seen as a sign of failure. Returnees interviewed by Seefar highlighted this as a major challenge in their outreach work. Unrealistic expectations such as the assumption that returnees would share financial gains widely among extended family further compound this perception. As a result, some returnees reported feeling disheartened by the stigma, emotionally burdened by having to revisit traumatic experiences.

Further, while returnees are a trusted source of information, our studies show that they are very rarely listed among the most trusted sources. Therefore, if a returnee's account is contradicted by a more trusted source, such as a successful diaspora member, the returnee's account will often be disregarded.

Campaigns should not take for granted that the influence of returnees will contribute to their success. Much more important is that the returnee influencers you are hiring:

1. are motivated to have an impact and support their communities;
2. are known and trusted individuals within their community; and
3. have good communication skills and are empathetic individuals.

Rather than a returnee, in many cases a person who is very well connected within the local community and has considerable community work experience may be better equipped to be an effective influencer.

## Channels and Messengers: Governmental and Non-Governmental Organisations

As highlighted by the LACE research, government agencies and NGOs continue to face challenges related to perceived relevance and credibility. While some respondents acknowledged their role in awareness-raising efforts, institutional actors were generally rated as having low influence and limited trust. Their impact remains constrained unless coupled with locally embedded messengers, accessible referral pathways, and responsive feedback mechanisms. This underscores the importance of community-based delivery, participatory engagement, and sustained presence - particularly in rural areas where institutional entities are often viewed as remote or disconnected.

At the same time, it is important to note that local civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs can play a valuable role when they possess established trust within their communities and maintain direct access to key audience segments. In several Seefar-led campaigns, strategic partnerships with such actors have

been integral to campaign success. These collaborations often include training and capacity-building components aimed at strengthening local partners' communications capacity and aligning messaging with behavioural objectives. When appropriately supported, these organisations can serve as credible, culturally relevant messengers and contribute meaningfully to reaching and engaging target populations.

## Channels and Messengers: Use of Mass Media

> *"In a café in Senegal, a talk show breaks for an advertisement. Mamadou looks up when he sees a Spanish Coast Guard officer appear on the screen. The officer explains that the Spanish government, in partnership with Frontex, actively patrols and turns back boats attempting to cross into the Canary Islands. He warns that anyone arriving irregularly will be detained and repatriated. Mamadou eats some rice and says, "When I get to Spain, I'd like to be a lifeguard.""*

Even when you have a simple message like Spain's *Stronger Borders* campaign, it can easily be distorted. It is tempting to see mass media as a simple megaphone, but it is more effective to think of broadcast channels as long threads in a tapestry you weave with the audience.

If your government makes a major policy change, such as tightening asylum procedures, advertising can be helpful to get the basic facts out to a wide audience. But you will need to use some of the other tools described in this book to sustain engagement and make sure that the facts are interpreted correctly. Simply announcing the policy will not change behaviour unless people understand how it impacts on their ambitions.

You will also need to commit to carrying out research on the ground in order to know what impact you've had. Beyond disseminating a major policy change, cost–benefit analyses usually show that advertising is much more expensive than alternative methods. A better way to use mass media is to plan for the long term. You want to shift norms through stories people tell each other. You want local media to report on the issues in a way that supports your objectives. And you want to build up brands that embody the norm without people needing to think about it. This isn't a matter of just broadcasting slogans; it's about shaping narratives over time. The key point here is that this is a deliberate process over time; you are not splashing paint on the wall, you are weaving a tapestry.

While online outreach is often the most cost-efficient approach, certain situations, such as reaching communities with low connectivity, call for in-person outreach or alternative media. These factors should always guide your choice of communication methods.

# Channels and Messengers: Use of Social Media

> *The European Union (EU) needed an information campaign that could respond to the surge of people arriving on its shores. At a seminar on the topic, a government official responsible for enforcement against migrant smugglers said, "I can go on my phone right now and find you some smugglers advertising on TikTok." He went on to explain that we must focus on social media as an "efficient" antidote to the smugglers' "propaganda".*

In the 21st century, no self-respecting communicator from London to Lesotho can pitch a campaign without including social media. The ubiquity of services like Meta makes its potential seem obvious: Even migrant smugglers are on there. Users can monitor the campaign in real time; see how people are responding; and the Meta interface is comfortingly familiar. Meta and other platforms also allow for precise audience targeting (by demographics, geolocation, and interest), which is extremely useful and relevant when addressing specific audience segments of your campaign. Advertising on social media is as simple as picking up a hammer. Of course, once you are holding a hammer, every problem starts to look like a nail. But it is rare you will find a pattern of migrant behaviour that responds to your hammer as straight and true as a nail.

A common approach to social media campaigning in migration communications is to use social media channels, usually Meta, to broadcast messaging. The messenger is often branded as or publicly associated with a government or international organisation. And the monitoring framework often doesn't square with the objectives. (Be suspicious of anyone who tells you they drive awareness change via Meta, then only reports on reach.)

As our research into the most trusted sources suggests, social media has great potential as a channel for influencing potential migrants; but to have an impact, your social media channels need to feel more like a space for discussion and your messengers need to win the audience's trust. For example, if we are running a page associated with the Zemblan government, we would expect its influence to be limited by users' views about the Zemblan government's objectives. Most of the target audience – people considering irregular migration to Zembla – while keen for factual information, distrust spin from this source and will be coy about exposing their own intentions in any online conversations.

Most of the social media components of migration communications campaigns are built on these broadcast properties. They are like safe, secure islands in the ocean of social media. We set up a lighthouse and some sailors will visit, but it is not where they get their sustenance. To be more influential, dive into the waters and swim more freely. But doing so is difficult for the top-down communications campaigns usually designed by governments and international organisations, because it means we need to create or co-opt a personalised, respected presence among communities of interest. It means we need to allow free-flowing discussions that may run tangential or counter to our ultimate goal for a while. And it means we must be nimble.

A major advantage of nimble social media engagement is that it tends to provide better evidence of impact. If you coordinate a donor-branded, broadcast-oriented page, you will find yourself reporting views,

likes and engagements to your funders. Encouraging stuff, but inevitably someone will ask whether it has any effect. You do not know – your metrics on "impact" are like a drunk person searching for their keys under a streetlight, because that is where they can see. The best way to demonstrate impact on social media is to run dynamic, responsive campaigns which generate sign ups and, when measured correctly, increase knowledge directly.

While traditional methods such as expensive offline surveys are still important for measuring results, social media can also demonstrate impact. Social media allows you to ask targeted questions, track how knowledge and perceptions shift over time, and gather case studies that reflect actual outcomes, such as increased awareness or sign-ups to a service. This kind of direct, interactive engagement can provide compelling evidence of impact at a fraction of the cost—so long as you've earned your audience's trust.

Social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, Instagram) plays a dual role as a mirror and amplifier of migration aspirations. Participants in LACE Research described how these platforms normalise migration, particularly through glamorised visual content shared by diaspora figures and influencers.

Platforms like TikTok and Instagram serve not only as storytelling arenas but also as planning and peer-research tools, especially for youth aged 18–24. WhatsApp, on the other hand, is more private, allowing for trusted, one-on-one information exchange. These platforms collectively build echo chambers that reinforce the desirability and attainability of migration.

SEEFAR

## Rating of Social Media by Age and Country



**What is your age?**
- 18-21
- 22-34
- 35-44

**What country are you in at the moment?**
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Tunisia

Total

Rate the Influence of Social Media

**No influence at all**
- 8,5
- 11,9
- 13,1
- 17,7
- 8,5
- 2,4
- 11,3

**Slight influence**
- 15,8
- 16,8
- 16,3
- 25,4
- 12,3
- 4,2
- 16,4

**Moderate influence**
- 14,2
- 19,1
- 22,6
- 24,6
- 15,6
- 10,8
- 18,6

**Strong influence**
- 29,2
- 25,4
- 24,4
- 23,1
- 29,2
- 26,5
- 26,2

**Very strong influence**
- 32,3
- 26,8
- 23,5
- 9,2
- 34,4
- 56,0
- 27,6

Percentage
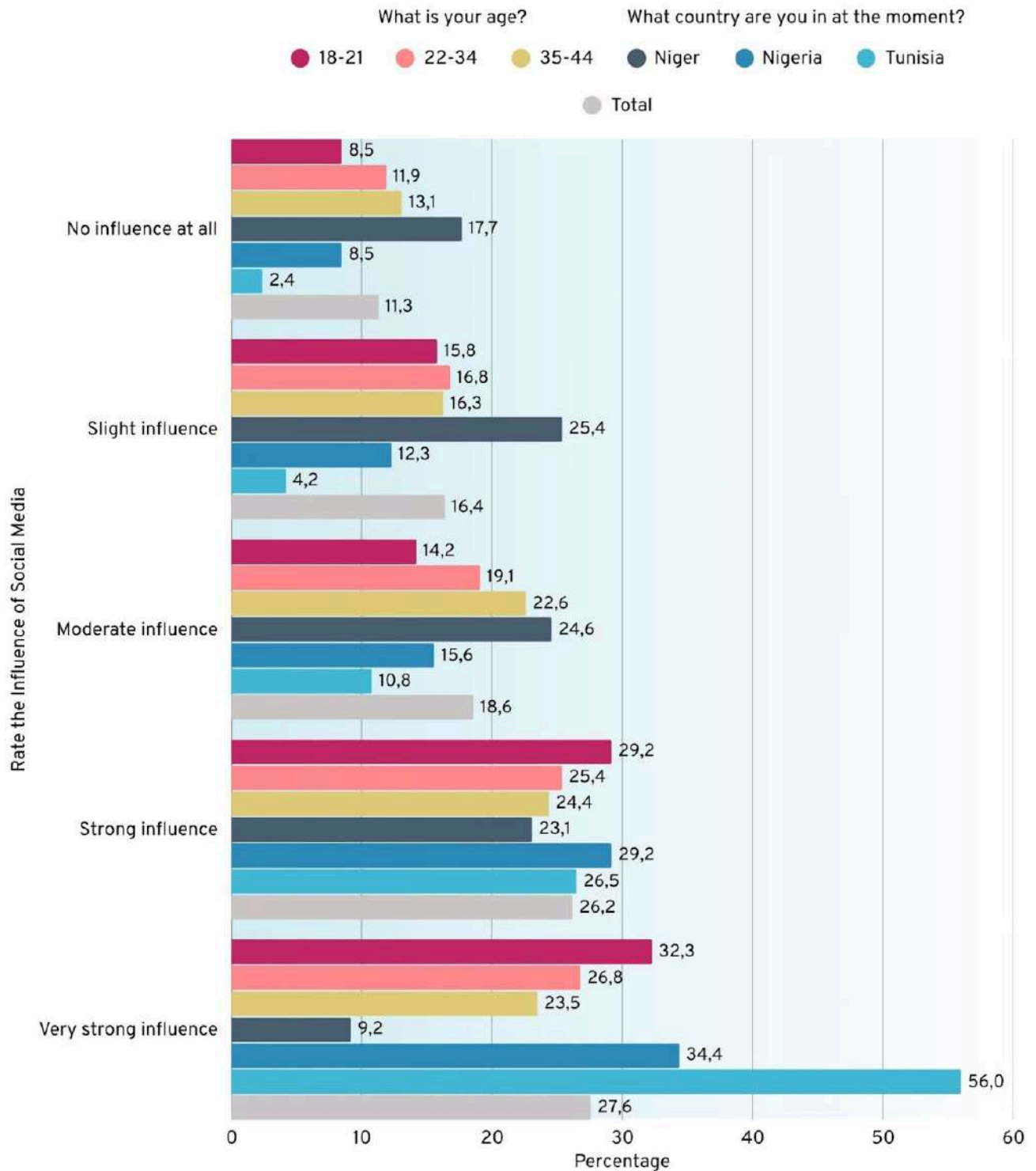
Despite their popularity, few respondents viewed these platforms as fully "trusted," highlighting the tension between widespread use and low credibility. Nonetheless, they remain essential arenas for engagement, particularly if trust can be built further through social media influencers/content creators as key campaign messengers.

## Channels and Messengers: Social media influencers

Social media influencers have emerged as a powerful and cost-effective channel for engaging younger audiences on migration-related issues. Among potential migrants aged 16 to 35, influencers are often viewed as relatable, trustworthy figures whose content can cut through institutional scepticism and stimulate meaningful dialogue. Seefar's experience has shown that strategic collaborations with influencers can significantly enhance campaign reach, drive service uptake, and build credibility.

However, the success of such collaborations is highly dependent on rigorous influencer selection and contextual alignment. Influencers must not only have a substantial following but must also demonstrate relevance to the campaign's target segment. This requires thorough analysis of follower demographics, engagement metrics, platform activity, and public positioning. Collaborations are most effective when influencers are either members of the diaspora or maintain strong cultural and social ties with the audience. Their credibility often stems from lived experience—having migrated themselves or being regarded as trusted intermediaries for safer, legal migration pathways.

For example, migration/travel content creators such as Waka Waka Doctor, Taiwo Odumoso, Odogwu Kiwi, and Sassy Funke - all members of the Nigerian diaspora -have built authority by sharing migration advice grounded in personal experience. Their content was routinely among the highest-performing when shared through Seefar's Nigeria-facing platforms, eliciting praise, gratitude, and requests for more information.

Equally important are the distribution channel, digital environment, and timing of publication. Even strong influencers can underperform if the content is not delivered in an environment conducive to user action. For example, a collaboration with a popular Nigerian influencer saw limited impact when a video was shared solely via his TikTok account, where the link to the migration consultation service was only clickable through his bio. However, when Seefar reused the same video in a Meta Lead Generation advertisement[5], targeting a defined audience segment through an optimised signup interface, the cost per sign-up among potential irregular migrants dropped by 97%. Because Seefar held the rights to reuse the video content beyond his initial TikTok publication, this pivot was accomplished with minimal additional investment and yielded dramatically improved results.

Given that influencer collaborations can be costly, ensuring maximum return on investment requires precision in both profile selection and content deployment. Audience surveys, platform testing, and A/B experimentation are essential to ensure influencer alignment with campaign goals and behavioural outcomes.

Seefar's experience across multiple countries illustrates the range of impact that well-designed influencer engagements can have:

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[5] A Meta Lead Generation Ad is a type of advertisement on Facebook or Instagram designed to collect contact information directly from users without requiring them to leave the platform. It uses an Instant Form, which opens natively within the app when someone clicks on the ad. These forms are pre-filled with the user's information (like name and email) for ease and speed. Instant Forms can include custom questions and conditional logic to segment users based on their responses. This ad format is ideal for driving signups, registrations, or interest in services while minimizing drop-off rates.

- In Tunisia, a video by a youth influencer triggered a 600% increase in sign-ups for migration consultations among potential irregular migrants aged 18–35.

- In Nigeria, influencer-led content consistently outperformed standard ads, delivering up to 98% lower cost per sign-up.

- Also in Nigeria, content curated and reposted from trusted migration and travel influencers routinely generated 300% more engagement on average than Seefar's standard posts.

- In Morocco, an experiment with two influencers showed striking variance in performance: a video from an influencer who was highly popular among younger audiences reduced cost per consultation sign-up among 16 to 20 year old by 89% compared to one by an influencer more popular with older audiences.

- In Pakistan, a one-week collaboration with an influencer based in Turkey led to a 73% reduction in average monthly advertising spend compared to prior months.

- A single post by a Kurdish influencer resulted in 500 additional priority consultation requests within a single day of publication.

Despite these impressive outcomes, collaboration with influencers is not inherently a guarantee of success. Campaigns must consider:

- Whether the influencer is a credible voice for the target demographic;

- The platform where content is distributed and its technical limitations (e.g. non-clickable links on TikTok or Instagram static posts);

- The audience's typical online presence and behaviour, and trust levels on that platform;

- Ownership rights to the content and ability to repackage it for higher-performing channels;

- And the timing and targeting strategy to optimise performance.

In sum, influencer marketing represents a high-impact and high-variance strategy in migration communications. When properly designed and executed, it offers a unique opportunity to bridge the trust gap between institutional campaigns and digitally engaged youth. However, success depends not only on the right influencer, but also on the right channel, content format, message delivery mechanism, and timing - all tailored to the audience's behaviour and context.

# 💬 Chapter 5 Messaging

> *Emmanuel is a confident young Nigerian living in Lagos. Imagine him starting the conversation with his arms folded, saying he already has this figured out. When he speaks, he starts with "Thank you," then "let me show you how it will work." Emmanuel pulls out some papers that show he's been planning his options carefully. He explains that he has been talking with friends and family, has gone online and he likes getting information from anyone wise.*
>
> *"Why do you want to migrate irregularly?"*
>
> *There are no jobs here.*
>
> *"What information would you like?"*
>
> *Well I think I understand it all now. We are just waiting for the right time to go.*
>
> *"You know what it will cost you?"*
>
> *Yes, sure.*
>
> *"You've heard there are dangers on the journey?"*
>
> *Of course. Everyone knows that.*
>
> *"What about Europe? Do you know what life is like?"*
>
> *I know.*
>
> *"Do you know that there are safe and legal alternatives to irregular migration?"*
>
> *I've explored them all. They do not work for me and there is no hope for my family if I stay.*
>
> *Sadly, Emmanuel has the kind of knowledge that American historian Daniel J. Boorstin worries about: "The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance – it is the illusion of knowledge."*

Think of Emmanuel when designing the content of your communications campaign. Respect his autonomy, but remember that Emmanuel is not the best person to tell you what Emmanuel doesn't know. This includes the question of what he knows, and doesn't know, about the risks.

## Messaging: Three Levels of Risk

Clarifying the concept of risk for your audience and for your donors is critical. This is the element of content creation that we have spent the most time debating with donors and teasing out of the upfront

research. Across the migration communications spectrum, we see three levels of insight into the risks of irregular migration. A good campaign will drill through the first two and strike gold in the third.

## Level One: It's Dangerous

Level One is where politicians and communications experts start when they first engage with a migration crisis. We look at how risky the journey is on an inflatable boat or across a desert, then we turn that into messaging that focuses on the dangers. We imagine that Emmanuel is to some degree ignorant of the facts.

For example, in 2024, the UK government launched an ad campaign across social media platforms to *Stop the Boats* as part of its effort to deter irregular migration. The campaign warned of the risks of being trafficked, exploited, or deported under the UK's revised asylum rules.

This is not unlike the approach of anti-drug, smoking or dangerous driving campaigns. These types of campaigns have been run in many countries. When initially launched these public health campaigns usually simply stated the dangers of the practices they sought to discourage. As time has gone on, they have become much more sophisticated in their messaging and delivery.

## Level Two: They All Know It's Dangerous

After some time and survey research, politicians and communications experts get down to Level Two, which is the opposite of Level One. They conclude that warning people about the dangers of a boat journey or a desert crossing may not be effective, not because the dangers aren't real, but because most people are already well aware of them. We also hear from Emmanuel himself, who calmly explains that he understands the risks involved in the journey and has considered them carefully.

Furthermore, we imagine these risks must be insignificant compared to the conflict or poverty at home. It is common to seize on dramatic quotes from migrants to underline how impervious they must be to hearing about the risks of irregular migration.

Most communications planning gets stuck on Level Two. Research exploring the audience's knowledge of probabilities leaps to the conclusion that there is no benefit from discussing risk. We did this ourselves until migrants told us there are multiple reasons why they want a discussion of risk.

## Level Three: Riding a Motorbike

Academic research suggests that motorbike riders are more knowledgeable regarding the statistics on motorbike accidents than people who do not ride motorbikes. They know it is dangerous, but they still ride motorbikes. Similarly, many migrants in Sudan will explain they know it is bad in Libya, but they are still going to travel through there since Sudan is much worse. What is really happening here?

First, we are presuming the risk tolerance, or risk ignorance, of a small sample of people is the same as a much larger pool we do not hear from. Some people ride motorbikes, but a lot of others are put off by the accident statistics.

Second, there is a massive gap between people's knowledge and how they apply it to themselves. One finding from the research on motorbike riders is that the majority believe they have above-average riding skills, which presumably affects their views on whether they may have an accident. If migrants know it is

risky but believe they will have above-average luck on the journey, they may not be accurately applying their knowledge of risk to themselves.

Third, hypothetical scenarios are often discussed with a sense of defiance, for example, someone might say, "I would rather die than stay here." However, lived experience often brings a much more sobering perspective. We have spoken with thousands of people who were aware of the risks but only fully grasped the harshness of the journey once they experienced it firsthand. Helping people understand this reality before they set out can prevent suffering and protect lives.

Fourth, the risk of the journey is not assessed in isolation. It's part of a complex decision involving various options and possibilities. If your goal is to reduce the number of people taking a risky journey, you do not need to convince them that the trip is infinitely risky;.you just need to shift their assessment of the relative risks and rewards of the trip compared to other options. Those who choose not to migrate despite previously expressing a willingness to take extreme risks often find ways to adapt and move forward in their lives. These decisions are not failures of ambition, but reflections of resilience.

Fifth and most simply, there is still a level of dangerous ignorance about major risks. People considering a journey often radically underestimate the costs and/or overestimate the income they will have after arriving. They do not understand the risk of prolonged poverty and frustration. When we ask them to prioritise the information they would like to receive, they are uninterested in hearing about costs or salaries. Either they do not know they are ignorant, or they do not want to hear that they do not know as much as they think they do. In either case, a good communications campaign is going to find a way to have a discussion about these risks.

Discussion is the key. Static facts aren't enough. You need to go much further and provide sustained engagement to help people interpret what the facts mean for them and how the risks of the journey compare to other options.

Knowledge can change behaviour but often does not. Risks are known but ignored. Repeating hard facts or showing scary images is about five percent of the task of a good migration communications campaign. The other 95 percent is generating a discussion about the rewards awaiting migrants and what threatens the outcomes they imagine.

As one 34 year-old Nigerien told us in 2024: "Thanks to the project, I realized I could build my future at home instead of risking my life in the desert. I've started my own business from scratch.""

In 2025, a Moroccan mother also expressed gratitude for a counsellor's influence into her teenager's decision to migrate irregularly: «*I cannot express enough gratitude for your initiative. Soufian (the counsellor] managed to convince my teenager, who had once attempted to migrate irregularly, to change his mindset and focus on education. He even helped him create a plan to strengthen his profile before considering leaving the country in a more sustainable way.*»

## Messaging: Engaging with Desired Outcomes

Why do people undertake irregular migration? It is a question posed at the start of most research projects that support communications campaigns. But it tends to be forgotten as the campaign is developed.

If you do not engage with the reasons people want to migrate, such as lack of jobs and rising cost of basic goods in Nigeria, for example, then your impact will almost certainly be superficial or even negative. If you only focus on the costs of travel, the risks of the journey or the danger of smugglers, you are not talking in

the language of your audience – the language of ambitions and dreams. It is like describing to a young athlete all the painful hours of training and injury they will endure, without discussing the gold medal that could result from the effort.

For example, when looking at a particular kind of modern slavery affecting Nigerians, it seemed that the years of unpaid servitude – the risks – increased the attractiveness of this option. Why? Because they believed that great, entrepreneurial rewards come to those who take risks; that the greater the risk, the greater the reward.

Let's return to the example of communicating the risks of exploitation on the journey. Often you have a mountain of contradictory evidence to cut through, because many people have arrived successfully despite the dangers you have raised. A better approach would be to link these risks explicitly to the intended outcomes rather than focus on the process.

Imagine you're speaking with a young man who is considering migrating to find work so he can support his siblings' education. He says he understands the risks, but feels he has no choice as his family is depending on him. Instead of focusing solely on warning him about the dangers, you might ask whether he's been able to explore safer alternatives, or whether anyone he knows has tried other paths. You could also ask what would happen to his family if something went wrong during the journey. Framing the conversation around his ultimate goal -helping his family - opens the door to discussing different ways to achieve that goal, rather than centering the conversation purely on the hazards of migration.

We can take the same approach with the costs of the journey, which people considering irregular migration regularly underestimate. You will often discover that they believe it to be an effective investment based on their understanding of how quickly they can recover their costs and become much wealthier.

For example, say that a Gambian man believes the migration journey can be paid for by taking out a loan of USD 4,000 and he expects to earn USD 3,000 per month after arriving in his new country. Based on your research, you can explain that the trip will probably cost USD 8,000 to USD 10,000 and after expenses he will have no more than USD 100 left of his salary each month. That means it will take years to pay back the cost of his migration journey.

We are not expecting everyone in this situation to throw up their hands and abandon the idea of migrating, but by helping with financial planning you have allowed this man to think through what he is trying to achieve. You have engaged with the outcome, not the process.

# Chapter 6 Long-term Solutions

People who migrate irregularly are not acting irrationally or recklessly - they are often making the best decision they can under difficult circumstances. Time and again, migrants express that they would prefer to stay in their home countries, where they feel connected to family, culture, language, and community. The decision to leave is usually one of necessity, not desire.

For example, Venezuelans facing economic collapse have left no viable future at home. If conditions in these countries were to stabilise, if people had safety, dignity, and opportunity at home, then the numbers of people leaving would reduce. But such transformations are unlikely to occur in the short or even medium term. Current forecasts suggest that displacement pressures will persist, with climate change emerging as a powerful, long-term driver. The task, then, is not to wish these pressures away, but to respond with realism and humanity.

The international protection system established following World War II is ill-equipped to deal with these issues. It is not focused on the most vulnerable people. It is focused on people able to move. The poorest and those least able to escape conflict or persecution are under-represented in this system.

This bias away from the most vulnerable comes from skewed methods of selection. A destination country can be a passive recipient, in which case those arriving are simply the people most interested and able to reach its territory.

Or, the country can pay UNHCR to manage selection overseas. UNHCR has an interest in helping the most vulnerable but also a stronger pressure to fulfil the destination country's criteria for selection, which often includes education and connections to the country.

More broadly, the only people this system considers are people who have left their country, excluding the people at home suffering conflict or persecution.

As a result, many in need of genuine protection are in an impossible situation. Staying at home is dangerous or has few avenues for advancement in life. Meanwhile, the international protection system is useless for the vast majority.

As long as there are people who have been successful in settling in their destination country after embarking on an irregular migration journey, those back home considering irregular migration will have role models, and a source of hope.

Migration communications campaigns can only do so much. They can help migrants make more informed decisions but cannot remove the underlying structural and environmental factors driving irregular migration.

## Long-term Solutions: Alternatives to Migration

Especially for economic migrants, the discussion of safer, legal alternatives is vital. Economic migrants are those who are fleeing poverty, pursuing a better quality of life, or following in the footsteps of role models who have gone before. The bottom line is, they are unlikely to be granted asylum in the EU.

In our experience, the general narrative from potential migrants is that there is nothing in their country for them. There are no economic opportunities, no accessible legal migration options, and their children will suffer.

So campaigns respond by sharing viable alternatives. However, these alternatives may not always be attractive to the target segment.

For example, Jordanian businesses were incentivised to provide jobs to Syrian refugees. A good idea in theory, it also shows how difficult the practice can be. To refugees, transport to the special economic zones did not seem feasible or attractive. Moreover, the wages on offer were comparable to the stipend provided by UNHCR and informal labour.

While promoting alternatives to migration can be an effective strategy, the success of such initiatives largely depends on the availability and attractiveness of those alternatives. Unfortunately, for many, the options at home may seem limited, and the perceived benefits of migrating still outweigh what many see as limited local opportunities.

## Long-term Solutions: Tackling Emotional Drivers

Alternatives are vital, but our experience shows that simultaneously tackling some of the emotional drivers to irregular migration is also essential.

When we first started sharing alternatives, our field-based campaign team told us that for some potential migrants, the barriers to entry are simply too high and they are simply not interested in these alternatives. Some potential migrants do not have passports and find it too burdensome administratively to get one; the scholarship programme has too many forms and the admissions essay is difficult to compose; the visa application forms require too many documents; the microfinancing programme is too competitive; and corruption is too endemic to get a teaching job. They tell us it is futile to provide information about alternatives when it is simply too difficult to access them.

A proposed solution is to try to walk an individual through the process of exploring alternatives so that they can achieve increased satisfaction that will ultimately lead them to abandon their plan to pursue unsafe irregular migration.

However, when we dug deeper into why the alternatives were not attractive, we discovered that economic reasons are simply the default explanation for the desire to irregularly migrate. But it does not begin to scratch the surface of the prospective migrant's underlying motivations.

In accepting the lack of employment as the sole reason for irregular migration, we are assuming that decision making is linear and coherent. It rarely is. Decision making generally includes a variety of rational and logical reasons, mixed with a good dose of emotions, sometimes referred to as our instincts or our gut.

Through speaking to over 200,000 potential migrants since 2014, we've uncovered a range of these emotional cues. They are exceedingly wide ranging. For example, someone may have a childhood friend who migrated to Europe and now regularly shares images of their new life on social media. Watching that success from afar - real or perceived - can create a powerful sense of comparison and aspiration. Others may experience a tipping point triggered by instability, such as losing a job due to political unrest. In some cases, it's not a long-planned decision but a sudden shift in mindset: something changes, and within days they're making arrangements to leave.

Without uncovering these underlying motivations for migration, the alternatives, no matter how well packaged, will never be quite right. Individuals can easily convince themselves and us that the barriers to entry are too high, there are simply no opportunities, and irregular migration is the only way. Only by simultaneously addressing the underlying emotions, such as fear, aspiration, and suffocation, can we create a conducive environment for potential migrants to consider the alternatives.
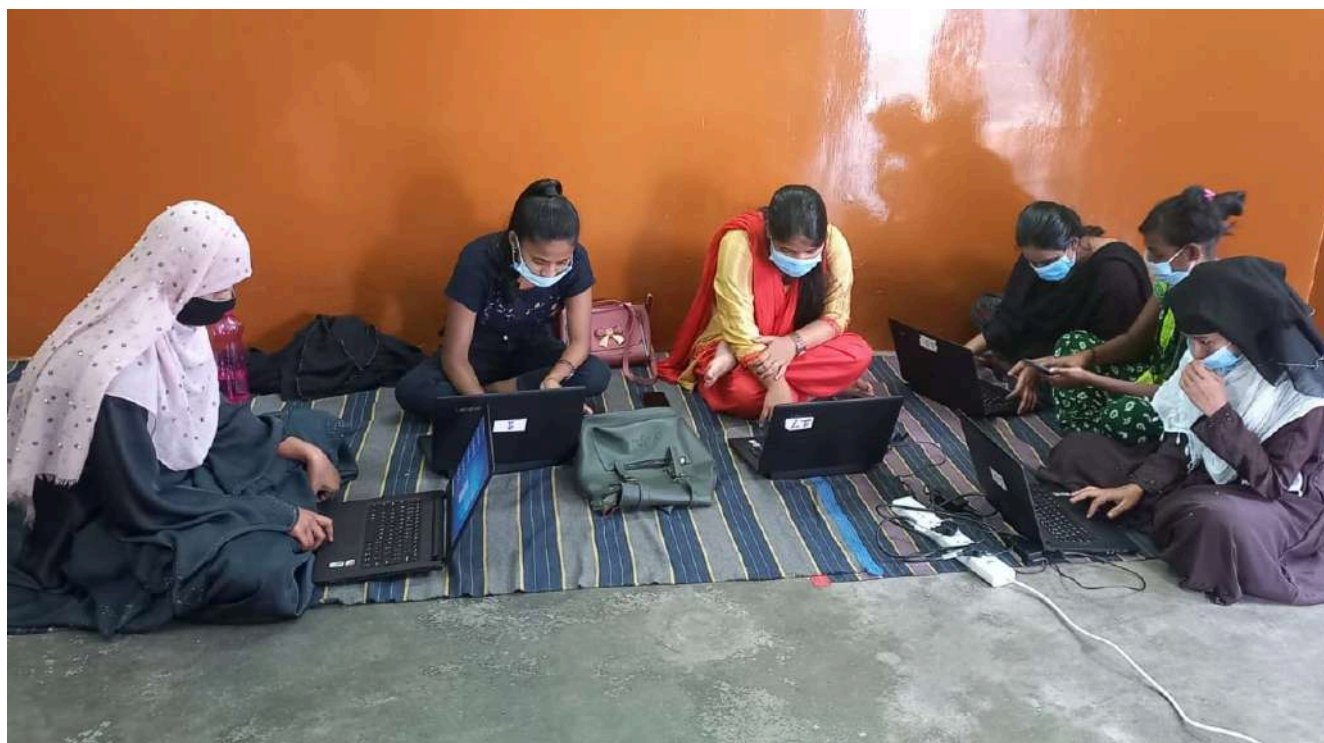
# ✦ Chapter 7 3E Impact Model
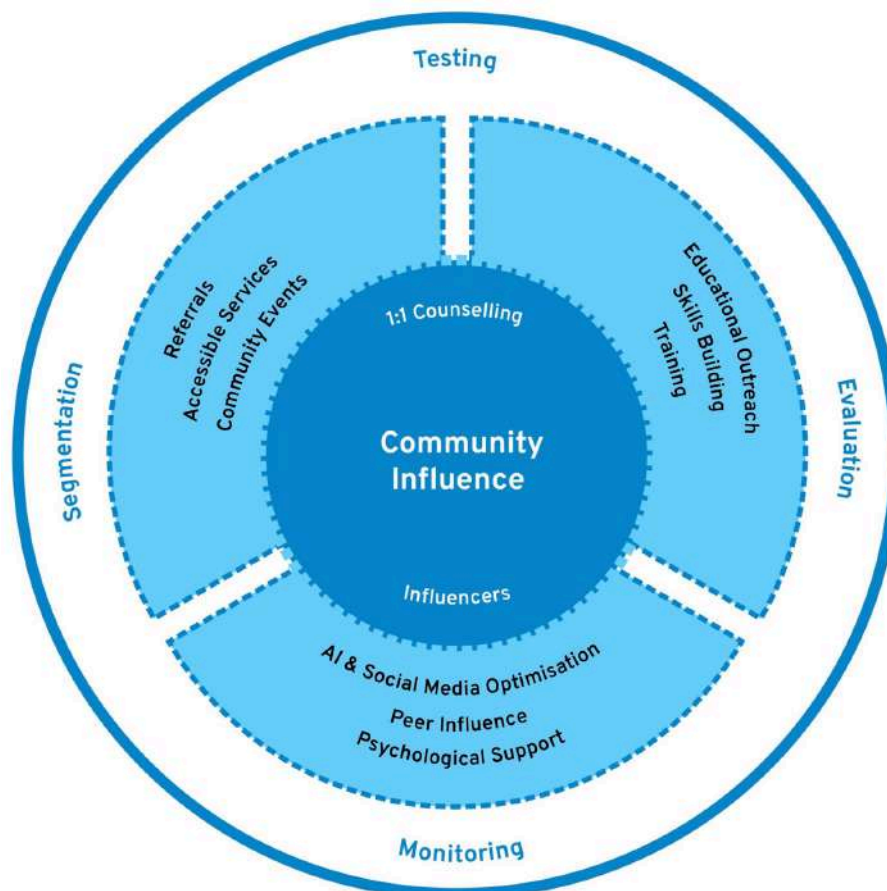


**The 3E Impact Model is Seefar's foundational approach for driving behaviour change.** It takes into account that migration decisions are not made in isolation; they are shaped by a person's ability to make informed choices, the social and structural environment that enables or constrains those choices, and the internal drivers and beliefs that influence their willingness to act. For example, in the context of migration, individuals may lack access to accurate information or legal pathways, live in communities where irregular migration is normalised or encouraged, or be driven by aspirations and pressures rooted in family expectations or perceived economic benefits. Understanding and addressing all three components is essential for fostering safe and informed migration decisions.

The **3E Impact Model is rooted in the well-established COM-B model for behaviour change,** which identifies three key components necessary for behaviour change to occur: Capability, Opportunity and Motivation. As our primary behavioural change model, COM-B enables us to see which areas we need to dial up or which factors we need to change - whether that's building skills and knowledge (Capability), increasing access and support (Opportunity), or influencing emotions and beliefs (Motivation) - to promote safer migration decisions and service uptake.

# 3E Impact Framework: A COM-B Approach to Behaviour Change
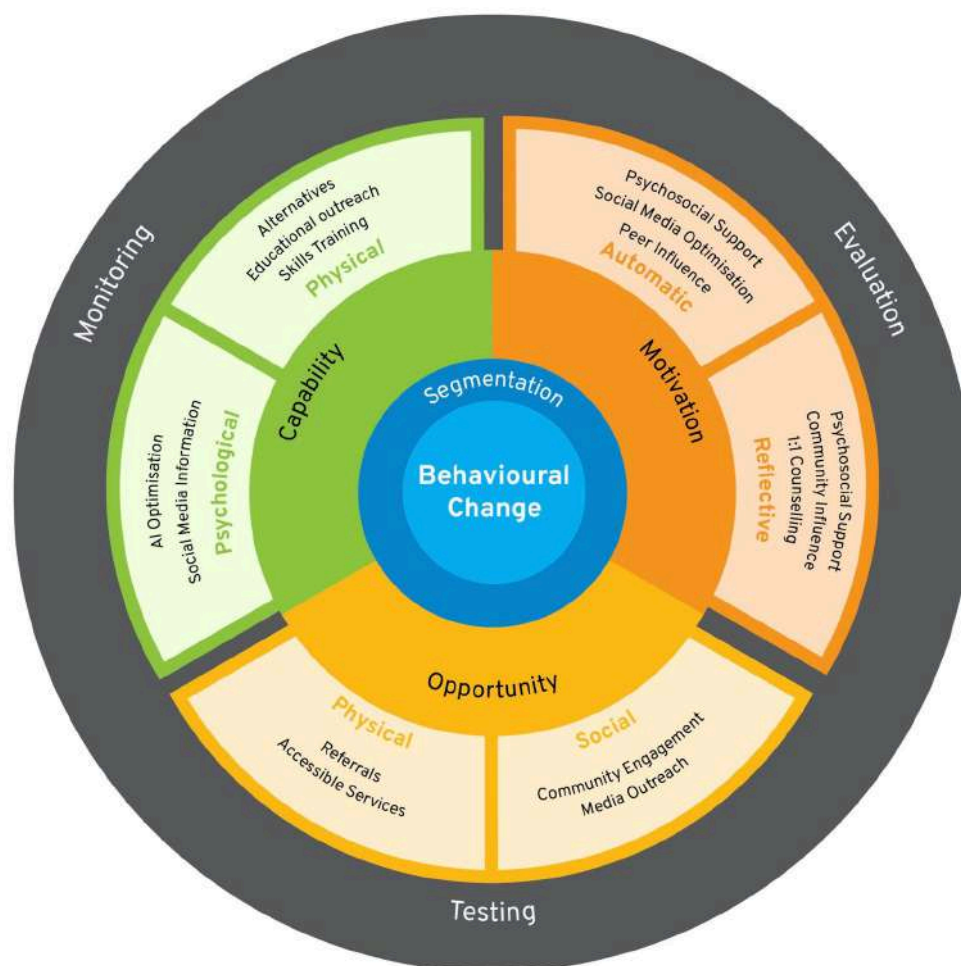


Our strategic migration communications campaigns apply the COM-B model in the following ways:

- **(Capability) Strengthening migrants' psychological and physical capabilities to make informed choices through the provision of knowledge, tools and skills**. This includes interpersonal activities such as educational outreach and skills training to support inclusive decision-making, and social media messaging and AI tools to increase awareness and knowledge of migration risks and opportunities.

- **(Opportunity) Creating opportunities for migrants to access viable resources and alternatives**. We collaborate with local communities, organisations and influencers to create safe spaces for dialogue and facilitate access to services. Interventions are designed to reduce physical and social barriers to promote inclusive participation regardless of location or circumstance, for example,

designing user-friendly referral systems that guide migrants toward safe, legal alternatives.

- **(Motivation) Increasing migrants' reflective and automatic motivation to adopt safe migration practices is central to the 3E Impact model**. This involves personalised 1:1 counselling and leveraging community influence to help migrants reflect, evaluate, and make informed choices, while addressing the emotional drivers, beliefs and habits that shape migration decisions. Our approach prioritises two-way communication, respecting the agency of migrants and their communities, while fostering positive behaviour change.

Monitoring and evaluation are embedded throughout the 3E Impact Model, not as add-ons but as core mechanisms to ensure effectiveness and accountability. Every campaign uses rigorous data collection and assessment tools such as message testing, independent monitoring, checkbacks, and longitudinal surveys from design, to implementation, to evaluation, to continuously evaluate what is working, identify areas for improvement, and adapt and scale accordingly.

By influencing capability, opportunity, and motivation simultaneously, Seefar enables meaningful and sustained behavioural change - most often seen in reduced investment in irregular migration and increased uptake of safer alternatives and more sustainable life paths.

While the 3E Impact Framework has been designed with migration in mind, its principles are adaptable to a wide range of complex behavioral challenges - such as education or livelihoods - offering a structured and evidence-based approach to driving positive change.

## 3E Ethical Principles

The ethical principles comprising the 3E Impact Framework are grounded in three core values: respect for migrant agency and autonomy, a commitment to participatory dialogue and a focus on integrity through evidence-based programmes. These principles guide our strategic communications approach and shape every stage of campaign design and delivery.

The 3E principles are:

1. **Ethical:** We respect people's agency and dignity.
2. **Engaged:** We listen to communities and co-design content with them.
3. **Effective:** We measure real change, with rigorous monitoring and evaluation.

# 3E Impact in Action: Applying COM-B Model

| Pathways: Changing irregular migration behaviour along the Eastern Mediterranean and Western Balkans routes | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Capability  +  Opportunity  + = Motivation** | | |
| (Physical and Psychological Capability) | *(Physical and Social Opportunity)* | *(Automatic and Reflective motivation)* |
| Online training for migrants and frontline workers ensures flexible, remote learning. It builds migration-related knowledge and counselling skills, empowering informed decision-making. | Online referral systems reduce logistical and geographical barriers by connecting users to local support services and resources. | One-on-one counselling and psychosocial support address emotional drivers, habits, and beliefs that influence migration decisions. |
| Social media campaign messaging enhances psychological capability by raising awareness, increasing knowledge, and strengthening the ability to critically assess migration-related risks and misinformation. | Training is online, free and multilingual, to make it widely accessible to people on the move and in different geolocations. | Social media campaigns spark emotional engagement through real-life stories and tailored AB tested messaging and motivates users to sign up. |

**Behaviour outcomes:**
- Adoption of safe migration practices and pursuit of local opportunities.
- Abandonment of harmful behaviours that increase vulnerability to exploitation.
- Uptake and utilisation of services.

# Why 3E Impact is Unique

> *"Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted. The trouble is, I don't know which half."*

Marketing pioneer John Wanamaker coined this phrase in the mid-1800s and it still sums up the key problem of any form of communications activity: While you may see increased sales, lower crime or decreased migration, you rarely know how you achieved that impact, or if your efforts contributed to it at all.

However, if you start designing a campaign with this question at the centre of your thinking then it will ultimately lead you to a positive place – an ethical, engaged and effective campaign that benefits all parties.

> *Counsellors.*
>
> *Aissata has been a remote counsellor for two years. She serves potential and transit migrants in her community in Bamako, Mali. She has been trained by Seefar on adaptive counselling methods and on migration facts, trends and news.*
>
> *Aissata is known in her neighbourhood as a migration expert. People considering migration trust her to give them reliable information about the risks they could face and the alternatives available to them. She schedules several one-on-one consultations each day.*
>
> *In her consultations, she listens empathetically to the unique motivations of the beneficiary, asking open questions to prompt them as needed. Then she provides information to fill any gaps in the beneficiaries' knowledge, and helps them internalise the information. At the end, she helps the beneficiary decide on their next steps, whether that be to have another conversation with her soon or to explore a specific job opportunity in Bamako or to speak more to their family about their concerns, for example. She also gives her contact details, knowing she will be re-contacted with follow-up questions and for further advice in future.*
>
> *Aissata takes pride in the number of people she has been able to help, but is also anxious about the future of the people she serves. In her spare time, she volunteers as a mentor for some promising youth from her community.*

When first developed, the 3E Impact method was groundbreaking in its use of trained counsellors to deliver personalised, one-on-one consultations with potential and transit migrants. Now, after hundreds of thousands of sessions across diverse contexts, we have a deep reservoir of evidence demonstrating their effectiveness in influencing knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.

These consultations are the foundation of our ethical, engaged, and evidence-driven approach to changing migration behavior. They are not simply scripted interactions - they provide the opportunity to discover and address unique motivations and information needs of the consultee. Drawing on Seefar's trauma-informed Adaptive Counselling (AC) methodology, our approach combines empathetic listening with evidence-based practices, enabling individuals to process past experiences, stabilise emotionally, and engage meaningfully with safer alternatives. It's not a script that can be repeated; it is a set of skills used by trained counsellors to build trust, understand individuals' motivations, and guide individuals through deeply personal decisions about their migration journeys and future opportunities.

These consultations are scalable and cost-efficient. The number of counsellors in the field can be increased or decreased at a marginal cost, with the monthly cost of a counsellor being about the same as one minute of prime time advertisements on national television.

## Demonstrating Results

Based on what our donors tell us, the other innovative strength of the 3E Impact method is the approach to measuring impact which allows you to conduct robust evaluations. By using overlooked research tools and building monitoring into the everyday work of the campaign, the 3E Impact method allows you to demonstrate results that go beyond reporting on completed activities.

You will see that if done effectively, a migration communications campaign can have positive impacts for donors and beneficiaries – a rare win-win on a polarised topic.

# 3E Impact Method

The 3E Impact method is a five-step method for delivering an ethical communications campaign that improves outcomes for beneficiaries and donors, created by Seefar and improved based on the lessons in this book.

## Step 1: Specify

The first step of the 3E Impact method is to set expectations by defining the purpose of the campaign. What is it supposed to achieve for the donor? What will it achieve for people considering migration?

At this point you should ensure that the needs of both the beneficiaries and the donor can be achieved equally. If you are using the 3E Impact method then this will be possible. If they do not equate, you need to revisit why.

You then need to set objectives and metrics, and articulate a theory of change.

A theory of change is an important piece of text for your campaign. It is a statement of what you believe your campaign will accomplish and how. It defines long-term goals and then maps the preconditions for that change. It guides everything the campaign does at a high level, while at the same time providing a basis for evaluation.

As the old adage goes, "What gets measured gets done." If you set the wrong expectations or the wrong objectives, then you will be evaluated against measures that don't correspond to what you have been doing in your campaign.

Once you have set your theory of change, you have one of the two elements needed to design your results framework. The second element is the campaign strategy itself. While the theory of change sets the objectives and intended outcomes of the campaign, the campaign strategy provides the vehicle for achieving it. You can set high-level metrics with only the theory of change but you cannot finalise them and decide on the measurement tools until the campaign strategy tells you the channels that will be used.

## Step 2: Understand

In reality, and therefore in the 3E Impact method, there is no substitute for primary source mixed-methods research in the field. Firstly, it is important to map out what you need to know. Then check your filing cabinets for data that is already available via a desk review. What's left, if anything, should be your fieldwork. Pre-campaign research is foundational if nothing is known about the key questions but it adds little value if information about the beneficiaries is readily available.

This section outlines the key issues you need to address in your campaign research phase and how you can do it. They can broadly be described as:

1. Beneficiary segmentation.
2. Motivations and understanding.
3. Supporting channels.
4. Message testing.

## Beneficiary Segmentation

Because each piece of the pie is different (see Chapter 3: Selecting Target Segments), the first step is to identify and define the particular segment or segments your campaign will focus on. This sounds simple, but in our experience, it is actually the hardest question to answer in your research and design phase. Want to do a campaign in Nigeria? Which segments of the 210 million people living in 36 states and speaking 530 languages do you want to talk to? Not everyone in Nigeria is a potential or transit migrant.

And even if you were able to identify the demographics of potential or transit migrants within your campaign country, even this group is far from homogenous. A 35-year-old male farmer with four children living in a rural area of Kano state is unlikely to respond to the same messaging or engage with the same activities as a 21-year-old single female university student living in Lagos city centre. To maximise your impact, you'll have to hone in on your priority groups and develop a specific theory of change for each, then design your campaign approach accordingly.

So, how do you decide which segments to prioritise? We recommend you develop clear selection criteria on the basis of your overall objectives. For example, if your motivation is purely linked to border management, you might want to look for common characteristics among migrants who are arriving irregularly and are not eligible for asylum. Vulnerability could be part of your selection criteria – you might want to define a segment which is at greater risk of sexual exploitation on the journey, and focus on reducing their vulnerability. Efficiency should most definitely be taken into consideration when selecting priority groups; in other words, if the members of a segment are particularly costly to reach, you'll need to be conscious of the trade-offs you make in choosing to prioritise them.

Another factor to consider is the level of influence your campaign can have over a particular group. For example, evidence from our past campaigns allows us to identify characteristics that correlate with a higher success rate in achieving our desired outcomes, so focusing on people with these characteristics could help us maximise our impact.

The clearer an idea you have of the characteristics and needs of your priority segments, the more tailored your approach can be, and so the better your results will be. That means you'll need to collect and analyse data in order to build up as detailed a profile as possible. Your final sketch of your priority segments will likely include information like their age range, gender, education level, marital status, employment status, motivations for migration, location, and more.

And how can you get this data? A combination of desk research, stakeholder interviews with interpreters or staff at NGOs and international organisations, and a survey of potential and transit migrants, as well as the diaspora. Interviewing stakeholders alone is not enough – they are liable to be influenced by their knowledge of your (and your donors') interest and focus. Similarly, you may get false responses from migrants if you do not design and administer the survey with this in mind.

## Motivations and Understanding

Once you have identified your target segment, you'll need to understand their motivations, context and influential relationships. If you do not you will end up like Zembla – sending information that does not connect with your audience.

A practical framework to guide this analysis is the **COM-B model** detailed in Chapter 7, which breaks behavior down into three essential components:

- **Capability:** Do individuals have the knowledge and skills to make informed migration decisions?

- **Opportunity:** Are there social and environmental factors enabling or constraining their behavior (e.g., peer pressure, economic instability, access to smugglers)?

- **Motivation:** What beliefs, aspirations, emotions, or experiences drive their decision to migrate?

Understanding the influential relationships allows you to identify any secondary target segments. For example, in parts of Nigeria, mothers are very influential in their children's decisions about migration. In these situations, you might want to specify a secondary target audience comprising mothers of your primary audiences.

For all the segments, you need to find out what they know, think and feel about the issue of irregular migration in as much qualitative detail as possible. This allows your creative team to design meaningful messages on platforms like television or radio. It also helps later on when you are training your counselors to understand the issues and how your priority groups think about them.

## Supporting Channels

The next decision you need to make is which channels to include in the campaign. This choice should be informed by data from a quantitative survey of the usage of and trust in different channels among your beneficiary segments. Although we are advocating a method with counsellors at its core, you need to know which supporting channels to include or exclude.

It's vital to understand not only which channels your beneficiary segments use most, but also how those channels can be used for campaigning. For example, a recurring issue we see with researchers new to migration communications campaigns is the temptation to focus on how the beneficiaries communicate. This is useful insofar as it tells us which channels they are accessible on.

For example, if you know a particular beneficiary segment uses WhatsApp every day to talk to their friends and families, then you'll train counsellors to be able to interact with their consultees through this medium. But you also need a channel which will help you to inform hundreds of thousands of potential beneficiaries about your counselling service, and that's not likely to be WhatsApp due to limitations in its broadcasting and advertising options. You'll need to identify a different channel that will drive people to WhatsApp for those consultations. That's where platforms like Meta come in. Meta allows us to reach highly specific segments based on location, age and gender, enabling campaigns to identify and engage the most relevant individuals. Used strategically, Meta can not only raise awareness but also convert interest into action, directing users to sign up for one-on-one consultations through more private channels like WhatsApp or dedicated web forms.

Seefar's use of digital channels is guided by our commitment to the [Principles for Digital Development](). All data collection is handled responsibly, and personal information is safeguarded to protect the privacy and dignity of every potential beneficiary.

## Message Testing

Your creative content in a migration communications campaign will usually be directed towards two outcomes – either attempting to directly influence migration behaviour or to generate traffic to your other channels, such as websites or hotlines, where you can more effectively engage with beneficiaries.

No professional communications agency would launch media adverts to sell a product without making sure the advert is going to be effective. Unfortunately, time and again, we see no testing being done on media products in migration communications campaigns.

To find out which messages and content formats are most effective among your beneficiaries, one simple way is to ask them. This could be in an online survey, poll or post, or in interviews with your beneficiaries. For example, we asked our beneficiaries in Niger, Nigeria, and Tunisia in 2023–2024 which topics they were most concerned about. Alternatives to irregular migration, risks related to irregular journeys, and information about life in Europe were the top three..

However, it's important to also go beyond self-reported data from your audience by observing impact on actual behaviours or attitudes. When it comes to social media, you can quickly, easily and cheaply learn about which type of content and messaging generates more of your desired results at a lower cost by developing split tests. These tests present two (or more) versions of the same advertisement to similar audiences and gather data on which version performs better.

Donors and practitioners ask us time and time again questions like: "What's most effective, positive or negative messaging?" This question can be broken down into a series of more specific questions, like:

- Is the audience more likely to seek further information about the risks of irregular migration, or about alternatives to it?
- Does the audience engage more with images of relaxed-looking migrants in a clean reception centre, or images of distressed-looking migrants in squalid makeshift camps?
- Does the audience respond better to text written in a hopeful tone or a pessimistic tone?

From these questions, we can then develop content which differs only by one variable and decide on the metric we will use to define success. From the results of these tests, we can then draw out actionable guidelines for content creation which will help us maximise our impact.

But we should remember that different audience segments, even within the same location, age group and gender, may well respond differently, meaning we need to run these tests for each segment. For example, when we ran the same ad targeting demographically similar audiences in Dari and Pashto, the results differed: Dari speakers were more motivated to sign up for a consultation by risk-focused messaging, while Pashto speakers responded better to alternatives.

Split testing is not the only way to get this information, and at times it's not the best way either. Running AI-powered software -such as Seefar's MigrantMatch - on the data from advertisements can reveal useful information which wouldn't show up so clearly in specific split tests. This approach is useful for analysing the results of a large number of advertisements as it picks up patterns you may not have thought to test. Having the advertisements manually tagged is also useful for gathering deeper insights. For example, among Amharic speakers in Ethiopia, we have found that to optimise the viral reach of a social media post, the image should showcase some form of risk related to irregular migration. Text containing mentions of smugglers are also seen to achieve a higher viral reach than those without.

This means that rigorous message testing should be a separate component of your research phase. This message testing should continue during implementation, acknowledging that message effectiveness can change with fast-changing circumstances on the ground.

There are a number of other ways you can effectively test messages, most of which achieve the same outcome, so we will not outline them all here. Your purpose is to test ideas, scripts and then the actual products before you deliver them. Ensure that they achieve their objectives before you waste money, lose a valuable opportunity to inform and risk being counterproductive to your campaign aims. Do not be Zembla.

# Step 3: Results

Designing your results framework is another element of the campaign strategy. There are two major components of a results framework – the monitoring and the evaluation.

The monitoring component usually comprises data that allows the campaign management to detect issues and ensure it is operating day-to-day as expected. It also provides donors and the project board with regular reports on progress towards achieving key metrics from the logframe, which is described below.  Monitoring data should also be shared with field teams and relevant stakeholders to support real-time responsiveness and alignment across campaign delivery.

It is important that the monitoring component goes beyond determining if the campaign activities have been delivered as planned. Data collection should be focused on providing continuous learning and systematic identification of the validity of the links described in your theory of change. This means, for example, collecting data that offer insights into the immediate impact of the campaign on beneficiaries and exploring the linkages between your activities and the impact.

Both process monitoring (e.g. activity completion) and outcome monitoring (e.g. shifts in knowledge or behaviour) are important. In addition to quantitative metrics, qualitative feedback, such as open responses from beneficiaries, helps assess emotional relevance, trust, and contextual fit. Rapid feedback mechanisms strengthen this real-time learning process. All monitoring activities follow ethical protocols, including informed consent and data protection.

The evaluation component is a more formal review of campaign performance, designed to assess the impact of the campaign. In the 3E Impact method this involves using measurement tools to determine and verify whether the desired longer-term impact has been achieved. At a minimum, the output should be a completed logframe with issues and recommendations for improvement in a corresponding report.

The monitoring and evaluation components are contained in the results framework. In the 3E Impact method this is comprised of:


1. Theory of change.
2. Logframe.
3. Measurement tools.
4. Roles and responsibilities.
5. Evaluation outputs.

We discussed the theory of change in Step 1, including how it sets the objectives and intended outcomes of the campaign. The logframe takes this one step further and links inputs with outcomes. A 3E Impact logframe contains the following elements:

| INPUTS | OUTPUTS | SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES | MEDIUM-TO LONG-TERM OUTCOMES |
|---|---|---|---|
| What we do before and during the campaign | What is delivered | What the target audience thinks, feels or does shortly after intervention | Impact of the communications activities on the target audience 3-6 months after intervention |
| E.g. 20 counsellors | E.g. 30,000 Individual consultations | E.g. 25,000 migrants say that counsellors are trustworthy. E.g. 20,000 migrants reporting increased awareness of risks. E.g. 20,000 migrants reporting increased awareness of alternatives | E.g. Number of migrants reporting they have changed their plan to migrate |

You will notice that the logframe outlines metrics at each level. It shows clearly and unambiguously your target inputs, your target outputs and, most importantly, the metrics for measuring your outcomes.

When you design these metrics, you need to refer back to the theory of change and ensure that your outcomes measure what you articulated in your theory of change.

So what is a successful outcome? This depends on your perspective. For donors, 3E Impact tracks the number of beneficiaries engaged who are no longer planning to migrate or have another behaviour change. This also allows you to generate metrics around cost per behaviour change. However, more importantly for the people we are providing a service to, 3E Impact tracks the number of people who report they have a greater understanding of risks, dangers and alternatives as well as the number who are satisfied with the service provided. 3E Impact also tracks the number of people who find the information delivered trustworthy and relevant. Find more on this in Step 5.

# Step 4: Execute

## Channels

The channels we recommend here are based on our experience using and testing the effectiveness of almost every communications method available over the course of developing the 3E Impact method. These include social media influencers, events, social media, large-scale media campaigns, posters, religious outreach, movies, TV and radio dramas, documentaries, testimonials and even building (and then branding) bus stops. Many of these do not work, for all the reasons we have discussed already.

Instead, we prioritise channels that support our methodology of addressing the unique motivations of individuals through trusted voices. We do this because it overcomes Wanamaker's problem of not knowing which half of his marketing budget is wasted.

This section outlines a series of channels you might consider for a campaign; how they work at a generic level.

## Counsellors

Counsellors are the trusted faces of campaigns. They are from the same communities as our beneficiaries. They help people make more informed decisions about migration.

The model involves recruiting people who are already trusted by their communities and who have high levels of empathy. We then train them to be counsellors, using methods developed by a behavioural psychologist. We teach them techniques to help them uncover and understand the unique motivations of their beneficiaries. We also train them to support their beneficiaries to internalise new information and reflect on what it means for their future. Counsellor training also focuses on making them experts on the topic of irregular migration and its alternatives.

The aim is to produce a service for potential and transit migrants. Counsellors are people from whom migrants can get reliable and factual information as well as help to better understand their options. They conduct their consultations either on the phone or in person, which allows them to adapt to the preferences and needs of the consultee. As the counsellors become known as reliable sources of migration information in their communities, their time is quickly over-subscribed.

At the beginning of a consultation with a new consultee, the counsellor prioritises building trust. The approach will differ depending on whether the consultation is remote or in person, but it will usually involve introductions, an explanation of the service, and general conversation to build rapport. The counsellors find it useful to emphasise that the service is completely free and confidential.

Once introductions are complete, the counsellor will usually try to get a deeper understanding of the consultee's current situation as well as their migration knowledge, motivations and plans. They do this by asking open questions and practising empathetic listening. Based on the information the consultee gives, the counsellor can then tailor their approach and messaging to make their consultation as useful and efficient as possible. They will give the consultee relevant information and help them internalise it by applying it to their own situation.

Lastly, the consultation will focus on next steps. For example, depending on how the conversation has gone so far, the counsellor might turn to motivating the consultee to explore a specific livelihood opportunity. The counsellor may also refer the consultee to relevant service providers or sources for further information. On some occasions, a follow-up consultation is scheduled. Other times, the consultee might just follow up with the counsellor via messaging.

**At no time in this conversation does the counsellor tell the person not to migrate.** That is important for two reasons:

1. **It is not the aim of the 3E Impact method; and**

2. **If the counsellor did that then they would likely be perceived as biased and lose the trust of the community.**

Many origin communities have only limited access to migration information. They see positive images of successful peers on social media, a positive impression of destination countries in western TV programmes

and many have smugglers and facilitators working in their community who are selling the idea of migration. The counsellors therefore fill an important role in the community by balancing these overly positive narratives. They engage beneficiaries to realistically reflect on how they personally would be affected by irregular migration, based on statistics for people with a similar profile to them. They also help beneficiaries to truly consider their other options and where relevant to change their perspective toward those options.

## Events

Counsellors also organise a variety of in-person events for beneficiaries. The main purpose of the events is usually to drive interest in consultations, but they are also beneficial for spreading campaign messaging to a wider audience and building brand awareness, trust and credibility within the community.

Events are designed with the interests and habits of the priority segments in mind. Partnering with groups and institutions that are commonly attended by your priority segment can be extremely valuable. For example, our counsellors have organised events in the past with the collaboration of sports teams, church groups, universities, schools, youth clubs and more. They've also spoken at events already scheduled by other relevant organisations like UNHCR.

Usually events will use some sort of 'hook' to entice attendance, like a sports competition or a film screening or a workshop. Counsellors will use the activity to build rapport with beneficiaries. They will then take the opportunity to discuss campaign messaging. Events usually involve a question and answer session. Lastly, counsellors will make themselves available for consultations either on the day or by sharing their contact details for the future.

## Media

In some contexts, securing media coverage may be useful for campaign objectives. For this component, you should hire people with strong networks in the local media landscape. You'll train them to become experts in migration. These media liaison officers will work with local media professionals to build up the latter's capacity and motivation to cover migration-related issues, through a mix of formal training sessions and more informal ongoing support. Our past experience shows us that media can lead to more and better quality migration reporting, even beyond the lifecycle of the project.

However, before deciding to include this component, you should consider how much your beneficiary segments consume and trust different media channels and outlets. An initial assessment of the volume and quality of media coverage of migration-related issues is also important to ascertain whether or not there is a real need for this component.

## Influencers

Collaborating with trusted social media influencers can be a highly effective and cost-efficient way to engage your target audience. (see Channels and Messengers: Use of Social Media Influencers).

Influencers are most successful when they have both a strong following and clear relevance to the campaign's target segment. Those with cultural or lived experience of migration - such as members of the diaspora—can be especially powerful messengers.

However, success also depends on how and where content is delivered. These collaborations work best when Seefar or implementing partners retain the rights to repurpose content and distribute it across multiple platforms for maximum reach and effectiveness.

**Trusted social media influencers can help people learn something new or encourage them to reconsider something they originally believed. It can even trigger certain desirable behaviours like further research into alternatives or a discussion about risks with a trusted relative.**

## Social Media

In the 3E Impact Framework, social media is unlikely to be the campaign's principal behaviour change tool. However, it may still be critical to the success of your campaign. Some of the ways that social media could be helpful are:

- Increasing knowledge about migration risks and opportunities.
- Efficiently marketing your services to priority beneficiaries.
- Gathering insights into your beneficiaries.
- Building brand credibility and trust.
- Spreading campaign messaging widely.

But to be effective and to prove effectiveness, your online strategy needs to be designed and implemented accordingly. The best way to assess the value of social media to your migration communications ambitions is to treat it as you would any other channel: research, compare, test, compare.

Here are some suggestions for how you can use social media to serve your campaign aims:

### Drive consultations

Paid promotion on social media can be a hugely efficient way of driving demand for consultations among your priority segments. With a modest advertising budget, well-crafted content and some clear targeting parameters, you can inform hundreds of thousands of relevant individuals about the service counsellors offer, and even connect them with counsellors using tools like a WhatsApp button or a lead generation form.

For instance, a recent campaign by Seefar to share trusted information on migration risks and alternatives with transit migrants moving along the Eastern Mediterranean Route, used a targeted approach to increase sign ups to the service, beginning with broad outreach and then narrowing focus to specific segments. This approach boosted sign us, reduced advertising costs and ensured resources were focused on the audiences most likely to engage, rather than wasting valuable budget on high traffic campaigns which reach thousands and garner vanity metrics but result in lower conversion rates.

But it's important to note that in many communities where irregular migration is common, smugglers and fraudsters are also targeting your audience with online ads. That means that trust is often low. If you want a potential migrant to go from seeing your ad to making a call or providing their contact details, you'll also have to work on building trust. There are a number of ways in which you can do that, and they vary depending on the audience; a few are featured in the table below.

## Understand your beneficiaries better

Once you've developed a trusted online brand, your access to unique information about your beneficiaries becomes almost instant. With a clear strategy and a reasonable promotion budget, you can use your online channels to gain answers to almost any question that pops up throughout the campaign.

Just a few simple examples of the possibilities include: online surveys to better understand the motivations and mindsets of your beneficiaries; sentiment analysis on comments to get a deeper understanding of the kind of reaction different messaging creates; social listening to gauge how a specific event is affecting your audience's perception of migration; AI-powered pattern recognition to identify the most effective targeting parameters as demonstrated by Seefar's MigrantMatch tool or A/B testing to learn which types of imagery or tone generate most engagement or sign ups. For instance, Seefar's A/B testing with female migrants from the KRI found that women responded better to positive, family-oriented messages rather than risk orientated content. This enabled us to scale, effective and targeted campaigns.

## Drive knowledge change

There is potential to drive changes in people's awareness and knowledge - and at times behaviour - through online and social media outreach. However, these changes are extremely difficult to measure and prove due to the difficulty of following up with individuals reached online over time. Online metrics like post engagements, link clicks and reach are limited in what they can tell you about a person's knowledge or actions in real life.

That's why, if you want to use online channels to drive changes in people's awareness or behaviour, strategies must be highly targeted, and interventions should include controlled experiments, such as pre- and post-assessments or surveys, to accurately measure knowledge gains. For instance, a Seefar campaign in the KRI and Pakistan used a control/treatment group approach to assess knowledge gains among people considering irregular migration. Those exposed to migration-specific facts showed significantly improved knowledge compared to those exposed to unrelated facts, even after controlling for demographic differences.

Social media puts a hammer in your hand; but it can't turn all your problems into nails. (see Channels and Messengers: Use of Social Media). It delivers the most value when paired with structured experiments and guided by tested approaches, such as those outlined in Seefar's Compendium of Proven Social Media Guidelines.

## Educational Outreach

Teachers are uniquely positioned to influence young people's decisions, given their regular, long-term contact with students and the trust they enjoy within their communities. Many students begin thinking about migration as early as age 14 or 15, making schools a vital entry point for delivering timely and accurate migration information. Teachers' intrinsic motivation to guide students' futures makes them valuable allies in promoting safer migration choices.

Seefar's educational outreach strategy empowers teachers to integrate migration awareness into their classrooms. The approach involves training local Educational Outreach Officers (EOOs) who, in collaboration with project teams, design engaging and age-appropriate curricula. These often include interactive materials like comic books, role-plays, games, and digital resources - including Seefar Academy's online courses - to reinforce learning beyond the classroom. To ensure relevance and impact, the curriculum is tailored to local teaching environments, acknowledging time and resource constraints. EOOs also help select schools based on location and capacity, and work with educational authorities to secure permissions and support.

Teachers are carefully selected through a short application process, ensuring strong motivation and suitability. Once trained, they receive continued support through WhatsApp groups, peer-exchange events, and light, friendly inter-school competitions to maintain momentum and motivation. Though the outreach approach is rooted in behavioural theory- such as Self-Determination Theory, which emphasizes both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation-these principles are applied practically to encourage teacher engagement and commitment.

Monitoring and evaluation focuses on measuring changes in students' and teachers' knowledge and attitudes about irregular migration. This includes pre- and post-session assessments, feedback forms, and occasional school visits. Follow-up calls are conducted several months later to assess whether teachers continued delivering sessions and how they used the training in practice.

Overall, this approach creates a sustainable and scalable model, equipping local educators to act as long-term messengers for safer migration decisions in their communities.

## Use the Power of Brands

We mean something specific when we talk about a brand in this context. Your brand does not have to have a logo; it could be a fictional character. Your brand does not need a theme song; it could be the name of a poem. We realise this stretches the idea of a brand beyond the focus of most brand marketing advice, but we think the stretch is worth it to give you a full range of useful options.

The short-term horizon of most budgets for migration communications makes it difficult to value the power of brands. But if we accept that we are dealing with a medium-term problem, we can more easily see a brand as a valuable investment.

A brand provides two benefits. First, it is an inexpensive way to create a strong echo; it repeats what you say without you having to keep saying it. Second, it is an emotional or instinctive prompt more than a rational dialogue. You do not have to dig through the facts and conversations again to tickle people's norms and instincts. Instead, your brand makes them spark automatically.

Once you have segmented your audience, you can narrow your creative search and you will probably be developing the associations for your brand in three main categories.

1. **Planning and wisdom:** Communicates that smart people plan ahead. Positive traits include patience, calm, and intelligence. Negative traits (for risky decisions) include haste, arrogance, or failure.

2. **Risk awareness:** Highlights risks like poverty, shame, wasted time, and harm to family, amplifying perceived dangers of irregular migration.

3. **Hope and alternatives:** Offers realistic, positive alternatives -though this is difficult in contexts where few genuine alternatives exist. At minimum, it can reinforce planning and risk awareness.

A different use of brands is to attract people to your other services, such as a hotline or an online property. This is the simplest use of brands and you can borrow quite easily from a universe of learning and advice in brand marketing. The key point to remember is that your service actually needs to be good or the brand will not grow beyond the advertisements.

It is often difficult to convince donors that branding can be done or is affordable. But again, you're not trying to launch a brand to compete with Pepsi and Coca-Cola – ubiquitous brand awareness is not the goal. Your audience is much narrower; if you can find a way to identify and connect with your audience without wasting resources on people outside your audience, then building a brand can be an efficient message multiplier.

## Step 5: Monitor, Evaluate and Adapt

The 3E Impact method is the most comprehensive and best value approach to monitoring and evaluating migration communications campaigns we know of. However, we are obsessive about constantly building in improvements to make it even better.

We have found that using outputs as indicators is the way a lot of campaigns measure their success. But how does knowing the number of Facebook likes or the number of people that saw your television adverts tell you anything about impact? They can be useful to get a sense of engagement and reach, but that is not the same as measuring impact.

In 3E Impact campaigns, we monitor the performance of the campaign using the following tools at a minimum:

1. Results from rigorous message testing.
2. Consultation reports.
3. Independent monitoring.
4. Checkbacks.

In weekly meetings with the project team, we review the project data, specifically progress towards the campaign's target outputs and outcomes. By identifying problems and successes, the project is constantly adapting its activities and strategy throughout implementation to ensure that campaigns and interventions remain relevant, well-executed, and aligned with the intended impact.

In monthly meetings with the project board we review the outputs and results from these tools and identify issues that need to be resolved, then make a plan to fix them.

## Why we are Confident in Results

The 3E Impact method assumes that everything can be evaluated in some way. Longitudinal studies and large scale surveys can provide data that can be analysed to assess the effectiveness of campaign media activity.

Independent monitoring and checkbacks allow us to evaluate the effectiveness of our consultations. But they also mitigate the risk of false reporting from counsellors. By contacting migrants who have received a consultation in the weeks or months following the session, we can confirm that reporting from the counsellors is accurate or identify patterns of concern in the reporting.

We do not provide any incentives to counsellors to either falsely report or achieve project outcomes. While counsellors are expected to meet a monthly target for the number of consultations completed, their performance is not assessed based on whether consultees achieve impact outcomes. Counsellors are also supported and supervised closely. They receive regular refresher training including customised counselling training where a supervisor or counsellor identifies this as necessary. Additionally, we integrate feedback received from beneficiaries during subsequent monitoring stages into the counsellor training process, enabling real-time performance optimisation and reinforcing accountability.

## Measurement Tools

The following non-exhaustive list of measurement tools is available for monitoring and evaluation of a 3E Impact campaign:

1. Activity reporting forms: These are used as output reporting forms by field staff and allow observations about beneficiary demographics and live insights into migration trends and perceptions.

2. Monitoring forms: These provide a management check of accuracy of reporting by field staff, and an assessment of beneficiary satisfaction with the service.

3. Checkbacks: These are used to measure mid and long-term changes in migration attitudes and behaviour as well as the additional longer-term impact of the campaign on the beneficiaries (see details below).

4. Field observations: Counsellors are observed conducting consultations by the team leader or manager, providing quality control to the consultations.

5. Control group or panel study: This provides a comparison of people who have not had consultations with counsellors and those who have, with the aim of checking that our impact is better than if the campaign had not existed.

6. Quantitative survey: This is used to monitor changes in attitude towards migration when mass media broadcasts are used in a campaign.

7. Feedback surveys: These are shared with consultees who consented during their session and gather insights on service quality, relevance, and impact. They cover satisfaction, trust, clarity, and short-term effects on migration decisions

8. Message testing: This provides a quality check on messages delivered in consultations as well as creative products to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

## Independent Monitoring Approach

One of the important benefits of using counselors in your campaign is the ability to easily record and track their impact. A counsellor can record an individual consultee's stated intention regarding irregular migration before the first consultation, and any change to it following a one-on-one consultation.

This allows you to track any immediate impacts from the communications campaign – something no other channel can do immediately at no marginal cost.

However, there are many layers of potential bias that are introduced when the person who provides a service (in this case the counsellor providing a consultation) is also involved in monitoring the impact and quality of the service.

This is where independent monitoring comes in. Every two weeks, independent monitoring officers reach out to consultees who had provided consent to be contacted for the monitoring activities. The monitoring officers confirm the occurrence of the consultation and collect information on the utility, quality, and impact of the consultations.

We call this an independent monitoring approach to emphasise that we are separating the delivery of the service (the consultation provided by the counsellor) from the monitoring of service outcomes. This stage allows us to assess the short-term impact of the service, including any observable changes in knowledge, or perceptions related to the subject matter.

## Checkbacks



Connecting activities to long-term behavioural impacts

| 1:1 Consultation | Instant Feedback | Self Reported Survey | Mystery Callers | +4 weeks IMO Follow-up | +9 months Long Term Checkback |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Quick adaptations of messages and better targeting | Feedback on the quality of the service, directly from the beneficiary | First hand, objective verification that our communications model is followed | Evidence of short term behaviour change and lessons for messaging and targeting - collected by independent officers | Longer term behaviour change outcomes, providing robust insight into how to improve effectiveness |

Using these systems, we can correlate behavioural outcomes directly with the services we have provided, down to the specific wording of counsellor conversations.

Independent monitoring only allows you to track the short-term impact of your campaign. However, this is not yet a behaviour change. You still need to control for the 'New Year's resolution effect'. In January each year, many people enthusiastically resolve to change their behaviour and start going to the gym every day or eating more healthily. Several weeks later, most are back to their old habits. How do we know the same is not happening after the enthusiasm of our consultation has drained away?

This is where checkbacks come in. Checkbacks are a verification tool sometimes used in quantitative research to validate that enumerators have interviewed real people. While the 3E Impact method uses them for that reason too, we have simply adapted them to help us evaluate our impact at the end of the project.

The theory of checkbacks is very simple (although the design and implementation is more difficult and requires experience to do well). We recontact migrants who had both consented during their consultation to be followed up and had already participated in the independent monitoring stage.. This sample is then re-contacted by a researcher independent from the consultation, five to six months after the consultation. The researcher asks structured questions – such as where the migrant is now, what their plans are and what factors most influenced their decisions – that allow us to verify if the reported impact at the end of the consultation resulted in actual behaviour change over time.

This provides a percentage of actual mid to long-term behaviour change that resulted from the consultations. This is then extrapolated across all consultations reporting a behaviour change. At the end, you have indicative figures of the total number of migrants the campaign has engaged who have had an actual behaviour change.

In some cases, we also deploy control groups. These look very similar to longitudinal studies and allow us to compare the results of our communications with people who have had no engagement with the campaign and our counsellors. This tells us if the campaign's impact is greater than having done nothing.

### Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs)

As with many areas of the development sector, recent years have seen interest in applying RCTs to migration communications projects. In principle, this could be a valuable way to demonstrate the value of particular communications methods. In practice, the benefits rarely justify the costs.

The core argument here is that the outcome being tested needs to be valuable at scale. For example, RCTs have been helpful in establishing the benefits of giving medicines to children by looking at outcomes in school attendance or achievement. Similarly, communications-related RCTs have suggested that broadcast methods encourage more people to get vaccinations. In such cases, there are tremendous ethical, financial and health dividends that you can expect from scaling up the intervention, even if it is only partially effective.

In migration communications, an RCT needs to find a similarly large outcome value. So far, RCTs have been applied to outcomes like increased knowledge or reported migration intentions. These may be valuable outcomes but the benefit of gaining this information is not greater than the cost of doing so. For example, it does not seem sensible to scale up a movie screening about migration on the basis of a 35% improvement in knowledge about migration, because we do not know what that does to migration behaviour. It would therefore be difficult to justify the cost of scaling up a cookie-cutter application of the movie to millions more people.

The 3E Impact method does not apply this strategy because our experience shows that, more often than not, RCTs in the field of migration communications do not justify the costs associated.

Ultimately, RCTs are only worth it if they can meet three strict criteria:

1. They must be aligned with overall campaign objectives.

The 3E method argues that every single interaction between counsellor and beneficiary is different. Further, the information needs to be delivered through multiple trusted sources over time to change behaviour. However, an RCT often needs the intervention to be reproduced across all individuals and include one single activity. Therefore, conducting an expensive RCT to test one intervention does not align with the behavioural change objectives of the 3E Impact method. Additionally, RCTs are best suited to linear and uniform interventions. This is not the case for complex behaviour change campaigns which depend on personalisation, contextual adaptation, and iterative improvement throughout delivery.

2. The treatment and control group populations must be comparable/identical but uncontaminated.

Slight differences in geography or background can play a large part in migration decision making. Thus, finding identical control and treatment groups is very difficult without making compromises. In real-life implementation settings, where populations are diverse, highly mobile, and shaped by shifting social and economic conditions, ensuring the purity of control groups or the comparability of treatment groups becomes impractical. Behavioural dynamics differ significantly even within the same community, and maintaining strict controls across diverse human experiences is neither feasible nor reflective of how interventions operate in reality.

3. The treatment and control groups must be trackable, without that tracking altering the subject's behaviours or responses.

In the case of our beneficiaries, they are often very difficult to track over time due to their mobile nature. Many consultees are in transit or experience frequent disruptions in connectivity and communication. As a result, follow-up becomes inconsistent or impossible. Additionally, the act of tracking itself can influence behaviours and responses, thereby undermining the neutrality of the study. This introduces further limitations in reliably measuring long-term outcomes within an RCT framework.

## Sustainability

Once a 3E Impact campaign starts to show results, the question of sustainability will inevitably follow: how can these gains persist after funding ends? The honest answer is that there is no silver bullet- but we can structure the conversation around three realistic dimensions: echo, scale, and long-term integration.

**1. Echo**: Echo refers to whether the knowledge or behavioural shift you've catalysed will endure at the individual level. Some will retain what they've learned and adapt their decisions accordingly - especially when migration is a recurring consideration. For others, migration will re-emerge as an option later. Follow-up is crucial to know which patterns dominate.

**2. Scale:** Sustainability also hinges on scale. There are two proven routes:

- **Replication through lean, proven models:** Programmes like Seefar's Livelihoods Hub in Afghanistan which focus on coaching, job signposting, and practical support can help potential migrants to pursue tangible alternatives.

- **Strategic partnerships for reach:** Seefar's educational outreach programming demonstrates that empowering trusted local figures -such as teachers - with tailored tools and content enables impactful conversations with youth and can drive measurable shifts in knowledge and behaviour.

**3. Integration:** In some cases, campaigns can be embedded within national systems. For example, Seefar's work on documentation backlogs with governments in Jordan has embedded migration-relevant processes into national systems.

There is still a tendency to view migration communications campaigns as one-off fixes - deployed in response to a crisis, with the expectation that short-term interventions will deliver long-term resolutions. But irregular migration is driven by persistent and evolving factors. When the pressures are continuous, so too must be the response.

Consider how public thinking has evolved in other sectors. For example, dangerous driving campaigns (aimed at drunk driving or speeding) aim to reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries on the roads. In many countries these domestic campaigns have become just one more complementary tool – alongside speed cameras, police patrols, mobile radar, etc. – that governments deploy continuously until the problem reduces to manageable levels.

Migration communications should be viewed through the same lens - not as emergency responses, but as core infrastructure. To ensure sustainability, they should be seen as continuous and essential in managing migration safely, ethically, and credibly.

# 🖥 Conclusion

Migration communications campaigns are hard to do well, hard to do ethically and hard to evaluate. Our intention in this book has been to distill Seefar's experience of migration communications campaigns into a method that is effective, serving the needs of both donors and migrants. The 3E Impact method starts by acknowledging that there are rarely simple right answers in irregular migration. National governments are balancing rather than advancing interests. Whichever balance they strike comes with risk. Potential migrants would rather not be considering the choice they are considering. Whichever decision they make comes with risk.

If you are a practising communications expert or a policymaker working in this domain, be prepared for Margot, the public servant we quoted on the wrong track. People will give you false challenges; information campaigns are not going to stop hundreds of thousands of people running away from conflict. But you will never be communicating to 'stop' all of these people. That's not your job. Your job is to choose the most important audiences, channels, content and measures of success for a communications campaign.

When you're doing that job, think about Elham. She demonstrated that migration is just one option among many that people are considering as a way to advance themselves. Migration decision making is not linear and never 'final'. On the one hand, that means you have to choose carefully what you define as success. On the other hand, it means that you have lots of opportunities to communicate with the same people, so you can build your message, you do not have to blast it out.

Then you could think about Emmanuel. When we introduced him, he had already been considering his plans for a long time, but he still underestimated the dangers of his journey. Even if you cannot counter the root causes of his interest in irregular migration, you can help him better understand the implications of his decision. But only if you do it well - Emmanuel is smart, proud, and has been thinking about this for a long time. A poster or an advertisement is going to have zero impact on him. Don't be Zembla.

Instead, remember Mamadou, who saw an advertisement meant to deter him but instead linked him to a different path. That's why sustaining your communications - rather than one-off warnings - is the best chance of making a longer-term impact.

In other words, you have a tough job with the potential to do a lot of good. We hope this book has given you a helpful model with which to plan your campaign.

# About Seefar

We're a social enterprise with a simple mission: to transform the lives of vulnerable people.

Through our programmes rooted in tech, psychology and behaviour change, we help people build vital skills and confidence so they can make a positive contribution to their communities. It's how we support governments and other donors in finding solutions to irregular migration, poverty, human trafficking, violent extremism and more. In short, we're building stability, one person at a time.

# SEEFAR

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