



PERCEPTIONS

Policy Brief

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Good practices and recommendations tackling information campaigns gaps in Morocco: practitioners' perspective

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● Executive Summary

As in other countries of origin or transit, information campaigns on the possible perils of irregular migration are launched in Morocco by different entities aiming at deterring (potential) migrants from initiating their journey to Europe. Since 2015, the EU policymakers have given greater relevance to campaigns as a policy tool to manage migration; however, the impact of this type of initiatives on migrants' decisions "to cross" the Mediterranean is often questioned.

This policy brief assesses the influence of information campaigns on migrants based on the fieldwork conducted in Morocco in the framework of PERCEPTIONS project, consisting of two iterations of interviews and focus groups targeting migrants and experts. From these findings, we offer some alternatives to information campaigns and draw some recommendations in the field of asylum and migration policies that adopt a more humanitarian and socially-oriented approach. Such an approach appears to be more effective, as viewed by Moroccan stakeholders.



● Introduction

Located as a privileged crossroads of Africa and Europe, Morocco represents a major “migration junction” (Abourabi, 2022). Besides being a significant country of origin, with around five million citizens living abroad (mainly in France, Spain, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany), Morocco has established itself as a transit country, mostly for sub-Saharanans on their way to Europe. Additionally, Morocco has recently become a destination country for part of those migrants, many of whom reside irregularly. In that vein, the number of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers has been increasing in the framework of a new migration policy based on human rights announced by king Mohamed VI in 2013. It was followed by the *Stratégie nationale d'immigration et d'asile* (National Strategy on Immigration and Asylum, SNIA), two regularisation campaigns (2014 & 2017) and the announcement of legislative reforms on migration, asylum and human trafficking that has not been implemented yet, since the controversial Law 02-03 (2003) that criminalizes migration, is still in force.

Morocco’s strategic position has favoured the establishment of privileged relationships with the EU in different areas, including a close control of migratory flows, which remains controversial, as the treatment of migrants in this country is often harsh, especially in the case of sub-Saharan Africans. In this context, policymakers have implemented information campaigns in Morocco as one of the EU's instruments to externalize border securitization (Musarò, 2019; Maâ, Van Dessel & Savio Vammen, 2022). While policymakers assume the effectiveness of these campaigns, a significant portion of academia and civil society question their efficacy and propose alternative measures.

● Evaluating campaigns in Morocco

Campaigns targeting (potential) migrants aiming to reach Europe from Africa are often implemented by the IOM or private companies (Pagogna & Sakdapolrak, 2021) and financed by the European Union or Member States. Overall, policy makers consider information campaigns as a valid instrument to counter irregular migration (Trauner, Cham & Caleprico, 2022; Brekke & Thorbjornrud, 2020) assuming considerable financial costs. Nevertheless, the impact of information campaigns targeting migrants is uncertain.

○ Inefficient impact evaluation

There are serious difficulties in establishing a causal link between campaigns and a reduction in the migration flow. Hence, the first constraint to assess campaigns is methodological, as there is indeed a limited evidence available on that regard, since the capacity of the evaluation tools designed to evaluate impact is usually insufficient. Additionally, the number of individuals targeted to conduct the impact assessment tends to be very low. Furthermore, in most

Key Issues:

- *A sound management of the migration flows coming from the Moroccan “migration junction” to Europe is crucial.*
- *Morocco represents a privileged partner for the externalisation of the EU’s border management, being information campaigns a control tool that has gained relevance.*

Key Findings:

- *Though deemed a key migration control instrument that implies considerable financial effort, the effects of information campaigns are unclear due to their poor impact evaluation.*



cases, neither the specific group targeted nor the campaigns objectives are well defined. Another relevant issue is that information campaigns are often based on premises that have not been properly contrasted, such as the credibility of the information provided, and their ability to modify perceptions and migration decisions (Tjaden, Morgenstern & Lazcko, 2018).

Overall, migration information campaigns in Morocco seem to face the same conundrums as those implemented in other countries. Indeed, Most campaigns results are presented as effective in modifying irregular migrants' perceptions on the conditions of the journey and destination. Moreover, they claim to be able to influence migrants' intention to initiate or continue their itinerary. Nevertheless, campaigns are often not subject to rigorous evaluation methods that could clearly determine their impact. In that vein, consulted Moroccan experts mentioned the difficulty of assessing effectiveness with solid quantitative data, as it simply does not seem to exist.

○ **Unclear objectives, target groups and message**

Another aspect to consider is the lack of a precise definition of the group to target, the objectives to attain and the message to transmit through the campaign. As expressed by a Moroccan expert, information campaigns from the Government, the United Nations or the European Union seem to “fall a bit short” as “they are very general”. Thus, as in other geographical areas, campaigns purposes and target groups and message should be better defined. However, campaigns are often not realistic, they do not respond to the circumstances of the people they target. An efficient campaign needs to take into account the target group reality and needs, above all, to transmit a clear message. Campaigns need to make sure that the targeted individuals feel identified, that they understand the risks of the decision they might take and at the same time offer them alternatives instead of leaving, otherwise many of them will cross. In that regard, most Moroccan experts felt that youths and minors are the target groups that campaigns should prioritize, as they seem to be the less aware of the potential dangers and real life in Europe.

○ **Need to co-implement campaigns with local actors**

Experts claim that the EU does not have sufficient knowledge of the realities on the ground, so it would be difficult to properly design, plan and implement those campaigns. For this reason, campaigns need to be developed and conducted in close cooperation with actors from origin and transit countries. That said, the effectiveness of peer-to-peer intermediation in information campaigns aiming to deter migration has been questioned by some researchers as it might still be regarded as a “biased propaganda” (Maâ, Van Dessel & Savio Vammen, 2022).

○ **Credibility of campaigns**

Another shortcoming highlighted during our research is the fact that campaigns goals and effectiveness are often biased by the role and interests

- *The impreciseness of campaigns objectives, target groups and messages might be partially overcome through horizontal cooperation. Nevertheless, migrants might still distrust the messengers.*



of the EU itself. This might even imply that campaigns are ultimately targeting EU citizens since many of the campaigns “very much aim for a foreign public that subsidizes projects”, as put by one of the experts interviewed in Morocco. This view is widely spread among migrants, as they often hold the belief that campaign messages cannot be trusted, and instead rely on stories shared by their friends or family members.

○ **Communication tools**

Regarding communication tools, it is advisable to prioritize social networks as a means to communicate these campaigns due to their widespread use across vast sectors of the population and particularly among youths. In that vein, it would be advisable to use mobile apps in combination with face-to-face interaction, using a language understandable to the targeted group.

○ **Questionable impact on deterrence**

Despite the difficulty in evaluating campaigns efficiency with sound quantitative data and rigorous methodology, most stakeholders consulted believe that campaigns have little influence in altering migrants’ decisions. Conceivably, their goal of fulfilling their dreams prevails over existing risks, which is especially true in the case of minors and young people. The perception of Europe as a land of freedom with a social protection system may take precedence over the dangers to be faced. That said, migrants have in mind realities that do exist in Europe and not necessarily myths or illusions as they know through acquaintances that it is possible to cross the Mediterranean, arrive to Europe and succeed: “to have a car and a family”.

○ **The Effectiveness of raising awareness about risks**

Information campaigns have proven to be useful in raising awareness about the real risks, neutralising false information often spread by smugglers in the in order to save human lives. In that vein, most of the sub-Saharan in transit in Morocco whom we interviewed explained that they were ignorant of the dangers inherent in attempting to “cross” over to Europe. Some of them add that they would have never embarked on their migratory journey had they known of the perils along their route and how harsh the European dream could become. In that regard, many campaigns in Morocco do succeed in sensitizing on the risks of crossing the Mediterranean and the myths about the luxurious life in Europe. For instance, in recent years, the IOM has carried out several migration prevention projects in schools located in humble neighbourhoods of cities from which many young Moroccans and third-country migrants attempt to cross to Spain, such as Tangiers. Caritas has implemented similar awareness-raising campaigns targeting unaccompanied minors. Likewise, the Catalan regional government has implemented a similar project targeting youths (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2021). This sort of campaigns did have a positive result in terms of raising minors’ awareness and confronting them with the difficulties that await them.

- *Social media is a crucial communication tool though it should be combined with in-person activities.*

- *Information campaigns seem to have no influence on modifying migrants’ decision to migrate.*

- *Campaigns are useful to inform on irregular migration risks and to tackle misperceptions on Europe.*



● Alternatives to campaigns

To dissuade people to take irregular routes that pose a threat on their safety, information campaigns have to be accompanied by alternatives in Morocco. In that regard, the EU should cooperate with authorities and civil society organisations from origin and transit countries implementing projects that contribute to create more stable societies with better opportunities and more aware citizens. It is indeed essential to offer accurate information so that people may access to those services to which they are entitled, and then decide to migrate or not with the best possible conditions. In this sense, some interviewed stakeholders' organizations opt for campaigns focused on awareness raising on Morocco's context and opportunities to facilitate integration. Their organizations do not inform on European countries or any other third country. Likewise, some initiatives offer training and recognition of skills and diplomas to improve potential local and transit migrants' access to the Moroccan labour market. Other projects create better relations between the transit host society and migrants as well as empowering the latter.

In the following section, we list some alternative initiatives proposed by the relevant stakeholders who participated in the research activities conducted:

○ Protecting minors and youths

In the specific case of minors and youths, one of the most vulnerable groups, they need to be guided by institutions that offer them other useful opportunities that attend to their most urgent needs, such as training, education, and housing. If they have nothing to lose, they will cross the Strait, even if it means risking their lives. Projects need to take into account and address major challenges youths and minors face, such as unemployment or drug abuse, and monitor their progress in subsequent years.

Accepting the fact that there is an unstoppable movement of migration from less developed to more developed countries is crucial to managing this phenomenon properly. The "Enfants et jeunes sur les routes migratoires d'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Nord" (EJM) is a Swiss cooperation project that improves young migrants' protection along an entire migration itinerary in sixteen countries. It aims to strengthen national and regional systems of protection, education and socio-economic inclusion and to facilitate access to these services for children and young people in mobility. The project aims to cover ECOWAS and Maghreb countries (Terre des hommes, 2021).

Some experts proposed alternatively that campaigns aim to help young people prepare their migration project by accompanying them in mobility projects, such as internships, civic services or voluntary work. For instance, in Morocco, in the Souss-Massa region, ANAPEC hosts an office from the German cooperation, the GIZ, which provides information on opportunities for study, work and internships in Germany.

● *Morocco's opportunities for migrants and nationals should be highlighted and reinforced.*

● *As one of the most vulnerable groups, minors and youths should receive special protection, covering their basic needs in Morocco and assisting them during their current or future migration itinerary.*



○ Regularisation campaigns

Morocco implemented two regularisation campaigns in 2014 and 2016-2017 that regularised the migration status of undocumented migrants, including those with serious illnesses, women and their children, and unaccompanied minors. Several other categories of migrants were included. The regularisation campaigns have reportedly contributed to the recognition of migrants, stabilising their legal situation, and contributing to change their perception of the country, so that they may choose Morocco as their final destination.

○ Recognising migrants' skills and qualifications

A growing number of organizations emphasizes migrants' integration through employment and training. Within this framework, the UN Economic Commission for Africa is currently implementing the program "Migration Statistics and Skills Recognition in Africa" with one of its main goals pertaining to the recognition of migrants' skills and qualifications, and assisting them in their integration process through a better access to the labour market. It mainly deals with intra-African migration, which constitutes 80% of African migration. The program includes workshops and a plan for the harmonisation of national procedures for diploma recognition, including both the private and the public educational institutions (ECA, 2021).

○ Tackling discrimination and improving social cohesion

A major obstacle for sub-Saharanans to choose Morocco as a final destination is the intolerance they experience. Different initiatives aim at changing perceptions and attitudes towards them, as "Living together without discrimination" that targets sub-Saharan migrants and the Moroccan host population to tackle discrimination and enhance co-existence. The project raises awareness and debate through social media platforms, launching video clips, radio spots, documentaries, and animation videos. It is financed by the EUTF for Africa and the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation & Development (AECID, 2021). Likewise, the Orient-Occident Foundation (2021) created "Vivre ensemble", an association of youths (sub-Saharan refugees and Moroccans) who perform sports and cultural activities, using social media to disseminate their activities with the greater aim to support social cohesion.

Different initiatives have been implemented to improve media coverage of the migration phenomenon. In this regard, the UNHCR and the IOM have trained future journalists to enhance social cohesion. These workshops were carried out within the framework of the AMAL project "Protecting and empowering migrant and refugee children and youth in Morocco" (UNICEF, 2021).

Unfortunately, sub-Saharan migrants also suffer discrimination from public authorities. Against this backdrop, the Belgian Cooperation Agency (2021), is implementing a project for legal empowerment that facilitates and adapts the judicial system to make it more efficient for the immigrant population.

● *Regularisation campaigns have proven to be crucial for migrants opting for Morocco as a final destination.*

● *Diplomas and skills recognition contribute to migrants' permanent settlement in Morocco.*

● *Sub-Saharanans' discrimination by the Moroccan society should be tackled changing Moroccans' perceptions, promoting coexistence and empowering sub-Saharanans.*



● Recommendations

1. The EU should expand **horizontal cooperation with local stakeholders** in the design and implementation of information campaigns. Additionally, campaigns effectiveness and **impact should be assessed through rigorous methods** based on sufficient quantitative data.

2. It would be advisable to **change the ultimate goal** of information campaign: to informing about the perils and misleading narratives in order to improve migrants' security and combat smugglers' actions, while assuming that irregular migration will continue to exist. Likewise, campaigns should focus on the **needs and characteristics of the targeted group**. In that vein, most experts feel that **unaccompanied minors and youths** should be the primary targets.

3. The EU should support the enhancement of measures adopted or to be adopted by Morocco to **improve the living conditions** of its population. Information campaigns should therefore be accompanied by **alternative projects** based on social intervention, mobility projects, training, as well as skills and diplomas recognition to provide alternatives to irregular migration.

4. The European Union should contribute to the promotion of the **permanent settlement** of transit migrants in **Morocco** as a final destination. The EU should support Morocco in launching additional **regularisation campaigns and socio-economic migrants' integration measures**. Additionally, it should finance projects aiming at **improving Moroccans' perceptions of sub-Saharan migrants** and at encouraging the peaceful co-existence of the different communities.

Key recommendations:

● *Local stakeholders should co-create & co-implement information campaigns.*

● *Campaigns impact should be rigorously assessed.*

● *Information campaigns should tackle misleading narratives and inform on opportunities, having minors and youths as primary targets.*

● *The EU should support socio-economic measures to improve living conditions in Morocco.*

● *Transit migrants' permanent settlement in Morocco should be boosted through regularisation campaigns, socio-economic integration and anti-xenophobic policies.*

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