The source of migrant information, the myth of the IOM's information campaigns and an examination of migrant decision-making processes

The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Information Campaigns (IC) have not been impactful in deterring potential migrants from making their journey to Europe. This is because ICs are developed under the assumption that migrants only decide to make the decision to flee because they are uninformed and unaware of the full dangers regarding the journey. This is incorrect; instead, migrants are informed through other avenues that they trust more, and any information they receive from the IOM is disregarded due to both a lack of trust and the presence of a strong socioeconomic risk-benefit decision-making calculus.

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The International Organization for Migration (IOM) attempts to shape the path and method of migration through the implementation of many program activities, one of which includes their Information Campaigns (ICs). ICs put on by the IOM seek to inform migrants domestically of the risks of illegal migration to the West by distributing various forms of allegedly informative media in a pervasive manner. For example, they would show videos, distribute brochures, or display advertisements regarding the dangers of migration, and these medias would be distributed in various areas that include airports, nightclubs, embassies, and universities.[1] These campaigns seek to change the risk-benefit calculus of migration inside the mind of potential migrants in order to affect their decision-making process prior to their departure.

The IOM's ICs have been demonstrated to be ineffective by the migrants who still make their journeys to Europe after being subjected to these campaigns. This paper seeks to explain why ICs do not have their intended impacts. It argues that the ineffectiveness of the IOM's ICs is caused by the IOM's incorrect assumption that migrants suffer from a lack of information regarding the migration process. These ICs operate under the assumption that migrants would not attempt the journey to Europe if they were aware of the dangers of the voyage. Instead this paper contends that migrants do not suffer from a lack of information. In fact, they obtain ample information from their informal networks, and the information presented by the ICs is of little consequences to them as it does not change their personal situation which causes them to consider migrating in the first place.

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[1] Céline Nieuwenhuys and Antoine Pécoud, "Human Trafficking, Information Campaigns, and Strategies of Migration Control," *American Behavioral Scientist* 50, no. 12 (2007): 1679-1680.

First, this paper will outline the manner in which the IOM perceives the role of information in the decision-making processes of potential migrants in order to establish the basic assumptions of the ICs. The next section will debunk the myth that migrants are uninformed and will explain the sources from which migrants obtain their information. This section will also examine why external information sources -- such as the IOM -- are not accepted by potential migrants. Third, this paper will assess why ICs can be detrimental in their ineffectiveness by elaborating on their ability to perpetuate victimization rather than ensure migrants' safety. In response to this, the paper will conclude by presenting alternatives to the current form of ICs to prevent illegal migration and trafficking.

IOM's assumptions in migrant decision-making

The IOM began developing information campaigns in the early 1990s as a new preventative strategy which sought to stem migration before it started by deterring migrants from leaving in the first place.[2] ICs are based on the assumption that migrants are "vulnerable to dishonest promises of a better life" because they are unable to accurately evaluate the dangers of the journey due to insufficient or counterfactual information.[3] The IOM also claims to be both "balanced" and "neutral"[4], although it is recognized that the ICs always presents migration as an inherently dangerous act rather than as a potential opportunity.[5] In fact, the IOM manual for migration practitioners notes that "the decision to migrate is not entirely rational" and that the decision to do so "is governed by personal beliefs and desires, hearsay,

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[2] Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1675; Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1683.
[3] Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1683-1684.
[4] Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1677.
[5] Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1675.

wishful thinking, and stereotypes."[6] Furthermore, this manual also stated that, "the attraction

of the unknown -- the *adventurous* [emphasis added] side of migration -- is also one of the

factors that influence decisions."[7] In essence, the IOM states that subjectivity is the main factor

in migrant decision-making, rather than verifiable socio-economic factors. They then use this

rhetoric to deter illegal migrants by perpetuating their illegality and irrationality.

      In addition, most of the campaigns are funded primarily by European states and

organizations who hope to "show Africans that Switzerland is not a paradise."[8] In this way,

these ICs attempt to complement border security in a more subtle, indirect manner; they aim

to be a more disciplinary tool for migrants rather than a physical border. ICs attempt to manage

the perceptions of migrants in order to subtly convince them that the choice to migrate is the

wrong one. Further to this point, Pécoud eloquently states that the IOM ultimately attempts to

"erect, in the minds of migrants, the territorial borders the EU has not succeeded in controlling

on the ground."[9] To this end, they use various technologies of control, as inspired by Michel

Foucault's idea of the *media dispositif*, which seeks to pervade the target society in order to

encourage the spread of an idea. In this regard, Heller provides an excellent comparison

between IOM ICs in Cameroon today and colonial cinema in Africa throughout the 1800s and

1900s, which demonstrates Western states' attempts to control the perceptions of Africans in

different areas of thinking.[10]

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[6] International Organization for Migration, "Managing Perception," in *Essentials of Migration Management - A Guide for Policy Makers and Practitioners,"* eds. IOM (Geneva: 2004), 4.
[7] IOM, 4.
[8] Tony Paterson, "Come over here and you will be miserable, Swiss government adverts warn Africans," *The Independent*, November 28, 2007, n.p.
[9] Charles Heller, "Perception Management. Deterring Potential Migrants through Information Campaigns," *Global Media and Communication* 10, no. 3 (2014): 311.
[10] Heller, 303-318.

Thus, the IOM is not only in the business of managing migration, but also of managing perceptions of migration. Of course, these campaigns are more subtle in their true intentions. They are presented as an effective way to curb migration for the safety of the migrants, not for the political will of (mainly) European states. The IOM states that their mission is to ensure the protection of migrants, and they claim that these ICs are one method of doing so.[11] Overall, the IOM claims that migrants only choose to leave their home country because they are inadequately informed of the risks of illegal migration. Their ICs are based on this assumption and seek to inform migrants of these dangerous so that they make the responsible choice to remain home.

Migrants are informed

This paper argues that the IOM's fundamental assumption behind their ICs is incorrect which contributes to the detriment of their effectiveness. They believe that migrants are uninformed of the dangers of illegal migration. However, migrants are informed: they obtain information from one key source -- their informal networks. These networks -- also referred to as the *mobile commons* -- are composed of people they trust, including family and community members.[12] The mobile commons is the unofficial network that migrants use to ease their migration by sharing information regarding routes, contacts and methods of migration.[13] It traverses multiple modes of communication, from the virtual to the physical.[14]

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[11] "Mission." International Organization for Migration. Accessed December 10, 2016.
[12] Stephen Castles, "Why Migration Policies Fail," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, no. 2 (2004): 208.
[13] Dimitris Papadopoulos and Vassilis S. Tsianos, "After Citizenship: Autonomy of Migration, Organisational Ontology and Mobile Commons," *Citizenship Studies* 17, no. 2 (2013): 190.
[14] Papadopoulos and Tsianos, 190; Castles, 208.

The IOM's ICs recognize the presence -- albeit maybe not the significance -- of the mobile commons and takes advantage of it to spread their information by infiltrating NGOs, schools, education institutions and cybercafés - all places that are common to these informal networks.[15] In doing this, the ICs target the migrants' networks in order to try to overtake the information provided by their informal sources and replace it with the IOM's messaging.

This does not work, because overall, migrants consider the information that comes from their informal networks as much more important than the information coming from the IOM or other sources outside of their trusted network.[16] It is also important to note that it is not only success stories and information regarding successful routes that travels through these informal networks. News of boat-related illegal migration, detentions and widespread abuse travel through the networks as well, which means that migrants are well aware of the risks.

Migrants are not only informed of the risks by their informal networks but also by other official sources and even from their own personal experiences. Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud note that undocumented migrants do get some pre-departure information. Nonetheless, they do not retain any of the information they receive at these sessions since they do not care about its validity.[17] In the aforementioned comparison between ICs and colonial cinema, Heller describes a situation in which the African audience starts to disregard the promotional materials being played by yelling "where is Charlie!", that is, Charlie Chaplin.[18] Clearly the issue here is that they do not place any importance on the information provided by external organizations or authoritative figures. Furthermore, some migrants make the journey multiple times, which

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[15] Heller, 313.
[16] Heller, 313.
[17] Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1685.
[18] Heller, 309.

demonstrates that, despite the fact that they know first-hand how difficult the experience may be, they are still willing to go through it again. One 2003 example shows that over a third of women at the IOM's Albanian victims' centre were trafficked two or more times.[19] Therefore, a lack of information is certainly not the issue here, but rather the source of the information.

This paper had demonstrated that migrants are, in fact, informed in a certain way. However, they obtain this information from a source that they prioritize over any other outside source, such as the IOM.[20] Thus, a lack of information is not a valid assumption when examining migrant decision-making.

Why do migrants flee?

It is clear that illegal migration is a dangerous and potentially perilous journey, and the section above has explained that migrants are aware of these dangers. ICs attempt to curb migration by "scaring" migrants into staying home by convincing them that migration is not the answer to their socioeconomic issues.[21] Clearly, this does not work. Thus, in seeking to truly understand the decision-making process of potential and actual migrants, the question begs to be asked: why do migrants continue to flee?

Hernandez-Carretero and Carling looked at this very question when examining groups of boat people who travelled the dangerous journey from West Africa to the Spanish Canary

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[19] Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1687.
[20] Heller, 313.
[21] Heller, 306-307.

Islands.[22] Upon conducting interviews they note that migration is not just a decision for some, but can be "related to notions of obligation and purpose."[23] The authors noted that in many countries, the moral context in which societies operate is one in which young men are seen as household providers. In cases where they are unable to obtain a job -- as is often the case in developing countries -- they are socially pressured to obtain employment by any means possible. Migration is seen as one of the most certain means by which people can seek socioeconomic improvement, despite the fact that, this study noted that the migrants were informed of the consequences they could face throughout the journey, including involuntary return, death, or physical and psychological harm. This means that migrant decision-making is not just a simple cost-benefit analysis, but that it has a moral and socioeconomic element to it.

In the aforementioned Spanish study, potential migrants noted that interviewees assumed that, although the journey may be difficult, these memories would be forgotten once they arrived to safety.[24] This demonstrates the certainty with which migrants believe that fleeing their home will result in improved living conditions. Additionally, after interviewing a group of non-Jewish Ecuadorians who migrated to Israel, Kalir introduced the idea of a "migratory disposition" which explains how migrants construct their own reality as a result of the inequalities they experience in their lives.[25] They then compare this reality of inequality to the potential improvements that migration could bring to them, which results in the creation of

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[22] Maria Hernandez-Carretero and Jorgen Carling, "Beyond 'Kamikaze Migrants': Risk Taking in West African Boat Migration to Europe," *Human Organization* 71, no. 4 (2012): 407.
[23] Carretero and Carling, 407.
[24] Carretero and Carling, 409.
[25] Barak Kalir, "The Development of a Migratory Disposition: Explaining a 'New Emigration'," *International Migration* 43, no. 4 (October 2005): 168.

a personal perspective that seems emigration as a way to eliminate these severe inequalities.[26] Hoyle et al. notes that upon being informed of the dangerous, migrants in Eastern Europe continue to seek work even in the sex industry because they still earn more money than they would by teaching in their own country.[27] Looking at it from this perspective, migrants seem to associate Europe with certain socioeconomic improvement given what they have seen on television.[28] If they are certain, this explains their ability to overlook the risks involved with irregular migration.

The empirical research provided by both Kalir and by Hernandez-Carretero and Carling shows that there is a strong perception among many migrants that taking this journey will lead to a good life and that once they reach Europe, they will finally have a comfortable life. This perception is developed mostly through these informal networks.[29] Part of this impression is developed through a culture of migration that results from a number of social factors and personal dynamics that encourage migration as a form of bettering their social situation.[30] In fact, Pécoud and Nieuwenhuys argue that these ICs essentially "ignore the embeddedness of such decisions in...social structures."[31] Furthermore, De Jong notes a number of factors that affect migration decision-making, including family migration norms, values and behavioural constraints.[32] By placing migration within the context of a migrant group's culture, it becomes

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[26] Kalir, 168.
[27] Carolyn Hoyle et al., "Labelling the Victims of Sex Trafficking: Exploring the Borderland between Rhetoric and Reality," *Social and Legal Studies* 20, no. 3 (2011): 321.
[28] Simon Bradley. "Advert aims to deter African immigrants." Swissinfo.ch. November 30, 2007. http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/advert-aims-to-deter-african-immigrants/6287120.
[29] Heller, 312-313.
[30] Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1685.
[31] Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1685.
[32] Gordon F. De Jong, "Expectations, Gender, and Norms in Migration Decision-Making," *Population Studies* 54, no. 3 (November 2000): 310.

evident how embedded this process is in their lives. To assume that one's culture can be reversed by a simple campaign subsequently seems unreasonable, no matter how intrusive this campaign may be.

This lack of responsiveness to information that outlines the danger of their actions can be explained by the idea that it does not change their current situation; the information campaigns do not change what is actually important in this case, which is the *current* safety of the migrant. Therefore, they do not change the risk structure that the migrants are going through. Heller notes that, "with the economic situation for the youth already amounting to *a form of social death*, they prefer taking their chance at seeking a better life elsewhere, even at the risk of their lives."[33] This shows that an input of information would not change migrants' behaviour if their socioeconomic status at home does not change, since this is the principle factor in their decision to migrate.

The Consequences of the Ineffectiveness of ICs

The research demonstrates that migration is a result of many factors including socioeconomic status and a migratory culture. However, unlike the IOM's claim that migrants incorrectly view migration as "adventurous," a lack of information is not a main cause of irregular migration.[34] Given that this is correct, there are many issues with the presence of ICs in migrant-sending states. Implementing ill-designed ICs in these countries can have negative consequences for both migrant-sending and migrant-receiving states. One main detrimental

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[33] Heller, 314.
[34] IOM, 4.

consequence of ICs is the perpetuation of victimization of trafficked migrants, which leads to a

number of problems, as discussed below.

The ineffective design of ICs can end up projecting an image of vulnerability onto

women. Andrijasevic uses the term "woman" to describe females (and the female body) simply

as a symbol that positions women as a sexual conscious-less object.[35] Within this field of study,

she notes that "migration is equated with victimization", and this is true for women in

particular.[36] When looking at the literature on gender and migration, words used include:

"naive and defenceless"[37] and "passivity, domesticity"[38] and the IOM's ICs perpetuate this type

of imaging.

Andrijasevic provides some great examples of this type of language, such as her

explanation of one ad which notes that women who migrate illegally will most certainly end up

joining the sex trade once they arrive in Europe.[39] Rather than simply being "migrants" or even

"people", women are predominantly referred to as "victims".[40] In addition, one of the

campaigns Andrijasevic mentions has a footing that states, "Ignorance Kills".[41] It is an

interesting choice of words to describe a woman as ignorant if she chooses to migrate.

Andrijasevic concludes that the IOM's ICs do not empower women because, instead of creating

a new workable representation of women, the campaigns deploy old techniques of sexualizing

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[35] Rutvica Andrijasevic, "Beautiful Dead Bodies: Gender, Migration and Representation in Anti-Trafficking Campaigns," *Feminist Review* 86 (2007): 38.
[36] Siobahn Stiles, "'I am Elena': Rhetorical analysis as the first step to a 'best practices' formula for sex trafficking Public Service Announcements," *Visual Communication* 11, no. 2(May 2012): 289.
[37] Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1684.
[38] Andrijasevic, 38.
[39] Andrijasevic, 34.
[40] Nieuwenhuys and Pecoud, 1684.
[41] Andrijasevic, 33.

them which results in a voyeuristic expression that combines with a lack of mobility in order to provide a docile perception of all female migrants.

This victimization is not limited to women alone; however it does predominantly affect them given traditional notions of female passivity. However, victimization of all migrants is a serious issue, as many believe that they are unable to access certain services unless they fit the mould of an "ideal victim".[42] Similarly, Christie notes the apparent presence of an "ideal victim", which is someone who is completely innocent and defenceless.[43] Perpetuating the seriousness of one's victimization in order to access services can lead to very detrimental effects; Hoyle et al. describe how an "ideal victim" and a "real victim" is characterized as dichotomous rather than binary, which ends up characterizing non-ideal victims as illegal.[44] Once a migrant is characterized as illegal, they open themselves up to unfair deportation or imprisonment.

ICs are not only based off of an incorrect premise but they do not convey helpful information. As such, ICs do not actually inform potential migrants, but rather subdues them or even normalizes the consequences of irregular migration by creating the expectation (rather than simply the *possibility*) of being trafficked. This could serve to encourage illegal migration further rather than stemming it.

Alternatives to the IOM's ICs

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[42] Hoyle et al., 322.
[43] Erin O'Brien, "Human Trafficking Heroes and Villains: Representing the Problem in Anti-Trafficking Awareness Campaigns," *Social Legal Studies* 25, no. 2 (2015): 208.
[44] Hoyle et al., 326

While these ICs may not be effective, there are alternatives that the IOM may pursue in order to truly fulfill their mandate of ensuring the safety of all migrants. Heller suggests legalizing migration further in order to discourage illegal (i.e., dangerous) migration efforts and diminish the profitability of Ruben's *bastard industry*.[45] However, Heller does also note that this is unlikely to happen soon within the major regional migration player: the European Union. Furthermore, these campaigns have political backing and are financed by major European organizations and simply implemented by the IOM in a private firm-like manner.

Alternatively, Stiles outlines some best practices for such campaigns, if they must be used. The first suggestion she provides might be an obvious one, but it is not currently employed: she notes that it would be useful to involve women who have had experience being subjected to sex trafficking in order to help the design the campaign in a way that would be useful to others. In this way, they could help convey information that they wish they would have known prior to their own departure using their own hindsight to assist others. In addition, she agrees with Andrijasevic in stating that any form of erotic objectification or fetishization should not be employed as they are not useful in conveying information appropriately, as well as any references to victimization and "othering". Instead, potential solutions and forms of assistance available to migrants should be clearly outlined in the campaign. This alternative would recognize migrants as true decision-makers; or, as Stiles puts it, "as active agents with depth of character".[46]

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[45] Heller, 314.
[46] Stiles, 201.

Conclusion

ICs put on by the IOM do not alter the decision of migrants to flee for two reasons. First, information campaigns are based on the assumption that migrants are not informed regarding the dangers of illegal migration. As this paper discussed, this is false given the fact that migrants obtain information from their informal networks and prioritize this source of information over any outside sources -- including the IOM. Second, the campaigns do not actually change the socioeconomic standing of the migrants, which continues to be precarious -- and even perilous.

The ineffectiveness of these campaigns is problematic because they end up producing the opposite effect to what they claimed to intend. They encourage the vulnerability of migrants along their already-dangerous journey. There are alternatives, as mentioned in the section above, but they must take into account the prevalence of victimization in this field of study. Interestingly, Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud note that the IOM does conduct research on their ICs and are even sometimes critical of them. Despite the IOM's enthusiasm regarding these campaigns, they recognize that migrants "know what awaits them but nevertheless decide to leave."[47]

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[47] Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud, 1687.

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