

## ARTICLE

# Disciplining migration aspirations through migration-information campaigns: A systematic review of the literature

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## Abstract

In the past few years, governmental agencies have developed a diverse repertoire of migration-management measures to steer migration flows and discipline unwanted migration. Migration-information campaigns have become a prominent tool aimed at communicating directly to migration aspirations of the targeted population in transit and sending countries. Through these information campaigns the geographical locus of control is shifted toward where the receiving state seeks to steer migration flows. This review paper is a research synthesis on literature engaging with migration-information campaigns. The study is based on 17 peer-reviewed journal articles from the years 2010–2020. Articles were coded based on discipline, type of research, research perspective, geographic origin and focus of the campaigns, objectives and rationale of the campaigns, tools and methods used in those campaigns, campaign funding, actor constellations, and a general assessment of each article. Findings from this study identify prominent trends as well as blind spots in the current research and indicate that there is still little research available on information campaigns concerning irregular migration, and even fewer studies report on their effectiveness. By implication future research is ad-

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vised to focus on empirical studies on the impact of information campaigns on migrants' aspirations.

#### KEYWORDS

awareness-raising, irregular migration, migration-information campaigns, migration aspirations and capability, migration control, migration policies, migration management

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, the dominant discourse on irregular migration has been broadly framed in terms of security and thus addressed through security measures. Due to general concerns about states' perceived inability to control migration, such practices have gained in relevance, and have externalized measures of migration management, from border control and stricter immigration policies in receiving countries to dissuasion and deterrence strategies in sending countries (Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011). Public information campaigns to inform potential migrants about the risks of migration and the harsh life conditions in the destination countries are increasingly being deployed as one such tool to manage migration (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007; Schans & Optekamp, 2016). In the 1990s, Australia, the USA and the European Union (EU) and EU member states started to implement public information campaigns predominantly in the framework of the fight against human trafficking, which has emerged as a new form of migration characterized by exploitation and coercion (McNevin et al., 2016; Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007; Watkins, 2017; Williams, 2020). The objective of these antitrafficking campaigns is to reduce potential "victims" vulnerability by informing them about the risks of being entangled in criminal networks of traffickers and smugglers (Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007). The line between public information campaigns focusing on human trafficking and those addressing irregular migration is fairly thin, with both disseminating messages warning potential migrants of the dangers of migration. In the case of trafficking the messages come across more strongly and are easier to convey, whereas campaigns focusing on irregular migration are centered around more security-related arguments to dissuade potential migrants from leaving (Pécoud, 2010). Recent events like the European "migration crisis" in 2015/16 and ongoing boat migration from Africa, with a large-scale loss of life, have revitalized receiving countries' governments' interest in the latter tool to address irregular migration (Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011; Schans & Optekamp, 2016).

In this paper, we focus on the more recently implemented formal campaigns targeting irregular migration prevention in migrant sending and transit countries. These are developed on the premise that potential migrants are lacking information on migration, or that the information available prior to the campaign is incomplete or inaccurate, or that the new information is trusted and will alter knowledge, perceptions and aspirations, which would then lead to behavior change, that is, not migrating (Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011; Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007). In addition to formal information campaigns targeting potential irregular migrants in transit and sending countries, there are also informal methods and channels of information dissemination, such as the cooperation between the IOM with humanitarian and community-based intermediaries (see Maà, 2020) and campaigns implemented in receiving countries to encourage so called "voluntary returns" (see Cleton & Chauvin, 2020; Van Neste-Gottignies, 2018). Both aspects are not in the scope of this review.

The increased popularity of "awareness raising and information campaigns on the risks of irregular migration" is reflected in numerous calls from the EU for funding such campaigns in course of the EU action plan against migrant smuggling, 2015–2020 (European Commission, 2015). Since 2015 the EU has devoted over EUR 23 million alone to information and awareness-raising campaigns to counter irregular migration (European Commission, 2019, p. 11) resulting in a total of 104 campaigns which have been deployed by member states and 25 by EU institutions (European Migration Network, 2019). These initiatives—as Pécoud (2010, p. 197) expressed pointedly—might be driven by policymakers' dream of an "ideal scenario," in which "successful information campaigns would make border control un-

necessary.” But in spite of their growing number, there is a lack of assessment of the campaigns’ proper effectiveness (Browne, 2015; Toms & Thorpe, 2012) and their overall efficiency remains highly contested (Andersson, 2016). Given the complexity and the variety of migration-information campaigns and their underlying assumptions, it is especially hard to produce evidence in this area (Carling & Hernández-Carretero, 2011; Nieuwenhuys & Pécoud, 2007; Schans & Optekamp, 2016).

The central objective of this review is to map emerging topics and the composition of the scientific literature on migration-information campaigns, and to delineate possible future research trajectories. So far, there are only two reports reviewing and assessing different migration-information campaigns (Schans & Optekamp, 2016; Tjaden et al., 2018). The report of Tjaden et al. (2018) is based on a systematic review of campaign-evaluation reports with a focus on the quality of evaluation processes. By contrast, the report of Schans and Optekamp (2016) addresses and critiques the underlying assumptions of information campaigns on migrants’ use of information and is based on data from 33 information campaigns and a literature review on migration decision-making. To the best of our knowledge, the present paper is the first to systematically review scientific literature on migration-information campaigns targeting irregular migration. For this purpose, a multiple-step systematic literature search was conducted. The first step included the search across three data bases: ISI Web of Knowledge, Scopus, and Google Scholar. The search was conducted through the following combination of keywords in ISI Web of Science and Scopus: (information OR “awareness rais\*” OR deterrence) AND campaign\* AND migration. Due to the broader scope of Google Scholar and consequently the significant higher number of results that a Google search creates, we decided to narrow the search through the “quotation mark” search operator to find exact matches for the following three key phases: “migration information campaigns\*”, “migration awareness raising campaign\*”, “migrant information campaign\*”. The search was carried out without temporal limitation and included all articles engaging with migration-information campaigns up to 29 March 2020. The combined screening of the three databases identified 262 records. Following the removal of 57 duplicate records, 196 records remained in the library. Subsequently, an additional narrowing selection was applied using the following exclusion criteria: (1) nonpeer-reviewed articles; (2) other than English language<sup>1</sup>; (3) focus on antitrafficking and anti-smuggling; (4) primary focus not on information campaigns. Through these exclusion criteria an additional 185 records were excluded, and 10 studies focusing on migration-information campaigns were identified. In a second search step, the results were broadened through (a) the screening of bibliographies, as well as (b) the search for the publication record of the authors of the originally identified 10 studies. Through this step, 7 additional publications could be identified. All in all, the systematic search procedures resulted in 17 studies with a focus on the examination of migration-information campaigns.

## 2 | RESULTS

To condense the selected publications and to provide a comprehensive overview, a content analysis of the data set was conducted, including (1) the distribution of the papers over time and publication outlets, (2) the regions and campaigns focused on in the papers, (3) the applied research methodologies, research focus and recurring topics that could be identified. By putting the results into context, we derive conclusions and propositions regarding the future development of the research field.

### 2.1 | When and where?

From the publication time period, we observe increasing attention being paid to the issue of migration-information campaigns over the past decade. The first paper in the sample was published in 2010, and since 2014 we can see a steady increase in the number of publications, with a peak in 2019 and 2020. From the various publication outlets involved we can see that the theme lies at the intersection of multiple disciplines, including media and communication

studies (*Global Media and Communication*, *InMedia*, *European Journal of Communication*, *Media International Australia*, *Mass Communication and Society*), marketing (*Journal of Communication Management*), migration studies (*Migration Studies*, *International Migration*, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*), geography (*Human Geography*, *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*), regional studies (*Territory, Politics, Governance*), risk research (*Journal of Risk Research*), and international relations (*Stosunki Międzynarodowe—International Relations*). Although, as was shown, research on migration-information campaigns is conducted within a broad range of disciplines, the internal focus and theoretical orientation within this body of literature remains relatively narrow. All of the publications were produced by researchers affiliated with Universities in the USA, Europe, and Australia. Hence, this points towards the institutional inequalities of knowledge production in academia in general and in the research on international migration management in particular.

## 2.2 | Regions and campaigns in focus

The papers focus on major immigration countries and on migration pathways between them and source countries. Ten of the selected articles focus on EU member states as countries that launched migration-information campaigns (Bartels, 2017; Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2018; Fiedler, 2020; Gazzotti, 2019; Hartig, 2017; Heller, 2014; Musarò, 2019; Oeppen, 2016; Rodriguez, 2019; van Bommel, 2020), whereas six papers engage with Australia's deterrence messaging and Overseas Public Information Campaigns (OPICs) (Fleay et al., 2016; Hartig, 2017; Hightower, 2013; Marczuk, 2016; Richardson, 2010; Watkins, 2017). Only two papers look at migration-awareness-raising campaigns from the USA (Kosnick, 2014; Williams, 2020). We could further identify three major regional sender-receiver constellations: (1) EU member states–African countries (Bartels, 2017; Fiedler, 2020; Gazzotti, 2019; Heller, 2014; Musarò, 2019; Rodriguez, 2019; van Bommel, 2020); (2) Australia–Central Asia and Asian Countries (Fleay et al., 2016; Hartig, 2017; Hightower, 2013; Richardson, 2010; Watkins, 2017); and (3) USA–Latin American countries (Kosnick, 2014; Williams, 2020).

A closer look at how the papers engage with campaigns shows, first, a wide range of scope. Some papers address campaigns broadly and investigate how campaigns created by or for one country's border enforcement have been implemented and evolved over a period of time (Watkins, 2017; Williams, 2020). Others focus on specific campaigns, such as that by Musarò (2019), who analyzed the narratives and images produced by the "Aware Migrants" campaign funded in 2016 by the Italian government and implemented by the IOM in 15 African countries and how this campaign supports migration-control practices. A few papers, such as those by Bartels (2017), Gazzotti (2019), and Rodriguez (2019), do not study campaigns directly but focus instead on prevention and development projects in areas deemed to have high emigration propensities. These projects combine preventive campaigns with the organization of cultural activities and education projects aimed mainly at young people. While most papers focusing on one sender-receiver constellation, one paper makes a comparison between countries concerning the messages transmitted by Germany and Australia to potential migrants and refugees in contrast to their public diplomacy narratives (Hartig, 2017).

A second campaign-related aspect, which could be observed from the data set, is the actor-constellation being focused upon. The campaigns in the papers are mostly funded by migrant-receiving states. They are being developed in cooperation with intra-governmental partners in receiving states, such as development ministries or customs, and implemented by international organizations—the IOM in particular gained importance as a major implementation partner for migration-related projects—or NGOs and local community leaders in countries of origin (Bartels, 2017; Gazzotti, 2019; Oeppen, 2016; Rodriguez, 2019). Additional private consultancy and communication firms, which are hired to design and administer such awareness-raising and information campaigns, are also involved. Watkins (2017, p. 299) considers these multifaceted actor-constellations as part of the "complicated expansion of borderwork." While eight papers (Bartels, 2017; Fleay et al., 2016; Gazzotti, 2019; Hartig, 2017; Heller, 2014; Rodriguez, 2019;

Watkins, 2017; Williams, 2020) provide insights into funding channels, only three (Fleay et al., 2016; Watkins, 2017; Williams, 2020) take a closer look at the budgets and financial flows of single campaigns, through which a trend in the importance of campaigns could be shown. Watkins (2017), for example, has highlighted the increasing budget allocation for Australia's OPICs since 2009.

A third campaign-related aspect is the different campaign dissemination strategies covered in the analysis of the articles. These have changed over time according to technological advancements. Those strategies in focus range from conventional community-level programs such as workshops, lectures, and cultural and social events (Bartels, 2017; Gazzotti, 2019; Rodriguez, 2019) to various types of media, including more traditional print media (postcards, billboards, posters, pamphlets, brochures and booklets, newspapers and magazines) (Hartig, 2017; Marczuk, 2016; Richardson, 2010), TV and radio broadcast (Heller, 2014; Watkins, 2017), and increasingly the Internet and social media (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, websites) (Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2018; Musarò, 2019).

### 2.3 | Conceptual and methodological approach

Generally speaking the reviewed articles can be divided into two main groups: the first group of publications, which focuses on the policy level and the implementation of information campaigns as part of international migration management and broader border-externalization efforts, draws mainly on concepts like autonomy of migration (Bartels, 2017; Gazzotti, 2019; Rodriguez, 2019), migration and border regimes and bordering practices (Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2018; Musarò, 2019; Oeppen, 2016), Foucauldian concepts of biopolitics, and governmentality (Heller, 2014; Watkins, 2017). One of those papers specifically draws on a feminist geopolitical approach to study the emotive aspects of migration-information campaigns and contributed the concept of "intimate bordering" (Williams, 2020). While the second and smaller group of publications looks into migrants' risk perception, and more generally the gathering and processing of migration information and migration decision-making, using concepts such as audience theory (Richardson, 2010), risk theory (Fleay et al., 2016; van Bommel, 2020), and structure and agency in migration processes (Fiedler, 2020). However, in only one publication could be found a clear proposition to connect awareness-raising campaigns, as a strategy to influence migrants' behavior and migratory decision-making (Fiedler, 2020).

Of the identified studies only two papers (Hightower, 2013; Kosnick, 2014) did not explicate the methodological approach, and can therefore be considered as scientific essays. Five papers (Hartig, 2017; Marczuk, 2016; Musarò, 2019; Oeppen, 2016; Watkins, 2017) focus in their analysis only on campaign materials and policy documents and employ content analysis as a method. The rest of the papers conduct qualitative empirical research and apply a range of diverse qualitative methods. These include interviews (Rodriguez, 2019; van Bommel, 2020), focus-group discussions (Rodriguez, 2019; van Bommel, 2020) and participant observations (Bartels, 2017; Fleay et al., 2016; Rodriguez, 2019). In terms of sampled groups, five papers focus on stakeholders including government officials and NGO/IO employees implementing or conceptualizing information campaigns (Bartels, 2017; Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2020; Gazzotti, 2019; Heller, 2014; Williams, 2020). Those papers make use of content analysis as well. Four articles include interviews with the target audience of migrant information campaigns (Fiedler, 2020; Fleay et al., 2016; Richardson, 2010; van Bommel, 2020). Only one paper (Rodriguez, 2019) included interviews with target audience and stakeholders.

### 2.4 | Thematic focus

The papers address a broad range of issues that can be grouped into the following thematic areas:

### 2.4.1 | Communication and media strategies

The first thematic area focuses on the messages, which are communicated through information campaigns, as well as on the various media channels, which are used for bringing the messages to the target audience. Hartig (2017) and Marczuk (2016) both see information campaigns as tools of public diplomacy, which refers to a country's communication with and self-representation toward foreign publics. In contrast to the mainstream understanding of public diplomacy as promoting a positive image of a country in the world, Hartig (2017) distinguishes between a "nice" (conventional) and "nasty" dimension of public diplomacy. Looking at Australia, he argues that the campaigns are trying to deter people by painting an overly negative picture of the country, an endeavor that apparently does not achieve the objective of keeping migrants away, while at the same time it does undermine positive public diplomacy initiatives (Hartig, 2017, p. 343). Understanding information campaigns as active communication efforts made by governments directed at prospective migrants, the study by Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud (2018) illustrates how governmental actors are entering a new terrain, in their case the Norwegian government, in using the affordances of social media platforms to disseminate their messages directly to private users across the world. For this purpose, they analyze the quandaries of conflicting interests involved when governments reach out to migrants using social media, which is actually regarded as strengthening people's resources and ability to migrate. In this case "government communication campaigns directed at potential migrants can hence be seen as an attempt to 'colonize' the 'backstage' of social media networks and resources," a protected space which is normally used for private or semi-private conversations (Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2018, p. 19). Another way in which government agencies and campaign producers aim to get their message to potential migrants is by using vehicles of popular culture (Kosnick, 2014, p. 6). In this way, they seek to affect migration behavior by disguising the origin of the message. So called "migracorridos" (migration ballads) are aimed at shifting migrants' perspectives by targeting their emotions, linking the idea of border crossing to death and desperation (Kosnick, 2014, p. 6; Williams, 2020, p. 9). Furthermore, in his paper Heller (2014) identifies similarities between colonial educational cinema and IOM's Information campaigns and sees the IOM's video testimonies of migrants as part of a "carefully planned assemblage of different media forms and networks," with the organization also relying on local actors to disseminate the message (p. 309). For instance, in the "Aware Migrants" campaign, launched by the Italian government and developed in partnership with the IOM, next to horrific personal video testimonies of migrants' journeys to Europe, there is a music video of a famous Ghanaian musician titled "No place like home" with him singing "no to irregular migration" (Musarò, 2019, p. 635). In short, these state-funded media campaigns aiming to dissuade potential migrants in their countries of origin form part of a range of new border control measures that have direct communicative dimensions.

### 2.4.2 | Implementation of migration-information campaigns

The second thematic area focuses on the implementation of migration-information campaigns from the vantage point of the countries, the actors and the individual projects. Heller's (2014) and Bartel's (2017) articles investigate the transfer of migration control to origin and transit countries from the vantage point of the implementation of information campaigns. Similarly, Gazzotti (2019) deals with the social life of prevention projects and carves out the dynamic process of border control by looking at their implementation and trajectory over time. Following a different approach, the article by Rodriguez (2019) explores local experiences of development actors' participation in European migration control in Senegal, pointing to these actors' agency in the interplay with the externalized EU governmentality of mobility. Finally, these papers show how the social experiences of the increasing employment of humanitarian and neoliberal forms of migration control is embedded in local dynamics and how these dynamics are providing people in regions of departure with agency.

### 2.4.3 | Symbolic dimensions of migration-information campaigns

The third thematic area explores the symbolic dimension of migration-information campaigns as a tool of migration control and the workings of these campaigns on physical and imaginative dimensions. Watkins (2017), as well as Williams (2020) illustrate how information campaigns work as a supplemental form of externalized border enforcement by looking at the symbolic associations established by such campaigns about the spaces and places of irregular migration and how they target the spatial imaginaries of potential migrants. However, Williams (2020) takes on a feminist geopolitical perspective to analyze how these campaigns affect the intimate spaces of migrants' everyday lives. Musarò (2019) researches how the campaigns' depiction of irregular migrants and refugees fosters migration control, and concludes that these campaigns contribute to "normalizing a transnational imaginary into a militarized borderscape" which takes place in the field of tension between care and control (p. 637). Oeppen (2016) on the other hand makes the case for these campaigns as rather symbolic, presenting governments as taking action to protect their borders while maintaining a humanitarian image and shifting responsibilities concerning the risks of the journey onto migrants themselves. To summarize, these papers focus on the campaigns' messages to comprehend the imaginary geographies that aid migration control.

### 2.4.4 | Effects of information campaigns on migrant decision-making and evaluation

The publications subsumed in this thematic area focus on the way the target audience of these campaigns—potential migrants and refugees—gather information about destination countries and are affected by information campaigns. The articles by both Fleay et al. (2016) and van Bommel (2020), inquire more generally about the sources and circulation of information on life in destination countries and the risks of migration used by migrants before departure, whereas Richardson (2010) examines refugees' interpretation of Australia's deterrence policies prior to their arrival. Furthermore, the articles by Fleay et al. (2016) and Richardson (2010) note that Australia's information campaigns are based on an outdated concept of communication processes and a simplistic understanding of the target audiences, stating that "government media and Internet strategies focused on deterring asylum seekers from their boat journeys to Australia are adopted without substantial knowledge of how information is sourced before and during these journeys (...)" (Fleay et al., 2016, p. 70). Moreover, the lack of empirical audience research tends to reinforce the assumptions of campaign initiators about migrants' choices and behavior that do not actually fit in with refugees' self-awareness, as they do not see themselves as irregular migrants and claim their right to seek asylum (Richardson, 2010, p. 17). In a different approach drawing on migration theory, Fiedler (2020) puts into question the supposed causal connection between migrants' risk awareness and decision-making processes, examining how information is accessed, processed and evaluated and how expectations are generated, thus raising the question of the effectiveness of such campaigns. Similarly, the effectiveness of migration-information campaigns is put into question by Rodriguez (2019) because of a mismatch between the perceptions that development agencies and local youth hold on migration and development (Rodriguez, 2019, p. 744). In the same vein, van Bommel (2020) points to the antagonistic perceptions of the initiators and receivers of risk information regarding what an "educated decision" might look like, highlighting the complex relationship between risk perception and decision-making. In summary, concerning the impact and effect of information campaigns these papers state that it remains unclear.

## 3 | DISCUSSION

The results of our literature review illustrate that the academic scholarship dealing with migration-information campaigns contributes rich insights into the practices of migration management. As shown above, the publications have taken up different topics that range from the direct communicative dimensions and the more symbolic dimensions of information campaigns to their actual implementation and their effect on prospective migrants' decision-making.

One of the recurring issues in the reviewed publications concerns the conflation of security and development agendas. This is reflected in the actor constellation of migration-information campaigns. Intergovernmental organizations, such as the IOM, have involved themselves in both humanitarian and border-control projects like migrants' "voluntary" return and awareness-raising campaigns so as to provide the management of migration "for the benefit of all" on behalf of the donors (Bartels, 2017; Rodriguez, 2019). As such, while the IOM claims its humanitarian interest in saving lives by providing migrants with risk information, at the same time it contributes to border security and thus to measures which put migrants' lives in danger (Heller, 2014, p. 311). Furthermore, local development actors partake in migration-prevention projects like income-generating training and facilitate migration-awareness-raising activities with local civil-society groups. As a result of their funding structure these organizations, despite their humanitarian rhetoric, often act in accordance with the interests of their most important donor countries (Rodriguez, 2019). There are also ethical concerns, which arise when information campaigns function as a form of deterrence to refugee flight (Musarò, 2019). In this sense, the "Rumors about Germany" campaign, launched in 2015 in Afghanistan, has been conceived controversially given the ongoing conflict and state of security in that country (Oeppen, 2016). Hence, while migration-information campaigns hardly focus on the actual causes that lead to migration movements on dangerous journeys in the first place, they tend to shift the responsibilities for the perils that migrants might encounter on their journeys onto the migrants themselves, showing that policymakers meet their humanitarian responsibilities by providing migrants with objective information (Kosnick, 2014; Oeppen, 2016).

Another recurring issue that arises is that of migration-information campaigns' effectiveness. The papers in this review did not really investigate any form of outcome, process, or impact evaluation of migration-information campaigns. The majority of the papers build on the argument that information campaigns have very limited or even no effect on migrants' decision-making after all. It is argued that they are not only based on false assumptions, but are also poorly evaluated. Although many papers just back up their claims with anecdotal evidence, only few papers directly look at their effectiveness and impact on migration decision-making in their analysis. In a systematic literature review on the impact of migration-information campaigns comprised of 58 evaluation reports of such campaigns targeting irregular migration and smuggling and two studies published in peer-reviewed journals, Tjaden et al. (2018) state that "in the absence of reliable evidence, the debate on the potential of this policy tool often relies on largely anecdotal evidence" (p. 6). This might be the case because of the methodological difficulties that arise when trying to collect data on the levels of awareness, changes in perception, or changes in attitudes and behavior from the target audience of information campaigns (Browne, 2015). A narrow view of the impact of campaigns on migration flows as a benchmark for decisions of continuing campaigns will certainly conceal the broader rationale of campaigns as they also follow a domestic mission, showing that governments are actually doing something to control their borders while at same time maintaining a humanitarian image (Fiedler, 2020; Oeppen, 2016). The fact that the effectiveness of migration-information campaigns is difficult to assess and that arguments about the (in)effectiveness thereof mostly rely on anecdotal evidence raises the question of whether research on the (in)effectiveness of information campaigns should perhaps make way for studying the multiplicity of the local effects of such campaigns, rather than focusing on their target audience's migration practices (see Rodriguez, 2019). This would open up relevant research perspectives.

The analysis of the reviewed papers shows that the regional, historical, and political contexts and constellations in which migration-information campaigns are embedded in make a difference in terms of messaging and the perceptions and interpretations thereof. This becomes clear, for example, when the different approaches of EU member states and Australia are compared. In Australia the "Pacific solution" was first introduced by the Howard government in 2001, externalizing the processing of asylum-seekers to regional processing centers in Nauru, Papua New Guinea, and Christmas Island (Pickering & Weber, 2014). However, after the legislation was repealed because of human rights concerns in 2008 it was revived again in 2012 with clear deterrence messages to potential asylum seekers. Australia's notorious "Stop the boats" campaign, which was implemented as part of Operation Sovereign Borders in 2013, a border-protection regulation aimed at stopping boat arrivals of asylum seekers, illustrates Australia's position on deterrence and securitization when it comes to managing migration (Fleay et al., 2016; Watkins, 2017).



In contrast, the EU's mode of migration control shifted to merging development with issues of security (Dini, 2018; Frowd, 2018) through the delocalization of border control to migrants' transit and sending states (see Guiraudon & Joppke, 2001) and the intensified cooperation with neighboring states in preventing migration and repatriating clandestine migrants (Carling & Hernandez-Carratero, 2011; Casas-Cortés et al., 2013; Vives, 2017). The EU's border management across the Global South, and particularly Africa, is continuously based on rationalities of state-building, development and cooperation, for which Frowd (2018) coined the term "developmental borderwork" (p. 1659). While Australia's governments set out to send "loud and clear" deterrence messages to potential asylum-seekers (Richardson, 2010; Schans & Optenkamp, 2016), EU campaigns in African countries, like the "Aware Migrant" campaign, along with deterrence messages, presents testimonies of return migrants talking about alternatives in their respective home countries (Musarò, 2019). Therefore, looking at the papers by Fiedler (2020), Richardson (2010), and van Bemmel (2020) in this review, it is safe to assume that these differences are reflected not only in the various ways people react to these campaigns, but also in how they shape their perceptions and knowledge about the structures and practices of migration and their self-awareness as migrants.

Many articles discussed in this review have built on the dominant focus in academic literature on states and institutions, which is based on securitization and governmentality. One of the shortcomings of these macrostructural approaches is their deterministic overtone, which leaves hardly any space for conceptualizations of migrants' individual agency. Yet, some current research demonstrates that despite of migrants' and refugees' "information precarity" (Wall et al., 2017), they also define and manage information strategies and can therefore contest the legitimacy of such campaigns (Gillespie et al., 2018).

There is still a scarcity of research on the local implementation and outcomes of these remote control-activities in transit and origin areas, let alone migrants' perceptions and experiences of these activities. This bias in research may have multiple reasons: (a) on a practical level the reason is linked to the difficulty to conduct fieldwork in the respective countries in terms of access to the areas and target population, particularly as these migration-information campaigns and programs are aimed primarily at irregular migrants; (b) the bias also stems from the fact that research on migration-information campaigns is dominated by political and communications sciences which put a stronger emphasis on structures and programs and pay less attention to the phenomena from the perspectives of the migrants themselves; (c) on a more structural level, the bias is generated through the positionality of the researchers involved as all are based in research institutions in the Global North and mostly take a perspective from the Global North on the issue on migration-information campaigns; (d) on a methodological level, the bias might be caused by the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the review, particularly the sole focus on English language literature, through which discourses in languages are excluded.

The review on research on migration-information campaigns raises on a more general level questions with regard to what knowledge is produced by whom with whom for what purpose. The awareness of the ethical dimension arises particularly in the context of cooperation with certain institutions. That is to say when engaging with the topic of migration-information campaigns and the responsibility for the knowledge production and dissemination it is important to interrogate more broadly the independence of research from institutional actors like the IOM who is interested in evaluating the efficiency of such programs and projects (see Stierl, 2020).

## 4 | CONCLUSION

The purpose of this literature review was to provide an overview of the body of academic literature concerned with migration-information campaigns targeting irregular migration, and to delineate future research trajectories. The body of literature on this topic is mainly divided into two parts—one based on securitization and border literature and the other one dedicated to migrants' decision-making and risk perception. Issues which were taken up in the articles concerned the effectiveness of these campaigns, the ethical concerns which arise when deterrence messages reach

refugee populations, and the shift from securitization to “developmental border-work,” and consequently the multiple actor constellations involved in regional variations of transnational migration management.

We see a need for future research to place stronger emphasis on the local implementation and outcomes of migration-information campaigns and programs, focusing not only on the variety of actors involved and information disseminated, but particularly to examine how migrants navigate this informational landscape and how it affects migration aspirations and practices. Bridging the duality of structure and agency in migration decision-making, De Haas's (2014, 2021) aspiration–capability framework for understanding migrants' agency could offer a fruitful path to link questions of the macro level, like political economy and mobility regimes, with analyses of the microlevel, such as the collective social imaginaries and aspirations which infuse migration projects (Carling, 2014). Both angles are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the highly contested processes surrounding migration-information campaigns and their communication strategies and migrants' information practices. Furthermore, not only campaigns in places of origin but also in destination and transit countries should receive more attention covering the different dissemination and communication strategies depending on the context of migration. Finally, future reviews should not only have a broader scope in terms of the campaigns and programs investigated, but should also include publications in languages other than English. The review has shown that a divers—in terms of regions and institutions—and transdisciplinary research is needed to decolonize research on migration-information campaigns in particular and international migration management in general.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no conflict of interests.

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## ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup> With the focus on English-language literature, we are addressing the international scientific debate on the issue, which is in the focus of this paper. We are aware that the focus has the limitation that national and regional debates in other languages are not covered by the review. This is beyond the scope of this review, but we see the need of further research addressing this gap.

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