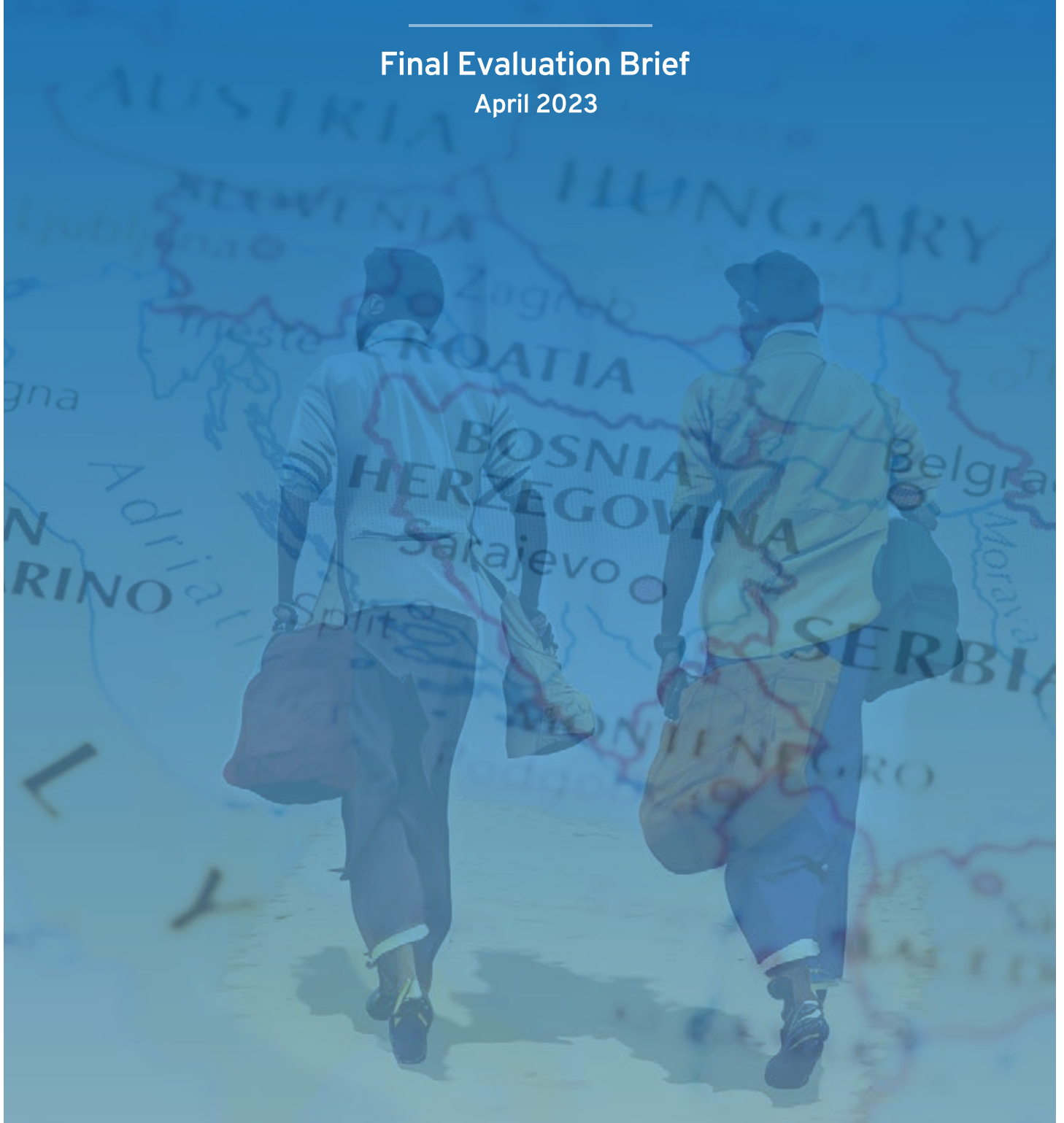# SEEFAR

External Evaluation of the WBAWARE Information Campaign

Final Evaluation Brief
April 2023

Executive Summary

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), in partnership with and co-funded by the German and Austrian Ministries of Interior and with the financial support of the European Commission, implemented a project called "Awareness Raising and Information Campaigns on the Risks of Irregular Migration for the Western Balkans 4 (WBAware)" to raise awareness about the risks and challenges of irregular migration to the EU. An information campaign called "Migrants talk to migrants" was conducted as part of the project, targeting migrants in four Western Balkans transit countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia A shorter information campaign also targeted potential migrants in selected areas of the countries of origin.

This evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the information campaign and offers recommendations for future programming. Therefore, the evaluation team employed a mixed-methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative data. A desk review of project documentation was conducted, as well as 17 semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Quantitative data collected by the campaign was reviewed as well.

Key Findings

The key results of the information campaign included an overall reach to 3 million people on Facebook, engagement with over 60 thousand users on Instagram, and generation of 4.5 million views across 108 videos on Youtube, with an average percentage viewed rate of nearly 80%. In addition, the in-person information sessions reached 355 transit migrants across the 4 implementation countries in the Western Balkans via 50 carefully planned information sessions.
The overarching orientation of the campaign was found to be well-aligned with EU portfolio's funding goals. Analysis of the campaign's designs and objectives reflected the commendable ability of the project team's to adapt to a challenging environment, and its continuous efforts to meet beneficiary needs.

In interviews, the donor identified the campaign objectives as including behavioural changes related to reducing irregular migration to the EU and Member states (MS) and promoting voluntary return. Further, the majority of key informants from the implementation team agreed that the primary goal of the campaign was to raise awareness about the risks of irregular migration. This highlights the need to define campaign objectives more specifically in the future, clearly identifying the intended effects and a measurable future state. By establishing clear campaign objectives, there is a greater chance of alignment between donors and implementers and a higher likelihood of achieving those objectives.

Broad campaign objectives led to varying interpretations of effectiveness among KIIs. While some focused on adaptability, others looked at campaign reach. Social media metrics showed the campaign's reach, but not how it was received and understood. Midline and endline assessments addressed research questions well, but their effectiveness was limited due to small sample sizes and few direct beneficiaries of the project taking part in the assessments.

Notably, social media metrics provided useful insights into the reach of the online campaign, while periodic assessments were effective in addressing the research questions outlined by the project team in the service-provider's TOR.

With very few pre-committed measurements set in stone and many MEL activities only defined on an ad-hoc basis, it appears that a comprehensive MEL plan along with a dedicated MEL consultant at the start of a project is crucial for future campaigns. GMDAC lacked the capacity to lead granular MEL, so a stronger MEL plan along with a project MEL officer, could have linked campaign objectives more clearly and directly to activities while aggregating all existing and planned data sources into an overarching framework that can measure campaign success effectively.

The initial research was highly successful in pinpointing the information sources used by migrants as well as knowledge gaps on migration risks and opportunities, and categorising the risks associated with irregular migration. The baseline research further complemented initial finding with focus groups but it appeared that, due to project delays, the content creation and communication strategies were more reliant on previous IOM reports than recommendations from the two studies' analyses.

All project stakeholders involved had strong technical expertise in their areas of specialisation. Fabrika, the social media provider, had worked with IOM and implemented a similar campaign in the region (AVRR). Using the structures of existing Temporary Reception Centers (TRCs) to conduct information sessions was effective in building rapport and trust with migrants and in cooperating with Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) representatives and lawyers from a legal aid organisation.

The evaluation team found that a strong suit of the campaign was its focus on integrating language diversity into content - which was crucial to contextualization. The campaign identified audiences based on their spoken languages and their intention to seek information on migration[1]. Although this approach enhanced accessibility to video materials and messaging for migrants, it may have missed an opportunity to segment the audience into subgroups and tailor activities and messaging further. By narrowing down the audience, it would have been possible to create more targeted and customised messages and interventions. The Center for Development Evaluation and Social Science Research's (CREDI) research was useful in identifying relevant differences between audience profiles and accordingly could have informed programming and campaign messaging.

The campaign produced engaging video content which was disseminated through various media channels (including Youtube and Facebook) to the target audience. The videos were created in the target groups' languages and featured migrants themselves which supported the content's credibility and relatability. The videos were short, authentic, and well-suited for a broad audience. The in-person sessions were interactive and good at rapport-building and could, in the future, be used for more discussion on legal alternatives and AVRR if that aligns with the campaign's larger goals.

The campaign messages effectively addressed the dynamic nature of migration trends and the circumstances for migrants in transit by expanding video content and boosting reach to also address migrants from Burundi, Cuba and India. While noting that the donor's requirements implied a focus on messaging on the risks of irregular migration, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) suggested that the balance between positive and negative messaging could have been improved. Preliminary research conducted by the project implementation team as well as in 2021, indicated that there were significant differences among specific migrant groups. Future campaigns should consider defining subgroups of audiences and creating separate target messages for each group in order to cater to specific social groups, including single migrants, families, etc.

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[1] Those looking for certain keywords on google were shown ads to redirect to campaign content.

The campaign included a number of different international actors and that clearly showed the value of that cooperation (discussed below). However, this meant less flexibility and ability to adapt to emerging situations on the ground. Several institutions may have been unable to provide analysis and take decisions at the speed that the campaign theory required. One such example includes being able to nimbly change strategy in response to emerging findings in social media analytics.

The project team successfully adapted the campaign to address emerging contextual changes such as Covid-19 lockdowns, challenges in recruiting partners, and unforeseen Ukrainian refugee movements. The team created videos that responded to new emerging nationalities being represented in migration trends and expanded the campaign to countries of origin, resulting in successful adaptations. Some recommendations from the midline report can be adopted to further enhance the reach of the campaign, provided the resources available allow for the same. An example is the pivoting of channels to include TikTok, to better target younger, single migrants.

Youtube and Facebook proved effective media to reach a large number of migrants. The campaign received over 5,000 unique views on its web page, 635 unique subscribers on YouTube, and 535 followers on Facebook. The top post on Facebook reached 473,000 users, generating an engagement with nearly 12,000 of them. YouTube videos received 4.5 million views across 108 videos, with views ranging from 70 to 277,000 per video[2]. To ensure that the scaled-up campaign reaches a variety of audiences, scaling approaches based on the reach of videos by sub risks category and audience groups are suggested rather than focussing primarily on the highest reach across all videos. While targeting source countries was less expensive, it did marginally improve engagement. Once the campaign officially targeted countries of origin, the cost of converting a person into clicking on content to seek more information decreased by nearly 75% to Euros €22 per click, while increasing the proportion of those clicking on content by 25%.

The video content generated was received very well across all stakeholders, including funders, implementers and beneficiaries. The high-quality and relevant content can be further leveraged; while data collected by CREDI indicated there may be a specific subgroup of transit migrants who benefitted from the videos, the exact benefits are still to be further explored. If videos are adapted, they could further lead to more information-seeking behaviour among transit migrants. Different types of information, such as specific steps one can take to access legal aid or AVRR support, may need to be included in the videos in order to prompt behavioural change. Programmatic investment into indicators and methods that track such changes on a continual basis in the future would shed more light on this.

While reach and watchtime of videos were high, the success of the social media component in terms of the actual impact of the videos was difficult to determine due to the limitations of social media metrics. It remains unclear whether viewers were in fact representative of the target audience. Posting more often on Facebook, using comments to engage with the audience, and A/B testing of posts, would provide an even wider reach for relatively low-cost investments.

Messaging on AVRR in transit countries remains challenging. Migrants were often reluctant to receive information about AVRR during in-person sessions. Videos on social media did not seem to include

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[2] Figures have been extracted from the campaign's Dashboard, designed and maintained by Fabrika. Data retrieved on March 20, 2023, using January 2021 to February 2023 date ranges where applicable. Summaries provided by Fabrika on the conclusion page were also referenced. Youtube subscription and Facebook followers were noted from the respective web pages.

easy-to-access links for direct click throughs to AVRR information for interested viewers. In order to improve future AVRR messaging, targeting audiences who are interested in receiving the information will be crucial. Such targeting would also focus on redirecting them to certain next steps which they are not aversed to. A targeted AVRR social media campaign would prioritise clear, accessible and easy-to-understand information as well as access to the relevant resources.

It was commendable that the campaign allocated a significant portion (18%) of the budget towards monitoring, evaluation, and research outputs, which is higher than industry average. The evaluation suggests that more investment in implementation could be considered. One could, for example, allocate more resources towards implementation than training in order to enhance impact. A budget analysis revealed that 15% of the budget was allocated towards training for in-person sessions, while only 11% was spent on actual implementation. Further, it is noteworthy that costs of staff delivering information sessions were covered by other projects, while the costs of the venue and equipment were given in kind by IOM. Given that in-person sessions are likely to have the greatest potential for behavioural impact, and that prioritising and engaging with beneficiaries is a key campaign objective, making more resources available for implementation during budget planning in future projects is recommended. Finding remote training methods to keep training costs low can further add to this orientation. At the same time, with a significant budget proportion dedicated to M&E, applying the recommendations from this evaluation to strengthen internal capacities and investing more into collecting information from direct beneficiaries will help better measure campaign effectiveness in the future.

The project proposal included a sustainability strategy, which aimed to generate best practices for future outreach campaigns and to enable local actors to implement their own campaigns. The project's content was also planned to remain open-source for EU and local partners. It was challenging to assess the campaign's sustainability at the time of evaluation as it remains open whether best practices generated through this campaign will be used in the future. While the campaign helped bring stakeholders together, lessons from that collaboration can also contribute to the campaign's sustainability goal.

Recommendations

1. **Clearly define SMART campaign objectives that align with overall funding priorities and instruments.** Explicitly state whether the campaigns aim to raise awareness, change attitudes, and/or change behaviours. Specific objectives will ensure greater alignment between donors and implementers while enabling the definition of precise indicators to measure the achievement of objectives. It is also important to not assume that awareness changes will automatically lead to behavioural changes. Moreover, if behavioural changes are desired, they should be explicitly stated. By following these guidelines, campaigns can become more specific, targeted, and more likely to achieve their intended outcomes. In cases where both migration management and protection objectives are present, it is crucial to analyse trade-offs and ensure that implementers understand the hierarchy of objectives.

2. **Define MEL plan and indicators clearly at the inception phase and, ideally, ensure that MEL staff are internal and supervise all campaign components.** It is also advisable to establish a minimum standard for MEL at the project's outset, as well as a budget to support it. Hiring a MEL specialist to serve as the project's MEL manager can help ensure consistency throughout the project, and facilitate campaign monitoring to assess progress toward intended goals at any given time. Part of the MEL plan (see section on MEL capacities in report for further details) could

include trialling more innovative MEL methods to complement social media metrics such as running Facebook surveys and conducting a sentiment analysis on received comments. Dedicated resources and appropriate planning can enable systematic testing to establish effectiveness of campaigns and of specific learning questions, for example "What is the influence of content on migrants' decision-making related to AVRR?". This would enable the clear identification of campaign achievements, enable periodic aggregation to evidence achievements across different components and allow to effectively adapt campaigns throughout implementation. While the current campaign included useful Facebook metrics for progress monitoring[3], one could track such data points disaggregated by target group, type of risk and key end message to improve project learning and resulting adaptations.

3. **Continue leveraging existing campaign materials and structures to support migrants for new campaigns.** Existing migration support programme structures can often be easily integrated with new communication campaigns. For instance, well-designed AVRR webpages were interlinked with this campaign's web pages and curated on its Youtube channel. Future campaigns can build upon and augment these structures by replacing outros (messages at the end of a video) which point migrants to 'consider AVRR' with specific messaging on seeking AVRR consultations and other services. Given IOM's extensive experience and success throughout numerous campaigns, bureaucratic processes should be streamlined to allow for the reuse of materials, reducing the need for redesigns. Moreover, creating a new Facebook page and generating followers can be a time-consuming task; therefore, exploring opportunities to leverage existing Facebook pages from IOM brands is recommended to maximise the reach of the campaign.

4. **Improve audience targeting for future campaigns by focusing on migrant profiles rather than source countries.** To improve targeting for future campaigns, it is recommended to shift focus from source countries to migrant profiles. The high variability within the Western Balkans context makes segmentation based on source countries very difficult. Instead, segmentation based on migrant profiles could be more effective. For example, migrants who have been travelling for more or less than 12 months could be considered as two separate profiles. Other options would include focusing more on profiles such as single university students or married men with children back home. Given Facebook's limitations in targeting based on narrow profiles, there are two possible ways to achieve effective targeting. The first is to correlate vulnerability profiles with demographic targeting data that Facebook allows. This would involve identifying the characteristics of vulnerable groups and then targeting them through Facebook's demographic filters. The second option would be to create tailored types of posts and promote them to the same audience, but use headlines that speak specifically to each group. This way, both vulnerable and non-vulnerable individuals can be reached through the same campaign.For in-person sessions, rapid screening mechanisms should be established to identify vulnerable individuals quickly. To maximise the effectiveness of the sessions, they should be delivered in smaller groups based on migrant profiles. By doing this, specific issues and concerns can be addressed for each group, and the information can be tailored to their unique needs. In doing so, future campaigns will be more effective in reaching their intended audiences through tailored messaging. That however assumes that any consortium structure that manages such a program does allow such a campaign (see recommendation 7).

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[3] Including watch time and reach for videos, and click throughs and engagements for posts amongst others.

5. **Enhance the effectiveness of in-person activities by allocating more time to discuss the available options and understanding personal motivations.** Spending more time discussing an individual's motivations for migration, their experiences thus far, and the factors that influence their decision-making (for example, onwards migration/return) would enhance both targeting and project effectiveness. While this was done as part of the preliminary research, by continuing to delve deeper into these topics, the information sessions can become more tailored to the individual's needs, increasing their engagement and motivation to consider voluntary return. This approach can also help build trust and rapport between the individual and the facilitator, leading to more honest and open discussions. Furthermore, taking the time to understand an individual's decision-making process can also inform the development of tailored reintegration support plans. This will ensure that the individual receives the necessary assistance and resources to successfully reintegrate into their home country.

6. **Tailor messaging to specific subgroups within the target audience.** With unique and personal challenges, experiences, and motivations for migrating, a more targeted and relatable content for subgroups would create a stronger connection between the audience and the campaign message and increase project effectiveness. Additionally, it is important to translate video intros and outros into languages that are understood by the target audience as this can make the message more powerful and accessible, especially for migrants with weaker English proficiency.

7. **Make sure the campaign's institutional arrangements support the campaign's theory of change and operational requirements.** The campaign design emphasised the need for flexibility and nimbleness in monitoring and changing campaign strategy and adapting activities, but, in practice, as discussed by many key informants, the time leading up to the finalisation of proposed adaptations point out that perhaps institutional arrangements did not allow for rapid adaptation. It is important to consider the strengths and weaknesses of implementing a campaign through multiple national organisations and governments when designing a campaign's theory of change in this way. In the future, a similar consortium may be better suited to a campaign that's more static to ensure the institutional arrangements can support the campaign's requirements.

8. **Expand the current campaign concept to include in-person programming in source countries.** The current concept has proven successful in certain areas and can be effectively applied to home country campaigns through the use of video content, trusted messengers, and online playlists that can be accessed for an extended period of time. However, it is essential to define the objectives of the campaign before using a video-based approach, as this method is best suited for certain types of messaging. If a video campaign is chosen, adding an in-person component to encourage behavioural change is recommended. It is essential to allocate resources where they will have the most significant impact. This may involve targeting specific regions, groups, and subgroups within the source country. Additionally, we recommend partnering with local organisations in countries of origin and using trusted messengers to ensure that the message resonates with the target audience. Using the cost effectiveness analyses presented in this evaluation to support proposal and budget development in the future can help make decisions on where to allocate resources.

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[4] It is noteworthy that individuals interested in asylum or AVRR are indeed referred to individual consultations where IOM and/or UNHCR partners provide further information and assistance services - often covered by other projects. This recommendation is stressing the importance of campaigns like WBAware to allow in-person information session protocols to prioritise sufficient discussions to increase the likelihood of an individual to begin thinking of taking steps towards the aforementioned decisions and related

9. **To effectively prioritise sustainability, it is important to start with a clear definition of sustainability in the context of campaign goals.** If the aim is to achieve sustainable behavioural change, consider using in-person messaging that extends over a longer period and includes evidence-based messages that have been shown to lead to intended behavioural change. For example, if the aim is abandonment of irregular transit plans, discuss with them clear anecdotes of delaying transit, other alternative options available for them and highlight the benefits of safer return and reintegration routes and programs. If project objectives deem it within scope to promote best practice sharing among EU Member states, incorporate mechanisms for sharing and tracking the adoption of these practices. For campaigns focused on migration management, sustainability might involve ensuring the long-term availability of resources and support, even after the campaign has ended. This could involve partnering with local organisations or creating sustainable funding mechanisms to ensure continued support for migrants and their communities.

10. **Expand partnerships to generate effective content.** For example, collaborate with member states (destination counties) to provide accurate and up-to-date information on migration policies, laws, and regulations. Additionally, engagement with donors can facilitate funding streams and build sustainable partnerships. Future campaigns can also build on successful partnerships with local stakeholders such as community-based organisations, civil society organisations, and faith-based groups to increase reach and impact. Establishing referral mechanisms for migrant support services and fostering partnerships with local media outlets (as applicable to the targeted regions of each campaign) can also increase visibility and credibility of the campaign.

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[5] While such efforts were made during the campaign, establishing partnerships beyond the initial group of partners proved to be challenging. It may be worthwhile for future campaigns to first reflect and workout the bottlenecks before including such results into intended plans and related measures.