Managing Perception

Section 1.10

Topics:

* Involving Governments in Information Management*
* Using Information to Manage Migration*
* Developing Communication Strategies*
Information can be used as a migration management tool to provide many benefits. This section examines the relationship between migration, information, and public perception. Information can make migration more orderly and manageable by informing migrants and publics about migration issues and by increasing awareness of the basis for migration policy and initiatives. Topic One explores government involvement with information management and communication related to migration issues. Topic Two provides guidelines for well-managed information campaigns. In Topic Three, communication strategies are discussed for the most common migration scenarios where migrants use information to make decisions.

Learning Objectives

- increase your knowledge of the main concepts and processes associated with managing public perception

- better understand the importance of managing public perception for policy success or failure

- develop your ability to manage public perceptions when developing and explaining migration policy

Background

Information can be managed to facilitate a more orderly, humane, and beneficial migration process for all. Information is important for migration because it:

- makes immigration policy objectives and procedures more transparent
- is an important part of the process of deciding to migrate
• can support integration
• can inform and influence public opinion
• can provide better protection to migrants and can help uphold their rights
• helps support migrant obligations.

Accurate and timely information can greatly increase the value of other migration management measures. Any message can be designed to reach a given audience. The range of communication media is practically limitless, and media can be selected that will fit any budget and time frame.

Public perception and migration decisions are not only formed by the quantity and quality of information that is available, because some people will only see and hear what they are prepared to see and hear. This observation applies mostly to voluntary or unforced migration, which has become, in the past century, the predominant form of migration.

The decision to migrate is not entirely rational in the straightforward sense of evaluating pros and cons and then making a decision based on which ends up with the greatest number of points. The process is still governed by personal beliefs and desires, hearsay, wishful thinking, and stereotypes. The attraction of the unknown—the adventurous side of migration—is also one of the factors that influences decisions.

Guiding Questions

1. How can an information management strategy help your State address its migration management challenges?

2. What are the migration-related issues in your setting that can be addressed by a carefully designed and targeted information campaign?

3. What potential benefits might there be for your State if information measures are considered that would:

   • address prospective migrants in their home settings?
   • address emigrants residing in other countries?
   • better inform your own citizens about the challenge, complexity, and direction of your State’s migration management policies and practices?
Managing Perception

Key Message

The distribution of reliable, objective, and timely information through campaigns and other approaches is a flexible, affordable, and powerful way to influence migration decisions and to make migration more orderly and beneficial for all.

Managed information can also be used to inform and influence public opinion, which, in turn, can influence the development of migration policies and the integration process of migrants.

Terms and Concepts

**Information**
Ideas and facts, i.e., knowledge, news, and factual intelligence acquired in any manner and communicated in any format. In the context of migration, information refers to news, ideas, and facts related to migration trends and statistics, immigration legislation and procedures, and the practical aspects of immigration and/or emigration.

**Information agency**
An organization whose primary function is to provide information to the public.

**Information campaign**
The sum total of all outreach efforts that support a product or purpose in order to achieve educational, informational, public relations, and related objectives.

**Mass communication**
The delivery of information to large audiences via traditional mass media, for example, print and electronic media, or through informal media, for example, direct communication, meetings, discussion, and active interaction.

**Mass information**
Information delivered to large target audiences usually through mass-media channels. Information prepared for the use of large audiences.

**Mass media**
Forms of communication that reach large audiences such as newspapers, magazines, radio, and television, in contrast to newsletters or other media that are more specialized.
Message
The content of a communication act or process. A communication, a statement, a basic theme of significance. In the case of information campaigns, the message presents the overarching theme of the campaign and concentrates the most important information for a target audience.

Perception
How something is experienced and interpreted by people. Perception is distinguished from information and knowledge. A perception can be true or false, justified or unjustified. Perception is the result of many factors including socialization, education, availability of information, and individual or group needs.
Topic One

**Involving Governments in Information Management**

A great deal of evidence shows that migrants tend to use information when it comes from what is considered to be an official and/or a reliable source. Although the decision process for migration is complex and involves more than tallying up pros and cons, information does play a critical role. Decisions can be directly related to information levels and to perceptions, which are largely, but not entirely, a function of information.

A regular and reliable supply of information from an official source can supplement and correct information that may be fragmented, biased, based on rumours, or based on false perceptions, or based on deliberately distorted information that, if left unchecked, could by itself generate migrant outflows or inflows that otherwise would not occur. Myths, misperceptions about migration matters, and incorrect information from second-hand sources need to be actively countered by credible information. In emergency and post-conflict situations, quick, vigorous, and clear communication can have significant benefits by pre-empting further conflict and avoiding humanitarian disasters.

A popular view of migration is that it is fundamentally an economically motivated phenomenon whereby migrants flow from poorer countries to richer countries according to the law of labour supply and demand. However, this model fails to explain why certain migrants migrate only to certain destinations, or why they do so within a certain time frame.

**Example**

Roma people from the Czech Republic seeking asylum in Canada suddenly increased from a handful of cases to almost 3,000 cases over the space of three months in 1999. The trigger appears to have been a documentary shown on Czech public television about the fate of Roma asylum-seekers in Canada that presented Canada’s asylum provisions in extremely favourable terms. This, coupled with information from Roma informal networks advertising Canada as a “soft spot,” motivated the sudden outflow.

Most measures aimed at protecting migrants are either legislative initiatives or law enforcement measures. While these measures are indispensable, governments must also recognize the growing
power of individual migrants, their awareness of their own rights, and their assertiveness in demanding that these rights be upheld.

While governments have their role to play, migrants can take steps to protect themselves. Their ability to do this will depend in large part on their access to objective information on migration regulations and procedures, social and economic realities in host countries, migrants’ rights and obligations, support and assistance structures abroad, and the risks and consequences of irregular migration.

Important Points

1. Governments can use mass information as a migration management tool to increase the impact of law-enforcement measures or of legislation. Before laws can be effective, the people who are their focus must first acknowledge and understand them. For example, legislated disincentives to irregular migration, whether through repatriation of illegal migrants or restrictive immigration measures, only serve their deterrent purpose to the extent that they are understood and recognized by prospective migrants.

2. Migrants act not so much on the basis of economic and other realities but on their perceptions of these realities. Often, these perceptions are shaped by media stereotypes, peer influence, and wishful thinking. Migrant decisions can involve expectations that may not correspond to reality.

3. Migrants may trust and use sources that present incomplete and biased information. Migrants often act on partial information that does not reflect the complete body of information required to understand the realities of migration for a specific country.

Example

Afghan migrants who arrived at the reception centre in Sangatte, France wanted to make their way to the UK, which was perceived as having a more generous social-benefits policy and more permissive immigration and employment laws.

A comparative analysis of the direct and indirect benefits available for immigrants and asylum-seekers between the UK and France showed that the benefits in the UK were comparable to, if not lower than, those in France. Inter-community communication and media stereotypes contributed to the misperceptions.
4 The passive, laissez-faire attitude towards emigrants who decided to try their luck abroad has gradually changed to one of more visible guidance and protection. The attitude of governments towards their emigrants has evolved considerably during the past few decades. An increasing number of governments are active in ensuring adequate protection systems are in place for the protection of their migrant workers abroad.

5 Better information can help remedy some misperceptions and convey a balanced and true picture of the actual policy and practice of immigration countries. A number of immigration countries have taken in, and continue to take in, considerable numbers of migrants, either in absolute numbers or in terms of a sizable percentage of the entire population. Many have developed into harmonious multicultural societies that do not fit the stereotype of the “immigration fortress.”

6 Effective communication can explain the challenges of the immigration process facing governments and migrants, particularly the management of entry and stay.

7 Better communication on policies and practices to control irregular migration sends out some important messages. Providing and distributing information is a quick and visible way for governments to demonstrate action against irregular migration. This type of communication, geared to political constituencies as well as to intending migrants, targets perceptions and stereotypes and can make it clear the governments are serious about controlling irregular migration.

What You Need To Know About...
Involving Governments

Governments should not be the sole providers of migration information. Although official sources rank among the most credible, according to the evidence gathered to date, the “consumers” appear to be happy with a diverse market and would be wary if any single provider were to corner it.

Most migrants expect governments to be more of a standard setter than a direct provider of information.

Apart from the role of standard setter, governments also need to take on a more proactive role in certain migration scenarios. Outflow of irregular migrants from areas undergoing social and political change, or from conflict ridden areas, requires a timely and larger injection of information. The lack of reliable information that arises in such circumstances is often quite considerable. Experience has
shown that, if ignored, it leads to large-scale misinformation, which in turn leads to undocumented and disorderly flows of migrants.

“Consumers” of migration information rely on official channels, on private sector providers, on immigration lawyers, and, in increasing numbers, on the Internet’s World Wide Web.

The flexibility and cost-efficiency of the Web make dedicated migration sites an ideal tool for the purpose of providing information on migration that is easily accessible to all providers. These sites would provide information directly to individual migrants and to other information providers or key multipliers who, in turn, will feed the information to larger audiences in a friendlier and more accessible format. Indications are, however, that those with access to a computer and the skills to find their way on the Web and its jungle of information will remain a small minority for the foreseeable future. The more immediate and significant impact of this medium will be on the information providers.

“Consumers” are looking to governments to provide a more rigorous certification process that would impose certain operational and ethical standards on free-market information providers.

What Do You Think?

Why should governments put out information about migration opportunities and risk generating interest on the part of people who may not have considered emigrating in the first place? One question most governments have asked themselves, particularly in the “closed door” decades of the mid-70s to the late-90s, is why they should put out information about migration opportunities when the possibilities for regular migration are limited or non-existent.

The trouble with this line of thinking, as the increase in irregular migration in the past three decades has shown, is that there is no such thing as an information void. When “objective” information is not available, “bad,” fragmented, or deliberately distorted information takes its place.

When information is not provided by governments, the view promoted by trafficking organizations will be encouraged, namely that irregular migration pays. Better communication, while not a solution to this challenge, will portray governments as more in control of their policies and borders and more caring towards potential new citizens.

The “silence” policy also means that government policies and intentions are often unknown, misunderstood, or misinterpreted, not only by intending migrants but also by other governments and organizations, potentially creating a false image that can affect bilateral and multilateral relations.
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<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>1  What sources of information are trusted and used by migrants in your setting?</td>
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<td>2  What communication has your government undertaken to offset misperceptions about migration?</td>
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<td>3  How could your government improve information for migrants?</td>
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<td>4  How does your government guide emigrants? What information is provided to enable them to protect their rights?</td>
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<td>5  How does your government help migrants understand the law?</td>
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<td>6  What factors have you observed in your setting that influence the decision to migrate?</td>
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<td>7  What are the most important reasons for governments to be involved in providing information on migration?</td>
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<td>8  How should governments use the Web to manage migration information?</td>
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<td>9  What standards should governments set for other migration information providers?</td>
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<td>10 What sources of information other than government are most helpful to migrants in your setting?</td>
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Using Information to Manage Migration

Information can be distributed to manage migration in any cultural environment. Hundreds of information campaigns based on humanitarian themes are under way every day around the world. Thousands more are carried out for commercial purposes. Information can be delivered in almost all cultural environments as there is no society that does not have its own information systems in place. Contrary to popular perception, it is not necessarily the mass media that, despite their wide outreach, ultimately have the most profound impact. Informal networks and distribution through other channels, for example, communities, schools, and families, are often far more effective.

Information campaigns are a combination of inter-related and mutually reinforcing activities that can be tailored to get out a specific message to as broad or as narrow an audience as required. Information campaigns are labour intensive and can be expensive, but they are also the most efficient in raising awareness and changing mentalities and perceptions.

Campaigns should generally be used to address situations where the information deficit is considerable or needs to be filled in a relatively short time. One of the major advantages of carrying out mass information work in the migration context is the extreme flexibility this context offers in terms of the channels for dissemination that are used, the messages that can be conveyed, and the variety of budgets and time frames that can be developed.

Putting together a definitive list of the most common situations in which campaigns can be used in the changing field of migration is difficult. However, large-scale information campaigns and targeted information efforts can be used as an effective management tool in the frequently occurring scenarios described in the important points that follow.

Important Points

1. Large-scale information campaigns can be used in situations of irregular outflows. Irregular outflows are a relatively common occurrence in modern day migration. Numbers and duration can
vary greatly—from a few hundred to several hundred thousands—depending on a number of factors that include the situation in a country of origin, the “attractiveness” of a target country or countries, proximity, and, as always, perceptions.

Information campaigns can:

- discourage irregular departures by warning of the risks and consequences of irregular migration
- point out the possibilities for regular migration to those migrant communities that are most likely to qualify for these opportunities (it is important that false expectations are not raised in those communities not likely to qualify for regular migration opportunities)
- give prospective migrants objective information on day-to-day economic and social realities in countries of immigration.

Example

There were large outflows following the collapse of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. Large numbers of migrants, most of them undocumented, headed west in search of a better life. The asylum systems of receiving countries were overloaded because asylum application was the only available option for residence. While the numbers have now subsided, the pressure they put on largely unprepared and under-resourced reception facilities was considerable.

2 Information campaigns can use a variety of media and messages to warn audiences of the risks and consequences of trafficking and forced prostitution in a foreign country. The spread of human trafficking is worldwide and affects almost all countries along the migration continuum. Children and young women between the ages of 15 and 25 are particularly at risk of falling victims to trafficking. Information can be an empowering tool and can offer choices, options, guidance, and protection, particularly if it is complemented by training and capacity-building programmes for government officials, national media, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to increase their impact and reach out to other concerned segments of society.

3 Pre-departure counseling or targeted information can facilitate labour migration flows. Information campaigns can be used to inform migrant workers of their rights and obligations and to provide them with practical information about day-to-day aspects of their life abroad as well as opportunities
for assistance. Labour import and exchange schemes have increased in numbers in recent years as more and more governments respond to demographic pressure and temporary or longer-term labour shortages.

However, despite their increasing popularity and the benefits to host and home country—the latter particularly in terms of remittances—very few of these schemes are properly prepared. As a result, many labour migrants are unaware of their rights and obligations, have trouble or take a long time finding their way around, and have difficulty integrating into their new work and living environment. At the same time, their ignorance makes them vulnerable to exploitation and prejudice, sometimes with painful, dramatic consequences.

Section 2.6, Migration and Labour, has more information on labour migration flows.

Better information leads to better crisis management in humanitarian emergencies and post-conflict situations. Information can be distributed through a concerted outreach effort such as a campaign, or through the use of dedicated media such as local radio, camp displays, and community meetings.

Example

The experience of a number of recent major conflicts such as those in Rwanda, Kosovo, East Timor, or Afghanistan has shown the critical role information systems can have in such situations. In the first instance, emergency information efforts assist migrants with their immediate needs and support the overall humanitarian effort undertaken on their behalf. These efforts provide populations in distress—refugees and internally displaced persons—with basic information about the nature and extent of relief and humanitarian actions, thus helping to stabilize them. In a second stage, they assist the eventual resettlement, reconstruction, and development projects. While the scope for such interventions is more limited and carries risks, information can nonetheless be used in the wake of conflicts to help dispel misinformation and rumours that could upset a fragile peace or stability.

Information campaigns have been used in some countries to inform irregular migrants of the possibility of their obtaining legal residence status through regularization or amnesty programmes. These campaigns also have the purpose of building trust in the amnesty process and dispelling misconceptions and mistrust on the part of irregular migrants as to the real purpose of the amnesty.

Well-targeted information campaigns carried out in the initial stages of reconstruction and development projects can help build trust in the process, address misconceptions and misinformation.
tion, and ensure that a majority of affected parties participate. Reconstruction and development projects are formidable tasks. Lack of proper information as to their purpose, scope, and benefits, as well as on the exact role and agendas of all parties involved, can make them even more difficult.

7 The difficult plight of displaced people or refugees being moved to new, unknown destinations can be made easier by giving them accurate and timely information about the conditions of the journey, and the conditions awaiting them at the end of their journey. Similarly, accurate information about reintegration and day-to-day conditions in their country of origin can considerably assist displaced populations and, in particular, highly skilled migrants who are considering voluntary return.

8 Information campaigns on medical themes can be designed to warn potential migrants of various health risks that are sometimes associated with migration.

9 Information campaigns can be targeted at the general public to promote the image of the migrant and highlight the overall positive contribution migrants make to their countries of adoption. This can contribute to a more tolerant, less xenophobic climate, create a more receptive attitude on the part of the general public towards immigration, and considerably facilitate migrants’ integration.

What You Need To Know About...

Well-managed Information Campaigns

The power of any information campaign to change perceptions comes from its credibility. This is best served by truthful and balanced information. Campaigns must not misrepresent the underlying social and economic situation of migrants nor attempt to present it in a more favourable light than is really the case.

Effective campaigns should balance the “negative” with the “positive” as overly negative messages can quickly become counterproductive.

Effective campaigns should try to offer choice wherever possible. A balance must be struck between good and bad news. One vital piece of good news is the existence of possibilities for legal migration. When there is no choice, information will have no impact. Campaigns that focus exclusively on the negative side of things, with strong “stay-home” messages, have little chance of succeeding.
Campaigns work better when they are part of a wider package of measures aimed at solving migration issues. Information can greatly increase the impact of law-enforcement, development, return, and reconstruction efforts. Campaigns are most effective in creating momentum and in bringing issues to the centre of public attention. However, if they are not followed by other initiatives, their effects tend to wear off quickly.

There is a limit to how long a campaign should be, usually between six and nine months of active dissemination. The impact of information is inherently limited by time. Recall rates decrease quite quickly after a campaign ends. A longer-term effort is needed, but this does not mean longer campaigns. In some settings, sustainability might be achieved through communication and information activities or projects carried out by national authorities. This can be accomplished through transfer of know-how and capacity-building so that local organizations can be positioned to pick up from where international or “outside” agents leave off. One alternative is to scale back to a single dedicated medium that can partially meet the information needs of potential migrants.

Apply What You Have Learned

1. In your setting, what migration situations could an information campaign address?

2. How could an information campaign improve the image of migrants in your setting?

3. What kind of information campaign would help labour migration in your country?

4. What would a well-managed campaign look like in your setting?
Managing Perception

Topic Three

Developing Communication Strategies

The following points present a list of media and strategies that have traditionally been used, in various combinations, as the main delivery channels for information campaigns. A precise combination, or so-called “media mix,” is decided after proper research has been carried out on the profile of the target audience and their information consumption habits. This choice is also influenced by the available budget and its time frame.

Important Points

1 Media and options to consider include:
   
   • TV documentaries produced by national public and/or private television stations or as sponsored productions. They might present the plight of the migrant, or that of the unsuspecting victims of trafficking. These are broadcast in prime time on national television channels and can be followed by live TV debates or talk shows.
   
   • TV debates or round tables with expert panels can help to clarify migration issues from different standpoints and enable audiences to ask their own questions and provide feedback.
   
   • TV public service announcements consisting of 15-30 second “spots” are used in high-rotation, prime-time campaigns to convey strong, simple, and practical messages that are relevant to the specific subject of the campaign. These are a persuasive tool for influencing migration decisions.
   
   • Weekly radio broadcasts can be formatted as write-in or phone-in programmes during which listeners seek concrete, simple answers to their questions on migration. These offer the advantage of good impact, flexibility as to subject matter and length, and a more personalized contact. They can be a means for migration officials and experts, representatives of humanitarian and relief organizations, returnees, and migrants to convey first-hand information, relate their personal experiences, and give practical advice. They can be distributed as audio news releases to local, national, or short-wave stations.
• Radio public service announcements and FM plugs tailored to the requirements of younger audiences can deliver, in compact and lively format, practical information, testimony from migrants or simple, strong messages. They are particularly effective in intense campaigns over FM radio and can be syndicated for wider broadcast.

• Migration magazines filled with migration-relevant information and sold at news-stands can be a very effective and convincing tool. These contain articles on many aspects of a migration decision: how and whether to move, where to get information, pitfalls, dangers, etc. The variety of topics makes a magazine appealing to a wide audience. Selling it at news-stands gives it greater value and ensures its wide exposure. Brochures, handbooks, and fact sheets dealing with the same topics, but in a more detailed manner, can be distributed through local administration offices, local NGOs, consulates, or schools, or inserted into local newspapers.

• Radio or TV soap operas can be extremely effective message carriers in countries where official channels lack credibility or impact. Starting from real-life situations and setting personal drama against a wider historical or social background, soap operas create powerful role models and situations with which listeners and viewers can instantly identify. Their flexibility and longer-term impact make them ideal for reaching wider audiences and for delivering strong educational and cautionary messages.

• Simple, easy to understand, printed materials describe the realities of migration and the consequences of irregular departures. Issues of major migrant and public interest, presented on a country-by-country basis, can include sections on family reunification, legal employment, study abroad, etc. Special sections can present in a concise and objective manner the pitfalls of irregular migration, especially to young women considering resorting to trafficking.

• Posters or billboards with simple, high-impact messages showing the consequences of irreg-
ular migration, placed in public places frequented by potential migrants, bring the message to the streets.

- Networking and seminar tours can be designed to “bring the message” to the people, to provide the population with concrete legal information, and to do so, in person, in their place of residence. Key individuals and local organizations that will act as further disseminators of information can be briefed during seminars or round tables thus creating a corps of influential people knowledgeable about the realities of migration. Trips abroad by national journalists can be sponsored to subsequently inform the general public back home on the realities of life as an immigrant, regular and irregular.

- Training sessions can bring together NGO leaders, youth organizations, as well as local government officials. Led by trained moderators, the discussions aim at raising the awareness of migration issues among local officials and community leaders and, through them, spread campaign messages to the vulnerable population not readily accessible by other initiatives or through mass media.

- Seminars and round tables enable participants to share experiences, present problems and concerns, and search together for solutions. Participants can include actual migrants, government officials, representatives of international organizations or NGOs, press, social activists, etc. They can be one- or two-day events held quarterly or bi-annually.

What You Need To Know About...

Information Centres

Direct counseling of the potential migrant community through dedicated offices or information points helps answer specific questions in a face-to-face setting. Due to its time- and staff-intensive character, this form of information dissemination is used only on a limited scale, despite its popularity with migrant audiences. Information points can take the form of fixed dissemination structures, such as information centres or offices, set up in partnership with national organizations in countries of origin. These are “one-stop shops” for actual and potential migrants offering a range of services for a small fee or for free. They function as a “drop-in” facility allowing a person to browse the relevant information at his or her convenience.

This type of centre can offer advice and information in many areas, including documentation for visa applications, how to emigrate legally to major countries of immigration, exit procedures, and current
emigration legislation. Information can also be provided on the dangers of irregular migration, countries of destination, including their legislation and culture, opportunities for education abroad, and the location of national cultural centres, embassies, and consular offices abroad.

These centres can provide a migration “hotline” for questions on all issues relating to migration, can organize workshops and seminars on pertinent issues of the day, and can provide access to specialized migration publications.

What Do You Think?

In any campaign, part of the information will fall on unprepared or uninterested people. This is not the case with information centres because they are used only by interested people. While there are initial setup costs, over the long term centres will be far less costly than information campaigns, and because centres provide a steady flow of information over longer periods of time, they can have a more profound prevention effect.

One of the major advantages of fixed-point information centres is that they don’t distribute information but invite the audience to a central dissemination point. This has a number of implications. The approach is less intrusive, hence more credible; dissemination of information is more regular; and the process is demand driven.

Apply What You Have Learned

1. What choice of media (media mix) would be most effective for an information campaign in your setting?

2. What are the pros and cons of having “one stop” migration information centres in your setting?

3. How could television and radio be used effectively in your setting?
Concluding Remarks

Determined migrants will find ways of moving abroad. The choice most governments along the migration continuum will make is whether migration will be informed or a leap in the dark, either through legal or illegal channels. This Section has described the role of governments in managing migration through the provision of timely, accurate, and well-targeted information.

Reliable, objective, and timely information will set a standard and provide a powerful tool for influencing migration decisions that can help make migration more informed, orderly, and beneficial to all.

Resources

The following three reference texts provide a good introduction to the subject of mass information:

Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders and Wong,
1996 Principles of Marketing (The European Edition); Prentice Hall.

Kotler, Philip and Eduardo L. Roberto,

Roemmele, Andrea and Hans-Dieter Klingemann,