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THINK IT WOULD
HAPPEN TO US**

**Mapping of CwC Activities along
the Central Mediterranean Route**



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ACRONYMS

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development	MSF	Doctors Without Borders
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance	NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ARC	American Refugee Committee (now known as Alight)	NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
ARCI	Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana	OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
BBC	British Broadcasting Service	PI	Public Information
CDAC	Communicating with Disaster Affected Communities Network	PoC	Persons of Concern
CNARR	Commission Nationale pour l'Accueil et la Réinsertion des Réfugiés et des Rapatriés (Chad)	RSD	Refugee Status Determination
CTR	Conseil Tunisien pour les Réfugiés	SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
CwC	Communicating with Communities	SMS	Short Message Service
DEMAC	Diaspora Emergency Action and Coordination	StARs	Saint Andrew's Refugee Services
DRC	Danish Refugee Council	ToT	Training of Trainers
FAQ	Frequently Asked Question	TRS	Telling the Real Story
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit	UASC	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
GSMA	Global System for Mobile Communications Association	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IEFTA	International Film Talent Association	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies	USD	United States Dollar
IOM	International Organization for Migration	WFP	World Food Programme
JRS	Jesuit Refugee Services		
MaM	Migrants as Messengers		
MCD	Media and Communications Division at IOM		
MENA	Middle East and North Africa		

INTRODUCTION

This report was compiled at the request of the office of UNHCR's Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean Situation to inform the development of a comprehensive strategy on Communicating with Communities (CwC) for the entire Central Mediterranean Route that would engage with the persons taking part in irregular migration as well as the diaspora in Europe. The main communities for the area covered by the office of the Special Envoy include persons from Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia.

This report was compiled with an aim to:

- Map existing CwC activities and mechanisms across MENA and the Horn of Africa as they are interlinked;
- Assess existing CwC tools and their applicability for additional target audiences, catchment areas and messaging;
- Identify information gaps (both regarding messages disseminated and audiences reached) and suggest how to fill them with new tools and innovative forms of communication to rapidly expand dissemination to communities in countries of first asylum, transit and destination countries and within diaspora communities;
- Explore innovative ways of using digital tools and social media to amplify the outreach directly with refugees and other persons of concern including main diaspora groups, opinion leaders, influencers, and local Goodwill Ambassadors.

By definition, each communication strategy is determined by five elements: the sender, the message, the communication tools, the recipients and the effect. This study used a mix of methods to capture all these elements:

- ① **Communication Tools, Message:** A comprehensive desk review was carried out to map existing CwC materials and platforms in use across the pertinent regions.

- ② **Communicator, Message:** An online survey established the range of CwC activities performed by UNHCR offices in Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Jordan (MENA Bureau), Italy, Sweden (Telling the Real Story), Sudan and Tunisia. The offices of Libya, Morocco, Niger, Rwanda and Somalia did not respond to the online questionnaire, so the researchers had to rely on the desk review alone and may therefore not have captured the full range of UNHCR CwC activities in those countries.

- ③ **Recipient, Effect:** A series of qualitative interviews with newly arrived asylum-seekers and migrants in Malta shed light on the levels of information and the information sources that reached the recipients.

Our thanks go to the offices who took part in the survey as well as the team of UNHCR Malta who went out of their way to organise the research team's access to reception and detention facilities and provided transport, interpretation and briefings at short notice. Without their support the field research would not have been possible.

The report consists of two parts. The first part maps and analyses UNHCR CwC activities in the region and is based on the desk review and survey. The second part is a kind of reality check. Based on the interviews conducted with new arrivals in Malta, it explores which of the CwC activities have reached this random selection of respondents from the intended target audience.



This symbol indicates good practices of UNHCR offices in the CwC context.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mapping of CwC activities in the main source and transit countries of asylum-seekers, refugees and migrants along the Central Mediterranean Route reveals a patchwork of communication interventions intended to inform and assist Persons of Concern (PoC).

Overall, UNHCR has considerable experience in CwC. They are in continuous contact with asylum-seekers and refugees and are very well aware of the information needs of PoC. They know which information sources PoC use and how they can be reached.

UNHCR as a whole uses an impressive range of information tools, including outreach workers, telephone infolines, posters, billboards, brochures, printed materials, videos and animation videos. Information is disseminated via websites, Facebook and Twitter accounts and blog posts. They use multiple languages to make sure that the intended

target audiences can be reached and understand the information on offer. No other organisation has such a large variety of CwC activities in the migration context, spanning such a huge area.

However, there is no consistent CwC policy in UNHCR. Whether and to which extent an office is investing in CwC seems to depend largely on the dedication and interest of individual staff members. The level of sophistication of CwC actions differs considerably as does CwC engagement over time, which is most likely due to staff rotation.



The need for objective information directed towards PoC is undeniable. The interviews in Malta once again proved that the migratory movement along the Central Mediterranean Route is largely information-driven. The persons of concern consult information sources before and during their journey, albeit the wrong ones. They are encouraged by the diaspora as well as smugglers to move on, but the information is false or incomplete and does not provide a sound basis for making an informed decision. The risks of irregular migration are played down, so persons of concern are not aware of the extent of suffering and the probability of becoming a victim of trafficking before they start the journey.

Hence, expectations are unrealistically high which leads to despair, suffering and aggression among PoC who find themselves stranded in detention or in very dire circumstances in Libya or, later, in Europe.

The counter-narrative UNHCR needs to provide should address the most widespread misconceptions in irregular migration. Persons of concern:

- Misjudge UNHCR'S role in Libya. They expect resettlement without understanding eligibility criteria or the limited availability of resettlement places in Europe;

- Have unrealistic expectations of life in Europe and, in most cases, are not aware of the concept of asylum procedures or the need for legal residency, nor do they know about the risks of being returned after all they have gone through;
- Underestimate the financial burden involved in irregular migration and that their entire family might end up impoverished because of the enormous sums they have to pay for ransom;
- Do not even consider alternative protection solutions because the dominant narrative is about going to Europe.

UNHCR responds to this overwhelming need for factual information with a piecemeal of CwC activities. They do convey useful and much-needed local service information but they neither address the dangers ahead nor irregular migration as such.

CwC interventions are isolated and not interconnected. They help people who are on the move already but do not address the smuggler narrative in a holistic way.

The positive exceptions are the campaigns Telling the Real Story (TRS) and Dangerous Crossings, which was initially aimed for the movements to and thru Yemen. This research showed that these are the only CwC activities about irregular migration which indeed reach their target audiences. The research team asked new arrivals in Malta whether they had ever been warned about the dangers of irregular migration. Without being prompted, approximately one out of ten Eritrean and Somali respondents reported that they had seen Telling the Real Story testimonials. (This figure only serves as a rough indicator as it originates from a small random sample in a qualitative study.) A smaller number of persons knew the Dangerous Crossings music video. No other related campaigns (such as IOM's Aware Migrants) were mentioned by the respondents.

TRS and Dangerous Crossings are the best information tools about irregular migration currently in existence. Yet, their outreach and impact do not suffice to create an efficient and credible counter-narrative against the massive volume of misinformation and disinformation spread by the smuggling/trafficking business and parts of the diaspora.

Most UNHCR offices use a large variety of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube to present its work and reach out to donors, journalists and partners. By contrast, only a few offices use social media specifically to reach out to refugees and asylum-seekers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are based on the findings from this study, including suggestions made by the UNHCR offices themselves in the online survey.

Institutional Level

- CwC activities need to be scaled up and **mainstreamed** at the corporate level to go beyond the current random approach that is based on the know-how and commitment of individual staff members. UNHCR needs a CwC policy that prescribes obligatory measures and secures adequate resources. A feedback mechanism to measure the impact of CwC activities should also be created.
- Communicating with audiences spread thousands of kilometres apart, from countries of origin to diaspora communities in Europe, is a highly complex form of communication. UNHCR as an organisation has considerable experience in CwC, but it is distributed erratically. The organisation therefore needs to **build staff capacities** as widely as possible, in all operations and at all levels. The best way to do so is to develop an **advanced programme for CwC trainers** who would instruct and guide less experienced staff members, thus evening out the inconsistencies between offices.

Central Mediterranean Route

- Current UNHCR and TRS **awareness activities** are **no match for the flood of disinformation** PoC are exposed to. In order to enable PoC to make informed decisions, UNHCR needs to **expand the**

are only used at the national level, if at all. UNHCR should also collect more data on the target audiences, including their access to mobile phones and their literacy levels.

- **Add new formats to the UNHCR / TRS family of products** by creating a regular professional **news show**, presented by personalities from the communities and using audio and video files from community members, interviews, news developments, etc. Different shows should be tailored to the different communities and produced in different languages (e.g. Somali, Tigrinya, etc).
- In addition to individual testimonials disseminated through TRS and Dangerous Crossings, it should produce **talk shows with VIP presenters** to raise awareness on **underreported topics** related to irregular migration. Potential topics include (1) the situation of families who have to pay excessive ransom, (2) the long-term effects of torture that survivors are experiencing, and (3) the persuasive techniques smuggling agents are using to recruit customers.
- UNHCR does not use the full potential of social media, especially the possibility to reiterate and reinforce communications by **cross-channel messaging**. All info products should be disseminated via the usual UNHCR and TRS channels (mainly Facebook and YouTube) with additional strategic

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