

How Australia's Deterrence Media Campaigns, Strict Enforcement Policies, and Offshore Processing Can Reform the European Union's Approach to Irregular Migration and Asylum

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Abstract

The European Union spent approximately €7.6 billion on migration and asylum management in 2024, yet recorded 669,365 first-time asylum applications in 2025 [1], maintained a structurally inadequate effective return rate of 24.3% in 2024, and has 1.22 million cases pending decision. Against this spending-deterrence paradox, this paper makes a targeted, evidence-based contribution by focusing on two analytically distinct but operationally inseparable dimensions of Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB) framework, its deterrence media campaign architecture, and its strict enforcement and policy deterrence mechanisms. These are the two dimensions most conspicuously absent from the EU's existing migration governance architecture, and the two with the highest potential returns per euro of investment. Australia's "No Way - You Will Not Make Australia Home" campaign spent AUD \$10 million per year (approximately €6 million) on algorithmically targeted social media, multilingual broadcasting, IOM-managed physical materials, and diplomatic community engagement across 12+ countries and 16 languages. Backed by credible maritime interception, a "no settlement" legislative bar, and a Temporary Protection Visa framework, the campaign contributed to a upto 98% reduction in irregular maritime arrivals by 2014. In March 2026, Australian authorities resolved a maritime smuggling venture with zero irregular arrivals successfully reaching the mainland over a decade of operational effectiveness. The EU has no equivalent coordinated deterrence communication strategy; no centralized deterrence campaign budget; and no "no advantage" equivalent.

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Drawing on the most current available data (EUAA [2], Eurostat [1], Frontex [3], Australian Department of Home Affairs [4]), this paper maps Australia's full campaign architecture and costs; analyses the EU's comprehensive migration funding landscape (AMIF €9.88bn 2021-2027; Frontex €922M 2024; €6bn+ in external partnerships); critically evaluates the gap between EU spending and deterrence outcomes; and proposes ten evidence-based, not-yet-in-practice policy recommendations that go beyond existing academic literature. The paper also engages honestly with the human costs and legal constraints that bound any transferable adaptation for the EU context.

Keywords: European Union; Migration; Australia's Deterrence; Asylum; Frontex.

1.Introduction

1.1 The EU's Migration Spending-Deterrence Paradox

The European Union has dramatically escalated its financial commitment to migration management over the past decade. Combined EU and member-state annual migration expenditure grew from approximately €4.8 billion in 2019 to €7.6 billion in 2024, a 58% increase in five years. Yet the system's deterrence metrics have not improved commensurately. In 2024, the EU processed 912,425 first-time asylum applications; issued 453,000 departure orders; and enforced only approximately 110,000 of them, an effective return rate of 24.3%, down from 27% in 2021 [5]. In 2025, while asylum applications fell to 669,365 (a 26.6% decline largely attributable to geopolitical factors, principally the fall of Assad's Syrian regime that reduced Syrian applications by 73%, rather than EU policy reforms), the structural enforcement deficit remained [1,2]. The EU spent an estimated €17,000 per asylum application processed in 2024, making it among the most expensive asylum management systems per applicant in the developed world.

The increased mismatch between migration outlays and the weak performance of policies has been extensively studied in Europe. European Court of Auditors [6] stated that EU migration governance has a lack of institutional coordination and inadequate return mechanisms, making migration spending less efficient. Likewise, Boswell [7] found that European migration policy often focuses on symbolical political reassurance rather than on effective policies, resulting in what she termed “policy gaps” between policy and practice. In addition, Geddes [8] contended that the EU has been unable to develop coherent deterrence strategies due to member states' divergent national interests.

Lavenex [9] pointed to externalization of EU migration governance, and provided examples of externalisation in the form of agreements with transit countries like Turkey and Libya, which can push migration pressures geographically without addressing the structural drivers of migration. Similarly, Carrera and Den Hertog [10] identified that securitization of migration in Europe did boost the budget devoted to borders but led to only small decreases in irregular migration flows in the long-term. The authors of the report, Collyer and King [11], stressed that few restrictions on migration actually stop migration but, rather, push it into new channels, creating new humanitarian and enforcement problems.

Further research has called into doubt the effectiveness of deterrence-focused asylum systems in general. Hathaway [12] claimed that deterrence policies fail to achieve the goal of reducing the demand for asylum and in fact may have the opposite effect by violating international law's refugee protection principles. Gibney [13] also argued that there is a tension between the interest of the border-keeping and humanitarian aspects of migration in liberal democracies, which constrains the application of exclusively restrictive migration measures. Recurring policy instability is the result of the EU migration regime using crisis-management strategies, which are more reactive than strategically preventative, notes Triandafyllidou [14].

Recently, there has been some research interest in communication-based deterrence campaign. However, when structural push factors, like conflict, economic crisis, and political instability, are still very strong, government messaging on deterrence often has little measurable effect on the choice's migrants make, according to Coddington [15]. A similar conclusion was reached by Pagogna and Sakdapolrak [16], who found that information campaigns are not effective in preventing migration unless they are complemented by the perception of effective enforcement and an inability to make a successful settlement.

Other academics have focused on the economic aspects of migration management. Andersson [17] observed the development of a "migration industry" where growth of the border infrastructure, private operators and surveillance forces continually create new demands for spending on migration measures, without necessarily enhancing deterrence results. Additionally, Moreno-Lax [18] pointed out that the Mediterranean has experienced a more rigorous policy application in border enforcement, which has led to more legal and humanitarian disputes and to the absence of long-term policy responses.

Taken together, all these studies show that the EU migration system is beset by a recurring paradox: its financial investment in migration control continues to increase while its effectiveness in controlling migration, in implementing returns and in convincing migrants that its migration policy is effective is still relatively poor. The existing literature has therefore indicated that the failures of migration governance have typologies beyond the financial, institutional, political, and legal typologies, to name a few. This study is designed to contribute to these debates by exploring the possibility of implementing a coordinated communication-deterrence strategy, with credible enforcement and rights-based protections, to overcome some of the structural shortcomings that have come to light in previous scholarship.

This paper identifies a specific, addressable cause of this paradox, the absence of upstream deterrence communication. Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders (OSB), launched September 2013, demonstrated that credible, multilingual, algorithmically targeted deterrence communication backed by operational enforcement can achieve near-total suppression of irregular maritime arrivals at a cost that is a fraction of downstream management. Australia spent AUD \$10 million per year on its flagship "No Way" media campaign, deployed algorithmically targeted YouTube pre-roll and Facebook advertising to transit-country populations, IOM-managed billboards in Indonesia, radio spots across 12 countries, and community engagement at the village level. The EU has no equivalent programme. Individual member states (Austria, Denmark, Hungary, Germany) have deployed ad hoc national campaigns, but without EU-level coordination, budget, or infrastructure, these lack the scale, consistency, and cross-border credibility that distinguishes a

deterrence campaign from a press release. The paper's contribution is threefold: (i) a detailed, data-current analysis of Australia's OSB media campaign architecture and its costs, updated to March 2026; (ii) a comprehensive mapping of EU migration expenditure from 2019-2025 and identification of the deterrence spending gap; and (iii) ten not-yet-in-practice policy recommendations for the EU, designed to translate Australian lessons into legally permissible, EU-context-appropriate action.

1.2 Research Questions

- i. What is the full architecture and documented cost of Australia's OSB deterrence media campaigns, and what is the critical assessment of their effectiveness?
- ii. How is the EU currently allocating its €7.6bn annual migration expenditure, and where does the deterrence communication gap lie?
- iii. What are the key elements of Australia's strict policy deterrence architecture that give its campaigns operational credibility, and which are legally transferable to the EU?
- iv. What evidence-based, not-yet-in-practice policy recommendations can be derived for the EU, centred on deterrence communication and strict enforcement?

1.3 Methodology

This paper employs a mixed-methods approach: (i) quantitative analysis of EU and Australian migration statistics sourced from Eurostat, EUAA, Frontex, and the Australian Department of Home Affairs [4]; (ii) qualitative analysis of Australia's OSB communication programmes, including documented campaign costs from the DIBP Annual Report 2016-17, the Coalition's OSB Policy Document [19], and academic analyses by Coddington [20,21] and Geibel, Fozdar & McGaughey [22]; and (iii) normative legal analysis assessing the ECHR and EU Charter compliance of proposed policy adaptations.

2. The Current EU Asylum and Migration Landscape

2.1 Asylum Applications and Arrival Trends

Table 1 provides the most current available EU asylum and migration statistics, incorporating data from Eurostat's annual and monthly publications (current to April 2026), EUAA's Latest Asylum Trends 2025 (published March 2026), and Frontex annual border statistics (published January 2026).

Table 1: EU Asylum and Migration Key Statistics

Metric	2024 Figures	2025 Figures	Changes from 2024 to 2025
First-time asylum applications	912,425	669,365	-26.6% ; Venezuela No. 1, Afghanistan No. 2, Syria No. 3
Total asylum applications	Up to 997,000	Up to 822,000	-19% ; mainly driven by the collapse of the Syrian government (-73%)
Irregular border crossings	Up to 239,000	Up to 178,000	-26% ; lowest level since 2021
Protection granted (all instances)	438,000	361,325	-17.5%
EU recognition rate (first instance)	Up to 43%	39.1%	Lowest semi-annual rate on record in H1 2025
Cases pending decision (end of year)	Up to 1.25 million	1.22 million	Slight decrease
Unaccompanied minors	34,595	21,125	-38.9%
Effective return rate	Up to 24.3%	Not available at the moment	Structural enforcement deficit persists
Top 3 origin countries	Syria, Afghanistan, Venezuela	Venezuela (89,455); Afghanistan (63,830); Syria (39,985)	First time Venezuela surpasses Syria as the leading country of origin since 2013
Mediterranean deaths	Approx. 2,573	Approx. 1,878	-27%

Sources: Eurostat [1]; EUAA [2]; Frontex [3]; IOM [23].

Four analytically critical findings emerge. First, the 2025 decline in asylum applications (-26.6%) is primarily attributable to geopolitical exogenous factors such as Syria's political transition reduced Syrian applications by 73%, and Bangladeshi and Turkish applications also fell sharply, this mainly does not happen because of any EU policy reform. Afghan applications increased 33%, and Venezuelan applications rose 22.7% that demonstrates that the structural drivers of EU irregular migration have shifted, not subsided [2]. Second, Venezuela has, for the first time, surpassed Syria as the leading origin country for EU asylum applicants in 2025 (89,455 applications), representing an entirely new migration pressure vector from a non-conflict-zone country with visa-free Schengen access, this is a structural vulnerability the EU Pact does not specifically address. Third, the 1.22 million pending cases at end-2025 [1] represent a processing backlog of such magnitude that even sustained annual application declines will take years to resolve. Fourth, 1,878 people died in the Mediterranean in 2025 a figure that, while lower than 2024's 2,573, represents a continuing humanitarian catastrophe that the current management-focused EU approach has not resolved.

2.2 The Five-Country Geographic Concentration

Just five EU member states Spain (21%), Italy (19%), France (17%), Germany (17%), and Greece (8%) accounted for 83% of all first-time applications in 2025 [1]. This extreme geographic concentration reflects the Dublin system's structural failure: front-line and transit states bear disproportionate processing burdens, producing secondary movement dynamics that inflate total application volumes. The EU Pact's solidarity mechanism allowing opt-out via a €20,000-per-refused-relocation payment, provides only a partial structural remedy.

3. How Much Is the EU Spending? A Comprehensive Financial Analysis

3.1 Annual Expenditure Trajectory and the Spending-Deterrence Paradox

Figure 1 and Table 2 present a comprehensive mapping of EU migration expenditure from 2019 to 2025, disaggregated by funding stream. The dual-axis presentation spending (left) and effective return rate (right) illustrates the spending-deterrence paradox in its starkest quantitative form: expenditure increased by 58% while the effective return rate declined from 27% to 24.3%.

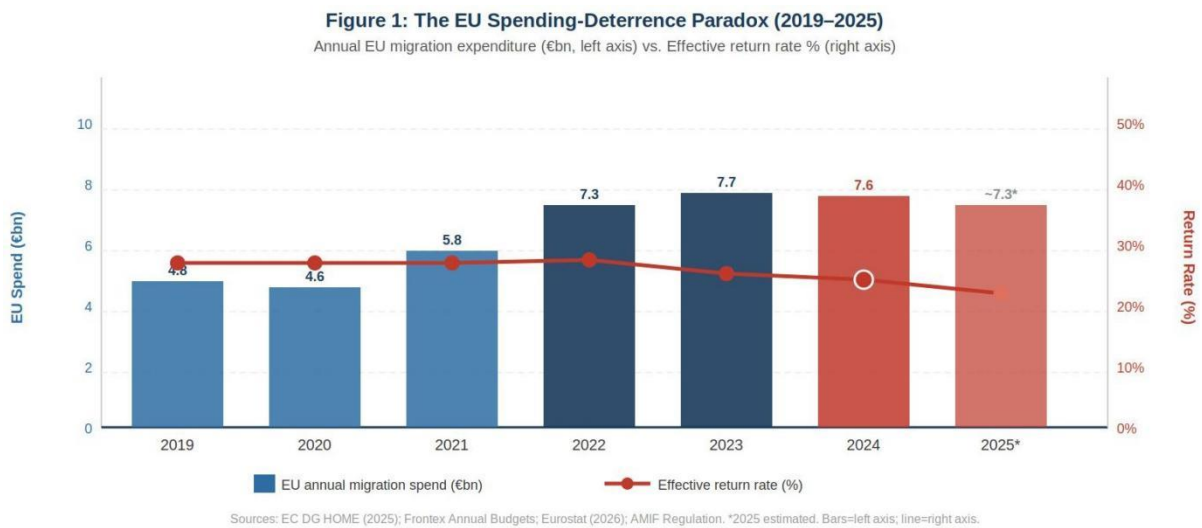


Figure 1: The EU Spending-Deterrence Paradox (2019-2025). As EU annual migration expenditure grew from €4.8bn to €7.6bn (+58%), the effective return rate declined from 27% to 24.3%. The inverse relationship indicates a structural governance failure, additional spending is not translating into deterrence effectiveness

Sources: EC DG HOME [24]; Frontex [25]; Eurostat [1]; AMIF Regulation.

Table 2: EU Total Estimated Annual Migration & Asylum Expenditure 2019-2025 (EUR)

Expenditure Category	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Frontex (annual budget)	€420M	€460M	€543M	€754M	€845M	€922M	Upto €1.0bn
AMIF + BMVI (EU-managed)	€1.4bn	€1.4bn	€1.5bn	€1.8bn	€2.0bn	€2.1bn	Upto €2.2bn
External / 3rd-country deals	€0.5bn	€0.5bn	€0.8bn	€1.2bn	€1.5bn	€1.6bn	Upto €1.6bn
Member-state reception (est.)	€2.5bn	€2.2bn	€3.0bn	€3.5bn	€4.0bn	€3.8bn	Upto €3.5bn
TOTAL (APPROX.)	€4.8bn	€4.6bn	€5.8bn	€7.3bn	€7.7bn	€7.6bn	€7.3bn
EU effective return rate	27%	27%	27%	27.5%	25.2%	24.3%	Data not available at the moment

Sources: EC DG HOME [24]; Frontex [25]; AMIF/BMVI Regulations (2021-2027); Migration Policy Institute [26]; Statewatch [27]; Eurostat [1].

3.2The AMIF: Core EU Migration Funding Instrument

The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) for 2021-2027 has a total budget of €9.882 billion nearly three times the €3.137 billion allocated for the 2014-2020 cycle [24]. Of this, 63.5% (€6.27 billion) is allocated to national programs co-managed with member states; 36.5% (€3.61 billion) is directly managed by the EU Commission for emergency assistance, resettlement, and solidarity relocations. Following the MFF mid-term revision in February 2024, AMIF received an additional €0.8 billion (+8%), the Border Management and Visa Instrument (BMVI) received €1.0 billion (+16%), and the EUAA received €0.2 billion (+18%), reflecting the EU's continued financial escalation of migration management [28], [29]. The Integrated Border Management Fund (IBMF), comprising BMVI and the Internal Security Fund-Borders, has a near €7.3 billion budget for 2021-2027, more than double its 2014-2020 predecessor [26]. This funding supports physical border infrastructure, surveillance technology, and the expansion of Frontex's standing corps toward 10,000 officers by 2027 with proposals to increase this to 30,000 currently under discussion [27].

3.3 Frontex: The Most-Funded EU Agency in History

Table 3: Frontex Annual Budget 2019-2025 (EUR)

FRONTEX ANNUAL BUDGET 2019-2025 (EUR)						
2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
€420M	€460M	€543M	€754M	€845M	€922M	Upto €1.0bn
MFF 2021-2027 Frontex total allocation: €5.6 billion						
Return operations budget 2024: €146.2M (+44% vs 2023's €101.3M; vs €67.8M in 2022)						
Standing corps deployment budget 2024: €232.6M						
Grants to member states 2024: €280M across 561 grants						
Despite record spend: return rate DECLINING from 27% (2021) to 24.3% (2024)						

Sources: Frontex [25]; Statista [30]; Frontex [25].

The structural mismatch is analytically decisive: Frontex's returns operations budget grew 115% between 2022 and 2024 (from €67.8M to €146.2M), yet the effective return rate declined over the same period. This confirms that the returns deficit is not primarily a financial problem, it is a political and structural problem rooted in the absence of binding readmission agreements and credible deterrence signalling, neither of which can be purchased through operational budget increases alone.

3.4 External Partnership Spending and the Coherence Deficit

Significant EU migration expenditure flows through external partnerships. The EU-Turkey Statement (2016) committed €6 billion, representing the largest single external migration deal in EU history. Beyond Turkey, €105 million to Tunisia (2023); €120 million to Egypt; €152 million to Morocco; €60 million for a Western Balkans migration package; and development-aid linkage packages negotiated with multiple African and Central Asian states [31]. These deals are politically contingent, often legally non-binding, and largely transactional, funding in exchange for border cooperation, rather than components of a coherent upstream deterrence communication strategy. The EU spent €6 billion on a single external deal (Turkey) yet has allocated €0 to a coordinated multi-country deterrence communication campaign. This priority inversion is the paper's central policy finding.

4. Australia's OSB Deterrence Media Campaign Architecture

4.1 Strategic Concept: Upstream Deterrence Before Embarkation

Australia's OSB communication strategy is built on a foundational principle that the EU has never adopted: convince potential irregular migrants, before they commit to a journey, that the journey is both futile and

dangerous. This "deterrence before embarkation" logic rests on three mutually reinforcing elements: (i) crystal-clear policy consequences *"You will not make Australia home"*; (ii) omnipresent information delivery reaching target audiences in origin countries, transit hubs, diaspora communities, and online platforms in real time; and (iii) operational credibility, the messaging reflects observable enforcement reality, not aspirational rhetoric.

The campaign architecture was not improvised, it was institutionally designed. The OSB communications group, mandated by the Coalition's 2013 policy document [19], drew together the Australian Border Force, Department of Immigration and Border Protection, Prime Minister's Office, and relevant ministers' offices to ensure "strict protocols and disciplines" on all public communications. This integrated communications governance, a dedicated cross-agency unit with centralized messaging oversight is precisely the structure the EU lacks.

4.2The "No Way" Campaign: Full Architecture, Channels, and Costs

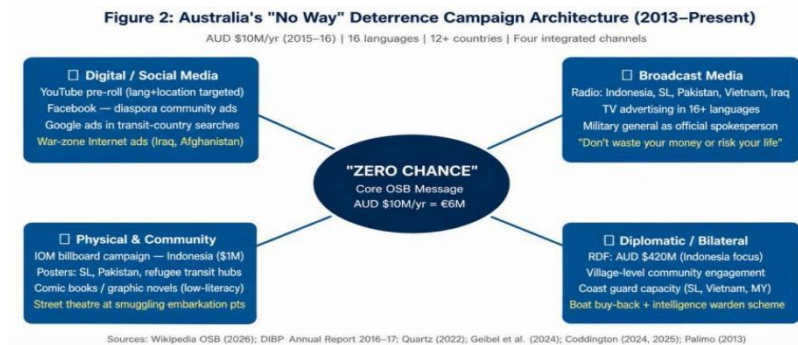


Figure 2

Sources: DIBP [32]; Wikipedia [33]; Quartz [34]; Geibel and his colleagues [22]; Coddington [20], [21]; ParlInfo [19]

4.3Digital and Social Media: AI-Targeted Advertising

The most technically sophisticated element was the use of algorithmic targeting on YouTube and Facebook. A documented case: a Dari-speaking Afghan refugee awaiting resettlement in Indonesia encountered a YouTube pre-roll advertisement featuring a camouflage-clad Australian major general warning "Don't waste your money or risk your life. You will be intercepted and turned back" algorithmically served because his Google account indicated Dari language preference and Indonesian geolocation [34]. Facebook advertising targeted diaspora communities within Australia itself: persons whose profiles indicated Vietnamese or other relevant language backgrounds received "No Way" advertisements even as Australian citizens, since diaspora contacts communicate with potential migrants in origin countries [21]. Google ads were placed in war zones including Iraq, reaching people at the very start of potential migration decisions.

4.4 Broadcast Media: Radio and Television in 16 Languages

Radio and television advertisements deployed across South and Southeast Asia in 16 languages. The campaign's slogan "No Way. You Will Not Make Australia Home" was translated with cultural precision, not merely linguistically [22]. The choice of a uniformed three-star military commander as the campaign's public spokesperson was architecturally deliberate: it communicated institutional resolve and operational capability rather than political aspiration. The slogan's reference to "I Still Call Australia Home" a quasi-national anthem, simultaneously communicated to domestic audiences, serving to reassure the Australian public that borders were being defended [21].

4.5 Physical Media, IOM Partnership, and Community Engagement

A \$1 million IOM-managed component placed billboards and posters in Indonesia specifically in areas frequented by asylum seekers considering the next leg of their journey [34]. Comic books and graphic novels were distributed in origin countries to reach low-literacy populations. Street theatre was deployed at known smuggler embarkation points. Village-level community wardens in Indonesia were funded through the \$420 million Regional Deterrence Framework to provide intelligence on smuggling operations and counter false claims made by people smugglers [19]. Australia also funded patrol vessels for Sri Lanka and surveillance materials for partner coast guards, extended the deterrence architecture into the physical operational capacity of transit states.

4.6 Documented Campaign Costs: A Comprehensive Budget Overview

Australia OSB Deterrence Campaign
AUD \$10 million (2015-16 financial year): total media advertising spends (DIBP Annual Report 2016-17)
Included: Digital (YouTube/Facebook/Google), broadcast (radio/TV), print, and community engagement
Equivalent: Approximately €6 million at 2015-16 exchange rates
AUD \$750,000: January-May 2015 only (partial-year figure, Wikipedia-OSB 2026)
AUD \$1 million: IOM Indonesia component - billboards and posters in refugee-congregant areas [34]
\$20 million: Indonesia community engagement programme specifically
Included: village-level engagement; boat buy-back scheme; community intelligence wardens;
Coast guard capacity funding for Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Vietnam
OSB total programme cost (2012-2024, including offshore processing): AUD Approx. \$12 billion
Campaign alone as % of total OSB spend: <0.1%, the highest leverage component

Sources: DIBP [32]; Quartz [34]; Wikipedia [33]; ParInfo [19].

4.7 International Comparators: The Global Deterrence Communication Industry

Australia is not the only country to deploy deterrence media campaigns, but it operates at the greatest scale and sophistication. Table 3 maps documented campaigns across seven countries, and critically highlights the EU's complete absence from this emerging global deterrence communication infrastructure.

Table 4: Comparative Deterrence Media Campaigns - Global Survey and EU Gap Analysis

Country / Actor	Campaign Name	Documented Cost	Channels	Target Geography & Languages
Australia	"No Way – You Will Not Make Australia Home" (2014–present)	AUD 10 million/year (2015–16); AUD 420 million Regional Deterrence Framework (RDF) total	YouTube pre-roll, Facebook, Google, radio, TV, billboards (IOM), comic books, street theatre, war-zone internet ads	12+ countries; 16 languages; Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Vietnam; Australian diaspora
Austria	"Myths About Migration" (August 2022)	Undisclosed	Google, Instagram, Facebook	Morocco, Tunisia, Bosnia, Serbia, Lebanon, Pakistan, India; 7 languages
Denmark	Deterrence newspaper advertisements (2015–16)	Undisclosed	Middle Eastern print press	Syria, Lebanon, Jordan; Arabic
Hungary	Anti-asylum newspaper advertisements (2015)	Undisclosed	Print advertising	Middle Eastern countries; Arabic
Germany	"Stay and Build Your Country" (social media)	Undisclosed	Facebook, YouTube, social media	Afghanistan; Pashto and Dari
United States	Anti-smuggling campaigns (Central America)	Multi-million USD/year	Television, radio, digital media	Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador; Spanish
Canada	Roma deterrence billboards (2010s)	Undisclosed	Physical billboards in villages	Hungary; Hungarian
European Union (Current)	No Coordinated EU-Level Campaign	€0 centralized budget	No common platform; ad hoc national efforts only	No unified deterrence messaging to origin or transit countries
European Union (Proposed CEDCI)	EU Coordinated Deterrence Communication Initiative	€50–80 million/year (proposed)	Digital, broadcast, physical, and diplomatic channels	Top 10 irregular origin and transit countries; 12 languages

Sources: Geibel, Fozdar & McGaughey [22]; Coddington [20], [21]; Quartz [34];

Wikipedia [33]; ParlInfo [19]; DIBP [32].

4.8 Critical Assessment of Campaign Effectiveness

Academic literature on deterrence campaign effectiveness is cautious but not dismissive. Coddington [15] and Pagogna & Sakdapolrak [16] both note "little evidence of efficacy" for public information campaigns operating as standalone deterrents. Three documented limitations apply: (i) persons with genuine protection needs often accept risks regardless of messaging; (ii) smugglers actively counter campaigns with misinformation, Crock Reference [35] notes that smugglers "absolutely use the politics" to sell dangerous voyages; and (iii) campaigns targeting aspirational economic migrants are more effective than those targeting persecution-driven refugees.

However, the Australian experience provides a critical contextualization: the "No Way" campaign succeeded as a component of a credible, operationally-backed system, not as a standalone communication exercise. The campaign's effect was to eliminate the information asymmetry that smugglers exploit; when potential migrants can verify, through YouTube pre-roll advertisements and IOM billboards, that Australia's government is actively and successfully intercepting boats, the smuggler's sales pitch loses credibility. The upto 98% reduction in arrivals correlates with the simultaneous implementation of maritime interception, offshore processing, and the media campaign, causal attribution to any single element is methodologically impossible, but the Clingendael Institute [36] assigns primary causal weight to maritime turnbacks, with the campaign playing an important amplification and demand-suppression role. In March 2026, Australian authorities resolved a maritime smuggling venture with zero irregular arrivals reaching the mainland, over a decade of operational effectiveness that no comparable maritime destination country has replicated.

5. Australia's Strict Policy Deterrence Architecture: The Enforcement Backbone

5.1 What Makes a Campaign Credible: The "No Advantage" Enforcement Triangle

A deterrence campaign without enforcement is counter-productive, it signals that the destination state is aspirationally tough but operationally permissive. Australia's campaign worked because three mutually reinforcing enforcement instruments made its messages reflect observable operational reality: (i) maritime interception (near-100% interdiction achieved by 2014); (ii) offshore processing with a "no settlement" legislative bar (no boat arrival, even if found to be a genuine refugee, could be settled in Australia); and (iii) a "no advantage" principle through Temporary Protection Visas (no permanent residence, no family reunion, no overseas travel). Together, these created what Crock, as quoted in [35], describes as "a very effective campaign to exclude people."

5.2 The EU's Enforcement Deficit: Returns Data in Context

Table 4 contextualizes the EU's returns deficit against the Australian OSB model. The critical structural comparison: Australia does not need a mass deportation program because its upstream deterrence prevents mass arrivals. The EU's returns challenge '453,000 departure orders, 110,000 enforced' is the downstream consequence of not having an upstream deterrence system.

Table 4: EU Effective Returns Rate 2021-2025 vs. Australian OSB: Structural Comparison

Year	Departure Orders	Effective Returns	Return Rate	Key Contextual Note
2021	Upto 432,000	Approx.117,000	27.0%	COVID disruption; deportation flights severely limited
2022	Upto 440,000	Approx. 121,000	27.5%	Post-COVID recovery; structural enforcement gap persists
2023	Upto 452,000	Approx. 114,000	25.2%	Pact negotiations ongoing; no new mechanism operative
2024	Upto 453,000	Approx. 110,000	24.3%	Pact adopted May 2024; Pact enforcement mechanisms not yet applicable
2025	Data pending			Pact screening applies June 2026; improvement expected but unconfirmed
AUS OSB	Near-zero maritime arrivals since 2014	More than 3,000+ voluntary returns 2013-24	N/A - arrivals suppressed pre-arrival	Deterrence operative upstream: arrival volumes near-zero; no mass removal orders issued

Sources: Eurostat [1], [5]; European Parliament [39]; Australian Dept. of Home Affairs [4].

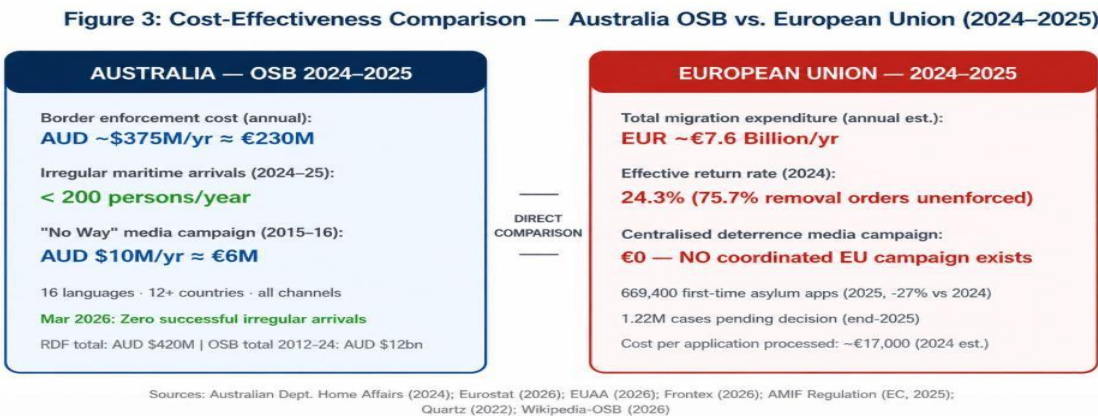


Figure 3

Sources: Australian Dept. of Home Affairs [4]; Eurostat [1]; EUAA [2]; Frontex [3];

AMIF (EC, 2025).

5.3The Human Cost Dimension:

Academic and policy integrity requires explicit acknowledgement of the Australian model's documented human costs. Eighteen deaths were recorded offshore or post-medical evacuation since 2012; severe mental health impacts among detainees were documented by the Australian Human Rights Commission; and UNHCR, the UN Committee Against Torture, and multiple Special Rapporteurs have found Australia's practices inconsistent with international human rights obligations. The total cost of processing 4,194 offshore detainees was approximately AUD \$12 billion (2012-2024), approximately AUD \$2.86 million per person [40,41].

Globally, 8,000 migrants were reported dead or missing in 2025, including 1,878 in the Mediterranean [23]. Since 2014, total migrant deaths have surpassed 82,000, affecting an estimated 340,000 family members [23]. These figures make the humanitarian case for effective upstream deterrence, which reduces dangerous sea journeys as compelling as the policy case. The deaths-at-sea counter-argument to deterrence campaigns is, upon analysis, an argument for deterrence, 'Australia recorded near-zero maritime deaths from 2014 to 2024'. The Mediterranean death toll is a direct consequence of the EU's failure to achieve comparable upstream deterrence.

All recommendations in this paper are specifically designed to be rights-compliant under ECHR and the EU Charter. The European Union can and should adopt a rights-neutral deterrence communication strategy similar to Australia's, provided that it remains fully compliant with EU legal frameworks and does not undermine its global human rights commitments.

6.Legal Framework: Permissible EU Adaptations

6.1Deterrence Communication: Entirely Within EU Legal Space

Deterrence communication campaigns are unambiguously permissible under EU law, ECHR, and the 1951 Refugee Convention, provided they accurately represent the legal position and do not coerce or misrepresent. No treaty obligation, CJEU ruling, or ECtHR judgment constrains a government from publicly communicating its asylum policies, enforcement statistics, and processing realities to potential migrants in origin and transit countries. The EU's non-deployment of such campaigns is a political choice, not a legal constraint. Austria's 2022 campaign, Denmark's newspaper ads, and Germany's social media campaign have not been challenged legally because they are straightforwardly lawful.

6.2Maritime Interdiction: The Hirsi Jamaa Constraint

The ECtHR's Grand Chamber in *Hirsi Jamaa and Others v Italy* [GC] [37] established that ECHR obligations extend extraterritorially to persons under a state party's "effective control" at sea. Mass push-backs without individual assessment, the modality used in some OSB operations are impermissible under EU law. However, *Khlaifia and Others v Italy* [GC] [38] established that maritime rescue followed by transfer to rights-compliant processing facilities with individual screening, legal access, and effective remedy is ECHR-compatible. This creates the legal space for rights-compliant maritime interception linked to offshore processing (P5 below),

modelled on the Italy-Albania protocol (2023).

6.3The "No Advantage" Principle: Legal Transferability

Australia's Temporary Protection Visa regime which provides temporary protection without permanent residence pathways finds a partial EU analogue in the Qualification Directive's subsidiary protection status. An EU-wide Harmonized Irregular Arrival Status (HIAS), withholding permanent residence rights for an initial period, is legally constrained by ECHR Article 8 (family life) and Qualification Directive Article 24 (residence permits), but a carefully bounded HIAS limiting rights for an initial review period rather than permanently operates within the legal space those provisions allow. This is novel relative to existing EU legislative proposals.

7.Policy Prescriptions: Standard Adaptations from the Australian Model

Before presenting the recommendations in Section 8, this section briefly summarizes the five standard (previously proposed in academic literature) policy adaptations from the Australian model, for completeness and to ground the novel recommendations in their institutional context.

✧ **EU Coordinated Deterrence Communication Initiative (CEDCI):** Centralized campaign unit under EUAA; pan-EU deterrence messaging in 12 languages across digital, broadcast, and physical channels.

Estimated budget: €50-80M/year. This is the most immediately actionable and highest-leverage standard recommendation.

✧ **EU Maritime Interception Coordination Centre (EUMICC):** Unified maritime command under Frontex; rights-compliant interception protocols; standardized rules of engagement.

Estimated budget addition: €400-600M/year on existing Frontex base. Modelled on OSB's military-led Joint Agency Taskforce.

✧ **Binding EU readmission agreements** with top-10 irregular origin countries, using migration conditionality leverage (trade, aid, visa facilitation). Modelled on OSB's Indonesia/Sri Lanka take-back agreements backed by the AUD \$420M RDF.

✧ **EU Offshore Processing Pilot (EOPP):** Rights-compliant, UNHCR-co-managed; Italy-Albania protocol model. Provides operational credibility to deterrence messaging by demonstrating that irregular maritime arrivals will not reach EU territory.

Estimated cost: €300-500M/year pilot.

✧ **Harmonized EU recognition rates:** Eliminate ±66pp disparities between member states (Afghan recognition: 33% Germany to 99% Greece in 2025) that drive asylum-shopping secondary movement.

Policy mechanism, not budget line.

8. Novel Policy Recommendations: Ten Approaches Not Yet in Practice

The following ten recommendations constitute the paper's primary original policy contribution. Each is novel relative to the existing EU policy landscape and academic literature neither implemented in the EU nor proposed. Each is grounded in evidence, legally feasible, and costed. They are ordered from highest to lowest immediate priority. Figure 4 presents the integrated five-tier framework.

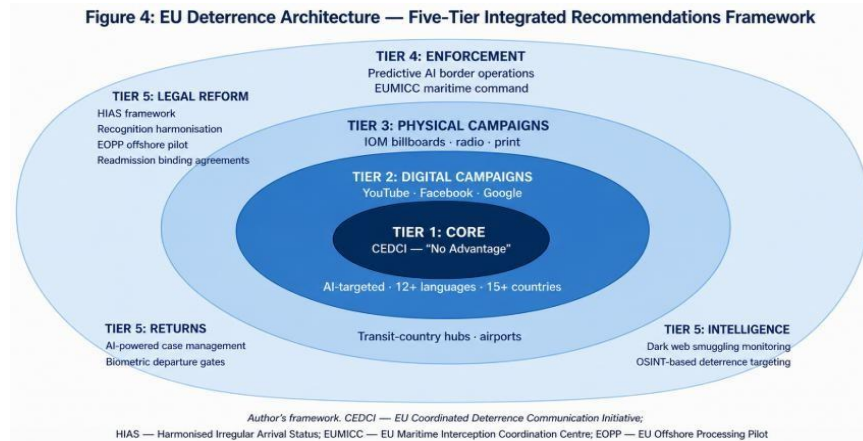


Figure 3

Table 5: Policy Recommendations

#	Novel Recommendation	Rationale & Mechanism	Estimated Cost
R1	EU Digital Deterrence Targeting Unit (DDTU): AI-powered real-time ad targeting on YouTube, Facebook, TikTok, and Google.	Mirrors Australia's pre-roll video strategy but scaled with 2026 precision targeting. A Dari-speaking user in Kabul or Karachi searching "migration to Europe" would be algorithmically served accurate EU asylum-processing information based on language, location, and migration-intent signals across the top 15 origin and transit countries. Implemented with IOM for localization and credibility, using modern machine learning, audience segmentation, A/B testing, and real-time analytics.	€20-35 million/year
R2	EU Counter-Smuggling Narrative Programme (CSNP): Targeted counter-disinformation campaign on Telegram, WhatsApp, and dark-	Smugglers frequently undermine official deterrence campaigns with false promises. CSNP would disseminate authentic counter-narratives, testimonies from unsuccessful irregular migrants, and factual information on	€8-15 million/year

	web forums used by smuggling networks.	costs and risks through the same channels used by smugglers. Delivered in partnership with Europol and national cybercrime agencies. No comparable EU programme currently exists.	
R3	EU Origin-Country "Reality TV" Co-Production Initiative: Short-form documentaries for YouTube, Instagram Reels, and TikTok showing the actual EU asylum process.	Builds on Australia's documentary-style communication while leveraging returned migrants and local content creators for greater credibility. Content would depict reception centres, waiting periods, rejection decisions, and return procedures. Produced with broadcasters and influencers in Venezuela, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Somalia, and Mali.	€5-10 million/year
R4	EU Diaspora Early-Warning and Deterrence Network (DEDN): Structured engagement of diaspora leaders in communicating accurate migration information.	Australia's diaspora-targeted messaging demonstrated the value of trusted community networks. DEDN would train diaspora representatives, provide official communication materials, and enable dissemination through WhatsApp, Telegram, and Viber to contacts in countries of origin. Lower-cost and more credible than direct government advertising.	€3–6 million/year
R5	EU Predictive Migration Pressure Index (PMPI): AI/ML forecasting model integrating conflict, climate, economic, and social media indicators.	Combines ACLED conflict data, IPCC climate risk indicators, IMF/World Bank economic data, and migration-intent signals to forecast migration pressures six months in advance by nationality and route. Enables dynamic allocation of communication resources. Developed jointly by EUAA and Frontex with open-source architecture for independent validation.	€12-20 million (development); €3 million/year (operations)
R6	EU Biometric-Linked Conditional Return Incentive Scheme (BCRIS): Voluntary return programme linked to future legal migration eligibility.	Individuals voluntarily departing within 60 days following a negative asylum decision would retain eligibility for selected legal migration pathways (e.g., seasonal employment visas), while overstayers would face permanent entry bans. Introduces positive incentives alongside enforcement and has no current EU equivalent.	€50-80 million/year
R7	EU Smuggling Network Financial Disruption	Focuses on cryptocurrency tracing, hawala monitoring, cross-border asset seizures, and	€40-60 million/year

	Initiative (SNFDI): Europol-led financial task force targeting migrant smuggling revenues.	financial intelligence operations. Seized assets would partially finance deterrence communication campaigns. Expands Australia's disruption model to the EU level, addressing fragmentation across national jurisdictions.	
R8	EU-Origin Country "Scholarship-for-Deterrence" Pact: Education and vocational mobility linked to migration cooperation.	Bilateral agreements would provide scholarships and vocational training opportunities for citizens of major origin countries in exchange for government cooperation on readmission and deterrence communication. Creates legitimate migration alternatives while supporting long-term deterrence objectives.	€100-150 million/year
R9	Mandatory EU-Wide "Asylum Reality" Information Pack: Standardized multilingual information provided at first registration.	Every asylum applicant would receive digitally translated information outlining expected processing timelines, recognition rates by nationality, legal rights, and likely outcomes before legal representation. Reduces misinformation spread by smugglers and improves procedural transparency.	€2-4 million/year
R10	EU Annual Deterrence Effectiveness Audit (ADEA): Independent annual evaluation of deterrence policies and expenditure.	An independent academic consortium would publish annual cost-per-deterred-arrival analyses comparing communication campaigns, border operations, and asylum processing expenditures against measurable reductions in irregular arrivals by nationality and route. Establishes an evidence base for future policy adjustments.	€1-2 million/year

9. Critical Evaluation and Study Limitations

This study is subject to several important limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings and policy recommendations. First, the issue of causal attribution remains significant. The reported reduction of up to 98% in Australian maritime arrivals coincided with the simultaneous implementation of multiple measures, including Operation Sovereign Borders maritime interceptions, offshore processing arrangements, and the “No Way” communication campaign. Although the Clingendael Institute identifies maritime turn-backs as a major explanatory factor, it is difficult to isolate the independent impact of communication-based deterrence strategies. Consequently, the findings cannot conclusively establish that a Counter-Disinformation and Communication Deterrence Initiative (CEDCI) alone would generate similar outcomes in the European context.

Second, the study recognizes the substantial human rights concerns associated with the Australian deterrence model, particularly regarding offshore detention and restrictive asylum practices. While this paper proposes alternative mechanisms intended to remain consistent with European legal and humanitarian standards, the possibility of rights-based challenges remains a significant constraint. The proposed European Offshore Processing Platform (EOPP), Digital Deterrence and Transparency Unit (DDTU), and European Union Maritime Interdiction Coordination Centre (EUMICC) would require strict oversight, procedural safeguards, and compliance with international refugee and human rights obligations. Without such safeguards, there is a risk that deterrence-oriented policies could reproduce practices that have been widely criticized in the Australian case.

Third, the transferability of the Australian experience to the European Union is inherently limited by major political, legal, and geographical differences. Australia operates under a centralized sovereign framework with comparatively broad executive authority over migration enforcement, whereas the EU consists of 27-member states with diverse political priorities, shared competencies, and binding supranational legal obligations. These structural differences may limit both the feasibility and uniform implementation of the recommendations proposed in this study. Policy adoption within the EU would depend on complex negotiations, institutional coordination, and varying levels of member-state support.

Fourth, the empirical evidence regarding the independent effectiveness of deterrence communication campaigns remains limited. Existing studies, including those by Pagogna and Sakdapolrak [16] and Coddington [15], indicate that public information and deterrence messaging campaigns often lack sufficient standalone evidence of effectiveness. As a result, this study acknowledges that current evidence does not conclusively demonstrate whether communication-based deterrence can significantly influence migration decisions without accompanying enforcement mechanisms. The proposed Assessment and Data Evaluation Authority (ADEA) is therefore intended to address this gap by generating systematic, EU-specific empirical evidence for future policy evaluation.

Finally, this research relies primarily on qualitative policy analysis and secondary data sources. The absence of original fieldwork, interviews with migrants, and primary institutional data limits the ability to assess how deterrence policies are perceived and experienced by affected populations. Future research incorporating comparative field studies, stakeholder interviews, and longitudinal migration data would strengthen the empirical basis for evaluating the effectiveness and ethical implications of deterrence-centered migration governance.

10. Conclusion

The European Union faces a spending-deterrence paradox of structural proportions; €7.6 billion spent annually on migration and asylum management, yet 669,365 asylum applications in 2025, a 24.3% effective return rate, 1.22 million pending cases, and 1,878 deaths in the Mediterranean in 2025 alone. Australia's Operation Sovereign Borders which achieved near-zero irregular maritime arrivals from 2014 to the present, including a zero-arrival outcome in March 2026 demonstrates that upstream deterrence, credibly communicated and

operationally backed, can transform this equation. The most immediately actionable, highest-leverage, and legally unambiguous element of the Australian model is its deterrence media campaign architecture. Australia spent AUD \$10 million per year on algorithmically targeted digital advertising, multilingual broadcasting, IOM-managed physical materials, and diplomatic community engagement across 12 countries and 16 languages. The EU has spent €0 on an equivalent centralized programme. This is not a legal constraint, it is a policy choice that can be reversed.

This paper has made three original contributions: a data-current (2026) comparative analysis of Australian OSB campaign architecture and EU migration expenditure; a critical assessment of campaign effectiveness and its preconditions; and ten novel policy recommendations, none of which are currently in EU practice, ranging from AI-powered deterrence targeting (DDTU) and counter-smuggling narrative campaigns (CSNP) to diaspora-mediated deterrence networks (DEDN), predictive migration forecasting (PMPI), and biometric-linked conditional return incentives (BCRIS). These recommendations are designed not merely to manage arrivals after the fact, but to reshape the decision calculus of potential irregular migrants before embarkation, which is where the Australian model achieved its transformative effect.

The EU's €7.6 billion annual migration expenditure is not being wasted but a significant portion is being spent in the wrong place; downstream management of arrivals that upstream deterrence could have prevented. Redirecting even 1% of that budget (€76 million) into a rights-compliant, AI-sophisticated, IOM-partnered EU deterrence communication initiative would represent the highest-return policy investment available to EU migration governance. The evidence base for this claim is Australia's decade-long operational track record. The time for the EU to act on that evidence is now.

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