

The Myth of the Misinformed Irregular Migrant? Insights from Nigeria

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Abstract:

The last several years have seen large numbers of migrants, many of them from sub-Saharan Africa, attempt to reach Europe irregularly by way of the "Mediterranean route," a reflection of migratory pressures from sub-Saharan Africa that are unlikely to subside anytime soon (Hanson and McIntosh 2016). In turn European governments have invested significantly in initiatives to deter migration of this form, and there has been an explosive expansion of information campaigns that are designed to impress upon potential migrants the dangers of journeying across the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea and the unwelcoming reception they might receive in Europe (Schans and Optekamp 2016). Beyond the ethical and political implications of these programs, there is not only little research on whether they accomplish their stated objectives, but there is even a surprising lack of evidence concerning the extent to which potential migrants are actually misinformed about the costs and potential benefits of trying to irregularly migrate to Europe. We provide such evidence from a representative survey we conducted in Benin City, the epicenter of irregular migration out of Nigeria, which itself is the single largest sub-Saharan African source of irregular migrants to Europe. We find that potential migrants may in fact be better informed about destination contexts than ubiquitous information campaigns appear to assume, but are poorly informed about the journey itself. We discuss correlates of migration-related knowledge and present results from two survey experiments in which we provided relevant information.