

When Risk and Rescue Matter: Irregular Migration Across Origin and Transit

This paper examines how migration risk shapes irregular migration across origin and transit. We focus on how sea-crossing risk and rescue affect migration intentions in origin countries and departure dynamics during transit on the Central Mediterranean route. We combine an information experiment in Nigeria with high-frequency, geo-referenced data on irregular departures and NGO rescue operations. At the origin, our experiment shows that rescue-induced changes in perceived crossing risk do not affect irregular migration intentions. Exploiting exogenous variation in NGO rescue availability, we find that greater rescue presence increases same-day departures, consistent with smugglers competing by offering relatively safer passage to Europe.