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# INFORMATION GAPS AND IRREGULAR MIGRATION

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PARTNERS





# Motivation

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Irregular migration to Europe through the sea, though risky, remains one of the most popular migration options for many Sub-Saharan Africans. Policymakers have scaled up their efforts to deter potential migrants from embarking on this dangerous route. But the impact of these efforts has mostly not been rigorously evaluated, which leaves room both for unintended effects of these policy interventions and for the waste of resources spent on policies that are ineffective. Hence the importance of the impact evaluation component of our work.

Policy interventions aimed at limiting irregular migration must address the relevant factors in the decision-making process of the potential migrants. Do they know how risky their intended voyage is? Do they have realistic expectations regarding their chances of being granted asylum upon arrival? If not, are their migration intentions and decisions affected by more accurate information? What other policies can be put in place to save lives in this process?

To address these questions, our project conducted a randomized controlled trial to measure the impact of three different policy interventions to reduce irregular migration to Europe. The first is an informational campaign about irregular migration to Europe. Information on expected costs and benefits of irregular migration is likely to be an important input into the decision of potential migrants, but may not be enough to influence the final choices of potential migrants. Hence, we implemented two additional policies. These policies provide alternatives to status quo staying at origin and in this way complement the information provided. In particular, we also evaluate the impact of facilitating regional migration to neighboring Dakar, in Senegal, and of providing vocational training.



# The Campaign

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This AMIF EU funded project used individual-level policy interventions targeting potential migrants residing in rural Gambia. Three different campaigns were implemented:

## **1. Information campaign about irregular migration to Europe:**

includes an animation video providing statistics about the migration journey (such as the cost of irregular migration, the probability of dying en route and of obtaining legal residence status, as well as the chances of being deported), together with testimonies of both unsuccessful irregular migrants that are back in The Gambia and current irregular Gambian migrants in Italy. These testimonies describe personal experiences acquiring information and witnessing accidents, deaths, kidnapping during the migration journey, as well as general advice to prospective migrants.

## **2. Regional migration facilitation:**

comprises a video documentary including testimonies of Gambian migrants residing in Dakar who provided information about their migration experience, a cash transfer voucher aimed at covering the transportation and initial settling costs in Dakar (1200 GMD, or about 25 EUR paid at origin), and the direct contact details of a Gambian immigrant association in Dakar who provided advice and support for migration to Senegal, including an additional cash transfer (10,000 CFA, or about 15EUR, paid by the association to the migrants who arrived in Dakar).

## **3. Vocational training intervention:**

provided tuition-free vocational training to potential migrants. The training was provided locally by the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI) in the Julangel branch, close to the rural areas where we worked. The courses had a planned duration of six months. The available courses were building construction (block work), carpentry and joinery, electrical installation, plastering and tiling, plumbing and gas fitting, refrigeration and air conditioning, small engine maintenance and repair, and welding and fabrication.



## TARGET AUDIENCE

Potential migrants residing in the rural areas of The Gambia with the highest incidence of irregular migration to Europe in the country – which is also the African country with the highest rates of irregular migration to Europe.



## ENGAGEMENTS

3641 males aged 18 – 33 years in 391 villages



## COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

Videos shown individually to each potential migrant on tablets and mobile phones in their local language of choice towards the end of the baseline survey. Vouchers for regional migration or vocational training (depending on policy intervention that applies) were provided after watching videos.



# Experimental Evaluation Design and Implementation

## Experimental Implementation:

The experimental design of our project enabled the measurement, as rigorous as possible, of the effects of three alternative policies. For this purpose, the 391 villages in our sample (including a total of 3641 individuals) were randomly divided into four groups:

- ① The first treatment group (T1 - 953 individuals in 97 villages) was shown the video informational intervention about irregular migration to Europe.
- ② The second treatment group (T2 - 907 individuals in 98 villages) was shown a video with the same information content as the first group, as well as additional video information about migrating to Senegal, together with a cash transfer voucher labelled as support of travel expenses to Dakar, provided to those who expressed an interest in travelling to Dakar.
- ③ The third treatment group (T3 - 892 individuals in 98 villages) was also shown the same video information as the first and second treatment groups, and was also given the opportunity to participate in the tuition-free vocational skill training program.
- ④ The final (control) group (C - 889 individuals in 98 villages) was shown a placebo video unrelated to migration decisions, on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding.

## Data collection:

- ✓ The baseline survey took place between April and May 2019. Data collection was successfully conducted face-to-face with 3641 males in 391 settlements.
- ✓ The end line survey took place face-to-face in September and November 2020. Out of the 3641 baseline respondents, a total 2,761 youths could be directly re-interviewed. This survey was followed by phone interviews and WhatsApp location requests to individuals who could not be interviewed in their home village. This strategy provided the location of 481 additional baseline respondents. The location of other youths interviewed at baseline was provided indirectly by 370 household members and 28 village elders who were surveyed face-to-face at the time of the end line survey. There was only one individual whose whereabouts could not be determined at the end line.
- ✓ Measurement of outcomes of interest took place during the 16 months between baseline and end line surveys, i.e., 10 months before the pandemic, as well as about 6 months during the pandemic period.

## Main outcomes of interest:

- Actual migration to Europe, Senegal and urban areas in The Gambia;
- Steps taken towards back way migration to Europe;
- Intentions to back way migrate in the future to Europe.



# Findings and Recommendations

## DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY RESULTS:



### The COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic reduced migration intentions both to Europe (for 31 percent of youth in our sample) and to Senegal (34 percent of sample) across all treatment groups; with fewer than 4 percent of the sample increasing their intention to migrate

- ✓ The reduction is larger for those who were unsure about migrating pre-COVID-19; and for poorer individuals for whom COVID-19 may have made liquidity constraints more binding.
- ✓ Despite this reduction in intentions to migrate, the desire to migrate to Europe is still high amongst the young men who responded to our surveys, with 65 percent saying they are likely or very likely to try to migrate, and 58 percent saying they would consider the back way to Europe.

## EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS:

### The information campaign (T1)

- ✓ had no significant effects on migration to Europe related outcomes (actual migration, steps taken towards migration, or intentions to migrate to Europe in the future);
- ✓ reduced the probability of potential migrants considering irregular migration as the way to migrate to Europe by 5 percentage points;



## The regional migration support intervention (T2)

- ✓ did not have any significant effects on migration to Europe related outcomes (actual migration, steps taken towards migration, or intentions to migrate in the future);
- ✓ increased longer-term migration to Senegal, defined as residing in Senegal at the time of the endline survey, by 2.2 percentage points.
- ✓ increased the probability of potential migrants considering migration to Senegal by 7.5 percentage points;

## The vocational training coupled with information about irregular migration to Europe (T3)

- ✓ decreased the number of steps already taken towards irregular migration to Europe by 15 percent;
- ✓ reduced intentions of migration to Europe in the following 5 years by 7.0 percentage points;
- ✓ increased longer-term migration to Senegal, defined as residing in Senegal at the time of the endline survey, by 2.6 percentage points;
- ✓ reduced the probability of potential migrants considering irregular migration as the way to migrate to Europe by 9.1 percentage points.

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## Overall

This project provides experimental evidence on the short run effects of alternative policies to dissuade irregular migration. The evidence supports the potential for positive impact of policies that go beyond the commonly used information-based campaigns seeking to dissuade risky migration without offering a hopeful livelihood alternative.

In this sense, we see vocational training as part of a series of policy efforts that can be used to provide potential migrants with a pathway to better jobs - at home or elsewhere. We do not claim that vocational training is the only, or indeed the best, such policy – just that policies which provide a viable alternative to irregular migration in addition to information only seem to be a policy option worthy of further exploration.