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Migration information campaign through music: The effect of Kofi Kinaata's highlife song on young people in Ghana

ABSTRACT

Since 2014 over 2 million people have arrived at the shores of Europe through irregular crossing. This has created huge socio-economic consequences for the European people. In a bid to solve this unprecedented migrant crisis, the European Union and its member states have implemented migration information campaign (MIC) as part of a remote border control strategy to curb irregular migration. In Ghana, Kofi Kinaata was selected as a goodwill ambassador and his song, entitled 'No Place Like Home' is part of a broader advocacy programme that was implemented in West Africa to reduce irregular migration. This study seeks to investigate the effects of Kofi Kinaata's song on the migration intention of young people in Ghana. The study is a qualitative descriptive study involving sixteen participants in the Cape Coast Metropolis in Ghana. The study revealed that young people with the ambition of migrating irregularly are already aware of the fear

KEYWORDS

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messages used by sponsors of MICs, though they still want to travel through the irregular way. It is therefore recommended that investment in remote border control by European countries should focus more on reducing poverty and creating jobs in migrant source countries since these are the key factors driving irregular migration. Immigration policies by EU countries and other migrant receiving countries should also be relaxed making room for alternative affordable and safe pathways to migration. This article has also called on governments in migrant source countries to strengthen their institutions to deal with poverty and regulate migration. This will go a long way to curb the menace of irregular migrants in Europe and elsewhere.

INTRODUCTION

The current migration crisis faced by European countries has become the worst and the most challenging since the Second World War. Since 2014, over 2 million people have arrived at the shores of Europe through irregular crossing (Connor and Passel 2019). This situation has created huge socio-economic consequences for the European people. One of such consequences is the near collapse of the Common European Asylum system due to an overwhelming number of asylum seekers in 2014/2015 (Jeannet et al. 2021). European countries have to bear a cost of €10,000 for the accommodation and processing of applications for each asylum seeker per year (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2017). In the United Kingdom alone, revenue loss due to tax evasion by irregular migrant workers has been estimated to be approximately £1 billion per year (Grieve et al. 2006).

In a bid to confront this unprecedented migrant crisis, the European Union initiated a process to reform and strengthen its internal policies towards irregular migration. However, due to low political will and commitment among EU member states, the European Union resorted to seeking solutions outside the continent by initiating some policy interventions in developing countries in order to block irregular migration to Europe (Tagliapietra 2019). Through its Migration Partnership Framework, the European Union provides development aid to developing countries to ensure political, social and economic development. In exchange, developing countries are to ensure proper border control to curb irregular migrants, dismantle migrant smuggling networks and save lives at sea and the desert (Castillejo 2017).

A key feature of the European Union's external border control measures aimed at reducing the influx of irregular migration is the migration information campaign (MIC), aimed at revealing tragic stories of abuse and death of migrants attempting to cross to Europe. This is premised on the assumption that irregular migrants lack accurate information, and by providing them with reliable and trusted information, they will alter their perception, which would lead to a change in behaviour and hence shun migrating (Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2011; Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007). MIC has become a popular topic for discussion in the border control debate due to the perceived perception that EU member states have failed to control irregular migration with traditional border control measures, such as border policing and stricter immigration policies (Carling and Hernández-Carretero 2011). The history of MIC goes back to the 1990s when the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and other state actors piloted it in some developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin

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America to curb the menace of human trafficking to Europe, America and Australia (Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007; McNevin et al. 2016). The goal of these anti-trafficking campaigns was to ensure that potential migrants do not fall prey to traffickers and smugglers by providing them with risk information of being caught in a web of criminal networks (Nieuwenhuys and Pécoud 2007).

Between 2014 and 2019 alone, the European Union implemented over 100 MICs in developing countries to the tune of about €12 million (Hahn-Schaur 2021). Four main media are used to disseminate MICs. One is the use of conventional community-based programmes, such as workshops, lecturers, cultural and social events (Bartels 2017; Gazzotti 2019; Rodriguez 2019). Second is the use of the print media including newspapers and magazines, flyers, billboards and brochures (Hartig 2017; Marczuk 2016; Richardson 2010). The third medium involves the use of TV and radio broadcast (Heller 2014; Watkins 2017), while a most recent medium is the use of digital technologies involving internet and social media (Brekke and Thorbjørnsrud 2018; Musarò 2019). The effectiveness of using MIC as a remote border control tool for deterring prospective migrants has been questioned by some scholars. Kosnick (2014) and Oeppen (2016) argue that it is unlikely for MIC to be trusted by its targeted audience. Mbaye (2014) also revealed that knowing the risk associated with irregular migration is not deterring enough for prospective migrants to refrain from migrating. Rodriguez (2019) also argues that MIC messages are most often subverted by local actors involved in its dissemination. Although FitzGerald (2020) and Williams (2020) agree to some extent that MIC could be used for border control, they regard it as a 'soft' enforcement mechanism, which needs to be complemented with 'hard' enforcement strategies involving the use of military equipment, surveillance and criminal prosecution.

Existing evidence on the effectiveness of MICs has been very limited (Tjaden et al. 2018). Currently, there is just one study in Africa that attempts to answer whether MICs can change migration intentions. In a study by Tjaden and Dunsch (2021) in Senegal where video of returned migrants from Europe recounting their negative experiences were shown to potential migrants, intention to migrate irregularly was reported to have decreased by 20 per cent while the rate of people planning to migrate in general remains the same. To add to the existing literature, this study seeks to determine whether MIC used in Ghana has been effective in changing young people's intention to migrate irregularly. The study relies on IOM's advocacy programme dubbed 'Aware Migrant' Information Campaign under the Engaging West African Communities (EWAC) project which is implemented in Senegal, Niger and Ghana. The aim of the project is to raise awareness on irregular migration along the main routes from Western Africa across the desert and the Mediterranean. The Project adopts innovative tools and community-based approaches in disseminating information on the dangers of the journey to allow potential migrants to make informed decisions. One key feature of the 'Aware Migrant' information campaign is the use of goodwill ambassadors to spread information. In Ghana, a musician, popularly known as Kofi Kinaata, was selected as a goodwill ambassador by IOM for the project. Kofi Kinaata is a highlife musician and his songs are popular among Ghanaians. He was tasked to release a song on the dangers of irregular migration to aid the campaign. In 2018, he released the song entitled 'No Place Like Home'. In this article, we will analyse Kofi Kinaata's song and its effect on the Ghanaian youth.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Fear appeal messaging is employed as a theoretical framework for this study. Fear appeals are persuasive messages that are directed at a target population with the intention to arouse fear by placing emphasis on potential dangers and calamities that will befall persons who do not stick to the recommended actions in the message (Dillard et al. 1996; Maddux and Rogers 1983). In their study investigating theories that are linked to fear and experimental studies that have treatments exposed to fear appeal, Tannenbaum et al. (2015) revealed that fear appeal messaging is effective at positively influencing attitude, intentions and behaviour change and that there are no identified circumstances under which they backfire and lead to undesirable outcomes. However, they added that the effectiveness of fear appeal increases when a larger percentage of the targeted population are females.

In the field of irregular migration, Townsend and Oomen (2015) suggested some three reasons why fear appeal messaging may not be effective in dissuading people from migrating illegally. To them, people are not generally good at calculating risk and most often discount risk in their day-to-day decisions. Also, the risk of death or injury may seem worth taking, especially compared with immediate threats to personal safety. And finally, long-term risks are weighed against short-term risks and may appear more important at a given moment; for example, migrants may worry more about future obstacles to finding work or summoning family members than about immediate risks to life and limb. There have also been several studies that suggest that prospective migrants are very much aware of the risks to migration used as fear messaging appeal, but yet pursue their migration agenda (van Bommel 2020; Mbaye 2014).

The inclusion of border policy in migration studies widens the focus to a global level. It is beginning to seem appropriate to empower and encourage safe migration through not only tightening border controls but also widening access including labour corridors, which would enable migrants to migrate safely with dignity. Most countries approach migration governance from an enforcement perspective, such as border control policies with little or no policies intended to help illegal migrants settle, thus, conflicting with the New York Declaration that all migrants are rights holders, regardless of status (par. 5). Biles et al. (2008) earlier observed that until recent years, European and other western countries had the migration market to themselves, except at the highest levels of scientific, artistic, sport and corporate achievements, opportunities for movement were limited. Notwithstanding the focus on policy, this article is not aimed merely at policy-makers. Its primary goal is to contribute to public debate and public understanding of irregular migration. By suggesting a series of policy directions, we might make progress with regards to safe migration and to echo and address the question, 'to what extent are their lived experiences marked by precarity, social and civil death?' (O'Neill et al. 2019: 130).

METHODS

This was a qualitative descriptive study using data from four focus group discussions conducted in Cape Coast Metropolis in Ghana during the months of April and October 2021. The study was conducted in four different communities in Cape Coast including Abura, Bakano, Brofoyedru and Amanforo. Each focus group session was made up of four participants, making a total of

sixteen participants. Five of the participants were females while eleven were males. Inclusion criteria were young people between the ages of 18 and 35 who have ever used illegal routes to travel outside Ghana to seek greener pastures abroad and those who have an ambition of travelling abroad using illegal routes. The snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants of the study. First, a key informant was contacted to identify a returned irregular migrant, which in turn led to the recruitment of the other participants. In each focus group session, we included two returned migrants and two people with the intention to migrate.

Data collection took place in a serene spot in each community. All focus group discussion sessions were recorded and lasted for 47 minutes on the average. Prior to the discussion, Kofi Kinaata's song entitled 'No Place Like Home' was played at the spot for participants to listen to (see Table 1). Participants were asked to indicate whether they have heard and understood the lyrics of the song. They were also asked to describe their initial reaction when they first heard the song. We also discussed the lyrics in the song and the effect it had on the participants.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. This involves seven different steps and they are transcription, reading and familiarization, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finalizing the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2013). To ensure anonymity of the respondents, pseudonyms were used to represent the respondents. The finding of this study is divided into three subsections based on the themes from the analysis. The first section will discuss the factors pushing young people to migrate irregularly in Ghana. The second section will discuss responses from the youth that confirm that the lyrics of Kofi Kinaata's song are not an exaggeration while the final section discusses the effect of Kofi's song on the migration intention of young people.

'NO PLACE LIKE HOME': A SONG ON THE DANGERS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Table 1 is the song recorded by Kofi Kinaata entitled 'No Place Like Home'. The table shows the Fante (a Ghanaian language) lyrics and its translation into English. This song begins by acknowledging that movement of persons from one place to the other is a right in Ghana's present democratic dispensation. As a member of the United Nations, Ghana subscribes to article 13 of the Universal declaration on human rights, which states that everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state, and the right to leave any country including his own and return to his own (United Nations 1948). As a result, Ghanaians are found in almost every part of the world. In 2019, Ghana recorded a net migration of 503,845, implying that the number of people emigrating from the country is 503,845 more than those immigrating into the country (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2019).

Kofi Kinaata mentioned that 'Nna mmom erekɔ a, eye a fa kwan pa do' which is translated as 'but use the right channel when traveling'. In order to travel to any country in the world, there are some prescribed regulations governing such movements. Some countries require the individual to acquire a travelling visa while other countries have an arrangement with Ghana, which makes provisions for visa free entry. Kofi is therefore drawing his listeners' attention to the fact that it is illegal to ignore the requirements needed

Table 1: 'No Place Like Home' (Fante lyrics and their translation to English).

Fante version	English version
Abade mpo	What's happening
Youth life matter, call me Kofi Kinaata	Youth life matters, call me Kofi Kinaata
Alright	Alright
Hwɛ adze obi nka dɛ mɛmma obi ntu kwan	Look, no one has said you shouldn't travel
Nna mmom ɛrɛkɔ a, ɛyɛ a fa kwan pa do	But use the right channel when traveling
Bɛkɔ akɔfa beebi a ɛbɛ hwere wo nkwa no dze dwen ho	Think about this, using illegal means could put your life at risk
Connection man dze ɔbɛgye ne sika	Traveling agents are in need of money
Bohyɛ a wɔbɛhyɛ wo no mu gu ahorow	They will give you several promises
Bɔkɔ ekodur hɔ mpo na ebia ɔnte dɛm	But all might turn out to be a mirage
Ntsi dwen ho	So think about it
Ma mɛpɛ dɛ me ka kyere wo nye dɛ, abrabɔ nnye racing	What I want to tell you is, life is not a race
To wo bo ooooo na ɛpɛpere wo ho a	Tread cautiously, because when you rush
Anhwɛ a arush eti	You might get it wrong
Your life is precious ooo sister	Your life is precious ooo sister
Hwɛ yie na anwaste no ooo brother	Don't waste it brother
Ma wasi wo Libya nyinaa anaa wo wɛrɛ efir?	Have you forgotten what happened in Libya?
Onyɛ agor ooo hwɛ	It's not easy oo
Noble and strong men sef dey turn beggars	Noble and strong men have turned beggars
Women are beaten and forced to be sex workers	Women are beaten and forced to be sex workers
Kɔ hwɛ Agades, n o mu armed robbers	Look at Agadez, there are several armed robbers
No food no water on the hot desert	No food, no water on the hot desert
Dem dey beat, maltreat and some dey rape some	They beat, maltreat and rape some
I hear say recently dem start dey sell some	I heard recently, they sell people
Over five thousand people dey die for sea top	Over five thousand people died on the sea
Africa, Ghana man for wake up	Africa, Ghana we have to wake up
Na obra ɔbɛ kɔ do a, onye woara	Your life is in your own hands
Ntsi tɔ boara nkakra nkakra bebia nye ha	Exercise patience, there is no place like home
Hwɛ ade aswear walahi talahi who wey dey worry for money	Look, we are worried about money
Bebia ndwee yɛfir bike ansaana yɛakɔ Bugatti	No place is safe. We move from Benz to Bugatti
Kɛsɛ wɔkan, yɛbesi dan, yebotu kwan, yebohwe nkwan	Victory is ahead, we will build, we will travel, we will feast
Anaa ese dɛn?	What do you say
If we must migrate, we must migrate safe	If we must migrate, we must migrate safe
We say no(no)2x	We say no(no)2x

Table 1: Continued...

Fante version	English version
We say no to irregular migration	We say no to irregular migration
We say no(no)2×	We say no(no)2×
We say no to irregular migration	We say no to irregular migration
We say no(NO000)	We say no(NO000)
Ma mepɛ de me ka kyɛr ³ wo nye d ³	What I want to tell you is
Abrabɔ nnyɛ racing	life not a race
To wo bo ooo na ɛpɛpɛr wo ho a, anhwɛ a rush eti	Tread cautiously, because when you rush You might get it wrong
Your life is oo previous ooo sister	Your life is precious ooo sister
Hwɛ yie na en waste no ooo brother	Don't waste it brother
Ma woesi wo Libya nyinaa anaa won wɛrɛ fir?	Have you forgotten what happened in Libya?

for entry into any country. In recent times, several people have been deported from Europe and America because they are considered as irregular migrants (DeBono 2016). In 2017, about 226,000 people were deported from America by the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (Torbati 2017). Similarly, the US government in 2018 reached an agreement with its Ghanaian counterpart to deport about 7000 irregular migrants to Ghana (Ibrahim 2018).

In Ghana, most irregular migrations are facilitated by travelling agents. Kofi referred to them as 'connection men'. These agents prey on the vulnerability of people, especially the youth by promising them a rich experience abroad. Kofi explained that these agents are more interested in making money than the welfare of migrants as most of their promises turn out to be false. Awumbila et al. (2019) recount that these agents can charge as much as GH¢ 25,000 (exchange rate of \$1 for GH¢ 6.17) to facilitate a person's travel to the Gulf regions or North Africa. Also, in a study conducted by the IOM, 70 per cent of returned migrants recounted that their migration experience in the destination countries did not match the promises that were made by their agents (International Organization for Migration 2019).

Kofi identified a major transition route used by irregular migrants to Europe. He mentioned *Agadez* and *Libya*. Irregular migrants from West Africa often use two principal routes through the Maghreb region in order to cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. Those aiming to transition at the western side of the Mediterranean travel through Gao in Mali to the city of Adrar in Algeria, then to Oujda in Morocco. Those who aim at the central side of the Mediterranean also travel through Gao and then pass through Agadez in Niger in order to reach Tripoli in Libya. (Idemudia and Boehnke 2020). Idemudia and Boehnke (2020) revealed that Agadez is the main hub for irregular migration and is central to the whole migration flow in West Africa because of its well established and highly structured smuggling activities. Irregular migrants from West Africa are transported by long distance drivers to smuggling centres at Agadez where they pay a facilitation fee to the smugglers. These smugglers in return facilitate their travel from Agadez to Libya. Part of the facilitation fee is used to bribe state authorities for smooth entry. Tinti and Reitano (2018) estimated that between March and August 2013, over 5000 West Africans migrated monthly through Agadez.

Kofi proceeds by recounting the troubles irregular migrants go through as they journey to the Maghreb region and to Europe. He said, 'Kɔ hwɛ Agades, no mu armed robbers' which is translated as '[l]ook at Agadez, there are several armed robbers'. Kofi also indicated that there is a shortage of food and water in the desert. He recounted that several people get robbed, raped and beaten while a lot also get drowned in the Mediterranean Sea. He concludes by urging the youth to be patient in life and migrate safely.

DRIVERS OF IRREGULAR MIGRATION AMONG THE YOUTH IN GHANA

In this study, several reasons were given as drivers of irregular migration. First, the youth are frustrated by their inability to secure jobs in the country and perceive that there are better prospects abroad. YA is a graduate with university qualification and he recounts that:

Four years after completing my national service, I have not been employed even though I am constantly looking for a job. I have sent several job application letters and not a single one has even acknowledged receipt of my letter. Why won't I think of leaving this shit hole? After all, all die be die [*sic*].

This is a desperate statement reflecting the hopelessness of young people as they struggle to secure jobs. The World Bank estimated that the youth unemployment rate in Ghana is about 12 per cent and more than 50 per cent of young people in employment are underemployed. A recent statement by Ghana's Finance Minister confirms this gloomy situation when he remarked that government payroll is full and it is unsustainable to keep adding to employment figures in the public sector (Arhinful 2021). It is disappointing to know that the youth unemployment rate in Ghana is higher than the overall unemployment rates in Sub-Saharan African countries (Dadzie et al. 2020). The future outlook is worrisome given that the youth population in Ghana and other African countries are projected to double by 2045 (Soucat et al. 2013).

The link between unemployment and irregular migration has been firmly established as a push factor of migration in the literature and hence collaborating this study. In Nigeria, Dayo (2018) reports that the cause of irregular migration among Nigerian youth includes poor salaries, lack of job opportunities and unemployment. UNICEF (2014) also reported that unemployment and underemployment especially in rural areas among the youth are the principal drivers of irregular migration. Similarly, Shimeles (2010) also postulates that irregular migration is driven by motives to improve livelihoods with notable evidence in labour market status. In Ghana, Tanle (2012) has earlier revealed that lack of jobs and low pay were some of the reasons why returned migrants from Techiman and Nkoranza Township migrated to Libya and Europe.

Poverty is pushing young people out of their communities. This has accounted for the increase in the population of major cities in Ghana including Accra, Kumasi and Takoradi, thereby stretching the cities carrying capacity and hence perpetuating poverty (Owusu et al. 2008). Sadly, some youth opt to move out of the country by embarking on a dangerous journey through the Sahara desert and crossing the Mediterranean Sea. CA is a returned migrant and he mentioned that:

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My grandmother lives in this community and she is poor, my grandfather died as a poor fisherman in this community. My parents are at home now and they are poor. You think I will escape poverty if I continue to live in this community? This is the very reason why I left Ghana to Lampedusa.

Although Ghana has been touted as a middle income country, poverty is still widespread. The Ghana Statistical Service reports that about 24 per cent of the population are living below the national poverty line of €3.6 a day (Momo et al. 2019). Aside from the poverty rate, several people in Ghana do not have a decent place to sleep, lack electricity and water supply and their communities are engulfed in filth (Amo-Asamoah et al. 2020).

Onuoha and Okafor reports that 'harsh economic realities, including inflations of stable food and services, have subjected the citizens to excruciating poverty and other vulnerabilities that are pushing Africans to seek greener pastures outside their country of origin and most of them end in Libya' (2021: 148). Since 2016, the Ghana cedi has depreciated by more than 100 per cent against the US dollar. This has resulted in the increase of prices of goods and services given that Ghana is a net import country. This has also contributed to the huge interest rate on capital and as a result, the youth and other entrepreneurs lack access to capital/loan to set up businesses, create jobs and reduce poverty levels.

One other driver of irregular migration in Ghana which has not yet been explored in the literature is the role of social media influencers. Social media influencers are every day, ordinary internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube through their textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in digital and physical spaces and monetize their following by integrating commercial adverts into their blog or social media posts (Abidin 2015; Raun 2018; Carter 2016; Deborah et al. 2019). In recent times, Ghanaians living abroad have been using social media platforms to share information on the better conditions in America, Europe and Asia. One key person in this campaign is Twene Jonas. Characteristically of him, he has been going round the city of New York and sharing live videos of the beautiful city. He describes New York as heaven on earth, a land with an effective social and institutional support system, and a city built with glasses. Conversely, he describes Ghana as a farm and a place where animals are kept with poor living conditions. As at 7 November 2021, Twene Jonas has a total of 13,628,348 YouTube views and over 697,000 followers on Facebook. In this study, all the youth in the focus group discussions acknowledged that they have watched YouTube videos by Twene Jonas and other Ghanaians abroad who urged them to travel abroad. NA is a regular follower of Twene Jonas and he stated that 'Twene Jonas is a lovely guy. As for me [...] his videos on facebook and youtube likening America to heaven is what I enjoy most. I really want to be there. I wouldn't mind if I needed to stowaway'.

Some of the youth also recounted that they have heard several stories that describe how prosperous America and Europe are, but seeing these beautiful countries live on social media everyday has increased their desire to travel abroad. Studies have shown that social media influencers could change people's behaviour and attitudes. Endorsements by social media influencers are more effective than celebrities. Their followers also trust them more than celebrities and are more likely to mimic their attitude than celebrities

(Schouten et al. 2020; Jin et al. 2019). It is therefore not surprising that the youth in Ghana are yearning to travel abroad.

Difficulty in acquiring a travelling visa has also been cited as a factor contributing to irregular migration. In Ghana, several people resort to irregular migration after their attempt to migrate through the regular channel has been frustrated (Amoh-Asante 2019). MK is a 27-year-old vulcanizer and he recounts that:

I was rejected on four different occasions in my attempt to travel to Europe. They said I am not likely to return if I am permitted to enter the UK. But honestly, I had no intention of coming back. Ghana is hard. [...] I am waiting on an agent in Takoradi who has promised to hide me in a ship.

Reasons for MK's visa rejection were varied and include inadequate funds, forged documents and unclear travel intentions. Although MK disputed the claim of false documentation and inadequate funds, he admitted he did not have the intention to return to Ghana when he applied for a six months tourist visa to the United Kingdom. The link between visa rejection and irregular migration has been explored in the literature. In their study of 26 European states in the 2000s, Czaika and Hobolth (2016) estimated that a 10 per cent increase in asylum rejections raises the number of irregular migrants by an average of 2–4 per cent, and also, a 10 per cent increase in short-stay visa rejection leads to a 4–7 per cent increase in irregular border crossing.

Restrictive immigration policies by foreign countries also contribute to the desire of Ghanaian youth to migrate irregularly. SP is a returned migrant from Germany and he has this to say:

My goal was to use the legal route to travel to the UK to study. I had an admission to a school in London. Those days, I had enough money to cater for my visa application and enough for my travel and living expenses. My plan was that I will work part time to gather money to pay my school fees as I live in the UK. Unfortunately for me, the UK Government changed their immigration policy and required that students show evidence of payment of school fees before they are allowed entry. This crushed my plan because I didn't have money for the school fees. Subsequently with the help of a connection man, I took a flight to Libya and boarded a boat to cross the sea. I finally settled in Germany.

Although restrictive immigration policies are meant to control migration, a study by Simon et al. (2018) revealed that it can be counter-productive. They mentioned that restrictive policies imposed on students have little added effect because eligible individuals are likely to migrate through alternative legal routes. They furthered that, although restrictions on family-based visas result in more reductions in total migration, they produce the largest re-orientation towards unauthorized routes.

THE LYRICS ARE NOT AN EXAGGERATION: RETURNED MIGRANTS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES

During one of the focus group sessions, a returned migrant remarked that 'the lyrics are not an exaggeration. Kinaata is right on point on the dangers we face

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as we cross the desert'. He said sorrowfully while other participants nodded their heads as they began to share their terrible experiences. Young people face several risks as they make up their mind to migrate irregularly. Their first point of contact in their journey abroad is connection men. As explained earlier, connection men are agents who facilitate the movement of irregular migrants to their destination. PK is a 32-year-old plumber and he recounts his experience with a connection man below:

A friend recommended an agent to me. He indicated it will cost me €2000 to facilitate my travel to Tripoli. He asked me to make a deposit of €1500 and meet him at Bawku, a border town in the north. Before I left Cape Coast I called him and he said he was waiting for me and that other people who also want to go to Tripoli are gathering at Bawku. [...] When I reached Bawku, he never returned my calls and his number has not been active ever since.

This is a typical incidence of scam by an agent as Kofi Kinaata has mentioned in his song. Although there are reports of reliable agents, several of them are fraudsters who prey on unsuspecting migrants. Sanchez (2020) observed that scam artists pretend as agents in the irregular migration stream to steal money without providing any mobility services. Several of them profile migrants and their habits in order to target them without fail. PK revealed that he became stranded at Bawku as he knew no one in the community. After spending two days at Bawku in search of the agent, he became frustrated and depressed. There have been several reports on the death of migrants as they attempt to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Onuoha and Okafor (2021) report that about 73 per cent of deaths at sea occur in the Mediterranean. Within 1 January to 16 September in 2015 alone, about 2812 persons have already perished in the Mediterranean of which the majority were identified as irregular migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa. April 2015 was the worst month when a boat carrying over 800 migrants capsized in the sea off Libya (Adepoju 2016). SP is a returned migrant and he narrates his near death experience on the Mediterranean Sea below:

[T]he boat was overloaded and it developed a technical problem. As we were approaching the Italian border, the boat started sinking and some fell inside the sea and died. The coastal guards came to our rescue and saved the majority of us. I was so close to death.

Several irregular migrants do not even reach the sea but die in the desert. Swing (2016) reported that the bodies of 48 migrants were found decaying in the desert between Niger and Algeria in June 2016. It has been reported that migrants crossing the desert generally eat once a day and most often eat only biscuits. They are exposed to shortage of water and food because vehicles conveying them frequently develop faults and this leads to a much longer journey than expected. Sadly, those who get sick along the journey are most often dumped by smugglers in the desert to protect other migrants from contracting diseases (International Organization for Migration 2013; Adepoju 2016). KK also narrates his experience below:

We were traveling in a group in the desert around Algeria. Our water got finished and we were really thirsty. So I elected to go bring water. I

lost my way back and I couldn't trace my team. I never found them but I later heard in the news that some people died in the desert close to Algeria because they were thirsty. Maybe they were my colleagues.

An independent fact finding mission commissioned by the UN's Human Rights Council found a systemic and widespread attack directed at irregular migrants in Libya. Migrants are reported to be subjected to torture, murder, enslavement, imprisonment, rape and other inhuman acts which amount to crime against humanity (UNHRC 2022). Some of the returned migrants narrated some incidents they faced which collaborated with the UNHRC findings. MO recounts that:

I was arrested in Gargeresh. One early morning, the entire community was surrounded by anti-immigration police and some soldiers. They broke down our doors and forced us to come out. They beat some of us as they loaded us into pickup trucks like sardines to the detention centre. They took away my money and my phone.

EFFECT OF KOFI KINAATA'S SONG ON THE MIGRATION INTENTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

In this study, we found out that all the returned irregular migrants interviewed were already aware of some of the dangers they were likely to encounter before they embarked on their journey. CA travelled from Ghana to Lampedusa in 2017 and he recounted that:

Kofi released his song a year before I left Ghana. I heard the song on several occasions but I had already made up my mind to travel. Before Kofi's song, there have been several other songs that describe how dangerous Libya is yet people go every day.

MO also added that:

After Gadafi's death, we all saw in the news how the country has been run down. There were several reports of deaths and robbery in the media, Kofi Kinaata is just saying what we already knew. If he is suffering like the way I am suffering here, he would also like to go.

The assumption that providing prospective irregular migrants with better information about risk and dangers of migration will dissuade them from migrating is quite unrealistic. Although CA and MO were aware of the dangers in travelling, this did not appear to deter their migration aspirations. This confirms other studies which suggest that migrants are fully aware of the risks in irregular migration and hence MIC might achieve very limited results (Van Bommel 2020; Mbaye 2014). CA further suggested that if Kofi Kinaata was suffering like he is, he would most probably migrate. This indicates that young people perceive the hardship they face in Ghana as more dangerous than the risk in travelling irregularly. This also confirms the assertion by Townsend and Oomen (2015) that the risk of death or injury may seem worth taking when compared to immediate threat to personal safety. Awumbila et al. (2019) also revealed that the need to improve livelihood is more pronounced in migration decision making and as a result young people may underestimate other risks involved in migration. She furthered that due to the absence of satisfactory

local jobs and state provisions for social protection, migration often functions as a means to alleviate local risks.

It is interesting to note that only one person at the FGD mentioned that she will no longer migrate after hearing stories from returning migrants that collaborated on the lyrics of Kofi's song. The rest of the returned migrants and aspiring migrants all wanted to migrate even if they had to do it in an irregular way. SAA is aspiring to migrate to Europe for the first time and he had this to say:

In this life there is something called luck? If others were not lucky, it doesn't mean i will also be unlucky. They are always talking about people who did not make it. Why are they not talking about those who made it? How many made it and how many did not make it? They should give us the figures. Kofi should not use a few unlucky ones to sell his music.

TA also mentioned that:

Kofi Kinaata's song is only telling me that this journey I am about to pursue is going to be hard and I need to prepare adequately to face it. Nothing in this world is easy but with the help of God I will cross the desert and the sea.

SO also added that:

If I listen to all the successful men in this country, none of them had it easy. They made it out of poverty because they persevere and endure all kinds of hardship. It is either you get rich or die trying. The desert is not going to stand in my way after I have identified a reliable connection man.

It is worth mentioning that the respondent who rescinded the decision to migrate irregularly is a female. This does not seem to be a surprise since Tannenbaum et al. (2015) have revealed that fear appeal messages are more effective when the targeted audience are females. However, it appears her decision was not based on Kofi Kinaata's song since she has heard the song on several occasions before the interview. Rather, she changed her mind after hearing the terrible experiences of the returned migrants.

The youth perceive that the media and Kofi Kinaata have been biased in reporting stories on irregular migration. They mentioned that it is important that the media also tell the success stories of irregular migration. Several of the youth also mentioned that they personally know people who have successfully made the crossing and are living well in Europe. This sentiment has actually been expressed by some observers. Adepoju (2016) cited a news article in the Mail & Guardian Africa where an observer remarked that traversing the Mediterranean on a rickety boat is not actually as perilous as media reporters have made it appear. The paper continued that for 2015, about 3500 asylum seekers and migrants died while crossing the Mediterranean to Europe. But 219,000 people successfully made the crossing. That translates to a journey success rate of 98.4 per cent. This is an indication that irregular migrants do not trust MICs and this confirms the assertion by Brachet (2016), Kosnick (2014) and Oeppen (2016) that it is unlikely for MICs to be trusted by its targeted audience.

It was also evident that the youth interpret MICs differently from the intended meaning of MIC by its sponsors. As in the case of TA above, Kofi's song is a wake-up call for him to prepare adequately so that he can successfully face the challenge ahead. By this way, CA is interpreting the song to reinforce his decision to migrate irregularly. This collaborates with the findings by Van Bommel (2020) who mentioned that migrants interpret risk information to suit their migration agenda.

CONCLUSION

Issues regarding migration continue to be a policy priority, given the observed increase in irregular migration of past decades. The broadest conclusion reached in this article is that irregular migrants are aware of the fear appeal messages used by sponsors of MIC to dissuade prospective irregular migrants from migrating. However, these messages do not appear to change young people's intention to migrate irregularly. People do not continue to migrate through unapproved channels, for example, because of ignorance of the devastating socio-economic and health consequences, but for a variety of economic and social reasons, including stress associated with unemployment, poverty, living in poor conditions and loss of hope in their country of origin. Simple advice will not work.

As a result, we make the following general recommendations:

- Research should continue on gathering existing data sources and specifying practicable and evocative pointers of irregular migration, as well as applying them in policies and programmes in support of equitable and safe migration across the globe.
- Specific studies of irregular migration should be conducted to demonstrate how and with what extent human rights and migration interact and what kind of connections are required to foster safe migration from Africa.
- In order to develop a comprehensive irregular migration policy agenda, the potential indicators or measures described in this article should be extended to other irregular source countries in future studies.

It is clear that both source and destination countries have responsibilities to help in fighting irregular migration. This article has called for a continuous joint responsibility where source and receiving countries team up to monitor economic outcomes in source countries and initiate policy interventions aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment. In addition, unscrupulous travel agents/agencies that promise a better standard of living elsewhere and lure the youth to emigrate without proper documentation and regulations should be regulated. It is also recommended that receiving countries initiate policies aimed at creating alternative affordable pathways to migration. We believe that these initiatives will go a long way in reducing irregular migration from Ghana to Europe and elsewhere.

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