



November 20, 2024



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Wrecking their Hopes? The Effect of Travel Risk Assessment on Migration Decisions

Risks play a crucial role in conventional migration models but there is limited empirical evidence on their effect. We analyse the effect of perceived travel risks on migration decision by exploiting the exogenous wreckage of migrant passenger ships in the era of mass migration. Using complete lists of Danish emigrants for the years 1868-1908 in combination with passenger lists of ships involved in an accident at sea, we estimate the effect on potentially following migrants from parishes directly affected by a previous emigrant being involved in an accident at sea. We estimate the effect using a difference-in-differences approach and recent developments from the staggered treatments literature. Preliminary results indicate a statistically significant reduction in the probability to observe an emigrant from affected parishes. In addition, we use digitized newspaper archives, providing information on the local coverage of shipwreck incidents, to investigate the indirect effect of accidents on potential emigrants through media coverage.