Influences of origin and destination on migrant fertility in Europe

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Abstract

Theories of migrant fertility were developed with migration from high- to low-fertility contexts in mind. Although some of the same explanations are applicable to migration from low- to low-fertility or low- to high- fertility contexts, they may take on a different character. By focusing on immigrants from low-fertility countries (Poland and Romania) that live in a context with comparatively high fertility (UK and Sweden) as well as low (Italy), and using a multi origin/destination approach that includes also stayers at origin, we will be able to distinguish between the role of culture and social norms and that of institutional and social policy context in childbearing behavior. Testing the main hypotheses related to fertility of migrants with this innovative perspective, the paper will produce valuable input to policy makers in Europe about potential remedies for declining fertility. The paper also covers issues of immigrant integration, a topic that has emerged as increasingly pressing on the political agenda in several European countries, through the lens of family demographic change.

Introduction

Theories of migrant fertility were developed with migration from high- to low- fertility contexts in mind. Although some of the same explanations are applicable to migration from low- to low-fertility or low- to high- fertility contexts, they may take on a different character.

In the short-run, migration interrupts the life course in countries of origin. Migrants may have a pent-up demand for childbearing, producing a positive arrival effect on fertility (Mussino and Strozza 2012a). Migrants from lowest-low fertility contexts may react slower, as they may consider themselves to have more time to achieve their fertility goals. Migration may also delay fertility on arrival due to the stress of becoming established in the new country (Milewski, 2010), but with an acceleration in childbearing afterwards (Ford 1990). This pattern may be pronounced among migrants from low-fertility contexts.

Longer-term differences as well as convergence of migrant to native fertility is explained in terms of adaptation, a gradual process in which exposure to new social structures and ideas shifts preferences and behavior toward those of the host country. Consistent with Coleman's (1994) argument about socioeconomic similarities, we expect that the speed of fertility convergence will depend on sociodemographic differences between countries of origin and destination. Thus, we would expect a faster convergence to native fertility levels for those from lowest-low fertility countries than for migrants from high-fertility countries.

Migrant selection may also play a role: those who migrate are predisposed to behaviors at the destination (Bagavos et al. 2008). Selectivity on fertility behaviors or socioeconomic characteristics associated with higher fertility is more plausible for those migrating from low-fertility countries than from high-fertility contexts.

Our emphasis on the influence of country of origin and destination will highlight the importance of cultural norms and practices from the origin country versus social norms and institutional contexts. The different contexts of origin reflect differences in cultural background, which can be maintained after migration (Gabrielli et al., 2007) and influence fertility patterns; the country of destination offers new norms and policy context. These differences may translate into different fertility models, reflecting underlying differences in integration into the new context.

Because migratory patterns are quite different for men and women, it is plausible to assume that the different migratory models will have other effects on the fertility of immigrant men. The associations might be weaker; men may need to be more settled in the new country before they decide to have a child. Or they may have already realized their fertility in their home country in anticipation of migration, resulting in having no further children in the country of destination. Both dynamics highlight the importance to study men and male fertility patterns in more detail.

To better study the role of the cultural and normative effect of country of destination in fertility behavior we will study immigrants from different origin countries in different destination countries and compare with those who remained in their origin country (non-migrants) in Europe using the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS).

The focus on the possible impact that the different welfare states may have on the fertility of migrants allows us to study how immigrants adapt to their new society and also how different policy provision may influence the childbearing behavior of different immigrant groups. E.g. native-born tend to adjust their childbearing behavior and parental leave uptake in reaction to different reforms in Swedish family policies (Andersson et al. 2006, Mussino and Duvander 2016). In contrast, there is little documentation of how immigrants tend to react to family policy change. Andersson et al. (2006) find that with the introduction of the speed premium in the Swedish parental leave system in the 1980s, native-born women shortened their birth intervals, whereas immigrant women did not change their behavior in the same way. However, arriving at different ages and being exposed for different times at the destination will influence the reception of the norms and consequently have different impacts on fertility behavior.

Contrary to previous research, this study will not only fill the gap in the literature studying the fertility of immigrants (men and women) from low-fertility settings. It also approaches, for the first time, the fertility of migrants as a two-way multidimensional process incorporating a multi cross-countries comparative including stayers at origin. Doing so, we are able to link a purely demographic measure in more challenging literature on immigrant integration.

Data and Method

We merged seven waves (2009-2015) of the European Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), the British Labour Force Survey (UK-LFS) and the Italian Labour Force Survey (IT-LFS) in a unique large dataset. Unlike EU-LFS, which distinguishes macro-categories of geographical origin, UK-LFS and IT-LFS give detailed information on the country of birth, helping to distinguish specific groups of migrants. Thus, from these data we selected Polish and Romanian migrants in UK and Italy as well as British and Italian natives. EU-LFS was used to take information on Polish and Romanians that did not migrate (stayers). This allowed us to study fertility behaviours of Polish and Romanian migrants settled in two destination countries with different fertility levels as well as different structural characteristics in terms of welfare regime and labour market regulation (Italy and UK),

comparing them not only with natives in the destination, but also with static remained in the country of origin. The analytical sample included 1,209,031 men and 1,215,134 women in Italy as for Italy, and 845,729 men and 862,795 women in UK, from age 20 to 45.

We focused on two dependent variables. The first was the total number of children, born in the host country or abroad, living in the household. The second was the age at first birth. Since the data did not include direct information on the number (and age) of children in the household, we applied the 'own-child method' (Bordone et al. 2009). This procedure links children to their (supposed) mothers (or fathers) in the same household, assuming that minor children recorded in a household comprise all the children born, and still alive, to the parents in that household, even if the relationship is not directly specified. Of course, this technique enables only detection of those children still living, at the time of the interview, with at least one parent. By including in our analysis only those individuals aged between 20 and 45 years old, we could assume that there were no children living outside the household, and we were able to reconstruct the actual number of children indirectly.

The independent variable was geographical origin, distinguishing immigrants from the natives and stayers according to the country of birth. Individuals were divided in five categories: a) natives (British or Italian); b) Polish stayers; c) Polish migrants; d) Romanian stayers; e) Romanian migrants. We also included two additional and residual categories, namely Italian migrants in UK and British migrants in Italy.

We included the following control variables in the analysis: a) educational attainment (lower-secondary or less, upper-secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary and tertiary); b) employment condition (operationalised through the ISCO-08 code at 1 digit, including also two additional categories for the unemployed and the inactive); c) marital status (single, married, widowed or divorced). Models also controlled for year of the survey and age group (five 5-years dummies).

We estimated OLS regression models separately by gender and country (of destination), dividing the analytical strategy in two steps. The first compared the fertility (in terms of quantum and timing) between natives, migrants and static. The second studied the trends over time of Polish and Romanian migrants' fertility (with respect to natives and stayers), splitting the immigrant groups according to the years of residence in the host country (1-2; 3-4; 5-6; 7-8; 9-10; >10).

Results

Final results, including also the Swedish case, will be available in time for the EPC meeting.