

Fertility Differentials by Migrants' Legal Status: Examining the Legitimacy Hypothesis

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Abstract

Family formation of immigrants and their descendants has gained increasing attention as they make a growing proportion of the population. Most studies show that a combination of mechanisms (selection, disruption and interrelation of events) explain the different fertility patterns observed. The legitimacy hypothesis (adaptation of fertility behaviour in order to access citizenship and rights) is present in public debates but has not often been used to explain migrants' fertility. This paper seeks to understand whether fertility patterns of migrants vary depending on their administrative trajectories upon arrival, but also explores to which extent the observed differences may be linked to other confounding factors. We use the second Longitudinal Survey of Newly Arrived Immigrants in France (Elipa 2), which has the unique advantage of including both respondents' childbearing histories and their migratory and legal trajectories. We estimate age- and duration-specific fertility rates and transitions to 1st / 2nd or higher order births and carry out descriptive and multivariate analyses (discrete-time event history models). Migrants with precarious administrative trajectories more often have children born in France at time of their admission to stay, but this result is in part due to their longer presence (period of exposure). More importantly, we show that legal status (or its absence upon arrival) is the result of unfavourable circumstances (at time of departure, such as precipitation due to a crisis or conflict; lengthy and dangerous journeys; precarious living conditions upon arrival), which also affect migrants' reproductive health and behaviour in the first years after their arrival.