

## The Socioeconomic Selectivity of Migrants: A Comparative Analysis

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A standard proposition of the migration literature is that individuals with high levels of education or in highly skilled positions have a greater tendency to move. Migration research has also found that migrants are over-represented at the lowest and highest socioeconomic levels, i.e., persons with higher-status occupations as well as those with more marginal occupations are more likely to be migrants than persons with mid-status jobs. For the poorest groups, migration is often assumed to be a means out of poverty. Whether poor individuals benefit from migration, though, depends on their human capital and on their chances of getting a job at destination.

In the existing migration literature, findings on the socioeconomic characteristics of migrants vary greatly by country and are highly dependent on the source of data, methodology, and the population or area under analysis. In addition, most studies have focused on male migrants and on one single migration stream (typically rural-to-urban). Yet in many countries, the sex composition of migrants varies greatly by type of migration flow (e.g., according to DHS, in many African countries, females are more likely to be rural-to-rural migrants whereas males are more likely to be rural-to-urban migrants) and our findings show that the characteristics of migrants vary significantly by sex. While the focus on rural-to-urban migration has guided much of the analysis on internal migration, contrary to expectations, this may not be the most common type of internal migration in many countries.

To more systematically understand migrant selectivity regarding educational attainment, labor force participation, and occupational status, we use information from all available DHS surveys for developing countries. Specifically, this paper aims at answering the following questions: (1) Are recent migrant men and women in various destinations and from various origins (big cities, small cities, rural areas) more educated than non-migrants? (2) Is their labor-force participation comparable to that of non-migrants? (3) What are the migrant-non-migrant differentials regarding occupational status? Finally, (4) Do results vary by country and geographical region?

Despite their focus on reproductive health issues, DHS data contain valuable information regarding migrants, residential transitions by type of locality, and migrant characteristics. While the early DHS surveys were restricted to women, men were soon included in most surveys. Given their coverage, consistency and comparability across countries, DHS surveys are an exceptional source of information to examine internal migration patterns from a cross-national perspective. They can produce a comprehensive profile of the population in reproductive ages, migrants and non-migrants, and of the moves themselves.

Following a descriptive analysis of the characteristics of migrants and the main internal migration patterns by country and region, we have conducted multivariate analyses using logistic regression to assess whether being a migrant (that is, having migrated during the ten years preceding the survey) has an impact on educational attainment, occupation and labor force participation, and whether such impact varies by area of destination (beyond urban-rural residence, we distinguish big from small cities, towns and the countryside), area of origin (that is, whether migrants are positively or negatively selected from the population in the areas from which they originate) and by sex. The higher the skills of migrants and, in particular, the better migrants do in the labor market, the more effective is migration as a way out of poverty. If migrants lack the skills needed, or if they are unable to use their skills productively—signifying a mismatch or underemployment—then migration will not be a successful pathway out of poverty. However, given the past urban bias of development programs, the transfer of poverty via migration from rural to urban areas can have the function of making poverty visible, which is a first step toward addressing poverty through policy means.

Our preliminary analyses indicate that differences by migrant status are often significant and persist once we control the effect of age, childhood residence, previous residence and, when assessing labor market characteristics, education. Namely, we have obtained the following results:

1. *Differences in education between migrants and non-migrants by type of residence (comparing migrants with residents at destination).* In the African countries analyzed, migrant women are significantly more educated than non-migrants in rural areas as well as in towns and in small cities (i.e., the odds of having secondary or higher

education are higher for migrant women than for non-migrant women). No significant differences are found in big cities. A different situation exists in the Latin American countries analyzed, where migrant women are significantly less educated than non-migrants in big cities, small cities and towns. The migrant-native differentials in education tend to be larger for men than for women, with the same direction of the differences in Africa.

2. *Differences in education between migrants and non-migrants in areas of "origin" (comparing migrants with the population in the type of locality from where they came; i.e., migrants from rural areas are compared to individuals in rural areas who did not migrate recently).* The findings for the African countries analyzed so far show that migrants from rural areas –and residing in towns, small cities or large cities at the time of the survey- are more educated than individuals in rural areas. No significant differences for individuals coming from big or small cities –residing in rural areas- when compared to those currently residing in cities. Since the educational attainment of migrants is measured at the time and place of the survey, it is conceivable that some individuals moved with the purpose of studying. That is, the observed level of education may have been attained after the move. However, results from preliminary analyses based on an older sub-sample of men and women (who, in all likelihood, attained the observed levels of education before they moved) are similar to those obtained for the full sample.

3. *Differentials in labor force participation between migrants and non-migrants (at destination).* For the countries analyzed so far, the odds of working are significantly higher for migrants in all areas (cities, towns, and rural areas) –after controlling for education and the other characteristics listed.

Preliminary results for several African and Latin American countries regarding occupational status indicate that, in urban areas, the odds of having a highly-skilled job are often, but not always, similar for migrants and non-migrants with comparable education.

The paper will discuss the possible reasons for these differences in the labor market situation of migrants and non-migrants and their implications. In addition, we will expand the analyses systematically to males and females and to the four types of localities (large and small cities, towns, and rural areas) for all developing countries

covered by DHS. In the discussion of the findings, we will link the findings back to our earlier observation that migration can function as a pathway out of poverty, and that, especially in the case of rural-to-urban migration, migration might function as a means of making poverty visible through the migration of poor people from invisible rural places to more visible urban localities.

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