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Migration between Senegal and Europe. Do economic and non-economic factors play the same role in departure, return and circulation?

Abstract

In this paper we report on a particular research stream of the project MAFE-Senegal: the determinants of first migration, and of return and circulation of migrants. We investigate the value of several competing explanations of migration decisions, both at the individual and the household level, to account for migration flows between Senegal and Europe.

Data comes from the MAFE-Senegal Survey (Migrations between Africa and Europe), which has recently finalized its field work in both Senegal and three European countries (Italy, France and Spain). We use discrete-time event history techniques to explore the determinants of migration decisions and differentiated patterns of migration across individuals.

Background and aim of the paper

The departing point of the MAFE project is that international migrations are not simply uni-directional flows between departure and destination countries that respond to economic or demographic differentials between the two. Rather, flows are increasingly fragmented and dispersed, and create various articulations between points in a 'migration system' (circulation of people, goods, money, ideas, etc.) that critically affect the development of subsequent migration.

Following this line of reasoning, this paper challenge two common assumptions that are deeply rooted in European research and policy-making: 1) the first assumption is that African migration is primarily an immigration movement to Europe, as if there were little or no spontaneous return migration from Europe to Africa; 2) the second assumption is that once people arrive in Europe, they are here to stay, in spite of evidence that 'transnational' practices are increasing and significant.

Namely, in this paper we examine the determinants of first departure from Senegal to France, Italy or Spain (jointly named as "Europe"), jointly with the determinants of return and repeated migration (circulation). Our basic goal is, therefore, to test whether the importance of the same factors varies across the different trips an individual may make, or not, and why. In other words, our aim is to test empirically various theories of international migration in order to contribute to a better understanding of the causes of international migration by adding new evidence from international flows different to the Mexican-US case. We will compare the role played by both economic and non-economic factors in explaining different migration decisions. In particular, we will compare the relative importance of education, household poverty and deprivation, family networks and remittances in accounting for individuals' trips between Senegal and Europe. Some of the issues and questions we expect to deal with are:

- Education: does the level of education influence the probabilities of migrating toward Europe? does it affect the choice of destination and the length of migration? does it affect patterns of circulation between origin and destination places? does the effect of education vary between men and women – in other words, are educated women more or less likely to migrate than educated men?
- Household poverty: to what extent does out-migration from Africa actually affect the poorest households?
- Family and community factors: which is the actual
- Remittances: what's the role of different kinds of transfers (e.g. family support, productive investments) in triggering return migration?

Data

The MAFE-Senegal Survey (Migrations between Africa and Europe) carried out its field work in 2007-2008. It includes an individual questionnaire, designed to be applied both in Senegal and in European countries: nearly 1200 individuals interviewed in Senegal (including non migrants and returned migrants) and 600 individuals born in Senegal and living in Europe at the survey date (200 in each of the countries studied: France, Italy and Spain). This quantitative retrospective survey studies several dimensions of the life course of the individuals interviewed, including their education/activity career, their family career, and migration trajectory (including every change of dwelling). In addition it asks, among others, about individual's networks abroad, remittances, financial situation, investments and properties.

Methods

We use discrete-time event history techniques to study migration decisions. We first present some descriptive data using life table indicators (survival functions, number of migrations per head), followed by multivariate analyses. We analyze separately first migration from subsequent moves and from return migration.

The small size of the sample precludes us to split it according to gender, yet it is planned to test several interaction effects of gender (e.g. with such indicators as: partner living abroad, educational level, household resources, number of children).

We explore several indicators of our variables, such as the size and composition of the individual network, objective and subjective measures of economic status, educational level and enrolment, amount and type of transfers to Senegal.

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