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Who seeks asylum in Germany?

Qui demande l'asile en Allemagne ?

Author: Lucas Guichard

Abstract: European countries experienced a short-lived surge in the arrival of asylum seekers from 2014 to 2016. The size, diversity, and potential consequences of the large number of asylum seekers makes it important to identify the characteristics of the newcomers, which are likely to affect the socioeconomic outcomes of the stayers in the origin country and of the natives at destination.

Résumé : Entre 2014 et 2016, les pays européens ont connu une brève et spectaculaire arrivée de demandeurs d'asile. La taille, la diversité et les conséquences potentielles de l'arrivée des demandeurs d'asile impliquent qu'il est important d'identifier les caractéristiques des nouveaux arrivants, susceptibles d'affecter les conditions socio-économiques des personnes qui restent dans le pays d'origine et des natifs habitant le pays de destination.

More than 1.2 million first-time asylum applications were registered in the European Union in 2015, with Germany that received around three quarters of the applications lodged that year. The determinants that explain who is able to leave the home country to seek asylum abroad have been rarely explored in the literature. I exploit individual-level and representative data related to the recent surge in asylum applications to Germany to improve the current limited knowledge and understanding about the mechanisms fostering the migration decision in the context of forced migration.

The paper focuses on the self-selection on education of asylum seekers arrived in Germany since 2013, delivering the first insights on this question for individuals drawn from the origin population of five source countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Iraq, Serbia, and Syria. These countries represent 65% of all first-time asylum applications lodged in Germany, and they offer an interesting variety of economic and security conditions at origin, allowing an investigation of variations in the pattern of selection of asylum seekers coming from different countries. Individuals claiming asylum in Germany from Iraq and Syria are shown to be positively selected on education, while the results provide mixed evidence on the selection of asylum seekers from Afghanistan. On the other hand, Albanian and Serbian asylum seekers are found to be drawn from the lower tail of the education distribution.

The different conditions at origin are key to describing the pattern of selection of asylum seekers in Germany. Individuals from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria are likely to be in danger at home, but asylum seekers from the Balkan region left countries considered to be safe. Now, the level of threats that can be encountered in the origin country largely determines the high (low) rates of acceptance of asylum applications from conflict-affected (Balkan) countries. Accordingly, this could lead to differences in the expected duration of stay in Germany, such that asylum seekers from Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria have a longer time horizon in the host country, compared with asylum seekers from Albania and Serbia, who are legally entitled to stay at destination only until their applications are rejected, something that almost invariably occurs.

Different expected durations of stay in Germany influence the selection of asylum seekers with respect to education, through the returns to education at destination that are increasing with the time spent since migration. The longer time horizon of individuals from conflict-affected countries could imply a favourable selection on education. By contrast, Balkan asylum seekers are more likely to be negatively selected because of their greater probability of staying temporarily in Germany. This pattern is consistent with the high (low) migration costs faced by asylum seekers originating from conflict-affected (Balkan) countries. Liquidity constraints on the decision to migrate of the former drive a positive selection on education, while the latter encounter low migration costs to move to Germany.