Three Essays on the Economics of Migration

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ABSTRACT

The questions around international migration, determined by economic and/or socio-political motives, regularly appear as an important and divisive topic in the political world, in public opinion or in the media. While attention towards this debate is relatively recent, the analysis of the causes and consequences of migration flows between countries has been addressed by economists and, more generally, by academia for many years. The three articles in this dissertation are in line with the economic literature on migration, while contributing to existing research on similar issues. In the first chapter, I examine the pattern of selection on education of asylum seekers recently arrived in Germany from five key source countries: Afghanistan, Albania, Iraq, Serbia, and Syria. The analysis relies on original individual-level data collected in Germany combined with surveys conducted at origin. The results reveal a positive pattern of selection on education for asylum seekers who were able to flee Iraq and Syria, and the
selection is neutral for individuals seeking asylum from Afghanistan and negative for asylum seekers from Albania and Serbia. I provide an interpretation of these patterns based on differences in the expected length of stay at destination, the migration costs faced by asylum seekers to reach Germany, and the size of migration networks at destination. In the second chapter, we emphasize that acquiring information about destinations can be costly for migrants. We model information frictions in the rational inattention framework and obtain a closed-form expression for a migration gravity equation that we bring to the data. The model predicts that flows from countries with a higher cost of information or stronger priors are less responsive to variations in economic conditions in the various destinations, as migrants rationally get less information before deciding where to move. The econometric analysis reveals systematic heterogeneity in the pro-cyclical behavior of migration flow across origins that is consistent with the existence of information frictions. In the third chapter, I attempt to provide an answer to the following question: does the adoption of a list of safe countries of origin influence the asylum applications lodged in OECD member states? I draw on a structural gravity model to derive an empirical migration equation that is brought to the data to estimate the direct effect of the list on the bilateral number of asylum claims. This, in turn, allows me to solve the structural model to quantify the externalities arising from a counter-factual experiment about the safe country policy. The empirical analysis reveals that the introduction of a list of safe source countries leads to a decrease of around 30% in the bilateral volume of asylum applications. The simulation exercise under an hypothetical change of the asylum policy suggests the presence of diversion effects on the sheer scale of asylum claims across both origin and destination countries.