

The Impact of Geographical Mobility on Class Attainment. A Longitudinal Study of Internal Migrants in Europe

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Short abstract

This study analyses the interplay between geographical mobility and social stratification, focusing on its impact on occupational attainment. Drawing on two waves of the SHARE dataset covering respondents from six European countries (Sweden, France, Germany, Poland, Spain, and Italy), we examine the life histories of individuals born between 1930 and 1965. We focus on internal migrants also distinguishing according to the direction of migration (onward versus return migration). This study incorporates three innovative contributions. Firstly, we consider the distinction between those who moved only once, returned and onward migrants. Secondly, we evaluate the effect of mobility on labour market attainments over time as a process involving the period before and after the move. Thirdly, the analysis employs Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) techniques, treating migration as a 'treatment', effectively 'pruning' observations to create a randomized experiment design. Preliminary findings reveal that Geographical mobility has a stronger positive effect on employment likelihood for men than women, with gender differences more pronounced in employment outcomes rather than social class attainment. Both men and women experience a pre-move employment penalty, but men recover more successfully after the move, whereas women experience only partial recovery, unable to regain pre-move employment opportunities. Additionally, returned and onward migrants show a further advantage across both in terms of employment and class attainment.

1. Geographical mobility and occupational attainment

Classical research on social stratification has widely considered the geographical dimensions of social inequalities (Blau and Duncan, 1967). However, studies considering how geographical mobility affects the intergenerational reproduction of social inequalities are scant (Ballarino and Panichella, 2021), despite the substantive importance of the phenomenon (Huinink, Vidal and Kley, 2013). Indeed, geographical mobility plays a significant role in shaping demographic and social change and is a significant experience for many individuals. As such, understanding the social implications of mobility is a crucial topic for social research (see Vidal and Lersch, 2021).

Internal migration – and long-range migration in particular – tends to be generated by the same factors that typically generate international migration: it is motivated by the opportunities for realizing economic gains and financial support for local activities, investing in human capital and improving one's economic condition. Existing literature underlined the positive impact on occupational achievement for migrants (Bonney and Love 1991; Smits 2001). Those who moved to an area with more job opportunities have better chances of obtaining higher socio-economic status later in life than those who did not move (Van Ham 2003). Therefore, long-haul internal migration, such as inter-regional moves, can be an important investment in human capital leading to the expectation that migration will pay off in the future. Indeed, although the geographical movement can disrupt social networks (i.e., the social capital is 'location-specific', see DaVanzo, 1981) and separate family members and friends, it positively affects occupational status, since it widens movers' job search area, allowing them to escape the limitations of the occupational structure of their place of origin and to take advantage of job opportunities available elsewhere (Ballarino and Panichella, 2021; Panichella and Cantalini, 2023). Geographical mobility is thus considered as 'an instrument of occupational achievement' (van Ham, 2002, p. 6), allowing to gain a better occupation position when job opportunities are unevenly distributed across regions (Huinink, Vidal and Kley, 2014).

This study incorporate three innovative contributions. Firstly, we consider the distinction between those who moved only once, returned and onward migrants. Returning to the previous region of residence can be part of a planned strategy, for example following the completion of tertiary education or training (Mulder et al. 2020), it may follows specific family events such as the birth of a child (Mulder et al 2018) or it can be the reaction to adverse circumstances such as negative outcomes in the labour market (Huttunen et al 2018) or marital separation (Spring et al, 2021). Past migrants are however more likely to migrate in the future not only to return to their region of origin but also to other regions (Bernard 2022).

Secondly, we evaluate the effect of mobility on labour market attainments over time as a process involving the period before and after the move. It is likely that the return of migration does not take place immediately after the move but rather in the long run (Mulder and Van Ham 2005). Hence, advantages can be higher if the migration takes place in the early stages of the labour career (Topel and Ward 1992).

Thirdly, the analysis employs Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) techniques (Iacus et al 2011), treating migration as a 'treatment', effectively 'pruning' observations to create a randomized experiment design.

2. Geographical mobility and social stratification: research question and empirical strategy

Our approach puts migration into the analytical core of social stratification research, by looking at migration as one of a set of possible events characterizing the life course of individuals. While the analysis of the effect of the social background of origin on life chances over and above education is at the core of the current social stratification research, few studies have considered geographical origin and mobility as an additional dimension of social stratification. The empirical analysis aims at measuring the impact of geographical mobility on occupational success for men and women, quantifying the *migration benefit/disadvantage*, i.e., the differences in occupational outcomes between the internal migrants (*movers*) and those who remained in the region of origin (*non-movers*) with the same individual characteristics. In other words, has the choice to move among regions been ‘advantageous’ compared to the decision to stay in the place of origin? (RQ1)

Among individuals who have moved at least once in their lifetime, we can differentiate between those who moved only once (*First move*), those who returned to their region of origin (*Return migration*), and those who relocated to a third region (*Onward migration*). Return migrants are expected to fare worse occupationally to other groups when their decision is driven by dissatisfaction with opportunities at the destination (DaVanzo, 1981; Newbold, 1996) or family obligations, such as childcare or elderly care (Bailey and Cooke, 1998). However, return migrants might also benefit from existing local resources and networks, making it easier to find employment (Mulder and van Ham, 2005). Onward migrants may base their decision on stronger expectation of better job opportunities. Thus, the second research question is: Do return and onward migrants experience additional benefits? (RQ2)

Following a longitudinal approach, we remove the typical approach in the literature, which observe the gain and losses of migration only in the short term after the move, and on the impact of just one migration, usually the most recent one. Thus, the second research questions is related to the distribution of the effect over the life course: do returns to migration occur right away or after some time lag? (RQ3)

Research has widely shown that geographical mobility is a gendered phenomenon because it interrelates with family behaviours that often exhibit substantial gender differences (Taylor, 2007).

While men who move have on average better occupational outcomes than those who do not, this is not always the case for women, whose occupational achievement is negatively affected by the geographical movement (Kulu and Milewski, 2007; Cooke, 2008), in particular when mobility occurs after couple formation (Boyle, Feng, and Gayle, 2009; Cooke et al., 2009). Thus, our third research question is related to the gendered effect of geographical mobility: are occupational returns of internal migration lower for women? (RQ4)

3. Data and methods

Analyses are based on two waves of the SHARE (Survey on Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe) (2008-09 and 2017 called SHARELIFE) providing life-history information about representative samples of

respondents aged 50 and over living in six selected European countries (Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Sweden and Poland). After merging and harmonizing the two waves, the resulting dataset contains 24,812 individuals born between 1930 and 1965.

As research strategy we employed a CEM matching technique (Iacus et al 2011) considering migration as a treatment. According to this approach, observations are “pruned” in order to reproduce a fully blocked randomized experiment design: the imbalance is 0 by design since treated and control groups are blocked at the start exactly on observed covariates (Iacus, King and Porro, 2011, p.349). CEM enables to get an exact balance on the observed covariates (age, education, sex, etc.) and an on average balance on the unobserved (motivation, intelligence, skills, etc.). The benefits of this strategy is to get: i) more efficient estimates, ii) a lower degree of unbalance, and iii) more statistical power (King and Nielsen, 2019). CEM is also particularly appropriate when, as in our case, a large dataset is analysed and no continuous confounders are included in the analysis (Blackwell et al. 2010, p. 3).

After pre-processing data with CEM, we estimated a set of Linear Probability Panel Models with Fixed Effects to quantify the effect of geographical mobility on occupational attainment, and a distributed fixed-effect model (Dougherty 2006) to quantify the timing of the effect of mobility on attainment. In the latter case, the effect of geographical mobility is treated not as a discrete event, as in the former case, but as a process involving the period before and after the movement, ranging from 5 years prior to it to 10 years afterwards.

The dependent variables are three: being employed (Y/N); entering the service class (EGP I-II) (Y/N), and avoiding working class (EGP IIIb, V-VI-VIIab). The independent variable is the geographical mobility defined as a move between two regions (NUTS2) within the same country.

The pre-treatment variables are: *gender* (male, female); birth cohort (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s); *education* (low sec. or less, upper sec. tertiary), *country* (France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and Sweden), *area when 15 years* (big city, suburbs, large town, small town, rural area); and *social class of origin* (service, middle, working class).

4. Preliminary results

Preliminary results (table 1) reveal that the positive effect of geographical mobility on employment observed for male is not confirmed for women. However, when considering social class we found a generalized positive impact on the likelihood to access the service class (conditional on employment) and to avoid the working class are positive for both men and women. Additionally, among movers, both returned and onward migrants show a further advantage across all three outcomes.

Looking at the effect of geographical mobility on labour market outcomes over time (Figure 1), we found that both men and women experience a penalty on the possibility of being employed before moving, which increases starting from 5 years before the internal migration. However, for men, geographical mobility manages to compensate for this penalty, as they are more likely to be employed after the move than they were in their region of origin. For women we have only a partial catching up: the (smaller) positive effect of the

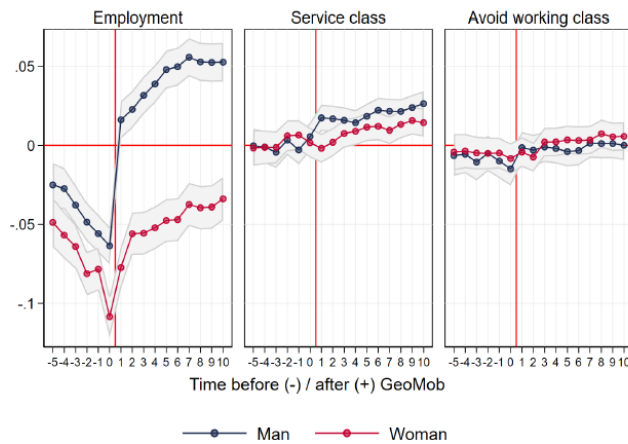
mobility fails to achieve the employment opportunities they had 5 years before the migration, making the recovery process only partial.

The effect of internal mobility on entry into the service class is similar for both genders. In both cases, the positive effect is smaller, but it occurs after the move. Finally, we found no effect for the third labour market outcomes, namely avoid working class. Here, the geographical mobility has a limited impact. However, there is a substantial heterogeneity (here not shown) among individuals with different education.

Tab. 1. Geographical mobility and occupational attainments. Linear probability models with FE

	Employment		Service class		Avoid working class	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
First move	0.05***	-0.01***	0.01***	0.01***	0.00	0.01***
Returned	0.11***	0.08***	0.04***	0.05***	0.03***	0.01
Onward migrant	0.17***	0.06***	0.05***	0.05***	0.03***	0.04***

Figure 1. Effect of geographical mobility on labour market outcomes. Distributed Fixed effect model



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