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# The impact of internal migration on educational outcomes: Evidence from Turkey

Ali Berker\*

Department of Economics, Abant İzzet Baysal University, 14280 Gölköy-Bolu, Turkey

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## ABSTRACT

Similar to the relation between the inflows of immigrants and educational outcomes that are found in immigration studies, the spatial distribution of internal migrants within a given country also may influence educational outcomes, at least in the short run. This could be particularly true in Turkey, where inter-provincial mobility is high and where striking differences in educational resources and therefore educational success across regions persist. Using the 1990 and 2000 Turkish Censuses, this study exploits variations over time in the inflow of internal migrants across provinces to identify the causal effect of internal migration on natives' educational outcomes. The evidence suggests that the inflow of migrants lowers natives' completion rates for middle school and high school. Evidence also indicates that while the negative effects appear to be greater among native children from low-SES households, native high-SES households are able to mitigate these adverse effects for their children. Furthermore, the estimated effects exhibit some differences by children's gender and migrant status.

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## 1. Introduction

As induced by the migration of families and children, the school-age population's spatial redistribution across regions in a given country might alter both educational opportunities and incentives for both those who previously resided (native population) and those who newly reside (migrant population) in local areas experiencing different densities of migrant inflows. Economic theory conjectures that for a given local area, the migrant inflow may generate changes in both the marginal benefit and marginal cost of education, which might result in two opposite effects for educational investments. As a result, migration has ambiguous effects on natives' educational outcomes in a given local area (Betts, 1998; Betts & Fairlie, 2003; Gould, Lavy, & Paserman, 2004). For instance, the migrant inflow may increase the marginal cost of education for natives,

decreasing their educational outcomes because an expansion in the number of migrant students lessens the efficient use of fixed-level school resources, at least in the short run. The migrant inflow's negative effect may be reversed, however, when migrants have relatively lower skills than natives; the skill premium – the marginal benefit of education – is likely to increase for natives, thus improving their educational outcomes. Economic theory, therefore, calls for a well-designed empirical study to determine the direction and magnitude of the relation between the migrant inflow and natives' educational outcomes.

In addition to responding to this call, increasing public concerns about immigrant flows from less-developed to developed countries such as the U.S. and European countries have led researchers to explore international migration's causal effects on various outcomes, such as natives' educational outcomes. For example, Betts (1998) used variation in the immigration ratio across states over time in the U.S. to estimate immigration's effect on natives' educational attainments. Gould et al. (2004) examined the long-term educational impact of immigra-

\* Tel.: +90 374 254 1464; fax: +90 374 253 4521.

E-mail address: [berkera@gmail.com](mailto:berkera@gmail.com).

tion for Israeli high school students who were exposed to different densities of immigrant students during their elementary education. These two studies provide evidence that as native students, particularly those with disadvantaged family backgrounds, are exposed to a greater immigrant influx, immigration's adverse effect becomes stronger. Immigrant inflows may influence not only individuals' educational level, but also the types of school they attend. *Betts and Fairlie (2003)* provide evidence that for a given metropolitan area, a higher immigrant inflow may lead more native students, particularly white native students, to attend private schools.

Building on the econometric methods of previous studies that examined the spatial correlation between the immigrant population's density and natives' educational success in the international migration context, this study is the first to examine the causal relation between the migrant inflow and natives' educational outcomes in the internal migration context. It is also the first to evaluate to what extent a shock to the educational sector (in this case a change to the school-age population within the local area caused by the migrant inflow) can be handled by the Turkish educational sector, which has been characterized by excessive centralized governance, the absence of specific policy rules for determining the distribution of resources across schools, and sharp differences in educational outcomes among regions as well as well across students with varying backgrounds. Using the 1990 and 2000 Turkish Censuses, I exploit changes over time in the inflow of internal migrants across provinces to estimate the effects of the migrant–native ratio on the likelihood of completing middle school for the 16–19 age group and of completing high school for the 18–20 age group. To measure the density of migrants for a given province, I obtain the recent migrant–native ratio by dividing the number of recent migrants ages 6–20 by that of natives in the same age group.

A simple analysis of the association between the migrant inflow and natives' educational outcomes might capture a spurious relation between migration and natives' educational outcomes. This is mainly because the province-level fixed effects that may influence natives' outcomes also might be related to the migrant inflow. Applying a two-stage estimation method on 2-year, province-level panel data, I first estimate the first-difference specification to remove the province-level fixed effects. However, the first-difference estimation method still might yield biased estimates of the migrant–native ratio's effect, because temporary shocks at the province level may be correlated with both the migrant–native ratio and natives' educational outcomes. To address this possible problem, I use the migrant–native ratio in 1990 as an instrument for the change in the migrant–native ratio between 1990 and 2000 in the first-difference equation.

Econometric approaches applied in this study provide reduced-form estimates that net out the relative strengths of the effects of changes in both labor market returns and the cost of acquiring additional education, where both changes were presumably induced by a change in the migrant inflow at the province level. Overall, the estimation results provide evidence for a negative association between the migrant inflow and natives' educational outcomes. I fur-

ther investigate how the estimated effects differ with the native households' socio-economic status (SES). While children from low-SES households appear to be most harmed by an increase in the migrant inflow, a statistically significant negative effect is limited to their middle-school completion rate, and no significant impact was observed for children from high-SES households. The estimation results also indicate heterogeneity in the estimated effects with respect to children's gender and migrant status.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Similar to international migration, by changing the school-age population's distribution across regions within a given country, internal migration could affect educational production for native students in migrant-receiving local areas in various ways (*Betts, 1998; Betts & Fairlie, 2003; Betts & Lofstrom, 1998; Gould et al., 2004*). First, a higher inflow of migrant students may adversely alter the efficient use of school inputs. Indeed, a given local area experiencing a higher inflow of migrant students may experience a dramatic increase in the average number of students per educational input, such as teachers and laboratories, and thus this local area may fail to meet its student population's educational needs.

In addition to changing the size of school-age population, the migrant inflow may also change the composition of peer inputs for native students at the neighborhood, school, and class levels (*Gould et al., 2004*). The effects of the change in the peer composition on natives' educational outcome may hinge on differences between native and migrant parents in their educational attainment and their preferences regarding their children's education. Thus, by changing the efficient use of school inputs and native students' peer composition, which are the most important determinants of the supply of education for a given local area, the migrant inflow may alter the marginal cost of education and, consequently, influence natives' educational outcomes. For example, coupled with an increase in the school-age population, the inflow of migrant students with a lower parental background may adversely affect the education production in migrant-receiving areas, increasing the time period in which native students complete any given level of education.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, this type of migrant inflow may increase the marginal cost of education, thus reducing natives' educational outcomes.

In addition to influencing the supply of education in a local area, the migrant inflow may also alter economic returns to education, leading to changes in natives' demand for education (*Betts, 1998*). The direction and magnitude of this effect are closely related to the skill composition of both migrants and natives in a local area. For instance, when the migrant inflow results in a disproportional increase in the number of middle-school graduates, an increase in the wages of high-school graduates relative to those of middle-school graduates may produce incentives for addi-

<sup>1</sup> In contrast, for example, migrant students with a higher parental education background may serve as a complementary input in educational production, increasing native students' educational success.

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