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Migrant Self-Selection

Anthropometric Evidence from the Mass Migration of Italians to the United States,
1907–1925

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Abstract

We study migrant selection using the rich data generated by the migration of Italians to the US between 1907 and 1925. Comparing migrants' heights to the height distributions of their birth cohorts in their provinces of origin produces a measure of selection that is exogenous to migration, representative, and generated by almost unrestricted migration. The Italian migration was negatively selected at the national level, but positively selected at the local level. Selection varied systematically within Italy, with more positive local selection from shorter and poorer provinces. Selection was more negative among individuals with stronger connections in the United States and became more positive after imposition of the literacy test in 1917. These results highlight the importance of measuring selection at the local level to fully understanding the composition of migrant flows, shed light on the potential impacts of screening policies, and support theories that relate networks to more negative selection.

JEL: F22, J61, O15, N30

Keywords: Migration, Migrant Selection, Stature

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Notes This is a revised version of chapter 4 of Zimran's dissertation. A previous version of this paper was titled "Self-Selection of Immigrants on the Basis of Living Standards: Evidence from the Stature of Italian Immigrants at Ellis Island, 1907–1925."

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