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Gender inequality and emigration: Push factor or selection process?



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ABSTRACT

Our objective in this research is to provide empirical evidence relating to the linkages between gender equality and international emigration. Two theoretical hypotheses can be made for the purpose of analyzing such linkages. The first is that gender inequality in origin countries could be a push factor for women. The second one is that gender inequality may create a “gender bias” in the selection of migrants within a household or a community. An improvement of gender equality would then increase female migration. We build several original indices of gender equality using principal component analysis. Our empirical results show that the push factor hypothesis is clearly rejected. All else held constant, improving gender equality in the labor market is positively correlated with the migration of women, especially of the high-skilled. We observe the opposite effect for low-skilled men. This result is robust to several specifications and to various measurements of gender equality.

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1. Introduction

Gender inequality is a worldwide phenomenon and one of the most persistent forms of inequality. Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is a key aspect of development. It is one of the

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Millennium Development Goals adopted in 2000 by the United Nations. While the influence of gender inequality on economic growth has been widely studied,¹ it remains to consider carefully how it may also affect other individual or collective behavior. One specific aspect is a possible impact on migration behavior.

When considering non-wage motivations for migration, little attention has been given to working conditions (in a broad sense, including social security, unemployment insurance, etc.), and when it has, the interest has been focused on the working conditions in destination countries, considered as pull factors. Nevertheless, poor working conditions in source countries could also be considered as push factors. In this paper, we propose to address the issue of the linkages between gender (in-)equality and emigration.

Gender inequality is defined as the difference of outcome between men and women. These differences are the result of two distinct phenomena: discrimination (gender prejudices characterized by attitudes or beliefs) and differences of preferences. For instance, differences of labor market participation can be explained not only by sexist prejudices but also by differences of choices between men and women. Sexist prejudices *per se* cannot be observed directly. Therefore, we will focus on gender inequality in the empirical analysis. Gender equality can be seen as a proxy of sexist prejudice even if we cannot completely exclude that part of gender inequality is explained by differences of preferences.

More precisely, we focus on gender inequality in the labor market, which is only one part of the entire phenomenon. As it is stated in the last ILO Report devoted to this issue (ILO, 2007, p. 1), “like any other social institutions, the labor market and its institutions are both a cause of and a solution to discrimination. In the labor market, however, discrimination can be tackled more readily and effectively”. Since labor market characteristics have a central role in the migration decision process,² our primary focus of interest is on this specific aspect of gender inequality.

Literature on migration has focused on several gender-related issues. Ravenstein (1885, 1889) edicted seven “laws of migration”. The fifth law, as enumerated by Lee (1966), states that “females appear to predominate among short journey migrants” (Ravenstein, 1889, p. 288 and Lee, 1966, p. 48). However, in this last paper (p. 51), Lee (1966) describes female migrants as mostly dependent movers: “not all persons who migrate reach that decision themselves. Children are carried along by their parents, willy-nilly, and wives accompany their husbands though it tears them away from environments they love”. As Lauby and Stark (1988) noted that this presumption may explain why migration studies have “focused on the movement of men, on the assumption either that men are the decision makers in the migration process and women are tied movers, or, if women migrate alone, that they follow the same routes, are motivated by the same considerations and experience the same consequences as do male migrants”. The scope of investigation broadened in the 1980s due to the “feminization of international labor migration”³ observed during the period, and a new interest for this issue emerged. Women migrants were not viewed as “tied movers” anymore, and the literature considered the dynamics of collective behavior within the household or the community. One such example is the paper by Lauby and Stark (1988) on the rural-urban migration of young women in the Philippines (see also Pedraza, 1991, for a survey of the literature on international migration of women). More recently, the World Bank published a book on the international migration of women (Morrison et al., 2007) that addresses

¹ See for instance Behrman et al. (1999) or Klasen (2002) on discrimination in education and Forsythe et al. (2000), Seguino (2000), Lagerlof (2003) or Klasen and Lamanna (2009) on the influence of gender equality at work.

² Since Hicks (1932), differences of wages are considered as the first determinant of migration. Harris and Todaro (1970) observed that even in the presence of urban unemployment, migration is still an attractive option if the agents maximize their expected earnings. Recent papers such as Hatton and Williamson (2002), Grogger and Hanson (2011) or Mayda (2010) show empirically that labor market outcomes are predominant determinants of migration flows.

³ The term “feminization” is however contentious, as noted by Jolly and Reeves (2005), because women already made up nearly half of the migrants several decades ago. For example, in 1960, female migrants accounted for 47% of the total, as compared to 49% in 2000. However, the feminization also consists in a qualitative change in female migration patterns, including both “young single women and female family breadwinners, who move both independently and under the authority of older relatives” (Sorensen, 2005). The so-called feminization should therefore be understood as an increase in individual migrations decided alone – for example to look for a job – rather than as accompanying male family members (Jolly and Reeves, 2005). In addition, globalization and development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the 1990s and 2000s should have accelerated this qualitative feminization: “Growth in export and ICT-enabled sectors, together with a decline in the importance of physical strength and a rise in the importance of cognitive skills, has increased the demand for female labor” (World Bank, 2012).

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