Health and migration

Wednesday 3 September, 2.45pm

The subnational impact of the mortality of international migrants on estimates of county-level period life expectancy in Sweden, 1990-2023.

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Period life expectancy (PLE) a widely used summary measure of population health. However, such estimates seldom consider the distinct mortality risks of international migrants compared to non-migrant populations. The lower mortality risks of migrants typically elevate national life expectancy figures—and increasingly so over time. As a result, migrant mortality may introduce growing bias in national PLE estimates. Given that subnational variations in life expectancy guide resource allocation and policy at the regional level, we aim to examine the impact of international migrants on regional differences in PLE over time in Sweden between 1990-2023

Using Refu-Gen, a comprehensive longitudinal dataset from Stockholm University that links administrative registers on population, migration, and mortality in Sweden, we generate life tables and estimate PLE_o for total, native-born, and foreign-born populations. We explore temporal trends in life expectancy across Swedish counties, comparing outcomes between these populations and assess regional lifespan inequality using life disparity ($e^\dagger$) as an absolute measure, investigating how it has evolved over time.

Preliminary results show an overall increase in life expectancy and decrease in lifespan inequality over time. We observe a a temporal shift in mortality inequality between native-born and the total population (which includes migrants) over time, reflecting the growing demographic weight and mortality patterns of migrant groups. We also iilustrate regional differences, highlighting how migrant populations contribute differently to mortality variability across counties. Findings may reflect a combination of health selection among migrants, differential access to healthcare, and structural inequalities that vary across counties and over time.

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How Does Origin Affect Migrant Mortality Advantage in Spain?

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In high-income countries, migrants tend to have lower mortality compared with natives. It is necessary to understand such a phenomenon, known as “the migrant mortality paradox”, to design better social policies aimed at migrants. This paper aims to study the impact of the region of birth on the differences in migrant mortality advantage in Spain using data for the period 2002–2019. To do so, we estimated age-specific death rates by origin for ages 30 to 90 years, smoothed the crude curves using B-splines and compared the resulting temporary life expectancy. Results show a large mortality advantage for Asian and Latin American migrants (both men and women) over the Spanish native population. African males also have significant advantages, followed by North American males. African and North American females and European males and females show an overall disadvantage. Women benefit from a lower mortality advantage over their native counterparts, compared with male migrants from the same origin. In conclusion, the relatively higher advantage of migrants from low-income countries compared with migrants from industrialised countries is more likely due to differences in selection processes. The same appears to apply to the difference between men and women migrants; migrant men may be subject to more severe selection procedures compared with their accompanying women. Alternatively, women may encounter more discrimination than men during the migration process, particularly those from Africa.

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Beyond Averages: Lifespan Inequality Among Migrants and Natives in Sweden, Belgium, and England&Wales.

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Migrants to high-income countries typically have higher life expectancies than native populations. However, standard mortality estimates can mask variability in ages at death within migrant groups. Here, we ask three questions: How diverse are migrant populations in terms of mortality? How does their inter-individual mortality disparity compare to that of natives? Has this picture changed over the past two decades? To answer them, we apply several life-table-based measures of lifespan inequality: the interquartile range, lifespan disparity ($e^{\dagger}$) as an absolute measure, and the entropy index (H) as a relative measure. Using official statistical data on deaths and population counts from Belgium, Sweden, and the UK—three countries with sizable and diverse migrant populations—we analyse mortality over three-year periods centred on the census years 2001, 2011, and 2021. Lifespan inequality will be assessed at various ages for the total population, natives, all migrants, and migrants born in European vs. non-European countries. Differences between natives and migrants, as well as temporal changes, will be decomposed into age-specific contributions. Although lifespan inequality generally declines with increasing life expectancy, we expect migrants to show higher inequality than natives due to greater mortality variation in young and middle adulthood. We hypothesize two possible trends: increasing inequality as migration becomes more diverse, or decreasing inequality as international mortality gaps narrow. Lifespan inequality indicators capture not only population-level heterogeneity but also individual-level uncertainty in the timing of death—an uncertainty that shapes human decisions. Understanding these dynamics can deepen knowledge of migrant mortality and better inform equitable health policies.

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