
INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY AND PROFESSIONAL INSERTION: THE CASE OF CONGOLESE IN BELGIUM

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1. BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTION

The international mobility of Congolese people (DRC) to Belgium is not a recent phenomenon. From the start, Congolese migrations in Belgium have always been predominantly made of students (Kagné and Martiniello 2001), and it is still the case today (Schoonvaere 2010). The political and economic crises which DR Congo has been facing for several decades have certainly contributed to the substantial inflows of immigrants, but the reason most frequently cited by respondents of our surveys remains the willingness to complete studies in better conditions.

Currently, the Congolese population in Belgium is the third largest population group of non-EU foreign nationality at birth (after Moroccans and Turks) and the first foreign-born population group originated from sub-Saharan Africa (Schoonvaere 2010)¹. In terms of education and training as well as in terms of socio-economic integration, the Congolese population differs from other foreign populations from developing countries because its profile is somewhat ambivalent (Schoonvaere 2010, Feld 2010). On the one hand, Congolese migrants are very highly educated not only compared to Belgians but also to other foreign borns in Belgium. On the other hand, the Congolese population has to deal with a higher unemployment rate compared to other nationalities. To explore this apparent paradox, this article attempts to see if migrants who studied in Belgium are better-off in terms of employability. We hypothesize that Congolese migrants who return to studies after spending several years in Belgium are more likely to gain access to the labor market, since their resumption of study is often conceived as an adaptation to the existing labor market.

2. DATA AND METHODS

The data used in this study come from a survey conducted within the MAFE² - Migration between Africa and Europe- project. This survey is an international collaborative work, involving different European and African partners, under the coordination of the INED³. MAFE's aim is to study and compare three migratory systems, from three different African countries towards different

¹ Nationality at birth is different from nationality, and is most often used to represent the foreign population since it does not take into account changes of nationality or naturalization. The non-EU foreign born community is the population whose nationality at birth is different from a European nationality

² www.mafeproject.com

³ Results presented in this paper have been obtained within the Migration between Africa and Europe project (MAFE). The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme under grant agreement 217206. The MAFE project is coordinated by INED (C. Beauchemin) and is formed, additionally by the Université catholique de Louvain (B. Schoumaker), Maastricht University (V. Mazzucato), the Université Cheikh Anta Diop (P. Sakho), the Université de Kinshasa (J. Mangalu), the University of Ghana (P. Quartey), the Universitat Pompeu Fabra (P. Baizan), the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (A. Gonzalez-Ferrer), FIERI (Forum Internazionale ed Europeo di Ricerche sull'Immigrazione; E. Castagnone), and the University of Sussex (R. Black).

destinations in Europe. Transnational surveys have been conducted, in the three countries of origin (Senegal, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ghana), as well as in the six destination countries (France, Italy, Spain, Belgium, United Kingdom and The Netherlands).

Here we focus on migrations from the DR Congo towards Belgium, by using the survey conducted in Belgium. 279 Congolese migrants were interviewed between July 2009 and February 2010. In Belgium, as in other European countries, a biographic questionnaire was used. It collects detailed information on the life course of each interviewed migrant. The questionnaire is multi-topic, and different aspects of the personal trajectories are covered: migration histories, but also family, occupational, and legal status histories.

Different methods will be used to analyse the possible effect of education in Belgium on professional insertion. Cross-section descriptive statistics will allow to picture migrants' profile and professional status at different points of time. Event history analysis, associated with sequential analysis, will help to understand professional integration, by taking into account all influencing time-varying factors.

3. PROFILE OF THE « STUDENT » MIGRANTS

To consider the educational status of migrants in Belgium, three different groups can be differentiated.

The first group is made of migrants who have never been enrolled in courses in Belgium. As data was collected with yearly periods, people who never spent a complete year studying in Belgium are considered as “non-students” as well, and thus belong to that first group.

People in the second group are those who pursued at least one year of training during their stay in Belgium, and who were studying immediately the first year of arrival. They will be called “first-year students”, referring to their first occupation at arrival, which were studies.

The third group gathers another type of students. Migrants of this group took courses for at least one year during their stay in Belgium, but studies were not their occupation during the first year of their stay. They were not studying that first year, but they came back to studies some years later. So they will be called “later stage students”. Contrary to the previous group, their migration reasons are not specifically linked to the studies.

Results show that the three groups have very different profiles. Age and family statuses at arrival, as well reasons for migration and administrative trajectories differ from a group to another.

Characteristics of studies undertaken

The characteristics of the studies undertaken by migrants are not the same either. First, migrants in the two groups of students don't have the same level of education. Most of first-year students are highly educated, having a high university degree (MA or PhD) whereas most later-stage students are less educated.

Moreover, the length of studies in Belgium is different between the two groups of students. Most of first year-students undertake long studies, lasting 5,7 years on average, whereas later-stage students follow shorter studies, about 2 years on average.

As regards to the domain of studies (for Bachelor's, MA and PhD degrees), later-stage students seem to be interested by sectors with high demand if not shortage of workers. An important share of them pursued studies in health, sales and engineering and technical fields. In Belgium, these sectors are more working force demanding, than social sciences sectors for example, in which most of first-year students pursued studies.

Thus, the project of undertaking studies in Belgium seems to have different meaning for the 2 groups of students. As expected, the return to studies later on after arrival appears to be a real adaptation to the labour market, for people who came for diverse reasons, and after a certain time decide to train again in order to be able to find a job in Belgium. The studies are short and concerns sectors where workers' demand is high. It is not the same project that undertaking long studies from arrival. Average duration before returning to studies is 3 years for men and 6 years for women. Men come back more quickly to studies.

4. COMPARING STUDENT MIGRANTS' PROFESSIONAL INSERTION WITH OTHER MIGRANTS

This section focuses on professional insertion of migrants of the three groups. The first indicator used here is the duration passed before getting a first job in Belgium. It is a measure of the relative easiness or difficulty to access the local labor market, using Kaplan-Meier estimates.

To go beyond that simple cross-section measure, the professional trajectories of the groups can be compared with sequence graphs. Occupational trajectories and distribution of different occupational statuses (active, inactive and students) each year after arrival will be compared for the 3 groups. The mean time spent by each group in different statuses will also be compared.

A model will estimate the probability of getting first job after arrival, using fixed and time-varying variables. Education level and study status in Belgium will be used as explanation variables.

5. CONCLUSION

Very first results show that it seems relevant to distinguish between first-year students and later-stage students. Indeed, these two groups appear to be very different in terms of migration project as well as in term of studies courses (domain, length,...). Studies appear to meet very different purposes. Regression results also indicate that having studied in Belgium make a difference for professional insertion.

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