



Spatial selectivity and demographic impact of German Immigrants in Switzerland

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Introduction and background

Since 1997, Germans are the largest immigrant group in Switzerland. 8'200 new arrivals are registered in 1998, a number that reached 46'300 in 2008. The major reason for this increase is the ratification of the Agreement on the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the European Union in June 2002. However, not only legislative changes but also the economic growth encountered by Switzerland at the turn of the XXIth century caused the increase.

Little is known about the socio-demographic and professional profiles of German immigrants to Switzerland and even less about their distribution within the region. Sauer and Ette (2010) observe despite a relatively heterogenic composition of the German emigrant group an overrepresentation of young, single, urban, male professionals. First analyses, based on the Swiss Labor Force Survey (SLFS) seem to confirm these findings on the aggregated level (Steiner forthcoming) and suggest a homogenization of the German immigrant group over the past 30 years.

However, a recent exploratory study conducted by our institute on the spatial dimension of new immigration to Switzerland reveals a close link between the immigrant's profiles and the structural profiles of Swiss regions. Demand for foreign workers with specific characteristics is strongly influenced by the regional economy. Stutz and al. (2010: 37) observe that German and Austrian immigrants concentrate within the Zurich economic area either in the urban center or the borderland to Germany and Austria. Furthermore, the authors identify a higher social status for German and Austrian immigrants living in the urban center as for the ones living in the borderland. Therefore, the latter present a more similar social profile to the native population as the German immigrants concentrating in the urban center (Stutz et al. 2010: 39).

Thus, one can argue that the repartition and not least the demographic impact of German immigrants within the Swiss territory underlie a spatial selectivity (Gorter et al. 1998), by various reasons, as for example the federalist political organization, linguistic specificities, a diversity of economic structures and fields of activity as well as the positions on the center-periphery scale of the regions.

In this context, our paper describes the regional socio-demographic and professional characteristics of German immigrants arrived after 2002 in Switzerland, in order to illustrate spatial selectivity of immigration as to different regions within Switzerland. In a second step the demographic impact in the selected regions is assessed.

Data and methods

Our analyses rely on the Swiss Central Aliens Register (SCAR), which permits the assessment of immigrant's socio-demographic characteristics. The second data set used for our research is the Swiss Labor Force Survey (SLFS), in order to add information regarding professional characteristics of German immigrants.

Immigrant characteristics are compared between the 16 job market regions of the country and their composition of different types of communes. Both typologies were constructed by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO). Whereas the latter is based on a center-periphery model and permits the analyses of the characteristics of different communes (e.g. central, suburban, touristic, industrial etc. communes), the former typology is based on different labor market catchment areas and therefore divides the country in different regions.

All analyses covers the period from June 2002 until December 2009, since migration policy has had with the ratification of the Agreement on the free movement of persons between Switzerland and the European Union an influence not only on the size but also on the composition of the German immigration group.

The demographic impact in the different regions is assessed by means of an analysis of the migrant turnover and net migration, since fertility, mortality and naturalisation only have a reduced influence on the demographic dynamics of the German immigrant group in Switzerland.

Discussion

Results show important differences in the composition and the size of the German immigrant group in the analyzed job market regions. Regarding their distribution we find a predominance of the analyzed group in the Swiss-German speaking parts as well as in the borderland regions. This concentration confirms once again that cultural and geographic proximity is an important factor in migrant's choices concerning the region of settlement. It's Zurich that attracts the most German immigrants (35% of total immigration between June 2002 and December 2009), due to its flourishing economy and its high density of universities and colleges.

Although most regions present a similar mean age at immigration (between 29 and 32 years), it reaches 42 years in Bellinzona. Since that region is situated in the warmer south of the country, retirement migration is taking place. Lausanne on the other hand presents a mean age of only 28 years. Due to the fact that EPFL is located in that French speaking region, mainly young German immigrants settle there in order to study at the international renowned university. Since life course is greatly structured by age, we observe for example a higher proportion of married people in Bellinzona (45%) and a lower proportion in Lausanne (20%). We can assume that the absence of family and therefore commitments facilitate the decision to re-migrate to another country or to return to Germany.

Analyses of professional characteristics show that human capital is not distributed the same way in the different regions¹. Whereas 56% of German immigrants in Bern are qualified and employed as HRST² only 34% are in the same situation in Winterthur-Schaffhausen. However it's Luzern that accounts for the most German immigrants (37%) that are neither qualified nor employed as

¹ Due to an insufficient sample size, we only consider the 6 regions with 100 or more German immigrants interviewed (Bern, Basel, Zürich, Winterthur-Schaffhausen, St. Gallen and Luzern).

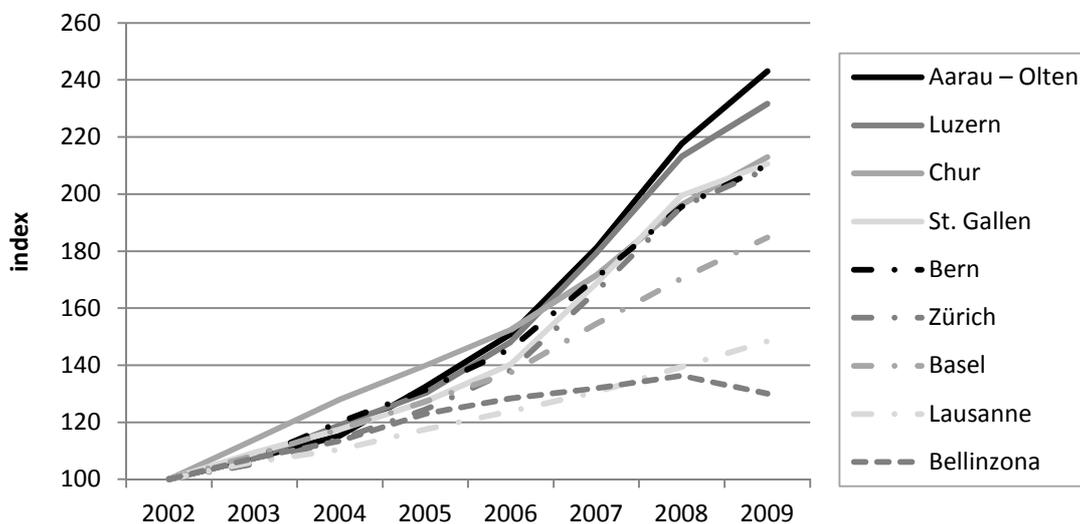
² Definition based on the OECD Manual of Canberra. Qualified as HRST = detaining a third-level education (ISCED 5 or 6) and employed as HRST = occupation ISCO 1, 2 or 3.

HRST. In Bern on the other hand almost half of all German immigrants are working in an academic profession (45%) in 2009. Considering the fact that persons with a university degree show a very high disposition to return to Germany (Prognos 2007) or to pursue their migration trajectory on to another country, these findings seem important regarding demographic impact in the regions. Therefore, we assume that the “turnover” of migrants in Bern is higher than in the other analyzed regions.

All regions record a net migration gain between June 2002 and December 2009. However as assumed, the turnover is bigger in Bern (46 emigrants for 100 immigrants) than in the other Swiss-German speaking regions. Aarau-Olten, Zurich and Basel even record the lowest turnover rates of all regions (30/100). The ones with the highest turnovers are Sion (76/100) and Chur (71/100). This can be explained by the economic structure and fields of activity: both regions are situated in the mountains and depend on foreign workforce in the tourism industry. However, the turnover became in all regions smaller over the years, indicating that more and more German immigrants settle down in Switzerland.

The examples of Sion and Chur show that the type of communes that are predominant in the different regions and as a result their economic structure influence greatly the migrant’s profiles as well as their disposition to stay, return or move on in their migration trajectory. Over the analyzed years, the turnover of migrants in touristic regions was 84/100 compared to 30/100 in the commuter communes on the countryside and 31/100 in the suburban communes. For example Chur is composed of 49% touristic regions, compared to Aarau-Olten, a region that is composed of 32% suburban and 13% commuter communes.

Table 1: Indexed evolution of the number of German permanent residents in Switzerland, 2002-2009



Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office (SFSO) - Swiss Central Aliens Register

Between the end of 2002 and 2009, the number of German permanent residents doubled from 121’845 to 243’232 persons. However, whereas Bellinzona only accounts for 1.3 times more German residents in 2009 compared to 2002, the factor reaches 2.4 in Aarau-Olten (cf. Table 1).

Conclusion

Analyses confirm the importance of considering different regions while trying to understand German immigration to a country like Switzerland. By reason of the federalist political organization, the linguistic particularities, a variety of economic structures and fields of activity as well as the positions on the center-periphery scale of the Swiss regions, the aggregated level is insufficient, in order to analyze the demographic impact of an immigrant group. Demographic and economic impact differs according to the migrant's profiles and their disposition to settle in the different regions within the country of destination.

It is the interrelation between the job market regions, the type of communes where immigrants settle and their socio-demographic and professional profile that greatly influences migratory movements and decisions.

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