

Political turmoil, economic crisis, and international migration from Africa to Europe

Evidence from event-history data in DR Congo

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African migration to Europe

As a number of studies have shown, African migration to Europe has increased significantly over the last decades. Even though the United States and Canada have attracted a growing number of African migrants (Zezeza, 2002; Zlotnik, 1993), Europe remains by far the major destination of sub-Saharan migrants leaving Africa. In 2000, Sub-Saharan African migrants living in Europe were estimated at close to 3 millions, almost one million greater than in 1990 (Lucas, 2006). Annual flows of migrants have also increased significantly since the 1960s, despite restrictive policies. Legal migration flows from Sub-Saharan Africa to six Western European countries (Belgium, Germany, France, United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Sweden) grew from about 13,000 migrants per year in the early 1960s to nearly 50,000 in the late 1980s (Zlotnik, 1993), and more than 100,000 in the early 2000s (Migration Policy Institute, 2007; Black, 2004). Asylum seekers (which are usually not included in statistics of legal migration, unless they are accepted as legal migrants) from sub-Saharan Africa have also increased appreciably, from just over 10,000 per year in the early 1980s for the same six European countries as above, to more than 60,000 per year in 2001 (Migration policy Institute, 2007). Illegal entries of undocumented migrants are by definition difficult to estimate, but are also thought to have increased significantly in the context of restrictive migration policies.

The large increase of African migration flows to Europe, and the prospects of further increases, has generated much debate among policy-makers. However, researches on migration from Africa to Europe are notoriously rare, and have long been handicapped by the lack of adequate data (Lucas, 2006). More specifically, in-depth research on motives and determinants of African migrations, and in particular on the migratory responses to

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deteriorating economic and political conditions are crucially lacking. While statistics on migration flows and asylum demands in European countries provide some evidence on the temporal patterns of migration, they give very little information on the specific factors influencing decisions to move. Moreover, undocumented migrants are excluded from most of these statistics.

Context and objectives

As one of the largest Sub-Saharan African countries (and the largest French-speaking African country), DR Congo is a key case study for African migrations to Europe for several reasons. First, it is currently one of the major contributors of migration flows to Europe. Migration flows from DR Congo were relatively small before the 1980s, but gained momentum in the 1980s. Since the 1990s, Congolese asylum-seekers have been the bulk of Congolese migrants to Europe, and represent a large share of African asylum-seekers in that region¹. Secondly, DR Congo has been hardly hit by economic crises and political turmoil for several decades, and epitomizes the tragic and complex situations faced by many African countries.

Using a unique and very recent longitudinal survey on migration in DR Congo, this paper will aim at documenting the impact of political and economic crises in DR Congo on international migration patterns, with a special focus on migration to Europe. Instead of using aggregate data on migration flows, as is usually the case in such analyses (see for example Zinyama, 1990), this study will rely on longitudinal data sets including both micro and macro-level factors. While acknowledging that the impacts of economic and political variables are not easily disentangled in migration analysis (Morrison, 1994), we will take account of both political and economic macro-level variables to try separate their impacts². Finally, another originality of this paper will be to consider both migration as such and migration attempts from DR Congo to Europe.

¹ Congolese migrants in Europe currently probably number between 150,000 and 250,000. The major Congolese community in Europe by its size lives in France, with around 90,000, of which approximately half were legal residents (Bazenguissa-Genga, 2005). Probably around 50,000 (documented and undocumented) Congolese migrants live in Belgium, and as many as 30,000 migrants from DR Congo were living in the UK according to a recent report by the IOM (2006). Germany and the Netherlands also host significant communities of Congolese migrants.

² Data on motives of migration attempts and on migration motives will be used to substantiate statistical results.

Our overall hypothesis is that migrations and migration attempts to Europe have increased significantly in response to economic and political crises. The role of international migrations as a way of diversifying risks for households and the apparent growing dependence of Congolese households on remittances suggest that international migration is indeed a survival strategy in periods of economic crises (De Bruyn and Wets, 2006; Sumata, 2002). Political crises, and notably the change of political regime in 1997, are also thought to amplify migration flows. The increase in the number of migrants fleeing the new regime is one reason for this expected increase. We also hypothesize that different categories of people responded different ways to political and economic crises in DR Congo. As far as Congo is concerned, some authors have suggested that the deteriorating economic conditions have led to a diversification of migrants profiles. For instance, whereas the more educated were thought to be much more likely to settle in Europe until the 1980, some have argued that the differences in propensity to migrate by educational levels have narrowed over time. Gender differences are also thought to have diminished, with a feminization of international migration. Responses of individuals to political crises may also differ depending on his/her family situation. As suggested by qualitative surveys suggest, people with children may be more likely to move (with their families) in periods of political crisis for security reasons.

The specific objectives of this paper will be (1) to describe the patterns of international migrations and migration attempts since the 1980s (temporal patterns, changes in destinations and characteristics of migrants...), (2) to measure the impact of economic and political crises on the risks of migration and migration attempts to Europe through event history analyses (3) to assess the differential responses of different categories of persons (by gender, education, family situation, employment status) to economic and political crises.

Data

This study relies on unique longitudinal data collected in Kinshasa (DR Congo) in August-September 2007 as part of a research project called “Crisis and international migration in DR Congo”. This project is a collaborative research project between the University of Kinshasa (DR Congo) and the University of Louvain (Belgium). The survey was conducted among a representative sample of 1,000 households in Kinshasa, the capital city of DR Congo. Event history data were also collected from about 1,000 adults in these households (males and females, return migrants and non-migrants) aged between 20 and 60.

- 1) In all the households, questions were asked to identify all the people who had lived in the household at some point in time and who had gone abroad for at least three months,

whether they were still living abroad or had returned to DR Congo. In addition, brothers and sisters of the household head and of his/her spouse who had lived out of DR Congo were also identified through this questionnaire. Data on the migrations of these individuals (year of departure, destination country, year of return if the person returned, etc.) were collected. In addition, socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education, marital status, place of birth) were recorded for all the current members of the households as well as for the migrants. The availability of data for both migrants and non-migrants, as well as data on the timing of migration enables us to use event history models of migration determinants.

- 2) The individual questionnaire was used among people aged 20-60 living in Kinshasa. Full international migration histories were collected among return migrants, and histories of migration attempts were collected from all the respondents. These include data on the nature of the steps that were undertaken to migrate (applied for a scholarship, asked a visa, registered in a foreign university, etc.) the date at which the individual began these steps, the reasons for which the person was willing to move, as well as the country to which the individual wanted to move³. In addition, full employment histories were collected, enabling us to analyze interrelationships between individual economic conditions and migration attempts.

Qualitative data is also currently being collected through in-depth interviews among return migrants in DR Congo, as well as among Congolese migrants in Belgium. These data will also be used in this paper, mainly to illustrate findings from quantitative analyses.

Methods

Analyses will rely on the retrospective longitudinal data to estimate the impact of economic and political crises on the risks of out-migration and of migration attempts. Descriptive analyses will first be used to document the temporal patterns of migrations and migration attempts, as well as the changing patterns of destination and characteristics of migrants.

Discrete time event history analyses will then be performed to estimate the influence of both micro and macro-level factors on the risks of migration and migration attempts. As far as *migrations* are concerned, micro-level determinants will include age, gender, education,

³ Preliminary data indicate that about one fourth of all the individuals interviewed in the survey had taken steps to migrate to another country.

marital status and place of birth, which are available in the household questionnaire. Macro-level time varying variables will be taken into account to measure the impact of economic and political shocks on migration risk. Of particular significance are the years of major political changes (eg. 1997, with the replacement of President Mobutu by the President Kabila) and of economic crises (e.g. the 1991 crisis of the banking system and lootings)⁴. Interactions between micro and macro-level factors will allow us to test if the different categories of individuals (compared by gender, level of education, marital status) have responded in different ways to economic and political crises

The same macro-level variables will be used to estimate the impacts of economic and political factors on *migration attempts*. However, more detailed individual level variables (of which many are time varying) will be taken into account. The employment history of individuals collected in the individual questionnaire is of particular relevance to the objective of this paper. Using detailed employment histories, it will be possible to include employment status at every point in time in the event history models (in addition to other variables) as an intermediate variable between macro-economic factors and individual migration attempts. Information from marital and birth histories also make it possible to take account of the family situation of the respondents and of its effects on migration in periods of crisis.

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⁴ Preliminary analyses from a small sample of respondents (data entry is currently being done) suggest for example that migrations increased significantly from 1997 onwards.

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