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The impact of migration on the LFS data; The case of Poland

Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a common source of data on the labour markets used in economic analyses for cross country studies. Due to the similar methodologies and common guidelines, LFS data are treated as comparable both within and across countries. This article seeks to demonstrate that a closer look into the technical details of the countries' surveys can reveal striking features of the data. It will be shown, for the case of Poland, that even within one country, the data should be used with caution and awareness of its intrinsic features.

The analysis covers years 1995-2006 and is carried out on the Microdata from the Polish LFS. The features of the data addressed in the study include several methodological changes of the basic definitions in the survey and the population category used to generalise the sample data. Changes of the definitions make it hard to treat the Polish LFS results as a consistent series within the analysed period. The category of the population used for generalisation include migrants who have not deregistered upon migration (majority of Polish emigrants). This makes the LFS estimates a theoretical category, consistent with the employed definition of population, but difficult to use for the policy modelling.

The study aims to analyse the methodological changes which makes the data incomparable in time. As a result, consistent, in terms of definitions, time series have been produced. To examine the impact of the population category on the LFS results, the process of the data generalization has been simulated for a different category of population. The category used in simulation (without emigrants) better reflects actual phenomena on the labour market, and, hence, is more appropriate for the economic policy purposes. The simulation suggests that the trends on the labour market differ substantially from those in the official statistics.