

# **Cross-national comparison of refugee mobility in Europe**

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## Long abstract

With growing immigrant populations in European cities and population decline in peripheral regions, state governments are increasingly trying to manage migration flows at the subnational level and ensure greater spatial mixing and regionalization of immigration. The refugee dispersal policies introduced in various countries are one of the most striking examples. These policies are generally based on the assumption of permanent residence in the assigned location, whereas recent literature suggests that dispersed refugees tend to move away from remote areas once mobility restrictions are lifted.

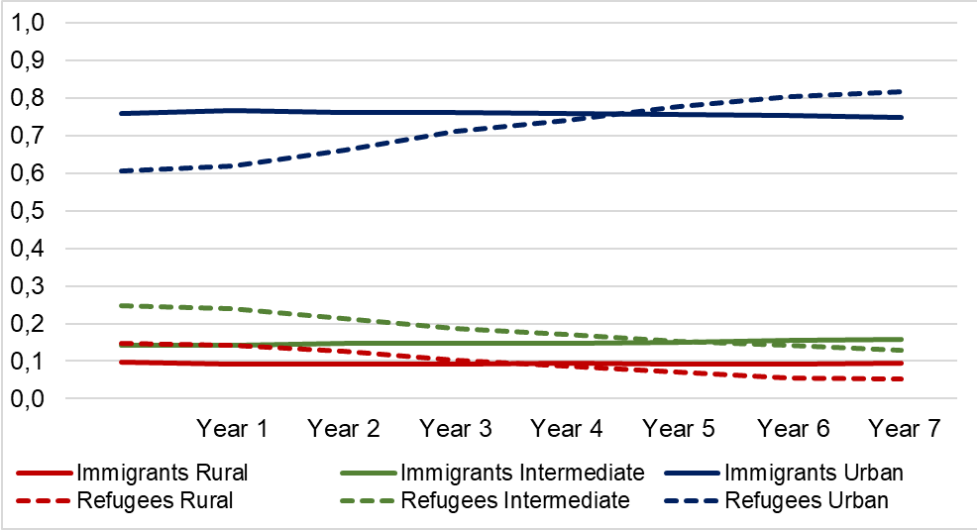
Using microdata from Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, and the UK, this paper provides a first cross-national comparison of immigrant and refugee mobility in Europe. Event history models account for the (un)adjusted probability to live in different settlement types over time since migration i.e., their respective share in urban, suburban, and rural areas. We provide both within and between country comparisons. First, we compare the geographical location of refugees over time in different countries and discuss the differences in the light of their respective dispersal policies. Second, because regional mobility (and the typology of municipalities) can be country-specific, we compare the spatial distribution of refugees with that of other immigrants within each country. Urban-rural municipality typologies are based on authoritative classifications from national statistical offices and account for criteria such as population density, number of inhabitants, and distance to city centres.

In line with the spatial assimilation perspective, we expect immigrants to initially settle in established urban gateways and gradually disperse to surrounding (peri-urban) areas, suburbs and the countryside. On the contrary, we expect dispersed refugees to leave their assigned rural areas and increasingly settle in urban centres.

Preliminary results from Switzerland show that immigrants' representation in the different settlement types is fairly stable over time: the probability to live in urban area only marginally reduce over time. This result contrasts sharply with the spatial pattern of refugees. Initially, refugees subject to dispersal policies are less represented than other immigrants in urban areas (about 10 points differences). After three years, the share of refugees in urban areas is equal to

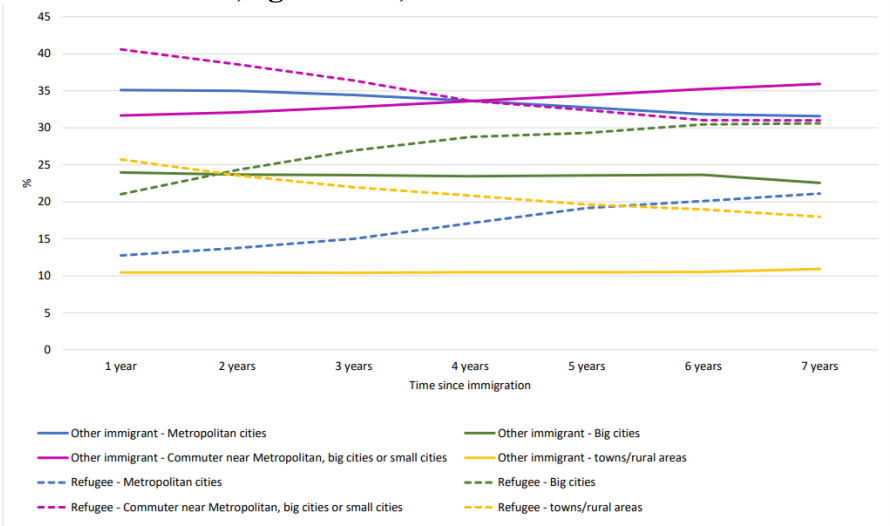
that of other immigrants, and their representation continues to increase over time to reach a gap of 10 percentage points after eight years.

**Predicted probability to live in different settlement types by time since migration (age-adjusted), cohorts 2012-2015, aged 18-49, Switzerland.**



Source: Swiss population register

**Predicted probability to live in different settlement types by time since migration (age-adjusted), cohorts 2010-2016, aged 18-49, Sweden.**



Source: Swedish population register

The Swedish results also show an increase in the number of refugees in big cities and metropolitan cities over time, and a decrease in commuter municipalities and rural areas. Although the typologies of municipalities have not yet been harmonised, the results for Switzerland and Sweden point in the same direction.