Immigration, Working Conditions, and Health

Osea Giuntella  
University of Oxford, IZA  

Fabrizio Mazzonna*  
University of Lugano, MEA

Draft  
September 26, 2013

Abstract

This paper studies the effects of immigration on health. We combine information on individual characteristics from the German Socio-Economic Panel with detailed local labor market characteristics for the period 1984 to 2010. We exploit the longitudinal component of the data to analyze how immigration affects the health of both immigrant and natives over time. Immigrants are shown to be healthier than natives upon their arrival (“healthy immigrant effect”), but their health deteriorates over time spent in Germany. We show that the convergence in health is heterogeneous across immigrants and faster among those working in more physically demanding jobs. Immigrants are significantly more likely to work in these types of jobs and to be exposed to job-related health risks for longer periods. In the light of these facts, we investigate whether changes in the spatial concentration of immigrants affect natives’ and previous immigrants’ health by changing the allocation of working condition in the resident population. Our results suggest that immigration reduces residents’ likelihood to work in physically demanding jobs increasing the likelihood of reporting good health and decreasing the risk of work-related injury among natives. These effects are concentrated in blue-collar occupations and larger among previous cohorts of immigrants.

*Giuntella: Blavatnik School of Goverment, University of Oxford, 10 Merton Street, OX14JJ, Oxford, Oxfordshire, UK. Email: osea.giuntella@bsg.ox.ac.uk. Mazzonna: University of Lugano. Department of Economics, via Buffi 13, CH-6904, Lugano. Email: fabrizio.mazzonna@usi.ch. We thank Rafael Gruber for precious research assistance.