Economic Studies 214

Anton Sundberg
Essays in Labor Economics
ECONOMICS AT UPPSALA UNIVERSITY

The Department of Economics at Uppsala University has a long history. The first chair in Economics in the Nordic countries was instituted at Uppsala University in 1741.

The main focus of research at the department has varied over the years but has typically been oriented towards policy-relevant applied economics, including both theoretical and empirical studies. The currently most active areas of research can be grouped into six categories:

* Labour economics
* Public economics
* Macroeconomics
* Microeconometrics
* Environmental economics
* Housing and urban economics
Abstract

Essay I: This paper examines the impact of parenthood on labor market outcomes for both men and women using population-wide annual income data from 1960 to 2021 in Sweden. First, I document the contemporary child penalties across several labor market outcomes. Second, I show that while the motherhood penalty in earnings declined significantly during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, the rate of decline slowed from the late 1980s onwards. Third, I identify a fatherhood penalty emerging since the 1980s, particularly pronounced among men in more gender-egalitarian households (proxied by the father's share of parental leave) and among fathers who have sons relative to daughters.

Essay II (with Olof Åslund and Arizo Karimi): We explore the effect of gender equality norms and shared institutional and economic contexts on the size of the motherhood penalty, studying child migrants and children of immigrants in Sweden. While there are results pointing to a moderate but statistically robust negative association between source country gender equality and the labor market impact of motherhood, the overall picture is more one of similarity across highly diverse groups. All groups of mothers exhibit qualitatively comparable labor market trajectories following first childbirth, but penalties are somewhat greater among those descending from the most gender-unequal societies.

Essay III (with Demid Getik and Anna Sjögren): We examine how exposure to recent migrants and asylum seekers affects the academic performance of incumbent students in Sweden between 2008 and 2022, a period characterized by large migration inflows. To identify the effect, we exploit variation in contemporaneous and cumulative exposure to recent migrants between siblings and across cohorts within schools. We find a small but statistically significant positive impact on native students’ test scores from cumulative exposure to recent migrants. However, students with immigrant backgrounds do not experience similar benefits. A closer look at the more acute 2015 refugee crisis corroborates our main findings.

Essay IV (with Mounir Karadja): We study the economic effects of gaining access to the taxi labor market. Comparing individuals who pass the required written exams for a taxi license with those who have not yet done so, we find that immigrants increase their monthly earnings by nearly 50 percent between 1 and 3 years later and reduce their reliance on social insurance programs. Natives experience smaller gains of about 10 percent. Recently arrived immigrants reap the largest gains, suggesting that their outside options are limited, leading to a larger impact of taxi driving on their earnings.

Keywords: Parenthood, child penalties, gender earnings gap, immigrant integration, native-immigrant earnings gap, refugees, education, peers

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Stockholm, February 2024
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Over the past century, the labor markets of high-income countries have undergone significant transformations, notably marked by the increased female labor force participation and the heightened levels of immigration. Along with the increased presence of women and immigrants in the labor market, there is also a persistent segmentation of economic activity based on gender and immigrant status. In fact, inequality by gender and immigrant status is evident in most facets of economic success.

Immigrants often occupy lower-paying jobs, are more likely to be overqualified for their jobs, and face substantial barriers in entering the labor market relative to natives (Carlsson and Rooth, 2007; OECD/EU, 2015; Baert, 2018). Women, traditionally perceived as primary caregivers, confront significant obstacles reconciling market work and family responsibilities (Goldin, 2014; Bertrand, 2020). Moreover, although women as a group are more educated than men across most high-income countries today, they are still more likely to make educational and occupational choices that consistently result in lower earnings (Kahn and Ginther, 2018; Bertrand, 2020).

Understanding the root causes of these inequalities in outcomes has been a fundamental part of research in economics for a long time. Early research focused on discrimination (Becker, 1957) and human capital accumulation (Mincer and Polachek, 1974). More recent additions to the potential mechanisms are identity (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000, 2010) and culture and preferences (Bisin and Verdier, 2001, 2011). All essays in this thesis build on these seminal contributions to the research on economic inequalities.

Why is it important to consider inequalities in economic outcomes? As argued by Bertrand (2018, 2020), there is one argument about fairness and another about efficiency. The argument that individuals should have the same opportunities regardless of gender and immigrant status is likely an argument that is appealing to many. Perhaps this argument may suffice to justify why this is a relevant and important topic to study. But, within a stricter economic framework, one can also argue for efficiency. Women account for roughly half of the population, and many countries today have large and increasing immigrant populations. If there are labor market barriers that are based solely on gender and immigrant identity—and not on relevant abilities or aptitude—a

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1 These trends have been consistent across most OECD countries, although magnitudes differ. For female labor force participation across countries, see Olivetti (2014) and Olivetti and Petrongolo (2016), and for the share of immigrants in the population, see UN (2020).
large number of individuals will not be efficiently allocated in the labor mar-
ket. This potential inefficiency will, in turn, lower the overall economic well-
being of a society.\(^2\) Hence, both in terms of a general notion of fairness and in terms of what is beneficial for society, uncovering inequalities and their underlying mechanisms is of first-order relevance in economic research.

This thesis consists of four self-contained empirical essays that encompass various questions within labor economics but have a common denominator: they are all related to inequalities in opportunities or outcomes. Each essay addresses this issue from a different perspective, and the thesis aims to improve our understanding of the mechanisms or the importance of the context for each of them. The first two essays focus on the gender gap in labor market outcomes from parenthood. The latter two focus on immigrant peers in schools and immigrant labor market integration, respectively. A short introduction and summary of each essay follow.

**Essays I and II**

A few months ago, Claudia Goldin received the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel for “having advanced our understanding of women’s labor market outcomes” (The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, 2023). The press release stated:

> Historically, much of the gender gap in earnings could be explained by differences in education and occupational choices. However, Goldin has shown that the bulk of this earnings difference is now between men and women in the same occupation, and that it largely arises with the birth of the first child.

—*The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, 9 October, 2023.*

The first two essays in my thesis build on Goldin’s work and focus on the differential impact of parenthood on the labor market outcomes for women relative to men in Sweden.


Women have now entered the labor market at almost the same rate as men and have even surpassed men in educational attainment in many high-income countries. Moreover, the gender gaps in earnings, hours of work, wages, and occupational rank have all narrowed considerably (Goldin, 2006). Goldin (2014, p. 1) refers to this development as “among the grandest advances in society and the economy in the last century.”

\(^2\)See Hsieh et al. (2019) for theoretical and empirical evidence on the economic importance of the misallocation of talent based on gender and race.
This development notwithstanding, it is well documented that gender gaps in labor market outcomes are still present and appear to be persistent (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2023). The main driver of this persistence is the female-male differentials in the impact of parenthood (Bertrand, Goldin, and Katz, 2010; Angelov, Johansson, and Lindahl, 2016; Kleven, Landais, and Søgaard, 2019; Bertrand, 2020; Cortés and Pan, 2023; Kleven, 2023). Parenthood accounted for about 80 percent of the earnings gap in Denmark in 2013 (Kleven, Landais, and Søgaard, 2019) and nearly 70 percent of the pay gap in the US in the 2010s (Cortés and Pan, 2023). The substantial negative impact of children on women’s earnings is often referred to as the “motherhood penalty.” It contrasts with the non-existent or even positive impact of children on men’s earnings (the “fatherhood premium”).

In my first essay, I focus on the gender inequality that stems from family formation using a panel of 62 years of annual income data in Sweden. First, I document contemporary child penalties for men and women across several labor market outcomes. Second, I show that the motherhood penalty decreased significantly during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s but has been only modestly reduced since the early 1980s. Third, I show that since the late 1980s, there has been a fatherhood penalty, and this penalty is higher in more gender-egalitarian households (proxied by the father’s use of paternity leave) and among men having sons relative to daughters.

The substantial reduction in the motherhood penalty coincides with a significant entry of women into the labor market (Olivetti, 2014; Molinder, 2022) and major family policy reforms in Sweden in the early 1970s. These reforms include individual income taxation, publicly funded universal child care, and the introduction of job-protected and gender-neutral parental leave. The reduction in the motherhood penalties shown in this essay, therefore, adds to the overall picture of a greater transformation in terms of women’s labor market outcomes in Sweden in the 1960s to 1980s. It also corroborates previous research showing that the impact of children is crucial in understanding gender gaps in labor market outcomes and that a lot of the progress in closing the gender gaps in labor market outcomes has slowed in the recent decades (Blau and Kahn, 2006; Goldin, 2006; Blau and Kahn, 2017; Bertrand, 2020; Kleven, 2023).

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3 Although earlier papers explicitly referred to a “motherhood wage penalty,” e.g., Budig and England (2001) and Anderson, Binder, and Krause (2002), the terminology is now so well established that the labor market outcome (earnings, wages, or, employment) is implicitly assumed and therefore omitted. Nevertheless, the term “motherhood penalty” should be viewed as very specific and implicitly refers to the negative impact of parenthood on a labor market outcome. Although the terms “penalty” and “premium” have normative connotations, the terms encompass all underlying causes, including, for example, discrimination, hours worked, and choice of workplace. It has also become more common to use the term “child penalty,” even though the term also includes the impact of additional children.
Although the impact of parenthood on the labor market outcomes of men is small compared to women, I show a fatherhood penalty emerging in the 1980s. This penalty in earnings is primarily driven by reduced labor supply in the first years after the child is born (due to the use of paternity leave) but also persists in the longer horizon. The penalty in the long run is driven by reduced hours worked and lower wages but is relatively small in magnitude. While the long-run motherhood penalty is largely unaffected by the length of parental leave and the distribution of parental leave within the household, there is a linear increase in the fatherhood penalty for men using more paternity leave. These results indicate that differential gender norms across households matter for variations in the size of the fatherhood penalty.

The fatherhood penalty is also higher among men having sons relative to daughters. This finding contrasts studies from the US and Germany (Lundberg and Rose, 2002; Choi, Joesch, and Lundberg, 2008; Dahl and Moretti, 2008) where fathers of sons have higher earnings relative to fathers of daughters. One potential explanation for this discrepancy is that gender norms in Sweden are different from those in the US and Germany. While the higher earnings of men with sons are often discussed in the literature in terms of a role model effect (Raley and Bianchi, 2006), this effect might only be present in societies with a more pronounced breadwinner norm rather than in environments characterized by more gender-egalitarian norms, such as Sweden.

Essay II: Origin, Norms, and the Motherhood Penalty (with Olof Åslund and Arizo Karimi)

Although the existence of motherhood penalties is well established, the underlying causes still need to be understood. The long-run child penalty is nearly identical for women birthing and adopting children, challenging the notion that biological factors (e.g., pregnancy, delivery, breastfeeding) explain the gender earnings gap post-parenthood (Kleven, Landais, and Søgaard, 2021; Rosenbaum, 2021; Andresen and Nix, 2022).

Family policies have also shown limited importance in explaining the size of long-run child penalties. Expansions of parental leave in Germany (Schönberg and Ludsteck, 2014) and Austria (Lalive and Zweimüller, 2009; Lalive et al., 2014; Kleven et al., 2022) had very modest impacts on long-run earnings for women. Earlier research from Sweden, the US, and the UK, also showed that a higher uptake of parental leave did not lead to higher long-run motherhood penalties (Waldfogel, 1998; Albrecht et al., 1999). The same results hold for childcare subsidies in Austria (Kleven et al., 2022).

Recent studies also question the importance of specialization within the household (Becker, 1981) and male-female differentials in human capital accumulation (Mincer and Polachek, 1974) in contributing to child penalties. First, in the Nordic countries, the differential impact of children on men and women is much larger in opposite-gender couples compared to same-gender couples even when couple characteristics such as education and earnings are
held constant (Andresen and Nix, 2022; Vleuten, Evertsson, and Moberg, 2023). Second, in the US, the motherhood penalty is even higher in couples where women outearn their husbands (Almond, Cheng, and Machado, 2023).

The leading candidate for understanding the impact of parenthood on earnings is the male breadwinner norm; women are expected to take the primary responsibility for child rearing (Boelmann, Raute, and Schönberg, 2021; Kleven, Landais, and Søgaard, 2021; Andresen and Nix, 2022; Kleven, 2023; Vleuten, Evertsson, and Moberg, 2023). Cross-country comparisons also suggest a positive relationship between child penalties and elicited traditional gender norms (Kleven et al., 2019), offering additional support for this explanatory factor.

In my second essay, we add to the literature on child penalties by focusing on the role of culture and gender norms in determining the size of the motherhood penalty in earnings. We study whether people living in the same economic and institutional context (Sweden) but with different cultural backgrounds are affected differently by entering parenthood. We focus on child migrants and children of immigrants to hold institutional and overall societal exposure during adolescence and early adulthood constant across groups. Gender norms across groups are proxied by a parental country of origin ranking according to the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index (GGI). This study, therefore, uses the “epidemiological approach” to study the importance of culture for economic outcomes (see Fernández, 2011, for a review of the method and its applications). Hence, we also add to an expanding literature that explores the importance that cultural variables have in determining economic choices and outcomes (Guiso, Sapienza, and Zingales, 2006; Alesina and Giuliano, 2015; Giuliano, 2021).

We find that gender norms among child migrants and children of immigrants show pre-parental similarities not only with first-generation adult migrants sharing their geographic origin but also with the gender equality indicators seen among the populations of these countries. We also find that gender norms influence the size of the motherhood penalty, but mainly that mothers from different backgrounds show strong similarities in their earnings trajectories after entering parenthood. The findings highlight that while parental gender norms matter to some extent, motherhood penalties are strikingly similar across groups with very different cultural backgrounds.

**Essays III and IV**

My third and fourth essays focus on different dimensions of immigration and integration. Globally, around 300 million people (3.5 percent of the global population) live in a country other than their country of birth. Migrants tend to move to relatively richer countries, and more than 1 in 10 residents in the EU and the member countries of the OECD are foreign-born. The number for
Sweden is more than 1 in 5, which is the fifth highest in the EU (Frattini and Bertino, 2023).

Moreover, as of July 2023, more than 6.2 million refugees had fled from Ukraine after Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022 (UNHCR, 2023a), and the UNHCR estimates that there were around 36 million refugees globally at the end of 2022 (UNHCR, 2023b). Recent developments in terms of climate change, population growth, and military conflicts are indicating that the number of migrants and refugees will be high also in the future. In a globally representative survey in 2021, 16 percent of adults answered that they would like to permanently migrate to another country if they could (Gallup, 2023).

In tandem with the increasing number of migrants and asylum seekers, the political question of immigration and integration has risen to prominence in most high-income countries in the last decades. Figure 1 shows how the question has gained increasing significance following surges in asylum seekers in Sweden. During the 2015 European refugee crisis, immigration was declared the main challenge facing the EU in all member countries except Portugal (European Commission, 2015).

![Figure 1](image-url)

*Figure 1.* Changes in the number of asylum seekers and the perceived importance of the political question of immigration/integration over time in Sweden. The right axis shows the percentage of people who included immigration/integration as one of the three most important issues/societal problems. *Sources:* Data from the SOM Institute (2023) and the Swedish Migration Agency (2024).
Essay III: Recent Migrant Peers and the School Performance of Incumbent Students (with Demid Getik and Anna Sjögren)

From a host country perspective, immigration raises concerns regarding its potential to adversely affect the labor market opportunities for natives and its potential to burden public institutions and the functioning of the welfare state (Rica, Glitz, and Ortega, 2015). Although these questions are empirically hard to study, the interest for them in economics research has risen with the increasing number of migrants in the last decades. Pioneering work by Chiswick (1978) and Borjas (1985) focused on the labor market outcomes of immigrants in the host country (the US), and their work has been followed by extensive work on the fiscal impact of immigration and the impact of immigration on the labor market.4

Compared to the extensive literature on the impact of immigration on the labor market outcomes of natives, less research has been devoted to the effects of immigration on the educational outcomes (Figlio et al., 2023). This notwithstanding, children are largely over-represented among refugees and correspond to more than 41 percent of the refugees in the world (UNHCR, 2023b). The influx of the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe led to political debates in many European countries about the strain migration put on school systems. This debate spurred again following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The importance of school peers on educational performance is a well-known fact, going back to the Equality of Educational Opportunity Study (known as the “Coleman Report”) studying school segregation in the 1960s in the US (Coleman, 1966). More recent studies have corroborated these early findings on the importance of peers (Hoxby, 2000; Sacerdote, 2011) as well as the importance of students’ relative performance in the classroom (see Delaney and Devereux, 2022, for a review). A sudden surge in migrants (as in 2015 in Europe) might also lead to a sudden reorientation of teaching activity, cause classroom disruptions, and increase competition for resources in the short run (Fix and Zimmermann, 1993; Lazear, 2001; Card, 2009). Changes to the student composition due to migration flows may additionally affect school choices and cause families to change neighborhoods or schools (often referred to as “native flight”), which further alters the student composition of receiving schools (Grodzins, 1957; Clotfelter, 1976, 2001; Betts and Fairlie, 2003). In my third essay, we ask: How are native students affected by exposure to newly arrived immigrants in terms of their educational outcomes? The setting is the influx of migrant children into Swedish schools over the last 15 years. Sweden had the highest per capita refugee admission in the OECD during the peak of the 2015 refugee crisis, amounting to 163,000 asylum seekers, corresponding to 1.6 percent of the population (OECD, 2017). In the

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4See Chiswick and Miller (2015) for a more recent review on the overall economic consequences of immigration.
academic year 2016/17, 12 percent of the students in Swedish compulsory schools were foreign-born, and two-thirds of the foreign-born students were recent migrants.\(^5\)

We use administrative student registers with data on school assignments and test scores for all Swedish compulsory school students (including asylum seekers) to study the impact of exposure to recent migrants on native students’ academic performance. The fact that we have information on the student composition at both school and classroom levels for all grades in compulsory school means that we can follow individuals over time and study exposure throughout the compulsory school. Moreover, this data is merged with registers on families, allowing for sibling comparisons in exposure and outcomes. Thus, the data allows us to include changes in student composition due to potential native flight.

Our results suggest that the negative association between migration and the school performance of native students stems from a significant negative sorting of migrants and native students to schools that have a high inflow of recent migrants. Once we account for this sorting, we find that both contemporaneous and cumulative exposure have small positive effects on native students’ performance. The overall conclusion is, therefore, that exposure to recent migrants had a modest, albeit significantly positive, impact on the educational performance of native students. There are, however, signs of a small negative effect on students with an immigrant background. An event study analysis of the more acute exposure during the 2015 refugee crisis corroborates our main findings. It shows that while classrooms in exposed schools initially became more crowded, schools reacted to the migrant influx by reducing class sizes. This finding points to an important role for resources.

**Essay IV: The Labor Market Impact of a Taxi Driver’s License (with Mounir Karadja)**

In most countries in the EU, foreign-born are less likely to be employed compared to natives (Frattini and Bertino, 2023). Moreover, immigrants with a non-Western immigrant background have worse labor market outcomes than natives and their Western immigrant counterparts (Eriksson, 2010; Aldén and Hammarstedt, 2014; Brell, Dustmann, and Preston, 2020). My fourth essay focuses on a labor market with a large over-representation of non-Western immigrants (roughly half of all taxi drivers in Sweden are foreign-born). This over-representation raises the question of what role this and other occupations with similar characteristics—service sector with low formal qualification requirements—play in the native-immigrant employment and earnings gaps.

To the best of our knowledge, this project is the first to estimate the effects of a taxi driver’s license on labor market outcomes. Examining the impact

\(^5\)Recent migrant is defined as a foreign-born student being granted a residence permit within the last four years or asylum-seeking students in the asylum process who have not yet received a residence permit.
of access to certain occupations with low formal requirements and barriers to entry is complicated because access to these occupations is rarely formally restricted. However, being a taxi driver requires a specific driver’s license, meaning the individual must pass several exams. We use these previously unused data on all written exam results for the taxi driver’s license in Sweden between 2004 and 2017, matched with administrative data on individual labor market outcomes.

We find that gaining access to the taxi labor market positively affects both natives and immigrants. However, the taxi labor market has a more significant positive impact on immigrants relative to natives, which is evident both in levels and relative terms. Immigrants are also more likely to enter the taxi labor market from unemployment, while natives are more likely to have been employed. Moreover, more highly educated individuals take up taxi driving among immigrants than natives. Highly educated immigrants have higher post-taxi earnings than lower-educated immigrants, while the opposite is true for natives. We interpret this as an indication that outside options are generally lower for highly educated immigrants, compared to highly educated natives, in line with studies finding foreign-acquired human capital having lower economic returns (Friedberg, 2000).

We also find that immigrants who pass the taxi exams show no decline in taxi driving as their main occupation throughout our sample period. Thus, we find no indication that immigrants use taxi driving as a stepping stone to other occupations within our time frame. Natives, by contrast, display a peak in taxi driving as their main occupation in the first 12 months after passing exams, after which it decreases gradually. Taxi driving for immigrants appears to represent a more stable and long-standing shift in labor market status, while it is a more temporary occupation for natives.
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