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‘The economic cost of political conflicts: The case of Republican refugees during the Spanish Civil war’

Forced migrations, exiles and genocides are shocks that affect to the lives of millions of individuals. Although the moral effects are dramatic and clear, there are also secondary consequences that are usually undervalued; the loss of a significant stock of human capital is one of them. Recent studies have focused their interest on this field and in the importance of the drainage that forced migrations and genocides suppose (Acemoglu, Hassan & Robinson 2011). The Republican exile in post-civil war Spain is an excellent case study and also one of the most popular topics analyzed in the history of the country. The amount of literature related to the issue is abundant in quantity and also in quality, ranging from the recreation of the personal experiences of the exiles to the quantification of their numbers (Ruiz Franco and Riesco Roche, 1999). The traditional view of this extensive literature argues that the importance of the exile does not rely exclusively on the number of people who left the country, but also on their quality as together with farmers and blue collar workers moved professors, engineer and liberal professionals. However, not that much has been said about the quantification of this loss or the measurement of the quality of the human capital that left Spain after the end of the civil war. This paper tries to fill this gap offering an estimation of the quality of the human capital that left Spain during the exile, putting it into a broader context comparing it with the years that preceded and followed it and also with economic migrants who were moving at the same time. We make use of a unique primary source, the National Registry of Foreigners that Mexico established in 1926. The registry was controlled by the General Direction of Migratory services and had as main purpose the registration of all the foreigners living in Mexico at the time. After recording the stock of migrants within the country, the registry kept recording all migrants who entered Mexico until 1950. We transcribed all the information from Spanish immigrants that the registry contains, a total of more than 26,000 records of migrants that entered Mexico between 1870 and 1950. We use multivariable regression models to estimate the existence of a skill premium in Republican refugees, analysing proxies of human capital like occupations, heights, and foreign languages spoken. Our initial results suggest that Spanish Republican refugees in Mexico presented a skill premium compared to economic migrants. This result is particularly relevant because traditional economic migrants from Spain to Mexico have been considered a “privileged migration” given their high levels of human capital (Lida and Pacheco Zamudio, 1994). The quality of the source allows us to extend the analysis to both men and women, an important contribution given the traditional invisibility of women in recorded economic history.