

# Comfort and Conformity: A Culture-based Theory of Migration\*

Ruxanda Berlinschi<sup>†</sup> and Jan Fidrmuc<sup>‡</sup>

*September 2020*

## Abstract

This paper proposes a theory of migration decisions in which cultural values play a role. Individuals are assumed to desire comfort (high wages) and conformity (sharing similar values in social interactions). Countries are assumed to differ economically (average wages) and culturally (the distribution of values). The theory predicts that the relationship between individual values and the desire to move to a different country may be U-shaped, hump-shaped, monotonic or flat, depending on the relative wages and on the relative cultural diversity at the origin and destination. The theory implies that (1) Tieboutian sorting (people moving to countries where cultural values are closer to theirs) does not hold if countries differ substantially in terms of cultural diversity or wages and (2) migration makes richer and culturally diverse regions more culturally diverse, and poorer and culturally homogeneous regions more culturally homogeneous. Historical examples of migration to North American settlements and an analysis of survey data on migration intentions from Moldova lend empirical support to the theory.

*Keywords:* Migration; self-selection; values; culture; diversity; Tiebout model.

*JEL Classification:* A13; F22; J61; Z1

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\* We benefited from helpful comments and suggestions received from John Benett, Niclas Berggren, Peter Huber and Oded Stark, and from seminar/conference participants at the CESifo Munich, European Workshop on Political Macroeconomics, and the Slovak Economics Association. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic.

<sup>†</sup> Faculty of Business and Economics, K.U. Leuven Campus Brussels. Email: [ruxanda.berlinschi@kuleven.be](mailto:ruxanda.berlinschi@kuleven.be).

<sup>‡</sup> Corresponding Author. Lille Économie & Management (L.E.M), Université de Lille;; PRIGO University, Havířov; Institute for Strategy and Analysis (ISA), Government Office of the Slovak Republic; CESifo Munich; Rimini Centre for Economic Analysis (RCEA), and Global Labor Organization (GLO). Contact: Department of Economics and Finance, Brunel University London, Uxbridge, UB8 3PH, United Kingdom. Email: [Jan.Fidrmuc@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:Jan.Fidrmuc@brunel.ac.uk).