

Migration and Poverty

A Longitudinal Study of the Relationship between Migration and Social Mobility in England and Wales

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1 Introduction: Research Questions

This article explores the relationship between migration and poverty using data from the England and Wales Longitudinal Study to answer four questions:

- i. Do the poor migrate more than the rich?
- ii. Do those who migrate escape poverty?
- iii. Do the migrations of people to urban areas increase or decrease the levels of poverty in those areas?
- iv. Are 'immigrants' (i.e. those who belong to ethnic minorities) more likely to become poor than non-immigrants?

2 The Longitudinal Study Dataset

England and Wales is uniquely privileged amongst major countries in having a Longitudinal Study (LS). The LS is based upon the linking of census records from the 1971, 1981 and 1991 censuses. The records are linked at the individual level for just over 1 per cent of the population (individuals are selected on the basis that their birthdays fall on just four dates in the year). This generates a sample of about 500,000 LS members, and the number of LS members is kept roughly constant by adding births and subtracting deaths (immigrants and emigrants are revealed at the time of the next census). The proportion of the census returns that are successfully matched from one census to another is high and the reliability of the data is good.

The advantages of this form of data for analyses of the relationships between migration and social mobility can hardly be overstated! We know all the census information about a person at the time of the three censuses, including their socio-economic group and their region of residence. We can, therefore, follow these 500,000 people through the system as they enter the labour market, progress or otherwise in their work histories, leave the labour market (for example, for family or retirement reasons), and move from region to region (or into England and Wales from elsewhere). Never before has it been possible to study the associations between social mobility and geographical mobility for such a large sample of the population.

In this article the regions used are the nine Standard Regions of England and Wales, and the

social classes are groups of socio-economic groups as outlined in Fielding (1989). The social classes are defined in such a way as to reflect to the greatest extent possible the differences in their wealth status. Those who are described as members of the service class are professionals and managers who, in general, benefit from holding high-status, secure and well-paid jobs. The members of the petty bourgeoisie are rather more varied in their wealth status, but, as self-employed people or the owners of small- or medium-sized businesses, they share the characteristic of being independent economic agents in possession of the means to carry out their business (shops, factories, hotels, tools etc). Those who are classified as white-collar employees are members of the working class in that, although employed in non-manual work, they generally lack status, high pay and job security. Typically, many of these jobs are done by women at rates of pay that do not allow the achievement of reasonable aspirations or the enjoyment of a decent standard of living (for example, through employment as secretaries, catering staff, cleaners, shop assistants, childminders or welfare workers). Similarly, while there are those in blue-collar jobs who receive decent wages, most are employed in jobs that are very insecure, have low status and are badly paid. That insecurity means that it is blue-collar employees who are most likely to join the unemployed. The unemployed are the poorest and the most powerless people in the labour market. These five social classes (with the service class sometimes split into its two parts, the professionals and the managers) form the basis of the analyses which follow, but for some purposes the service class and the petty bourgeoisie are grouped together into the middle classes (Savage *et al.* 1992), while the other three classes are grouped together into the working classes.

3 Do the Poor Migrate More Than the Rich? Inter-Regional Migration Rates by Social Class and Housing Tenure

Table 1 shows inter-regional migration rates for England and Wales 1971–81 by social class and housing tenure. The third column shows the spatial mobility of each social class and tenure group (relative to the England and Wales total, which is set at 100), by class and tenure at the time of the 1981

census. This is a fairly familiar picture with the service class showing high inter-regional mobility and the blue-collar workers showing very low inter-regional mobility. However, we do not know from this data what social class and tenure group those individuals belonged to at the time of the previous census. In the final column, therefore, the data refer to only those who were in the same class and tenure group at the time of both censuses. This is clearly a much more accurate description of the class and tenure-specific mobility rates. The results are striking. The mobility of those who are in the best jobs is very high, the mobility of those who are in the worst jobs is generally low, with blue-collar workers being especially immobile. Also immobile are the petty bourgeoisie, presumably because they need to stay in one place to build up good supplier and customer networks for their businesses. The unemployed are rather unexceptional in their spatial mobility, more mobile than the manual working class from whose ranks many of them have come, but much less mobile than the members of the service class. As for housing tenure, those who own their houses (and who might therefore have been expected to have been rather immobile) are highly mobile, those who rent in the private sector are moderately mobile (though notice from the figures in the other columns that this is often a tenure of transition), and those in social housing (council tenants) are extremely inter-regionally immobile. This last tenure contains a high proportion of those who are poorest in British society. Figures from the LS for class-specific mobility only, covering the period 1981–91, show very similar features, though the inter-regional mobility of professionals and managers was rather lower, while that of the unemployed was rather higher than in the previous decade.

We can summarise by saying that, in general, the poor (manual workers and council tenants) are extremely immobile, while the unemployed (against the expectations of the economists) are only averagely mobile. Conversely, the rich (managers and professionals, and owner-occupiers) are highly mobile.

4 Do Those who Migrate Escape Poverty? Associations Between Social Mobility and Spatial Mobility

Table 2 shows the inter-regional migration rates for each social class and housing tenure transition for England and Wales 1971–81. If there was no relationship between spatial mobility and social mobility then all the values in this Table would approximate 100. As it is, a clear pattern can be discerned. The values in the diagonal tend to be below 100, while those that are off the diagonal tend to be greater than 100. It is hard to overstate the importance of this finding; it means that there is a strong positive relationship between spatial mobility and social mobility. Those who are class and tenure immobile are also spatially immobile, migrants are far more likely to change their social class positions than non-migrants. What is more, the Table shows us that this relationship holds for both upward social mobility (that is, from working class occupations to middle class ones), and for downward social mobility (that is, from middle class occupations to working class ones). What the Table does not tell us is whether, on balance, the effect of spatial mobility is to socially promote or to socially demote.

To answer this question we need the data in Table 3. The best way to read this Table is to start at the top left-hand figure of 11.4 per cent. This represents the proportion of people who were not in the service class in 1971, who were in the service class in 1981. They are in a sense the winners in the system, because they have achieved a move from less secure and less well-paid jobs to jobs which are more secure and better paid. This likelihood of upward social mobility is then calculated for sub-groups of the population depending on their gender, and on their occupational, region of residence, and housing tenure characteristics in 1971. Reading down the second column to the bottom figure in the top half of the Table, one can see that someone who is male, and was in the South East region, in a white-collar job and in owner-occupation in 1971, had a 36 per cent chance of social promotion to the service class by 1981 (i.e. more than three times the average). But the big difference comes with inter-regional migration. The figures on the right-hand part of the Table show that rates of entry into the service class are roughly doubled by inter-regional mobility. A man who migrates to the

South East from a white-collar, owner-occupation background can expect a 55 per cent chance of entry into the service class. Since a woman who lives outside the South East and does not migrate, and who lives in rented accommodation and is not in a white-collar job in 1971, has only a 3 per cent chance of entry into the service class, there is about a 20-fold difference between those who were most advantaged by their situations in 1971 and those who were least advantaged!

To summarise, there is strong evidence in this data to show that while some do not escape poverty by migration, many do.

5 Do the Migrations of People to Urban Areas Increase or Decrease the Levels of Poverty in those Areas? Inter-Regional Migration and the Social Polarisation of the London Region

It is possible to use the LS to analyse the social class changes which are brought about by specific migration flows. Migration flows to and from the South East region of England (which roughly coincides with the extended commuting area of London) comprise about one half of all inter-regional migrations in England and Wales. The flows to the South East are strongly biased towards those who are entering the labour market, that is, to people in their early 20s, living in single person households. The flows from the South East are strongly biased towards older people, including many who are at or close to the official retirement age. They tend to be in multi-person households. The key issue becomes ‘what are the net effects on the social class structure of the South East region of these migration exchanges with other regions?’

Social class ‘accounts’ for the South East region can be constructed which show all the transitions which contribute to a change in the size of the different social classes in the region. In Table 4 it can be seen that the service class expanded greatly in the period 1971–81 (from 16.0 thousand LS members to 19.8 thousand). This growth, however, did not arise from the net migration gain of mid-career members of the service class. In fact, there was a small net loss of such people (650–923). Rather, the growth arose from (i) the excess of entries from education

into the service class within the region over retirements and deaths (3498 – [1059+1814]); (ii) the excess of transfers into the service class within the region over transfers out (5011–2660); the minor gains from the transfers of people (mostly women) into and out of the labour market (1070–858); and last, but not least, the effects of inter-regional migration (2389–1770). This latter figure arises largely from the large number of young people who were in full-time education outside the South East in 1971 but in the service class in the South East in 1981 (1230). The net contribution of migration to the change in the number of people in the service class in South East England can be seen to be +619 out of a total growth of +3807.

Reading across the second to last row in Table 4 we can see how migration contributed to changes in the other social classes in the region. It is clear that the net effect of inter-regional migration is to add people to both the top and the bottom of the London region's social structure; that is, migration adds to the social polarization of the capital city-region's social structure. In addition, there are some signs in this data that manual workers are being 'squeezed out' as London enhances its role as a global financial centre.

6 Are 'Immigrants' (i.e. Those Who Belong to Ethnic Minorities) More Likely to Become Poor than Non-Immigrants? The Social Mobility of 'Immigrants' in England and Wales

Finally, the LS can be used to provide evidence on the social mobility of Britain's 'immigrant' population. Figures 1-3 show that members of ethnic minorities are (i) very different in their social mobility characteristics from the population as a whole; and (ii) that patterns of social mobility differ between groups of 'immigrants'. The figures have been constructed as follows: (i) the transitions between the different social classes have been calculated for the 'immigrant' population as a whole, and for its ethnic sub-groups. These transitions have then been expressed as a ratio of the equivalent transitions for the total population. Only rates of flow that were higher than the England and Wales average (which was set at 100) were plotted. Figure 1 shows that the dominant characteristics of

the social mobility of the 'immigrant' population as a whole is for downward transitions to unemployment, and upward transitions to the petty bourgeoisie to be particularly important. Thus the likelihood of a member of one of Britain's ethnic minorities experiencing the most likely cause of entry into poverty (that is, unemployment), is much higher than for the population in general. Figure 2 shows that this tendency is especially strong for members of the Afro-Caribbean community. Notice, in particular, the high flows from education into unemployment, and from new immigration into unemployment. Insofar as there is upward social mobility, it is largely confined to movements from unemployment into the blue- and white-collar working classes. Figure 3 shows the same data for Asian-Africans (mostly East African Asians). This time a very different pattern of social mobility emerges. There continue to be strong flows into unemployment, but upward flows into the petty bourgeoisie are very evident, as are exchanges with the service class. The picture thus presented is complex; 'immigrants' are indeed more likely than the host population to experience downward mobility into poverty, but, largely through the use of the small and medium-sized business sector, some groups achieve upward mobility into the middle classes.

7 Conclusions

The LS data has succeeded in answering a number of key questions about the relationships between migration and poverty in Britain. In general, the poor migrate less than the rich, many of those who migrate succeed in escaping poverty, migration leads to a social polarization of the social class structures of metropolitan areas, and 'immigrants' are more likely to become poor than non-immigrants.

References

- Fielding, A.J., 1989, 'Inter-regional migration and social change', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* Vol 14: 24–36
- Savage, M. *et al.*, 1992, *Property, Bureaucracy and Culture*, London: Routledge.

Table 1 Inter-Regional Migration, Social Class and Housing Tenure: England and Wales 1971-81

Social class/housing tenure category	Class/tenure in 1981	%	In labour market in 1981	In labour market in 1971-81	In same class/tenure in 1971-81
Service class	45988	21.1	194	188	222
Petty bourgeoisie	14451	6.6	91	97	54
White collar	57501	26.4	92	94	99
Blue collar	82197	37.7	55	56	55
Unemployed	17834	8.2	98	110	104
Total	217971	100.0	100	100	100
Owner occupiers	137669	63.2	111	117	129
Council tenants	58364	26.8	42	41	27
Other tenants	21938	10.1	182	145	115
Total	217971	100.0	100	100	100

The data refer to people who were in England and Wales at both dates. Columns 3, 4 and 5 are inter-regional migration rates expressed as ratios of the values for England and Wales (England and Wales = 100). 1.096% sample. Source: OPCS Longitudinal Study (Crown Copyright Reserved)

The social class categories are as follows:

1. Service class = professional, technical and managerial workers = SEGs 1, 2.2, 3, 4 and 5.1
2. Petite bourgeoisie = employers and self employed = SEGs 2.1, 12, 13 and 14
3. White collar proletariat = lower level non-manual employees = SEGs 5.2, 6 and 7
4. Blue collar proletariat = manual employees = SEGs 8, 9, 10, 11, 15 and 17

Data refer to men and women and to full-time and part-time employment.

Table 2 The Association Between Inter-regional Migration and Changes in Social Class and Housing Tenure: England and Wales, 1971-8

Social class in 1981						
Social class in 1971	Service class	Petty bourg.	White collar	Blue collar	Unemployment	Total
Service class	103	117	89	73	115	100
Petty bourgeoisie	185	69	161	100	190	100
White collar	165	163	77	77	157	100
Blue collar	209	168	136	75	133	100
Unemployment	215	104	113	79	70	100
Housing tenure in 1981						
Housing tenure in 1971	Owner occup.	Council tenants	Other tenants	Total		
Owner occupiers	94	121	232	100		
Council tenants	192	37	337	100		
Other tenants	141	67	63	100		

The data refer to people who were in the labour market in England and Wales at both dates. Inter-regional migration rates: England and Wales = 100. Standardised by social class and housing tenure in 1971. Source: OPCS Longitudinal Study (Crown Copyright Reserved)

Table 3 Interactions Between Inter-Regional Migration, Social Class, Housing Tenure, Gender and Region, As They Affect Entry to the Service Class: England and Wales, 1971-81

			Total	Inter-Regional migrants only		
			Total	Males only	Total	Males only
i. In labour market in 1971						
Total	England and Wales	Total	11.4	12.3	23.1	26.0
		Owner occ. only	14.7	16.4	26.1	30.5
	South East only	Total	13.5	15.1	28.2	32.0
		Owner occ. only	17.4	20.0	33.9	39.9
White collar only	England and Wales	Total	18.8	31.7	31.1	45.6
		Owner occ. only	21.7	35.6	32.6	48.0
	South East only	Total	19.7	32.1	35.8	49.8
		Owner occ. only	22.9	36.0	40.6	55.4
ii. Entries from education 1971-81						
	England and Wales	Total	18.3	18.2	45.7	47.9
		Owner occ. only	14.0	24.2	49.0	50.5
	South East only	Total	19.0	19.8	50.5	53.7
		Owner occ. only	25.3	25.8	54.2	57.5

The data refer to people in England and Wales at both dates. A rate of entry into the service class is calculated by dividing the number of people entering the service class 1971-81 by the number of people in the category of origin in 1971. The rates of entry are therefore transition probabilities x 100. Data for South East inter-regional migrants are for flows to the South East. Source: OPCS Longitudinal Study (Crown Copyright Reserved).

Table 4 A Social Class 'Balance Sheet' for the South East Region

The data include migration to and from the rest of England and Wales but not to and from the rest of the world. Untraced records are also excluded.
1.096% sample. SE = South East; LM = labour market

	service class	petty bourg.	white collar	blue collar	unem- ployed	total
total in class in SE in 1971	15989	5036	24154	29426	2215	76820
additions:						
transfers into class within SE	5011	2188	3457	3553	2018	16227
entries from education within SE	3498	428	6362	4990	1799	17077
other entries within SE	1070	318	3630	1731	261	7010
in-migrants from E & W	2389	159	1338	818	317	5021
of which:						
in class in 1971	650	26	282	281	16	1225
in LM in other class in 1971	375	83	181	146	113	898
in education in 1971	1230	30	657	281	152	2350
in other in 1971	134	20	218	110	36	518
total additions	11968	3093	14787	11092	4395	45335
subtractions:						
transfers out of class within SE	2660	1510	5246	5827	984	16227
deaths	1059	496	1590	2777	203	6125
retirements within SE	1814	628	2638	4357	313	9750
other exits within SE	858	284	4856	2092	312	8402
out-migrants to E & W	1770	257	1777	1308	157	5269
of which:						
in class in 1981	923	86	418	487	26	1940
in LM in other class in 1981	333	87	514	435	80	1449
in retirement in 1981	292	45	256	247	16	856
in other in 1981	222	39	589	139	35	1024
total subtractions	8161	3175	16107	16361	1969	45773
net change 1971-81	+3807	-82	-1320	-5269	+2426	-438
net migration 1971-81	+619	-98	-439	-490	+160	-248
total in class in SE in 1981	19796	4954	22834	24157	4641	76382

Source: OPCS Longitudinal Study. Crown Copyright Reserved

Figure 1. The social mobility of 'immigrants' in England and Wales 1971-81.
 Only salient links are shown.

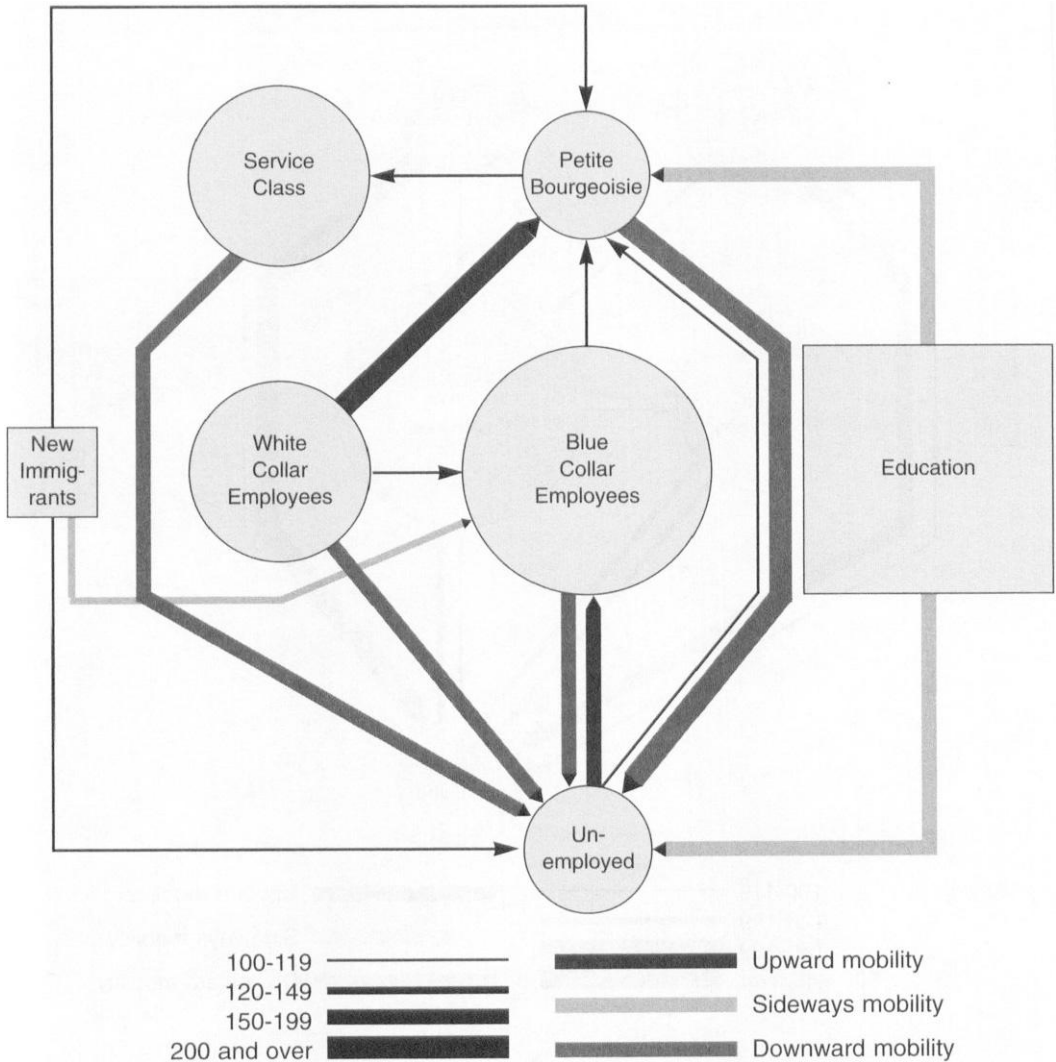


Figure 2. The social mobility of Afro-Caribbeans in England and Wales 1971-81.
 Only salient links are shown.

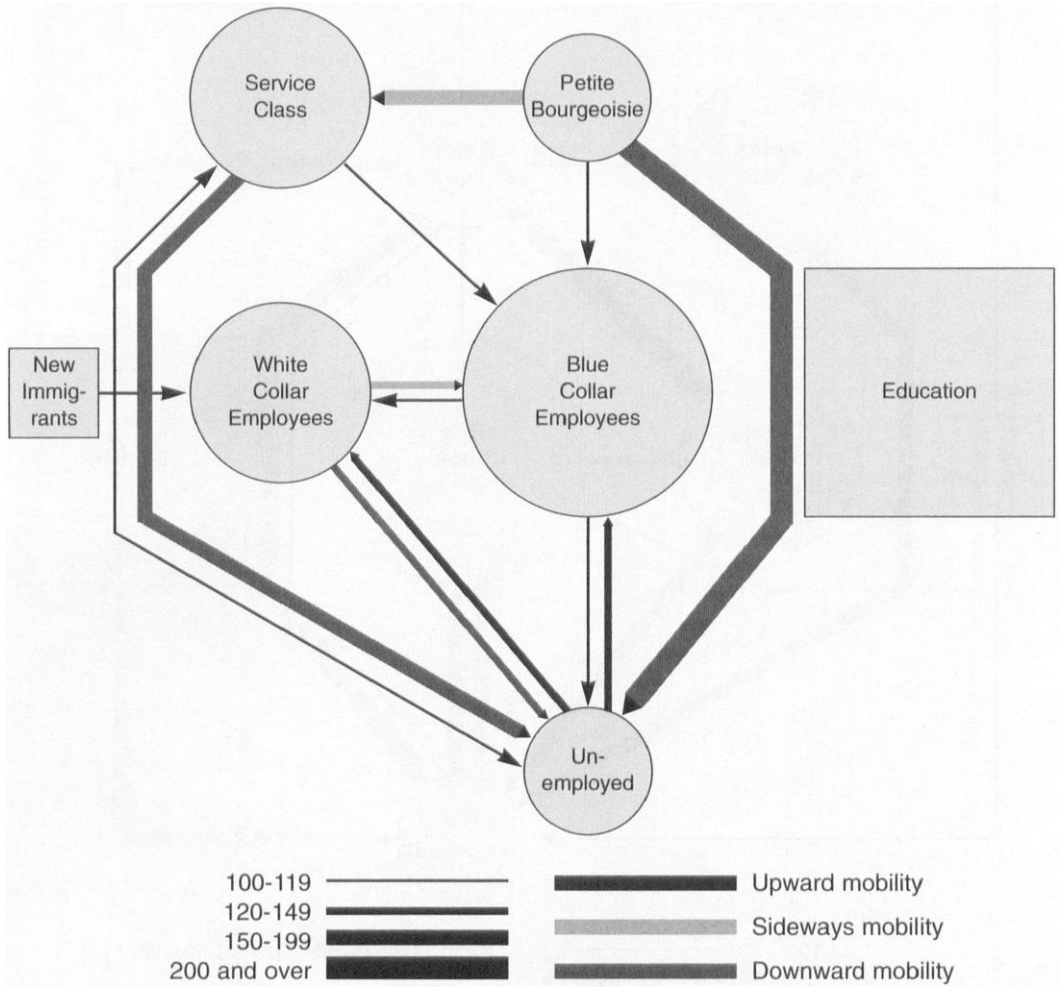


Figure 3. The social mobility of Asian-Africans in England and Wales 1971-81.
 Only salient links are shown.

