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The Determinants of Family Reunification among German Guest-Workers

by Johannes Velling

Reuniting families is a high priority in the immigration policies of most countries. Like political asylum, the policy is driven more by humanitarian than economic reasons. Family reunification accounts for a large proportion of yearly immigration. In Canada, family reunification is responsible for about one third of total immigration. In the U.S. the number is about the same, but the category "close relatives" includes 80 percent of all visas, compared with only 5 percent for persons who qualify based on their economic skills¹.

In Germany family reunification continues to be a major reason for immigration especially with respect to Immigration from the former guest-worker countries. Veiling (1993) estimates that between 1973 and 1983 up to 65% of gross immigration from those countries can be attributed to family reunification. Despite its quantitative importance, family reunification has rarely been systematically studied in Germany (for an exception see Münzenmaier and Walter 1983). This paper uses data from the Socio-Economic Panel to look at immigration into West Germany in the 1980s by the relatives of guest-workers.

Family Reunification in the SOEP

The empirical analysis is based on the first six waves of the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) for West Germany. Foreigners from the main source countries for guest-workers, i.e., Turkey, Yugoslavia, Italy, Greece and Spain, have been oversampled in the SOEP. This means there are around 3,100 individuals in 1,300 foreign households covered. This provides an unique opportunity to analyze family reunification of citizens from these countries.

Until the first alien law was passed in 1965, there were no restrictions on family reunification. After 1965, only the spouse and children under the age of 18 of a family member already living in Germany could immigrate, and only if the family member had lived in Germany for at least three years (one year for guest-workers from recruitment countries), held currently a job, and lived in an apartment large enough to accommodate the immigrants. A hardship clause permitted exceptions under certain circumstances. Family reunification was further restricted in 1981: children had to be aged 16 or under to immigrate and both parents had to be already living in Germany. This regulation was not changed very much during the 1980s.

For one foreign country under investigation the regulation is somewhat different. Citizens of Italy were covered by the free movement of labour clauses of the European Community from EC's inception. This regulation was extended to family members in 1968. Greece became a member of the EC in 1981, but Greek people did not benefit from free movement within the EC until 1988. The peculiar situation for Italians would usually justify a different approach for Italians, but EC regulations on family reunification are quite similar to the German ones. The most important exception is the age limit of 21 for children.

Using this legal framework, family reunification can be identified in the SOEP. For each member of an SOEP household who leaves the household or moves into the household between two consecutive waves, the SOEP address protocol provides information on the reasons. We define a remigrant as a person who leaves the household because he or she "moved abroad." We define an immigrant because of family unification as a person who moved into the household because he or she "moved from abroad" and who is the "spouse of household head" or a "child" within the household.

¹ The numbers are taken from Canada Immigration Centre (1991) for Canada and from Borjas (1990, pp. 30/31).

Table 1

Family Reunification in the SOEP

Lines		1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
1	Household Heads Total	1 396	1 180	1 123	1 113	1 065	1 037
2	with Family Members Abroad	228	214	178	168	137	100
3	with Spouse Abroad	90	67 ²)	60	58	43	39
4	with Children Abroad	196	186	146	139	117 ²)	81
5	Nothing Happened ¹)	85.5 %	89.9 %	87.8 %	89.6 %	85.8 %	—
6	Remigrated to Family	7.5 %	3.1 %	6.4 %	3.9 %	4.7 %	—
7	Part of Family Moved to Germany	7.0 %	7.1 %	5.8 %	6.5 %	9.5 %	—
8	Spouse Moved to Germany	46.7 %	50.0 %	50.0 %	30.0 %	14.3 %	—
9	Child(ren) Moved to Germany	80.0 %	71.4 %	60.0 %	80.0 %	85.7 %	—

¹) Only those with family abroad who are still in the SOEP in the consecutive wave or have remigrated. — ²) Statement of previous wave since question was not asked that wave.

Table 1 shows the quantitative dimension of family reunification in the SOEP. Its first section shows how many household heads were in each wave, how many of them have family members abroad, and how the family members abroad were distributed between spouse and children. Note that spouse and children need not add up to family members abroad since there were some household heads who had both spouse and children abroad. The number of household heads with family members abroad decreased both in absolute and relative terms over time because of family reunification in Germany and remigration.

The second panel in Table 1 provides information on the incidence of remigration and family reunification between consecutive waves. Since some household heads left the sample for reasons other than remigration, the absolute numbers of all three possibilities are slightly less than the second totals in the line of the table. While the proportion of heads whose family members came to Germany is relatively constant over the years, the magnitude of remigration in 1984 was relatively large. Remigration behaviour in 1984 was affected by the "return promotion act" of 1983 which ruled that claimants of benefits paid for early remigration had to leave Germany by September 1984 (see Hönckopp 1987 and Steiner/Veiling 1993).

Total family reunification in Germany can be distributed among spouses and children moving to Germany. The relative share of either family member is shown in the third section of the table. Again, the numbers add up to more than 100% as some households have both spouse and child(ren) move. Over the total period covered by the SOEP, more household heads have their children come to Germany than their spouse. This result is consistent with Münzenmaier/Walter (1983) who found that 23% of all household heads with child(ren) abroad intended to have their children come to Germany, but only 14% of their wives came. Another reason is that heads have more children than spouses living abroad (see lines 3 and 4 in section 1 of the table).

Econometric Specification

I model family reunification as a discrete choice and estimate it using a multinomial logit model². The specification of the likelihood function relies on the assumption of independence between all observations for a given individual, between different individuals and between choices. It would have been desirable to control for individual heterogeneity by using a random effects model rather than simple pooling for estimation. However, the usual estimation of a non-linear random effects model as suggested by Chamberlain (1984) is not feasible here since it requires a subestimation of the model for each wave. Sample size limitations make this impossible.

I use the Hausman/McFadden (1984) test for Independence from Irrelevant Alternatives (IIA). The IIA is done by comparing the estimation results of the unrestricted multinomial model to the one of a restricted

model which leaves out one alternative for the estimation (here: Remigration). The test statistic is

$$HM = (\beta^u - \beta^r)' (\text{var}(\beta^1) - \text{var}(\beta^r)^{-1}(\beta^u - \beta^r)$$

If the IIA assumption holds, the test statistic follows a χ^2 -distribution where the degrees of freedom are the numbers of explanatory variables (including the constant). Since the weighing matrix is only asymptotically positive semidefinite, but is frequently negative semidefinite in finite samples, it is then necessary (as in this application, too) to modify the covariance matrix for the parameters of the restricted estimation in order to obtain a positive semidefinite matrix.

Empirical Analysis of the Determinants of Family Reunification

The empirical analysis will be carried out for a rich set of explanatory variables which might have an impact on the decision of family reunification in Germany or abroad. The variable choice is based on the small literature on family migration behavior as well as on the much larger literature on (re)migration behavior of guest workers (see, e.g., De-Jong/Fawcett 1981 for a general survey, and Steiner/Veiling 1993 for a survey on the remigration literature). Table 2 shows all variables included in the estimation with their exact definition as well as the mean/proportion and standard deviation. The summary statistics are depicted for all identifiable child parent reunification and all total family reunification including all cases with child(ren)/family abroad. Spouse reunification is left out for the reasons given below. There has been some grouping of the variables to indicate which variable addresses which aspect of family reunification. Besides the personal characteristics I include several variables which reflect the family situation in the home country, some indicators of social integration of the household head in Germany, and finally some indicators for economic incentives for choosing one of the three alternatives.

The variable TRAIN_A indicates whether the household head has had vocational training in the home country. Households with vocational training probably have fewer problems finding an adequate job after remigration.

The variable group *Family Abroad* is supposed to cover the maintained family links to the home country and the disruption of these links, respectively. The variable MOTHER_A also accounts for the possibility that the

² An alternative approach would be a nested multinomial logit model (see Boersch-Supan 1987) where the first level of the decision tree is family reunification versus no family reunification. The nested model would be less restrictive since it does not rely on the assumption of Independence from Irrelevant Alternatives. However, the coefficients of the nested model can be derived from a multinomial logit model as long as there are no choice-specific variables included (as it will be the case in the estimations to follow).

Table 2

**Definition of Variables and Summary Statistics
Evaluated for Child-Parent and All Family Reunification**

Variable	Variable Definition	Child-Parent Reunification		Family Reunification	
		Mean/ Proportion	Standard deviation	Mean/ Proportion	Standard deviation
	Dependent Variable				
NOTH__HA	Family reunification didnot happen = 0	90.7	—	87.1	—
FAM__GERM	Family moved to Germany = 1	4.3	—	7.3	—
REM__FAM	Remigration to family abroad = 2	5.0	—	5.6	—
	Personal Characteristics				
SEX	Female = 1	6.3	—	8.5	—
AGE	Years of age	42.3	7.3	43.6	8.2
NATY	Nationality = Yugoslavia	31.3	—	29.4	—
NATG	= Greece	10.1	—	10.9	—
NATI	= Italy	14.0	—	14.6	—
NATS	= Spain (base category = Turkey)	13.1	—	12.7	—
EDUC__LOW	Low education	34.6	—	35.8	—
EDUC__HIGH	High education (base category = no degree)	12.3	—	11.7	—
TRAIN__A	Training in home country = 1	43.9	—	44.7	—
	Family Abroad				
MOTHER__A	Mother living in home country = 1	58.3	—	55.6	—
SPOUSE__G	Spouse living in Germany = 1	75.2	—	64.1	—
CHILD__G	Child(ren) living in Germany = 1	0.0	—	18.5	—
NCHILD__A	Number of children living in home country	1.8	1.1	1.4	1.2
CHILD__5	Child up to 5 years living abroad = 1	14.2	—	11.5	—
CHILD__15	Child between 6 and 15 years = 1	76.4	—	62.3	—
CHILD__18	Child between 16 and 18 years = 1	30.2	—	24.6	—
	Integration Indicators				
YSMI	Years since migration to Germany	16.4	4.5	16.6	4.7
GSPEAK__B	Knowlege of spoken German = bad	20.8	—	21.4	—
GSPEAK__G	= good; (base category = sufficient)	36.5	—	34.9	—
FEEL__B	Subjective evaluation of well-being in Germany = bad	8.0	—	8.0	—
FEEL__G	= good (base category = indifferent)	60.4	—	60.3	—
EXPSTAY ¹⁾	Expected duration of stay in Germany; (no return = 50)	—	—	13.8	17.3
TRANSF	Transfers to home country = 1	78.0	—	76.8	—
	Economic Indicators				
HHLINC	Monthly net labour income of household head (1000 Marks)	1 767.3	1 100.1	1 716.2	1 041.2
RHINC	Other monthly net household income (1000 Marks)	807.7	919.5	767.9	1 267.2
UNEMP	Household Head unemployed at date of interview = 1	6.1	—	6.0	—
UNEMP__DUR	UNEMP interacted with cumulated unemployment duration within last year, DUR	0.4	1.9	0.4	1.8
Number of individuals		636		780	
Note: Since missing values are occuring at expected duration of stay, the number of individuals reduces to 662 for this variable at family reunification.					

mother takes care of children left in the home country. The inclusion of SPOUSE__A captures the following idea: If the spouse lives in Germany, the care for the children left behind must already have been arranged. Having the children come to Germany would probably mean one spouse, usually the wife, must stop working, thus leading to a substantial financial loss. NCHILD__A, the number of the children in the home country, stands for a further tie to the home country making separate spouse reunification more difficult. Finally, the age of the children is supposed to capture such things as finishing the children's education before they could come to Germany, as well as the age restriction of the institutional regulations.

Net household income is divided into the household head's net labour income and other income of the household to allow for differences in behaviour with respect to this variable. The latter variable also contains interest income on savings and thus acts as a proxy for household wealth. The household head's cumulated duration of unemployment is calculated by adding the duration of all unemployment spells within the twelve months before the date of interview in each wave, where spells may be both left and right censored. This variable is interacted with an individual's employment status at the date of interview. Thus, past unemployment duration only has an effect on an individual's expected duration of stay if he or she is unemployed at the date of interview.

The estimation results on child-parent and total family reunification are presented in Table 3. A separate estimation on spouse reunification did not perform very well since the number of cases was too low both in absolute and relative forms in the two reunification categories (see Table 1). The table contains the usual inference statistics as well as the percent of correctly predicted cases, which should be compared to the proportion of those doing nothing in the first row of Table 2. The Hausman/McFadden test statistic which is reported at the bottom of Table 3 indicates that the IIA-assumption cannot be rejected.

Beginning with the personal characteristics, Table 3 suggests gender does not have a significant effect on the transition process. Its irrelevance for child-parent reunification is not surprising, but the insignificance for family reunification which also includes spouse reunification is not as obvious. The patriarchal structure of guest-worker households, as it is often assumed to be, would rather support a finding that the wife is more likely to follow her husband than an equal relationship. One possible explanation for this result is that the interaction of child-parent and spouse reunification in the second specification wipes out the single negative effect of gender on spouse reunification. This explanation seems quite plausible comparing the estimation results in Table 3³.

The age effect is positive and significant. Whereas the propensity to have the family/child(ren) come to Germany increases with age, remigration to the family is less likely the older is the household head. Relative to guest-workers

from Turkey, only Yugoslavians and Spaniards differ in their behavior. Yugoslavian guest-workers are less likely to have their children come to Germany than Turks. Spaniards prefer family and child parent reunification much more than Turks, but tend to remigrate less often than the reference group. Different education levels do not have a significant effect on family reunification. Also vocational training in the home country does not change the decision of family reunification in Germany or abroad significantly. Nevertheless, the signs of the coefficients for vocational training are as expected.

Family background in the home country does have a significant effect on family reunification. Having the mother living in the home country does significantly lower the likelihood of bringing children and spouse to Germany. However, as the remigration coefficient of this variable is negative and insignificant, it can be assumed that it is potential child care that drives that first coefficient negative rather than family linkage.

The variable "spouse abroad" has to be interpreted with care within the second specification. For spouse reunification, this dichotomous variable always bears the value of one, and thus it can't be distinguished from the intercept. Therefore, "spouse abroad" can only be interpreted with respect to child-parent reunification. If the spouse lives in Germany, it is less likely that the children will come to Germany. This finding seems to contradict Münzenmaier/Walter (1983) who assumed a division of household rules between the head in Germany. It suggests that if the spouse lives in Germany, both spouses work in and achieve a higher total income. This makes it less expensive to let relatives raise the child in the home country. In contrast to its effect on having the children come to Germany, the foreign residence of the spouse does not have a significant effect on the remigration behaviour of the household head to the children. This result fits to the finding of Steiner/Veiling (1993) that Veiling, having children in the home country affects the remigration propensity whereas the place of living of the spouse does not matter significantly.

The number of children abroad has a negative but insignificant impact on both reunification decisions. The age of children abroad does not seem to have a significant impact on family reunification even if the signs are as expected. However, the estimation results are affected by a high degree of multicollinearity between these age variables and the number of children variable. Leaving the latter variable out leads to a higher t-statistic for each coefficient, lifting the coefficient for remigration to children above 18 above the significance level. Therefore a careful interpretation of the age coefficients seems appropriate. The younger the child, the greater the urge for family reunifica-

³ It would have been desirable to separate the effect of gender on child-parent and on spouse reunification. However, the low number of cases falling into the second category did not allow a separate consideration of the two.

Table 3

Determinants of Child-Parent and Family Reunification Maximum Likelihood Estimation

Variable	Transition to							
	Child(ren) coming to Germany		Remigration to child(ren) abroad		Family coming to Germany		Remigration to family abroad	
	Parameter	t-value	Parameter	t-value	Parameter	t-value	Parameter	t-value
CONSTANT	−5.0242	−2.34*	−0.4181	−0.23	−4.5412	−2.55*	5.4028	3.83*
	Personal Characteristics							
SEX	0.1913	0.16	−0.0312	−0.04	−1.0446	−0.94	−0.8203	−1.29
AGE	0.0930	2.29*	−0.0826	−1.99*	0.0731	2.17*	−0.0736	−2.44*
NATY	−1.3102	−1.89**	−0.1093	−0.20	−0.6745	−1.24	0.0904	0.21
NATG	0.0788	0.08	−0.5515	−0.69	−0.0356	−0.05	0.0397	0.07
NATI	−0.3494	−0.48	−0.5378	−0.74	0.5281	0.98	0.0496	0.09
NATS	1.2707	2.08*	−2.2815	−1.93**	1.2638	2.41*	−1.0781	−1.43
EDUC__LOW	−0.2332	−0.51	0.2039	0.42	−0.3920	−1.04	−0.0438	−0.12
EDUC__HIGH	−0.6020	−0.50	−0.2244	−0.31	−0.7750	−0.71	0.0032	0.00
TRAIN__A	−0.1915	−0.40	0.3916	0.73	0.2066	0.53	0.0666	0.18
	Family abroad							
MOTHER__A	−2.1049	−3.69*	−0.5502	−1.15	−1.7032	−3.69*	−0.5537	−1.52
SPOUSE__A	0.9662	1.71**	−0.6107	−0.89	0.9761	2.00*	−3.8216	−5.92*
NCHILD__A	−0.1312	−0.52	−0.3062	−0.94	−0.1508	−0.61	−0.0508	−0.18
CHILD__5	0.3649	0.49	0.9450	1.33	0.6527	0.92	0.8447	1.35
CHILD__15	0.7401	1.07	−0.0905	−0.14	0.5663	0.87	−0.0095	−0.02
CHILD__18	−0.6639	−1.05	−1.3212	−1.48	−0.3917	−0.68	−0.3752	−0.54
	Integration Indicators							
YSMI	−0.2409	−3.80*	0.1243	1.76**	−0.1492	−3.09*	0.0240	0.51
GSPEAK__B	0.6647	1.17	0.3764	0.65	0.3915	0.90	0.0274	0.06
GSPEAK__G	0.3964	0.71	−0.4460	−0.83	−0.0632	−0.13	−0.3048	−0.78
FEEL__B	−0.9999	−0.92	1.2837	1.70**	−0.0254	−0.04	0.9246	1.54
FEEL__G	0.9664	1.75**	0.7850	1.41	0.6406	1.44	0.3845	1.00
TRANSF	0.9853	1.37	1.2502	1.96**	0.3645	0.65	0.8007	1.85**
	Economic Indicators							
HHLINC/1000	0.1586	0.47	−0.9701	−2.45*	−0.1360	−0.44	−0.7218	−2.38*
RHINC/1000	0.1445	0.52	−0.0769	−0.27	−0.0498	−0.44	−0.0404	−0.25
UNEMP	2.9324	2.61*	−0.9174	−0.71	1.7568	1.85**	−0.3635	−0.34
UNEMP__DUR	−0.1976	−1.22	−0.1213	−0.71	−0.0881	−0.73	−0.1163	−0.72
Statistics: Likelihood—Ratio- ² (d.o.f) Percent Correctly Predicted Mc Fadden's pseudo R ² Number of observations	114.70 (50) 91.35 0.2418 636				200.42 (52) 90.00 0.2710 780			
Note: Test statistics are marked by one (two) asterisk(s) if significant at the 5 % (10 %) level.								

tion — in Germany or abroad. For children of school age, it is more likely that they will come to Germany than that their household head will move back to them which corresponds to the findings of Mehrländer (1974). Finally, children between ages 16 and 18 reduce the chances of family reunification. This might be due to the institutional framework for family reunification in Germany, but could also be attributed to their expected departure from the home.

With respect to the integration indicators, more years since migration lowers the propensity to have the family come to Germany. The significant coefficients for the other integration variables are as expected. Feeling good in Germany does improve the chances of having the family come, whereas feeling bad promotes the remigration. If the household head transfers money to the family back home, his propensity to return to the family is higher.

Looking at the effect of income on family reunification, a higher labour income decreases the propensity to return home. There are two possible explanations for this finding: If the level of income reflects the individual's place in the income hierarchy, a higher income attenuates the urge of migration in order to improve social standing (see Stark 1991, Ch. 7-10). Also a positive selection process on migration could explain the result. The successful migrants stay in Germany whereas the less successful migrants return home first. In contrast to Münzenmaier/Walter (1983) I did not find a positive and significant effect of income on having one's family come to Germany.

The findings on unemployment reflect the importance of distinguishing between individual unemployment and overall unemployment in the economy. An increase in the German unemployment rate significantly reduces reunification, but insignificantly affects remigration. But the duration of an individual's unemployment does not seem to matter. Personal unemployment does have a positive and significant effect on having the family come to Germany which is attenuated when spouse reunification is included. A possible explanation is that we measure the employment status on the day of the interview, while the reunification decision if made up to a year after the interview and employ-

ment status could have changed in the interval. Employees who have become unemployed during the year might have decided against family reunification, while unemployed household heads might have found a job again (the average duration of unemployment in the sample is about six months). It may also be that the break in employment has helped to prepare for family reunification (searching for a larger apartment, etc.). Nevertheless, the results show that individual unemployment status cannot be used to explain a deferral of family reunification. However, one has to be careful to draw conclusions for newly arrived foreign workers. Most of the guest workers included in the underlying sample have lived in Germany for many years. Their residence status is consolidated so that they do not lose their permit when they are unemployed — which is not true for those foreigners who have recently arrived. Personal unemployment experience must be sharply separated from the unemployment level in the economy. Whereas the former stands for the actual employment status of the individual, the latter rather captures the risk of becoming unemployed and the chances of finding a new job.

Conclusion

The family reunification decisions of guest-workers in Germany has been analyzed separating out the most important determinants for family reunification in Germany and abroad. Based on a multinomial logit estimation, the effect of a large set of variables on the decision to move of child-parent and total family reunification was examined.

The results suggest that personal characteristics, the location of one's wife and children, integration indicators, and economic variables all influence movement to and from Germany by guest-workers and their families. Given the small number of empirical studies on family reunification, these results contribute to a better understanding of the mechanism underlying the decision of families to reunite. Such an understanding is especially important in order to be able to accurately forecast immigration flows. This baseline information will prove vital in formulating an active migration policy for Germany.

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