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Intergenerational Social Mobility in Africa Since 1920

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Abstract

The COVID-19 crisis has a severe impact on education and employment and exposed the many social inequities that make some populations more vulnerable to shocks. Despite a vast literature on social mobility in advanced economies, little is known about it in African countries, mainly due to data limitations. Using a large harmonized dataset of more than 72 million individuals, we fill this gap and examine socioeconomic status mobility across generations, measured by educational and occupational attainment. We uncover the substantial geographical variations in the degree of upward/downward educational and occupational mobility across and within African countries, and the gender and rural/urban divide. Additionally, we explore the determinants of social mobility in the African region. We find that social mobility on the continent could be partly explained by observable individual characteristics (gender, marital status, age, etc.), and that educational mobility is a driver of occupational mobility. Lastly, we show that the quality of institutions, the level of public spending on education, social protection coverage, natural resource endowments, and countries' fragility are strong predictors of social mobility in Africa.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	2
I. Introduction	4
II. Description of the Data	7
A. Data limitations.....	8
B. Educational attainment	10
C. Occupational attainment.....	11
D. Transition matrices	13
III. Measuring Social Mobility.....	14
A. Education attainment	15
A.1. Intergenerational mobility in education status	16
A.2. The geography of intergenerational mobility in education	18
B. Occupational attainment.....	22
B.1. Intergenerational mobility in occupation status	22
B.2. The geography of intergenerational mobility in occupation	24
C. The interplay of education and occupation intergenerational mobility.....	26
IV. Intergenerational Mobility at the District Level	28
V. Determinants of Educational and Occupational Mobility	32
A. Empirical strategy.....	32
B. Determinants of educational mobility	34
C. Determinants of occupational mobility	37
VI. Concluding Remarks	40
References.....	42