

COVID-19 and the Intention to Migrate from Developing Countries: Evidence from Online Search Activities in Asian Countries

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COVID-19 has had an enormous effect on labor markets globally. Economic restrictions, notably strict border controls and lockdowns, have led many workers to lose their jobs and forced many migrants to return to their homes or change their migration plans. While adverse effects on labor mobility are expected, variations in the prevalence of COVID-19 and governmental responses to the pandemic across countries are likely to influence workers' intentions to migrate in different ways. To understand the effects of pandemics on the international labor supply, we explore the impact of COVID-19 and the various economic restriction policies on job search behavior through considering cases from Asian countries, in which large inflows and outflows of migration are observed, using the difference-in-differences (DID) approach with data from the Google Trends Index (GTI). We found that the search volume of a single query related to the labor market dramatically increased over time following the outbreak of COVID-19. However, we did not observe any positive impact on the search volume related to emigration, regardless of the infection control measures in the host countries. Our results imply that the intention to work increases after the imposition of lockdown due to a severe increase in unemployment in the respective countries. On the other hand, the expectation to migrate outside of the country, which requires preparation time and incurs high costs, does not seem to have increased in the case of developing countries.

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