

ESSAYS ON SCHOOLING AND CHILD LABOUR IN PORTUGAL



Abstract

This thesis examines child labour and schooling in Portugal from a historical and contemporary perspective and comprises three essays. Throughout the thesis, I attempt to strike a balance between research of the local context and a comparison with an international context.

The first essay provides an analysis of the evolution of child labour in Portugal. The essay is based on two different sources of information: qualitative — that is, reports by education and labour inspectors, conference proceedings of jurists and lawyers and parliamentary proceedings; quantitative — that is, relying on industrial, labour and household surveys conducted during the 19th and 20th centuries. Child labour was widespread up to mid-20th century, but started declining thereafter, accelerating in the 1960s and particularly in the 1980s. My analysis suggests that the changing needs of the economic structure of the country reduced the interest in children's work and was in turn reflected in the norms and values espoused by its political leaders and their willingness to pass and implement legal measures. The results suggest that the transfer of affordable (or even free) labour-saving technology to developing countries may curb the demand for child labour. In spite of the long-term decline in child labour, at the turn of the millennium, 8-12 per cent of Portuguese children aged 6-15 could still be classified as working.

The second essay studies the patterns of present-day child labour in Portugal and distinguishes between the effects of economic and domestic work on children's educational performance. Distinguishing between labour types is important from a policy perspective as it helps in the construction of tailor-made solutions. I use an instrumental variables approach to address the simultaneous determination of school success and child labour. I find that economic work hinders educational success, while domestic work does not appear to be harmful. It is suggested that this negative association relates to the submissive, non-creative and non-entrepreneurial nature of the activities performed by children. The results also suggest the relevance of controlling for selection effects.

The third essay focuses on the determinants of present-day school outcomes and on the role of a child's interest in school in determining educational success. The analysis presented in the essay draws on a large body of literature in economics of education and educational

psychology. In addition to controlling for the effects of a wide range of individual, family and school characteristics, the unique aspect of this essay is that it focuses on the role of a typically unobserved attribute: a child's interest in school. The empirical work in the essay is based on cross-section and panel data.

The estimates suggest that after controlling for time-invariant unobservable traits and attempts to mitigate the simultaneous determination of interest and achievement, children with high levels of interest in 1998 are 6 to 9 percentage points less likely to fail a grade between 1998 and 2001 as compared to children with low and medium levels of interest. The results show the importance of non-cognitive traits in determining children's educational outcomes and support the idea that the development of non-cognitive skills may serve as an additional and important lever to enhance cognitive outcomes.