WAVES OF (DIS)SATISFACTION: EFFECTS OF THE NUMERUS CLAUSUS SYSTEM IN PORTUGAL

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Abstract

This article focuses on applicants to medicine and aims at analysing the consequences of the numerus clausus system in Portugal by answering two questions. How does the numerus clausus system shape the demand for medicine? How do non-enrolled medical candidates influence the global allocation system and generate waves of dissatisfaction? What makes the Portuguese case somewhat unique is the fact that access to higher education is governed by a generalised system of numerus clausus in universities and polytechnics, public or private (Magalhães et al. 2009; Teixeira et al. 2009). Even for study programmes in very low demand, there is a numerus clausus. Because such supply constraints apply to all study programmes, students are encouraged to select the programmes to which they have better chances of being admitted. Medicine, being the study programme that shows the highest excess demand provides a very rich case to be studied when it comes to the effects of the numerus clausus system on student choices. The empirical analysis benefits from the characteristics of the Portuguese public higher education admission system, as there is a central admission system for all public institutions, which provides a very rich dataset on all applicants and their preferences. This makes it possible to know whether students were allocated to the preferred option or to any of the second best alternatives.