

What Makes the Privileged Move? Updating Migration Theory for Emigration from Developed Economies

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Background and relevance

Regional economic disparities are major drivers of international migration. Challenging this core assumption of migration scholars, every year substantial numbers of migrants emigrate from the economically most highly developed welfare states. The classic canon of migration theories is relatively silent on those forms of international movements that certainly do not constitute their typical field of application (e.g. Haas et al., 2020; Massey et al., 1993). Whereas the basic mechanisms that initiate and sustain migration flows are well understood, the international movements of citizens from economically highly developed countries remain puzzling. This form of international mobility regularly challenges micro-economic human capital approaches. Although they provide a framework for understanding the positive self-selection of emigrants from these countries (Borjas et al., 2018; Haberfeld et al., 2020), they hardly provide an understanding about the underlying triggers that make people move internationally. The available scholarship is hampered by the lack of appropriate data. Much of the existing literature on migration from economically highly developed welfare states is overwhelmingly qualitative in nature (Ryan & Mulholland, 2014; Scheibelhofer, 2018). The available quantitative research regularly refers to revealed preferences and migration intentions only (Hadler, 2006; Marrow & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020) because existing surveys on those forms of international migration processes focus on specific professions or stages in the life course only, e.g. international students, qualified workers, physicians etc. (Pantenburg et al., 2018; Verwiebe et al., 2010; Lörz et al., 2016).

Theoretical framework

In response to this state of the art, the paper builds upon existing micro-economic human capital approaches but develops a conceptually broader perspective. In particular, the theoretical framework starts linking existing theories about international and internal migration with studies about expatriates and their global work experience (King & Skeldon, 2010; Shaffer et al., 2012) within a life course framework to better explain international migration processes

from economically highly-developed countries. More recently, the life course approach has developed into a prominent perspective within empirical migration research (Kley, 2011; Mulder, 1993). From this perspective, relevant triggers and constraints of international migration decisions include: the individual situation within different life domains (e.g. work, family etc.), particular personal life events of individuals and those of linked social others (e.g. partner, children, parents), and previous mobility experiences (Blossfeld & Huinink, 2001; Mayer, 2009). This framework accounts for the situation of the individual within the economic realm (e.g. educational level, education-occupation matches, job satisfaction, unemployment events) and in the family realm (e.g. new partner or children, economic situation of partner, living situation of parents) next to mobility capital (e.g. migration background, language acquisition, friends and family abroad). Taking into account the path-dependencies in life courses, we differentiate between first-time emigrations abroad and repeated international movements. Furthermore, all models are separately estimated for both sexes taking the gendered structures of life courses into account.

Data, methods and preliminary results

The analysis of actual emigration processes imposes high demands on empirical data. Ideally, emigration would be analysed on the basis of a probability sample of the German resident population that includes information about a sufficient number of German emigrants. In the real world, information about emigration is either not available in survey data or the number of emigrants within these data does not allow for detailed analyses (Schupp et al., 2005). The absence of such data was a major motivation for the establishment of the German Emigration and Remigration Panel Study (GERPS). This new survey is based on a sample of the internationally mobile population and provides data representative of German citizens who moved abroad between July 2017 and June 2018. Through combination with the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), an established panel survey of the German resident population, we obtain a sound basis for modelling emigration decisions and testing our theoretical framework.

We use information about the current living situation of non-migrants in 2017 based on SOEP data and retrospective information about the living situation of the internationally mobile population three months before emigration based on GERPS (Ette et al., 2021). The analytical sample includes 16,470 German citizens between 19 and 70 years of age (non-migrants: 13,053; emigrants: 3,417). We calculate binary logistic regressions to estimate the probability of emigration. Preliminary results are presented in Table 1. The model specification is based on the theoretical model outlined above. The left hand model is based on the total sample,

irrespective of their current labour force status ('total sample') and the right hand model focuses only on those respondents who are active in the labour market ('employed sample'). These preliminary findings demonstrate, in line with previous research, that emigration from economically highly developed welfare states is a highly selective process. Moreover, they indicate that the situation in different domains of life is crucial for a better understanding of these forms of international mobility.

Table 1: Coefficients and average marginal effects of logistic regressions on emigration

	total sample		employed sample	
	logits	AME	logits	AME
Women (ref. men)	-0.264*** (-4.83)	-0.022*** (-4.83)	-0.285*** (-3.80)	-0.023*** (-3.80)
Age	-0.091*** (-28.16)	-0.006*** (-27.59)	-0.101*** (-20.71)	-0.006*** (-21.81)
Age ²	-0.001*** (-6.40)		-0.002*** (-6.10)	
Education	0.308*** (25.57)	0.025*** (27.56)	0.185*** (8.44)	0.015*** (8.52)
Partner (ref. none)	-0.177** (-2.60)	-0.015** (-2.58)	-0.330*** (-4.05)	-0.027*** (-4.00)
Minor children (ref. none)	-1.787*** (-24.09)	-0.153*** (-25.19)	-1.769*** (-19.44)	-0.147*** (-20.25)
Many close friends (ref. few)	0.601*** (9.47)	0.052*** (9.03)	0.665*** (8.58)	0.057*** (8.10)
Stays abroad (ref. none)	1.981*** (33.36)	0.216*** (28.78)	2.004*** (26.88)	0.213*** (23.27)
Migration background (ref. none)	0.544*** (7.80)	0.047*** (7.40)	0.486*** (5.49)	0.041*** (5.21)
Unemployed	0.366** (2.65)	0.031* (2.54)		
Net labour income (ref. second tertile)				
First tertile			-0.208* (-2.02)	-0.015* (-2.04)
Third tertile			0.633*** (7.54)	0.053*** (7.53)
Overeducation			0.236* (2.36)	0.019* (2.29)
Occupational sector (ref. business administration)				
Production of goods			-0.580*** (-5.60)	-0.047*** (-5.76)
Personal services			-0.284** (-3.14)	-0.024** (-3.16)
IT/natural sciences			-0.013 (-0.10)	-0.001 (-0.10)
Commercial services			-0.707*** (-4.66)	-0.056*** (-4.99)
Constant	-6.491*** (-32.37)		-4.714*** (-14.52)	
Observations		16,470		11,024
Pseudo R ² Adj. Pseudo R ²		0.467 0.465		0.449 0.444

Notes: z statistics in parentheses; * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001.

Sources: GERPSw1, SOEP2017.

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