

## **Realization of migration intentions – lessons from a panel study**

The role of previous migration intentions, subjective expectations and perceived external norms

(Extended abstract)

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The paper examines the relationship between migration plans and subsequent migration behaviour of ethnic Hungarians living in Transylvania (Romania), and provides insight into the self-selection mechanism of emigration. The analysis is based on data from the panel study *Turning points of our lives – Transylvania* conducted in 2006 (first wave) and 2009 (second wave).

From point of view of individual decision-making and behaviour migration is a process which begins with *considering migration* (due to discrepancy between one's goals and perceived opportunities), then in some cases is followed by *planning migration* (triggered or hindered also by life-course events), and finally – depending on the different supporting and inhibiting factors – by *realizing migration* (De Jong – Fawcett 1981, Fawcett 1985, Krieger 2004, Kley – Mulder 2010, Kley 2011). For understanding the background and motivations of migration decisions, as well as the micro-level factors determining the actual move, it is important to follow the self-section process of migrants from the beginning. This requires longitudinal panel data which contain information on previous migration intentions and subsequent movements as well.

The combined examination of migration intention and subsequent action (actual migration) helps to understand the selection process as a whole. It can be well assumed that factors underlying the formation of migration plans are different from those determining actual migration. By comparing the profiles of migration planners and those realizing it within

a given period, and contrasting the factors underlying migration intention and realized migration we can better understand why certain plans remain only dreams (Van Dalen – Henkens, 2008), and what explains the change in selection between the two stages of migration process (Chort 2012).

In the realisation of migration the different – human, social, financial, psychological – capitals play an important role; these could promote or hinder the realisation of intentions (Massey – Espinosa 1997, Palloni et al. 2001). Nevertheless, according to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen 1991, 2005), the *primary determinant of migration behaviour is migration intention* (De Jong 2000). Although there have been relatively few panel studies in the field of international migration about the realization of migration intentions, these reveal that the chance of migration is indeed higher among those with previous plans (Gardner et al. 1985; De Jong et al. 1985; Van Dalen – Henkens 2008, 2013).

The paper examines the following questions:

- 1) to what extent and among whom were migration intentions and plans measured in 2006 realized until the second wave in 2009, and which type of migration plans (short as well as long-term plans for working abroad, or emigration) was mostly followed by actual migration;
- 2) what factors determined (on the supply side) the realization of migration during the surveyed period, and what was the role of previous migration intentions, as well as migration-related expectations and external norms in it;
- 3) what factors explain selection between planning and realizing migration, i.e., what factors promote or hinder/impede the realization of migration plans?

As potential explanatory factors we include in our logistic regression models variables of living conditions, unemployment experience, job satisfaction, housing condition, household member living abroad and subjective well-being, controlled for basic socio-demographic characteristics. In addition – based on Ajzen’s theory of planned behaviour –, a special emphasis is laid on exploring the role of *previous migration intentions*, *migration-related expectations* (perceptions of expected advantages and disadvantages of emigration), as well as *perceived external norms*.

According to the results, 17% of the migration plans was followed by migration during the three-year period between the two waves of the survey. However, migration occurred among non-planners as well, albeit only to a relatively small extent (5%). Nearly three-quarters of first wave respondents acted in accordance with their previous intentions, i.e., migrated or stayed. *Deliberate migrants* (whose migration plans were followed by actual migration) are not only younger, less educated and less likely to be married but are also more

likely to be characterized by unfavourable financial, housing and labour market conditions compared to *stayers* (who neither planned migration nor went abroad). The composition of so-called *dreamers* (who failed to realize their migration plans) is in many respects similar to that of deliberate migrants, suggesting that selection partly occurred already in the phase of forming intention.

Negative selection of migrants was also confirmed by the multivariable analysis: in the second half of the 2000s those who struggled with financial difficulties, had unemployment experience, were dissatisfied with their job, as well as lived in poor housing conditions were more likely to be involved in some (even temporary) form of migration. Psycho-social well-being was also of key importance: the absence of relationships offering safe support, as well as concern for the future of children increased the chances of migration. Nevertheless, a positive selection was revealed concerning subjective health status and anomie: those satisfied with their health were more likely to move, while some level of anomie (lack of trust in the future, feeling 'lost') significantly reduced the chances of migration.

Negative selection was not only revealed concerning the population of origin, but also in the process of realizing the plans: between movers (deliberate migrants) and dreamers. Even within the group of planners, job dissatisfaction and unfavourable housing conditions at least doubled the chances of migration, and so did the concern for the future of the children, and the lack supportive social connections, too. Anomie, in turn, reduced the chances of realizing migration intentions, although it contributed to its development.

Our analysis confirmed that existence of previous migration plans is a statistically significant predictor of migration: those who had a migration plan in 2006 were over three times more likely to move till 2009 than non-planners. At the same time, even after controlling for previous intention, the effects of job dissatisfaction and anomie remain strongly significant. Although migration-related positive expectations and – to some extent – perceived external norms regarding migration increased the chances of migration, these effects disappeared after involving previous migration intention as an explanatory variable. These findings confirm that migration-related attitudes and subjective norms influence migration behaviour indirectly, via migration intentions – as suggested by Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour.

Although on individual level previous migration intention/plan is the primary determinant of migration, it has become evident that based on intentions alone, the volume of future migration can be considerably overestimated, and estimations regarding the composition of migrants are likely to be biased as well. In order to use migration intentions

and plans as more appropriate indicators for predicting future migration, it is essential to 'refine' their measurement, i.e. filter out 'serious' plans with additional questions, including items concerning timing and preparation, among other things. Presumably it could produce an indicator of migration potential that predicts volume and composition of expected migration more accurately.

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