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# Systematic review of determinants of migration aspirations

Deliverable 2.2



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# 1 Introduction

International migration is preceded by cognitive and preparatory processes that unfold before any observable movement across borders. Migration scholars are increasingly analysing these processes, using diverse frameworks and perspectives that share a stepwise logic (Carling & Schewel, 2018; Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016; van Naerssen & van der Velde, 2015; Willekens, 2017). Alongside the theoretical developments, there has been a surge in survey data on individuals' desires, intentions or plans for migration. We refer to these constructs collectively as migration aspirations, as explained in greater detail in later sections.

In this paper we comprehensively review the findings of published empirical research on the formation of migration aspirations. That is, we are interested in how individual factors (such as educational attainment or employment status) and contextual factors (such as the quality of public services or the levels of violence and insecurity) help explain who wants to leave and who wants to stay.

The paper is structured around a systematic review of survey-based research, supplemented with insights from ethnographic and qualitatively based research. This combined approach allows us to reflect on the underlying mechanisms and enables a discussion that also acknowledges determinants that are hardly touched upon in the survey-based literature and represent possible gaps. We synthesize findings on 32 determinants from 49 comparable articles that use surveys of the general population. In doing so, we use innovative visual representations that convey the diversity of findings. This is explained in detail in section 3.

We approach the analyses on the basis of a simple two-step model that breaks migration down into two sequential processes: (1) the formation of migration aspirations, and (2) the conversion of migration aspirations into actual migration (Carling, 2020; Carling & Schewel, 2018). For each step, it is pertinent to examine the nature of the process as well as the effect of specific determinants. Table 1 lays out the resulting analytical questions. The bulk of this paper is concerned with question A, which asks which factors that differentiate persons who aspire to migrate from those who do not. This question is addressed in dozens of quantitative analyses that use multivariate regressions to examine the effect of diverse determinants of migration aspirations. These are the studies that we systematically review.

The outline of analytical questions in Table 1 conveys a difference of approach that to some extent, but not entirely, reflects contrasts between qualitative and quantitative research methods: Whereas survey-based studies seek to identify determinants in the formation of migration aspirations across time and space (A), the strength of qualitative literature lies mainly in examining the processes by which migration aspirations develop (C). Historically informed analyses are represented in both approaches, but the comparative projects tend to differ, survey-based literature comparing effects across contexts, whereas qualitative studies devote attention to context-specific circumstances in comparison. Partly, this difference of approach to the formation of migration aspirations conveys a divergence between explanatory and interpretative social sciences, the first preoccupied with identifying causal relations, the second with cultural variation and the constitution of meaning, or presently, with mutual influences in relationships between people and political, cultural and/or material circumstances.

It should be mentioned, however, that qualitatively oriented social sciences, too, have focused on, or assumed, underlying ecological, economic or social determinants of migratory decisions in comparative analyses (Clerge, Sanchez-Soto, Song, & Luke, 2015; Kearney, 1986; Stenning, 1957). By the same token, quantitative data, for instance in the form of longitudinal surveys, may be used to document processes relating to the formation of migration aspirations and to theorise on changes over time (for an example, see Czaika & Vothknecht, 2014). Moreover, historically informed research that seeks to uncover how and why migration aspirations are socially distributed between groups or societies, render categorical contrasts between explanatory and descriptive approaches impossible. We stress the complementary nature of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, and seek to identify dominant effects on migration aspirations all the while attending to diversity across analyses, and in effect, discuss how the same determinants may work differently due to context-specific social mechanisms by drawing on supplementary reading of qualitative literature (see section 2.4).

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As noted, the systematic literature review focuses on survey literature, the bulk of which discusses determinants in the formation of migration aspirations (A). Towards the end of the paper we review the relatively few studies that have tackled question B, which is far more demanding in terms of research design and data. The more theoretical process-oriented questions (C and D) are addressed more marginally in the discussion, drawing on articles included in the systematic review, other quantitative research, and qualitative studies.

The surge in survey data and analyses of migration aspirations is partly motivated by desires to predict or forecast migration flows. Although the vast majority of aspiring international migrants never migrate, stated aspirations, intentions or plans can contribute to modelling aggregate migration flows (Tjaden, Auer, & Laczko, 2019). This would nevertheless be much more valuable with a better understanding of how migration aspirations are converted into actual migration.

Besides the wish to model or predict migration outcomes, there are other important reasons for studying migration aspirations. First, if we want to understand what *motivates* migration, it is insufficient to study actual migration. The so-called “root causes” of migration – which have garnered renewed interest in recent years – drive migration aspirations, rather than actual migration. But whether or not they lead to people crossing borders is a separate issue, governed not least by restrictive migration policies and other obstacles.

Second, migration aspirations could affect behaviour in other ways than migration, especially when the desire to leave remains unfulfilled for many years. People who wait for a chance to leave could, for instance, be less inclined to invest in local livelihoods, skills or relationships, with consequences for their own lives and societies.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1. Overview of analytical questions

	Determinants	Processes
<b>Formation of migration aspirations</b>	(A) What are the factors that explain who aspires to migrate and who does not?	(C) How do migration aspirations develop?
<b>Conversion into actual migration</b>	(B) What are the factors that explain which aspiring migrants actually migrate?	(D) How do aspiring migrants overcome the obstacles to migration?

## 1.1 Separating migration aspirations and ability

In migration theory, “migration aspirations” is used as an umbrella category for various forms of the belief that leaving would be better than staying. In other words, it refers to a series of cognitive and emotional orientations relating to future migration as a possibility in individuals’ lives. They encompass ambitions, attitudes, expectations, intentions, plans, preferences, wants and wishes, desires, dreams, hopes, longings, and yearnings; as well as the seemingly more hesitant, uncertain or neutrally oriented notions of considerations, imaginings, needs, necessity, obligations, and willingness to migrate. The idea of an umbrella term covering diverse facets and variants underpins two central premises for this paper:

- The various manifestations of migration aspirations – desires, intentions, expectations, and so on – are not interchangeable, but reflect substantive differences that have theoretical and methodological implications (Carling 2019).
- Sometimes it is nevertheless valuable to bracket out these differences and treat migration aspirations with all their diverse facet as a single analytical concept, for instance to explore broad patterns in the formation of migration aspirations.

It is the second premise that guide the analyses that follow. The generic concept of migration aspirations is central to “two-step approaches” (Carling & Schewel, 2018) that distinguish between the formation and

<sup>1</sup> The effects of migration aspirations on behaviour and well-being are central to the project Future Migration as Present Fact (FUMI) which is carried out in parallel with QuantMig ([www.prio.org/fumi](http://www.prio.org/fumi)).

realisation of migration aspirations. This distinction enables analysis of migration ability and inability among prospective migrants, in contrast to perspectives that infer aspirations from migration behaviour, as seen, for instance, in works inspired by neo-classic economic theory (Kearney, 1986). Another version of an analytical collapse of migration aspirations and migration behaviour is evident in works that forecast migration patterns on the basis of people's expressed desires of lives abroad: Statements about wishing to leave a country in many contexts serve to convey complaint about socio-economic conditions rather than concrete plans (Bal, 2014; Bal & Willems, 2014). This example brings attention to methodological challenges involved in eliciting migration aspirations – and the varied nature of relations to future migration more generally.

The terminology that is used to describe migration aspirations varies both within and between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Much ethnography attempts to translate and convey vernacular terms used in specific local contexts, e.g. demonstrating how interlocutors employ words like dreaming, longing or yearning when talking about potential future migration. In other instances, qualitative works connect with debates in social science, humanities and philosophy in ways that entail the use of specific terms, as seen for instance in works on migration connecting with hope studies (Kleist & Thorsen, 2016; Pettit & Ruijtenberg, 2019; Pine, 2014).

Migration aspirations and abilities differ between individuals and are socially distributed between groups and in personal networks.

## 1.2 Migration aspirations at the individual level

Individual dimensions have been studied in so-called “value-expectancy models” that presume rationally calculating individuals that make decisions on migration according to cost and benefit concerns (de Jong et al., 1983). Current analytical approaches that zoom in on individual dimensions go beyond economic rationalities (Carling & Collins, 2018). For instance, they highlight migration aspirations' life cycle dimensions (Boccagni, 2017; Gaibazzi, 2015; Grabska, de Regt, & Del Franco, 2019; Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016). van Naerssen and van der Velde (2015, pp. 4-6) distinguish between “thresholds” that aspiring migrants must cross, which present conceptual tools in the study of migration aspirations. The *mental threshold* refers to a person's mindset about migrating; the *locational threshold* consists in deciding on a destination, and crossing the *trajectory threshold* involves identifying border-crossings and routes. Other migration scholars have drawn on the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) to dissect the processes at work at the different stages of prospective emigrants' decision-making processes. They focus on person-level predictors of intentions, as they shaped by subjective beliefs about the consequences of migration, about the social approval of migration, and about their own capacity to overcome obstacles to migration (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015; Willekens, 2017).

Migration aspirations may thus also be influenced by personality (Shuttleworth, Stevenson, Bjarnason, & Finell, in press; Tabor, Milfont, & Ward, 2015). Boneva and Frieze propose that persons who wish to migrate “tend to be more work-oriented and to have higher achievement and power motivation, but lower affiliation motivation and family centrality, than those who do not want to leave their country of origin” (2001, p. 477). Prospective migrants engage in mental time travels, imagining lives elsewhere. Socio-cognitive and socio-psychological research has found that individuals who aspire to migrate engage in more prospective thinking than others, nurturing “optimistic future prospection” (Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016, pp. 764-765). Recent anthropological research has also focused on how personhood is shaped by “prospective migration” in emigrant communities (Elliot, 2016b), and foregrounded that aspirations of future migration are informed by both global discourses and ideals, and local realities (Alpes, 2014; Bal & Willems, 2014; Graw & Schielke, 2012; Robertson, Cheng, & Yeoh, 2018; Skrbis, Woodward, & Bean, 2014).

## 1.3 Analytical dimensions beyond the individual

The aim of analyses of the individual determinants is to determine which individuals have migration aspirations and which do not. A potential challenge is to take onboard the importance of context-specific influences. The ability to migrate differs across socio-economic divisions, as so do migration aspirations,



thus attributing a structural element to the futures that people imagine as possible (Appadurai, 2004; Carling, 2002). Collective dimensions direct attention to the ways in which migration aspirations are socially distributed between groups, defined, for instance in terms of culturally constituted age and gender categories (Grabska et al., 2019), caste (Roohi, 2017), and class (Sancho, 2017). Particular historical epochs too give grounds for broadly shared anticipations and aspirations (Bryant & Knight, 2019) that may influence migration aspirations, as seen among youth in emigrant settings in the wake of the rise of unregulated boat migration in the Mediterranean (Gaibazzi, 2012a). The concept of “cultures of migration” (Kandel & Massey, 2002) has been used to convey the cultural embeddedness – and normalcy – of migration aspirations in some settings, challenging the sedentarist bias of much mobility and migration research that assume that migration decisions, rather than aspirations to stay, ought to be the subject of explanation.

Without homogenising personal aspirations in terms of culture (Bal & Willems, 2014), our approach acknowledges individual as well as more broadly shared dimensions of migration aspirations. It enables a view to politics of mobility and immobility (Robertson et al., 2018); acknowledges that mobility and immobility are differently valued in different settings and by different individuals; and that the formation of *immobility* aspirations is an equally important issue as migration aspirations (Carling, 2002; Pettit & Ruijtenberg, 2019; Schewel, 2015; Schiller & Salazar, 2013).

There are notable caveats to individual migration aspirations, that draw attention to their relational aspects. Personal motivations are influenced by family members who encourage, facilitate, hinder or straightforwardly oppose the migration of others. Immediate and extended family members influence prospective migrants’ decision to leave, and aspiring migrants pursue goals other than their own that pertain to concerns and mutual obligations in larger social networks (Fleischer, 2007; Gaibazzi, 2012a). Ethnographic studies also provide examples of persons who aspire to migrate in order to facilitate others to stay put (Hannaford, 2017). Furthermore, authority figures in extended families occasionally select who should migrate on families’ behalf (Heidbrink, 2019), without this necessarily entailing that decisions are forced. Adolescents’ drive for migration tends to be underestimated (Thorsen, 2010) or hidden by parental agendas, especially in transnational families that migrate in stages (Soto, 2010). Moreover, the fact that migration aspiration may be “distributed” in broader social units occasionally blur distinctions between “voluntary” and “involuntary” migration.

## 1.4 Measuring migration aspirations

The systematic literature review covers survey-based analyses that all have a dependent variable that specifies migration aspirations. In other words, the variable is derived from a survey question that connects (a) the prospect of future migration to a (b) current or recent cognitive or emotional state. The two parts can be analytically distinguished as the *action* and the *mindset*, respectively (Carling, 2019). Examples of questions include the following: *Have you and your family seriously considered living in another country?* (Wood, Gibson, Ribeiro, & Hamsho-Diaz, 2010), *Do you intend to migrate abroad?* (van Dalen, Groenewold, & Schoorl, 2005), and *Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?* (Cai, Esipova, Oppenheimer, & Feng, 2014).

The differences between such questions can be broken down into five components, which might be explicit, implied or remain ambiguous (Carling, 2019; Carling & Mjelva, 2021):

1. The nature of the mindset (e.g. preference, intention)
2. The temporality of the mindset (e.g. during the past year, at the moment of the interview)
3. The nature of the action (e.g. migrate abroad, live in another country)
4. The temporality of the action (e.g. during the next five years, permanently)
5. Elements of conditionality (e.g. ideally, if you had the opportunity)

When we give an overview of the publications in the systematic literature review (section 2.2), we include the classification of the nature of the mindset – that is, whether the survey question that is used in the analysis measures consideration, preference, intention, or some other form of mindset regarding the prospect of migrating.

In addition to the core question that measures the respondent mindset vis-à-vis migration, many surveys contain follow-up questions about the envisioned migration (e.g. destination or duration) or about the specificity of plans or preparatory steps taken. Such additional questions fall outside the scope of this paper.

## 2 Methodology and data

### 2.1 Systematic review of survey-based research

Systematic reviews seek to “comprehensively identify, appraise, and synthesize all the relevant studies on a given topic” (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p. 19). In this case, our aim is to synthesize the survey-based literature on determinants of migration aspirations. In what follows we explain the detailed step-by-step process of how publications were identified, screened and selected for analysis.

#### 2.1.1 Identification of publications

The review covers survey-based literature on migration aspirations in order to synthesize findings on their determinants. We restrict the review to peer-reviewed journal articles in English, published since 1990. This cut-off point has limited implications given the recency of the field. In fact, only one of the 49 publications finally selected for review was published before the turn of the millennium.

The initial pool of publications for screening were assembled through a combination of expert insights and systematic search. First, 202 relevant publications were selected from the authors’ reference library of several thousand publications on migration. The references have been accumulated over two decades research on migration aspirations and have provided foundations for previous project proposals and publications. Second, 287 articles were identified through a search in the Web of Science database. The relevant literature uses a range of overlapping terms, including migration aspirations, migration intentions, potential migration, willingness to migrate, and several others (Carling, 2019; Carling & Schewel, 2018). The database search therefore required *aspiration*, *desire*, *intention*, *plan*, *potential*, or *willingness* (or other forms of these words) to occur near *migration* or *emigration* in the title or abstract. In addition, the word *survey* was included.<sup>2</sup>

#### 2.1.2 Screening and eligibility assessment

After merging records from the two sources and removing duplicates, we were left with 436 records to screen (Figure 1). The screening of abstracts resulted in the exclusion of 292 records. The remaining 146 articles were evaluated in full, and 96 were excluded. In both rounds, the following exclusion criteria were applied:

- The publication was not a peer-reviewed article, not in English, or published before 1990.
- The survey did not cover the general population of any age group, but a predefined select group (e.g. health workers, medical students, migrants). The reason for this exclusion was to keep the systematic review as general as possible.
- The sample was subdivided, and analyses were run separately for each subsample (e.g. by educational attainment). This criterion did not exclude samples that were stratified by age, country or region.<sup>3</sup>
- Migration aspirations (or an equivalent term) was not the dependent variable in any analysis.
- The data were based exclusively on household-level reporting.

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<sup>2</sup> The exact search string was TS=((aspiration\* OR desire\* OR intention\* OR plan\* OR willing\* OR potential) NEAR/2 (migrat\* OR emigrat\*)) AND survey\*.

<sup>3</sup> We treated segmentation by age differently from other types of segmentation because every sample was already confined to an age range. Since these age ranges differed, excluding articles that distinguished between age groups would therefore not add to the comparability of the analyses.

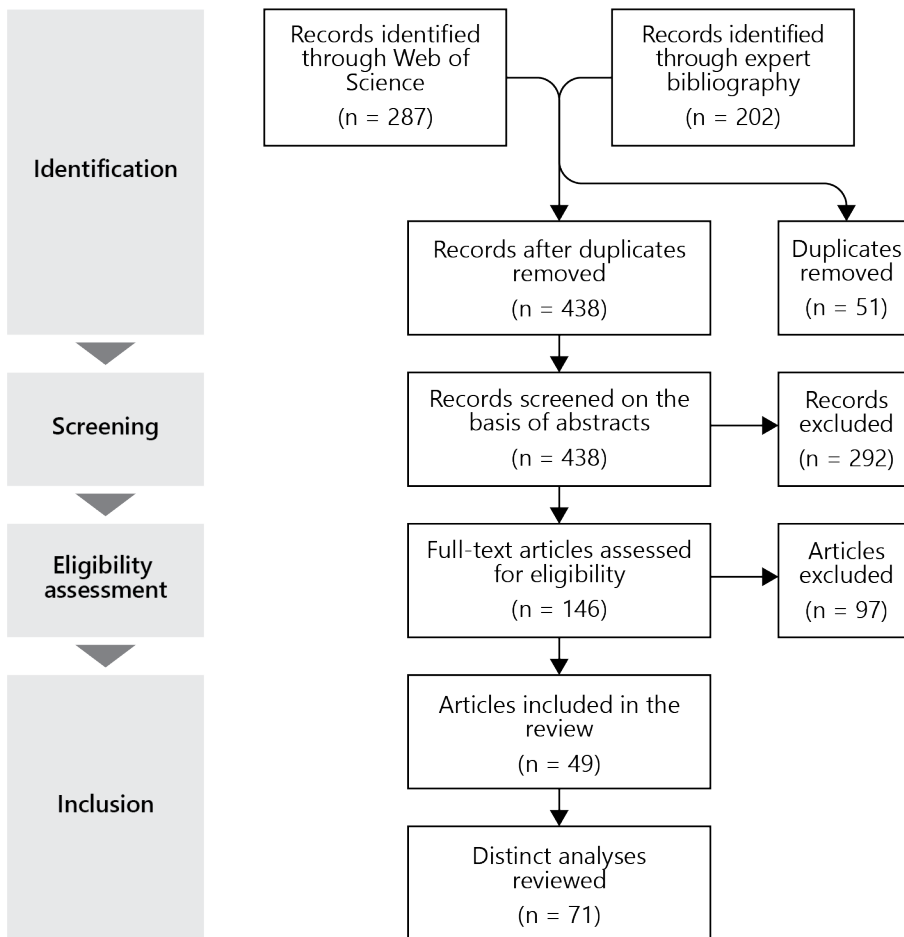


Figure 1. Systematic review flow diagram

Based on the PRISMA standard (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, & Altman, 2009).

- The data or analyses covered only internal migration.
- The data or analyses covered migration for a specific purpose or of a specific type (e.g. studying abroad, unauthorized migration) rather than migration more generally.

During the screening and eligibility assessment, records were excluded as soon as it was clear that one exclusion criterion was met. Therefore, we do not provide an overview of the multiple reasons for each exclusion.

After the screening and eligibility assessment, we were left with 49 articles that are included in the review. These were further subdivided into 72 distinct analyses, as explained below. Of the 49 articles in the final selection, 23 were retrieved from the authors' reference library, 15 were results from the Web of Science search and 12 were duplicates that came from both sources. The screening and eligibility assessments were made collectively by two members of the author team.

### 2.1.3 Separation of analyses within the same publication

Some publications include several analyses of the same dataset. We have handled such cases on the basis of these three principles:

1. If analyses are run separately on different parts of the sample, we include each one as a separate entry. This is, for instance, the case for several multi-country surveys that run separate analyses for each country. Such splitting-up of the sample does not violate our criterion of only including samples of the general population, and it does not mean representing each respondent more than once.

2. If the same data is analysed with multiple models, introducing new variables in an iterative manner, we have used the results of the most complete model, i.e. with the greatest number of covariates. This model might show a smaller number of significant effects and is not necessarily the most illuminating one. However, it represents the best approach for synthesizing the isolated effects of specific determinants across diverse analyses.
3. If the same data is analysed with different dependent variables related to migration aspirations, we select the analysis of the dependent variable that expresses the most general and unspecified form of migration aspirations. This choice reflects our theoretical focus on the first step in two-step models of migration, as discussed in the introduction.

#### 2.1.4 Recording and description of effects

In synthesizing the results, we consistently describe the various dependent variables as *migration aspirations*, as explained in section 1.1. For each analysis, we first recorded the effects of each determinant, including the operationalization, effect size and significance level. In some cases, this information was straight-forward. In other cases, such as with categorical variables or unusual operationalizations, more detail was needed. This was also the case where one determinant in our classification was covered by several closely related variables. Across the 49 articles we recorded a total of 966 effects.

Based on the summary information, we coded the effect of each determinant as either *negative*, *positive*, *not significant* or *mixed*, where the latter describes significant effects in opposite directions. For instance, socio-economic status could be measured separately with an asset index and a subjective evaluation. If one is negative and the other is not significant, we summarize the effect as negative; if one is negative and the other is positive, we summarize the effect as mixed. The same principle is used for ordered categorical variables that do not have consistent results in one direction. In the text, it is implicit that all the effects we discuss are significant.

## 2.2 Overview of publications

The articles included in the review are presented in Figure 1. The first column contains the ID, where each number represents an article. When an article contains separate analyses, as described in section 2.1.3, we distinguish between them by appending a letter to the article number (e.g. 12a, 12b, 12c). In discussing the results, we refer to them as different *analyses*. Because of such subdivisions, the 49 articles represent 71 different analyses. We use the IDs to refer to analyses that are visualized in figures, and otherwise refer to the articles with standard citations.

Some of the articles are based on survey data with several sub-samples that are analysed separately. For instance, some cover a handful of countries and run analyses on each. Others include more than a hundred countries and run separate analyses by region or income level.

Table 2 presents an overview of the 49 articles included in the systematic literature review, by publication year, sample size, region, and number of citations. The regional classification, which is used throughout this paper, is the classification used by the World Bank. The number of citations indicates the cumulative impact of each article. The most highly-cited articles (9, 24) are noted primarily for their theoretical contributions but use surveys of migration aspirations.

The figure shows that the number of eligible publications increased from 2014 onwards. Before this year, there were usually just one or two publications per year, which for the most part relied on data from Europe and Central Asia, or from Latin America and the Caribbean. From 2014 onwards, several articles have used proprietary data from the Gallup World Poll. In total, seven of the fifty articles use a version of this dataset.

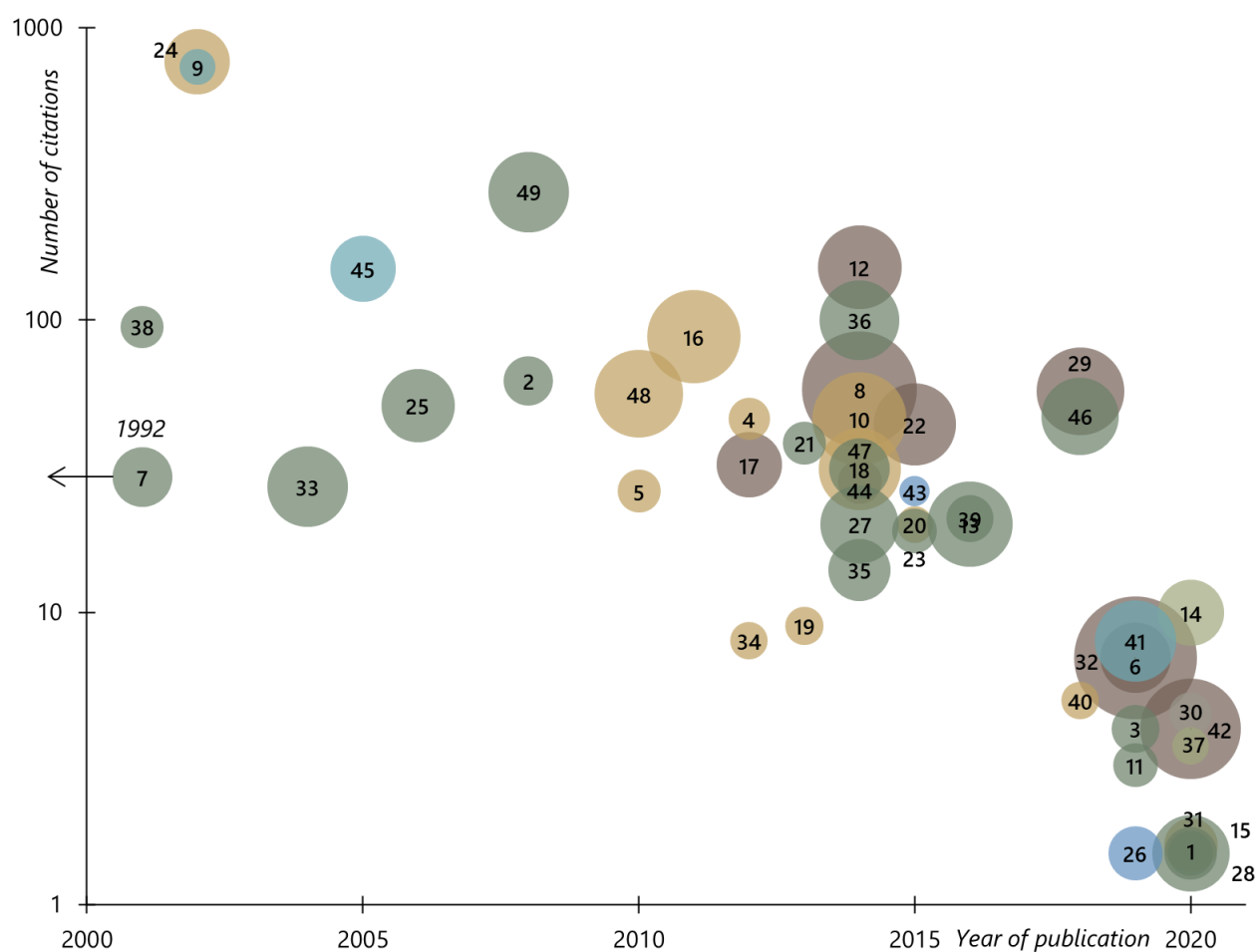


Figure 2. Articles included in the systematic literature review

Numbers refer to article IDs (see Table 2 for references). Citation counts are from Google Scholar at the end of 2020.

Table 2 Publications included in the systematic literature review

ID	Citation	Specification of subsample (in articles with multiple analyses)	Region <sup>a</sup>	Number of Countries	Sample size <sup>b</sup>	Data collection period <sup>c</sup>	Key concept in dependent variable <sup>d</sup>
1	Agadjanian et al. 2008	—	ECS	1	2 000	2011	Intention
2	Agadjanian 2020	—	ECS	1	1 500	2005	Intention
3	Bastianon 2019	—	ECS	2	1 300	2010-2013	Preference
4	Becerra et al. 2010 <sup>e</sup>	—	LCN	1	720	2009	Preference
5	Becerra 2012 <sup>e</sup>	—	LCN	1	830	2009	Preference
6	Berlinschi and Harutyunyan 2019 <sup>f</sup>	—	MR	34	11 000	2010	Intention
7a	Brym 1992 <sup>cai</sup>	Czechoslovakia	ECS	1	1 000	1991	Preference
7b	Brym 1992	Hungary	ECS	1	1 000	1991	Preference
7c	Brym 1992	Lithuania	ECS	1	510	1991	Preference
7d	Brym 1992	Poland	ECS	1	950	1991	Preference
7e	Brym 1992	Russia	ECS	1	810	1991	Preference

ID	Citation	Specification of subsample (in articles with multiple analyses)	Region <sup>a</sup>	Number of Countries	Sample size <sup>b</sup>	Data collection period <sup>c</sup>	Key concept in dependent variable <sup>d</sup>
8	Cai et al. 2014 <sup>g</sup>	–	MR	154	420 000	2007-2012	Preference
9	Carling 2002	–	SSF	1	400	2000	Preference
10	Chindarkar 2014 <sup>h</sup>	–	LCN	18	80 000	2004-2007	Consideration
11	Crisan et al. 2019	–	ECS	1	910	2018	Intentions
12a	Dustmann and Okatenko 2014 <sup>g</sup>	Asia	MR	13	7 400	2005-2006	Likelihood
12b	Dustmann and Okatenko 2014 <sup>g</sup>	Latin America	LCN	20	11 000	2005-2006	Likelihood
12c	Dustmann and Okatenko 2014 <sup>g</sup>	Sub-Saharan Africa	SSF	25	16 000	2005-2006	Likelihood
13	Efendic 2016	–	ECS	1	40 000	2002-2010	Willingness
14	Etling et al. 2020	–	MEA	5	7 800	2016	Preference
15	Golovics in press <sup>i</sup>	–	ECS	28	20 000	2010	Likelihood
16	Graham and Markowitz 2011 <sup>h</sup>	–	LCN	18	74 000	2004-2009	Consideration
17	Groenewold et al. 2012 <sup>j</sup>	–	MR	5	7 100	1996-1998	Intention
18	Hiskey et al. 2014	–	LCN	22	30 000	2008	Intention
19	Hoffman 2013 <sup>k</sup>	–	LCN	1	510	2007	Mixed <sup>n</sup>
20	Hoffman et al. 2015 <sup>k</sup>	–	LCN	1	390	2007	Consideration
21	Ivlevs 2013	–	ECS	1	780	2005	Likelihood
22	Ivlevs 2015 <sup>f</sup>	–	MR	61	31 000	2010	Intention
23a	Ivlevs and King 2015	Kosovo Albanians	ECS	1	630	2008	Likelihood
23b	Ivlevs and King 2015	Kosovo Serbs	ECS	1	350	2008	Likelihood
24a	Kandel and Massey 2002	Primary school students	LCN	1	1 300	1995-1996	Preference
24b	Kandel and Massey 2002	Secondary school students	LCN	1	3 600	1995-1996	Preference
24c	Kandel and Massey 2002	Preparatory school students	LCN	1	2 100	1995-1996	Preference
25a	Krieger and Maître 2006 <sup>i</sup>	Turkey	ECS	1	2 000	2002	Intention
25b	Krieger and Maître 2006 <sup>i</sup>	Poland	ECS	1	2 000	2002	Intention
25c	Krieger and Maître 2006 <sup>i</sup>	Other new EU members <sup>l</sup>	ECS	9	9 000	2002	Intention
25d	Krieger and Maître 2006 <sup>i</sup>	Romania and Bulgaria	ECS	2	2 000	2002	Intention
26	Lee and Lee 2019	–	EAS	1	2 600	2017	Willingness
27	Lovo 2014 <sup>g</sup>	–	ECS	25	22 000	2008-2011	Preference
28	Maleszyk and Kędra 2020	–	ECS	1	980	2018	Consideration
29	Manchin and Orazbayev 2018 <sup>g</sup>	–	MR	150 <sup>m</sup>	49 000	2010-2013	Mixed <sup>n</sup>
30	Marrow and Klekowski von Koppenfels 2020	–	NAC	1	860	2014	Consideration
31	Méndez in press	–	LCN	1	2 300	2013	Consideration
32a	Migali and Scipioni 2019 <sup>g</sup>	High income countries	MR	50	230 000	2010-2015	Preference
32b	Migali and Scipioni 2019 <sup>g</sup>	Middle income countries	MR	80	430 000	2010-2015	Preference
32c	Migali and Scipioni 2019 <sup>g</sup>	Low Income countries	MR	25	100 000	2010-2015	Preference
33a	Mintchev et al. 2004	2001	ECS	1	25 000	2001-2003	Likelihood
33b	Mintchev et al. 2004	2003	ECS	1	1 000	2001-2003	Likelihood
34	Nieri et al. 2012	–	LCN	1	460	2007	Preference



ID	Citation	Specification of subsample (in articles with multiple analyses)	Region <sup>a</sup>	Number of Countries	Sample size <sup>b</sup>	Data collection period <sup>c</sup>	Key concept in dependent variable <sup>d</sup>
35	Nowotny 2014	–	ECS	3	5 300	2010	Preference
36	Otrachshenko and Popova 2014 <sup>i</sup>	–	ECS	27	24 000	2008	Intention
37	Ozaltin et al. 2020	–	MEA	1	440	2015	Intention
38	Papapanagos and Sanfey 2001	–	ECS	18	780	1992	Likelihood
39a	Roman and Vasilescu 2016	Ages 20-29	ECS	1	800	2014	Intention
39b	Roman and Vasilescu 2016	Ages 15-19	ECS	1	440	2014	Intention
40	Roth and Hartnett 2018	–	LCN	1	450	2016	Intention
41	Sadiddin et al. 2019 <sup>g</sup>	–	SSF	32	29 000	2014	Preference
42	Smith and Floro 2020 <sup>g</sup>	–	MR	94	140 000	2014-2015	Preference
43	Tabor et al. 2015	–	EAS	1	210	2012-2013	Mixed <sup>n</sup>
44	Timmerman et al. 2014	–	MR	1	910	2010-2011	Preference
45a	van Dalen et al. 2005 <sup>j</sup>	Ghana	SSF	1	1 600	1996-1998	Intention
45b	van Dalen et al. 2005 <sup>j</sup>	Morocco	MEA	1	560	1996-1998	Intention
45c	van Dalen et al. 2005 <sup>j</sup>	Senegal	SSF	1	2 300	1996-1998	Intention
45d	van Dalen et al. 2005 <sup>j</sup>	Egypt	MEA	1	2 900	1996-1998	Intention
46	Williams et al. 2018	–	ECS	9	20 000	2015-2016	Intention
47	Williams and Baláž 2014	–	ECS	1	4 500	2011	Intention
48	Wood et al. 2010 <sup>h</sup>	–	LCN	17	49 000	2002-2004	Consideration
49b	Zaiceva and Zimmermann 2008 <sup>i</sup>	New EU members 2004 (EU10)	ECS	10	4 700	2002	Intention
49c	Zaiceva and Zimmermann 2008 <sup>i</sup>	New EU members 2004 (EU10)	ECS	15	8 100	2005	Intention
49d	Zaiceva and Zimmermann 2008 <sup>i</sup>	Pre-2004 EU members (EU15)	ECS	15	8 600	200	Intention
49a	Zaiceva and Zimmermann 2008 <sup>i</sup>	Pre-2004 EU members (EU15)	ECS	10	5 000	2005	Intention

*Notes to column headers:* (a) World Bank country classification by region. EAS: East Asia and Pacific; ECS: Europe and Central Asia; LCN: Latin America and the Caribbean; MEA: Middle East and North Africa; NAC: North America; SSF: Sub-Saharan Africa; MR: multi-regional, covering two or more of the above-mentioned regions (No analyses were confined to South Asia). (b) Rounded to two significant digits. (c) First and last year of collection of data used in the analysis, not necessarily data for intervening years. (d) Classification under the theoretical framework presented in Carling (2019), based on analysis of survey items rather than words used in the publication. See text for details.

*Data sources:* In most cases, each survey is used in only one article. Notes indicate survey data that is used in two or more articles, sometimes with different time spans or subsamples. (e) Migration Intentions among Mexican Adolescents. (f) Life in Transition Survey. (g) Gallup World Poll. (h) Latinobarómetro. (i) Eurobarometer. (j) Multicountry Migration Study. (k) Mexican High School Students Survey.

*Notes to specific analyses:* (l) Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovakia, and Slovenia (m) Specified only as “more than” 150 countries. (n) Survey item combines consideration and planning

## 2.3 Limitations in comparability

The criteria for inclusion of articles reflected a wish to compare results and approach general statements about the effects of various determinants. Still, there are important limitations in the comparability. We first address these limitations and then turn to the approach we have developed for the synthesis.

### 2.3.1 Specification of the dependent variable

In section 1.2 we accounted for the umbrella term *migration aspirations* and variations in how it is conceptualized and measured. There is a well-documented gradient in the *incidence* of positive responses as questions go from general desires to shorter-term intentions and preparatory actions (Carling, 2013; Laczko, Tjaden, & Auer, 2017). Where the dependent variable lies on this spectrum could affect the results. For instance, it might be that educational attainment has a positive effect on specific plans to migrate, but not on the general desire to do so. Such variation in the specification of dependent variable limits the direct comparability of results. In the overview of publications in a later section, we identify the broad type of dependent variable, using Carling's (2019) analytical classification. However, there are almost as many question formulations as there are surveys, and they differ along several dimensions.

### 2.3.2 The range of variables used in the analysis

An assumption of statistical analysis is that all relevant variables that are likely to affect the dependent variable are included. If some relevant variables are excluded, an effect we find may actually be caused by a third variable (i.e. we observe a spurious relationship). If all relevant variables are included, the results (coefficients) should not change if we add variables that are unrelated to the dependent variable to the. In practice, both the number and selection of variables is a matter of judgement. Moreover, many analyses use survey data that may have been collected primarily for other purposes and do not contain all the variables that should ideally have been included. In sum, even when the dependent variable is identical across analyses, the effect of an unambiguous independent variable such as age or gender may vary due to the other variables in the respective analyses not being the same.

### 2.3.3 The type of multivariate regression model

All the analyses in the review use some form of multiple regression, but different types of models. Most use logistic or probit models, while some use ordinary least squares (OLS). A few analyses apply multinomial models with more than two outcomes, such as staying, migrating domestically and migrating internationally. The mathematical and conceptual differences between the models mean that the coefficients are not immediately comparable.

### 2.3.4 The nature of the surveyed population

Although the analyses we have included all cover what we call the "general population" (i.e. not predetermined subgroups), the populations still vary in ways that affect the comparability of the analyses.

First, some surveys only cover youth or young adults, while others include all individuals above a certain age. We address these differences when we discuss the effects of age itself on migration aspirations (section 3.1.1). However, it is also likely that the effect of other variables could differ across age groups, and hence be different in surveys that cover different age ranges.

Second, the survey samples differ not only in size, but also in heterogeneity. Some analyses cover a single town or city, while at the other extreme, there are analyses that pool more than a hundred countries across different world regions. Many determinants of migration aspirations are likely to have context-specific effects that fade out in large heterogeneous samples while they reflect particular contexts in surveys with small and homogenous samples.

Third, the mean value of the dependent variable differs enormously. In some surveys, fewer than 1 per cent of respondents express migration aspirations, while in others more than a third do so. This variation partly reflects research design differences, including the formulation of questions and the size and heterogeneity of the samples. When migration aspirations range from being a very rare to a very common phenomenon, the effects of determinants can be challenging to compare.

The limitations in comparability that we have outlined in this section are not surprising for a review of studies on elusive social mechanisms. Still, there is such a large body of similar survey-based research that systematic synthesis and comparison can create a valuable frame of reference for the field. The limitations in comparability inform *how* we synthesize results, which we elaborate on in a later section.

## 2.4 Supplementary review of qualitative research

The systematic review of survey-based literature on determinants of the formation of migration aspirations and of conversion into actual migration, is complemented by a reading of research based on qualitative techniques and methodologies. The qualitative literature has not been subjected to a systematic review on a par with the quantitative, but has fed into the analysis of the survey based-literature. The literature was gathered from the authors' reference libraries and from additional online searches. The aim of this complementary qualitative reading is to provide interpretations of results found in the systematic review, in relation to

1. the overall understanding of processes behind the formation of migration aspirations and how obstacles to migration are overcome, and
2. interpretation of findings on independent variables, in order to make better sense of the formation of migration aspirations *in context* and over time. The latter relates, for instance, to the role of education, labour market participation, place-specific inequalities, and other selected variables in particular contexts.

Furthermore we rely on insights from qualitative literature to reflect on topics and interconnections that are *not* covered or explored in survey-based research, and in pointing out how the issues interrogated with respect to migration aspirations tend to differ between geographical areas.

By *qualitative literature and research* we refer to research based on ethnographic methods and qualitative techniques like interviews and focus group discussions. It also includes methodologies employed in psychological research, some of which rely on in-field experiments (Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016). As the literature review relates to aspirations, we focus on experience-based empirical material, and consequently exclude research on human movement based on archaeological or forensic evidence (which otherwise is part of US "four field" anthropology). Natural science research has also been excluded. As for the ethnographic literature, we have concentrated on works that document and discuss interlocutors' migration aspiration prior to travel, rather than post-migration reflections on aspirations (the latter a topic which comes to the fore in studies of onward migration). We have made this choice in order to minimize selection effects of aspirations among successful migrants, thus missing out on aspirations among persons who end up never migrating. Secondly, it is likely that accounts of aspirations in hindsight are affected by post-migration experiences, thus not making them directly comparable with pre-migration thoughts.

## 3 Determinants of migration aspirations

Synthesizing results requires analytical judgements and leads to new questions as well as insights. Not only are there limits to the comparability of results, as described above, but influences on migration aspirations could be contradictory and inconclusive and defy generalization. For instance, a single determinant may work differently due to context-specific social mechanisms. In presenting the results, therefore, we aim to strike a balance between identifying dominant, overall effects and being attentive to diversity across analyses. For this purpose, we have developed new forms of visualizations and synthesize results in a stratified way, depending on the number and comparability of the underlying analyses.

- *Visualization of effect sizes and significance levels:* In a few cases, we find it justifiable to directly compare effect sizes and significance levels across analyses. We do this only for relatively unequivocal binary determinants, such as gender.
- *Visualization of significant effects by direction:* In many cases, effects can be classified by direction, even if the sizes of effects are not comparable. This gives a three-fold separation into significant positive effects, significant negative effects, and non-significant results. For some determinants, there is a fourth group of mixed effects. These are analyses where the determinant is found to have significant effects in both directions, e.g. a curvilinear relationship.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In technical terms, mixed effects can be evident when the determinant is operationalized as a categorical variable or if it is additionally included in squared form. In most cases, the analyses assume a linear effect.

- *Narrative synthesis*: In the case of determinants where the results are too few or disparate in substance or measurement to be summarized visually, we provide a brief narrative synthesis.

Table 3 lists the determinants we have identified and that we discuss over the following pages. They are grouped in five thematic domains plus a residual category. Some determinants (or clusters of determinants) are relatively unambiguous measures, such as *age* or *homeownership*. Others are made up of thematically related determinants, such as *employment status and types*, and *violence and insecurity*, which typically include various measures and operationalizations. The identification and clustering of determinants reflect patterns in the incidence and consistency of independent variables in the data as well as analytical decisions. For instance, we have not grouped determinants by objective versus subjective measures of socio-economic status, since the distinction is often blurred and depends on the exact formulation of survey items. Such variation is instead addressed under each heading.

*Table 3. Determinants covered in the systematic literature review, with number of articles and analyses*

Domain	Determinant	Number of articles	Number of analyses
Demographic and family-related factors	Age	49	70
	Gender	47	69
	Marital status	31	43
	Parenthood and children	15	21
	Household size	8	12
	Family relations	4	4
	Urban or rural residence	27	42
Socio-economic factors	Socio-economic status	27	35
	Homeownership	7	12
	Employment status	20	27
	Income	17	23
	Other aspects of employment or activity	22	36
	Parental education	5	8
Other individual-level factors	Educational attainment	40	58
	Social identities	11	12
	Health status	3	3
	Subjective well-being	9	11
	Willingness to take risks	3	3
	Personality traits	4	4
	Internet access and use	4	5
Country and community of origin	Country- or community-level development	7	7
	Governance	5	7
	Public services	3	5
	Corruption	6	7
	Violence and insecurity	8	10
	Social attachment and participation	12	16
	Norms and values	5	8
	Change over time	11	19

Domain	Determinant	Number of articles	Number of analyses
Migration-related factors	Migration history	19	26
	Migration networks	26	34
	Remittances	4	5
	Perception of destinations	6	9
Other determinants	Other determinants	16	19

### 3.1 Demographic and family-related factors

This section covers the influence of demographic and family-related variables on migration aspirations. Most of these variables were used frequently, in some cases in nearly every analysis. Table 4 lists these determinants, specifies which analyses include them and briefly summarize their effect. In what follows we discuss each of these factors in turn.

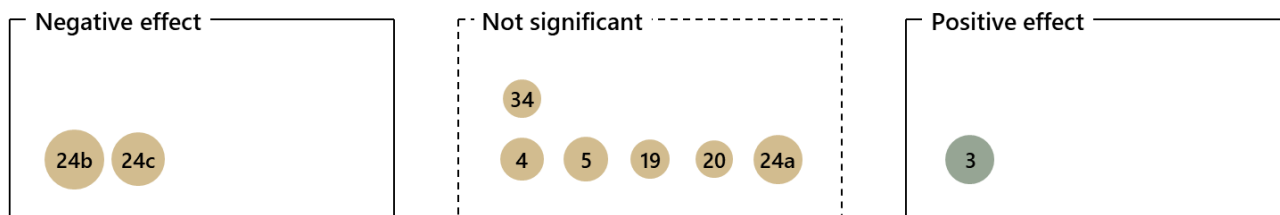
*Table 4 Influence of demographic and family related factors on migration aspirations*

Determinants	Specification	Analyses	Results
Age		All except 39b	Overwhelmingly negative
Gender		All except 22 and 37	Mainly positive (male vs. female)
Marital status	Married or cohabiting vs. other situations, possibly differentiated from each other	1; 2; 6; 8; 10; 11; 14; 15; 16; 17; 21; 22; 23a; 23b; 25a; 25b; 25c; 25d; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 32a; 32b; 32c; 33a; 33b; 35; 36; 37; 41; 42; 43; 44; 45a; 45b; 45c; 45d; 46; 49a; 49b; 49d	Mainly negative (married or cohabiting, vs. any other status)
Parenthood and children	Being a parent, possibly differentiated by ages, number and custody of children	2; 6; 15; 21; 23a; 23b; 27; 29; 30; 32a; 32b; 32c; 35; 36; 41; 42; 44; 49a; 49b; 49c; 49d	Divergent
Household size	Number of persons in the household, possibly differentiated by adults and children	3; 8; 23a; 23b; 26; 31; 41; 42; 49a; 49b; 49c; 49d	Slightly positive
Family relations	Quality of relations between family members	5; 19; 20; 34	Slightly positive
Urban or rural residence	Urban or rural environment of residence, possibly differentiated by town or city size	1; 2; 6; 7a; 7b; 7c; 7d; 7e; 8; 11; 13; 14; 15; 16; 18; 21; 22; 23a; 23b; 24a; 24b; 24c; 25a; 25b; 25c; 25d; 26; 29; 33a; 33b; 36; 38; 39a; 39b; 41; 42; 46; 48; 49a; 49b; 49c; 49d	Mainly positive (urban vs. rural)

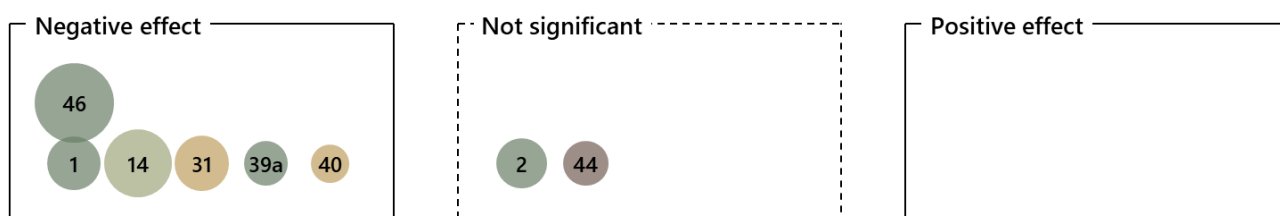
#### 3.1.1 Age

Young adults are generally known to be the most mobile age group, and might be presumed to have the highest incidence of migration aspirations. All but one of the reviewed analyses include age, measured either numerically or categorically. Since the age range of the samples differ, we have used a three-fold classification to distinguish between the effect of age in different age groups.

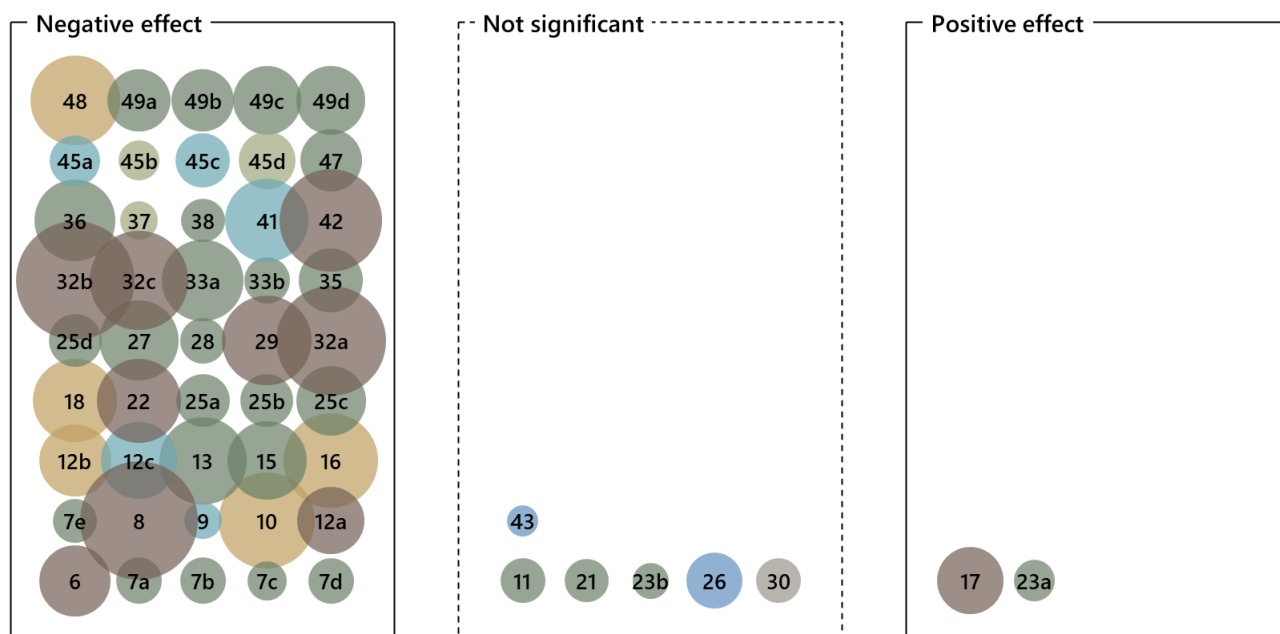
Panel A. Survey population: youth



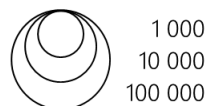
Panel B. Survey population: young adults



Panel C. Survey population: adults



Sample size



Region



Figure 3. Effects of age on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

The analyses are grouped on the basis of the top of the sample's age range, as follows: *youth* (upper bound <25 years), *young adults* (upper bound 25–39 years), and *adults* (upper bound ≥40 years). The minimum age of the target population varied across these categories. It was as low as 9 years for one survey of adolescents and ranged from 12 to 18 among surveys classified as surveying the adult population. Publications that did not report the exact age range were allocated to one of the three categories based on available information. A summary of effects for each of the three groups is displayed in Figure 3.



Particularly the analyses of adults and young adults show a consistent pattern indicating that younger individuals are more likely to possess aspirations for international moves, with few inconclusive or conflicting results. The effect of age on migration aspirations among youth is less certain, with two negative, one positive and six insignificant results, as displayed in Figure 3.

It is a striking pattern in the studies included in this review that, although age is a well-covered determinant, it is usually used as a control variable, and not as a variable of analytic interest in and of itself. Few quantitative studies discuss the theoretical implications of the effect of age on migration aspirations.

We reflect further on age as an influence on migration aspirations in section 3.3.2. Biological age is differently socially and culturally constituted across societies, and we point out that wishes and problems relating to the transition from childhood to adulthood is a key concern in ethnographic and qualitative studies of migration aspirations.

### 3.1.2 Gender

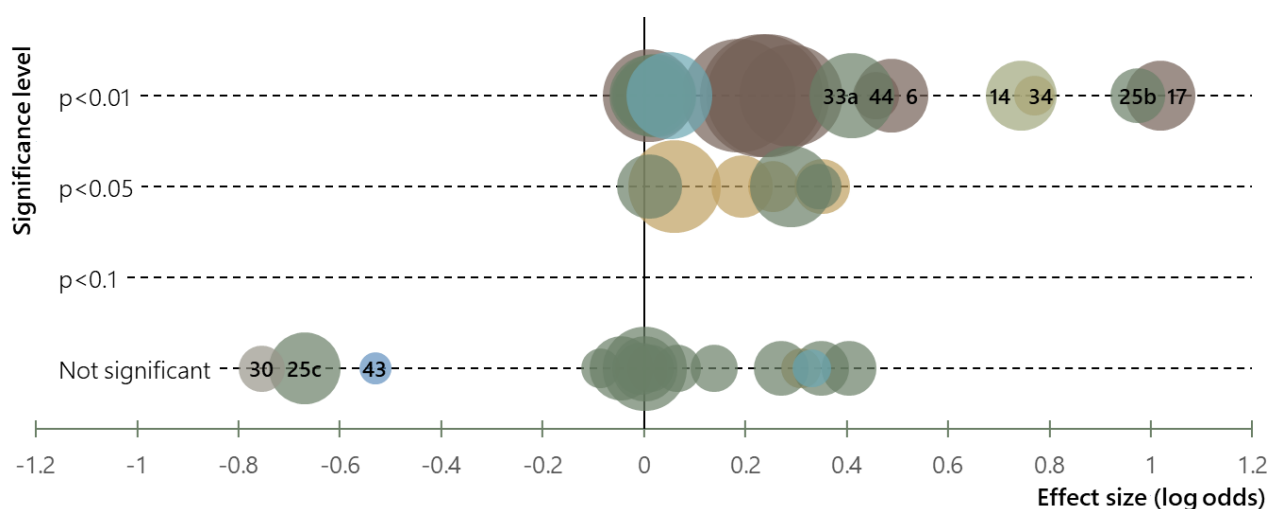
Overall, the survey-based literature shows that men are most likely to possess migration aspirations. This pattern is evident in Figure 4.<sup>5</sup> One analysis, with data from South Korea (26) stands out in contrast to the overall pattern of a male dominance among aspiring migrants. The tendency for migration aspirations to be more widespread among men can partly be explained by gender norms that favour men's income-earning work away from the home (Smith & Floro, 2020). In many West African settings, women carry the load of childcare and housework and men the responsibility for providing for the household. Much ethnographic attention has been devoted to men who aim to migrate to provide for their families through remittances (Hannaford, 2017) and to procure the economic resources necessary for marriage, without which their transition to manhood is inhibited (Vigh, 2009). Similarly, Kandel and Massey (2002, p. 984) describe Mexican migration to the U.S. as an "important rite of passage for young men" .

Gender norms vary greatly across the globe and within regions, and analyses of global figures of gendered migration aspirations should be done with care. For instance, Thorsen (2010) recounts examples from rural Burkina Faso, where girls' migration too – and their imagined migration – are considered by many as integral to transitions to womanhood. In particular contexts, migration may serve as an escape from domestic violence and social restrictions for women (Nieri et al., 2012; Smith & Floro, 2020). In an ethnographic study, Belloni (2019) demonstrates how migration aspirations convey young women's conscious attempts to delay adulthood in Eritrea – as women hope to escape both compulsory military service and a rising tendency of earlier marriage to avoid national conscription. In this setting, migration aspirations convey aspirations for alternative forms of adult womanhood, e.g. in terms of studying and helping family economically. Furthermore, in several Asian societies, migration aspirations reflect increasing participation in tertiary education that enables a "stretching" of the youth phase ahead of marriage for both men and women (Robertson et al., 2018, pp. 614-615). Moreover, migration aspirations convey gender norms and embody emergent forms of gendered adulthood.

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<sup>5</sup> To make the effect sizes as comparable as possible (see section 2.3 for a discussion of limitations to comparability), panel A displays the effect size and significance level of analyses that use logistic regression and panel B the direction of the results from other types of regression analyses.

Panel A. Size of effects found in logistic regression analyses



Panel B. Direction of effects found in other types of regression analyses

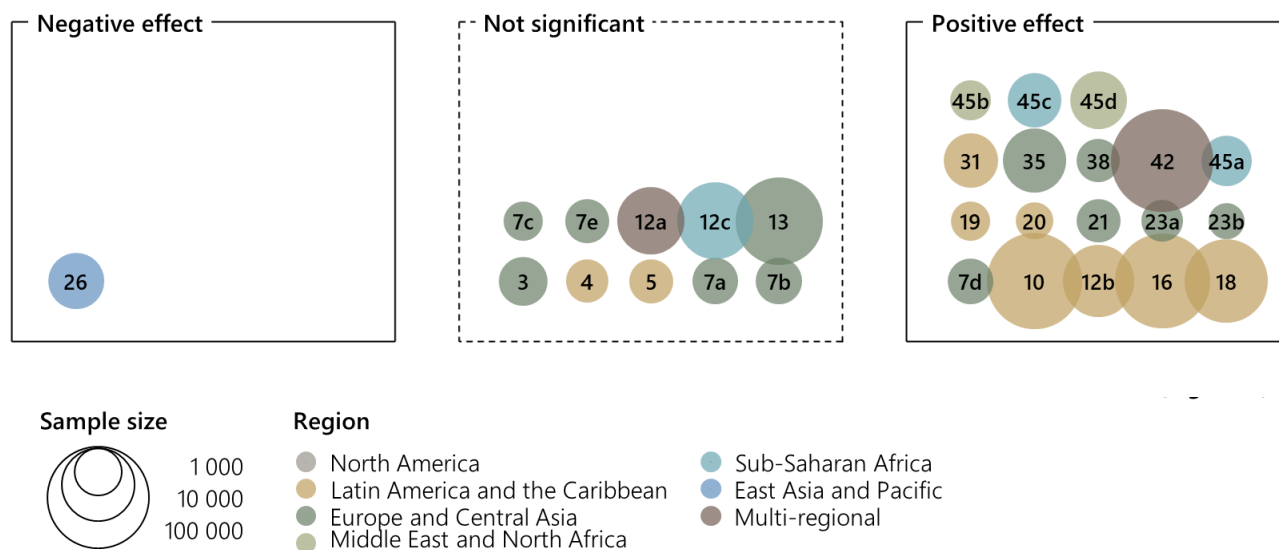


Figure 4. Effects of male gender on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Only selected results are labelled in panel A. Analyses may differ as to whether or not effects with  $p < 0.1$  are identified as such or reported as not significant. In some cases, log odds displayed here are converted from odds ratios in the original publication and/or inversed for consistent measurement across all analyses.

### 3.1.3 Marital status

Marriage can cause both constraints on, and opportunities for, migration. Likewise, the desires, opportunities and needs of a spouse may influence individuals' own settlement preferences, as many partners strive to stay together. Hence, if a person wants or needs to migrate, such aspirations will plausibly influence the considerations of its partner. Similarly, if a person is determined to stay in the current residence, that determination will likely limit the desires of its spouse to migrate. On the same note, aspirations for temporary migration, in terms of a shorter work or study period abroad, could be more present among single individuals than for those in partnerships. Yet, if job opportunities are better abroad, married individuals could have incentives to migrate temporarily in order to send remittances back home. These reflections would suggest marital status to have a mixed effect on migration aspirations. As the implications of marriage vary across societies, we should also expect some cultural differences.

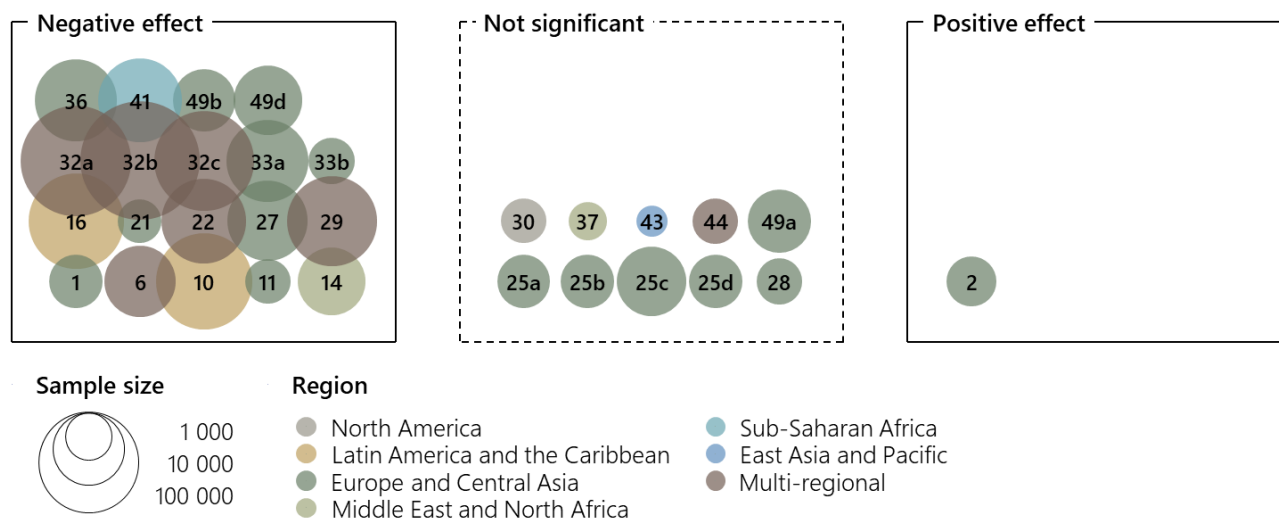


Figure 5. Effects of being married or in cohabitation on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

About two thirds of the quantitative analyses include marital status, but the operationalization of the determinant varied. 30 of the analyses compared being married or in a partnership (i.e. living with a partner) to being single, divorced and/or widowed. These analyses show an overwhelmingly negative relation between marriage and migration aspirations, as displayed in Figure 5. Except for analysis 2 (Agadjanian, Nedoluzhko, & Kumskov, 2008), which is based on a subnational survey of young adults in Kyrgyzstan, all significant results indicate that single individuals are most likely to aspire to migrate. Interestingly, analysis 2 included a survey question asking respondents if they had a personal network partner, exemplified as a close or trusted person, who intends to migrate (Agadjanian et al., 2008). Although this person could be a parent or a friend, it could also be a spouse. The results showed that those who had such a partner who intended to migrate were significantly more likely to have migration aspirations themselves, compared to the other group. Inclusion of these results may have affected the overall findings on the effect of marital status.

An additional 13 analyses were not directly comparable with the binary partnership variables. These analyses mainly used additional categories of marital status, such as divorced, separated, and widowed, and some analyses distinguished between cohabitation and marriage. The results from these analyses largely confirm that single individuals are most likely to have migration aspirations. By the same token, Golovics (in press), using survey results from Eurobarometer 2008, observed that married individuals were less likely to have migration aspirations than those who were single or divorced, while there was no certain difference between married and those widowed or living with a partner. Here too we find an exception to the general pattern: Groenewold et al. (2012) compare people who were never married to those who have ever been married and find that the latter group have stronger migration aspirations. Nevertheless, overall, the influence of marital status on migration aspirations is not as mixed as expected, nor does it seem to vary between the major world regions.

One methodological issue related to analysing these results deserves particular mention. When asked to identify as either single or married, individuals in committed relationships, but who are not married, will have to decide where they belong. Most of these respondents might identify as single since marriage has legal and/or formalistic connotations, meaning that their response to the survey item does not reflect their relationship status or partner commitments. Only a few of the abovementioned analyses included “domestic partner” as a separate, or as part of, an answer category. If being in a committed relationship is what affects migration aspirations, and not a person’s legal status as married or unmarried, then some variation is likely to be undetected by the analyses. Still, the bigger picture presented by our review shows that married individuals are more attached to their homes than other persons.

Marital status figures prominently in ethnographic migration literature, for instance in explorations of unmarried women's hopes to make their dreams of migration real by marrying emigrant men (Elliot, 2016a). A plethora of marriage-related forms of migration – e.g. arranged or semi-arranged marriages between second generation immigrants and prospective spouses abroad, marriage of affection *or* convenience to partners abroad and mail-order bride arrangements (Brettell, 2017) – may convey an unexplored relevance of marital status among aspiring migrants. Unfortunately, few studies zoom in on such aspirations prior to migration, though there are exceptions, especially with respect to migration aspirations among men who hope to finance marriage costs by getting work abroad (Hannaford, 2017; Vigh, 2009). As we discuss in section 3.4.7, norms and values that prescribe specific spouses or marriage forms may also affect migration aspirations.

### 3.1.4 Parenthood and children

A key differentiating factor among young adults – the age group where migration aspirations are most common – is whether or not they have children. Parenting responsibilities are highly likely to affect considerations of migration, but they could do so in very different ways. On the one hand, children could dampen migration aspirations if going abroad would mean leaving them behind. On the other hand, providing for children or giving them a better future is a common motivation for migration. For instance, migration could be used as a strategy for supporting children in the form of remittances that pay for education and health care, or with an aim of raising and educating children abroad (Agadjanian et al., 2008; Carling, Menjivar, & Schmalzbauer, 2012).

There was a binary parenthood variable in 16 analyses, and its effects were distributed quite evenly, with six negative, four positive and six non-significant effects. These results are illustrated in Figure 6. The results do not immediately have any clear pattern. The largest negative and positive effects of parenthood on migration aspirations are all found in post-communist countries in Europe and Central Asia: Kyrgyzstan (2), Eastern Europe (35) and Latvia (21). In all these cases individual labour migration coexists with settlement-oriented family migration (Agadjanian et al., 2008; Apsite, Lundholm, & Stjernström, 2012; Hazans, 2019).

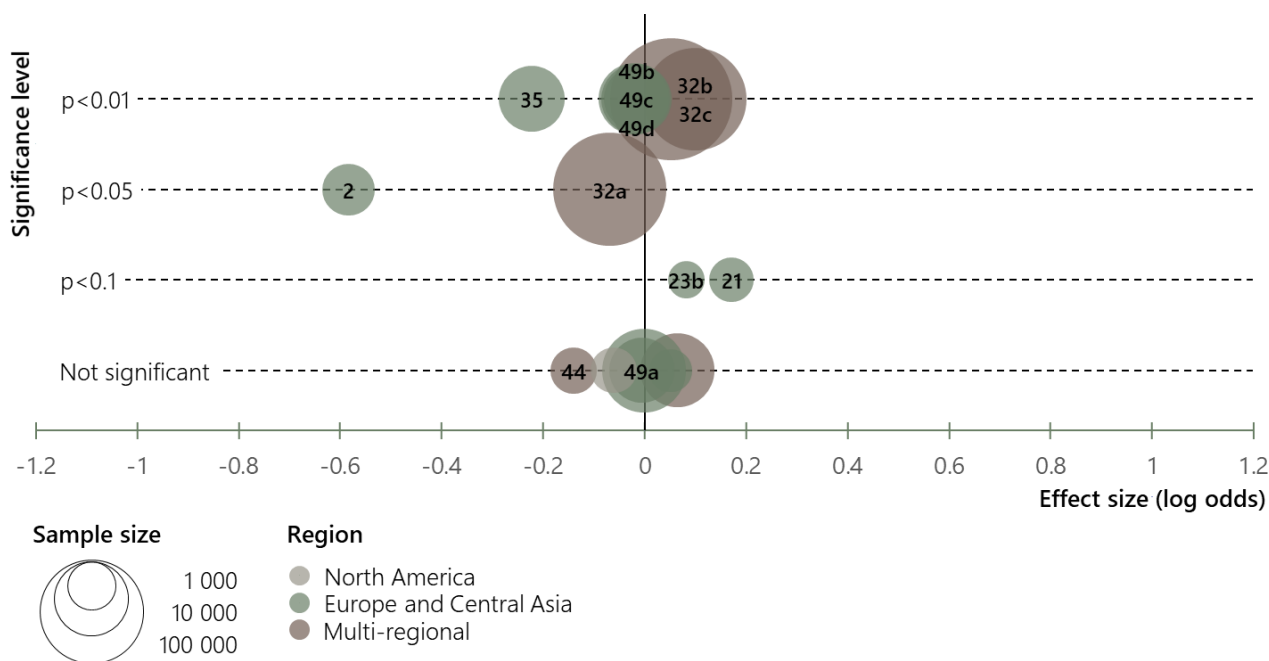


Figure 6. Effects of parenthood on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Analyses may differ as to whether or not effects with  $p < 0.1$  are identified as such or reported as not significant. In some cases, log odds displayed here are converted from odds ratios in the original publication and/or inverted for consistent measurement across all analyses. Articles 21, 23, and 35 use probit models which limits their comparability with the other effects.

One striking pattern in Figure 6 is the differences between 32a, b and c, which use Gallup World Poll data from three broad income groups. Parenthood lowers migration aspirations in high-income countries (32a) and raises migration aspirations in middle-income (32b) and low-income countries (32c). The effect is strongest in the latter group, where being a parent raises the odds of having migration aspirations by about 10 per cent. This suggests that, as expected, the breadwinner motivation for migration is stronger in poorer countries.

In addition to the sixteen analyses with a binary parenthood variable, five analyses measured the effect of the *number* of children. However, they differed as to whether these were children in the household or the respondent's biological children and did not show any overall pattern of effects.

The meaning of parenthood depends on its relationship with marital status, which varies greatly between cultural contexts. All the analyses that covered parenthood also included marital status. Therefore, parenthood status was only compared between respondents of the same marital category. More fine-grained analyses would need to consider different combinations of marital status and parenthood.

### 3.1.5 Household size

Related to the influences of children and parenthood, household size could shape migration aspirations. First, household size could be indicative of the number of children in a family, which would imply a similar effect of this determinant as what was found under section 3.1.4. Although some households consist of people originating from outside of the nuclear family, large households mean many to provide for, and could thus have many of the same implications for migration aspirations as having children, even for non-parents. Under financial constraints, sending one or several members of the household abroad could assure income for the household through remittances. Consequently, individuals living in large households could have a higher propensity of aspiring to migrate than those with fewer household fellows.

At the same time, large households potentially entail better access to labour force. Anthropological research from rural areas where crops are labour intensive and labour force is a critical resource (as much as land), has shown that smaller households are reluctant to release as many members into migration as larger households (Gaibazzi, 2012b). If this applies to migration aspirations too, it would imply that household size influences aspirations negatively in such contexts, and thus potentially account for urban-rural and other variations.

In the review, 12 analyses included household or family size as a determinant of migration aspirations, measured as the number of individuals (or adults) living in the same household as the respondent. The results from these studies are shown in Figure 7. Household size influences aspirations positively, but with some contextual variation. Interestingly, all analyses from Europe and Central Asia showed insignificant results, while all the analyses using Gallup World Poll (8, 41, 42) as well as one study with data from South Korea (26) found evidence that individuals in larger households were more likely to have migration aspirations than those living with fewer people. Overall, the results demonstrate that household size has a positive effect on migration aspirations when significant.

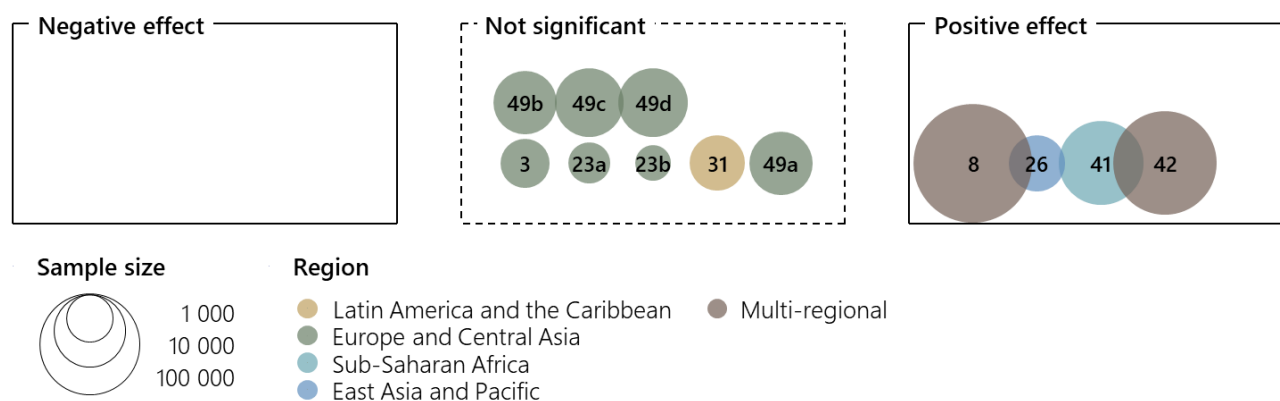


Figure 7. Effects of household size on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

One analysis from Uruguay used a slightly different operationalization than the other papers and compared migration aspirations of respondents living in one parent households to those in two parent households (article 31). The results from this analysis are inconclusive. Additional research is needed to conclude on the relation between household structure and the dependent variable.

### 3.1.6 Family relations

Apart from the demographics of family and household structure, the *quality* of interpersonal relations in the family can be decisive for migration aspirations. Four articles in this review included questions specifically about respondents' relations with their parents. In three cases the results were not significant, but in the fourth case (Hoffman, Marsiglia, & Ayers, 2015) poorer relations with parents were associated with a higher likelihood of migration aspirations. All four surveys had samples of youth – respondents in their teens or early twenties – which suggests that relations with parents might have been particularly important. However, ethnographic studies show that also among adults, migration can provide distance from a spouse without the stigma of divorce, or a means for escaping the control of in-laws or siblings (Chant, 1998; Constable, 2007; Tacoli, 1999). A survey of Brazilians, Moroccans and Ukrainians in Europe found that one in seven reported “family problems” as one of their motivations for migrating.<sup>6</sup> It is possible, therefore, that the quality of family relationships is a determinant of migration aspirations that would be beneficial to include more often in surveys. When this is not covered, part of the effect could be captured by subjective well-being (see 3.3.4).

### 3.1.7 Urban or rural residence

The systematic review shows that, if urban or rural residence makes a difference for migration aspirations, the effect tends to be that living in urban areas increases migration aspirations, compared to living in rural areas. Of the 42 analyses that have considered area of residence, half show that urban residence has a positive effect on migration aspirations, while most of the remaining analyses are inconclusive (Figure 8). Some analyses use a binary urban–rural distinction while others have a scale that includes differently sized towns and cities. The results thus show the effect of living in larger settlements, sometimes in a more continuous sense than the rural–urban dichotomy.

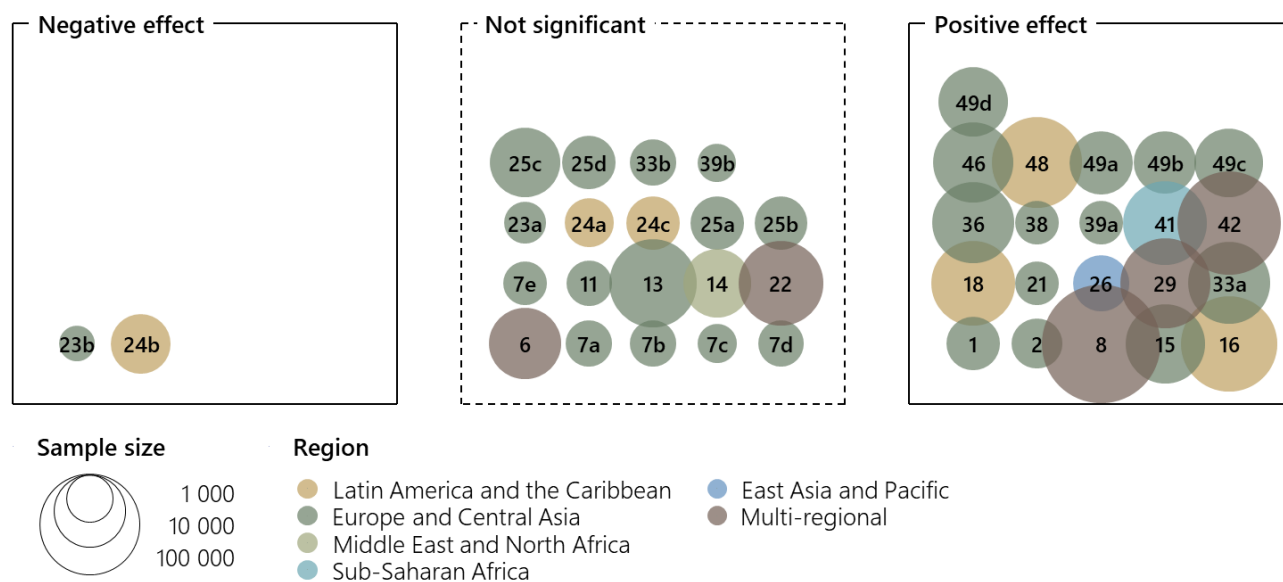


Figure 8. Effects of urban residence on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

<sup>6</sup> Unpublished data from the project *Theorizing the Evolution of European Migration Systems*. See Carling and Jolivet (2016).



Rural residents could have lower migration aspirations because rural livelihoods are connected with agriculture, land, livestock and locally-based petty production and investments, making rural populations less mobile. Moreover, stepwise migration from rural areas to towns and cities and thereafter abroad is one common migratory path that connects internal mobility to international migration (King & Skeldon, 2010). Interactions with internal migration make it potentially important to control for respondents' place of birth and not only for previous international migration experience (see section 3.5.1)

Two analyses, one in Kosovo, and one in Mexico, find that rural residents have a higher likelihood of having migration aspirations. Such exceptions are more common in areas of high out-migration over time. Past rural-urban migrants may then already have emigrated and established transnational ties with residents in their rural places of origin, thereby lowering the threshold for migration aspirations.

### 3.2 Socio-economic factors

Migration aspirations are affected by a range of factors that reflect different aspects of a socio-economic inequality. They concern, for instance, living conditions, property, and livelihoods. The identification of specific determinants, presented in Table 5, is not straight-forward, given the diversity of related measures. Our approach reflects the frequency of similar variables in the analyses as well as conceptual judgements. Parental education is included in this section because of its use as an indicator of class background.

*Table 5 Influence of socio-economic factors on migration aspirations*

Determinants	Specification	Analyses	Results
Socio-economic status	Current living conditions as reflected in asset ownership, food security, or evaluation of personal or household financial situation	2; 3; 4; 5; 10; 12a; 12b; 12c; 15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 22; 26; 29; 30; 31; 34; 35; 36; 41; 42; 44; 45a; 45b; 45c; 45d; 46; 48; 49a; 49b; 49c; 49d	Mainly negative
Homeownership	Whether or not the respondent's house is owned by one or more of the residents	11; 15; 25a; 25b; 25c; 25d; 26; 30; 35; 49a; 49b; 49d	Slightly negative
Employment status	Being employed versus not employed, possibly differentiated as unemployed, in education, or not economically active	1; 2; 6; 9; 10; 13; 14; 17; 21; 22; 23a; 23b; 26; 27; 30; 32a; 32b; 32c; 33a; 33b; 36; 42; 43; 45a; 45b; 45c; 45d	Mainly negative (employed vs. unemployed)
Income	Individual income, total household income, or per capita household income	1; 6; 8; 11; 13; 21; 22; 23a; 23b; 25a; 25b; 25c; 25d; 26; 27; 29; 30; 32a; 32b; 32c; 37; 38; 41	Divergent
Other aspects of employment and economic activities	Employment type (including self-employment and entrepreneurship), employment fraction, security, sector or skill level	9; 11; 14; 15; 16; 21; 24a; 24b; 24c; 25a; 25b; 25c; 25d; 28; 29; 32a; 32b; 32c; 35; 36; 37; 38; 39a; 39b; 41; 42; 43; 45a; 45b; 45c; 45d; 46; 49a; 49b; 49c; 49d	See text
Parental education	Mother's and father's completed years or levels of education	5; 24a; 24b; 24c; 34; 39a; 39b; 40	Slightly negative

### 3.2.1 Socio-economic status

The socio-economic status of individuals and their households is likely to influence international migration aspirations. In general terms, this relationship is affected by counteracting factors. On the one hand, higher socio-economic status may be associated with higher professional or material ambitions and thus inspire migration aspirations. On the other hand, it is perhaps the individuals in lower socio-economic groups who have the most to gain from leaving, or at least are motivated to leave by their experience of relative deprivation. A plausible outcome of these counteracting influences is that the relationship between socio-economic status and migration aspirations follows an inverted U – that it is low among the poorest and the wealthiest, and high in the middle groups (de Haas, 2020). Against this background, the dominant linear effect is unpredictable.

In the systematic review, 35 analyses examine the effect of socio-economic status, measured either at the individual or household level. The measures include asset indexes, indexes based on batteries of factual questions, perceived financial situation and contentment with personal living conditions. The results are varied, but mostly indicate that as socio-economic status rises, migration aspirations decline (Figure 9).

Five analyses find significant effects in opposite directions, which reveal interesting dynamics. In four cases (12a, 12c, 22, 48) migration aspirations are found to rise with measures based on factual questions and decline with measures of subjective evaluation or satisfaction. The three articles that find a positive effect (10, 16, 20) all use primarily factual measures.

Overall, it appears that migration aspirations consistently decline with positive subjective assessments of economic well-being, while the relationship with factual measures of wealth is more diverse. The importance of subjectively experienced socio-economic status is also reflected in qualitative research. In different parts of the world, experiences of stagnation or disconnection from progress are conveyed in prospective emigrants' hopes of migration (Hage, 2009; Mandin, 2020; Pettit & Ruijtenberg, 2019; Vigh, 2009).

The articles included in the review differ in terms of whether or not their socio-economic measures capture relative deprivation. For instance, if asset indexes are constructed at the level of countries or world regions, a household's placement might not say much about their position in relation to relevant reference groups. Some of the subjective measures are implicitly relative, since notions such as sufficiency or satisfaction reflect expectations that are likely to be informed by the lives of others. Literature in development economics (Czaika & de Haas, 2012; Stark & Taylor, 1991) as well as in anthropology and sociology (Gaibazzi, 2012b; Roohi, 2017; Sancho, 2017) have demonstrated how migration aspirations are shaped by socio-economic status as a relational and potentially complex concept.

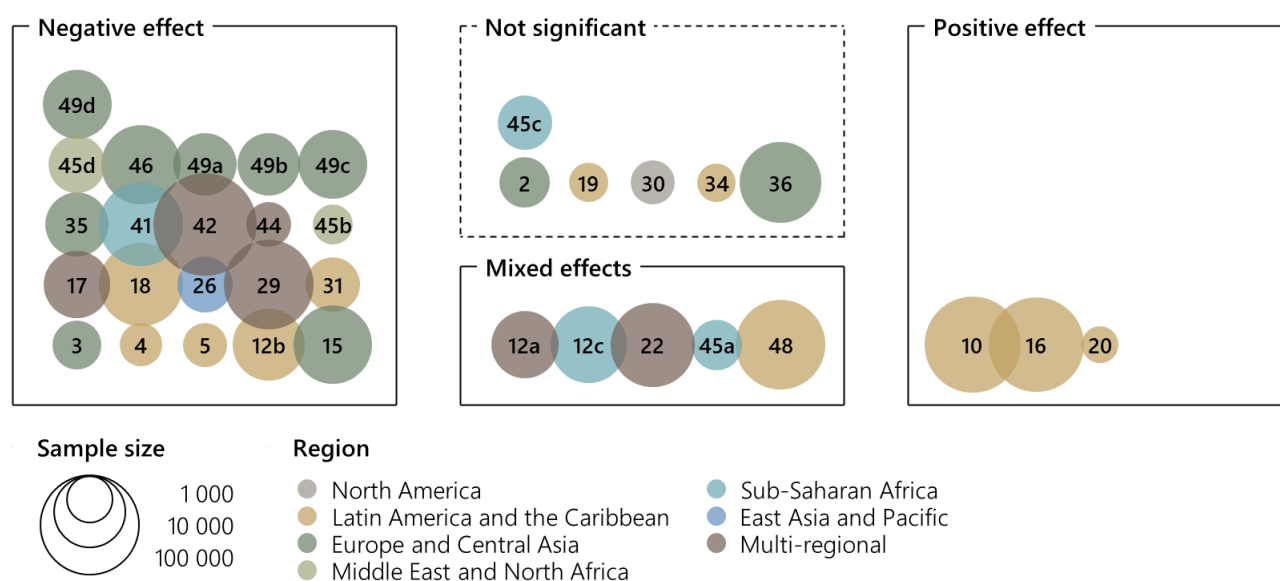


Figure 9. Effects of socio-economic status on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

Like most other determinants, socio-economic status affects migration aspirations in context-specific ways. The two articles with separate analyses across regions (12, 45) illustrate that the effects of socio-economic status differ geographically when the variables and analytical models are the same. Dustmann and Okatenko (2014) find that the relationship between wealth and migration aspirations is positive in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia and slightly negative (and not significant) in Latin America. The other multi-regional study (van Dalen et al., 2005) finds that in Ghana (45a) migration aspirations are most prevalent at the two extremes of the socio-economic scale and lower in the middle. This finding is surprising, since it is the opposite of what prevailing theory assumes (de Haas, 2020). However, it illustrates how migration aspirations can reflect diverse motivations and be associated with contrasting forms of migration. For instance, experiences of stagnation and the inability to make a decent living can generate migration aspirations among professionals (Blacklock, Ward, Heneghan, & Thompson, 2014) as well as among unskilled youth (Vigh, 2009).

A factor that is visibly absent in the systematic review, and overall under-investigated, is debt. Qualitative studies document the importance of debt for migration dynamics in various parts of the world (Heidbrink, 2019; Hoang, 2020). For many people, working abroad can be a means to repay debt. At the same time, the cost of migration itself often requires borrowing. When migration attempts fail or migrants are deported, indebtedness can therefore be a strong driver of re-migration aspirations (Heidbrink, 2019; IOM, 2020). Debt can be a determinant of migration aspirations across the socio-economic scale if socio-economic status is measured in ways that capture more durable positioning rather than short-term liquidity.

### 3.2.2 Homeownership

Homeownership could affect migration aspirations in several ways. It is often correlated with socio-economic status and could therefore be assumed to reflect broader relationships between class and migration aspirations. However, the twelve analyses that include homeownership all cover at least one other indicator of socio-economic status, such as income, relative deprivation, or employment. Therefore, the effect must at least partly be seen as the isolated effect of being a homeowner at a given level of socio-economic status.

A direct link from homeownership to migration aspirations might lie in the desire to construct a house, which is a widespread motivation for migration (Graw & Schielke, 2012). Half of the analyses do indeed find that owning a house reduces the likelihood of wanting to migrate (Figure 10). Still, four analyses are inconclusive and one, using data from Turkey, find a positive effect.

Survey respondents are typically asked about the ownership status of the house in which they live. Respondents who are not heads of households could therefore live in an owner-occupied house, but not be the homeowner. An adult son might, for instance, want to establish a home of his own and therefore express migration aspirations in the survey. This connection between household-level and individual factors can blur the effect of homeownership on migration aspirations. In analyses of the individual-level data, insights might have become clearer by considering the interaction of homeownership and headship.

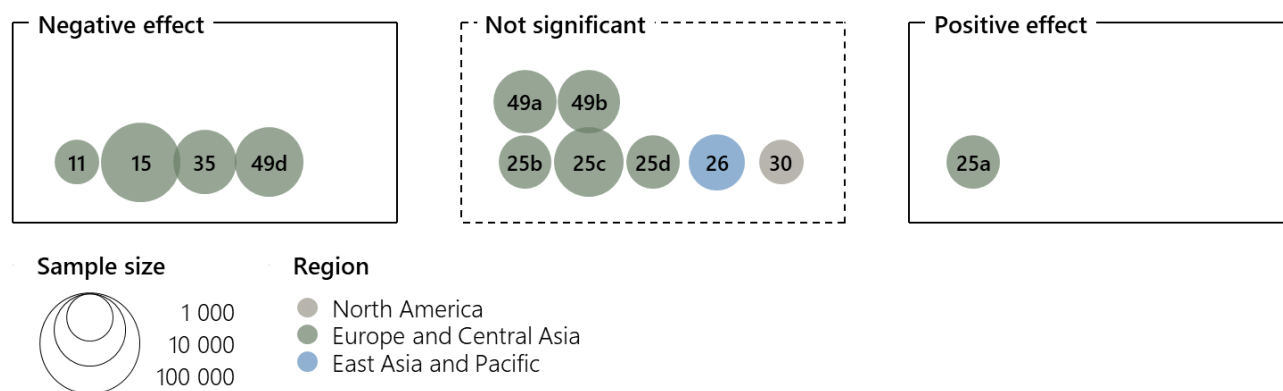


Figure 10. Effects of homeownership on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

### 3.2.3 Employment status

Unemployment can raise migration aspirations as unemployed people are more likely to pursue work abroad when they are faced with limited work opportunities at home. Beyond the systematic review, a study of irregular youth migration from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe find that unemployment is one of the most important drivers of migration desires, to the extent that the authors describe the large flows of “irregular migrants” from this region as a “coping mechanism” for high levels of unemployment (Dibeh, Fakh, & Marrouch, 2019, p. 242). In total, 27 of the reviewed analyses include employment status and 15 specifically identify the effect of being employed versus unemployed. In the remaining analyses, the employment variable include additional categories.

The effect of being employed rather than unemployed is displayed in Figure 11. As the figure shows, unemployment is generally associated with high levels of migration aspirations. An interesting exception is the four analyses from Van Dalen et al (2005), who discovered varying tendencies depending on the geographic area in focus. The results from Ghana and Egypt were uncertain, while unemployment in Morocco increased and in Senegal decreased aspirations for international moves.

In addition to the analyses that included a binary employment variable, 12 analyses could not be streamlined. These include inactivity; work for pay; and not-currently employed. Of the 12 analyses, eight are inconclusive, and with the exception of one article from Ghana, Senegal, Morocco, Egypt and Turkey (Groenewold et al., 2012), the rest of the analyses, in line with the findings above, show that being employed decreases the likelihood for migration aspirations. Perhaps expectedly, unemployment interacts with age, gender, education level, and levels of home country’s social services and have a varied influence on migration aspirations. However, being unemployed may result in inability to secure the cost of migration for potential migrants.

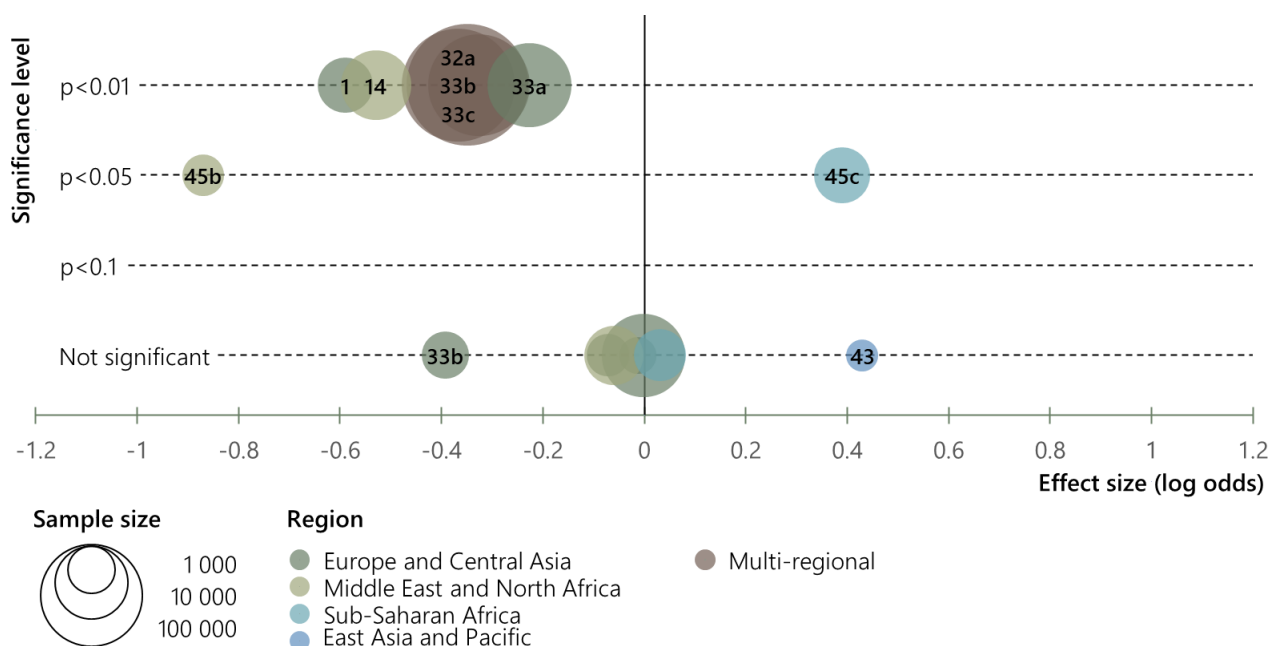


Figure 11. Effects of employment as opposed to unemployment on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Analyses may differ as to whether or not effects with  $p < 0.1$  are identified as such or reported as not significant. In some cases, log odds displayed here are converted from odds ratios in the original publication and/or inversed for consistent measurement across all analyses. Articles 23 and 45 use probit models which limits their comparability with the other effects.

### 3.2.4 Income

Although income is undoubtedly a determinant of migration aspirations, studies show the relationship to be variable and context dependent. In the systematic review, almost half of the analyses include income as a determinant of migration aspirations. Income is measured as household income, per capita household

income, placement in relative income groups (e.g. quintiles), self-reported income group, and levels of income sufficiency. The effects of income on migration aspirations appear to diverge: seven analyses show that higher income decreases migration aspirations, four show an opposite effect, while 12 analyses, mainly from Europe and Central Asia, are inconclusive (see Figure 12 for results).

Using data from the Gallup World Poll, Migali and Scipioni (2019) find that income has a negative effect on migration aspirations in high- and middle-income countries, while there is no significant relationship in low-income countries. Looking across groups of countries, however, they confirm the assumed inverse U-shaped relation between income and migration aspirations.

If migration is motivated by the wish for a higher income, current income is only one relevant factor (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019). Expected income at the destination is equally important. Since income is partly determined by unobservable factors, it could be that individuals who already earn well in the country of origin could still expect the largest income gains from migration. Such considerations make the relationship between income and migration aspirations an elusive one.

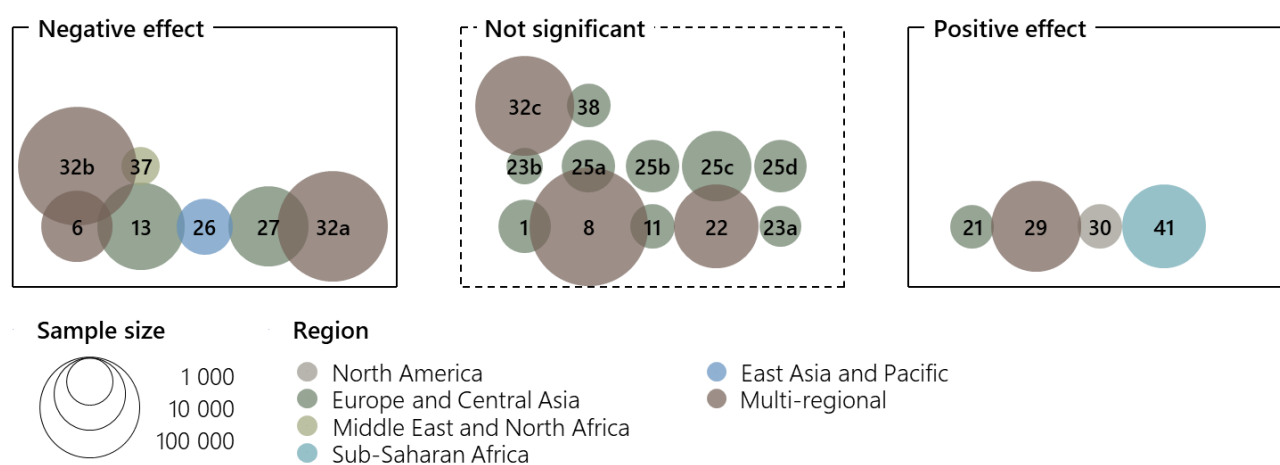


Figure 12. Effects of income on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

### 3.2.5 Other aspects of employment

Apart from employment status and income, other aspects of employment or activity can also influence migration aspirations. At a macro-economic level, unemployment ratio, availability of public sector employment, labour market situation, prospect for upward professional mobility, and job opportunities and satisfaction can all drive migration aspirations.

A variety of employment-related topics are examined in the reviewed literature: inactivity, student status, skilled, unskilled, white-collar, blue-collar, private or public sector, temporary, part-time and full-time employment, self-employment and housewife-status. All these aspects might affect migration aspirations in various ways. Yet, as the analyses differ in which aspects of employment they compare with each other, the picture is ambiguous and makes synthesizing the results of several of the topics difficult. For instance, several analyses study self-employment, which could affect aspirations through job satisfaction by stimulating feelings of prestige, respect and personal development, but also create stress, uncertainty and instability. One analysis compares self-employment to unemployment (Williams, Jephcote, Janta, & Li, 2018), others to other types of employees and workers (Otrachshenko & Popova, 2014; van Dalen et al., 2005), yet others to white-collar (Zaiceva & Zimmermann, 2008), and private sector employees (Nowotny, 2014). What stands out is that most of the survey-based literature focuses on individuals' employment status and type, without paying attention to their *satisfaction* with their job situation.

When the factor is included, job satisfaction is found to decrease the probability of possessing migration aspirations. Results from Etling, Backeberg, and Tholen (2020) show that individuals who were employed

but dissatisfied or without a contract were likely to have migration aspirations, whereas Manchin and Orazbayev (2018) observe that job satisfaction lowers the propensity of a person aspiring to move internationally. Graham and Markowitz (2011), by use of the Latinobarómetro, examine economic satisfaction more broadly, and find migration aspirations to be less frequent among people who were satisfied with their job and who considered their pecuniary situation to have improved over the past year. Quality of the working environment has been the subject of qualitative research on migration aspirations: A literature study summarising six analyses of health care workers in seven African countries shows that absence of adequate professional support and development – and desire for professional prestige and respect – are among the main motivations for migration (Blacklock et al., 2014).

Temporary employment can be a cause of uncertainty and hence dissatisfaction, which could, in turn, make people seek more stable economic activity elsewhere. Ozaltin et al. (2020) find individuals working on temporary contracts to be more likely to possess aspirations than those permanently employed. In a qualitatively based study, Mandin (2020) quotes interlocutors' experiences of job precariousness – temporary contracts and unsuccessful job application processes – as a main reason for migration to Canada among European youth of Maghrebi origin. Similarly, one might expect underemployment to increase the likelihood of possessing migration aspirations. However, two analyses in our review compared full-time and part-time work to unemployment and find that being employed in any capacity *increase* the migration aspirations of individuals (Sadiddin, Cattaneo, Cirillo, & Miller, 2019; Williams et al., 2018). Smith and Floro (2020) compared part-time to full-time workers, and observed individuals within the latter group to have the highest propensity to aspire to migrate. One explanation for these results could be that unemployment or part-time work makes migration difficult if financial constraints are high, thus reducing aspirations. Further explorations of the influences of underemployment and job satisfaction could improve our understanding of these results.

### 3.2.6 Parental education

Parental education can be a valuable indicator of unobservable socio-economic variation, especially in studies of youth and young adults, who have yet to establish occupations or income of their own, and might still be in education. Even among independent adults, parental education can be a useful complement to data on the respondent's own education and employment.

In a detailed study of the culture of Mexican migration, Kandel and Massey (2002) found that the desire to migrate to the United States was generally not affected by the parents' educational attainment. This is partly because parental education, especially the mother's education, is a predictor of the child's educational achievement, and education has many contrary effects on migration aspirations (section 3.3.1).

In this systematic review, eight analyses include parental education as a determinant of migration aspirations. Overall, parental education provides little indication of children's migration desires. Three analyses, two in Mexico and one in Romania, show a negative association between parental education and individuals' migration aspirations, while five analyses are inconclusive. Results are shown in Figure 13.

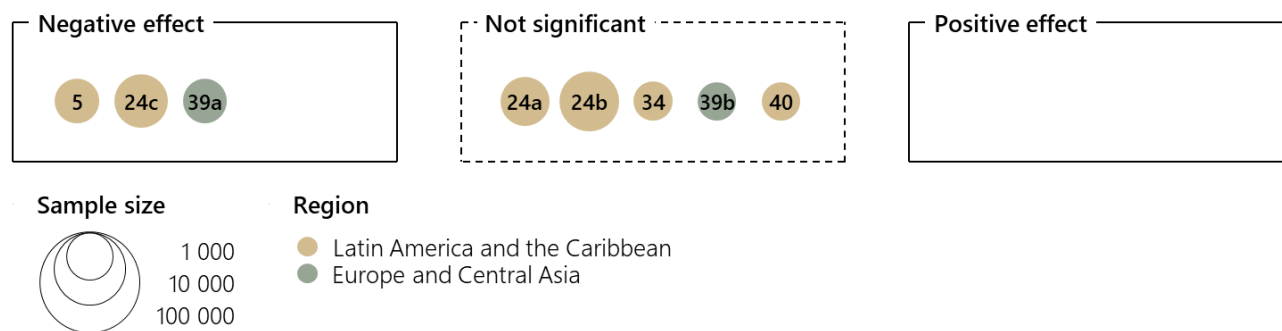


Figure 13. Effects of parental education on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.



### 3.3 Other individual-level factors

This section addresses various individual characteristics that cannot be subsumed under socio-economic factors, though several are likely to vary systematically along socio-economic lines. Table 6 presents an overview. With the exception of educational attainment, each of these determinants is covered in a relatively small number of analyses.

*Table 6 Influence of other individual-level factors on migration aspirations*

Determinants	Specification	Analyses	Results
Educational attainment	Completed years or levels of education	1; 2; 3; 6; 7a; 7b; 7c; 7d; 7e; 9; 10; 11; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17; 18; 21; 22; 23a; 23b; 25a; 25b; 25c; 25d; 26; 27; 28; 29; 30; 31; 32a; 32b; 32c; 33a; 33b; 35; 36; 37; 38; 39a; 39b; 41; 42; 43; 44; 45a; 45b; 45c; 45d; 46; 47; 48; 49a; 49b; 49c; 49d	Mainly positive
Social Identities	Belonging or ascription to ethnic, racial, religious, caste, gender, life cycle or other collective identities	1; 2; 3; 6; 13; 15; 21; 30; 33a; 33b; 37; 41	See text
Health status	Self-reported health status	22; 29; 46	Divergent
Subjective well-being	Satisfaction with life, levels of happiness, or experiences of positive and negative affect	8; 10; 16; 19; 22; 27; 32a; 32b; 32c; 36; 42	Overwhelmingly negative
Willingness to take risks	Attitudes to risk in hypothetical or experimental situations or engagement in risky behaviour	6; 40; 47	Overwhelmingly positive
Personality traits	Scores for selected personality traits, such as extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability	6; 17; 43; 46	See text
Internet access or use	Individual internet access or frequency of internet use	15; 30; 39a; 39b; 41	Overwhelmingly positive

#### 3.3.1 Educational attainment

Education could be associated with migration through several pathways. First, educated individuals “face lower institutional barriers, skill premiums may be higher abroad, and they may find it easier to learn a new language” (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019, pp. 838-839), all of which could make them more likely to possess migration aspirations because migration is viewed as more achievable. In some contexts, educational attainment can affect the acquisition of visas, where higher educated individuals have higher chances of gaining entry (van Dalen et al., 2005). Education can also lower migration aspirations, when an individual’s competence, obtained through education, is not “transferable abroad” (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019, p. 838). Ethnographic studies expose yet another twist to the education-migration nexus. Sancho (2017) describes how middle-class youth in India seek to escape a highly competitive educational culture in India by undertaking educational migration to Australia. In this case, desires to migrate are not related to the potential gain of education in Australia only, but to escape pressures of academic performance (Sancho, 2017).

A large majority of the analyses include educational attainment. The determinant is essentially measured in two ways: either numerically based on an individual’s number of years of education, or categorically based on its highest educational attainment. The results indicate a mainly positive link between high educational attainment and aspirations to migrate (Figure 14). A striking observation is that the four analyses from article 45 have divergent results associated with geographic affiliation, where educational attainment have a positive effect on aspirations in Ghana and Egypt, negative effect in Morocco, and mixed effects in Senegal.

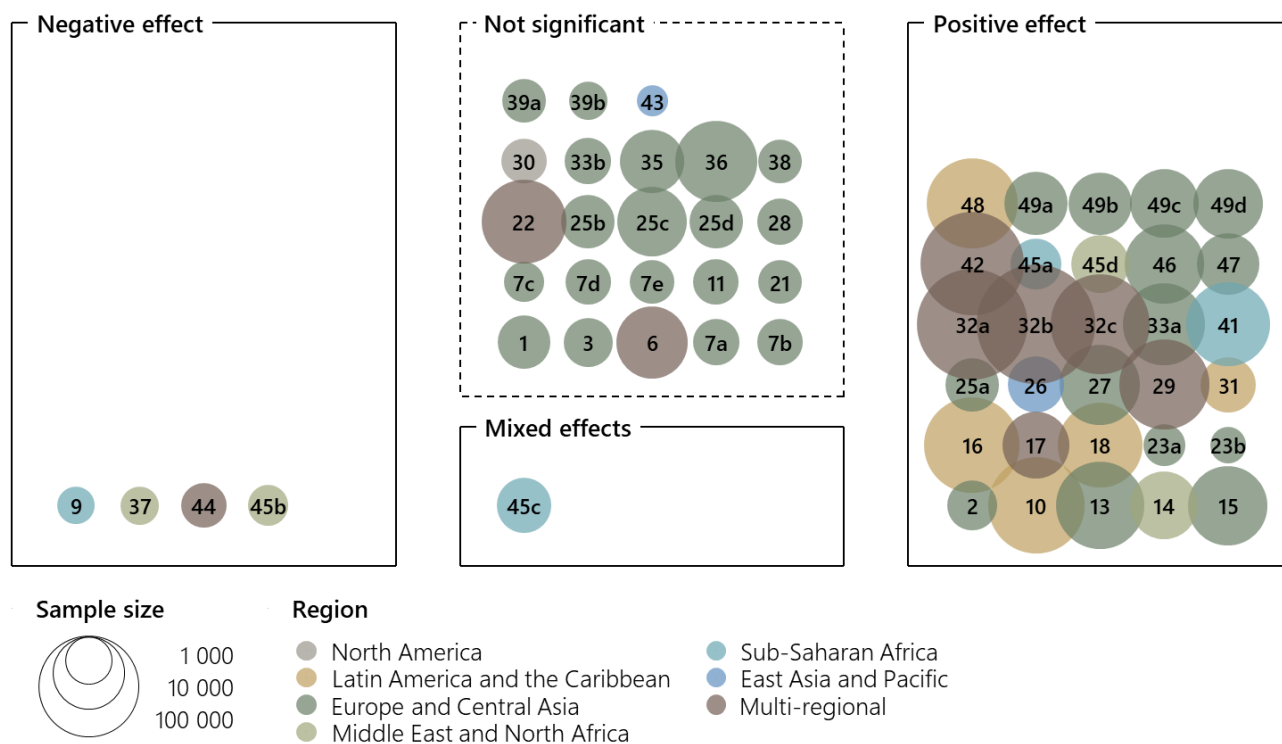


Figure 14. Effects of educational attainment on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

As pointed out by the researchers, some of this variation could be caused by differences in the distribution of educational attainment of respondents within each sample. For instance, as van Dalen et al. point out, in Senegal, “95% of the respondents only had a primary education or no formal education at all (van Dalen et al., 2005, p. 767).

Several analyses find insignificant connections between educational attainment and migration aspirations, implying that, everything else being equal, an individual’s educational level is not what tips the balance towards aspirations in these analyses. Overall, however, the results from this systematic review show a positive association between higher educational attainment and migration aspirations, but the causal relationship is ambiguous: Do individuals have migration aspirations because they are highly educated, or do they seek higher education to fulfil their aspirations to migrate? An additional link lies in the seemingly widespread aspiration for obtaining an education abroad, as “international education” has become a differentiating factor in many labour markets (Robertson et al., 2018, p. 618).

### 3.3.2 Social identities

Social identities encompass broader categories or groups that are socially, culturally and/or economically constituted, as in the case of age, gender, ethnicity, religious constructs, and ranked categories like caste and class. Belonging partly relies on self-ascription and partly on ascription from others. Some identifications are ascribed by others rather than self-ascribed, such as some cases of racialised identities and minority status, and form the basis for discrimination that stimulates aspirations to leave.

In our review, 12 analyses examined the effects of various social identities on the formation of migration aspirations. Broadly speaking, the survey-based literature covers four dimensions of social identification: Ethnicity (Agadjanian, 2020; Agadjanian et al., 2008; Bastianon, 2019; Efendic, 2016; Ivlevs, 2013; Mintchev et al., 2004); religious affiliation (Ozaltin et al., 2020); racialized identities (Marrow & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020); and minority group belonging (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019; Golovics, in press).

All the analyses that include ethnic identification found significant differences in migration aspirations along ethnic lines (Agadjanian et al., 2008; Bastianon, 2019; Ivlevs, 2013; Mintchev et al., 2004). The two analyses

from Bulgaria in Mintchev et al. (2004) (or analyses 33a and 33b) find ethnic affiliation to be of dissimilar character for aspirations of permanent migration at two points in time. An investigation of the effect of religious affiliation on migration aspirations did not render significant results (Ozaltin et al., 2020), nor did an investigation of the effects on migration aspirations of racialised categories (Marrow & Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020).

In cases when ethnic distinctions follow livelihood adaptations – for instance related to traditional or hereditary occupations, the trade in particular goods, production types or cultivation of specific crops – migration practices may have differed along ethnic lines too, over longer periods of time. Cultural expectations of travel that differ between ethnic groups, may shape aspirations for international migration, as described in an anthropological monograph from The Gambia (Gaibazzi, 2015).

Migration aspirations may also be influenced by identities related to the socio-cultural constitution of age in different contexts, and more specifically, in relation to transitions to adulthood. As we pointed out in section 3.4.1, the effect of age is seldom devoted much analytical attention in quantitative studies. However, ethnographic and qualitative studies are rich in examples of how aspirations to migrate among youth coincide with transitions to adulthood, e.g. in terms of wishes for education, work, marriage, and having children (Grabska et al., 2019; Robertson et al., 2018). Migration aspirations have been found to be integral to fulfilling or obtaining particular social identities or forms of adult personhood (Rodan & Huijssmans, 2020). Vigh describes how aspiring migrants conceptualise life in Guinea Bissau in terms of social death, and that they aspire to migrate in order to take on the roles of providers that adult manhood entails (2009, p. 106). In a study of aspiring migrants in Eritrea, Belloni found that migration aspirations conveyed the longing for new forms of womanhood (2019).

The influence of identity on migration aspirations may also take the form of aspirations for embodying cosmopolitan forms of personhood. Based on fieldwork in rural India, Aslany (2020) found that rising migration aspirations among the emerging rural middle-class male youth centred on the notion of being a global citizen more than job opportunity per se. In turn, however, ideals of global citizenship in migration aspirations were connected with aspirations for upward class mobility. A similar finding is presented, although in the urban context, by Sancho (2017) in an ethnographic study from the southern Indian State of Kerala. Sancho argues that migration aspirations among the middle-class youth are a form of class aspirations – that migration desires are “underpinned by wider desires to become integrated into the global world of an imagined transnational Indian middle class” (Sancho, 2017, p. 517). Similarly, Skrbis et al. (2014) describe mobility aspirations among young people in Queensland as *cultural* aspirations related to cosmopolitan culture and identities.

In extension, social identities in many contexts convey local, socio-economic parameters of inequality that shape aspirations and/or ability to migrate, for instance relating to differences defined in terms of caste (Roohi, 2017) and class (Sancho, 2017) in India and low (“post-slavery”) rank in West Africa (Gaibazzi, 2012b). Roohi examines the intersection of class and caste and provides an example of how “migration is seen as inevitable by members of only certain group (sic!)” (2017, p. 2766). Roohi’s analysis provides an example of the way in which ranked social identities affect migration aspirations, and also explains the socio-economic processes that have created such differences over time. Ethnic, caste and racialised distinctions may also be accompanied by discriminatory practices or stigmatisation that make social identity relevant to migration aspirations as a “push” factor. In a qualitatively based study, EU citizens of North African heritage that were interviewed, expressed feelings of being racially “stuck” and socio-economically immobile, leading to motivations and patterns of migration to Dubai (Alloul, 2020). Mandin (2020) describes similar experiences among Muslim youth in Europe who aspire for lives in Canada, whereas Bal (2014) describes gender-based harassment as an ingredient in expressions of “yearning for faraway places” among female students in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In the survey-based literature, an analysis from Bosnia and Herzegovina asks whether respondents have had bad or unpleasant experiences caused by ethnic background over the year presiding the survey interview, but finds the association with migration aspirations to be inconclusive (Efendic, 2016), as does another survey on the subjective expectation of improvement of the conditions of the respondent’s ethnic group (Agadjanian, 2020). In some surveys (see

analysis 39), the absence of discrimination is used as a measure of social cohesion or attachment, which in turn is negatively linked with migration aspirations (see section 3.4.6).

Focusing on minority status in general terms is a different survey approach to the potential effects of discrimination. Two analyses examine whether belonging to a minority group influences migration aspirations (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019; Golovics, 2020). Based on Eurobarometer data, Golovics (2020) finds minority group affiliation to raise migration aspirations, whereas findings in the other study, which measures minority status in Eastern Europe and Post-Soviet states according to language competence, are inconclusive (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019). Generalised concepts of minority status may hold promise for the comparative analysis of migration aspirations, but there are obvious methodological challenges related to definition (e.g. demographic versus political minorities) and context (the existence of a clear majority group, number of minor groups, etc).

Social identities form a perfect illustration of the potential challenges involved in determining whether the relation between migration aspirations and independent variables is causal or characterised by mutual influence. In this particular case, for instance, migration aspirations may shape cosmopolitan identities as well as the other way around. This is not an atypical example: Studies from across West Africa provide ample documentation of kin-based groups changing ethnic affiliation following migration, as ethnic affiliations are fluid and associated with livelihood and rank (Hultin & Sommerfelt, 2020, pp. 263-264). Even so, it is valuable to include social identities in analyses, as systematic covariations give an indication of the social distribution of aspirations at group level. Moreover, social identities are processual – not static – and they concern community-level characteristics beyond individual variation. Longitudinal surveys can be a valuable tool to detangle complexities of the covariation between social identities and migration aspirations.

### 3.3.3 Health status

Health status could potentially be important for migration aspirations, though poor health might either encourage staying or encourage moving, depending on the context. Most articles that have examined connections between health status and migration aspirations have focused on residential preferences and domestic migration among the elderly, or specifically on return migration, and are therefore not included in the systematic literature review. Among the articles that are included, only three cover self-reported health. Two find that better health is associated with higher migration aspirations (Ivlevs, 2015; Williams et al., 2018) and one find the opposite effect (Manchin & Orazbayev, 2018).

### 3.3.4 Subjective well-being

Subjective well-being is expected to influence migration aspirations, in the sense that migration can act as a gateway to a better life. Overall, this review indicates that individuals who have higher levels of satisfaction or happiness are less likely to have migration aspirations. Subjective-well-being is increasingly

Of the analyses in the systematic review, 11 cover the relationship between subjective well-being and migration aspirations. Various variables are used: level of life satisfaction; experiential wellbeing; levels of happiness; and recent presence of suicidal thoughts. Results are shown in Figure 15. Except for one study that shows a mixed effect, the analyses provide strong evidence that people with higher subjective well-being and life satisfaction are less likely to have aspirations to migrate. Interestingly, one study in this review, which covers 35 European and Central Asian countries and was conducted by Ivlevs (2015), show a U-shaped relationship. Using a life-satisfaction scale to measure subjective well-being, the study shows that migration aspirations are more common among “the most and the least life-satisfied people” (Ivlevs, 2015, p. 337).

However, subjective well-being is also highly linked to social, economic and political factors. Subjective well-being as a driver of migration aspirations is most prominent among people who suffer less from objective ills such as poverty and violence. A study of data from Latin America and the Caribbean found that “life satisfaction” had greater effect on migration calculations of those with higher education and speculated that they might have “higher aspirations or [be more] dissatisfied with the opportunities that their home country offers” (Chindarkar, 2014, p. 173). The study also showed, however, that “life satisfaction”, particularly amongst the highly educated, was dependent on such external factors as confidence in their home country’s public institutions, availability of healthcare and prospects for the economy (Chindarkar, 2014).

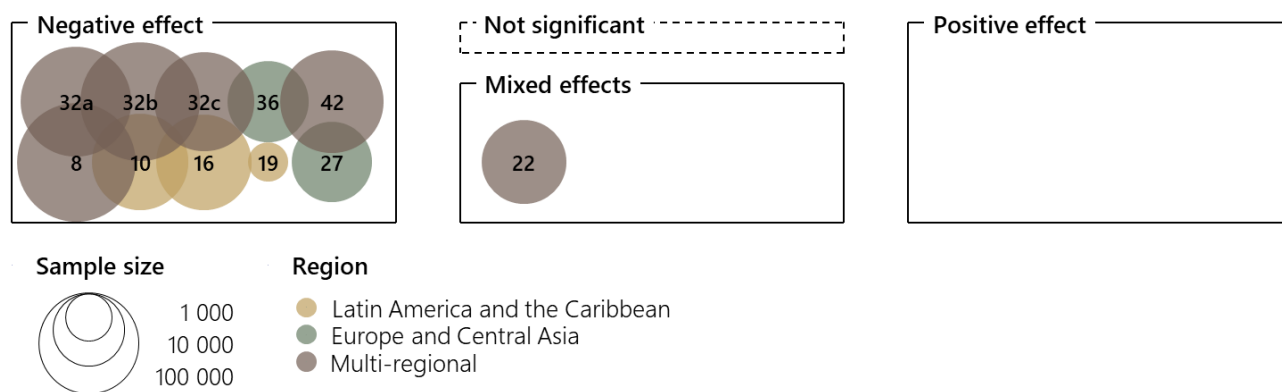


Figure 15. Effects of subjective well-being on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

### 3.3.5 Willingness to take risk

Migration is typically a big financial and emotional investment with uncertain outcomes. The appeal of migration might therefore be affected by individuals' more general attitude to risk. Three articles in the review find that respondents who are generally more willing to take risks, are also more likely to have migration aspirations (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019; Williams & Baláž, 2014; Williams et al., 2018). In addition, Roth and Hartnett (2018) found that, in El Salvador, migration aspirations were positively affected by engaging in risky behaviour. However, since the risky behaviours included involvement with gangs, a wish to leave could reflect the real individual risks of staying, as much as general risk-aversiveness.

In the context of contemporary migration, it is important to differentiate between fundamentally different types of risks. In addition to the risk of life at the destination falling short of expectations, there are often physical dangers associated with migration itself (Laczko, Singleton, & Black, 2017). Among the articles reviewed, Williams and Baláž (2014) assess the influence of perceived travel hazards, but they did so with a sample of United Kingdom residents who are rarely exposed to truly high-risk migration. Beyond the articles in the review, Mbaye (2014) has examined attitudes towards the risk of unauthorized boat migration from Senegal to the Canary Islands. More than a third of the respondents were willing to migrate in this way, and, on average, this group assessed the risk of dying in the attempt to be as high as 25% – more than five times the actual fatality rate. In an ethnographic study of the same migration context, Hernández-Carretero and Carling (2012) found that potential migrants acknowledged the generally high risk, but also found reasons why they, personally, would make it.

Overall, it appears that risk assessments and risk attitudes could be important in explaining individual-level differences in migration aspirations, and that existing research rarely uses this potential (Williams & Baláž, 2014). However, the challenges of meaningful measurement in surveys are considerable. For instance, Williams and Baláž (2014) used several risk measures of which some were found to affect migration aspirations and others not.

### 3.3.6 Personality traits

Beyond subjective well-being and willingness to take risk, migration aspirations could be influenced by psychological factors related to personality (Shuttleworth et al., in press; Tabor et al., 2015; Koikkalainen & Kyle, 2016). We discuss these jointly, but they do not represent a single dimension. Within research in personality, the so-called Big Five is an established set of traits that, in combination, are widely used to differentiate personality profiles (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann Jr, 2003). The five dimensions are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience. Only one study in the review, Tabor et al. (2015) takes such a holistic approach to personality and migration aspirations, using big-five measures. With a sample from New Zealand – a country with high levels of out-migration – they found that migration aspirations were lowered by agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. Not surprisingly, openness to experience had the opposite effect. The trait with the

strongest influence on migration aspirations, however, was *persistence*, which was measured in addition to the Big Five. For every step on a seven-point scale of persistence, the odds of having migration aspirations roughly double. Other articles measure traits that are related to perseverance, with varying outcomes. Groenewold et al. (2012) found that *self-efficacy* increases migration aspirations, but Williams et al. (2018) surprisingly found *perseverance* to have a negative effect.

### 3.3.7 Internet access or use

It is well known that migration of every kind and from every region depends crucially on information. Individuals make migration decisions based on their assessment of a range of factors, such as the chance of improving their economic, legal or social situation in the destination country, the cost and difficulty of moving and establishing themselves, etc. Some of this information is gathered from impersonal sources such as newspapers, some from personal networks abroad and at home. In every case, individuals with good access to computers and smartphones may be in a better position to plan and execute decisions. However, access to information does not always increase aspirations to move. As Timmerman et al. (2014) make clear in their comparison of two regions in Turkey, negative information about a destination country or region may in fact diminish the desire to migrate. Yet, sustained computer and internet access, as well as the ability to access and process social and economic information (often in foreign languages) are associated with higher education and family wealth, which in turn are positively associated with migration aspirations in many regions. It is probably also true that recent generations, which have grown up with the internet, are more likely to view their local conditions in a global context, and therefore to think internationally about how to maximise their life opportunities. For those who wish to migrate, computers and phones are essential for research, planning and making the necessary personal and professional connections.

Only a few of the analyses in our overview study whether and how internet access and use shapes migration aspirations (Figure 16). Three of these (15, 39a, and 39b) inquired about the amount of time respondents spend online, while the remaining two focused specifically on internet access. Apart from one analysis with inconclusive results from the United States (30), the models that included this determinant indicate a positive effect on migration aspirations. The direction and causality of this relationship is not clear, however, as aspiring migrants might spend more time online than others *because* they are researching or planning an international move. Moreover, individuals without internet access might strive to acquire it in order to make necessary pre-migration preparations. While the reviewed analyses suggest a positive effect of internet use and access, more fine-grained analyses with details on why and how individuals use the internet could enhance our knowledge about this determinant.

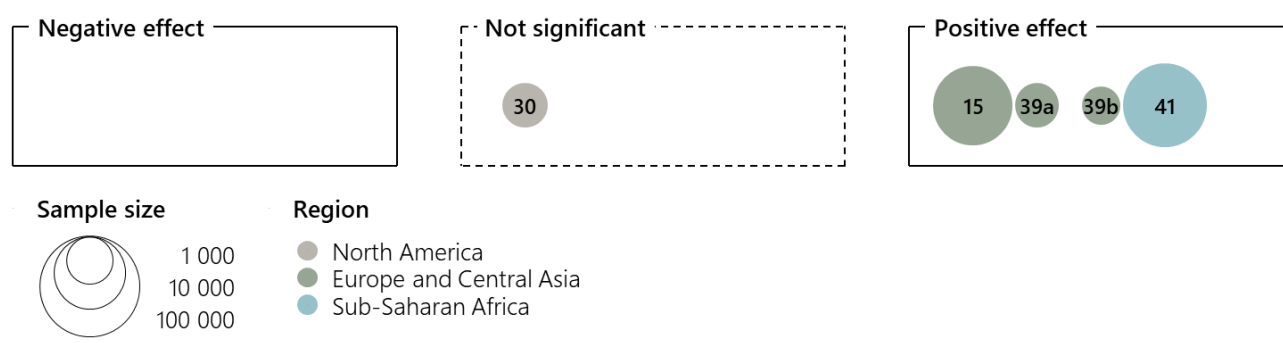


Figure 16. Effects of internet access or use on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

## 3.4 Country and community of origin

Migration aspirations are formed not only by factors directly related to individuals, but also by characteristics of their local or national environment. In this section we review a number of such factors, listed in Table 7. When analyses cover multiple countries or communities, many determinants could



potentially be measured by aggregate statistical data, such as per capita income or homicide rates. With a few exceptions, however, the data is based on survey questions about individual perceptions or experience. In the following, we explain how each determinant has been measured, and discuss in greater detail how and why it affects migration aspirations.

*Table 7 Influence of characteristics of country and community of origin on migration aspirations*

Determinants	Specification	Analyses	Results
Country- or community-level development	Perceived situation of the country or community, especially in terms of economic conditions and employment opportunities.	16; 18; 29; 30; 38; 44; 48	Overwhelmingly negative
Governance	Perceived quality and functioning of government institutions, the legal system and the political system	6; 12a; 12b; 12c; 14; 18; 44	Mainly negative
Satisfaction with public services	Contentment with the quality of country's public services, such as healthcare, education, and public institutions	10; 12a; 12b; 12c; 41	Consistently negative
Corruption	Perceived levels of corruption or personal experiences of corruption, possibly differentiated by sector or type	11; 14; 18; 27; 29; 39a; 39b	Overwhelmingly positive
Violence and insecurity	Perceived insecurity or experiences of crime or violence	12a; 12b; 12c; 14; 16; 18; 29; 34; 37; 48	Consistently positive
Social attachment and participation	Attachment to, participation in, or cohesion of society, locally or nationally	2; 3; 6; 15; 25a; 25b; 25c; 25d; 26; 29; 30; 37; 39a; 39b; 40; 41	Mainly negative
Norms and values	Opinions about gender relations, politics, the role of religion, and other societal issues	6; 14; 30; 45a; 45b; 45c; 45d	See text
Change over time	Perception of societal changes (e.g. in terms of economic conditions and employment prospect) or corresponding expectations for the future.	1; 2; 6; 7a; 7b; 7c; 7d; 7e; 10; 12a; 12b; 12c; 13; 18; 27; 32a; 32b; 32c; 37	Mainly negative

### 3.4.1 Country- or community-level development

Migration aspirations can be shaped by the overall development in the country or community of origin, as suggested by various forms of migration transition theory. The notion of a “migration hump” suggests that migration aspirations rise with economic development until a certain level, and then declines (Carling, Czaika, & Erdal, 2020; Clemens & Mendola 2020). Empirical research has indicated that the turning point is at the level of upper-middle income in the World Bank's classification, meaning that most developing countries would see a positive relationship between economic development and migration aspirations.

The results from the systematic literature review, however, point in the opposite direction (Figure 17). The more positively people assess their current environment, the less likely they are to have migration aspirations. The six articles included measures of economic conditions, employment opportunities or development more generally, which do not fall under the specific aspects of development addressed in subsequent sections.

One article (Wood et al., 2010) uses country-level secondary data – the Human Development Index (HDI) – while the remainder use individual-level variables based on respondents' perceptions. Subjective assessment of conditions and opportunities can be shaped by personality traits (section 3.3.6). For instance, one of the articles (16) used a question about respondents' “fear of unemployment” which must be seen as a composite result of overall labour market conditions, individual employability, and personality traits such as optimism, positivity, and anxiety. However, this article uses the same multi-country dataset as article 48 (Wood et al., 2010) and thus indicates that “development” in a broad sense lowered migration aspirations regardless of whether it is measured with HDI statistics or individual fears of unemployment.

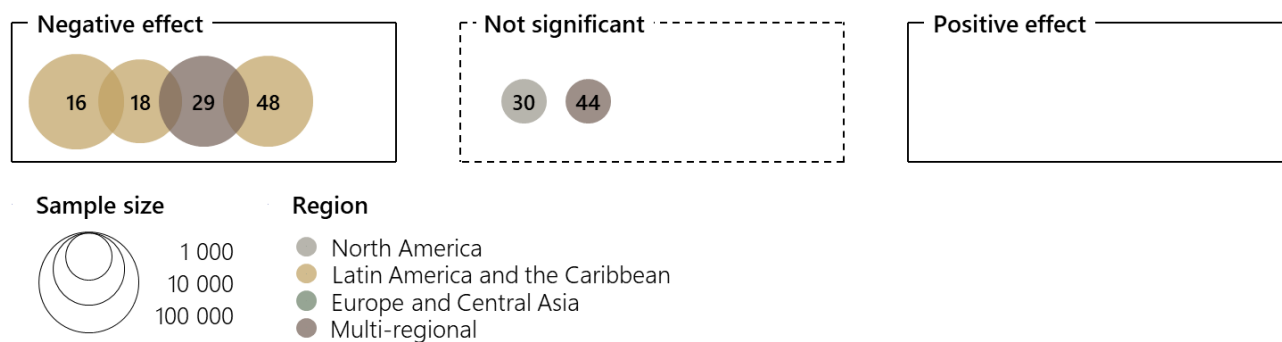


Figure 17. Effects of country- or community-level development on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

Surveys that cover a number of countries, districts, or communities have the potential to examine development at several levels. Wood et al.'s (2010) combination of country-level indicators and individual level survey data is a case in point. Comparisons across societies are necessary, for instance, to assess the effects of *inequality*, which can be important. That is, respondents' attitude towards migrating could be affected by the level of inequality in their society as well as their individual position in the socio-economic hierarchy.

### 3.4.2 Governance

Governance broadly refers to a country's political system, the way it is functioned at the highest level, and the quality of its various institutions. In a foundational paper, Hirschman (1978) argues that what economists call "public goods" – such as "guaranteeing human rights and democratic liberties" – can function as "attractions" which "reinforce [citizens'] normal reluctance to leave." (Hirschman, 1978, p. 105, cited in Hiskey, Montalvo, & Orcés, 2014, p. 95). Hiskey et al. (2014) point out, however, that this political component to migration aspirations can be difficult for researchers to capture. It may be obvious in extreme cases (e.g. Batista supporters fleeing revolutionary Cuba, or left-wing intellectuals fleeing the Argentinean junta) but more usually it is hidden by economic motivations, since poor political conditions are often linked to poor economic situations.

Nevertheless, large multivariate analyses can show that governance plays its own independent role in determining migration aspirations. Hiskey et al. (2014) examine the influence of governance in Latin America and the Caribbean by combining individual perceptions and experiences of crime and corruption (as captured by the biennial *AmericasBarometer* surveys of 2004-2010) with two more formal, aggregated democracy indices (calculated by Freedom House and Polity respectively). They find that individual experiences of and attitudes towards the political system are essential for understanding why a person would consider emigration as a viable option. More particularly, the overall quality of a country's governance is decisive. In countries with good democratic credentials, individual experiences of corruption or crime do not increase aspirations to migrate. Where governance is poor, such negative experiences has a much greater influence. The authors conclude that "exit" is more necessary where there is little opportunity for discontents to be democratically expressed (Hiskey et al., 2014, p. 94).

Similarly, in a study of young people in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, Etling et al. test the influence of individuals' "perceptions of democracy and the ability to shape government policies" (2020, p. 1388). Using data from the SAHWA Youth Survey 2016, the study shows that, whilst migration aspirations are most conspicuously driven by age, gender, economic situation and availability of networks abroad, they are strongly associated also with perceived flaws in the political system – especially the inability of individuals to exert democratic influence, and a perceived excess of religious control over political decision-making. Moreover, their study find low confidence in the legal system, a perception of widespread corruption, and personal experience of violence to be important.

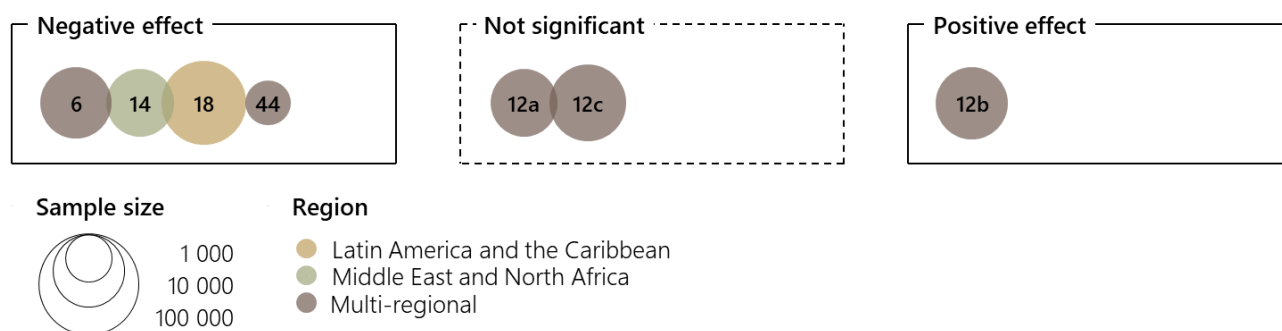


Figure 18. Effects of perceived quality of governance on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

In our review, seven analyses use governance as a determinant of migration aspirations (Figure 18). These analyses cover individuals' evaluation of democracy at the country of origin, confidence in the country's institutions, in government, and the legal system, and levels of satisfaction with democracy. While four show that better governance reduces individuals' migration aspirations, one analysis from Latin America shows an opposite effect. One possible explanation is that good governance is often accompanied by good public education: education increases an individual's ambitions and cosmopolitan ideals, and could stimulate migration aspirations (section 3.3.1). Two analyses, meanwhile, are inconclusive. Overall, these analyses suggest that individuals with negative perceptions of the quality of governance in their home country are more likely to aspire to emigrate.

### 3.4.3 Public services

The quality of public services in the country of residence has a marked effect on international migration aspirations. Dissatisfaction with public education or healthcare, for instance, can be an important consideration for those who cannot afford to pay for private-sector alternatives. Reliable public healthcare and education is also a sign of political and economic stability and is strongly connected with general well-being in the home country (Chindarkar, 2014), which generally diminishes migration aspirations (section 3.3.4) (Dustmann and Okatenko, 2014).

In total, five analyses in this systematic review use satisfaction with public services as a determinant of international migration aspirations. They consistently show that individuals that are more content with public services are less likely to have migration aspirations (Figure 19).

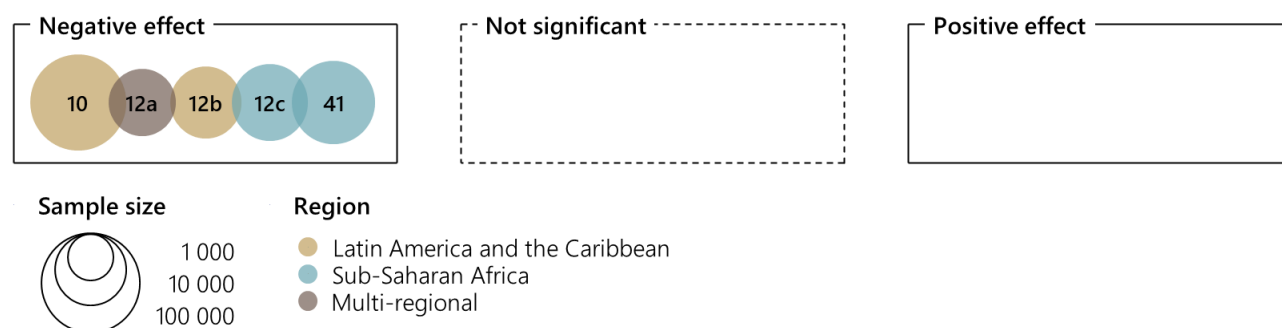


Figure 19. Effects of satisfaction with public services on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

Based on a study of 18 Latin American countries, an analysis by Chindarkar (2014) shows that satisfaction with healthcare services is highly associated with lower migration aspirations. Education is less straightforward: while good-quality public education increases life satisfaction, educated people have higher confidence in their ability to sell their skills abroad, and therefore may have higher migration aspirations (see section 3.3.1). Similarly, using data from the Gallup World Poll, Dustmann and Okatenko (2014) find contentment with local services to be almost as important a factor as levels of personal wealth.

### 3.4.4 Corruption

Corruption is commonly defined as *the abuse of entrusted power for private gain*. While corruption brings benefits to some, it has the reverse effect on others, and the latter group is usually much more numerous. Perceptions and experiences of corruption in the country of origin are expected to strengthen migration aspirations.

Crisan, Crisan-Mitra, and Dragos (2019), in their study of the relationship between corruption and migration aspirations in Romania, note that the definition of corruption and the way it is measured varies across different studies and regions. Examining corruption in the workplace and in national institutions, they find strong effects of both these forms on migration aspirations. Looking at the workplace, they find that (1) observed organisational misconduct and (2) perceived organisational corruption lead to (3) diminished career satisfaction; all three of these factors have an effect on migration aspirations. As far as national corruption is concerned, both experienced corruption (e.g. bribe-taking by public figures working in the judiciary, political system, police, public services, etc.) and perceived corruption are important drivers of migration aspirations in Romania.

Additionally, individuals' observation of organisational misconduct and perceptions of the effectiveness of government to fight against corruption have been used to measure corruption. Five analyses in this review observe that individuals who perceive or experience high levels of organisational and country level corruption are more likely to have migration aspirations, while one study conducted in Romania (including two separate analyses among teenagers and youth) is inconclusive. Overall, these analyses suggest that lower levels of corruption in the home country - both experienced and perceived - decreases international migration aspirations among its residents. See Figure 20 for illustration of results.

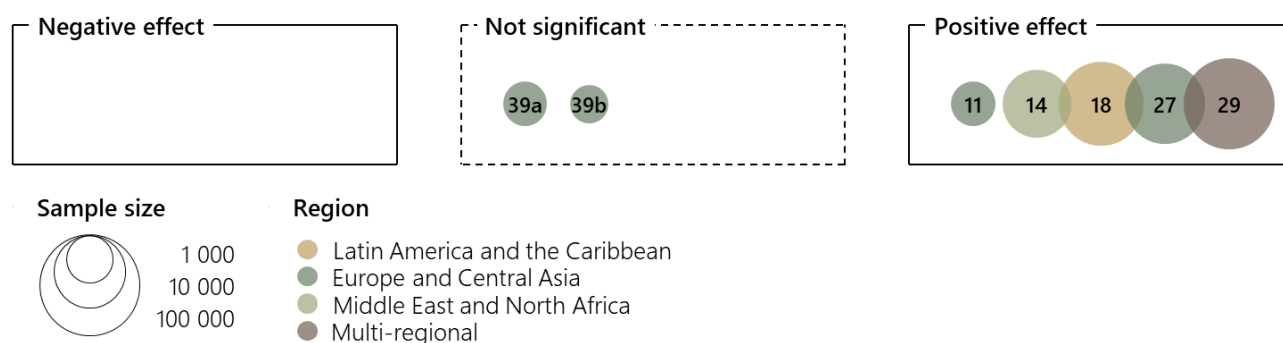


Figure 20. Effects of corruption on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

### 3.4.5 Violence and insecurity

Exposure to violence – active armed conflicts, mass violence such as war and civil war, prolonged humanitarian crises, etc – can create considerable incentives for migration. Particularly, this has been studied in Latin America, where political violence in the 1970s and civil wars in the 1980s produced large numbers of migrants to the US. Since the 1980s, however, the most conspicuous phenomenon in Latin America is the surge in violent crime. Latinobarómetro survey data from seventeen Latin American countries in 2002-2004 showed that crime was second only to unemployment among respondents' concerns (Wood et al., 2010).



Figure 21. Effects of violence and insecurity on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

In their study of migration aspirations and crime victimization in Latin America, Wood et al. (2010) showed that small-scale, criminal violence provides a major incentive for people to seek greater personal security elsewhere. The same Latinobarómetro survey data was used in this study to show that the probability of “seriously considering” family migration to the United States was around 30% higher among those who reported that they or a member of their family was a victim of recent criminal violence (usually robbery and other property crimes). The study is quick to point out that many factors have been shown to dissuade people from actually carrying out such plans, such as negative cost-benefit analyses, or the lack of necessary social networks on the other end. However, the propensity to migrate was highly affected by the experience of crime (Wood et al., 2010). Similarly, a study of young people in Mexico examines the influence of experiences of violence on aspirations to migrate to the United States (Nieri et al., 2012). Defining violence as “threats of or actual physical or sexual violence between individuals”, this study shows that migration aspirations are more prevalent among those who have experienced violence (Nieri et al., 2012, p. 366).

In our review, 10 analyses use violence and insecurity as a determinant of migration aspirations. These analyses take into account individuals’ perception of local area security; experienced crime victimisation among individuals or their family members; local homicide rates and supporting negotiations for inter-ethnic conflicts resolution. All of them consistently show that high experience and perception of violence and insecurity have a positive influence on migration aspirations. See Figure 21 for result. Similarly, a literature study that summarises qualitative research from six African countries, lists insecurity in the workplace, and fear arising from threats to personal or family safety both within and outside of the workplace, as two of six main reasons underlying health care workers’ decisions to migrate (Blacklock et al., 2014). Widespread insecurity and violence may also give emigration aspirations a collective dimension. In a study from Guinea Bissau, Vigh argues that “the historical process of decline and conflict is so overwhelming” (2009, p. 98) and the sense of insecurity intense to a point that it creates mass emigration desires (2009, p. 101).

### 3.4.6 Social attachment and participation

People who feel strongly attached to their current society, value its cohesion or participate actively in it could be less inclined to leave. In this section we group a series of overlapping factors that can shed light on this effect. As shown in Figure 22, the effect on migration aspirations is largely negative. Analyses that found a negative effect use measures such as national pride or attachment (3, 15, 30), local community satisfaction or attachment (15, 26, 41), interpersonal trust (6), absence of discrimination (39) and composite measures of social capital (26, 29, 40).

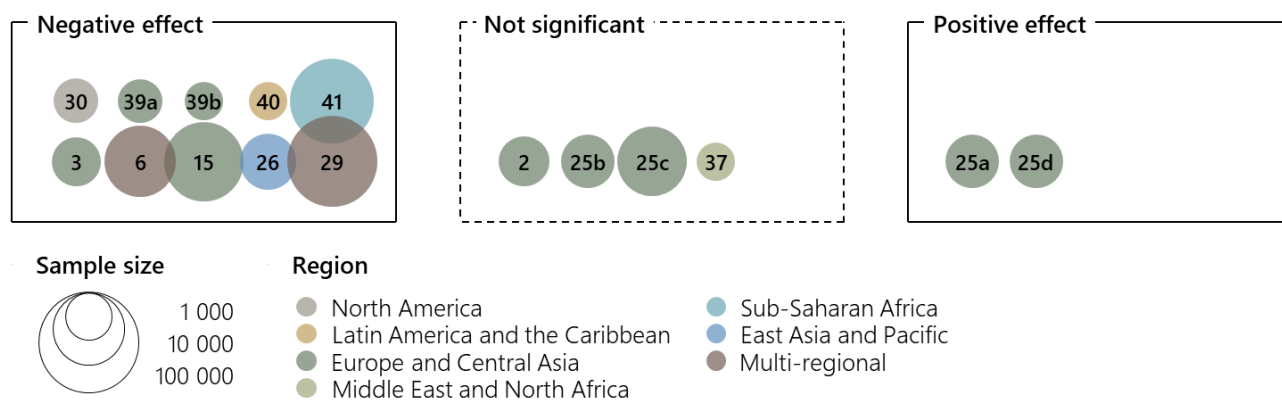


Figure 22. Effects of social attachment and participation on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

Divergent results are represented by article 25, which uses a composite measure of participation in political, social, cultural, religious and other voluntary organizations. Such participation was associated with higher migration aspirations in Turkey (25a) and Bulgaria and Romania (25d). As with several other determinants, it is possible that this is correlated with personality traits that strengthen migration aspirations. Moreover, civil-society participation relates to migration in other ways than as a sign of local attachment. For instance, political activity could reflect grievances that also motivate migration. Religious commitments might even encourage migration when life in the diaspora is perceived to allow for a purer form of religious practice (Bolognani & Mellor, 2012).

The various aspects of social attachment and participation are not possible to fully disentangle in the articles reviewed here. However, they support the plausible idea that migration aspirations are dampened by a strong sense of belonging.

### 3.4.7 Norms and values

Norms, cultural ideals and political values may influence migration aspirations, but insights based on quantitative literature are rather scattered. Political values have been found to have an influence in a study of European and former Soviet states, where views on economic policies affect migration aspirations in some areas (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019). However, the authors note that these findings may as well convey the extent of personal alignment with government views as political values per se (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019, p. 837).<sup>7</sup> Etling et al. (2020) find a tendency among aspiring migrants in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, and Tunisia to value democracy, and argue that this could reflect an absence of stable or “proper democratic institutions” in the surveyed countries (Etling et al., 2020, p. 1397). The article also studies the connection between views on secularism and migration aspirations. Their findings suggest that individuals who favour the influence of religion on political decisions are less likely to aspire to migrate than those who prefer state secularism, a pattern the authors relate to the increasing relevance of religion in politics since the Arab Spring (Etling et al., 2020, p. 1397).

Analyses on the ways in which religious orientation shapes migration aspirations point in different directions. Hoffman et al. (2015), in an analysis from Mexico, find that people who are frequent attendees at religious services are less likely to have migration aspirations, but also, that individuals who state that religion is important to them are more likely to aspire to migrate than others (Hoffman et al., 2015). Moreover, the potential influences of religiosity and religious values cannot be recounted in simplistic terms. Religious mores and notions of divine predestination have been made a topic in ethnographies of emigrant communities, entering for instance in aspiring migrants’ understandings of *when* opportunities of migration

<sup>7</sup> The data from Eastern European and former Soviet states also show that those who believe authorities deserve more respect are significantly less likely to possess migration aspirations than others (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019).



arise (Gaibazzi, 2012a), rather than influencing the formation of migration aspirations as such. Recent anthropological research on notions of divine predestination in migration contexts emphasise that concepts of destiny – Islamic conceptions of divine will particularly – do not produce fatalism but rather active engagement to elicit what the future holds (Elliot, 2016a; Gaibazzi, 2012a) or to provide rationalisations in the aftermath of events (Horst, 2006).

Opinions on gender roles can convey attitudes towards change that influence migration aspirations. Analyses of data from Ghana, Morocco, Senegal and Egypt showed that migration aspirations were less frequent among people who disapproved of unmarried women's migration (Van Dalen et al., 2005). Gender norms that portray women's or girls' unaccompanied migration as indecent or less ideal do not necessarily *limit* girls' migration aspirations, but rather shape the particular forms that aspirations take, for instance how or with whom aspiring migrants hope to migrate (Thorsen, 2010). Ethnographic studies have shown that gender-related norms may stimulate migration aspirations, e.g. in works relating to girls and women who hope to evade expectations of marriage (Belloni, 2019; Kringelbach, 2016) and to men and women who renegotiate sexual norms (Mai, 2009; Martin, 2018) by migrating. In the latter studies on sexuality, however, insights rely on accounts from interlocutors after migration.

Several anthropological studies note that new consumptive ideals and culturally valued sources of wealth in emigrant contexts, created by migrants' material lifestyles and remittances, trigger desires to migrate (Awedoba & Hahn, 2014; Graw & Schielke, 2012; Reeves, 2012; Vigh, 2009).

### 3.4.8 Change over time

Migration aspirations are affected by perceptions of conditions in the household, community or country of origin, as shown in other sections. But conditions could be assessed in terms of the *current situation* – which is what the articles discussed so far have done – or in terms of *change over time*. In particular, people's expectations for the future could be decisive for whether or not they want to move elsewhere. In the review, 11 articles, with a total of 19 analyses, include one or more measures of perceived change over time, primarily in terms of economic prosperity. Most of the relevant survey items refer explicitly to the future. Others ask respondents to assess change over the past few years, or address societal changes without any time frame. The survey items also differ with respect to being about the respondent's own family, community or the country at large.

Across these differences, all eighteen analyses can be interpreted as whether or not there is positive change over time. Figure 23 shows the distribution of effects on migration aspirations. The overall picture is not fully conclusive, but lends support to the idea that people who perceive that positive change is under way, are less likely to have migration aspirations. By the same token, qualitatively based studies recount examples from societies in which pessimism about the future related to socio-economic stagnation in the current country of residence is coupled with hopes of better lives abroad (Pettit and Ruijtenberg, 2019 on aspiring migrants in Egypt; Vigh, 2009 on Guinea Bissau). Experiences of ethnic discrimination or racism may also cultivate expectations of improved futures through migration (Alloul, 2020). In a study of French and Belgian youth of Maghrebi heritage, Mandin (2020) describes how discrimination in the job market underlie aspirations of moving to Canada. Following migration, aspirations to class mobility were not always fulfilled, but experiences of ethnic and religious (negative) visibility was perceived as changed for the better (Mandin, 2020).

The future is inevitably uncertain, and even assessments of the current situation are subjective. Responses about perceived change over time, or expectations for the future, could therefore also reflect optimism or positivity as personality traits. This perspective can help interpret the outlier in Figure 23 that finds a positive effect of future expectations on migration aspirations (6). The survey item measures expected change in the respondents' own position in their country's income distribution, rather than changes in society as a whole (Berlinschi & Harutyunyan, 2019). This variable can therefore also be seen as a measure of self-confidence, which, not unexpectedly, has a positive effect on migration aspirations.

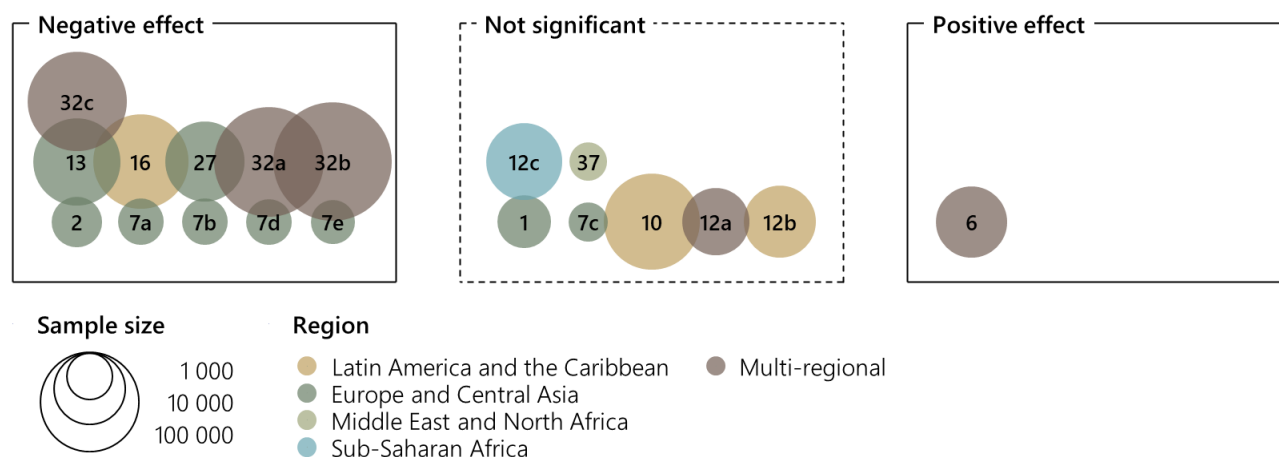


Figure 23. Effects of perceived positive changes on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

### 3.5 Migration-related factors

Migration has a strong self-sustaining element: migration typically fosters more migration. Established migration histories and pathways, ties with current or former migrants, and flows of remittances may encourage migration aspirations. All these factors, which derive from migration itself, have been grouped together. This section also includes perceptions of destinations as a determinant of migration aspirations. Such perceptions tend to be, at least partially, informed by experiences of other migrants. A brief overview of what each of these determinants are, their distribution in the analyses and their effects are shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Influence of migration-related factors on migration aspirations

Determinants	Description of measurements	Analyses	Results
Migration history	Family migration history and personal experience of internal or international migration or other international mobility	2; 6; 13; 14; 19; 20; 21; 23a; 23b; 24a; 24b; 24c; 30; 31; 33a; 33b; 34; 35; 36; 43; 46; 47; 49a; 49b; 49c; 49d	Overwhelmingly positive
Migration networks	Ties with current or former international migrants, possibly differentiated by friendship or kinship ties	1; 2; 6; 8; 9; 14; 15; 17; 18; 19; 20; 21; 22; 23a; 23b; 24a; 24b; 24c; 27; 29; 30; 31; 32a; 32b; 32c; 34; 35; 41; 42; 44; 45a; 45b; 45c; 45d	Overwhelmingly positive
Remittances	Receiving remittances	9; 17; 18; 23a; 23b	Overwhelmingly positive
Perceptions of destinations	Perceived characteristics of the potential migration destination, for instance in terms of living and working conditions - both in general and for migrants in particular	4; 5; 17; 34; 44; 45a; 45b; 45c; 45d	Overwhelmingly positive

#### 3.5.1 Migration history

Some individuals migrate more than once in their lives. Having experienced a major life event such as migration once might make a second international move less frightening. Former and current migrants also have knowledge of how to convert aspirations into actual migration, experience they can use to make

migration possible a second time around. Furthermore, former and current migrants are likely to have networks abroad, either in their previous country of residence, or in other locations if the community they migrated from have a large proportion of out-migration. Former and current migrants also have an attachment to another country (i.e. their previous country of residence), which persons who have never migrated are less likely to have. All these points suggest that migration aspirations should be more prominent among people who have previously moved internationally than among those who have never undergone such a journey.

Two types of variables related to migration history appear in the literature review: inquiries about previous international migration experience and inquiries about previous travels abroad. The distinction between migration and other travelling is not always clear. Even when past migration is defined precisely in surveys, definitions vary. However, the basic distinction between having travelled abroad or not can be decisive.

The reviewed literature finds an overwhelmingly positive effect of past international migration or travelling experience on migration aspirations (Figure 24). The results from one analysis (47) deviate from the rest: Williams and Baláž (2014), based on a survey from the United Kingdom, find that individuals who had lived or worked abroad for at least 6 months within the ten years preceding the interview have lower propensity to possess migration aspirations than other individuals. Two analyses (23a and 23b) study whether being a second-generation migrant affects migration aspirations, in addition to including variables on first-generation migration. Both analyses come from the same article (Ivlevs & King, 2015) that studies migration aspirations in Kosovo. The two analyses differentiate between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs, though the distinction is made based on geographic residence. Analysis 23a, which focus on the first group, find that being a child of a migrant raises migration aspirations, while the effect of first-generation migration is insignificant. The results from analysis 23b, where the focus is on Kosovo Serbs, show the opposite pattern, a difference in results that might have contextual explanations. Still, it is perhaps unsurprising that second-generation migrants could be affected by the experience of their parents, and that this may make migration more plausible also for them.

As mentioned, former migrants are likely to have networks in the previous country of residence. The migration history variables might thus capture some of the effect of migration networks. However, over half of the analyses include migration networks in their models, meaning that the outcome observed in these analyses is the effect of having migrated or travelled internationally among respondents with the same level of migration networks.

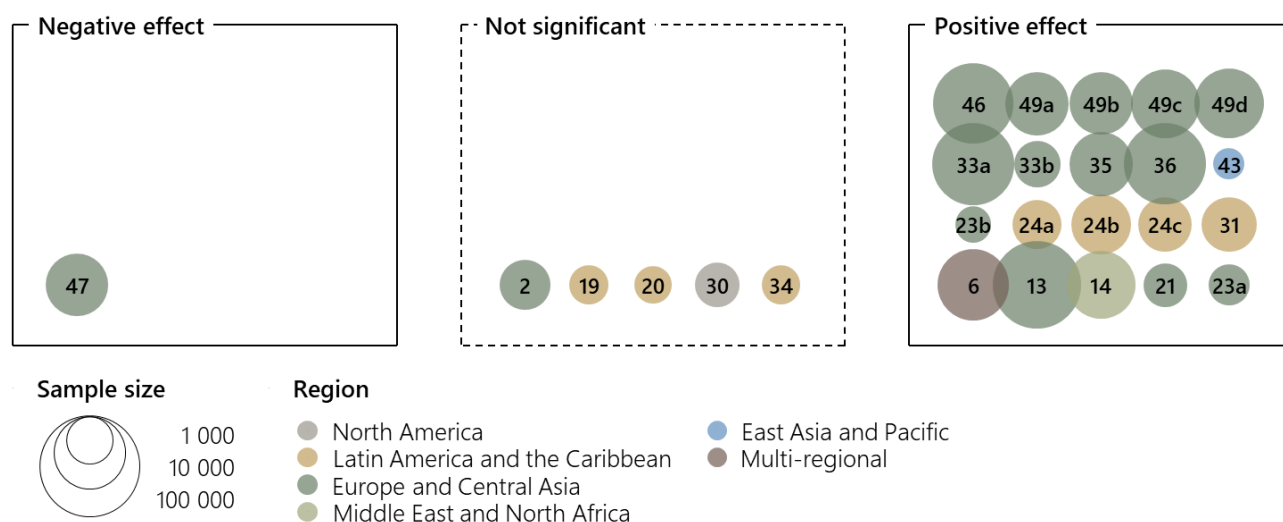


Figure 24. Effects of international migration or travelling experience on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

### 3.5.2 Migration networks

People differ in terms of their transnational connections with others who have already migrated. Such ties can be close or distant and include few or many individuals. Another important aspect of variation is the geographical distribution of ties. Many diasporas have both a proximate and a distant component, and for individuals in the country of origin it can matter greatly how far their networks extend (Van Hear, 1998). As an example, many Afghans have relatives in Pakistan or Iran, while fewer have family in Europe, North America or Australia. This difference relates to another key dimension of variation: how the networks are conduits for flows of information or money, and other cross-border transactions (Carling, in press). Remittances, which are particularly important as a potential determinant of migration aspirations, are addressed in a separate section (3.5.3).

Networks with current migrants can affect migration aspirations in three distinct ways. First, individuals with close family members abroad can aspire to migrate *in order to be reunited* with those family members. Second, ties with current migrants can *shape perceptions of migration* and the country of destination, for instance through migrants' return visits, social media posts, or direct communication (Bakewell & Jolivet, 2016). The effect on migration aspirations could be either positive or negative. Third, transnational networks with current migrants could incite migration aspirations by *increasing the perceived feasibility* of migration. That is, a person who can expect help from someone at the destination could see migration as a more attractive option. Transnational networks thus affect not only aspirations to migrate, but also the ability to do so. Still, the effects can be considered separately.

One or more measures of migrant networks were included in about half of the articles. The survey items inquired about household members, friends, relatives or specific kinship categories – such as mother, father, or siblings – who are current or former migrants. Apart from two inconclusive analyses, all found that knowing current or former migrants increases the likelihood of migration aspirations (Figure 25).

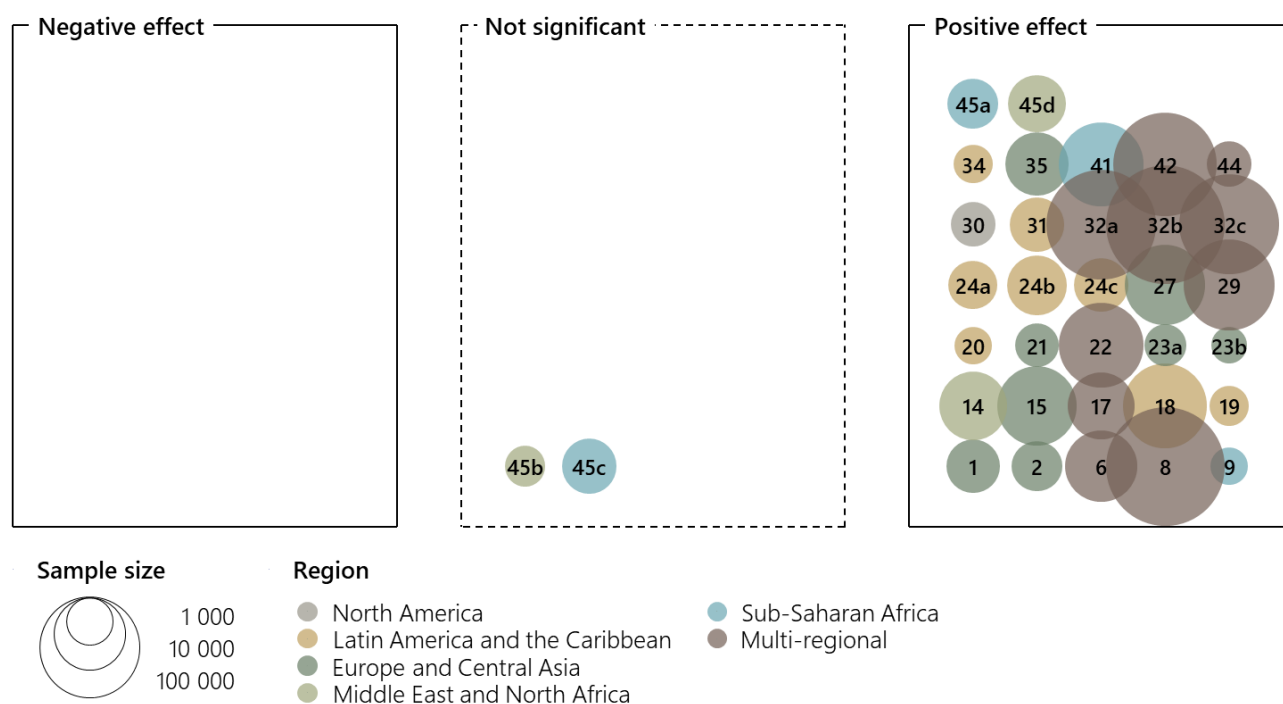


Figure 25. Effects of migrant networks on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

### 3.5.3 Remittances

Remittances can play diverse roles with respect to migration aspirations. First, they reflect the strength or level of commitment in transnational ties with migrants, and thereby differentiate among people who have friends or relatives abroad. The stronger the ties, one might think, the greater the migration-encouraging effect – either in order to be together with the remittance sender or because receiving help to settle abroad seems more likely (see section 3.5.2). In addition, remittances can be seen as tangible proof that migration pays off, and in this way stimulate migration aspirations. A counteracting mechanism is also possible. People who receive remittances at a substantial level might prefer to stay precisely because they have a source of income that makes staying more likely. Overall, however, receiving remittances appears to strengthen migration aspirations (Figure 26). The five analyses in this review that included this variable also inquired about migrant networks, which they found to have a positive effect on migration aspirations. In other words, Figure 26 show the additional effect of migration networks on migration aspirations when the respondent receives remittances.

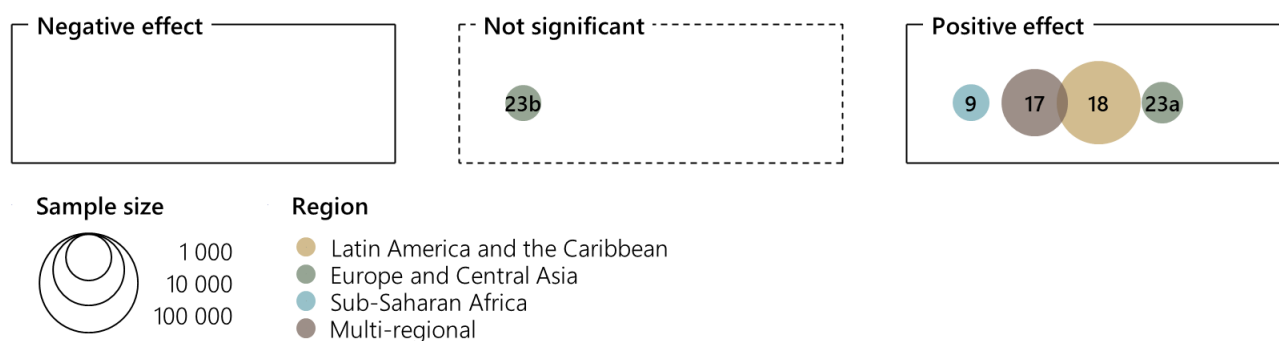


Figure 26. Effects of remittance-receiving on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

### 3.5.4 Perception of destination countries

Migration aspirations are shaped by people's perceptions of the potential destinations. These perceptions can be difficult to assess in survey research, since respondents who are considering migration might have different destinations in mind – perhaps several at the same time – or think about “abroad” in general terms. In some contexts, however, a single country or region is the dominant destination for migration, and surveys have covered perceptions of these destinations. Measures include questions about perceived economic opportunities, welfare and legal systems, women's rights, human rights, democratic systems, corruption levels or better public services, to name a few.

In their study of migration from West Africa and the Mediterranean region to the European Union, van Dalen et al. (2005) found that migration aspirations on the part of Egyptian individuals were closely associated with feelings that finding a job was easier in Europe compared to Egypt (van Dalen et al., 2005, p. 770). In a subsequent study in the same countries plus Turkey, Groenewold et al. found that individuals who expected a higher income in another country were “6.4 times” more probable to have migration intentions (2012, p. 222).

However, Pajo (2008) argues that aspirations in voluntary migration should not simply be understood in terms of desires for economic betterment. Rather, hopes of advancement convey a world imagined as a social hierarchy in which different destinations are attributed different value morally, in terms of potential for individual advancement, their perceived humanity and placement in a global order (Pajo, 2008, p. 69). Several other work have sought to understand the effects on migration aspirations of perceptions of politics and society in destination countries. For example, Becerra (2012) studied the influence of perceived anti-Mexican discrimination in the United States on migration aspirations of Mexican adolescents. In general, this study found that the effect of such perceptions was weak. Becerra found, for instance, that perceptions of higher discrimination in the United States had only a “moderately significant” effect on those who thought

they might migrate at some point in the future, and no effect for those who felt that, for economic reasons, they had no choice but to migrate (2012, p. 27). Similarly, Groenewold et al. (2012) investigated whether perceived restrictions on religious freedom in Europe might influence the migration desires of their (primarily Muslim) respondents, yielding inconclusive results.

Perceptions of and actual conditions in the destination country do not necessarily correlate. As Groenewold et al. (2012) underscore, although individuals with more information about destination countries – whether as a result of education or international networks – were more likely to have aspirations to migrate, the *subjective expectations* of gains abroad are more important than actual financial conditions.

Overall, nine analyses in our overview include measurements of perceptions of destination countries as determinants for migration aspirations (Figure 27). In addition to perceptions of economic, political and societal conditions studied in the analyses outlined above, pre-migration acculturation (Becerra et al., 2010) is investigated. Except for one analysis in Ghana which shows a negative effect, and one from Morocco that is inconclusive, they all find that having positive perceptions about the potential destination increases likelihood of migration aspirations.

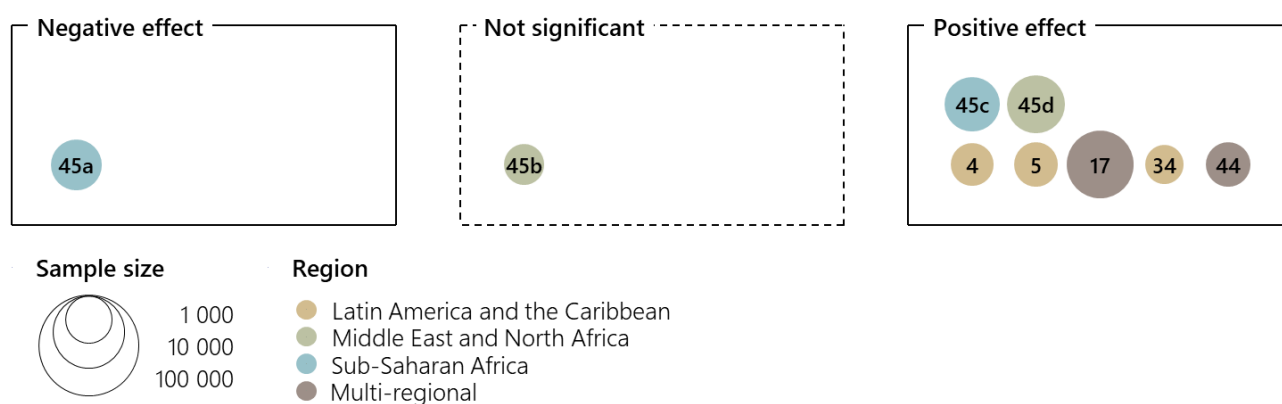


Figure 27. Effects of perceptions of destinations on migration aspirations

Numbers refer to analyses (see Table 2 for references). Results are listed in numerical order within each frame.

### 3.6 Other determinants

Some determinants have appeared several times, although inconsistently, during the above review. Although we do not discuss them in full here, we nonetheless provide a brief account of those that might be of interest to the reader.

As perhaps instinctively expected, individual's possession of a passport (Marrow and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020), having a second citizenship (Méndez, in press), and knowledge of several languages were found to affect aspirations positively (Golovics, 2020; Marrow and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020; Nowotny, 2014). Particularly, as Nowotny points out, "[l]anguage skills affect the psychological costs of living and/or working abroad and can therefore also impact the total (pecuniary and non-pecuniary) mobility costs" (2014, p. 148). Similarly, owning a passport or having a second citizenship can reduce the cost of migration, which could, in turn, increase the likelihood of aspiring to migrate. However, the causal relation of some of these factors need closer scrutiny: for example, an individual is likely to have acquired a passport or learned a foreign language as a result of his or her aspiration to move abroad.

Similarly, some analyses investigate the effect of residing in regions with a long history of migration on formations of migration aspirations, and found it to be positive (Goenewold et al., 2012; Hiskey et al., 2014).

Another determinant to emerge from this review, although only once, was proximity to the main destination. With reference to Latin America, (Wood et al., 2010) examined the distance of a survey country



to the United States as a measure of the cost of migration. The results from this analysis show a significant but marginal effect.

None of articles covered in the review address the impact of environmental stress, with the exception of one article that examines satisfaction with access to water (Sadiddin et al., 2019). Environmental stress resembles other complex characteristics of the community of origin (cf. section 3.4), in that it has various specific manifestations and can be measured in terms of perceptions, experiences or aggregate statistics. Many articles successfully examine the effects of other factors of this kind, and the lack of attention to environmental factors is therefore particularly regrettable.

## 4 The conversion of migration aspirations into actual migration

The migration literature contains far more data on the formation of migration aspirations than on conversion of migration aspirations into actual migration. The discussion of findings in this section reflects this imbalance. Some of the studies discussed here did not fit the criteria to be included for review of determinants of migration aspirations, for instance because they cover only internal migration or are based on surveys of specific sub-populations. In light of the limited literature, however, and to enable a discussion of methodologies, we refer to publications beyond the systematic literature review.

By “conversion of migration aspirations into actual migration” we refer to the process by which individuals who have migration aspirations realize those aspirations in the form of physically moving across borders. In other words, it refers to the second step in two-step approaches.

Acts of planning and preparation, such as applying for a visa, do not amount to conversion of migration aspiration into actual migration. They may consist of observable actions, but migration itself might still not take place. That said, many surveys and publications distinguish between aspiring and planning, thus invoking time depth, horizon or timeframe of aspirations to migrate and exploring transitions between different phases pre-migration. Some articles thus distinguish between longer-term aspirations and shorter-term planning (Crisan et al., 2019), explore the relations between intentions and preparatory steps to migrate (Ivlevs & King, 2015), discuss the maturity of migration intentions (Agadjanian et al., 2008) examine the transition from considerations to planning (Kley & Mulder, 2010; Ruysen & Salomone, 2018) and trace transitions from aspirations to planning and decision-making without studying physical migration (Sadiddin et al., 2019). There are also studies that apply, or are inspired by, the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991) in the analysis of migration (Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015; Willekens, 2017).

### 4.1 Considerations on research design and methods

Actual migration demonstrates ability to migrate. Stayers could also have ability to migrate, but stay because they do not have migration aspirations. As ability is difficult, or impossible, to observe directly, studies of migration ability go through assessment of the realisation of aspirations into actual migration (Carling & Schewel, 2018).

A number of survey-based research designs have been employed to approach the conversion of migration aspirations into actual migration. Some articles address the conversion by relating the incidence of migration aspirations to the levels of migration in the general population (Bahna, 2008; Dao, Docquier, Parsons, & Peri, 2018). Although these studies yield important insights, we disregard them here, as we are seeking to identify links between aspirations and behaviour at the individual level.

A second research design combines individual-level survey data on migration aspirations at one point in time with individual-level register data on migration at a later point (de Groot, Mulder, Das, & Manting, 2011a; de Groot, Mulder, & Manting, 2011b; Dommermuth & Klüsener, 2019; van Dalen & Henkens, 2013). These analyses typically focus on internal migration, as individual-level register data is more accessible within countries than internationally. One survey, the American Housing Survey, used by Lu (1998) and Lu

(1999), follows housing units over time, and not individuals or households, and in that way acquires information about the migration history of the occupants of the units at different points in time. Again, the focus is on internal mobility, not international migration. This design could potentially be used on international migration as well, using administrative information on emigration. Everything that would be required are individual-level records of emigration. However, even in the few countries that maintain continuously updated national population registers, emigration statistics are often inaccurate.

The ideal type of survey for studying the conversion of aspirations into actual migration is panel surveys, in which the same respondents are interviewed at several points in time. Such surveys allow for identifying aspiring migrants in the first round of interviews, and then observing whether or they have actually migrated by the second round. (Panel surveys can have more than two rounds, but for simplicity, we use the example of a two-round survey in the following.)

Panel surveys are always expensive and logistically challenging. For studying migration, it is necessary to determine what has happened to respondents who drop out from one round to the next. The respondent may be impossible to reach, and the research team must try to determine whether this is a case of migration or if the respondent has died, changed their contact details, or decided against continued participation in the survey.

Panel data on conversion from aspirations to actual migration can be sub-divided as follows:

1. *Panel data from personal interviews across time, not space:* These panel data are based on follow-up interviews with individuals who expressed migration aspirations in a first interview. Interviewers return to respondents' household for a second interview. Information about individuals who have moved in the meantime is obtained from interviews with the migrants' (former) household members. Put differently, this type of data requires two or more rounds of interviews, but not follow-up interviews with the migrants who have left the survey area. Hence, this design potentially generates rich data on stayers, but not details on the conditions and experiences of the migrants. Examples include the *National Migration Survey of Thailand*, used by de Jong (2000), and a survey investigating migration aspirations among Spanish language students, used in Hoppe and Fujishiro (2015).
2. *Panel data from personal interviews across time and space:* These are panel data in which the second round of interviews in the original location is supplemented with attempts to contact and interview respondents who have migrated. Migrants might be contacted via phone, mail, email, or personal visits if possible. In contrast to the first type, this type of panel data includes information on the conversion of aspirations into actual migration provided by the migrants. Acquiring such data is more costly and logistically challenging but may potentially provide more detail on the conversion of aspiration to migration. Examples include the *Mexican Family Life Survey*, used in Chort (2014); Creighton (2013); Creighton and Riosmena (2013), a survey of university graduates in the Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium, applied in Hooijen, Meng, and Reinold (in press), and a survey of young adults in two German cities, used in Kley and Mulder (2010).

Data on the migratory status of all respondents at different points in time are needed to draw conclusions on determinants of the conversion of aspirations into actual migration. Both types of panel data, as well as survey data combined with register data, enable researchers to focus their analyses on those who stayed and those who migrated but, first-hand survey interviews provides especially rich data.

Not all publications focus on both stayers and movers, even though there is data on both groups. For instance, Creighton (2013) focuses on why respondents migrated and Chort (2014) examines why respondents stayed, but both rely on the same panel data (*The Mexican Family Life Survey*).

## 4.2 Analyses of the relation between aspirations and behaviour

To the extent that data allow for making the connection between migration aspirations and subsequent migration, researchers have taken two approaches: some have examined *the strength* of the relation, and others have examined the *what influences* the relation. As they shed light on different aspects of the

conversion from migration aspirations to actual migration, these studies are complementary. The same datasets can be explored along both analytical paths, as exemplified by Chort (2014), van Dalen and Henkens (2013) and Lu (1999). We discuss each perspective in turn.

#### 4.2.1 The link between aspirations and actual migration

A number of articles (though none of them included in our systematic review) include analyses of determinants of the conversion of aspirations into actual migration, with migration aspirations as either the sole determinant (Chort, 2014) or one of several determinants (Creighton, 2013; Creighton & Riosmena, 2013; de Jong, 2000; van Dalen & Henkens, 2013; Dommermuth & Klüsner, 2019; Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015; Kley & Mulder, 2010; Lu, 1998; Lu, 1999). The full sample of both aspiring migrants and respondents who do not report to have migration aspirations is included in these analyses. The analytical procedures usually compare determinants of migration aspirations with determinants of actual migration, in order to explore the relation between the two. More specifically, they incorporate an analysis of the determinants of migration aspirations, and use the results to discuss differences between factors that affect aspirations and factors affecting actual migration (Creighton, 2013; Creighton & Riosmena, 2013; de Jong, 2000; Dommermuth & Klüsner, 2019; Hoppe & Fujishiro, 2015; Kley & Mulder, 2010; Lu, 1998). Such discussions potentially shed light on the conditions under which aspirations can be converted into actual migration, but decisive conclusions about determinants for converting aspirations into migration behaviour cannot be drawn. In other words, this mode of analysis allows for conclusions on whether aspirations affect actual migration, but not on which determinants affect conversion.

Analyses using this design find, not surprisingly, that migration aspirations positively affect actual migration. No such article met the criteria for inclusion in the systematic review of determinants of migration aspirations, but we discuss examples here to illustrate insights from this mode of analysis. For example, Chort (2014) and Creighton (2013), based on data from the *Mexican Family Life Survey* collected in 2002 and 2005–06, show that the association between intentions to migrate and actual migration is robust. Similarly, de Jong (2000), in a study of migration behaviour in rural Thailand, finds that the effects of migration decisions are differentiated for temporary and permanent migration, that migration intentions are “statistically significant explanation for more permanent but not for temporary migration behaviour” (p. 318). Interestingly, only 11 percent of the aspiring migrants studied by Creighton (2013) had migrated at the time of the second interview, which took place three years after the first. In a study from Spain of potential migrants to Germany, Hoppe and Fujishiro employ the framework of the theory of planned behaviour and find that 22 percent of the aspiring migrants who were in the “pre-actional” phase – i.e. who started to gather information to plan for migration – and 47 percent of those in the “actional phase,” who made logistical arrangements and accepted or declined job offers in the intended destination, did migrate to Germany within twelve months (2015, p. 22). However, only very few (2 percent) in the longitudinal sample who expressed a vague intention to migrate had migrated 12 months later, leading the authors to the conclusion that the “pre-actional phase” of migration (without concrete planning or preparatory steps) is a weak predictor of actual migration (Hoppe and Fujishiro, 2015, p. 22). Moreover, this implies that, although migration aspirations shape migration behaviour, many individuals who at one point aspire to migrate do not convert their aspirations to action, either due to obstacles leaving them involuntarily immobile, or because they changed their mind.

#### 4.2.2 Determinants of the conversion of aspirations into migration

The second mode of analysis investigates determinants of actual migration behaviour among individuals who have previously expressed migration aspirations. In contrast to the design discussed in the previous section, where the full sample is used, these analyses are based on a filtered sample that consists only of the respondents who indicated having migration aspirations in the first interview. As such, the design permits investigations of the factors that determine which of the aspiring migrants actually migrate, or, put differently, analyses of the determinants of the conversion of migration aspirations into actual migration. The design does not enable analyses of whether aspirations affect migration behaviour per se, for which the design discussed in section 4.2.1 should be applied. Not all survey designs produce data that allow for these

types of analyses, as the proportion of respondents who have migration aspirations is often too small to be statistically meaningful.

Although this mode of analysis could be applied to both types of panel data discussed in section 4.1, and for survey data combined with register data, it is not often used. Examples of articles that do follow this analytical procedure include Chort (2014); de Groot et al. (2011a); de Groot et al. (2011b); van Dalen and Henkens (2013); Hooijen et al. (in press); and Lu (1999).

Published research of this kind is too limited to allow general conclusions. However, a few examples highlight the kinds of insights the procedure yields. Chort (2014) finds that women who expressed migration intentions in 2002 proved to be less inclined than men to have migrated abroad by 2005-2006. The author argues that gender is the most important determinant of unrealized migration intentions, and that women's constraints account for this difference: "Alternative interpretations, such as different time preferences of men and women or the voicing by women of a household migration plan are not supported by the data," Chort argues (2014, p. 546). In explaining the gap between "(im)mobility intentions" and behaviour of recent higher-education graduates in European sub-regions, Hooijen et al. identify potential "intervening factors" and show that "a (perceived) lack of employment opportunities in the study region and (perceived) better opportunities elsewhere" led to changing the intention to stay or leave (in press, p. 13).

Anecdotally we know that many people decide not to act on their migration aspirations because their life situation changes (e.g. as a result of marriage), they are unable to cover the high costs involved, meet legal requirements, or they acquire information about the possible benefits of migration and conclude that migration is not worth the effort. Others change their mind when confronted with the arduous reality of moving. Migration aspirations also change during the life course, waning as time passes or developing with age in different locations and circumstances and among differently positioned individuals. Imagining future impediments to migration may eventually lead to aspirations dying out.

At present we cannot say with any certainty how migration aspirations evolve, how frequently they are dropped or otherwise change, and in which circumstances they lead to actual migration. It appears that one of the main factors obstructing developments in research on the conversion from aspirations to behaviour is perhaps that researchers tend to focus either on migration aspirations or on actual migration. As mentioned, this shortfall is hardly surprising: while it is possible to ask an individual about their aspirations in the present, follow-up requires studies over the course of a longer time span. Moreover, in the case of those who remain in their place of origin, it may never be possible to say with certainty that they did not migrate, only that they had not yet done so.

In summary, although we identified a sizeable literature documenting the individuals' migration aspirations, there are far fewer studies addressing the obvious next questions: how many of these individuals ultimately act on these aspirations, and which factors are most important in enabling or obstructing this "conversion"? In survey-based literature, the conversion of aspirations into actual migration is a rarely explored field with much potential.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper is the first of its kind in providing a systematic review of the literature on formation of migration aspirations. We have synthesised the findings of 49 empirical survey-based articles examining the determinants of such aspirations in various regions of the world. The articles were published in 37 different journals in migration studies, economics, sociology, psychology and other fields over the past three decades.

In order to also address the second step in two-step approaches to understanding migration, we also reviewed the much smaller body of survey-based research that studies how migration aspirations are converted into actual migration. This literature is still too small and heterogeneous to justify a systematic review.

Our examination of survey-based literature is augmented by a complementary reading of qualitative research, which uses tools such as interviews, focus groups, and in-field experiments, as well as ethnographic methods of participant observation, to study migration. The qualitative element of our study has given the basis for the analysis of how migration aspirations are formed in different economic, social and

cultural contexts. In combination, the survey-based and qualitatively based analyses offer in-depth understandings and explanations of the interconnected nature of economic and non-economic determinants, the relationship between individuals and the wider context within which their aspirations are formed, and the changing nature of migration aspirations across time and space.

Combining a vast range of findings through systematic review, we have attempted to build a comprehensive overview of all relevant determinants of migration aspirations, and to draw a coherent picture of the extent of research in the field. This has also allowed us to identify several gaps in the current understanding of how migration aspirations are formed, and therefore to develop recommendations for further research, which we return to towards the end of the conclusion.

Alongside the empirical results, this paper makes a contribution by developing new ways of presenting results from systematic literature reviews in social sciences. In the study of elusive and intricate social processes across diverse settings, divergent or inconclusive results are to be expected. Exceptions and outliers should not be dismissed as noise, but can sometimes be the source of new understandings, by highlighting differences between countries in different regions or income levels, for instance. We apply a new type of visual display that allows for drawing conclusions about overall results without obscuring the heterogeneity of studies in terms of regional coverage and sample size.

Through the review we identified 32 different determinants of migration aspirations. Table 9 summarizes the results by distributing the determinants across frequencies of use and the consistency of the effects. The further to the right in the table, the greater is the number of *analyses* that inform the conclusions; the higher towards the top of the table, the more consistent is the effect on migration aspirations. We classify the results in the same way as in the tables that summarize each cluster of determinants. The “not classifiable” determinants in the bottom are those that do not represent a single dimension.

Table 9. *Effects of determinants of migration aspirations*

Classification of results	Number of analyses		
	Fewer than 10	10-29	30 or more
<i>Consistently positive/negative</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Satisfaction with public services (N)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence and insecurity (P)</li> </ul>	
<i>Overwhelmingly positive/negative</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Willingness to take risks (P)</li> <li>• Internet access or use (P)</li> <li>• Country- or community-level development (N)</li> <li>• Corruption (P)</li> <li>• Remittances (P)</li> <li>• Positive perceptions of destinations (P)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subjective well-being (N)</li> <li>• Migration history (P)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age (N)</li> <li>• Migration networks (P)</li> </ul>
<i>Mainly positive/negative</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality of governance (N)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment (N)</li> <li>• Social attachment and participation (N)</li> <li>• Positive societal change over time (N)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male gender (P)</li> <li>• Being in a marriage or cohabitation (N)</li> <li>• Urban residency (P)</li> <li>• Socio-economic status (N)</li> <li>• Educational attainment (P)</li> </ul>
<i>Slightly positive/negative</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parental education (N)</li> <li>• Family relations (P)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Household size (P)</li> <li>• Homeownership (N)</li> </ul>	
<i>Divergent</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health status</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenthood</li> <li>• Income</li> </ul>	
<i>Not classifiable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personality traits</li> <li>• Norms and values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social identities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other aspects of employment</li> </ul>

Note: Letters in parentheses indicate whether the effect is positive (P) or negative (N).



Several observations stand out from the Table. A small set of factors in the top-right part of the table have an effect on migration aspirations that is not only unequivocal but is also supported by a sizeable number of analyses: migration aspirations *rise* with the level of violence and insecurity, the presence of ties to current or former migrants, and with having a history of international migration or travelling; migration aspirations *decline* with individuals' level of subjective well-being and with increasing age – at least across adult age groups. These five effects emerge as the clearest conclusions from the systematic literature review.

Other factors are well documented in the survey-based literature and have effects that show a clear tendency, but with some variation or exceptions. People are more likely to aspire to migrate if they are male, unmarried, live in urban areas, have low socio-economic status, and high educational attainment. Another set of determinants also show a clear tendency in their effect, but are supported by fewer analyses: individuals are more likely to have migration aspirations if they are unemployed, have weak social attachments where they live, and see societal changes as negative.

But while many of these determinants are straightforward in their effects some influence migration aspirations in more indirect ways. This complexity is reflected in exceptions to the dominant trend, or in more balanced effects in opposite directions, as is the case with income and parenthood. The contradictory or inconsistent effects can be due to the limited comparability of the analyses, for instance when they include different controls or measure migration aspirations differently, as discussed in section . But there are also less coincidental forms of complexity at work.

- *Non-linear relationships*: The effect could be positive at either end of a variable's distribution and negative in the middle, or the other way around. Most analyses were not set up to discover such relationships, and the ones that were often showed an effect that was roughly linear. But results suggest that more fine-grained analyses of age and income, for instance, could find strongly non-linear effects.
- *Regional differences*: Migration reflects social, economic and institutional dynamics that vary enormously across countries and regions, and there is no reason to expect that effects will be the same worldwide, or even persistent over time. In a few cases, the results showed systematic regional differences. For instance, all the analyses that showed a higher likelihood of migration aspirations among women than among men were from East Asia.
- *Differences in measurement*. Most determinants were not conceptualized or measured in exactly the same way across analyses. This was, in general, only a source of uncertainty, but in a few cases suggested substantive differences. In particular, it appears that the more subjective or satisfaction-oriented measures of income have a clearly negative effect on migration aspirations while more objective measures have mixed effects.

Finally, there are factors which make a rare appearance in the survey-based literature and which nonetheless appear to be important. We suggest that further survey-based research should be conducted on these fronts. The under-studied factors include individual health status, personality traits, and others listed in the left-most column of Table 9. Potentially relevant factors that make no appearance at all include environmental stress, access to credit and indebtedness, all of which have been highlighted in other parts of the migration literature. The influence of (anti-)migration information campaigns was not addressed by any of the publications that qualified for inclusion in the literature review. However, this is a topic of interest in other recent studies and ongoing research.

While there are many determinants that merit attention, the total number is too large to be meaningfully combined in a single analysis—especially considering that many of the determinants are correlated. In other words, the overview indicates variables that can be valuable to include in surveys, so that various analytical priorities can be pursued.

As an additional means of synthesizing the determinants of migration aspirations we display the findings in Figure 28. The figure is based on the information presented in Table 9, with some additional developments:



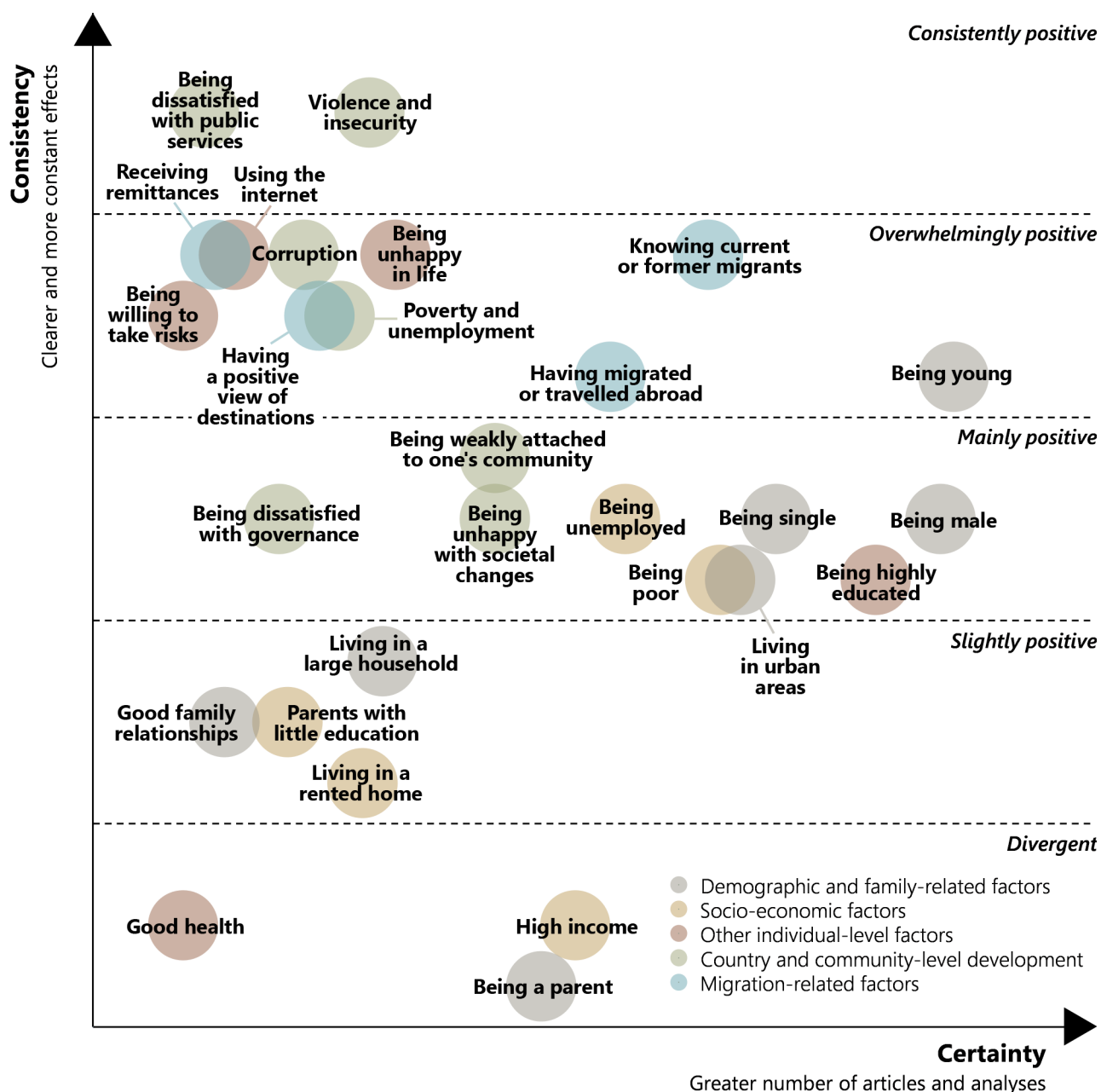


Figure 28. Effects of determinants of migration aspirations

Notes: See text for details on the assessment of consistency.<sup>8</sup>

The vertical axis, *consistency*, uses the same five-fold classification as Table 9 but also differentiates further within each category in order to create a more continuous distribution. We deliberately choose a holistic and analytical approach rather than a mechanical procedure for this differentiation. It is based on an analytical reading of the figures that display the results for each determinant, taking all the available information into account. For instance, the determinants that 'overwhelmingly' point in one direction are distinguished on the basis of the importance of the exceptions to the overall trend. If there is one exception, for instance, it matters whether it is a very large multi-country survey or a survey that covers a few hundred respondents in a single city. These judgements are made collectively by two members of the author team. Like in Table 9,

<sup>8</sup> Consistency is calculated as  $(\log(\text{Articles} + (\text{Analyses}/3)))^2$  which does not have any substantive interpretation but ensures appropriate weighting of articles and analyses as well as a suitable distribution along the axis.

the degree of consistency does not reflect the *sizes* of effects (which are not comparable), only the degree to which effects are statistically significant and point in the same direction.

The horizontal axis, *certainty*, reflects the volume of results that underlie the conclusion about the effects of each determinant. Whereas the columns in Table 9 simply uses the number of analyses, the figure uses a simple formula that gives additional weight to analyses that are independent from each other, as opposed to being part reported in the same article.

Finally, to ease interpretation, all determinants have been formulated so that its effect can be described as positive. This means a reversal of the description of all the determinants that were found to have primarily negative effects on migration aspirations. For instance, the determinant 'age' is represented here as 'being young', since this describes what is associated with a higher likelihood of migration aspirations. Similarly, 'socio-economic status' becomes 'being poor' and marital status becomes 'being single'. Labels are as short as possible to allow for being displayed in the figure, and reformulations that are not self-evident are listed in the notes to the figure.

Figure 28 illustrates more explicitly than Table 9 how the determinants are spread out in a space with varying degrees of certainty and consistency in the effects. At one extreme, *being young* and *knowing current or former migrants* are determinants that almost always raise migration aspirations, and which demonstrate this effect across a large number of articles and analyses, giving it a high degree of certainty. At the other extreme, *good health* has divergent effects on migration aspirations, based on what we know. But the basis for concluding is extremely weak, since only a couple of analyses included health status as a determinant. More research might show that, indeed, health status tends to affect migration aspirations, in one direction or the other. It is much less likely that additional research will change our conclusions about the effect of being young and knowing current or former migrants.

The cluster in the top-left corner is particularly interesting. Here we see nine determinants that appear to be highly consistent drivers of migration aspirations, but which are not very well documented. Four of them are *societal* challenges: corruption, violence, poor services, general poverty and unemployment. By contrast, *individual* unemployment and poverty are located towards the middle of the figure, reflecting better documentation but less consistent effects.

In the top-left corner we also find the two most specifically *psychological* determinants: willingness to take risks, and level of happiness in life (also labelled as life satisfaction or subjective well-being). Perhaps this means that interpersonal psychological differences could add substantially to the explanatory power of models that focus on more conventional demographic, socioeconomic and institutional factors.

Looking at the colour-coding in Figure 28, we can identify several trends:

- Migration-related factors consistently raise migration aspirations, reflecting the self-sustaining dynamics of migration flows.
- Country and community-level development are important for migration aspirations. However, each factor is relatively poorly documented.
- Individual socio-economic factors have comparatively weak and ambiguous effects on migration aspirations. The same is true for demographic and family-related factors, except age.

Many of the determinants are roughly aligned with dimensions of development and well-being, reflecting the extent to which individuals live fulfilling lives in well-functioning societies, or not. These determinants allow for considering whether migration aspirations are driven primarily by deprivation and despair. Indeed, eleven determinants point in this direction, in the sense that worse-off individuals in worse-off societies are more likely to have migration aspirations.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> These are socio-economic status, homeownership, employment status, income, subjective well-being, country- or community-level development, governance, public services, corruption, violence and insecurity, social attachment and participation, and change over time.

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There are two exceptions, pointing in the opposite direction: internet access or use, and educational attainment. Both are valued characteristics in the sense of human development, and results suggest that they raise migration aspirations. Internet use is particularly challenging to interpret, though, since individuals who have migration aspirations are presumably more likely to use the internet, which makes it hard to determine what causes what. The same type of mechanism can apply to education, if people see educational credentials as a stepping-stone to international migration. In that case, educational attainment can be the result of migration aspirations, rather than the other way around. The extent of such two-way effects is difficult to determine.

One development-related variable – income – stands out with *divergent* effects on migration aspirations. Herein lies potential for much more fine-grained analyses of variations in the effect of income across geographical contexts and socio-economic strata.

Across the different thematic domains, we have documented a wealth of insightful research on the determinants of migration aspirations. Still, there is substantial scope for better insights. Most basically, we would like to see more deliberate, more precisely discussed, and better documented measures of migration aspirations. Surprisingly often, the exact formulation of survey questions is either not available or poorly aligned with the terminology that is used in the text. The formulation of survey questions on migration aspirations is discussed in greater detail elsewhere (Carling 2019; Carling and Mjelva 2021).

In terms of research design, we have already pointed to the value of longitudinal designs that allow for also examining the conversion of migration aspirations into actual migration. Similarly, longitudinal designs could be valuable for the study of migration aspirations. For instance, longitudinal panel data allow for examination of the effect of independent variables at different points in time, which may give an intake to whether particular co-variations with migration aspirations are causal or mutually effective. But while longitudinal designs can be prohibitively expensive or difficult to finance, there is also room for greater insights from cross-sectional surveys. In particular, we would welcome greater use of multilevel analyses that shed light on both individual and societal dynamics. This requires data spanning several communities, regions or countries, which many datasets already do. Determinants such as environmental stress, levels of inequality, or social cohesion can only be fully assessed through comparisons between societies or localities, as well as between individuals.

Our systematic literature review leaves out important bodies of research that fell outside our scope but would also benefit from systematic reviews. This primarily concerns two themes: aspirations for onward and return migration among current migrants, and migration aspirations among specific groups, such as health care workers. Within the scope of our review, it is also clear that each determinant we have examined could be addressed in much greater detail.

Those who approach the survey-based literature on migration aspirations without awareness of ethnographic research could remain blind to the role of factors such as indebtedness, interpersonal obligations, and social identities. There is a dual challenge here, of expanding survey research to cover currently under-researched determinants, and also fostering more systematic links across methodologies. Some issues will remain elusive to surveys alone and require multi-method approaches.

To advance our understanding of the drivers of migration aspirations, therefore, there is a need to develop empirical approaches which allow us to assess, not only the interrelatedness of various determinants, but also relations between the individual and the structures in which their aspirations are formed: family, community, and the wider socio-economic-cultural milieu.

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