

# Anticipated job benefits, career aspiration, and generalized self-efficacy as predictors for migration decision-making



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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify person-level factors, rather than economic situations, that influence migration decision-making and actual migration. Building on the theory of planned behavior, this study investigated potential migrants' expectations and attitudes toward migration and career (i.e., anticipated job benefits of migration, career aspiration) as well as beliefs (i.e., generalized self-efficacy) as predictors of migration decision-making conceptualized in three phases: the pre-decisional, pre-actional, and actional phases. This was examined with cross-sectional pre-migration questionnaire data from 1163 potential migrants from Spain to Germany. We also examined whether the migration decision-making phases predicted actual migration with a subsample ( $n=249$ ) which provided follow-up data within twelve months. For the cross-sectional sample, multinomial logistic regressions revealed that anticipated job benefits and career aspiration are predictive for all migration phases. Self-efficacy predicts the preactional (e.g., gathering information) and actional phases (e.g., making practical arrangements). Finally, for those with low self-efficacy, anticipated job benefits play a stronger role for taking action. For the longitudinal subsample, a logistic regression revealed that being in the preactional and actional phases at baseline is predictive of actual migration within twelve months. This study expands previous research on migration intentions and behaviors by focusing on expectations, values, and beliefs as person-level predictors for migration decision-making. With a longitudinal sample, it shows that international migration is a process that involves multiple phases.

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## 1. Introduction

Within the context of cross-cultural research, the migration process has been studied with psychological, social, and economic factors as important components (Berry, 1997, 2005; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Although most research has focused on acculturation and socio-cultural adaptation processes in the post-migration phase (see the following reviews Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Salant & Lauderdale, 2003; Wilson, Ward, & Fischer, 2013), researchers have also considered the pre-migration phase in order to explore predictors for migration intentions and behaviors (De Jong, 2000; Kley, 2013). These pre-migration studies have primarily concentrated on economic and social factors that shape the decision to migrate. From an economic perspective, traditional theories on migration are based on the assumption that people migrate in order

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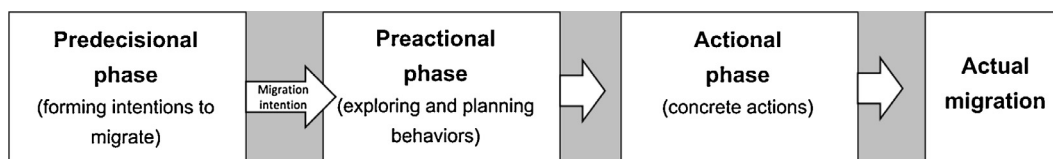


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

to improve financial and social standing (see Massey et al., 1993 for a review). Following this reasoning many studies have confirmed high unemployment as a predictor for migration (Kumpikaitė & Zickute, 2013; Mihi-Ramírez, Rudžionis, & Kumpikaitė, 2014; Neto & Mullet, 1998; Pissarides & Wadsworth, 1989). This economic perspective has been expanded to include social factors as important drivers of migration. It has been well documented that the existence of social networks of friends and family in the destination country increases the intention to migrate and actual migration behavior (Kritz & Zlotnik, 1992; Massey, 1999).

Yet, these economic and social factors do not fully explain why people migrate. For example, in a study of Dutch migrants, unemployment and social networks – though important predictors – were not the main drivers of actual migration (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2012, 2013). Therefore, researchers call for studies that consider person-level factors such as expectations, values, beliefs, and personality traits as predictors for migration decision-making (Boneva & Frieze, 2001; Tabor & Milfont, 2011). Boneva and Frieze (2001) claimed that those who intend to migrate differ from those who want to stay in their home country with regard to these person-level variables. Indeed, a few recent studies showed that migration is predicted by person-level factors, such as risk aversion and sensation seeking (Gibson & McKenzie, 2011; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2013), expectations for adaptation difficulties or discrimination (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Yijälä, 2011), and self-efficacy (Jasinskaja-Lahti & Yijälä, 2011; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2013). With the current study we expand this small body of research by investigating the combination of expectations, values, and beliefs as person-level predictors for migration decision-making with a sample of potential migrants from Spain to Germany during their pre-migration period.

Drawing on a migration decision-making framework that builds on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) and the Rubicon model (Gollwitzer, 1996; Heckhausen, 1991), this study investigates expectations (i.e., anticipated job benefits), values (i.e., career aspiration), and beliefs (i.e., generalized self-efficacy) along with other person-level, social, and economic predictors for migration decision-making. Furthermore, with a longitudinal sample, we explore how migration decision-making predicts actual migration. We argue that, in order to grasp the complexity of migration as a process, we must gain a better understanding of person-level predictors that shape migration intentions and behaviors.

### 1.1. Migration decision-making phases

Migration decision-making is a multi-phase process that begins well before the actual move to another country. One of the most frequently applied frameworks for explaining the migration process is De Jong's (2000) model on migration decision-making. Building on the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), which postulates that intentions are the primary factor influencing behavior, de Jong's model differentiates between migration *intention* and migration *behavior*, and asserts that migration intention is the best predictor for migration behavior. Intention is defined as a person's motivation and perceived likelihood to perform a specific behavior (Ajzen, 1991) whereas behavior involves concrete actions. Several studies on international migration have provided empirical support for this two-phase model (e.g., Creighton, 2013; Van Dalen & Henkens, 2013). Despite the strong predictive power of intentions on actual behaviors, the literature on migration decision-making also reveals that intentions alone do not explain actual migration. For example, one study of Dutch residents reported that only 34% of respondents who had indicated a strong intention to migrate actually migrated within five years (Van Dalen & Henkens, 2013).

The two-phase perspective of migration decision-making was expanded by Kley (2011) who drew on the *Rubicon model*, a motivational theory on decision-making (Gollwitzer, 1996; Heckhausen, 1991). The model divides the decision-making process into three instead of two phases: the predecisional, preactional, and actional phases. The predecisional phase corresponds with intentions in De Jong's model. It involves initial thoughts and considerations regarding migration, which often remain vague and do not involve preparatory actions. This phase terminates with the decision to migrate. Next, the model focuses on migration behaviors by dividing them into two distinct phases that both involve preparatory actions for migration: In the preactional phase a person begins to explore options for migrating by gathering information from friends, agencies, and organizations. These actions are still tentative and involve no obligation. Subsequently, the actional phase involves a very concrete and determined pursuit of goal completion such as making logistical arrangements for the move or accepting a job offer.

To investigate person-level factors as predictors of migration decision making, we build on Kley's three-phase model: (1) a predecisional phase (people express intentions to migrate, but have not taken any actions), (2) a preactional phase (people engage in exploring and planning behaviors), and (3) an actional phase (people take concrete actions for migrating) (see Fig. 1).

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