

## Introduction

We are thrilled to introduce the special issue that casts new light on migration decision-making. The selection of this theme is evidently pertinent, arising from the post-2022 influx of Ukrainian migrants who sought refuge in various European countries following Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. These forced migrants did not fit into earlier existing definitions but exemplify a unique case warranting academic scrutiny. Their decision-making, due to its atypical nature, raised new questions which later, as this volume presents, could also be investigated in different contexts supplementing the existing body of scholarship.

Despite migration decision-making being a foundational topic in migration studies, its contemporary examination remains limited. This paucity of scholarly engagement is perplexing, given the significance attached to this act by policymakers who tend to divide migrants into different categories purely based on the reason for their migration. The consequences of such division should push scholars toward studying and popularising the inherent complexity and unpredictability of the migration decision-making process. As Czaika et al. (2021:15) aptly note, the success or failure of migrants depends on indeterminate circumstances prior to the process (ex-ante) and the challenges migrants navigate once underway (ex-post). This characterization underscores the profound ambiguity, encompassing boundless individual aspirations juxtaposed with constrained and uncertain outcomes.

This special issue is a step into building a new understanding of migration decision-making. The discussion is initiated by addressing the traditional dichotomy between voluntary and forced migration. Such binary classification categorising economic migration as voluntary and refugee movement lacking agency, is evidently outdated and ineffective. Such a perception of migration decision-making not only appears excessively simplified, but it also overlooks the intricate interplay between choice and coercion.

The seven papers, presented in this volume, guide readers through various dimensions of migration decision-making. The individual narratives and histories illustrate that migration decision-making is far from being a straightforward process. Rather,

it is a highly nuanced phenomenon, set in various contexts and filled with uncertainties and complexities.

The issue begins with a theoretical paper on migration decision-making by Ewa Ślęzak-Belowska and Agnieszka Bielewska. The authors present a new model for understanding the “decision-making” process that includes experiences of different categories of migrants at different stages of migration. Despite its existing significant and diverse body of knowledge related to it, the topic of migration decision-making requires in authors’ opinion further exploration and reconceptualization. They adopt various disciplinary and methodological approaches, and offer multiple perspectives, encompassing not only categories of voluntary and forced migrants, and the interplay of choice and coercion, but also highlighting different degrees of agency among selected categories of migrants. Filling the identified gaps in current conceptualizations, they develop a new model that encompasses the elements missing in the earlier works.

Anne White’s study of economic migrants highlights the discrepancy between the labels “forced” and “voluntary” migration, as well as the experiences of individuals undertaking the journey. Her interviewees simultaneously experience both choice and coercion. Their migration narratives encompass feelings of being compelled to migrate while also viewing it as an opportunity. White adopts Leffer’s (2023) “both-and” orientation towards agency and coercion in migrants’ decision-making, rather than an “either-or” perspective. She further analyses how decisions are understood and what deciding means for her research subjects, exploring how they articulate their sense of agency.

Barbara Jaczewska’s paper introduces to the migration decision-making the notion of multilocal living understood as activity falling between relocation and everyday mobility. Her research demonstrates that people make decisions not only between leaving or staying, but between mobility, multilocality and staying. Jaczewska studies Polish specialists who engage in various forms of multilocal living to evaluate the effectiveness of three theoretical approaches in capturing the spatial dimensions of their decision-making. She examines how rational choice theory, the sociology of everyday life, and actor-network theory influence the interpretation of their decision-making processes.

Zuzanna Kapciak and Paula Pustułka’s paper explores migration as a process, focusing on the complexity of individual and family trajectories. They convincingly argue that migration stories offer a broader perspective for understanding migration decision-making than simply asking about reasons for migration. By examining Polish families in Germany, the paper reveals how both migration decisions and migration paths are narrated across generations. Both parents and adult children refer to the same events when describing their move to Germany, sharing co-created memories and meanings, even if they express different emotions.

While Kapciak and Pustułka’s research focuses on families and captures the narratives of adults, Elżbieta Goździak brings to the discussion the role of children in family

migration decision-making. Her focus on children is evident in her methodology, as her research is conducted with children and by children, with teenage girls serving as her co-researchers. This approach introduces two new elements to the discussion on migration decision-making: it highlights the agency of children in migration and introduces children's education as a significant area of migration decision-making. Goździak examines the impact of children and young adults on family decisions. The migration decisions identified by her, reach out beyond the classic choice of moving or staying and include selecting the type of school (public versus private, with instruction in English, Ukrainian, or Polish), relocating within the host country to find better educational opportunities, and deciding whether to return to their home country.

Agnieszka Kurzemska explores a topic that is not widely addressed among migration scholars: the decisions and consumer behaviour of migrants in the context of their acculturation. Drawing on research conducted with a heterogeneous group of Polish migrants in the United States, Kurzemska analyses key consumption patterns within this group. Her findings reveal that consumer acculturation reflects broader social inequalities and can either support integration or act oppressively. The study found that Polish migrants generally maintain healthier dietary habits than general population, emphasizing fresh products over the highly processed American diet. However, dietary patterns within the diaspora are complex and influenced by multiple factors, highlighting the need to promote positive aspects of Polish cuisine while addressing risks associated with westernized eating habits.

The issue concludes with a fascinating piece by Natalia Ożegalska-Łukasik, which takes us on a journey to understand how Chinese migrants in Poland make their migration decisions. Chinese people face unique challenges in maintaining family obligations, particularly while migrating to a country like Poland, which is both geographically distant and has a relatively small Chinese diaspora. This study smoothly analyses the migration experience, including decision-making factors, perceptions of filial piety (*xiao*), and practices for maintaining family ties when living abroad. Her findings reveal that Chinese migrants generally view Poland as a temporary residence, with limited opportunities to develop transnational care strategies. For most participants of the study, the decision to migrate to Poland was influenced by external factors, and interestingly they expressed a desire to return to China, anticipating a deeper emotional engagement with their aging parents upon their return.

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