

Understanding migrant decision-making: implications for policy

WORKING PAPER



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1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is one of today's most visible policy agendas. Across Europe, the combination of increasingly polarised political environments and 2015's so-called 'refugee crisis' has resulted in a shift towards restrictive migration policies designed to stop certain categories of people from coming to the continent. While most countries continued to maintain policies designed to attract skilled migrants – some notable exceptions to this include Hungary, Poland and the UK – for the most part policies towards refugees and migrants moving through irregular channels became more restrictive (Cosgrave et al., 2016; Hargrave and Pantuliano, 2016)¹.

This policy priority is coupled with large amounts of bilateral and multilateral funding. The EU's €4.5 billion Emergency Trust Fund (EUTF) for Africa, launched in Valetta in 2015, aims to promote stability and address 'root causes' of migration (EU, 2019). One year later, the EU offered €3 billion to Turkey – alongside other political concessions and promises of resettlement of refugees from Turkey – in exchange for the country's government essentially closing off the Turkey-Greece border. These trends are set to continue: the EU's most recent budget for the period 2021-2027 puts aside €34.9 billion for migration and border management – an almost three-fold increase compared to the 2014-2020 budget (EU, 2018).

On the surface, many of these policies aim to better 'manage migration' – to create safer, more predictable and more orderly migration practices. To this end, in December 2018, the (non-binding) Global Compact for Migration was endorsed by 152 countries at the United Nations. The Compact presents a vision for 'safe, orderly and regular migration' (language used by many of the actors in this area).

Yet, the goal of prevention is clearly visible in these policy discussions. Safe and orderly migration is often used simply as short-hand for deterring and stopping migration. Tackling 'root causes' and supporting development in order to curb migration remains high on policy agendas. For instance, the idea behind many of the EUTF's development projects is that potential migrants are offered other opportunities so that they decide not to make the journey in the first place.

The effectiveness of such an approach remains, at best, unclear. Empirical evidence based on longitudinal data and policy analysis shows that when a strong demand for migrant labour remains, measures to stop migration are largely

¹ We use migrants as an overarching term here to denote a person who changes their usual place of residence. This broad group of migrants includes all types of migrants, including refugees. As argued by Carling (2017), differentiating between migrants and refugees is counter-productive because it could undermine protection for other migrants, besides refugees. Further, refugees and migrants often face similar challenges and share similarities in their decision-making processes. This paper's main focus is on those who move through irregular channels.

ineffective. Using a 38-country data set, Czaika and de Haas (2013) show that more restrictive visa policies often result in what they call ‘substitution effects’, reducing circular and return migration whilst displacing migrants into irregularity. Moreover, drawing on almost eight decades’ worth of data on the US-Mexico border, Clemens and Gough (2018) demonstrate that enforcement efforts have only been successful in suppressing irregular migration when coupled with the expansion of channels for regular migration.

The evidence on deterrence and dissuasion policies paints an equally ambiguous picture. A recent OECD study across a range of policy areas, including the provision of health and social protection benefits as well as employment programming, shows that policies often produce inadvertent and unexpected effects, some of which even run counter to their initial objectives (OECD, 2017). A review of more than 100 studies found that livelihood interventions are in fact more likely to facilitate migration aspirations and plans than prevent them (Fratzke and Salant, 2018). Likewise, there is little evidence that information campaigns for migrants – such as those seeking to raise awareness of the risks associated with irregular migration journeys – are particularly effective at achieving their goals (Browne, 2015; Oeppen, 2016; Tjadden et al, 2018).

The key question, then, is why these kinds of migration policies so often fall short. One possible answer is that rather than being based on evidence of what actually works, they are put in place to respond to populist concerns (Balfour et al., 2016). Indeed, many studies have noted the irrelevance of migration policies per se, pointing instead to the comparatively more powerful role that ‘non-migration’ policies play in shaping migration behaviours. Access to economic opportunities and education, for example, have been shown to be important factors in decision-making (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016; OECD, 2017; Thielemann, 2014), while other studies have highlighted the importance of historical ties in explaining migration patterns (Jackson et al., 2012; Wiklund, 2012).

This paper contributes an additional answer to the question of why migration policies are often ineffective, specifically by drawing attention to a crucial perspective missing from the mainstream debate. It argues that migration policies designed to reduce irregular and forced migration need to take account of how migrants themselves act and operate at the micro level. Understanding actual migration behaviours is a first step to understanding under which conditions migration happen, that is making migration more predictable and supporting those on the move to have safer migration trajectories. In other words, understanding people’s aspirations, behaviours and decision-making processes can contribute to creating genuinely safer and more orderly migration practices.

This paper is divided into three further sections. In the first section, we summarise the evidence on factors that shape individual decision-making. The

second section introduces a new framework to help connect the preceding stocktake of the evidence to the core question of policy effectiveness, thereby considering how migrant decision-making mediates the impacts of policy. We conclude with four lessons for policy-making.

2. WHICH FACTORS SHAPE MIGRANT DECISION-MAKING?

The process of migration is underpinned by a number of interrelated decisions – whether to migrate in the first place, where to go and how to get there – these are the focus of this paper². Though these decisions are closely connected to each other and may sometimes occur simultaneously, it is important to distinguish between these various elements given that the same factor or policy might have different effects on different aspects of the decision-making process³. It is also important to keep in mind that migrants are likely to go through this process several times: when they first decide to migrate, and again at various different stages during the migration journey.

Decision-making can vary for different types of migrants. For labour migrants recruited along formal migration channels, the ‘where to go’ and ‘how to get there’ components of decision-making are often pre-determined, before mobility takes place. Likewise, those migrating for family, study or adventure will in parts follow a different process than the one described below. Hence, the discussion in this section mostly applies to those who move through irregular channels: people fleeing conflict and human rights abuse for whom there are no legal entry routes or people looking for work who cannot get access to legal entry routes/work visas.

2.1 WHETHER TO GO

Theories on the causes of migration have long been influenced by neoclassical notions of rational agents maximising utility, for instance the New Economics of Labour Migration sees migration as a household decision to maximise absolute and relative income and minimise financial risks (Stark, 1991). These theories have since been critiqued quite widely, including on the basis of their failure to pay attention to wider systems and structures and the ways in which migration networks and past migration can facilitate further migration (e.g. Goss and Lindquist, 1995; Massey, 1990). While this paper focuses on the micro-foundations of migration practices, and therefore does not explicitly engage with their broader structural causes, it works

² Others include whether to send remittances and, if so, how much, whether to organise/ engage in activism, whether to return.

³ See also Velde and van Naerssen (2011, 2015, 2018) who put forward the so-called threshold model formalising the idea of different stages of the decision-making process.

with a conception of human agency and decision-making that both: i) emphasises how individuals relate and respond to wider structures and circumstances (i.e. it is not about agency in the abstract or without constraints); and ii) incorporates a broader, more empirically grounded view of the factors motivating movement across borders (i.e. beyond narrow ideas of utility maximisation).

Our understanding of the initial decision to migrate has evolved greatly over past decades. No longer is this decision seen as an individual-level, rational, straight-forward decision motivated by wage differentials, but a fundamentally personal and social process, driven and shaped by feelings, perceptions, relationships and networks. Personal characteristics (e.g. gender) and circumstances, material conditions, aspirations and opportunities (e.g. access to jobs and education) all play a role (Carling and Schewel, 2018; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016).

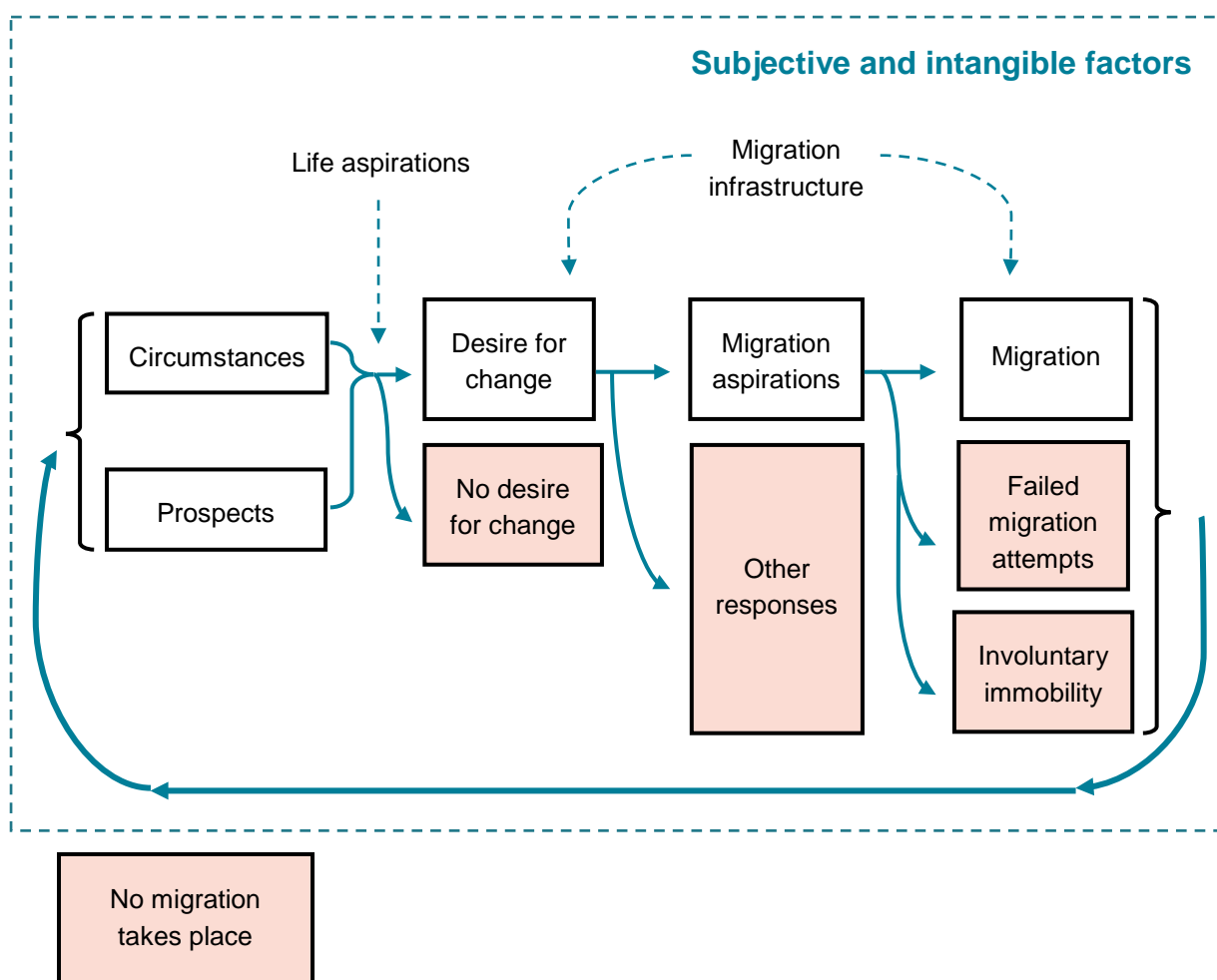
Migration can only take place where there is a desire for change (see Figure 1 for an illustration of the migration decision-making causal chain). But where does this come from? Limited prospects and economic opportunities can drive a desire for change. Moreover, often, this desire is rooted in difficult circumstances, such as political and economic insecurity, conflict, violence, human rights abuses and repressive governments. Desire for change is in essence about people wanting to make a change in their life to manage a wide range of risks – and this change could be migration, but it does not have to be (Gagnon and Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Stark, 1991). These underlying drivers are often described as the ‘root causes’ of migration and are a key area of interest to policy-makers. However, the wide range of policies that have sought to tackle these ‘root causes’ often produce counterintuitive effects, shaping as they often do not just root causes but also individual aspirations for a better future. For instance, higher levels of education have been shown to foster migration aspirations, in turn often leading to higher migration levels (Clemens and Postel, 2017). Greater access to vocational or livelihood trainings has also been shown to lead to higher outmigration rates (Fratzke and Salant, 2018; OECD, 2017), amongst other reasons because the new skills are not easily applied in domestic labour markets

Policy-makers are most interested in the point where a desire for change results in aspirations for migration: where aspirations become more concrete plans and intentions to migrate, and eventually result in preparation and actual migration. In fact, aspirations for migration are only one possible response to a ‘desire for change’, and the vast majority of people around the world in fact do not possess an aspiration to migrate⁴. Moreover, throughout this stage of ‘cognitive migration’,

⁴ Carling and Schewel (2018) map global migration aspirations by measuring the respondents who would prefer to move permanently to another country, based on OECD data. They find that this proportion is highest in Sierra

migration taking place in minds before physical migration (Koikkalainen and Kyle, 2015), aspirations can evolve and become weaker as well as stronger⁵. For instance, conversations with family members or friends, stories, pictures and media representations of migration and destination countries can strengthen weak migration aspirations⁶ - this is represented by the dotted line from migration infrastructure in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Migration decision-making is messy and aspirations for change don't necessarily result in migration



Source: Author elaboration of Carling and Talleraas (2016).

Aspirations can only be realised when the ability and capacity to migrate are available to a migrant (Carling, 2014, de Haas, 2010). This means having the financial means, family support, a social network that can provide information and

Leone (56%), Liberia (54%), Haiti (52%) and the Dominican Republic (52%), but much lower in the rest of the world.

⁵ On a methodological note, it is extremely difficult to capture thoughts and feelings about migration. Aspirations and related concepts are elusive, fuzzy and hard to operationalise empirically. They require the measurement of something highly subjective, which may actually never be 'revealed' if the 'aspired-to' action does not take place (see Carling, 2019 for a conceptualisation of different aspects of migration aspirations).

⁶ For instance, access to Italian television has been linked to increased migration from Albania to Italy (Mai, 2013).

other support, access to the migration infrastructure (e.g. brokers) and pathways for migration. As mentioned above, sometimes policies can inadvertently relax such (financial) constraints, making migration more feasible than it was prior to the policy roll-out, for instance new skills learnt in a TVET programme, or cash transfers allowing family members to finance migration of another member (OECD, 2017).

At this point, the ‘whether to go’ decision starts intersecting with ‘where to go’ and ‘how to get there’.

2.2 WHERE TO GO⁷

When ‘aspiring’ migrants start planning and realising a desire for migration, considerations of where to go start coming in more concretely. It is important to distinguish between destination choices/ decisions and preferences here: due to an increasingly restrictive policy context and, in particular, the lack of safe and regular migration pathways, aspiring migrants may not always be able to go to the country they initially intended to go to (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019).

A number of different factors at the macro, meso and micro level shape the destination preferences of migrants. At the macro level, a number of studies highlight the importance of historical ties (e.g. a Colonialist past) for destination preferences (e.g. Jackson et al., 2012; Wiklund, 2012), with factors including shared language and favourable visa requirements making particular destinations more attractive. Geographical distance also plays a role here, with refugees and other migrants often opting for a neighbouring or regional country (at least initially).

Other structural factors at the macro-level, including employment opportunities and migration policies, also affect the overall attractiveness of destinations. Consistent with macro migration theories (e.g. Todaro and Harris, 1970; Stark, 1991), labour market access and the availability of jobs have been found to influence destination preferences (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016; Hanson and McIntosh 2012; Mallett et al., 2017; Riosmena and Massey 2012). Contrary to popular perceptions, there is not much empirical evidence supporting the assumption that welfare states act as a significant pull factor (James and Mayblin, 2016), though a few conclude that some specific interventions contribute to the destination preferences of some nationalities (e.g. Jackson et al. 2012; Kuschminder and Koser, 2017).

The question of most interest to policy-makers in this area is the significance of migration policies. On the whole, the evidence – as reviewed by Crawley and Hagen-Zanker (2019) – is mixed. Around a dozen (mostly quantitative) studies find that certain migration policies influence destination preferences, although importantly

⁷ This section draws on Crawley and Hagen-Zanker (2019).

some find this only for specific aspects of policies, specific nationalities or specific host countries. For instance, Kuschminder and Koser (2017) find evidence that only *favourable* migration policies, such as asylum acceptance rates or rights for asylum seekers, are influential (in some cases) with their study finding no evidence of the corollary i.e. that adverse policies deter migration.

Some of the recent qualitative and in-depth research has explored precisely *how* migration policies affect destination preferences (Crawley et al., 2017; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016; McAuliffe and Jayasuriya, 2016). In the cases explored, most migrants lacked specific knowledge about the actual migration policies of potential destination countries, instead coming into contact with more anecdotal information provided by family, friends, acquaintances and brokers/ smugglers before departure and whilst on the move. This information can be of varying quality and at times it appears to be inaccurate or incomplete. This means that where migration policies come into play at all, it is the *interpretation* and *perception* of such policies that appears to be of most consequence.

Finally, at the micro level, individual socio-economic and demographic characteristics also have a role to play in shaping potential destinations. Resources, social networks, educational attainment, whether people are able to speak/read different languages, whether or not they are travelling with children and social networks all play a major role in opening up – or closing down – the options available to people (Collyer 2005; Crawley, 2010; Robinson and Segrott, 2002). At this level we also find the subjective, intangible, deeply personal and possibly irrational factors that shape destination preferences. Often it is not a single factor that leads to a decision. Rather it is a ‘coming together’ of a series of different factors, often based on a country’s reputation and the perception that somewhere is a ‘good country’ – a place where it appears possible to make a future due to the existence of economic opportunities, together with rights and freedoms (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019). As mentioned above, friends and family and (social) media can play a critical role in shaping such perceptions.

2.3 HOW TO GET THERE

For far too long, this final question of how a migrant journey actually happens has been seen as a meaningless intermediate phase (Cresswell, 2010). This is no longer the case and the past few years have seen high-quality media reporting on migration journeys, for example [the BBC Exodus programme](#) which followed migrants on their journeys to Europe in 2015 or reporting on the migrant caravan in Mexico more recently.

Looking at migration journeys is important because for many migrants these journeys represent a ‘profoundly formative experience’ (BenEzer and Zetter, 2015: 297) and as such can change aspirations, plans and migration outcomes. This is

particularly the case for migrants who do not have access to a formal migration pathway, such as getting on a plane with a visa or work permit. For this group, by necessity migration journeys tend to be non-linear and rarely straightforward (Crawley and Jones, forthcoming). Multiple phases of both mobility and immobility are typically involved, with many migrants initially settling in transit countries in the region but then moving on – either sooner or later – when they are unable to make a future for themselves (see for example Crawley et al., 2018; Mallett et al., 2017). People do not necessarily travel along the easiest or quickest route, constrained as they are by border controls, limits on financial and social capital, the actions of smugglers, and the extent and reliability of available information. Aspirations and plans change, and decisions evolve as the journey unfolds.

It is within the context of journeys that the role of good or bad luck and chance encounters in changing the course of a migrant's journey has been highlighted. In their research on irregular migrants' journeys and decision-making, Gladkova and Mazzucato (2017) show that chance events such as meeting someone who shares new information can have both long-lasting and far-reaching effects on migration decisions, even if encounters are ephemeral or relatively fleeting in nature. Furthermore, such chance events are more likely to happen – and can have stronger effects – during periods of uncertainty and vulnerability, which defines many current migration journeys (ibid).

People's journeys and migration experiences are also shaped by their *personal* willingness to take risks. Recent empirical evidence suggests that many migrants appear to tolerate high levels of dangers on the road (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016; Mbaye, 2014; Townsend and Oomen, 2015;). While it might look like this is because of limited awareness of the risks, personal risk assessment models are often much more nuanced and refined than the current the dominant narrative acknowledges (Townsend and Oomen, 2015). Three points are worth making in this respect. First, some research suggests that for many people the risk of death or injury seems worth taking when placed in relation to the more immediate threats to personal safety faced back home (ibid) or countries-of-first-destination like Libya. This is of course particularly relevant to forced displacement. Second, many migrants have already experienced years of violence or conflict at home, and this may increase their willingness to take risks. There is a growing literature that shows a correlation between long-term exposure to violence and lasting changes in risk preferences. For instance, some of these studies find that individuals exposed to conflict have increased risk tolerance (Callen et al., 2014; Voors et al., 2012). And third, migrants may be operating on a different timeframe, prioritising long-term objectives over short term cost and hardship. Such long-term planning is consistent with economic migration theory, e.g. the New Economics of Labour Migration which suggests that families invest in a family member migrating, even if (financial) costs for the family are higher in the short term, to spread risks and improve the long-term

wellbeing of the entire family (Stark, 1991).

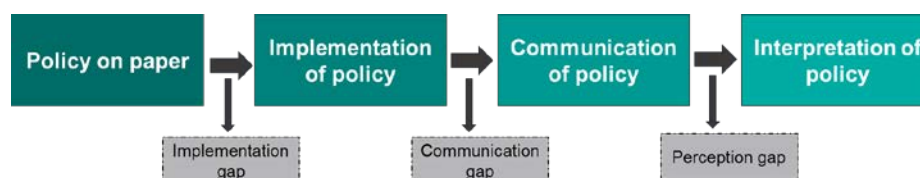
3. WHAT DOES THIS ALL MEAN FOR MIGRATION POLICY?

This paper set out to show what the complexity of migrant decision-making means for policy. The previous section summarised the factors that influence different aspects of key migration decisions, including whether to migrate, where to go and how to get there. In this penultimate section, we show how these decisions affect the effectiveness of migration policies by introducing the ‘policy transformation process’ framework.

This framework helps us understand how the objectives of migration policies tend to get diluted at different stages of the policy lifecycle, and why they might subsequently not achieve their intended aims. More specifically, and as the preceding discussion illustrates, policies are often ineffective because they are based on flawed assumptions of migrant decision-making processes – resulting in a chasm between policy on paper and the aspects of policy that actually stand a realistic chance of influencing migrant behaviour.

The central issue at play here is that policy-makers appear to assume that migrants know, understand and act upon migration policies precisely as these were set out on paper. However, as the framework we put forward shows, policies undergo a ‘transformation process’, where at every stage the content of the policy evolves into something slightly different to the original policy document. While this framework is both rooted in and inspired by the important theoretical work of Czaika and de Haas (2013) – in which the authors argue that an ‘implementation gap’ can limit the effectiveness of policy⁸ – we propose that there are two further gaps resulting in ineffective policy outcomes: an information gap and a perception gap. This refined framework is depicted in Figure 2 and shows the gradual transformation of policy.

Figure 2 The policy transformation process



Source: Author elaboration of Czaika and de Haas (2013).

⁸ The authors also argue that discursive gap (the discrepancy between public discourses and policies on paper) is a further explanation for why migration policies seem to fail.

The first stage results in the implementation gap: that is, the disparity between a policy on paper and its implementation (Czaika and de Haas, 2013). Factors such as financial and human resources, competing policy priorities, and the discretion of officials explain why policies might not be (fully) implemented (ibid).

Then there is the ‘communication gap’. Recalling some of the earlier research cited in this paper, information on the aims and content of policies does not always filter down directly and clearly to migrants. Instead, it can get lost and distorted along the way, meaning that migrants may possess limited or incomplete knowledge of actual migration policies (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016). As one example, a study by Mallett et al. (2017) highlighted how Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia were often uncertain about the mechanics of resettlement programming, particularly in relation to timeframes and general likelihood of acceptance. Not only did this manifest itself in personal situations of considerable mental stress, but the accompanying loss of faith in formal systems meant that the risks of irregular transit became somehow more tolerable.

Policy-makers are mostly aware of this gap, and migration information campaigns – particularly on the subject of irregular migration risks – have gained in popularity in recent years as an explicit attempt to address this. The problem is that such campaigns often have very limited effect on migrant decision-making (Browne, 2015; Tjaden et al., 2018). Information campaigns tend to be broadly targeted towards a wide group of potential migrants and focus on the general risks of irregularity rather than specific policies or pathways for regular migration. Moreover, research suggests that people use trusted information to make their decisions, drawn from their social networks rather than donors or destination countries (Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016). People might also be distrustful of the donor’s underlying interests – especially if the messaging focuses purely on deterrence – and they might discredit the information as not relevant (Carling and Talleraas, 2016).

In addition to the ‘information gap’, individual-level perceptions and interpretations of policy are also different to how they look on paper – and they also matter for how policy gets diluted down the line. People may have subjective interpretations of the information communicated or only absorb partial information about the policies. We call this a ‘perception’ gap. Migration decisions are a deeply personal and subjective process. Subjective, frequently non-economic, intangible and often deeply personal factors and characteristics often shape people’s thinking (Carling and Collins 2017). For example, migrants often explain destination preferences with a country’s ‘reputation’ – a factor which cannot be objectively measured in any obvious or straightforward way. This gap can also vary by education level: migrants with lower literacy who mainly rely on secondary information may have higher perception gaps.

Crucially, people’s aspirations colour their interpretation of policies and the type

of policies that influence their decisions. Such aspirations explain why migration policies are often of relatively minor importance compared to broader public policies around employment, education and human rights (see, for example, Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016). Aspirations mean migrants are operating under a different time-frame and can explain why they might be willing to accept high risks and costs in the short term for greater opportunities / wellbeing for themselves and their families in the future. This holds not just for initial migration decisions: return and reintegration is now a major policy objective amongst European policy-makers, but when such policies, including those in countries of origin (OECD, 2017), do not take return migrants' aspirations into account, re-migration is likely.

This final gap is the one most neglected by policy-makers, and at the same time appears the hardest to address. Paradoxically, however, it is here where it becomes most apparent that policy-makers need to consider and understand micro-level dynamics in order to create effective policies.

Finally, as discussed above, migration is a dynamic and constantly evolving process – it is not a one-off decision, but one that is revisited over and over again, precisely because it is intertwined with people's desire for change and aspirations for a better future. This means that the gaps outlined in the 'policy transformation process are also not static. At different stages, migrants may have more or less information and different aspiration and perceptions of policies.

While the gaps put forward in our framework explain why migration policies often fail, they also offer opportunities for improving the effectiveness of policy. Policy entry points and lessons for policy-makers are therefore discussed next.

4. FOUR LESSONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Migration journeys are not a straight-forward movement from 'A to B', with a clear and linear causal chain (Crawley and Jones, forthcoming; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016), but rather a messy, subjective and complicated process. It is important to understand people's underlying aspirations, motives and perceptions in their desire for change. While an aspiration to migrate might be the outcome of a desire for change, it does not necessarily have to be. Likewise, if people's aspirations cannot be met in origin or transit countries, it is likely that onward migration will remain a priority for them. People interpret options, opportunities and policies subjectively, based on a range of factors that are specific to the individual (but conditioned by wider environments and experiences), such as personal aspirations and willingness to take risks. In order to gauge the limits and possibilities of migration policy, it is therefore necessary to understand: what kind of information people use to make decisions; what kind of information they trust, and from which source(s); and how they subjectively perceive risks and policies.

Although the factors shaping different aspects of migrant decision-making are personal, intertwined and often detached from host country policy, this does not mean there are no entry points for policy-makers. To that end, policy makers seeking to develop more effective policies in this area should consider the following four lessons.

4.1 THE JOURNEY ITSELF INFLUENCES DECISIONS

People's plans change as they move along their journey. Final destinations are often uncertain when people start off, and then become more concrete as people move through different places and come into contact with other individuals and opportunities. Decisions about next steps and onward migration are shaped by experiences along the way, random encounters and luck – both good and bad. The majority of migrants want to (and do) stay close to home, only tending to move on if they cannot meet their aspirations. So-called transit countries or sites thus constitute a concrete entry point for policy-makers wishing to manage onward migration, with the potential effectiveness of 'transit' policies dependent on the way in which the policy transformation process unfolds. It is therefore critical to understand people's aspirations and motivations for secondary migration (for instance, our research found that Eritreans tended to express a stronger desire to move on from Ethiopia when they were unable to access formal employment or refugee resettlement (Mallett et al., 2017)).

4.2 UNDERSTAND THE POLICY TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

Migration and other public policies generally do not work as they are set out on paper. As policies move through multiple stages – from legislation to implementation to communication to perception – details get lost, diluted or misinterpreted. The communication and perception gaps we have introduced in this paper explain this transformation in the content and understanding of policy. While this suggests there may be a stronger role to play for the provision of information to migrants, here too existing information campaigns have been shown to be fairly ineffective in achieving deterrence (Tjaden et al., 2018), based as they often are on inaccurate assumptions about decision-making and failing to offer helpful information about legal alternatives. In designing such campaigns, understanding the micro is thus crucial. This means taking aspirations seriously and considering how (and why) certain kinds of information become trusted and meaningful. Part of what that might imply is additionally focusing campaigns on decent alternatives at home, rather than exclusively amplifying the dangers of the onward journey.

4.3 LOOK BEYOND MIGRATION POLICY

For the most part it is not migration policies that significantly shape people's decisions, but the broader public policy environment – access to education, labour market opportunities, and safety / rights all matter. This means that in order to effectively influence migration decisions, policy makers ideally need to cast the net much wider than 'pure' migration policy. There is evidence, for example, that labour market policy has a far greater bearing on migration outcomes than deterrence policies, as do greater opportunities for legal migration (not only for labour migrants but also for those forcibly displaced). More broadly, this calls for a 'whole of government' approach, underlining the need to work towards policy coherence across a range of different sectors.

4.4 BE POLITICALLY SMART AND OPPORTUNISTIC

There is clearly a gap between current policy-making and the actual evidence on how migration works. This gap can be at least partly explained by the fact that what counts as 'evidence' is contested, and that the policy-making process itself is refracted by vested interests and the potential for political gain (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 2018). The toxic politics surrounding the migration debate in many European countries has undoubtedly contributed towards the implementation and reproduction of migration policies that look and sound big, but in practice largely fail to achieve their intended objectives. To deliver more effective policy, policy-makers need to be politically smart and opportunistic, and to focus instead on what is politically viable (Foresti, 2017). Concrete entry-points to make migration safer, more predictable and more beneficial for migrants and host countries may or may not lie in migration policy. Ultimately, migration policy-makers need to become more inclusive in the policy-making process, potentially drawing on unusual coalitions with both non-migration policy makers as well as the private sector.

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