

# **Emigration from ‘destination’: The unfulfilled migration aspirations of the precariat in the ‘Global North’**

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*To all the morning hot chocolates  
and the afternoon drinks with my loved ones.*

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## ABSTRACT

It is often assumed that there is a fundamental difference in the emigration patterns and rationales of 'Global South' versus 'Global North' citizens, with emigration from the 'South' being associated with instrumental rationales and considered to be a result of 'misery' while emigration from the 'North' is often romanticized, linked to intrinsic rationales, and considered to be systematically fulfilled and fully voluntary. While emerging research is contradicting these assumptions, the scarce application of two-step migration approaches beyond the so-called 'Global South' hinders theory-building and reinforces artificial categorizations. This thesis applies two-step migration approaches to high-income countries from a macro- and micro-perspective and asks: *How do people in high-income countries form and fulfill their migration aspirations?* By doing so, it advances the operationalization and conceptualization of aspirations, capabilities, adaptation, and (in)voluntariness. From a macro-perspective, the objective is two-fold. First, to examine migration aspirations drivers in high-income countries and investigate whether these are different to those in moderate- and low-income countries. Secondly, to provide an operationalization and approximation of migration capabilities across countries by relying on economic, social, human and citizenship capital, which advances the aspirations-capability framework by providing a novel approach to measure capabilities at the aggregate level. I show that, from a macro-perspective, the situation of 'Westerners' appears to be, overall, ideal, as migration capabilities are high and migration aspirations drivers seem to be associated with intrinsic rationales. Through in-depth analysis in El Bierzo and Laciana, two sluggish regions in Northwest Spain, this thesis demonstrates, however, that this is not always the case given that *unfulfilled* aspirations, limited capabilities to migrate and remain, feelings of *involuntariness*, and adaptation mechanisms are also present in the so-called 'Global North'. Based on its empirical insights, this thesis theoretically and methodologically advances general theorizing on two-step migration approaches and migratory decision-making by developing propositions that: (1) conceptualize aspirations, capabilities, and involuntariness in a spectrum of degrees, (2) approach adaptation strategies as a *process* to explain how the various adaptation mechanisms interact, and (3) surpass the 'mobility bias' of transnational studies. Perhaps, more importantly, this thesis challenges artificial categories that have long crippled migration and development debates and calls for more systematic research on the formation and fulfillment of aspirations of those in precarious, neglected, and deprived regions, regardless of the country of origin and residence. In this vein, the insights of this thesis aim to reconcile theorizations of social processes in the 'Global South' and the 'Global North'.

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## ACRONYMS

|                 |                                                                     |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>AIC</b>      | Akaike Information Criterion                                        |
| <b>CARICOM</b>  | Caribbean Community                                                 |
| <b>CEN-SAD</b>  | Community of Sahel-Sahara                                           |
| <b>COMESA</b>   | Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa                       |
| <b>EAC</b>      | East African Community                                              |
| <b>ECOWAS</b>   | Economic Community of West African States                           |
| <b>ECSC</b>     | European Coal and Steel Community                                   |
| <b>EEA</b>      | European Economic Area                                              |
| <b>EFTA</b>     | European Free Trade Association                                     |
| <b>EU</b>       | European Union                                                      |
| <b>FHI</b>      | Freedom House Index                                                 |
| <b>GWP</b>      | Gallup World Poll                                                   |
| <b>HDI</b>      | Human Development Index                                             |
| <b>HPI</b>      | Henley Passport Index                                               |
| <b>IATA</b>     | International Air Transport Association                             |
| <b>MERCOSUR</b> | Southern Common Market                                              |
| <b>QNI</b>      | Quality of Nationality Index                                        |
| <b>SADC</b>     | Southern African Development Community                              |
| <b>TTTA</b>     | Australia and New Zealand under the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement |
| <b>UCDP</b>     | Uppsala Conflict Data Program                                       |
| <b>UEMOA</b>    | Treaty of the West African Economic and Monetary Union              |
| <b>UNGMD</b>    | United Nations Global Migration Database                            |
| <b>WID</b>      | World Inequality Database                                           |

## **PART I – INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH**

This thesis consists of four parts. Part I presents this thesis's research foundations and argues that simplistic distinctions between the so-called 'Global South' and 'Global North' when categorizing migration and emigration motives hinders theory-building and sustains dichotomous categories, crippling migration and development debates. Part I consists of three chapters. **Chapter 1** introduces the theoretical and empirical foundations of the thesis and presents its relevance. **Chapter 2** engages with theoretical debates, defines terms, and positions the research within two-step migration approaches. **Chapter 3** delves into the methodology employed in this thesis and justifies the combination of macro- and micro-level analyses.

## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

### 1 WHAT'S THE MATTER

Traditional migration frameworks have long assumed that if people wish to migrate, they do so, which sparked the characterization of the current global system as *The Age of Migration* (Castles and Miller 1993), though this has since changed. Following Carling's (2002) introduction of the notion of migration aspirations into the field, a greater number of scholars have adopted a two-step approach to migration. This approach encapsulates analytical frameworks with a common feature: the differentiation of the aspirations to migrate from the capability to do so<sup>1</sup>. This analytical distinction is simple and incredibly helpful to explain why some migrate, but others do not (see Carling and Schewel 2018). Thanks to this, theories on decision-making processes, immobility and migration aspirations have been advanced, and our age is increasingly being named the 'age of involuntary immobility'. This is because, since the early 2000s, scholars have paid particular attention to one of the three (im)mobility categories<sup>2</sup> that Carling (2002) introduced: involuntary immobility, which refers to the inability to fulfill migration aspirations. As a result, researchers have stressed, on the one hand, the consequences of this immobility outcome, as those with unfulfilled migration aspirations experience hopelessness, emotional limbo, despair (de Haas and Fokkema 2010; Stevens 2018; Stuesse and Coleman 2014), and exclusion from important life stages, such as adulthood, especially in places with a strong emigration culture (Jónsson 2008; Mata-Codezal 2015). On the other hand, the factors inducing involuntary immobility have also received ample attention. These include, among others, restrictive immigration policies (Drotbohm 2015; Jónsson 2008; Ortiga and Macabasag 2020, 2021; Nurick and Hak 2019), a lack of development and resources (Schewel and Fransen 2018), wartime scenarios (Lubkemann 2008; Vigh and Bjarnesen 2016) or family constraints (Adeel and Yeh 2018; de Haas and Fokkema 2010; Rodriguez-Pena 2023).

Complementing empirical studies on involuntary immobility, scholars have also explored the linkages between development and mobility (de Haas 2003, 2014), the causes and consequences of acquiescent immobility (Schewel 2015) and voluntary immobility (Mata-Codezal 2018), and how individuals adapt and try to move across (im)mobility categories (Ortiga and Macabasag 2020, 2021; Rodriguez-Pena 2023). These studies, which also adopt a two-step approach, resonate with the other three (im)mobility categories of the 'aspirations-capability' framework, which are: (1) mobility – the result of both aspirations and capabilities –; (2) voluntary immobility – being able to move but not aspiring to do – (see Carling 2002); and (3) acquiescent immobility – which presents people unable and not aspiring to migrate (Schewel 2015).

These theoretical and empirical studies not only share a conceptualization of migration in two steps, but also a similar geographical focus as most research is centered on the (im)mobility of those in and from the so-called 'Global South'. In this way, the aspirations and capabilities of individuals in Latin America (Graham and Markowitz 2011; Mata-Codezal 2015), Africa (Carling 2002; Carling et al. 2013; Conrad Suso 2020; Drotbohm 2015; Jónsson 2008), and Asia (Blondin 2020; Bylander 2017; Nurick and Hak 2019) have received careful consideration, as well as the aspirations of wartime migrants (Lubkemann 2008), those in transit (Schapendonk and Steel 2014), or stuck in destination countries (Haugen 2012; Stevens 2018; Stuesse and Coleman 2014). This geographical focus is important, and studies in this regard have kick-started the debate on the consequences

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<sup>1</sup> Carling (2002) introduced the first iteration of the two-step model – the aspiration/ability model – while de Haas (2014) proposed the aspirations-capability framework. In this thesis, I adopt the notion of 'capability' and the expanded aspirations-capability framework (de Haas 2014). I explain the justification for this, as well as the difference between 'ability' and 'capability' in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.

<sup>2</sup> This thesis engages with categories, aspirations, and capabilities to migrate and to stay. For simplification purposes, I use throughout the thesis '(im)mobility categories', '(im)mobility capabilities', and '(im)mobility aspirations' to capture both options. However, I do not make use of the notion of 'immobility aspirations' because I acknowledge that individuals do not aspire to remain socio-economically or existentially immobile (Müller-Funk, Üstübcici and Belloni 2023). In this regard, 'aspirations to stay' is a more comprehensive notion.

that unfulfilled migration aspirations have for communities and individuals, while also challenging the ‘mobility bias’ of migration studies (Schewel 2020a).

Nonetheless, the fact that most research using a two-step approach is centered on the ‘Global South’ both explains and reinforces common divides in migration studies. These include (1) investigating the forces driving *emigration* from the ‘Global South’ and *immigration* to the ‘Global North’ (Schewel 2019), and (2) viewing *emigration* from the ‘North’ and ‘South’ from different lenses. First, as Western and Northern European countries became immigration societies in the 1960s, research on emigration from the ‘Global North’ lost momentum as a research topic<sup>3</sup>, while research on the integration of migrants skyrocketed (Dodevska 2023). This is because “Western and Northern bias pervades much of the thinking on migration and development” (Geiger and Pécout 2013, 373), which results in a glaring bias towards destination countries, their needs and interests, including the motivations leading people to migrate to the ‘Global North’. Consequently, the European Union (EU) is regarded as a major ‘destination’ for Southern migrants, despite increasing historical and empirical research stressing the importance of ‘South-South’ migration (see İşleyen and El Qadim 2023) and increasing emigration in some European countries (Rodriguez-Pena forthcoming). Moreover, this emphasis on ‘immigrant integration’ (Dodevska 2023) has resulted in relatively little research on emigration in the ‘Global North’ and as such, “what drives the international mobility of people living in high-income countries remains somewhat of a *mystery* [emphasis added] [...] Emigration from industrialized countries has not been extensively examined”<sup>4</sup> (van Dalen and Henkens 2007, 37-38).

Secondly, the fact that emigration from the ‘Global North’ seemingly remains a so-called ‘mystery’ exemplifies the different explanations given to emigration from the ‘North’ versus the ‘South’. Indeed, as some have shown that economic considerations are not a dominant factor explaining emigration from high-income countries (van Dalen and Henkens 2007), ‘lifestyle migration’ approaches have gained momentum to explain why those from prosperous countries emigrate. Emigration from the ‘Global North’ is, consequently, often considered a project and associated with adventure seeking behaviors, looking for a slower pace of life, a less noisy environment, or a warmer climate (Benson and O’Reilly 2009; Sooudi 2014). This has given rise to a series of assumptions that romanticize the emigration of ‘Northern’ citizens, including the fact that ‘Westerners’ live a ‘good life’ and migrate just for intrinsic rationales, that they can systematically fulfill their life and migration aspirations, and that their migration is inherently voluntary. There are popular narratives that support these views by highlighting the ‘global citizenship’ of high-income citizens, while portraying the ‘Global South’ as an exotic place for ‘Westerners’ to discover. These include the UK reality TV series ‘A Place in the Sun’, docuseries that focus on the wonders of the world for ‘Westerners’ to explore, such as ‘Parts Unknown’, or even the film ‘Eat, Pray, Love’ (Barbour 2012). These discourses contrast with those surrounding emigration aspirations from the ‘Global South’, which are often seen as ‘a result of misery’, linked to instrumental rationales and likely to be unfulfilled (see Arar 2022; Mondain and Diagne 2013; Sancho 2017; and Schielke 2009 for analyses on the migration aspirations of individuals from the ‘Global South’ departing from this perspective).

These divides (1) showcase that there is an ‘origin bias’ in emigration research, as particularly the (im)mobility of those in low- and moderate-income countries is investigated, and (2) generate artificial distinctions around focal questions in migration studies, including who a migrant is and why people migrate. These (di)visions concurrently hinder theory-building (see Pryor 1981). Additionally, they suggest a ‘development effect’ by tying intrinsic migration aspirations and the fulfillment of these to high-income countries. This is despite scarce

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<sup>3</sup> This does not entail a complete disregard of the emigration of ‘Northern’ citizens, as the mobility of certain groups, such as artists, scientists, diplomats, and retirees, has received attention (Scheibelhofer 2018).

<sup>4</sup> This shows that we have fallen into the trap of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), as the focus on continental and national levels disregard regional dynamics showing contradictory trends, such as internal out-migration from economically ailing regions and demographically stagnant areas within high-income countries.

research on emigration from the 'Global North'. And, more importantly, despite recent studies showing how economic difficulties tie 'Westerners' in place (see Sharman 2020 for a study on USA citizens), and the fact that frustration over the economy, politics and welfare services and the search for a better professional future also drive migration in Europe (Bilan 2014; Cenci 2018; Düvell and Lapshyna 2015; Lapshyna 2014; Pratsinakis et al. 2020; van Mol 2016).

Sustaining simplistic, biased distinctions between the 'Global South' and the 'Global North' is detrimental for theory-building, especially when (dis)similarities between 'South' and 'North' are assumed but not systematically researched. This thesis aims to fill this gap by exploring aspirations and capabilities to migrate and to stay in high-income countries. By doing so, this thesis adds to migration studies in two ways. First, it provides sufficient empirical evidence to rethink dichotomous categories crippling academic migration debates, as I show that emigration within the so-called 'Global North' does not systematically fit within the 'lifestyle' or 'free migration' stereotypes. Secondly, the thesis adds to the aspirations-capability framework by further operationalizing migration aspirations and capabilities, and by bringing both notions together to explain the (in)voluntariness of migration. Therefore, the insights of the thesis contribute, in general, to broader social sciences by reconciling theorizations of social processes in the 'Global South' and the 'Global North', and, in particular, to theorization on two-step migration approaches.

## 1.1 AND WHY IT MATTERS: THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL APPLICATIONS

Focusing on emigration from high-income countries is important for theoretical and empirical reasons. Theoretically, leaving an important population sample aside hinders theory-building, interferes with the application of two-step approaches to *distinct* and *all* forms of (im)mobilities, and consolidates a common divide between migration from and in the 'South' versus the 'North'. Acknowledging that those in the 'Global North' experience higher human development and security, I answer the call of Mata-Codesal (2019): she has previously emphasized the need to also explore migration aspirations and capabilities in high-income countries, particularly in regions with high precarity where the notion of the 'good life' might be at stake. This focus (1) strengthens the analytical potential of two-step migration approaches to investigate *all* forms of (im)mobility in a single framework, (2) departs from simplistic distinctions when categorizing migration and migrant motives and (3) moves beyond methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). Furthermore, moving beyond (di)visions in emigration research is relevant to conceptualize decision-making in the *middle space*, which refers to (im)mobility not near or at the extremes of different binaries, such as the 'North' versus 'South' dichotomy, the 'forced' versus 'voluntary' spectrum, or the 'strong' versus 'weak' aspirations continuum (Schewel 2022).

Empirically, the scarce application of two-step approaches beyond the 'Global South' is problematic for three main reasons: (1) due to the ample population sample that is left understudied, (2) because of the recorded gap between migration aspirations and emigration rates in high-income countries, and (3) because of territorial and within-countries difference. Firstly, we know little about an ample population sample: 37,33% of countries worldwide are classified as higher-income countries (World Bank 2022) and, in 2019, 18,87% of individuals in these countries aspired to migrate internationally<sup>5</sup> (Gallup 2022). Moreover, approximately 65% of international

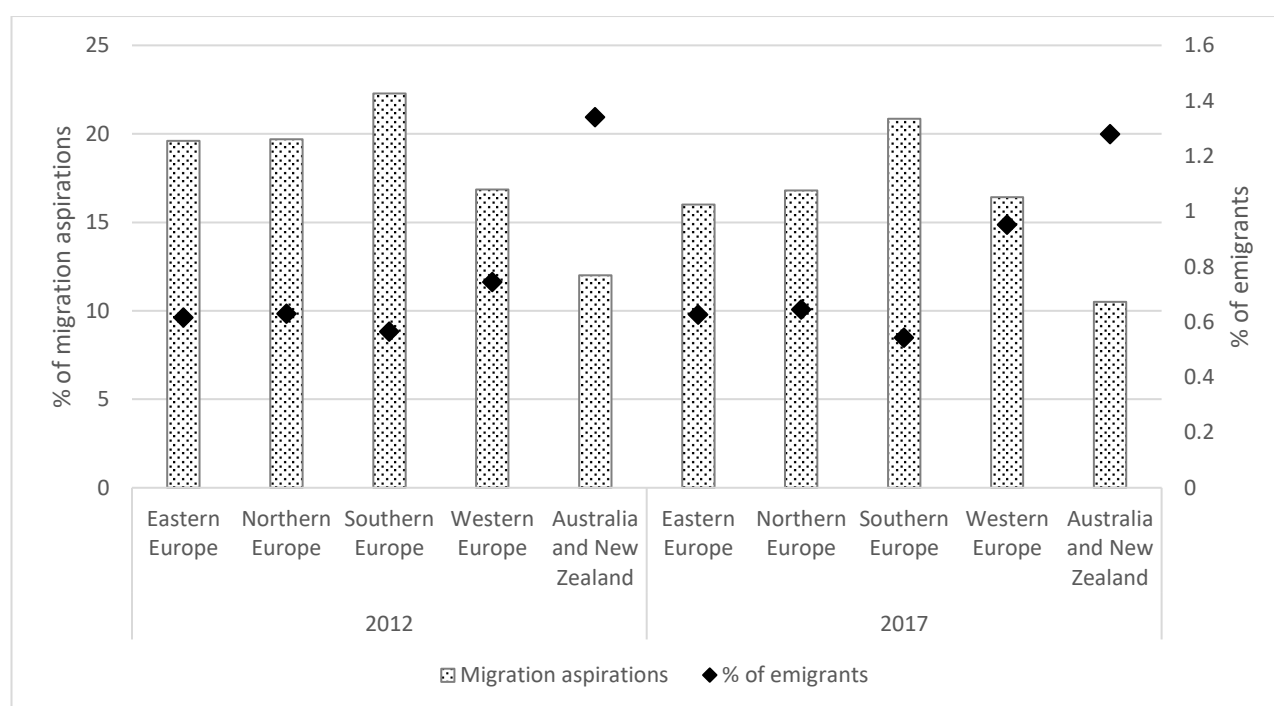
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<sup>5</sup> This figure must be read with caution. Gallup (2022) gathers this data asking the following question: 'Ideally, if you had the opportunity, would you like to move *permanently* [emphasis added] to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?'. While the Gallup dataset provides unique data to explore changes on migration aspirations over time, individuals do not usually aspire to initially move permanently somewhere else, even if at the end they do settle permanently.

migrants reside in the so-called Global North<sup>6</sup> (UN DESA 2020a) and whether they can fulfill aspirations to move forward or return, or, instead, if they are trapped into a ‘second state of immobility’ (Haugen 2012), has overall received little attention (for some exceptions see Haugen 2012; Stevens 2018; Stuesse and Coleman 2014).

Secondly, time-series data on migration aspirations show that there is an important gap between recorded migration aspirations and actual emigration rates from high-income countries, which could indicate unfulfilled migration aspirations there (Figure 1). The data must be read, however, with caution as the gap can be explained in three manners: (1) Methodological difficulties to record both migration aspirations and emigration flows have led to an overestimation of the former and an underestimation of the latter<sup>7</sup>, making the gap, in reality, insignificant; (2) the gap captures the transient nature of migration aspirations and people might have decided that remaining in place was a better option later in time, as a result (real) migration aspirations are overestimated; and (3) people lack migration capabilities and, despite common assumptions, the gap is important and there are indeed unfulfilled migration aspirations in the ‘Global North’.

**Figure 1.** Migration aspirations and emigration flows in selected high-income areas in 2012 and 2017



Source: Own elaboration based on Gallup (2022), UN DESA (2015), DEMIG (2015), Eurostat (2022a), Statistik Austria (2022), Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), StatBel (2021), Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2022), Czech Demographic Handbook (2020), Statistics Denmark (2022), Statistics Estonia (2022), Statistics Finland (2022), Statistisches Bundesamt (2022), Hungarian Central Statistical Office (2022a, 2022b), ISTAT (2022), Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia (2022), CBS (2022), StatsNZ (2022), Statistisk Sentralbyrå (2022), Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2022), Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2022), INE (2022a), Statistics Sweden (2022), and World Bank (2022).

<sup>6</sup> Around 3% of international migrants live in Australia and New Zealand, 31% do so in Europe and 21% in Northern America (UN DESA 2020a). These numbers also include asylum seekers and refugees (UN DESA 2020b), but disregard undocumented migrants.

<sup>7</sup> Emigration flows are often underestimate as emigrants tend to not deregister from the municipality and country of origin, while the abstract and transient nature of aspirations make them difficult to capture through questionnaires (Carling and Schewel 2018).

Finally, assuming that people in the ‘North’ systematically fulfill their aspirations overshadows important territorial inequalities between and within high-income countries – for instance, available data on the European Union corroborates that in certain Southern European areas between 32.8% and 47.2% of the population are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat 2022b). The scarce research on the migration aspirations of this population shows the need to explore the heterogeneity of life conditions worldwide. This is especially the case considering that the current economic system is characterized by precarity (Azmanova 2020) and that the ‘precariat’ has emerged as a new working-class<sup>8</sup> (Standing 2011). In this thesis, I use the term ‘precariat’ to refer to those individuals who are considered precarious due to their experiences and circumstances, as well as due to the uncertainty of their socio-economic environment. This understanding moves beyond accounts of precarity understood in terms of job insecurity (or class) to also investigate the suffering undergone to secure a livelihood (see Aznar Erasun 2022). This approach is useful to analyze how the ‘precariat’ think about migration, how they relate to possibilities locally or elsewhere, and, perhaps, more importantly, to highlight the presence of unfulfilled migration aspirations also in high-income countries. In fact, given the scattered and relatively recent emergence of empirical studies on emigration aspirations in high-income countries (Marrow and Klekowski von Koppenfels 2020; van Mol 2016; Pratsinakis et al. 2020; Scheibelhofer 2018), comparative and theoretical insights on the similarities and differences of aspirations and capabilities across the development spectrum are still in an early stage of development. Yet, while in-depth applications of two-step approaches in the ‘Global North’ are still missing (Schewel 2019; Mata-Codesal 2019), these could encourage theory building applicable to different forms of (im)mobilities, while simultaneously exploring the veracity behind the above-mentioned assumptions around migration aspirations and capabilities in the ‘Global North’ versus the ‘South’.

## 2 THE RESEARCH FOCUS

To start filling this gap, this thesis investigates the formation and fulfillment of the aspirations to migrate and to stay in high-income countries from a macro- and micro-level perspective. It combines both levels of analysis for two reasons. First, because aspirations and capabilities are simultaneously shaped by the macro and the micro contexts (Carling 2002; Carling and Schewel 2018): While (1) the macro-level context socially construes (im)mobility perceptions and generates structural opportunities or constraints to fulfill aspirations, (2) individuals interact with the environment forming their aspirations and evaluating the capabilities needed to fulfill these. By adopting a macro-micro perspective, I translate macro-phenomena on migration aspirations drivers and migration capabilities into the micro-realities of individuals that compose the macro-context, and I explore how individual circumstances, life ambitions and migratory decision-making processes interact with broader patterns.

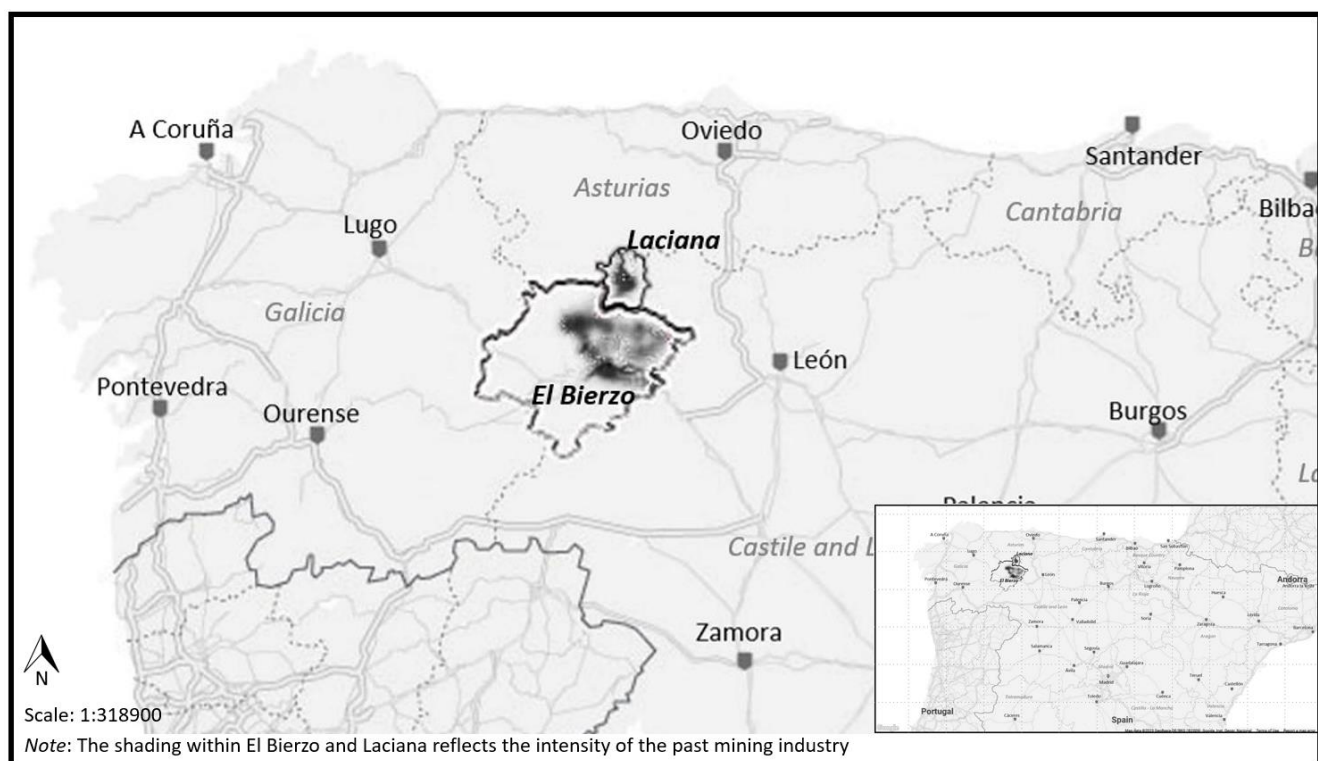
Secondly, researching at once migration aspirations and capabilities at the macro- and micro-level shows how individual decision-making processes either *depart from* or *converge with* the broader ‘emigration context’ (Carling 2002). Rather than showing that micro- and macro- dynamics present symmetries (see Collins 1988), this thesis highlights how individual situations can *depart from* broader advantageous structural opportunities, and the ways in which unfulfilled migration aspirations can also be present in countries with a consolidated economy and a strong welfare state. In fact, while, from a macro-level perspective, this thesis seems to show that individuals from the ‘Global North’ systematically fulfill their migration aspirations, adopting a micro-level perspective, I highlight that this is *not* the case. From a micro-lens, this thesis presents a more nuanced

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<sup>8</sup> Definitions and understandings about the ‘precariat’ vary. Standing (2011) argues that globalization has created a new working-class: the ‘precariat’; nonetheless, he does not substantially define the term, and authors relying on class theories question the nature of the ‘precariat’ as a class in itself considering the similarities on material interests with the working class (Wright 2016) and their role in relation to production and reproduction processes (Munck 2013). Overall, the ‘precariat’ can be understood as a precarious proletariat, characterized by the greatest levels of instability and insecurity across all different forms of capital (Savage et al. 2013).

perspective on social reality and demonstrates how uncertainty and precarity also shape the formation and fulfillment of aspirations in high-income countries. Through an in-depth analysis on El Bierzo and Laciana<sup>9</sup>, two traditionally dynamic and immigratory but currently sluggish and emigratory areas in Northwest Spain (see Figure 2), this thesis depicts individuals with unfulfilled aspirations, limited capabilities, feelings of involuntariness and who adopt adaptation strategies to increase life satisfaction in stagnant regions of the so-called 'Global North'. Their cases resemble that of some individuals in certain 'Global South' regions. Acknowledging the privileges of 'Northern' citizens, this thesis calls into question the common divide between emigration from the 'South' and the 'North', it expands the applicability and analytical potential of two-step approaches across the 'development spectrum', and rethinks dichotomous categories crippling migration debates.

**Figure 2.** El Bierzo and Laciana within Spain



Source: Own elaboration<sup>10</sup>

## 2.1 (NORTHWEST) SPAIN AS A NOVEL PERSPECTIVE TO TWO-STEP APPROACHES

Spain presents an ideal opportunity to advance theory-building on two-step migration approaches and depart from dichotomous development categories, and my case selection was influenced by three key factors: (1) the important depopulation dynamics in Northwest and Central Spain, which are linked to continuous rural-urban migrations; (2) the puzzle of Spain's relatively low migration aspirations in comparison to its high unemployment

<sup>9</sup> As outlined throughout the thesis, I focus on the mining basins of El Bierzo and Laciana in Northwest Spain. While Laciana is a mining valley, El Bierzo can be distinguished between the upper and the lower Bierzo. The lower Bierzo has traditionally focused on small-scale agriculture, while the economy of the upper Bierzo was based on the mining industry. While I investigate (im)mobility in the *upper* Bierzo, I refer to my case study as *El Bierzo*. This is not only for simplification purposes, but also because the whole socio-economic fabric of El Bierzo was indirectly based on coal mining. Chapter 6 provides a detailed overview of the historical changes that both El Bierzo and Laciana have experienced since the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

<sup>10</sup> The map was created using Snazzy Maps and Photoshop.

rates; and (3) the increasing socio-economic precarity and 'working poor' rate, which questions if a 'good life' can be achieved in the country.

Firstly, Northwest and Central Spain are referred to as the 'Empty or Emptied Spain'<sup>11</sup>, as they are characterized by a rural demographic decline and a population density lower than 8 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. This figure is comparable to the Finnish Lapland, and it represents the largest depopulated area in Southern Europe (Llorent-Bedmar, Cobano-Delgado Palma, and Navarro-Granados 2021). This depopulation process started in the 1960s and 1970s and has continued since then, as particularly the youth has left rural areas and smaller cities for big urban nuclei. Northwest Spain presents fertile ground to analyze how *internal* migration aspirations are formed and how the migration capabilities to fulfill these are perceived among the population. While the aspirations-capability framework has been, so far, mostly applied to international migration aspirations, there is no reason to not widen its analytical value and explore distinct forms of (im)mobilities, including internal migration or non-migratory mobilities. In addition, Northwest Spain presents migratory trends that contradict those at the national and continental level, as emigration has surpassed immigration flows. This stresses the importance of more comprehensively investigating emigration dynamics in high-income countries to also capture the emigration patterns of ailing regions in the 'North' and to avoid the danger of methodological nationalism.

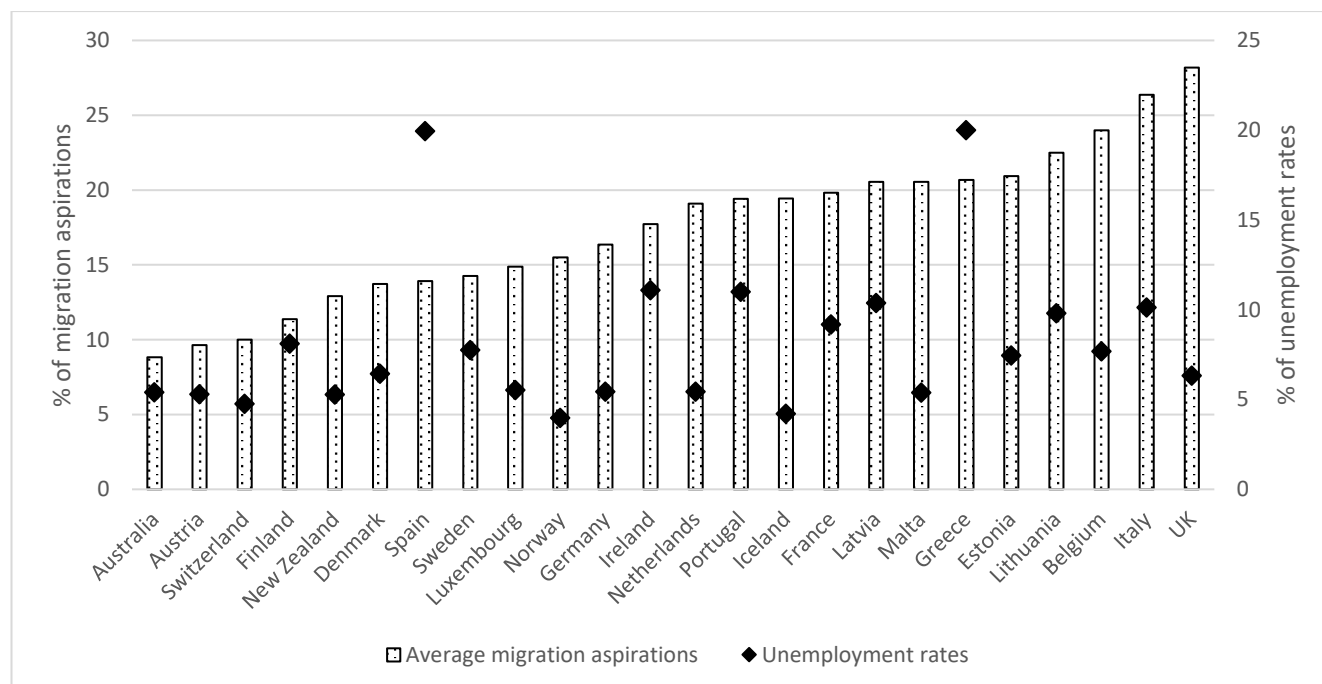
Secondly, Spain's average migration aspirations and unemployment rates during the 2007-2021 period present an interesting puzzle: While the country's average unemployment rate is the second highest among high-income countries, reaching 19.94% – just after Greece's (19.99%) – (World Bank 2022), its average migration aspirations rate is comparatively low (13.91%) (Gallup 2022) and resembles that of countries with stronger economies, such as Australia, Austria, Switzerland, Finland, or Denmark, whose average unemployment rates have not surpassed 8% during the 2007-2021 period. In comparison, Spain's average migration aspirations rate is substantially lower than those with similar unemployment rates<sup>12</sup>, such as Greece, Ireland, or Portugal (see Figure 3). These figures are interesting considering that, according to neo-classical migration theories (Harris and Todaro 1970) and push-pull models (Lee 1966), aspirations to move should be higher, which presents the opportunity to investigate why recorded aspirations to move are not stronger.

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<sup>11</sup> Emptied Spain (*la España vaciada*) or Empty Spain (*la España vacía*) refer to agricultural-reliant regions in the vast interior of the country, such as Castile and Leon, Castile-La Mancha, Extremadura, and Aragon. These regions missed out on much of the speedy industrialization and development that larger cities and the tourist-friendly coast enjoyed. The disparity encouraged migration toward the cities, especially of the youth, further accentuating the rural-urban divide.

<sup>12</sup> Yet, youth migration aspirations rates (ages 16-30) are one of the highest (59.8%), together with youth unemployment rate (53.2%) (van Mol 2016).

**Figure 3.** Average migration aspirations and unemployment rates in selected high-income countries (2007-2021)



Source: Own elaboration based on Gallup (2022) and World Bank (2022)

Finally, since the 2008 economic crisis household indebtedness, job destruction and informality have increased significantly in Spain, and, since 2011, total and youth unemployment rates have remained over 14% and 32.5%, respectively (World Bank 2022). This situation has been accompanied by corruption and a loss of trust in public institutions (Balancé Losilla, Caïs and Torrente 2018) and, while frustration with the socio-political and economic environment has increased, general life satisfaction is decreasing (INE 2022b). The ‘good life’ is, therefore, at stake, and the increasing precarity and the high in-work at-risk-of-poverty rate<sup>13</sup> at the national level – which is one of the highest in the EU (Eurostat 2022b) – question whether the life and migration aspirations of all are systematically fulfilled in high-income countries. This facilitates exploring how the ‘precariat’ form and fulfill life and migration aspirations.

As a result, Spain presents a case study (1) to analyze the formation of aspirations and the perception of capabilities in a high-income country where the notion of the ‘good life’ is at stake. And, consequently, (2) to question the substance behind common divides between emigration from the ‘South’ versus the ‘North’ furthering theorization on emigration aspirations and motives and moving beyond the ‘origin bias’ of emigration research.

## 2.2 EL BIERZO AND LACIANA AS AN INTERESTING PUZZLE

Within Spain, I focus on El Bierzo and Laciana in the Northwest. I do so because they (1) challenge the dichotomous differentiation between the ‘Global South’ and ‘Global North’, and (2) present an interesting empirical puzzle.

Firstly, El Bierzo and Laciana challenge the dichotomous categories of ‘Global South’ and ‘Global North’. While the lines demarcating the ‘North’ from the ‘South’ are artificial and not substantially defined (Bakewell 2009; Comaroff and Comaroff 2012) (see also Chapter 2 of this thesis), ‘Global North’ countries are usually regarded as more technologically advanced, more politically stable, wealthier, and less uncertain socio-economically, while the ‘Global South’ is defined in opposition (Odeh 2010). Yet, El Bierzo and Laciana have experienced

<sup>13</sup> This refers to those who are employed or self-employed and at risk of poverty.

persistent socio-economic crises since the early 2000s, when the regions' economic fabric – the mining industry – was destroyed and the population was left with no substantial alternatives (see Chapter 6 for a discussion on the changes that the regions have experienced since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century). The continuous sluggishness, precarity, and instability have left El Bierzo and Laciana stuck in a 'midway' between the 'dynamic and secure Global North' and the 'dependent and uncertain Global South': While both regions are part of the 'Global North' and are safeguarded by a 'consolidated' welfare state and national economy, the uncertainty of the local economies and the destruction of the mining industry truncate securing a 'good life'. This in-betweenness highlights the theoretical futility of concepts such as 'Global North' and 'Global South' (see Chapter 2, Section 1 for a more detailed discussion), and calls to investigate how individuals whose livelihoods are at stake form aspirations and perceive capabilities in a consolidated, migratory country of the 'Global North' (see Mata-Codesal 2019).

Secondly, El Bierzo and Laciana mine basins present an interesting empirical puzzle: During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both regions were dynamic and attracted large numbers of internal and international migrants, nevertheless, since the early 2000s, the persistent economic crises have resulted in few work opportunities other than in the hospitality industry and the public sector. According to neoclassical (Harris and Todaro 1970), human capital theories, as well as to historical structuralist theories (Massey et al. 1993), this setting would encourage voluminous migration patterns, particularly of the youth, as residents have much to gain financially by moving to locations with stable jobs and higher earnings. Yet, while internal and international emigration have increased 163.01% and 603.7%, respectively, in the last decades, migration has not been a major phenomenon: Internal out-migrants have not represented more than 4% of the population throughout most of the 2000s, and census data shows that international emigration grew from 27 departures to 190 between 2002 and 2017 – when international migration peaked –, representing respectively 0.06% and 0.50% of the regions' population (Junta de Castilla y León 2022). Why is this? El Bierzo and Laciana facilitate exploring whether this is a result of strong aspirations to stay, a culture of permanence, or a lack of capabilities as precarity and the lack of employment have increased.

Focusing on the formation and fulfillment of (im)mobility aspirations in a Spanish sluggish area highlights the existence of economically ailing and increasingly emigratory areas in Europe, which is often portrayed as rich, opportunity-laden and migratory. Most importantly, this thesis brings to light the rare application of the aspirations-capability framework to high-income countries and emphasizes that we know little about what explains migration aspirations there (van Dalen and Henkens 2007, 37-38). To remedy this situation, scholars are increasingly examining the emigration patterns of 'affluent' individuals under the umbrella term 'lifestyle migration' (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Ryan, Klekowski von Koppenfels and Mulholland 2014), and, since the 2008 economic crisis, the migration aspirations of workers and the youth has been increasingly investigated (Rey, Bolay and Gez 2020; van Mol 2016; Pratsinakis et al. 2020; Sharman 2020). Yet, a comprehensive analysis showing that the analytical potential of two-step approaches – including that of the notion of 'involuntary immobility' – is not restricted to the 'Global South' and highlighting the similarities between emigration from the 'North' and the 'South' is still largely missing. This is the focus of this thesis.

### **3 THE ARGUMENT**

This thesis explores the following question: *How do people in high-income countries form and fulfill their migration aspirations?* It argues that *unfulfilled* aspirations are also present in high-income countries, and that migration can also be perceived as involuntary in the 'Global North'. From a macro-level perspective, this thesis shows that, overall, 'Northern' citizens seem to have the capabilities to systematically fulfill their migration aspirations, which are better explained by intrinsic rationales. Adopting a micro-lens, however, this thesis demonstrates that this reading is incomplete, as uncertainty and precarity are also present in the so-called 'Global North', which can result in unfulfilled aspirations, limited capabilities, feelings of involuntariness and

coping mechanisms. Based on its empirical insights, the thesis applies the aspirations-capabilities framework beyond 'Global South' countries and offers potential directions for theoretical innovation (1) to operationalize and disaggregate aspirations and capabilities, (2) to conceptualize the voluntariness of migration and immobility on a continuum, and (3) to integrate adaptation more comprehensively into two-step migration approaches. This not only allows to draw comparisons between studies adopting two-step approaches across the 'Global South/North' divide, but it unpacks key notions for migration studies by further operationalizing and conceptualizing the decision-making process through the concepts of aspirations, capabilities, and adaptation.

### 3.1 THE EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The combination of the macro-micro lens suggests that, despite a privileged position at the global level, aspirations are *not* systematically fulfilled in high-income countries. Indeed, the cases of El Bierzo and Laciana exemplify that binary development categories are insufficient to explain the formation and fulfillment of migration aspirations, given that regional, local, and individual circumstances can differ from those at the national scale. The findings are not only theoretically relevant, as explained in the subsection below, but they have important implications for policy discussions on migrant categorizations, rural depopulation, and life satisfaction. First, while always acknowledging the structural benefits that 'Westerners' experience, this thesis points out the limitation of consistently associating emigration from the 'North' with intrinsic rationales, full voluntariness, and systematic fulfillment. The thesis provides enough evidence to rethink simplistic distinctions between emigration in the 'Global North' and the 'Global South', as well as the artificiality of 'expats' as a policy category. Secondly, this thesis highlights the worrisome depopulation trends in the Emptied Spain, as the youth is forming migration aspirations even in those places with a culture of permanence and strong place attachment, which questions what the future of the regions will be. This calls for more systematic research on migration transitions and the reversal of migration trends, and the consequences that transitioning from immigration to emigration countries can have socio-economically. Finally, the thesis illustrates diverse understandings of *what* a 'good life' is and *where* it can be secured, given that, contrary to a purely monetary, neoliberal perspective, some value roots and belonging over economic prosperity (Vezzoli 2022). This challenges the neoliberal logic permeating research and policy-making and calls to investigate the deeper implications of values for migration aspirations and decision-making.

### 3.2 THE THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

By mobilizing its empirical insights, this thesis advances theory-building on two-step migration approaches and shows the commonalities of individual experiences regarding (im)mobility aspirations and capabilities across locations. I formulate approaches to further conceptualize:

- (1) how (im)mobility aspirations are formed;
- (2) how capabilities are perceived;
- (3) how (in)voluntariness can be understood in a spectrum of degrees; and
- (4) how people adapt to their unfulfilled aspirations.

First, I mobilize the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of human (im)mobility (Carling 2012, 2014a; de Haas 2021) to demonstrate that the combination of these two dimensions can further the operationalization of (im)mobility aspirations by highlighting their diverse strengths. The instrumental dimension understands migration as a strategy to improve other dimensions of life and achieve, among others, a better education, improved living and working conditions, or escape economic or political crises. The intrinsic dimension, in comparison, relates to the value that individuals place on the migration experience itself. Examples of this include the desire to leave the parental home, as well as aspirations to explore other cultures and societies out of curiosity or adventure. By mobilizing these two dimensions, I show that the combination of the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of human (im)mobility can have two outcomes: They can reinforce each other, or

conversely, they can collide. *Reinforcing aspirations* result in strong aspirations to either stay or leave as the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of (im)mobility converge in the same spatial category, be this migrating or remaining in place. Since people are convinced about what to do, reinforcing aspirations are, to a great extent, voluntary. On the contrary, *conflicting aspirations* are a result of a clash of the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of human (im)mobility. Conflicting aspirations lead to postponing the decision-making process, uncertainty about *where* a 'good life' can be achieved, and higher perceptions of involuntariness. The approach not only encompasses different strengths of aspirations, including reinforcing, conflicting or mild aspirations, but also facilitates measuring aspirations on a continuum.

Secondly, I incorporate some of the important notions developed within development and capabilities studies to further operationalize migration capabilities, which, unfortunately remain abstract and under-conceptualized. For this, I distinguish between internal and external capabilities (Jackson 2014). Internal capabilities capture individual resources, skills, aptitudes, and attitudes, while external capabilities reflect structural opportunities and constraints. By introducing these two dimensions of migration capabilities, I show that external and internal capabilities interact in various manners, and by doing so, I propose an approach to explore the capabilities to migrate and to stay in a spectrum of degrees.

Thirdly, I argue that aspirations and capabilities are the pillars to comprehend the (in)voluntariness of (im)mobility (see de Haas 2021). As such, I bring together the insights gained on aspirations and capabilities to propose a combined approach that explores the (in)voluntariness of migration and immobility on a continuum. I do so by investigating how reinforcing aspirations are and how high capabilities are. I provide a unified framework that incorporates all forms of (im)mobilities and that facilitates measuring (in)voluntariness in migration studies, bridging the gap between 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration.

Finally, I propose a theoretical framework to analyze the interaction of the different adaptation strategies that those with unfulfilled migration aspirations employ. This framework facilitates studying how people make use of different coping strategies, while it also introduces the notion of *transimmobility*, which I coin to stress the *active* role that non-migrants without migratory connections have in the creation of transnational ties. This not only expands the notion of transnationalism, but it also challenges the 'mobility bias' of the subfield.

By specifying theoretical approaches applicable across geographical locations, this thesis expands the analytical potential of the aspirations-capability framework and rethinks (di)visions around migration studies by further theorizing and operationalizing aspirations, capabilities, (in)voluntariness and adaptation mechanisms. While the thesis contribution is greatly conceptual, it also disentangles similarities across the development spectrum and demystifies assumptions about why people emigrate from the 'North' versus the 'South'.

## 4 THE OUTLINE

The thesis is divided into four parts. The theoretical and methodological underpinnings of the thesis are outlined in Part 1. **Chapter 1** lays the fundamental questions and empirical foundations of the thesis and also presents its contributions and relevance. **Chapter 2** presents the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this thesis and maps current theoretical and empirical insights on two-step migration approaches. This chapter also shows how the biased knowledge regime has affected the theorization of aspirations and capabilities and argues that theory-building is best achieved by moving beyond pre-fixed categories and investigating how micro-level experiences might converge with or depart from macro-level 'opportunity structures'. In **Chapter 3**, the methodology and methods employed in this thesis are explained, along with the justification for a combination of macro- and micro-level perspectives and a mixed-method approach. The chapter also reflects on the abductive research approach adopted to maximize dialogue between theory and empirics, and on the specificities of the fieldwork.

Part II and III constitute the core of the empirical work of this thesis, namely (1) how aspirations are formed and fulfilled, and (2) how capabilities are perceived in high-income countries. By doing so, they advance this thesis's central argument from a macro- and micro-level perspective, respectively. Part II consists of *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 5*. **Chapter 4** shows, quantitatively, how migration aspirations and development processes are associated in high-income countries, as well as how these associations are different from those in moderate- and low-income societies. **Chapter 5** operationalizes and calculates 'migration capabilities' worldwide, showing how these rank in high-income countries in comparison to other regions across the world. These chapters provide an overview of how migration aspirations are formed in the 'Global North', and the spread of migration capabilities there. While these chapters fit some of the discourses surrounding emigration from the 'North' – namely that aspirations are intrinsic and that capabilities are high –, they set a point of departure to investigate how local experiences depart from or adjust to macro-level circumstances. Part III further deepens into this showing how local realities do not conform to macro-level, structural opportunities.

Part III consists of four chapters: *Chapter 6*, *Chapter 7*, *Chapter 8*, and *Chapter 9*. **Chapter 6** offers a brief overview of the social changes that my fieldwork site, El Bierzo and Laciana, have experienced during the last century, along with an overall picture of how migration patterns have shifted, and how the present and the future are perceived in the regions. **Chapter 7** presents the (im)mobility aspirations of my interviewees and shows that the two dimensions of human (im)mobility – the intrinsic and the instrumental – can reinforce each other, but also collide. I coin the term 'conflicting aspirations' to illustrate the divergence of both dimensions from one another, and I present an approach to measure aspirations on a continuum. **Chapter 8** explores the migration capabilities of my interviewees by focusing on how external and internal capabilities interact. In doing so, it proposes an approach that measures the capabilities to migrate and to stay in a spectrum of degrees, and it shows how precarity capitalism (Azmanova 2020) not only sticks aspiring migrants in place but also deprives the population of reasonable opportunities to stay despite strong aspirations to do so, furthering feelings of involuntariness. **Chapter 9** ends this thesis's empirical analysis by illustrating the adaptation mechanisms of those with unfulfilled migration aspirations. This chapter teases out the coping mechanisms that individuals employ and introduces transnationalism as an adaptation strategy of the involuntarily immobile, coining the notion 'transimmobility'.

Finally, Part IV theoretically engages with the empirical insights gained in Part III. **Chapter 10** proposes an approach to investigate involuntariness on a continuum by combining aspirations and capabilities in a single framework. It also theorizes how adaptation strategies can interact over time, more comprehensively introducing adaptation to two-step migration approaches. **Chapter 11** concludes this thesis. Apart from summarizing the theoretical implications and arguments of the thesis, *Chapter 11* also identifies avenues for future research in migration studies. Particularly, this chapter suggests that framing migration in binary categories has resulted in artificial distinctions and theoretical boundaries that can be surpassed by (1) adopting emic perspectives and (2) introducing different temporalities and social transformation perspectives more comprehensively into two-step migration approaches.

## CHAPTER 2 – MOVING ACROSS THEORIES

### 1 ADVANCING (TWO-STEP) MIGRATION APPROACHES: A CRITIQUE TO THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF KNOWLEDGE REGIMES

The ultimate objective of this thesis is to advance more systematic theorizing on two-step approaches to migration by disentangling similarities on (im)mobility aspirations and capabilities across the development spectrum. This not only consists of demystifying assumptions about why people aspire to move from the so-called 'Global North' versus the 'Global South', but it also entails rethinking the validity of these same dichotomous categories. In fact, the binary concepts of 'Global North' – also, developed countries, the West, or the First World – and 'Global South' – or developing countries, the Rest, and the Third World – bring forth an unsystematic categorization of countries that suffers from theoretical futility. This is because the diverse political, economic, geographical, and cultural landscapes of *all* countries cannot be contained by these terms. And, also, because the boundaries of the 'North' and 'South' change depending on the indicator used, such as income levels or human development, political instability, geostrategic alignments, location, or regime type. This means that neither term is analytically or substantially defined, but rather on a relational basis, in opposition to each other, and marked by a history of colonization and oppression (Bakewell 2009; Cazzato 2014; Comaroff and Comaroff 2012; Dainotto 2017).

Despite their poor analytical value, these terms have important implications, as they are grounded in hierarchical and asymmetrical global power structures. One of these implications includes a biased international intellectual system that highlights Western concerns and emphasizes Euro-centric knowledge, while the needs and ideas from the 'South' are marginalized (Alcadipani et al. 2012; Robertson 2008; Weiler 2009). Migration studies also reflect this biased intellectual system. Consider, for instance, the use of power constructs, such as 'South-South' and 'South-North' migration (Bakewell 2009), and the differentiation between 'destination' and 'origin' countries. In addition, the field of migration is, to a great extent, characterized by a divide between the drivers of emigration from the 'Global South', and immigration dynamics and the needs of destination countries in the 'Global North' (Schewel 2019). This division typifies Western attempts to control who enters their territory, how, for how long, and why.

The analytical potential of two-step migration approaches has also suffered from this common divide on migration studies, and studies on migration aspirations and capabilities are limited in three ways. First, research focuses, mainly, on the aspirations and capabilities of individuals from the 'Global South' (e.g., Babar, Ewers and Khattab 2019; Battistella and Conaco 1998; Bylander 2017; Jingzhong and Lu 2011; Conrad Suso 2019), while, in opposition, two-step approaches have been randomly applied in the 'Global North' (Schewel 2019). This results in the assumption that 'Western' citizens have the freedom to fulfill their migration aspirations and live a 'good' or 'worthy' life, even when this is at stake as precarity spreads (see Mata-Codesal 2019). Overlooking emigration from the 'West' is partially a consequence of the pervasive 'destination' or the 'receiving-country' bias: Attempts to control who enters high-income countries has resulted in considering migration an unidirectional movement from 'poorer' to 'wealthier' countries (Collyer and de Haas 2012) and investigating, firstly, immigration in high-income countries and then, 'South-North' emigration. This overlooks the emigration dynamics within and from high-income countries, including the emigration aspirations of the 'precarariat' (Mata-Codesal 2019), and showcases that emigration research suffers an 'origin bias', as especially the (im)mobility of those in low- and moderate-income countries is investigated.

Secondly, there is an assumption that emigration rationales from the 'North' versus the 'South' are intrinsically different, as research has increasingly associated aspirations and emigration in the 'West' with the pursuit of self-fulfillment and personal development, while migration from the 'South' is linked to a wish for a better future. Scheibelhofer (2018, 1004-1005) summarizes this distinction:

“Since the mid-1970s, empirical studies carried out in Europe have indicated a significant shift from the traditional value of fulfilling family-related duties to striving for self-realization [...] By contrast, studies dealing with the motives of migrants from economically deprived regions have shown that everyday actions are largely determined by the wish for a better future, economic or otherwise, which is often connected with a sense of duty vis-à-vis family and communities.”

This divide goes beyond two-step migration approaches. For instance, the term ‘lifestyle migration’ gained momentum in the early 2000s to conceptualize the emigration of affluent individuals who migrate looking for “a search, a project, rather than an act”<sup>14</sup> (Benson and O’Reilly 2009, 608). The framework extends migration beyond utilitarian and economic lenses and emphasizes the intrinsic value that mobility can have in itself. Nevertheless, the ‘lifestyle migrant’ has often been conflated with the ‘Western migrant’<sup>15</sup>, even though this approach is not limited to affluent ‘Northern’ citizens and has the analytical potential to be applied to wealthy individuals worldwide to provide a different, non-utilitarian view about migration. This biased application depicts problematic assumptions underpinning migration: While the ‘Northern’ emigrant is affluent, the ‘Southern’ migrant is not. While emigration can be a lifestyle choice for the ‘Northern’ emigrant, the emigrant from the ‘South’ migrates because of ‘misery’. While ‘Northern’ citizens are ‘expats’, ‘Southern’ citizens are emigrants. While problematic and ugly, these assumptions are sustained because of the scarce research on contemporary emigration patterns from the ‘North’, and because migration from the ‘South’ is often conceptualized in an instrumental fashion. Bakewell (2009) has already highlighted the futility of assuming that emigration from the ‘South’ is fundamentally different to emigration from the ‘North’, however, empirical studies proving how emigration dynamics and motives are similar in regions with different income-levels remain relatively scarce. Some recent research counterarguing this assumption show that those in the ‘Global South’ also migrate for self-realization and exploration purposes (Arar 2022; Mondain and Diagne 2013; Sancho 2017; Schielke 2009), and that a search for a better future, greater economic opportunities, frustration over politics, and family responsibilities also drive emigration from high-income countries (see Bilan 2014; Cenci 2018; Düvell and Lapshyna 2015; Lapshyna 2014; Pratsinakis et al 2020; van Mol 2016 for studies on Southern and Eastern Europe; and Marrow and Klekowski von Koppenfels 2020 for a study on the aspirations of USA citizens).

Finally, partially because of the emergence of multicultural societies in the ‘Global North’ since the 1970s and 1980s, the field has focused on international migration. This shows that research on two-step migration approaches has fallen into the trap of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) as primarily researching migratory dynamics at the national level has resulted in overlooking regional migration aspirations and patterns, and aspirations to migrate from ailing to economically dynamic regions within Europe<sup>16</sup>. This is despite research showcasing the precarity of high-income countries in South Europe (see Rhodes 1996 for a discussion of the Southern European welfare state and van der Ploeg, Franco and Borrás Jr 2015 for an analysis of land grabs in Europe), and how instability is triggering increasing migration aspirations in high-income but precarious countries (van Mol 2016; Pratsinakis et al. 2020; Rey, Bolay and Gez 2020). Additionally, overlooking internal migration and non-migratory mobility in favor of international emigration has resulted in a vague awareness of the relationship between international, internal, and non-migratory mobilities (Skeldon 2006, 2-3); despite this, instances on how internal and international migration aspirations are part of a broader life strategy have been advanced (Schewel 2022).

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<sup>14</sup> This can entail, among others, a slower pace of life, nicer weather, health benefits, or lower living costs.

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that lifestyle migration has often been used to theorize the migration from Northern to Southern Europe (Benson 2010; Stone and Stubbs 2007; Torkington 2010), and particularly to Spain (Benson and O’Reilly 2009, 612). This shows the theoretical futility of the concepts of ‘Global South’ and ‘Global North’, and how ‘Southern’ and peripheral regions are also present in ‘developed’ countries.

<sup>16</sup> Olivier Crevoisier, Jean-Thomas Arrighi and Sean Mueller are conducting research in this regard at the National Center of Competence in Research (nccr – on the move).

The political economy of knowledge production, which centers on the needs of ‘destination, Western’ countries, encourages these limitations, while the ‘North/South’ divide brings forth an unsystematic categorization of countries that obscures (1) important research questions, such as how migration aspirations are formed and fulfilled as precarity and uncertainty widespread worldwide, including in some immigratory, ‘Global North’ countries, as well as (2) dynamics that might have greater explanatory power in the analysis of (unfulfilled) migration aspirations and migration capabilities than futile categorizations. While the limited analytical value of the ‘South/North’ binary and global power asymmetries have negatively impacted social scientific theory-building, they have not gone unchallenged. Critiques of Euro- and Western-centrism in social theory are nothing new (Wallerstein 1997), as postcolonial and postmodernist scholars have long discussed the Western domination over knowledge and the bias of a universal social theory based on ‘the Western experience’. In this way, while some promote a ‘decolonization’ of social sciences, others encourage broadening the scope of the field. On the one hand, some aim to disrupt the Western *telos* by ‘decentering interlocalities’ (Dainotto 2017; Trefzer et al. 2014), ‘provincializing’ theory (Burawoy 2005; Chakrabarty 1992) and ‘decolonizing’ knowledge (Mignolo 2002). These approaches emphasize the array of epistemologies around the globe and call for an analysis of experiences through distinct theoretical lenses, which, ultimately, impedes generalization. On the other hand, other scholars have brought up the ‘Southern’ perspective into academia, demanding a revision and expansion of theory in pursuit of a more global social science (Connell 2014; Krotz 2005).

Considering that this thesis aims to reconcile theorizations of social processes in the ‘Global South’ and the ‘Global North’, the use of these very notions might be odd, especially when other concepts that aim to go beyond binaries have been proposed. Consider, for instance, Wallerstein’s (1979) world-systems theory, which acknowledges the colonial legacies of the global capitalist system, and differentiates between core, semi-peripheral, and peripheral countries. These notions introduce more nuance to social sciences by emphasizing how colonial structures affect power asymmetries and the control of some countries over others. Despite this, I use the concepts of ‘Global South’ and ‘Global North’ because they remain powerful forces at the political, social, and discursive levels, and because the artificial binary is powerful enough to shape ideas, practices and, as shown above, (migration) research. By applying these notions, I attempt to show how problematic and artificial they are, and the need to employ more nuanced and specific terminology or to avoid these terms altogether<sup>17</sup>. I do so by deeply engaging with migration research-related assumptions surrounding the ‘North/South’ binary and challenging them. I made a conscious decision, then, to stick with these notions, rather than using more nuanced concepts, such as ‘semi-periphery’, which is also defined on a relational basis, always in consideration of what the ‘core’ and the ‘periphery’ is. While it is true that my fieldwork sites, El Bierzo and Laciana, lay between the ‘Global North’ and the ‘Global South’ (see Chapter 1, section 2.2, and Chapter 6), I stick with these broad categories, also from a micro-level perspective, for two reasons. First, because, originally, the term ‘semi-periphery’ applied only to states – and not regions<sup>18</sup> – and highlighted the role of countries in the international capitalist system (Chiot and Hall 1982, 86). In this sense, the world-system theory “is too holistic to account for local dynamics” (Klak 2014, 196). Secondly, because rather than giving importance to geographical space, I aim to emphasize the social experiences of individuals by highlighting the presence of the ‘precariat’ in high-income countries to comprehend the formation and fulfillment of their (im)mobility aspirations vis-à-vis understandings of structural realities. This brings me closer to Edward Soja’s ‘thirdspace’ notion, which opens up the possibility to move beyond binaries by incorporating the lived experiences of individuals, challenging taken-for-granted categories and highlighting the existence of liminal spaces and different understandings of the ‘Global South/Global North’ (Soja 2002; see also Haug 2020).

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<sup>17</sup> This is even when this thesis does not propose alternative notions as it goes beyond its scope.

<sup>18</sup> It must be noted that attempts to apply the world system theory to regions has been made (Skeldon 1997), even if these approaches remain, to a great extent, focused on the national level.

As such, this thesis is part of a collective effort to move beyond dichotomous categorizations and apply approaches across localities to expand knowledge, which invites us to be open-minded towards unexpected patterns and similarities. This could result in more general social sciences that move beyond pre-determined, power constructions in favor of more theoretically pertinent divisions based on experiential similarities and differences in social relations worldwide. With regards to the aspirations-capability framework, this entails applying the approach beyond the 'Global South' to more systematically unravel the analytical potential of two-step approaches to investigate *all* forms of (im)mobility – including internal and non-migratory mobilities – across geographical locations. This approach is in line with calls for a middle-range<sup>19</sup> theorization of migration studies (Castles 2007; King and Skeldon 2010; Merton 1949; Portes 1997), based on empirical research to improve the applicability and scope of current theories. The ambition of this thesis is therefore to advance middle-range theorizing on two-step migration approaches. For this, the rest of the chapter is devoted to outlining and reviewing the literature on the fundamental notions that ground my argument: aspirations, capabilities, and adaptation strategies.

## **2 EXPLORING ASPIRATIONS, CAPABILITIES AND ADAPTATION STRATEGIES: THE NEXUS OF TWO-STEP MIGRATION APPROACHES**

In researching (im)mobility in high-income countries, I engage with the two conceptual elements of the 'coming about' of migration: (im)mobility aspirations – “the conviction that leaving would be better than staying” or vice versa (Carling and Collins 2018, 915) –, and capabilities – the freedom to fulfill such aspirations. While, as the name implies, two-step approaches consist of two elements – aspirations and capabilities –, this thesis also engages with adaptation mechanisms. It does so for two reasons: (1) As this thesis shows, life and migration aspirations can be conflicting (see Chapter 7), and, as such, individuals might need to reconsider and adapt what they envision as the 'good life' to move forward (see Chapter 9). And (2) since aspirations are not always fulfilled (Carling 2002), adaptation strategies<sup>20</sup> are needed to increase well-being. Adaptation brings both aspirations and capabilities together when *ideal* aspirations cannot be fulfilled.

These three elements – aspirations, capabilities, and adaptation – unravel the migratory decision-making process as individuals (1) decide what is better and more convenient – migrating or remaining –; (2) discern if they have enough resources to move or to stay<sup>21</sup>; and (3) adapt either before, during or after migrating. By examining aspirations, capabilities, and adaptation strategies, how individuals prioritize life ambitions, perceive their capabilities, and how they relate to the 'opportunity structure' can be elucidated, and the components of the decision-making process are broken up into researchable elements. Aspirations, capabilities, and adaptation serve, then, as the conceptual foundation for this thesis.

### **2.1 (IM)MOBILITY ASPIRATIONS**

An aspiration is an (emotional) orientation to the future and a disposition in the present towards the realization of a specific goal (Boccagni 2017; Brown 2011). It also encompasses the past, as previous experiences, life conditions and 'past futures' outline aspirations by comparing the past with present attainments (Boccagni 2017). As an overarching term, aspirations include occupational, educational, familial, or, most relevant for my research, (im)mobility aspirations.

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<sup>19</sup> Middle-range theories refer to “theories that lie between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop an unified theory that will explain all the observed uniformities of social behavior, social organization, and social change” (Merton 1949, 39).

<sup>20</sup> Including expanding migration capabilities, subduing migration aspirations, or being more flexible regarding how migration is desirable.

<sup>21</sup> As I outline in Section 2.2, this consists of individual perceptions on whether resources and abilities are enough, as well as on structural opportunities and constraints that frame the needed capabilities.

## ***Aspirations, migration, and two-step migration approaches***

'Migration aspirations' are the predominant term to refer to "a subject's relation to migration possibilities" (Carling and Collins 2018, 915) and to describe the conviction that moving would be better than remaining in place (Alpes 2014; Carling 2002; Creighton 2013; Crivello 2015; de Haas 2010a). Other concepts, such as 'desires', 'fantasies', 'imaginaries', or 'wishes' (Bolognani 2016; Collins 2018; Collins et al. 2014), are used less frequently but in a similar way<sup>22</sup>, which suggests that they might be grouped together under the umbrella term 'migration aspirations' (see Carling and Collins 2018). In line with a growing body of scholars applying a two-step approach to migration studies (see Carling and Schewel 2018), who theoretically engage with aspirations as a central analytical variable, this thesis investigates the formation and fulfillment of aspirations in high-income countries. But what exactly does the aspiration concept capture?

To begin with, the term 'aspiration' was introduced to social sciences in the early 1930s to advance 'quality of life' psychological research and capture the consequences of a mismatch between aspired goals and individual well-being (Dembo 1931 and Hoppe 1930 as cited in Lewin et al. 1944). Originally, the term 'aspirations' was limited to a self-centered and self-contained individualistic approach, and how socialization and social expectations influenced aspirations was poorly conceptualized<sup>23</sup> (see Lewin et al. 1944). As a result, this psychological perspective did not account for the collective, normative, and structural elements that shape individual aspirations. Despite this limitation, this approach kick-started the conceptualization of aspirations in social sciences encouraging further theorization. Culturalist and contextualist approaches complement this perspective highlighting how socio-cultural narratives and social contexts shape the formation of aspirations: Giddens (1991) focuses on the 'reflexive project of the self' and discusses how social understandings and group pressures frame the creation of identity narratives, as well as desires and aspirations. Similarly, Appadurai (2004) emphasizes that the capacity to aspire is a cultural capacity, given that the establishment of cultural expectations might orient individuals towards or deter them from future goals and success. Culturally and socially constructed imaginaries create normative expectations, which shape ideas about how life should look like<sup>24</sup>, as well as migration aspirations (Schewel 2020a; Taylor 2002). The social milieu becomes, then, a crucial component to investigate how aspirations are shaped, and how individual characteristics, sociocultural norms, and structural constraints and opportunities interact to form migration aspirations. Following the various scholars that have argued that migration aspirations are 'socially grounded' (Appadurai 2004; Carling and Collins 2018; Ray 2006), marked by "an intersection of personal, collective and normative dimensions" (Carling and Collins 2018, 915) and defined as "the personal ability to believe in 'making it'" (Chamberlain 2001, 8), this thesis looks both at the social environment and the personal-self-orientation aspects of migration aspirations.

These theoretical debates on migration aspirations have been accompanied by increasing empirical studies exploring how a combination of individual characteristics and structural opportunities and constraints explain aspirations to move. In this regard, scholars have focused on the macro-, meso- and micro-level factors influencing migration aspirations. At the macro-level, perceptions of political, economic, and social conditions at home and abroad (Carling et al. 2013; Lapshyna 2014; Timmerman et al. 2014), youth unemployment ratios (van Mol 2016) and access to the internet (Marrow and Klekowski von Koppenfels 2020) shape migration

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<sup>22</sup> This is, partially, because theoretical efforts to disentangle migration aspirations from migration desires and imaginaries remain scarce (for some exceptions see Carling and Collins 2018; Carling and Schewel 2018).

<sup>23</sup> While (cultural) groups were mentioned to serve as a reference frame to set future goals (Lewin et al. 1944, 340-345), the interaction between individual and collective dynamics was not explained.

<sup>24</sup> This refers to the good life. It is important to note that the social imaginary and the 'good life' are not fixed narratives, but rather understandings about the ideal society and imagined ideas about how life *should* be that change over time (Taylor 2004; Nordbakke and Schwanen 2014) and that are dependent on group references, and geographical, socio-historical, and cultural contexts. The social imaginary can change, for example, during and after crisis periods (Varvarousis 2019) or through the exposure to fresh ideas, discourse, policies, and practices (Vertovec 2012).

aspirations. At the meso-level, involvement in migrant networks, attachment to family and friends living abroad, and a 'culture of migration'<sup>25</sup> encourage migration aspirations (Elbadawy 2011; Marrow and Klekowski von Koppenfels 2020, Mata-Codesal 2015), while strong place attachment, and alternative understandings of the 'good life' can negatively affect their formation (Suckall, Fraser and Forster 2017; Vezzoli 2022). Finally, micro-level dynamics have also received ample attention as individual characteristics, such as gender, age, educational attainment, prior migratory experience, life satisfaction, and familial responsibilities, shape aspirations in important and patterned ways (Bastianon 2019; Bilan 2014; Elbadawy 2011; Graham and Markowitz 2011; Pratsinakis et al. 2020; Strielkowski and Bilan 2016; Suckall, Fraser and Forster 2017; Schewel and Fransen 2018; van Mol 2016; van Mol et al. 2018).

As I have already argued, the vast literature on contemporary emigration patterns, including migration aspirations, is predominantly based on the experiences of individuals from the 'Global South' (Schewel 2019; Mata-Codesal 2019; see Section 1 of this chapter). As a result, much of the research above has focused on the aspirations of those in Africa (Carling et al. 2013; Timmerman et al. 2014; Elbadawy 2011; Suckall, Fraser and Forster 2017; Schewel and Fransen 2018), Asia (Blondin 2020; Bylander 2017), and Latin America (Graham and Markowitz 2011; Mata-Codesal 2015), as well as on the experiences of migrants within 'developed' contexts<sup>26</sup> (Chauvin et al. 2021; McCarthy 2020; Stuesse and Coleman 2014). These studies provide rich insights into migration patterns; yet the emigration dynamics of 'Western' citizens remains understudied and portrayed in a different fashion, which, apart from generating a division between emigration from the 'South' and the 'North', leaves some questions unanswered at the macro-, meso- and micro-level:

- (1) At the macro-level, how people in 'consolidated' welfare states and 'reliable' national economies consider migration during and after periods of crises deserves more attention. While scholars have investigated migration aspirations in post-2008 Europe (van Mol 2016; Pratsinakis et al. 2020; Rey, Bolay and Gez 2020), how non-migrants relate to (im)mobility is unclear, particularly in those countries where unemployment rates remain high and expectations for the future might be dire.
- (2) At the meso-level, while research has proven that 'migration cultures' encourage migration aspirations<sup>27</sup> (Ali 2007; Jónsson 2008; Massey et al. 1993), little is known about how people challenge a 'culture of permanence' and develop migration aspirations when mobility is not part of the socio-cultural norm.
- (3) At the micro-level, it might be worth investigating the self-efficacy of those born and raised in a 'culture of permanence', considering that emigratory know-how might be low and the familiarity with emigration (and its routes, corridors, and requirements) scarce.

While these points illustrate the ways in which the understudy of emigration from the 'North' handicaps theory-building, I am not necessarily calling for more theorization on 'Western' emigration, as this would sustain dichotomies that are problematic in the first place. Instead, I engage with the assumptions regarding emigration from the 'Global North' – that this emigration is intrinsic, voluntary, and systematically fulfilled – to explore the 'substance' behind these assumptions and the analytical applicability of two-step approaches and (im)mobility outcomes – including involuntary immobility – across the 'development spectrum'. While from a macro-perspective, I acknowledge that 'Western' citizens have important privileges and advantages, I adopt a micro and emic perspective to understand how those in a sluggish area of a high-income country, characterized by a

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<sup>25</sup> A 'culture of migration' can result in further aspirations to move as migration becomes the norm (Jónsson 2008). However, feedback loops are usually important in regions characterized by a 'culture of migration' and non-migrants receive information about the migration experience. When this is the case and the information received is negative migration aspirations can decrease (Timmerman, Hemmerichs and de Clerck 2014).

<sup>26</sup> This includes how migrants negotiate and strategize to overcome immobility once in destination countries.

<sup>27</sup> How people challenge a 'culture of migration' by remaining in place has also been investigated (Mata-Codesal 2015).

‘culture of permanence’, relate to emigration. Drawing on the cases of El Bierzo and Laciana, I show that there are more commonalities across geographical localities than previously thought. This is because involuntariness, instrumentality, and unfulfillment are also present factors in high-income countries as precarity is spreading (Azmanova 2020). This thesis argues, then, that research should focus on the commonalities across locations as a starting point to further theory-building on emigration dynamics.

### ***Moving, staying, and everything in-between***

So far, I have referred to “a subject’s relation to migration possibilities” (Carling and Collins 2018, 915) as *migration* aspirations. This term is, however, problematic as it frames the aspirations to stay as a residual option (Carling 2014a; Mata-Codesal 2019), concurrently strengthening the mobility bias within the field of migration studies (Schewel 2020a). To counterargue this bias, scholars are increasingly engaging with immobility as an analytical, independent, and active variable of study. Schewel (2015), for example, has explored the causes and consequences of acquiescent immobility – which entails being unable and not aspiring to emigrate. And Mata-Codesal (2015, 2018) has focused on the different ways, reasons, and motivations behind remaining, which highlights the lived experiences of immobility and advances the notion ‘voluntary immobility’ – being able to move but not aspiring to do so.

In this way, efforts to stress the activeness of immobility have been made. For example, Carling (2014a, 6) has suggested shifting from *migration* to *spatial* aspirations to provide equal weight to the aspirations to leave and remain. The term, however, has not permeated within migration studies, which is unfortunate given that the notion of ‘space’ reflects (1) interrelations, (2) distinct and multiple trajectories, and (3) an open, changing system (Massey 1999). First, people relate to other individuals and structural constraints and opportunities as they inhabit localities, which captures the multifaceted nature of aspirations and the interrelation between the self and the social environment. Secondly, the existence of other spaces worldwide means that there are spatial alternatives to ‘home’, and as such, imagining, perceiving, and thinking about life elsewhere results in aspirations about *where* to go. This can include remaining in place, as well as emigrating internally, internationally, or in a pendular manner. Finally, there is the opportunity to (re-)learn about *potentiality* elsewhere as space is always under construction, either because places boom and wane, because what the ‘good life’ is changes over time (Taylor 2004; Nordbakke and Schwanen 2014), or because individuals become aware about new spaces abroad over time or perceive places in a different manner than in the past<sup>28</sup>. However, while *spatial* aspirations might bear the analytical potential to conceptualize *all* forms of (im)mobility, its usage remains scarce and instead, researchers are employing the term *(im)mobility aspirations* more frequently<sup>29</sup>. This might be due to how abstract the term ‘spatial’ is, and because its theorization remains difficult and changes over time (Massey 1985). In comparison, *(im)mobility* is a more straightforward concept that centers the attention not on the concept itself, but, rather, on the experiences and aspirations of individuals. For this reason, this thesis embraces the term *(im)mobility aspirations* to capture both aspirations to migrate and aspirations to remain.

Apart from confronting the ‘mobility bias’ of the field (Schewel 2020a), over the past decades, theorization on migration aspirations has advanced on five other significant points:

- (1) Migration scholars have developed more nuanced and comprehensive definitions of migration aspirations, that look beyond target-directed behaviors and yes/no categories and conceptualize aspirations in a spectrum of degrees (Carling 2002, 2014a) or intensities (Mata-Codesal 2019), according to the level of desire to move or stay put.

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<sup>28</sup> The fact that the relation with space changes over time illustrates the transient nature of aspirations.

<sup>29</sup> A search of both terms in Google Book Ngram Corpus shows this.

- (2) Complementing these conceptual developments, the changing and shifting nature of aspirations has attracted greater attention too. In this way, survey methodologies capturing the transient nature of aspirations have advanced. Whereas in most cases data is limited to one-time data gathering exercises, the Gallup World Poll (GWP) presents time-series data worldwide since 2007 (Gallup 2022). Other scholars have also engaged with quantitative, longitudinal data to analyze changes in the aspirations to move; yet these are often limited to a single state or a small group of countries, and/or limited to specific time periods. For example, Coulter (2013) engages with 1991-2008 British household panel data, Koubi, Freihardt and Rudolph (2023) investigate the effect of long- and short-term environmental distress on migration aspirations in Bangladesh, and Becerra et al. (2010) explore the desires to move from Mexico to the USA in Tijuana (Mexico) in 2009. Efforts to map migration intentions and plans (Carling 2013; van Dalen, Groenewold and Schoorl 2005), preparation for migration (Ersanilli, Carling and de Haas 2011), the likelihood (Bjarnason and Thorlindsson 2006; Dustmann and Okatenko 2014; Madhavan and Landau 2011) and necessity to move (Becerra et al. 2010; Becerra 2012), or the consideration of migration (Creighton 2013; Wood et al. 2010) have also been made, which shows the increasing – although diverse – collective attempts to quantitatively measure migration aspirations and related concepts (see Carling and Schewel 2018, 948 for a typology of survey questions). Moreover, scholars have highlighted the different development processes by which aspirations to migrate shift over time (see MADE project (Osburg 2020, Rodriguez-Pena 2020; Schewel 2020a; Vezzoli 2020a).
- (3) Rather than unitary entities, (im)mobility aspirations are now seen as being composed of two dimensions: the instrumental and the intrinsic (see Carling 2012, 2014; de Haas 2021 for an elaboration on these two dimensions). The instrumental dimension understands mobility as a strategy to improve other dimensions of life and achieve, among others, a better education, improved living and working conditions, or escape economic or political crises. Labor and student migration are examples of this. The intrinsic dimension, on the other hand, relates to the value that individuals place on the migration experience itself. Examples of this include the desire to leave the parental home, as well as aspirations to explore other cultures and societies out of curiosity or adventure. This dimension, which is often linked to gap years or lifestyle migration, essentially captures the inner wellbeing acquired from moving (Carling 2014a; de Haas and Rodríguez 2010) (Chapter 7 further elaborates on the interrelation between both dimensions and highlights how they can also be applied to immobility).
- (4) Scholars have called to include distinct temporal dimensions to better comprehend the ongoing process of migration (Carling and Collins 2018; McCormack and Schwanen 2011; Shubin 2015). This is because past experiences, present achievements and situations, and future ambitions bridge together to form migration aspirations (Carling and Schewel 2018; Boccagni 2017); as a result, the inclusion of distinct temporalities within migration studies provides a point of departure to explore how aspirations connect with future thinking and the imagination (Boccagni 2017; Vezzoli 2022).
- (5) Migration scholars have sought to explain the adaptation mechanisms that arise when individuals are unable to fulfill their aspirations. In this vein, some scholars focus on individual strategies, such as subconsciously subduing migration aspirations (Carling and Schewel 2018, 958), expanding migration capabilities, or being more flexible about the conditions under which migration is desirable to increase life satisfaction (Mata-Codesal 2019; Rodriguez-Pena 2023). Others (see FUMI project (PRIO 2023)) are engaged in comprehending how unfulfilled migration aspirations affect development and the future of localities by analyzing how individuals perceive life ahead.

In line with these theoretical developments, I approach (im)mobility aspirations as a spectrum of attitudes and convictions between mobility, on the one hand, and immobility, on the other, rather than seeking to squeeze aspirations into either the immobile or mobile box (Carling and Schewel 2018). I demonstrate, through my case studies, the relevance of understanding aspirations within this spectrum, as diverse life aspirations can result in *conflicting* (im)mobility aspirations. As I show in Chapter 7, aspirations can be reinforcing but they can also be conflicting. Reinforcing aspirations happen when intrinsic and instrumental aspirations converge in the same spatial category. In comparison, conflicting aspirations result from clashing instrumental and intrinsic aspirations to stay or leave, which leads to unclear convictions about whether moving or remaining in place is best, feelings of unfulfillment, and to postponing the decision-making process. Therefore, while de Haas (2021, 18) has recently argued that “in practice, intrinsic and instrumental aspirations may occur simultaneously and often reinforce each other”, I focus on other possible interactions between intrinsic and instrumental aspirations, including a clash between both dimensions. The cases of El Bierzo and Laciana give insights to frame four potential interactions of both dimensions of human (im)mobility, which include the following: (1) strong, reinforcing migration aspirations, (2) strong, reinforcing aspirations to stay, (3) strong, intrinsic aspirations to stay and concurrent strong, instrumental aspirations to leave; and (4) strong, intrinsic aspirations to leave and concurrent strong, instrumental aspirations to stay. The last two scenarios reflect *conflicting* aspirations, while the first two present *reinforcing* aspirations (Chapter 7 further details this).

Since (im)mobility aspirations can reflect different and conflicting life ambitions, I use the term in its plural form – aspirations – to capture pluralistic convictions about *where* the ‘good life’ can be achieved. My approach resonates with that of Osburg (2020) who, in an analysis of the migration aspirations of Western French Guiana youth, shows how individuals hold aspirations to remain in place, but professional and educational aspirations that can only be achieved through migration. Drawing on my case studies, I propose an approach to elucidate the various interactions between the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of (im)mobility. Apart from conceptualizing migration in a spectrum of degrees, this is useful for two other reasons: (1) to question if (im)mobility is voluntary to the same extent when the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of human (im)mobility collide – rather than reinforce – with each other; and (2) to analyze how and at what level – intrinsic or instrumental – socio-cultural and familial expectations can either facilitate or hinder individual migration aspirations. Chapter 7 discusses the various interactions of the two dimensions of (im)mobility, as well as the relevance of the approach. All in all, my approach stresses how political, economic, and familial factors can be brought together in a sole framework to explain reinforcing, conflicting, mild, as well as unfulfilled aspirations.

## 2.2 CAPABILITIES

For now, I have discussed (im)mobility aspirations, however I position myself along the two-step approach to migration studies. This subsection unravels, then, the second step of this approach and focuses on the notion of ‘capabilities’. Nevertheless, before continuing, it is important to differentiate the notions of ‘ability’ and ‘capabilities’, considering that, even though they are often used interchangeably in migration studies (Randell 2016), there are theoretical nuances to consider.

The first iteration of two-step approaches introduced the aspiration/ability model to migration studies to explain unfulfilled migration aspirations in Cape Verde (Carling 2002). By ‘ability’, Carling denoted whether prospective migrants were able to turn their aspirations into actual mobility and the ‘ability to migrate’ was only considered to be relevant among aspiring migrants. The notion of ‘capability’, in contrast, was introduced to the field by de Haas (2003, 2010b, 2021), as he expanded the model to also encompass migration-development interactions. The concept ‘capabilities’ (see Sen 1999) is theoretically more comprehensive because the “capability to migrate is a valuable freedom in its own right, regardless of people’s preferences for staying or leaving [...] The ‘capability’ to migrate is, by definition, equally relevant to all” (Carling and Schewel 2018, 956-957) including those who aspire to remain in place. Indeed, capabilities designate the manners in which one can develop and exercise

human agency to live a worthy life (Nussbaum 1999; Sen 1990), and, therefore, they account for the capability to move or remain, regardless of one's aspirations. Accounting for the capabilities to remain is essential because, although often taken for granted, they can be constrained, as living a 'good, worthy' life while remaining in place can be difficult. Consider, for instance, a locality with no (temporal) local opportunities following an intense economic crisis, a natural disaster, or a coup d'état. These circumstances could make remaining in place temporarily impossible, regardless of strong aspirations to stay. Considering (1) that this thesis engages with both aspirations to migrate and aspirations to stay and (2) the theoretical richness of the term, I embrace the term 'capabilities' and the 'expanded aspirations-capability framework'<sup>30</sup> (de Haas 2014). In the section below, I present some important elements to consider when investigating capabilities and movement freedom (for a detailed discussion on the capabilities approach see Alkire 2005; Gasper 2017; Jackson 2004; Nussbaum 1999; Sen 1990).

### ***An ontology of capabilities: Between structure and agency***

Capabilities<sup>31</sup> designate the freedoms a person enjoys to live a worthy life (Nussbaum 1999; Sen 1990, 1999) and they capture what one is capable of *doing* and *being* (Sen 1990). This means that capabilities are largely unobservable (van Ootegem and Verhofstadt 2012), as well as forward-looking as they refer to opportunities and options and to what 'could be' (Gasper 2017). The broadness of the approach raises some problems for its conceptualization. On the one hand, the conceptual framework itself, together with the objects under study – human life and freedoms – are surrounded by ambiguities (Desai 1990; Sugden 1993). On the other hand, the threshold of capabilities needed varies depending on (1) the goal to be achieved<sup>32</sup> – in the case of this thesis migrating or remaining in place – and (2) on individual characteristics and circumstances<sup>33</sup>. As a result, operationalizing capabilities is difficult and can be subjective (see Alkire 2005; Mata-Codesal 2019; Sen 1990, 46). So, what constitutes having the capabilities to realize one's aspirations?

Despite the ambiguity of the capability approach, efforts to operationalize and break-down the notion of 'capability' have been made (Gasper 1997; Jackson 2014). Scholars differentiate between (1) S-capabilities or internal capabilities and (2) O-capabilities or external capabilities. The former captures individual skills, aptitudes, and attitudes, whereas O-capabilities or external capabilities reflect environmental options and opportunities (see Gasper 1997, 2002, 2017 for a discussion on O- and S-capabilities, and Jackson 2014 for an overview of internal and external capabilities). These concepts resonate with de Haas's (2021) introduction of positive and negative liberties into the migration aspiration-capability framework. Positive liberty refers to "the ability to take control of one's life and to realize one's fundamental purposes" (de Haas 2021, 24) for which resources and abilities are needed, and it resembles S- or internal capabilities. Negative liberty captures the absence of obstacles and external constraints, featuring O- or external capabilities. I stick with the concept of external and internal capabilities because, I believe, they are more intuitive, and I argue that internal and external capabilities compose the two dimensions of migration capabilities. This is because both notions are

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<sup>30</sup> While I adopt the notion of 'capabilities' due to its theoretical richness, from an analytical point of view the resemblance with 'ability' is substantial. My approach is, therefore, also applicable to migration abilities.

<sup>31</sup> 'Capability' and 'capabilities' are often used interchangeably in the literature, however, the 'capability approach' alludes to Sen's work (1990), while the 'capabilities approach' refers to Nussbaum's (1999). Sen's notion of "'capability' is the full set of attainable alternative lives that face a person [...]" 'Capabilities', in contrast, conveys a more concrete focus on specific attainable functionings in life" (Gasper 2017, 336) and connects these to people's skills and power. In this thesis, I use both terms interchangeably.

<sup>32</sup> This is why "Sen does not identify one set of basic functionings (or basic capabilities) precisely because no one set will do for every situation" (Alkire 2005, 119).

<sup>33</sup> Opportunities and constraints vary depending on gender, social class, social norms and values, education or social networks, among others (Schewel 2020b, 8).

intrinsically linked as “one cannot have capability in the sense of opportunity freedom if one lacks capability in the agency senses” (Gasper 2017, 340). De Haas (2021, 24) puts it this way:

“The absence of external constraint (negative liberty) is not a sufficient condition for people to exert migratory agency, because they need a certain degree of ‘positive liberty’ that will enable them to enjoy genuine mobility freedom – which implies a real choice about where to live. For instance, governments may grant nominal freedom of movement but poor people may still lack positive liberty in the form of capabilities and access to resources that would enable them to actually use such negative liberty”.

In the field of migration studies, the interrelation between internal and external capabilities is obvious considering that border closings and immigration policies stratify the ability to move along social groups, class, and nationality lines (Faist 2013; Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Kim 2018; Mata-Codesal 2015; Shamir 2005), and that skills and resource acquisition are shaped by structural opportunities and barriers.

In line with these conceptual developments, I approach capabilities in a bidimensional form and a continuum. First, since both dimensions – external and internal – influence migration capabilities, these can only be regarded as high when both dimensions surpass a subjective threshold<sup>34</sup>. Chapter 8 focuses on the capabilities of El Bierzo and Laciana’s youth and it shows the relevance of differentiating between both dimensions to conceptualize at what level – internal or external – capabilities are constrained, and how individuals cope with these challenges. Second, I understand capabilities in a spectrum of degrees to investigate how individuals perceive their own capabilities and how those far from the extremes – with limited migration capabilities, or with high external but low internal capabilities or vice versa – face their situations. Apart from conceptualizing the abstract notion of capabilities and measuring these on a continuum, this approach is also useful (1) to measure the (in)voluntariness of (im)mobility depending on the capabilities to migrate or remain, and (2) to investigate how persistently low capabilities and involuntary immobility affect life satisfaction and local development. Drawing on the cases of El Bierzo and Laciana, I show that the increasing precarity and a lack of resources can result in unfulfilled migration aspirations in a high-income country, as some lack the capacity to remain, while others cannot fund movement regardless of a strong passport and nominal freedom to move. Although to different degrees in comparison to those that see their lives in immediate danger, poor socio-economic rights and widespread constraints illustrate that unfulfillment or involuntariness is not exclusive to the ‘Global South’, which calls for a more comprehensive application of two-step migration approaches beyond low- and moderate-income countries.

### ***Capabilities in migration studies: Analytical tools for their operationalization***

This thesis aims to further conceptualize and operationalize the capabilities to migrate and to stay given the vagueness of the approach and the scarce investigation in this matter. Indeed, the aspirations to emigrate have received most attention while ‘migration capabilities’ remain understudied. This is evident considering the low number of studies on ‘migration capabilities’ or ‘abilities’ in comparison to research on ‘aspirations’<sup>35</sup>. This leaves theorization around two-step migration approaches incomplete. Still, since the first iteration of the two-step approach (Carling 2002), investigations on the capabilities needed to fulfill aspirations have mushroomed, which has been accompanied by four important advances.

First, researchers have examined the barriers that migrants experience during transit (Hess 2012; Isleyen 2018), as well as before and after migration has taken place (Bloch and McKay 2015; Cheung and Phillimore 2014; Da

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<sup>34</sup> This threshold remains subjective because it is dependent, among others, on *ideal* circumstances under which migration (or immobility) are desirable (Mata-Codesal 2019).

<sup>35</sup> A quick search of ‘migration aspirations’, ‘migration capabilities’, and ‘migration abilities’ in Google Book Ngram Corpus shows the relative frequency of the three terms.

Lomba 2010; Haugen 2012; Stevens 2018; Stuesse and Coleman 2014). In this vein, investigations on involuntary immobility highlight that unfulfilled migration aspirations are often a result of a lack of economic, social and human capital (Bylander 2017; Blondin 2020; Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye 2004), a consequence of border regimes (Carling 2002; Jónsson 2008), and/or a ramification of socio-cultural values and familial power asymmetries, along lines such as gender (Adeel and Yeh 2018), age (de Haas and Fokkema 2010), or sexual orientation (Rodriguez-Pena 2023), among others. These studies have furthered theorization on the barriers that migrants face beyond structural economic and political constraints, as how the family and a lack of human capital can trigger unfulfilled aspirations has been detailed.

Secondly, and closely associated with these insights, scholars are defining internal migration capabilities in terms of the economic, social, and human capital individuals possess (see de Haas 2007, 2010b; 2014). (1) Economic capital is key to understanding how a threshold of economic resources is necessary to embark in a migratory process, while financial resources, in the form of remittances, also allow some family members to remain in place (Gaibazzi 2010, 8). (2) Social capital and being part of a network, although not endless havens of support (Böcker 1994), concern advantages, assistance, and resources to aspiring migrants which facilitates fulfilling migration aspirations<sup>36</sup>. (3) Human capital is also key in the realization of migration aspirations<sup>37</sup>, as increasing formal educational attainment, feelings of self-efficacy (Schewel and Fransen 2018), goal-achievement and problem-solving attitudes, and social skills (Lanzi 2007, 428) can increase other resources, either material or informative, strengthening the capabilities to move.

Thirdly, scholars have incorporated temporalities to migration capabilities to show that these can be *revealed* or *potential*. Revealed capabilities refer to the manifest capabilities of migrants who have fulfilled their aspirations; in contrast, potential capabilities involve the possibility of realizing aspirations in the future (Carling and Schewel 2018, 955). While studies on migration capabilities remain, overall, sparse, research on revealed migration capabilities are more common (Creighton 2013; Docquier, Peri and Ruysen 2014), as investigations on potential migration capabilities are limited to the Visa Restriction Index (Henley and Partners 2015), passport costs (McKenzie 2007) or national statistics on visa acceptance rates. Examining potential migration capabilities proves more challenging as these are subject to change as individual resources and opportunities reduce or expand, or as the circumstances under which migration is desirable change.

Finally, considering the difficulty of conceptualizing migration capabilities prior to migrating, Carling (2014a) has called to consider capabilities as a *process*. This entails acknowledging that capabilities, like aspirations, have a transient nature and that they can constantly change. This perspective accounts for the changes at the macro-level that either benefit or hinder the freedom to move. Consider, for instance, a boom period accompanied by the need of migrant labor facilitating documented entrance, or a transition from authoritarian lines to an hybrid regime that lifts emigration restrictions. It also considers that self-learning opportunities are usually in-place, and that life skills can be acquired over time as people gain formal education or informal abilities. Conceptualizing migration capabilities as a process accommodates multiple times and spatial horizons (Mata-Codesal 2019; Valentine and Sadgrove 2014), and, additionally, it acknowledges the close interconnection between capabilities, aspirations, and adaptation strategies. In fact, unfulfilled migration aspirations can lead, over time, to strategies to surpass involuntary immobility by expanding capabilities (Rodriguez-Pena 2023).

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<sup>36</sup> These can help searching for employment and accommodation, and they can also provide relevant information and emotional support (Garip and Asad 2016; MacDonald and MacDonald 1964; Thing 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Expanding human capital can also encourage migration aspirations, as the increasing access to information, the media and formal education confront individuals with alternative, urban lifestyles, potentially shifting notions of the 'good life' and resulting in migration aspirations, especially if a gap between life aspirations and perceived, local opportunities exist (de Haas 2007, 2014; Schewel 2020b).

Despite these advances, a precise operationalization of migration capabilities is missing. In this regard, the weight that different forms of capital have in the formation of migration capabilities and how different structural factors, such as constraints and opportunities, and resources and abilities interact is underexplored. Chapter 5 provides an approximation to external migration capabilities worldwide by operationalizing economic, social, human and citizenship capital. By doing so, this thesis shows (1) how different forms of capital interact at the macro-level and (2) illustrates that a lack of economic and citizenship capital is, generally speaking, more significant to explain unfulfilled migration aspirations. From a micro-level perspective, however, Chapter 8 shows that, in addition to a lack of economic resources and citizenship capital, personal thresholds and informal human capital skills – including social and personal skills (see Lanzi 2007 for a comprehensive conceptualization of human capital) – also matter to overcome structural constraints and a ‘culture of permanence’.

### 2.3 ADAPTATION MECHANISMS<sup>38</sup>

Lastly, I delineate the final element of my investigation: adaptation mechanisms. Adaptation is a process of change to meet new circumstances, and whereas the aspirations-capability framework offers the conceptual tools to examine (im)mobility outcomes, the framework itself does not explain how people move between (im)mobility categories and adapt to their unfulfilled aspirations (Mata-Codesal 2019). As a result, studies on the transition between different states of (im)mobility remain, unfortunately, scarce, although scholars are increasingly interested in this topic. Emerging research shows how migrants adapt their capabilities and aspirations (1) before migration has taken place, (2) during their journeys, and (3) at destination. Studies on adaptation at destination and *en route* focus on how immigration policies and border controls shape the experiences of migrants, especially of the undocumented. At destination, migrants need to assess their intra-city mobility and reside in areas difficult to access to avoid detention and a ‘second state of immobility’<sup>39</sup> (Haugen 2012; Stevens 2018; Stuesse and Coleman 2014). In transit, migrants negotiate with smugglers, other migrants, and border guards (Mainwaring 2016), and employ travel strategies, such as joining migrant caravans (Torre Cantalapiedra and Mariscal Nava 2020), to contest border regimes and reach their destination. In comparison, studies on the adaptation strategies of aspiring migrants in origin are, to a great extent, more theoretical than empirical, although, lately, empirical investigations on how aspiring migrants adapt pre-migration have emerged. The coping strategies of the involuntarily immobile often take three forms: (1) individuals transition towards acquiescent immobility by subduing their migration aspirations to increase their life satisfaction<sup>40</sup> (Martin and Bergmann 2021; Ortiga and Macabasag 2021); (2) aspiring migrants adapt their *ideal* migration aspirations by being more flexible in terms of how migration is desirable – this includes migrating internally rather than internationally (Ortiga and Macabasag 2020), or migrating without documents (Rodriguez-Pena 2023) –; and (3) the involuntarily immobile expand their migration capabilities and acquire more resources or skills (Rodriguez-Pena 2023). For a theoretical discussion on involuntary immobility and adaptation mechanisms see Carling and Schewel (2018) and Mata-Codesal (2019).

Despite these important advances, studies on the adaptation mechanisms of aspiring migrants suffer two limitations: (1) they are detached from the broader literature on migration and adaptation, and (2) how distinct

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<sup>38</sup> This section is partially based on the literature review published in Rodriguez-Pena (2023).

<sup>39</sup> While here I focus on the strategies that migrants employ at destination to avoid a second state of involuntary immobility (Haugen 2012), it is important to note the literature, particularly in ethnic studies, that highlights how migrants adapt to the culture of the destination society by letting some original cultural habits go, incorporating new ones, and/or by experiencing an identity transformation that entails a shift from a monocultural to an increasingly intercultural self-orientation (Hutnik 1991; Kim 2017). While important strategies to integrate, I do not focus on this literature, as I am interested in the adaptation strategies linked to the fulfillment of (im)mobility aspirations.

<sup>40</sup> While subduing migration aspirations can be done subconsciously (Carling and Schewel 2018), it can also be an active process by which aspiring migrants balance past endeavors and future prospects and consider their circumstances (Ortiga and Macabasag 2021).

adaptation strategies interact between each other remains understudied. First, scholars have showed that transnationalism leads to alternative forms of socioeconomic, political, and sociocultural adaptation as migrants move internationally (Bauböck 2003; Portes 2001, 2003; Portes, Haller and Guarnizo 2002; Sánchez Molina 2008; Vertovec 2004). Yet, aspiring and non-migrants have remained conceptualized as passive transnational actors, despite calls to integrate them into transnational migration studies more comprehensively (Boccagni 2012; Lacroix 2009). This is unfortunate considering that through transnationalism individuals reconceptualize their relationship to social space and to their possibilities across borders (Bauböck 2003; Gargano 2009). Therefore, the exchange, transformation and organization of ideas, resources, and practices (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) that characterize transnational social fields allow those with unfulfilled aspirations to also establish cross-border ties and construct solutions to local constraints through transnational imaginaries (Bissell 2007; Cangìà and Zittoun 2020; Salazar 2011). This is because aspirations shape transnational orientations (Dimitriadis 2020; van Meeteren 2012), and because “through imagination we can imagine ourselves being or becoming mobile, we can cross material borders and make mobility possible where it does not seem to be the case” (Cangìà and Zittoun 2020, 645; see also Bissell 2007; Salazar 2011). As such, it is important to examine how transnationalism can be a coping mechanism for the involuntary immobile, which would result in the incorporation of two-step migration approaches to the broader literature on adaptation and migration.

Secondly, how different adaptation mechanisms – expansion of capabilities, subduing aspirations, or being more flexible about how migration is desirable – interact is unclear. How do those with unfulfilled aspirations adapt, reassess their situation over time, and change their strategy? How do individuals decide to either hold on to their *ideal* migration aspirations or let them go? Bringing adaptation strategies into a single approach could help answer these questions and to more comprehensively understand how aspirations and capabilities change over time.

During my investigation of the formation and fulfillment (or lack thereof) of migration aspirations in El Bierzo and Laciana, I came across these questions. As a result, I approach adaptation strategies as a *process*. I do this to account for the changing adaptation strategies of individuals, who, as this thesis shows (see Chapter 9), rather than conforming with one coping strategy, often employ a variety of them – including transnationalism – to increase their likelihood of fulfilling their aspirations in the (near) future. This thesis expands two-step migration approaches by integrating adaptation more directly into analysis; it does so by (1) introducing transnationalism into two-step migration approaches (Chapter 9), (2) proposing a theoretical framework to investigate how different adaptation strategies may interact over time (see Chapter 10), and more generally, (3) showing that adaptation mechanisms to cope with unfulfilled migration aspirations are also present in the so-called ‘Global North’, demystifying the assumption that migration aspirations are systematically fulfilled in high-income countries.

### **3 CONCLUSION: ABANDONING BINARY VISIONS**

This thesis aims to advance middle-range theorization of two-step migration approaches. It does so by differentiating the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of aspirations and external and internal capabilities, which offer novel opportunities to understand (im)mobility that are not fully voluntary or fully involuntary. Moreover, this thesis demystifies some of the assumptions surrounding the emigration dynamics of ‘Northern’ citizens, including that they are inherently driven by intrinsic rationales, inherently voluntary and systematically fulfilled. By exploring aspirations and capabilities at the macro- and micro-level in the ‘Global North’, this research (1) acknowledges the structural advantages that ‘Northern’ citizens have, while (2) highlighting within-region differences and the theoretical futility of concepts such as ‘Global North’ and ‘Global South’ by (3) demonstrating that those in high-income countries also present feelings of involuntariness and unfulfilled aspirations. My research stresses, then, the danger of the ‘destination bias’ and methodological nationalism, and how overlooking emigration from the ‘West’ – while stressing immigration flows – has resulted in artificial

discourses that ultimately hinder theory-building and encourage world (di)visions grounded on a relational basis, rather than on substantial analysis. Consequently, this thesis contributes to broader reflections to overcome theoretically futile concepts by empirically and theoretically reflecting on dichotomies that cripple migration debates and by further theorizing and operationalizing key concepts in migration decision-making: aspirations, capabilities, (in)voluntariness and adaptation.

## CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

### 1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 1.1 A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO THE FULFILLMENT OF ASPIRATIONS

As introduced in Chapter 2, my analysis on the formation and fulfillment of (im)mobility aspirations in high-income countries draws on two-step migration approaches. This approach, as I have already shown, analyzes (im)mobility outcomes in two steps: (1) the formation of (im)mobility aspirations, and (2) the fulfillment of such aspirations at a certain point in time. Theoretically, this approach envisions migration and immobility as phenomena that are in constant interaction with structural opportunities, structural constraints, and individual perspectives. Methodologically, this meant overlooking assumptions about the opportunities people are *supposed* to have access to and, instead, focusing on the opportunities individuals can *actually* access. By doing so, I was able to transcend dominant divisions on emigration from the ‘South’ versus the ‘North’. To better understand how (im)mobility aspirations are formed and fulfilled, I make use of two interrelated methodological approaches: This thesis combines a macro- and a micro-level perspective and adopts a social transformation methodological lens to investigate how macro-level change affects aspirations, capabilities, and individual lives.

First, this thesis combines a macro- and micro-level perspective to investigate aspirations and capabilities. This approach adds value to my research in two ways: (1) (Im)mobility aspirations and capabilities take place in a set of ‘opportunity structures’ (de Haas 2021) and they are concurrently influenced from *above* and *below* (Carling 2002). This means that individuals and their circumstances, ambitions and characteristics interact with their context to understand the benefits and losses associated with moving and staying in place. Simultaneously, the macro-level environment sets up local structural opportunities and constraints, as well as social constructions of mobility and immobility that either encourage or hinder migration. A combination of the macro and micro scales facilitates investigating how individuals benefit from, are harmed by, cope with, or challenge the structure while they form and fulfill their (im)mobility aspirations. In addition, (2) a combination of both levels of analysis brings forward the variations and inequalities between national, regional and local ‘opportunity structures’. Apart from acknowledging that social groups benefit differently from structural opportunities and constraints (Schewel 2020b, 8), it is also important to separate macro socio-economic indicators at the national level from the *real* opportunities that individuals can access locally, as these can strongly depart from ‘national’ indicators. In this way, this thesis shows how daily life individual dynamics can deviate from broader, national understandings of what the structure offers, ultimately illustrating unfulfilled migration aspirations in a high-income country.

Secondly, aspirations and capabilities transition over time. These changes can be a result of shifting life ambitions and opportunities, changing familial relationships, changes in individual statuses within social networks, a new job or, among others, the acquisition of new formal education. I grasp these changes through the in-depth interviews. Aspirations and capabilities can, however, also shift due to macro-level changes. To account for these and understand how migration aspirations are linked to development processes, I employ the ‘social transformation’ perspective as a methodological lens to conceptualize change. The social transformation approach argues that migration is an intrinsic part of development (Castles 2003, 2010; de Haas et al. 2021; Khondker and Schuerkens 2014). The social transformation approach distinguishes five dimensions of ‘development’<sup>41</sup> (or the social realm) (de Haas et al. 2021, 18):

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<sup>41</sup> While development is an inherently normative concept that frames how life and societal organization *should be* and is often equated with *progress* (Arndt 1981; Chang 2011), I do not use the concept in this way. Instead, by ‘development’ I refer to how change in societal structures historically proceeds. Abandoning the term ‘development’ altogether and employing more nuanced terminology, such as change or social transformation, is tempting; nevertheless, ‘development’ remains a powerful political, social, discursive, and cultural force that shapes ideas and practices around the world.

- (1) The political, which consists of organized control over populations and state formation processes;
- (2) The economic, which consists of the expansion of industrial capitalism and the restructuring of the economy;
- (3) “The technological, which consists of the application of knowledge through the deployment of procedures, skills and techniques” (de Haas et al. 2021, 18);
- (4) The demographic, which consist of urbanization dynamics and demographic transitions; and
- (5) The cultural dimension, which consists of shared values, beliefs, and norms.

All five dimensions interact with each other and develop over time, resulting at times in the restructuring of society<sup>42</sup> (see de Haas et al. 2021). The timing, sequencing, and intersection of social change processes become relevant to explore how development affects and stimulates migratory or staying behavior. Consequently, I employ the social transformations approach as a macro-level methodological and conceptual framework to orient my empirical research and investigate how macro-level change affects the social structure, the social imaginary and, ultimately, the formation and fulfillment of (im)mobility aspirations. Methodologically, this was essential to understand what drives migration aspirations in high-income countries (see Section 2.1 for the operationalization of the social transformation framework and Chapter 4 for an empirical analysis). It also served me to examine how the abrupt destruction of the mining sector in El Bierzo and Laciana triggered a ‘domino effect’ that negatively impacted (1) the role of the state as a provider of resources, such as public education opportunities; (2) the population pyramid of the regions; (3) technological innovation and the search for alternative livelihoods; and (4) slow changes on *where* a ‘good life’ can be achieved (see Chapter 6 for an overview of these social transformations). While this thesis is not historical per se, I integrate the social transformation perspective to account for changing notions of the ‘good life’ and to highlight the slowly shifting migration transition that is under way in El Bierzo and Laciana. It must be noted, though, that I do not actively integrate the social transformation perspective in empirical Chapters 7, 8 and 9; in these chapters I adopt an emic and micro-level perspective to comprehend how aspirations are formed and fulfilled, even when it becomes obvious how social transformations have impacted individual life, aspirations, and resources.

## 1.2 A SMALL-N CASE: REGARDING THE SELECTION OF CASES

This thesis furthers conceptualization of two-step migration approaches and challenges common assumptions about emigration motives in the ‘North’ and ‘South’ by analyzing from a macro and micro-level perspective the formation and fulfillment of aspirations in high-income countries. To conduct the micro-level analysis, I selected two sluggish regions, El Bierzo and Laciana, in Northwest Spain as my case studies (see Figure 2 in Chapter 1, Section 1.1). Consequently, while at the macro-level I employ a large-N study technique, at the micro-level I adopted a small-N case study methodology<sup>43</sup>. While some researchers contend that single and small-N studies cannot yield generalizable insights, they present theory-building potential, especially in areas where theorization is lacking<sup>44</sup> (Eisenhardt 1989; Yin 2018). In fact, the theoretical and analytical value of single and small-N case

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<sup>42</sup> It is important to note that change in one dimension does not necessarily result in a transformation of social structures, particularly if change in other dimensions is delayed or inexistent. For social transformation to happen all five dimensions of society must be impacted.

<sup>43</sup> El Bierzo and Laciana are neighboring regions which have undergone the same economic and social restructuring, making the similarities between the two striking.

<sup>44</sup> Although the dynamics observed in El Bierzo and Laciana are not empirically representative of Spain or, for that matter, of many other mining regions (Hu and Hassink 2017), the theoretical propositions of my case studies are, as I shown throughout the thesis, generalizable to other contexts (Yin 2018).

study has been amply demonstrated within two-step migration approaches<sup>45</sup> (Carling 2002; Mata-Codesal 2015, 2018; Schewel 2015).

As outlined in Chapter 1 (see Section 2), I focus on Northwest Spain for three reasons: First, because emigration flows have surpassed immigration flows, contradicting migratory trends at the national and continental level. Secondly, because Spain presents an interesting puzzle as migration aspirations remain low, in comparison to its unemployment rates (see Figure 3 in Chapter 1, Section 2): migration aspirations rates are similar to those mapped in stronger economies, such as Austria or Switzerland, which contradicts neo-classical migration theories (Harris and Todaro 1970) and push-pull models (Lee 1966). And finally, because Spain presents one of the highest in-work at-risk-of-poverty rate in the EU (Eurostat 2020b), which opens an avenue to investigate how aspirations are formed and fulfilled when the 'good life' is at stake. As explained in Chapter 1 (see Section 2), when focusing on Northwest Spain, I further narrowed down the focus to El Bierzo and Laciana for two reasons: First, because they present an in-between state to explore localities that (1) are part of the 'Global North' and of a consolidated welfare state and industrialized economy, but (2) are simultaneously uncertain and precarious as the youth has no reasonable options to earn a living. Secondly, El Bierzo and Laciana present an empirical puzzle: Despite increasing migration patterns, the persistent economic crises since the early 2000s have not been accompanied by voluminous emigration rates; instead, international emigration and internal out-migration rates have remained around 0.50% and 4% of the total population, respectively, during the last years. These figures contradict the theoretical assumptions of neoclassical (Harris and Todaro 1970), human capital, historical structuralist theories (Massey et al. 1993) as well as push-pull models (Lee 1966). El Bierzo and Laciana provide, then, the opportunity to investigate aspirations and capabilities in a 'Global North' region where precarity and instability are widespread, and the role of the state is decreasing.

I explore the formation and fulfillment of (im)mobility aspirations at two levels: (1) over time, and (2) over space. On the one hand, through my case study, I map how the socio-economic fabric of the regions has changed over time and how these changes have resulted in shifting aspirations and capabilities, which increases the external validity of the study. On the other hand, to draw conclusions on two-step migration approaches in 'developed' contexts, I employ a small-N case to further theory-building. Instead of adopting a comparative design between either El Bierzo or Laciana and a 'developing' case study, I make use of the variety of empirical studies on two-step migration approaches in the 'Global South' as shadow cases (see Chapter 2). What this research offers is the analysis of the fulfillment of aspirations beyond this dichotomy.

## **2 DATA COLLECTION, DATA ANALYSIS AND FIELDWORK**

For the analysis, this thesis relies on a combination of macro-level quantitative and exploratory research, and micro-level archival research and qualitative in-depth interviews with aspiring migrants, non-migrants, returnees, and immigrants. From a macro-level perspective, I first conducted a quantitative analysis to investigate what drives migration aspirations in high-income countries to test whether aspirations drivers are intrinsically different from those in moderate- and low-income countries. Secondly, I operationalized the notion of 'migration capabilities' to provide an approximation of these worldwide and to analyze migration capabilities in high-income countries. From a micro-level perspective, I first gathered archival documentation to examine how social structures and migration patterns have changed over time in El Bierzo and Laciana. And then, I conducted in-depth interviews to understand how (im)mobility aspirations are formed and fulfilled, and how capabilities are perceived in the area. Altogether this methodological approach facilitated understanding of the fulfillment of aspirations in the 'Global North' from a macro- and micro-level.

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<sup>45</sup> While most investigations applying a two-step approach to migrate adopt a single or small-N case study, large-N studies on aspirations to migrate and to stay have also emerged (Debray, Ruyssen and Schewel 2022; Grubanov-Boskovic et al. 2021).

## 2.1 MACRO-LEVEL QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH: WHAT DRIVES MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS IN THE ‘GLOBAL NORTH’

To explore what drives migration aspirations in high-income countries, I try to associate migration aspirations rates with development processes (see Chapter 4 for the empirical analysis). For this, I draw on the GWP to measure migration aspirations rates<sup>46</sup>, and on a variety of economic, political, demographic, and technological indicators to operationalize social transformations.

First, I make use of the following GWP’s question on migration wishes or aspirations to measure migration aspirations worldwide: ‘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?’<sup>47</sup> (Gallup 2022). GWP uses nationally representative samples, and it is the only database mapping migration aspirations worldwide<sup>48</sup>. Despite the unprecedented information on individual migration aspirations that the database provides, the GWP questionnaire suffers three limitations: (1) the question is hard to interpret and picturing an *ideal* scenario might be a difficult exercise for some; (2) the question only takes into consideration those with aspirations to move ‘permanently’ and consequently, it overlooks those without a pre-defined duration of the movement or those aspiring to move in a circular manner (Carling and Schewel 2018, 951); and (3) the GWP covers migration aspirations at the national level and as a result, regional differences are not available; this is unfortunate considering the important repercussions of a place on migration aspirations and that within-country differences can be greater than between-country ones (van Mol et al. 2018). As relevant as it is to acknowledge these limitations, ignoring GWP’s data means overlooking an important opportunity to explore how aspirations transition over time worldwide, as well as to carry cross-sectional analyses on the development-migration aspirations nexus.

Secondly, to show associations between migration aspirations and development processes, I adopt the social transformation perspective. As already mentioned (see Section 1.1), this approach captures five dimensions of social change: the political, the economic, the technological, the demographic and the cultural. I selected data that can be used as a ‘proxy’ of the five dimensions of social transformation, drawing on the theoretical work by de Haas et al. (2021) and the empirical application of the framework by de Haas and Fransen (2018). The selection of the variables followed a three-fold criterion: (1) the variables were reasonable ‘proxies’ for the dimensions under study, (2) the geographical coverage of the variables was high, and (3) data quality was high. Because of this, I dropped important variables either because of the poor data quality, the limited geographical coverage, to avoid statistical multicollinearity, or to construct a parsimonious model. Despite efforts to use the best available data, there are still limitations in the approach which highlight the need to improve data to measure social transformation in the future. The selected variables to account for social transformation include:

- (1) For the **economic dimension**, I drew on the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP 2023), and derived data on annual GDP per capita growth and total unemployment rate from the World Bank development indicators. I selected these variables because as countries develop and life aspirations expand, growing life ambitions can be accompanied by migration aspirations especially when local opportunities remain scarce or insufficient (Cai et al. 2014; Migali and Scipioni 2019). Because of the

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<sup>46</sup> GWP started introducing questions about migration aspirations worldwide in 2007. However, the geographical coverage is particularly high for the 2011-2017 time period (Gallup 2022).

<sup>47</sup> GWP also presents three other questions related to the evaluation of migration as a course of action, nevertheless, I do not employ those as they are related to migration plans, migration preparation and the likelihood of mobility.

<sup>48</sup> The Latinobarometro and the Afrobarometer provide regional databases on migration intent in Latin America and Africa, respectively.

limited coverage and to avoid multicollinearity, I was not able to include inequality statistics to test the effect of economic redistribution.

- (2) For the **technological dimension**, I included phone users, which serves as proxy to explore awareness about opportunities abroad. I derived the data from the World Bank development indicators. I dropped the share of the population with access to electricity and the Internet to avoid multicollinearity with the HDI.
- (3) For the **demographic dimension**, I included annual urban growth, derived from the World Bank development indicators, and emigration rates, which were calculated using the United Nations Global Migration Database<sup>49</sup> (UNGMD) (UN DESA 2020a). On the one hand, annual urban growth can be used as a proxy of opportunities in urban nuclei and internal migration (Annez and Buckley 2009); as such, this indicator can provide more comprehensive assessment of fast growth within borders and indicate whether internal migration is a substitute or a complement to international emigration. On the other hand, I included the share of emigrant population to test how a culture of migration and the likelihood of being part of a migratory social network influences migration aspirations (Timmerman, Hemmerichs and de Clerk 2014). While scholars (Skeldon 1997; Zelinsky 1971) have stressed the importance of other demographic factors, such as the 'youth bulge', I did not include more variables to avoid multicollinearity as the share of young population is highly correlated to the HDI and annual GDP growth.
- (4) For the **political dimension**, I drew on the Freedom House Index (FHI) to capture civil liberties<sup>50</sup> (Freedom House 2022), and on the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) (2022) to include the incidence of conflict<sup>51</sup>. I use these indicators because poor socio-political conditions can trigger aspirations to move abroad (Lapshyna 2014).
- (5) While I acknowledge the importance of cultural factors for migration aspirations, I did not include specific variables mirroring the **cultural dimension**. This is because the geographical coverage for formal education was insufficient, and data was particularly poor for countries located in the 'Global South'. In fact, including the variables of primary, secondary, and tertiary school enrollment implied losing data for 46, 52 and 31 countries, respectively. While I dropped the variables of primary and secondary net enrolments and tertiary gross enrolments, I capture how education changes notions of the 'good life' and impacts aspirations through the HDI, which also covers an educational dimension by measuring (1) the projected number of schooling years for children of schooling age, and (2) the average years of schooling for adults over 25 years of age.
- (6) Drawing on de Haas and Fransen (2018), I also included two **control variables**: population size of the country and land surface. Countries with large population sizes are more likely to have multiple urban agglomerations and consequently, absorb migration within their borders (de Haas 2010b). Including land surface allows to control the exceptionally high emigration rates that small islands and small countries often have, as well as the higher costs of crossing borders in larger countries.

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<sup>49</sup> This database contains bilateral migrant stock data by country at the global level in five-year intervals between 1990 and 2019.

<sup>50</sup> The FHI is a global dataset containing data on political rights during the 1973-2016 period. Civil liberties are measured in a one-to-seven scale, where one is the highest degree of freedom and seven the lowest. Drawing on de Haas and Fransen (2018), I reversed the coding to provide a more intuitive interpretation of the results. The reversed scale runs from 1 (low civil liberties) to 7 (high civil liberties).

<sup>51</sup> The UCDP (2022) is a global dataset containing data on wars and small conflicts during the 1946-2007 period. The database contains a two-fold typology of conflict: (1) armed conflicts, where at least one party is the government of a state, and (2) non-state conflict, where neither of the parties are a government. This variable is coded as a dummy variable, and a conflict is recorded when yearly casualties are at least 25.

Adopting the social transformation perspective (de Haas et al. 2021), Chapter 4 offers an analysis on how migration aspirations relate to development in high-, moderate- and low-income countries and tests whether migration aspirations drivers experience continuity as countries develop. This, as I have already argued, is important to prove the ‘substance’ behind assumptions surrounding migration motives from the ‘South’ and the ‘North’, and to reconcile theorizations on emigration dynamics. Yet, this approach presents two limitations as I consider the selected indicators as unitary entities and I focus on between-country differences.

First, while (im)mobility aspirations are composed of two dimensions – the intrinsic and the instrumental –, Chapter 4 approaches the selected indicators as unitary entities. This means that I do not highlight which indicators can trigger intrinsic versus instrumental migration aspirations. This is a conscious choice given that the selected variables can be considered both instrumental and intrinsic factors. For example, increasing civil liberties results in greater opportunities – e.g., access to formal education – and can be undoubtedly regarded as a factor improving living conditions overall. This shows the instrumental component of the variable. Concurrently, high civil liberties can make life more valuable in itself as further civil rights can be enjoyed – which highlights its intrinsic component. Similarly, emigration rates have an important instrumental role: From a macro-level perspective, emigration can alleviate the pressure on national markets<sup>52</sup>, while from a micro-lens, being part of a (migratory) network can trigger important economic and informative advantages. Emigration also has a relevant intrinsic component considering that it can enhance self-realization and fulfillment. Migration aspirations, as I show in Chapter 7, can also be a result of instrumental motives – e.g., getting a better salary –, intrinsic rationales – e.g., discovering the world –, or both. Considering the difficulty to establish when and how each variable follows an instrumental or intrinsic logic, I decided to not differentiate the variables’ dimensions.

Secondly, I analyze the development-migration aspirations nexus at the aggregate, national level. This means that I explore between-country differences, and that I overlook within-country inequalities. I do not deny that the latter are significant and that aggregate numbers tell us little about how migration aspirations might be formed among groups – men versus women, the youth versus the elderly, low- (and the precariat) versus high-socioeconomic classes. This shows the necessity to improve regional datasets to account for within-country disparities more comprehensively.

Despite the inherent limitations of the study, Chapter 4 analyzes the association between development and migration aspirations in high-, moderate- and low-income countries, providing, as far as I am concerned, a first approximation into migration aspirations drivers *across* these groupings.

## **2.2 MACRO-LEVEL EXPLORATORY RESEARCH: AN APPROXIMATION TO MIGRATION CAPABILITIES WORLDWIDE**

One of the limitations of two-step migration approaches is the lack of operationalization on capabilities, which not only hinders theory-building but also sustains the assumption that emigration aspirations in the ‘Global North’ are systematically fulfilled as capabilities are high. Chapter 5 offers the first operationalization and calculation of capabilities worldwide. Considering the scarce research on migration capabilities and the methodological difficulties of conceptualizing the notion of capabilities itself (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2), operationalizing capabilities entailed exploratory research about what migration capabilities are and how they can be measured. I map migration capabilities drawing on four forms of capital: economic, social, human and citizenship capital.

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<sup>52</sup> For example, this, together with the aim to obtain foreign currencies, is why the Spanish Emigration Institute (IEE) was created in 1956. The IEE gathered and channeled overseas employment, especially in Western Europe, and matched it with Spanish applicants (Sánchez Alonso 2011).

- (1) **Economic capital** refers to goods, property, and other economic resources. These not only facilitate the fulfillment of migration aspirations<sup>53</sup>, but also allow some family members to remain put (see Stark and Bloom 1985). I capture economic capital by deriving data on average net personal wealth from the World Inequality Database (WID) (2022a), which refers to the total capital of households (both financial and non-financial), after deducing their debt<sup>54</sup>. The average net personal wealth is a more comprehensive indicator than measures on GDP per capita or national income for two reasons: It captures non-market transactions, income from informal sectors and income from capital, and it also accounts for income and wealth inequality by considering personal debt and non-financial assets. See Chapter 5, Section 3.1 for a discussion on how I employ this indicator to measure economic capital.
- (2) **Social capital** captures the advantages, assistance and resources linked to being part of a group, and within migration studies there is ample research on the benefits of being part of a migrant network<sup>55</sup>. Nevertheless, operationalizing social capital at the national level is difficult, since it is virtually impossible to measure how many family members, friends or acquaintances potential migrants have abroad and whether they can rely upon them. I address this methodological challenge by capturing migrant networks at the national level using two indicators: (1) the share of emigrants as % of the total population, and (2) received remittances in current US\$. Chapter 5 (see Section 3.2) further explains the rationale for the selection of these two indicators and how I brought them together to map migration social capital.
- (3) **Human capital** involves abilities, skills, and competencies. Measuring human capital proves challenging since it is not yet possible to measure life-skills or specific technical knowledge (see Lanzi 2007 for a comprehensive overview of how these form human capital). For this reason, researchers often rely on the completion of formal education, which, although narrow, provides an understanding of human learning (see Schuller 2000). I also follow this strategy and I rely on net primary, secondary and tertiary school enrollment as % of total population as proxies of abilities and skills. Because of a lack of geographical coverage, I dropped important indicators covered by the World Value Survey, including being a social individual or being capable of taking risks. These two indicators relate to the expansion of life-skills and self-empowerment, which leads to increases in life and migration capabilities. Still, mapping net enrollment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education reflects basic skills and more complex competencies (see Chapter 5, Section 3.3 for a more detailed discussion).
- (4) Finally, citizenship regulates access to resources and services, including visas, and immerses people in a political stratification system. As such, **citizenship capital** captures the freedom (or lack thereof) of moving across borders, which affects life chances, and accordingly, migration capabilities (Bauder 2008; Kalm 2020). This form of capital not only reflects the ease of entering the destination country, but also the ability to exit the origin country, as countries put emigration policies in place. I measure citizenship capital drawing upon three indicators: entry freedom, settlement freedom, and exit freedom. Chapter 5 (Section 3.4) further explains the rationale for the selection of these three indicators and how I brought them together to map citizenship capital.

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<sup>53</sup> The threshold of economic resources needed to embark in a migratory process remains subjective, tied to how people aspire to move (Mata-Codesal 2019), and therefore, difficult to calculate.

<sup>54</sup> Instead of measuring average wealth per individual, the WID data consists of 'equal-split adults'. This perspective accounts for an expected equal redistribution of income and wealth among couples. This is an optimistic perspective, considering that due to familial hierarchical dynamics and distinct bargaining power equal distributions does not represent reality. Yet, an opposing view, no redistribution whatsoever, remains unrealistic, and it underrepresents the wealth available to nonworking partners.

<sup>55</sup> These include, among others, assistance finding accommodation and employment, emotional and psychological support, and the provision of information (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964; Thing 2010). It is important to note that group membership is, however, not a safe haven as networks present power asymmetries and they can weaken and erode over time (Böcker 1994).

Combining these four forms of capital – economic, social, human and citizenship capital –, Chapter 5 provides the first approximation of migration capabilities worldwide, which is important considering the scarce theorization and the subjective thresholds surrounding migration capabilities. Yet, this exploratory research presents some limitations, which include: (1) the focus on external capabilities, and (2) the focus on between-country differences.

First, I focus on migration capabilities at the aggregate, national level and I operationalize contextual and structural circumstances either facilitating or constraining the fulfillment of migration aspirations. In other words, I focus on external capabilities (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2). This means that I do not capture internal capabilities. This is because from a macro-perspective it is not possible to capture individuals' skills and abilities. Focusing on migration capabilities at the structural level is, however, very useful to establish a point of departure and average shares of migration capabilities worldwide, and to capture which general constraints or opportunities people encounter across countries. It also provides a point of departure to further conceptualize the migration capabilities of distinct groups and individuals.

Secondly, I map migration capabilities at the aggregate, national level. As a result, I focus on between-country differences, overlooking within-country inequalities. I do not deny that the latter are significant and that aggregate numbers tell us little about inequalities among groups. This shows the necessity to improve regional datasets to account for within-country disparities more comprehensively.

Despite the inherent limitations of the study, I provide, as far as I am concerned, the first operationalization of migration capabilities worldwide, which furthers two-step migration approaches.

### **2.3 MICRO-LEVEL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS: ASPIRATIONS AND CAPABILITIES IN EL BIERZO AND LACIANA**

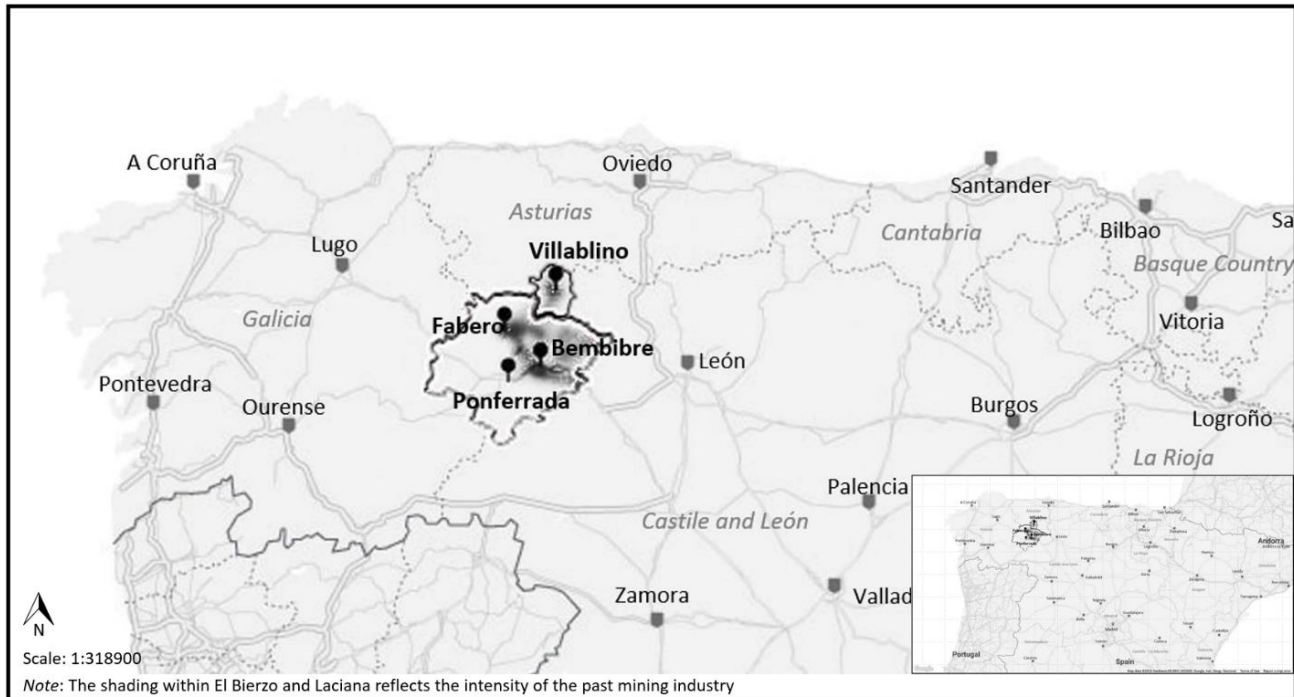
My fieldwork took place between May 2021 and February 2022, when I conducted interviews with aspiring migrants, non-migrants, returnees, and immigrants in Bembibre, Fabero and Ponferrada in El Bierzo, and Villablino in Lacia (Figure 4). I selected these four municipalities because they were the key mine basins<sup>56</sup>, traditionally the most economic and socially important municipalities, and currently the most populous<sup>57</sup> (Junta de Castilla y León 2022) (see Chapter 6 for a historical overview of both regions).

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<sup>56</sup> Although Ponferrada was not a mining municipality, the city provided necessary industry and services to run and maintain the mining industry.

<sup>57</sup> Throughout Chapter 7, Chapter 8, and Chapter 9, I refer to these municipalities as (upper) El Bierzo for simplification purposes.

**Figure 4.** Bembibre, Fabero, Ponferrada and Villablino within El Bierzo and Laciana



Source: Own elaboration<sup>58</sup>

During fieldwork, I carried out 37 interviews that captured the life history, and (im)mobility aspirations and capabilities of 39 individuals<sup>59</sup>. Out of the 39 interviewees, nine were conducted with migrants. Of this, three were internal migrants and six international migrants. Three of the six international migrants had aspirations to re-emigrate and two were undocumented at the time of the interview. Thirteen interviews were conducted with returnees, of which six aspired to re-emigrate. And seventeen interviews were conducted with non-migrants, of which eleven had migration aspirations. Of the interviewees, nineteen were male and twenty were female, and they ranged from seventeen to 67 years of age. Table 1 provides an overview of the main characteristics of the respondents. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish, and they lasted, on average, 48 minutes; the shortest interview lasted 19 minutes and the longest 1 hour and 40 minutes. Interviewees gave verbal consent to participate in the interviews. I have given interviewees pseudonyms to protect their identities, which are used consistently throughout this thesis.

<sup>58</sup> The map was created using Snazzy Maps and Photoshop.

<sup>59</sup> This is because, on two occasions, I interviewed two individuals together.

**Table 1.** Interview record

|                              | <i>n (%)</i>    |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>                |                 |
| Male                         | 19 (48.72)      |
| Female                       | 20 (51.28)      |
| <b>Age group</b>             |                 |
| 17-30                        | 16 (41.03)      |
| 30-39                        | 2 (5.13)        |
| 40-59                        | 11 (28.26)      |
| 60+                          | 10 (25.64)      |
| <b>Migration status</b>      |                 |
| Non-migrant                  | 17 (43.59)      |
| Migrant                      | 9 (23.08)       |
| Returnee                     | 13 (33.33)      |
| <b>Migration aspirations</b> |                 |
| Yes                          | 20 (51.28)      |
| No                           | 19 (48.72)      |
| <b>Country of origin</b>     |                 |
| Spain                        | 29 (74.36)      |
| Argentina                    | 3 (7.69)        |
| Belgium                      | 1 (2.57)        |
| Cape Verde                   | 2 (5.13)        |
| Colombia                     | 1 (2.57)        |
| Germany                      | 1 (2.57)        |
| Pakistan                     | 1 (2.57)        |
| Portugal                     | 1 (2.57)        |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>39 (100)</b> |

The interviewees were recruited through youth and local associations, such as Amilcar Cabral, and through snowballing sampling. In addition to my formal interviews, I was also invited to roundtables and demonstrations on the future of the regions. These allowed me to observe the hope or despair of the population regarding the local opportunities, inter-actor dynamics, and to conduct tens of informal conversations. All the informal conversations I had during my fieldwork (around fifty) matched the information of the interviews.

While most of the interviews were conducted onsite ( $n = 27$ ), due to COVID-19 ten interviews were conducted online. Given the difficulty of estimating the development of the pandemic, remote methodological alternatives appeared as a solution to face-to-face interviews (Gruber et al. 2021). I chose to conduct remote interviews using a video conferencing platform because this allowed me to process body language and non-verbal cues. To protect the privacy of my interviewees and assure their comfort during the interviews, I took the following actions: (1) let them choose the videoconferencing platform they were more familiar with, (2) inform them about privacy risks associated with using these platforms, particularly if they were joining from their phones and using a public Wi-Fi network, (3) make sure that either encryption or two factor authentication were enabled in their chosen platform, and (4) ask for consent and notify them when the recording started (see Boland *et al.* 2021). I did not experience any problems or difficulties during the remote interviews. In addition, once it was safe to conduct research on site, I either interviewed again or held informal conversations with those

interviewees who participated online. Face-to-face interviews were resumed always following the recommendations of the health authorities to ensure the safety of the interviewees.

The semi-structured interviews focused on four issues:

- (1) The **interviewees' life history**. This allowed me to explore major turning points in their life courses, their perception about the social structure of the region, and their life ambitions. Although not directly tied to migration, their stories detailed how (im)mobility experiences and aspirations have influenced their paths, and how (im)mobility aspirations and capabilities have been shaped by the social transformations of El Bierzo and Laciana.
- (2) Their **imagined futures and ideal life circumstances**. During this section, I asked further questions about what they want to do in life and how they envision the 'good life'. This involved questions about their (im)mobility aspirations, and the circumstances under which (im)mobility is desirable.
- (3) Their **assessment of potential migration capabilities**. This implied conversations about their plans and likelihood of fulfilling their (im)mobility aspirations, and the opportunities and constraints they envision in this regard.
- (4) Finally, to those with unfulfilled migration aspirations, I asked questions about their **adaptation preferences and strategies** to cope with their situation.

## 2.4 MICRO-LEVEL ARCHIVAL RESEARCH: DELVING INTO THE HISTORY OF EL BIERZO AND LACIANA

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I conducted archival research in one municipality: Fabero, El Bierzo. I was not granted permission to enter the registries of other municipalities in El Bierzo and Laciana<sup>60</sup>. However, according to the interviews, the patterns were similar in all mining municipalities across the region. During my visit to the archives, first and foremost, I collected statistics on internal in- and out-migration, and international emigration and immigration, population estimates and vital statistics. I also accessed reports from associations and local institutions on migration patterns in El Bierzo and Laciana, which confirmed the interviews' insights that emigration rates, although higher in the upper Bierzo region, were similar across municipalities. Although scarcer, I was also able to compile data on unemployment rates, economic restructuring, and occupation by sector. Whenever possible, I completed the statistics with reports on the social transformation the regions have experienced over time, and I contrasted these with the overview of the development processes that older interviewees were able to provide. This was central to systematizing insights and to analyzing the respondents' accounts using triangulation.

All in all, the archival research was an important component of this investigation to understand how social change has been accompanied by shifting migration patterns over time in El Bierzo and Laciana. Chapter 6 provides an overview of development processes and migration dynamics in the regions from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

## 2.5 MICRO-LEVEL RESEARCH: ANALYZING THE DATA THROUGH ABDUCTIVE RESEARCH

I relied on abductive analysis to process the micro-level data and foster a threefold, iterative examination of data collection, data analysis and theory-building for three reasons. First, the selection of a Spanish region meant explaining a theoretically striking empirical finding. Namely, low migration aspirations and migration rates

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<sup>60</sup> The right and responsibility to access population registers is covered under the Spanish Historical Heritage Law (*Ley de Patrimonio Histórico Español*). While some city councils referred to maintenance works to deny the access – which is possible according to the heritage law –, others did not provide an explanation. While I made a formal complaint about this, I never heard back from them.

despite high unemployment rate, precarity and destruction of livelihoods. Second, while theoretical and empirical insights on two-step migration approaches informed the selection of my case study and the initial data collection, I started analyzing my empirical material while on fieldwork. This allowed me to generate new working hypotheses on conflicting aspirations (Chapter 7) and transnationalism as an adaptation mechanism (Chapter 9) that I later confirmed or refined with additional fieldwork. I did this by conducting follow-up interviews or informal conversations with the respondents I interviewed early on during my fieldwork to confirm, reject, or specify conceptual ideas that came up throughout research. Finally, I analyzed the interview material in two steps: Initially, I coded the empirical data with the objective of capturing similarities, differences and patterns on aspirations, capabilities, adaptation and change in El Bierzo and Laciana. In a second analysis round, however, I relied on different theoretical frameworks – including transnationalism – to gain analytic significance and cluster insights.

This iterative process between theory and empirics is consistent with this thesis's ambition outlined in Chapter 2, namely to develop middle-range theories and to strengthen two-step migration approaches.

### **3 FIELDWORK REFLECTIONS AND POSITIONALITY**

My positionality as a white, young, female, Spanish, emigrant researcher shaped my fieldwork in three different ways. First, being Spanish conducting research in Spain provided me with linguistic and cultural competences facilitating the interaction with the informants. However, on occasions, I was treated as an outsider as I was not born or raised in the Autonomous Community of Leon, which also proved to be beneficial. In fact, the respondents found it peculiar that an outsider to El Bierzo and Laciana was interested in understanding the changes that the region has experienced, as well as how the shifts in the socio-economic fabric have affected the daily life of the population. Even if I cannot know how informants would have treated me had I been from the region, my status as an 'outsider' proved to be an asset since the interviewees not only explained things that are taken for granted, but they also offered me visits to relevant locations that everybody in the region is familiar with and they were excited to present me to other potential interviewees (see Carling, Erdal and Ezzati 2014 for a discussion on the insider-outsider divide). This was reinforced when they asked who was funding the research – EU's Horizon 2020 –, as they associate the EU with the financial aid received after the collapse of the mining sector (Chapter 6 discusses this in-depth). While I was very clear about the scope of the research and the consequences that it would have, I had the impression that they were more open to sharing their experiences with me once they learnt I was an outsider with EU funding.

Secondly, my status as a Spanish emigrant also shaped my fieldwork. Some interviewees, particularly those with emigrant offspring or with emigration background on their own, were more likely to accept participating in the interview, as, I believe, the figure of the 'emigrant' embodied a sense of nostalgia and appeal among them. Aspiring migrants and migrants with aspirations to re-emigrate were also very interested in the rationale of the project and willing to reflect on their past and future migration projects. My status as an emigrant shaped our conversations given that some respondents were extremely curious about my own migration experiences, which meant that, at times, I needed to redirect the interview.

Thirdly, it seemed to me that being a young woman influenced their perception of me as more caring when covering delicate topics (see Tarrant 2013), such as unfulfilled life and migration aspirations. This was particularly the case with younger interviewees with whom my age proved to be useful to avoid a power asymmetry between the researcher and the respondent.

Reflections on positionality are usually accompanied with speculative questions about 'what would respondents have told me' were I different in terms of age, gender, nationality or race, among others. This remains unanswered, but I assessed the reliability of the data gathered in interviews through data triangulation (see Section 2.4).

## 4 CONCLUSION

Despite the theoretical nuances of (im)mobility aspirations and capabilities and the methodological difficulties of capturing these (see Chapter 2, Section 2.1 and 2.2), a combination of macro- and micro-level analyses was the best approach to research this thesis's main research question: *How do people in high-income countries form and fulfill their migration aspirations?* My methodological approach provides the center for the empirical analysis of (im)mobility aspirations fulfillment in the 'Global North'. On the one hand, I investigate the association between migration aspirations drivers and development processes at the global scale, and I calculate migration capabilities worldwide. This provides a first axis to understand the structural opportunities and constraints that individuals, including Western citizens, experience. On the other hand, my fieldwork, composed of 37 interviews, about fifty informal conversations, observation, and archival research, provides empirical nuances on how the 'opportunity structure' translates into what people can do at the local level. The micro-level research provides, then, a second axis to investigate the asymmetries between structural opportunities and local realities. My conclusions from my empirical data are informed by the literature on two-step migration approaches, and research on capabilities and transnationalism discussed in Chapter 2. After having considered the theoretical and methodological cornerstones of this thesis, I now proceed to its empirical analysis: the formation and fulfillment of (im)mobility aspirations in high-income countries from a macro- and micro-level perspective.

## **PART II – A MACRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS ON MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS AND CAPABILITIES ACROSS THE DEVELOPMENT SPECTRUM**

Part II adopts a macro-level perspective and investigates the drivers of migration aspirations and spread of migration capabilities worldwide, with a focus on high-income countries. **Chapter 4** offers a quantitative analysis of how migration aspirations are driven by development processes in high-, moderate- and low-income countries, while **Chapter 5** presents the first operationalization and calculation of migration capabilities across countries. Both chapters showcase that, from a macro-level perspective, the ‘opportunity structure’ in the ‘Global North’ is beneficial. The chapters confirm that (1) migration capabilities are overall very high in the ‘Global North’ – which may indicate a systematic fulfillment of aspirations – and (2) that instrumental rationales do not explain migration from the ‘Global North’ well. While these insights are demystified in Part III of this thesis, *Chapter 4* and *Chapter 5* also demonstrate (1) that instrumental rationales are also relevant in high-income countries, and (2) that not *all* in high-income countries have the capability to move. These factors already illustrate similarities in the emigration motives between countries across the development spectrum, which calls to move beyond theoretically futile concepts and categories and research emigration patterns, aspirations, and capabilities more systematically worldwide, including in high-income countries. This would facilitate the application of two-step migration approaches and theory-building away from dichotomous categories.

## CHAPTER 4 – THE DRIVERS OF MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS

### 1 DEMYSTIFYING MIGRATION ASPIRATION DRIVERS

Shifting from the theoretical and methodological pillars of this thesis, this chapter investigates how migration aspirations relate to development processes. By adopting a macro-level perspective, it adds to my overall argument that migration aspiration rationales in the ‘North’ are not that different from those in the ‘South’. The chapter does so by demystifying the idea that emigration from the ‘North’ is a result of intrinsic rationales, while emigration from the ‘South’ results from instrumental and utilitarian motives (Scheibelhofer 2018, 1004-1005). As I argued in Chapter 2 (see Section 1), this differentiation of emigration in the ‘North’ and the ‘South’ is grounded on power asymmetries and the knowledge production regime. This chapter provides empirical evidence on the crippling effect of such differentiation considering that emigration from high and low human development countries is similar in two ways: First, instrumental rationales are present worldwide as decreasing urban growth – which can be used as a proxy for the creation of local employment opportunities – explains increasing migration aspirations in high human development countries. Secondly, this chapter stresses that often-used variables to explain migration do not fully explain migration aspirations, particularly in high and low human development countries, showing potential similarities across countries at different stages of the development and migration transition. This chapter provides evidence that further exposes the futility of dichotomous categories jeopardizing migration and development debates and calls for more systematic investigations on emigration dynamics that surpass the ‘origin bias’ of emigration studies. In doing so, it joins a theoretical and empirical effort to move beyond artificial discourses to further theory-building (see Arar 2022; Bilan 2014; Cenci 2018; Mondain and Diagne 2013; Sancho 2017; or Schielke 2009).

### 2 THE RESEARCH DESIGN: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

This chapter tests the association between migration aspirations and development processes in high, moderate, and low human development countries. To do so, I derive data on ‘migration aspirations’ from the GWP, and I adopt the social transformation perspective to measure change at the economic, political, demographic, technological and cultural levels (see Chapter 3, Section 2.1 for a more detailed discussion on the methodology).

The GWP has included questions related to migration aspirations since 2007, and this chapter explores the association between migration aspirations and social transformation processes for the year 2015. I focus on the year 2015 – instead of more recent years – for two reasons: (1) The geographic coverage of migration aspirations is comparatively low prior to and after the 2011-2017 period (see Table 2); and (2) within the 2011-2017 time period, important independent variables, such as emigration rates, are only available for the year 2015<sup>61</sup>.

**Table 2.** GWP coverage of migration aspirations by country, 2007-2021

|                          | 07 | 08 | 09  | 10  | 11  | 12  | 13  | 14  | 15  | 16  | 17  | 18  | 19 | 20 | 21  |
|--------------------------|----|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|
| <b>Countries covered</b> | 76 | 86 | 114 | 124 | 146 | 141 | 138 | 148 | 140 | 142 | 147 | 119 | 50 | 11 | 121 |

Source: Own elaboration based on Gallup (2022)

Respondents are considered to have a preference to migrate from their country of residence if they answer positively to the question, ‘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?’ (Gallup 2022; see Chapter 3, Section 2.1 for a discussion about the limitations of GWP methodology). Figure 5 plots the proportion of GWP respondents who

<sup>61</sup> As I detailed in Chapter 3, Section 2.1, I calculate emigration rates – the share of emigrants by % of the population – drawing on the UNGMD (UN DESA 2020a), which contains bilateral migrant stock data in five-year intervals since 1990.

expressed a preference to migrate abroad in 2015. The map shows that aspirations to stay are predominant worldwide (see Debray, Ruyssen and Schewel 2022 for a quantitative analysis of the drivers of aspirations to stay), and that the lowest shares of migration aspirations are reported in Central, South and Southeast Asia. In contrast, only in 6 countries over half of the population aspires to migrate. These countries are El Salvador, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Albania, Liberia, Haiti, and Sierra Leone<sup>62</sup>. Refer to Table A.1 in Annex 1 for the complete list of the countries I use in the empirical analysis of this chapter.

**Figure 5.** Migration aspirations per country of residence, 2015



Notes: Hong Kong and South Sudan, although unplotted in the map, are included in the sample.

Source: Own elaboration based on Gallup (2022)

To conceptualize development processes and change, this chapter draws on the social transformation perspective (see de Haas et al. 2021), which captures social change in five interconnected dimensions: the political, the economic, the technological, the demographic and the cultural (see Chapter 3, Section 1.1 for a more detailed discussion on this perspective). I selected a maximum of three indicators per dimension. Table 3 below illustrates the selected indicators (see Section 2.1 of Chapter 3 for a justification of the selected indicators).

<sup>62</sup> Most of these countries presented outlying values. I detail how I dealt with these in page 45.

**Table 3.** Operationalization of social transformation: Selected indicators by dimension

| <b><i>Social transformation</i></b> |                               |                                      |                             |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Political dimension</b>          | Civil liberties               | Occurrence of conflict               |                             |
| <b>Economic dimension</b>           | Human Development Index (HDI) | Annual GDP per capita growth         | Total unemployed population |
| <b>Technological dimension</b>      | Mobile phone subscriptions    |                                      |                             |
| <b>Demographic dimension</b>        | Urban population growth       | Emigration as % of total population) |                             |
| <b><i>Control variables</i></b>     |                               |                                      |                             |
|                                     | Total population              | Surface area                         |                             |

Note: I account for the cultural dimension through the HDI, which captures standards of living, having a long and healthy life, as well as *knowledge* (see Section 2.2 of Chapter 3). I do this because the geographical coverage for school enrollment is scarce: including the variables of primary, secondary, and tertiary school enrollment implied losing data for 46, 52 and 31 countries, respectively (World Bank 2022).

Source: Own elaboration

Table 4 depicts descriptive statistics for all variables considered in the empirical analysis. The average share of migration aspirations worldwide is 23.05%, which has remained rather stable since the early 2010s as averages have ranged between 20% and 25% for the past years (Gallup 2022). There are seven countries that present outlying migration aspiration values; these countries are: Sierra Leone, Haiti, Liberia, Albania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, and Dominican Republic, all of which were mild outliers but Sierra Leone, which was an extreme outlier. I decided to keep the outliers in the analysis for two reasons: (1) there was no appreciable difference in the results with and without the outliers, and (2) according to Hoaglin and Iglewicz (1987) mild outliers can be kept in analysis, as they do not usually generate problems or biases. Unsurprisingly, the statistics in Table 4 suggest that important variations across countries exist especially for the share of phone users, emigration rates, and the total population and surface area.

**Table 4.** Descriptive statistics for all variables

|                                          | <i>Mean</i>          | <i>St. Deviation</i> | <i>n</i> |
|------------------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------|
| <b><i>Migration aspirations</i></b>      | 23.05                | 12.70                | 138      |
| <b><i>Economic dimension</i></b>         |                      |                      |          |
| Human Development Index (HDI)            | 0.71                 | 0.16                 | 135      |
| Annual GDP per capita growth (in %)      | 1.57                 | 4.98                 | 136      |
| Total unemployed population (in %)       | 7.73                 | 5.82                 | 136      |
| <b><i>Technological dimension</i></b>    |                      |                      |          |
| Phone users (per 100 people)             | 110.47 <sup>63</sup> | 33.13                | 136      |
| <b><i>Demographic dimension</i></b>      |                      |                      |          |
| Annual growth of urban population (in %) | 2.02                 | 1.59                 | 136      |
| Emigration rate                          | 8.36                 | 8.26                 | 136      |
| <b><i>Political dimension</i></b>        |                      |                      |          |
| Civil Liberties                          | 4.60                 | 1.84                 | 137      |
| Total conflicts (1 = yes)                | 0.17                 | 0.38                 | 138      |
| <b><i>Control variables</i></b>          |                      |                      |          |
| Total population (in millions)           | 49.21                | 164.32               | 137      |
| Surface area (in sq. km)                 | 775165.32            | 1953769.78           | 136      |

Source: Own elaboration based on Gallup (2022), World Bank (2022), UNDP (2023) and UN DESA (2015)

The ambition of this chapter is to debunk assumptions about emigration drivers worldwide, showing that migration aspirations drivers are not inherently different in high-human development countries. To do so, I first test the drivers of migration aspirations worldwide, and then I examine migration aspirations drivers in low, moderate, and high human development countries. I do this to show how migration aspirations drivers in each development group either depart from or conform with general migration aspirations drivers.

### 3 TESTING THE DRIVERS OF MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

This section tests the relation between migration aspirations and social transformation processes worldwide through descriptive and regression analyses. In the subsections below, I first present bivariate correlations between migration aspirations and social transformation indicators. Then, I present multivariate regression analyses to test how social transformation processes overall relate to the aspirations to move.

<sup>63</sup> This value indicates that one individual can have more than one phone subscription.

### 3.1 MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: A BIVARIATE ANALYSIS

Table 5 shows bivariate correlations between migration aspirations, on the one hand, and social transformation variables on the other. See Table A.2 in Annex 1 for bivariate correlations between all variables.

**Table 5.** Bivariate correlations between migration aspirations and all variables

|                                     | Migration Aspirations |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Migration aspirations               | 1                     |
| Human Development Index             | -.331***              |
| Annual GDP per capita growth (%)    | -.207**               |
| Total unemployment (Ln) (%)         | .207**                |
| Phone users                         | -.149*                |
| Annual urban growth (%)             | .102                  |
| Emigration rate (Ln)                | .186**                |
| Civil liberties                     | -.048                 |
| Incidence of conflict (1 = yes)     | -.044                 |
| Total population (in millions) (Ln) | -.185**               |
| Surface area (in sq. km) (Ln)       | -.190**               |

Note: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.1$

An important observation is the moderate, negative correlation between migration aspirations and HDI. This confirms the idea that a lower standard of living and lower opportunities boosts the aspirations to leave (Cai et al. 2014; Migali and Scipioni 2019), while acknowledging, too, that the relation might be affected, for instance, by confounding variables. Annual GDP growth per capita shows a negative but weak correlation with migration aspirations. Considering that the GDP growth rate measures how fast an economy is growing, this correlation might support the fact that positive perceptions of the future justify reasons to stay (see Vezzoli 2022). The correlation between the total unemployed population and the aspirations to move is, in contrast, positive but also weak, which also confirms that lower economic opportunities increase migration aspirations.

With regards to the demographic variables, only emigration rates are positively correlated with migration aspirations and this correlation is weak. This might capture the fact that migration can become self-perpetuating with expanding social networks abroad (Cai et al. 2014) or that migration aspirations become part of the cultural norm under a migration culture<sup>64</sup> (Jónsson 2008). Nevertheless, the weak correlation might also indicate that this is dependent on other factors, such as local opportunities. Before drawing any conclusions, this relation must be explored in a multivariate setting (see next section). Interestingly, annual urban growth is not correlated with international migration aspirations. This might be because rural-to-urban migration and internal migration aspirations anticipate (and sometimes substitute) the aspirations to move internationally.

Surprisingly, there are no significant correlations between political stability and security – captured by the incidence of war and civil liberties freedom – and migration aspirations. This indicates that migration aspirations might be mostly influenced by economic factors. Nevertheless, it is important to note the variety of qualitative

<sup>64</sup> It is important to note, however, that feedback loops are usually present and that, through these, non-migrants can receive negative information about the migration experience, subsequently decreasing the aspirations to emigrate (Timmerman, Hemmerichs and de Clerck 2014).

studies stressing how political instability shapes migration aspirations, especially as opportunities decrease, violence intensifies and discontent, particularly among the youth, increases (Müller-Funk 2019; Müller-Funk and Fransen 2022; Ruhe 2021; see also Aslany et al. 2021 for an overview of migration aspirations drivers in the literature, including political factors).

Finally, with regards to the control variables, Table 5 shows a weak negative correlation between migration aspirations, and total population and country sizes. This is consistent with the idea that countries that are large and populous will hold most mobility within their borders, and that it is more challenging to cross the borders of larger countries. The difficulties of crossing and exiting larger countries might lead to (unconsciously) subduing migration aspirations, especially when individuals consider they do not have the capabilities to move (Carling and Schewel 2018, 958). While this chapter addresses the drivers of migration aspirations, it is important to note that self-internalized barriers can minimize migration aspirations, which illustrates the interrelation between migration aspirations and capabilities.

### **3.2 MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: A MULTIVARIATE, REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

I ran a multiple regression analysis to explore how the selected social transformation indicators relate to migration aspirations. The analysis satisfied all the assumptions of regression analyses<sup>65</sup> but one as there was heteroskedasticity. To account for the violation of homoskedasticity, I present the coefficients with corrected robust standard errors<sup>66</sup> (Hayes and Cai 2007). Table 6 presents the results of the regression analyses.

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<sup>65</sup> In the regression analyses, there was (1) linearity – as assessed by partial regression plots and a plot of studentized residuals against the predicted values –; (2) independence of results – as assessed by Durbin-Watson statistic –; (3) no evidence of multicollinearity – as assessed through tolerance values –; and (4) the assumption of normality was met – as assessed by Q-Q plots. While some countries in Model 1, Model 2 and Model 6 presented moderately high leverage values, I decided to keep them in the analysis for two reasons: (1) the cutoffs points are illustrative of *potential* unusual values, and (2) departure of the data from the rules of thumb was minimal.

<sup>66</sup> The presence of heteroskedasticity was assessed by visual inspection of a plot of studentized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values. While heteroskedasticity can invalidate statistical inferences and, consequently, present biased *p*-values, it can also be a sign that a model is mis-specified, especially if measurement errors are unlikely. Considering the methodological challenges of measuring migration aspirations and the fact that no model is perfect (Hayes and Cai 2007), I continue with the regression analyses.

**Table 6.** The effect of social transformation on migration aspirations

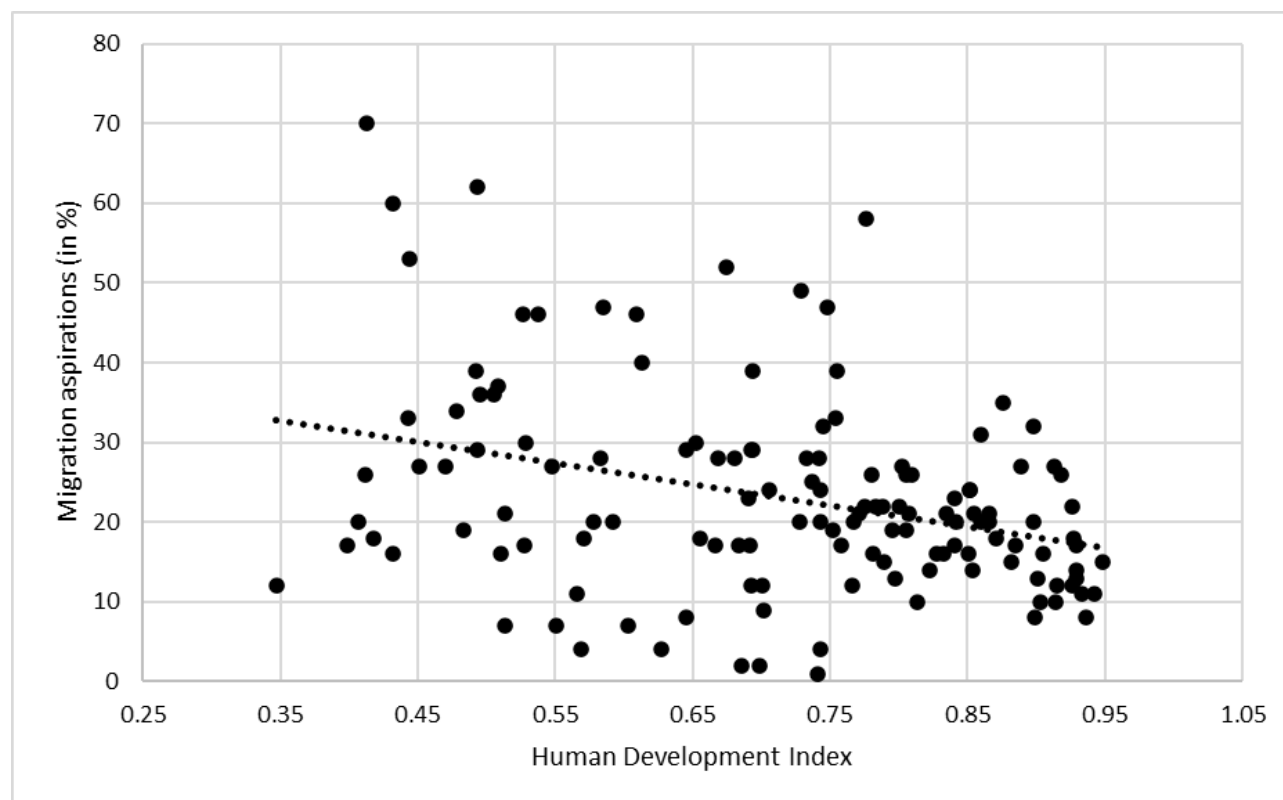
| <i>Variable</i>     | <i>(1) Econ.</i>      | <i>(2) Econ. III</i>  | <i>(3) Tech.</i>      | <i>(4) Demogr.</i>   | <i>(5) Polit.</i>     | <i>(6) All</i>         |
|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Constant</b>     | 68.649***<br>(11.687) | 69.439***<br>(10.883) | 48.886***<br>(10.474) | 23.396**<br>(10.539) | 42.235***<br>(11.304) | 74.257***<br>(15.634)  |
| HDI                 | -30.395***<br>(7.303) | -39.752***<br>(7.225) |                       |                      |                       | -55.956***<br>(12.961) |
| GDP growth (%)      | -.412<br>(.420)       | -.244<br>(.452)       |                       |                      |                       | -.316<br>(.422)        |
| Unemployment (Ln)   |                       | 5.378***<br>(1.243)   |                       |                      |                       | 4.967***<br>(1.325)    |
| Phone users         |                       |                       | -.085**<br>(.035)     |                      |                       | .025<br>(.047)         |
| Urban growth (%)    |                       |                       |                       | 1.841**<br>(.733)    |                       | -.772<br>(1.097)       |
| Emigration (Ln)     |                       |                       |                       | 3.070*<br>(1.590)    |                       | .641<br>(1.545)        |
| Civil Liberties     |                       |                       |                       |                      | -.765<br>(.670)       | .714<br>(.725)         |
| Conflict (1 = yes)  |                       |                       |                       |                      | -.231<br>(3.058)      | -4.745<br>(3.503)      |
| Population (Ln)     | -.724<br>(.893)       | .055<br>(.918)        | -1.108<br>(.968)      | -.116<br>(1.015)     | -.797<br>(.989)       | .885<br>(1.071)        |
| Country area (Ln)   | -1.752**<br>(.812)    | -2.230**<br>(.752)    | -1.115<br>(.798)      | -.741<br>(.824)      | -1.111<br>(.888)      | -2.176**<br>(.728)     |
| Adj. R <sup>2</sup> | .194                  | .286                  | .064                  | .061                 | .021                  | .298                   |
| <i>N</i>            | 134                   | 134                   | 136                   | 136                  | 135                   | 133                    |

Notes: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \* $p < 0.1$ . Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with corrected robust standard errors in parentheses. *Econ.* is an abbreviation for economy, *Tech.* for technology, *Demogr.* for demography and *Polit.* for politics. Model 6 includes all the independent variables.

First, migration aspirations are higher in countries where human development is lower and employment opportunities scarcer. This highlights that the relation between migration aspirations and economic development might be linear, which is to be expected following traditional migration theories, including neoclassical theories (Harris and Todaro 1970) and push-pull models (Lee 1966). By this I do not mean that push-pull models and neoclassical theories explain migration dynamics, but rather I highlight that while the relation between economic development and emigration is nonlinear (de Haas 2010b; de Haas and Fransen 2018), the association with migration aspirations seems to be linear. This is theoretically sound considering that scarcer migration capabilities constrain emigration from lower-income countries, while aspirations and ambitions for a better life are present worldwide and migration aspirations expand especially in countries with poor perceptions of standard of living, low life satisfaction and limited local economic opportunities (Cai et al. 2014; Migali and Scipioni 2019). In addition, greater local opportunities and more stable economies give people reasons to stay or to migrate *internally*. I demonstrate the linear relation between migration aspirations and development in three ways: (1) In a scatterplot between aspirations to move and human development index, (2) building a squared term of HDI to test for non-linearities in regressions models, and (3) calculating the Akaike Information

Criterion (AIC)<sup>67</sup> to determine which model fits the data best – one with or one without a squared term of HDI. As Figure 6 shows, the scatterplot clearly indicates a linear relation between migration aspirations and human development, while Table 7 reveals that a linear model is a better alternative as the association between migration aspirations and a squared term of HDI is insignificant in all models. Moreover, a comparison of the AIC of both models highlights that a linear model fits the data best since introducing a squared term of HDI implies a higher AIC<sup>68</sup>.

**Figure 6.** Scatterplot between migration aspirations and human development index



Source: Own elaboration based on Gallup (2022) and UNDP (2023)

<sup>67</sup> The AIC compares the relative quality of statistical models. A lower AIC indicates a model that explains the largest variation with the lowest number of independent variables.

<sup>68</sup> Introducing the squared term of HDI implies between 1.38 and 1.99 more units of AIC, depending on the model.

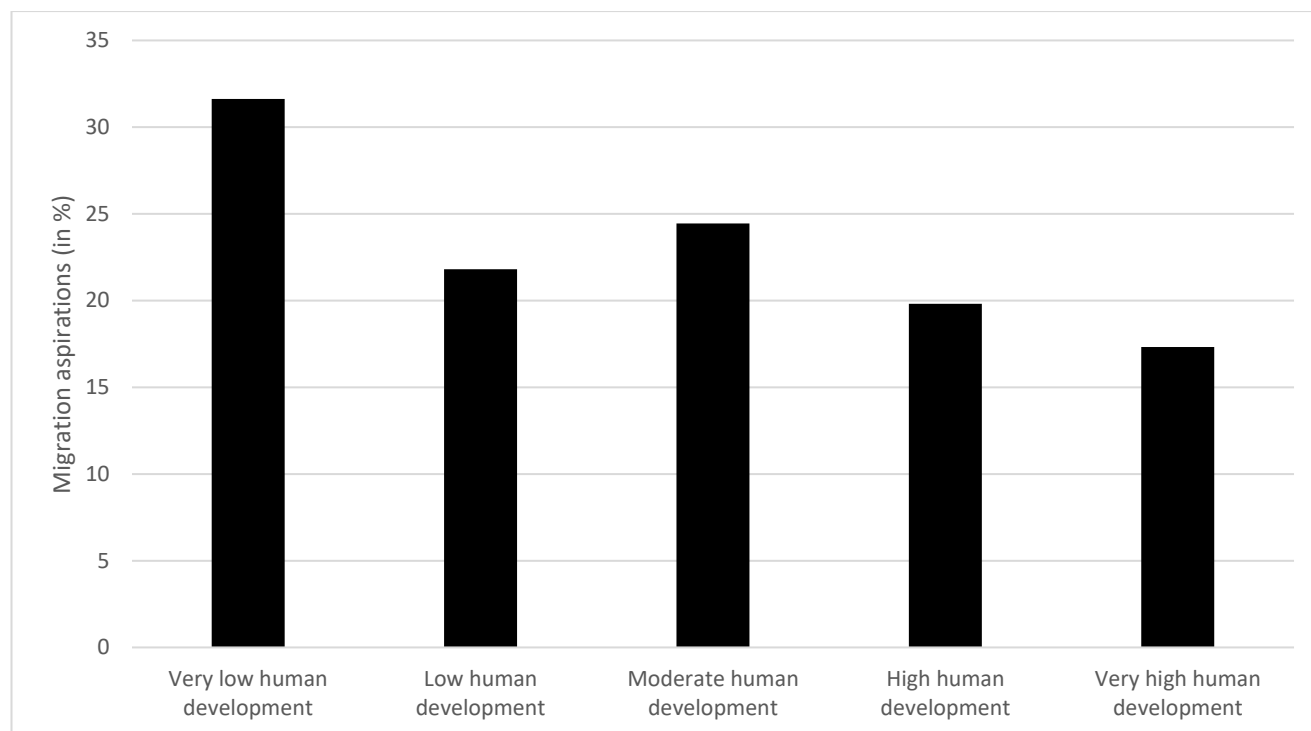
**Table 7.** The effect of social transformation on migration aspirations with built-in squared term of HDI

| <i>Variable</i>     | <i>(1) Econ.</i>  | <i>(2) Econ. III</i> | <i>(6) All</i>    |
|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Constant</b>     | 54.622** (25.322) | 71.564*** (25.104)   | 76.216** (31.145) |
| HDI                 | 14.270 (68.369)   | -46.563 (67.582)     | -62.490 (83.793)  |
| HDI squared term    | -32.834 (48.141)  | 4.962 (46.961)       | 4.744 (57.495)    |
| GDP growth (%)      | -.429 (.426)      | -.240 (.446)         | -.313 (.420)      |
| Unemployment (Ln)   |                   | 5.414*** (1.305)     | 5.000*** (1.421)  |
| Phone users         |                   |                      | .026 (.050)       |
| Urban growth (%)    |                   |                      | -.774 (1.110)     |
| Emigration (Ln)     |                   |                      | .667 (1.590)      |
| Civil Liberties     |                   |                      | .686 (.803)       |
| Conflict (1 = yes)  |                   |                      | -4.776 (3.609)    |
| Population (Ln)     | -.752 (.907)      | .064 (.925)          | .902 (1.092)      |
| Country area (Ln)   | -1.769** (.810)   | -2.230** (.760)      | -2.174*** (.738)  |
| Adj. R <sup>2</sup> | .192              | .281                 | .293              |
| <i>N</i>            | 134               | 134                  | 133               |

Notes: \*\*\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*p<0.1. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with corrected robust standard errors in parentheses. Model 6 includes all the independent variables.

Yet, it is important to note that differentiating the sample into equally sized quintiles shows an imperfect linear relation between migration aspirations and HDI (see Figure 7) since aspirations to move are slightly higher in moderate human development countries than in low human development countries.

**Figure 7.** Migration aspirations mean by HDI equally sized quintiles



Source: Own elaboration based on Gallup (2022) and UNDP (2023).

Secondly, the association between social transformations and migration aspirations measured in table 6 suggests that phone usage is negatively associated with migration aspirations, while urban growth shows a positive association. When controlling for other factors, however, these variables have no significant effect on migration aspirations. This suggests that the correlations were spurious. This is an interesting finding in itself, given the importance that migration theories have traditionally ascribed to demographic factors. This finding supports the insights of previous quantitative studies on emigration and development (de Haas and Fransen 2018) as well as the common idea of the indirect relation between demographic factors and emigration.

Thirdly, civil liberties and the incidence of conflict have no significant effect on migration aspirations. This is interesting, considering that, based on push-pull models, a positive relation between political repression and insecurity and migration aspirations is expected. The lack of a significant relation might highlight the domination of the economy over migration aspirations. However, it should be noted that political and economic instability tend to be interrelated and that migration aspirations are also heightened by weak institutions (Lapshyna 2014). The lack of a significant relation might relate to one of the methodological limitations of the GWP's questionnaire as it asks whether individuals would prefer to move *permanently* to another country, which can underestimate migration aspirations, especially when 'distress migrants' (de Haas 2021) aspire to return 'home' once conflict ends (Müller-Funk 2019). I delve into this limitation in Chapter 3, Section 2.1.

Finally, there is a negative effect of country size on migration aspirations, while the population size is not associated with migration aspirations. As mentioned above, crossing large countries is more challenging and expensive, which might result in subduing migration aspirations, especially if migration capabilities are limited (see Carling and Schewel 2018, 958). Migration capabilities can be limited by states, especially when they restrict their citizens' exit rights; this is the case of some large countries, such as China, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Iran, and Mongolia (DEMIG 2015).

The analyses confirm the idea that the relation between development and migration aspirations is complex. Consider, for instance, the absence of a significant association between conflict and migration aspiration, and

the fact that the Adjusted  $R^2$  for Model 6 is 0.298, which entails a moderate effect according to Cohen (1988, 80). This means that the model explains 29.8% of the variance in migration aspirations worldwide. While it is likely that I am not accounting for relevant structural factors shaping migration aspirations<sup>69</sup>, it also must be noted the relevance of the intrinsic dimension for migration aspirations (Carling 2012; de Haas 2021), which suggests that self-realization and explorative purposes also act as drivers of the aspirations to migrate. In this analysis I focus on how structural opportunities and constraints might drive migration aspirations, and, due to data limitations, I do not control for intrinsic rationales. This is for two reasons. First, as explained in Chapter 3 (see section 2.1), the selected indicators can have both an instrumental and intrinsic dimension. For example, urban growth results in more local economic and educative opportunities, while it also offers greater leisure opportunities and improved living conditions. However, the difficulty of establishing how and when each variable follows an instrumental or intrinsic logic, and how these affects migration aspirations make it unfeasible to differentiate between both dimensions. Secondly, worldwide data on factors that clearly have an intrinsic component is lacking. One manner of introducing intrinsic factors into quantitative analyses on migration aspirations drivers could be to map the materialistic and post-materialistic values of countries through the World Value Survey. The former refers to the need for financial security and social stability, while the latter indicates the human need for freedom and self-actualization (Inglehart 1977). While cultural transition theories have already been used in qualitative studies to understand the formation of intrinsic migration aspirations (Jolivet 2020), I did not introduce these in the analysis due to the limited geographical coverage of the World Value Survey ( $n = 64$ ).

The question that comes up next is: Are these migration aspirations drivers the same across countries? Or, as societies develop, do different drivers lose and gain momentum? The following section engages with these questions to investigate whether migration aspirations drivers in high-human development countries are different from those in other countries.

#### **4 THE DRIVERS OF MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS IN HIGH, MODERATE, AND LOW DEVELOPMENT COUNTRIES: EXPLORING A TRANSITION EFFECT**

This section tests whether migration aspirations drivers are consistent across the development spectrum. It does so to test the assumed differences about emigration patterns and motives in high and low human development countries, which create important divisions in migration studies. These divisions include artificial distinctions of migration aspirations rationales, as well as of migrants themselves. For example, discriminatory discourses refer to migrants from lower- and middle-income countries as ‘immigrants’, while migrants from higher-income countries are often labelled as ‘expats’. While this is being increasingly challenged (Klekowski von Koppenfels 2014), these discourses are still very much present and are grounded on discriminatory attitudes, but also on assumptions about fundamental differences on migration rationales and patterns. While questionable and problematic, different migration drivers could explain these discourses. As a result, I analyze whether the drivers of migration aspirations experience continuity, or instead, if different factors come into play as states develop. To do so, I first conducted a one-way Welch ANOVA to examine whether there are significant differences in the means of migration aspirations in high, moderate, and low human development countries. Then, I split my file into these three equally-sized groups of human development to run multiple regressions.

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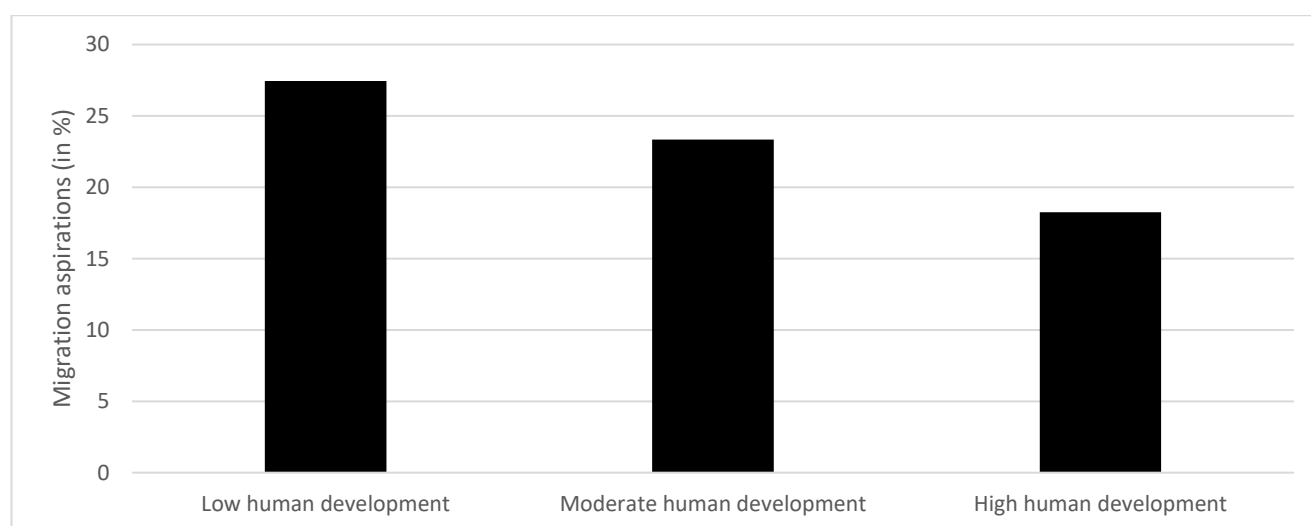
<sup>69</sup> For instance, I dropped important variables, such as the share of the young population, to avoid multicollinearity. This is further explained in Chapter 3, Section 2.1.

## 4.1 MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS AVERAGES IN HIGH, MODERATE AND LOW HUMAN DEVELOPMENT COUNTRIES: ARE THEY DIFFERENT?

I conducted a one-way Welch ANOVA to determine whether the means of migration aspirations were significantly different in countries with distinct human development levels. Country cases were classified into three equally-sized groups: high ( $n = 45$ ), moderate ( $n = 45$ ) and low ( $n = 45$ ) human development. The analysis satisfied all the assumption of one-way ANOVA<sup>70</sup>, but homogeneity of variances, which was violated<sup>71</sup>. To account for this violation, I use the Welch ANOVA test<sup>72</sup> (Liu 2015).

The results indicate that the means of migration aspirations increase from the high ( $M = 18.24$ ,  $SD = 6.404$ ) to the moderate ( $M = 23.33$ ,  $SD = 12.515$ ) to the low ( $M = 27.44$ ,  $SD = 15.907$ ) human development country groups, in that order. Figure 8 presents the means for these three groups, which are statistically significantly different between *at least* two of the groups under study, Welch's  $F(2, 76.190) = 8.104$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Since Welch ANOVA is an omnibus test, it does not indicate which of the three groups differ from each other. To determine this, I used a follow-up post hoc test. The Games-Howell post hoc analysis revealed that the mean increase from high to moderate (5.089, 95% CI [.06, 10.11]) was statistically significant ( $p = .047$ ), as well as the increase from high to low (9.20, 95% [3.05, 15.35],  $p = 0.002$ ) human development groups.

**Figure 8.** Migration aspirations mean by high, moderate, and low human development country groups



Source: Own elaboration based on Gallup (2022)

While these tests have indicated that there is a statistically significant difference in the mean increase between the high and moderate, and the high and low human development groups, it does not explain whether distinct drivers come into play as countries develop. The next subsection presents the result of multiple regression analyses and examines migration aspirations drivers in these three groups.

<sup>70</sup> In the analysis the data was normally distributed for each group, as assessed by Normal Q-Q plots, and, while seven countries presented outlying values, these were mild outliers and not extreme outliers. The countries that presented outlying values were: (1) for the high human development group, Italy and South Korea; (2) for the moderate human development group, Albania, Armenia, Dominican Republic, and El Salvador; and (3) for the low human development group, Sierra Leone. Mild outliers do not usually generate biases and therefore I kept them in the analysis (Hoaglin and Iglewicz 1987).

<sup>71</sup> This was assessed by Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variance ( $p < 0.001$ ).

<sup>72</sup> The Welch ANOVA is a modified version of the one-way ANOVA, which presents robust tests of equality of means to account for the heterogeneity of variances (Liu 2015).

## 4.2 MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS DRIVERS IN HIGH, MODERATE AND LOW HUMAN DEVELOPMENT COUNTRIES: ARE THEY DIFFERENT?

I ran multiple regression analyses to explore whether the same or different social transformation indicators explain migration aspirations in countries with high, moderate, and low human development. To do this, I split the data file into the three equally-sized groups detailed in the subsection above: high ( $n = 45$ ), moderate ( $n = 45$ ) and low ( $n = 45$ ) human development.

### *Explaining non-significant model fits*

Initially, I ran Models 2 to 6 presented in Table 6 (Section 3.2)<sup>73</sup>. Nevertheless, the tests of model fit indicated that several models were not significant for high and low human development country groups, as tested by the total variation explained by the model – calculated using the adjusted  $R^2$  – and the statistical significance of the model<sup>74</sup>. This means that the models did not provide a better fit to the data than a model containing no independent variables. There are several explanations for this, including: (1) that the model is not linear, which is unlikely as demonstrated in Section 3.2, (2) that the variability within the groups is low, (3) that interaction terms between independent variables might exist, or (4) that additional variables, including intrinsic rationales might explain migration aspirations across the development spectrum. Table A.3 in Annex 1 presents the results of these models.

The fact that for high- and low-human development countries the models presented in Table 6 (Section 3.2) are poor fitting is an interesting finding in itself, as it might highlight that instrumental variables are not enough to explain migration aspirations across the development spectrum and, that, instead, intrinsic rationales, such as self-realization, personal fulfillment, or exploration, are important for all, regardless of the country and the stage in the development and migration transition. This, together with qualitative studies showing that people everywhere migrate for intrinsic motives (Arar 2022; Mondain and Diagne 2013; Sancho 2017; or Schielke 2009), ask for further research on the intrinsic rationale of migration across the world.

### *Towards working models*

In an attempt to present working, parsimonious models, I explored whether adjustment to the models might explain the above-mentioned intriguing results. For this, I ran three models including only the variables that showed a significant statistical relation to migration aspirations worldwide in Section 3.2, while I excluded the remaining variables. The rationale for this being that to explore whether similar factors drive migration aspirations worldwide, it is important to select those variables that have already been proven to shape migration aspirations. As a result, I included the following variables into the model: the total unemployed population (in %), annual urban growth (in %), emigration rates (in %), and the control variables of population size (in millions) and country area (in  $\text{km}^2$ ). The variables that did not present statistically significant values in any of the Models presented in Section 3.2 were excluded; these variables are: annual GDP per capita growth (in %), phone users (per 100 people), civil liberties, and incidence of conflict. HDI, although statistically significant, was excluded as my database was split based on this variable.

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<sup>73</sup> Model 2 was run dropping the HDI variable.

<sup>74</sup> I did not run Model 1 because I split the groups based on their HDI. The rest of the models run in Section 3.2 – Model 2 to Model 6 – were statistically not significant. Model 2 (economic variables), Model 3 (technological variables), Model 5 (political variables), and Model 6 (all independent variables included) were statistically not significant for high human development countries. Model 3, Model 4 (demographic variables), Model 5, and Model 6 were statistically not significant for low human development countries. In comparison, all 5 Models were significant for countries with moderate human development.

Drawing on these variables, I ran a multiple regression analysis to investigate how migration aspirations drivers experience (dis)continuity across the development spectrum. The analysis satisfied all the assumptions of regression analyses<sup>75</sup> but one as there was heteroskedasticity. To account for the violation of homoskedasticity<sup>76</sup>, I present coefficients with corrected robust standard errors (Hayes and Cai 2007). Table 8 presents the results of the conducted regression models.

In general, the regression analyses confirm the dominance of economic factors on migration aspirations, particularly for moderate and low human development countries. Unemployment has a positive significant association with migration aspirations in these two country groups, even when controlling for more variables. Unemployment is also positively and significantly associated with migration aspirations in high human development countries; nonetheless, the association becomes insignificant when controlling for other variables. These findings confirm those presented in Table 6 (Section 3.2) but highlight that moderate and low human development countries drive the results.

Interestingly, the findings seem to indicate that urban growth presents a negative, significant association with migration aspirations in high human development countries, whereas the relationship is insignificant in moderate and low human development countries. This might capture that internal migration (aspirations) substitutes or anticipates the aspirations to move internationally, especially as countries develop and national economies consolidate, internal employment and local opportunities arise, and the possibility to have economic security without emigrating abroad emerges. The negative, significant association between urbanization and migration aspirations in high human development countries is interesting, especially because annual urban growth is a proxy for the creation of local, internal employment, which implies that economic (in)stability in important urban areas is key to comprehend migration aspirations in high human development countries. This reflects the instrumentality of migration aspirations in wealthier societies, highlights that people from the 'Global North' also migrate for utilitarian motives and, therefore, illustrates that the drivers of migration aspirations experience continuity as countries develop.

Moreover, there is a negative, significant association between migration aspirations and country area in high and low human development countries, while the effect is insignificant in moderate development countries. This insight might reflect, first, that, as aforementioned, emigrating from larger countries is more expensive, which can consequently lead to unconsciously subduing migration aspirations, especially when capabilities to migrate are scarcer. And, secondly, that large countries tend to have higher productivity growth and are characterized by economies of scale (Perkins and Syrquin, 1989), while smaller countries are more volatile (di Giovanni and Levchenko 2012). This may suggest greater local opportunities and stability in larger, wealthier countries, which concurrently may boost aspirations to remain.

Finally, Table 8 indicates that Model 1, Model 2, and Model 3 explain the variation of migration aspirations differently in high, moderate, and low human development countries. Overall, the Models account best for the variation of migration aspirations in moderate development countries, as assessed by an Adjusted  $R^2$  of 37.2%, 32.4%, and 39% in Model 1, Model 2, and Model 3, respectively; this entails a moderate effect according to Cohen (1988, 80). In comparison, the variation that these same Models explain for high and low human

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<sup>75</sup> In the regression analyses, there was (1) linearity – as assessed by partial regression plots and a plot of studentized residuals against the predicted values –; (2) independence of results – as assessed by Durbin-Watson statistic –; (3) no evidence of multicollinearity – as assessed through tolerance values –; and (4) the assumption of normality was met – as assessed by Normal P-P plots and by Q-Q plots. While some countries in Model 1, Model 2, and Model 3 presented moderately high leverage values, I decided to keep them in the analysis for three reasons: (1) the cutoffs points are illustrative of *potential* unusual values, (2) the values presented *slightly* unusual points, and (3) the leverage points did not lead to further unusual values, such as high influential points.

<sup>76</sup> This was assessed by visual inspection of a plot of studentized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values.

development countries decreases significantly, and they have a low effect (Cohen 1988, 80): Models 1, 2 and 3 explain 9.2%, 14.6% and 14.6% of the variation in high human development countries, and 12.9%, 2.6% and 11.9% in low human development countries, respectively. These numbers indicate that the models do not work that well for high and low human development country groups, which may reflect that other variables explain migration aspirations better in these countries. Further research is needed to explore migration aspirations drivers more comprehensively across the development spectrum, and test (1) whether these drivers are indeed different, and (2) systematically review how instrumental and intrinsic dynamics justify aspirations to move in high, moderate, and low human development countries.

**Table 8.** The effect of social transformation on migration aspirations in high, moderate, and low human development country groups

| Variables           | Model 1 – Economy    |                      |                      | Model 2 – Demography |                    |                     | Model 3 – All independent variables |                    |                       |
|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
|                     | High dev.            | Mdt. dev.            | Low dev.             | High dev.            | Mdt. dev.          | Low dev.            | High dev.                           | Mdt. dev.          | Low dev.              |
| <b>Constant</b>     | 23.071***<br>(5.858) | 46.777**<br>(17.263) | 80.747**<br>(33.519) | 32.735***<br>(7.976) | 26.926<br>(27.620) | 87.998*<br>(49.220) | 31.041***<br>(7.787)                | 21.015<br>(23.004) | 100.845**<br>(45.552) |
| Unemployment (Ln)   | 3.486*<br>(1.747)    | 4.938**<br>(1.726)   | 5.227**<br>(2.140)   |                      |                    |                     | 1.925<br>(2.184)                    | 4.548**<br>(1.679) | 6.481**<br>(2.271)    |
| Urban growth (%)    |                      |                      |                      | -3.094**<br>(1.057)  | .713<br>(1.657)    | .739<br>(3.366)     | -2.648**<br>(1.165)                 | .950<br>(1.599)    | .301<br>(3.154)       |
| Emigration (Ln)     |                      |                      |                      | -.295<br>(1.440)     | 4.561<br>(3.231)   | -.486<br>(4.126)    | -.740<br>(1.516)                    | 4.124<br>(2.760)   | -3.644<br>(4.004)     |
| Population (Ln)     | 1.519<br>(1.104)     | -2.007*<br>(1.147)   | .265<br>(2.853)      | .992<br>(1.132)      | -2.564*<br>(1.373) | -.253<br>(3.087)    | 1.019<br>(1.204)                    | -1.587<br>(1.318)  | -.201<br>(3.037)      |
| Country area (Ln)   | -1.286*<br>(.649)    | -2.216<br>(1.506)    | -4.845*<br>(2.680)   | -1.168*<br>(.589)    | -.522<br>(1.952)   | -4.874<br>(3.441)   | -1.310**<br>(.617)                  | -.940<br>(1.844)   | -6.146*<br>(3.141)    |
| Adj. R <sup>2</sup> | .092                 | .372                 | .129                 | .146                 | .324               | .026                | .146                                | .390               | .119                  |
| N                   | 45                   | 45                   | 45                   | 45                   | 45                 | 45                  | 45                                  | 45                 | 45                    |

Notes: \*\*\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*p<0.1. Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with corrected robust standard errors in parentheses. *Mdt. dev.* means 'moderate development'. Model 2 was statistically insignificant for low human development countries,  $F(4, 40) = 1.290$ ,  $p = .290$ .

## 5 CONCLUSION: QUESTIONING DICHOTOMOUS CATEGORIES

This chapter shows that the relationship between social transformation patterns and migration aspirations is complex, and that such complexity is further intensified when accounting for aspirations drivers in countries at different stages of the development transition. The chapter points out recurrent development dynamics that scholars have associated with migration aspirations, including lower local economic opportunities and high unemployment rates (Cai et al. 2014; Migali and Scipioni 2019). Concurrently, this chapter offers three new insights on migration aspirations drivers. First, it demonstrates that the relationship between development and migration aspirations is linear, in comparison to the development-migration nexus which follows an inverted U-shaped relationship. This is theoretically sound given that scarce capabilities constrain migration from low-income countries and that migration aspirations expand, particularly in countries with lower life satisfaction (Cai et al. 2014). And it is empirically proven using scatterplots, testing for non-linearities in regression analyses, and calculating the AIC. Secondly, the chapter also shows that migration aspirations in high human development countries are also boosted by utilitarian and instrumental rationales. In fact, urban growth, which can be used as a proxy for local employment creation and socio-economic dynamism, is significantly and negatively associated with migration aspirations in high human development countries. This adds to emigration studies showing that intrinsic rationales are not enough to explain emigration from the ‘Global North’, which is often the focus of research (Scheibelhofer 2018). Finally, regression models based on variables often used to explain migration drivers do not account well for the variation of migration aspirations in high and low human development countries. While around 30% of the variation is explained for moderate human development countries, this remains, overall, below 15% for high and low human development countries (Table 8). This calls to examine aspirations drivers more systematically along the development spectrum and to develop methodological tools to also explore the importance of intrinsic migration rationales across countries<sup>77</sup>. While the chapter might raise more questions than answers, it indicates that, overall, ‘push-pull’ models explain emigration, particularly, from moderate-income countries, while emigration aspirations for high and low human development countries are not that well accounted for.

Ultimately, this chapter calls to end dichotomous visions on emigration from the ‘North’ and the ‘South’ by more systematically researching migration aspirations across the development spectrum and the association between migration aspirations drivers across countries. This is important not only to avoid the use of artificial, futile categories that cripple migration studies, but also to further theorization on often overlooked phenomena, including emigration aspirations and patterns from ailing regions in high-income countries (Mata-Codesal 2019) and from regions characterized by a ‘culture of permanence’<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>77</sup> One way of doing this is by expanding the geographical coverage of the post-materialistic index (see the World Value Survey).

<sup>78</sup> I further explore how migration aspirations are formed in these areas in Chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 5 – MAPPING MIGRATION CAPABILITIES WORLDWIDE: AN APPROXIMATION

### 1 THE ROAD TO OPERATIONALIZATION

Shifting from the macro-level analysis on migration aspirations drivers that Chapter 4 provided, this chapter focuses on migration capabilities. Capabilities translate to the freedoms a person enjoys to live a worthy life and capture what one is capable of *doing* and *being* (Nussbaum 1999; Sen 1990). Thus, they are largely unobservable (van Oortegem and Verhofstadt 2012) and forward-looking, as they refer to opportunities, options and what ‘could be’ (Gasper 2017). Within migration studies, they refer to “people’s freedom to choose where to live – including the option to stay” (de Haas 2021, 4) and despite being crucial to understanding why some aspiring migrants cannot migrate (Carling and Schewel 2018), their theorization has remained relatively scarce. This is partially because the ‘capability approach’ itself is surrounded by ambiguity (Desai 1990; Sugden 1993), and because the threshold of capabilities needed varies depending on the goal to be achieved and on individual characteristics and circumstances. Despite the difficulties to operationalize capabilities, efforts in this regard have been made and researchers now differentiate between (1) external capabilities – which account for structural obstacles and opportunities –, and (2) internal capabilities – which capture individual skills and resources (Gasper 1997; Jackson 2014).

This chapter provides the first operationalization of migration capabilities across countries. It does so by exploring (1) how four forms of capital – economic, social, human and citizenship capital – compose migration capabilities, (2) how these can be operationalized, and (3) how their interaction provides estimates of migration capabilities worldwide. For this, I focus on external migration capabilities, which is useful to offer average shares of migration capabilities worldwide and to capture which general constraints and opportunities people encounter across countries. By further conceptualizing the important – albeit often overlooked<sup>79</sup> – component of capabilities, the chapter not only facilitates middle-range theorizing of two-step migration approaches, but also adds to theory-building in migration and development studies by further delineating why some aspiring migrants cannot migrate. What this chapter provides, then, is a departure to map migration capabilities globally, examine individuals’ probability of fulfilling their migration aspirations, and facilitate studies on migration decision-making.

Apart from contributing to this thesis’s theoretical ambition of conceptualizing ‘capabilities’, this chapter also adds to my overall argument by demonstrating that migration aspirations are not systematically fulfilled in high-income countries, given that limited emigration know-how and the widespread of economic precarity can hinder the fulfillment of aspirations of *some* also in the ‘Global North’. The chapter questions whether individuals in high-income, immigratory countries can *consistently* fulfill their migration aspirations, challenging widespread ideas about emigration from the ‘North’ (see Chapter 2, Section 1 for a more detailed discussion). Indeed, in thinking about migration aspirations, we often assume that people in high-income countries are, more often than not, able to fulfill them, in comparison to those in low-income countries. While this assumption is not unfounded<sup>80</sup>, evidence proving this and showcasing the degree of migration capabilities across countries is missing.

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<sup>79</sup> While researchers have long examined the barriers that migrants experience both during transit (Hess 2012; Isleyen 2018) and after migration has taken place (Bloch and McKay 2015; Cheung and Philimore 2014; Da Lomba 2010; Haugen 2012; Stevens 2018; Stuesse and Coleman 2014), more recently, investigations on involuntary immobility have shed some light to the capabilities of aspiring migrants. Unfulfilled migration aspirations are often the result of a lack of capital (Bylander 2017; Kaufmann, Bergman and Joye 2004), a consequence of border regimes (Carling 2002; Jónsson 2008), or a result of socio-cultural values and norms (Adeel and Yeh 2018; de Haas and Fokkema 2010; Rodriguez-Pena 2023).

<sup>80</sup> In fact, economic resources, which are necessary to move, are more diversified in high-income countries, and, overall, ‘Westerners’ can travel more freely given that the need to apply for visas is relatively low (Henley and Partners 2015).

## 2 A FOCUS ON EXTERNAL CAPABILITIES

This chapter provides an approximation to *potential*<sup>81</sup> migration capabilities (Carling and Schewel 2018, 955) at the national level, and it operationalizes and maps external capabilities worldwide. I focus on external capabilities for three reasons: First, from a macro-perspective it is impossible to capture individual skills and abilities. On top of lacking databases, capabilities are bound to subjective thresholds and to individuals' self-assessments about their resources, skills, and internalized obstacles (Mata-Codesal 2019). Secondly, while structural opportunities and constraints vary depending on gender, education, social networks, social class, and social norms, among others (Schewel 2020b, 8), national aggregate data facilitates research on how different social groups are impacted by the structure. Lastly, investigating the social structure sheds light into the causal importance of this for individual freedom and well-being. The fact that this chapter approaches capabilities from a macro-level might seem contradictory considering that the 'capability approach' has been criticized for being too individualistic and for overlooking social structures (see Robeyns 2005, 107-110 for a counterargument on these critiques). However, while the approach embraces ethical individualism it does not adopt methodological or ontological individualism<sup>82</sup>, and, instead, it acknowledges the influence that the structure has on individual capabilities and freedoms (Robeyns 2005).

While I offer the first approximation of migration capabilities across countries, it is important to note that this chapter does not claim to fully account for migration capabilities, as it solely engages with external capabilities and therefore, overlooks individual resources and abilities. Nonetheless, considering the scarce conceptualization and operationalization of the notion of 'migration capabilities', what this chapter provides is a point of departure to map capabilities to move worldwide and examine individuals' probability of fulfilling their migration aspirations (see Gasper 2017, 2012). In this sense, drawing on this chapter, I offer a more comprehensive, micro-level perspective on migration capabilities in Chapter 8, where I investigate the external and internal capabilities of aspiring migrants in El Bierzo and Laciana, and how they perceive what they can be and do – migrate or stay.

Next, I continue detailing how I operationalize and measure migration capabilities by relying on four forms of capital: economic, social, human and citizenship capital.

## 3 OPERATIONALIZING THE FORMS OF CAPITAL

I map migration capabilities drawing from four forms of capital: economic, social, human, and citizenship capital. While economic, social, and human capital are often regarded as the triad making up migration capabilities (de Haas 2007, 2010b, 2014), I also rely on citizenship capital considering that nationality affects the capacity of people to move across borders, access visas and pass border controls. In this way, by capturing these four forms of capital, I do not only account for the diversification of resources among the population, but I also consider the implications of border and migration policies (Carling 2002; de Haas 2021).

Chapter 3 (see Section 2.2) provided a justification on why I selected these four forms of capital. This chapter explains (1) the selection of the indicators used to capture each of these forms, and (2) how migration capabilities are operationalized. Table 9 offers an overview of the selected indicators, while the

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<sup>81</sup> As outlined in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.2), migration capabilities can be revealed or potential. Potential migration capabilities refer to the freedom of individuals to fulfill their migration aspirations in the future (Carling and Schewel 2018, 955).

<sup>82</sup> Robeyns (2005) differentiates three types of individualism: (1) ethical individualism, (2) ontological individualism, and (3) methodological individualism. Ethical individualism considers individuals as the only units of moral concern. Ontological individualism asserts that society is composed only of individuals and that everything that exists is the combination of individuals and their properties. Methodological (or exploratory) individualism asserts that all social processes may be described based on individuals and their characteristics (Robeyns 2005, 107-108).

operationalization of these four forms of capital is explained in detail in the sections below. An analysis on how these forms of capital interact and result in ‘migration capabilities’ is explored in Section 4.

**Table 9.** Operationalization of migration capabilities: Indicators by form of capital

|                            | Indicators                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Economic capital</b>    | Average net personal wealth [(non)-financial assets – personal debt]                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Social capital</b>      | Emigration stocks (% of emigrants as of the total population)<br>Migrant remittance inflows (US\$ million)                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Human capital</b>       | School enrollment in primary education (net %)<br>School enrollment in secondary education (net %)<br>School enrollment in tertiary education (gross %)                                                                                              |
| <b>Citizenship capital</b> | Entry freedom (access to countries visa-free or with a visa-on-arrival)<br>Settlement freedom (number of countries to work and live with no or minimal immigration requirements)<br>Exit freedom (the restrictiveness to exit the country of origin) |

Source: Own elaboration

Before continuing, it is important to note that this chapter maps migration capabilities worldwide for the year 2015. I focus on the year 2015 – instead of more recent years – for two reasons: (1) Emigration rates by country – which comprise the social capital indicator – are presented in a five-year interval since 1990, which means that the most recent data is for 2015 and 2019; and (2) the geographical coverage of primary and secondary school enrollment rates – which comprise the human capital indicator – are low for 2019<sup>83</sup>.

### 3.1 ECONOMIC CAPITAL

Certain economic resources are needed for movement. For instance, in Tanzania passport costs amount to TSh130,000 (The United Republic of Tanzania n.d.), about 12.95% of the average monthly income (WID 2022b), and in Australia passport fees reach AU\$308 (Australian Government 2022) around 9.56% of the monthly salary (Australian Bureau Statistics 2022). Smugglers fees are not cheaper: in 2014-2016, “coyote-led door-to-door journeys” to cross from Central America to the USA “ranged between 4,000 and 6,000 U.S. dollars” (Guevara Gonzalez 2018, 182). Apart from passport costs, visa, smugglers, interest fees and transport fares, there are also daily expenses to cover bare necessities while moving, such as food and clothing. I measure economic capital through equally-sized quintiles based on average net personal wealth data<sup>84</sup> (2022a). Table 10 indicates wealth shares for each country category, while Figure 9 illustrates net personal wealth by country for the year 2015.

<sup>83</sup> Just four countries presented data for primary school enrollment and three for secondary school enrollment.

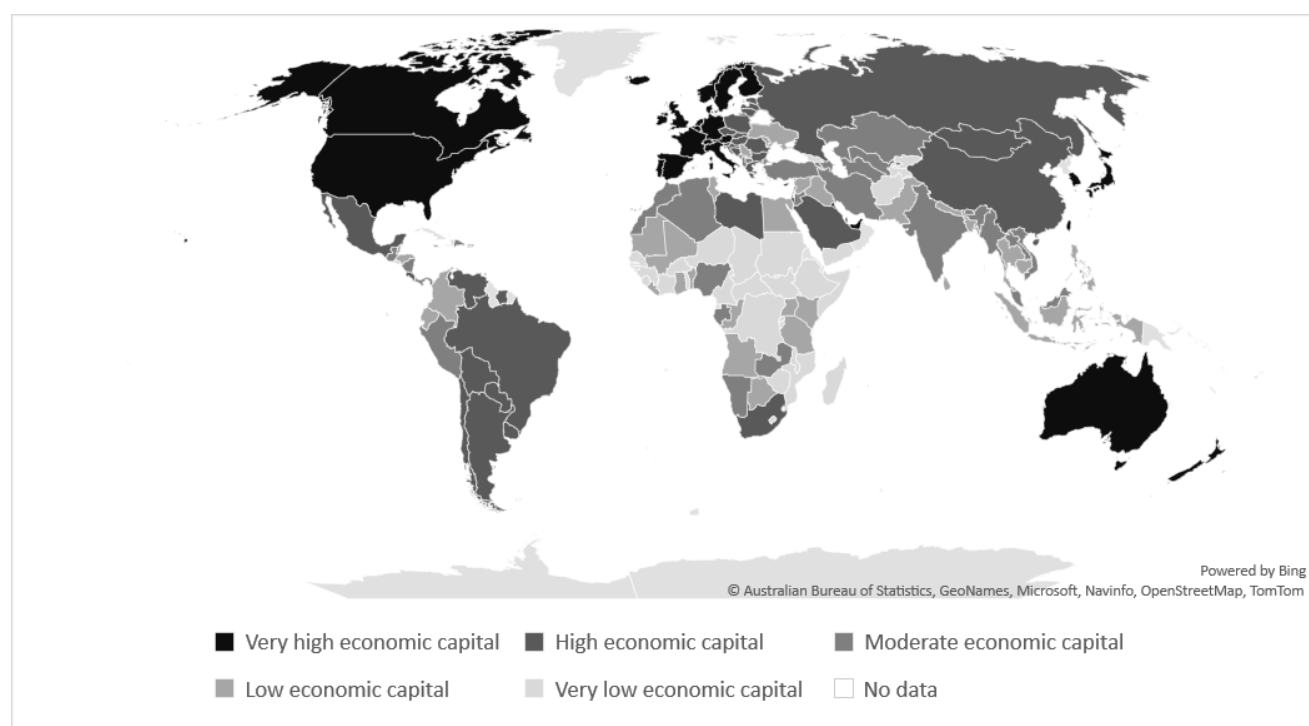
<sup>84</sup> This indicator is more comprehensive than measures on national income, as it captures household (non-)financial assets and debts (see Chapter 3, Section 2.2 for a more detailed explanation).

**Table 10.** Economic capital by country category (in US\$ constant, PPP)

| Indicators                        |                                                       |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Very low economic capital</b>  | Net personal wealth is US\$10,979 or less             |
| <b>Low economic capital</b>       | Net personal wealth is between US\$10,980-US\$21,499  |
| <b>Moderate economic capital</b>  | Net personal wealth is between US\$21,500-US\$43,499  |
| <b>High economic capital</b>      | Net personal wealth is between US\$43,500-US\$129,999 |
| <b>Very high economic capital</b> | Net personal wealth is more than US\$130,000          |

Source: Own elaboration

**Figure 9.** Economic capital worldwide, 2015



Note: This data consists of average net personal wealth per ‘equal-split adults’, which considers that households redistribute wealth *equally* among its members. While optimistic, considering that equal distribution does not often represent reality, an individualistic perspective underestimates the resources of nonworking partners.

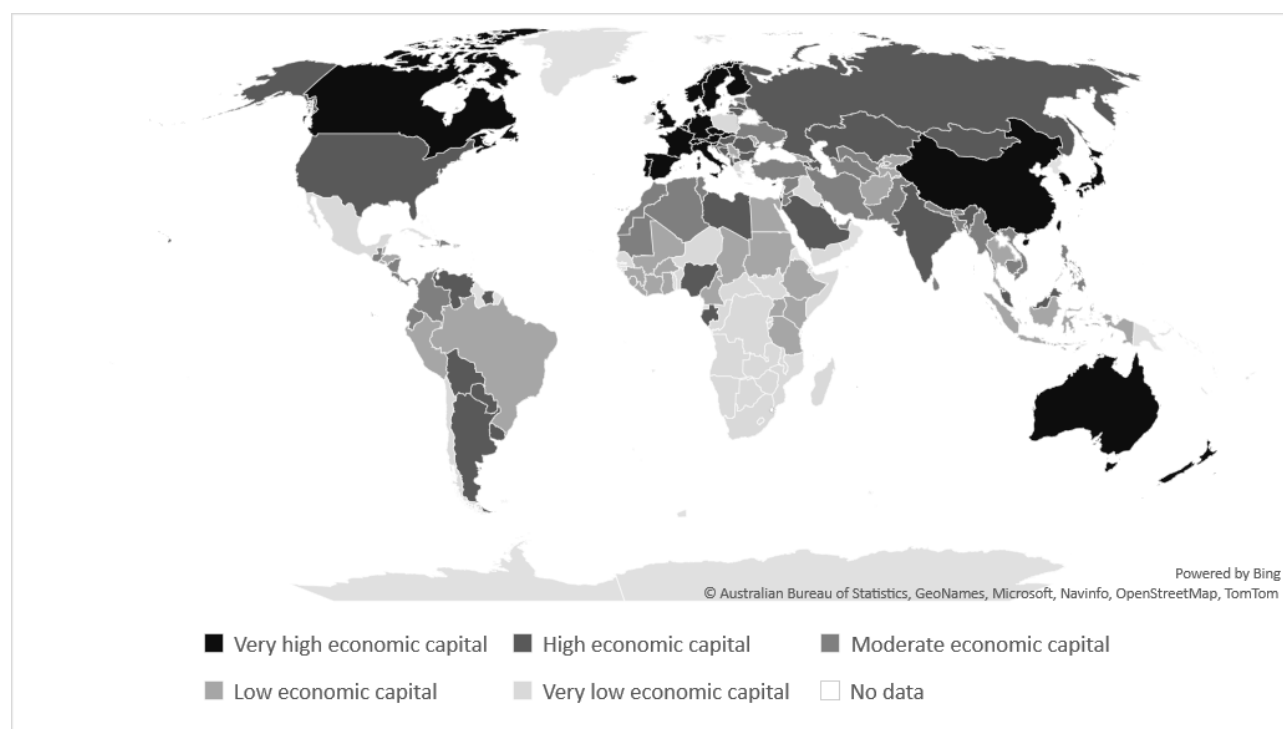
Source: Own elaboration based on WID (2022a)

Unsurprisingly, the map illustrates higher shares of economic capital in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, Northern America, some parts of Northern and Eastern Asia, as well as South America. Several Southern and Southeastern Asian countries, and Northern African countries present moderate shares of wealth, while countries in West, East and Central Africa feature the lowest. This is in accordance with the World Bank classification of income groups and diversification of wealth.

Data on net personal wealth for the bottom 50% shows slightly different patterns (see Figure 10). While Western European and Northern American countries still belong to the very high and high tier, the average wealth of the bottom 50% decreases significantly. For example, the bottom 50% of households in the USA have a net wealth of US\$7,374.2, while average wealth reaches US\$338,395.7. Similarly, net average personal wealth is

US\$104,963 in Greece and, in comparison, the wealth of the bottom 50% is US\$-3,705.82, showing high indebtedness. Wealth inequality also influences heavily shares of economic capital in Latin and Southern America: Brazil and Chile move from the high quintile to the low and very low quintiles, respectively, when exploring the wealth of the bottom 50%. While African and Asian countries remain, broadly, in the same percentile, the share of wealth of the population decreases about 94.24% and 92.09%, respectively. This implies important inequality rates and showcases the lack of resources of the ‘precariat’. Table 11 presents the equally-sized quintiles of the economic capital for the bottom 50% of the population

**Figure 10.** Economic capital by country for the bottom 50% of the population, 2015



Note: This data also consists of average net personal wealth per ‘equal-split adults’.

Source: Own elaboration based on WID (2022a).

**Table 11.** Economic capital for the bottom 50% of the population by country category (in US\$ constant, PPP)

| Indicators                        |                                                    |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Very low economic capital</b>  | Net personal wealth is US\$589 or less             |
| <b>Low economic capital</b>       | Net personal wealth is between US\$590-US\$1,259   |
| <b>Moderate economic capital</b>  | Net personal wealth is between US\$1,260-US\$2,999 |
| <b>High economic capital</b>      | Net personal wealth is between US\$3,000-US\$9,999 |
| <b>Very high economic capital</b> | Net personal wealth is more than US\$10,000        |

Source: Own elaboration

The economic capital of the bottom 50% experienced an average reduction worldwide of 92.22%, being Central America and Western Asia the regions with the highest reductions (95.40% and 95.25%, respectively) and East Asia and Australia and New Zealand the regions with the lowest (89.70% and 89.87%, respectively). This questions *who* has the economic resources to fulfill their migration aspirations, even in high-income countries. The economic capital of the bottom 50% in the ‘very high’ tier – US\$10,000 or less (Table 11) – is lower than the economic capital for the total population in the ‘very low’ tier presented in Table 10 – US\$10,979 or less. This

means that, on average, the share of wealth of the bottom 50% of the population in the so-called 'Global North' is lower than the share of wealth of the total population in the most economically deprived regions of the 'Global South'. While it is important to acknowledge the presence of strong welfare states and the advantageous positions of high-income countries, it is also relevant to (1) stress the scarce resources of the 'precariat' worldwide, including in high-income countries, and, consequently, (2) to further investigate *who* can lead a 'good life' and fulfill migration aspirations, regardless of the country of origin or residence.

### 3.2 SOCIAL CAPITAL

**Social capital** captures the involvement in migratory social networks and has proven to be a key factor determining migration aspirations, decisions, and imaginaries about destinations abroad (Collins 2018; Docquier, Peri and Ruysen 2014; Marrow and Klekowski von Koppenfels 2020). It also shapes migration capabilities, as aspiring migrants can get economic, emotional, and informative assistance prior, during and after movement (Garip and Asad 2016; MacDonald and MacDonald 1964; Thing 2010). I calculate social capital at the aggregate level by employing two indicators: emigration rates and received remittances in current US\$.

First, emigration rates indicate the share of emigrants as % of the total population<sup>85</sup> and capture whether a country is characterized by a culture of emigration or, rather, by a culture of permanence where immobility is the norm. People in emigration countries have greater chances of knowing emigrants and accessing their experiences about movement and destination(s). Additionally, when emigration is generalized it is also more likely that people have access to information and know, for instance, safer and cheaper routes to emigrate abroad, regardless of how well integrated they are in migrant networks. This consequently increases their capabilities to move<sup>86</sup>.

Secondly, received remittances can be used as a proxy for migrant network support and for the possibility to rely on migratory networks. This is because remittances are inherently social transactions that contain emotional, relational, and material elements (Carling 2014b, S219), and, therefore, reflect a continued relationship between migrants and non-migrants. Remittances show how strong ties between aspiring migrants and migrants are, and how these can increase resources, facilitating migration<sup>87</sup>. It is important to note, however, that while migrant networks can increase migration capabilities, they can also exacerbate hierarchical relations, generate social debts and feelings of humiliation (see Carling 2014b), as well as neglect some group members from accessing resources (Rodriguez-Pena 2023).

This approach follows previous studies that capture social networks based on a culture of migration and frequency of contact with family and friends abroad (van Mol et al. 2018), and it accounts for both the structural (connections and networks) and cultural aspects (norms and values) of social capital (see van Deth 2003). It also draws on previous studies showing how social capital generates wealth and well-being (Hamilton, Helliwell and Woolcock 2016). I first present the methodology used to capture emigration rates and received remittances, and then, I explain how I have brought both indicators together to map **migration social capital**.

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<sup>85</sup> While I focus on international emigration rates, I acknowledge that internal migrants and immigrants can also pass information to non-migrants, which increases awareness of opportunities elsewhere and emigration know-how. However, due to the lack of data on internal migration and on the ties between immigrants and non-migrants by country, I limit the data used in this chapter to international emigration rates.

<sup>86</sup> The fact that negative feedback about migration is more likely to curb migration aspirations from high emigration regions (van Mol et al. 2018; Timmerman, Hemmerichs and de Clerck 2014) shows the awareness and embeddedness of people in migration corridors and processes.

<sup>87</sup> It is important to remember that I map migration capabilities worldwide without focusing on whether individuals aspire to stay put or migrate. This is why remittances are important for my analysis, despite the fact that received remittances can increase aspirations and capabilities to stay.

### ***Emigration rates as a proxy for information and emotional support***

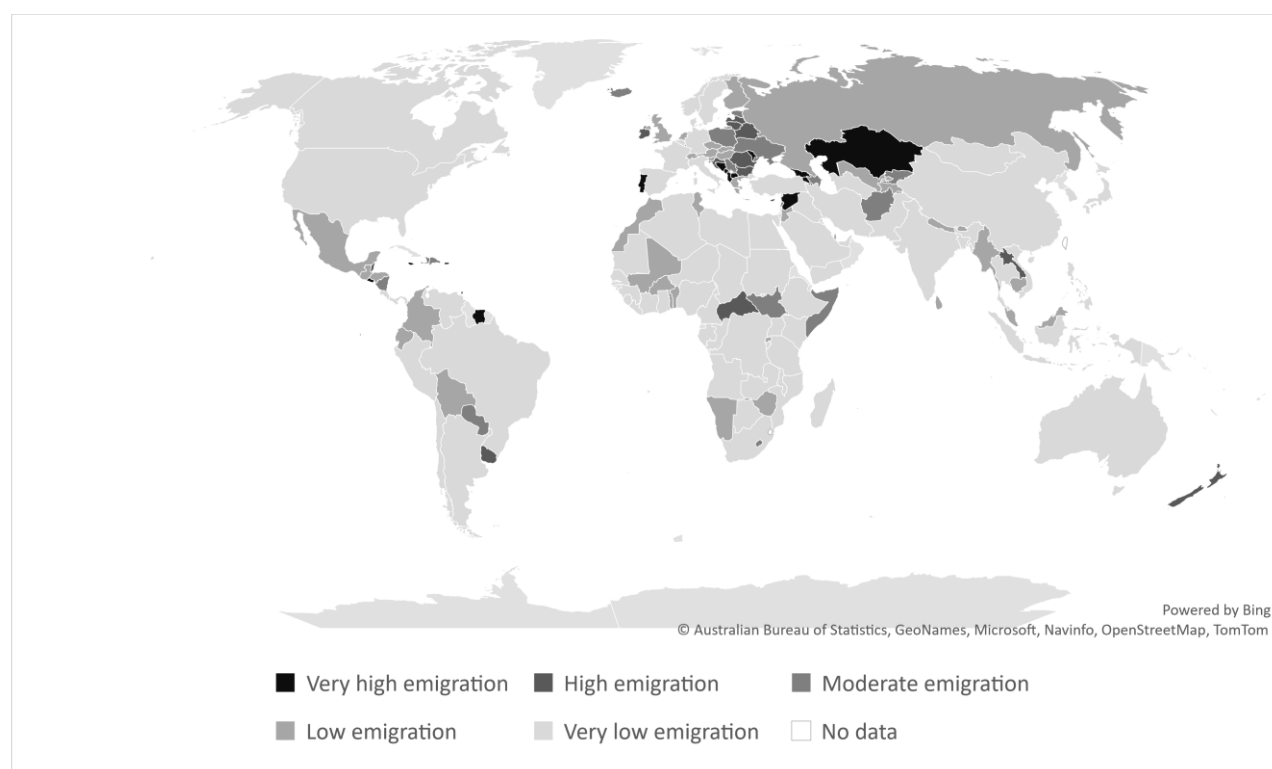
Intense emigration rates translate to diversified information about emigration that facilitates movement (Lee 1966, 54-55; Appleyard 1992). Drawing on UNGMD<sup>88</sup> and the population data from the World Bank, I categorize countries into five groups depending on their emigration rates (Table 12). Figure 11 illustrates emigration rates worldwide.

**Table 12.** Emigration shares by country category

|                                       | Indicators                                             |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Very low emigration countries</b>  | 4.99% or less of the population has emigrated          |
| <b>Low emigration countries</b>       | Between 5% and 9.99% of the population has emigrated   |
| <b>Moderate emigration countries</b>  | Between 10% and 14.99% of the population has emigrated |
| <b>High emigration countries</b>      | Between 15% and 19.99% of the population has emigrated |
| <b>Very high emigration countries</b> | 20% or more of the population has emigrated            |

Source: Own elaboration

**Figure 11.** Emigration shares by country, 2015



Source: Own elaboration based on UN DESA (2020a) and World Bank (2022)

The map shows that emigration rates are low in most countries, including regions often associated with extensive migration corridors and intense exodus, such as East and Central Africa, and South Asia. This illustrates that we do not live in an ‘age of migration’ (Carling 2002), as high and very high emigration rates are limited to 29 countries, mostly located in East Europe, Central America and the Caribbean, as well as West and Southeast

<sup>88</sup> The UNGMD includes bilateral migrant stock data in a five-year interval period from 1990 to 2019. This stock data can be a proxy for past migratory movement, which implies familiarity with and knowledge about emigration (UN DESA 2020a).

Asia. Yet, the data is compiled using population censuses and registers, and nationally representative surveys which not only underestimate documented emigration<sup>89</sup>, but also largely overlook undocumented migration.

Despite this limitation, the data shows that countries with high emigration rates are often those with moderate or low personal net wealth levels, while, in comparison, countries with very low, high, and very high shares of personal net wealth present lower emigration rates. This is nothing new, as it exemplifies the inverted U-shaped relationship between migration and development: Emigration rapidly increases in the initial phases of economic development as wealth diversifies to gradually decrease when countries develop (de Haas 2010b). Interestingly, the data also shows the presence of (very) high emigration rates in some low-income countries, including El Salvador, Laos, or the Central African Republic. This questions how a culture of migration and emigration know-how might increase capabilities to move countervailing, to some extent, the legal, political, and financial obstacles that keep people in place.

### ***Remittances inflows as a proxy for network access and mobilization***

To also account for the possibility to rely on migratory networks, I focus on received remittances in current US\$<sup>90</sup> (World Bank 2022). This has two components: personal transfers and compensation of employees. The former refers to the interpersonal, transnational transfer of resources, while the latter is money that border, seasonal and other short-term workers receive for work outside their country of residence. This definition is incomplete given that (1) by focusing on single senders and receivers, some remittances are excluded, such as those sent to hometown associations, and (2) that it does not refer to migration necessarily, making the definition of remittances too general. This second point arises from the methodological challenge of measuring remittances and differentiating them from other transfers made, for instance, from non-migrant senders to non-relative recipients in communities not in their country of origin (Carling 2020, 7). Depending on the share of received remittances, I categorize countries into equally sized quintiles (Table 13).

**Table 13.** Received remittances by country category (in current US\$)

|                                     | Indicators                                                |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Very low remittances inflow</b>  | Received remittances accounting for < US\$60MM            |
| <b>Low remittances inflow</b>       | Received remittances accounting for US\$61MM-\$365MM      |
| <b>Moderate remittances inflow</b>  | Received remittances accounting for US\$366MM-US\$1.27bn  |
| <b>High remittances inflow</b>      | Received remittances accounting for US\$1.28bn-US\$3.35bn |
| <b>Very high remittances inflow</b> | Received remittances accounting for >US\$3.36bn           |

Source: Own elaboration

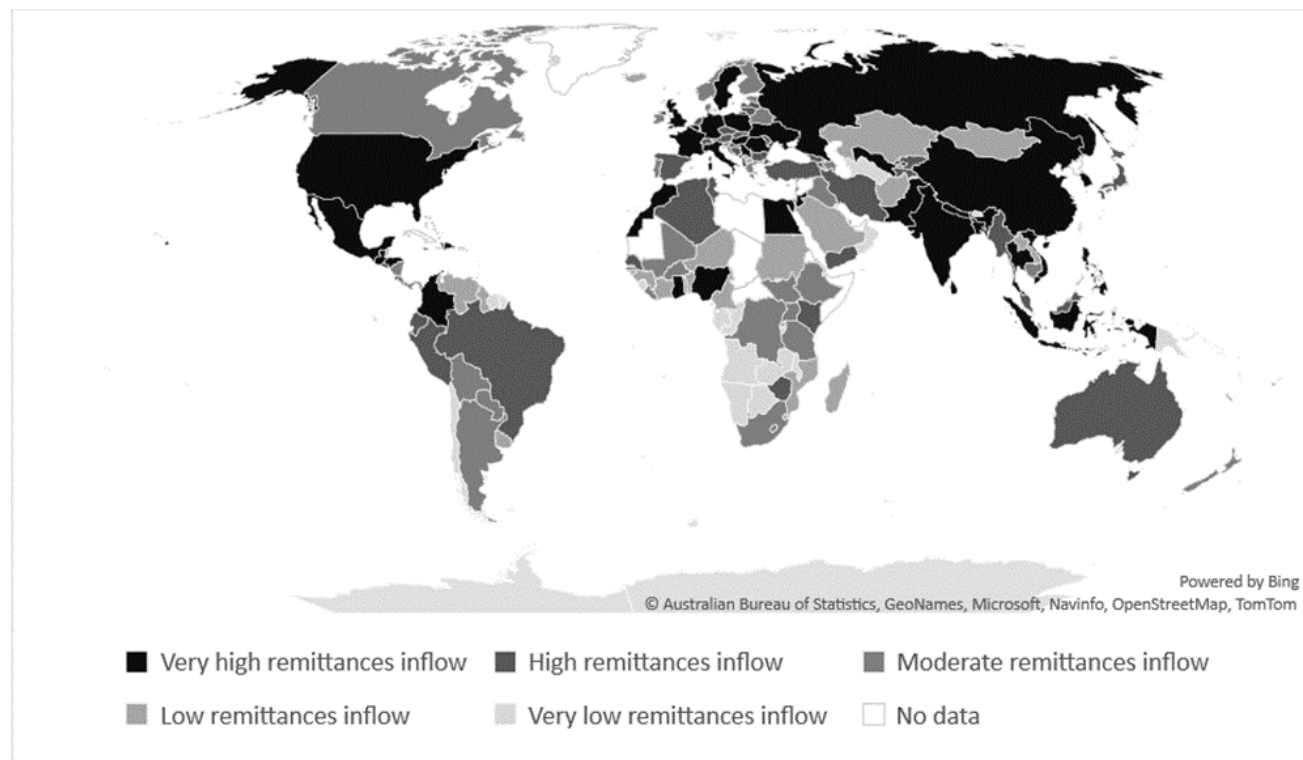
Figure 12 illustrates remittance inflows, indicating three patterns. First, Asian countries show the highest remittances inflows, followed by European and American countries. Region-wise, South and Southeast Asia, and East Europe present the highest inflows. Some high-income countries, including France, Germany, and Belgium rank in the top 20 recipients (World Bank 2022). Rather than individual transfers, this captures the compensation of employees (European Commission 2007). Secondly, overall, lower-middle-, and middle-income countries are top remittance recipients, and, on average, represent 4.23% and 1.55% of their GDP, respectively. Comparatively, remittance inflows in absolute terms are lowest in low-income countries and upper-middle income countries, where they represent 2.69% and 0.66% of the GDP, respectively. Considering the scarce economic diversification of low-income countries, remittances represent a higher share of the GDP despite being relatively low in absolute numbers. Finally, ten out of the 74 countries that present (very) high remittances

<sup>89</sup> This is because people might not deregister when emigrating abroad.

<sup>90</sup> I do not rely on received remittances as % of the GDP because this stresses the role of remittances in smaller economies, while it obscures remittances in more diversified economies.

inflows, also present (very) high emigration rates<sup>91</sup>. This is not surprising as high and stable remittances are linked to a constant stream of (short-term) new migrants (Kasinitz et al. 2002, Rumbaut 2002). Most countries presenting high remittance inflows, however, present moderate or (very) low emigration rates, including, for instance, Kenya, South Korea, France, or Egypt. This might reflect the difficulty of measuring emigration rates, as well as remittances sent by non-migrants or sent to diaspora communities and not to the community of origin (see Carling 2020) or employee compensation. The latter captures the salaries and benefits of seasonal, border and short-term workers who are often not recorded as emigrants, even though their mobility can entail strong ties between origin and destination.

**Figure 12.** Remittance inflows, 2015



Source: Own elaboration based on World Bank (2022)

### ***Measuring migration social capital: The weight of emigration rates and remittances***

To capture the information, economic and emotional support that aspiring migrants might have access to, I rank migration social capital on a scale from 0% to 100% and this ranking consists of two indicators: emigration rates and remittances inflows. For the calculation, emigration rates have a weight of 70%, while remittances inflows, 30%. I consider emigration rates to have a greater weight as an indicator for two reasons: First, in an emigration country, migration is usually part of the socio-cultural values and non-migrants are surrounded by emigration-related *savoir faire*<sup>92</sup>. Emigration provides an environment for individuals to be more familiar with emigration itself and the different routes and corridors, regardless of the support they receive from migrant networks. Secondly, as aforementioned, I find the World Bank definition of ‘remittances’ problematic in that it does not necessarily refer to migration and only reflects the transfer of monetary resources. Although economic remittances are inherently social transactions that go beyond the economic domain (Carling 2014b, S219), I

<sup>91</sup> These countries are primarily located in East Europe and the Caribbean, and are the following: Romania, Croatia, El Salvador, Jamaica, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia, and Albania.

<sup>92</sup> This does not mean that the information received accurately reflects the situation of migrants abroad or their migratory experience; however, having access to information generates a sensation of know-how and readiness.

attempt to capture the advantages, assistance and resources linked to being part of a group, which might be present even when individuals do not receive remittances. For instance, information and support can be conveyed via phone calls, even when remitting was not possible or when economic remittances were only sporadic. I give less weight to this indicator to limit this methodological challenge.

To calculate migration social capital, I allocated a number to each of the tiers composing emigration rates and remittances inflows. Both indicators were divided into five tiers, ranking from ‘very low’ to ‘very high’ (Table 12 and Table 13, respectively). I ranked each of these tiers from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). For each country, I have aggregated the number associated with each indicator, considering, as aforementioned, their different weight – 70% for emigration rates and 30% for remittance inflows. The sum of these tiers is expressed in a scale from 0% to 100% which captures migration social capital into the following five tiers (Table 14):

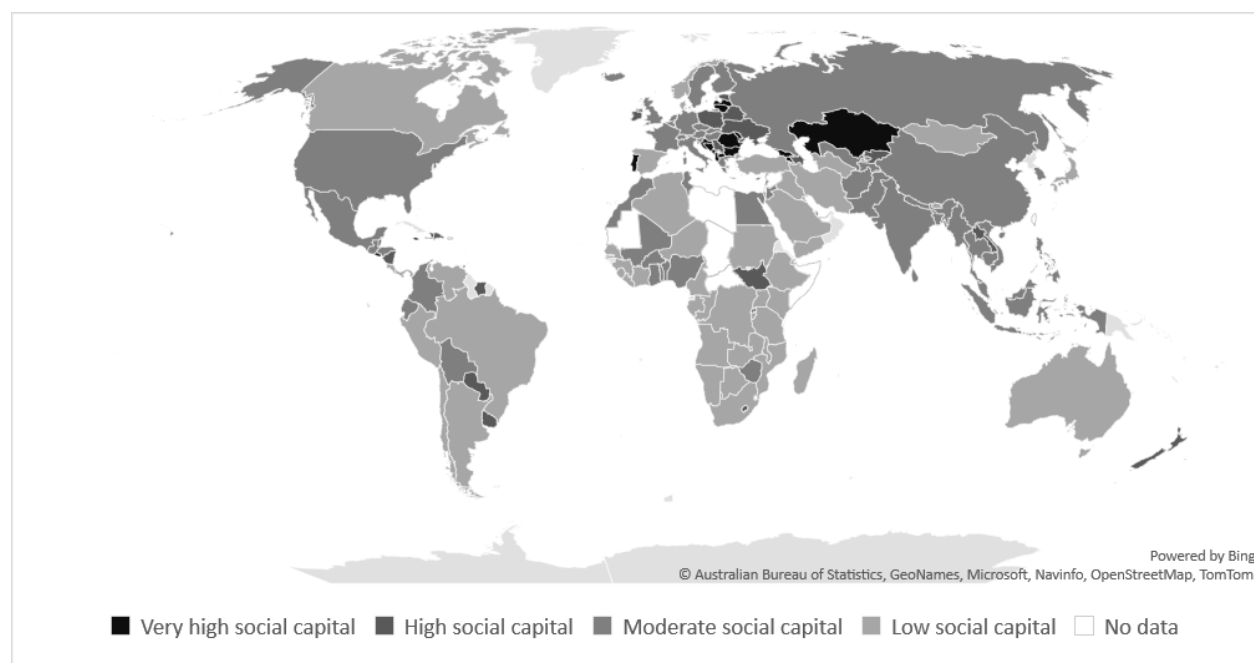
**Table 14.** Migration social capital by tiers

|                                 | Indicators                                   |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Very low social capital</b>  | Countries with a value of 19.9% or lower     |
| <b>Low social capital</b>       | Countries with a value between 20% and 39.9% |
| <b>Moderate social capital</b>  | Countries with a value between 40% and 59.9% |
| <b>High social capital</b>      | Countries with a value between 60% and 79.9% |
| <b>Very high social capital</b> | Countries with a value of 80% or higher      |

Source: Own elaboration

Figure 13 illustrates migration social capital worldwide, which shows that social capital is not well distributed across countries. Indeed, out of the 148 countries with data, most have moderate (56 countries) or low (51 countries) social capital, and high and very high social capital countries are mostly localized in East Europe, Central America and the Caribbean, and some countries in Central Asia<sup>93</sup>.

**Figure 13.** Migration social capital worldwide, 2015



Source: Own elaboration based on UN DESA (2020a) and the World Bank (2022)

<sup>93</sup> These regions are also characterized by a culture of emigration and high aspiration to migrate internationally (Gallup 2022).

The limited access to social capital worldwide questions how access to first-hand information and network support affects migration capabilities. Social capital decreases the costs and risks of emigrating while also providing emotional and psychological support (Taylor 1986), which can partially compensate for low economic resources and countervail legal obstacles to mobility, making migration gradually less selective<sup>94</sup>. A lack of social capital raises, then, important questions, including: How do individuals compensate for a lack of social capital? What is the threshold of economic or citizenship capital needed to surpass this? And how does a lack of social capital affect the formation *and* fulfillment of migration aspirations? These questions are particularly pertinent in countries characterized by a culture of permanence, where remaining in place rather than migrating is the norm. I explore this in depth in Chapter 8 by investigating migration capabilities in El Bierzo and Laciana, which have traditionally been characterized by immigration.

### 3.3 HUMAN CAPITAL

**Human capital** relates to migration capabilities in two manners. On the one hand, as human capital expands, self-empowerment, life-skills and life-options spread, “giving people new possibilities to enrich their lives” (Lanzi 2007, 426; de Haas 2007, 2014), which, concurrently, expands migration capabilities. On the other hand, the expansion of human capital translates to increases in the instrumental, productive value of individuals, which can facilitate documented migration, especially to countries using merit- or point-based migration systems. I draw data from the World Bank (2022) on primary, secondary, and tertiary enrollment rates to measure human capital on a scale from 0% to 100%. I consider that all three indicators have the same weight (33.33%). When data was unavailable for one of the indicators, I selected available data as close as possible to the period under study. In some cases, this meant selecting data for 2011, for instance<sup>95</sup>. Table 15 captures human capital into five tiers, while Figure 14 below shows national measurements.

**Table 15.** Human capital by category

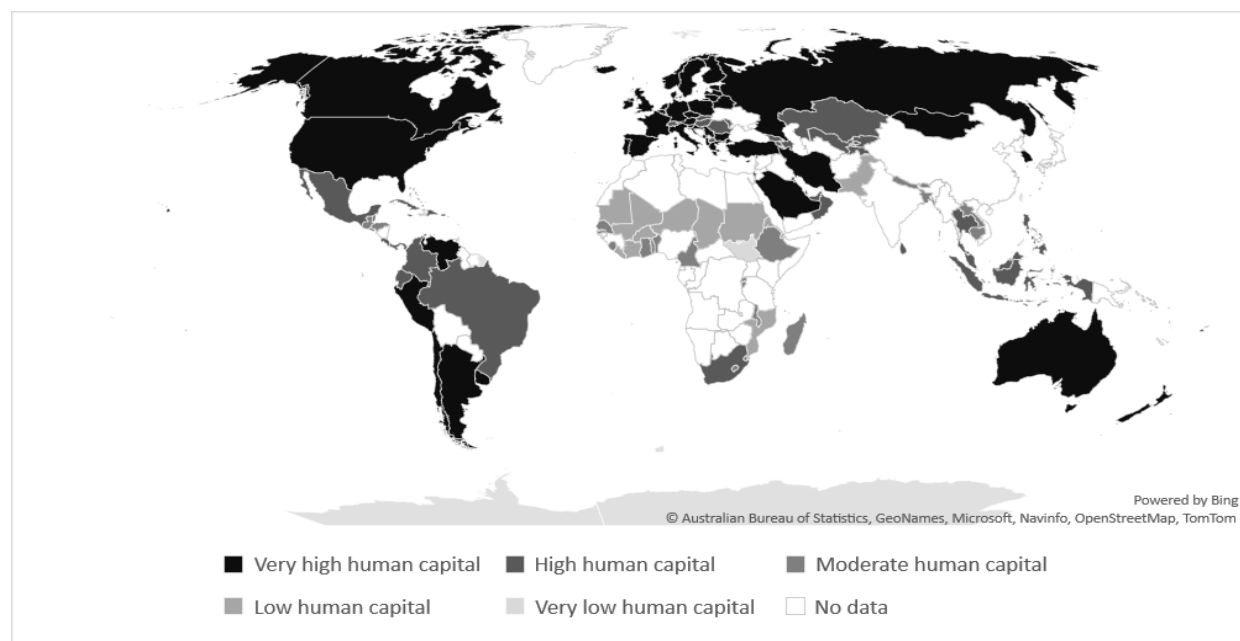
|                                | Indicators                                   |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Very low human capital</b>  | School enrollment accounts for 19.9% or less |
| <b>Low human capital</b>       | School enrollment is between 20% and 39.99%  |
| <b>Moderate human capital</b>  | School enrollment is between 40% and 59.99%  |
| <b>High human capital</b>      | School enrollment is between 60% and 79.99%  |
| <b>Very high human capital</b> | School enrollment accounts for 80% or more   |

Source: Own elaboration

<sup>94</sup> Settled migrants act as bridgeheads increasing the likelihood of subsequent migration and potentially making migration self-perpetuating when a critical threshold level is reached. What threshold level makes this possible remains unclear.

<sup>95</sup> Although not ideal, I did this for two reasons: first, human capital is too important a variable to drop it altogether despite the lack of geographical coverage, and secondly, opting for data on previous or subsequent years does not present a big change, as the percentages remain similar.

**Figure 14.** Human capital worldwide in 2015



Source: Own elaboration based on World Bank (2022)

While there is missing data for 78 countries – including microstates and small island states –, the map illustrates that human capital is (very) high for most countries and that only South Sudan presents very low levels. Low and moderate human capital is limited to 12 and 26 countries, respectively, especially in Central, Western and Eastern Africa along the Sahel. The increasing enrollment of pupils in all three forms of education, as well as the increasing access to information technology means that overall people’s awareness about opportunities elsewhere has increased, which facilitates both the formation and fulfillment of migration aspirations. Despite this, differences accessing education between rural and urban areas and genders exist (World Bank 2022).

### 3.4 CITIZENSHIP CAPITAL

Citizenship capital reflects the ease of entering countries and the ability of exiting the country of origin. I measure it by drawing upon three indicators: entry, settlement, and exit freedom. First, entry freedom marks how many countries a particular nationality can visit without a visa or with one issued on arrival for short stays. I draw on the Henley Passport Index (HPI) (2022) to capture entry freedom. Secondly, settlement freedom captures how many countries a given nationality grants full access to. This includes being able to live and work without requiring permission or being granted it automatically. Entitlement to social security benefits, health care and family reunification, or specific skill qualifications, including bar or medical qualifications, are not considered. I draw on the Quality of Nationality Index (QNI) (2022) to capture settlement freedom. Considering the risks, vulnerability and exploitation undocumented migrants suffer, I consider that full access to a country increases migration capabilities. Finally, exit freedom captures the restrictiveness of exiting the country of origin. States can handicap citizens’ exit rights and make emigration virtually impossible by blocking exit or by establishing bureaucratic hurdles, requiring, for instance, extra permits or making passport costs exorbitant (see de Haas and Vezzoli 2011). I capture exit freedom drawing on the DEMIG Visa database to assess changes in exit policies<sup>96</sup>. I first present the selected three indicators and then, I explain how these compose citizenship capital.

<sup>96</sup> DEMIG VISA tracks annual bilateral visa requirements in 214 countries over the 1970-2013 period, and tracks both the need (or lack thereof) of visas as well as exit permits for regular passport holders.

## Entry freedom

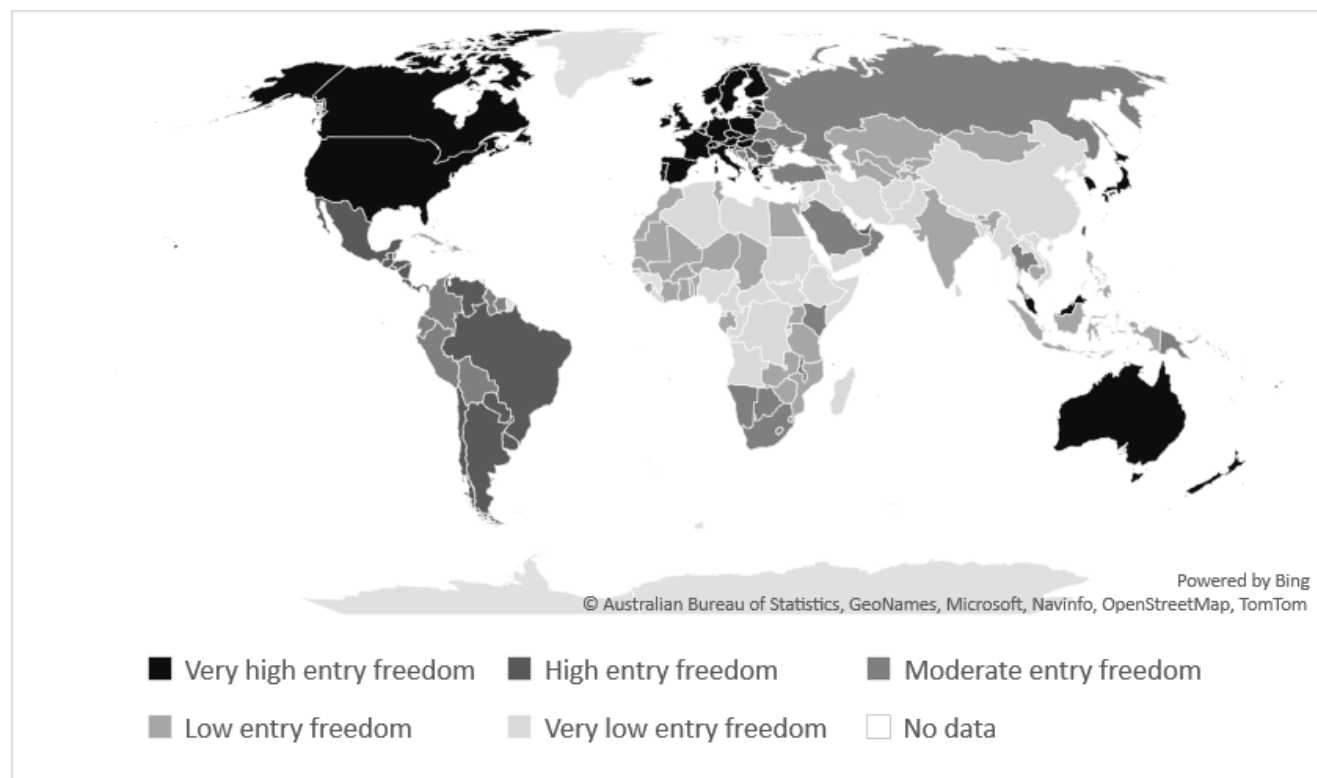
I categorize countries in equally sized quintiles based on the number of countries passport holders can enter visa-free. Table 16 below captures the shares for each category, and Figure 15 maps entry freedom worldwide.

**Table 16.** Entry freedom by country category

|                                | Indicators                                                         |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Very low entry freedom</b>  | Passport holders can enter 46 or less countries visa-free          |
| <b>Low entry freedom</b>       | Passport holders can enter between 47 and 65 countries visa-free   |
| <b>Moderate entry freedom</b>  | Passport holders can enter between 66 and 102 countries visa-free  |
| <b>High entry freedom</b>      | Passport holders can enter between 103 and 151 countries visa-free |
| <b>Very high entry freedom</b> | Passport holders can enter 152 or more countries visa-free         |

Source: Own elaboration

**Figure 15.** Entry freedom worldwide in 2015



Source: Own elaboration based on HPI (2015)

Unsurprisingly, the map predominantly highlights very high shares of entry freedom in Western Europe and North America, while countries across Africa and Asia have limited freedom to move internationally with documents. This does not come as a surprise because global power asymmetries direct and establish conditions for spatial movement (Czaika, de Haas and Villares-Valera 2017, 8), and the regimes of mobility entrap and contain certain people, while normalizing the mobility of the privileged (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013; Shamir 2005).

## Settlement freedom

The QNI (2022) measures settlement freedom based on two components: diversity and weight of settlement freedom. The former states how many countries a given nationality grants full access to. The latter calculates the 'value' of the countries granting full access to a specific nationality based on the destination country's human development level and economic strength. I only rely on the diversity of settlement freedom component because weighing settlement freedom based on political and economic stability benefits high-income countries, while concurrently downplaying the aspirations and capabilities to migrate to other destinations. While I only capture one of the components of QNI, I refer to this indicator as settlement freedom for ease of understanding.

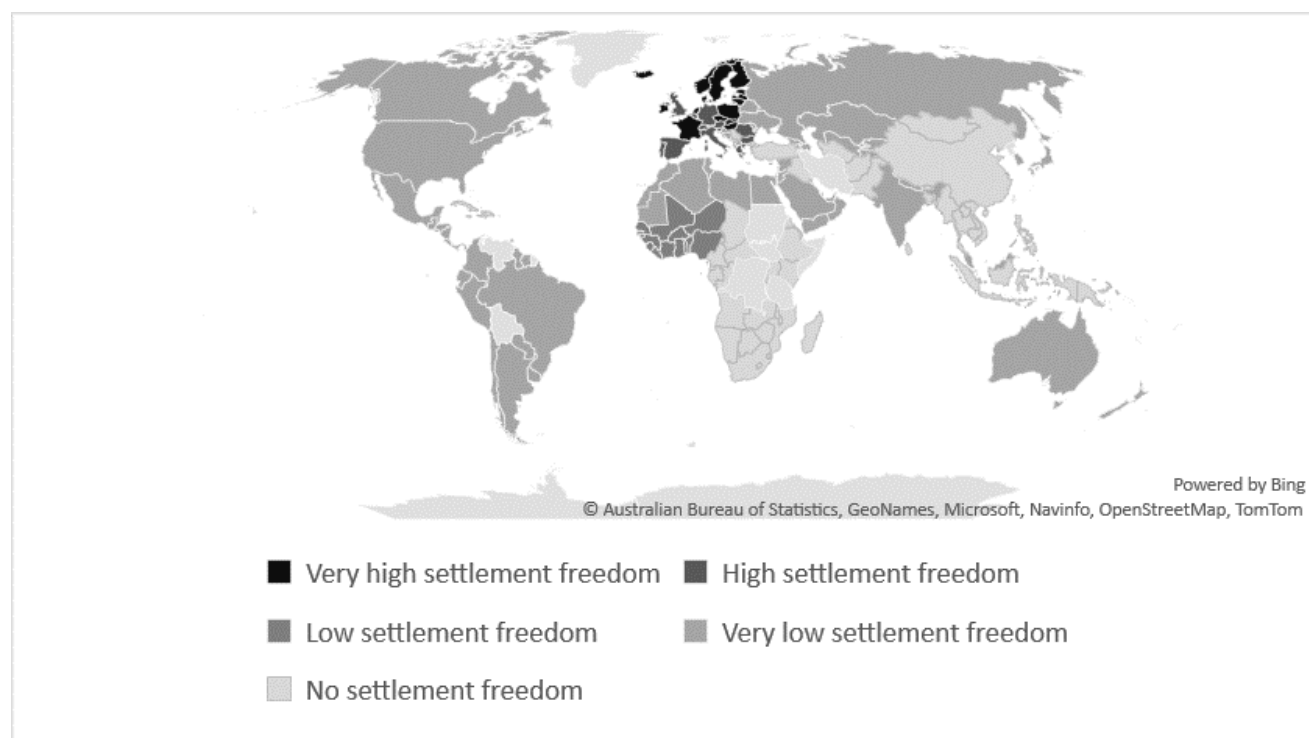
I categorize countries into six groups depending on the number of countries passport holders can live and work in with no or minimal immigration requirements. Table 17 below indicates the shares for each category, and Figure 16 maps settlement freedom worldwide.

**Table 17.** Settlement freedom by country category

|                                     | Indicators                                                |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>No settlement freedom</b>        | Passport holders do not have full access to any countries |
| <b>Very low settlement freedom</b>  | Passport holders have full access to 1-9 countries        |
| <b>Low settlement freedom</b>       | Passport holders have full access to 10-19 countries      |
| <b>Moderate settlement freedom</b>  | Passport holders have full access to 20-29 countries      |
| <b>High settlement freedom</b>      | Passport holders have full access to 30-39 countries      |
| <b>Very high settlement freedom</b> | Passport holders have full access to 40 or more countries |

Source: Own elaboration

**Figure 16.** Settlement freedom worldwide in 2015



Source: Own elaboration based on the QNI (2022)

Predictably, EU countries have very high and high settlement freedom. This is because EU citizens have the right to emigrate within the EU to live, study, work, look for a job, or retire, and, in principle, they can stay in another

EU country without registering for up to three months. Citizens of the European Economic Area, the single European market, and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) also enjoy similar settlement freedoms. Nevertheless, there is a significant gap between these countries and the rest of the world, as the amount of countries nationals have full access to decreases significantly outside of Europe. Still, it is interesting to note that countries in West Africa enjoy greater settlement freedom than higher income countries, including the USA, Australia, or Japan by virtue of the Treaty of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA)<sup>97</sup> and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)<sup>98</sup>, which provide the right to enter, reside and establish on the territory of member states<sup>99</sup>. Despite these treaties, efforts to curtail freedom of movement and settlement have been made, which were intensified and justified following the COVID-19 pandemic (Hamadou 2020).

### ***Exit freedom***

Ultimately, exit freedom accounts for the ease or difficulty of exiting the country of origin, measuring how emigration policies can hinder the exiting of nationals. I derive the data from the DEMIG VISA database (DEMIG 2015), which covers exit permits from 1970 to 2008<sup>100</sup>. I rely on the 2008 data because: (1) I lacked the resources to update the DEMIG VISA data, and (2) changes to exit permits are not very common, particularly in recent decades. Since 1970 there have been 51 exit policy changes worldwide, and these have been concentrated in the 1975-1979 and 1995-1999 period in Africa, the Americas and Asia (see Figure A.1 and A.2 in Annex 2). As a result, while I acknowledge that exit rights might have changed from 2008 to 2015, these changes are likely to have been kept to a minimum, entailing, primarily, an increase in exit rights. In fact, since 1970, out of the total 51 policy changes, 35 boosted open exit (DEMIG 2015).

I categorize countries into two groups depending on whether nationals can freely exit their country of origin – full exit rights –, or, instead, if an exit permit exists – restrictive exit rights. Figure 17 shows exit freedom worldwide.

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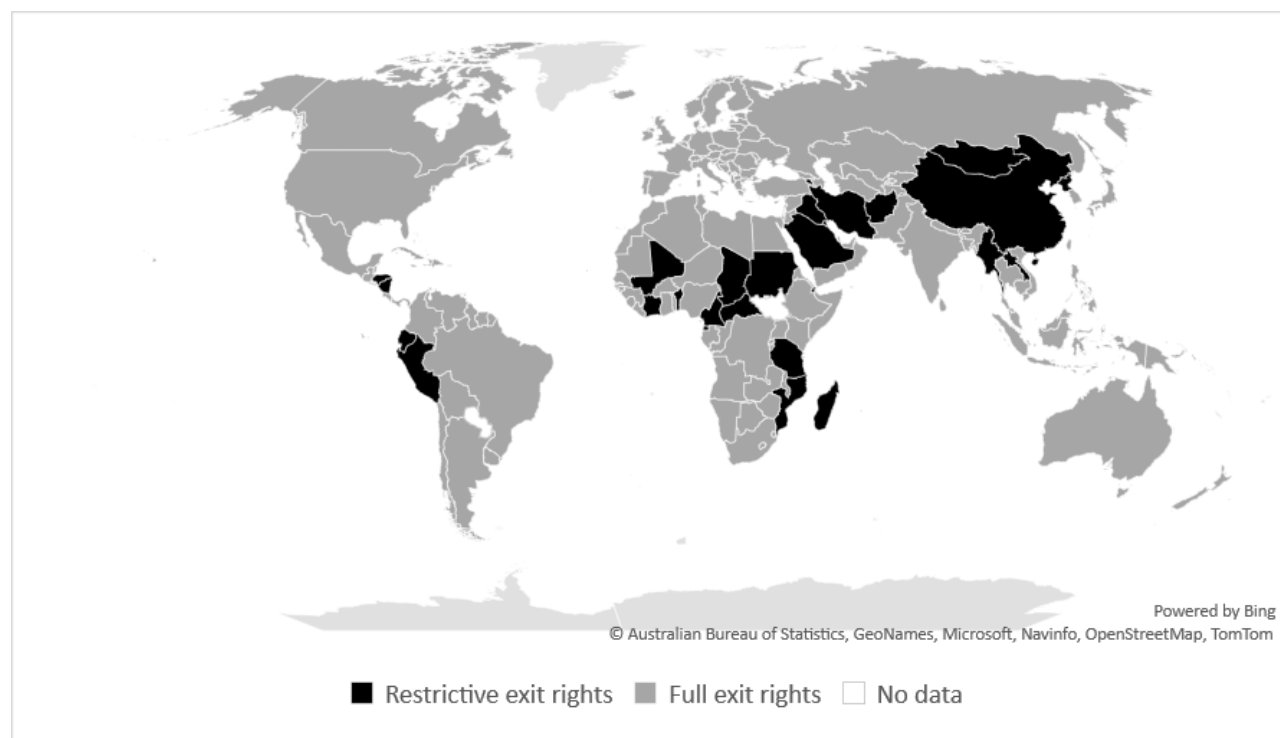
<sup>97</sup> See article 91.

<sup>98</sup> See article 59, as well as the Protocol Relating to Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, art. 2.1.

<sup>99</sup> Similar regional arrangements exist between Australia and New Zealand (see the Trans-Tasman Travel Arrangement), for Caribbean states (see CARICOM), among countries in Latin America (see MERCOSUR), and for East and South African countries (see the free movement protocol of 2001 of COMESA).

<sup>100</sup> The database differentiates three categories: exit permit is not needed (value = 0), exit permit is needed (value = 1), and individual travel to a specific country is not allowed (value = 2).

**Figure 17.** Exit freedom worldwide in 2008



Source: Own elaboration based on DEMIG (2015)

Most nationals have full rights to exit their countries of origin without major prior requirements apart from holding identification documents. However, in 28 countries, predominantly located in the Middle East, East Asia, and in Central and West Africa, restrictiveness to exit exists. This includes, among others, the need to apply for exit registration cards, exit visas (Abdelsalam Babiker 2010), or bureaucratic hurdles to apply for and acquire a passport (see Kabeleova, Mazmanyan and Yeremyam 2007 about unofficial exit visas in Armenia). Exit visas are not necessarily applied equally among the population: for instance, in China bureaucratic obstacles especially apply to managers of large- and medium-sized businesses, government officials, and rural residents (Liu 2009).

### ***Measuring citizenship capital: The weight of entry, settlement and exit freedom***

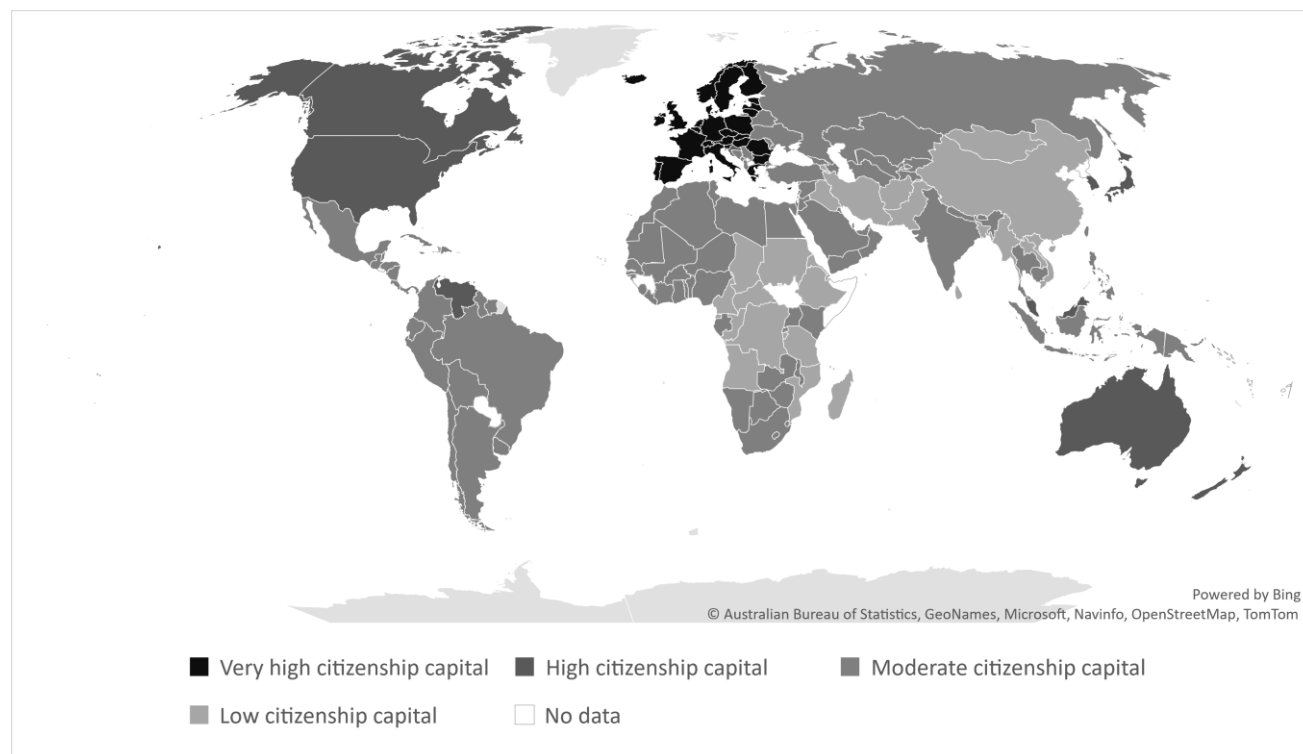
I rank citizenship capital on a scale from 0% to 100%. This ranking consists of the three indicators presented above: entry, settlement, and exit freedom. All indicators have the same weight (33.33%), even though I acknowledge that low settlement freedom can be circumvented by overstaying a visa. To calculate citizenship capital, I have allocated numbers to each of the tiers composing entry, settlement and exit freedom. All three indicators were divided into tiers: entry freedom is ranked from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high) (Table 16), settlement freedom from 0 (no settlement freedom) to 6 (very high settlement freedom) (Table 17), and exit freedom is ranked as either restrictive (value = 1) or full exit rights (value = 2). The aggregate distributes citizenship capital into five tiers (Table 18). Figure 18 illustrates citizenship capital worldwide.

**Table 18.** Citizenship capital by tiers

|                                      | Indicators                                   |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Very low citizenship capital</b>  | Countries with a value of 19.9% or lower     |
| <b>Low citizenship capital</b>       | Countries with a value between 20% and 39.9% |
| <b>Moderate citizenship capital</b>  | Countries with a value between 40% and 59.9% |
| <b>High citizenship capital</b>      | Countries with a value between 60% and 79.9% |
| <b>Very high citizenship capital</b> | Countries with a value of 80% or higher      |

Source: Own elaboration

**Figure 18.** Citizenship capital worldwide in 2015



Source: Own elaboration

The map shows that very high citizenship capital is concentrated in the Schengen Area. Interestingly, however, there are no countries with very low citizenship capital, while low citizenship capital is mainly concentrated in Africa and Asia. The map also highlights that citizenship capital is slightly more widespread than what popular assumptions might hold. In fact, countries in South, West and North Africa have moderate citizenship capital. The same is true for some countries in Southeast and Central Asia. This data is relevant for two interrelated reasons. First, it shows that, while mobility in the so-called 'Global South' is certainly constrained, individuals in low- and moderate-income countries do have options to move internationally. Secondly, however, the capabilities to move are certainly restricted by border controls and as a result, being able to move (freely and safely) to destination communities is dependent on *where* people are going. Adapting migration aspirations is often necessary to increase migration capabilities considering that the immigration regime (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013) decreases citizenship capital even in those countries where this might be, in theory, relatively high.

Consequently, Figure 18 must be read with caution: the map indicates general freedoms to move without exploring the ease to enter specific locations. Imagine, for instance, Ecuadorian nationals. Do they have the same capabilities to emigrate to the USA, Spain, or Chile? From a citizenship capital point of view, certainly not. While the Mercosur Residence Agreement facilitates emigrating and settling in member states – including Chile –,

moving to the USA or Spain poses difficulties (see Mata-Codesal 2015 for a micro-analysis on this). ‘High’ citizenship capital is always dependent on *where* people want to emigrate and settle. This methodological challenge also applies to other forms of capital, including, for instance, economic and social capital. Depending on where individuals aspire to emigrate to, more material resources will be necessary, especially if the *ideal* destination is far afield or if the origin country is an island. Similarly, social capital is high when aspiring migrants are moving close to their relatives or when the latter have the resources to remit and help. This limitation reminds us that capabilities are bound to subjective thresholds (Mata-Codesal 2019). Nonetheless, considering the impossibility to measure and establish a threshold of individual migration capabilities, I believe examining general migration capabilities at the national level provides a preliminary *approximation* to the capabilities to move.

#### 4 CALCULATING MIGRATION CAPABILITIES: THE WEIGHT OF CAPITALS

Is economic or citizenship capital more important? Do economic resources make up for a lack of abilities and skills? Or does high social capital, instead, mask scarce financial means? These questions exemplify the artificiality of measuring migration capabilities, as these are subjective in nature (Mata-Codesal 2019). Furthermore, these questions also capture how different forms of capital are interrelated. For example, low citizenship capital can be compensated with economic resources through citizenship investment programs, and high social capital can partially compensate for a lack of economic resources. Overall, the subjective nature of migration capabilities generates a methodological challenge: What is the real weight of the different forms of capital in the measurement of migration capabilities?

Below, I present three scenarios showcasing different distributions of capital. To calculate these, I have allocated a number to each tier composing economic, social, human and citizenship capital. Each form of capital was ranked into five tiers from ‘very low’ to ‘very high’ (Tables 10, 14, 15 and 18, respectively). Each country has an aggregated number for each form of capital. The aggregates display different values depending on the scenario. Regardless of the scenario, the sum of the values is always expressed in a scale from 0% to 100%, which captures migration capabilities into the following five tiers (Table 19):

**Table 19.** Migration capabilities by tiers

| Indicators                              |                                              |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Very low migration capabilities</b>  | Countries with a value of 19.9% or lower     |
| <b>Low migration capabilities</b>       | Countries with a value between 20% and 39.9% |
| <b>Moderate migration capabilities</b>  | Countries with a value between 40% and 59.9% |
| <b>High migration capabilities</b>      | Countries with a value between 60% and 79.9% |
| <b>Very high migration capabilities</b> | Countries with a value of 80% or higher      |

Source: Own elaboration

Before continuing with the analysis, it must be noted that just 108 countries present data for *every* form of capital. Missing data is particularly concentrated in Africa and Asia. To also capture migration capabilities in these continents, I include countries with missing values for one form of capital and assign them a value of 0. This strategy does not represent actual migration capabilities, but it serves as an approximation to examine ‘minimum’ migration capabilities in 149 countries.

##### 4.1 EQUAL WEIGHT SCENARIO

This first scenario considers that all forms of capital have equal weight (25%), showing two patterns (see Figure 19). First, (very) high shares of migration capabilities are concentrated in West and East Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, and in most of South America. This is not a surprise, considering that the majority

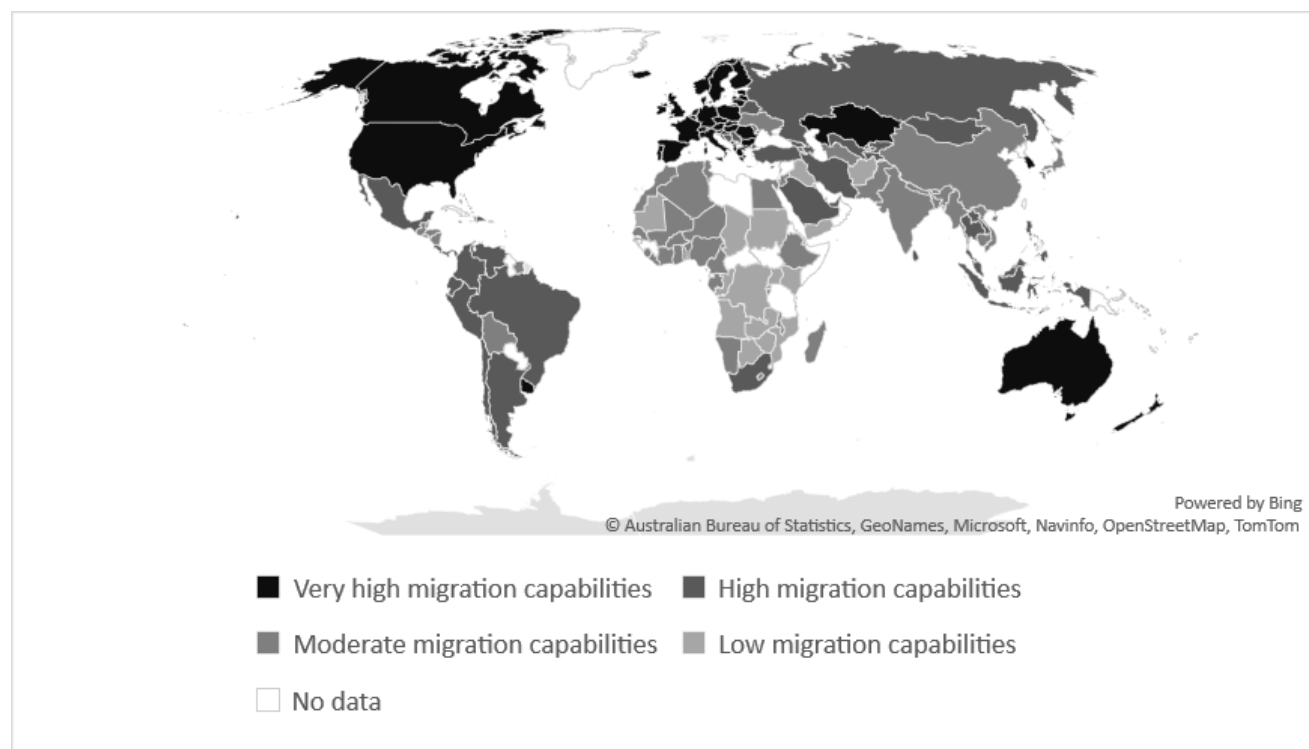
of countries in these regions scored high for most forms of capital, and just relatively low for migration social capital. This scenario confirms that citizens of the 'West', overall, have high migration capabilities. Nevertheless, it is important to remember within-country differences and the scarce economic resources of the bottom 50% of the population (Figure 10), which questions *who* has the capability to fulfill aspirations. Moreover, the fact that countries with high migration capabilities scored comparatively low for migration social capital calls to explore how a culture of permanence and limited emigration know-how influence aspirations, capabilities and the migratory decision-making process. This is important for two cognitive biases: the mere exposure effect, which suggests that individuals have a tendency to gravitate towards situations they are familiar with (Lee 2001), and the ambiguity effect, which explains the aversion towards the unknown<sup>101</sup> (Frisch and Baron 1988; Trautmann and van de Kuilen 2015). People in countries characterized by a culture of permanence, where immobility is the norm, are more familiar with immobility, and migration might appear as a riskier, more unfamiliar option, especially because migration is not only about potential gains, but also about certain losses. This makes investigations on how a culture of permanence influences migration aspirations and capabilities necessary, particularly given the lack of studies in this regard in comparison to those analyzing the consequences of a culture of migration for migration (aspirations) (Jónsson 2008; Massey et al. 1993).

Secondly, figure 19 also shows that migration capabilities are moderate in countries across Asia and Africa often associated with limited resources, life capabilities and involuntary immobility, including Mali, Niger, the Ivory Coast, Ghana (Jónsson 2008), the Philippines, or Thailand (Bylander 2017; Nurick and Hak 2019). This raises a limitation about measuring migration capabilities: While Figure 19 represents capabilities at the aggregate level, it does not consider *where* people aspire to move. For instance, in West Africa entry and settlement freedom are high, particularly, when individuals aspire to move regionally to ECOWAS countries. However, lower citizenship capital to move to Western Europe, as well as the need for more economic capital might result in involuntary immobility and in the need to adapt *ideal* migration aspirations to move to this region. The approach, therefore, raises several questions: Considering the 'involuntary immobility' of our age (Carling 2002) and the immobility that aspiring migrants suffer in countries as diverse as Ecuador (Mata-Codesal 2015) or Cape Verde (Carling 2002), how do different forms of capital interact? Are some forms of capital more important than others? If so, should they receive a greater (relative) weight in their analysis? To account for this possibility and explore the unequal distribution of capital, I present two further scenarios: one centered on economic capital, and one centered on economic and citizenship capital.

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<sup>101</sup> This is similar to risk aversion. The ambiguity effect considers familiarity with the implications of just one outcome – migrating *or* staying –, whereas risk aversion occurs when, being familiar with both options – migrating *and* staying –, individuals gravitate towards that with a greater likelihood of success but smaller payoffs.

**Figure 19.** Migration capabilities worldwide in 2015 – Equal scenario



Source: Own elaboration

## 4.2 ECONOMIC CAPITAL-CENTERED SCENARIO

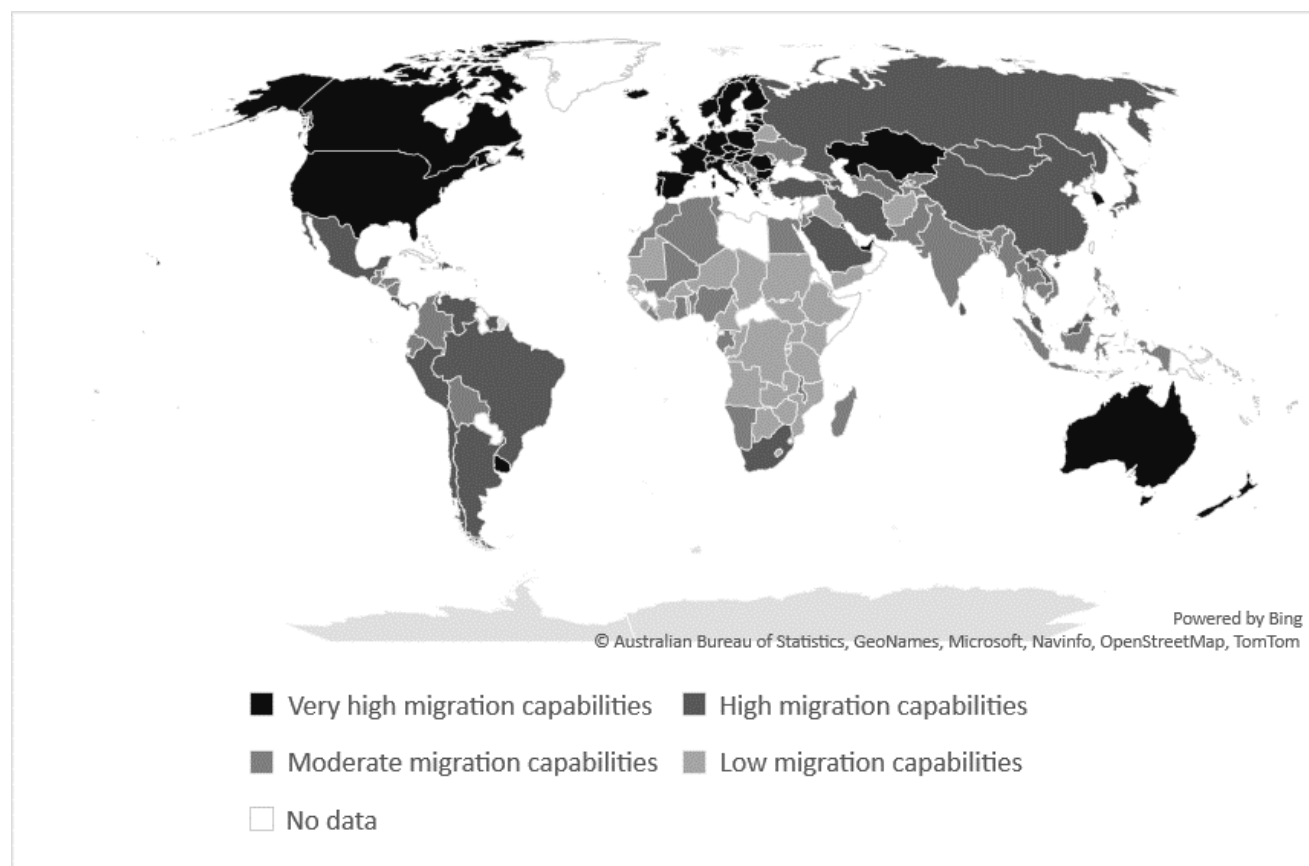
This second scenario is centered around economic capital and considers that economic resources primarily explain migration capabilities. As such, economic capital has a greater weight (62.5%) than the other forms of capital (12.5% each). I focus on economic capital because, while a lack of social and human capital can be circumvented to some extent by economic resources, economics are essential to finance movement and reach destination. Figure 20 depicts this scenario and shows that giving a greater weight to economic capital results in six countries increasing and 25 countries decreasing their migration capabilities, in comparison to an equal-weight scenario. The countries that experience increases are mainly located in West and East Asia, including China, Japan, Kuwait, or the United Arab Emirates. These countries' lower migration capabilities in an equal-weight scenario can be explained due to their low social and moderate citizenship capital. In comparison, the 25 countries that experience a decrease of migration capabilities are primarily located in Africa and Asia, particularly in West and East Africa, and in Southeast Asia<sup>102</sup>. In an equal-weight scenario the scarce economic capital of these countries was masked by moderate citizenship and social capital, and, consequently, an analysis centered on economic resources leads to 13 countries decreasing from high to moderate, and 12 from moderate to low migration capabilities.

Giving more weight to economic capital results in a more realistic scenario, in which countries previously associated with involuntary immobility, such as Senegal (Carling et al. 2013), Tajikistan (Bylander 2017), Ecuador (Mata-Codesal 2015) or the Philippines (Ortiga and Macabasag 2020), show scarcer migration capabilities. Nevertheless, this scenario overlooks the border regime that constraints movement and that studies have highlighted as one of the main obstacles to migration (Carling 2002; Jónsson 2008; Mata-Codesal 2015). The

<sup>102</sup> Countries in East (Belarus and Moldova) and South Europe (Serbia), and in the Americas (Colombia, Ecuador, Belize, and Jamaica) also experience decreases.

next scenario centers on the politico-economic regime and takes both economic and citizenship capital as key variables.

**Figure 20.** Migration capabilities worldwide in 2015 – Economic-centered scenario



Source: Own elaboration

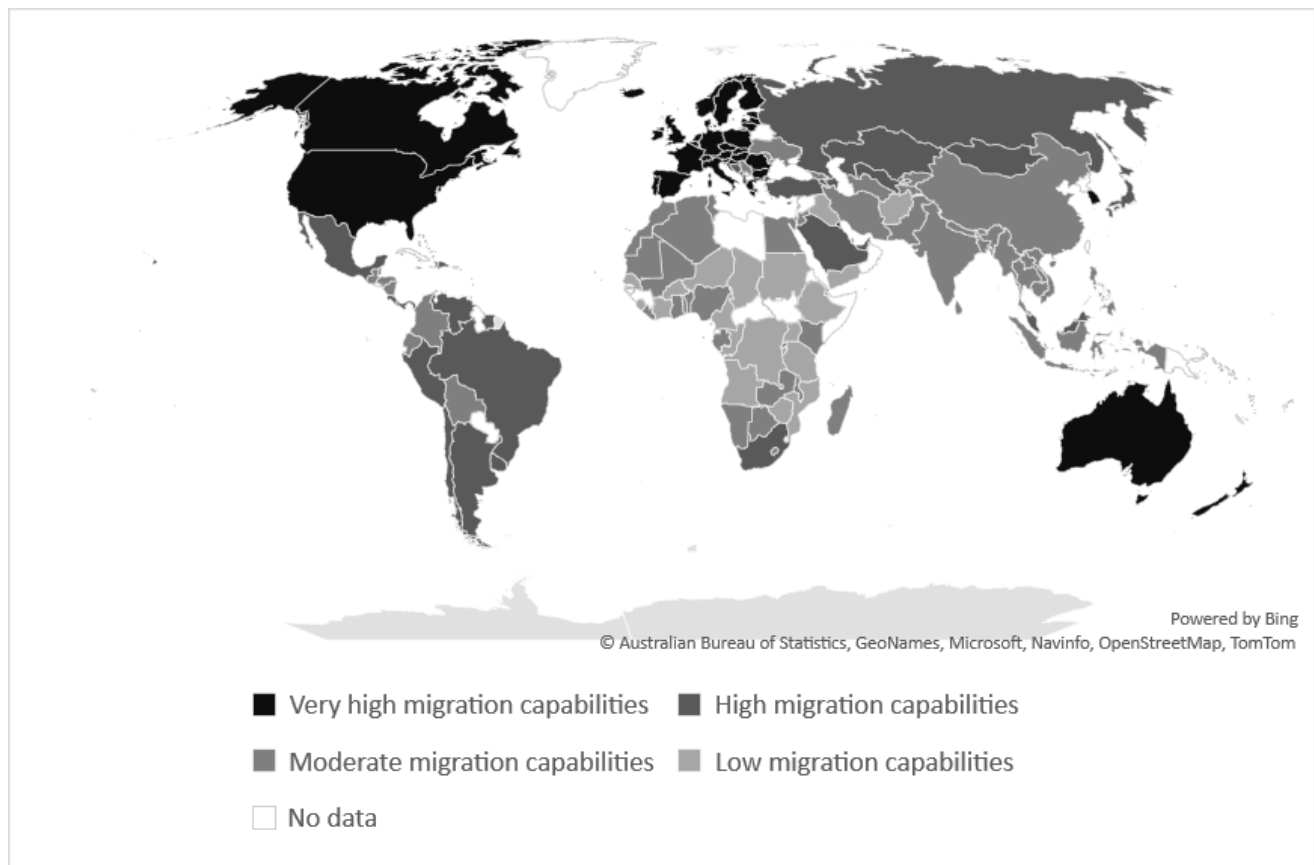
### 4.3 TOWARDS A WORKING SCENARIO: AN ECONOMIC AND CITIZENSHIP-CENTERED SCENARIO

This scenario assumes that economic and citizenship capital primarily drive migration capabilities. It does so for two reasons: First, because unequal global relationships trigger ‘regimes of mobility’, which allow the movement of some, while containing others (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013). The impact that border and immigration regimes have on migration capabilities has been amply detailed by researchers, who highlight how border controls and bills favoring ‘selective immigration’ constitute barriers for migration (Jónsson 2008; Mata-Codezal 2015). Secondly, because economic resources are necessary to move: ‘Marginal’ households that cannot cover daily expenses cannot afford movement (Cohen 2002).

To capture such a scenario, economic capital and citizenship capital are given a greater weight than human and social capital. The weight of economic capital is 50% and that of citizenship capital 30%, while both social and human capital are given 10% each. The rationale for this is as follows: While the border regime constrains migration, the benefits that high citizenship capital entails can only be accessed when economic resources are high enough to cover passport and visa fees. I keep human and social capital in the analysis because being aware of opportunities elsewhere, having necessary skills, and being familiar with emigration are important factors facilitating movement and can result in requiring less economic capital.

Figure 21 presents this scenario and shows that 8 countries increase, and 9 countries decrease their migration capabilities, in comparison to the economic-centered scenario. The countries experiencing a decrease in migration capabilities are mainly located in Asia and the decrease of capabilities is explained due to scarce citizenship capital. This includes countries with low entry and settlement freedom, as well as with restrictive exit rights, such as China, Iran, or Laos. In comparison, 7 out of the 8 countries experiencing an increase in migration capabilities are located across Africa, especially in West, East and South Africa. Increases in migration capabilities in these regions capture the moderate-to-high citizenship capital of member states of ECOWAS, EAC, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), or the Community of Sahel-Saharan (CEN-SAD), which offer visa-free entries and right to reside to nationals of member states.

**Figure 21.** Migration capabilities worldwide in 2015 – Economic and citizenship-centered scenario



Source: Own elaboration

This scenario is supposed to reflect reality best and reveals that, overall, countries associated with involuntary immobility reflect moderate or low migration capabilities. Nonetheless, the map also highlights the necessity of adopting *emic* perspectives to study two-step migration approaches (Mata-Codesal 2019) for two reasons. First, aggregate representations of migration capabilities do not account for the opportunities and constraints that individuals experience locally. This is particularly important considering the spread of socio-economic precarity and instability worldwide (Azmanova 2020), and the diverse opportunities and constraints that different social groups face. Secondly, the map shows that countries usually associated with limited resources and instability score relatively high due to high entry and settlement freedom. This includes countries such as Mali or Mauritania that present moderate migration capabilities due to the freedom to enter other ECOWAS countries. The difficulty of portraying migration at the national level calls to rethink how adequately macro-level indexes reflect reality overall, and more importantly, to explore *what kind* of migration capabilities matter. As aforementioned, capabilities encapsulate the freedoms a person enjoys to live a worthy life (Nussbaum 1999;

Sen 1990) and, as such, what matters is *where* people see themselves living a 'good life', which is reflected by their migration aspirations. Capabilities to move from Bamako to Dakar might hardly represent freedom to move to somebody aspiring to migrate to Nouakchott or London. Migration capabilities matter in a social context based on *where* and *how* people can and want to migrate to (see Mata-Codesal 2019).

## 5 CONCLUSION: CHALLENGING (DI)VISIONS OF MIGRATION CAPABILITIES

The threshold of migration capabilities needed to move freely is subjective for a variety of reasons, as it is important to consider, among others, *where*, *how*, *from where*, and *with whom* individuals aspire to migrate. Due to the methodological difficulties of conceptualizing and operationalizing migration capabilities, research in this matter has remained scarce, particularly in comparison to research on aspirations to migrate and stay. This chapter fills this gap in the literature by providing the first operationalization of migration capabilities drawing on four forms of capital: economic, social, human and citizenship capital. By doing so, the chapter contributes to migration and development studies, and it adds to the argument of this thesis in three ways.

First, it adds to middle-range theorizations of migration by conceptualizing migration capabilities and improving the applicability of two-step migration approaches. While two-step migration approaches provide an inclusive, unified approach to explain (im)mobility beyond overly individualistic or structural explanations, the scarce conceptualization of capabilities has resulted in a theoretically incomplete theoretical framework. By further operationalizing migration capabilities this thesis proves the empirical applicability of the notion and adds to a comprehensive approach that explains why some people move but others do not.

Secondly, while the chapter shows that high-income countries overall possess high migration capabilities, it also argues that migration aspirations might not be systematically fulfilled in high-income countries for two reasons. First, high-income countries are characterized by intense immigration flows and usually by a culture of permanence, where immobility rather than mobility is the norm. How people in a culture of permanence relate to emigration is unclear, especially considering that emigration flows remain significantly lower than migration aspirations in high-income countries (see Figure 1 in Chapter 1). Whether people overstate their migration aspirations, emigration flows are underestimated, or if low migration social capital postpones emigration is subject to further research, especially because unfamiliarity with a situation – i.e., migration – can trigger cognitive biases, such as uncertainty reduction and ambiguity effects (see Section 4.1), and, therefore, to biased decision-making processes. I further elaborate on how a culture of permanence can influence migration capabilities in Chapter 8 (see Section 4.2) to contribute to migration decision-making theories. Secondly, this chapter shows that the widespread of precarity capitalism (Azmanova 2020) results in limited economic resources for the bottom 50% of the population worldwide. On average, the financial freedom of this segment of the population decreases 91.90% in high-income regions in comparison to the economic capital of the total population, and their average net personal wealth is lower than the share of wealth of the total population in the most economically deprived regions of the 'Global South' (See Section 3.1). This questions *who* can systematically fulfill their aspirations and calls to incorporate the 'precariat' more actively into two-step migration approaches. Especially, because due to 'destination biases' research has focused on immigration dynamics in the 'Global North' and emigration patterns and aspirations in the 'Global South', overlooking the increasing precarity and working poor rate also in high-income countries and how this relates to migration aspirations and decisions.

Finally, the chapter highlights the importance of adopting an emic perspective towards two-step approaches to go beyond analyses at the macro and aggregate level and research (1) how the 'opportunity structure' is experienced by social groups; and (2) how *ideal* migration aspirations can be fulfilled.

### PART III – A MICRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS ON ASPIRATIONS, CAPABILITIES AND ADAPTATION IN HIGH-INCOME COUNTRIES: THE CASES OF EL BIERZO AND LACIANA IN NORTHWEST SPAIN

Part III completes the macro-level analyses provided in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 by adopting a micro-level perspective and exploring the formation of aspirations, perception of capabilities and adaptation mechanisms in two sluggish Northwest Spanish regions in the province of Leon: El Bierzo and Laciana. Part III consists of four chapters. **Chapter 6** offers a brief historical overview of El Bierzo and Laciana mine basins. By doing so, the chapter (1) provides a context of the socio-economic changes both regions have experienced, (2) details how these have been accompanied by migration patterns, and (3) delves into how the population thinks about and perceives the future. The chapter shows the economic and migratory transition the regions have experienced from dynamic and immigratory to stagnant and increasingly emigratory. This chapter sets the scene to explore how the socio-economic transition has impacted the population's decision-making process. **Chapter 7**, **Chapter 8**, and **Chapter 9** focus, respectively, on the aspirations, capabilities, and adaptation mechanisms of individuals in Bembibre, Fabero and Ponferrada in El Bierzo, and Villablino in Laciana. These four municipalities were not only the key mine basins<sup>103</sup> and the most economic and socially important municipalities, but they were and still are the most populous (Junta de Castilla y León 2022). That is why they are the focus of my empirical analysis, and why in Chapters 7 to 9 I refer to these municipalities as El Bierzo and Laciana for simplification purposes.

**Chapter 7** delves into the (im)mobility aspirations of the population in El Bierzo and Laciana and argues that a clash in the two dimensions of human (im)mobility – the intrinsic and the instrumental – explains (1) how myriad life ambitions lead to unclear (im)mobility aspirations and (2) when migration can be conditional and perceived as involuntary. This chapter offers a framework to approach aspirations in a spectrum of degrees and shows that aspirations can be *reinforcing* but also *conflicting*. **Chapter 8** investigates the migration capabilities of the population in both regions, which are handicapped by the precarity, instability and uncertainty of the economic market, as well as by a lack of migration know-how. This chapter shows that a culture of permanence limits emigratory *savoir-faire* and that further research on how this can influence migration is needed. This chapter offers a framework to approach capabilities in a spectrum of degrees and shows how differentiating between internal and external capabilities fosters theory-building around two-step migration approaches. Finally, **Chapter 9** explores the adaptation mechanisms of those with unfulfilled migration aspirations. This chapter introduces adaptation mechanisms into two-step migration approaches and challenges the mobility bias of transnationalism by coining the notion of 'transimmobility', which captures how non-migrants create and maintain transnational ties over time to cope with an unwanted immobility status.

The chapters serve to operationalize the abstract notions of aspirations and capabilities and contribute to two-step migration approaches by delineating theoretical frameworks that understand these concepts in spectrum of degrees. In addition to furthering theory-building, the chapters also illustrate that unfulfilled migration aspirations are also present in high-income countries, and that involuntariness is not exclusive to citizens in low- and moderate-income countries. While the 'opportunity structure' is undoubtedly beneficial for those in the 'Global North', the increasingly widespread precarity affects the migration and immobility of people worldwide and as such, these chapters call to rethink dichotomous categories about emigration and emigration motives.

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<sup>103</sup> Although Ponferrada was not a mining municipality, the city provided the necessary industry and services to run and maintain the mining industry.

## **CHAPTER 6 – A CENTURY OF CHANGE AND MIGRATION IN EL BIERZO AND LACIANA: AN OVERVIEW OF THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

### **1 INTRODUCING EL BIERZO AND LACIANA**

This chapter briefly presents the main changes that the socio-economic fabric of El Bierzo and Laciana mine basins have experienced from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Figure 2 in Chapter 1 for a map of the regions). By doing so, this chapter shows how these two areas, traditionally characterized by internal and international in-migration, are slowly transitioning towards increasing emigration, since the demise of coal mining in the early 2000s left the people without substantial opportunities.

As such, this chapter is more descriptive in nature, but it sets the scene to understand the forthcoming three empirical chapters as past, present, and future interact in the formation of migration aspirations and the perception of migration capabilities. This chapter is based on the social changes and migration transitions that have taken place across the twelve mining municipalities conforming the upper El Bierzo and Laciana<sup>104</sup>, while the forthcoming three empirical chapters focus on the aspirations, capabilities, and adaptation strategies of individuals in Bembibre, Fabero and Ponferrada in El Bierzo, and Villablino in Laciana (see Figure 4 in Chapter 3 for a map of the municipalities). This chapter relies on (1) longitudinal datasets on internal and international migration patterns, population estimates and occupation by sector<sup>105</sup> (see Chapter 3, Section 2.4), (2) an extensive literature review on the history of the regions, and (3) insights gained during the interviews – when I include material from the interviews I identify the source using the following system: for example, I1 for interview number 1 and I7 for interview 7. The data collected through the interviews corroborates the secondary literature and the available quantitative data, which provide a deep understanding of the social changes and migration dynamics taking place in the field sites.

### **2 LOOKING INTO THE PAST: THE MINING BASINS OF EL BIERZO AND LACIANA ACROSS THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

Coal mines have traditionally been the main economic drivers of El Bierzo and Laciana, and small-scale producers and businesses were already present in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (I26; I31a). However, coal mining activities, not only in El Bierzo and Laciana but more generally in Spain, remained marginal during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for a variety of reasons: Spanish coal was not competitive at the international level, productivity was low, there was an infrastructure backlog, and state intervention remained overall limited<sup>106</sup>, among others (Sanz Falagán 2018). Over time, however, coal mining gained momentum, triggering an expansion of the socio-economic structure of El Bierzo and Laciana (Figure 22), which was initially limited to subsistence, agricultural economies and presented few inhabitants<sup>107</sup> (INE 2022e; I26; I31). The social fabric of El Bierzo and Laciana experienced three major growth periods:

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<sup>104</sup> These twelve municipalities are: Bembibre, Berlanga del Bierzo, Cubillos del Sil, Fabero, Folgoso de la Ribera, Igüeña, Noceda del Bierzo, Páramo del Sil, Toreno, Torre del Bierzo, Vega de la Espinareda in El Bierzo, and Villablino in Laciana.

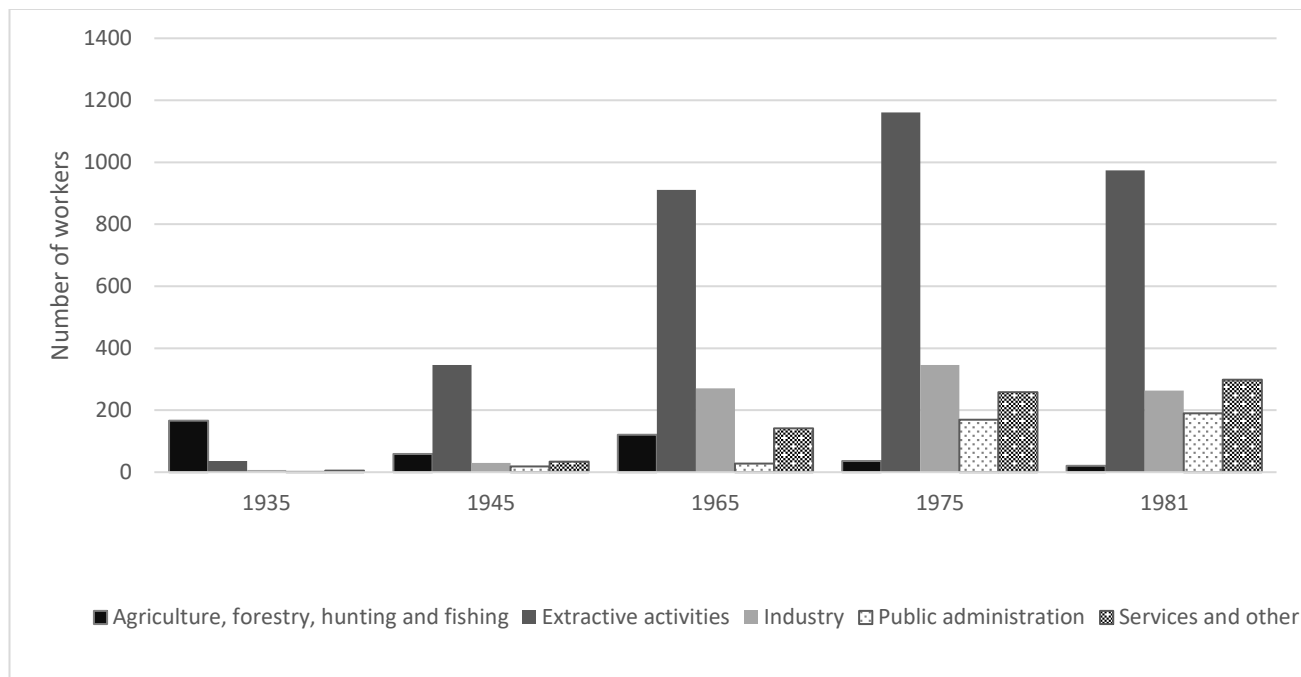
<sup>105</sup> Most of the historical longitudinal datasets only contain statistics for Fabero (El Bierzo). This is because, unfortunately, I was not granted permission to enter the population registers of the other municipalities under study (see Chapter 3, Section 2.4). However, according to the interviewees, the patterns have been similar for mining municipalities across both region (I26; I31a; I31b), which is confirmed by governmental reports.

<sup>106</sup> There were exceptions including the Coal Statute in 1927 enacted during Primo de Rivera's dictatorship (1923-1930).

<sup>107</sup> National historical statistics show that in 1930 only three municipalities (excluding the capital city of Ponferrada) surpassed the 3,000 inhabitants: Bembibre with 4,007 inhabitants, Toreno with 3,026, and Villablino with 6,837 inhabitants. By 1950 the total population of mining municipalities in El Bierzo and Laciana reached 46,792 inhabitants, a 91.25% increase since the beginning of the century and a 38.27% increase since the 1930s (INE 2022e).

- (1) From the early 1920s to the late 1940s, when technological improvements resulted in increasing, albeit still scarce, work opportunities.
- (2) From the 1950s to the late 1960s, when the autarkic policy and international isolationism of Franco's dictatorial regime (1939-1975) resulted in the nationalization of coal, a growing productivity of coal mining, and increasing internal in-migration.
- (3) From the early 1970s until the late 1990s, when the state strongly intervened to procure energy security, the socio-economic fabric of the regions boomed, and internal and international in-migrations skyrocketed.

**Figure 22.** Number of workers by economic sector in Fabero, 1930-1981



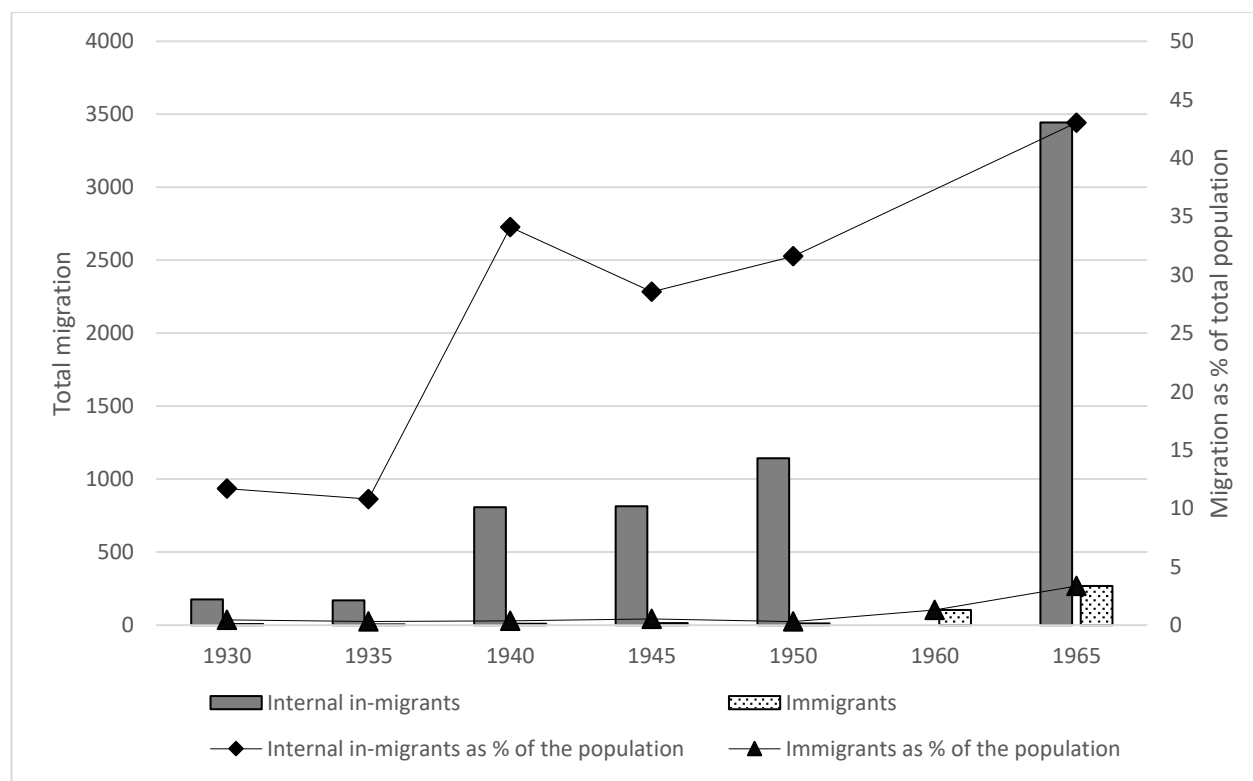
Source: Ayuntamiento de Fabero, Population registers, 1935-1981

First, during the 1920s, a railroad line connecting Ponferrada (the capital city of El Bierzo) and Villablino (the capital city of Laciana) was established, which cheapened transport costs. Concurrently, thermal power stations were constructed, leading to an expansion of mines and of industrial work opportunities even during the great depression of the 1930s (Cortijo Álvarez 2012, 209-210; I26; I31a). Despite these improvements, coal mining productivity was still low. El Bierzo and Laciana were largely based on a subsistence economy, where opportunities were, for most of the population, limited to the primary sector and small-scale coal mining (I26). This changed in the early 1950s (I31a; I31b; I36), when the second boom period of coal mining began (refer to Figure 22).

Secondly, during the first two decades of Franco's dictatorship (1939-1975), an autarkic policy and an international isolation were imposed, which translated into increasing electricity needs and industrial demands. As a result, efforts to nationalize coal and make it the most widespread energy resource were made, and the introduction of capital goods into the production process fostered the productivity of coal mining (I31a, I31b; I26). In this way, during the 1950s, employment opportunities improved, which attracted internal migrants from bordering provinces, such as Galicia, as well as from the farther away provinces of Extremadura and Andalusia (Figure 23). In Fabero, internal in-migrants represented 11.70% of the total population in 1930, while by 1950 the number had increased to 31.58%; in comparison, between 1930 and 1950, internal out-migration remained

below 3%, peaking in 1941 with 68 departures (around 2.84% of the population)<sup>108</sup> (Municipality of Fabero, 1936, 1941, 1950). Apart from vibrant economies, this second growth period was also accompanied by greater welfare services and a more active presence of the state as: (1) housing schemes were introduced to satisfy the increasing demographic growth of both regions, (2) charitable foundations, which provided medical assistance, educational training and saving banks to the population gained momentum<sup>109</sup>, and (3) the state introduced economic benefits positively affecting coal mining<sup>110</sup> and further increasing coal productivity. The steady rise of coal mining experienced temporal economic contractions in the early 1960s following the Stabilization and Liberalization Plan of 1959<sup>111</sup>, wage increases and the low oil prices (Sanz Falagán 2018; I31a).

**Figure 23.** Internal and international migration to and from Fabero, 1930-1965



Source: Ayuntamiento de Fabero, Population registers, 1930-1965

The third and more important boom period started in the early-to-mid-1970s, when oil prices tripled, open-pit mines gained momentum (I30; I31b), and the state strongly intervened to procure energy security (I26; I31a; I35). Since the late 1970s, state intervention concentrated in: (1) regulating coal price and offering operating aid to coal mines to increase production and productivity<sup>112</sup>, (2) funding proposals to increase the subway coal production, improve mining technology and strengthen structures for coal supply<sup>113</sup>, and (3) replacing oil power stations with coal-fired plants and expanding hydroelectric power plants<sup>114</sup>. The robust growth through the

<sup>108</sup> While this is likely to be an underestimation as people tend to not deregister when they emigrate, the interviews corroborate that internal and international emigration in El Bierzo and Laciana have traditionally been low.

<sup>109</sup> In the province of Leon around 19,990 social institutions were present in 1950.

<sup>110</sup> These measures were implemented within the *Acción Concertada* framework in 1965.

<sup>111</sup> While this plan aimed at aligning the Spanish and the global economy by favoring foreign investment, technological innovation, and changes in the occupation structure (Collantes 2007; Lieberman 2005), Spanish coal has consistently faced difficulties to compete in the international open market and accordingly, state support has been required (Consejo Económico y Social de Castilla y León 2012, 27).

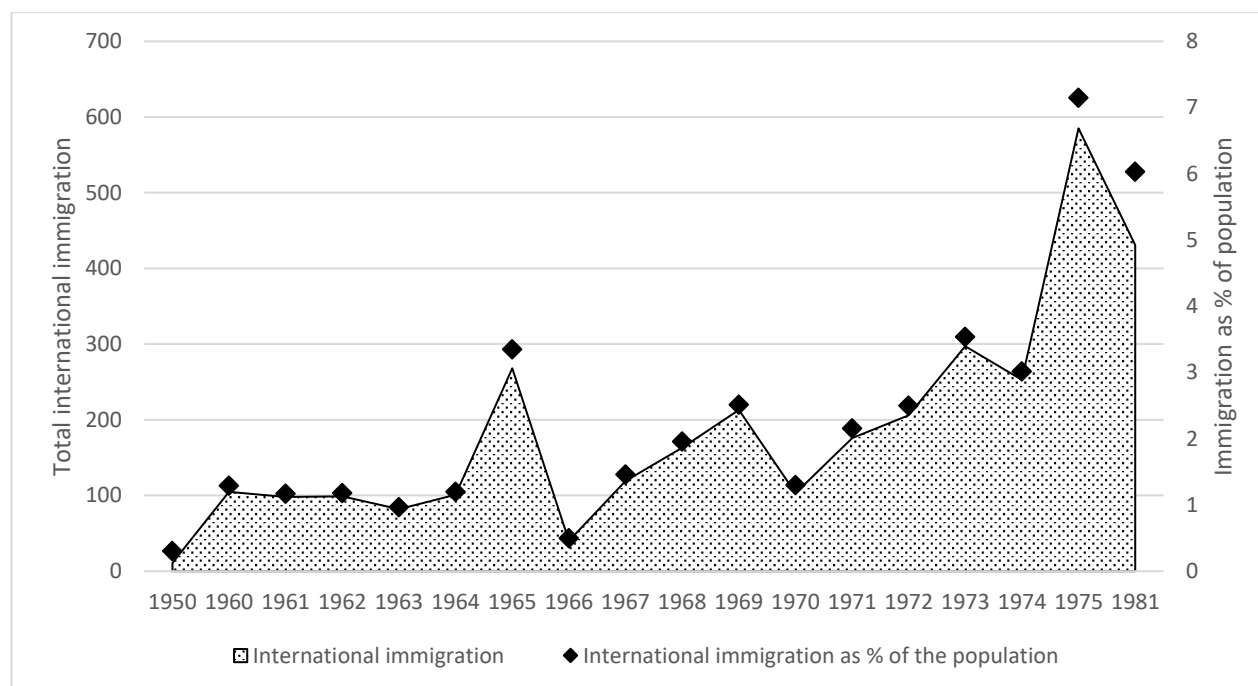
<sup>112</sup> For more information see the National Energy Plan of 1979.

<sup>113</sup> See the Medium-term Coal Production Program and the National Coal Research Plan of 1979.

<sup>114</sup> See the Accelerated Coal Power Plant Construction Plan and the National Energy Plan of 1978 and 1983.

1970s and 1980s continued attracting international and internal migrants (see Figure 24 and 25, respectively) (I26; I31a; I31b; I36). For instance, in Fabero, in 1975, both international and internal immigration peaked with 585 and 4404 arrivals, respectively. This meant that 7.14% of the total population was composed by international immigrants, primarily coming from Portugal and Cape Verde, while internal in-migrants comprised around 53.79% of the municipality's population, and primarily came from other municipalities in Leon, the neighboring communities of Galicia and Asturias, and from farther away provinces in Andalusia and Extremadura<sup>115</sup>. According to the interviews, these trends persisted during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and they are representative of the changes that other mining municipalities experienced too (I31a; I35; I36).

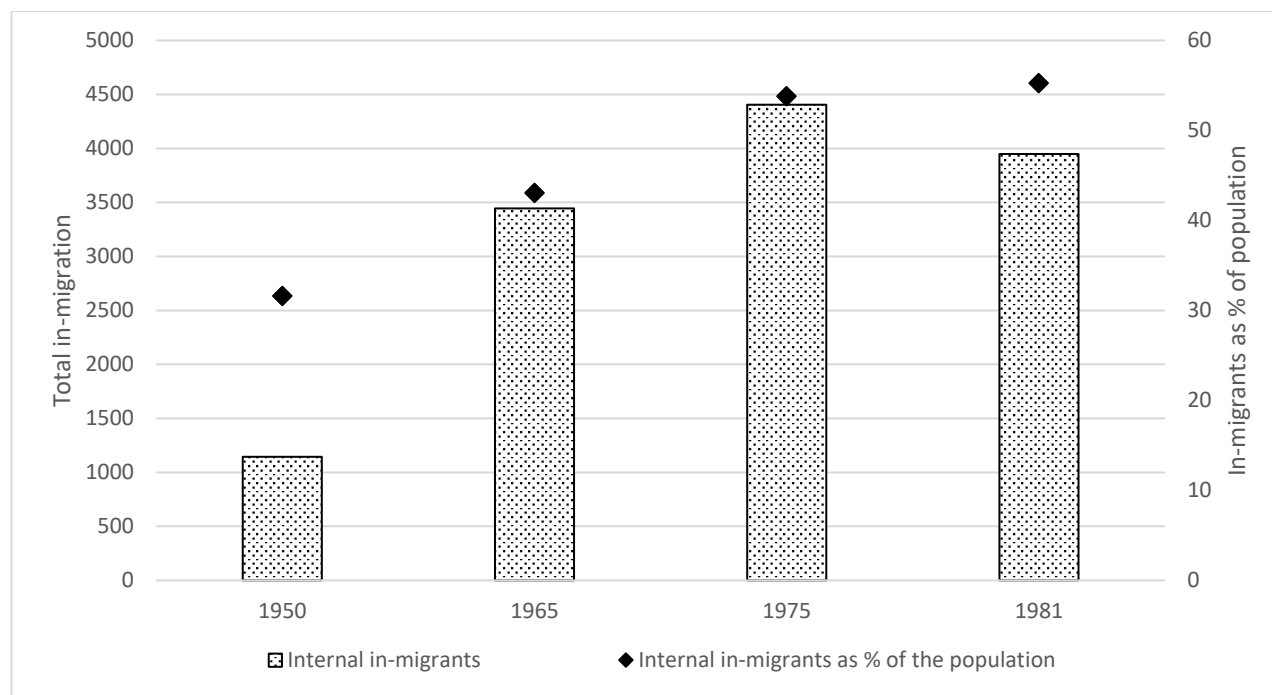
**Figure 24.** International immigration in absolute numbers and as % of total population in Fabero, 1950-1981



Source: Ayuntamiento de Fabero, Population registers, 1950-1981

<sup>115</sup> I have recently explored the transformations that Spain experienced from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the migration dynamics that accompanied these changes. To further understand how the developments that El Bierzo and Laciana experienced during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century fit with those at the national and autonomous level see Rodríguez-Pena (forthcoming).

**Figure 25.** Internal in-migration in absolute numbers and as % of total population in Fabero, 1950-1981



Source: Ayuntamiento de Fabero, Population registers, 1950-1981

Following the economic growth, El Bierzo and Laciana boomed, and the regions were characterized by vibrant socio-economic structures until the early 2000s, when coal mining started deteriorating. This is exemplified by the interviews, which recall that both regions, particularly Ponferrada, were considered “dollar cities” (I27; I31; I33; I36) where purchasing power was high and (male) employment was guaranteed (I31a; I33; I35; I36). Two interviewees put it this way:

“In El Bierzo there was not a lack of work...There was a monoculture. A monoculture of coal, iron and slate mining, and the electrical industry. Everybody here had a job, a stable, good-paying job...People did not have to look [for a job]. They knew they were employed for life” (I31a, Spain, 67 years old).

“We left [for France] at the end of the 1960s. My father always said that had we waited a little longer, we would not have left. Working conditions were not great, but [the early 1970s] was a very flourishing period. Whenever we came [to visit family] from France, I saw that there was a lot of money, especially in all the towns of the mining basins. There was a very high purchasing power, very dynamic economies...People here had things we did not in France. El Bierzo and Laciana boomed, and they changed completely” (I35, Spain, 54 years old).

The growth of coal mining meant that by 1990 between 60%-70% of the population depended, directly or indirectly, on the mining industry (I23; I31a; I31b; I36). The exponential growth, however, was accompanied by uncontrolled extractions, a lack of restoration, invasion of communal lands for exploitation, and smallholdings which hindered claim processing and settlement (I26; I30; I31a; I36). There were efforts to halt these dynamics with the incorporation of Spain into the European Economic Community (current EU) in 1986, when the economic restructuring and reductions of the productive capacity of coal and its workforce began.

Restructuring plans became more acute with the expiration of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 2002 and with a change in the communitarian energy strategy towards renewable energies and sustainable economies. As a result, in the early 2000s, governmental aid alleviating the restructuring of the sector was limited and closure plans began to be drawn up (I26; I31a; I36). Spain was initially able to maintain minimum

coal production to contribute to the availability of primary energy within the EU and was granted aid for the restructuring of the sector. Nevertheless, both EU and national aid maintained a decreasing trend throughout the early 2000s. Decreases in governmental aid coincided with increases in wage and structural costs, the Spanish building boom, and the lower price of imported coal. Consequently, the productivity of coal industries decreased significantly, and so did the profits (I31a; I36). In 2010 preliminary agreements on the closure of uncompetitive mines were established following EU clean energy policies<sup>116</sup>.

Closure plans were detailed within the Framework Action 2013-2018<sup>117</sup> which entailed, among others, the closure of non-competitive mines, early retirements, plans to reactivate the socio-economic structure of mining areas, and the end of subsidies in 2018. From 2019 onwards, there were two alternatives: either close the industries, or continue coal mining and return the received subsidies (Consejo Económico y Social de Castilla y León 2012, 28) (I31a; I36). In the case of El Bierzo and Laciana, the last coal mine remained open until 2018. The reactivation funds were divided into aid for (1) business projects, (2) infrastructure, and (3) training. National reports show overall compliance with the funding allocated for training, whereas that for business and infrastructure projects reached 62% and 59% of the forecast, respectively (Consejo Económico y Social de Castilla y León 2012, 29-30).

### 3 TAKEN ABACK BY THE PRESENT: THE END OF COAL MINING

The interviews illustrate discontent with the restructuring plans and the reactivation funds, which took the population aback:

“Nobody thought that there had to be an after. Not this soon. We all thought that [coal mining] was going to be exhausted in 2025, 2028. But [because of] political maneuvers promoted by the European Union and some Spanish chieftains all ended in the early 2000s [...] Nobody here thought about what to do next [...] People here only thought about [coal] mining. Coal mining or Endesa [a national electric industry]. Those were the only options” (I31a, Spain, 67 years old).

The plans were perceived by many not as restructuring but as closure and abandonment plans (I1; I2; I22; I23; I25; I26; I31a; I33; I36): “It was all a story, a lie [...] People were left in the street [...] They needed to look for a living out there [...] People fought [...] but there was not much [to do]” (I36a, Spain, 66 years old). The closure of coal mining and the lack of economic restructuring and development projects provoked important mobilizations, including the *Marcha Negra*<sup>118</sup>, and they have resulted in increasing political and social discontent. The discontent has been further intensified as people perceive the funds were misused and invested in unpractical infrastructures, including parks and gardens, roundabouts, unfinished theaters, and (unfinished) industrial warehouses and industrial parks even when there were not road accesses, rather than in the establishment of alternative industries (I2; I22; I25; I26; I30; I31; I33; I36). Indeed, the interviewees mentioned that, as for today, there is only one major company in the region – LM Wind Power, a rotor blade for wind turbines supplier –, which has already resorted to redundancy plans (I26; I19; I31a; I36).

The closure of the mines has, therefore, destroyed the main source of employment in the region. In 1994, there were 69 mining companies in Leon, employing 7,790 direct workers; by 2004, these numbers were reduced to 19 companies and 3,255 direct workers. This resulted in a loss of 72.46% of the mining businesses and a

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<sup>116</sup> For more detailed information on these measures see the ECSC’s decision 3632/93 on the reduction on state aid, as well as Council Regulations (EC) No. 1407/2002 and No. 2010/787/EU.

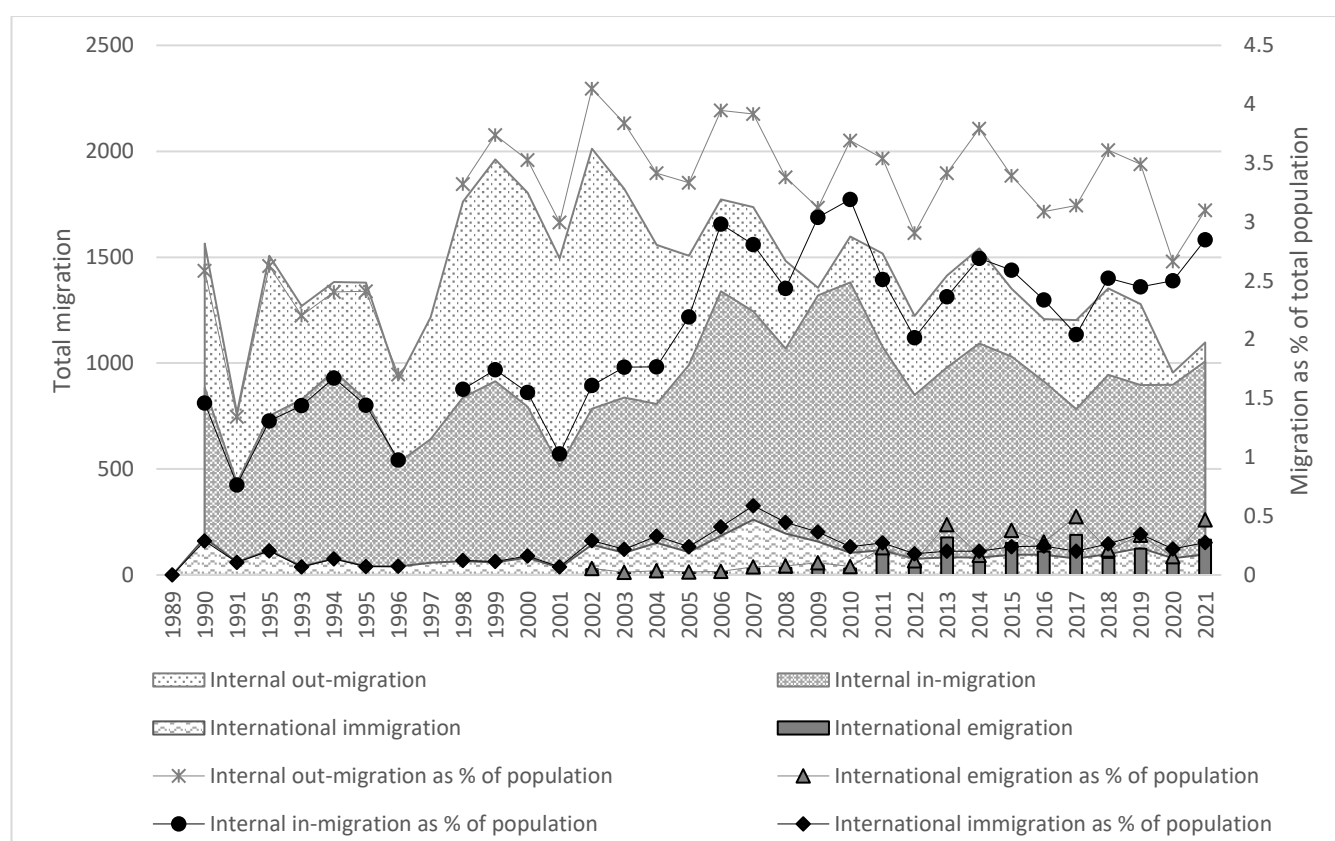
<sup>117</sup> See also Council Decision 2010/787/UE.

<sup>118</sup> The literal translation is ‘Black March’. It was the name given to an union action carried out by miners, which consisted of a march on foot from Villablino (Laciana) to Madrid, which are 402 km away from each other. The first one took place in the early 1990s when plans for the reconversion of the mining industry began. A second march was held in 2012. There were other marches from Villablino to Leon in 2010 (I36).

reduction of the direct workforce by 58.22% in ten years. The economic fabric of the region was also destroyed as, still in 2006, an increase of 100 direct jobs in the mining sector generated a total of 187.3 jobs (Cortijo Álvarez 2012, 264-277). The absence of an industrial fabric at present has furthered the sluggishness of the regions and has sparked increasing depopulation, primarily from the most isolated mining municipalities, such as Sabero.

Consequently, while El Bierzo and Laciana have traditionally been dynamic regions, they are currently characterized by lethargic economies, high dependency on pensioners (Vega Núñez and Calvo González 2020; I1; I2; I22; I25; I26; I29; I30; I31; I36) and growing internal and international out-migrations. In 1991, 1.35% of the total population in the upper Bierzo and Laciana emigrated internally, while in 2002 4.13% of the population did so, an increase of 163.01% in internal emigration rates in a decade<sup>119</sup>. International emigration, while lower in number, peaked in 2017 with 190 departures (around 0.50% of the total population) and has also maintained around that percentage since then (Figure 26). International emigration increased 603.7% from 2002, when 0.06% of the population emigrated, to 2017.

**Figure 26.** Internal and international migration from and to El Bierzo and Laciana, 1989-2021



Source: Junta de Castilla y León (2022)

Out-migrations have slowly surpassed internal and international in-migration flows and the transition from immigration to emigration is under way. Yet, the increases in out-migration patterns are still relatively low and the geographical orientation of out-migrants is limited to other municipalities within the province of León<sup>120</sup>. This is despite the province's limited opportunities and precarious employment, the low labor participation

<sup>119</sup> Internal out-migration has remained around 3.5%-4% throughout most of the 2000s.

<sup>120</sup> The municipalities of Ponferrada and León, as well as the two Leonese satellite towns of San Andres del Rabanedo and Villaquilambre have been the main destination for migrants, including those coming from mining municipalities (Junta de Castilla y León 2022).

rates, high temporality, and low wages<sup>121</sup> (INE 2022c, 2022d). The negative prospects, and the lack of local opportunities is exemplified by, among others, the following interviewees:

“I think that here they don’t do a damn thing to change things [...] I don’t think they have the will to develop something new, a purpose for young people to stay, something for this to grow [...] We are not living, we are surviving. Surviving as we can. It discourages people. They are not kicking us out of Ponferrada. They are kicking us out of all places. Either they give us a little light or we can’t see [a future here]” (I22, Spain, 41 years old).

“An area whose 90% of its income was from a single sector like mining, which has gone bankrupt, to start an alternative [sector] would entail starting from scratch [...] They have closed the mining industry and they have abandoned us. Nobody cares about the miners, the mining basins, when years ago it was what moved the country. It generated electricity, it heated homes. Everything” (I23, Spain, 37 years old).

#### **4 A HOPELESS FUTURE: WHAT NOW?**

Despite the desire to see El Bierzo and Laciana develop, the majority of the interviewees have negative expectations for the future. They have no faith in governmental institutions, and the fact that the reactivation funds were misused has resulted in little hope that industrial and economic opportunities will flourish. This is despite being aware of the richness that the regions hold:

“We could have much more industry and the little we have, we don’t see them [politicians] fighting for it either [...] People say that we cannot get worse, but look, I think we can. I think we can go from bad to worse unless something is done [...] Here there is a lot of wealth. In El Bierzo we have peppers, apples, chestnuts. We can grow tomatoes. I don’t know. We have wine, vineyards and so on. And the fact is that here everything is promoted very little [...] There could be a lot of industry here. We could bottle the products, sell them. I don’t know what they do” (I25, Belgium, 55 years old).

The political discontent and the little economic opportunities have led many to despair, especially because the regions are now dependent on pensioners (Vega Núñez and Calvo González 2020) and what will be once they are no longer present is unclear. Opportunities for the youth are, therefore, questionable and some consider the future of the regions to be hopeless:

“I don’t know what will happen in a few years, but I think that young people will leave because here there are not many alternatives left. The alternative is small-scale agriculture and livestock farming. With the regulations that are in place, you cannot do anything, you can get very little out of agricultural smallholdings. I don’t see many ways out” (I26, Spain, 62 years old).

How are the limited opportunities at present and the negative future outlooks impacting the aspirations to migrate and to stay of the youth? Why are more people not emigrating? Why do they remain close by despite the pervasive precarity of the province? And how is the transition from immigration to emigration affecting the decision-making process? Understanding the regions’ past, present, and future is important to answer these questions as temporalities affect migration in intricate ways. Comprehending the past is vital as a history of positive developments can trigger place attachment and a sense of loyalty encouraging aspirations to stay despite dire future expectations (Vezzoli 2022). This is particularly the case when emigration has not traditionally been the norm and migration know-how remains, as a consequence, low. While this chapter has presented background information on El Bierzo and Laciana, the next three empirical chapters tackle these questions and

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<sup>121</sup> In 2021, the labor participation rate of the province of Leon did not surpass 51%, presenting one of the lowest rates at the national level (INE 2022c). Similarly, in 2020, 16.5% of the total workers presented low wages in the autonomous community of Castille and Leon (INE 2022d).

investigate the formation and fulfillment of (im)mobility aspirations in Fabero, Bembibre, Ponferrada and Villablino.

## CHAPTER 7 – THE CONTINUUM OF THE ASPIRATIONS TO MOVE AND TO STAY: REINFORCING AND CONFLICTING ASPIRATIONS

### 1 INTRODUCING CONFLICTING ASPIRATIONS

Shifting from El Bierzo's and Laciana's historical overview that Chapter 6 provided, this chapter develops an approach to understand aspirations in a spectrum of degrees. It does so because while scholars have acknowledged that migration aspirations are better understood in a spectrum of degrees (Carling 2002, 2014a) or intensities (Mata-Codesal 2019), the conceptualization and operationalization of aspirations remain scarce, approaches that 'measure' aspirations are lacking and how the 'degree' of migration aspirations relate to myriad life aspirations is understudied. This chapter examines how people form aspirations to migrate and to stay in the two traditionally immigration areas of El Bierzo and Laciana, and addresses the gaps in the literature by exploring how the two dimensions of human (im)mobility – the intrinsic and the instrumental – interact and how these interactions explain the strength of aspirations. As shown in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.1), instead of an unitary entity, migration is now seen as composed of two dimensions: the instrumental and the intrinsic (Carling 2012, 2014a; de Haas 2021). The instrumental dimension understands mobility as a strategy to improve other aspects of life and achieve, among others, better education, living and working conditions, or to escape economic or political crises. The intrinsic dimension, on the other hand, captures the inner wellbeing acquired from moving (Carling 2014; de Haas and Rodríguez 2010). It includes the desire to leave the parental home and aspirations to explore other cultures out of curiosity or adventure, and it is often linked to gap years or lifestyle migration. These two dimensions are also applicable to human *immobility*. Remaining in place can have an important instrumental component, especially if emigration means a lower salary, or if staying put facilitates the movement of other family members. Similarly, individuals can gain intrinsic wellbeing by remaining in place, close to family members, friends, and the community, and by leading local development (Mata-Codesal 2018; Vezzoli 2022).

While migration has been mostly perceived as an instrumental venture (Harris and Todaro 1970; Stark and Bloom 1985), more recently investigations on the intrinsic value of mobility have gained momentum<sup>122</sup> and scholars are highlighting how migration can capture both instrumental and intrinsic desires (Brzozowska 2022). This shows that when individuals are strongly convinced about what to do – be this migrating or remaining in place – both dimensions lead towards the same spatial category, resulting in *reinforcing aspirations*. Nonetheless, it is also possible that the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of (im)mobility collide, as individuals' myriad life ambitions may clash. I capture this through the notion of *conflicting aspirations*. How do people form aspirations when instrumentally aspiring to leave and intrinsically aspiring to stay, or vice versa? Is migration voluntary to the same extent when the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of human (im)mobility collide rather than reinforce? Drawing on semi-structured interviews on the aspirations of 22 individuals in El Bierzo and Laciana, this chapter answers these questions by exploring the various interactions between the intrinsic and instrumental value of migration and immobility. By doing so, I contribute to migration studies providing, first, a theoretical framework that measures the 'strength' of migration aspirations, and secondly, rich insights into (1) how myriad life ambitions relate to the aspirations to migrate and stay, (2) what the consequences of conflicting aspirations for the decision-making process are, and (3) how aspirations impact the (in)voluntariness of (im)mobility. This adds to the ambition of this thesis to advance middle-range theorizing of two-step migration approaches. Moreover, the chapter adds to my overall argument by demonstrating that migration is not always fully voluntary in high-income countries, as structural constraints, and familial

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<sup>122</sup> Migration can be part of a "reflexive project of the self" (Benson and O'Reilly 2009, 615) and an opportunity offering adventure, experiential learning, 'global exposure' and freedom (King and Sondhi 2018; Korpela 2014; Olwig 2018; Suter 2019).

responsibilities limit human agency – although to varying degrees – across the ‘development spectrum’, resulting in *conflicting aspirations* about where to be.

The chapter continues as follows. First, it theoretically introduces how the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of (im)mobility interact. After a short overview of the methodology and background information on the field site, the chapter uses four vignettes to empirically apply the theoretical approach. The four vignettes depict four interactions of intrinsic-instrumental aspirations: the *first* and *fourth vignettes* show people at or near the extreme ends of aspiring to migrate and aspiring to stay, respectively, with firmly established convictions in which intrinsic and instrumental aspirations reinforce each other. The *second* and *third vignettes* depict a more nuanced scenario, as intrinsic and instrumental dimensions collide, often heavily, and individuals are immersed in insecurity and uncertainty, not knowing what to do and postponing the decision-making process. The second vignette illustrates individuals with intrinsic aspirations to stay but instrumental aspirations to emigrate, while the third vignette shows intrinsic aspirations to migrate and conversely, instrumental aspirations to stay (see Table 20 for an overview). This chapter ends with a discussion on the implications of distinguishing both dimensions of (im)mobility.

**Table 20.** Four vignettes of the aspirations to move and to stay

|                   | Location<br>(im)mobility<br>continuum | in an<br>aspiration | Intrinsic<br>aspirations | Instrumental<br>aspirations | Interviews<br>illustrating<br>this<br>pattern                |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Vignette 1</b> | Strong,<br>aspirations to migrate     | reinforcing         | To move                  | To move                     | Carmen; David;<br>Isabel; Maria;<br>Diego; Diana;<br>Manuela |
| <b>Vignette 2</b> | Conflicting aspirations               |                     | To stay                  | To move                     | Mateo; Jaime;<br>Emma; Lucas                                 |
| <b>Vignette 3</b> | Conflicting aspirations               |                     | To move                  | To stay                     | Antonio; Julia;<br>Valeria; Daniel;<br>Eduardo               |
| <b>Vignette 4</b> | Strong,<br>aspirations to stay        | reinforcing         | To stay                  | To stay                     | Lucia; Marina; Leo;<br>Rafael; Agatha;<br>Mimi               |

Source: Own elaboration

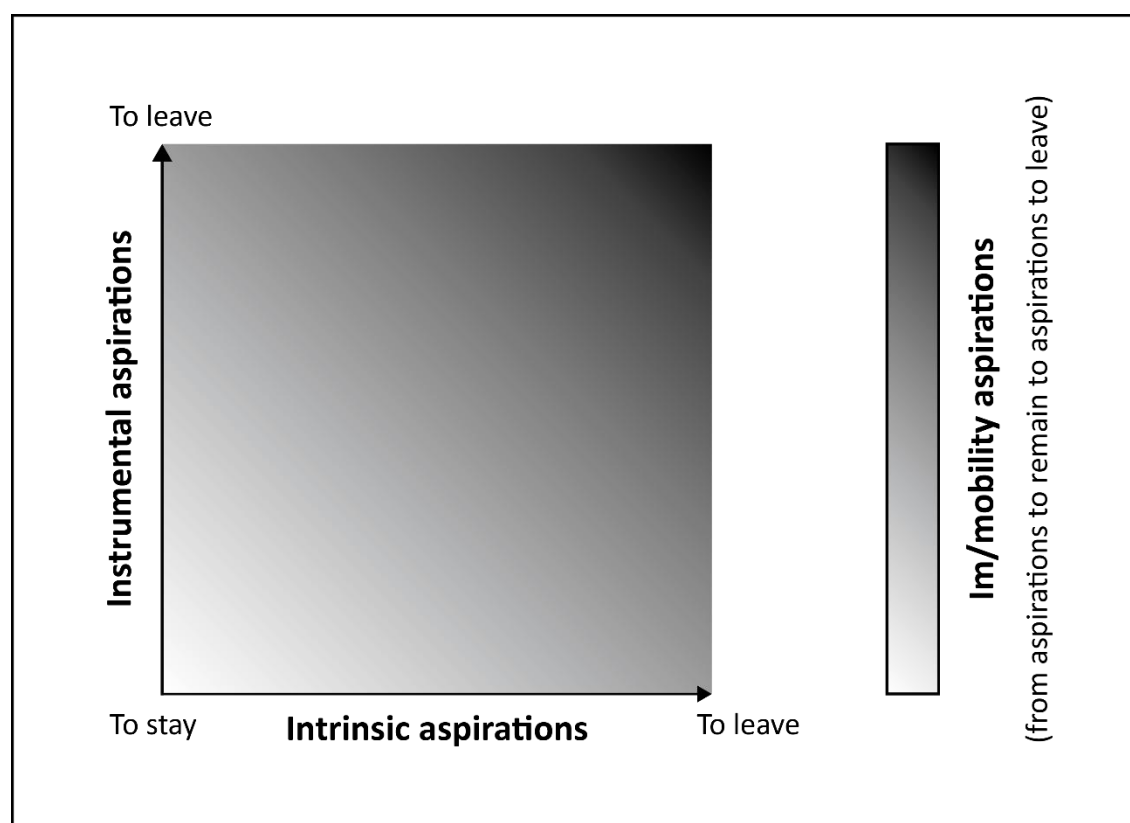
## 2 THE INTRINSIC AND INSTRUMENTAL DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN (IM)MOBILITY

Migration aspirations are defined as the conviction that migrating is preferable to remaining in place, whereas aspirations to remain are the opposite. But how do people form their aspirations and become convinced of what is best? Certainly, the macro-level context and individual characteristics play an important role, as aspirations are shaped by local opportunities and constraints, by social constructions about (im)mobility, as well as by individual characteristics and perceptions (Carling 2002). Nevertheless, aspirations are not straightforward phenomena, but rather a decision-making process in which individuals decide what is best or preferable. How people decide whether staying or leaving is more convenient is still a research subject, primarily because life ambitions are complex and myriad. How do people ‘rank’ their life ambitions? How do these relate to aspirations to either migrate or stay put? More importantly, how are people eventually convinced of what is best when life and, therefore, migration aspirations are multiple? Although unrelated to migration, think, for example, about ‘work-life balance’ or ‘work-life conflict’ expressions, which reflect that a conflict exists between two intertwined life spheres: the ambitions to pursue a career and that of raising children, enjoying a hobby, or relaxing,

especially for women<sup>123</sup> (Sørensen 2017). The fact that myriad life aspirations exist means that individuals put some life ambitions over others and by doing so, they choose what ‘road’ to take. This is also applicable to (im)mobility, especially because migration is not only about potential gains but also about certain losses. Since human (im)mobility consists of the instrumental and the intrinsic dimensions, the questions that remain are how these two dimensions reflect distinct life ambitions, how they interact, and what happens when they are not reinforcing but rather, conflicting.

Lately, research has emphasized that people migrate to remain in place in the future and that the household can ‘push’ members to migrate, even when migration might not be appealing and when it means sacrificing individual short-term wellbeing. For example, Mata-Codesal (2018, 5), in a study of immobility in a Mexican village, highlighted that “migration was not reported as being preferable on its own, it was considered instrumental by some villagers to realize their desires to stay put in the village”. While this reflects conflicting aspirations, theorization on these and on their ramifications has been so far overlooked. Yet, bringing the instrumental and the intrinsic dimension of (im)mobility together shows that the trajectories of (im)mobility are complex. Exploring intrinsic desires vis-à-vis instrumental aspirations allows us to understand whether individual (short- and medium-term) wellbeing is being sacrificed for longer-term (familial) wellbeing. Figure 27 summarizes how the interaction of both dimensions leads to varying configurations and strengths of aspirations.

**Figure 27.** (Im)mobility aspirations derived from intrinsic and instrumental dimensions



Source: Own elaboration<sup>124</sup>

The approach conceptualizes aspirations in a spectrum of degrees and accounts for (1) reinforcing (im)mobility aspirations, (2) conflicting aspirations, and (3) mild aspirations. Reinforcing aspirations to migrate and remain

<sup>123</sup> This is a gendered issue and Sørensen (2017) has argued that women are often asked to (1) opt out of a career or work part-time to prioritize children, (2) not have children and develop professionally, (3) externalize child-care and be considered ‘bad’ mothers, or (4) become ‘superwomen’ to have it ‘all’.

<sup>124</sup> I thank Josef Neubauer for his feedback and support designing the figure.

are a result of strong convictions about what is best as utilitarian and intrinsic desires converge in the same spatial category. Reinforcing migration aspirations are located in the upper-right quadrant, while reinforcing aspirations to stay are located in the lower-left quadrant of Figure 27. Conflicting aspirations can represent (1) intrinsic aspirations to stay and strong instrumental aspirations to leave (upper-left quadrant) or (2) intrinsic aspirations to leave and strong instrumental aspirations to stay (lower-right quadrant) (Figure 27). The first scenario captures, for instance, forced migration, especially when asylum seekers and IDPs migrate not for the value of moving in itself but, rather, due to the violence and conflict at 'home'. The movement of labor migrants can also exemplify this if migration is solely a strategy to improve working conditions but does not reflect an intrinsic desire to move. The second scenario captures, for instance, individuals leaving aside their intrinsic desires to discover the world due to local and/or family responsibilities. Conflicting aspirations do not necessarily mean that individuals do not plan to move after all, as, after 'ranking' their options, they might still decide that migration is more convenient. However, conflicting aspirations highlight the complexity of the pre-migration decision-making process as the formation of aspirations is not always straight-forward. This opens an avenue to investigate if (im)mobility is voluntary to the same extent when the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions collide rather than reinforce each other. Additionally, investigating how both dimensions interact also highlights the existence of mild aspirations. These can represent indifference about where to be, as the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions are not strong enough neither towards staying nor towards leaving (this is represented at the center of the quadrant in Figure 27), and people who might not have reflected about migration.

The fact that aspirations may collide (1) explains why aspirations need to be measured in a spectrum of degrees, rather than in yes/no categories, (2) questions what the satisfaction of emigrating is when people would have preferred to stay for intrinsic rationales – or vice versa –, and (3) facilitates exploring whose aspirations individuals are fulfilling: theirs or the family's. I discuss in depth the importance of this approach later in the chapter, after presenting the data collection process, the field site, and the interviewees' aspirations.

### 3 THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

This chapter is based on the life histories, and life and migration aspirations of 22 individuals. The interviews were conducted in Spanish from May 2021 to February 2022 in Fabero, Ponferrada and Bembibre in the upper El Bierzo region, and in Villablino in the Laciana valley in Northwest Spain. Of the interviewees, ten were male and twelve were female; they ranged from 18 to 60 years of age. At the time of the interview, seven interviewees aspired to either migrate internally within Spain or abroad, six aspired to remain in place, and nine were uncertain about what to do (see Table 20 in Section 1 of this chapter). I selected these interviewees because they represent individuals with varying degrees of (im)mobility aspirations: individuals with very strong aspirations to emigrate, individuals with very strong aspirations to stay, and individuals with very strong conflicting aspirations. While more interviewees had strong aspirations to migrate, I decided to only include in this chapter those with *very strong* aspirations, as they provide a good point of comparison with those with conflicting aspirations. As shown below, uncertainty and not being convinced whether emigrating or remaining in place was best was a result of conflicting aspirations. In this chapter, I explore the participants' aspirations and, as such, I do not refer to their capabilities. I do this because the objective is to demonstrate that aspirations can be *reinforcing* but also *conflicting*. However, it is important to note that some participants had limited capabilities and that not all could fulfill their aspirations. I address the capabilities of the interviewees in Chapter 8.

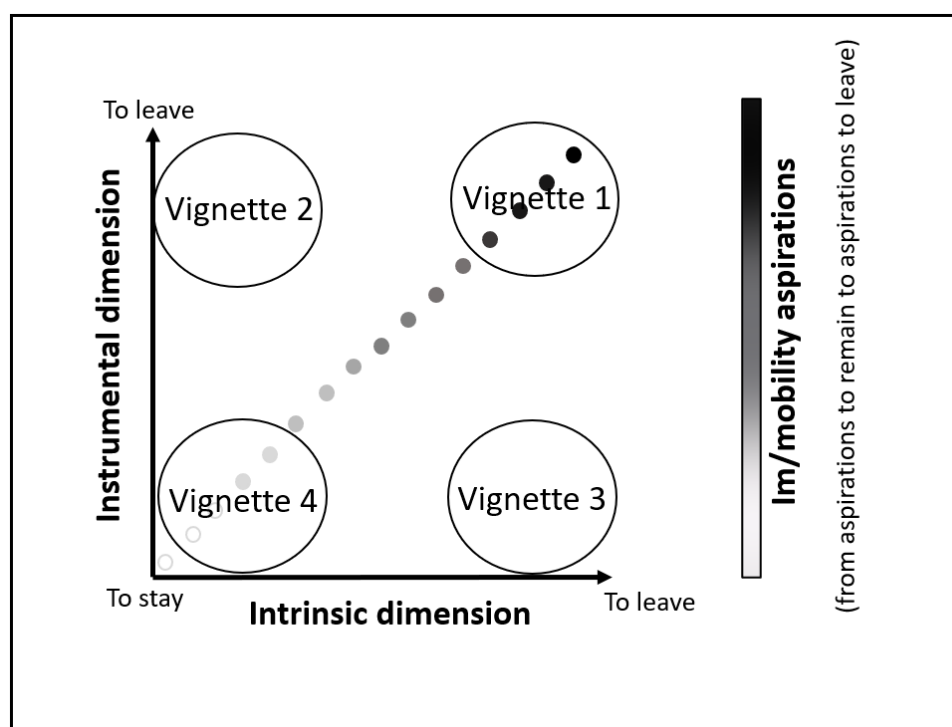
The interviewees were recruited through youth and local associations, such as Amilcar Cabral, and through snowballing sampling. In addition to conducting informal interviews, I also attended demonstrations and roundtables on the regions' future. These allowed me to observe the population's hope or despair regarding local opportunities and to conduct around fifty informal conversations. These matched the information of the interviews and showed that while some have reinforcing aspirations to move or stay, others are unsure about

what to do. All qualitative data was coded using the following structure: (1) migration-specific codes, which traced, among others, migration aspirations, reasons for migrating and the selection of ideal destinations, and (2) codes on life ambitions, family relationships, and perception of the past, present, and future. All the names used in this chapter are pseudonyms. The pseudonyms are consistently used across this and the two subsequent empirical chapters. Further information about the methodology and the data collection process is provided in Chapter 3, Section 2.3.

#### 4 FOUR SCENARIOS OF (IM)MOBILITY ASPIRATIONS: BETWEEN STRONG AND CONFLICTING ASPIRATIONS

This section presents the (im)mobility aspirations of 22 individuals in El Bierzo and Laciana in four vignettes. Vignette 1 introduces individuals with reinforcing migration aspirations. Vignettes two and three showcase conflicting aspirations. Finally, vignette 4 explores individuals with reinforcing aspirations to stay. These four vignettes map the aspirations of individuals at or near the extremes of aspiring to emigrate (Vignette 1) and aspiring to stay (Vignette 4), as well as the uncertainty surrounding those with conflicting (im)mobility aspirations that are not convinced about what to do (Vignette 2 and 3). Figure 28 shows where these aspirations are located along a continuum of intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of (im)mobility.

**Figure 28.** Locating the four vignettes on a continuum



Source: Own elaboration

##### 4.1 I WANT AND NEED TO GO

The sorrow for a booming past that ended 20 years ago is vividly present among older interviewees who remember the strong socio-economic fabric of El Bierzo and Laciana in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Chapter 6). However, just like in other studies on migration aspirations, age is a defining factor of strong aspirations to leave (Timmerman et al. 2014; van Mol et al. 2018), and mainly younger interviewees present both instrumental and intrinsic migration aspirations and consequently, *reinforcing* aspirations to emigrate. This is particularly the case for those in their 20s and early 30s, who do not recall the dynamic past but have

experienced the sharp economic decline and see the future with despair. Their migration aspirations are accompanied by negative views of socio-economic opportunities in El Bierzo and Laciana, as well as by a strong discontent with the cultural offer and political will. These perspectives support the findings of previous studies relating economic sluggishness and stagnation with increasing migration aspirations (Carling and Talleraas 2016). Carmen, who started working at 16, stresses the economic precarity, instability and uncertainty she has experienced for the last 5 years, which have fueled her migration aspirations:

“I realized I was not going to have anything here. There are no opportunities [...] I see that things are deteriorating, there are fewer and fewer opportunities. So, I am burned out. The little work we can find is either poorly paid, or precarious, or it is temporary work, or all combined [...] Either you go to work in a bar and work from 15:00 to closing time, earning a pittance, or there's no future here, that is, there's no future [...] The future I have here is to work in a bar because bars [...] they hire people all the time, but under what conditions?” (Carmen, Spain, 21 years old)

This same view is shared by other interviewees, who mentioned that the working standards and employment opportunities in El Bierzo and Laciana are not comparable to those available in bigger cities and abroad, and that the lack of dynamism is currently unstoppable and getting people down:

“I have this feeling that this is only happening here, and I am sure it is not the case, but I can't get rid of this feeling. Politically, economically, it goes from bad to worse and this has been going on for a long time. It doesn't seem [like] it is going to improve any time soon. And in a sense, I don't want to feel part of this process of decadence [...] So, yes, I want to go and see something new and see what it is like. Then, what I find there, I don't know if I will like it or not [but] I'll go” (David, Spain, 23 years old).

The weak economic fabric has permeated all aspects of life in both regions, and as a result, sluggishness is a pervasive characteristic underpinning migration aspirations. The lack of dynamism goes beyond economic opportunities, and additional constraints, linked to the poor cultural and educational offer, the political mismanagement, and the perceived lack of entrepreneurship intensify the interviewees' aspirations to leave. For instance, the scarce offer of university-level and vocational training education is 'pushing' people out. The local university campus in Ponferrada only offers six BA and two Master's level degrees, revolving around health sciences, and forest and mining engineering. While higher in number, the variety of vocational training courses is also scarce, and they mostly focus on IT technologies and some economic related courses. Consequently, migration aspirations are also linked to the ambition to get a better education. Isabel mentions: “My plan is to get a degree in Economics, which I cannot get here, and then, I would like to do a Master's degree or an interesting internship [...] I just want to get good training, a good education” (Isabel, Spain, 18 years old). The discontent about the lack of educational offering, in terms of seats and variety of courses, was also expressed by other interviewees, who perceive that El Bierzo and Laciana are left out in comparison to other close-by (but bigger) cities, such as Leon, Gijon, or Salamanca.

On top of looking for better life conditions and opportunities intrinsic aspirations to leave are also present, as some consider their happiness to be somewhere else. Carmen and Maria put it this way:

“There are people [...] who say: This is my home, my land, and I have my family here, so I stay. But that is not me. My friends, my family are here, but I see that I would not be happy here in the future. Well, I am not happy here now [...] I can't wait to leave” (Carmen, Spain, 21 years old).

“I just don't want to stay here because I have been here already for many years. And, well, in the end, I got a little tired of it. I want to study in other places, get to know other places. I love to travel. I know very few places in Spain, so I would love to travel around. Get to see what there is” (Maria, Portugal, 22 years old)

Others, like Isabel, associate emigration with breaking free, emancipating and growing as a person:

“I want to develop my personality, be on my own, and get to know myself a bit more. I have to learn to function alone, to be able to know what I am capable of. I think it is important for me to leave the nest. Even though I am afraid and even though I have been with my parents for my whole life, it is a good time to develop my strengths and to learn how to leave the nest” (Isabel, Spain, 18 years old).

This sub-section’s interviewees present strong, reinforcing migration aspirations. This is because instrumentally and intrinsically they aspire to either migrate internally or internationally. Not only are they convinced that they would get better life and working conditions elsewhere, which indicates strong instrumental aspirations to leave, but they also express happiness and wellbeing from the mere fact of moving, which reflects strong intrinsic migration aspirations. Since both dimensions of mobility converge in the same spatial category, they have *reinforcing migration aspirations*. They are convinced that leaving is better than staying and they have no doubts about the decision they have taken. Nevertheless, their reinforcing migration aspirations do not necessarily result in high migration capabilities and instead some are stuck in place (see Chapter 8).

## 4.2 BETWEEN THE HAMMER AND THE ANVIL

In the next two subsections, I present *conflicting aspirations*. I first explore the aspirations of those with instrumental aspirations to leave and intrinsic aspirations to stay, and then, I delve into the experiences of those with instrumental aspirations to stay but intrinsic aspirations to leave.

### *I want to stay but need to go*

The increasing instability and poor employment opportunities in El Bierzo and Laciana act as ‘push factors’ enhancing migration aspirations, as some consider they cannot develop professionally locally. Concurrently, however, some participants hold important aspirations to remain in place, as they experience strong place attachment and aspire to be close to family and friends. Consequently, they are not convinced of whether staying or leaving is more convenient, and they are immersed in an uncertain decision-making process, unable to decide what is best: emigrating to achieve a career – which might concurrently enhance their wellbeing –, or remain in a place they associate with joy, happiness, and peace.

Mateo, for example, loves El Bierzo, his family and friends are there, and he associates the region with happiness and inner peace; nevertheless, he also aspires to develop a career as a mechatronic, which he cannot do in El Bierzo. He highlights:

“My options are very limited because no matter how much I want to, my work cannot be done online and here we would need an industry to flourish. Or else it would be impossible [to get a job], or I would have to work in something else or in a more precarious way. If there was any [employment] left, that’s it. It is either to live here in any sort of way or go abroad to make the life you want. But out of here [...] So it is not that I want to leave [...] We leave because the opportunities are there and there are none here. [...] Not even in Spain. So, the only way to survive economically is to go abroad, even if you don’t want to. It’s either going abroad or nothing. It is the only option we have [...] But what I want is to be home, with my people, my family, in my area. In this place which is mine. But if you get a good job, a good contract [abroad], I wouldn’t be able to come back, no matter how much I want to [...] One thing is what we would like, another thing is what there is. So, how to choose?” (Mateo, Spain, 23 years old).

Mateo sees his freewill limited by structural constraints and he highlights that the difficulty in reaching a decision is a result of what he voluntarily would choose to do – stay – and what the economic circumstances are pushing him to consider – leave. Valeria, whose life and migration aspirations are presented in the next sub-section, confirms that her brother, Jaime, who has never thought about migrating, is in a similar situation:

“V: I have moved around quite a lot, but my brother has always stayed here in Ponferrada [...] He has always been very home loving and he has stayed here happily. He wanted and wants to stay. But now, he is starting to fool around with the idea of leaving [...] Here he has a job, but not a good job: It is poorly paid and there are long hours. So, he is fooling around with the idea of saying, well, if I find a good job nearby, I am leaving. I am selling the apartment and I am leaving. I have never heard that from my brother before. [...] He prefers to stay here, at home, he prefers to stay in Ponferrada because he loves, loves the place. But people get tired of the situation, you know? But I have never seen my brother like this.

N: How?

V: Not knowing what to do. Unhappy. Stuck” (Valeria, Spain, 41 years old).

While Jaime, who is in his early 40s, did not agree to be interviewed, he was happy to have informal, unrecorded conversations with me, as well as to allow me to observe his interactions with Valeria and his parents. During our encounters, he corroborated that he feels ‘paralyzed’ and ‘between two stools’, unhappy in El Bierzo but not convinced that internal migration is a better option. The happiness he feels in El Bierzo and his strong place attachment fuel his aspirations to stay, however, he wants a professional promotion, an above minimum wage job, and better living standards, which he cannot get staying in place. Uncertainty, insecurity and in-betweenness were notions that he mentioned repeatedly. Emma confirms these emotions:

“I would like to work here because it is where all my family is. I feel good here. In the end, it is your country, your place and you are always going to be tied to where you were born, I think [...] But life is complicated. I mean, how can you know? If this place dies and there is no more work, then I have to leave. I would have to. I cannot live all my life off my father. If there is no work here, then I will have to leave, like everybody else [...] Thinking about the future is overwhelming. It is screwed up. I don’t know what to do” (Emma, Spain, 21 years old).

Lucas also emphasizes:

“L: Professionally the situation is pretty obvious. I don’t see a future here. Unless by chance I manage to work in one of the few photography stores, it is impossible to make a living as a photographer here. Completely impossible. For me the only way to go is to leave [...] But I would like to stay in El Bierzo. It’s going to sound bad, but I think this is one of the most beautiful places. It is a beautiful place, and I would love this to be the place where I could come back to rest. It would give me a lot of peace of mind, which I don’t have now. I am hesitant because I am not convinced about what is best and I don’t know how to get out of this situation. I am stressed. You live abroad, right?

N: Yes.

L: What would you do?” (Lucas, Spain, 23 years old).

Lucas directly asked me for my opinion in our first conversation. Although, more subtly, Mateo, Jaime and Emma also did the same after a few encounters. How to choose and what to do were recurrent questions in our multiple conversations and doubts they raised to close friends and family members. While they try to familiarize themselves with the ‘migratory’ experience by asking acquaintances abroad about their situation, they, concurrently, also try to shape change in the regions to increase their chances of staying. They do so by being involved in demonstrations and shopping locally. Mateo stressed:

“I know it is not much. It is not going to change the fact that this place is dying. But we can’t give up. I might very well leave soon, and I could not stand leaving without trying to stay here first. You know what I am saying?” (Mateo, Spain, 23 years old).

Lucas, Jaime, Emma, and Mateo have two sentiments in common: conflicting emotions and a feeling of hesitancy. This shows the difficulty of choosing *where* to be when intrinsic and instrumental dimensions collide, as they perceive their agency to be constrained by a lack of structural opportunities. In one of our conversations, Jaime mentioned: “My decision is not mine anymore” which resembles Lucas’ observation: “If I leave, I am not leaving. They are pushing me out”. Similarly, Mateo is concurrently looking forward to leaving the student life behind to enter the labor market and, simultaneously, wishing for his vocational training course not to end so he can postpone the decision-making process:

M: I can’t make a decision. I have to. But I can’t. I will have to go. I know that. It is so much.

N: How do you feel about that?

M: I feel defeated. And sad. But also hopeful, in a way.

N: Do you think it is the best for you?

M: No. No. It is a good enough plan, you know? A plan B. The best for me would be to stay here. With a job, obviously. But that would be an ideal, rosy world.” (Mateo, Spain, 23 years old).

These interviewees have concurrently strong aspirations to leave and remain, and their decision-making process is entangled by *conflicting* life ambitions. Their situations question whether migration is voluntary for those who have conflicting aspirations in the same way it is for those with reinforcing intrinsic and instrumental migration aspirations. In Section 5 of this chapter, I discuss the relevance of differentiating between both dimensions of (im)mobility, and how this approach can be applied to analyze the ‘(in)voluntariness’ of migration on a continuum rather than in a dichotomous classification of forced versus voluntary migration.

### ***I want to go but need to stay*<sup>125</sup>**

Apart from local opportunities and constraints, migration aspirations are also shaped by group dynamics. Individual convictions about *where* to live a ‘good life’ can be overridden by collective aspirations, such as familial decisions about where members should live (Rodriguez-Pena 2023). This is because family members influence other members (im)mobility by facilitating and encouraging but also hindering and opposing migration (Adeel and Yeh 2018; de Haas and Fokkema 2010), and because aspiring migrants can be subjected to family obligations (Fleischer 2007). In this way, individuals migrate to allow other members to stay put (Mata-Codesal 2018), or they set aside their intrinsic migration aspirations to contribute to other members’ migration (Rodriguez-Pena 2023). The latter is the case of Antonio, Julia, Valeria, Daniel, and Eduardo, who illustrate how individuals set aside individual intrinsic migration aspirations for the family’s sake, showcasing the relational aspect of migration.

Antonio is a returnee. He emigrated in his early 20s within Spain out of curiosity to discover new places but also to secure a job as a high school teacher. While he had no aspirations to return to El Bierzo, he did so in his 50s because of family responsibilities:

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<sup>125</sup> The theoretical underpinning of this subsection is largely based on Rodriguez-Pena (2023), where I argue for the differentiation between individual and collective (im)mobility aspirations and capabilities. Individual aspirations are the convictions dictating where individual see themselves living a good life, while collective aspirations capture group convictions about where family members should live. Individual capabilities refer to the resources that individuals own, whereas collective capabilities are the resources that the family network owns, which cannot be accessed without the permission of other group members.

A: I worked in several places within Asturias. In Vegadeo, I was also in Oviedo for a couple of years, then I moved to Sotrondio for another couple of years. I lived in other places as well. Then I settled down here [...]

N: Why did you come back?

A: It was a responsibility, more than anything else. I would have preferred not to come back, but I had to make a decision. I didn't want to, but, well, in the end, there was the responsibility [towards the family] [...] I am an only child, and I was going to take care of them [his parents]. I needed to. That was clear" (Antonio, Spain, 60 years old).

Antonio illustrates how aspirations might collide following familial responsibilities, and the fact that individuals sometimes set individual, intrinsic aspirations aside for the family's sake. A clash between individual preferences and collective responsibilities also triggered the immobility of Julia, who is in her late 50s and works as a dental prosthetist. Julia took over the family business and finances as a young adult, which prevented her from emigrating. Becoming the main breadwinner of the family meant putting her intrinsic migration aspirations in second place:

J: I would have loved to leave because I am a restless arse. Not because I didn't have a future here. I did [...] I did not need to go out. There was always work back then. This place was very dynamic [...] But myself, my idea was to always go abroad. Live in a different country. It was my life dream.

N: What kept you here?

J: Family. The family business. I felt totally obliged to work in the family business [...] I am too rooted to my family and all that, so I couldn't say no. Or I didn't know how to say no, maybe. I was too young. But I would have loved it [to migrate]. I have always wanted to move, even before I got together with my now ex-husband. He didn't want to leave, but I wanted to. My family didn't have that need. They liked it here. And I stayed" (Julia, Spain, 56 years old).

Both Antonio and Julia allude to a past decision-making process, where they experienced conflicting aspirations, but they decided to return 'home' or remain in place due to familial obligations. They highlight how their life satisfaction was negatively affected by such decisions, yet immobility was not an inactive process for them. Instead, it was a conscious but constrained choice that entailed setting intrinsic, individual aspirations aside. The cases of Valeria, Jaime's sister, and Daniel also revolve around caregiving responsibilities, but their decision-making process is taking place at present. Valeria is an English teacher in her early 40s and, when she was in her early 20s, she first emigrated to Barcelona then moved to Australia to finally settle in Madrid. She returned to El Bierzo before COVID-19. Although she did not aspire to return, her father was diagnosed with advanced cancer and she became the primary caregiver. She mentions that she cannot leave at the moment, because

"my father has pancreatic cancer so right now I can't move from here because, honestly, he has 3 more days left. As soon as it happens...whatever happens, whatever it has to happen, I feel more liberated in the sense that, well, I would not have to be here [...] Right now I am looking after my father and doing what I need to do for him and my family. I mean, you see, [before coming back] I was thinking of moving to Ireland. To travel, discover a different place. I needed to go because my blood was burning [...] That's how I am. I would like to leave, to be somewhere else teaching English or Spanish, but I might need to stay here dying of disgust" (Valeria, Spain, 41 years old).

Daniel's case is similar. Originally from Pakistan, he emigrated to Spain when he was 5 years old. His father passed away in 2020, when he became the manager of a relatively successful fruit shop in Ponferrada, as well

as the provider for his mother and five younger siblings. His new situation means that his aspirations and plans to migrate to the UK, where he has family and friends, have been postponed:

D: I was about to leave at the end of 2019, but my father got very sick, so I delayed the trip. Then, the pandemic happened, my father passed away and all of a sudden I was in charge of everything and everyone. So, I cannot leave now. They need me.

N: What about your plans?

D: What plans? I cannot plan as I wish anymore. I need to take care of the fruit shop. I have to provide for my mother, my sisters. I am the head [of the family] now.

N: How did you decide?

D: I didn't. Life decided for me. Maybe when they [his sisters] get married, I can leave. But not now" (Daniel, Pakistan, 21 years old).

Their role as caretakers confronted their individual aspirations with responsibilities towards the kin, which triggered the decision to postpone their intrinsic aspirations to migrate and discover new places. This shows the importance of exploring the relational aspect of migration aspirations to, consequently, investigate whether individuals migrate or stay put for their or the family's benefit, and how they perceive the (in)voluntariness of their (im)mobility. Indeed, the clash between the interviewees' intrinsic aspirations to leave and the instrumental need to stay negatively affected their life satisfaction and agency, even when, although constrained, immobility was a relatively active choice. Valeria, for example, mentions:

"My father is not keeping me here himself. He tells me to go back to Madrid or to leave for Ireland because he knows that is what I want to do. He also thinks he is getting better, and he is not. So, yes, it is my decision but at the same time I feel I don't have an alternative. If I leave, I will feel terrible, guilty. So, I can't" (Valeria, Spain, 41 years old).

Antonio confirms:

"I could have put them [his parents] in a nursing home, but I wasn't fond of the idea. I thought about it, but I felt guilty. They took care of me. I needed to take care of them. They didn't make me [come back], but I felt it wasn't about me anymore. My life was out of my control somehow, you understand? [...] And after a while, I came to terms with being here. Not 100% happy, but...satisfied, I guess" (Antonio, Spain, 60 years old).

In addition to feeling guilty and responsible, another common sentiment, especially for Daniel and Valeria, who are younger, is hope for the future. Depending on how their personal situations unravel, they are still hopeful that they will be able to regain control of their lives and potentially fulfill their migration aspirations. In the cases of Antonio and Julia, while they still have migration aspirations, these have decreased over the years as their family responsibilities have increased and they have developed adaptation strategies to increase their content (I explore these in Chapter 9).

As I have argued before (Rodriguez-Pena 2023), it is essential to distinguish between individual and collective migration aspirations and capabilities. Such differentiation manifests the relational aspect of migration. More importantly, it facilitates examining, firstly, how individual, familial and community convictions about where to live are intertwined and, as a result, how individual (im)mobility can be shaped by the family as well as by socio-cultural norms. Secondly, it stresses when individual (im)mobility is completely voluntary and when it is

mediated, limited, and driven by other family members. This calls to theorize (in)voluntariness in a spectrum of degrees, rather than in dichotomous categories of voluntary versus forced migration.

### 4.3 I WANT AND NEED TO STAY

Despite the economic decline and the financial gains migration could provide (Harris and Todaro 1970), particularly for the youth, some individuals in El Bierzo and Laciana clearly display strong and reinforcing aspirations to stay. This is because their aspirations are based on alternative meanings of the 'good life' that treasure non-financial life aspects, as well as on aspirations to develop and shape regional change.

First, the life aspirations of some depart from highly successful careers and from giving prime importance to the financial situation of a place. Rather, they value being close to family and friends, the natural environment, and the tranquility and security they associate with 'home'. Voluntary immobility in sluggish scenarios, such as El Bierzo and Laciana, is often seen as economically irrational due to the economic bias underpinning much of migration research (Clark and Lisowski 2017). However, more recently, scholars are showcasing that immobility can also be an active decision providing people with wellbeing and happiness, even in stagnant scenarios (Mata-Codesal 2015; Vezzoli 2022). For instance, Lucia is voluntarily immobile, and her immobility is not a by-product of a lack of migration but the 'product' itself (see Preece 2018: 1784):

"I decided to establish my life here and I am still here. I don't regret it [...] I decided to have a family, to dedicate some years to them, we did well economically, I did well in my relationship with my partner, and so on. So, I had economic and, more importantly, emotional stability [...] It's not so much the place, but the situation, you know?" (Lucia, Spain, 51 years old).

The last sentence of Lucia's quote "it's not so much the place, but the situation" stresses the value of perceptions and subjective well-being. While El Bierzo and Laciana are perceived as void of opportunities for some, others see the situation differently and find value in non-economic life aspects, including being 'home' and close to family. Diego mentions: "I like it here, with lots of meadows, lots of mountains. I'm not so much a city person [...] and all the people I know are here" (Spain, 18 years old). A strong place attachment is also fueling the aspirations to remain of Marina, who after a brief educational exchange in France in her mid-teens, returned to El Bierzo. She currently has no intention of leaving as her previous migration

"boosted my love for my home. Many people leave and it's an eye-opening experience. For me, it was the opposite. I realized how great it is here. France was dizzying for me. It was a very stressful life. I was in a city, not excessively big, but every morning we had to take the bus, take the tram to go somewhere. For me it was very chaotic. When I got home again, I said: What a wonder, what a wonder. It depends on the place and the experience, but in my case, it opened my eyes to like my home even more" (Marina, Spain, 18 years old).

Secondly, aspirations to stay are, in some cases, accompanied by discontent and complemented by strong desires to see El Bierzo and Laciana develop socio-economically. This is particularly so when interviewees feel relatively endowed and responsible towards their homeland. Relative endowment offers a complementary view of the well-known concept of relative deprivation, and it refers to the relative well-being that individuals experience in relation to a reference group (Vezzoli 2022). In this research, it captures non-migrants' well-being in relation to other non-migrants that are perceived to be worse off and to people in other contexts (e.g., urban areas)<sup>126</sup>. Leo, for example, mentions that his aspirations to remain in Laciana are tied up to shaping change: "I am doing great, and I am one of the few that can say that. If I don't stay, who will?". Feeling responsible and

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<sup>126</sup> Vezzoli (2022, 5) defines relative endowment as "a feeling of relative privilege and well-being experienced by non-migrants in relation to several reference groups, such as past and present migrant groups as well as non-migrants who are perceived to be worse off".

refusing to allow the regions to die is a sentiment that, particularly, older generations share, as they feel that they have the financial capacity to contribute to local development. Apart from Leo, Rafael, a 66-year-old mine owner who benefited from early retirement, mentions:

“I believe that God put me on earth with an obligation. They made me a businessman, they made me have a career, and I have to create jobs, I have to do things. In 2004 [when he retired], if I had put the money in my pocket I could have lived very well, but I decided that I had to create, that I had to help, and I got into the [golf] sector. But then, the famous crisis of 2008 came by, and everything went south [...] [His second son] has a sports shop here. He told me: Dad, I am leaving [to the USA] but I might come back. This was 8 years ago. I am trying to keep the store for him [...] I have not only stayed in business, but I have multiplied it” (Rafael, Spain, 66 years old).

Place attachment, the presence of social networks, and aspirations to see the regions develop are strong rationales encouraging immobility among some interviewees. This contradicts the neoliberal logic that associates the ‘good life’ with financial prosperity and socio-economic mobility (Spohrer, Stahl and Bowers-Brown 2017; Stahl 2014), which has resulted in perceiving voluntary immobility in places in economic decay as failure and as a synonym of limited aspirations (Clark and Lisowski 2017). Yet, the ‘good life’ is linked to what people value and, therefore, economic crises do not automatically result in large migrations. The volume of migration following economic sluggishness depends on the duration, geographical reach, severity of the crisis, as well as on who is affected by it (Vezzoli 2022). Subjective interpretations of social change and future possibilities capture how people behave, and distinct life ambitions, priorities and values can encourage aspirations to stay, even in lethargic regions. This is particularly the case when individuals value non-financial aspects of life, including family, friends, or the environment over capital accumulation (Hofstede, Salemink and Haartsen 2022; Vezzoli 2022).

## **5 THE IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENTIATING INTRINSIC AND INSTRUMENTAL (IM)MOBILITY ASPIRATIONS**

The vignettes have illustrated either convinced and *reinforcing* aspirations about where to be or *conflicting* aspirations and strong uncertainty about what the best decision – staying or leaving – is. While other combinations are also possible – e.g., mild migration aspirations or weak conflicting aspirations –, throughout the four vignettes I have illustrated that bringing the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of (im)mobility aspirations together is important for three reasons: (1) to conceptualize aspirations in a spectrum of degrees, which facilitates (2) theorizing (in)voluntariness on a continuum and (3) analyzing how life aspirations and socio-cultural expectations relate to (im)mobility aspirations.

First, analyzing the different dimensions of (im)mobility facilitates measuring aspirations in a spectrum of degrees. While survey questionnaires tend to measure aspirations in yes/no questions (Carling and Schewel 2018, 948-949), which simplifies the choices for participants (Carling 2019), aspirations are complex phenomena and, generally, only individuals with firm convictions, at or near the extremes of aspiring to migrate or stay, give predictable answers. Among my interviewees only those in Vignette 1 and 4 present established convictions and, therefore, strong aspirations to move or remain, respectively. Conversely, the answers of the interviewees with conflicting aspirations depended on the context, the formulation of the questions, and the degree to which I delved into their life aspirations and migratory convictions. Mild, conditional, and conflicting aspirations cannot be measured in yes/no categories. Instead, mechanisms examining the “different strengths and dimensions of migration aspirations” (Carling and Schewel 2018, 950) are needed, which this chapter provides. Examining how the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of human (im)mobility interact is a solution to capture the strength of aspirations as it allows exploring how convinced individuals are about their decision and how (im)mobility relates to their overall life ambitions.

Secondly, differentiating between instrumental and intrinsic aspirations provides a framework to partially unpack the voluntariness of (im)mobility<sup>127</sup> and delve into the experiences and interpretations of both migrants and non-migrants. It facilitates exploring whether (im)mobility is voluntary to the same extent when intrinsic and instrumental aspirations collide rather than reinforce. When both dimensions clash migration or immobility might not be liberating experiences but, instead, a result of a lack of opportunities to either remain or leave, or a consequence of familial responsibilities and socio-cultural expectations. In these cases, people might see their life possibilities limited as they need to choose between what provides them with direct wellbeing and what they ought to do for utilitarian reasons. Is migration voluntary when there are no available options to earn a decent living in place? Is immobility voluntary when the family hinders or disapproves migration? If volition is understood as the variety and quality of alternatives available to individuals to either migrate or remain in place, the answer to these questions is no (Bivand Erdal and Oeppen 2018). This is because possibilities for mere survival cannot be interpreted as reasonable alternatives to develop the self, and, instead, we need to question what kind of alternatives are enough to consider migration or immobility *completely* voluntary and investigate how aspirations are formed under different circumstances. Differentiating instrumental and intrinsic aspirations and examining whether these reinforce or collide enables researching this as we can analyze (1) the rationales for migrating or staying in place, (2) the aspirations and desires of individuals (Carling and Collins 2018), and (3) the volition involved in migration or immobility. The distinction of both dimensions of aspirations, together with differentiating the dimensions making up capabilities (Chapter 8), makes it possible to incorporate all forms of (in)voluntariness into a single, comprehensive framework. I present this framework in Chapter 10, where I bring together the insights of this chapter and Chapter 8.

Finally, differentiating both dimensions also eases analyzing how and at what level socio-cultural expectations can either facilitate or hinder individual aspirations, and when and how members might need to set their intrinsic aspirations aside either because of family responsibilities or due to collective expectations. I have previously argued for the necessity to differentiate between individual and collective (im)mobility aspirations (Rodriguez-Pena 2023). Individual aspirations refer to the convictions that dictate where individuals envision themselves living a good life, whereas collective aspirations are the group convictions about where group members should live. Distinguishing between individual and collective levels within the aspiration-capability framework sets the scene to investigate more deeply the interactions between individuals and social groups (see Mata-Codezal 2019) and explore, for example, how intra-household power dynamics might affect individual aspirations and capabilities (Carling and Schewel 2018, 958) or how individual aspirations are affected by a culture of migration or permanence. Nevertheless, such differentiation does not indicate exactly how or at what level social expectations and family members constrain or encourage migration or immobility. Examining instrumental and intrinsic individual aspirations can elucidate when and how members might need to set their intrinsic aspirations aside either because of family responsibilities or due to collective expectations. This permits questioning, for instance, whether individual migration aspirations in a village characterized by a culture of emigration responds to an innate desire to migrate or, instead, if it answers to socio-cultural expectations and only has an instrumental rationale.

## 6 CONCLUSION: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON ASPIRATIONS

This chapter proposes an approach to conceptualize aspirations in a spectrum of degrees and to account for the various strengths and configurations of aspirations. It does so by analyzing how instrumental and intrinsic aspirations interact, and it shows that aspirations can be reinforcing but also conflicting. While *reinforcing aspirations* capture strong convictions about what is more convenient – staying or leaving –, *conflicting aspirations* stress that instrumental and intrinsic aspirations can collide. Conflicting aspirations showcase, on the

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<sup>127</sup> I say partially because it is important to acknowledge how the capability to move or remain also shapes (in)voluntariness.

one hand, that the formation of (im)mobility aspirations is not always a straight-forward process, as myriad life ambitions need to be considered and 'ranked' before these are formed, which stresses the complexity of pre-migration decision-making processes. On the other hand, the fact that conflicting aspirations exist means that, while some might postpone the decision-making process, others might migrate, even when it means sacrificing personal wellbeing. This calls to explore whether migration is voluntary to the same extent when intrinsic and instrumental aspirations collide or reinforce each other.

The proposed approach is not only important to (1) further operationalize aspirations and their 'strength', but also to research (2) how life and (im)mobility aspirations relate to each other and (3) what the desirability of migration is. Especially, because it theorizes the existence of conflicting aspirations and the dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and in-betweenness that some (aspiring) migrants feel. This framework is useful to further theory-building around the concept of 'aspirations' and two-step migration approaches; perhaps, more importantly, the framework also adds to decision-making theories and theories of (in)voluntariness by offering a simple approach to better understand the pre-migration process, contributing to key subfields of migration studies.

Apart from furthering theory-building, the insights of this chapter also show that perceived involuntariness is present in high-income countries, and that, therefore, this is not an inherent characteristic of low- and moderate-income countries, but, rather, a ramification of constrained opportunities and socio-cultural expectations which, although to varying degrees, are present across the 'development spectrum' (Azmanova 2020). The dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and feelings of in-betweenness and 'stuckness' that those with conflicting aspirations in El Bierzo and Laciana feel question whether their immobility is currently voluntary and whether their mobility will be voluntary in the future would they emigrate (Vignettes 3 and 2, respectively). Acknowledging the obvious differences and opportunities between those in the 'Global North' and the 'Global South', this chapter calls to end dichotomous (di)visions on migration aspirations, considering that emigration from the 'North' is often romanticized and research on the aspirations of the 'precariat' in high-income countries remains scarce. More systematic research on the formation of aspirations of those in neglected and deprived regions is, therefore, needed, regardless of the country of origin and residence (Mata-Codesal 2019).

## CHAPTER 8 – THE CONTINUUM OF CAPABILITIES

### 1 INTRODUCING CAPABILITIES IN A SPECTRUM OF DEGREES

Shifting from the (im)mobility aspirations of individuals in El Bierzo and Laciana, this chapter develops an approach to conceptualize capabilities to migrate or remain on a continuum. It does so because, since the first iteration of the aspirations-ability approach (Carling 2002), scholars have particularly focused on investigating aspirations to migrate (Carling 2002; Carling and Schewel 2018; Drotbohm 2015; Jónsson 2008) and to stay (Mata-Codesal 2018; Schewel 2015; Vezzoli 2022). In comparison, the theorization of migration capabilities has remained comparatively scarcer, even though Development Studies scholars have made important contributions to operationalize these (I acknowledged this in Chapter 2, Section 2.2). The lack of conceptualization and operationalization of (im)mobility capabilities is unfortunate as it leaves theorization around two-step migration approaches incomplete. This chapter aims to address this gap in the literature by exploring how the two dimensions of capabilities – the external and the internal – interact, and how these interactions explain the strength of capabilities and the likelihood of fulfilling aspirations.

As shown in Chapter 2 (see Section 2.2), within migration studies, capabilities refer to the “the freedom to choose where to live – including the option to stay” (de Haas 2021, 4), and they are composed of two dimensions: the external and the internal. The external dimension reflects structural options and opportunities, while the internal dimension captures individual resources and abilities to exert control over one’s life and fulfill life and (im)mobility aspirations (Gasper 1997, 2002, 2017; Jackson 2014; de Haas 2021)<sup>128</sup>. External and internal capabilities are not only applicable to migration but also to immobility and to the aspirations to remain. Although often taken for granted, capabilities to remain can be constrained as living a ‘good, worthy’ life while remaining in place can be difficult. For instance, economic crises, a natural disaster, or a coup d’état can result in a lack of local opportunities making immobility (temporarily) impossible, regardless of strong aspirations to stay put. To also capture who can remain in place, this chapter investigates both the *capabilities to migrate* and *to remain*.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with 14 individuals in El Bierzo and Laciana (Northwest Spain), this chapter explores how aspiring migrants perceive<sup>129</sup> their ‘opportunity structure’, as well as their resources and skills to fulfill their aspirations. By doing so, I present an approach that theorizes capabilities in a spectrum of degrees, rather than in dichotomous ‘high’ versus ‘low’ conceptual boxes, and I answer the following questions: How do people perceive the likelihood of fulfilling their life and (im)mobility aspirations? How does the ‘opportunity structure’ and individual resources impact this perception? How is the voluntariness of migration perceived when there are no local economic alternatives? The chapter argues that capabilities can only be (very) high when both the external and internal dimensions of capabilities coincide and surpass a (subjective) threshold (e.g., an aspiring migrant with high citizenship capital and enough resources to fund movement). Similarly, capabilities are only *extremely* low when both dimensions are very poor: think, for example, about an individual based in a low-income country with restrictive exit rights, low exit and settlement freedom, as well as with very limited economic and educational resources. (Very) high and (very) low capabilities represent ideal categories, situated at or near the ends of a spectrum. Yet, there are other possibilities as capabilities can be *limited* and external and internal capabilities can slightly or strongly diverge. For example, high citizenship capital (i.e., high external capabilities) can be accompanied by insufficient economic resources to fund movement (i.e., low

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<sup>128</sup> Different terms have been used to refer to these two dimensions. While Jackson (2014) sticks with external and internal capabilities, Gasper (1997, 2007, 2017) differentiates between S-capabilities and O-capabilities, and de Haas (2021) between positive and negative liberties. S-capabilities and positive liberty refer to internal capabilities, while O-capabilities and negative liberty to external capabilities. I stick with the concepts of external and internal capabilities because I believe they are more intuitive. A comprehensive literature review of the concept is provided in Chapter 2, Section 2.2.

<sup>129</sup> This chapter focuses on *potential* capabilities and therefore investigates how people *perceive* what they can do in the future and how they can fulfill their aspirations to migrate or remain.

internal capabilities). The varying interactions of both dimensions can lead, therefore, to other gradients apart from ‘high’ and ‘low’ capabilities, which I conceptualize as *limited capabilities*. This chapter provides rich insights to conceptualize these as well as to explore the different gradients of the (in)voluntariness of (im)mobility. In so doing, this chapter contributes to migration studies by providing (1) a theoretical approach to further conceptualize and theorize migration capabilities, as well as rich insights into what the consequences of limited and low capabilities are for (2) the decision-making process and (3) perceptions of (in)voluntariness. This adds to the ambition of this thesis of advancing middle-range theorizing of two-step migration approaches. Furthermore, the chapter adds to my overall argument by demonstrating that migration aspirations are not systematically fulfilled in high-income countries, as structural constraints and limited emigration know-how limit human agency – although to varying degrees – across the ‘development spectrum’, resulting in *involuntary immobility* also in the ‘Global North’.

The chapter continues as follows. It first theorizes how the two dimensions of capabilities interact and how their interaction results in a gradient of freedoms to choose *where* to live – either at home or elsewhere. After presenting the methodology and background information on the field site, the chapter uses four vignettes to empirically apply the theoretical approach. The vignettes depict four interactions of external-internal capabilities: (1) individuals with high capabilities to choose where to live, (2) individuals with limited capabilities to move, (3) individuals with limited capabilities to remain, and (4) individuals with very low or no movement freedom. Table 21 offers an overview of the vignettes. The chapter ends with a discussion on the implications of distinguishing between the external and internal dimensions of capabilities.

**Table 21.** Four vignettes of the capabilities to move and to stay

|                   | Location in the capabilities continuum    | External capabilities | Internal capabilities | Interviews illustrating this pattern              |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Vignette 1</b> | High capabilities to choose where to live | High                  | High                  | David; Isabel; Diego; Diana; Valeria; Leo         |
| <b>Vignette 2</b> | Limited migration capabilities            | Limited               | Limited               | Carmen; Maria; Emma; Lucas; Mimi; Agatha; Manuela |
| <b>Vignette 3</b> | Limited capabilities to remain            | Limited               | Limited               | Mateo; Lucas                                      |
| <b>Vignette 4</b> | Low capabilities to choose where to live  | Low                   | Low                   | Theory-based                                      |

Source: Own elaboration

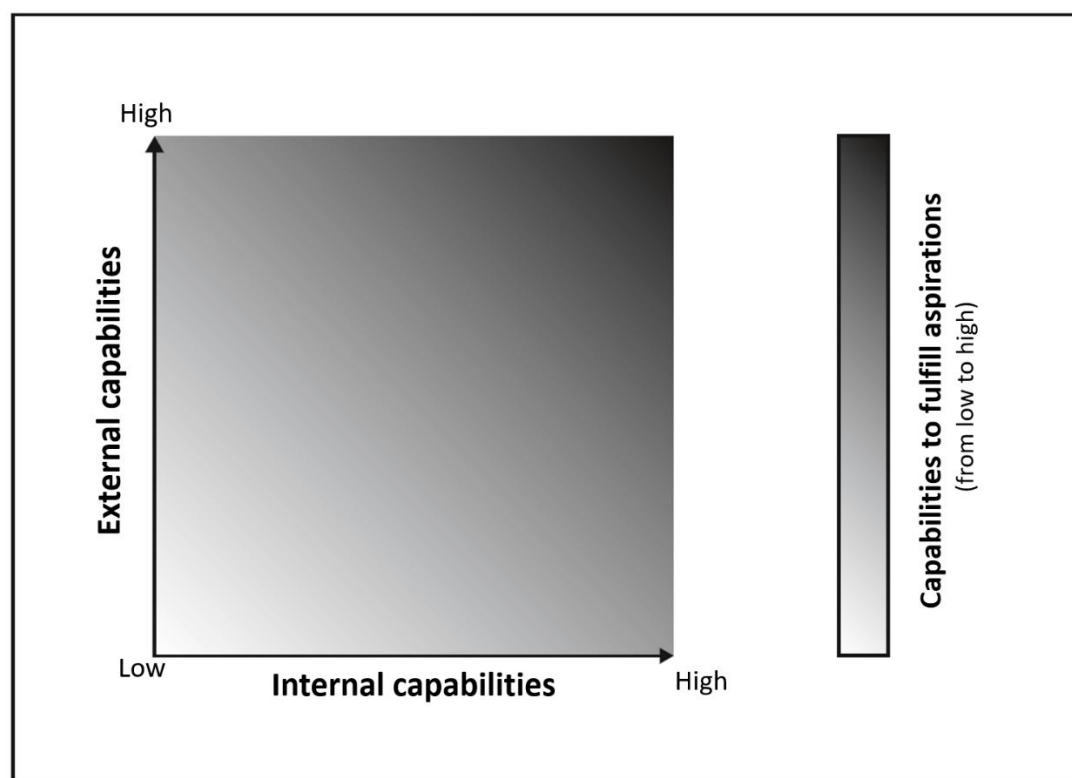
## 2 THE EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL DIMENSIONS OF CAPABILITIES

How can we measure capabilities and understand how people perceive them? Certainly, the macro-level context and individual resources and skills play an important role, as capabilities are simultaneously shaped by the external structure and by individual resources and abilities: while a lack of development at the national, regional, or local level (de Haas and Fransen 2018), the border regime (Carling 2002) and a state of violence and danger (Lubkemann 2008) constrain human agency, individual resources, skills and abilities are necessary to benefit from structural opportunities, or, instead, to be further constrained by structural obstacles. Consider, for example, the limited capabilities of impoverished individuals to migrate despite nominal movement freedom

(de Haas 2021), or the fact that socio-economic resources favor abilities to return among refugees despite ongoing conflict<sup>130</sup> (Müller-Funk and Fransen 2022).

Considering that “one cannot have capability in the sense of opportunity freedom if one lacks capability in the agency senses” (Gasper 2017, 340), the external and internal dimensions of capabilities are interrelated to one another (see Chapter 2, Section 2.2 for a more detailed discussion on the terms and their interrelation). This chapter proposes an approach that elucidates how the interaction of both dimensions leads to varying configurations and strengths of capabilities. The approach conceptualizes capabilities in a spectrum of degrees and accounts for (1) high capabilities, (2) low capabilities, and (3) limited capabilities. In all the cases, capabilities capture both migration capabilities and capabilities to remain. Figure 29 visually summarizes the approach.

**Figure 29.** (Im)mobility capabilities derived from the external and internal dimensions



Source: Own elaboration

*High capabilities* are a result of not being constrained by structural obstacles, which means having high external capabilities, and, concurrently, having enough resources to either stay or fund movement – this is, having high internal capabilities. High capabilities are located in the upper-right quadrant of Figure 29. *Low capabilities* capture an opposing scenario, where important structural constraints (i.e., low external capabilities) and a lack of resources and agency (i.e., low internal capabilities) handicap movement as well as having a ‘good life’ in situ (lower-left quadrant). *Limited capabilities* capture limitations to choose where to live, and they represent an in-between state between low and high capabilities. They account for the individuals that are not located at or near the extremes of the continuum. This means individuals with both limited external and internal capabilities for whom migration or immobility, though not impossible, would be much more challenging (those around the center of Figure 29). Limited capabilities can also capture individuals with strongly deviating capabilities, in which one dimension is high while the other is low. This means having (1) high internal capabilities but low external capabilities (lower-right quadrant) or (2) low internal capabilities but high external capabilities (upper-left quadrant). The first scenario captures, for instance, somebody unable to stay (temporarily) in place due to

<sup>130</sup> The possibility of refugees to return is also linked to structural conditions in their home country (Müller-Funk 2019).

extreme climate events or a state of violence and danger, and ‘forced’ to temporarily migrate to a close-by city or internationally. The second scenario refers to an individual unable to move due to a precarious job and limited savings, despite high citizenship capital. Limited capabilities do not necessarily mean that individuals cannot migrate or stay after all, but rather that their options to do so are limited by either structural constraints or scarce resources. Consequently, the decision-making and preparation process require more time and energy in comparison to somebody with high capabilities. Yet, not all with limited capabilities require the same level of time or resources to fulfill their aspirations: those closer to the low capabilities spectrum will face more barriers in comparison to those closer to the high capabilities spectrum. The fact that *limited capabilities* capture individuals along the spectrum might hinder separating this ideal category from that of low capabilities, particularly because the closer those with limited capabilities are to the low capabilities spectrum the more artificial and difficult it will be to separate both categories. The difference between them is the degree of agency they hold: those with low capabilities have a very reduced agency (see Section 4.4), while those with limited capabilities have greater freedom to choose or to fulfill their aspirations in the future, although to varying degrees.

While the category of limited capabilities encompasses people with different degrees of capabilities, it is an useful ideal category that emphasizes the complexity of pre-migration decision-making processes and the manners in which individuals along the continuum perceive ‘what could be’ and what can they do. This, as I explain throughout the chapter, opens an avenue to investigate how (in)voluntariness is perceived for those with limited capabilities, particularly far from the extremes and in the middle of the continuum (see the center of the quadrant in Figure 29). Therefore, the approach accounts for multiple social realities and facilitates (1) breaking the abstract notion of capabilities down into more researchable components, (2) measuring capabilities in a spectrum of degrees, away from dichotomous high versus low categories, and (3) investigating subjective thresholds dictating when capabilities are perceived as high enough to realize one’s aspirations. I discuss in depth the importance of this approach later in the chapter, after presenting the data collection process, the field site, and the interviewees’ capabilities.

### **3 THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

This chapter is based on the life histories and capabilities to migrate and to remain of 14 individuals. The interviews were conducted in Spanish from May 2021 to February 2022 in Fabero, Ponferrada and Bembibre in the upper El Bierzo region, and in Villablino in the Laciana valley in Northwest Spain. Of the interviewees, five were male and nine were female; they ranged from 18 to 41 years of age. At the time of the interview, eight interviewees aspired to either migrate internally within Spain or abroad, three aspired to remain in place, and three were uncertain about what to do. Of these, five perceived they could fulfill their aspirations in the near future, while nine considered they could not do so (see Table 21 in Section 1 of this chapter). I selected these interviewees because they represent individuals with varying degrees of capabilities: individuals with high capabilities to choose where to live, and individuals with limited capabilities to do so. While none of my interviewees presented very low capabilities, my approach facilitates exploring the realities of these individuals too, and I do this theoretically.

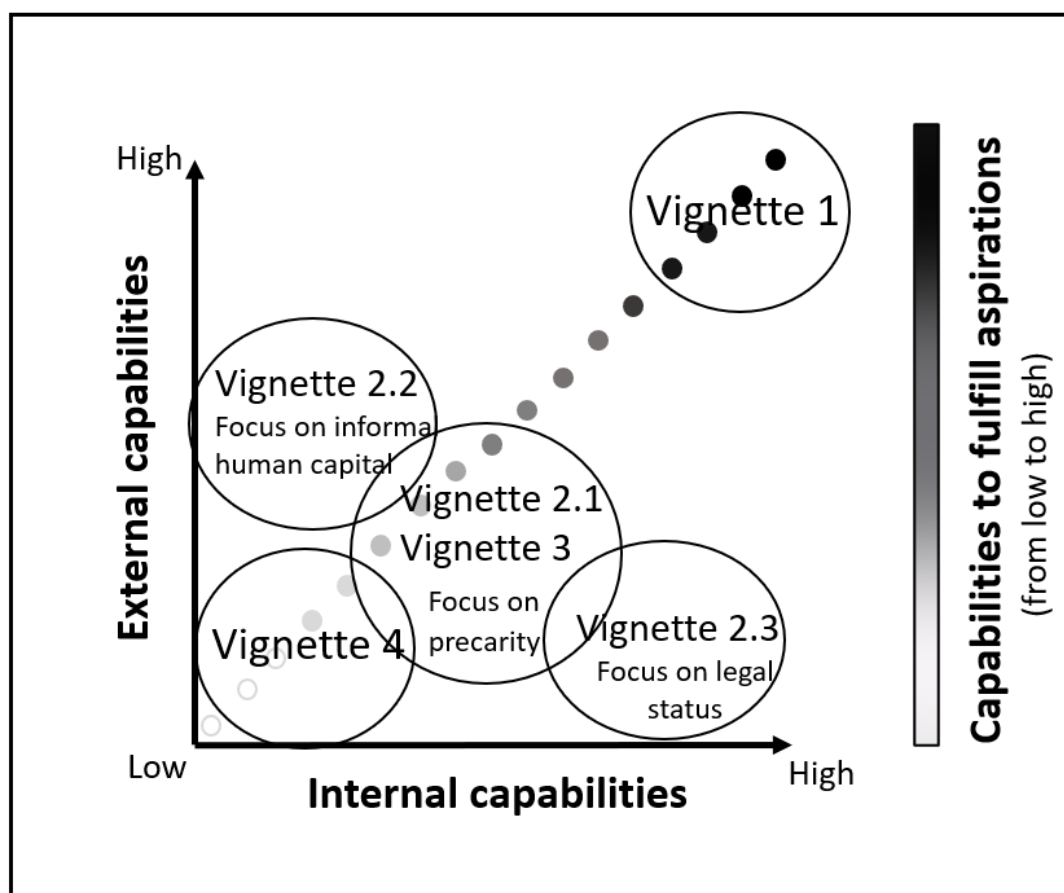
The interviewees were recruited through youth and local associations, such as Amilcar Cabral, and through snowballing sampling. In addition to conducting informal interviews, I also attended demonstrations and roundtables on the regions’ future, which allowed me to conduct around fifty informal conversations. These matched the information of the interviews and showed that many youngsters lack the capability to fulfill their aspirations. All qualitative data was coded using the following structure: (1) migration-specific codes, which traced, among others, migration aspirations, migration capabilities, reasons for migrating, and the selection of ideal destinations, and (2) codes on life ambitions, life circumstances, family relationships and networks, and perceptions of the past, present and future structural opportunities and constraints. All the names used in this

chapter are pseudonyms. The pseudonyms are consistently used across this chapter, Chapter 7, and Chapter 9. Further information about the methodology and the data collection process is provided in Chapter 3, Section 2.3.

#### 4 FOUR SCENARIOS OF CAPABILITIES: BETWEEN HIGH AND LOW CAPABILITIES TO CHOOSE WHERE TO LIVE

This section presents the (im)mobility capabilities of 14 individuals in El Bierzo and Laciana in four vignettes. Vignette 1 introduces individuals with high migration capabilities, vignettes two and three showcase limited capabilities, and vignette 4 accounts for low capabilities in a theory-driven scenario. These four vignettes map the capabilities of individuals at or near the extremes of high (Vignette 1) and low capabilities (Vignette 4), as well as the uncertainty surrounding those with limited capabilities that are not able to fulfill their migration aspirations (Vignette 2) or their aspirations to remain (Vignette 3). Figure 30 shows where these capabilities would be located along a continuum of degrees, differentiating the internal and the external dimensions of capabilities. The different rationales illustrating limited migration capabilities (Vignette 2) are displayed in three scenarios: structural precarity (Vignette 2.1), limited emigration know-how (Vignette 2.2), and past or present status as undocumented (Vignette 2.3). The widespread structural precarity also explains the limited options of those that aspire to remain in place – as such, Vignette 2.1 and Vignette 3 are pictured in the same area of the quadrant in Figure 30.

**Figure 30.** Locating the vignettes on a continuum



Source: Own elaboration

## 4.1 HIGH CAPABILITIES TO CHOOSE

El Bierzo and Laciana have suffered three main crises since the 1990s: the collapse of the mining industry in the early 2000s, the 2008 economic crisis and the COVID-19 crisis. While the regions are dependent on (early) retirees (Vega Núñez and Calvo González 2020) and opportunities are scarce, not all have been affected in the same manner. While some struggle to get a job and earn a living (see Section 4.2), others get through life comparatively easily, despite hopes remaining low and the future being generally perceived pessimistically. This is, for instance, the case of David, who is employed in the family's tax counseling and has a relatively easy life:

"I study [business] administration in the mornings and then I am working at my father's counseling in the afternoons. I help them with the workload [...] I started working there two summers ago. There was a lot of work and they told me I could come and earn some money. At first, I was taking packages to the post office, filling out documents, that sort of thing. Now I go there all year round. I started studying administration because of it [...] I don't mind working there for now, but it's not something I am passionate about doing in the long term. But I have a job, I can save money, which not many can say now, particularly of my age" (David, Spain, 23 years old).

Being aware of the difficulties that others face makes some, such as David, feel endowed (Vezzoli 2022) and fortunate about their situation. However, the limited opportunities for the youth makes many dependent on family resources. This is the case of Isabel, Diego, and Diana, who also feel endowed as they can rely on their families to support their studies and fulfill their life ambitions. Diana puts it this way:

"D: We all have economic limitations, and I depend on my family, but I have no complaints [...] Some of my friends are in a very bad situation. A friend of mine for example. Her parents, well, her mother doesn't work, and her father works but he doesn't earn much. I know he earns about 1000 euros a month. My friend has an older brother, and he is studying at the university in Salamanca. They sent him money so she cannot go to university yet because they cannot afford it. So, here she is. Her brother will be done [with university] this year. And then she'll go. She wanted to go sooner. She's been waiting for a whole year. But she couldn't.

[...]

N: And how do you feel in comparison to her?

D: Lucky. I see she has no options, and I can choose, you know?" (Diana, Spain, 19 years old).

The possibility to rely on individual and collective capabilities means that these interviewees are able to fulfill their migration aspirations and continue with their education or professional endeavors elsewhere. David, for instance, has been saving to go on Erasmus and he has already applied for admission: "I am going on Erasmus next year. I have already applied and all that [...] I would like to go to Prague and I am really looking forward to it". Isabel, who as we saw in Chapter 7 aspires to study Economics in a different province, mentions: "The university here doesn't offer degrees in Economics, and I can only apply to universities elsewhere because my parents can pay for it. I don't meet the requirements to get a scholarship" (Isabel, Spain, 18 years old). This is also the case for Diego, who feels free to study in A Coruña (Galicia) because his parents own a house he can take advantage of.

While David can fund his mobility himself, Isabel, Diana, and Diego cannot do that without the support of their families. This shows the necessity to differentiate between individual and collective levels of analysis within the aspirations-capability framework to understand how, when, and why families facilitate or constrain mobility (Rodríguez-Pena 2023). In fact, the reliance of the interviewees on their families opens a question about their own individual capabilities. While on their own they will not be able to migrate, migration decisions are made

as members of a group and as such, capabilities are shaped by group dynamics. These can, on occasions, generate social debts and exacerbate hierarchical relations (Carling 2014b); nevertheless, relying on collective capabilities was not regarded negatively by my interviewees. Instead, they feel relatively endowed (Vezzoli 2022) as they have ample opportunities, and they can freely choose what to do: “I don’t know if I’ll get accepted at the universities I have applied to. If not, I might need to stay here. But it is a relief to have the option” (Diego, Spain, 18 years old). This shows that, despite the economic decline and recurrent economic crises, not all are affected equally as some individuals are free to either migrate or stay as they have a secure job or can rely on family networks.

## 4.2 LIMITED MIGRATION CAPABILITIES

In the next three subsections, I present the limited migration capabilities of my interviewees, who feel stuck in place. First, I explore the capabilities of those with scarce economic resources, who experience socio-economic precarity and exclusion. These interviewees highlight the difficulty of surpassing shrinking economic opportunities at the local and regional level, despite efforts to save and improve individual resources. Then, I present the circumstances of those who feel migration is unattainable due to a ‘culture of permanence’ that makes emigration know-how scarce. These interviewees emphasize how low informal human capital and cumulative immobility processes result in underestimating what one can do (see Carling 2002; de Jong 2000), despite high citizenship capital and supporting networks. Finally, I delve into the involuntary immobility and second state of immobility (see Haugen 2012) that those with limited citizenship capital are currently feeling or have felt in the past. These interviewees demonstrate how the border regime and police controls can negatively affect individual skills and resources, even when these are relatively high.

### *How to move when I am barely making it*

The collapse of the socioeconomic fabric and the lack of alternative industries has left many without opportunities to earn a living in El Bierzo and Laciana, especially as youth unemployment skyrocketed after the 2008 economic crisis and precarity and job temporariness increased. While some, like David, have a stable job, others move from job to job trying to find some stability. This handicaps the possibility to fulfill migration aspirations, especially when the support of social networks is absent. Valeria, who is an English teacher, highlights:

“My students, they get desperate because they study, they do this here and that there, they complete a course, they sign up for...whatever. They finish all that and they still cannot find a job. When they find one it is for 3 months and then they are unemployed for 6 months. I mean, they get discouraged. So, how do they leave? To leave you also need to start out with something. You cannot leave without a penny in your pocket. People used to do that because they were super daring, alright, but nowadays we are used to having everything, we cannot be without our phones, with no WhatsApp, then, you go and pay for rent. It is not easy” (Valeria, Spain, 41 years old).

Valeria not only summarizes the cases of Carmen and Maria, which are presented below, but she also stresses how different thresholds about how and under which circumstances migration is desirable affect migration capabilities over time. Indeed, migrating and remaining in place do not occur in a vacuum, but instead imagined futures elsewhere and life circumstances shape aspirations and, as a result, the necessary threshold to be able to fulfill these (Mata-Codesal 2019). Considering the social dimension of migration, how values and cultural orientations shape capabilities thresholds is worth investigating. Especially because, according to sociocultural theories, as societies develop, values transition from materialistic to post-materialistic, and the orientations associated with life quality gain momentum (Inglehart 1977). While researchers have shown that this transition affects the formation of migration aspirations (Jolivet 2020), little is known about how this can also influence migration capabilities thresholds. Therefore, while many may wonder whether individuals in high-income

countries can have unfulfilled migration aspirations and be involuntary immobile due to the overall beneficial structural opportunities (see Chapter 5), we must remember that “it is not about migrating or staying put, but to be able to do so under specific circumstances” (Mata-Codesal 2019, 35). Some might consider undocumented migration (Rodríguez-Pena 2023), while for others migrating without papers is not an option (Mata-Codesal 2018). Some might consider migrating with very limited economic resources even when that means not being able to pay for accommodation, while for others knowing they will be able to secure basic comfort is essential. This is the case of Carmen. As I showed in Chapter 7, she has strong migration aspirations, however, she has a precarious, temporary work that does not allow her to save money and migrate:

“I am tired, you know? Having such a clear idea of what I want to do, having so much desire to go out and having to stick with being here [...] It is very hard for me. Very hard, because I want to leave now, and I cannot. I am holding on here. Holding on to a job that doesn’t give me enough money for what I want to do [...] I need to check every penny, see how the money comes to see if I can finally pay for the bus and [leave with] at least [money] for one month’s rent” (Carmen, Spain, 23 years old)

After the interview (which took place in December 2021), Carmen mentioned that she hoped she could move in the summer of 2022. I followed up with her then and learnt that it has not been the case as she still did not have the money to pay for one month’s rent of a double bedroom for her and her husband in A Coruña (Galicia) – a close-by city and their desired destination. This is despite her attempt to save money by having the heating off, showering in public gyms, or working double shifts. Maria is in a similar situation: She engaged in seasonal migration when she was 18 years old, when her uncle got her a summer job in a restaurant in Mallorca (Balearic Islands, Spain). Her migration partially funded the immobility of the family as she remitted money to El Bierzo. The temporary closure of the hospitality sector during the COVID-19 crisis meant she had to return to El Bierzo, as she could not afford rent anymore. Now, she has strong aspirations to migrate to Italy, as she knows the language and dreams about pursuing a fashion degree there (see Chapter 7), however, she remains unemployed, and she lacks the financial resources to migrate:

“I have been looking for jobs. Here, in Mallorca, in other places in Spain. Everywhere. But I only have the high school certificate and not that much experience in bars and restaurants. There are hundreds [of people] with a better CV, so they never call me back. I don’t have savings because I was sending my family money when I was in Mallorca and life there was expensive. How can I leave this place if I cannot even pay for a shared room in Leon? [...] I am stuck at my mother’s” (Maria, Portugal, 22 years old)

The increasing precarity that Carmen and Maria experience opens a question about where we should locate them on a continuum of capabilities. Carmen is close to suffering in-work poverty, and Maria could not have a roof over her head if it was not for the help of her family. This showcases very low capabilities, and a situation of exclusion. However, they both have high citizenship capital, and they can rely on a ‘strong’ welfare state. Carmen put it this way: “I have been working for quite some time now, but I am making so little money that saving up is a miracle. My husband is not in a better position. Now that we finally live together, we can apply for greater [social] benefits. We are waiting to see if the resolution is favorable. That will help a lot” (Carmen, Spain, 23 years old). Due to the support of the kin, the structural benefits associated with a strong welfare state and the possibility of benefitting from their high movement and settlement freedom, Carmen and Maria can be located within the ‘limited capabilities’ spectrum, even if close to the ‘low capabilities’ category. Their situations illustrate the need for more research on capabilities to depart from ideal typologies and to better understand categories and how people fit in them.

### ***If I knew how, I could go***

A culture of migration is characterized by widespread information about what migration entails, extensive migratory social networks, and by a presence of migration in the socio-cultural norm (Mata-Codesal 2015). While

the implications of ‘cultures of migration’ have been amply researched (Ali 2007; Jónsson 2008; Massey et al. 1993), studies on how a ‘culture of permanence’ shapes migration aspirations and capabilities remain, in comparison, scarce. This is unfortunate considering that not valuing migration can result in low emigration (de Jong 2000), and that cumulative immobility processes make remaining in place the norm (Carling 2002). A culture of permanence can make emigration more challenging in two ways. First, cognitive biases benefitting the preference towards familiar options – that is, immobility – might challenge the formation of migration aspirations<sup>131</sup>. Secondly, if individuals are not familiar with emigration, can a lack of information or self-efficacy negatively affect migration capabilities? If so, how? These questions are particularly important considering that emigration know-how and the support of social migratory networks can partially compensate for a lack of economic capital. I engage with these questions through the life circumstances and migration capabilities of Emma and Lucas. Both interviewees, presented in Chapter 7, have conflicting aspirations: They aspire to migrate to access professional stability, while intrinsically they are convinced staying in El Bierzo is best (see Chapter 7, Section 4.2). While their decision-making process is messy and neither of them knew what was best for them at the time of the interview, their reflections show how aspirations and capabilities are intertwined and how a lack of migration capabilities makes reaching a decision more difficult. Lucas, for example, mentioned:

“Perhaps if I knew how, I would be gone. But I have no idea how to do it, really. I don’t know what is needed, how the system functions [abroad]. I have done my research about opportunities abroad, flights, flats, all that. But I don’t know how to move forward. You reach the place and then what? It terrifies me” (Lucas, Spain, 23 years old).

At the time of the interview, and despite his efforts, Lucas was not getting employment offers in El Bierzo, in other Spanish municipalities or abroad. Not getting offers from outside El Bierzo was, on the one hand, a relief from him, as, intrinsically, he does not aspire to leave ‘home’. However, on the other hand, Lucas clearly lacks self-efficacy. For him, not knowing what to expect and not being familiar with emigration is a problem that limits not only the possibility to see himself in destination, but also his migration capabilities. When I asked him to consider a hypothetical scenario where he was offered a job in a big city abroad and to reflect on the decision he would take, he mentioned:

“I don’t know anybody abroad, or in any big Spanish city for that matter. If you know people you are halfway there, you know? It is easier. But I would have nobody. And I would not know how to make friends. It is very important to have enough money, but above all I need to know I will be fine. I don’t know if I’ll be able to make it. It’s uncertain. As I said before, I don’t know what to do with my life, but when I think about leaving... It paralyses me. I don’t have anybody or anything to check with. But, but I can’t stay here either”.

Emma shares Lucas’ feelings. She mentions:

“[To migrate], you need willpower. Willpower in the mind, that is, to say: I am going. I mean just to take and say: I am going to start a life somewhere else. You have to have willpower for that, you know? It is not like you are going on vacation [...] You have to have willpower, even when it comes to staying there, you know? You need perseverance and you need willpower [...] I don’t know if I could do it. I might have to, but what if I am not able? Sometimes I think about leaving, about the fact that it is the best for me, but I don’t know who to ask or how to get ready” (Emma, Spain, 21 years old).

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<sup>131</sup> Consider the two cognitive biases – the mere exposure effect and the ambiguity effect – presented in Chapter 5. The former explains that individuals have a tendency to develop preferences for things they are familiar with (Lee 2011), while the latter stresses that people are less likely to consider unknown, riskier options (Trautmann and van de Kuillen 2015).

The cases of Lucas and Emma clearly show how migration aspirations and capabilities are interrelated. They highlight the importance of (1) relying on a social network and (2) having self-efficacy to migrate. Their circumstances highlight how a culture of permanence, where migration-related know-how and migratory social networks are scarce, can handicap both migration aspirations and capabilities. This reflects the importance of informal human capital for migration. While scholars have examined the manners in which formal school achievements influence the formation and fulfillment of migration aspirations (de Haas 2007, 2014; Schewel 2020b), how informal human capital affects migration remains understudied. Lanzi (2007) captures informal human capital by differentiating between three components: basic skills, professional competencies, and complex functions. Complex functions involve having personal and social skills, such as self-confidence or problem-solving and goal-achievement attitudes (2007, 428). Recently, Schewel and Fransen (2018), in a study on the aspirations of the Ethiopian youth, have demonstrated that high feelings of self-efficacy explain internal and international migration aspirations. Informal human capital does, therefore, affect migration aspirations; nonetheless, more research is needed: First, to investigate how those with low self-efficacy, who perceive they cannot overcome obstacles, form aspirations, and secondly, to research how self-efficacy shapes migration capabilities. Do individuals that 'believe in making it' set lower capability thresholds? Does low self-efficacy trigger unfulfilled migration aspirations or do people overcome a lack of confidence? How feelings of self-efficacy and how a culture of permanence shape migration capabilities is worth investigating to further understand how people imagine migration – negatively, positively, full of hope, with fear, etc. – and how people form and fulfill migration aspirations when mobility is not the norm. The constraints that a 'culture of permanence' generates showcases that a lack of informal human capital skills can explain limited migration capabilities, as relatively high external capabilities – in the form of supporting networks in origin and high citizenship capital – can be overshadowed by perceived, low internal capabilities.

### ***I am here but I cannot move***

While this thesis engages with the formation and fulfillment of (im)mobility aspirations of 'Westerners', it is important to also account for the difficulties that migrants face in destination countries, especially when they are undocumented and get trapped in a 'second state of immobility' (Haugen 2012). Indeed, immigration policies and border controls shape migrants' experiences at destination, as police checks and the fear of detention make some live in areas difficult to access, as well as carefully assess when, how and for what purposes they engage in intra-city travel (Haugen 2012; Stevens 2018; Stuesse and Coleman 2014).

This was not a concern for most of my interviewees, who were aware of their high citizenship capital and benefits in comparison to people in other world regions and felt endowed due to the freedom of movement in the EU. David, for instance, highlighted the ease of going on Erasmus without constraints. Other interviewees, however, were either currently facing or had faced in the past important challenges as they overstayed their visa and became undocumented. The cases of Mimi, Agatha and Manuela exemplify this. Mimi and Agatha are sisters-in-law and originally from Argentina, while Manuela is Colombian. Mimi decided to migrate to Spain in 2007 as she was dealing with an abusive ex-husband, who did not accept she had rebuilt her life. Agatha entered the country in 2020, right before the closure of borders due to COVID-19, following her partner. And Manuela migrated to Spain in 2018 to restore her relationship with her mum who she had not seen for 11 years. The three of them overstayed their visas, which was accompanied by immobility, depression, and putting their lives on hold. Mimi, who was able to legalize her situation in 2011, describes the situation this way:

"M: I came as a visitor to the country. I wanted to see how I could do here. I liked it and I stayed. I came when I was already 5 months pregnant, I had a 5-year-old child. For me everything was more complicated than for other people [...] I don't know how but I lost my passport [...] This means that in April 2009, they [the police] came to my sister's house because I was registered at my sister's. I was just

about to start the process to get my papers, I was a little short on the 3 years<sup>132</sup> [...] I was detained at Ponferrada's police office for a few hours [...] I was going to be in principle expelled [of Spain] for 3 to 10 years [...] It was a big process of going back and forth, sending appeals, returning the appeals. In 2011 I went to the [administrative] trial in Leon and they gave me instead a fine of €501<sup>133</sup> [...] It was very painful and for me it was 3 or 4 years that I didn't go out.

N: You didn't leave the house?

M: No, I just took my son to school. I didn't want to go out, see the police. I was afraid. I was terrified" (Mimi, Argentina, 41 years old)

Mimi's past situation reflects Haugen's (2012) 'second state of immobility' notion, as her undocumented status trapped her in place after emigrating and resulted in a fragile mental state. While Agatha and Manuela, who are undocumented, have not yet been targeted by the police, they are familiar with Mimi's situation, which has sparked fear and efforts to go unnoticed. Manuela, who has strong aspirations to leave El Bierzo, not only feels the uncertainty of being undocumented, but she also feels her life is on hold. She mentions:

"I came to visit my mother. I hadn't seen her for about 11 years. So, my plan was to come visit, meet my younger sister [...] But there is nothing here, I ask myself every day when I get up: what am I doing here? I mean, what did I do? [...] I had my trip to return after my birthday [in 2019] but I stayed to be with my family. But there is nothing for me here. It's very depressing, if I'm being honest. The fact that you have your life and then you get here and it's like you're out of so many things, like you can't do much, you know? [...] You feel like you're not doing what you could do, like you are not getting the maximum out of you [...] I can't work because I don't have documents and people don't want to employ me. I worked taking care of an old lady. But that's it." (Manuela, Colombia, 25 years old)

Low citizenship capital<sup>134</sup> not only results in constraints to freely move across borders, but it also shapes life after migration has taken place, resulting, on occasions, in an incapacity to benefit from the potential gains that migration has to offer. This is also the case even when migrants have relatively high internal capabilities, such as economic resources or the necessary abilities and skills. In fact, Manuela has enough economic resources to leave El Bierzo, and she could rely on her family in the USA and Colombia to support her and fund the movement, if necessary. Nevertheless, her undocumented status implies constraints to move freely, which overshadows her individual resources and skills. This shows the importance of investigating how external and internal capabilities interact, opening the possibility to explore the amount of adaptation needed to surpass external in comparison to internal constraints.

### 4.3 LIMITED CAPABILITIES TO REMAIN

Since capabilities entail "the freedom to choose where to live – including the option to stay" (de Haas 2021, 4), it is imperative to also account for the capabilities to remain. While a lack of migration capabilities makes

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<sup>132</sup> Undocumented migrants who have stayed in Spain for 3 years and meet certain requirements are able to obtain residence in Spain based on Organic Law 4/2000 and Royal Decree 557/2011. This is referred to as *Residencia por Arraigo*. One of the possibilities to obtain this kind of residence is through family links. Mimi's daughter has Spanish citizenship, which is one of the requirements to apply and obtain such a permit.

<sup>133</sup> According to the Alien Act, the proceedings initiated against undocumented migrants can result in the imposition of a fine or in an order of expulsion. "The Supreme Court has ruled on several occasions, clarifying that the main sanction should be the fine, not the expulsion" (Moffette 2014, 273).

<sup>134</sup> While citizens of the 'Global North' overall have high citizenship capital (see Chapter 5, Section 3.4), this also depends on how the 'Global North' is defined, as the artificial delineations between the 'South' and the 'North' change over time. Consider, for instance, the change in status of Polish migrants after EU accession in 2004 and the possibility to access more easily documented migration in comparison to previous decades (Düvell 2004).

immobility a residual option and not an active choice about where to live, having no alternatives at home – apart from mere survival – makes migration the ‘option left’. Limited capabilities to remain can be observed, for instance, among climate migrants. Even if their mobility is, in many cases, temporary (McLeman and Hunter 2010), the distress of extreme climate events makes remaining in place temporarily unsustainable and migration serves, consequently, as an adaptation mechanism when capabilities to stay are limited. The circumstances of those in wartime scenarios also reflect this logic: as living a ‘good life’ at ‘home’ becomes unfeasible due to the political instability, conflict and violence, migration is not an active choice but rather a residue. This further explains why mobility can be involuntary, despite strong instrumental migration aspirations, and when it might not be considered a well-being enhancing factor.

My interviewees have high citizenship capital and is unquestionable the benefits they have in comparison to the scenarios just presented. Nonetheless, the cases of El Bierzo and Laciana also show the involuntariness of migration, not only because many do not aspire to move (see Chapter 7, Section 4.2), but also because some perceive that a ‘worthy’ life is not possible at ‘home’. The lack of opportunities to develop a career and the self implies that mobility is a residual option. Consider the situation of Mateo, whose conflicting aspirations were presented in Chapter 7 (see Section 4.2):

“Here we would need an industry to flourish. Or else it would be impossible [to get a job], or I would have to work in something else or in a more precarious way. If there was any [employment] left, that’s it. It is either to live here in any sort of way or go abroad to make the life you want. But out of here. And that is because there are no options for young people. No options to live well” (Mateo, Spain, 23 years old).

While the ‘good life’ shapes aspirations to either migrate or stay (Schewel 2020b; Vezzoli 2022), capabilities are also interrelated to ideas about how life *should* look like, as, in essence, capabilities reflect the “freedom to live a life we value and have reason to value” (Qizilbash 2013, 35). Mateo’s quote stresses that it is not just about staying, but rather about being able to earn a living, develop the self, and live a valuable life at home. When this is not possible, capabilities to remain are limited, immobility becomes unfeasible, and migration appears as a residual option even when people have agency left and they *choose* to migrate. This challenges the traditional dichotomy between mobility and immobility within migration studies, as immobility has long been considered *the* residual option and just recently scholars have argued that immobility can be an active choice (Mata-Codesal 2018), challenging the ‘mobility bias’ of the field (Schewel 2020a). I focus on the residual option that mobility can be, when the capability of remaining in place is removed. Leo, who has the aspirations and capabilities to stay (see Chapter 7, Section 4.3) puts it this way:

“Young people are living with their parents because they cannot afford rent, they cannot access a loan. With part-time contracts, where do they go? [...] It is sad, but the basis of the country is failing [...] Basic things like food, being at home fail and you can’t do anything. It is useless to generate jobs with very low salaries. It is one thing to live and another to live badly” (Leo, Spain, 37 years old).

Leo highlights the high in-work at-risk-of-poverty-rate in Spain, which is one of the highest in the EU (Eurostat 2022b) and shows that, as substantial options to stay are wiped out, the capabilities to stay decrease. As a result, individuals are more likely to experience wellbeing-decreasing deprivation. While this does not mean that migration is a residual option for all (see Section 4.1), some view migration involuntarily, as the ‘only option left’: even when they are not being forced to move by violent means, migration strongly goes against their own intrinsic aspirations and is a consequence of low socio-economic rights (see Chapter 7, Section 4.2). Lucas mentions:

“For me the only way to go is to leave. And not because I want to move somewhere else, but because I can’t stay here. I can’t stay here and live out of my parents forever. They don’t even call me to work at

bars or restaurants. How can I live without a job? Money? I don't even have my own money to buy groceries. I am not asking for much. They are basic things. It sucks. It sucks a lot. It doesn't make sense. But I would like to stay in El Bierzo" (Lucas, Spain, 23 years old).

The limited structural opportunities to earn a living at 'home' mean that some, like Mateo or Lucas, consider migration something that 'must be done', since their mobility freedom is limited and so is their agency. This is because *full* voluntariness – be this either voluntary mobility or voluntary immobility – is only applicable to those with the capacity to freely choose where to live, which includes the option to stay. If volition is understood as the quality of alternatives available to individuals to live a 'worthy', 'valuable', or 'good' life, very high and high capabilities, and, therefore, full voluntariness to act, are confined to those with the simultaneous capability to stay and to leave and, consequently, to those with both high external and high internal capabilities. Those with limited capabilities have, in comparison, limited agency and limited volition to act. Similarly to the cases of Carmen and Maria (see Vignette 2.1), the challenge here is to locate individuals like Lucas or Mateo in the wide spectrum that limited capabilities cover. This is because they can clearly benefit from the presence of a welfare state, higher diversification of wealth in comparison to other countries, social networks, and a high citizenship capital. Nevertheless, because of the precarity they experience, it is clear that, rather than closer to the high capabilities spectrum, they would be located around the middle quadrant in Figure 29.

As it should be clear, I am not arguing that my interviewees have *no* options left, but, rather, that their options are limited, and that their migratory decision-making process should be analyzed taking into account these agency constraints. These constraints are visible only when we analytically investigate capabilities to remain and migration capabilities at once, and when we differentiate between external and internal capabilities. In the next section, I theoretically propose situations and (im)mobility categories where agency is almost non-existent, and migration or immobility can indeed be conceptualized as 'forced' or fully 'involuntary'.

#### 4.4 LOW CAPABILITIES TO CHOOSE

Researchers have highlighted that "almost all forms of migration entail choices and constraints" (Schewel 2019, 336), which makes the theoretical distinction between 'voluntary' and 'forced' migration difficult. However, conceptualizing capabilities as the freedom to choose and in a spectrum of degrees sheds light in this matter. This is because at one extreme of the spectrum we find (very) 'low capabilities'. This encapsulates the cases of individuals imprisoned, deported, slaved, or trafficked<sup>135</sup>, which show extreme situations and circumstances of extremely low mobility freedom as individual agency has been extirpated and virtually no freedoms to decide are left. Yet not all with low mobility freedom see their agency limited to the same extent. Consider the cases of refugees, internally displaced people, climate migrants, or 'distress migrants': while staying is not an option because it would put them in life-threatening circumstances, they still retain some agency, as migration is a conscious decision. This exemplifies that there are "two basic ways of conceptualizing 'forced mobility' – either as a conscious act to escape external threats and oppression or livelihood insecurity and poverty or as literally forced mobility" (de Haas 2021, 31). Consequently, even within the ideal categories of 'involuntary migration' and 'involuntary immobility', there are different gradients of involuntariness and capabilities, which are worth studying to theorize the ways in which limited agency leads to decisions on where, how, and when to go, and how this affects life satisfaction and the migratory experience.

Breaking capabilities into external and internal dimensions offers, then, (1) researchable components to further investigate the interrelation between the structure and agency and (2) propositions to conceive migration and

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<sup>135</sup> This does not include people who choose to be smuggled into another country, as the (constrained) choice of smuggling entails agency.

immobility in a spectrum from low to high limitations. In the section below I detail the implications of this approach, including how we can bridge the divide between forced and voluntary migration.

## **5 THE IMPORTANCE OF DIFFERENTIATING EXTERNAL AND INTRINSIC CAPABILITIES**

The vignettes have illustrated three possibilities that emanate from the combination of various thresholds of external and internal capabilities: (1) high capabilities to choose where to live – either at home or elsewhere; (2) limited capabilities to choose where to live – as the capability to either stay at home or move elsewhere is compromised (although to varying degrees) –; and (3) low capabilities to choose where to live – as freedom to move elsewhere or live a fulfilling life at home is virtually absent. The vignettes highlight the interrelation between structural opportunities, constraints, and agency, as well as the options that individuals have left when full agency is not present. It does so by differentiating between external and internal capabilities. This approach has important implications for theory-building for three reasons: (1) to conceptualize capabilities in a spectrum of degrees, which facilitates (2) theorizing the (in)voluntariness of (im)mobility beyond dichotomous categories of ‘forced’ versus ‘voluntary’ migration, as well as (3) how involuntary immobility affects local development.

First, exploring the different dimensions of capabilities demonstrates that these occur in a spectrum of degrees that go beyond ‘high’ versus ‘low’ dichotomous boxes. The wide spectrum of interactive options between external and internal capabilities (see Figure 29) proves that individuals will inevitably be closer to one end of the spectrum than the other, and that only those at or close to the extremes have full agency or virtually no agency at all. This is because not all face the same degree of structural constraints. While some face very little obstacles and have very high capabilities to choose and others face substantial obstacles and see their agency reduced virtually completely, others are in an in-between state: able to enjoy some structural opportunities but concurrently facing other constraints and with reduced resources to live a completely ‘good’ life. These individuals have limited capabilities to choose where to live. My research exemplifies these cases.

Secondly, differentiating between external and internal capabilities not only provides a framework to unpack the abstract notion of ‘capabilities’, but it also provides a model to revise the (in)voluntariness of migration. This is because when capabilities to remain are limited, migration might not be a completely active choice or a liberating experience, but rather the only option left to develop the self and live a ‘good life’. This is closely associated with the alternatives at home regarded as ‘reasonable’. While life-threatening or exploitative situations are unquestionably considered not ‘reasonable’ options to stay (de Haas 2021), capabilities designate the freedoms a person enjoys to live a worthy life (Nussbaum 1999; Sen 1990), which cannot be obtained when opportunities to earn a living are unavailable and individuals are deprived of their socio-economic rights. In this regard, my argument comes close to that of de Wind (2007, 382) who has already highlighted that “international migrants deprived of social, cultural, and economic rights – including but not limited to people displaced by ecological or development forces resulting from government directive or neglect – would seem to need and deserve international protection no less than refugees”. While those deprived of their economic rights also see their agency and options to stay reduced, this is certainly not to the same degree as somebody in a wartime scenario who sees their life immediately threatened. Yet, it reflects the significant constraints that most migrants, who are usually cast as ‘voluntary’, face. Investigating the capabilities to remain in a spectrum of degrees encompasses the (in)voluntariness of migration to its varying degrees. This, together with the distinction between the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of aspirations presented in Chapter 7, results in a framework that makes it possible to incorporate all forms of (in)voluntariness into a single, comprehensive meta-conceptual framework (I present this in Chapter 10).

Finally, how individuals surpass a state of involuntary immobility remains understudied, despite emerging research on this matter (Ortiga and Macabasag 2020, 2021; Rodriguez-Pena 2023). Further research needs to focus on who subdues and gives up on their migration aspirations, and who challenges their involuntary

immobility status, especially because among those with limited capabilities there are various degrees of constraints: some are closer to the high capability extreme while others are closer to the low capabilities spectrum. Are the ones with limited capabilities but closer to 'making it' more likely to wait involuntary immobility out? Does it depend on demographic characteristics, such as age or gender? In essence, what is the relation between the (degree of) capabilities and adaptation mechanisms of aspiring migrants? This could shed light into who eventually finds content in local opportunities and fosters local development, and who remains hopeful international migration is possible in the near future and is unwilling to spend time and resources in a locality they envision leaving soon.

## 6 CONCLUSION: REFLECTING ON CAPABILITIES

This chapter proposes an approach to investigate capabilities in a spectrum of degrees and to account for the various strengths and configurations of capabilities. It does so by examining how the external and internal dimensions of capabilities interact, and it shows that capabilities can be high, low, or limited. While *high capabilities* capture very high freedoms to choose where to live and *low* capabilities present an opposing scenario, *limited capabilities* illustrate situations where the capability to remain or to migrate is limited to varying degrees. The proposed approach is important (1) to quantify capabilities on a continuum and move beyond 'high' versus 'low' dichotomous categories, and (2) to explore the volition and (3) the adaptation mechanisms of those with 'limited' and 'low' capabilities. This framework is not only useful to further theory-building around the concept of 'capabilities', which remains abstract, leaving theorization around two-step migration approaches incomplete, but it also adds to decision-making theories and theories of (in)voluntariness by offering a simple approach to better understand the pre-migration process, contributing to key subfields of migration studies.

Apart from furthering theory-building, the insights of this chapter also show that *unfulfilled* aspirations are present in high-income countries, and that, therefore, this is not an inherent characteristic of low- and moderate-income countries, but, rather, a ramification of constrained opportunities and socio-cultural expectations which, although to varying degrees, are present across the 'development spectrum' (Azmanova 2020). The dissatisfaction, uncertainty, and feelings 'stuckness' that those with limited capabilities in El Bierzo and Laciana feel question whether their (im)mobility is voluntary and calls to (1) expand the notion of involuntary (im)mobility beyond the so called 'Global South' and (2) question romanticized visions of emigration in the Global North. In this way, this chapter calls to end dichotomous visions on migration capabilities that consider these to be high across the 'Global North', regardless of the increasing precarity and in-work poverty in some countries (Mata-Codesal 2019).

## CHAPTER 9 – ADAPTING TO INVOLUNTARY IMMOBILITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES FOR THE INVOLUNTARILY IMMOBILE

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Shifting from the analysis of the aspirations and capabilities of individuals in El Bierzo and Laciana presented in the two preceding chapters, this chapter investigates the adaptation mechanisms of aspiring migrants there. It does so because unfulfilled (migration) aspirations are usually followed by adaptation strategies to find alternatives to fulfill them. However, these strategies have been mostly theorized (Carling and Schewel 2018), and empirically grounded studies on how the involuntarily immobile think about their future and look for alternatives to fulfill their migration aspirations remain scarce. In this vein, this chapter joins recent calls to investigate how aspiring migrants reclaim mobility through a variety of resources or mechanisms, including digital, cognitive, and institutional resources (see Liu and Peng 2023; Mainwaring 20016; Rodriguez-Pena 2023). I examine the life circumstances and adaptation mechanisms of seven involuntarily immobile in El Bierzo and Laciana, and I show that they adapt by (1) expanding their migration capabilities, (2) shifting *ideal* migration aspirations, and (3) creating and sustaining transnational ties on their own to increase life satisfaction. This chapter answers the following questions: How do people adapt to unfulfilled migration aspirations while immobile? How do they increase their life satisfaction? And what mechanisms do they put in place to do so? The chapter focuses on the strategies of those who, despite trying, have not succeeded in migrating. This adds to migration studies by integrating adaptation strategies into two-step migration approaches and by offering conceptual tools to examine how people move across (im)mobility categories.

Furthermore, with its focus, the chapter also demonstrates that aspiring migrants with no migratory connections or experiences can create and sustain transnational ties *on their own* over time and introduces the notions of ‘transimmobility’ and ‘transimmobile’ to migration studies. This highlights the transnational activities that individuals with no links to migration engage with in their daily lives, and it goes beyond current theorizations about the role of non-migrants in transnational fields, which remain limited to non-migrants *with* migratory connections, such as individuals with migratory family members (Bastia 2009; Graham et al. 2012) and second-generation migrants (Shahrokni 2019). As I show throughout the chapter, my approach expands the notion of transnationalism without watering-down the concept itself and contributes to current critiques about the ‘mobility bias’ (Schewel 2020a) within the study of transnationalism (Boccagni 2012; Gaibazzi 2015; Lacroix 2009). This chapter contributes, then, to migration studies in general and to two-step migration approaches in particular, adding to the ambition of this thesis to advance middle-range theorizations of migration. It also adds to my overall argument by illustrating that migration is not systematically fulfilled in high-income countries, as aspiring migrants employ coping mechanisms to increase their life satisfaction during a state of involuntary immobility.

The chapter continues as follows: First, I argue why, theoretically speaking, transnationalism should be more comprehensive introduced to immobility studies, and I introduce the notion of ‘transimmobility’ to the field. After a short overview of the data collection process, I present the three adaptation strategies my interviewees employ to cope with their unfulfilled migration aspirations: while some expand their capabilities and others shift their ideal migration aspirations, all employ transnationalism to adapt. This chapter ends with a discussion on the implications of the concept ‘transimmobility’ for transnational and migration studies.

### 2 TRANSNATIONALISM AS AN ADAPTATION MECHANISM FOR ASPIRING MIGRANTS

Two-step migration approaches offer conceptual tools to investigate four (im)mobility categories: migration, voluntary immobility, involuntary immobility, and acquiescent immobility (Schewel 2015). While the framework itself does not explain how people move across these categories, researchers are increasingly paying attention to the adaptation mechanisms of individuals stuck along the migration journey. First, *in origin* as aspiring

migrants either let their aspirations go after an active assessment of what migration would entail (Ortiga and Macabasag 2021), expand their capabilities to increase their chances of migrating, or are more flexible about how and where to migrate (Rodriguez-Pena 2023). Second, *in transit* as stranded migrants negotiate with smugglers, border guards and other migrants surpass immobility (Mainwaring 2016). And, finally, *in destination* as settled migrants endure limited mobility to circumvent police control (Haugen 2012) or develop ‘mobility repertoires’ when they cannot move freely to increase satisfaction (Liu and Peng 2023). These studies offer an important point of departure to shift attention away from (im)mobility categories to transitions. Nonetheless, investigations on the adaptation mechanisms of the involuntarily immobile suffer one main limitation: they are detached from the broader literature on migration and transnational adaptation, which is unfortunate for three reasons.

First, because transnational fields are characterized by the exchange, transformation and organization of ideas, resources and practices (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004) through which individuals reconceptualize their relation with the social space and envision possibilities across borders (Bauböck 2003; Gargano 2009). This means that transnationalism is a strategy to envision solutions to local constraints also for aspiring migrants who remain in place. Indeed, Zelinsky (1971) already argued that the intensification of cross-border information flows has triggered ‘the mobilities of the mind’, which refers to changes in the personal perception of time and geography, among other phenomena. This relates to the emergence of the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm and to new forms of movement, including ‘virtual’ or ‘imaginative’ travel (Sheller and Urry 2006). How aspiring migrants might adapt by mobilizing foreign information flows, such as international cultural products, or through the imagination to feel ‘there’ has received little attention (see Bissell 2007; Cangìà and Zittoun 2020; Salazar 2011). Secondly, because aspirations shape transnational orientations as individuals engage in transnational activities depending on their aspirations to stay, leave or return (van Meeteren 2012; Dimitriadis 2020). And, lastly, because migration scholars have traditionally focused on the socioeconomic, political, and sociocultural adaptation opportunities that transnationalism offers to international migrants (Bauböck 2003; Portes 2001, 2003; Portes, Haller and Guarnizo 2002; Sánchez Molina 2008; Vertovec 2004), while non-migrants have been treated as passive receptors of transnational connections (Carling 2008). More recently calls to include non-migrants in transnational studies have been made (Boccagni 2012; Carling 2008; Gaibazzi 2015; Lacroix 2009) and empirical studies on the matter have mushroomed, which focus primarily on second-generation migrants (Shahrokni 2019; Wessendorf 2007) and non-migrants with migratory family members (Bastia 2009; Graham et al. 2012; Hoang et al. 2015; Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2013). The manners in which non-migrants employ transnational connections to reinforce their imaginations, aspirations and mobility plans remains understudied (Gaibazzi 2015), which calls to examine the practices and activities of aspiring migrants while in place.

Do aspiring migrants engage in transnational activities? If so, how? In which ways? And for what purposes? To answer these questions and theorize how aspiring migrants can initiate and sustain transnational ties *on their own*, I propose the concept of ‘transimmobility’ and, therefore, ‘transimmobile’. Section 4.3 shows the empirical applicability of this notion and Section 5 discusses how it adds to transnationalism without watering-down the approach.

### **3 THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

This chapter is based on the adaptation mechanisms of seven aspiring migrants. The interviews were conducted in Spanish from May 2021 to February 2022 in Fabero, Ponferrada and Bembibre in the upper El Bierzo region, and in Villablino in the Laciana valley in Northwest Spain. Of the interviewees, three were male and four were female; they ranged from 19 to 60 years of age. At the time of the interview, all interviewees presented unfulfilled internal or international migration aspirations. Out of the seven interviewees, three try to expand their migration capabilities, two have shifted their *ideal* migration aspirations to facilitate migration, and all

sustain transnational connections to increase their life satisfaction and feel ‘there’ while staying ‘here’<sup>136</sup>. I selected these interviewees because they represent individuals unable to fulfill their migration aspirations and who have adapted through time in diverse manners. Most of the interviewees have unfulfilled migration aspirations at present. However, two interviewees, Antonio and Julia, have had intrinsic migration aspirations for the last decades, which could not be realized due to their caring responsibilities and a consequent instrumental necessity to stay (see Chapter 7, see Section 4.2); their situations reflect adaptation mechanisms that have been ongoing over, at least, a decade.

The interviewees were recruited through youth and local associations, such as Amilcar Cabral, and through snowballing sampling. In addition to conducting informal interviews, I also attended demonstrations and roundtables on the regions’ future, which allowed me to conduct around fifty informal conversations. These matched the information of the interviews and showed that many youngsters feel stuck in place and are dissatisfied, which results in adaptation strategies to increase their subjective well-being. All qualitative data was coded using the following structure: (1) migration-specific codes, which traced, among others, migration aspirations, migration capabilities, reasons for migrating, and the selection of ideal destinations; and (2) codes on life ambitions, life circumstances, family relationships and networks, perceptions of the past, present and future, and adaptation mechanisms. All the names used in this chapter are pseudonyms. The pseudonyms are consistently used across this chapter and the preceding two chapters (Chapter 7 and Chapter 8). Further information about the methodology and the data collection process is provided in Chapter 3, Section 2.3.

## **4 LONGING FOR MIGRATION WHILE IMMOBILE**

This section details the three adaptation mechanisms that my interviewees employ to cope with their unfulfilled aspirations. First, I explore how some try to expand their migration capabilities to surpass involuntary immobility by increasing their financial resources. Then I focus on the manners in which the circumstances under which migration is desirable change as ideal aspirations sour. Finally, I show how the involuntarily immobile initiate and sustain transnational ties over time to increase life satisfaction while feeling ‘trapped’ in place. This last subsection illustrates the empirical applicability of the notion ‘transimmobility’ and highlights how transnationalism can add to immobility studies.

### **4.1 ‘IF I TRIED A BIT HARDER, I MIGHT GO’**

The expansion of migration capabilities has been empirically demonstrated to be an adaptation mechanism to try to surpass a status of involuntary immobility, as individuals make up for their lack of resources by enlarging networks via the Internet (Rodriguez-Pena 2023) or joining migrant caravans (Torre Cantalapiedra and Mariscal Nava 2020). Research, however, remains scarce, which calls to explore what kind of resources can be expanded. These may include, among others, increasing individual economic resources, getting more support from social networks, achieving formal education and language skills<sup>137</sup>, or increasing citizenship capital through investment programs (Christians 2017). Some of my interviewees attempt to increase their migration capabilities by saving and increasing their self-efficacy.

Interviewees in a precarious situation, who are either unemployed or in an uncertain job, try to save money to buy tickets to their *ideal* destination and afford one month’s rent there. Carmen, who has been saving for one year and a half mentioned in one of our informal conversations that she and her husband “are trying to save as

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<sup>136</sup> The fact that the interviewees employ more than one adaptation strategy to cope with unfulfilled aspirations opens an avenue to explore how people select which mechanism to employ as they reassess their situation over time. I explore this in Chapter 10.

<sup>137</sup> This can be particularly relevant to access visas in permit- or point-based immigration systems and to increase self-efficacy.

much as possible” and that they “cannot waste the money”, which often means having the heating off during winter<sup>138</sup>, showering in public gyms and working, whenever possible, double shifts. Misusing the funds not only means postponing movement but also aggravates a state of dissatisfaction and challenges mental health as self-blaming is common. Yet, the destruction of the socio-economic fabric of El Bierzo and Laciana and the difficulties to access a stable job hinder the possibility to increase individual economic resources. As a result, some rely on their families as much as they can, which shows the intricate relationship between collective and individual capabilities (Rodriguez-Pena 2023). Maria, for instance, is now looking for a job and since her migration would imply remittances for non-migratory family members, the family has started a ‘money box’. She invited me to a family gathering, where, pointing to the ‘box’, she mentioned: “as little as it is, 2 euros, sometimes 5 euros, it helps. Even when we might need the money for something else [later on]” (Maria, Portugal, 22 years old).

Apart from increasing material resources, feeling more confident by practicing language skills also appears as a mechanism to increase capabilities and be sure they will ‘make it’ at destination. David, who is close to fulfilling his migration aspirations by going on Erasmus (see Chapter 7, section 4.1), practices his English language skills via platforms such as Discord and Omegle: “They [his vocational training institute] do an English test [to go on Erasmus] but it is just written. There was no speaking test at all. I feel insecure about my speaking, and I wouldn’t want to go and not be able to communicate at all. It’d be an awful experience” (David, Spain, 23 years old). This shows that expanding migration capabilities is not just important for those who cannot afford movement, but also for those individuals who envision migration as a well-being enhancing experience and for whom being able to integrate and ‘live’ the migration experience is important.

## 4.2 IDEAL ASPIRATIONS ARE LONG GONE

Apart from expanding capabilities, some decide to shift their aspirations and engage in stepwise mobility (Ravenstein 1989) by migrating internally or to close-by cities when international emigration or emigrating to Madrid or Barcelona is not possible. This is the case of Diana, who, at the time of the interview, was planning her migration to Asturias, where she is doing a two-year cuisine vocational training course thanks to the support of her family, even though she initially aspired to migrate to Madrid:

“Madrid was *the* option for a long-time. My sister lives there, I love big cities [...] but living there is hard. You get out of the door, and you are already spending money. It is very expensive to live there [...] My father passed away so I get an orphan pension and so I have a small economic cushion and I am going to invest it in my studies [...] My grandpa is giving me some money to go [to Asturias] but I also have my own money for my studies and my future [...] Going to Madrid was not feasible. It is so expensive and my grandpa can’t send me that much money every month and with my savings it would be much more difficult to sustain myself. But Gijon<sup>139</sup> is doable. I think that by asking my grandpa for a little money per month, with scholarships and so on [...] I think can get by working at whatever too” (Diana, Spain, 19 years old)

Carmen also shifted her *ideal* destination from Madrid to A Coruña (Galicia) as the rent is cheaper:

“I lived in Madrid until I was 8 and then we moved back to El Bierzo. My parents are originally from here. I love the city [Madrid]. It has so, so much to offer. There are many more opportunities to work, to study, to visit. Marcos [her husband] wanted to move to Madrid and we looked into it. We have some friends, we asked. But everything is so damn expensive: rent, also groceries, you need a transport pass. We couldn’t afford to move out of here for a very long time. A Coruña is also a nice city. My cousin lives

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<sup>138</sup> From 1981 to 2010, the average temperature in El Bierzo and Laciana during November and March has been 7.14°C (AEMET 2023).

<sup>139</sup> Gijon is one of the main cities of the Autonomous Community of Asturias.

there. Marcos and I talked about it, and we are first going there, then we can always move down to Madrid” (Carmen, Spain, 23 years old).

Shifting migration aspirations is a strategy to increase the likelihood of migrating, and the case of Carmen shows that adaptation mechanisms are not exclusionary, as various adaptation strategies can be employed at once to fulfill migration aspirations as soon as possible. The variety of adaptation strategies and the fact that these can be used simultaneously presents an opportunity to explore how these interact, and how aspiring migrants reassess their situation over time and select between various adaptation mechanisms (I deal with this in Chapter 10).

Apart from efforts to surpass immobility, it is also relevant to investigate how aspiring migrants adapt *while* immobile by increasing their life satisfaction. Transnationalism offers an avenue to explain this, as individuals reconceptualize their relationship to space through transnational ties.

### **4.3 I AM ‘HERE’ BUT ALSO ‘THERE’**

While some aim to expand their capabilities and others shift their *ideal* aspirations, transnational activities are part of the everyday life of all the interviewees, including Carmen, Diana, and Maria. For them, engaging in transnational connections is a vicarious and partial manner of fulfilling migration aspirations, as transnational ties allow them to stay ‘here’ and ‘there’. Interestingly, they initiate and sustain transnational ties on their own without the assistance or the intervention of migrants. This shows that non-migrants also play an important role in transnational social fields and that, apart from transmigration, it is also important to introduce transimmobility to explore how *some* non-migrants engage with activities and ideas cross-borders in their daily lives.

I differentiate three mechanisms that the interviewees employ to experience *mobility* while remaining put: (1) joining spaces associated with ‘the abroad’, (2) imagining future mobility, and (3) engaging with past migratory memories. These strategic clusters interrelate unfulfilled migration aspirations, transnationalism, and temporalities. While time remains a marginal element within migration studies, it is slowly gaining momentum (Griffiths 2014; Ortiga and Macabasag 2021) as scholars discuss the interaction between time, emotions, and involuntary immobility (Robertson and Runganaikaloo 2014; Wang 2020) or the manners in which temporalities explain why and how migration aspirations shift over time (Ortiga and Macabasag 2021). Inspired by this work, this chapter shows how imagining and reflecting about present, future, and past transnational activities vicariously and temporarily satisfies unfulfilled aspirations.

#### ***Present strategies and activities: Living migration through culture***

Joining spaces often associated with ‘foreigners’, ‘migration’ and the ‘experience abroad’ is a strategy that some adopt to experience migration while they remain in place. These include the consumption of international cultural products and initiating and sustaining contact with foreigners in their daily lives. While in the current globalized world many watch international films, read international literary texts, and relate to foreigners in their daily day, for some, these interactions shape their aspirations and identities. In this vein, incipient research stresses the imaginative power of cultural products as individuals can pursue fantasies and be imaginatively mobile even when movement does not physically occur (Cangià and Zittoun 2020; Plasquy 2012). In fact, TV shows and documentaries fuel migration aspirations, as opportunities and distinct lifestyles elsewhere can be imagined (Salazar 2011; Souiah, Salzbrunn and Mastrangelo 2018). As such, aspiring migrants can cope with their unfulfilled aspirations by actively consuming cultural products to experience migration vicariously. This is the case for Carmen and Maria, two young adults with strong migration aspirations but unable to fund their movement due to their scarce economic resources (see Chapter 8, Section 4.2). They both make use of YouTube

videos to experience migration via cultural products. For instance, Maria, who speaks Italian and aspires to migrate to Italy, mentions:

“I do watch a lot of videos of people that are out there [in Italy] studying or people who are working. You idealize the whole experience, of course, and that makes me want to move there even more, but there is more than that. You see the everyday life, their work, their life. You get to know what [youtubers] do, so you can almost get inside their lives, and know what it would be like to be there [...] You can kind of get a little bit closer to what it [migration] could be” (Maria, Portugal, 22 years old).

The possibility to immerse oneself into cross-border routines and activities brings the interviewees closer to populations abroad, international cultures and the migration experience, showing the role of new technologies as information sharing and well-being enhancing spaces. Even if the interviewees remain in place, they are able to move virtually and imaginatively, which brings them joy: “I started a daily routine of watching people’s experiences in other cities and abroad. For a moment, I can imagine that it is me and it keeps me motivated” (Carmen, Spain, 23 years old). Apart from increasing their life satisfaction, consuming cultural products, including historical books, documentaries, or TV shows, about their ideal destinations results in increasing migration aspirations that keep their ‘dreams alive’. Julia, a dental prosthetist in her mid-50s who suppressed her intrinsic aspirations due to family responsibilities, is a frustrated globe-trotter (see Chapter 7, section 4.2): “It’s a life I could not have, but a life I wanted to have. I can’t let that die and I feel like myself when I can read new books or watch docuseries about life abroad” (Julia, Spain, 56 years old).

Apart from engaging with migration and international ‘cultures’, some try to engage more directly with the migratory experience by meeting foreigners to learn more about life abroad and cross-border practices. David makes use of online platforms, such as Discord, to establish conversations with individuals abroad. This not only gives him the chance of asking about foreign cultural routines and habits, but it also helps him practice his language skills: “Initially, I wanted to go [on Erasmus] to the UK, so I started playing videogames with British gamers. I could ask them about life there and practice some English” (David, Spain, 23 years old). Julia also tried to experience life in destination through foreigners:

J: “I tried to welcome a foreigner, a Briton, to my home. I wanted a Brit to come and join us as an au pair for a couple years. My initial idea was to have a British person for about two-to-three years, then a German and so on. The problem was that there was a high demand in big cities, so nobody wanted to come to Ponferrada, and it didn’t work out. But it was like, changing going out [abroad] for getting different people in [...] I tried it from 2000 to 2004, when I separated from my husband. And from then on, I tried it only once, it didn’t work out and I let it go.

I: You wanted to learn languages?

J: Well, yes. But, I wanted, well, everything. She would help out with the language, obviously, but there would be those moments when I would come back from work and I would want her to tell me everything about her life, about life there. I don’t know. Everything” (Julia, Spain, 56 years old).

For my interviewees the consumption of cultural products or trying to relate with foreigners is not a simple ramification of globalization, but, rather, it is an active adaptation strategy fully integrated in their daily lives that allows them to envision possibilities and to live across borders even when they remain put. They maintain intensive exchanges by initiating and sustaining contact over the years with people abroad, and by connecting with ‘cultures’ elsewhere. In this way, they not only engage in virtual travel in real time but also in imaginative travel that makes them transcend geographical boundaries (see King 2012; Urry 2007, 47). This calls for research

on how aspiring migrants with no connection to migration engage in transnational social fields, as well as to investigate the relationship between hope and imaginations for aspiring migrants more comprehensively.

### ***Future imaginaries: 'I live to travel'***

The fact that migration is a corporeal phenomenon has contributed to the traditional overlook of other forms of mobility, including the imaginative and, more recently, the virtual, and how these interact with migration itself. However, the 'emotional turn' (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015) and the 'mobilities turn' (Urry 2007) in migration studies have been accompanied by increasing research examining the interactions between aspirations and imaginations of mobility (Bissell 2007; Cangià and Zittoun 2020; Salazar 2011). Especially because "through imagination we can imagine ourselves being or becoming mobile, we can cross material borders and make mobility possible where it does not seem to be the case" (Cangià and Zittoun 2020, 645). Thinking about and planning mobility appear to be important adaptation mechanisms, as individuals with unfulfilled aspirations can temporarily escape from their daily lives by imagining life elsewhere. The imagination has, then, an important adaptative and transnational component.

My interviewees imagine and plan their future movement and by doing so, their daily lives are shaped by cross-border practices and localities. For some, planning mobility is a long-term adaptation strategy as they know it is unlikely they will fulfill their aspirations in the short-term due to their financial situation. This is the case of Maria, Carmen, and Eduardo who feel 'stuck' in El Bierzo due to their limited economic resources (see Chapter 8, section 4.2). Planning mobility is, for them, an escape valve, even when they know they cannot materialize the imagined movement. Planning and imagining migration they engage with their desired destinations by researching lifestyles, routines, and attitudes cross-borders. Maria highlights:

"I have this friend, who would also love to migrate abroad, but she is pregnant and she does not have any money. Just like me. We plan all these amazing getaways even though we can't go anywhere [...] The last holiday we planned was to Florence. I checked online restaurants, galleries, museums, shops, markets, etc. Everything I could think of. It helps, you know. It might sound like a waste of time, but it keeps me sane. And hopeful" (Diana, Portugal, 22 years old).

Carmen shares Maria's feelings, as planning and thinking about the possibility to move – even it is for a couple of days to a close-by city – helps her cope with her unfulfilled aspirations:

"Even if it is just two days, even if it is an afternoon in a close-by town, I need that [...] But it is really difficult because I am saving to go to A Coruña and I can't misuse the money. And I don't even know when I will have some vacation days. I am facing it very badly because the situation is bad, it's not ideal and I am very frustrated here because I know what I want to do and I need to stay here [...] I cannot leave the place because I barely have days off, I need to remain in a super precarious job. I am getting tired, you know? I have so, so clear what I want to do. I am yearning to leave, and I need to stay here. It is very tiring because I want to leave but I cannot and I need to bear it in here [...] So thinking, imagining that I can go, it means a lot" (Carmen, Spain, 21 years old).

Imagining and planning movement that has yet to happen has an important emotional component, which provides the interviewees with an imagined space where they feel 'there' while remaining 'here'. Planning mobility, however, is not only an adaptation strategy for those who aspire to migrate in the short-to-medium term, but it can also be a coping mechanism for those who aspire to return 'home' in the long-run. Eduardo, for instance, has high intrinsic aspirations to return to Argentina, although he only envisions fulfilling those aspirations once his children grow up and he retires. For him, researching the best and cheapest plane routes to Buenos Aires and what he can do once there is important, even if these plans will not be executed any time soon: "It is the homesickness, missing your family, your country. That makes you think when are you going back,

when can you leave [...] And you check what you can do once there, where to live, how to visit family that is not in Buenos Aires” (Eduardo, Argentina, 39 years old).

For those who remain in place due to familial responsibilities but have the economic means to migrate, thinking about and planning movement goes beyond the imagination as going on vacations is a manner of experiencing migration temporarily. This shows the relationship between migration and tourism, which, although relatively neglected within the field (Williams and Hall 2000), has started gaining momentum as scholars investigate how tourism generates more permanent forms of settlement (O’Reilly 2003; Haug, Dann and Mehmetoglu 2007) and how tourism-related imaginaries shape expectations, identities, and aspirations (Klekowski von Koppenfels, Mulholland and Ryan 2015; Salazar 2012). For some, migration aspirations shape how they engage with and relate to tourism, and tourism bears an important adaptative component because, as leisure studies have long held, tourism works “as a mechanism by which people attempt to lead a fulfilling life” (Currie 1997, 886). Therefore, tourism can be a way of experiencing the migratory experience when caring responsibilities make migration not possible. This is the case of Julia and Antonio, whose life and migration aspirations were presented in Chapter 7 (section 4.2): While their family responsibilities tie them to El Bierzo and Laciana and instrumentally need to stay, intrinsically they long for migration, and going on holidays is a way of mitigating their frustration and entrapment. Julia highlights:

“It is an issue of duty. My sense of duty towards my family is too high. How do I deal with it? Well, I only have 15 vacation days a year, so when those come, I leave. The farthest the better [...] I have been twice to Egypt, I have been to London, Rome, Paris, Mexico, Brazil, Cuba, Singapore, Hong Kong, Bali...It has been a manner of remaining healthy, happy [...] I only have those 15 days. The moment my holidays start, the airport doors are a release for me. The moment the door of the airport opens for me to enter, that is it. I have not even boarded the plane, and my world and I are already changing. And then...well, off to work and responsibility again” (Julia, Spain, 56 years old).

Similarly, Antonio, who is a secondary school teacher who returned to El Bierzo when his parents grew older, mentions:

“I consider myself a very mobile individual. I love moving from one place to another, but, well, I finally realized that my job has a benefit: the huge number of days off I get. So, I always seize that, and I leave. I can finally travel with no worries. I could not go abroad, but I have travelled a lot within the country. I have moved up, down, all over the place. It was a way of adapting for me. A way of not feeling imprisoned in one place. We can fly, can’t we? When I have vacations, we take the car, and we go. That’s it [...] It would have been very unsatisfactory if I could not have resorted to tourism, but my work allowed me to do so” (Antonio, Spain, 60 years old).

For Antonio and Julia tourism goes beyond going on holidays, as thinking about and planning their vacations is a manner of adapting to their unfulfilled intrinsic migration aspirations and a way of being connected with places outside ‘home’. They research different destinations, delve into blogposts, documentaries, and books to get familiar with the local culture and the specificities of the place. In this way, experiencing the culture at destination as a ‘local’ is extremely important to them, given that they are interested in understanding how locals live to enjoy a non-touristic version of this temporal movement. Julia highlights:

“I sightsee, obviously. But there is a part of me that just wants to go to the local shop, walk, experience the place. Sometimes it is just about walking and walking, as if I was a real local. I always think about it. Where would I like to live? I need to feel the street, I need to make it my own. To live in Egypt...that would be the dream, that is why I keep going back” (Julia, Spain, 56 years old).

Temporary tourism further increases their intrinsic migration aspirations but also their life satisfaction. Whereas the interviewees remain physically put, they imagine themselves in constant movement and residing in different destinations (Cangià and Zittoun 2020). Tourism, as my interviewees envision it, has a strong transnational component (Duval 2003), as they connect with routines and activities across borders. And they do so not only during their holidays but over time: first, when they plan and think about a movement that has yet to take place, and, second, after it has taken place, as memories serve as adaptation strategies to relive a migratory-like experience.

### ***Memories and nostalgia: Longing past movement to endure the day***

The constant interactions with other countries, cross-border practices and people configure the relationship of the participants to more than one nation-state. Nevertheless, these interactions are not only relevant while they are happening, but, instead, memories about past interactions – be these having contact with foreigners, planning mobility, or engaging with cultural products – are strong catalysts of migration aspirations and a way of feeling ‘there’ while remaining ‘here’. Some interviewees actively remember their short experiences abroad to increase daily satisfaction. Julia, for instance, emphasizes:

“15 days off is not enough to keep me going. It might work for the first months after my return, but after that I go back to planning my next big holiday and I keep scrolling through [my trip] photos and videos. Even the restaurant menu. Anything really. To know it was real, that I was there” (Julia, Spain, 56 years old).

The interviewees’ experiences show an interrelation between place, the everyday, and hope, which is closely linked to ecologies of affect and the manners in which ideas of place and past activities generate representations and imaginations about the future. Places can be represented through cultural forms and stories (Davidson 2011; de Martini Ugolotti 2020), and, consequently, past getaways, cultural products, and meeting foreigners, generate an intimate imaginary relation between where aspiring migrants want to be and where they really are. Affect and aspirations towards migration are reinforced and vicariously experienced through memories and nostalgia, which crystallize into real life interactions. Maria reflects on the ramifications that the YouTube videos about Italy she watches have for her:

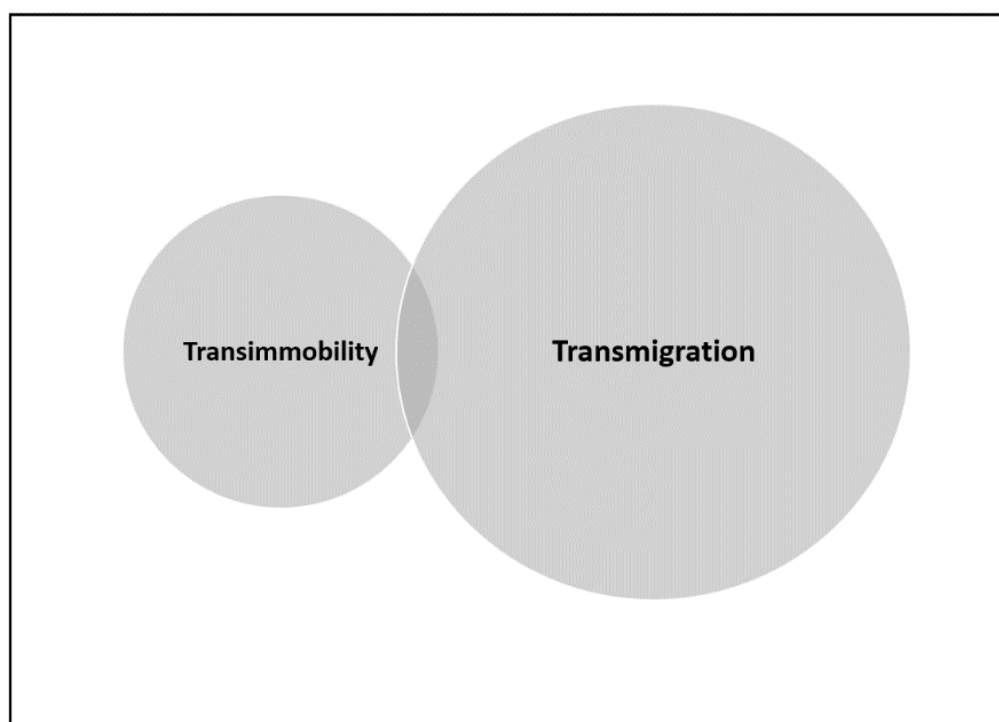
“I have never been there [in Italy], but I have felt it [the place], you know? It is difficult to explain. It is just through these YouTubers and their experiences, but somehow, I am there, for a tiny moment I can escape [...] It is not dictating my whole everyday but if I get very frustrated, I think about that moment [going home and watching YouTube] and it gets better” (Maria, Portugal, 22 years old).

Nostalgia and hope reinforce, then, the idealization of migratory experiences and they increase the interviewees’ life satisfaction, while, concurrently, generating strong cross-border interactions. In this manner, despite their state as involuntary immobile, the interviewees experience migration vicariously generating a dual and in-betweenness identity as mobile and immobile. While corporeal, spatial movement does not take place, some transcend geographical distances through imaginative and virtual travel (Urry 2007). Nostalgia and longing for migration operate across temporal and spatial dimensions, as nostalgia is not only an orientation towards past activities, but, instead, it is also situated in the everyday and creates hope and future imaginaries (Park, Davidson and Shields 2011). Migratory nostalgia is, in this case, related to the emotions brought by a memory or activity, and triggers an identification as mobile for a short period of time. The dual identity of the interviewees is exemplified by Antonio, who mentions: “Look, when I leave this place I feel good, I feel satisfied. I am moving somewhere. It is difficult to come back [to El Bierzo], but up here [pointing to his head] I am still there” (Antonio, Spain, 60 years old). What are the implications of this?

## 5 MOVING BEYOND THE ‘MOBILITY BIAS’ OF TRANSNATIONALISM: UNDERSTANDING TRANSIMMOBILITY

The transnational ties that my interviewees initiate and sustain by engaging with international cultural products, connecting with foreigners, planning future mobility, and thinking about past movements show that transnational connections are not only limited to migrants or to non-migrants with migratory connections. Instead, non-migrants can initiate, sustain, and have an active presence in transnational social fields *on their own*. As a result, I propose the notion of transimmobility – and consequently, transimmobile – to incorporate non-migrants *actively* engaged in transnational ties. This entails an expansion of the concept of transnationalism in its extension of the actors and not an extended or watered-down version of the concept that stretches the concept of transnationalism beyond usefulness<sup>140</sup>. This is because I maintain a tight definition of transnationalism, in line with Portes et al. (1999, 219) as “requir[ing] regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders”. Regular contact with people and institutions across borders is not necessarily constrained to migrants as shown by this research and by the calls to incorporate non-migrants and aspiring migrants more comprehensively into transnational studies (Boccagni 2012; Gaibazzi 2015; Lacroix 2009). Instead, the transnational interface consists of individuals whose identities and daily lives are heavily influenced by transnationalism be these migrants or non-migrants. Figure 31 illustrates this.

**Figure 31.** The transnational interface



Source: Own elaboration

While almost all individuals and countries are affected by the increasing interconnections worldwide and by the flows of ideas, goods and people that intensified during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not all daily lives and identities are shaped by cross-border interactions. The population at large is affected by cross-border activities as they consume international products and relate to foreigners, but their identities and lives are not necessarily shaped

<sup>140</sup> I thank Amanda Klekowski von Koppenfels for this remark.

by these as they primarily engage in the social, economic, political, and cultural activities that are local to them. Some, however, surpass this state when their daily activities are shaped concurrently by more than one state, therefore becoming part of the transnational interface. This means that apart from local endeavors, they also *actively* engage in socio-economic, political, and cultural practices and activities elsewhere. Transmigrants and transimmobles are an example of this. Figure 31 represents transmigration in a larger circle to capture the higher likelihood of migrants engaging with different localities at once as their identities are usually shaped by origin and destination communities. This has been amply researched by migration scholars as migrants are likely to disrupt linear understandings of movement from A to B as well as the fixity of identities (Bauböck 2003; Portes 2001, 2003; Portes, Haller and Guarnizo 2002; Sánchez Molina 2008). While likely to be smaller in scale, non-migrants can also actively engage in activities across borders and their identities can be shaped accordingly, as this research shows. In fact, not all that remain in place are primarily geared towards their immediate local context. Consider, for instance, second-generation migrants (Shahrokni 2019; Wessendorf 2007), non-migratory family members (Bastia 2009; Graham et al. 2012; Hoang et al. 2015), as well as aspiring migrants whose aspirations shape their transnational activities (Dimitriadis 2020). Since transimmobility captures how non-migrants can initiate and sustain transnational activities *on their own*, the intersection on Figure 31 refers to those non-migrants with migratory connections, such as non-migratory family members (Mata-Codesal 2015) or second-generation migrants.

Apart from capturing transnational dynamics that might not be that visible, the implications of expanding transnationalism beyond migrants and non-migrants with migratory connections is important for theory-building in two ways: First, to provide the opportunity to investigate how people engage with globalization and interconnectedness beyond a mere consumption of goods and ideas from elsewhere, and how adherence to ‘cosmopolitanism’ can encourage transimmobility and potentially migration aspirations. Secondly, while transnationalism has often been regarded as a form of immigrant adaptation (Carling 2008, 1455), focusing on transimmobility facilitates researching how aspiring migrants can adapt and increase their life satisfaction, even after subduing aspirations. This not only interrelates the aspirations-capabilities framework with transnationalism, but, more importantly, it offers a point of departure to explore whether transimmobility can be ‘a good enough option’ when people remain involuntary immobile for years.

## 6 CONCLUSION: THE LIFE SATISFACTION OF THE INVOLUNTARILY IMMOBILE

This chapter investigates how those with unfulfilled migration aspirations adapt by examining three adaptation mechanisms: (1) the expansion of migration capabilities, (2) shifting *ideal* migration aspirations, and (3) the creation of transnational ties by non-migrants. This is important for two reasons: First, to study how aspiring migrants negotiate an unwanted state of immobility, which calls to investigate how they select among a variety of mechanisms at hand. Secondly, to demonstrate that aspiring migrants with no migratory connections can create and sustain transnational ties over time, which introduces ‘transimmobility’ to migrations studies. Apart from expanding transnationalism in its extension of the actors, this calls to explore how embeddedness in transnational social fields generates an identity as ‘mobile’ while remaining in place. Moreover, ‘transimmobility’ provides a framework to empirically analyze the interrelation between spatial, virtual, and imaginative movement, and to study how aspiring migrants partially, temporarily, and vicariously move beyond involuntary immobility through non-corporeal travel.

In this way, this chapter not only furthers theory-building, but it also illustrates that adaptation mechanisms to cope with an unwanted state of immobility are present in high-income countries. This showcases that the ‘good life’ is also at stake in the ‘Global North’, particularly for those in precarious states (Mata-Codesal 2019), opening up the possibility to further emigration studies in two ways: First, by more comprehensively investigating how polycrises affect migration patterns and result in (unfulfilled) emigration aspirations in immigration countries

and consolidated economies; and secondly, by applying the concept of 'involuntary immobility' outside of low- and moderate-income countries. These lines of research have the potential of ending artificial and romanticized visions of emigration in the 'Global North'.

#### **PART IV – ASPIRATIONS, CAPABILITIES AND ADAPTATION ACROSS THE ‘DEVELOPMENT SPECTRUM’: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS**

Part IV reflects on the insights gained in Chapters 7, 8 and 9 and unravels their implications. **Chapter 10** first combines the findings obtained from differentiating the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of aspirations and the external and internal dimensions of capabilities (Chapter 7 and 8, respectively) to offer a framework that measures the (in)voluntariness of migration and immobility in a spectrum of degrees, bridging the gap between ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ migration studies. Then, it engages with the adaptation mechanisms investigated in Chapter 9 to theoretically analyze how different strategies interrelate with each other and how aspiring migrants reassess their situation over time. **Chapter 11** ends this thesis by summing up its arguments and by pointing towards future avenues for research.

## **CHAPTER 10 – THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter theoretically engages with the empirical insights in Part III. It does so in two ways. First, it expands the aspirations-capability framework by unraveling the (in)voluntariness of migration and immobility. It provides a framework that encompasses all forms of (im)mobility by bringing together the spectrum of degrees in which aspirations and capabilities take place (see Chapter 7 and Chapter 8, respectively). Secondly, the chapter engages with the insights gained in Chapter 9 and theorizes how adaptation mechanisms interact over time in an attempt to move the focus from (im)mobility categories to (im)mobility transitions (Liu and Peng 2023; Rodriguez-Pena 2023). With these theoretical and methodological reflections, this chapter outlines the importance of moving beyond dichotomous categorizations that obscure social realities and hinder theory-building.

### **2 UNRAVELING (IN)VOLUNTARINESS: AN INTERSECTION OF ASPIRATIONS AND CAPABILITIES**

This section argues that the (in)voluntariness of migration stands on two pillars: aspirations and capabilities. It unravels the (in)voluntariness of migration (1) by providing a short overview of the two potential combinations that instrumental and intrinsic aspirations can adopt – either reinforcing or conflicting – and how these can be measured on a continuum, and (2) by outlining how capabilities can be measured in a spectrum of degrees by looking into the interactions between external and internal capabilities. Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 provide the empirical insights and discussions leading to these approaches. This section ends by bringing together both approaches and presenting a theoretical framework that conceptualizes volition within migration studies in a spectrum.

#### **2.1 BETWEEN REINFORCING AND CONFLICTING ASPIRATIONS**

As outlined in Chapter 7, the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of aspirations can reinforce each other, but also collide. Reinforcing migration aspirations occur when migration is perceived as a means to achieve an end, as well as a wellbeing-enhancing experience on its own. Similarly, reinforcing aspirations to stay reflect a conviction that remaining in place is more beneficial from an utilitarian point of view as well as a driver of wellbeing that allows people to stay close to family, friends and at ‘home’. Reinforcing aspirations highlight, therefore, a scenario in which both the instrumental and the intrinsic dimensions of aspirations gear towards the same spatial category be this migrating or remaining in place. Conflicting aspirations capture, conversely, a situation in which the intrinsic and the instrumental dimensions of aspirations diverge. This can result in instrumental aspirations to migrate but intrinsic aspirations to remain in place, or in instrumental aspirations to remain but intrinsic aspirations to migrate. As outlined in Chapter 7 (see section 4.2), the former can be a ramification of a lack of employment opportunities and, therefore, limited capabilities to remain and earn a living, despite intrinsic desires to stay put. The latter scenario can be an outcome of family and caring responsibilities, which ‘trap’ people in place and result in setting aside intrinsic aspirations to ‘discover the world’ for the family’s sake.

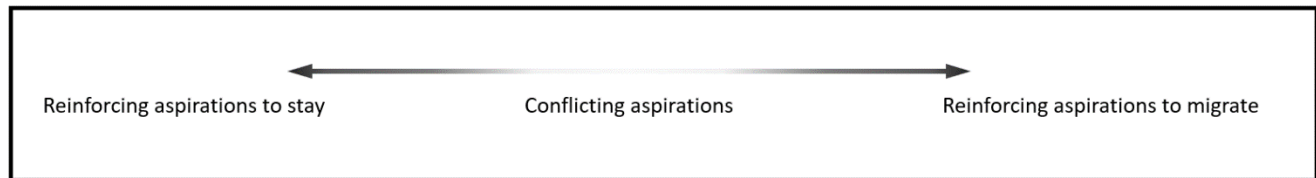
Investigating whether the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of aspirations converge or diverge facilitates measuring (im)mobility aspirations on a continuum from reinforcing aspirations to stay in one end of the spectrum to reinforcing migration aspirations in the other end, while accounting for conflicting aspirations in the middle (see Figure 32). As such, this approach not only accounts for individuals with firm convictions about where to be but it also considers those with different strengths of aspirations, such as conflicting or mild aspirations<sup>141</sup>. More importantly, investigating the divergence of the dimensions of aspirations helps unpack

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<sup>141</sup> As detailed in Chapter 7, mild aspirations represent indifference or unclear convictions about where to be, as the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions are not strong enough neither towards staying nor towards leaving.

volition because it calls to investigate whether (im)mobility is voluntary for those with conflicting aspirations to the same extent it is for those with reinforcing aspirations. As shown in Chapter 7, not being fully convinced about whether migrating or staying is best results in unhappiness and being stuck between what ought to be done and what individuals desire to do. For this reason, differentiating between reinforcing and conflicting aspirations serves as one of the pillars to understand (in)voluntariness in migration studies.

**Figure 32.** (Im)mobility aspirations in a spectrum of degrees



Source: Own elaboration

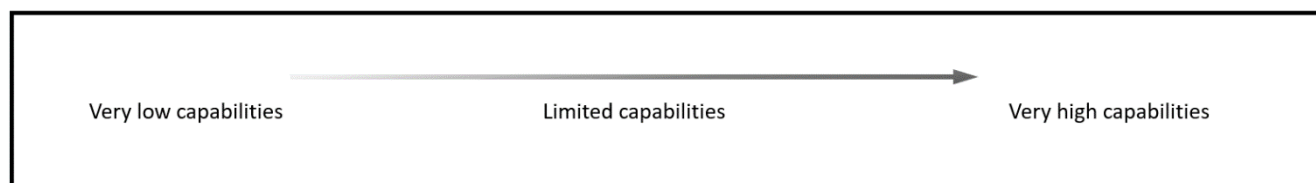
## 2.2 BETWEEN HIGH, LIMITED, AND LOW CAPABILITIES

As outlined in Chapter 8, external capabilities represent structural constraints and opportunities, while internal capabilities capture individual skills and resources. The interaction between both dimensions explains individual capabilities to migrate and to remain in a spectrum of degrees given that capabilities can be high, low, or limited. High capabilities represent one extreme of the spectrum, and they translate to low structural obstacles and enough resources to stay or fund movement. This encapsulates, for example, the relatively unconstrained migration of lifestyle migrants, or, in de Haas's (2021) words, 'free migration'. Low capabilities, on the other hand, capture important structural constraints, a lack of resources and virtually no agency, which handicaps the ability to move or stay, representing the other extreme of the spectrum. Deportation or slavery are examples of this. Limited capabilities refer to the circumstances of those with moderate resources and moderate access to structural opportunities, who see their options to stay or migrate limited to different degrees<sup>142</sup>.

Exploring the varying interactions of external and internal capabilities allows measuring these on a continuum, running from very high to very low capabilities while also accounting for limited capabilities. Figure 33 visually illustrates this approach, which is not only relevant to move beyond binaries of 'high' versus 'low' capabilities, but, more importantly, to further unpack the volition of (im)mobility. Indeed, such approach questions if migration is voluntary to the same extent when capabilities to remain are low or limited and migration is not a liberating experience, but, instead, the only option left to live a 'good life' and develop the self. This is linked to discussions on what can be considered 'reasonable' options to stay, which, as I argue in Chapter 8 (see section 5), go beyond life-threatening or exploitative situations. When capabilities to remain are constrained by a lack of development at the regional and local level, individuals need to choose between remaining in place in a precarious situation or migrating to earn a living and develop the 'self'. Under such circumstances, agency and volition are constrained (de Wind 2007). Capabilities serve, then, as the second pillar to understand (in)voluntariness in migration studies.

<sup>142</sup> As explained in Chapter 8, capabilities must be measured on a continuum. As such, those with limited capabilities will inevitably be closer to one end of the spectrum than the other. The time and resources required to fulfill aspirations will be dependent on where individuals are located in such continuum.

**Figure 33.** Capabilities in a spectrum of degrees

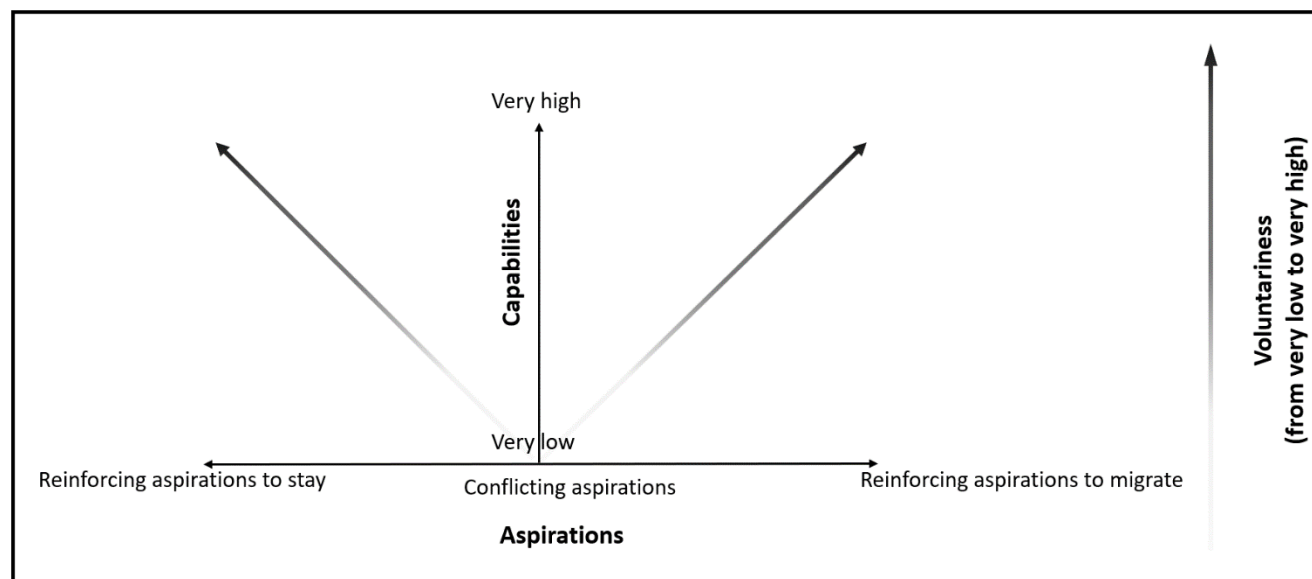


Source: Own elaboration

### **2.3 BRIDGING THE GAP: A FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND VOLITION IN MIGRATION STUDIES**

The dichotomous distinction between ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ migration hinders theory-building and the incorporation of all forms of (im)mobility into a single, comprehensive conceptual approach. De Haas (2021) has recently argued that the aspirations-capability framework has the analytical potential to bridge this divide, as a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between agency and structure can be advanced. I join his call and argue that differentiating the interactions between (1) the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of aspirations and (2) the external and internal dimensions of capabilities offers an approach to do so. Exploring intrinsic desires vis-à-vis instrumental aspirations allows to understand whether individual (short- and medium-term) wellbeing is being sacrificed for longer-term (familial) wellbeing, and if such a sacrifice is a result of limited capabilities to remain in place, especially when political and socio-economic rights, or life itself, are in danger. Figure 34 visually represents this approach, which brings together those presented in the sections above (Figure 32 and 33). This combined approach measures (in)voluntariness in two steps: (1) how reinforcing aspirations are and (2) how high capabilities are. First, the horizontal axis captures aspirations on a continuum and accounts for reinforcing as well as for conflicting aspirations. The more conflicting aspirations are, the lower the voluntariness of movement will be. This is because strongly conflicting aspirations capture, among others, labor migrants who migrate because of familial responsibilities, or non-migrants who stay, despite desires to leave, because of socio-cultural and familial expectations (Adeel and Yeh 2018). As outlined in Chapter 7, it is important to account for conflicting aspirations to investigate how they influence the migratory experience, and to explore whether migration is voluntary to the same extent when aspirations are conflicting and not reinforcing. Secondly, the vertical axis represents capabilities on a continuum running from very low to very high. The lower capabilities are, the lower the voluntariness of (im)mobility will be, as individuals have no real option to stay or to migrate and, therefore, no freedom to choose where to live.

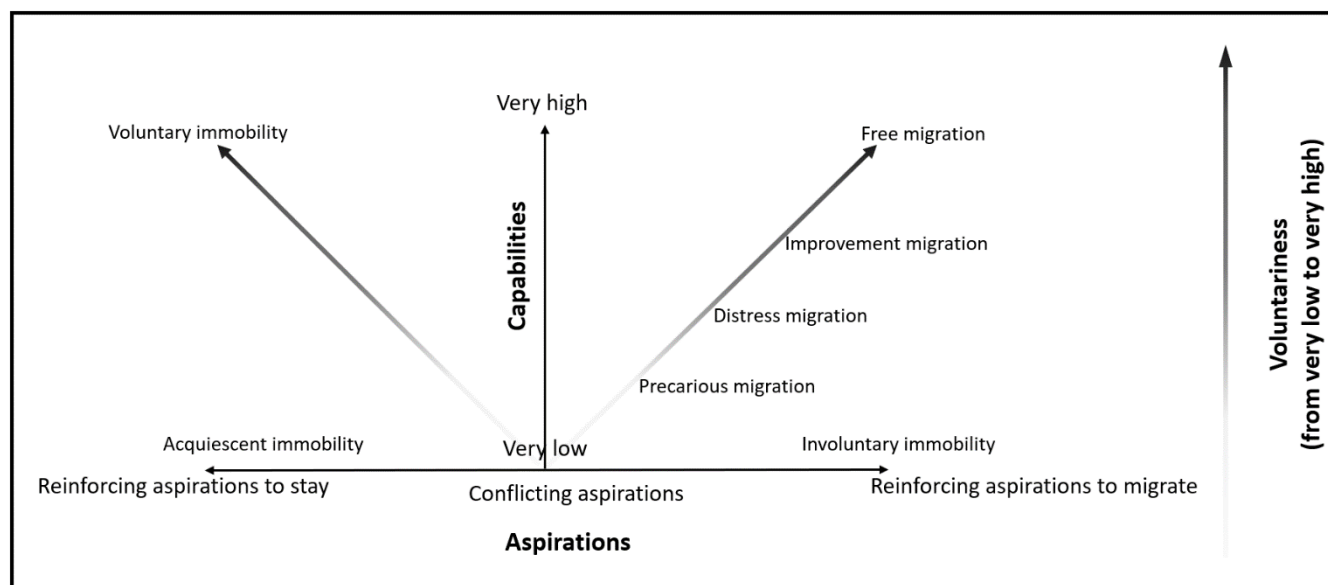
**Figure 34.** The (in)voluntariness of (im)mobility



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 35 incorporates some migration categories to the approach to demonstrate its usefulness. *Voluntary immobility* (Schewel 2020a) and *free migration* (de Haas 2021) represent ideal scenarios, in which individuals not only have very high capabilities to decide where to live, but also the ability to fulfill their aspirations, which are reinforcing. These two categories are, consequently, fully voluntary. In comparison, *involuntary immobility* (Carling 2002) and *acquiescent immobility* (Schewel 2015) represent an opposing scenario, in which low capabilities limit agency and the decision-making process. However, more research on the *acquiescent immobile* is necessary considering that while they can fulfill their aspirations to stay, they do not have a real option to leave. Therefore, how voluntary their immobility is remains uncertain, especially because some *acquiescent immobile* have subdued their migration aspirations due to structural constraints to access documented migration (Ortega and Macasabag 2021). I have also incorporated into the framework the concepts of *precarious*, *distress* and *improvement* migration (de Haas 2021) to highlight how different degrees of capabilities affect migration. *Precarious migrants* are those vulnerable to exploitation who experience high constraints and have scarce resources, and whose movement is usually short-distance or internal. This includes “impoverished labor migrants and the majority of people forcibly displaced by conflict” (de Haas 2021, 28). *Distress migration* captures relatively well-off refugees, who despite important structural constraints in the form of conflict, persecution, or oppression and no reasonable option to stay, have relatively high internal capabilities. *Improvement migration* encompasses, for example, labor migrants who can access documented migration and for whom socio-economic mobility via migration is possible despite limited financial resources. Considering that precarious and distressed migrants have no reasonable option to stay without risking their lives, their capabilities to (safely) remain in place are limited or low, and, therefore, the voluntariness of their migration is lower. As argued in Chapter 8, those migrants who cannot earn a living at ‘home’ and whose socio-economic rights are at stake also see their capabilities and volition constrained. While this can also be the case of improvement migrants, their agency and volition are clearly higher than those of an internally displaced person, given that their lives are not necessarily threatened. For simplification purposes, I have considered that the aspirations of precarious, distressed and improvement migrants are not that conflicting. Nonetheless, this is not always the case, as the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of mobility can heavily collide (see Chapter 7, section 4.2), and mobility is, especially for distressed and precarious migrants, often a response to severe danger at home, which exemplifies an instrumental rationale for migrating. When aspirations are not reinforcing, but rather conflicting, the voluntariness of migrants will be further jeopardized.

**Figure 35.** The (in)voluntariness of (im)mobility with selected migration categories



Source: Own elaboration

To fully account for the volition behind migration and immobility, it is necessary to simultaneously research aspirations and capabilities and to explore how reinforcing and how high they are, respectively. By doing so, it is possible to bring together the voluntariness of all forms of (im)mobility into a single framework that understands agency and the varying degrees of structural constraints in a spectrum. This approach moves beyond binaries and offers the analytical potential to bridge the gap between ‘forced’ and ‘voluntary’ migration by investigating the agency that ‘forced migrants’ have and the constraints that ‘voluntary migrants’ suffer. This approach will hopefully be useful to enable theoretical cross-fertilization between forced and migration studies and elaborate further theorizations on (in)voluntariness. This can be done by more systematically investigating (1) the interactions between intrinsic and instrumental aspirations, especially for refugees and forcibly displaced migrants, (2) how limited capabilities to remain clash with the ‘good life’, life aspirations and the aspirations to move or stay, and (3) the (in)voluntariness of those who stay, considering that conceptualization on the different types of ‘stayers’ is limited.

### 3 UNRAVELING THE INTERACTION OF ADAPTATION MECHANISMS: BETWEEN IDEAL AND NEW ASPIRATIONS

This second section focuses on the empirical insights gained in Chapter 9 to theorize how the adaptation strategies of aspiring migrants interact over time. It does so by theoretically reflecting on the manners in which different adaptation strategies, which include the expansion of migration capabilities, shifting ideal aspirations, subduing aspirations and transimmobility, result in a departure from *ideal* and *original* migration aspirations. This reflects a theory-building exercise to conceptualize adaptation strategies that needs to be further explored<sup>143</sup>.

#### 3.1 ADAPTATION AS A PROCESS

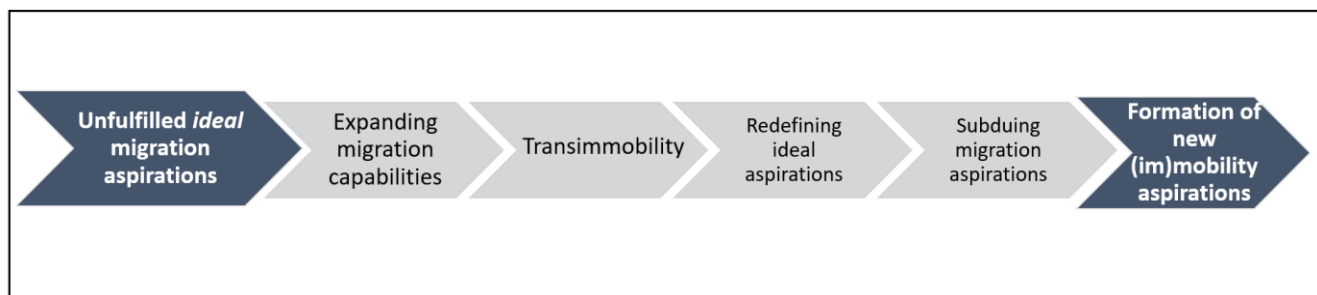
Adaptation preferences have gained momentum in the field of migration studies as more scholars are interested on how people strategy, cope and negotiate their unfulfilled aspirations (Carling and Schewel 2018; Mata-

<sup>143</sup> My previous research partially substantiates this theorization as I have shown that aspiring migrants first try to maximize their capabilities and, after a period of involuntary immobility, they become more flexible about how migration is desirable (Rodriguez-Pena 2023).

Codesal 2019; Ortiga and Macabasag 2020, 2021; Rodriguez-Pena 2023). Common adaptation strategies include the expansion of migration capabilities, subduing migration aspirations, and being more flexible regarding the conditions under which migration is desirable (see Chapter 2, section 2.3). As outlined in Chapter 9, I add transimmobility as a coping mechanism to investigate how aspiring migrants engage with transnational social fields to increase their life satisfaction while they remain immobile. Moreover, as also argued in Chapter 9, adaptation mechanisms are not exclusionary and instead, aspiring migrants can employ more than one coping strategy at once to increase the likelihood of fulfilling migration aspirations and their life satisfaction. For this reason and considering that adaptation is in itself a *process* of change, I theoretically reflect on aspiring migrants' adaptation strategies as a process in which various mechanisms take part to achieve a particular end, and I try to answer the following questions: How do different adaptation mechanisms interact? How does the selection of adaptation strategies reflect a transition of aspirations? Despite incipient research – or perhaps because of how incipient research in this matter is –, this remains unclear, and how aspiring migrants reassess their situation over time and change their adaptation strategies is underexplored.

I theoretically 'rank' adaptation strategies based on how, by adopting these, aspiring migrants depart from their initial, ideal migration aspirations. Inspired by the step-migration<sup>144</sup> concept elaborated by Ravenstein (1889), I refer to this process as *stepwise-adaptation* to capture how coping preferences might occur stage by stage as individuals deviate from their ideal aspirations until they let them go completely and form new (im)mobility aspirations. Figure 36 presents a visual representation of this.

**Figure 36.** Stepwise-adaptation



Source: Own elaboration

First, individuals might try to set strategies to expand their migration capabilities. Mata-Codesal (2019, 49) highlights that “it is not only about migrating or staying put, but to be able to do so under specific circumstances”. Therefore, those with unfulfilled aspirations might not be willing to let their ideal aspirations go. Individuals can, for instance, postpone their migration projects while they save up or while they mobilize the support of friends (Rodriguez-Pena 2023, 629). The expansion of migration capabilities does not entail shifting migration aspirations and, instead, aspiring migrants can still stick to their ideal aspirations. Furthermore, the efforts to expand migration capabilities is an active strategy to fulfill migration aspirations. For this reason, I consider that, in theory, it is the first step that aspiring migrants take when they cannot fulfill their migration aspirations.

Second, frustration and resignation with their immobile status can lead to a partial, vicarious, and temporary fulfillment of migration aspirations through transnationalism, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 9. Transimmobility captures the transnational connections that non-migrants initiate and sustain over time by actively engaging with international cultural products, connecting with foreigners, and thinking about and planning mobility. Transimmobility is a strategy to feel ‘there’ while remaining ‘here’ by engaging in cross-border

<sup>144</sup> Ravenstein (1889) highlights that migration might occur stage by stage, as people move from rural areas to urban cities before migrating internationally.

connections and activities, and as such it does not entail giving up on *ideal* migration aspirations. People can still aspire to move to their selected destinations under the circumstances they consider ideal, and they can actively try to create cross-border interactions to ‘feel’ and ‘experience’ that particular movement. Transimmobility is, however, a less active coping strategy than expanding migration capabilities, as it does not necessarily increase the likelihood of migrating. This is why I consider that transimmobility has the potential to jeopardize ideal aspirations to a greater extent and, as a result, comes second in the stepwise-adaptation process.

The third adaptation step refers to the reconsideration and redefinition of migration aspirations. Individuals can develop substitutive aspirations, which might include, for instance, aspirations to migrate internally when international migration is not possible (Mata-Codesal 2019). They can also soften the circumstances under which migration seems ideal by, for instance, agreeing to undocumented migration (Rodriguez-Pena 2023). This entails a departure from ideal migration aspirations and, consequently, aspiring migrants might engage in this adaptation strategy later in time, after having tried to fulfill their *ideal* aspirations.

Finally, aspirations can transition from strong migration aspirations to aspirations to stay to increase life satisfaction. Subduing migration aspirations is not always a passive process of ‘giving up’ migration desires or a consequence of hopelessness; instead, individuals can transition from involuntary to acquiescent immobility after an actively assessment of their situations (Ortiga and Macabasag 2021). This entails a complete modification of ideal migration aspirations, as new (im)mobility aspirations are formed.

Stepwise-adaptation calls to explore how aspiring migrants ‘fight’ and adapt to structural barriers and family responsibilities, and how they reassess their situation and employ different adaptation strategies over time. I have purposely chosen an arrow diagram to depict stepwise-adaptation (Figure 36) because the formation of new aspirations does not necessarily entail that individuals might not be able to fulfill them, and, as a result, it is possible to break free from unfulfilled migration aspirations (see Ortiga and Macabasag 2021). Yet, while I have depicted stepwise-migration in a linear manner for simplification purposes, there is no reason to believe that people move forward through the steps. Rather, some may get stuck in one coping mechanism, such as, increasing migration capabilities; others might go back to any of the steps – consider, for example, individuals who have shifted their initial migration aspirations but go back to them as soon as opportunities to access documented migration appear –; and, yet, others may skip some steps, as ‘waiting immobility over’ might not be an appealing option. While there are many questions unanswered, conceptualizing adaptation as a *process* opens an avenue to systematize the adaptation strategies of aspiring migrants in a single framework. This is theoretically relevant because it opens an avenue to bring adaptation into two-step migration approaches as a third conceptual foundation and to explore how aspirations and capabilities change over time. Moreover, it also facilitates researching the life satisfaction of aspiring migrants and the impact of unfulfilled aspirations on local development and life progression. In fact, by researching how aspiring migrants cope with their immobility status, we might be able to provide insights on when, how, and why the involuntary immobile either give up on their migration aspirations, or rather, continuously try to challenge their immobility status. This first scenario might translate into attempts to find content in local opportunities and foster local development, while, in comparison, remaining hopeful for international migration might hinder local development, especially since aspiring migrants might not be willing to spend time and resources in a locality they intend to escape from.

## 4 CONCLUSION

This chapter takes up the empirical insights gained during Chapter 7, Chapter 8, and Chapter 9 and theoretically reflects on them. By doing so, it proposes an approach that measures the (in)voluntariness of migration and immobility in a spectrum of degrees by exploring at once the interactions between (1) instrumental and intrinsic aspirations, and (2) external and internal capabilities. The proposed approach aims to surpass (di)visions around ‘forced’ versus ‘voluntary’ migration by illustrating the agency and constraints that all migrants, although to

varying degrees, experience. Apart from that, this chapter also theorizes how adaptation mechanisms can be 'ranked' based on the extent to which they depart from initial and ideal migration aspirations. This, as I have argued, is not only important to further integrate change into two-step approaches, but also to comprehend how aspiring migrants increase their life satisfaction, experience their immobility, and relate to local opportunities. This chapter adds to the theoretical ambition of this thesis by developing middle-range theorizations on two-step migration approaches and decision-making, and providing conceptual tools to end dichotomous categorizations that have long crippled migration debates.

## CHAPTER 11 – CONCLUDING THE RESEARCH

### 1 ADDING TO TWO-STEP MIGRATION APPROACHES

This brief concluding chapter brings together this thesis's insights and details how these add to migration studies. By doing so, I turn to the two central ambitions presented in Chapter 1. First, to challenge often-assumed dichotomies in the emigration from the 'Global North' and 'Global South' by investigating whether (im)mobility aspirations in the 'West' are intrinsic and systematically fulfilled (see Section 1 of Chapter 1 and Chapter 2). Secondly, to add to the applicability and scope of two-step migration approaches by applying these beyond the so-called 'Global South' and further operationalize and disaggregate the important notions of aspirations, capabilities, adaptation and (in)voluntariness. With its focus, this thesis provides necessary empirical evidence to support that emigration dynamics are not that different in the 'North' and 'South' and to move beyond (di)visions in migration studies. It shows that aspirations to migrate and stay are not systematically fulfilled in high-income countries due to widespread socioeconomic precarity, which adds to criticisms on the poor analytical value of dichotomous power constructs, such as 'Global North' and 'Global South' (Bakewell 2009; Connell 2014; Dainotto 2017), and to recent studies on the increasing emigration from precarious high-income countries (val Mol 2016; Pratsinakis et al. 2020). This thesis's insights are applicable to an array of migration patterns, and it contributes to migration studies by formulating approaches that further conceptualize (1) how aspirations are formed, (2) how capabilities can be measured, and (3) how people adapt to their unfulfilled aspirations. The approaches proposed on the operationalization of aspirations and capabilities also facilitate disaggregating (4) the (in)voluntariness of migration in a spectrum of degrees, bridging the gap between forced and voluntary migration studies.

My contribution to migration studies, which is further detailed below, is, therefore, fourfold. First, I develop an approach to conceptualize aspirations in a spectrum of degrees, based on the interaction between the two dimensions of (im)mobility: the instrumental and the intrinsic. This, apart from bringing theory closer to social reality, offers insights on the complexity of the decision-making and provides a first theoretical pillar to theorize the (in)voluntariness of all forms of (im)mobility. Secondly, I operationalize migration capabilities at the macro-level, and I propose an approach that measures capabilities in a spectrum of degrees. This approach, based on external and internal capabilities, provides a second theoretical pillar to theorize (in)voluntariness in migration studies. My conceptualization on capabilities advances two-step migration approaches considering that most research has focused on aspirations and that the conceptualization of capabilities remains scarce. Thirdly, I mobilize the insights gained from operationalizing aspirations and capabilities to bring all forms of (im)mobilities together in an approach that measures the volition of migrating and staying on a continuum. Finally, I explore the adaptation mechanisms of those with unfulfilled migration aspirations. By doing so, I demonstrate that transnationalism can be an important coping mechanism for the immobile as they can generate and sustain ties on their own. I introduce the concept of 'transimmobility' to migration studies to stress this and the active role that individuals with no migratory connections have in the creation of transnational ties.

These contributions arose from the combination of a macro- and micro-level perspective. In fact, to unpack the assumption guiding this thesis and investigate whether (im)mobility dynamics in high-income countries are systematically fulfilled, voluntary, and, to a great extent, based on intrinsic rationales, first, I conducted a macro-level analysis to (1) tease out the similarities and differences of migration aspirations drivers in high-, middle- and low-income countries, and (2) to investigate the spread of migration capabilities worldwide (see Part II, Chapter 4 and 5, respectively). The empirical insights show that, from a macro-level perspective, the 'opportunity structure' in the 'Global North' is indeed beneficial: Individuals not only possess, overall, high capabilities to move, but, additionally, their migration aspirations are not well explained by instrumental rationales. Nonetheless, the macro-analysis also illustrates that instrumental rationales are relevant in high-income countries, that there are puzzling similarities in the drivers of aspirations between high and low human

development countries, and that not *all* in high-income countries have the capability to move. Secondly, and to further unravel these patterns, I adopt a micro-level perspective and investigate how individuals form and fulfill aspirations in a stagnant region of the 'Global North'. For this, I focus on El Bierzo and Laciana, two mine basins in Northwest Spain, currently characterized by a lack of opportunities, increasing depopulation and strong place attachment (see Chapter 6). The dynamics in these two regions stress that unfulfilled migration aspirations are also present in high-income countries and that a lack of agency and volition is not exclusive to 'Southern' citizens, despite the clear structural advantages that 'Westerners' enjoy. Apart from showcasing that individual 'opportunity structures' often depart from opportunities at the macro-level (see Collins 1988), this thesis provides empirical evidence on the necessity to apply two-step approaches beyond low- and moderate-income countries to encourage theory-building and more unbiased migration studies. In the sections below, I further elaborate how this thesis contributes to migration studies.

## 1.1 DISSECTING THE FORMATION OF ASPIRATIONS TO MIGRATE AND TO STAY

By focusing on the cases of El Bierzo and Laciana, I was able to analyze the pre-migration decision-making of individuals and explore at once the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions of aspirations. The instrumental dimension understands mobility as a strategy to improve other life dimensions, while the intrinsic dimension captures the inner wellbeing acquired from moving (or staying). As shown in Chapter 7, the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of human (im)mobility can reinforce each other, or, conversely, they can collide (see Figure 27 in Chapter 7). *Reinforcing aspirations* illustrate a scenario in which both the instrumental and the intrinsic dimensions of aspirations gear towards the same spatial category – be this migrating or remaining in place. As such, they result in strong aspirations to either leave or remain in place (see Vignettes 1 and 4 in Chapter 7)<sup>145</sup>. In comparison, *conflicting aspirations* capture a situation in which the intrinsic and the instrumental dimensions of aspirations diverge: instrumental aspirations to migrate can be accompanied by intrinsic aspirations to stay, or vice versa. Conflicting aspirations capture uncertainty and insecurity about what is best, migrating or staying, which results in unhappiness, feeling 'stuck', and in a reluctance to decide and attempts to postpone the decision-making process (see Vignettes 2 and 3 in Chapter 7)<sup>146</sup>.

The formation of (im)mobility aspirations in El Bierzo and Laciana exemplifies that differentiating between the instrumental and the intrinsic dimensions of human (im)mobility offers an insightful view onto broader dynamics of pre-migration processes and decision-making. Specifically, analyzing the distinct interactions of the instrumental and intrinsic dimensions of aspirations advances migration theorization in three manners by facilitating: (1) measuring aspirations in a spectrum of degrees, (2) conceptualizing (im)mobility (in)voluntariness on a continuum, and (3) considering how structural constraints, social expectations, and familial responsibilities interact with human agency and (im)mobility aspirations.

First, scholars have called for a more nuanced approach to investigate migration aspirations in a spectrum of degrees (Carling 2014a; Carling and Schewel 2018; de Haas 2021). Yet, as far as I am concerned, my work is the first one to propose an approach to do so. Examining whether the instrumental and intrinsic dimension of (im)mobility aspirations collide or reinforce each other proves important to further develop the aspiration-capability framework, as it facilitates analyzing the strength of aspirations and what drives these: instrumental,

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<sup>145</sup> Vignette 1 in Chapter 7 captures how migration can be a result of both utilitarian rationales to get a better education or better working standards, as well as a consequence of wanting to see what is out there, breaking free, or having adventures. Vignette 4 in Chapter 7 shows reinforcing aspirations to remain in place. Immobility can be a strategy to maintain a booming business, but also to remain close to family and friends.

<sup>146</sup> Examples of conflicting aspirations can include aspiring to leave out of utilitarian reasons, while having strong aspirations to remain close to family and friends. Similarly, conflicting aspirations can also be a result of aspirations to leave to explore and live adventures, but, concurrently, aspiring to remain due to family and caregiving responsibilities. Vignettes 2 and 3 in Chapter 7 reflect these dynamics, respectively.

intrinsic rationales, or both. In this way, it is possible to explore aspirations on a continuum, and, therefore, account not only for strong aspirations to migrate or to stay but also for mild aspirations, uncertain convictions and for those not at or near the extremes of aspiring to migrate or to stay. This is important to better capture the complexity and nuance of social reality.

Secondly, if the two dimensions of (im)mobility aspirations collide, is (im)mobility voluntary to the same extent as when they reinforce each other? How do aspiring migrants perceive their options and alternatives? I argue that analyzing how the intrinsic and instrumental dimensions interact opens an avenue to conceptualize the (in)voluntariness of (im)mobility in a spectrum of degrees (see Chapter 10). Migrating due to a lack of local opportunities, despite strong intrinsic aspirations to stay, can be the lesser of two evils. The same can be true if staying put is a result of caregiving responsibilities and of setting aside individual aspirations to leave and live adventures abroad. Important constraints on personal development, a lack of possibilities, or family responsibilities limit human agency, and, as such, exploring what the utilitarian and intrinsic rationales of migrating or remaining in place are eases theorizing (im)mobility as more or less forced. As argued in Chapter 10, an approach on (in)voluntariness should account for both aspirations and capabilities, and researching the interaction between instrumental and intrinsic aspirations serves as one of the pillars to explore the volition of migration.

Finally, how exactly structural barriers, socio-cultural expectations, or family members constrain or encourage migration or immobility remains unclear. Aspirations have a transient nature (Carling and Schewel 2018), yet, to what extent are aspirations malleable by external factors? Is the instrumental or the intrinsic dimension more subject to change? By analyzing at once both instrumental and intrinsic aspirations, how a culture of emigration (or permanence), family members, or an economic crisis influence both instrumental and intrinsic (im)mobility aspirations can be explored. Perhaps, more importantly, it facilitates researching to what extent strong intrinsic aspirations to stay can be overshadowed by strong instrumental aspirations to leave – or vice versa–, and, consequently, how aspirations transition as individual circumstances change.

## **1.2 SCRUTINIZING THE COMPONENTS OF THE CAPABILITIES TO MIGRATE AND TO STAY**

This thesis also offers a conceptualization of (im)mobility capabilities. I develop a database of migration capabilities worldwide and an approach to examine the capabilities to move and stay at the individual level. This adds to migration studies considering the focus on migration aspirations and the fact that studies on the capability to migrate and to stay remain scarce, which prevents theorization on two-step migration approaches.

In Chapter 5, I present a global database on migration capabilities by operationalizing and bringing together four different forms of capital: economic, social, human and citizenship capital. This is a novel contribution to the field as I (1) operationalize these forms of capital, (2) advance how, broadly, their combination explains migration and involuntary immobility patterns, and (3) estimate the different weight of each form of capital in the composition of migration capabilities. In fact, I prove that assigning equal weight to the different forms of capital does not match observed migration and involuntary immobility patterns, and, consequently, my research reveals that a lack of citizenship and economic capital is, generally speaking, more significant to account for migration and involuntary migration patterns worldwide. Despite limitations (see Section 2.2. in Chapter 3), my operationalization of migration capabilities proves important, first, to further theory-building of two-step migration approaches and start a research agenda focused on capabilities, and secondly, to encourage further research on involuntary and acquiescent immobility, which can be done by paying greater attention to the geographical locations where migration is structurally more constrained and researching how a lack of external capabilities affects people's freedoms and life satisfaction.

Additionally, the operationalization of migration capabilities showed that not *all* in high-income countries have the resources to fund migration, considering the spread of precarity and economic instability. This not only

questions romanticized visions of emigration in the ‘Global North’ but also proves useful to examine how local opportunities converge or depart from those at the national level (Collins 1988). By focusing on the cases of El Bierzo and Laciana, I was able to examine individual capabilities to migrate and to stay. I did so by exploring at once external and internal capabilities. The former refers to structural constraints and opportunities, while the latter captures individual skills and resources. As shown in Chapter 8, the various combinations of external and internal capabilities can result in high, limited, and low capabilities to choose where to live – either at home or elsewhere (Figure 29). High capabilities represent strong opportunities to fulfill aspirations, limited capabilities showcase a scenario where the capability to stay or migrate is compromised to varying degrees, and low capabilities capture a lack of agency and poor chances to choose where to be (see Vignette 1, 2 and 3, and 4 in Chapter 8, respectively). Examining how the external and internal dimensions of capabilities interact advances migration theorization in three manners by (1) measuring capabilities in a spectrum of degrees, (2) theorizing (in)voluntariness on a continuum, and (3) considering how involuntary immobility affects local development.

First, theorization on two-step migration approaches is incomplete as scholars have greatly focused on aspirations. As far as I am concerned, my research is the first one proposing an approach to operationalize migration capabilities and investigate these in a spectrum of degrees. Differentiating between external and internal capabilities captures the capabilities to migrate and stay on a continuum beyond dichotomous ‘high’ versus ‘low’ boxes and highlights the agency and constraints that those not at or close to the extremes experience. This facilitates studying the strength of capabilities and the extent to which movement freedom is constrained. Secondly, capabilities serve as a second pillar to investigate (in)voluntariness in migration studies. This is because, as argued in Chapter 10, the lower the capabilities, the greater the involuntariness of (im)mobility. As such, being able to detail where in the spectrum individuals are located helps establishing the degree of (in)voluntariness they are likely to sustain. This is especially the case because measuring capabilities on a continuum reflects the constraints that most migrants experience, including those usually cast as ‘voluntary’, such as labor migrants. Finally, my approach calls to investigate who can challenge a status of involuntary immobility and who, instead, subdues and gives up on migration aspirations. In essence: Who is more likely to wait involuntary immobility out? Is it related to the degree of capabilities they hold? Are those with limited capabilities but closer to ‘making it’ more likely to insist on their aspirations in comparison to those with low capabilities? Initiating a research agenda on capabilities around these questions could shed light into the important role that capabilities play in pre-migration and decision-making processes, including who finds content in local opportunities and who does not because they remain hopeful about international migration.

### **1.3 (IN)VOLUNTARINESS ON A CONTINUUM**

Mobilizing the empirical insights gained on aspirations and capabilities, I propose a framework that conceptualizes (in)voluntariness in a spectrum of degrees. To do so, I ask: Is (im)mobility voluntary to the same extent when aspirations are not reinforcing, but, rather, conflicting? Is (im)mobility voluntary to the same extent when capabilities to remain or to leave are not high, but, rather, limited or low? I argue that volition can be operationalized by measuring how reinforcing aspirations are and how high capabilities are. I demonstrate that conflicting aspirations and not being fully convinced about what is best – emigrating or staying – result in unhappiness and being stuck between what ought to be done for utilitarian reasons and what individuals intrinsically desire to do. This showcases the complexity of the real-world application of two-step migration approaches, and the fact that, even when migration or immobility are conscious choices, decisions and motivations are often a reflection of conflicting emotions that can exemplify involuntariness to varying degrees. I also illustrate that limited and low capabilities to move or to stay question if migration is a liberating experience or, instead, the lesser of two evils. In fact, if capabilities to remain are constrained, individuals need to choose between remaining in place in a dangerous or precarious situation and migrating. I present my approach in Figures 34 and 35 of Chapter 10, where I showcase how all forms of (im)mobility, including voluntary immobility,

free migration, acquiescent immobility, involuntary immobility, distress migration, precarious migration, and improvement migration, can be integrated into a comprehensive framework.

## 1.4 OUTLYING THE MULTIPLICITY OF ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

How people cope, negotiate, and strategize their unfulfilled migration aspirations is gaining momentum in the field of migration studies, as scholars theorize how adaptation strategies might shape migration aspirations (Carling and Schewel 2018; Mata-Codesal 2019) and empirical studies on the matter emerge (Liu and Peng 2023; Ortiga Macabasag 2020, 2021; Rodriguez-Pena 2023; Torre Cantalapiedra and Mariscal Nava 2020). However, most research focuses on specific strategies that individuals employ to surpass involuntary immobility, including expanding migration capabilities (Mata-Codesal 2019; Rodriguez-Pena 2023) or subduing migration aspirations (see Carling and Schewel 2018, 958). By researching the unfulfilled migration aspirations of my interviewees, I contribute to the broader literature of migration studies in two manners. First, I propose a theoretical framework – stepwise adaptation – to investigate how people depart from their initial migration aspirations and to explore how individuals adapt either by getting ‘stuck’ in certain coping mechanisms or by moving between them to increase the likelihood of migrating. Secondly, I demonstrate that the imaginations, identities, and daily practices of aspiring migrants can be embedded in cross-border interactions, and I coin the notions of *transimmobility*, and, therefore, that of the *transimmobile* to capture this.

First, I propose the stepwise adaptation framework to investigate how different adaptation strategies interact (see Chapter 10). This contributes to two-step migration approaches by facilitating research on (1) how individuals select specific adaptation mechanisms, (2) how people might transition between different adaptation strategies, and (3) how these can shed light on the transient nature of aspirations. This is relevant because it remains unclear how adaptation mechanisms change over time as aspiring migrants reassess their situation and migration aspirations. The stepwise adaptation framework theoretically ‘ranks’ adaptation strategies depending on how they depart from *ideal* migration aspirations. For instance, subduing migration aspirations presents a clear departure from initial aspirations, while attempts to expand migration capabilities can reflect a firm decision to hold on to original migration aspirations. When, how and why aspiring individuals give up on their migration aspirations by subduing these, or, instead, continuously try to challenge their immobility status by trying to expand capabilities or shifting aspirations might be useful to investigate how unfulfilled aspirations relate to local development. Who ‘gives up’ on migration and finds content in local opportunities? And, who remains hopeful that migration will happen and does not invest in a locality they want to leave? What are the consequences of long-term unfulfilled migration aspirations for local development and the development of the self?

Furthermore, as shown in Chapter 9, aspiring migrants can actively create transnational ties by intensively consuming international (cultural) products, contacting foreigners, short-term traveling, or longing for past movement to adapt to their involuntary immobility status and increase their life satisfaction. By doing so, I introduce the concept of *transimmobility* to capture the active role that non-migrants with no migratory connections play in the creation and sustenance of transnationalism ties. This goes beyond current theorizations about how non-migrants actively maintain transnational ties through migration by locally investing remittances (Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2013) or by being part of transnational families (Mata-Codesal 2015). As a result, the notion of transimmobility expands the concept of transnationalism and contributes to current critiques about the ‘mobility bias’ (Schewel 2020a) within the study of transnationalism (Boccagni 2012; Gaibazzi 2015; Lacroix 2009). While I am aware that the concept of transnationalism can be stretched beyond usefulness, I maintain a tight definition of it (Portes et al. 1999, 219) as “requir[ing] regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders”. My expansion of the concept is, therefore, an extension of the actors, not an extended or watered-down version of the approach. Transimmobility captures how aspiring migrants create transnational ties on their own and contributes to a deeper understanding of the theoretical usefulness of transnationalism

by asking: How do mobility and immobility interact? How can globalization and ‘cosmopolitanism’ encourage the transnationalism of the immobile? Who can initiate (and sustain) transnational spaces between societies? And how can aspiring migrants experience migration while in place?

## 2 WHERE TO GO NEXT

To conclude, I outline two avenues to further unlock the analytical potential of two-step approaches for wider social sciences, namely by more systematically investigating emic understandings of the ‘good life’ and (im)mobility practices, as well as by further examining the linkages between distinct temporalities and migration aspirations.

### 2.1 OVERCOMING IDEAL-TYPE TYPOLOGIES: INSIGHTS FROM EMIC PERSPECTIVES

Firstly, the field of migration studies is characterized by opposing typologies, which include, among others, mobility versus immobility, internal versus international migration, forced versus voluntary (im)mobility, strong versus weak (migration) aspirations, or high versus low (migration) capabilities. These typologies ease the categorization of distinct forms of (im)mobilities, and some of these binaries have furthered investigation on the mobility and immobility patterns of those in and from the ‘Global South’ (Bylander 2017; Carling 2002; Drotbohm 2015; Haugen 2012; Jónsson 2008; Mata-Codesa 2015; Schapendonk and Steel 2014; Schewel 2015; Stevens 2018; Stuesse and Coleman 2014).

Yet, persistently framing migration in binary categories has resulted in artificial distinctions and theoretical boundaries. An example of this includes the distinct concepts, literatures and policy agendas guiding studies on emigration from the ‘South’ versus the ‘North’ (Scheibelhofer 2018), as well as the disengagement between forced and migration studies, despite calls to combine both subfields together (Bivand Erdal and Oeppen 2018; de Haas 2021). These dichotomies result in a poor conceptualization of migration decision-making in the *middle space* (see Schewel 2022), which refers to the (im)mobility practices that are not near or at the extreme of different spectrums or binaries, such as the ‘forced’ vs. ‘voluntary’ spectrum, the ‘North’ vs. ‘South’ dichotomy, or the ‘high’ vs. ‘low’ capabilities and aspirations spectrum.

To better understand the complexity of the migratory decision-making process and analyze the nuances of real-life (im)mobility patterns, one way forward is to adopt emic perspectives. As this thesis shows, this allows to account for *middle spaces* by applying the aspirations-capability framework to different settings and distinct forms of (im)mobilities. In this sense, scholars could pursue research in two directions. First, by opening up ‘categorization boxes’ and confronting theoretical assumptions about *ideal typical* migration from the ‘South’ and from the ‘North’, as these often lead to subsequent categorizations. As I have argued throughout this thesis, this would encourage research on the formation and fulfillment of aspirations of those in precarious situations regardless of their citizenship and locality of residence, a more active presence of the ‘precariat’ in future research and moving beyond the ‘origin bias’ of emigration research. This could facilitate (1) reflections on how, when, and for whom are national structural opportunities available and the ways in which local opportunities depart from national ones, and (2) moving beyond dichotomous (di)visions in migration and development studies. Secondly, adopting an emic perspective emphasizes the perceptions and situations of individuals, which might shed light on the capability thresholds needed to migrate, or how individuals relate to mild and conflicting aspirations. I envision qualitative methods as useful tools to research this and account for the spectrum of degrees in which aspirations and capabilities can take place. Nonetheless, mixed-method research can also be useful as it allows contextualizing information and provides better documentation of broader mechanisms. In this regard, Likert scales can generate more comprehensive questionnaires that map not just whether individuals have the aspirations to migrate or remain, but also whether these reflect intrinsic or instrumental rationales. These kinds of questionnaires can account for the reinforcing or conflicting nature of aspirations and represent social reality more comprehensively.

## 2.2 EXPANDING INSIGHTS ON THE ROLE OF TEMPORALITIES ON GLOBAL MIGRATION

Lastly, both migration and aspirations are integral components of social change. Migration patterns reflect societal transformations<sup>147</sup> (Castles 2003, 2010; de Haas et al. 2021), and aspirations capture the will to advance in life and develop the self. As such, (im)mobility aspirations can uncover key mechanisms to better understand how individuals relate to and generate change across time. Nevertheless, research on the migration-development nexus is often short-term, and difficulties to introduce distinct temporalities into research has resulted in scarce studies on the interactions between time, development, and migration aspirations (for an exception see Jolivet 2020; Osburg 2020; Schewel 2020b; Vezzoli 2020a). To better understand how these three dynamics interact, scholars could pursue research in three directions.

First, studies could explore how (im)mobility aspirations can shape present and future social change. Consider, for instance, the following scenario: Locality A is characterized by a stagnant economy and a culture of emigration, which, consequently, results in strong migration aspirations. However, migration capabilities are restrained due to the immigration regime and scarce resources and skills. Do people give up on their migration aspirations, or do they continuously try to challenge their immobility status over time? If so, how? And what are the consequences for life satisfaction, the development of the self, and medium- and long-term local development? Giving up on migration aspirations might translate into attempts to find content in local opportunities and foster local development, while remaining hopeful for international migration might hinder this development, especially if aspiring migrants are not willing to spend time and resources in a locality they intend to escape from. Also, when a place is characterized by a culture of migration, such as in the hypothetical case of Locality A, how can those aspiring to remain in place advocate for their aspirations and challenge a migration culture? This research line could challenge the ‘mobility bias’ (Schewel 2020a) of the migration-development nexus and provide important insights into (1) who is more likely to benefit from local-level development activities, such as micro-loans, and (2) how life and migration aspirations change and intersect over time.

Secondly, scholars could investigate how feedback mechanisms providing negative evaluations of migration lead to changes in aspirations and ‘migration cultures’ as, cumulatively, these mechanisms might trigger an aspirational change from strong aspirations to emigrate to increasing aspirations to remain in place or migrate internally, as the risks associated with international migration are uncovered.

Finally, efforts to embed micro-level migration models, such as the aspirations-capability framework, into macro-level theories, such as transition theories (Zelinsky 1971; Skeldon 1997) or the social transformation approach, have been made (de Haas 2021). These follow the increasing drive to link internal and international migration patterns with social change dynamics (Berriane, de Haas and Natter 2021; Osburg 2020; Rodriguez-Pena 2020; Schewel 2020b; Vezzoli 2020a, 2020b; Wielstra 2020), as well as efforts to triangulate national, regional, and local migration statistics to understand changing migration patterns over time. However, how social change results in changing migration aspirations is unclear, especially because migration aspirations are orientations and convictions about migration, which makes mapping aspirations over time and space difficult. Measuring how migration aspirations are related to development is challenging for three reasons: (1) convictions and orientations about migration or immobility are not only transient in nature but also abstract, (2) quantitative data on migration aspirations is relatively recent, and therefore, triangulating data remains problematic, and (3) conducting interviews on past migration aspirations can result in methodological limitations, as they can be subjected to selective memories of the past. To investigate how migration aspirations have transitioned over

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<sup>147</sup> Researchers have lately explored how macro-level social transformations, including land restructuring, the expansion of capitalism, the intervention of the state, or socio-cultural dynamics, among other factors, affect aspirational change, and consequently, migration aspirations and migration patterns (Berriane, de Haas and Natter 2021; Osburg 2020; Rodriguez-Pena 2020; Schewel 2020b; Vezzoli 2020a, 2020b; Wielstra 2020).

time and how these relate to societal change and broader macro-level theories, I propose engaging with correspondence letters between migrants and non-migrants, newspaper articles and social media posts on migration, and with sociocultural theories. (1) Correspondence letters can elucidate how people thought about migration even before this took place, and consequently, it can be useful to research the formation and fulfillment of aspirations over relatively long periods of time. Archives retain high-quality correspondence letters from, at least, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. (2) Newspaper articles and social media posts on migration can also provide useful information about how people have thought about and formed migration aspirations in more recent decades. (3) Theorizations on the transition of aspirations could be embedded within sociocultural theories, which argue that, as societies develop, values and convictions transition from materialistic to post-materialistic. Materialistic values capture the need for financial security and social stability, while post-materialistic values refer to the human need for freedom and self-actualization (Inglehart 1977). Materialistic orientations can be associated with an instrumental and utilitarian view on migration, while post-materialism is linked to intrinsic understandings of mobility (see Jolivet 2020). Considering that migration aspirations are orientations, mapping how migration aspirations and motives have changed over time could elucidate whether intrinsic rationales gain momentum as societies develop and economic and political security is achieved. This line of research could be useful to explore if a transition from materialistic to post-materialistic values shifts the understanding of migration (see Jolivet 2020). This could be a way of embedding the aspirations-capability framework into broader social science theories and relating aspirations and social change more comprehensively.

These three lines of research could open an avenue to further systematize how time mediates the link between social change, life, and (im)mobility aspirations, and fully catalyze the potential of two-step migration approaches to provide insights into social transformations theories and the broader social sciences.

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## ANNEXES

### ANNEX 1: MACRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS – MIGRATION ASPIRATIONS AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

**Table A.1.** All the countries under analysis in Chapter 4

|    | Country                           | Observations | Migration aspirations (in %) |
|----|-----------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|
| 1  | Afghanistan                       | 1,000        | 29                           |
| 2  | Albania                           | 1,000        | 58                           |
| 3  | Argentina                         | 1,000        | 14                           |
| 4  | Armenia                           | 1,000        | 47                           |
| 5  | Australia                         | 1,001        | 8                            |
| 6  | Austria                           | 1,000        | 10                           |
| 7  | Azerbaijan                        | 1,000        | 17                           |
| 8  | Bahrain                           | 1,000        | 16                           |
| 9  | Bangladesh                        | 1,000        | 20                           |
| 10 | Belarus                           | 1,034        | 19                           |
| 11 | Belgium                           | 1,037        | 27                           |
| 12 | Benin                             | 1,000        | 37                           |
| 13 | Bhutan                            | 1,020        | 7                            |
| 14 | Bolivia                           | 1,000        | 28                           |
| 15 | Bosnia and Herzegovina            | 1,000        | 39                           |
| 16 | Botswana                          | 1,000        | 24                           |
| 17 | Brazil                            | 1,004        | 24                           |
| 18 | Bulgaria                          | 1,000        | 21                           |
| 19 | Burkina Faso                      | 1,000        | 26                           |
| 20 | Cambodia                          | 1,000        | 18                           |
| 21 | Cameroon                          | 1,000        | 27                           |
| 22 | Chad                              | 1,000        | 20                           |
| 23 | Chile                             | 1,040        | 23                           |
| 24 | China                             | 4,265        | 4                            |
| 25 | Colombia                          | 1,000        | 28                           |
| 26 | Congo                             | 1,000        | 40                           |
| 27 | Congo, Democratic Republic of the | 1,000        | 53                           |
| 28 | Costa Rica                        | 1,000        | 22                           |
| 29 | Cote d'Ivoire                     | 1,000        | 34                           |
| 30 | Croatia                           | 1,000        | 16                           |
| 31 | Cyprus                            | 1,029        | 31                           |
| 32 | Czech Republic                    | 1,000        | 15                           |
| 33 | Denmark                           | 1,005        | 12                           |
| 34 | Dominican Republic                | 1,000        | 49                           |
| 35 | Ecuador                           | 1,000        | 20                           |
| 36 | Egypt                             | 1,000        | 23                           |
| 37 | El Salvador                       | 1,000        | 52                           |
| 38 | Estonia                           | 1,000        | 21                           |

|    |                             |       |    |
|----|-----------------------------|-------|----|
| 39 | <b>Ethiopia</b>             | 1,000 | 27 |
| 40 | <b>Finland</b>              | 1,000 | 12 |
| 41 | <b>France</b>               | 1,000 | 20 |
| 42 | <b>Gabon</b>                | 1,000 | 39 |
| 43 | <b>Georgia</b>              | 1,000 | 21 |
| 44 | <b>Germany</b>              | 1,000 | 11 |
| 45 | <b>Ghana</b>                | 1,000 | 47 |
| 46 | <b>Greece</b>               | 1,000 | 20 |
| 47 | <b>Guatemala</b>            | 1,000 | 29 |
| 48 | <b>Guinea</b>               | 1,000 | 33 |
| 49 | <b>Haiti</b>                | 504   | 62 |
| 50 | <b>Honduras</b>             | 1,000 | 46 |
| 51 | <b>Hungary</b>              | 1,000 | 21 |
| 52 | <b>Iceland</b>              | 596   | 18 |
| 53 | <b>India</b>                | 3,000 | 4  |
| 54 | <b>Indonesia</b>            | 1,000 | 2  |
| 55 | <b>Iran</b>                 | 1,001 | 15 |
| 56 | <b>Iraq</b>                 | 1,009 | 28 |
| 57 | <b>Ireland</b>              | 1,000 | 14 |
| 58 | <b>Israel</b>               | 1,000 | 13 |
| 59 | <b>Italy</b>                | 1,000 | 35 |
| 60 | <b>Japan</b>                | 1,003 | 16 |
| 61 | <b>Jordan</b>               | 1,000 | 28 |
| 62 | <b>Kazakhstan</b>           | 1,000 | 13 |
| 63 | <b>Kenya</b>                | 1,000 | 20 |
| 64 | <b>Kosovo</b>               | 1,000 | 40 |
| 65 | <b>Kuwait</b>               | 1,000 | 27 |
| 66 | <b>Kyrgyzstan</b>           | 1,000 | 17 |
| 67 | <b>Latvia</b>               | 1,001 | 17 |
| 68 | <b>Lebanon</b>              | 1,000 | 19 |
| 69 | <b>Liberia</b>              | 1,000 | 60 |
| 70 | <b>Libya</b>                | 1,006 | 29 |
| 71 | <b>Lithuania</b>            | 1,000 | 24 |
| 72 | <b>Luxembourg</b>           | 1,000 | 8  |
| 73 | <b>Madagascar</b>           | 1,000 | 7  |
| 74 | <b>Malawi</b>               | 1,000 | 27 |
| 75 | <b>Malaysia</b>             | 1,002 | 19 |
| 76 | <b>Mali</b>                 | 1,000 | 18 |
| 77 | <b>Malta</b>                | 1,002 | 18 |
| 78 | <b>Mauritania</b>           | 1,000 | 21 |
| 79 | <b>Mexico</b>               | 1,031 | 20 |
| 80 | <b>Moldova, Republic of</b> | 1,000 | 29 |
| 81 | <b>Mongolia</b>             | 1,000 | 25 |
| 82 | <b>Montenegro</b>           | 1,000 | 26 |
| 83 | <b>Morocco</b>              | 1,052 | 18 |

|     |                           |       |    |
|-----|---------------------------|-------|----|
| 84  | <b>Mozambique</b>         | 1,000 | 16 |
| 85  | <b>Myanmar</b>            | 1,020 | 4  |
| 86  | <b>Nepal</b>              | 1,000 | 11 |
| 87  | <b>Netherlands</b>        | 1,003 | 22 |
| 88  | <b>New Zealand</b>        | 1,007 | 10 |
| 89  | <b>Nicaragua</b>          | 1,000 | 30 |
| 90  | <b>Niger</b>              | 1,000 | 12 |
| 91  | <b>Nigeria</b>            | 1,000 | 46 |
| 92  | <b>North Macedonia</b>    | 1,024 | 33 |
| 93  | <b>Norway</b>             | 1,005 | 15 |
| 94  | <b>Pakistan</b>           | 1,000 | 7  |
| 95  | <b>Panama</b>             | 1,000 | 16 |
| 96  | <b>Paraguay</b>           | 1,000 | 9  |
| 97  | <b>Peru</b>               | 1,000 | 32 |
| 98  | <b>Philippines</b>        | 1,000 | 12 |
| 99  | <b>Poland</b>             | 1,000 | 21 |
| 100 | <b>Portugal</b>           | 1,021 | 20 |
| 101 | <b>Romania</b>            | 1,001 | 26 |
| 102 | <b>Russian Federation</b> | 2,000 | 10 |
| 103 | <b>Rwanda</b>             | 1,000 | 16 |
| 104 | <b>Saudi Arabia</b>       | 1,012 | 14 |
| 105 | <b>Senegal</b>            | 1,000 | 39 |
| 106 | <b>Serbia</b>             | 1,000 | 26 |
| 107 | <b>Sierra Leone</b>       | 1,000 | 70 |
| 108 | <b>Singapore</b>          | 1,000 | 17 |
| 109 | <b>Slovakia</b>           | 1,000 | 16 |
| 110 | <b>Slovenia</b>           | 1,002 | 27 |
| 111 | <b>Somalia</b>            | 1,000 | 14 |
| 112 | <b>South Africa</b>       | 1,000 | 17 |
| 113 | <b>South Korea</b>        | 1,000 | 32 |
| 114 | <b>South Sudan</b>        | 1,000 | 17 |
| 115 | <b>Spain</b>              | 1,000 | 17 |
| 116 | <b>Sri Lanka</b>          | 1,062 | 12 |
| 117 | <b>Sweden</b>             | 1,000 | 13 |
| 118 | <b>Switzerland</b>        | 501   | 11 |
| 119 | <b>Syria</b>              | 1,002 | 46 |
| 120 | <b>Taiwan</b>             | 1,000 | 21 |
| 121 | <b>Tajikistan</b>         | 1,000 | 8  |
| 122 | <b>Tanzania</b>           | 1,000 | 17 |
| 123 | <b>Thailand</b>           | 1,000 | 1  |
| 124 | <b>Togo</b>               | 1,000 | 36 |
| 125 | <b>Tunisia</b>            | 1,000 | 20 |
| 126 | <b>Turkey</b>             | 1,002 | 22 |
| 127 | <b>Turkmenistan</b>       | 1,000 | 12 |
| 128 | <b>Uganda</b>             | 1,000 | 36 |

|     |                                                             |       |    |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------|----|
| 129 | <b>Ukraine</b>                                              | 1,000 | 24 |
| 130 | <b>United Arab Emirates</b>                                 | 1,898 | 20 |
| 131 | <b>United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland</b> | 1,000 | 26 |
| 132 | <b>Uruguay</b>                                              | 1,000 | 22 |
| 133 | <b>Uzbekistan</b>                                           | 1,000 | 2  |
| 134 | <b>Venezuela</b>                                            | 1,000 | 22 |
| 135 | <b>Vietnam</b>                                              | 1,000 | 17 |
| 136 | <b>Yemen</b>                                                | 1,000 | 19 |
| 137 | <b>Zambia</b>                                               | 1,000 | 28 |
| 138 | <b>Zimbabwe</b>                                             | 1,000 | 30 |

Note: The table shows the countries in the analysis, together with the number of observations per country and the percentage of migration aspirations for the year 2015.

Source: Own elaboration based on Gallup (2022)

**Table A.2.** Bivariate correlations between all independent variables, 2015

|           | MigAsp   | HDI      | GDPgrowth | Unemp.   | Phone    | Urb.     | Emigr.   | Liberties | Conflict | Pop.    | Area |
|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|---------|------|
| MigAsp    | 1        |          |           |          |          |          |          |           |          |         |      |
| HDI       | -.331*** | 1        |           |          |          |          |          |           |          |         |      |
| GDPgrowth | -.207**  | .216**   | 1         |          |          |          |          |           |          |         |      |
| Unemp.    | .207**   | .305***  | -.115     | 1        |          |          |          |           |          |         |      |
| Phone     | -.149    | .651***  | .056      | .146*    | 1        |          |          |           |          |         |      |
| Urb.      | .102     | -.686*** | -.122     | -.341*** | -.431*** | 1        |          |           |          |         |      |
| Emig      | .186**   | .222***  | 0.100     | .356***  | 0.154*   | -.463*** | 1        |           |          |         |      |
| Liberties | -.048    | .580***  | .116      | .226***  | .307***  | -.452*** | .191**   | 1         |          |         |      |
| Conflict  | -.044    | -.373*** | -.229***  | -.090    | -.382*** | .242***  | -.153*   | -.411***  | 1        |         |      |
| Pop.      | -.185**  | -.205**  | -.003     | -.200**  | -.272*** | .178**   | -.561*** | -.248***  | .347***  | 1       |      |
| Area      | -.190**  | -.253*** | -.097     | -.043    | -.238*** | .182**   | -.512*** | -.268***  | .310***  | .683*** | 1    |

Note: \*\*\*p<0.01; \*\*p<0.05; \*p<0.1. To make the table more comprehensive, I have used abbreviations. MigAsp stands for Migration aspirations; HDI is Human Development Index; GDPgrowth is Annual GDP per capita growth; Urb. refers to urban growth, Emigr. translates to emigration rates, and Pop. is total population.

**Table A.3.** The effect of social transformation on migration aspirations: High, moderate, and low human development country groups, Models 2 to 6

| <i>Variables</i>    | <i>Model 2 – Economy</i> |                      |                      | <i>Model 3 – Technology</i> |                      |                      |
|---------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
|                     | <i>High dev.</i>         | <i>Mdt. dev.</i>     | <i>Low dev.</i>      | <i>High dev.</i>            | <i>Mdt. dev.</i>     | <i>Low dev.</i>      |
| <b>Constant</b>     | 23.386***<br>(6.267)     | 45.032**<br>(17.692) | 84.593**<br>(34.731) | 30.397***<br>(8.484)        | 61.022**<br>(20.574) | 89.703**<br>(40.850) |
| GDP growth (%)      | -.083<br>(.441)          | .315<br>(.529)       | -.495<br>(1.008)     |                             |                      |                      |
| Unemployment (Ln)   | 3.586*<br>(1.848)        | 5.135**<br>(1.735)   | 4.009<br>(2.413)     |                             |                      |                      |
| Phone users         |                          |                      |                      | -.022<br>(.043)             | -.049<br>(.063)      | -.036<br>(.078)      |
| Urban growth (%)    |                          |                      |                      |                             |                      |                      |
| Emigration (Ln)     |                          |                      |                      |                             |                      |                      |
| Civil Liberties     |                          |                      |                      |                             |                      |                      |
| Conflict            |                          |                      |                      |                             |                      |                      |
| Population (Ln)     | 1.484<br>(1.124)         | -2.242*<br>(1.312)   | .837<br>(2.935)      | 1.213<br>(1.035)            | -3.512**<br>(1.183)  | -.344<br>(2.817)     |
| Country area (Ln)   | -1.306*<br>(.667)        | -2.100<br>(1.551)    | -5.133*<br>(2.795)   | -1.027<br>(.628)            | -1.779<br>(1.508)    | -4.606<br>(3.091)    |
| Adj. R <sup>2</sup> | .072                     | .363                 | .148                 | -.002                       | .288                 | .047                 |
| <i>N</i>            | 45                       | 44                   | 45                   | 45                          | 45                   | 45                   |

Notes: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . Entries are unstandardized regression coefficient with corrected robust standard errors in parentheses. Mdt. dev. means 'moderate development'. Model 1 did not statistically significantly predict migration aspirations for high human developed countries,  $F(4, 40) = 1.858$ ,  $p = .137$ . Model 2 did not statistically significantly predict migration aspirations for high human development countries,  $F(3, 41) = .974$ ,  $p = .414$ , and for low human development countries,  $F(3, 41) = 1.717$ ,  $p = .178$ .

| <i>Variables</i>    | <b><i>Model 4 – Demography</i></b> |                    |                     | <b><i>Model 5 – Politics</i></b> |                      |                    |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
|                     | <i>High dev.</i>                   | <i>Mdt. dev.</i>   | <i>Low dev.</i>     | <i>High dev.</i>                 | <i>Mdt. dev.</i>     | <i>Low dev.</i>    |
| <b>Constant</b>     | 32.735***<br>(7.976)               | 26.926<br>(27.620) | 87.998*<br>(49.220) | 24.752***<br>(6.610)             | 48.986**<br>(18.851) | 82.464<br>(49.657) |
| GDP growth %)       |                                    |                    |                     |                                  |                      |                    |
| Unemployment (Ln)   |                                    |                    |                     |                                  |                      |                    |
| Phone users         |                                    |                    |                     |                                  |                      |                    |
| Urban growth (%)    | -3.094**<br>(1.057)                | .713<br>(1.657)    | .739<br>(3.366)     |                                  |                      |                    |
| Emigration (Ln)     | -.295<br>(1.440)                   | 4.561<br>(3.231)   | -.486<br>(4.126)    |                                  |                      |                    |
| Civil Liberties     |                                    |                    |                     | .136<br>(.473)                   | 1.036<br>(1.091)     | .257<br>(3.301)    |
| Conflict            |                                    |                    |                     | -6.973<br>(24.205)               | 3.790<br>(4.174)     | -3.365<br>(10.185) |
| Population (Ln)     | .992<br>(1.132)                    | -2.564*<br>(1.373) | -.253<br>(3.087)    | 1.256<br>(1.030)                 | -3.118**<br>(1.272)  | .846<br>(3.873)    |
| Country area (Ln)   | -1.168**<br>(.589)                 | -.522<br>(1.952)   | -4.874<br>(3.441)   | -.858<br>(.633)                  | -1.781<br>(1.552)    | -4.510<br>(4.063)  |
| Adj. R <sup>2</sup> | .146                               | .324               | .026                | -.001                            | .281                 | .034               |
| <i>N</i>            | 45                                 | 45                 | 45                  | 45                               | 45                   | 44                 |

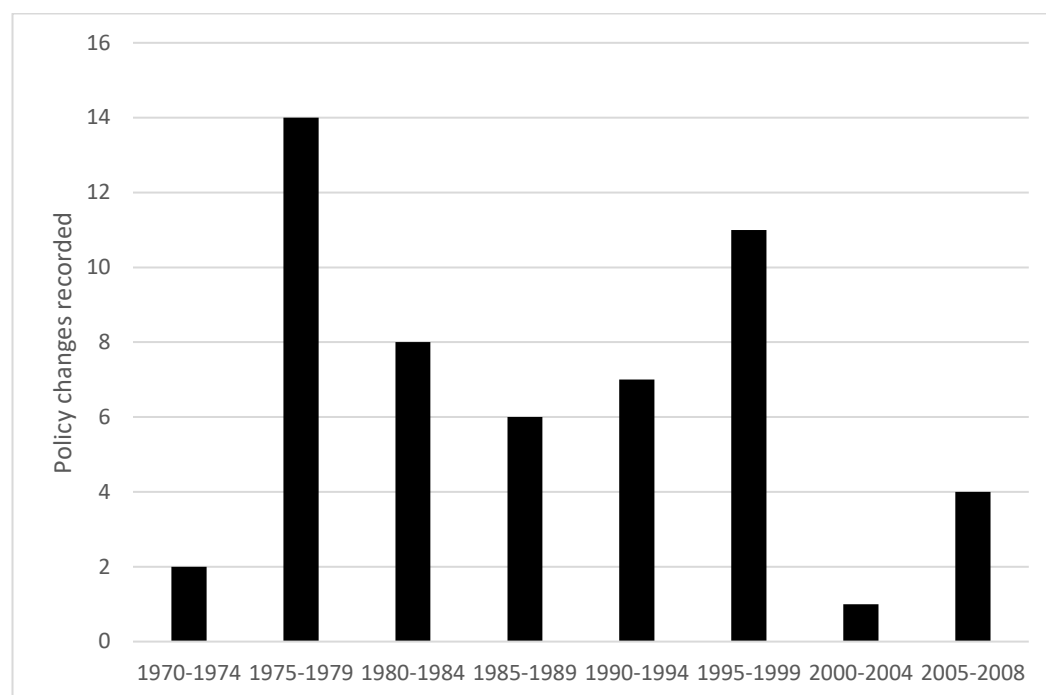
Notes: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . Entries are unstandardized regression coefficient with corrected robust standard errors in parentheses. Mdt. dev. means ‘moderate development’. Model 3 did not statistically significantly predict migration aspirations for low human development countries,  $F(4, 40) = 1.290$ ,  $p = .290$ . Model 4 did not statistically significantly predict migration aspirations for high human development countries,  $F(4, 40) = .991$ ,  $p = .423$ , and for low-human development countries,  $F(4, 39) = 1.375$ ,  $p = .260$ .

| <i>Variables</i>    | <b><i>Model 6 – All variables included</i></b> |                    |                    |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
|                     | <i>High dev.</i>                               | <i>Mdt. dev.</i>   | <i>Low dev.</i>    |
| <b>Constant</b>     | 24.457<br>(18.196)                             | 3.308<br>(37.874)  | 96.751<br>(57.385) |
| GDP growth %)       | -.110<br>(.148)                                | .448<br>(.629)     | -.492<br>(1.149)   |
| Unemployment (Ln)   | 1.967<br>(2.564)                               | 4.742**<br>(1.840) | 4.869<br>(2.897)   |
| Phone users         | .027<br>(.071)                                 | .018<br>(.097)     | -.019<br>(.139)    |
| Urban growth (%)    | -2.683**<br>(1.160)                            | 2.053<br>(2.361)   | .337<br>(4.044)    |
| Emigration (Ln)     | .344<br>(1.638)                                | 5.088<br>(3.862)   | -2.192<br>(4.702)  |
| Civil Liberties     | -.357<br>(.662)                                | 1.065<br>(1.398)   | .161<br>(3.560)    |
| Conflict            | -10.591<br>(9.132)                             | 1.524<br>(4.787)   | -4.409<br>(12.471) |
| Population (Ln)     | 1.357<br>(1.425)                               | -1.625<br>(1.785)  | 1.804<br>(4.616)   |
| Country area (Ln)   | -1.055<br>(.661)                               | -.477<br>(2.279)   | -6.052<br>(4.476)  |
| Adj. R <sup>2</sup> | .104                                           | .352               | .073               |
| <i>N</i>            | 45                                             | 44                 | 44                 |

Notes: \* $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ . Entries are unstandardized regression coefficient with corrected robust standard errors in parentheses. Mdt. dev. means 'moderate development'. Model 5 did not statistically significantly predict migration aspirations for high human development countries,  $F(9, 35) = 1.570$ ,  $p = .163$ , and for low-human development countries,  $F(9, 34) = 1.374$ ,  $p = .238$ .

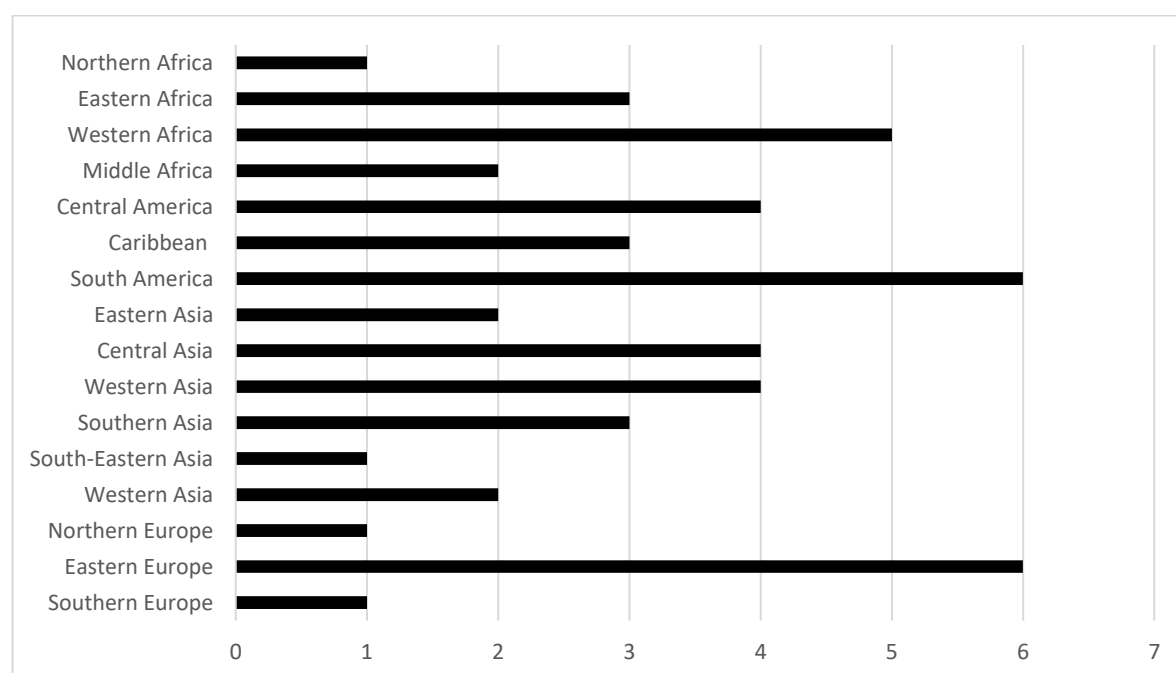
## ANNEX 2: MACRO-LEVEL ANALYSIS – MIGRATION CAPABILITIES WORLDWIDE

**Figure A.1.** Number of changes in exit permits per 5-year period, 1970-2008



Source: Own elaboration based on DEMIG (2015)

**Figure A.2.** Number of policy changes recorded by region, 1970-2008



Source: Own elaboration based on DEMIG (2015)

