Chapter 6

Settlement or Return? The Intended Permanence of Emigration from Germany Across the Life Course

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6.1 Introduction

“While ‘winners’ settle, ‘losers’ return” (Haas et al. 2015, p. 416) is the quintessential neo-classical formula used to explain return migration. From this perspective, economically successful and socio-culturally integrated migrants settle permanently in their country of immigration whereas temporary migration and subsequent remigration takes place only if the previous cost-benefit calculation has not materialised and expectations have not been fulfilled (cf. Borjas and Bratsberg 1996; Constant and Massey 2002). This formula was turned upside down by the new economics of labour migration (NELM) assuming that households send out the most capable individuals to gain an income elsewhere in order to spread household income risks. In line with neo-classical thinking, NELM also assumes that migrants want to increase their income by optimising their economic performance. But the resulting better structural integration will not result in permanent settlement because migrants—once their goals have been fulfilled—return home (cf. Stark and Bloom 1985; Taylor 1999). Recently, the transnational perspective added a more dynamic view to this debate and suggested the consideration of individuals’ embeddedness in the social contexts of multiple countries. From this perspective, remigration takes place within systems of transnational interconnectedness between places of origin and destination, including ties, practices, and continued mobility, and does not necessarily constitute the end of a migration process. It is thus also not merely a result of economic and socio-cultural experiences in the destination country (cf. Fauser and Anghel 2019; Cassarino 2004).

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These theoretical debates continue to inspire analyses concerned with migration systems that display larger economic development differentials (e.g. Haas and Fokkema 2011; Lindstrom 1996) and not least those between former guest worker sending and European receiving countries (e.g. Diehl and Liebau 2015; Waldorf 1995). Instead, studies dealing with migrants from economically highly developed countries are scarce and the emerging literature on privileged migration—e.g. on expatriates and lifestyle seekers—rarely touches the question of the permanence of emigration (for exceptions see, for example, Bygnes and Erdal 2017; Fauser 2020; Konzett-Smoliner 2016; Steiner 2019). Existing studies that include migrant groups from economically less and more developed countries demonstrate largely different remigration behaviour (e.g. Khoo 2003; Diehl and Preisendörfer 2007). Overall, it is fair to state that we know rather little about the permanence of emigration from economically highly developed countries.

Do German emigrants intend to settle permanently abroad, or do they plan to return home after some time abroad? The few empirical studies on permanent settlement or return of German migrants thus far arrive at largely different conclusions. A study of German scientists in the United States concluded that 66% are planning to stay permanently (Buechtemann 2001) and an analysis among German emigrants on the Spanish island of Mallorca found that 78% of the respondents wished to remain there (Kaiser 2011). These numbers are in line with the 80% of former respondents of the Socio-economic Panel now living abroad who also intend to settle permanently abroad (Erlinghagen et al. 2009). In contrast to these findings, the official migration statistics of Germany show that between the years 1991 and 2018, overall 3.3 million German citizens resettled abroad. Yet, taking remigration of 2.5 million Germans into account, average yearly net migration was only −27,100 German migrants. These numbers demonstrate a relatively high international migration volume of German citizens but an actually rather low migration intensity because within those three decades, approximately three-quarters of all emigrants might have returned (cf. Ette and Erlinghagen 2021). This finding fits the analyses by Ette and Sauer (2010) who, on the basis of completed employment career data of the German statutory pension insurance, showed that 80% of male employees who ever worked abroad during their career actually did return to Germany.

In light of these inconclusive findings, this chapter aims to provide a better understanding of the permanence of emigration from economically highly developed countries. Based on the German Emigration and Remigration Panel Study (GERPS) it provides initial evidence of those individual circumstances that shape German migrants' intentions to return after a temporary stay abroad compared to those who intend to settle permanently. The ideal research design would try to analyse actual migration behaviour. However, permanent settlement is an unfinished process par excellence because throughout the life course, return could always occur. Therefore, we would need data about an emigrant cohort who already lived abroad for an extended period together with data about those who had remigrated from this very same cohort. Because such data is not available, this study, as most other research on this topic, follows a stated-preference approach. Although migration intentions will not precisely match actual behaviour, research shows that

intentions constitute a good predictor of future behaviour (e.g. Ajzen 1991; van Dalen and Henkens 2013). For an analysis of stated preferences, GERPS provides data about a sample of emigrants who left Germany on average 12 months before the interview. Many existing surveys on settlement or return behaviour are carried out among migrants who have already stayed abroad for substantial periods. Whereas such studies are confronted with serious problems of selective remigration, GERPS offers information about intentions across a sample of recent emigrants, thus providing insights into aspects of their migration projects otherwise regularly overlooked.

In contrast to the traditional theoretical approaches discussed before, we argue that individual migration projects—particularly of migrants from economically highly developed countries (but perhaps from others, too)—are embedded within transitions in the individual life course (cf. Elder 1985; Bailey and Mulder 2017). Consequently, settlement and return intentions are, firstly, best understood by taking into account the interdependencies between migration and other domains of the individual life course, for example employment and working life, together with the linked lives of partners and other family members. Secondly, migration intentions develop as a response to the inherent path dependency of individual life courses including previous migration experiences and their embeddedness within broader institutional structures. This theoretical approach to study settlement and return intentions of emigrants from Germany will be discussed in the next section before the third section provides the empirical approach as well as descriptive information about the migration projects of our sample. Finally, the fourth section provides the results of multinomial logistic regressions differentiating between those who intend to stay permanently abroad and those who intend to return, in addition to those who were still undecided at the time of the survey. The final section concludes with a discussion about the potential of the life-course perspective for understanding individual migration intentions and migration projects more broadly.

6.2 Theoretical Considerations about the Permanence of Emigration

The individual intention of immigrants to return to their countries of origin or to settle permanently in their destination country depends on a variety of factors. Yet disagreement about the major drivers prevails, even for the case of traditional migration systems. German emigrants are a particularly highly qualified population and their intentions to settle or return might not be shaped so much by rather narrow economic assumptions driving return: either because of success (NELM) or failure (neo-classic). While not directly contradicting a transnational perspective, a life-course approach provides a way to conceptualise the intentions to stay on or move back as influenced by further career plans, changing family obligations, health and well-being as well as other transitions in their life course (e.g. Favell 2008; Massey

and Redstone Akresh 2006). The argument put forward here is that a life-course perspective provides an alternative way to predict migration intentions of persons from economically highly developed countries compared to existing approaches. The life-course perspective has established itself as an adequate theoretical framework for migration research (e.g. Geist and McManus 2008; Mulder and Wagner 1993) and the number of empirical studies has recently increased substantially (e.g. Falkingham et al. 2016; Dommermuth and Klüsener 2019) but mostly focused on internal migration. This study therefore joins recent attempts to apply the approach to international migration (but see Bettin et al. 2018; Kōu et al. 2015).

Life-course analyses do not share a concise set of testable propositions. They instead work through certain research perspectives, two of which are of particular relevance for the context of international migration: The first stipulates interdependencies between migration and other domains of the individual life course as well as with the life course of linked partners and further family members. Enrolling in further education and professional training, entering the labour market, partnership formation and dissolution, to name only a few, have all been found to influence migration intentions (e.g. Kley and Mulder 2010; Bettin et al. 2018). Three domains of the life course seem particularly relevant for the purpose of this study: (1) employment and working life; (2) partnership and family life; (3) well-being and social life. Second, migration is a self-perpetuating process that unfolds path dependencies throughout life courses, which are themselves embedded in broader institutional structures (cf. Elder 1985; Mayer 2009). Early events within the life course, for example previous stays abroad or immigration experiences of the parents, are linked with later events in the life course and subsequently shape current migration projects. Furthermore, the living conditions within different destination countries but also existing residence rights provide institutional structures along which migrants make their decisions.

Employment and working life: A first life-course domain concerns the position of an individual within working life. Most theoretical approaches focusing on settlement or return migration put emphasis on employment and the main activity status because of its fundamental importance for other spheres of life. In contrast to traditional theories—which come to different conclusions with respect to the role of working life—we expect a negative relationship between the job skill level and the intended length of stay in the case of overwhelmingly highly skilled international migrants from economically developed countries. Consequently, we expect the more qualified to return and the less qualified to be more likely to settle permanently. Highly skilled jobs require more flexibility and regularly demand the acquisition of new skills to enhance one's career, both making a stay abroad more likely than in less qualified jobs. However, as soon as those skills are acquired and the career demands for spatial flexibility end, migrants will return home because they have no interest in permanent settlement (cf. Stark 2019; van Ham et al. 2001). Next to the qualification of a job, individual employment status shapes migration intentions. Dependent employment—particularly as an expatriate moving abroad within the institutional context of a transnational company—is related with less personal investment compared to those owning their own business abroad. Acquiring skills

abroad is also a major motivation for all migrants who are still in education or training. With the institutional structures of academic mobility focusing mainly on temporary exchanges, international students are also more likely to express remigration intentions (cf. Hazen and Alberts 2006; Tharenou and Caulfield 2010). Finally, neo-classical approaches associate a worsening of individual economic performance with higher intentions to return. From a life-course perspective, unemployment or non-employment might not be related to remigration intentions since they are not understood from an individual perspective only. Instead, the life course of the partner or other family members might explain why setbacks for one partner might be accepted because of improvements for the other. Similarly, migrants' transition to retirement is regularly associated with higher intentions to return to the country of origin. Seen from the perspective of a traditional immigration country, the same argument would then predict permanent settlement intentions of older German emigrants with a migration background. But also German retirees without migration backgrounds might intend permanent settlement abroad—particularly those suffering from financial constraints (cf. Hayes 2014; Waldorf 1995).

Partnership and family life: The partner and family constitute a second domain of the life course closely linked to migration intentions. However, it is not so much the partnership and marital status as such, but the particular family arrangement that matters. When a partner is remaining in the origin country or other family obligations exist, this is likely to be linked to more temporary stays abroad. The opposite are partners originating from the current destination country. In this case, the couple unites abroad, which is a high incentive for more permanent settlement intentions (cf. Carling and Pettersen 2014; Konzett-Smoliner 2016). The household context in the destination country is expected to show more ambivalent results with respect to migration intentions. Generally, a family and in particular children in the destination country might increase social integration and thus the wish to stay permanently. Definitely the investment required of a family moving together abroad will be much greater compared to families living separately for a certain time. On the other hand, parents might want their children to grow up in the country of origin or at least to spend substantial parts of their education at home, which would reduce permanent settlement intentions (cf. Bivand Erdal and Ezzati 2015; Dustmann 2003). From a life-course perspective, partnership is also relevant because of the interdependence between the lives of both partners. A first consequence concerns the status of the partner in different domains of the life course potentially affecting one's own migration intention. A second consequence concerns the decision-making processes. Whereas a temporary stay abroad might be overwhelmingly shaped by the interests of one partner only, crucial biographical turning points like settling abroad permanently affect both partners and are more likely to be taken together.

Well-being and social life: A third domain of the life course affecting settlement or return intentions concerns the personal well-being and health situation as well as social interactions and integration. Although empirical results on traditional migrant groups are inconclusive, it is expected that migrants will prefer to return if their health status is deteriorating (cf. Arenas et al. 2015; Bettin et al. 2018). With respect to life satisfaction, the link to migration intentions is expected to be less linear.

Some studies suggest that less satisfied people are more willing to migrate because they have the most to gain. Others show that the more satisfied migrants choose to stay permanently, whereas the less satisfied return home (cf. Mara and Landesmann 2013; Otrachshenko and Popova 2014). Following propositions from socio-cultural integration theories, it can be assumed that social interactions with others and participation in the societies at destination and origin, e.g. having friends in the destination country or speaking its language, affect settlement and return migration intentions (cf. Diehl and Preisendörfer 2007; Steinmann 2019).

Migration process: A final dimension of the life course linked with settlement and return migration intentions are former experiences with migration. In line with the path-dependent logic inherent in many life-course approaches, one would expect that the longer migrants stay in the destination country, the more they will intend to settle permanently. Furthermore, prior stays abroad increase the likelihood to leave the destination country again because they indicate a mobile lifestyle. In contrast, previous migration experiences as an immigrant or as a child of immigrant parents might fundamentally change this reasoning. In this case, (biographical) migration experiences might result in an emigration to the country of birth, or that of the parents, making more permanent settlement intention more likely (cf. Kiliç and King 2017; Massey and Redstone Akresh 2006). The embeddedness of the migration process within institutional structures is more difficult to assess and the legal residence status has been found to have an ambiguous effect on the intention to settle permanently (cf. Carling and Pettersen 2014; Ette et al. 2016). With respect to the reception climate in the destination country, there is abundant literature documenting such effects on the integration of migrants but hardly any research exists about destination country effects on settlement or return intentions. Furthermore, existing studies provide plenty of evidence of migrant groups in the same country of destination who show very different settlement and return migration intentions. Generally, one would expect that a destination country with a high living standard and more amenities is more attractive for permanent stays. On the other hand, life in such a country may be more costly, potentially increasing return migration intentions.

6.3 Operationalisation of Theoretical Constructs

The following analyses use data from the first wave of the German Emigration and Remigration Panel Study (for more detailed information about the data source see Ette et al. 2021 in this volume). The sample is restricted to international migrants with German citizenship aged between 20 and 70 years who were living abroad at the time of the interview (between November 2018 and February 2019). It comprises 3554 emigrants who have lived abroad, on average, for 12 months and excludes individual cases falling out of the sampling frame who have stayed abroad already for more than 36 months (cf. Table 6.1 for an overview of dependent and independent variables).

Table 6.1 Descriptive statistics of dependent and independent variables

Variable	Per cent/mean (SD)	Variable	Per cent/mean (SD)
Dependent variable		<i>Partner and family life</i>	
Migration intention		Partner in Germany (yes = 1)	6.4
Remigration	49.9	Partner from CoD (yes = 1)	15.8
Undecided	27.9	Children in HH (yes = 1)	18.5
Permanent settlement	22.2	Not decided together (yes = 1)	29.0
Independent variables		<i>Well-being and social life</i>	
Female (yes = 1)	51.1	Happiness	7.8 (1.6)
Age (in years)	35.3 (10.1)	Health (satisfactory/ better = 1)	96.2
<i>Employment and working life</i>		Relative before mig. (yes = 1)	67.6
Education		Friends in CoD (yes = 1)	66.0
Higher tertiary	58.4	Language	
Lower tertiary	17.0	German in CoD	28.1
General maturity certificate	7.9	Mother tongue or good	48.1
Vocational certificate	7.5	Poor	23.8
Lower certificate	9.2	<i>Migration process</i>	
Employment status		Time since mig. (in years)	1.0 (0.5)
Employed	66.2	Mig. background (yes = 1)	27.3
Self-employed	7.5	Previous stay abroad (yes = 1)	64.8
Unemployed	2.2	Human Devel. Index in CoD	90.0 (7.1)
Retired	2.1	Residence status	
In education	11.0	Free movement	44.7
Not employed	11.0	Temporary residence title	37.8
Expat (yes = 1)	9.2	Permanent residence title	17.5

Source: GERPSw1

CoD country of destination

N = 3554

The literature has come up with different approaches to measure migration intentions (for an overview see Kley 2017). GERPS decided to adopt an approach followed by several new immigrant surveys and in particular by the IAB-SOEP Migration Sample (Brücker et al. 2014). In consequence, all respondents in GERPS living abroad at the time of the interview were asked: “How long do you want to stay in the country where you currently live?” They had to choose between the following categories: “a maximum of one more year,” “a few more years,” “forever,” and “don’t know yet.” For the multivariate analyses, we collapsed the first two categories into one category. This represents the intention to return after a couple of

years abroad, which is compared to those respondents who intend to settle permanently in the current destination country and—usually not regarded in most other studies (but see Di Barbiano Belgiojoso 2016; Tezcan 2018)—persons who are undecided about the length of their stay (dependent variable). The descriptive results show that 49.9% intend to remigrate, 27.9% have not yet decided about the permanence of their emigration, and 22.2%—although they have been living abroad only a relatively short time—intend to settle permanently. Additionally, a follow-up question asked all respondents stating that they are intending to stay a few more years: “How many years do you plan to stay in the country where you currently live?” The results of both questions show that among those who intend to stay temporarily, 84.5% expect to return to Germany within the next five years and only 10.1% plan to stay for ten or more years (see Fig. 6.1).

As covariates, we include variables along the four theoretical dimensions of the life course discussed in our theoretical approach together with controlling for sex, age, and—to represent a non-linear relationship between age, settlement, and return intentions—a quadratic age term. With respect to the first dimension—the individual employment situation—we control for the educational status of the respondents by applying the CASMIN classification (Brauns et al. 2003). Having its roots in social stratification research, it is a certificate-oriented classification, which focuses on educational signals for utilisation on the labour market and distinguishes general and vocational education. Because of the overall high educational background of internationally mobile Germans, lower and middle secondary education are collapsed into one category. Additionally, we consider the present employment status

Fig. 6.1 Intentions about the permanence of global lives of German emigrants and the intended length of stay (in years) of those emigrants reporting to remigrate. (Source: GERPSw1)

of the respondents, differentiating between employed, self-employed, unemployed, retired, not employed, and presently enrolled in education, to test for structural integration into the labour market. Finally, we also take into account whether a migrant is an expatriate sent by his or her company because this type of international mobility is by definition planned for a temporary duration only.

The partnership and family dimension of the life course uses four variables. The first accounts for a family arrangement where the partner of the respondent still lives in Germany and a second for arrangements where one partner already lived in the destination country. The third variable reflects negotiations within the partnership and accounts for a situation where either the respondent or their partner was the driving force in the decision to move abroad, compared to situations in which such a decision is taken jointly by both partners. Finally, the household composition is taken into account by a dummy variable testing for the influence of children up to the age of 16 years present in the household.

The social life and well-being is included as the third dimension in our life-course approach. Social contacts are represented by two dummy variables with the first measuring whether contacts to relatives or friends in the country of destination existed before emigration and a second measuring whether respondents indicate that they have at least one close friend in the destination country. Speaking the language of the destination country is a crucial condition for meeting and mating with others (Martinovic et al. 2009). The categorical variable differentiates between three groups: those living in a country with German as a major language, those with at least good language abilities or speaking the language of the destination country as mother tongue, and those with only poor language abilities. Personal well-being is operationalised through several well-established items. This includes overall happiness, measured by the question “How satisfied are you with your life, all things considered” as a continuous variable with an eleven-point scale. The potential effect of deteriorating health as a reason for return migration is measured by the self-rated health accounting for overall physical or psychological health problems (Simon et al. 2005).

Finally, path dependency of the individual migration process is tested by the influence of five variables. Although GERPS focuses on recent emigrants only, a first variable controls for the time elapsed since the time of emigration and the time of the interview as a continuous variable. Secondly, a dummy variable differentiates between respondents with a migration background—either first or second generation—compared to respondents without biographical experiences as an immigrant in Germany. Information about previous stays abroad is included as a second dummy variable. It is based on the question whether respondents always lived in Germany before the recent emigration or whether they lived elsewhere at previous times, referring to continuous stays of more than 3 months in other countries. Furthermore, two variables control for the institutional context of the destination country. First, the general level of development of the destination country measured by the human development index and, second, the information provided by the respondents about their legal residence status, differentiating between temporary and permanent

residence permit, and free movement rights as a German citizen, for example for a stay within another member state of the European Union.

In our analyses, we concentrate on investigating differences in migration intentions of recent emigrants using multinomial logistic regression models. The dependent variable differentiates between three groups: those respondents who intend to return to Germany and opt for a temporary stay only, the undecided who have not made up their mind about the length of their stay, and those who intend to settle permanently. To understand how status differences across various dimensions of the life course contribute to those different migration intentions, we estimate multivariate regression models testing the influence of each dimension of the life course separately as well as a full model including all dimensions simultaneously and calculate average marginal effects (output for the different dimensions as well as average marginal effects available on request from the authors). In all analyses, the base outcome is temporary migration intentions and the estimated coefficients were transformed to relative risk ratios. We performed several robustness checks by employing linear and ordinal regression models. These models include the information on the intended duration of stay as a linear or categorical variable and principally support the findings of the multinomial logistic regressions. Furthermore, alternative multinomial logistic regressions have been estimated, separating different cut-off points of short or long durations of stay. Because of small case numbers for respondents intending to stay more than 5 years but less than permanently, these models have been not included in the final version but are available on request.

6.4 Settlement and Remigration Intentions Across the Life Course

The results of the multinomial logistic regression models are displayed in Table 6.2. They show that, overall, significant differences exist between the three groups: Migrants who indicate that they intend to return contrast with those who intend to settle permanently abroad while the group of undecided migrants is situated somewhere in between. Whereas hardly any gender difference exists, the data show a rather linear effect of age on settlement and remigration intentions. Older migrants have higher probabilities to settle permanently—while at the age of 30 every fifth German living abroad reports permanent settlement intentions, this share increases to every third person at the age of 60—a strong indication that the life course is of major relevance in understanding migration intentions.

The empirical results support several of the theoretical expectations. For the mostly highly skilled emigrants from Germany, there is a negative relationship between qualification and the intended length of stay. Those emigrants with an academic degree (completed higher or lower tertiary education) show a significantly reduced risk of permanent settlement intentions compared to return migration intentions, but also compared to those migrants still undecided. The relative risk ratio of

Table 6.2 Multinomial logistic regressions on settlement and remigration intentions

	Undecided vs. return	Settlement vs. return	Settlement vs. undecided
Female (ref. male)	1.286** (0.114)	1.113 (0.117)	0.866 (0.093)
Age	1.027*** (0.007)	1.046*** (0.008)	1.019* (0.008)
Age ²	0.999** (0.000)	0.999* (0.000)	1.000 (0.000)
Education (ref. lower certificate)	—	—	—
Higher tertiary education	0.394*** (0.069)	0.215*** (0.039)	0.546*** (0.091)
Lower tertiary education	0.547** (0.105)	0.254*** (0.052)	0.464*** (0.088)
General maturity certificate	0.608* (0.137)	0.332*** (0.083)	0.545* (0.131)
Vocational maturity certificate	0.787 (0.177)	0.561* (0.131)	0.714 (0.152)
Employment status (ref. employed)	—	—	—
Self-employed	1.556* (0.268)	1.570* (0.294)	1.009 (0.179)
Unemployed	1.339 (0.390)	1.514 (0.495)	1.131 (0.344)
Retired	1.914 (1.020)	6.092*** (2.828)	3.183** (1.392)
Education or training	0.536*** (0.083)	0.300*** (0.065)	0.561* (0.128)
Not employed	0.563*** (0.087)	0.639** (0.109)	1.134 (0.209)
Expat (ref. no)	0.376*** (0.068)	0.103*** (0.039)	0.275** (0.110)
Partner in Germany (ref. no)	0.555** (0.109)	0.599* (0.146)	1.079 (0.293)
Partner from CoD (ref. no)	1.832*** (0.242)	3.627*** (0.495)	1.980*** (0.255)
Not decided together (ref. no)	0.745** (0.070)	0.769* (0.084)	1.032 (0.116)
Children in household (ref. no)	0.830 (0.103)	1.016 (0.140)	1.224 (0.176)
Happiness	0.938* (0.025)	1.246*** (0.045)	1.329*** (0.048)
Health (ref. poor)	0.965 (0.223)	0.855 (0.249)	0.886 (0.252)
Relatives in CoD before mig. (ref. no)	1.352** (0.131)	2.207*** (0.285)	1.633*** (0.222)
Friends in CoD (ref. no)	1.119 (0.104)	1.564*** (0.178)	1.397** (0.162)
Language of CoD (ref. very good)	—	—	—
German in CoD	1.486*** (0.155)	1.609*** (0.194)	1.083 (0.130)
Poor	0.805+ (0.092)	0.805 (0.113)	1.000 (0.148)
Time since migration	0.999 (0.091)	0.924 (0.101)	0.925 (0.103)
Migration background (ref. no)	1.134 (0.111)	1.289* (0.147)	1.137 (0.132)
Previous stays abroad (ref. no)	0.847+ (0.081)	0.773* (0.086)	0.913 (0.103)
Human Development Index of CoD	1.028*** (0.008)	1.034*** (0.010)	1.005 (0.010)
Residence status (ref. free movement)	—	—	—
Temporary residence title	0.708*** (0.069)	0.590*** (0.070)	0.834 (0.102)
Permanent residence title	1.052 (0.133)	1.460** (0.198)	1.387* (0.187)
Constant	0.114** (0.087)	0.049** (0.045)	0.429 (0.424)
McFadden's pseudo R ²	0.15		
N	3554		

Exponentiated coefficients (relative risk ratios); Standard errors in parentheses. Source: GERPSw1, authors' calculations

CoD country of destination

+ < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

migrants with higher tertiary education compared to those with a secondary educational certificate is 0.215 for being in the settlement vs return migration group (0.546 for settlement vs undecided).

Most likely, the higher educational level increases employment opportunities in the current destination country but also back home, potentially reducing the intention to settle. Overall, the highly qualified show little interest in permanent settlement, but for them international migration is a more functional biographical trajectory to acquire certain skills. The results for individual employment status support some of the theoretical assumptions: Whereas the additional investments of the self-employed increase their risk for permanent over temporary settlement, status as a student who is still in education or training reduces this risk significantly. In addition, the results for not being employed seem to be strongly related with an intention to return whereas this effect could not be confirmed for unemployment. Although the size of this group is relatively small and the effects are not statistically significant at conventional levels, unemployment even has a positive effect on the risk for more permanent settlement intentions. The findings on retirement provide a new perspective: Retired emigrants show a high risk of settling abroad permanently. Additional analyses show that this is true for both former immigrants to Germany as well as persons without migration backgrounds.

With respect to the effect of the partner and family life, the empirical results overall confirm theoretical considerations. Having a partner still living in Germany significantly reduces the risk of permanent settlement as well as of being undecided compared to return migration. In contrast, comparing the risks of those with permanent settlement intentions versus those having not yet made a decision, however, further supports the argument that a partner in Germany is a strong incentive to return. In addition, the expectation that a partner originating from the destination country reduces return intentions is supported. Based on the analysis of the average marginal effects, the probability of intending to settle permanently is 33.0% – more than double compared to other partnership arrangements. The expected ambivalent results about the household context and the presence of children are also confirmed. The presence of children has no significant effect on settlement or return intentions. Alternative models focusing on children of younger ages do not change those results and support the overall finding that the actual effect of the presence of children in the households on the probabilities to settle or return are small. Interestingly, the effects show that children make respondents' intentions more pointed and the risk of being undecided decreases. Finally, the indicator testing for decision-making is also in line with theoretical predictions: Individually taken migration decisions increase the risk of only temporary stays abroad whereas the intention for permanent settlement is preceded by joint decision-making.

Compared to the internationally non-mobile population, the physical and mental health status of German emigrants is much better (see Table 6.1 and see Stawarz et al. 2021 in this volume). Our results are statistically not significant. Nevertheless, it must be mentioned that in contrast to theoretical expectations, the healthier

migrants want to return whereas the unhealthier want to settle permanently. Overall satisfaction with life has a stronger association with remigration intentions. Here, the literature review provided different expectations about its effect with a linear but also a curvilinear u-shaped relationship. The empirical models tested several relationships (not shown in Table 6.2) but demonstrate a rather linear link between happiness and permanent settlement. The more satisfied migrants are more likely to settle permanently, whereas the less satisfied intend to return home. The undecided emigrants seem to be less satisfied, which explains the negative relation between the undecided and the remigration group. The remaining variables largely follow the theoretical expectations: Having relatives and friends in the destination country before emigration from Germany increases the risk to intend to settle permanently as does having close friends in the destination country. Further personal investments in the destination country, however, show more results that are inconclusive. Living in a German-speaking country, e.g. Austria or Switzerland, has a positive effect on the risk of settling permanently. However, poor language abilities in non-German speaking countries are hardly relevant for the intention to return or to settle (only the risk of being undecided compared to return increases). This finding either might be caused by the very recent emigration and consequently short duration of stay, or it is a potential indication of comparatively low social involvement of German emigrants in the local context of the destination country.

One key advantage of GERPS compared to many other migrant samples is its focus on recent emigrants who migrated on average only 1 year ago. Not surprisingly, the duration of stay in the destination country shows no significant and only weak effect. Other variables taking account of the migration process are in line with theoretical expectations: Prior stays abroad increase the likelihood to leave the destination country again whereas previous migration experiences as an immigrant or as a child of immigrant parents increases the risk for permanent compared to return migration. Furthermore, the residence title is closely related to settlement or remigration intentions. Although causality in cross-sectional analyses might generally be bi-directional, in the case of residence titles this is particularly obvious. The fact that a temporary title reduces the risk of permanent settlement might also be explained by a high interest in return migration. Nevertheless, it is a first indication that the “context of reception” (Luthra et al. 2018) in the destination country is relevant for further intentions even for emigrants from Germany. This is also supported by the positive effect of the human development index showing that a higher standard of living in the destination country increases the risk of settling permanently compared to return migration as well as in the comparison between undecided emigrants and those intending to return. This finding is robust in separate analyses excluding neighbouring countries like Switzerland or Austria. It confirms the assumption that destination countries with a high living standard and more amenities are more attractive for permanent settlement intentions of emigrants from economically highly developed countries.

6.5 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to analyse the intended permanence and length of migration projects of recent German emigrants. The results show that emigration from Germany is a predominantly temporary phenomenon with 49.9% intending to return, most of them within a relatively short period of only a few years. Furthermore, the chapter aimed to identify major drivers of the intentions to settle or to return in order to get a better picture of the characteristics of those migrants who want to stay abroad permanently and those who might come back to Germany. First, the empirical findings reveal that there is a negative relationship between the level of qualification of migrants and their intended permanence of migration. The most qualified tend to stay abroad only on a temporary basis and intend to return in the near future. Second, the results show that the settlement or return migration intentions are hardly explained by a neo-classical “winners” or “losers” dichotomy. Instead, migration intentions are closely linked to the individual status within several domains of individual life courses.

On the one hand, this chapter has demonstrated that a life-course perspective is better able to explain return and settlement intentions of migrants from economically highly developed countries. The interdependencies between different domains of the life course, the linked lives between respondents and their partner as well as the inherent path dependency within life courses fit settlement and remigration intentions better than overarching, mainly economical approaches. On the other hand, the chapter falls short of exploiting the full potential of this new perspective. The focus of the presented approach was on the effect of statuses in different life-course domains but hardly touched on the effect of events in different domains on migration intentions. The focus of life-course approaches on events, transitions, and trajectories has not yet been exploited but will become increasingly possible within the further development of GERPS as a panel study. The panel design of GERPS will also unlock further potentials and help to increasingly see migration beyond a singular event. On the one hand, it will provide the opportunity to analyse how intentions to stay permanently are implemented in practice and settlement solidifies. On the other hand, the panel will allow analyses about the influence of life-course events on changing previously stated intentions. Furthermore, the presented approach has accounted for mutual dependencies of the life courses of interacting individuals as linked lives. It has not fully recognised the embeddedness of individual migration processes in more superordinate social contexts, especially the crucial influence of different countries of destination. The findings on the human development status hint at obvious destination country effects, which need to be analysed in greater depth in future.

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