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Why, When and How? The Role of Inequality in Migration Decision-making

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Introduction

For a long time, migration decision-making was seen as a one-off decision concerning whether to leave or to stay based on individual cost–benefit calculations, usually monetary ones (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Massey et al., 1993). Gradually, this concept has expanded to focus much more on the "journey" of decision-making, both in the literal and figurative sense, encompassing types and modes of travel, trajectories and destination preferences (Crawley & Jones, 2021; Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2016). This expansion more accurately reflects the complexity of migration decision-making, since migration does not "just" correspond to a one-time decision or even journey, but rather starts much earlier on—that is, in personal mental processes such as imagining and planning. At the same time, there is no certainty on when migration and its effects end, if they ever do (Chambers, 2018; Hagen-Zanker et al., forthcoming), even after the arrival in the place of destination.

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Until recently, two competing theoretical models tried to make sense of migration decision-making. On the one side, functionalism (Harris & Todaro, 1970) considered migrants as rational agents who decide to move in order to maximise their income and in response to "push–pull factors" (Lee, 1966). Income inequality plays a large part in this theory, as wage differentials are seen as the key factor driving migration decisions and migration is predicted to continue until wages have equalised. This approach assumes that individuals have perfect access to information, make rational decisions based on measurable, mostly economic, factors and are free to move, should they wish to. Moreover, it ignores the manifold costs of migration. Before individuals can access the higher wages resulting from migration, they first have to pursue certain investments such as the material costs of travelling, the living costs while moving and looking for work, the difficulty in adapting to a new labour market and the psychological costs—not to mention that they interact with other actors through this journey, such as employers, who can refuse to give them work for reasons other than economic ones. On the other side, the historical-structuralist model focused on the macro-structure migrants are embedded in, seeing migration as both producing and reproducing socio-economic inequalities between individuals and states (de Haas, 2021). Yet, this model does not leave any space to individual agency, portraying migrants as victims of the circumstances or as irrational beings who move even when it is not beneficial to do so. De Haas (2021) and others, such as Carling and Schewel (2020), moved towards filling the gap between these two approaches through the "aspirations-capabilities framework", which conceptualises migration decision-making as "a function of aspirations and capabilities to migrate in a given set of perceived opportunity structure" (de Haas, 2021, 31). A focus on aspirations and capabilities helps to integrate both concepts of agency and structure, considered to be one of the main challenges for advancing migration theory (de Haas, 2011). By highlighting the role of aspirations, de Haas has paved the way for the inclusion of intangible factors in decision-making, which we explore in detail below.

Both tangible and intangible inequalities play a role in migration decision-making. We approach this theme from a theoretical perspective, grounding our analysis on the current literature on inequalities as drivers of migration within the so-called Global South. As for South–North migration, South–South migration too is tightly connected to inequality, as Cela et al. (2022) argue when describing it as a phenomenon that "often perpetuates inequalities across borders" (194). The entanglement of inequality and migration is also a reason why policy-makers focus on tackling poverty and inequality as a way to reduce migration, with containment strategies intended to prevent

populations from the Global South from migrating to the Global North becoming increasingly normalised (Landau, 2019).

The United Nations defines inequality as "the state of not being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities" (UN, DS and UNPAU, DPAD, and DESA, n.d.). Despite being a crucial concept for social justice, the breadth of inequality as a concept makes it still prone to confusion. Many authors have been singling out "economic inequality", mostly referring to income, wealth and general living conditions, while others have been focusing on access to rights (UN, DS and UNPAU, DPAD, and DESA, n.d.). Currently, there is some consensus on the definition of inequality as unequal "access to opportunities" (UN, DS and UNPAU, DPAD, and DESA, n.d.). This perspective, which we embrace, shows the pervasiveness of the factors determining inequality of opportunities both within and between countries (UN, DS and UNPAU, DPAD, and DESA, n.d.).

Throughout the chapter, we distinguish between tangible and intangible inequalities. Tangible inequalities are those inequalities that can be clearly defined and measured. In other words, they have a quantifiable impact on someone's life, such as socio-economic inequality, education and skill levels or unequal access to rights. Intangible inequalities, instead, are individually perceived, such as subjective feelings of discrimination or injustice. Being mental processes, they are less visible, more complicated to grasp, and, as such, have been studied less. Both in theory and in everyday life, telling tangible and intangible inequalities apart is not simple, as they often coexist. For instance, someone might feel discriminated against (intangible inequality) as a result of unequal economic structures (tangible inequality). Therefore, our classification does not aim at separating them, as much as presenting them more clearly, while shining light on those elements that have not been adequately explored so far.

Tangible Inequalities—Socio-Economic and Right-Access Inequality

Although economic inequality between countries has improved over the past 25 years, the gap between them is still considerable (World Bank Group, 2016), while inequality within many countries is increasing (Picketty, 2018). The UN (n.d.) indeed reports that, "today, 71% of the world's population live in countries where inequality has grown". As the UN rightly points out, this figure is particularly important because inequalities within countries are those that people feel day after day: "this is how people stack up

and compare themselves with their neighbours, family members, and society" (UN, n.d.) The COVID-19 pandemic has no doubt exacerbated this polarisation, as "globally the top 1% took 38% of all additional wealth accumulated since the mid-1990s" (World Inequality Database, 2021). The World Inequality Report 2021 divides inequalities into wealth, gender and ecological—as global inequality more and more fuels, and is fuelled by, climate change and ecological emergencies (Chancel & Piketty, 2021). While the literature considers socio-economic inequality, it has not yet considered ecological inequalities in relation to migration decision-making—apart from a few exceptions (e.g., see McLeman et al., 2016). In line with these definitions, in this section we consider the impact of a broad range of tangible inequalities on migration decision-making.

A high number of studies focuses on the links between economic inequality (i.e. wealth or income differentials) and migration, although research on South–South migration appears to be comparatively less nuanced than that focused on South–North migration (see also Casentini et al., in this volume). Already in 1980, Lipton noted that economic inequality is a driver of migration. Grounding his observation on a number of rural villages in India, Lipton (1980) argues that more unequal villages present a higher likelihood of rural–urban migration. Those who leave are predominantly young men between 15 and 30 years old, which means that, with their departure, villages are deprived of the fresh ideas and energy often fuelled by young people and capable of challenging inequality.

Inequality is in its very nature a relative assessment—how people's (economic) status relates to others—and keeping this in mind makes the link to decision-making clearer. In the 1980s, a set of influential papers known as the New Economics of Labour Migration broadened existing economic theories from a sole focus on income differences between source and origin countries to economic stability, risk and social status—the latter is defined as a household's absolute income in relation to the income of others in the community, also known as relative deprivation (Stark, 1991). As Massey et al. (1993) explain, "people may be motivated to migrate not only to increase their absolute income or to diversify their risks, but also to improve their income relative to other households in their reference group" (452).

Still nowadays, economic inequalities are reflected on who is able to migrate. International migrants tend not to come from the most deprived sections of society, given the often-high costs involved in international migration (Massey et al., 1993). Access to finances supporting migration is often "sourced from migrants' savings, financial resources received from family members, remittances from successful relations and friends abroad and their

connections" (Dinbabo et al., 2021, 221). Moreover, those coming from wealthier families often go through less risky migration journeys and/or land better-paid jobs once at destination. This in turn impacts on the remittances sent back to the place of origin, which both reflects income differentials between migrants and reproduces or potentially aggravates inequalities in the sending country. However, Black et al. (2006) warn that this conclusion is only partially accurate, because it frames remittances as a substitute to home earnings rather than an additional cash inflow. Indeed, even if this literature focuses on international migration, internal migration may also be costly, as it involves initial expenses and/or depends on social networks and job availability.

Rather than establishing whether migration increases or decreases economic inequality, Black et al. (2006) argue that "any overarching conclusion about impacts of inequality is unlikely to be very robust at a global or even regional level" (2). On the contrary, they state, inequalities are always context-specific and should be analysed as such. In addition, and most importantly for this chapter, Black et al. (2006) urge scholars to approach inequalities with a broader understanding than income and wealth. They write: "there are socio-cultural dimensions to inequality, as well as inequalities in access to power, whilst all aspects of inequality are highly gendered" (2)— and all these concur to shape migration decision-making. In the context of West Africans' migration to the Maghreb (Libya and Morocco) and Europe, Dinbabo et al. (2021) define inequality as "limited access to opportunities, poverty and unemployment amidst precarious development challenges", which go together with lack of "realistic expectations for a better life" (223).

Approaching inequality as more than just income and wealth, Cela et al. (2022) discuss Haitian emigration as driven by persistent structural inequalities, that is, a conjunction of economic and political instability originated during the nation's colonial past and the 1791–1804 revolution, to be then sharpened by invasion threats, diplomatic isolation, occupation, authoritarian governments, and natural catastrophes. The harsh living conditions generated by these factors have pushed "its urban poor, rural peasants, middle class, and even its educated youth to flee" (Cela et al., 2022, 194). This work reveals how far back the roots of inequality can reach, and that they impact several areas of social life at once.

Another well-explored area of study concerns the role of unequal gender norms affecting migration decision-making, which sit at a unique intersection between intangible and tangible. Evidence suggests that for men, migration often has an added social and normative component, making it a "rite of

passage" where migration is seen as a path to adulthood and economic independence (Massey et al., 1994; Tucker et al., 2013). For instance, Monsutti (2007) writes that young Hazara males migrating from Afghanistan to Iran see migration as an instrument to achieve both safety and social recognition while providing for their family, and, as such, as a pivotal step towards manhood. For women, however, their migration decision can be interlinked more to what they think is expected of them as women, to their position in the household, and to their perceived family responsibilities (e.g. to reunite with partners or to marry) (Hidrobo et al., 2022). Gender norms around kinship and care are also important factors influencing the decision to migrate or to stay put (Kanaiaupuni, 2000). Scalettaris et al. (2019) conducted a study with young Afghan men at the south-eastern border of Europe, revealing the complex network of mutual obligations between them and their stayed-behind families, and the high pressure they are under. On the one side, they are pushed to "succeed" in their migration by a "quest for autonomy and recognition" (Scalettaris et al., 2019, 519), while on the other side they gradually understand that the chances of settling in Europe are slim—this driving them to become more competitive with and jealous of their peers.

However, other studies have observed that some women do not only follow the conventional gender roles of migrating as daughters or wives but migrate with the purpose to continue studying or simply pursuing a better life (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). Further evidence has shown that gender norms are not static: they can and do change, with migration (and other processes) being a potential trigger of change (Marcus et al., 2015). Values and behaviours in the place of destination influence the set of norms that migrants have acquired at home, for example, when women increase their income, their confidence, their independence and their aspirations (Bastia, 2013; Leon-Himmelstine, 2017). Alternatively, migration can reinforce conservative or discriminatory gender norms (Tuccio & Wahba, 2018). Summarising, Fechter (2013) argues that migration in and of itself is neither oppressive nor liberating in gender terms, but that it rather has variegated outcomes for women and men alike,[1] which depend on the broader socio-economic context they are part of.

As mentioned in the introduction, migration policies in the Global North have increasingly focused on containing migration from the Global South. The stream of policy measures focusing on reducing inequalities in the places where migrations originate grounds on the assumption that, if development and inequalities within countries are improved, out-migration will go down. For instance, employment and education policies/programs

carried out in Global South countries are framed as a tool to potentially mitigate economic, educational, but also gender inequality by providing training and/or entrepreneurship skills needed to get a (better-paid) job, and hence reducing the need to migrate. However, most studies examined in a recent literature review find these programmes actually *increase* out-migration (Hagen-Zanker & Hennessey, 2021b). For instance, the OECD (2017) reports that participants in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes in the Global South are statistically significantly more likely to plan to emigrate than non-participants. This is due to the challenges that migrants face in employing their newly acquired skills in the local market, but also to their aspirations to put their training to use in a context where there are more possibilities to profit from it. This research demonstrates that, if a programme is not designed with reference to the local labour market, it will not succeed in reducing socio-economic inequality via new skills provision, simply because participants will not have the chance to apply them locally. Finally, Hagen-Zanker and Hennessey (2021b) point at individual and structural factors as complementary to employment and education programmes. Beyond the programme itself, inequality at the individual level (for instance, inequality in terms of wealth and class, gender or education) and at the collective one (socio-economic opportunities, right to work) greatly influence migration decision-making, and are often much more important than small-scale short-term policies that do not result in any structural changes.

Connecting both to this and to Cela's et al. (2022) discussion of structural inequalities, we conclude this section with some further reflections on the influence of policies on inequality and migration. In their work on the efficacy of migration policies, Hagen-Zanker and Mallett (2022) discuss how, over the past years, policies aimed at preventing irregular migration from Global South countries have worked either through the building of physical and bureaucratic obstacles or through the creation of alternative "favourable" conditions to reduce the desirability and need for migration (as discussed in the example above). Yet, they highlight that nation-states have only limited capacity to influence population movements as long as they do not tackle broader dynamics such as North–South, South–South or rural–urban inequalities and exploitative relations, such as labour market imbalances, opportunity differentials, conflicts and colonial legacies (Castles, 2004; Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2022; Lyberaki, 2008; Thielemann, 2004; Wiklund, 2012). In conclusion, the existence of a causal relation between migration-related policies and people's movement is debatable, since the impact of policies issued by faraway countries, regardless of how powerful, is

overshadowed by the daily force of global structural inequalities on people's lives.

Intangible Inequalities—Perception of, and Feelings About, Inequality

We now move on to "intangible" inequalities, namely those referring to a person's own *perception*, rather than to a straightforward measurement.

There are several important reasons for spotlighting perceptions of and feelings about inequalities. Firstly, this is very much an understudied area. For instance, while it is now well established that income differentials are a key driver of migration, only recently the literature has started exploring how people experience and feel about inequality, inequities and discrimination, and how this in turn affects migration decision-making (Hagen-Zanker & Hennessey, 2021a).

A study conducted in Latvia by Ķešāne (2019) shows that Latvian emigrants were very sensitive to vertical inequality and income differences in their country of origin, and they expressed this through anger, disappointment, and resentment towards their government. However, they were less sensitive to inequality in the country of destination. Their emotional reactions did not correspond one–one to absolute difference in deprivation levels within each country, but rather to the migrants' *perception* of opportunities available to them in their country of origin and in the country of destination (Eade et al., 2007). Although Ķešāne's work (2019) is not based on research in the Global South, we find it provides a useful understanding of migrants' different perceptions of inequality in countries of origin versus in countries of destination and of the potentially unexpected ways this influences migration decision-making. In this context, migration is an emotionally charged decision that can have an emancipatory function—or that can be perceived as such.

The literature on the migration-emotion nexus too has, in recent years, become more substantial. Work within this stream of literature has been focusing on, for instance, feelings of entrapment, jealousy and frustrations of one's life situation (Belloni, 2019; Kalir, 2005). There is also some relevant work on the connection between migration and shame (Bredeloup, 2017), guilt (Constable, 2014) or hope (Grabska, 2020; Hernandez-Carretero, 2016), as there is relevant research on love and attachment to either people or places (Mai & King, 2009), and on belonging (Schewel, 2015). Yet, these accounts very rarely include considerations on perceived inequality.

A second reason to focus on perception is that, while some aspects of someone's life are easily measurable, others are "inherently hard to measure" (Wolton, 2022), thus, focusing on how perceptions shape up and are experienced instead of attempting at objectively measuring them can foster our understanding of the intricacies of decision-making. Discrimination is one of these aspects. Wolton (2022) explains that we can use a broad or a narrow approach when trying to quantify discrimination. While the broad approach to discrimination tends to "look at simple differences in outcomes between different groups", such as wage gaps, the narrow approach "recognizes that groups differ in more than one dimensions" (i.e. living in different locations, being from different socio-economic backgrounds, etc.), and highlights that all those dimensions can affect the outcome of the analysis. Wolton's (2022) argument also reminds us that categories of disadvantage (e.g. discrimination based on class) do not function in isolation and intersect with other differences (such as race, ethnicity, age, sexuality and so on), usually having a profound effect on migrant's decision to migrate and their experience (Bastia, 2013). Obviously, the fact that discrimination or other elements are hard to measure is not a justification to stop measuring them altogether. Rather, exactly because measurement can hardly grasp the full extent of the impact on discrimination on someone's life, it is important to *also* enquire about how people perceive, make sense and feel about it.

Third, sometimes it is *perception* of inequalities, rather than objective differentials, that triggers (or discourages) migration. For instance, as it emerges from Ķešāne's study (2019), it is misleading to label economic inequality in the country of origin as key for migration decision-making, since comparative levels of income and wealth differentials are found in many countries of origin and of destination. This means that, at times, frustration, as well as perceived lack of recognition and respect compared to more privileged groups in one's society, can constitute a driver of migration much more than monthly earnings.

Having illustrated why it is important to focus on perceptions of inequality, we move onto defining some of the ways in which it can be perceived, as identified from existing research. Inequality is multi-dimensional and intersectional, thus people's perception of it can draw from various elements (i.e. gender, ethnicity and class just to name a few): however, it must be remembered that most of the time perceptions of inequality in different realms of life overlap and it is hard to separate the impact of one over another. For instance, Vacchiano (2018) conducted a longitudinal study with North African youth who had emigrated and found that they had done so equally to get out of what they perceived as material marginality—i.e.

economic inequality—and to be able to enjoy "a good life"—a desire stemming for a perception of social inequality. Vacchiano (2018) argues that their migration experience is marked by "a sense of lack that derives from the exposure to normative benchmarks of good life and the simultaneous exclusion from the actual means of achieving it" (82).

Gereke's (2016) research with young men in Thailand and Mo's (2018) work in Nepal reached similar conclusions, showing that perceiving to suffer from comparative material deprivation makes some people keener to take risks. This in turn increases their likelihood of migration, including through irregular channels. In her study with young Eritrean migrants, Belloni (2019) reports that images coming through the media convey a specific image of what modernity is, and the comparison of these with the goods and services available in Eritrea, represented for the migrants a "gap between their misery and the opportunities offered by the outside world" (Belloni, 2019, 344). Precisely, "the lack of petrol, the continual power cuts as well as the low quality of products in the local market were interpreted as expressions of Eritrea's backwardness and a metonym of my informants' existential stuckedness" (Belloni, 2019, ibid.).

According to Dinbabo et al. (2021), it is the perception of a lack of local opportunities and expectations of a better life that underlies the decision of many West African migrants to cross the Mediterranean. As before, this stems not only from an objective lack of opportunities—which we do not want to downplay—but also from a reflection on which are perceived to be valuable opportunities. Perception of opportunities and, indirectly, of the chances to reduce inequality, lie at the core of the migration decision, the selection of the destination (Baláž et al., 2016) and the prospects for return (Achenbach, 2017).

Contrary to the assumption that migration is a family decision, especially when young people are involved, Belloni's (2019) study shows that young Eritrean migrants often migrate to pursue their own aspirations, even contravening the family's plans, and/or to adhere to cultural values of moral worthiness and provision for the family. Grabska (2020) focuses instead on the journeys of Eritrean girls and young women to Khartoum. Her research (2020, 22) exposes the "interplay between aspiration and desire of becoming an adult linked to a specific geographical location, dreams of being elsewhere, impossibilities of returning, and realities of uncertainties and being-stuck in between". The results of Grabska's study (2020) are particularly rich and support our argument in that they show that aspirations are mediated by age, gender, culture, religion and geographical location. In addition, they show that aspirations rarely emerge in isolation, but are rather paired with other

feelings, such as stuckedness, restlessness and/or frustration. Importantly, Grabska (2020) also shows that, even in situations where migrants perceive to be forcibly kept in an intermediate destination and/or in a phase of their life (i.e. adolescence), migration is a way to expand their own decision-making and to take charge of their own life.

Aspirations can also be mediated by social caste and ethnicity, which can direct not only decisions on whether to migrate but also destination preferences. In a study on rural Nepal, Fischer (2022) finds that socially accepted destination choices are linked to caste and gender. For instance, a low-caste, male migrant might aspire to migrate to India, whereas a high-caste female migrant might aspire to travel to Australia. Of course, these aspirations are also tied in with the cost of migration and capacity to migrate to such places and as such crossing over with tangible inequalities. In addition, the returns from these different types of migration also differ, reproducing and potentially worsening existing inequalities.

A small number of studies consider the perception of inequalities and associated feelings of discrimination, leading to the decision to migrate. For instance, Alloul (2020) examines the decision-making process of European citizens of North African descent who had moved to Dubai to escape what he defines as a sense of "racial stuckedness" (313). While at home they had to cope with a stagnant socio-economic position and to face "racial ceilings for holding an immigrant and Muslim heritage" (Alloul, 2020, 352), in Dubai they found more opportunities for self-realisation and social mobility. Feelings of discrimination do not exclusively encourage outward migration but can also be the trigger for return. As an example, some studies on Turkish migrants in Western Europe look at how perceived discrimination influences return migration. Kunuroglu et al. (2018) find that perceived discrimination in the country of destination, along with a strong sense of belonging to Turkey, played a decisive role in migrants' decision to leave Germany, France and the Netherlands to move back to Turkey. Similarly, Tezcan (2019) investigates the main factors accelerating or postponing return migration for Turkish immigrants living in Germany and finds that they are a combination of economic and non-economic elements, including discrimination. More specifically, "difficult economic conditions, stigmatisation in both countries, social networks, commitment to the homeland, and perceived discriminatory attitudes" (Tezcan, 2019, 1) are found to accelerate return migration. Feelings of being discriminated against are often considered strong predictors of return aspirations (Groenewold & de Valk, 2017). Yilmaz Sener (2019) discusses the differences between the perception of discrimination and reasons for return of Turks who had migrated back to Turkey from Germany and the United

States. While those who had lived in Germany mentioned discrimination and identified it as a reason to return to Turkey, those who had lived in the United States did neither mention it nor state it was a trigger for return. Yilmaz Sener (2019) argues this depends on the presence in the country of destination of either bright or blurred ethnic boundaries, the former leaving no ambiguities on memberships while the latter being less clear cut.

Another stream of literature analyses the influence of perceived gender discrimination on people's aspirations to migrate and/or onto actual migration. Ruyssen and Salomone (2018) explore worldwide female "intentions and preparations to migrate" (224) relying on micro-level Gallup World Poll data from 148 countries collected between 2009 and 2013. Their study concludes that, while women who "do not feel treated with respect and dignity have a higher incentive to migrate abroad" (224). Concrete migration plans and journeys instead depend on a wider array of factors that are greatly "traditional", such as family obligations, but also on economic imbalances between men and women resulting in men globally having more tools and freedom to migrate. Nisic and Melzer (2016) reach similar conclusions, arguing that establishing direct causalities between gender and migration can easily become misleading if researchers do not account for macro-economic factors such as pay gaps, strict gender norms, expectations or discrimination. It is crucial to remember that migration in and of itself does not lead to a univocal outcome: if in certain cases migration can be (imagined as) "a way out of discrimination" (Ruyssen & Salomone, 2018), in others it can also preserve gender inequality (Riano et al., 2015). This happens when, for instance, the decision to migrate is not equally shared between members of a family, or the environment and values in the place of destination reproduce the same gender imbalances of the place of origin.

Research also finds that both aspirations to migrate and migration itself can be tied to the feelings of isolation, discrimination and stigma based on sexual orientation. Asencio and Acosta (2009) highlight this dynamic with respect to the case of sexual minorities in Puerto Rico. They find that, "for most participants, sexuality was not the reason they left Puerto Rico, but it was a factor in their decision to not return" (34). Importantly, Asencio and Acosta (2009) also state that ethnic identity contributes to sharpening sexual minorities' decision to migrate and/or not to return. Similarly, Del Aguila (2013) identifies a trigger towards migration in the experiences of discrimination based on sexual orientation reported by Peruvian gay men in their country of origin.

In addition, some scholars shed light on discrimination and perceived lack of belonging grounding on political elements. For instance, Charron (2020)

reports that the alienation felt by Crimean IDPs in Ukraine after the Russian occupation of Crimea in 2014, together with socio-economic and emotional factors, strengthened their decision to migrate elsewhere. In this context, Charron (2020, 432) defines Crimeans' migration as neither "exclusively forced not entirely voluntary" but running along a blurred line. Similarly, in their study conducted in the Adi Harush refugee camp in Northern Ethiopia, Mallett et al. (2017, 21) report, that "social inequality and (perceived) differential treatment by Ethiopians cause many Eritreans to feel that they will never become full member[s] of the Ethiopian society".

Besides inequality perceived as discrimination, another significant element is the perception of political and policy-related inequalities. Hagen-Zanker and Mallett (2022) have shown that, regardless of what is established in formal national and international policies, individuals' decision-making is more influenced by personal, cultural and social factors than by the content of policies. This is the reason why, in the encounter between (potential) migrants and migration policies, "outcomes cannot be taken for granted" (12). Paying attention to these dynamics allows to shed some light not only on the intricacies of migration decision-making, but also onto (the limits of) migration policies' impact. For instance, Mallett et al. (2017) write that "the lack of faith in formal [migration] channels [in Ethiopia] is also heightened by perceptions of unfairness and patronage in how the various [resettlement] programmes are managed" (27).

In this section, we have highlighted some intangible inequalities emerging from existing literature. However, this is by no means an exhaustive list, as inequalities are multi-dimensional, context-dependent, and—most importantly—connected to individual perceptions**.**

Conclusion

This chapter has underlined the importance of inequalities for various stages of migration decision-making. We have done this by giving particular attention to tangible inequalities—namely, those that can be measured such as wealth, differences in education, skill levels or health, as well as intangible inequalities—that is, those that are less observable and more personal such as imagination, personality traits, emotions, feelings, beliefs and values based on individual's perceptions (Hagen-Zanker & Hennessey, 2021a). We also consider the role that policies intended to address inequalities play in migration decision-making, given that such policies are often designed to deter migration from the Global South.

Examining the role of tangible inequalities in shaping migration decision-making helps us to understand the influence of economic and the macro-structure factors which migrants are embedded in. The literature shows that economic inequalities are important (Lipton, 1980), but migration decision-making seems to be more the result of migrants' desire to improve their economic status. This desire is in fact combined with, and fuelled by, perceptions of relative deprivation, rather than outcomes of absolute poverty (Massey et al., 1993; Stark, 1991). However, income differentials do matter when considering which migrants can fund their own migration, access the safest routes and obtain better jobs at destination. It is also undeniable that structural inequalities, originated in part by Global South's colonial past and sharpened by current economic inequalities, *do matter* and push individuals to migrate (Cela et al., 2022).

Another important aspect of tangible inequalities is the role of unequal gender norms and relations affecting migration decision-making. While men often experience migration as a "rite of passage" and a path towards economic independence, women consider what is socially expected from them when deciding whether to migrate or stay put, although the literature has shown that women also take decisions based on their desires to improve their material situation and to pursue a better life (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). Gender norms are dynamic and keep changing. This change is in part driven by migration, although its direction (either towards tighter or more egalitarian norms) seems to be context-specific (Fechter, 2013).

We also examined the literature on migration policies from the Global North to deter migration from the Global South, highlighting that such policies are not necessarily designed with reference to the structural factors that drive migration, thus usually struggling to accomplish their intended deterrence goals.

Moving forward, the chapter reviewed the ways that intangible inequalities shape migration decision-making. We stressed the important role that *perception* of inequalities plays to our understanding of the migration decision-making process: it can offer valuable insights regarding the place of emotions (Ķešāne, 2019), the aspects in migrants' lives that are "hard to measure" (Wolton, 2022), and the role of such perceptions regarding decisions to migrate or to stay put. There are many intangible inequalities involved in the decision-making process among migrants. By means of example, the desire to achieve one's aspirations for a better life plays a key role (Belloni, 2019). While these aspirations and decisions can be shaped by potential migrant's intended goals, Grabska (2020) showed that other factors are important to consider, such as individual characteristics (class, gender, age), personal values

(influenced by culture or religion) or caste and ethnicity, as shown by Fischer (2022). Other intangible inequalities influencing the decision to migrate are those associated with feelings of discrimination—which can also influence return decisions—based on race and ethnicity (Alloul, 2020; Tezcan, 2019), gender (Ruyssen & Salomone, 2018), sexual orientation (Asencio & Acosta, 2009; Del Aguila, 2013) or political grounds (Charron, 2020). Another important factor is the perception of migration policies as unequal and unfair, which is one reason why many migrants disregard or interpret policies according to their needs.

The key contribution of this chapter is to amplify emerging literature in the Global South on the synergies between migration and intangible inequalities, including personal and emotional dimensions (Hagen-Zanker & Hennessey, 2021a). We have shown that perceptions of inequality are multi-dimensional, intersectional and overlapping. Therefore, exploring how they are shaped and experienced by migrants at different stages of the migration trajectory is important to deepen our understanding of the decision-making process. Nevertheless, we want to reiterate that tangible inequalities also matter as economic, wealth and structural inequalities are decisive factors in the decision to migrate.

Despite the evolution of the literature on tangible and intangible inequalities and their influence in shaping migration decisions, important evidence gaps stand out. The literature on tangible inequalities between the Global South and the Global North is much richer than the one looking at internal inequalities between and within Global South countries and how they influence migration decisions. In the case of intangible inequalities, the "socio-cultural dimensions to inequality" highlighted by Black et al. (2006) are also less understood. For example, broader socio-cultural norms may influence migration decisions, as for instance migrating to fulfil community expectations to work or study abroad in order to improve the economic conditions of the individual and their community, or to comply to expectations to contribute to social and religious events with remittances. Likewise, the literature linking feelings of discrimination and decisions to migrate, although growing, deserves more attention. New research is also needed regarding the mutual relationship between tangible and intangible inequalities in the Global South equally covering the different phases of people's migration trajectories—since at present most studies still concentrate on the pre-migration phase. An excellent example of such research is Silva, Barbosa and Fernandes's chapter (this volume), which illustrates the inequality and structural racism experienced by Haitian migrants in Brazil.

Further research should look into the connection between intangible inequalities and policies, aiming at fostering a dialogue between scholars and policy-makers. The literature looking at the role of policies shows that nation-states usually assume there is a linear relationship between higher skills and economic development linked to a lower desire to migrate. However, individuals may also consider their families' and communications' expectations of them, what social mobility means in their context, and how this could be achieved, along with their personal aspirations and capabilities to migrate. Another example of the gap between intangible factors and policies is the current anti-migrant discourses in some parts of the Global North and the resulting legal uncertainty for some Global South migrants already settled in Global North countries. These discourses and legal barriers are probably exacerbating individual's feelings of discrimination, affecting decisions to further migrate or to return. We encourage other scholars and practitioners to look into these less analysed dynamics in order to broaden the understanding and fair applicability of migration decision-making.

Note

1. Although this specific study only mentions women and men, we are mindful that gendered experiences are not limited to these two categories.

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