**Family Influences on Migration Intentions: The Role of Past Experience of Involuntary Immobility**

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**Abstract**

The paper examines the relationship between past experience of involuntary immobility in a family and the current migration intentions of its members. While family migration experience has been shown to be positively related to migration intentions, the role of past unrealised migration intentions in a family is understudied. Using the case of the former communist bloc, we focus on the migration intentions of people whose family members’ mobility aspirations were stifled by the restrictive political regime. Drawing on data from the Life in Transition III Survey, we show that close relatives of people who had been prohibited from going abroad under communist rule are more likely to report migration intentions compared to people without such family experience. We explain these findings with the intergenerational transmission of mobility aspirations.

**Key words:** intergenerational transmission, involuntary immobility, involuntary non-migrants, migration aspirations, migration intentions, post-communist countries

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Introduction

Migration intentions are a critical social driver of migration behaviour (Chort, 2014; Docquier et al., 2014; Van Dalen and Henkens, 2013; see also Tjaden et al., 2019). While they are not a perfect predictor of an actual move (Bradley et al., 2008; Brzozowski and Coniglio, 2021; De Jong, 2000; see also Sutton, 1998), migration intentions may be an important predictor of other place-related behaviours, such as engagement in local social life or in the improvement of local living conditions (Aslany et al., 2021), making it important to understand the factors affecting them.

Migration intentions (or aspirations, if viewed more broadly, see Aslany et al., 2021) are believed to be shaped by a variety of factors, covering not only current but also past circumstances. When related directly to migration and mobility on the family level, past circumstances considered by previous studies involved prior personal migration and mobility experience (Bernard et al., 2022; Bernard and Perales, 2021; Bernard and Vidal, 2020; De Jong, 2000; Efendic, 2016; Huber et al., 2022; Marrow and Klekowski von Koppenfels, 2020; Petzold, 2017) as well as broader family migration history (Ivlevs and King, 2012; Kandel and Massey, 2002; Myers, 1999; see also Clifton-Sprigg, 2022). While the emerging literature has addressed the potential impact that family migration history may have on current migration intentions, it has concentrated on the consequences of past migration behaviour. However, previous migration-related experiences may also include mental processes and concrete efforts that have not ended in an actual move. Existing scholarship has so far not sufficiently attended to the role of past events and processes whose outcome, despite the presence of mobility aspirations (and often intentions), was immobility rather than mobility, in predicting current migration intentions (which may be viewed as yet another manifestation of ‘mobility bias in migration studies’, Schewel 2020). In particular, what remains unknown – and what in our view constitutes an important research question and a promising line of sociological inquiry – is how past mobility intentions unrealised due to external constraints, such as a narrow opportunity structure due to mobility restrictions, may affect the migration intentions of the descendants of those whose mobility aspirations remained unfulfilled. Understanding the consequences of unfulfilled mobility aspirations for subsequent generations is a relevant question for sociologists of migration as well as for policy makers, given the prevalence of involuntary immobility in today’s world (Carling, 2002).

Our study is embedded in the context of the post-socialist countries. This region offers a setting that is particularly well-suited for studying the implications of past experience of involuntary immobility, as cross-border mobility was subject to strict control under the communist regime, reaching historically unique levels (Light, 2012; Stola, 2015). At the same time, enough time has passed since the moment when mobility restrictions were lifted to enable the investigation of long-term, transgenerational consequences of realised mobility intentions. We are specifically interested in the current migration intentions of the relatives of people whose mobility aspirations were stifled by the restrictive political regime in comparison with the rest of the population. Rephrasing the question posed by Ivlevs and King (2012) in relation to mobility outcome, in this study we seek to investigate whether the relatives of people who wished to go abroad during communist times but were not allowed to do so are currently more likely to report the intention to migrate, compared to people in similar circumstances without this kind of family experience.
We assume that mobility restrictions might have fuelled the desire to leave the country among those who were denied the right to travel (De Haas, 2021). While some might have taken the opportunity to go abroad after restrictions had been lifted, others might have found themselves no longer capable of going (e.g. due to the shift in the life cycle phase, Clark and Lisowski, 2018; Coulter, 2013; Coulter et al., 2016; which points to the intersection of individual lifetimes and institutional times, Wang and Collins, 2020). We expect that the latter may have passed their unfulfilled mobility intentions onto their children and grandchildren. This, we contend, may happen through stories about past mobility intentions unfulfilled due to external constraints being passed from one generation to another, presenting migration as an attractive and desirable option. Our study will thus aim at verifying the following hypothesis: Past experience of involuntary immobility in a family is positively related to the current migration intentions of its members.

In the sections that follow, we first outline our conceptual base, defining the key notions that we use throughout the article. Next, we briefly review previous studies on the potential of the intergenerational transmission of migration-related attitudes and behaviour, explaining how we want to build on and advance them. We then describe the historical-geographical context that serves as the showcase for our analyses. Then, we present our data, measures and methods used. After presenting our results, we discuss their theoretical implications, the limitations of our analyses and our study’s contribution to the current body of knowledge.

Conceptual framework: migration intentions, spatial aspirations and involuntary immobility

An intention is usually defined as a plan or desire to do something. The list of its synonyms includes e.g. aim, aspiration, goal. Although often treated as synonyms, intentions and aspirations often diverge when the focus is on predicting migration decisions (Huber et al., 2022). In contrast to aspirations, intentions will often involve some engagement in the associated behaviour. Nevertheless, as aptly put by Carling (2002: 15), it ‘is difficult to say how much planning is needed for a wish to qualify as an intention’. Despite being aware of these differences, Aslany et al. (2021) treat migration aspirations as an umbrella category encompassing terms such as desires, intentions, plans and expectations. Interchangeable with migration wish or desire (Carling and Schewel, 2018), migration aspiration is defined as a conviction that migration is preferable to non-migration, or in broader terms, that leaving is preferable to staying (Aslany et al., 2021; Carling, 2002, 2014). In line with Carling’s (2002) aspiration/ability model, this belief can be turned into actual migration when it is accompanied by the model’s second conceptual component – the ability to transform the initial wish into reality.

In explaining migration outcomes, the aspiration/ability framework enables us to account for the role of barriers to migration, such as restrictive immigration and emigration policies. Importantly, the model was proposed to analyse not only migration/mobility but also non-migration/immobility. Immobility may result from a preference to stay or from the lack of an ability to realise one’s mobility aspirations (Carling and Schewel, 2018; see also Coulter, 2013) and hence may be either voluntary (involving voluntary non-migrants) or involuntary (involuntary non-migrants). Arguing that a preference to stay should not be equalled with the absence of migration aspirations but rather with the presence of aspirations to remain in place, in his later work Carling (2014) proposes to shift the focus from migration aspirations to spatial
aspirations, i.e. aspirations to leave or to stay. Spatial aspirations, once formed, may be either realised or repressed (the latter understood as either being forced to move despite wanting to stay or staying despite wanting to move), leading to mobility or immobility outcomes, respectively.

Paraphrasing the title of the well-known book by Castles and Miller (1993), Carling (2002) points to the high prevalence of involuntary immobility in the modern world. The statement on involuntary immobility being an immanent feature of the surrounding social reality might seem even more appropriate when applied to Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia under communism, with the majority of population deprived of the ability to go abroad, especially to the West. An extended aspiration/ability model proposed by Schewel (2015, 2020) allows us to narrow the category of involuntary non-migrants in this historical-geographical context, which will prove instrumental in our empirical analyses. As argued by De Haas (2021), the lack of potential access to the freedom of mobility may reflect negatively on subjective wellbeing and may encourage some to leave despite the obstacles. Members of ‘involuntarily immobile’ societies may however also adopt an alternative coping strategy to deal with the feeling of deprivation resulting from mobility restrictions. Resorting to a psychological defence mechanism, they may adapt to the prevailing conditions and cease to aspire to migrate (Carling and Schewel, 2018; Coulter, 2013). Due to the lack of aspiration in this case, the original aspiration/ability model would categorise such people as voluntarily immobile (voluntary non-migrants), which does not seem fully appropriate given the qualitative differences between the two groups. This is where the third immobility category proposed by Schewel (2015) – acquiescent immobility, implying an acceptance of constraints and including those who have neither the aspiration nor the ability to move – proves its worth. Similarly, Mata-Codesal (2018) advocates for the need to account for an indifferent attitude articulating itself with the absence of clear aspirations to (im)mobility. Regardless of the final set of categories and their scope, from our study’s point of view the relevant category is that of the involuntarily immobile, and we explore the long-term consequences of the repressed mobility aspirations of these people.

**Intergenerational transmission of (unfulfilled) mobility intentions?**

As a recent literature review showed, past family and personal experience of international migration or mobility has generally proved to have an overwhelmingly positive influence over one’s migration aspirations (Aslany et al., 2021). When the focus is on the role of family migration history, this positive influence may be explained by intergenerational transmission. For example, Ivlevs and King (2012) argue that a history of migration in a family reduces the psychological costs of migration for subsequent generations by shaping positive attitudes towards it. Within sociology, a positive association between a migratory experience and aspirations to migrate was also explained more broadly by the development of a ‘culture of migration’ (Kandel and Massey, 2002), involving both transmission across generations and across wider community social networks (jointly termed ‘cultural transmission of migration’). Regarding intergenerational similarities in residential mobility, Myers (1999) distinguished between two alternative family-of-origin models: the socialisation model, which assumes that children learn from their parents’ behaviours and replicate them in adulthood, and the status-inheritance model, which assumes that the similarity in mobility behaviours between parents and their adult children is due to common characteristics that are associated with mobility.
Myers (1999) lent support to both models: on the one hand, socialisation predisposes children to view mobility as a ‘general purpose strategy’ (residential mobility as a lifestyle) and a feasible option and, on the other hand, he demonstrated that past mobility experiences of parents are determined by specific family-of-origin variables that are transmitted to children and consequently affect their mobility in adulthood.

According to the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991, 2012), intentions are shaped by attitudes towards behaviour (favourable or unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour), subjective norms (perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour) and perceived behavioural control (perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour). These three conceptually independent determinants are assumed to follow from the respective beliefs about the behaviour’s likely consequences (behavioural beliefs), about normative expectations of significant others (normative beliefs), and about the presence of factors that control the performance of the behaviour (control beliefs). A positive migration experience in a family may lead to positive attitudes towards migration, a subjective norm for migration and increased perceived behavioural control, and in this way lead to the emergence of migration intentions among its members. At the heart of our study lies the assumption that attitudes towards mobility and subjective norms that crystallise as a result of unfulfilled mobility intentions1 may be transmitted intergenerationally in the absence of an actual move.

It is generally acknowledged that various resources and characteristics may be transmitted across generations – not just income or education but also beliefs, attitudes and aspirations (Bourdieu, 1986; D’Addio, 2007). Previous studies have shown that migrants are self-selected on values, beliefs, attitudes and aspirations (Berlinschi and Harutyunyan, 2019; Czaika and Vothknecht, 2014). Since these may be passed from generation to generation, our logic is that migration intentions may also be transmitted intergenerationally. This may happen through socialisation, when parents and grandparents act as socialisation agents triggering their offspring’s migration intentions through the transmission of values and attitudes. Socialisation may take the form of the conscious or unconscious transmission of values and attitudes and may be of a direct or an oblique nature (e.g. via willingness to take risks, Dohmen et al., 2012).

We argue that, especially under a narrow opportunity structure for international mobility, beliefs, the concomitant attitudes and norms, and consequently mobility aspirations and intentions may also be transmitted from generation to generation in a situation when, due to the low level of perceived behavioural control, intentions are not followed by actual behaviour. Importantly, Ajzen (2012) contends that only beliefs that are readily accessible in memory determine the attitude, subjective norms and perceived control. We argue that stories about family experience of involuntary immobility make the respective beliefs more readily accessible and thus facilitate the formation of migration intentions among members of the younger generation.

**The studied geographical context**

The geographical focus of our study is on the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. These countries share a common past – the communist rule that, depending on the country, lasted between 45 and 74 years – but in the present day, they differ markedly in terms of their economic, political, institutional and social development. Importantly, past and present migration environments have varied considerably among these countries. In particular, at the moment of interviews, people in the EU member states benefitted
from the EU policy of free labour mobility, while people in non-EU countries had limited opportunities of unobstructed migration to high-income countries. In what follows, we outline the major waves of migration the region has witnessed since the Second World War (WWII), as well as briefly discuss the conditions under which people made their migration decisions under communism.

Under Stalin – during and in the immediate aftermath of WWII – hundreds of thousands of people were forcibly displaced (repatriated, transferred, deported, sent to labour camps, or ‘population-exchanged’) as a result of the USSR’s annexations in the Baltics and former Polish territory, accusations of collaborating with the Nazis, ethnic cleansing and religious persecution. After WWII, following the Soviet policies of Russification and industrialisation, hundreds of thousands of people, mainly ethnic Slavs (Russian, Belarusians, and Ukrainians), migrated en masse to other USSR republics. This trend of managed migration of labour and military personnel stopped when the USSR broke up, and was followed by the mainly voluntary, and at times conflict-driven, return migration of ex-Soviet citizens to their republics/countries of origin (mainly ethnic Russians to Russia).

The category of people who were deprived of exit from their home country under communist rule was diverse and included both those whose formal request received an official refusal and those who were convinced that due to their background, e.g. profession or (alleged) access to information vital to state security, they would not be allowed to go. The former were people who had not obtained passports or were denied permission to leave the country (unofficially called *otkazniki* or *refuseniki* in the USSR). The latter subcategory included people without any formal bans who might have never attempted to travel abroad, because they assumed that such trips were not feasible (Golovachev, 2014) or were afraid of the potential consequences of requesting permission to emigrate in case of refusal (such as dismissal from work and other forms of social and economic pressure).

Despite restrictions imposed on out-migration across the entire Cold War period, the degree of restrictiveness of the (non-)exit policies was not uniform throughout these years (see Stola, 2010 for the Polish case). At certain times, the communists allowed the emigration of specific groups – for example, ethnic Jews, Germans and Armenians. Enabled by Israel’s Law of Return, approximately 200,000 Soviet Jews were able to emigrate to Israel between 1970 and 1975, followed by a larger exodus (of about 850,000) from the former USSR in the 1990s. Similarly, under Germany’s Aussiedler policy, 2.6 million ethnic Germans from Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia moved to Germany between 1988 and 1999 (Munz and Ohliger, 2003). Internal and cross-border migration was mostly forced or managed under communist rule and voluntary international labour migration was strictly controlled by the regime (but was not non-existent). Citizens of the countries of the communist bloc also sought other, informal ways to leave their homeland – by refusal to return from a legal temporary stay, for instance, fleeing to the West during short visits abroad (e.g. for tourist trips, scientific conferences, sport or cultural events).

Former Yugoslavia stands out both in terms of the type of communist regime it had (after breaking up with the Soviet Union in 1953, it developed its own ‘Third Way’) and the fact that it fully participated in the bilateral guest worker programmes with Western European countries. More than 700,000 workers emigrated from Yugoslavia in the 1960s and early 1970s (Brunnbauer, 2009). After the 1970s oil shocks, emigration continued in the form of family reunification, and was later followed by a large refugee migration driven by the Balkan wars in the 1990s and 2000s.
After the dissolution of the communist regimes, many people embraced formal and informal international labour migration opportunities as their home economies were recovering from painful economic and social transitions. Several important labour migration corridors developed, including but not limited to: Ukraine, Moldova and Central Asian countries to Russia; Albania to Greece and Italy; Romania and Ukraine to Italy, Spain and Portugal; Ukraine to Poland; and after the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements, from the new EU member states, such as Poland, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Romania, to the UK and other EU member states.

Data and methods

Data
We use cross-sectional, nationally representative individual-level data from the Life in Transition-III survey (LiTS-III), collected by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank in 2015/2016. The survey covered 29 post-socialist countries of Eurasia (including Mongolia but excluding Turkmenistan), as well as Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Germany, and Italy. In each country, the LiTS-III conducted approximately 1,500 face-to-face interviews. Respondents were selected according to multi-stage clustered stratified sampling. As the information on the prohibition of going abroad referred only to communist regimes, the corresponding questions were not asked in Cyprus, Greece, Turkey and Italy, and we exclude these countries from the analysis. We also exclude Uzbekistan, where the question was not asked, as well as Germany, where mobility restrictions applied only to the former citizens of the Democratic Republic of Germany.

Variables
Key regressor: experience of involuntary immobility in the family. Respondents were asked if, under communist rule, any members of their family (immediate family, grandparents, and any other relatives) were prohibited from going abroad. We create three dichotomous involuntary immobility variables, for the immediate family, grandparents and other relatives, which take the value of one if a prohibition from going abroad was mentioned in the respective family group, and zero if it was not. Overall, 4.4%, 4.2% and 5.6% of respondents said that their immediate family, grandparents, and other relatives were prohibited from going abroad. ‘Don’t know’ (11.9%) and refusing to answer (4.9%) outcomes were also possible (both these options applied to the whole question – all the categories combined), and we add dummy variables to capture them.

Dependent variable: intentions to move abroad. The variable capturing migration intentions draws on the question ‘Do you intend to move abroad in the next 12 months?’, with possible answers ‘yes’=1 (3.6%) and ‘no’=0. 2% of respondents provided a ‘don’t know’ answer, which we also code as 0.4 In two robustness checks, we 1) excluded these answers from the analysis and 2) included them as a separate outcome of the dependent variable. The results of the corresponding binary and multinomial logit regressions (see the online supplement) are consistent with our main results.

Control variables. Following previous literature on migration intentions, our estimations include the control variables for gender, age, education level (primary, secondary, tertiary), being married, employment status (proportion of time employed in the year prior to
the interview), self-perceived position on a 10-step wealth ladder, risk attitudes on a 10-point scale, ethnic minority status, self-assessed health level, urban residence, and the mother’s and father’s education level. In addition, as part of the further analyses, we control for the respondents’ past migration experience. For the definitions and summary statistics of all variables included in the analysis, see the online supplement.

**Estimation strategy**

To find out how the experience of involuntary immobility in the family affects the migration intentions of individual $i$ in country $j$, we estimate the following model:

$$\text{Migration intentions}_{i,j} = \alpha \text{* prohibition from going abroad in the family}_{i,j} + B \text{*control variables}_{i,j} + \text{country-fixed effects}_{j} + \text{error term}_{i,j}$$ (1)

We include country-fixed effects to account for all observed and unobserved country-level influences, such as economic development, unemployment or crime rates, that might affect people’s migration intentions. This allows us to focus on within-country individual-level relationships, without the risk of them being driven by country-level confounders. Given the binary nature of the dependent variable, we estimate all models with binary logit.

**Results**

Table 1 shows the baseline results, estimated with and without control variables. When control variables are not included, the prohibition from going abroad in the immediate family and among grandparents is associated with a 2.3 and 2.6 percentage points higher likelihood of reporting migration intentions ($p<0.01$). The marginal effect of the prohibition from going abroad among other relatives is positive but statistically non-significant, as are the marginal effects of the ‘refusal to answer’ category. However, the marginal effects of the ‘don’t know’ category are positive and statistically significant at the 95% level: providing a ‘don’t know’ answer to the past-restrained-mobility-in-the-family question is associated with a 1.1 percentage points higher likelihood of reporting emigration intentions.

The inclusion of control variables does not change the sign and statistical significance of the variables capturing involuntary immobility in the immediate family and among grandparents, but increases the marginal effect of the former to 2.7 percentage points and decreases the marginal effect of the latter to 2.2 percentage points. The ‘don’t know’ category is now statistically non-significant. These are large effects in terms of magnitude: evaluated against the sample mean of the dependent variable (0.037), the prohibition from going abroad in the immediate family is associated with a 73% (0.027/0.037) increase in the likelihood of reporting emigration intentions, and the prohibition from going abroad among the grandparents, with a 59% increase.

We also highlight the relative strength of the regressors of interest with respect to the effect of control variables. Thus, the effect of having a member of the immediate family who was prohibited from going abroad under communism is comparable to the effect of an age decrease from 40 to 25 years, moving down the wealth ladder from step 8 to step 3, or moving up the willingness-to-take-risks scale from level 3 to level 8, and is approximately twice as large as the effect of belonging to an ethnic minority or urban residence.
Table 1. Involuntary immobility in the family and migration intentions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prohibited from going abroad:</th>
<th>Dependent variable: intentions to move abroad in the next 12 months (0/1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate family</td>
<td>0.023**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other relatives</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>0.011*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusal to answer</td>
<td>-0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher on wealth ladder</td>
<td>-0.006***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>-0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lives in urban area</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minority</td>
<td>0.012***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better health</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to take risks</td>
<td>0.005**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father: secondary education</td>
<td>0.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father: tertiary education</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother: secondary education</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother: tertiary education</td>
<td>0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country-fixed effects</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R²</td>
<td>0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>14,007.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>42,195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. The table reports logit (average) marginal effects. Reference groups: male, primary education, father’s education: primary, mother’s education: primary. Survey weights, that add up to the number of interviews conducted, applied in all regressions. For complete econometric output, see the online supplement.

Overall, our baseline results reveal a strong positive association between having a member of the immediate family or a grandparent who were prohibited from going abroad during communist rule and respondents’ migration intentions 25 years after the fall of communism. This supports our key hypothesis that posits that unfulfilled mobility intentions in the family are being transmitted across generations. We find, however, that suppressed mobility intentions among other relatives have no bearing on respondents’ migration intentions. This would suggest that the intergenerational transmission of repressed mobility intentions does not extend beyond close family.

**Further analyses**

We next check the robustness of the results to the inclusion of additional controls. It is widely acknowledged that an individual’s previous migration experience is an important factor enabling future migration (e.g. Bernard and Perales, 2021; Bernard and Vidal, 2020; De Jong, 2000). The LiTS-III survey contains some information on respondents’ international migration experience. Specifically, respondents were asked how long they had lived in their current place of residence. Those who provided an answer other than ‘the whole life’ were subsequently asked where they had moved from, where they were born, and where they had completed secondary school. Overall, 6% of respondents reported having moved from abroad, 10% – being born abroad, 8% – having completed secondary education abroad, and 11% – at least one of these. Drawing on this information, we created four categorical variables, for specific as well as for ‘at-least-one’ international migration experiences. Each of these variables also included...
a missing data outcome, which ranged from 1% for having moved from abroad to 9% for having at least one international migration experience.

Table 2 reports the results of the baseline models (specifications 4 and 5, Table 1) to which we add – one at a time – variables capturing own international migration experience. Controlling for it does not change the magnitude or statistical significance of the key regressors. Interestingly, the marginal effects of the variables capturing own international migration experience are positive but statistically non-significant. A likely explanation for this finding is that many of these migration experiences are related to pre-1989/91 ‘managed’ migration flows, which might be of limited relevance for migration intentions 25 years after the fall of communism due to the age of people reporting them.

Table 2. Involuntary immobility in the family and migration intentions: controlling for past international migration experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prohibited from going abroad: immediate family</td>
<td>0.026**</td>
<td>0.027**</td>
<td>0.027**</td>
<td>0.027**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved from abroad</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was born abroad</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed secondary education abroad</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any international migration experience</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.010</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual controls</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country-fixed effects</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.133</td>
<td>0.132</td>
<td>0.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>12.035.7</td>
<td>12.033.1</td>
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</table>

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<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
<th>(8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prohibited from going abroad: grandparents</td>
<td>0.022**</td>
<td>0.023**</td>
<td>0.022**</td>
<td>0.023**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved from abroad</td>
<td>0.013</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was born abroad</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.007</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed secondary education abroad</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any international migration experience</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual controls</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Note: ** p<0.01. The table reports logit (average) marginal effects. Survey weights applied in all regressions. The same control variables as in Table 1 included in all regressions. ‘Missing’ categories (international migration variables) included in corresponding regressions, but their estimates are not reported. For complete econometric output, see the online supplement.

Next, we check if our full-sample results are driven by a particular country. To do it, we re-estimate the baseline model specifications with controls excluding one country at a time. For both the immediate family and grandparents, the marginal effects of the involuntary immobility variables always remain positive and significant at the 95% level (Supplemental Figure S1), meaning that no single country is driving the positive, statistically significant association between the variables of interest found in the full sample. Having said this, Kosovo appears to be the country that is pushing up the magnitude of the association: when it is excluded, the marginal effect of the immediate family variable drops by 27% and that of the grandparents variable, by 15%. This result may be explained by the stronger societal memory of the experience of involuntary immobility among ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, for whom this experience constituted part of a more recent history as they faced restrictions in access to state
services, e.g. regarding passports, yet through 1990s. As for the prohibition from moving abroad among other relatives, the marginal effects always remain statistically non-significant, meaning that no single country is driving the non-significant association that was found in the full sample.

Discussion

In this study, we tested for the potential for intergenerational transmission of mobility intentions, building on previous research that provided evidence for intergenerational similarities in mobility behaviour (Myers, 1999) and the impact of family migration history on current migration intentions (Ivlevs and King, 2012) and aspirations (Kandel and Massey, 2002). Rather than focusing on the influence of actual family migration or mobility experience, we investigated how past mobility intentions realised due to external constraints, such as a narrow opportunity structure due to mobility restrictions, may affect the migration intentions of the relatives of those whose mobility aspirations remained unfulfilled. We did so by examining the relationship between the past experience of being prohibited from going abroad under communist rule in a family and the current migration intentions of its members.

We found that the prohibition of going abroad in the immediate family and among grandparents during communist rule was indeed associated with a higher likelihood of reporting migration intentions 25 years after the fall of communism. We interpret this strong positive association as the intergenerational transmission of mobility intentions. We explain it with the socialisation process ongoing within the family, involving stories about the experience of involuntary immobility passed from one generation to another, presenting migration as an attractive and desirable option. Our findings also suggest that this process does not extend beyond close family — suppressed mobility intentions among other relatives proved to have no bearing on respondents’ current migration intentions.

While interpreting our results, the specifics of retrospective research need to be considered. It is widely acknowledged that retrospective data are subject to memory effects when imperfect human memory about the experience diverges from the actual course of events. This is also the case in our study. A positive answer to the question on past bans on travel may indicate the existence of past (unfulfilled) mobility intentions, but also captures the memory of involuntary immobility experience, which is crucial for the process of intergenerational transmission. What we capture by our independent variable is thus the memory or knowledge about involuntary immobility experience in the family rather than the very fact of its occurrence. Our conceptual framework provides theoretical arguments that deem such an empirical approach acceptable. In line with Ajzen’s (2012) stipulation on the importance of belief accessibility, we assume that the relationship between being prohibited from going abroad under communism and current migration intentions is moderated by the stories about the former told in the family.

Our study has several limitations. First, our measure of involuntary immobility – being prohibited from going abroad during communist times – should be treated as a proxy of involuntary immobility and unrealised mobility intentions in particular. With the question formulated in such a way, we cannot be sure whether respondents reported only cases when a formal ban was issued or also ‘assumed bans’ (cases when they thought that such trips were not
feasible for them and did not even dare to apply for departure). Furthermore, although we refer to unrealised intentions in our study, the assumption that being prohibited from going abroad is equal to having mobility intentions is also a simplification. For instance, a person might have had migration intentions but have not applied and thus was not officially prohibited. Repressed individuals without firm migration intentions might, in turn, consider themselves having been prohibited from going abroad being aware that departure abroad would not have been possible. Finally, we cannot be sure if the alleged unfulfilled intentions concerned migration, understood as a long-term or permanent move (a ban for emigration), or also short-term mobility, for instance, leisure- or work-oriented travels (e.g. a ban to go for a visit or a conference). We may assume, however, that in the case when the focus is on the experience of one’s family members and relatives it is less likely that younger generations would know (or remember) about a prohibition that concerned short-term mobility.

Second, LiTS-III lacks data on detailed family migration histories, providing only fragmentary information as regards the migration experience of both respondents and their relatives. For instance, we do not know whether those family members who were prohibited from going abroad during communist times succeeded in going abroad eventually (either still under communism or later after its fall). Should some of them eventually have fulfilled their migration intentions, their very presence abroad might be partly responsible for a higher propensity to declare migration intentions among their relatives back home. This would mean that the effect of the experience of involuntary immobility in their case is in fact partly driven (mediated) by networks abroad. This is likely to be valid with respect to immediate family members, in particular respondents’ siblings, but is less likely in the case of parents and, especially, grandparents. It is also possible that some of those who aspired to emigrate in communist times (especially among those who officially applied for departure) already had relatives abroad. The higher propensity to declare migration intentions among their descendants might thus also partially be an outcome of previous family migration experience. To account for the potential effect of migration networks, future research should include detailed information on family migration history and the presence of relatives and friends abroad.

Third, when speaking in Myers’s (1999) terms, we cannot fully separate the mechanism postulated by the socialisation model from the one postulated by the status-inheritance model. In other words, while we expect unrealised mobility intentions to be transmitted from generation to generation (through the respective beliefs and attitudes shaped by family stories and narratives), we cannot rule out the influence of other factors. While we control for a wide range of socio-demographic characteristics in our models, we cannot account, for instance, for genetic factors that children inherit from their parents. A comparison of the characteristics of people who had some or had no family experience of involuntary immobility sheds light on this issue (see supplement). The former are characterised, among other things, by higher education levels – both own and parental. This could point to self-selection issues – both regarding the application for departure (e.g. people who were highly educated, more determined or willing to take risks might have been more likely to apply) and non-random targeting by an exit ban (based e.g. on dissidence or profession.\textsuperscript{13}

Fourth, we only have information on part of the population from communist times – those who were still alive 25 years after the fall of the system, did not go abroad or have since returned. Since we assume, however, that many of those who were prohibited from going
abroad during communist times went abroad after restrictions had been lifted (and their chances of going were higher than the population on average), what we capture in our study is probably only remnants of the potential true effect of repressed mobility aspirations.

Despite these limitations, the paper develops existing literature, which examined how experience of migration and mobility may influence current migration intentions, by shedding light on potential consequences of repressed spatial aspirations. It advances migration theory by considering a wider spectrum of past migration- and mobility-related experiences than just those being the effect of the realisation of one’s migration aspirations. Broadening the ‘past migration experience’ category by the inclusion of involuntary immobility experience allows a fuller understanding of past influences on the formation of migration intentions and their realisation. By focusing on the consequences of immobility, the paper contributes to the recently burgeoning body of research that goes against the mobility bias in migration studies (Coulter, 2013; Coulter et al., 2016; Jónsson, 2011; Mata- Codesal, 2018; Schewel, 2020; see also Gruber, 2021 for a review of recent literature within this research strand). Future studies might find it worthwhile to expand our study and examine the effect of unfulfilled migration intentions (or more broadly – aspirations) when the past decision to stay in place was voluntary. By identifying the influence of past family experience linked to the repression of mobility aspirations on the current migration intentions of younger generations, the paper also adds to the wider sociological debate on the intergenerational transmission of values, attitudes and behaviours, and the effects of the older generation’s unattained goals and aspirations on the younger generation’s outcomes.

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1 It is debatable whether these are actually mobility intentions or mobility aspirations that were suppressed and are subject to intergenerational transmission.
2 A detailed account of survey design and implementation is provided in the online supplement and on the survey website (https://litsonline-ebrd.com/methodology-annex/index.htm).
3 Given the relatively small fraction of positive answers, as a robustness check we have additionally run models that correct for the potential bias: the Firth’s penalised-likelihood logistic regression (firthlogit Stata package, Coveney, 2008) and models for rare events data (relogit Stata package, Tomz et al., 2003). These additional specifications yielded results consistent with our baseline results (see the online supplement).
4 Replication code for our analyses, allowing the recreation of all the operations on the original LiTS-III data, is available as part of the online supplement.
5 As a robustness check, we have also estimated corresponding multi-level/mixed-effects models. The results are consistent with the country-fixed effect model estimations and can be found in the online supplement.
6 In the online supplement, we also provide means of control variables across the categories of our dependent variable.
Given that in a logistic estimation the marginal effects of continuous regressors depend on the value of the regressor, we first obtained predicted probabilities of the dependent variable for each value of the regressor.

While describing the countries of migration, birth and school completion, some respondents provided answers ‘USSR’ and ‘Yugoslavia’. This is potentially problematic, as both could refer to internal as well as external moves (as far as current country boundaries are concerned). In the analysis presented in Table 2, we have not coded migration related to the USSR and Yugoslavia as international moves. We did so in a robustness check and the estimates of the key regressors remained largely unchanged.

We are not reporting the robustness of the variable capturing the prohibition from moving abroad among other relatives, as it was statistically non-significant in the baseline specification and remains non-significant after adding international mobility controls.

Although the marginal effect of the ‘moved from abroad’ dummy never reaches statistical significance, the coefficient is sometimes significant – in models with an alternative treatment of ‘don’t know’ answers on the dependent variable as well as in rare events and penalised-likelihood logistic regression estimations.

In the online supplement, we provide the proportion of respondents declaring intentions to move abroad and experience of being prohibited from moving abroad in the family by country. We have also estimated our models for single country subsamples (using Linear Probability Model because of small categories). In most cases, our key regressors fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance, which may be due to small sample size.

Or in some cases simply passed within the family – the category of ‘immediate family’ might also include respondent’s siblings or (in rarer cases) children (instead of parents).

To address these endogeneity problems, we have additionally estimated propensity score matching models (see supplement). Their results are generally consistent with our main results, although the marginal effect for grandparents loses significance in a model with control for international migration experience (which confirms that the effect for immediate family is stronger).

References


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