

Settlement or Mobility? Migratory projects of recently arrived

Germans in Switzerland

Summary

During the past 20 years, migration in Western Europe has been shaped by a post-Fordist economic setting and a context of expanding globalization. European integration has induced a shift from state-controlled manpower recruiting to predominately market-regulated migration (Braun and Arsene 2009; Favell 2008) as well as to an Europeanization of immigration flows. The principle of free movement of persons, who now have the right to move, travel, study and work anywhere within the EU/EFTA, has led to more temporary and circular forms of migration (Faist 2008). However EU/EFTA citizens also have the right to settle and retire anywhere within the EU/EFTA, raising the question of how temporary and circular the current migration patterns really are.

In social demography the migrants' point of view regarding their migratory intentions is commonly studied using stated preferences, since it is viewed as one of the most reliable predictors of future behaviour (e.g. Van Dalen and Henkens 2013; De Jong 2000). Recently scholars have begun to examine differences between various pre-move thoughts instead of considering just one simple act in the migration decision-making process. Examples include desires and expectations to move (Coulter et al. 2011) or considerations and plans to move (Kley 2011).

However, few of the studies so far have addressed the central question of the factors intervening in the migration decision-making process of staying, returning or moving to another country altogether. Despite much excellent work on residential and international migration intentions, the subject of return or onward migration intentions has attracted little attention. Furthermore, the process of migration decision-making as such is understudied. Finally, existing studies generally considered the migrant population as a whole or focused on one specific type of migrant and did not compare different types of migrants. Yet, without an understanding of those dimensions we are left with an inadequate analysis of the current migration patterns and its drivers.

This study will contribute to the literature by examining the case of recent German immigrants living in Switzerland. This immigrant group stays on average for a shorter period in Switzerland than other nationalities do, suggesting that it predominantly follows more temporary migration patterns. The present study adopts a comparative approach by focusing on the decision-making process regarding different types of migrants as well as varying migratory projects¹, i.e. the intention to stay in Switzerland, to return to Germany or to move to another country. New survey data will be collected to allow a close and in-depth analysis of the factors that determine their mobility intentions and plans. Moreover, we will gain new empirical insights into the process of decision-making and the existence of different types of migrants in today's legal context of free movement of persons; this being new evidence that will finally allow us to theoretically refine the conceptual framework of the migration decision-making process of different migratory projects and subgroups and to better understand current migration patterns within EU/EFTA-countries.

¹ For the present study, the term « Migratory project » comprises the intention or the plan of first generation migrants to stay in the host country (for which we also use the term settlement), to move to another country (onward migration) or to return to the home country (return migration).