

The Realization of Re-migration Expectations among Long-Term Migrants in Sweden*

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Abstract: Within the literature on re-migration, covering both return and onward migration, little is known about the complex decision-making processes that precede a subsequent move. There is a distinct divide between studies analysing anticipated re-migration desires, and behavior. Furthermore, as re-migration is most common during the first years after arrival, less attention has been paid to long-term migrants. However, migrant long-term residents compose a rising share of many countries' populations, and many of them have maintained ties to their country of origin, including the idea of returning someday. Re-migration anticipations are theoretically important because they shape integration behavior and reflect how individuals weigh attachments, networks, and opportunities across different countries. Whether these anticipations are realized or not is equally revealing, as discrepancies between plans and outcomes illuminate how life course circumstances potentially change aspirations and capabilities. In this paper, we analyse anticipated and actual international mobility and immobility of migrant long-term residents in Sweden. We examine the extent to which anticipated migration might predict actual behavior and analyse which factors are related to the realization (or not) of re-migration expectations. The data comprise a unique linkage of the Swedish Level-of-Living Survey for Foreign-Born (LNU-UFB, 2010-12; n = 3,226 migrant permanent residents aged 18-75) with prospective, high-quality population register data through 2018, yielding up to eight years of longitudinal follow-up. Our main findings show that anticipated migration is an important determinant of re-migration, though it explains only a modest share of its variation: while it carries statistically meaningful predictive weight, it is insufficient as a standalone predictor of actual moves. Moreover, transitioning into unemployment after the stated expectations is associated with a lower likelihood of realizing intended mobility outcomes, whether staying or re-migrating. This suggests that the loss of economic resources constrains the capability to act on prior mobility plans, and that staying in a destination country is an active process which is re-negotiated over time.

Keywords: Re-migration anticipation • Re-migration behavior • Migration trajectories • Realization of migration expectations • Life courses

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1 Introduction

International migration following an initial move, in this paper referred to as “re-migration”¹ and defined as any subsequent move from the host country – whether a return to origin or onward to another country – is a common feature of contemporary international migration (Azose/Raftery 2019). Although the study of re-migration is not new, and even less its phenomenon, only in recent decades has the underlying assumption of permanent moves started to be replaced by the idea of migration as an open-ended process. While much of this research has focused on selection into primarily return migration (e.g., Bratsberg *et al.* 2007; Constant/Massey 2003), less is known about the complex decision-making processes that precede a subsequent move.

While individual-level decision-making frameworks have a long history in migration research, their application to re-migration specifically remains underdeveloped (Czaika/Reinpracht 2020). With some exceptions, the still relatively limited literature on re-migration is distinctly divided between studies that investigate either desires, intentions, plans, or subjectively perceived likelihoods of re-migration, and those that analyse actual re-migration behavior. Furthermore, because re-migration often occurs shortly after the initial move in the form of return migration to the country of birth (e.g. Bratsberg *et al.* 2007; Constant 2020; Monti 2020), less scholarly attention has been paid to long-term residents in destination countries who may still consider leaving. Yet, many net immigration countries are witnessing a large and growing migrant population who do *not* return or move onward soon after migration, but rather remain connected across national borders through family networks, friendships, and aspirations of future mobility, including the possibility of returning “someday.” Their ideas, plans, and anticipation regarding future residency are important, as they reflect a will to continue to invest resources, time, and participation in their destination country (Bekaert *et al.* 2021). Additionally, the realization (or not) of these expectations, whether they involve staying or leaving, reflects the changing living conditions within this group over time, influencing their migration capabilities and aspirations (Schewel 2020).

In this paper, we adopt the conceptual notion of migration not as a one-time event or decision, but as an open-ended process unfolding over time, encompassing shifting expectations of re-migration or staying and the eventual realization of these expectations. We focus on individuals who have migrated to and resided in Sweden for at least five years, specifically examining their anticipations and behaviors related to either remaining in or leaving the country. Including also an analysis of *staying*

¹ The term “re-migration” has been used ambiguously within the academic literature, defined either as a return to the country of origin/birth, or, as we do in this paper, as the mere exit from a destination country (King/Kuschminder 2022). In empirical studies where the destination of a subsequent move is not observed, re-migration has often been interpreted as return migration. Ahrens and King (2023) argue that this assumption reflects a tendency to view migration as a process linking a single origin and destination, thereby overlooking the possibility that migrants may relocate to a third (or higher order) country rather than return to their country of origin.

in the destination country, this study responds to recent calls in geography to also conceptualize immobility as an active, negotiated process shaped over time by the presence or absence of social, economic, and cultural resources and privileges (Gruber 2021). Like the decision to leave, the decision to stay in the destination country is influenced by both structural and personal forces, although this is often obscured by the search for migration determinants (Schewel 2020).

Our aim in this paper is twofold: First, by following the same individuals over time, we aim to analyse the predictive power of anticipated migration or staying on actual behavior. This includes analysing the relative importance of migration expectations for re-migration behavior, as well as other aspects driving actual re-migration, once expectation is controlled for. In doing so, we can advance the literature by assessing the implicit assumption (Della Puppa/King 2019; Barbiano di Belgiojoso/Ortensi 2013) that anticipated and actual behavior are interchangeable in studying re-migration processes. Second, we aim to investigate which factors contribute to the realization or non-realization of stated re-migration expectations, whether they involve staying in or leaving the destination country. This will shed light on re-migration and staying not as one-off decisions, but as dynamic processes influenced by prior migration experiences and changing living conditions. It also considers staying as a substantive and evolving aspect of mobility trajectories. Drawing on temporal perspectives of evolving life courses, this study asks: among long-term migrants in Sweden, to what extent do individuals realize their re-migration anticipations, and what life course conditions and events shape the (non-) realization of anticipated re-migration and staying?

To address these questions, we draw on a unique combination of survey data on individuals' medium-term mobility anticipations and country attachments, linked to Swedish longitudinal register data that track actual re-migration behavior for up to eight years after the interview. The study population comprises adult migrant long-term residents in Sweden, many of whom arrived in Sweden at young ages, allowing us to trace how migration trajectories unfold well beyond the initial move.

With its history of diverse migration – tracing back to the 1960s – and highly heterogeneous migrant population (Statistics Sweden 2021), Sweden presents an ideal opportunity for re-migration research. The distinctive dataset allows us to follow individuals' stated re-migration expectations five years into the future, linking these to transnational ties and evolving living conditions – and thus to empirically trace how migration trajectories unfold long after the initial move.

2 Re-migration anticipation and behavior

2.1 Anticipating migration and related concepts

Research on the thoughts and feelings preceding migration outcomes has used a plethora of terminology, capturing everything from preferences and desires (Carling 2013; Di Saint Pierre et al. 2015) to more concrete intentions (e.g., Anniste/Tammaru 2014; De Haas/Fokkema 2011), plans, and preparations (e.g., Bilgili/Siegel 2017; Carling

2013; Massey/Akresh 2006). While some studies concern aspirations, others try to capture the capability to migrate. These concepts are not equivalent. Aspirations and desires capture what migrants would prefer, while intentions and plans reflect more concrete commitments to action. In yet other work, these are combined into a self-rated likelihood of migration outcomes (e.g., Barbiano di Belgiojoso 2016; Carling/Pettersen 2014; Dustmann/Okatenko 2014). These “anticipations” or “expectations” are forward-looking probability judgments and assessments of what one thinks will happen, containing aspects of both aspirations and self-assessed ability (Carling 2002, 2014; Carling/Schewel 2018). In this paper, we assess the latter.

The literature on return and re-migration aspirations and expectations predominantly relates these to aspects of transnational belonging (Barbiano di Belgiojoso 2016; Bolognani 2007, 2016) and destination country integration (Bekaert et al. 2021; Caron 2020). Stronger social, cultural, and structural attachments to the destination country, measured through contact with non-migrants, language proficiency, citizenship, and property ownership are generally associated with lower return and re-migration intentions (Anniste/Tammaru 2014; Bilgili/Siegel 2017; Carling/Pettersen 2014; De Haas/Fokkema 2011; Di Saint Pierre et al. 2015; Massey/Akresh 2006; Steiner 2019). Conversely, maintained ties to the country of origin, such as economic investments (De Haas/Fokkema 2011) or contact with family and friends (Bilgili/Siegel 2017), are associated with higher return intentions. However, such ties may also reflect broader forms of transnational connectedness rather than concrete migration plans. As such, remittances can be sent due to familial obligations (De Haas/Fokkema 2011). Shorter return visits may be a substitute for more permanent migration (Lulle 2014), understood as a balancing of belonging in different contexts (Oeppen 2013) or as a transnational strategy for managing one’s livelihood and family arrangements (Gonzales-Ferrer et al. 2014).

2.2 Re-migration Behavior

Research on re-migration behavior, including both return and onward migration, similarly highlights the role of country attachments, but has historically been more strongly rooted in economic explanations, primarily focusing on a single origin and destination. Prominent theories focus on return migration and interpret it as either the outcome of unsuccessful economic integration in the destination country (Todaro 1969) or as the result of successfully accumulated resources intended for use in the origin country (Stark/Bloom 1985). Reflecting the predictions of these theories, empirical studies have predominantly focused on labor-market outcomes and the accumulation of economic resources. Migrants experiencing unemployment, unstable employment, or economic hardship are found to be more likely to leave the destination country and return, whereas citizenship, accumulated labor market experience, host country-specific skills, higher occupational prestige, potential earnings, and property ownership are associated with lower probabilities of doing so (Bijwaard et al. 2014; Constant/Massey 2002, 2003; Constant/Zimmermann 2011; Jensen/Pedersen 2007; Massey/Espinosa 1997; Monti 2020; Reagan/Olsen 2000; Saarela/Scott 2017; Steiner/Velling 1994).

Origin-country ties have been shown to increase return probabilities, including economic investments (Massey/Akresh 2006; Massey/Espinosa 1997) and the presence of family and friends in the origin country (Constant/Massey 2002, 2003; Constant/Zimmermann 2011; Gonzales-Ferrer *et al.* 2014). Some studies – though not all (Massey/Akresh 2006) – also find that remittances raise return probabilities (Constant/Massey 2002, 2003; Steiner/Velling 1994). Subjective psychological factors, such as identity and a sense of belonging to the origin country, have likewise been associated with higher likelihoods of return (Saarela/Scott 2017).

Higher educational attainment is associated with an increased likelihood of re-migration, especially in terms of onward moves (Monti 2020; Nekby 2006). One possible explanation is that highly educated migrants often have higher expectations regarding employment and social status while also possessing greater opportunities to work elsewhere. In a study of Iranian-born individuals in Sweden, Kelly (2013) shows that onward migration may be driven by attempts to regain a perceived loss of middle-class identity following migration through the pursuit of more favorable opportunities elsewhere. In a study of Somali migrants, Moret (2016) finds that onward mobility serves as a strategy for accessing better positions and opportunities.

Social networks and group-based affiliations linked to migrants' countries of origin can also be important resources for onward migration (Kelly 2013; Moret 2016; Ramos 2018; Van Liempt 2011). Ahrens and King (2023) conceptualize this as *multi-sited transnationalism*, in line with understandings of transnationalism as social networks within transnational "social fields" (Levitt/Glick Schiller 2004). Rather than being confined to a single country of origin, social relations, resources, and identities linked to a shared "homeland" may extend across multiple national contexts, as family members, friends, and co-ethnics become geographically dispersed through successive migration. As demonstrated in Della Puppa and King's (2019) study of Bangladeshi migrants moving onward from Italy to London, access to a larger ethnic community and freedom from racialization can enhance migrants' sense of feeling "at home".

3 Realizing anticipated mobility

3.1 Connecting expectations and behavior

Today, anticipated re-migration and behavior are examined and treated in two largely separate bodies of literature, with few studies looking at their interconnectedness. In a study of Senegalese and Congolese migrants in Europe, Flahaux (2015) analysed retrospectively stated intentions and behavior of the same individuals. Her findings show that initial return intention, though a strong driver of return behavior, was complemented and sometimes even outplayed by family life at the destination and the importance of the situation in the origin country in terms of security, stability, and job opportunities, causing migrants to repress their re-migration intentions.

In a study of German migrants in Switzerland, *Steiner* (2019) distinguishes between re-migration intentions and plans (though not behavior), finding that intentions are more related to subjective perceptions and “wishful” thinking, whereas having concrete re-migration plans was more often based on objective conditions.

Wanner (2021) analysed emigration intention and behavior among migrants in Switzerland, finding that 96 percent of the migrants realized an intention to stay, and 71 percent realized an intention to leave within two years. While *Wanner* concluded that intention is a good predictor of behavior, the notable gap between staying and leaving suggests that predictive power varies considerably by the type of anticipated behavior (leaving or staying). Moreover, although the determining factors for intention and behavior were largely the same, structural factors were more strongly related to actual behavior, indicating that intention alone does not fully capture the mechanisms driving re-migration. Among non-migrants in the Netherlands, *Van Dalen* and *Henkens* (2013) similarly argued that intention is a good predictor of emigration, yet only 34 percent of those stating an intention to leave the country in the near future did so within two years – a realization rate that arguably challenges rather than supports that conclusion.

Despite these contributions, prospective studies examining individual migrants’ anticipated re-migration and subsequent behavior are still lacking. This is especially true for long-term migrants who have had time to develop multiple country attachments. Moreover, we know little about the factors behind the *realization* of anticipated international migration behavior, as well as what makes individuals *not* realize their migration expectations.

3.2 Unfolding life courses

To better understand the (non-) realization processes of either re-migration or staying, we draw on a perspective treating both phenomena as dynamic processes unfolding over time, along individual life course trajectories. This trajectory-based perspective on migration can help conceptualize how migration decisions evolve through the interplay of hope, aspiration, and disillusionment, as past experiences and future expectations intersect (*Erdal et al.* 2023; *Erlinghagen* 2021).

Previous research has demonstrated that re-migration propensity is intrinsically linked to time spent in the receiving country. The risk of re-migration is highest shortly after migration (*Constant/Massey* 2002; *Constant/Zimmermann* 2011; *Monti* 2020) and then decreases with time in the receiving country (*Jensen/Pedersen* 2007; *Kuhlenkasper/Steinhardt* 2017; *Reagan/Olsen* 2000). However, this process should be understood as neither linear nor inevitable (*Erdal/Ezzati* 2015). First, the temporal pattern partly reflects the mechanical composition of migrant cohorts, including temporary and visa-based workers for whom departure is structurally expected. Second, for more long-term migrants, the passage of time intersects with life-stage transitions and events – both planned and unexpected – as well as with the spatial location of significant others (*Ahrens/King* 2023; *Erdal/Ezzati* 2015). Whilst this temporal lens on the unfolding migration decision process is still limited in studies

on re-migration, the residential mobility literature has more explicitly adopted a life course perspective.

The life course approach emphasizes different spheres of human life from a temporal perspective, highlighting how conditions and future opportunities evolve across the lifespan (Elder 1994). When understood as a process rather than a single event, migration can be understood as one of these life domains, evolving over time through an interdependence with other life spheres, such as work, health or family life, influencing one another in dynamic ways. From the residential mobility literature, we know that anticipated life course events, i.e. discrete life course transitions, are important predictors of realizing planned mobility (Fang 2006; Kley/Mulder 2010; Lu 1998). Similarly, unexpected life events may result in initial intentions being changed (De Groot et al. 2011; Kan 1999). Bettin et al. (2018) contribute to the literature on return migration by linking the study of life course events and return migration intentions, examining how life course transitions influence migrants' intentions to return to their country of origin. Their findings suggest that entering the empty-nest stage, experiencing unemployment, and obtaining employment in their country of residence are associated with a higher likelihood of planning a return. By contrast, partnership dissolution and the birth of a child tend to reduce migrants' intentions to return. The latter findings align with existing evidence highlighting the role of family ties in the destination country, which tend to reduce migrants' propensity to re-migrate (De Haas/Fokkema 2011; Monti 2020). This is consistent with the principle of "linked lives" in life course theory, which emphasizes that individuals' life trajectories are embedded in social relationships and shaped by the evolving pathways of significant others (Elder 1994). An important question, however, is whether life events and social connectedness may also help explain whether migration expectations are ultimately realized or remain unfulfilled.

As time passes, the meaning of memories and attachments to the country of origin may shift (Erdal/Ezzati 2015). In this paper, we argue that this is also true for the structural and emotional dimensions of being and belonging in the country of residence. Neither of these processes are unidirectional, and a clear example of this is the interpretation of re-migration intentions as a form of reactive transnationalism – a response to experiences of racism and social marginalization in the country of residence (Itzigsohn/Giorguli-Saucedo 2005; Snel et al. 2016). The observation of reactive transnationalism among young adults of migrant origin who grew up in the destination country (Bolognani 2007, 2016; Haller/Landolt 2005) moreover underscores how migration histories intersect with life stages to shape attachments, intentions, and migration expectations.

4 Connecting expectations and behavior: Hypotheses

In this paper, we examine the importance of anticipated re-migration for actual re-migration behavior among long-term migrant residents of Sweden, a group who has had time to develop multiple country attachments. We perform longitudinal analyses of the realization of these migrants' international (im-) mobility

expectations, focusing on the role of changed living conditions compared to those at the time when migration expectations were stated. Doing so, we contribute to the migration literature by linking migration plans and realizations through a life course perspective.

Only measuring anticipated re-migration may be an unreliable measure of actual behavior (*Constant/Massey* 2002), as individual plans and preferences might change over time (*De Haas/Fokkema* 2011). Only looking at behavior, on the other hand, misses incorporating previous processes of selection into anticipating re-migration in the first place (*Liebig/Sousa-Poza* 2004; *Van Dalen/Henkens* 2013). As we have seen, previous literature suggests that aspirations, intentions, and expectations – more than behavior – reflect an identification process and a way of belonging, whereas actual migration behavior rather reflects opportunity structures (*Caron* 2020). At the same time, some studies interpret anticipated and actual re-migration without any greater distinction (*Della Puppa/King* 2019; *Barbiano di Belgiojoso/Ortensi* 2013), an approach that rests on the assumption that anticipation is often a good proxy for behavior, an assumption only partially confirmed by prospective studies (e.g., *Van Dalen/Henkens* 2013; *Wanner* 2021). To test this assumption directly, we formulate the following hypotheses:

H1a) Anticipated re-migration is a (statistically) significant predictor of actual re-migration behavior, net of other determinants.

H1b) However, anticipated re-migration explains only a limited share of the variation in actual re-migration behavior.

Following the literature on evolving migration trajectories, we argue that a longitudinal, prospective view on migration decisions must allow for evolving life courses. Adding a temporal perspective of unfolding realities could provide a fruitful way to bridge the gap between intention and behavior. Particularly drawing in the importance of linked lives, we hypothesize that

H2) life events that strengthen social connectedness with significant others in the destination country, such as marriage and childbirth, are associated with lower re-migration propensities, thereby increasing the likelihood of realizing expectations to remain while decreasing the likelihood of realizing expectations to re-migrate.

Moreover, we expect that the non-realization of re-migration expectations (whether these are to leave or stay) are shaped by changing living conditions, as aspirations and capabilities adjust in response to such dynamics. In particular, we hypothesize that

H3) disruptive and destabilizing life events occurring after the interview, such as divorce, sick leave, and becoming unemployed, are associated with a higher likelihood of not realizing prior expectations, neither to leave nor to stay.

Although some of these events may be anticipated to varying degrees, they often entail substantial uncertainty, emotional strain, and shifts in economic and social resources, making them difficult to fully account for in individuals' future expectations.

5 Data and methods

Our study uses data from a unique set of linked survey and register data. The Swedish Level of Living Survey for Foreign Born (LNU-UFB), conducted by the Stockholm University Linnaeus Center for Integration Studies in cooperation with Statistics Sweden from 2010-2012, contains the migrant histories of, as well as demographic and socioeconomic information on, non-adopted persons aged 18-75 years born outside Sweden and without Swedish-born parents (*Wadensjö* 2013). To capture the integration processes in Sweden, the surveyed study population is limited to individuals who had been permanent residents of Sweden since 1 January 2005 at the latest, meaning for at least five years at the time of the survey. The survey also includes a considerable share of individuals who migrated as children, and 24 percent arrived in Sweden under the age of 10. Overall, this means that the sample consists of a population of long-term migrants, a substantial share of whom spent their formative years in Sweden.

The total number of surveyed individuals is 3,448. However, due to missing information on key variables such as migration anticipation and time since migration, the final analytical sample consists of 3,226 individuals after listwise deletion. The LNU-UFB was the first large-scale Swedish survey to ask migrants about their social and economic contacts with people outside Sweden and their thoughts on future migration. The survey also contains information on family and labor market statuses stemming from national population registers. Register variables are updated longitudinally so that we may follow individuals over time from the year of the survey through 2018, meaning between six and eight years after the interview. At the end of the study period, all but five individuals who had not registered death or emigration were still found in the registers, suggesting a high degree of completeness in the linkage between the survey and register data.

The survey sample was drawn from a population frame stratified by age and country of birth. This was done to also secure responses from smaller migrant groups by origin and thus enable comparisons between categories. In the present analysis, the percentages and shares presented in Table 1 and A1 include a post-stratification weight, calibrated with respect to differences in response rates. The weighting enables nationally representative results for the selected study population. In the unweighted models, variables calibrating the weight were used as controls (*Carlsson* 2010).

5.1 Models

The analysis is carried out in two parts. To test Hypotheses H1a and H1b, we estimate logistic regression models of whether re-migration had taken place within six years after the survey. Using this time restriction, we can analyse the full sample, controlling for information available at the time of the survey. Model 1 includes country attachment variables related to the country of origin and destination. The variable of re-migration expectation is then added in Model 2.

Second, to test our hypotheses on the (non-) realization of re-migration expectations (H2 and H3), we use two different discrete time event history models estimating the likelihoods of emigrating from Sweden among those whose anticipated leaving (Model 3) or staying in Sweden (Model 4). Individuals are at risk from the year of the survey and are censored in cases of experiencing the event or death. The event history approach enables us to utilize the yearly information provided by the registers, allowing for time-varying variables as well as the inclusion of life events occurring after the interview.

5.2 Variables

Individuals' migration expectations are based on the survey question "Do you think you will be living in Sweden in five years?", with the answer categories "Yes" and "No". The question does not consider the *desire* to leave Sweden; nor does it ask about a *plan* for or *preparation* of emigration. Instead, the question captures the *anticipation* of migration, summarized in a self-rated likelihood estimation of emigration. Hence, in relation to actual behavior, the self-assessed probability should be even closer to the behavioral outcome than mere aspirations. As pointed out by Carling and Schewel (2018), staying and leaving are not equal projects. However, as migration intentions may be understood along a continuum rather than as a binary outcome (Carling 2002, 2014), only those with the *clear intention to leave* will be likely to answer "No" to the question of staying (Carling 2014, a similar approach has been used by Diehl/Liebau 2014). Similarly, the dichotomous framing of the question might imply that those who are uncertain about remaining in Sweden may nevertheless be classified as expecting to stay.

The outcome variable of actual emigration behavior stems from the emigration registers. All Swedish residents who intend to live abroad for at least one year are required to de-register from the population register. Over-coverage, i.e., individuals who emigrate without de-registering, has been estimated at approximately 3 percent for the migrant population in Sweden in recent years (Mussino *et al.* 2024). Crucially, however, over-coverage varies substantially by time since migration: while it is highest among recent arrivals, it is very low and stable among migrants who have resided in Sweden for more than ten years, which corresponds to the population under study here (Monti *et al.* 2020; Mussino *et al.* 2024). Additionally, Statistics Sweden periodically identifies individuals who have emigrated without de-registering and assigns them an estimated emigration date; we include these corrected cases as events in our analysis. We discuss remaining limitations in the conclusion.

In the logistic regression models, all independent variables are measured at the time of interview. Country of residence attachment is measured through time spent in Sweden since first immigration, and through economic aspects, such as having experienced *economic difficulties*, stemming from the survey question "In the past 12 months, have you had difficulty meeting your current expenses for food, rent, bills, etc.?" and owning one's accommodations or not, measured as a dummy. From the registers, we have additional information on *Swedish citizenship*. Country of

residence attachment is further measured through sociocultural aspects captured by the survey, such as *Swedish proficiency*, measured through the self-rated abilities to speak and read; and having one's *best friend* living in Sweden.

Origin country attachments are represented by sending *remittances* or not, and the number of *return visits* since arriving in Sweden (or in the past ten years, if one has been in Sweden longer than ten years). Other sociodemographic characteristics include *country of birth*, defined as macro area; *age*, measured as a categorical variable to capture potential associations with, for example, reaching retirement age; *gender*; having a *child living in the household*; and *highest level of education* as declared by the respondent at the time of the interview.

As for the discrete time event history models, the included variables are similar to those in the logistic regressions, although Swedish citizenship, age, and time since migration are measured as time-varying variables, utilizing the yearly information from the register follow-up. Time-varying variables are also added, reflecting whether the respondent experienced any of the following transitions after the year of the interview: marrying; divorcing (or being widowed); experiencing *childbirth* (or adoption); illness resulting in *sick leave*; or *becoming unemployed*. All time-varying independent variables are measured as lagged values from the previous year. However, once an individual has experienced a given event, it is coded as "yes" from that point onward. Table A1 in the Appendix provides an overview of all independent variables included in the models.

6 Results

6.1 Anticipated re-migration as a proxy for behavior

Table 1 shows weighted descriptive statistics on re-migration expectations and behavior. Almost 96 percent of the survey sample declared that their expectation was to stay in Sweden given a five-year time horizon, while 4 percent expected to leave. Among the individuals expecting to leave, 10 percent had done so within six years. Of the individuals expecting to stay, about 3 percent left within six years. The unweighted analytical sample (not shown) shows similar shares, with 6 percent anticipating re-migration and 13 percent actually leaving Sweden if expecting to do so. The low share realizing the intention to leave underscores that anticipating re-migration is vastly different from actual behavior. The higher share of realizing the intention to stay is expected, especially given the fact that the study population can be described as a highly stable residing population with a long time already spent in Sweden, many from young ages.

Model 1 in Table 2 shows the likelihood of re-migrating for different country attachments. Unsurprisingly, the likelihood of leaving Sweden decreases with time since the initial immigration. Re-migration is additionally less likely if holding a Swedish citizenship at the time of the interview, having a best friend living in Sweden, or having at least one child living in the household. Compared to migrants born in other Nordic countries, individuals born within the EU or Eastern European

Tab. 1: Re-migration expectations and behaviors

Expectation	% of total study population	Behavior* among those expecting to stay or leave respectively			
		% Stayed	% Emigrated	Total	N (sample)
Stay	95.64	97.43	2.57	100.00	3,045
Leave	4.36	89.87	10.13	100.00	181
Total	100.00				

* Measured six years after stated expectation

Note: Percentages include a post-stratification weight to account for non-response.

Source: Own calculation based on LNU-UFB survey (2010-12) and register data from Sweden (2010-18).

countries are less likely to re-migrate. This is also the case for migrants born in Asian countries, though not significant at the 5 percent level in this model.

Experiencing economic difficulties at the time of the interview increases the likelihood of re-migration. In line with what we know from previous research, post-secondary education is additionally associated with re-migration, although only significant at the 10 percent level. Home ownership and Swedish language proficiency show no and insignificant effects, respectively. Similarly, no significant associations are found for transnational activities such as sending remittances or visiting the country of origin. Significant associations are neither found in relation to individuals born in Middle Eastern or Northern African countries, Sub-Saharan Africa, or Latin America; women; or individuals of different age groups.

Adding the variable of re-migration expectation (Model 2), the described associations remain very similar. Hence, excluding anticipation from a model of behavior would not necessarily lead to bias when analysing country attachments and their relation to re-migration behavior.

Expecting to leave Sweden is associated with almost four times the odds of actual re-migration compared to expecting to stay. Thus, in terms of effect size, not only is anticipated re-migration a statistically significant predictor of actual re-migration behavior, net of other determinants (thereby confirming H1a), migration anticipation is also among the strongest determinants of re-migration behavior. At the same time, adding expectations to the model of behavior only slightly adds to the total variance in the behavior, with the pseudo R^2 increasing only two percentage points (Models 1 and 2). This supports the second part of our first hypothesis (H1b), which anticipated that re-migration would explain only a limited share of the variation in actual re-migration behavior, as indicated by modest improvements in model fit when expectations are included.

6.2 Realizing anticipated re-migration

To test H3 and H4, we track individual realization processes over time. The main results from the discrete event history models are presented in Models 3 and 4 in Table 2. Among those anticipating leaving Sweden (Model 3), few variables reach

Tab. 2: Models of the likelihood of emigrating from Sweden

	Logistic regression models				Discrete time event history models			
	Full sample				Expecting to			
	Behavior				leave	stay		
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p
<i>Control variables measured at the time of interview</i>								
<i>Expectation (ref.: Stay)</i>								
Leave			3.96	0.00				
Years since migration*	0.96	0.00	0.96	0.00	1.00	0.94	0.96	0.00
<i>Economic difficulties (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes	1.90	0.01	1.82	0.01	0.65	0.52	2.15	0.00
<i>Home ownership (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes	0.93	0.76	0.99	0.96	0.59	0.43	1.25	0.39
<i>Swedish citizenship* (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes	0.42	0.00	0.44	0.00	0.10	0.00	0.72	0.22
<i>Swedish proficiency (ref.: Not fluent)</i>								
Fluent	1.32	0.37	1.27	0.44	3.65	0.11	0.99	0.98
<i>Best friend in Sweden (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes	0.59	0.02	0.63	0.05	0.98	0.98	0.65	0.07
<i>Remittances (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes	1.23	0.53	1.08	0.82	0.83	0.80	1.25	0.53
<i>Return visits (ref.: No one)</i>								
1-5 visits	0.99	0.98	0.95	0.87	0.65	0.62	0.95	0.89
>5 visits	1.27	0.53	1.12	0.77	0.55	0.55	1.25	0.58
<i>Country of birth (ref.: Nordic)</i>								
EU15+	0.39	0.00	0.36	0.00	0.11	0.02	0.53	0.05
Eastern Europe	0.32	0.01	0.32	0.01	0.26	0.26	0.32	0.01
Middle East/Northern Africa	0.65	0.34	0.58	0.23	1.85	0.56	0.49	0.13
Subsaharan Africa	0.59	0.27	0.53	0.18	0.35	0.43	0.61	0.30
Asia	0.45	0.06	0.41	0.04	0.79	0.80	0.36	0.02
Latin America	0.78	0.54	0.72	0.41	1.56	0.61	0.60	0.22
<i>Gender (ref.: Man)</i>								
Woman	1.11	0.62	1.08	0.73	2.33	0.11	1.07	0.75
<i>Age* (ref.: 18-25)</i>								
26-35	1.08	0.81	1.13	0.70	1.37	0.69	1.76	0.20
36-45	1.32	0.50	1.58	0.28	1.00	1.00	1.55	0.41
46-55	0.66	0.34	0.78	0.57	1.91	0.61	1.61	0.38
56-65	0.45	0.11	0.57	0.27	0.91	0.94	1.13	0.83
66 or older	0.73	0.58	0.94	0.91	0.45	0.63	0.85	0.80

Tab. 2: Continuation

	Logistic regression models				Discrete time event history models			
	Full sample				Expecting to			
	Behavior				leave	stay		
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p	OR	p
<i>Education (ref.: Primary)</i>								
Secondary	1.77	0.10	1.82	0.09	1.61	0.56	1.58	0.20
Post Secondary	1.96	0.07	2.02	0.06	3.92	0.12	1.56	0.24
Missing	1.68	0.34	1.64	0.37	4.72	0.21	1.39	0.58
<i>Child in household (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes	0.41	0.00	0.42	0.00	1.58	0.43	0.40	0.00
<i>Ever having experienced any of the following events after interview</i>								
<i>Married* (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes					1.60	0.69	0.57	0.29
<i>Divorced* (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes					4.83	0.21	1.75	0.29
<i>Childbirth* (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes					3.47	0.08	1.53	0.21
<i>Sick leave* (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes					0.33	0.11	0.49	0.03
<i>Becoming unemployed* (ref.: No)</i>								
Yes					0.12	0.05	1.81	0.03
Constant	0.19	0.01	0.16	0.00	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.00
N individuals	3,226		3,226		181		3,045	
N person years					1,341		23,953	
Pseudo R ²	0.13		0.15		0.19		0.08	
LL	-408		-397		-101		-555	
AIC	867		847		264		1172	
BIC	1025		1011		425		1423	

* Time varying in Discrete Event History Models

Source: Own calculation based on LNU-UFB survey (2010-12) and register data from Sweden (2010-18).

statistical significance, likely partly due to the small sample ($n = 181$). Nevertheless, contrasting our second hypothesis that the birth of a child should be associated with lower re-migration propensities, experiencing the birth of a child after interview more than triples the odds of realizing re-migration expectations, significant at the 10 percent level. Moreover, contrasting our third hypothesis on disrupting events driving the non-realization of re-migration expectations, experiencing divorce or widowhood after the interview also increases the likelihood of realizing an anticipated re-migration, though not significantly. Fluent Swedish language skills

and higher education similarly increase the likelihood of realizing anticipated leave in the analysed sample. However, neither of these associations is significant, probably largely attributable to the small sample.

The likelihood of realizing the intention to stay increases with time spent in Sweden, and with at least one child living in the household at the time of the interview, as indicated by the low odds ratios in the model of re-migration among those with the intention to stay (Model 4). The same applies to having a best friend living in Sweden, although significant only at the 10 percent level. Additionally, compared to individuals born in other Nordic countries, individuals born in the EU ($p = 0.05$) or Eastern European countries and Asia are more likely to stay in Sweden according to their stated expectation. Experiencing sick leave after the interview is related to a higher likelihood of realizing an anticipated stay, as indicated by the low odds of re-migration within this group. This contrasts our third hypothesis, which expected that disruptive and destabilizing life events occurring after the interview would be associated with a higher likelihood of *not* realizing prior expectations.

6.3 Not realizing anticipated re-migration

Returning to Model 3 in Table 2, we see that Swedish citizenship (measured as a time-varying variable in the event history models) is associated with a substantially lower likelihood of realizing an anticipated re-migration from Sweden. Moreover, and in line with our third hypothesis, experiencing a transition into unemployment after the interview lowers the probability of realizing re-migration anticipations ($p = 0.05$). Experiencing sick leave after interview also decreases this likelihood, although not significantly.

Turning to Model 4, we find higher likelihoods of re-migrating among the group expecting to stay when individuals indicated having economic difficulties at the time of the interview. Additionally, experiencing a transition into unemployment after the interview also increases the likelihood of leaving despite expecting to stay, supporting our third hypothesis. Experiencing divorce and childbirth after the interview additionally increases the risk of re-migration among those expecting to stay, although not significantly.

7 Concluding discussion

In this study, we apply a temporal lens to the analysis of re-migration, including both return and onward migration expectation and behavior, allowing us to examine the (non-) realization of stated (im-) mobility expectations through a perspective of evolving living conditions and the longitudinal unfolding of migration trajectories (cf. *Erdal/Ezzati 2015; Erlinghagen 2021; Ahrens/King 2023; Erdal et al. 2023*). Doing so, the paper has aimed to link studies on re-migration expectations and behavior, which so far has been analysed in largely separate literatures. Using a unique set-up of linked survey and register data from Sweden, we have analysed the relative importance of re-migration expectations for actual behavior. Moreover, we have

analysed factors driving the realization or non-realization of anticipated international migration and staying among immigrant long-term residents.

Our results show that re-migration expectation is among the strongest determinants of re-migration behavior. At the same time, it only explains a very small share of the variance in re-migration behavior, and a vast majority of those stating re-migration expectations do not realize these anticipations within the stated time period. Hence, in contrast to *Wanner* (2021) and *Van Dalen and Henkens* (2013), we do not find expectations to be a sufficient predictor for re-migration behavior among immigrant long-term residents of Sweden. Additionally, we find that not including expectations in regression models of re-migration behavior does not necessarily lead to bias in terms of other determinants.

We do find that structural attachments and socio-economic ties to the destination country are related to re-migration behavior, with decreasing propensities to leave as time passes, having obtained a Swedish citizenship, having a best friend living in Sweden, and having at least one child living in the household. However, in line with the differentiated focus within previous re-migration literature, in which transnational belonging and behavior is primarily related to re-migration desires and plans rather than actual behavior (*Caron* 2020), we find no evidence of positive associations between origin country ties and re-migration behavior, nor realization of anticipated leave. If anything, return visits are associated with lower probabilities of realizing re-migration expectations. Possible reasons for this might be the fact that transnational activities in themselves might be ways of balancing one's being and belonging across geographical space (*Bilgili/Siegel* 2017; *Oeppen* 2013; *Carling/Erdal* 2014), as in the findings by *Lulle* (2014), who interprets return visits as substitutes for more permanent moves. Moreover, transnational activities, such as sending remittances, might be motivated by maintained social ties and obligations (*De Haas/Fokkema* 2011), rather than involving re-migration preparations, especially given the long time already spent in the country of residence.

In terms of the role of significant others, we find that the presence of a child at the time of stated expectations indeed increases the likelihood of realizing an anticipated stay in the destination. Among those anticipating leaving Sweden, we find that the birth of a child after the interview is associated with higher probability of actually leaving. These findings help nuance previous literature by demonstrating that the birth and presence of a child should not be uniformly interpreted as reducing re-migration propensities. Rather than acting as a universal constraint on mobility, children appear to stabilize existing trajectories, supporting settlement among those intending to stay, while potentially even reinforcing anticipated re-migration.

Moreover, we found that experiencing a transition into unemployment is significantly related to a lower likelihood of realizing previously anticipated re-migration, suggesting that the loss of economic resources constrains the capability to act on prior mobility plans. This result illustrates that future mobility expectations may change through shifting structural attachments to the destination country influencing the capabilities to migrate (*Carling* 2002; *Carling/Schewel* 2018). Migration requires resources, and if sudden or unexpected events change the

economic circumstances or financial security, expected re-migration might be changed or postponed.

Interestingly, experiencing a transition to unemployment is also related to not realizing an anticipated stay in Sweden, with higher re-migration propensities among those expecting to stay. This finding is corroborated by the fact that already experiencing economic difficulties at the time of anticipating a stay in Sweden is significantly associated with a higher propensity to leave anyway. This finding stresses how staying also involves an active process negotiated over time in relation to, in this case economic, resources (Gruber 2021; Schewel 2020). It may be reflective of what is known as “reactive transnationalism” in the literature, where turning to an origin country can be understood as a response to experienced marginalization (Itzigsohn/Giorguli-Saucedo 2005; Snel et al. 2016). It may also be the result of migrants moving onward in attempts to strengthen their societal status and find better opportunities elsewhere, as seen previously in qualitative studies (Kelly 2013; Moret 2016).

Experiencing sick leave reduces the likelihood of leaving, also among those who initially anticipated staying. However, rather than enabling an anticipated stay in the destination country, sickness is likely to reflect an unexpected and substantial change in living conditions, an unanticipated deterioration in health and living conditions that constrains mobility capabilities.

Overall, our findings highlight that even within relatively stable migrant populations, anticipated and actual re-migration or staying are interconnected with living conditions and evolving life trajectories in terms of social ties, health and economic resources. Contributing to knowledge on underexplored aspects of leaving and staying in a destination country, this study is focused on immigrant long-term residents with generally low re-migration probabilities. As a selective group of stayers, this study population should not be seen as representative of re-migration from Sweden or of integration processes in other countries or contexts.

By linking survey and register data, we have been able to connect respondent's stated likelihoods of emigration with later observed emigration behavior, thus providing a combination of aspects of re-migration that are rarely available in large numbers. Swedish register data are generally regarded as high-quality, and, although the registers are subject to some degree of over-coverage due to delayed or unreported emigration, such over-coverage is both low and stable among long-term residents – the population targeted in this study (Monti et al. 2020; Mussino et al. 2024).

In this paper, we were not able to distinguish onward moves from return migration. Thus, while most previous theories, as well as most of the survey questions on transnational ties, refer to return migration intentions and behavior, our migration outcome includes both return and onward moves. While this is a limitation, it could be argued that origin country ties could also be important for onward moves (Kelly 2013; Moret 2016; Ramos 2018).

Since the survey was conducted in 2010-12, dramatic policy changes have affected the lives of migrants in Sweden, including increased uncertainty following the introduction of temporary residence permits and a heightened and more

restrictive policy climate surrounding access to citizenship. During the study period, Sweden had relatively generous welfare provisions accessible to long-term residents and comparatively liberal citizenship acquisition rules. These features may affect generalizability to other contexts, including Sweden today – in a time marked by increased uncertainty and questioned citizenship rights. Whether and how such changes affect the relationship between re-migration expectations and behavior among long-term residents remains an important question for future research. Nevertheless, the paper demonstrates how a life trajectory approach could be used to bridge the gap between re-migration expectations and behavior, and conceptualize re-migration as a differentiated, open-ended process unfolding over time. In doing so, we add to the study of re-migration, connecting international re-migration to the broader field of realization within demographic processes.

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Appendix

Tab. A1: Sample characteristics

Expectation <i>Behavior</i>	Stay <i>Stayed</i>	Stay <i>Left</i>	Leave <i>Left</i>	Leave <i>Stayed</i>	Total <i>Total</i>
<i>Years since migration (continuous)</i>					
Mean	26.87	20.19	23.29	24.37	26.57
Std. Err.	0.34	2.00	4.81	1.30	0.33
<i>Economic difficulties</i>					
No	0.81	0.62	0.70	0.67	0.80
Yes	0.19	0.38	0.30	0.33	0.20
<i>Tenure</i>					
Not owning	0.48	0.39	0.64	0.72	0.49
Owning	0.52	0.61	0.36	0.28	0.51
<i>Swedish citizenship at interview</i>					
No	0.20	0.49	0.83	0.21	0.21
Yes	0.80	0.51	0.17	0.79	0.79
<i>Swedish citizenship within observed period</i>					
No	0.15	0.40	0.77	0.19	0.16
Yes	0.85	0.60	0.23	0.81	0.84
<i>Swedish proficiency</i>					
Not fluent	0.23	0.26	0.17	0.23	0.23
Fluent	0.77	0.74	0.83	0.77	0.77
<i>Best friend in Sweden</i>					
No	0.31	0.44	0.55	0.34	0.32
Yes	0.69	0.56	0.45	0.66	0.68
<i>Remittances</i>					
No	0.90	0.91	0.69	0.90	0.90
Yes	0.10	0.09	0.31	0.10	0.10
<i>Return visits</i>					
No one	0.14	0.14	0.20	0.20	0.14
1-5 visits	0.40	0.33	0.31	0.37	0.40
>5 visits	0.46	0.52	0.49	0.43	0.46
<i>Country of origin</i>					
Nordic	0.24	0.38	0.38	0.16	0.24
EU15+	0.09	0.08	0.12	0.09	0.09
Eastern Europe	0.26	0.20	0.09	0.23	0.26
MENA	0.22	0.16	0.20	0.28	0.22
Subsaharan Africa	0.05	0.07	0.05	0.07	0.05
Asia	0.08	0.06	0.05	0.10	0.08
Latin America	0.06	0.06	0.11	0.07	0.06
<i>Gender</i>					
Man	0.47	0.57	0.47	0.52	0.48
Woman	0.53	0.43	0.53	0.48	0.52

Tab. A1: Continuation

<i>Expectation Behavior</i>	<i>Stay Stayed</i>	<i>Stay Left</i>	<i>Leave Left</i>	<i>Leave Stayed</i>	<i>Total Total</i>
<i>Age at interview</i>					
18-25	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.22	0.08
26-35	0.13	0.14	0.38	0.17	0.13
36-45	0.19	0.31	0.09	0.12	0.19
46-55	0.26	0.22	0.12	0.22	0.26
56-65	0.21	0.12	0.19	0.20	0.20
66 or older	0.15	0.13	0.15	0.07	0.14
<i>Education</i>					
Elementary	0.22	0.22	0.18	0.33	0.23
Secondary	0.41	0.36	0.15	0.38	0.41
Post secondary	0.33	0.35	0.54	0.28	0.33
Missing	0.03	0.06	0.12	0.01	0.03
<i>Child in household</i>					
No	0.56	0.74	0.79	0.61	0.57
Yes	0.44	0.26	0.21	0.39	0.43
<i>Ever having experienced any of the following events after interview</i>					
<i>Married</i>					
No	0.92	0.99	0.99	0.93	0.92
Yes	0.08	0.01	0.01	0.07	0.08
<i>Divorced or widowed</i>					
No	0.93	0.94	0.99	0.92	0.93
Yes	0.07	0.06	0.01	0.08	0.07
<i>Childbirth</i>					
No	0.92	0.88	0.80	0.93	0.92
Yes	0.08	0.12	0.20	0.07	0.08
<i>Sick leave</i>					
No	0.65	0.85	0.86	0.60	0.65
Yes	0.35	0.15	0.14	0.40	0.35
<i>Becoming unemployed</i>					
No	0.82	0.82	0.98	0.68	0.82
Yes	0.18	0.18	0.02	0.32	0.18
Total N, sample	2,963	82	24	157	3,226

Note: Shares include a post-stratification weight to account for non-response.

Source: Own calculation based on LNU-UFB survey (2010-12) and register data from Sweden (2010-18).

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