

# Introduction: doing migration research today as an engaged and conscientious scholar

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## 1. MIGRATION STUDIES AND MIGRATION RESEARCH

Migration research has notably blossomed in recent decades, as evidenced by the growing number of academic journals, postgraduate programs, PhD schools, conferences, and seminars devoted to migration, as well as the growing number of migration-related sections in different academic professional associations. Especially now that migration scholarship is on the rise, it is a good time to offer guidance to students, early-career researchers, experts, and scholars interested in improving their methodological skills as they engage in a complex scientific social world.

Migration research is a multidisciplinary field that studies multiple facets of human mobility. It requires examining debated conceptual and theoretical frameworks, participating in epistemological and reflexive conversations regarding human mobility, borders, diversity, and citizenship. Additionally, it involves case studies and comparative empirical work that use existing data or generate information and knowledge to describe, explain, and understand patterns, processes, impacts, and policies associated with migration dynamics.

Most migration researchers also aim to objectively analyze the experiences of migrants, the effects of migration on origin and/or residence countries, as well as the effectiveness of policies shaping migrants' lives. They employ a range of research methods (e.g. surveys, experiments, interviews, ethnographies, etc.) and apply them at various territorial scales and analytical levels, including macro-level institutions and structures, meso-level collective actions and organizations, and individual levels (perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors).

Conducting research is an iterative process that involves several stages of inquiry. Each stage builds on the previous one, and the process continues until the desired outcome is achieved. The process includes participating in

and/or hosting research meetings to decide on the research design or to share preliminary results, collaborating with institutions and think tanks, disseminating expertise to society and policy-makers, and publishing research findings in academic journals, reports, or policy briefs to enhance comprehension of migration and support policy decisions.

Migration studies and migration research are closely related fields. While the terms are often used interchangeably, there can be some subtle differences between them.

*Migration studies* generally refer to the broader field of academic inquiry that examines human mobility from multidisciplinary perspectives. This field encompasses a wide range of topics, including the causes and drivers of migration, the experiences of migrants, the impacts of human mobility, settlement, or return on individuals and societies, as well as policies and practices related to migration. Migration studies mainly encompass disciplinary contributions from sociology, political science, anthropology, geography, economics, law, and demography to offer a comprehensive understanding of migration occurrences.

*Migration research* is the scientific study and analysis of migration within its field, specifically aimed towards generating knowledge and contributing to the development of the academic domain. It prioritizes a focus on knowledge creation and encompasses data collection and analysis, research method application, as well as knowledge and insight generation about migratory processes and settlement. The primary objective of migration research is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on migration and to inform policy and practice in this area.

Migration research covers various methodological approaches. These include conducting quantitative studies that analyze large datasets, carrying out qualitative studies that delve into the lived experiences of migrants through interviews or observations, evaluating the effectiveness of migration policies through policy analysis, and examining migration patterns and processes across different contexts through comparative studies.

Both migration studies and migration research play important roles in advancing the comprehension of migration and its consequences. They offer valuable perspectives into the intricate dynamics of migration, inform policy decisions, and contribute to effective strategies for governing migration. Additionally, they promote power sharing and equality within increasingly diverse societies.

As there is a proliferation of handbooks and edited books on migration studies, there are probably few on migration research. This edited book is about the thinking and doing migration research. It has a practical endeavor mainly aimed at students and early-career researchers interested in studying migration. In Europe, there are only few monographs and edited volumes

that have addressed methodological issues in migration studies. Examples include: *Qualitative Research in European Migration Studies* (Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz 2018); *The Practice of Qualitative Research in Migration Studies: Ethical Issues as a Methodological Challenge* (Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz 2020); *Qualitative Methods in Migration Studies: A Critical Realist Perspective* (Iosifides 2011); *Introduction to Migration Studies: An Interactive Guide to the Literatures on Migration and Diversity* (Scholten 2022); or the *Handbook of Research Methods in Migration* (Vargas-Silva 2012). Although they provide valuable insights, this book covers more methodological ground, therefore seeking to offer a more holistic, pragmatic, and strategic orientation to migration research. In the United States, there are even fewer books on migration research methods: one example is *Migration and Health: A Research Methods Handbook* (Schenker et al. 2014) – a useful resource for those seeking guidance on research methods to study specifically the link between migration and health.

## 2. THE AIMS OF THIS BOOK

The purpose of this book is to provide researchers at the undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels, as well as those interested in contributing to the rapidly developing field of migration studies, with a basic set of tools to address the main issues and questions they are likely to face during the research process. Especially in the context of the inter- or multidisciplinary nature of migration studies, this co-edited book aims to raise awareness of (and appreciation for) the importance of developing rigorous methodological procedures and solid research results understood by and relevant to a range of scholars and practitioners alike. The book is multi-method and multidisciplinary, giving readers broad exposure to approaches that can be of practical help when studying different migration-related aspects.

This publication draws on the research, teaching, and supervision expertise of the book editors and contributors in dealing with the many challenges associated with conducting research on the timely, complex, and consequential topic of migration. While migration issues are hot topics worldwide, often spilling over into normative debates about what immigration and inclusion should look like, this book underscores the importance of employing a range of solid methods and reliable data to arrive at rigorous and scientifically sound research findings. In providing a diverse methodological toolbox to conduct migration research, the different contributions can also help to counteract the many prejudices and misinformation around migration, which often lead to stereotyping, misunderstandings, or even discrimination against migrants.

How can novice scholars prepare for conscientious research on migration while also being sensitive to growing inequalities in the world? This collective

book intends to equip researchers who seek to refine their analytical skills, enabling them to tackle migration issues with the understanding that they are intertwined with complex power dynamics and increasing inequalities that define contemporary societies. While migration issues are hardly ever neutral, researchers can be trained to think critically about key migration concepts and their measurements, as well as how best to formulate research hypotheses, ways to test them, and how to build theoretical frameworks to synthesize key findings. Students and early-career researchers can also learn how best to share their research findings in a world when these are easily misconstrued by individuals and groups critical of migration and migrants.

With an eye towards making this book of practical significance for those wishing to venture into the terrain of migration research, it adopts a problem-based and tool-based approach to the study of migration. Each chapter in this book provides a unique reflection on second-level research that migration scholars may encounter, while discussing how specific methods, techniques, or data sources can offer valuable solutions. The discussed issues and methodologies offer significant value to emerging scholars across diverse disciplines by enabling them to conduct research that could influence daily life and underscore political and social implications beyond the realm of academia.

### 3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The architectural plan of this co-edited book follows four main parts. Each part has its own autonomy and is headed by a key question.

In Part I, we ask what are the basic distinguishing features of migration research that an engaged and conscientious researcher should know about. Chapter 1 by Ricard Zapata-Barrero starts by drawing attention on contested concepts in migration studies, thus highlighting the need for migration scholars to embark in a reflexive conceptual thinking during the research design in view of improving the analytical clarity of their work. Chapter 2 by Jan Rath then places migration studies as a field that crosses disciplinary boundaries, while arguing that interdisciplinary approaches to migration are richer and more fruitful. Parvati Raghuram and Gunjan Sondhi offer, in Chapter 3, a guide on how to do intersectional migration research after outlining some key motivations for adopting intersectional lenses when studying migration. Chapter 4 by Jørgen Carling highlights the opportunities provided by conducting migration research following a mixed-methods approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative data and methods. Finally, in Chapter 5, Verena Wisthaler and Mireille Paquet examine the strengths and challenges derived from conducting scholarly work on migration beyond the nation-state, with a specific analytical focus on downscaling research on immigration governance, policy, and politics at the local and sub-national level.

The second and third parts of the book focus on specific methods in migration research. Part II asks how particular qualitative data and methods can be used to widen our knowledge about migration issues, while highlighting their challenges and offering practical tips on how to overcome them. In Chapter 6, Justyna Salamońska provides a kick-off discussion on these matters, by using empirical examples to substantiate arguments regarding the pros and cons of qualitative migration research. The other chapters in Part II then provide further details about specific aspects related to qualitative approaches to the study of migration. Chapter 7 by Valentina Mazzucato explains different types of multi-sited research designs and lays out the advantages and challenges they pose for researchers. Franck Düvell provides in Chapter 8 a theoretically informed practical guide on how to conduct ethnographic research, including tips on fieldwork preparation, gaining access to the field, identifying potential interviewees, and winning their trust. Chapter 9 by Guy Drudi and Bob W. White then guides researchers regarding the process of analyzing qualitative data, by using the illustrative example of qualitative analysis software that can account for the subjective nature of qualitative data without sacrificing the principle of scientific rigor. The contribution of Monica Varsanyi on migration research based on archival data (Chapter 10) concludes the second part of this book by offering a practical guide on how to work in archives and how to deal with some challenges often encountered in this process – from access to archives and finding relevant data to reading state archives against the grain.

Part III of the book then introduces students and early-career researchers to quantitative methods in migration research. Chapter 11 by Daniela Vintila provides an introduction into this topic, by tackling some of the most notorious specificities, strengths, and challenges of quantitative migration research – from the availability of migration-related numerical data to the complex endeavor of definitions, measurements, and interpretation of such data. The other chapters included in Part III dig into more specific methods, data, and techniques in quantitative migration research. In Chapter 12, Steffen Pöttschke introduces readers to some critical perspectives on surveys and migration research, by discussing central aspects regarding different types of surveys, sampling, survey modes, and questionnaire translation. Daniel Auer contributes in Chapter 13, with an overview of experimental migration research, by explaining the quest for causality when studying migration, common types of experiments, and ethical issues in experimental migration research. Chapter 14 by Jasper Tjaden shifts the focus on how social media can be used for migration research, while addressing key aspects regarding the advantages of social media data for innovative studies, as well as main challenges related to data privacy, data protection, and external validity. Chapter 15 by Abdeslam Marfouk provides a practical example on how cross-national surveys can offer insights into public opinion on migration, while outlining

the specificities of the most widely used and publicly available surveys on this topic. Finally, Luicy Pedroza and Pau Palop-García explain in Chapter 16 how to design indices and indicators for comparative migration research that meet current methodological standards, while providing examples of different types of migration indices, their applicability, and limitations.

The last part of this book (Part IV) asks about different ways in which engaged and conscientious scholars can communicate and share their findings widely. It starts with a contribution by Leila Hadj Abdou (Chapter 17) that traces and summarizes the “reflexive turn” in migration research, by highlighting tendencies and effects of reflexivity and knowledge production in migration studies. Chapter 18 by Christina Clark-Kazak then guides readers into the process of research dissemination by drawing attention to particular ethical issues and by discussing strategies to navigate ethical dilemmas. In Chapter 19, Nathan Levy, Asya Pisarevskaya, and Peter Scholten map the development of migration scholarship across topics, countries, and disciplines, while illustrating how to elaborate a systematic taxonomy and literature review in the field. Chapter 20 by Ernesto Castañeda then offers practical tips on how migration scholars can disseminate their findings to the general public in a reflexive and considerate manner to avoid misinterpretations or sensational frameworks that may repeat stereotypes, urban legends about migration, or media clichés. In turn, Chapter 21 by Irina Isaakyan guides migration researchers into the process of publishing their work, with a practical discussion of the main epistemological issues that are often faced when converting a PhD thesis into articles to be published in academic journals. Finally, Chapter 22 by Albert Kraler complements this discussion on migration research dissemination by focusing on the demand for policy-relevant scientific knowledge and practical guidelines on how to translate migration research findings for the policy world.

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