



RISK-TAKING PROPENSITY AND EMIGRATION DECISION-MAKING: A QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

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Abstract. *Risk-taking plays an important role for the psychological prediction of decision-making processes in a situation of uncertainty. The objective of this paper is to examine in-depth the association between risk-taking propensity as a personality tendency and emigration decision-making of young people. Although the correlation between risk-taking propensity and migration potential has been studied in some countries, it has not been examined to date in Bulgaria – an economy in transition. Furthermore, it was scrutinized neither in view of different risk domains (social, financial, health, ethical) nor in terms of desire, plan and preparation to move abroad as key aspects of the emigration decision-making process. The methods of in-depth calendar interviewing and qualitative data analysis were employed. Semi-structured calendar interviews (N=45) were carried out in June - November 2020 among young Bulgarian men (N=21) and women (N=24) aged 18-35 years from large, middle and small towns/villages in Bulgaria. The findings showed a positive association of risk-taking propensity and (e)migration decision-making. Respondents, identified as risk-seekers, were more likely to emigrate, compared to risk-avoiders. Social and financial domains of risk-taking turned out most closely associated with emigration decision-making. Young people, who were more willing to move away from their family, social surrounding and cultural environment, to improve their social-economic standing (education, income, career), were more positive about emigration and more likely to plan and prepare for relocation. The findings have some important interdisciplinary implications both for psychological theory and for demographic policy.*

Keywords: risk-taking propensity; emigration; decision-making; qualitative methods.

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CONTRIBUTION:

Diana Bakalova –Methods and procedure, Results, limitations and implications for future research

Tsvetelina Panchelieva – Theoretical background, Summary and discussion, Conclusion

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INTRODUCTION

Mobility and migration are natural processes motivated by individuals' desire to improve the quality of life, including income and career prospects, living conditions, psychological well-being, etc.

Most studies on human mobility and migration are economic, sociological and demographic in essence. They are driven mostly by the interest of researchers in the role of migrant capital for efficient functioning of the labour markets (Borjas, 2001). However, these studies and theories do not provide a comprehensive picture of migration potential and behaviour beyond external factors, such as income levels, unemployment rates, economic growth, political instability, human rights and liberties, social inequality and discrimination.

In recent years, there has been a growing body of psychological research on migration. These are studies aimed at exploring psychological determinants of emigration potential and behaviour. However, the studies focused on risk-taking propensity as a psychological antecedent of emigration decision-making are scarce. They were conducted in a few countries such as Germany, Italy, Romania, Estonia, Mexico and Ghana (Jaeger, et al., 2007; Mazzarini, et al., 2019; Dumitrescu & Spînu, 2019; Toma & Grigorescu, 2019; Grigoryev, et al., 2018; Fregoso & Massey, 2019; Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2017; Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2016).

Overall, the studies suggest that risk-taking propensity plays an important role in emigration decision-making, particularly for migrants who may face greater uncertainty or obstacles in the migration process. However, most studies explore the relationship between risk-taking propensity and migration decision-making by quantitative methods (surveys), by focusing on internal migration and/or without taking into consideration the different facets of risk-taking and decision-making.

The objective of this paper is to scrutinize in-depth the association between risk-taking propensity as a personality tendency and emigration decision-making of young Bulgarians in terms of their desire, plans and preparation to move abroad. Furthermore, this association is examined in the light of both general risk-taking propensity and risk domains (social, financial, ethical, health). To our knowledge, the role of risk propensity in shaping the desire, plan and preparation as important aspects of the emigration decision-making process, as well as the role of domain-specific risk propensity in emigration decision-making, have not been explored so far.

THE CONCEPTS OF RISK-TAKING PROPENSITY

Although security is a basic human need, individual and group insecurities coming both from within and from the outside world nowadays challenge us to be a part of a "risk society" (Beck, 1992). Paradoxically, risky tendencies in the "culture of fear", which is striving to security, are strong (Furedi, 1997). Both the mass media and scientific literature provide numerous examples of risky behaviours and their consequences, including financial collapses, natural disasters, terroristic attacks, extreme sports life experimentation (Torres, 2017), pandemics, wars, large refugee migrant flows, economic crises, etc. Today, we are forced to face a larger and more complicated picture of the global risk than before.

Theories and research on risk-taking have a long and interdisciplinary history ranging from behavioural economics to personality and social psychology. According to Kahneman & Tversky (1979) and their Prospect theory, situational factors and a reference point for evaluation of the prospects are crucial for risk-taking. Risk-taking behaviour is influenced by the way that people perceive and evaluate potential gains and losses. Specifically, the theory proposes that people tend to be risk-averse when making decisions that involve potential gains, preferring certain gains over uncertain gains with higher expected value. Conversely, people tend to be risk-seeking when making decisions that involve potential losses, preferring uncertain losses over certain losses with equal expected value.

This pattern of risk-taking behaviour is explained by the theory's two key components: the value function and the weighting function. The value function describes how people subjectively evaluate outcomes based on their deviation from a reference point, such as the status quo or an initial endowment. The weighting function describes how people subjectively weight probabilities when making decisions, often overweighting small probabilities and underweighting large probabilities.

Overall, the prospect theory suggests that people's risk-taking behaviour is influenced by their subjective perceptions and evaluations of potential outcomes, rather than objective probabilities and expected values.

In a psychological perspective, risk-taking is determined mostly by individual and personality factors. Risk-taking propensity, that is individual perceptions of opportunities and threats across different situations, rather than the situational factors, explain the tendency of risk-taking. Unlike

the Prospect theory of risk-taking, risk propensity is associated with sensation-seeking - a personality tendency, characterized by the preference for new, intense and varied experiences, and decision-making in highly uncertain situations. According to Zuckerman (1994) and Zuckerman and Kuhlman (2000), sensation-seekers take risks to have exciting, challenging or new romantic experiences. Sensation-seeking was found to correlate strongly with risk-taking (Zuckerman, 2007). The affective component is regarded as a key ingredient of risk perception - the higher the risk, the stronger the emotional stimulation. Sensation-seekers do not perceive risky ventures and dangerous situations as so threatening and hence, they are much more likely to get involved into activities entailing high risk in comparison to risk-avoiders.

Another approach to risk-taking combines both personality and situational factors to answer the questions about who, when and why take chances. It is the approach to domain-specific risk propensity (Jackson, 1972, 1994; Weber et al., 2002; Ritchie, Tucker-Drob & Cox, 2018; Breivik et al., 2020), which we employ in this study. According to this approach, risk-taking propensity refers to “the likelihood that an individual will engage in a risky behaviour or take a risk in a given situation, and is thought to reflect both individual and situational factors.” (Ritchie, Tucker-Drob & Cox, 2018, p. 66).

The degree of perceived risk in a certain situation is likely to vary depending on the situational and domain-specific characteristics, but the overall personality tendency of sensation-seeking, that is how attractive the perceived risk is, tends to remain relatively stable across different situations and life domains. Weber et al. (2002) argue that individuals may be risk-takers in some areas of life, but risk-avoiders in other areas, and at the same time they tend to keep a relatively stable perception of risk. Individuals who are inconsistent in their approach to risk in different risk domains are not considered individuals with high risk-taking propensity. Risk-taking propensity can explain the consistency of either risk-taking or risk-avoidance as a personality tendency relating to other relatively stable personality traits (such as optimism, achievement motivation and others). Some aspects of risk-taking have been examined more closely than others.

Jackson (1972, 1994) argued that risk is a multi-dimensional construct, which can be conceptualized and operationalized in four domains: 1. *monetary/financial* – gambling or investing to gain financially; 2. *social* – being different to stand out of the crowd;

3. *ethical* – breaking the rules to get what you want; 3. *physical* – getting involved in dangerous activities. Other researchers expand the multidimensionality of the construct by encompassing other risk domains, e.g. recreational (See Weber et al., 2002), intellectual, political, achievement-related and existential (See Breivik et al., 2020). For the purposes of this study and for the sake of brevity, we used Jackson’s domains of risk-taking as initial semantic categories.

MIGRATION AND EMIGRATION DECISION-MAKING IN RELATION TO RISK-TAKING PROPENSITY

In broad terms, migration is the movement of an individual from one place of residence to another. For demographic purposes, it is usually regarded as a movement that results in a long-term or permanent change in the usual place of residence (Toney & Bailey, 2014). The act of changing one’s place of residence within the political boundaries of the country of residence is defined as internal migration. When one moves out of the political boundaries of a country with the intention to reside in another country, they are considered emigrants in view of the sending country, but immigrants in view of the host country. Most countries apply a 183-day rule (6 months) to determine if someone should be considered a resident for tax purposes. Otherwise, the broader term mobility is usually used to indicate shorter terms of relocation.

Conceptualisation and operationalisation of emigration decision-making is based on the aspects of emigration potential measured by the Gallup World Poll (2016) by the following questions: 1. “If you had the opportunity, would you like to move permanently to another country, or would you prefer to continue living in this country?” 2. “Do you plan to move permanently to another country in the next 12 months?” 3. “Are you taking any steps to prepare for a move to another country, such as obtaining travel documents, applying for a visa, or looking for work or housing in another country?”

These questions aim to capture different aspects of migration potential, including individuals’ *desire* to migrate, their concrete *plans* to migrate in the near future, and their *preparation* for migration. The GWP has used these questions in multiple surveys to track trends in migration potential across different countries and regions. The desire, plan and preparation to move are also regarded as key aspects and stages of the emigration decision-making process.

Migration potential and decision-making is actually a pre-migration stage. Like migration attitudes, migration decision-making may or may not result in actual migration behaviour (Chaiklin, 2011) due to a complex of factors that are not only economic, but also psychological in nature.

Emigration is a risky enterprise, because it is associated with uncertainty and/or unfamiliarity in various areas of life - job, income, career, close ties, social surrounding, cultural environment, physical health and/or psychological well-being (e.g. Lepièce et al., 2018). However, empirical evidence on the association between risk-taking propensity and emigration decision-making is scarce, circumstantial and available mostly from economically advanced EU countries such as Germany (Jaeger, et al., 2007) and Italy (Mazzarini, et al., 2019) or from non-European countries such as China (RUMiC, 2009), Mexico (Fregoso & Massey, 2019; Ruiz & Vargas-Silva, 2017) and Ghana (Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2016). In-depth evidence for Eastern European countries with economies in transition such as Bulgaria with regard to the different aspects of risk-taking (financial, social, ethical, health) and decision-making (desire, plan, preparation) is not available yet. There is some evidence on the relationship between risk-taking propensity and emigration potential from other EU countries such as Romania (Dumitrescu & Spînu, 2019; Toma & Grigorescu, 2019) and Estonia (Grigoryev, et al., 2018).

Earlier research of Jaeger et al. (2007) in Germany found that risk tolerance was a determinant of migration attitudes and behaviour, and also that their association was positive. Individuals who scored high on risk-taking propensity were more likely to migrate compared to the low scorers. The researchers found that successful experience with migration was more likely for individuals who tended to be risk averse. Career risk-taking was found to be most strongly associated with internal migration (Jaeger et al., 2010). Individuals who moved to another place for family reasons (e.g. moving out of parents' home, separating from a spouse or partner) were found to be more susceptible to risks than those who moved for other reasons (ibid., 2010; He et al., 2020). However, this empirical evidence of the association between risk propensity and emigration attitudes is circumstantial, since Germany has been an economically advanced country and since the research has been focused on internal migration between labour markets in the country, but not on emigration to other countries.

One of the few studies on the relation between risk tolerance and migration attitudes in an east-

ern country was performed in China. Again, it was focused on internal migration and found that individuals with higher tolerance to risk were more likely to migrate to Chinese cities to use the better labour market and salary opportunities there after the fast economic development of China, in comparison to people with lower tolerance to risk (RUMiC, 2009).

A more recent study of Grigoryev, Arutyunyan, and van de Vijver (2018) investigated the relationship between risk-taking propensity and emigration intentions among Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia, finding that risk-taking propensity was a significant predictor of emigration intentions, even after controlling for other factors such as demographic characteristics and economic conditions.

Other recent evidence for young people from Italy and Romania shows that higher levels of risk-taking propensity are associated with a greater likelihood of intending to migrate and a greater willingness to move to more distant and unfamiliar destinations (Mazzarini, et al., 2019; Dumitrescu & Spînu, 2019; Toma & Grigorescu, 2019).

A study on international migration among Mexican migrants in the USA found that higher levels of risk-taking propensity were associated with a greater likelihood of migration, after controlling for other factors such as education level, income, and family background, and also that this relationship was particularly strong for unauthorized or informal migration. The authors suggest that higher levels of risk-taking propensity may lead individuals to consider migration as a way to seek greater economic opportunities and to overcome potential barriers and uncertainties associated with moving to a new country (Ruiz & Vargas, 2017; Fregoso & Massey, 2019).

All of the studies above suggest that risk-taking propensity is an important factor to consider in understanding emigration potential and decision-making. However, further in-depth research is needed to elucidate the nature and mechanisms of this relationship.

The scarcity of in-depth research on the association between risk-taking propensity and emigration decision-making makes it an interesting topic to explore by qualitative methods, especially in an Eastern European country with a comparatively low gross domestic product and standard of living such as Bulgaria and especially among young Bulgarians, who were found to contribute the most to the negative net migration rates from 2007-2019 and the least to the positive net migration rates in 2020 and 2021 (NSI, 2007-2021).

METHODS AND PROCEDURE

This qualitative study is a part of an ongoing larger research project aimed at exploring psychological determinants of young people's attitudes to emigration and life planning in the context of demographic challenges in Bulgaria (See Acknowledgements).

Grounding on previous research on the relationship between risk-taking propensity and emigration attitudes/decisions we *hypothesized* that risk-taking propensity would play an important role for the psychological explanation of emigration decision-making (including emigration desire, planning and preparation) of young Bulgarians, because:

1. Emigration is associated with *uncertainty/unfamiliarity* in various areas of life (e.g. Lepière *et al.*, 2018) - job, income, career, close ties, social surrounding, cultural environment, physical health and/or psychological well-being;

2. The uncertainty/unfamiliarity relating to different facets of emigration may be regarded as *more attractive* and *less threatening* by individuals *with high risk-taking propensity* (sensation-seekers) in comparison to those with low risk-taking propensity (risk-avoiders).

Furthermore, we hypothesized that risk-taking propensity in the social and financial domains would associate with emigration decision-making more closely compared to the other studied domains (ethical, health/well-being).

To test our hypotheses in this particular study, we employed the method of semi-structured calendar interviewing and qualitative (thematic and relational) data analysis. The method of calendar interviewing is commonly used in social science research, including sociology, psychology, public health and economics (Axinn & Pearce, 2006; Gillen & Lertwachara, 2017). We decided to employ this research technique, because it provided opportunities to cap-

ture information on experiences, events and daily routines of interviewees by a visual aid - *calendar grid*, as a tool to help respondents recall and report their activities and experiences over a timeline ranging from certain periods in the past to their future perspectives (See Table 1).

Furthermore, the method of calendar interviewing can be used for a wide range of life areas, periods of time (months, years or even lifetime), and populations. It can reproduce high quality and retrospective narratives and in-depth understanding of the studied constructs.

The calendar interviews (N=45) were carried out in June - November 2020 among young Bulgarian men (N=21) and women (N=24) aged 18-35 years from large, middle and small towns/villages in Bulgaria, with and without prior emigration experience. They were administered in Bulgarian language.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic conditions, almost all of the interviews were scheduled and conducted online via Zoom, Skype, Viber or Messenger, audio recorded and then transcribed. A few of them were conducted face-to-face by strictly observing all anti-pandemic measures. The interviews were approximately 45-60 min long, depending on respondents' personal experience, views and their desire to share more or less details and associations.

Firstly, each respondent was introduced to the research main objective and procedure and each had either to sign a consent form (for a face-to-face interview) or to confirm their consent to participate (for the audio record). Then, each interviewee was introduced to the calendar grid, which was completed with keywords/key phrases together with the interviewer during the interviewing process. Looking at the grid helped respondents recall the most important events and personal experiences, as well as clarify the associations between them.

Table 1. Calendar grid used for the semi-structured calendar interviews with young Bulgarians (18-35 y.o.)

Row 1	Age	0-10	10-15	15-20	20-25	25-30	30-35	Near future	Distant future
Row 2	Year/place of birth/ changes in the place of residence (in Bulgaria)								
Row 3	Emigration experience/ visits abroad								
Row 4	Education & foreign languages								
Row 5	Job and career								
Row 6	Marital status and children								
Row 7	Material/financial security								
Row 8	Other								

Interviewees' responses to the following main and probing questions included in the calendar interview protocol were encompassed by the thematic and relational data analysis of this particular study:

- Did/Do you *want* to move to another country?
- Did/Do you *plan* your relocation (incl. destination, period of relocation, etc.)? When?
- Did/Do you *prepare* for your relocation? Certain steps?
- Did/Do you know the spoken *language* in the host country in advance? Level of language skills?
- Were/Are you aware of the *living conditions, culture, traditions, laws* and your rights in the host country before departure?
- Did/Do you have any *close people* in the host country?
- Did/Do you make any *lodging* and *job arrangements* in the host country before departure?
- Were/Are there any *challenges* (compared to country of residence)?

It is important to note that the general tendency of risk-taking, the risk domains (financial, social, ethical, health) and their relationship to emigration decision-making were not studied purposefully and separately from the young people's life planning and attitudes towards emigration. Consequently, the semantic categories were extracted either explicitly or implicitly, and were found in 31 interviews, as 14 interviews were thus excluded from the analysis. The semantic categories were extracted by two independent experts and agreed upon.

Interview data coding and content analysis on risk-taking propensity was initially based on Jackson's (1994) categorization of risk domains: *finan-*

cial, social, ethical and *physical*. Furthermore, additional semantic subcategories and higher categories, which could not be unanimously assigned to any of the four Jackson's categories were identified, e.g. general risk-taking propensity and health risk propensity (including physical health/security and mental health well-being).

Data coding and analysis on emigration decision-making was grounded on the Gallup World Poll (2016) concept of migration potential, including *desire, planning* and *preparation* (taking certain steps) to move.

The research was carried out in compliance with the Code of Conduct of the Institute for Population and Human Studies – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and also in conformity with the contractual agreements with the funding institution (See Acknowledgments). The consent forms were designed and completed in accordance with the agreement, the law and regulations on personal data protection EU policies. The categorization of respondents by age, gender, marital status, education, income and other socially constructed categories was based on the respondents' self-report.

RESULTS

By means of both thematic and relational analysis we extracted 3 groups of interviewees with regard to their general risk-taking propensity:

A thematic analysis showed that interviewees, who have been identified as ***risk-seekers***, were characterized by a salient sensation-seeking tendency and high risk-taking propensity in all or most of the studied risk domains (financial, social¹, ethical, physical health and/or psychological well-being).

For example, a 21-year old man from the Capital of Sofia said²:

Table 2. General risk-taking propensity profiles

<i>Group 1: Risk-seekers</i>	<i>Group 2: Risk-avoiders</i>	<i>Group 3: Inconstant risk-takers/avoiders</i>
<i>N=8</i>	<i>N=13</i>	<i>N=10</i>
characterized by high risk-taking propensity	characterized by low risk-taking propensity, incl. those who take only reasonable, planned and necessary risks	characterized by dynamically changing and/or inconsistent risk-taking propensity across risk domains and/or over time

¹ Most significant/loved ones (family, partner, children), close social surrounding (friends, colleagues, acquaintances) and extended social/cultural environment (compatriots/fellows, language, customs, traditions, etc.), education, job and career were all included in the social risk domain as high-order semantic category.

² Excerpts from the interviews were translated by the authors so as to keep authenticity of the respondents' narratives. Keywords and key phrases that constitute the semantic categories of both risk domains and decision-making aspects are given in bold.

"I have always wanted to study abroad and to be connected to other countries, anyway... my interest to get familiar with the unknown, until I find something that I like the most... I have always had and I still have this interest towards the different, the unfamiliar... This is my basic drive to experiment and to decide YES or NO. That is why, I decided to study abroad... I will work in England or in another country. ... I intend to come back in the long run [10-20 years]... Once I thought it was more important to live close to my family. Over time, I learnt it was not the end of the world, anyway... I was not so dependent on them [parents]... I would not say I experienced the separation as shocking... I was not so upset to move... My idea is basically to run my own business, not working for someone else, but independently. ...I would not say I was familiar with the living conditions, culture, traditions, etc. in England before departure."

A relational analysis revealed that most risk-seekers have already moved to another country in the past at least once either to study or to work abroad. Five of them relocated for more than six months and two of them - for less than six months. Only one of them had a desire and plan to move for educational reasons in the past, but not prior experience with neither mobility nor emigration in terms of the 183-day rule.

A half of the risk-seekers (N=4) would like to emigrate for future, as two of them had a plan and one of them got prepared at the time of the study. The other half of respondents would not like to emigrate, but stated that they would do it if they felt pressed by the circumstances such as a job loss, lack of career opportunities, political and economic crisis in the country.

Most risk-seekers (N=5) claimed they would prefer to return to their country of origin in the long run and one would like to have a circular mobility, i.e. to reside both in Bulgaria and abroad for some time. Interestingly, most of the risk-seekers were found to be young men from large Bulgarian towns.

Some of the keywords and key phrases depicting the profile of risk-seekers in relation to emigration are: *unpredictable; exciting; unsettled; (continuous) interest in/striving for the new/unknown/different/unfamiliar/ foreign places/people/cultures/experiences/sensations; experimenting/trying (to see if I can handle it); expanding; mobility; adventure(s); courage; daring; living on the edge; cosmopolitan; impulsive; open to the world; no worries; by acci-*

dent/chance; no compromise with anything; no limits; meet challenges (head on); (strongly) impatient; living here and now; green card; a blind move; no plan; no preparation; not (much) information in advance; (enjoyment of) taking chances (with emigration, if unemployed, etc.); ready to adjust; flexible; unaware in advance; thinking on one's feet; having new, higher and more courageous goals than before; challenge; jump in at the deep; out of the comfort zone; not afraid (of the new/unknown); easily breaking ice; (love, etc.) at any cost; jumping high; intuitive decision-making; just to see what will happen; no stick to plans; drive and ambition ("I want it!"); freedom (to work for myself); no place to stay (found by chance); preference for living between two places; not knowing what comes next; led by intuition; unconscious decisions; instinct; business ideas; something new (sensations/emotions/experience); on the go, etc.

Interviewees, who were identified as **risk-avoiders**, were individuals with a low degree of risk-taking propensity in all or most studied life domains, incl. emigration as a challenging endeavour.

For example, a 25-year old woman from a small Bulgarian town said:

"Generally speaking, I don't like changes...I always need to analyse in advance. Moreover, my negative characteristic is that I firstly think about how a bad thing would happen and about its solution, rather than how things will turn out for the better and what we are going to do then... I'm rather of the sort of people, who are afraid of trying new things... I had thought about whether I would go on a youth brigade. Still, what I mentioned earlier, the unfamiliar, the fear held me here. I admire people, who take risks and move to other places...I have a language barrier... I will be overly stressed, if I know that I move somewhere, where I don't know anybody, where I don't know what exactly will happen, where I don't know if I will feel contend... According to me, it will have a very bad effect on my mental health...Bulgaria have given me a peace of mind so far. That is the most important thing – I feel at ease now..."

A relational analysis showed that most of the risk-avoiders (N=11) had short personal, educational or business visits abroad, but none of them had previous emigration experience. Only 4 of the risk-avoiders argued that they wanted to move abroad in the past, as only 2 of them had a plan, but never got prepared nor moved. Only 2 of all risk-avoiders said

they would like to move for educational purposes, as only 1 of them was planning and preparing for the move, but not moved yet. Only 4 of all risk-avoiders argued they would emigrate if they felt pressed by the circumstances (e.g. an intimate partner who was willing to move abroad, a partner from abroad, or a job loss).

Most risk-avoiders (N=11) expressed their desire to live in their country of residence permanently, as 2 of them would relocate to either a larger or a smaller town/village within the country mostly due to security reasons relating to the better healthcare access in the larger towns or to the peaceful environment in the smaller towns. Interestingly, most risk-avoiders were found to be young women.

Some of the keyword and key phrases outlining the profile of risk-avoiders (i.e. those who take reasonable, planned and necessary risks) in relation to emigration are: *secure; organized; settled; well-arranged; orderly; predictable; well-planned, well-prepared, planning (everything/most things in life); no impulsive move (by chance); only because of force major; informed/aware/prepared in advance; thorough/careful thinking; only if necessary/needed/unavoidable; planning and preparation in advance; not enjoying challenges; preference for comfort and peaceful mind; checking/verifying everything before any move; knowing what/where/when in advance; never relying on chances; uncomfortable with surprises; not a risky player; make sure; always thinking about alternative options; extremes aversive; unplanned moves are wild-cat; no hurry; not enjoying changes; reasonable; thinking about how negative things occur; fear of the unknown/unfamiliar/of trying something new; not so/overly ambitious; keeping things as they are; enjoyment of planning; no moves by accident; thoughtful; awareness; certainty; no start from scratch; fearful; stability; solid; age-dependent; family reasons (children-related); no courage; no sudden/abrupt changes; slow/certain steps; not daring; shock/stress avoidant; calculating pros and cons/gains and losses; investigation; research; no losses; rational thinking; always a plan B; no floating on air, etc.*

For individuals, who were identified as **inconstant risk-takers/avoiders**, our findings showed that although sensation-seeking has been regarded as a relatively stable personality tendency, *domain-specific risk propensity* might be dynamically changing or might seem somewhat inconsistent.

For example, a 34-year-old man from a middle Bulgarian town said:

“My motivation is different [now] – career development and family, and stability... so, it really depends on age, and [priorities] change over time... Yes, it may not be because of age. Perhaps, I am at the same age, but still have different priorities. However, it is because of marital status... Oh yes, yes; otherwise, I used to be as mobile as I could be most of the time before [I got married] and I avoided being in one place...”

Another example of inconsistent risk-seeker/avoider is a 27-year-old woman from a small Bulgarian town, who argued:

“...I am a person, who seeks new sensations, and I believe that such a hypothetical or hopefully actual relocation would be beneficial in this regard. This is something new. I believe that one should continuously experience new emotions, visit new places and meet new people. If something eventually fails, I am a person who will always have a plan B... what I have planned for this migration is... it will not be abrupt, from September to October. It will occur at a slow pace... Generally speaking, these will be certain steps to take. If I see that some problems arise somewhere on my way, I will not dare move.”

The vivid examples above, as well as the narratives of other interviewees, provide reasons to outline some specific mechanisms of this seemingly contradictory and dynamically changing nature of domain-specific risk propensity of the so-called “inconstant risk-takers/avoiders”, as follows:

1. A changing *focus* of the risk-taking tendency due to age-specific or individual changes in values and priorities; due to varying levels of satisfaction with life or with certain areas of life; due to achievement motivation in certain life domains rather than others at a certain time. For example, some respondents mentioned their decreasing desire to emigrate, to seek for new and exciting contacts abroad, to achieve in career, etc., after they had built a satisfying intimate relationship or a family with children in their country of permanent residence;
2. Either increasing or decreasing domain-specific risk propensity due to expansion of *previous experiences* in a certain area of life that enabled an individual to carry out

further analysis of pros and cons, opportunities and challenges ahead. For example, negative experiences with emigration such as unemployment abroad, separation from loved ones, nostalgic moods and feelings of loneliness, intercultural misunderstandings, unpleasant social contacts, etc., resulted in lower propensity of some interviewees to emigrate for future;

3. Conveyance of contradictory messages about one's own risk-taking tendency due to an *inner conflict* between actual, verbalized and (socially) desired attitudes towards risk-taking and/or between attitudes and behaviour. For example, some of the youngest interviewees, who were not so experienced and self-reflective to analyse and verbalize their own attitudes and behaviour in an unbiased manner, claimed rational evaluation of risks relating to emigration, but employed rather emotional and intuitive clues in this regard, i.e. they moved abroad without any lodging and job arrangements, just because they had "a drive" to move.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

As far as the summer and the autumn of 2020, we have found that most young Bulgarian interviewees (18-35 y.o.) were not willing to emigrate, especially on a permanent basis. Although most respondents, identified as risk-seekers, declared prior emigration experience and a half of them - a current desire to move abroad, most of them did not plan nor prepared to emigrate. Even if they emigrated, they would prefer to return and live in their country of origin and permanent residence – Bulgaria, in the long run.

Most interviewees, identified as risk-avoiders, have not had previous emigration experience. Neither did they demonstrate a desire, a plan or preparation to move abroad. All of them expressed their desire to live in Bulgaria both in the short and in the long run. Regarding inconstant risk-seekers, an ambiguous association between risk-taking propensity and emigration decision-making was found, as either the domains of their risk-taking propensity were dynamically changing over time or they were unaware of their true motivation.

In summary, risk-seekers, i.e. those characterized by a salient risk-taking propensity and sensation-seeking tendency were much more likely to take a decision to emigrate compared to risk-avoiders.

Furthermore, the former were more likely to move impulsively and quickly (on the whim), without much planning or preparation for emigration in contrast to risk-avoiders, who would prefer careful and thorough planning and preparation for any move and only in case it was necessary, reasonable and short-term (e.g. mobility for education, work, etc.).

Consequently, our hypothesis that risk-taking propensity would be associated with emigration decision-making and that it could play an important role for the psychological explanation of emigration desire, planning and preparation as important aspects of the emigration decision-making process, was supported.

The findings also came to support earlier research evidence (e.g. Jaeger, et al., 2007, 2010; RUMiC, 2009; Awumbila & Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2016; Mazzarini, et al., 2019; Fregoso & Massey, 2019) that attitudes to risk were a significant and positive antecedent of emigration attitudes.

Some respondents declared that they would emigrate, if pressed by the circumstances such as a job loss, low income, an intimate partner/family living abroad or willing to live abroad, political and/or economic crisis in the country. However, even most of those, who said that they would emigrate if pressed by the circumstances, did not make certain plans nor took certain steps to prepare as important aspects of the emigration decision-making process. Consequently, risk-taking propensity for most of the interviewees seems to be most strongly associated with the "desire" stage of the emigration decision-making process, but not with its "planning" and "preparation" stage, especially for risk-avoiders.

Furthermore, our hypothesis that risk-taking propensity in the social and financial domains of risk would associate more closely with emigration decision-making compared to the other studied risk domains (ethical, health/well-being) has also been supported, as most of the respondents did not plan nor prepared to emigrate due to: 1. low propensity to take chances with their loved ones (family, partner, children), reported by most interviewees (N=27) and 2. low propensity to take risks with their immediate social surrounding (friends, colleagues, acquaintances) and cultural environment (e.g. fellows/compatriots, language, customs, traditions), reported by 26 respondents. The findings support previous research evidence that emigration is a risky endeavour, since has been associated with uncertainty and ambiguity in various areas of life (e.g. Lepièce et al., 2018).

Furthermore, in support to our hypothesis, the interviewees who took (would take) chances with

their social standing (N=17, education, job, career), followed by those who took (would take) chances with their financial/material security (N=12) to attain a better social-economic standing, were the highest number of domain-specific risk-seekers and hence, potential emigrants. These results also came to support some previous research evidence that social-economic standing (education, job, income, career) is the risk domain most strongly associated with emigration (Akgüç, Liu, Tani, & Zimmermann, 2016).

In spite of the COVID-19 pandemic context of the study, the domains of physical health/security risk, mental health/well-being risk and ethical risk were not as prominent in the narratives or interviewees as the other risk domains (social and financial). Still, an association with emigration decision-making was found - about one third of the respondents, both risk-seekers and risk-avoiders, were not willing to relocate abroad because they would not take chances with their health, either physical or mental (i.e. mostly a feeling of loneliness and depression). Otherwise, a few risk-avoiders would relocate to a smaller town/village in the country, where they would feel more secure, calmer and more peaceful than in their crowded current place of residence.

Also, it is interesting to note that respondents often described risks, especially ethical challenges, as ones coming from the outside world and as ones concerning others, rather than their own personality. The respondents claimed that poor social and economic conditions in the country, inequality and low standards of living, civil disobedience, breaking the law/code of conduct, the pandemic conditions and problems of the healthcare system in Bulgaria and around the world, etc., resulted in insecurity and discontent for many young Bulgarians and hence, in young people's willingness to emigrate in order to attain higher security and life satisfaction. The projection of motivation onto others and external circumstances is one way to provide a socially desirable response by disguising one's own ethical, financial, etc. risk-taking propensity tendencies. At the same time, mental health/well-being risks were depicted mostly as coming from within and concerning the interviewed individual.

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Many respondents demonstrate some ambivalent and dynamically changing attitudes to both risk-taking and emigration, which are of great future re-

search interest, using not only qualitative, but also quantitative (survey) methods.

Perhaps, the study has some *limitations* that may also be regarded as either strengths or *implications for future research*.

Firstly, it is the low number of interviewees who had prior emigration experience and positive emigration attitudes, including desire, plan and preparation to relocate abroad either in the short run or in the long run. Although this qualitative study provided a deeper understanding of the relationship between risk-taking propensity and emigration decision-making at the individual level through the authentic interviewees' narratives, the findings should be replicated within a larger sample controlled for previous experience with emigration and other sociodemographic variables (e.g. age, gender, education).

Secondly, risk-taking propensity in the different domains (social, financial, health, etc.) in this particular research was not studied purposefully and separately from the young people's attitudes towards emigration and life planning. Consequently, the semantic categories of risk domains (independent of emigration decision-making process) were extracted using implicit, rather than explicit indicators. Although the coding experts agreed upon the semantic categories and their content, the interviewees' responses and narratives might still be somewhat biased by the "emigration" context of most questions.

The third limitation, but also strength of the study is the fact that it has been conducted under unprecedented global pandemic conditions. On the challenging side, the results may not apply to other (e.g. usual, non-pandemic or war) conditions. Neither may they apply to other cultural contexts, since the issue of emigration concerns different cultural contexts. On the positive side, carrying out research under such unusual conditions, just after the 1st lockdown and during the 2nd lockdown, provides any further replication studies with a rare chance to compare findings on the relationship between risk-taking propensity and emigration decision-making under different conditions.

CONCLUSION

Along with the objective social, economic, political conditions in the country, the decision of young Bulgarians to emigrate could also be explained by psychological factors such as the risk-taking propensity, especially the propensity to take social-economic risks. Young people, who were more likely to move

away from their family, from the immediate social surrounding both at home and at work, from their familiar cultural environment, including language, traditions, to improve their social-economic standing (education, income, career), were more positive about emigration and more likely to plan and prepare to relocate abroad.

Our finding that risk-taking propensity, especially its social-economic and close relationships domain, is closely associated with emigration decision-making, can be used to efficiently predict emigration attitudes and behaviour of young Bulgarians, especially short-term, return and circular migration. The results can be employed to prevent further deepening of the demographic crisis and the brain drain from Bulgaria through development of appropriate social and economic policies and measures to enhance the quality of life, educational and career development of young Bulgarians in their country of origin. These measures should address not only citizens and residents, but also returnees and circular migrants.

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