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Gender Attitudes, Inequality and Migration Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

We explore the role of gender-unequal attitudes towards gender norms and perceived structural gender inequality in the migration decision-making of men and women. Adopting a conceptual model based on possible selves theory, the research employs a contextual social identity perspective concerning gender. We posit that the disparate spheres of inequality experienced by women relative to men should have a distinct relationship with the constituent elements of migration decision-making per gender. We expect a negative (positive) relationship between more conservative gender attitudes and women's (men's) aspirations to migrate. Similarly, gender inequalities concerning structural opportunities should have a negative (positive) relationship with women's (men's) expectation to migrate. We explore these propositions using survey data from a sample of 11,563 young adults aged 18-39 from Afghanistan, Cabo Verde, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Tunisia and Turkey. The results provide insights regarding the role of gender-unequal attitudes and structural gender inequality in migration decision-making. More conservative gender-unequal attitudes are associated with a lower preference for migration among women. More conservative gender-unequal attitudes have no statistically significant relationship with a preference for migration among men. On the other hand, higher perceived structural gender inequality is linked to higher expectations of migration for men, but with no statistically significant indication for women.

1 | Introduction

A growing body of evidence on the gendered nature of migration decision-making is emerging from the recent research literature (e.g., Chort 2014; Ruyssen and Salomone 2018; Docquier et al. 2020). The concept of the 'feminisation of migration' has led to a (re-)shift in focus from men towards women as a distinct social group of actors with the capacity for independent migration decision-making, which challenged the long-standing notion of women as 'tied movers' in the migration process (Lee 1966). Research posits that women's agency in migration decision-making is set to grow in the coming decades (Baudassé and Bazillier 2014). It makes a strong case for a balanced approach between women and men, given the unique situation of each that informs their choices (Morrison et al. 2007; Chant 2000).

In measuring the situational setting per gender, most studies use a rather one-dimensional approach. The impact of the gendered situational setting is inferred from the biological gender, relying on the significant correlation between biological and social gender (Anastasiadou et al. 2023). Concerning inequalities per gender, most studies have either analysed gender inequalities as a homogenous barrier and assumed their effects to be the same irrespective of their composition or made inferences based on one form of gender inequality

(Baudassé and Bazillier 2014; Docquier et al. 2020). The resulting evidence is mixed. While some studies reveal a negative relationship between gender inequalities and the migration aspirations of women (Docquier et al. 2020; Baudassé and Bazillier 2014), other studies show that it is exactly high gender inequalities in the socio-structural sphere that foster the preference for migration among women (Belloni 2019; Ferrant and Tuccio 2015), but also men (Ruyssen and Salomone 2018). Overall, insufficient attention has been paid to the interaction between gender and different forms of contextual gender inequalities in migration decision-making.

Our study takes a novel approach by adopting a contextual social identity perspective (Turner et al. 1987) concerning gender, while building on possible selves theory (Markus and Nurius 1986) to elucidate decision-making processes in the context of migration. The conceptual model offers a more fine-grained understanding of migration decision-making by distinguishing between the idealistic self and the rational possible self in the form of migration aspirations and expectations. This provides unique insights into the nuances of gendered migration decision-making. By incorporating a contextual social identity perspective of gender, our analysis extends beyond the mere impact of biological gender to encompass the influence of gender-unequal contextual settings and the interplay between these two factors. As proposed by Ruyssen and Salomone (2018), an understanding of the motivations behind migration requires consideration of the intricate interplay between individual agency and the perceived gendered structures that shape it. It is anticipated that conservative gender-unequal attitudes towards gender norms will have a negative relationship with migration aspirations of women and a positive relationship with those of men, with a stronger effect on women. Perceived unequal structural opportunities for each gender are hypothesised to have a similar effect, but primarily on the expectation to migrate. In other words, the disparate spheres of inequality experienced by women relative to men should have a distinct relationship with the constituent elements of migration decision-making for each gender.

This study advances understanding of gendered migration decision-making in at least three ways. First, by exploring how different forms of gender inequality influence the process, we show how women's and men's agency in migration decision-making is shaped by their socio-cultural and structural-opportunity spheres. Second, by deconstructing the migration decision-making process concerning aspirations and expectations, we provide clearer insights into gender dynamics. Third, we test these theoretical arguments with a large-N data set from 25 geographical areas in ten countries in the Global South by using a comparative perspective between men and women following the call for a male-female-balanced approach (Chant 2000).

2 | Conceptual Background

Possible selves theory (Markus and Nurius 1986; Knox 2006) posits that individuals construct self-representations that can be classified as rational and idealistic mobility orientations. This entails distinguishing between the potential future self and the desired future self. In the context of migration decision-making, our objective is to gain insight into how individuals perceive these self-constructions concerning migration. These two concepts of rational and idealistic mobility orientation need not be aligned. The impact of this gap has been described theoretically with frameworks such as self-discrepancy theory (Higgins 1987), Kant's 'rational belief' (Vernunftglaube; Kant 1781) or Freud's 'Ego ideal' (Freud 1923). Large empirical evidence indicates that this discrepancy is prevalent in the educational attainment research literature (Haller 1968; Sewell et al. 1969) and the field of migration studies, particularly within the integration discourse. This field of study explores the distinct aspirations and expectations regarding educational attainment among immigrant and native youth (Portes et al. 2010; Koo 2012; Khattab 2014; Salikutluk 2016; Tjaden and Hunkler 2017). When applied to the emigration decision, the rational possible self conceptualises the expectation to migrate, while the ideal self refers to the aspiration to migrate.

The formation of possible selves is predominantly a cognitive process, yet this process is subject to influence from the social context and the role one assumes in that context (Turner et al. 1987). The social identity based on gender represents a group identity that influences an individual's vision for their future selves in several ways (De Jong et al. 1996; Knox 2006; Fetterolf and Eagly 2011). Concerning migration, the evidence of the relationship between gender and an individual's aspirations and expectations concerning migration is inconclusive. The evidence either reveals no distinction by gender with regard to migration aspirations and expectations (e.g., Carling 2002) or shows a lower migration aspiration and expectation among women in contrast to men (e.g., Helbling and Morgenstern 2023). However, as highlighted in the gender literature, the distinction between biological sex and social gender indicates that the categorisation based on physical display as belonging to the social group of men or women is not the sole factor that shapes how an individual may construct their self with regard to migration (e.g., West and Zimmermann 1987; Stambach and David 2005). From a contextual social identity perspective, it is anticipated that an additional relational layer will be observed via the contextual inequalities concerning social norms (I) and opportunities (II) on a gendered basis.

In line with possible selves theory, it is anticipated that these components will relate to both possible selves, the ought and the expected, that is, the aspiration to migrate and the expectation to do so. Following the existing literature on educational aspirations and expectations (Haller 1968; Sewell et al. 1969; Lent and Brown 2019; Lent et al. 2018), we assume that the socio-cultural sphere, specifically gender-unequal attitudes towards gender norms, primarily links to aspirations to migrate. Conversely, the structural-opportunity sphere, or perceived gender inequality in opportunities, is assumed to relate primarily to expectations to migrate.

Gender-unequal social norms (I) can be understood as a form of inequality that manifests within the socio-cultural sphere. These norms of gender inequality are aligned with what is also described as conservative norms, whereby women are expected to fulfil a family-oriented caring role within the household and men are expected to pursue 'bread-winning' behaviour (Ahmed and Sen 2018). Given the pervasiveness of patriarchal influence

in most of the world's societies and the few tribal exceptions of matriarchal societies (e.g., the Minangkabau of Indonesia or the Bribri and Cabécar of Costa Rica), we refer in this study only to the conservative direction of gender-unequal attitudes towards gender norms. Hence, we expect the role of conservative attitudes to be a global phenomenon, not to be attributed specifically to the Global South or the Global North. However, the extent of inequality among gendered social norms may vary between regions within a country (Evans 2019), countries, and cultures (Knight and Brinton 2017). As individual perspectives may not always align with regional norms but still exert a significant influence on migration decision-making (Helbling and Morgenstern 2023), it is anticipated that gender-unequal attitudes towards gender norms will display a primary relationship with the individual-level migration decision-making processes.

An individual's attitude towards gender-unequal norms may exert a direct link with migration decision-making processes. However, it is much more likely that these attitudes are in interaction with the social gender. The impact of one's conservative gender-unequal attitudes towards gender norms may represent a distinct factor shaping men's preferences to migrate, in contrast to women's. This may be attributed to the fact that conservative attitudes towards gender norms, by their very nature, imply an anti-migration decision-making behaviour for women and vice versa for men. Moreover, the literature on possible selves theory and gender suggests an imbalanced role of norms, noting that women are the social group primarily influenced by social norms regarding gender roles in their decision-making (Knox 2006). Considering the aforementioned literature, we propose that the cognitive construction of the aspired possible self is subject to variation based on gender-unequal attitudes, which are themselves moderated by gender.

In contrast, unequal structural opportunities (II) represent a more concrete aspect of inequality, encompassing resources and opportunities that are stratified along gender lines and shaped by institutionalised gender discrimination. Inequality concerning structural opportunities on a gendered basis describes a situation whereby women are afforded a smaller set of opportunities than men (Chort 2014). As with gendered social norms, the extent of this discrepancy may vary by geographic location. In the academic literature, unequal structural gender opportunities are typically studied in actual migration behaviour. This is done either by using a subjective measure of perceived structural gender discrimination (Ruyssen and Salomone 2018) or, more commonly, via structural data on different aspects of opportunity, such as human rights (Nejad 2013; Nejad and Young 2014), the OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (Ferrant and Tuccio 2015) or the labour market (Chort 2014; Baudassé and Bazillier 2014).

Following the tenets of possible selves theory, it can be posited that the perception of unequal opportunities based on gender may already influence the relationship with the cognitive decision-making stage, where expectations of one's future self are formed. As with the role of gender-unequal attitudes, a direct relationship between perceived socio-structural inequalities and migration expectations is possible, but it is much more likely that this relationship is moderated by gender. These restrictions may prevent women from expecting to leave their homes, as the opportunities are not on their side. At the same time, men may expect to emigrate, given their opportunities. We anticipate that the cognitive construction of the expected possible self is the product of an interaction between gender-imbalanced opportunities and the individual's gender.

In essence, this framework examines the role of gender and the impact of unequal contextual settings on migration decision-making processes, resulting in the following hypotheses (see also Figure 1):

Hypothesis 1a. *More* (*less*) *conservative gender attitudes will be related to decreased* (*increased*) *preference for migration among women.*

Hypothesis 1b. *More* (*less*) *conservative gender attitudes will be related to increased* (*decreased*) *preference for migration among men.*

Hypothesis 2a. *More* (*less*) *unequal opportunities across genders will be related to decreased* (*increased*) *expectations of migration among women.*

Hypothesis 2b. *More* (*less*) *unequal opportunities across genders will be related to increased* (*decreased*) *expectations of migration among men.*

Our argument does not assert that gender-unequal norms are entirely decoupled from gender-unequal opportunities. In a context where gender inequality is pervasive, the norms associated with each gender and the opportunities available to them

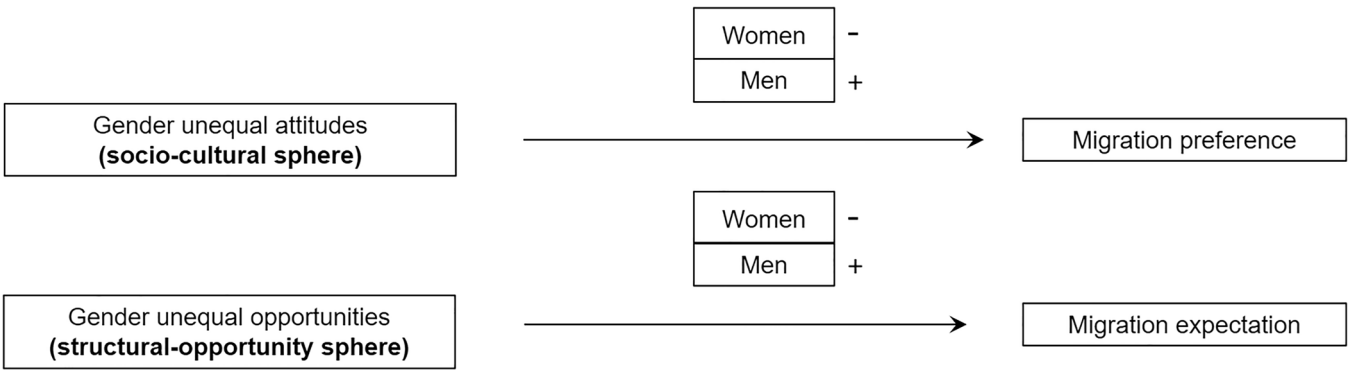

FIGURE 1 | Conceptual background predictions.

are likely to be closely intertwined. However, switching to individual-level perspectives, this interlinkage may be less strong than on the macro-level. The individual-level approach adopted here considers the contextual perception of structural-opportunity gender inequalities and focuses on individual gender-unequal attitudes concerning the socio-cultural sphere, permitting a greater discrepancy between the two concepts per observation.

3 | Data and Methods

This paper uses data from the Aligning Migration Management and the Migration-Development Nexus (MIGNEX) project. In particular, it relies on a sample of 11,563 young adults (aged 18-39) from an in-person survey across areas of Afghanistan, Cabo Verde, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Somalia, Tunisia and Turkey.[1] Table 1 reports the number of observations per location.

The specific locations for data collection in each country were selected to provide a diversity of contexts. They differ, for instance, in terms of security, livelihoods, living standards, infrastructure, and migration networks. The selection ensured contrasting conditions within each country and a good spread of conditions across the selection as a whole. Locations for data collection included towns, city segments, and rural areas and generally have a population between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants.

The survey covers topics related to migration and development and was designed to allow comparisons between locations. The survey was piloted in Afghanistan, Cabo Verde and Ghana in early 2020, after which minor adjustments were made to the questionnaire. The sampling was household-based and designed to be representative of the 18-to-39-year-old population in each location. The initial target was a uniform sample size of 500 respondents per location, but actual numbers vary slightly (see Table 1).

The sampling strategy had three stages: (1) usage of satellite maps to estimate the size of the research area population, identification of clusters and usage of probability-proportional-to-size sampling (PPS) to sample clusters; (2) a random walk to select households within each cluster; and (3) random sampling of a respondent within a household (Hagen-Zanker 2024; Hagen-Zanker et al. 2023a). If the randomly selected household member was unavailable during the first visit, enumerators visited the household up to two additional times to conduct the interview. Enumerators also made appointments to conduct interviews when possible. Interviews lasted about 45 min and were conducted in the local language, with 20 different languages used. The regressions presented below use survey weights to ensure the representativeness of the 18-to-39-year-old population in each location.

In the analysis, we run a series of linear probability regressions in which the dependent variables are binary indicators related to expectations and preferences related to migration. The expectation indicator is constructed from two different questions in the survey. First, respondents were asked:

TABLE 1 | Observations per selected location.

	N	% of sample
Cape Verde		
São Nicolau	451	3.90
Boa Vista	484	4.19
Guinea		
Boffa	491	4.25
Dialakoro	438	3.79
Ghana		
Gbane	462	4.00
Golf City	409	3.54
New Takoradi	371	3.21
Nigeria		
Down Quarters	363	3.14
Awe	411	3.55
Ekpoma	372	3.22
Ethiopia		
Batu	503	4.35
Moyale	516	4.46
Somalia		
Erigavo	482	4.17
Baidoa	518	4.48
Tunisia		
Enfidha	458	3.96
Redeyef	462	4.00
Turkey		
Hopa	505	4.37
Yenice	501	4.33
Kilis	423	3.66
Afghanistan		
Shahrake Jabrael	478	4.13
Behsud	526	5.55
Shahrake Mahdia	506	4.38
Pakistan		
Chot Dheeran	446	3.86
Youhanabad	514	4.45
Keti Bandar	473	4.09

> *In five years' time, do you think you'll still be living in [RESEARCH AREA]?*

If the response to the question was 'No', a follow-up question was asked:

> *Do you think you'll still be living in [COUNTRY]?*

Our migration expectation variable is equal to 1 if the response to the two questions was 'No' and equal to 0 if the response to

either question was 'Yes'. As reported in Table 2, 18% of those in the sample reported expecting to migrate in the next five years, with the share being five percentage points higher for men relative to women.

The preference indicator was constructed from this question in the survey:

> *Would you like to go and live in another country sometime during the next five years, or would you prefer to stay in [COUNTRY]?*

Our indicator is equal to 1 if the response to this question is 'Yes' (i.e., live in another country) and 0 if the response is 'No' (i.e., stay). Table 2 shows that close to 45% of respondents would prefer to migrate during the next five years, a share that is 10 percentage points higher among men relative to women.

As explained in the previous sections, our interest is to explore the role of gender, gender-unequal attitudes towards gender norms and perceived gender inequality of opportunities in affecting preferences and expectations regarding migration. The following statement preceded the gender attitude component of the survey: *Now I will read some statements about the lives of men and women. Please tell me whether you mostly agree or not*.

The measure of gender-unequal attitudes was constructed using the following statements from this section of the survey:

> *Only men should be responsible for providing income.*
>
> *Education is more important for boys than girls.*
>
> *When a mother works for pay, the children suffer.*
>
> *Only women should take responsibility for the household.*

In all cases, we assigned the value of 1 if the response was 'Yes' and 0 if the response was 'No'. Table 3 suggests substantial variation in the share agreeing with the statements. While half of the respondents agreed that children suffer if the mother works, only 18% of respondents agreed that education is more important for boys than girls. Interestingly, across the four gender attitude variables, *When a mother works for pay, the children suffer* is the only statement for which women have more conservative gender attitudes than men. One potential explanation is that the other statements have an explicit relative gender comparison, while for this one, the question relates to the situation of the children. We constructed an aggregate gender attitude indicator that is the sum of the four gender attitude variables for each respondent (0 to 4).

To create an indicator of perceived gender inequality in sociostructural opportunities, we use the following question from the survey:

> *In [RESEARCH AREA], women have the same opportunities as men.*

Our indicator of perceived gender inequality is equal to 0 if the response to this variable was 'Yes' and 1 if the response was 'No'. Table 3 shows that 52% of respondents disagreed with this statement (i.e., think that inequalities exist), with the share being eight percentage points higher for women. Finally, 53% of the respondents in the survey are women.

Table 4 reports the correlation coefficients for the different indicators. High correlations occur between some of the indicators. For instance, the correlation coefficient between the

TABLE 2 | Means of key variables for analysis.

	Full sample	Women	Men
Expect to migrate	0.1828	0.1583	0.2099
Prefers to migrate	0.4496	0.3975	0.5073
Observations	11,563	6,347	5,216

TABLE 3 | Means of key variables for analysis.

	Attitude		
	Full sample	**Women**	**Men**
Men responsible for income	0.3470	0.3024	0.3966
Education more important for boys	0.1792	0.1561	0.2049
Children suffer if mother works	0.4861	0.4952	0.4760
Women responsible for household	0.2255	0.2128	0.2396
Aggregated gender attitude (0 to 4)	1.2380	1.1666	1.3173
		Opportunity	
Unequal opportunities	0.5199	0.5560	0.4797
		Demographic	
Female	0.5262	1	0
Observations	11,563	6,347	5,216

responses that women are responsible for the household and men are responsible for income is 0.36. However, in none of the cases is the correlation coefficient above 0.5, suggesting a correlation between the indicators, but that they measure different aspects. Moreover, the female and unequal opportunities indicators have a relatively small correlation coefficient with the different gender attitude indicators, indicating substantial variation in responses to these questions across genders and perceptions of gender inequality.

Figure 2 provides further evidence that the variables capture different aspects. Panel A reports the mean of the aggregate gender attitude variable per location, while Panel B does the same for the variable indicating perception of gender-unequal opportunities. The research areas with an asterisk (*) are the 10 areas that show the highest gender-unequal attitudes in our data. As Panel B indicates, these areas with very conservative gender-unequal attitudes are spread across the whole distribution of the unequal opportunities variable.

In the analysis, we estimate a series of linear probability regressions along the following lines:

$$y_{ij} = R_j + \varnothing F_i + \tau Attitude_i + \omega F_i{*}Attitude_i + \delta Opportunity_i + \gamma F_i{*}Opportunity_i + \beta X_i + \varepsilon_{ij} \quad (1)$$

Where y_{ij} is either our indicator of the preference for migration or the expectation of migration. R_j is the research area fixed effect. F_i is a dummy variable indicating that the respondent is female. $Attitude_i$ is one of the indicators of gender-unequal

TABLE 4 | Correlation coefficients between key indicators.

	Female	Men responsible for income	Education more important for boys	Children suffer if mother works	Women responsible for household
Men responsible for income	−0.0942				
Education more important for boys	−0.0595	0.2901			
Children suffer if mother works	0.0358	0.2291	0.1374		
Women responsible for household	−0.0169	0.3582	0.2826	0.1219	
Unequal opportunities	0.0671	0.0300	−0.0429	−0.0611	−0.0141

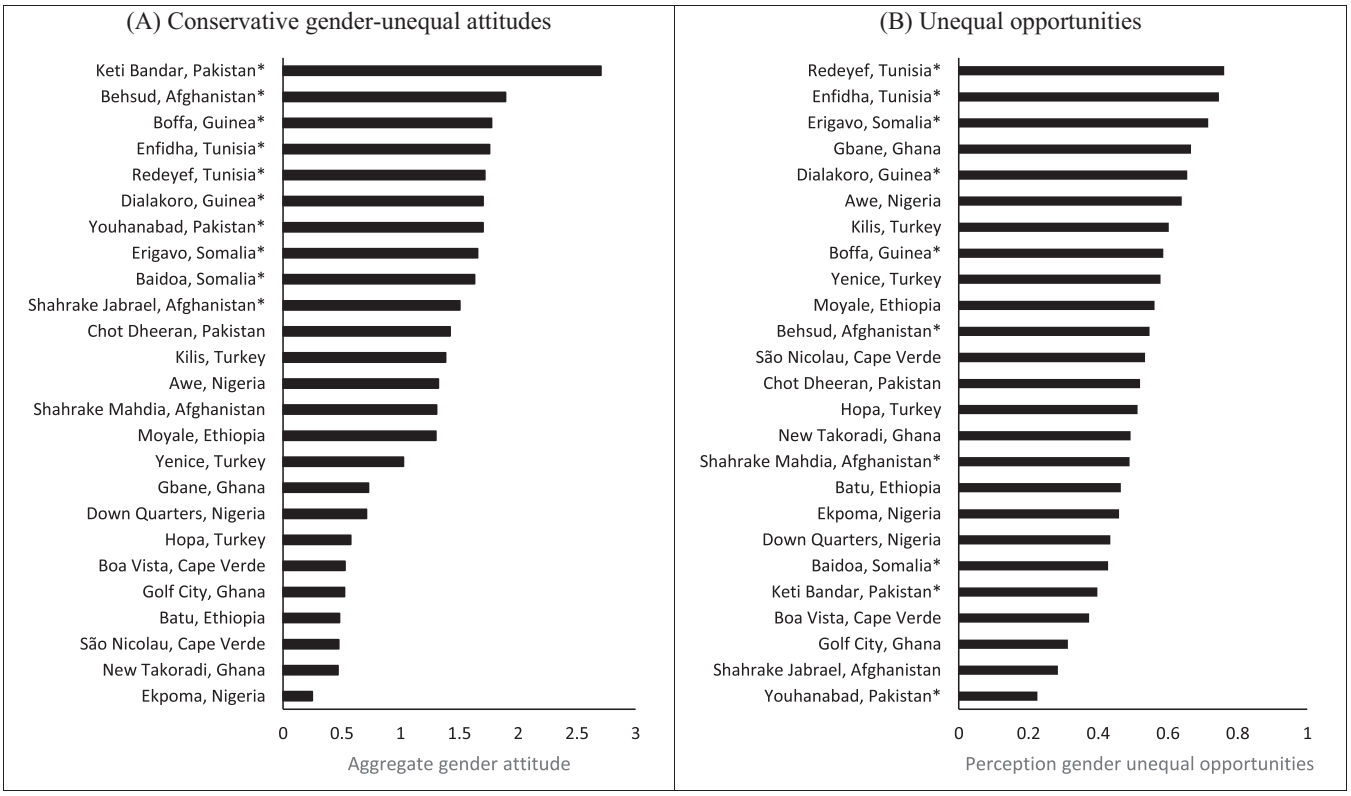

FIGURE 2 | Means of the indicators of conservative gender-unequal attitudes (aggregate) and unequal opportunities by research area.

TABLE 5 | Means of control variables.

	Full sample	Women	Men
Age	27.2630	27.2470	27.2807
Married	0.5341	0.6211	0.4374
Number children in household	2.8576	2.8727	2.8408
Number adults in in household	4.8379	4.3575	5.3714
Primary schooling	0.1138	0.1157	0.1118
Secondary schooling	0.6175	0.5590	0.6825
Employed	0.5263	0.3836	0.6849
Knows emigrants	0.3193	0.2723	0.3715

attitudes (including the aggregate one), while *Opportunity* is the gender inequality in opportunity indicator explained above.

Table 5 presents X_i, a series of control variables. We control for demographic factors (age, marital status, household size, and education), employment situation and the existence of migrant networks. These factors have been shown to affect preferences and expectations regarding migration in previous studies (Aslany et al. 2021; Czaika and Reinprecht 2022; Docquier et al. 2014).

In the regression, the coefficient $\varnothing$ provides insights into the difference in migration preferences or expectations for women who do not perceive gaps in opportunities and do not indicate conservative gender-unequal attitudes, relative to the rest of the sample. Meanwhile, τ and δ represent, respectively, the effect of having conservative gender-unequal attitudes for men and perceiving gender gaps in opportunities. Finally, ω and γ, represent, respectively, the difference in migration preferences or expectations between women who have conservative gender-unequal attitudes and perceive gaps in opportunities and women who do not.

In the regression in which migration preference is the dependent variable, Hypothesis 1a suggests that the coefficient ω is negative, while Hypothesis 1b suggests that τ is positive. In the regression in which migration expectation is the dependent variable, Hypothesis 2a suggests that the coefficient γ is negative, while Hypothesis 2b suggests that δ is positive.

We are not estimating causal effects in the regressions, as no exogenous factor affects gender-unequal attitudes or opportunities. Instead, we are estimating conditional correlations between the variables. Moreover, by including research area fixed effects, we are comparing differences in the conditional correlation of the indicators of gender opportunity and attitudes and migration decision-making within a local area. This means we are controlling for differences, including unobserved ones, across locations. This is important as our survey covers 25 local areas with important differences across 10 countries.

4 | Results

Table 6 reports the regression results for the estimations with the combined gender attitude variable and the unequal opportunities indicator included as independent variables. The coefficient for the female indicator is negative and statistically significant in both regressions, with the estimate being larger (i.e., more negative) for preference for migration. For example, looking at columns (1) and (2), we see that women who do not perceive unequal opportunities and do not have conservative gender-unequal attitudes are six percentage points less likely than men to prefer migration and three percentage points less likely to expect to migrate during the next five years.

The aggregated gender attitude indicator has no statistically significant relationship with preferences for migration for men, but the interaction of this variable with the female indicator is statistically significant for preferences regarding migration. In particular, having more conservative gender-unequal attitudes is associated with a decrease in the preference for migration among women, confirmed by the combined linear coefficient for women (-0.0116). These results support Hypothesis 1a but not Hypothesis 1b.

The perception of higher unequal opportunities across genders is related to a three-percentage-point increase in the expectation of migration for men. The coefficient on the interaction with the female dummy is negative, as expected, but the interaction coefficient is not statistically significant. Hence, we have support for Hypothesis 2b, but not Hypothesis 2a. Moreover, when we look at the combined linear coefficient of unequal opportunities for women, the combination is statistically insignificant. Meanwhile, perceived inequality of opportunity is not statistically significant on the preferences for migration, which is in line with the expectations presented above.

So far, the analysis suggests some validity in the hypotheses presented, but no simple asymmetry between the dynamics for women and men. Similar to De Jong (2000), we find that what matters for women seems different from what matters for men. To explore this further, in Table 7, we replicate the regressions of Table 6 but use the individual indicators of gender-unequal attitudes rather than the single aggregate indicator. Table 8 reports the coefficient combination for females.

As previously, the coefficient for the female dummy in Table 7 is negative with both the preference and the expectation for migration as dependent variables, with the coefficient being larger in absolute value for the preference. Likewise, the unequal opportunities coefficient is only significant for men in the expectation for migration regression. The coefficient oscillates around the three-percentage-point value.

Concerning the attitude variables, the interaction coefficients of females with the indicators that men are responsible for income and that education is more important for boys are statistically significant for the regressions when a preference for migration is the dependent variable. In both cases, the coefficient is negative as expected based on Hypothesis 1a.

TABLE 6 | Regressions for expects to migrate/prefers to migrate.

	Prefers (1)	Expects (2)
Female	−0.0609*** (0.0212)	−0.0324* (0.0179)
Aggregated gender attitude	0.0036 (0.0074)	−0.0047 (0.0061)
Unequal opportunities	0.0181 (0.0161)	0.0297** (0.0138)
Female* Aggregated gender attitude	−0.0153* (0.0092)	0.0027 (0.0077)
Female*Unequal opportunities	−0.0122 (0.0206)	−0.0196 (0.0174)
	Combination for females	
Aggregated gender attitude	−0.0116* (0.0066)	−0.0020 (0.0057)
Unequal opportunities	0.0059 (0.0146)	0.0101 (0.0114)
Observations	11,385	11,385

Notes: Coefficients from linear probability regressions with location fixed effects and control for variables as described in the text. Columns (1) and (2) show results for separate regressions with a dummy indicating preference for migration or expectation of migration as dependent variables, respectively.

There is an interesting difference with the aggregated results presented in Table 6. The coefficient for the variable indicating that the children suffer if the mother works is negative and statistically significant for men in the regression in which the expectation for migration is the dependent variable. As explained above, this indicator is slightly different from the previous ones as it focuses on the outcomes for the children rather than just gender differences.

5 | Heterogeneities and Nonlinearity

In this section, we explore the results further by presenting evidence of heterogeneities across the sample and potential nonlinearity in the results. First, we explore sub-samples based on whether the respondent is married or has children. Massey et al. (2006) show that women with partners have lower odds of out-migration, particularly in more patriarchal societies. Riosmena (2009) explains how the effect of marital status on migration reflects different bargaining positions within a family. He also shows that the number of children, particularly young ones, is negatively associated with migration.

In our analysis, marital status and the number of children were control variables; now we use these variables to create sub-samples and run separate regressions. Panel A (preference) and Panel B (expectation) in Figure 3 report the coefficients for the aggregate gender-unequal attitudes indicator and unequal opportunities dummy from separate regressions for those who are and are not married. We show on their own the coefficients that indicate the size of the estimated relationship for men and the interaction with the gender dummy, which shows the relationship for women. The error bars represent 90% confidence intervals.

First, the coefficients are much larger (in absolute value) for the unmarried. For instance, while in the regression with a preference for migration, the coefficient for the interaction of the aggregate gender-unequal attitudes indicator and the gender dummy is −0.0026 for the married sample (not statistically significant), it is −0.0353 for the unmarried sample (statistically significant).

A similar dynamic is present when we look at the coefficients that relate to men. For instance, the unequal opportunities coefficient in the regression for the expectation of migration is 0.0011 in the married sample (not statistically significant), while it is 0.0457 in the unmarried sample (statistically significant).

Panels A and B of Figure 4 report similar coefficients as in Figure 3, but for separate regressions for those with and those without children. As in the previous figure, the coefficients are larger in absolute value for those without children. Looking again at the coefficient for the interaction of the aggregate gender-unequal attitudes indicator and the gender dummy in the regression for preference for migration, we again see that the coefficient is smaller for those with children (−0.0098) than those without children (−0.0305).

In general, the results suggest that the conditional correlations we explore for preferences and expectations for migration are larger in sub-samples of the population who are unmarried and do not have children. This is in line with the results of previous literature (Massey et al. 2006; Riosmena 2009) and is true for men and women.

The evidence suggests that the higher inequality per gender is correlated with higher women migration flows up to a point, after which higher gender inequality is correlated with lower women migration flows (i.e., an inverted 'U' relationship). The idea is that initial levels of gender imbalances in society encourage women to migrate, but too much becomes an obstacle to migration. For example, Ferrant et al. (2014) suggest that in a highly unequal environment, women could be deprived of inheritance and left without the resources necessary for migration. Similar dynamics may occur if women face strong barriers to accessing education, employment and credit, among other factors.

We explore whether nonlinearity appears in our results. The unequal opportunities indicator is a dummy and hence cannot provide insights on this. Table 9 shows the distribution of the aggregate gender-unequal attitudes indicator. We estimate a regression similar to the one included in Table 6, but separating

TABLE 7 | Regressions for expects to migrate/prefers to migrate: disaggregated attitude variables with gender interactions.

	Prefers (1)	Expects (2)	Prefers (3)	Expects (4)	Prefers (5)	Expects (6)	*P*refers (7)	Expects (8)
Female	−0.0670***	−0.0273*	−0.0707***	−0.0289**	−0.0738***	−0.0391**	−0.0771***	−0.0280*
	(0.0185)	(0.0155)	(0.0179)	(0.0147)	(0.0206)	(0.0178)	(0.0179)	(0.0149)
Men responsible for income	0.0057	0.0065						
	(0.0179)	(0.0138)						
Education more important for boys			0.0140	0.0174				
			(0.0186)	(0.0160)				
Children suffer if mother works					0.0125	−0.0444***		
					(0.0165)	(0.0146)		
Women responsible for household							−0.0053	−0.0001
							(0.0185)	(0.0146)
Unequal opportunities	0.0170	0.0305**	0.0182	0.0308**	0.0190	0.0272**	0.0177	0.0303**
	(0.0161)	(0.0137)	(0.0161)	(0.0137)	(0.0162)	(0.0138)	(0.0161)	(0.0137)
Female*Men responsible for income	−0.0434**	−0.0017						
	(0.0219)	(0.0181)						
Female*Education more important for boys			−0.0450*	0.0051				
			(0.0259)	(0.0212)				
Female*Children suffer if mother works					−0.0103	0.0203		
					(0.0210)	(0.0179)		
Female*Women responsible for household							−0.0101	−0.0023
							(0.0243)	(0.0176)
Female*Unequal opportunities	−0.0093	−0.0199	−0.0126	−0.0194	−0.0119	−0.0177	−0.0111	−0.0199
	(0.0206)	(0.0175)	(0.0206)	(0.0174)	(0.0207)	(0.0176)	(0.0206)	(0.0174)
Observations	11,385	11,385	11,385	11,385	11,385	11,385	11,385	11,385

Notes: Coefficients from linear probability regressions with location fixed effects and control for variables as described in the text. Columns show results for separate regressions with a dummy indicating a preference for migration or expectation of migration as dependent variables.

TABLE 8 | Combination for females.

	Prefers (1)	Expects (2)	Prefers (3)	Expects (4)	Prefers (5)	Expects (6)	Prefers (7)	Expects (8)
Men responsible for income	−0.0376**	0.0048						
	(0.0149)	(0.0146)						
Education more important for boys			−0.0309	0.0226				
			(0.0195)	(0.0154)				
Children suffer if mother works					0.0022	−0.0241**		
					(0.0143)	(0.0111)		
Women responsible for household							−0.0154	−0.0024
							(0.0169)	(0.0128)
Unequal opportunities	0.0077	0.0105	0.0056	0.0114	0.0071	0.0094	0.0066	0.0103
	(0.0146)	(0.0115)	(0.0147)	(0.0115)	(0.0147)	(0.0114)	(0.0146)	(0.0114)

Notes: Linear combinations of coefficients for females from regressions presented in Table 7.

the aggregate gender-unequal attitudes indicator into dummies indicating a value of 1, 2, 3 and 4, with the base category being those who answered 'No' to all questions related to gender-unequal attitudes.

Figure 5 shows the coefficients for the different dummies based on the aggregate gender-unequal attitudes indicator. The results show that the coefficient is small for values of 1 and 2 but increases substantially for values of 3 (the largest coefficient) and 4. Hence, while the evidence does not show a clear inverted U-shaped pattern, the results suggest that some accumulated level of conservative gender-unequal attitudes is necessary to affect preferences for migration.

6 | Conclusion

We contribute to the debate on migration decision-making by exploring the role of gender-unequal attitudes towards gender norms and structural gender inequality in the migration aspirations and migration expectations of men and women. This sheds light on an additional channel through which different gender inequalities can influence men and women.

We employ a conceptual model based on possible selves theory and incorporate a contextual social identity perspective of gender to posit that the disparate spheres of inequality experienced by women relative to men should have a distinct relationship with the constituent elements of migration decision-making. This is reflected in the results, which rely on data from 25 areas from 10 countries in the Global South. We find that more conservative gender-unequal attitudes are associated with lower preferences for migration among women. On the other hand, higher perceived structural gender inequality is linked to higher expectations of migration for men.

In addition to the statistically significant relations, statistically insignificant relations provide important insights. For instance, more conservative gender-unequal attitudes do not have a statistically significant relationship with preference for migration among men. This is in line with the literature on possible selves theory and gender, which suggests that women are the social group primarily influenced by social norms regarding gender roles in their decision-making (Knox 2006). The results also indicate that higher perceived structural gender inequality has no statistically significant link to women's migration expectations. Overall, the results suggest no asymmetry in the effects of conservative gender-unequal attitudes and structural gender inequality in the migration decision-making of women and men.

We also explore possible heterogeneities and non-linearities in the results. The analysis suggests that the estimated associations of migration decision-making with indications of conservative gender-unequal attitudes and perceived structural gender inequality are stronger for sub-samples of non-married respondents and those without children. This goes along with the role of these demographic factors in migration decision-making found in previous literature (Massey et al. 2006). We also show that a level of gender imbalance is necessary for

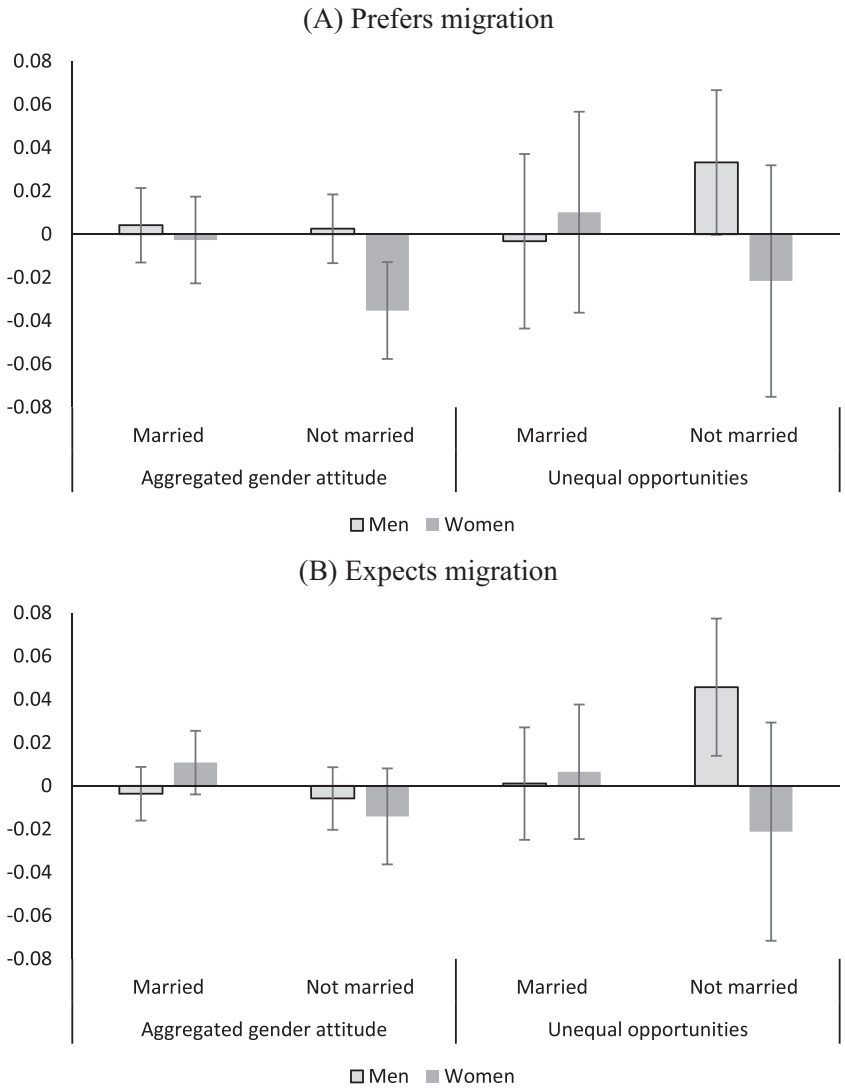

FIGURE 3 | Coefficients for regressions with married and unmarried samples. Notes: The figure shows coefficients from linear probability regressions with location fixed effects and control for variables as described in the text, excluding the marital status variable. The regressions are from separate samples for those who are married or unmarried.

conservative gender-unequal attitudes to have a negative association with the preference for migration. This supports the literature highlighting the strong barriers to migration that women face in highly unequal contexts (Ferrant et al. 2014).

Concerning the conceptual framework, the core argument is expected to apply to individuals in both the Global North and the Global South. However, given the limited nature of the data, the argument can only be tested for regions in the Global South. Future research may provide substantiating or refuting evidence for the global applicability of our argument using relevant data from the Global North and a broader range of countries in the Global South.

Methodologically, we encourage future studies to implement more fine-grained measures of attitudes towards gender issues, perceived structural inequalities, and the concept of gender. The available indicators in the data limit our study. This applies to both the scale dimensions and the number and variety of items for testing the theoretical construct. For instance, our attitude indicators rely on dichotomous measures but could alternatively be measured with a Likert scale, which could better capture the subjective and nuanced nature of the construct.

This study contributes substantially to the existing literature on migration decision-making by providing an in-depth understanding of how different forms of inequality influence gendered migration decision-making. Methodologically, the relationship between gendered inequalities and migration is evaluated using data from 25 distinct geographical areas in 10 countries across the Global South. In contrast to most studies that seek to elucidate the influence of gender disparities on migration, we rely on a micro-level data set and exploit the variation across individuals for many locations (see also Bertoli and Ruyssen 2018; Dustmann and Okatenko 2014). This comparative perspective allows an analysis of relationships not influenced by context-specific factors or path dependencies.

Additionally, we contribute to theories of migration decision-making by advancing our understanding of the distinct mechanisms at play for men and women. First, we take a nuanced

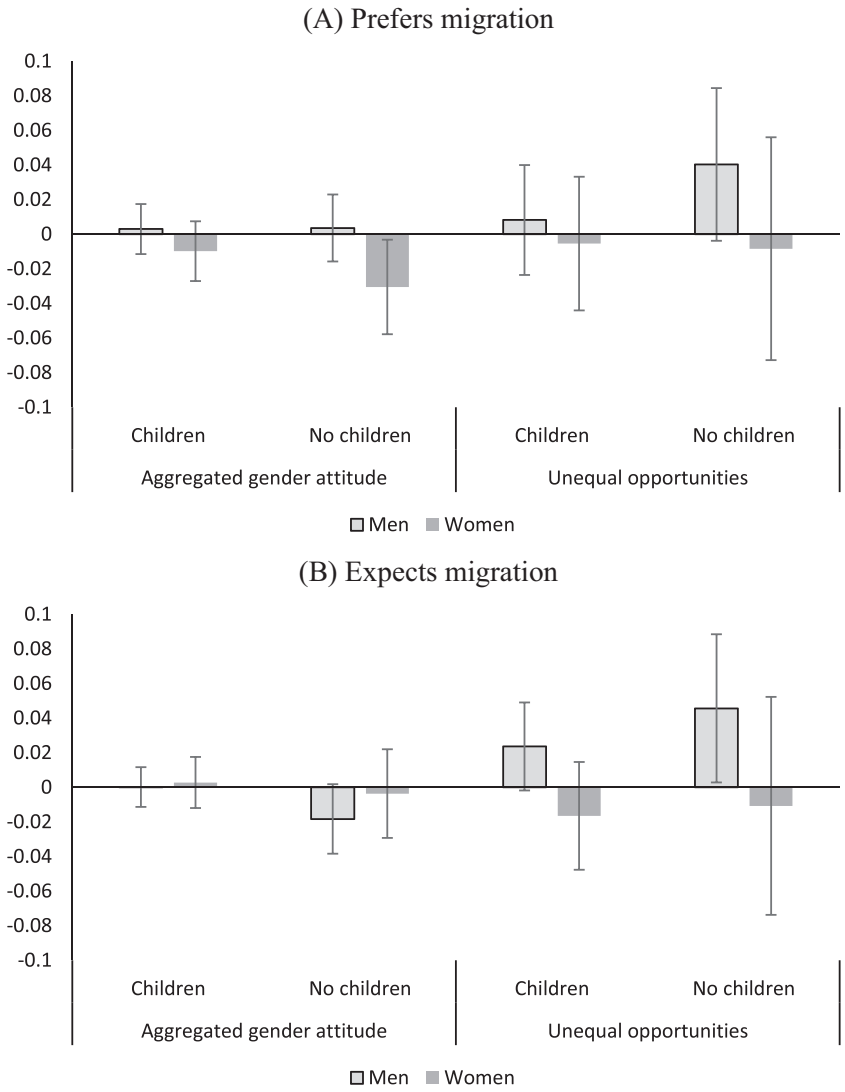

FIGURE 4 | Coefficients for regressions with children and no children sample. Notes: The figure shows coefficients from linear probability regressions with location fixed effects and control for variables as described in the text, excluding the number of children variable. The regressions are from separate samples for those who have and do not have children.

TABLE 9 | Distribution of the aggregate gender-unequal attitudes indicator.

Value	Share
0	32%
1	31%
2	20%
3	11%
4	5%

view of the role of gender, adopting a contextualised social identity perspective. The differentiation between gender and the contextual socio-cultural sphere (i.e., attitudes) of gender inequalities and the structural-opportunity sphere, in our theoretical conception, is influenced by feminist theories that view gender not only as a category but also as a concept (e.g., Stambach and David 2005). Our empirical results support this distinction. By focusing on attitudes towards gendered norms and perceived structural opportunities, we can identify the extent to which women and men prefer and expect to exercise agency, depending on their socio-cultural environment.

Our study also contributes to the existing literature by subdividing the process of migration decision-making and providing a more detailed understanding of gender. Due to data limitations, many studies have analysed migration decision-making as a homogeneous construct. This has resulted in a theoretical line of enquiry suggesting more nuanced measures into migration decision-making being halted (Kalter 1997; De Jong and Gardener 1981) and potentially perpetuated the practice of gender-blind migration theories (for a critique, see Bircan and Yilmaz 2023). Although undifferentiated in some of the emigration literature, a theoretical distinction between aspirations and expectations is a fundamental concept in the integration literature, particularly when differentiating between migrants and non-migrants in terms of educational attainment (Portes et al. 2010; Khattab 2014; Salikutluk 2016). Our theoretical concept and analytical results demonstrate the value of considering more nuanced migration theories. Employing a

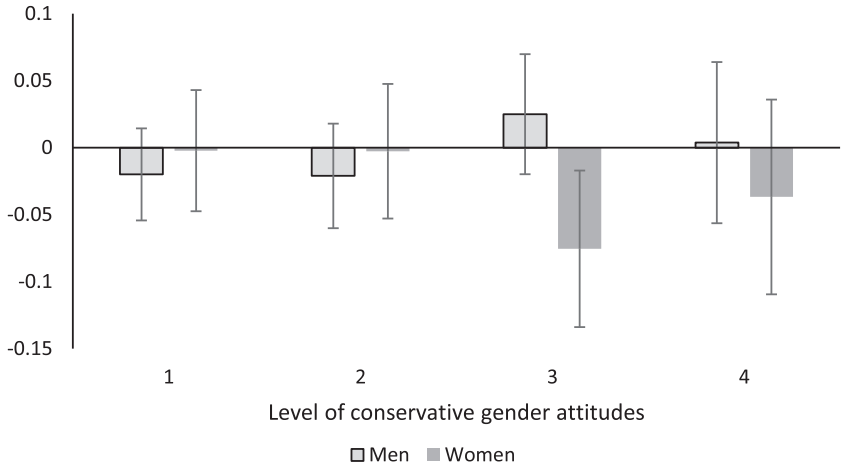

FIGURE 5 | Coefficients for regression with dummies for aggregate attitudes indicator. Dependent variable: preference for migration. Notes: figure shows coefficients from linear probability regressions with location fixed effects and control for variables as described in the text, but with the aggregate gender attitudes indicator separated into dummies for each value.

more granular concept (and operationalisation) of migration decision-making and a more comprehensive concept of gender, this study shows that differentiating between the idealistic and the rational possible selves in the form of migration aspiration and migration expectation is a particularly fruitful avenue for investigating gender imbalances in migration decision-making. By focusing on the interplay between individual agency and the different perceived gendered structures that shape it, in this case, inequality based on conservative gender-unequal attitudes and inequality perceived in opportunity structures, we can advance our understanding of the distinct theoretical mechanisms at play for men and women. This study may provide a foundation and plea to develop more nuanced and gender-sensitive migration theories.

From a practical standpoint, the results of this study can provide policymakers and organisations with valuable insights when formulating migration policies and gender equality initiatives. The findings underscore the importance of incorporating gender-sensitive approaches that consider how socio-cultural and structural inequalities influence migration decision-making processes differently for men and women. Furthermore, by comprehending the distinct roles of various inequalities across different genders, efforts can be directed towards identifying specific barriers women encounter when migrating, thereby informing initiatives to promote women's empowerment.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The restricted-access variant of the MIGNEX Survey Data set used in this paper is not public for data-protection reasons. However, a similar data set, with only small differences, is available in the MIGNEX Zenodo website (https://zenodo.org/communities/mignex/). That data set includes all the variables used in this paper.
The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Zenodo at <Fonterror-Rubik-Medium>https://zenodo.org/records/13991767</Fonterror-Rubik-Medium>, reference number https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13991766.

Endnotes

[1]We use the MIGNEX survey data set restricted-access variant, Version 1 (Hagen-Zanker et al. 2023b). One location, Kombolcha in Ethiopia, is excluded from the analysis because the survey data collection was halted prematurely for security reasons.

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